

**THE UNIVERSITY IN
THE MODERN WORLD**

THE UNIVERSITY IN
THE MODERN WORLD

*and other papers
on higher education*

BY

LORD ROBBINS

Palgrave Macmillan

1966

ISBN 978-1-349-00634-2 ISBN 978-1-349-00632-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-00632-8

© Lord Robbins 1966

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1966

MACMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED
Little Essex Street London WC 2
also Bombay Calcutta Madras Melbourne

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED
70 Bond Street Toronto 2

ST MARTIN'S PRESS INC
175 Fifth Avenue New York NY 10010

Library of Congress Catalog Card number: 66-18270

To
CLAUS MOSER
and
RICHARD LAYARD
comrades in difficult country

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	ix
1. THE UNIVERSITY IN THE MODERN WORLD	I
2. RECENT DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITAIN	17
3. EXPANSION AND THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT	40
4. EVIDENCE PRESENTED TO THE COMMIS- SION ON OXFORD UNIVERSITY	57
5. HIERARCHY AND RECRUITMENT IN TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION	101
6. THE FINE AND APPLIED ARTS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL	108
7. THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	118
8. EXPANSION AND THE BINARY SYSTEM	138

PREFACE

The speeches and papers here reproduced were written in the course of the discussions which followed the publication of the Report of the Committee on Higher Education of which I had the honour to be chairman. I am republishing them in this form, not because I am under any illusion about the permanent value of such occasional pieces, but because I hope that they may serve to explain and to illustrate principles of educational policy which are still matters of lively controversy. I have made no attempt to rewrite them as a continuous argument nor have I shorn away the preliminary patter incidental to formal orations. But perhaps a short account of their contents will indicate the perspective in which I would like them to be read.

The first paper, which gives its title to the collection, is an address delivered to the assembly of European Rectors and Vice-Chancellors which took place last year at Göttingen. It is an attempt to outline the demands made on universities by the circumstances of the modern world and the structures and policies appropriate to meeting them. If the scope is felt to be unduly wide for the length — or unduly didactic — I hope it will be remembered, in mitigation, that it is not often that a mere lecturer has the massed university chiefs of Continental Europe and this country at his mercy for fifty-five minutes in a closed hall, and that the temptation to get in as much as possible was therefore very strong. In the context in which it is here reproduced, I hope it will serve as background ideology.

The second paper *Recent Discussion of the Problems of Higher Education* is an address which was delivered in the Littauer Center at Harvard, in the early spring of 1964. It singles out those aspects of the report of our committee which I thought would be of interest in the United States. It is reproduced

here chiefly because it deals at some length with certain special problems on which I am anxious to make my own position quite explicit, namely the choice of alternative methods of estimating future needs for higher education, the desirable pattern and sequence of university courses, the costs and productivity of higher education and the modes of financing it, with special reference to the question of loans *versus* grants. I have, however, retained the explanation of our British system of insulating the universities from inappropriate political pressures, via the devices of the buffer committee and the block grant. This is dealt with at length in the relevant chapter of our report in terms with which I am in full agreement. But I do not think we can sufficiently often articulate the high importance which those of us who value academic freedom attach to the constitutional position of the University Grants Committee and the momentous responsibility involved in the conduct of its business. I would be lacking in candour if I were to conceal deep anxiety in this latter respect since the publication of our report.

The speech in the House of Lords which comes next was delivered very shortly after the publication of the report and as the title I have given it implies, it was concerned mainly with the issues of expansion and of the machinery of government. So far as the first of these issues is concerned, it was designed to refute the suggestion, widely current at the time, that our estimates of future needs involved a reduction of standards of admission ; and although by now this particular criticism may be regarded as having been refuted, I think it is still worth reproducing — the forces of obscurantism are rarely silent for long. The argument regarding the machinery of government was an attempt to save a losing cause. The recommendation of our committee that the so-called autonomous sector should be the responsibility of a new ministry concerned as a whole with all those cultural and scientific activities which have their connection with government, as do the universities, through special expert committees and bodies of trustees — a

Ministry of Arts and Science, we called it — had come under criticism ; and I was concerned both to vindicate it from misrepresentation and to argue its administrative and constitutional advantages. As we all know, the battle was lost. The autonomous institutions, the research councils and various museums and cultural bodies are now all lumped together with the schools and other educational activities under the vast Department of Education and Science ; even the experiment of federalization represented by the existence of two permanent secretaries rather than the usual one, by which the pill was originally sweetened for the autonomous institutions, has been quietly replaced by an organization which is entirely monolithic. So far as the arts and music are concerned, I hasten to say, that up to now, my own experience of this organization has been entirely felicitous. But I doubt if the same favourable verdict can be passed on what has happened and is happening, to Higher Education. In my judgment already many of the more gloomy predictions of my speech are in process of being fulfilled ; and I do not see the end of the process.

The *Evidence presented to the Commission on Oxford University* is the one item in the collection which was not willingly undertaken. It was requested by Lord Franks, the Chairman of the Commission ; but since the one paragraph in our report in which the reference to Oxford and Cambridge, despite many heartfelt tributes elsewhere, suggested that improvement in some respects was still possible, had provoked so much aggrieved comment and even personal abuse, I was extremely loath to accept the invitation. On reflection, however, I decided that this would be craven and that indeed some good purpose might perhaps be served by removing misunderstandings. The paper which is here reproduced is the result — there are still further elucidations in the relevant minutes of evidence which are reproduced here by kind permission of Lord Franks. I hope that, if it is read calmly and without prejudice it will be found to embody an outlook on the present position and possible future of the older English universities which, if, like most

expressions of opinion on these delicate matters, it is not immune from criticism, is at least the product of good faith — and good will.

The next three papers deal with the problems of special types of higher education. The first, an address delivered at the Manchester College of Technology, is chiefly concerned with the idea of hierarchy in technological institutions and their problems of recruitment. The second, delivered at the Royal College of Art on the annual foundation day, was directed to explain the conception of institutions of university status with centres of gravity other than the traditional groupings — with special reference to the fine and applied arts as such a centre. The third a lecture on the *Rôle of Management in Economic Development* which was the opening event at a conference at Teheran, although traversing a substantially wider horizon, involved, *inter alia*, an attempt to spell out the rationale of Business Administration as a suitable object of study at the university level ; and for that reason I have decided to include it.

The final item, a speech in the House of Lords on the 1st of December this year, which I have called *Expansion and the Binary System*, is a survey of developments in the field of higher education since the publication of our report in October 1963. In particular it is concerned with the rejection of the proposal for the integration of the teacher training colleges south of the border into the English university system and with the philosophy of the so-called Binary system which has been developed to justify that, and other backward-looking policies, such as the refusal of permission for the amalgamation of certain technical colleges with universities. I attach more importance to this item than to anything else in the collection, in that it is concerned with a policy which in my judgment is positively wrong and may indeed lead to serious distortion of our educational development. I have watched politics now for over half a century and have had many surprises, agreeable and otherwise ; but I can sincerely say that nothing has astonished me more than that a government with an egalitarian background

and actively engaged, at the school level, in an attempt to reduce unnecessary and invidious distinctions, should be energetically supporting, in the field of higher education, a separation which must have exactly the opposite effect. I personally regret this all the more in that I have a warm regard and admiration for some of the authors of this policy.

Save for trifling verbal corrections, the speeches are printed as delivered. I have added footnotes in some instances to bring the comments up to date.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that the papers in this collection, although obviously deriving strongly from my experience as a member of the Committee on Higher Education, are entirely my own : no other member of the Committee is to be held responsible for their, doubtless many, crudities and errors. I would also like, however, to take this opportunity of declaring my embarrassment at the prevalent habit of describing the report of that committee as the Robbins Report. For that indeed was the result of a collective effort in which each contributed his or her full to the common pool ; and as a participant with less experience than others of some of the most important problems, I certainly learnt much more than I gave.

The London School of Economics
December 1965

ROBBINS