

YOUTH – TRANSMISSION AND COMMITMENT

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MALTA has a youthful population. More than 35% of its 300,000 population are under 20 and 60% below the age of 25. In a country where there is complete absence of natural resources, the human resources are the only asset Malta can rely upon in national development. And it is against this background that the Republic of Malta's policy on youth is shaped. It is the aim of the government to provide for the development of every young person so that he will be able to realize as full a life as possible regardless of his family's economic background and status. Malta recognizes the importance of providing comprehensive youth services in education and training, health and social welfare, employment as well as general welfare. Recently measures have been taken to nurture the youth into responsible and dedicated citizens of the country by entrusting them with the right to vote at the age of eighteen. The vestiges of centuries of colonial experiences are no longer curbing our youths from a relaxed, active participation in politics. So Malta has brought out new strength, dynamism, hope and self assurance. It has weakened the clash mentality between generation – it has narrowed the generation gap, that stopped the outlets to their talents. There will be a new sense of equality and thus a readiness to respect and understand the views and aspirations of all.

Our country is now dedicated to the ideology of development and modernization. Our own system of education has been for years showing cracks in the wall. Our youths have to be provided not only with educational facilities and economic security but also with the new dimensions to their presence in the community and healthy changes brought about in the approach to development. Our youths are not satisfied with remaining dissatisfied. There are signs that they are on the move. This is a happy sign as long as they co-operate with others who like them want a happier society to live in.

A milestone in the social and educational history of our island was the legislation of the first 'Education Act'. But it should not remain the business of experts in the Government. The co-operation of the people has to be secured to ensure its success. The

younger generation has a major role to play in the implementation and execution of this first 'Education Act'. So far in the educational field we were unfortunately still linked by an obdurate umbilical cord to our pre-independence past. Our 18th and 19th century heritage of division of labour based on a monoculture, a small capitalistic class, a system of education for the few, the academic and white collared, disdain for manual labour and aping our colonial betters still haunt us. There is a reactionary, fossilized thinking among amateurs and do-gooders who feel they hold a monopoly to the future of youth. Education has not found any nobler aim in our country than the examination mania. Everything was learned for examinations purposes. Self-education, self enrichment and self development outside the examinations needs were rarely or never encouraged. The schools have preserved methods which only foster a passive, unthinking mentality.

Only free people conscious of their worth and their equality can build a free democratic society. How close was our system to this ideal? Very far indeed. On the contrary it was a system which produced robots and intellectual slaves and does not in the least encourage the actualization of all our potentialities. The syllabus was there to keep us busy. Politics, international affairs manifest themselves by their absence. Thinking was prohibited. It was not the education of a truly democratic country for it serves the purpose not of the majority but a handful of people and the establishment whose survival depends on the ignorance of the masses. Their culture and their values were rammed down the throats of people eager to 'become educated'.

Malta is running a race against time. As any other under-developed country it has a special role to play in the world education movement. We face many a problem intricately interwoven with demands and aspirations for development which cannot be solved by borrowing institutions and methods from developed countries. New answers will have to be found, experiments ventured upon and flexible institutions created. The contention is that the best way to make independence meaningful is only via education. There must be a plan taking into consideration all social, political, economic and intellectual realities. The publication of the 'Development Plan for Malta 1973-1980' illustrates the Government's efforts in this direction. Making active citizens, capable of understanding and coping with the problems of society is the grand design of this 'Plan'. The younger generation has a major role to play in its exe-

cution. Without their participation, development will be very slow and expensive. But with their participation, they will become aware of the various roadblocks along the way of progress. Maltese youths are strong believers that they can lead a rewarding life both as individuals and in society. This is impossible unless they have contact with social, economic, cultural and political life. Maltese youths are helping the quick and smooth development of our island by their revolution: 'the superseding a pedagogy of transmission by a pedagogy of commitment, relationship and research.'

Mediocrity prevails in a country when its people are not imbued with noble ideas and a sense of direction. It is true that scarcity of jobs had forced our intellectuals into joining the Civil Service where many vegetate intellectually. But Malta independent means independent reasoning, original work and productive thinking.

It seems to me that these two objections correspond to two needs, to two of the fundamental aspirations of youth which are also the two requirements of a developing island.

Our young people certainly desire independence, yet yearn for a sense of belonging to a community.

It is one of the duties of the University to teach them how to acquire the former, as a sense of freedom, and the latter as a driving force for the development of our beloved country – Malta.