

PART IV

Background Addresses

YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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High Commissioner for Fiji in the United Kingdom

Mr Chairman, you have asked me to comment on the background paper produced by the Commonwealth Secretariat on the seminar held last year in Malaysia for the Asia and Pacific region.

One glance at this paper cannot but impress me with the extremes demonstrated by the facts and highlighted by the figures. Extremes in area from the largest to the smallest countries, from the 1½ million square miles of India to the 2 square miles of Pitcairn. In population, from 560 millions in one country to a mere 100 in another. Not to mention the diversifying differences in their religions, languages, culture and customs, to name a few more, and then to ponder and wonder - what holds these Commonwealth countries together? There must be a unifying force.

Reading between the lines of these reports one has the impression that there seemed to be an upsurge in the youths of Asia and the Pacific. Are they causing problems? If they are, how can one sublimate these surging emotions and harness them for the betterment of their respective regions?

I am here today representing the Pacific area. I come from Fiji. The isles of Fiji in the South Pacific lie about 18° to 20° south of the Equator, spanning the international date line. Fiji comprises some 300 islands, 100 of which are inhabited by 520,000 people of a multi-racial community. The total area is about 7,055 square miles.

Sugar is the main industry and accounts for over 60% of the country's total exports. Then there are copra, gold and tropical fruits. Fish and meat are canned and exported along with some tropical fruits and vegetables. Tourism is also booming. Our gross domestic product has risen from \$F36.m. in 1950 to \$F90.m. in 1970. Our gross national product per capita in 1971 was \$400 U.S.

When our King and Paramount Chiefs ceded our islands voluntarily and unconditionally to Her Britannic Majesty in 1874, Fiji was a country with one major race. Today, it has developed into a multiracial community. More than half the population are Indians from east India; a little over 40% are native Fijians. The other 10% consist of Europeans, Chinese and other Pacific Islanders.

We achieved our political independence peacefully, without going into general elections, two years ago; and we have been continuing to progress in harmony and in peace, respecting and tolerating each other's differences. I have given you a brief background of our youth which I will now discuss very briefly.

The need to curb the zeals exhibited by youths first seemed to be recognised in Fiji by church leaders. Youth leaders were sent overseas for training; and in 1950 a Youth Department was formed by the Methodist Mission (to which 83% of the Fijian population belong) to encourage youth to take more positive participation in life. Seminars and conferences followed on a self-help basis, as there were no funds available anywhere to service such meetings. It caught on like wildfire, throughout Fiji, then Tonga, Samoa, and Rotuma followed. Now every three years seminars are held in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, New Zealand or Australia which youths representing those countries attend. They support themselves, and pay their own fares, board and conference fees.

Themes for the seminars and conferences do not confine themselves to religious subjects. They cover all aspects of life and problems confronting youth. Most of their resolutions fell on deaf ears during colonial days, but it did not discourage them. Every year they still meet and discuss their problems, and they have been able to inject new ideas, new perspectives in the life of the Church, which encouraged them.

They have just completed a project which took them ten years to achieve. That is a three-storey modern complex concrete building which they themselves built under the direction of a professional builder who is also a member. The complex building has a concert hall with stage, dormitories, lecture rooms, gymnasium and offices. At times they were short of money and materials, but never a shortage of will and manpower to carry out manual work, during the building of that project. The building is now in full capacity use.

Following this, the Catholic Youth Movement, the SDA, the YWCA, the YMCA and the Student Christian Movement have all come into being and joined hands to tackle the problems of youth. The Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, of course, were on the ground before this, following their formal patterns.

A new trend of social service by youth emerged two years ago. In a combined Youth Conference, it was moved to accept and support the establishment of a voluntary service scheme which was to begin with the students and be part of the Fiji Student Christian Movement becoming an independent body at a later stage. The objectives of the scheme are:

1. To give appropriate service to people who are in need.
2. To promote understanding between the highly educated and the less educated people of Fiji.
3. To promote cultural understanding among the different cultures of Fiji.
4. To localise the voluntary services given by overseas groups.

Six months after the establishment, a group of volunteer students from various colleges and institutions spent six weeks during their Christmas holidays in one of the outlying islands, helping to establish a secondary school. The work done included the construction of teachers' quarters, under the supervision of students from the Technical Institute, with villagers providing the labour; the cataloguing of books in the new library by university students; work on the school garden by the agricultural students; and the teaching of health and education to parents and the community by medical students.

The volunteers also returned with the answers to questionnaires which they had obtained from the rural community, and submitted these to the Ministry of Social Services to give information on the needs and requirements of that particular area in terms of future development.

Many of these young people consider some form of social service as an urgent necessity for their personal growth. They believe it builds up their knowledge and experience and develops skill. Through co-operation in voluntary labour in

backward areas, they find reality less remote. They become more mature as far as human relations are concerned and are confronted with the limits of possibility in realising their own ideas.

Since Fiji became independent, the Government has been very much concerned with the increasing youth problems and the positive move by the young people, for it has set up last year a new Ministry, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Rural Development. This new Ministry is seeking the co-operation and help of all youth organizations in trying to meet the needs of youth in Fiji. Its role is to co-ordinate rather than to create.

On the political scene, the youths have recently formed a multiracial political party and have styled it the "Young Alliance". The "Alliance" is the present party in power. It consists of the three racial parties: the Fijian Association, the General Electors (European-Chinese) and the Indian Alliance. So the "Young Alliance" formed by the youth is a further step to integrate the three separate races into one party - the "Young Alliance" supports the "Alliance".

It is often useful in endeavouring to identify local problems of youth, or whatever it might be, to cast our eyes around, near and far, and see how other people, though under different conditions and backgrounds, are battling with theirs. What effects have the problems had on their youth, or what effect has their solution had on their problems? In doing so, it sometimes gives one the inspiration required, the different ideas that might be tried, or it may confirm one's doubts. Even if merely to prove to ourselves how immature they are, and how effective our methods have always been all along. It is such programmes of action that rejuvenate energies, and comparisons fertilize programmes of action, giving the impetus to progress.

I would like to congratulate the Director of the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and his co-workers for what they have achieved since they were saddled with this challenging task, and for the practical approach they have developed on this most fascinating and absorbing project. An aspect of the approach that appeals to me is the way in which they have involved the youth themselves to participate in the discussion of their own problems and in identifying them.

Very often in the past the experts were called on to endeavour to diagnose where the problems are, then to formulate classical remedies to match them. Theoretically, most do look good, and may have been the best solution, but, without the participation of the party concerned, there is lack of communication and inspiration: the recommendations often ended up on shelves.

I think it was Professor John Adams who once said that if you are going to teach John Latin, you must not only know Latin; you must also know John. The experts may know Latin back to front, but who knows John and what John wants better than John himself? For these reasons, I welcome this approach in the participation of youth to help identify their own problems in co-operation with the experienced people who have the interest and welfare of youth at heart, and who have been engaged in youth work, as we have seen in this seminar.

In my opinion the youth in developing countries have been misunderstood and disregarded for some considerable time. After providing them with good education and training we tend to regard them as our inferiors. I believe the youths want to be recognised and to be treated as our equals. If we believe in equality then we must grant them their due. They should not be deprived of the opportunities and responsibilities merely because they are youths.

When I refer to equality, I am reminded of that memorable speech by one of Britain's foremost Prime Ministers, Disraeli, when he said that there are two kinds of equality. There is the equality that elevates and creates and the equality that levels and destroys. Raising one of his hands with his fingers closed together pointing upwards in full view of his audience, he pointed with the index finger of his other hand to the middle finger of his raised hand saying: "To that fellow, equality means the raising and elevation of the other fingers to enjoy its status." Then pointing at the thumb of the raised hand he said: "To that fellow, it means the chopping off of the rest of the fingers to come to his level, which of course would cause bloodshed and pain."

Does it ever occur to some of us, that perhaps at times the youth of today, with the advantage of learning we have provided for them, and by inheritance and through mass media of modern facilities, have developed and matured earlier than we realised, have often found themselves in the situation of the latter?