

FOREWORD

by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

The Commonwealth Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar completed the series of regional meetings devoted to a study of youth problems, youth training and employment. In Nairobi towards the end of 1969 participants from our twelve African member countries met to discuss the increasingly urgent problems deriving from markedly youthful populations. In August 1970 the Commonwealth Caribbean countries took up the same problems in the context of their own geographical area. A year later, experts from Commonwealth Asian and Pacific members, representing nearly four-fifths of Commonwealth people and nearly one quarter of the total world population, gathered to consider how their four hundred million young people could best be enabled to participate in creating a future in so far as possible in keeping with their expectations.

By the time that the Asia-Pacific Seminar assembled in Kuala Lumpur much had been learned from the previous meetings. Kuala Lumpur did not merely repeat the same play with different actors and backcloth. The Seminar developed from the two previous regional seminars and also drew heavily on earlier meetings organised in the region by international agencies to discuss other aspects of the same major problems. In the period since the Nairobi meeting our own thinking had advanced. While the African Seminar concentrated heavily on aspects of vocational and social training for young people, it has become even more apparent that this is only one facet of the overall problem. The Fifth Commonwealth Education Conference recognised that the crux of the youth problem facing developing and more developed member countries alike is the creation of employment opportunities and the preparation of individuals to take advantage of them. The increased provision of training, for example, without ensuring employment opportunities for the successful trainees merely advances the level of frustration, and the establishment of youth

services without full planning for useful absorption of those emerging from such services results in disillusion and unrest.

The Secretariat programme, which started modestly by considering particular aspects of the problem, has led inevitably to the conclusion that these aspects cannot be studied profitably in isolation. They become meaningful only when set in their full context. Youth training must be viewed against the formal educational structure and the employment situation. The employment situation itself is influenced by educational policies, demographic trends, economic development and international trading patterns. It would not be untrue to say that the unemployed school leaver in the poorest developing country casts his shadow over the GATT Conference table and the stock market indicator board.

Nor can education and training be divorced from patterns of social change. Weakening family structures and inadequate standards of nutrition, hygiene and housing, coupled with the pressures exerted by the mass media, complicate still further the political and economic pattern.

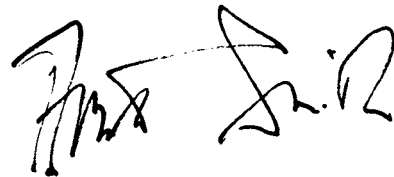
Today's youngsters will inherit the earth, and they will do so sooner than many care to think. People under 25 form the majority of the Commonwealth's population - and of the world's population. Young people are not distinct zoological species; when we talk about "youth problems" what we mean is national development in countries with predominantly youthful populations.

Only when regarded thus does the perspective become clear. Palliative legislation will not serve. This merely delays the 18 plus problem and creates a far more dangerous one at 25 plus. Solutions will only be found if petty sensitivities give way to interdisciplinary, inter-departmental, inter-Ministerial action. Merely talking about the problem will not suffice. Good intentions require positive action, now.

Commonwealth Heads of Government, at their meeting in Singapore in January 1971, instructed us to organise a conference at Ministerial level of those concerned with youth matters to make a comprehensive review of youth problems with particular reference to the alleviation of unemployment. The Secretariat proposes to hold this meeting in mid 1972. To ensure adequate preparation the Ministerial conference will be preceded by a meeting of senior officials engaged with youth questions. It is hoped that the outcomes of these two crucial meetings will

lead to specific action on national, regional and Commonwealth levels.

The complexity of youth problems, their urgency and potential dangers, are now sufficiently known and appreciated to ensure that measures will be taken to come to grips with them. While the task is not easy, I am confident that Commonwealth Governments will meet the challenge. Survival depends on success.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John G. ...". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the first part of the name.