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BLURRING THE LINES

THE historical concept of higher education in Malta is being obscured by new crude mental attitudes of people without a sense of tradition and history who are disregarding the very *raison d'être* of every university, which is, research and teaching.

The emphasis on technological education is not without its justification, especially in a rapidly changing society that is seeking its economic survival in industrialisation. We not only feel the need for this new orientation, we heartily support it because, after all, we cannot afford to live in an ivory tower.

As we ourselves have enjoyed the benefit of a liberal education, which we would like others to enjoy for their own good, we have been so mentally conditioned by this educational background that, luckily, we can appreciate the need for a two-pronged type of education, differently graded and differently inspired within the framework of a broad national education. We still believe in a liberal education because it is this type of education that liberalises the human mind, opens up new horizons and provides wider terms of reference for comparative thinking and evaluations which is so essential for mature value judgements.

We support a well planned educational programme which will strengthen the traditional subjects described as the humanities for leadership and enlightenment (education for life) and, at the same time, support an utilitarian education for the practical purposes of material living. Polytechnics, more than the degree conferring institutions known as universities, have to concern themselves mainly with the latter purpose, precisely because their subject-matter is technological and hardly ever speculative. The problem is how to convince some policy-makers that what Malta needs is not the

elimination or even the demotion of the humanities, as if these were the hall marks of an élite, (what nonsense), but the parallel promotion of these two types of academical and technological education without any blurring of the line of demarcation.

Maltese society, like any other progressive society, needs the knowledge that comes from a university proper, largely intellectual, and that which comes from technological institutions, which is largely mechanical. While the liberally-trained scholar who has an open mind understands the need for a parallel promotion of academical and technological education, the man with an illiberal mind, mainly because he himself received an illiberal or mechanical education, concentrates on technological education as an exclusive priority at the expense of an academical education. This is where the red light is. This is where the bungling begins.

We have to be on our guard all the time against the erosion of the status of a university proper lest the line of demarcation between it and a technological institution will be so blurred that in the process the university in its traditional and historical sense will disappear and we shall be left with one type of mediocre so-called higher education. This is perhaps not only Malta's problem but, as we live in Malta, we must face our own problems and solve them without having to wait for the rest of the world to solve its own problems or for our bunglers to mess them up!

THE EDITOR