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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS - 33 NOTES ON ENLIGHTENMENT AND
TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION I:
THE ISSUES

P. O. Box 14246
Nairobi, Kenya
12th April 1973

Mr. Richard Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Attached you will find the first installment of a four part series about the problems of transnational cooperation in matters of enlightenment.

This first newsletter identifies the issues involved in such cooperation and briefly considers the record of two grand international organizations -- OECD and UNESCO.

Since the series is in reality a continuing essay, I shall use continuing pagination.

I hope that the position I take, though unorthodox, places the problems of transnational cooperation in a helpful perspective.

Sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

I. J. Spitzberg
Institute of Current World Affairs
27th March 1973

NOTES ON ENLIGHTENMENT AND TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

The history of international cooperation in matters of enlightenment has been of minimal importance to the conduct of processes of enlightenment and education in national systems. At the outset I should say that this observation about international cooperation in enlightenment matters is based strictly upon personal experience, reading, and conversation, not upon extensive survey. From my own experience as student and teacher in the American educational system and sometime member of various and sundry international scholarly communities, I can think of few examples of the results of formal, international, cooperative endeavors having a profound impact on what actually happens "on the ground", where work is actually being done in research and education.

When I make this judgment about "international" institutions, I have in mind the grand transnational organizations involved in enlightenment matters: especially UNESCO. I use the term "international" to refer to institutions with large memberships drawn from most if not all of the nation-states of the world. I shall use the term multinational institution to refer to those institutions which draw on relatively small numbers of nation-states to pursue their organizational purposes. And I shall use the term "transnational institution" to include both international and multinational organizations.

I am not arguing that de facto international cooperation has not been meaningful and important. One can offer a vast range of examples where scholars and teachers from one country have cooperated in the pursuit and transmission of knowledge with those in other countries. Indeed with modern technologies -- especially communications technologies -- the communities for enlightenment are truly international.

My argument is simply that the formal agencies of international cooperation in the fields of enlightenment have made only negligible contributions to the process of enlightenment; especially negligible in comparison with the sums invested in such organizations. And I shall argue further that more limited multinational organizations -- limited in geographical or subject area of concern -- have been more successful in actually affecting the course of enlightenment processes and show great promise of continuing to do so in the future.

In this argument I use the concept of "enlightenment" to cover all of the knowledge generation and transmission activities instead of the more usual "education", because although "education" might do as well, it carries with it in the conventional wisdom too many institutional constraints to be helpful in analyzing the broader enlightenment policy

issues as well as those dealing with particular educational institutions in their international context.* Also, in terms of international organizations, educational matters have been dealt with in their more general setting of cultural and scientific policy, which makes the "enlightenment" characterization of the issues more appropriate. Although I use the more general conception of enlightenment, I am quite concerned with the possibilities of international cooperation in traditional areas of education and in regard to problems of national educational systems. But the general term will be more helpful even to understand the specifically educational issues.

There is a long history of transnational programs dealing with problems of enlightenment. Bilateral programs have been quite significant and effective: examples range from foreign assistance programs to exchange scholarship programs on the model of the private Rhodes Scholarships and the public Fulbright Fellowships. These bilateral programs have focused upon people exchanges and have not attempted to develop cooperative agencies for solving problems in the enlightenment process. Recently some major bilateral problem-solving ventures have been established -- e.g. the U.S./Soviet space flight and cancer research activities -- but these endeavors are of such recent vintage that it is too early to assess them.

International programs have involved themselves directly with the policy problems of enlightenment. UNESCO is the grand old institution of international enlightenment organizations. And its activities deserve some comment.

UNESCO's activities in matters of enlightenment policy have been quite ambitious but of only limited importance in the life of the industrialized nations of the world. An example of UNESCO's attempts at dealing with important problems of education and enlightenment is the recent "Faure Report", LEARNING TO BE, which calls for a great commitment to lifetime learning systems. This report draws together a number of developments which are already happening in various educational systems and then extrapolates and codifies these trends in an argument which commends more extensive development of lifetime learning systems. As a policy document the report is rather general: it contains illustrations of its recommendations but it seldom gives detailed guidelines for implementation. As a scholarly document the report does show extensive knowledge of developments in many nations but little detailed analysis of the particular problems and prospects of the different projects it cites. Most important, LEARNING TO BE is just another book to lie on educators and politicians' bookshelves collecting dust.

To date the response of various national systems to LEARNING TO BE has been, in my experience in the U.S., Britain, and Scandinavia, to say

* (I adopt and adapt "enlightenment" following the usage of Prof. Myres McDougal and his colleague Harold Lasswell.)

"We already plan to do it anyway", or "We have been doing that for years". But the most usual response out in the educational and local political systems has been total unrecognition of the name of the report or the ideas included in it. This is not atypical of the impact in industrialized countries of most UNESCO work on educational, scientific, and cultural issues. The reason for this marginal impact is that UNESCO must serve so many masters that it is unable to create a supporting network in its national members to keep its work in touch with the needs of the national systems and to create communications channels out into the operating sectors of the systems. The grand international organizations are organizations of and for government bureaucrats with international interests; the men and women on the shop floor of the educational and enlightenment systems of the nation-states have little contact with them.

An organization which should be classified somewhere between an international and multinational institution is OECD. Its membership is limited to the major industrial countries of the world, but its approach to issues has much in common with the UN affiliated organizations such as UNESCO. For purposes of my comments here, I shall consider OECD a grand international organization.

OECD's activities sometimes seem to have somewhat more impact than UNESCO's, but in the case of OECD the constituency for the activities is much more limited in terms of level of development in participating countries. Although in some ways OECD's present scope of operations may be broader in subject matters of concern than UNESCO's.

The national constituencies for OECD are quite limited, just as those for UNESCO: OECD activities in the educational, research, and, insofar as they exist, cultural areas tend to focus on a very limited community of government officials and scholars. There are no general service programs, a constraint inherent in the policy analysis orientation of OECD. But more importantly, there seems to be no attempt to deal with those involved in policy analysis in the local communities, so the impact of OECD work on enlightenment activities in particular countries is severely limited. This impact (or lack thereof) is especially disappointing in educational systems, even though OECD does attempt to provide evaluations of work being done in particular educational systems through a series of country reports. Sometimes these reports cause a brief flurry -- e.g., a very negative report on Germany in 1971-72 prompted a very defensive response within the country's educational bureaucracies -- but seldom do these reports result in large scale debates throughout the system and even more rarely in significant changes.

One area of activity where in the past OECD has had some impact in the educational arena has been in the sphere of educational planning. Some European countries credit OECD research and training activities with the development of their systems of educational planning. Again Germany presents the clearest example, because most of the leading educational

planners in Germany have had some connection with the OECD development of educational planning techniques. But this success best indicates the severe limitations of international cooperation in matters of enlightenment for two reasons: first, the audience for this cooperation in planning is limited to a very small number of planning and education bureaucrats; second, the techniques developed serve only the interests of this small audience and could be argued to be detrimental to the local development of education and enlightenment activities in the particular countries, because their technocratic character tends to vest power in the bureaucrat's hands. Also, these techniques seem to allow for little variation -- or at least are given surprisingly little variation -- in particular national and social contexts. In fairness to OECD I should say that the emphasis in educational planning is changing and moving toward greater participation in planning by affected communities; but this change follows by a number of years dissatisfaction in participating countries and still involves only the professional educational planners talking to each other.

I would suggest that the limited impact of activities of these grand international institutions in enlightenment matters is indicative of important weaknesses in the way they operate and of a profound misunderstanding of the constraints on international enlightenment and educational systems, which cultural and social characteristics of national systems place on these attempts at cooperation.

The greatest weakness of these grand international enlightenment institutions is their reliance on limited audiences of government bureaucrats and professional scholar-conference buffs for information about problems important to national systems and as channels for communicating policy suggestions to national constituencies. Not only is the sample for understanding enlightenment problems small, but often these audiences are woefully out of touch with the local enlightenment systems. To illustrate this point one need only look at the International Affairs Bureau of the Office of Education in Washington, which is a connecting link between the grand international organizations and the local educational systems, or observe the way most scholars of comparative and international education relate -- or more appropriately, do not relate -- to local educational and enlightenment systems and their problems. Both are irrelevant to the main streams and minor tributaries of American education. These examples provide a paradigm of what is wrong with the support systems and limited constituencies of these grand international enlightenment organizations. Most enlightenment activities occur at a very local level well below the institutions of the nation-state; and the grand institutions do not deal with the local organizations.

Another weakness of the grand organizations is the great breadth of their concerns. Comprehensiveness of concern and inclusiveness of constituencies are important goals, but in matters of education and enlightenment, any organization which attempts to consolidate under its institutional umbrella most or all social, cultural, educational, scientific, and/or economic problems runs the dual risk of spreading its resources too thin and not having any meaningful constituency; a risk which is a reality in the case of most grand international organizations.

But the most important reason these grand organizations have not been very successful in encouraging meaningful international cooperation in enlightenment matters is that the constraints of national social and cultural contexts have not been fully appreciated. I personally am a strong believer in the "commonness" of educational and enlightenment problems among the various countries of the world and the potential applications of alternative solutions in one country to the problems of other countries; though there are obvious limits to the commonness of problems and possible solutions -- e.g., level of economic development, ethnic mix, social systems. But I also strongly believe that the uniqueness of political environment and the national centeredness of educational and enlightenment systems makes it unlikely that overly large and general international organizations are likely to contribute to the solution of these problems in national contexts, which is where the problems are and is where they must be solved.

The fact that most (though not all) enlightenment issues must be dealt with in national contexts means that issues of enlightenment must be distinguished in terms of international institutional roles from issues such as world order and security, where the solution to problems can only be transnational and often international in character. The forum for analysis and solution of problems between nations must be transnational and in the most important issues international; the forum for analysis and solution of national centered problems such as enlightenment issues must be mainly national.

I should clearly qualify my point about the role of national systems in the development of enlightenment policies and processes in three ways: first, I would reiterate my earlier recognition that because of the impact of modern communication technologies and human mobility all enlightenment issues have an international as well as a national parameter, but this point is not sufficient to justify the development of large scale international institutions to deal with these parameters; second, that existing international organizations play some enlightenment roles and have themselves international enlightenment needs which must be met through international institutions; and third, that there is an important transnational role to be played by various sorts of international and multinational enlightenment organizations to serve the enlightenment needs of national and international systems.

The last qualification is especially important in its emphasis on service. I would suggest that in the area of transnational communications services international organizations have played and will play important roles. In terms of personal communication, the activities of UNESCO and OECD have been extremely important as forums for communication about enlightenment issues among nations. One can raise questions, as I have done, about the overall effectiveness of their performance of this role, but they have made an important contribution where no other contributor was at hand.

The concept of international cooperation to service national systems is given substance in international organizations governing national access to international telecommunications channels such as the International Communications Agreement and INTELSAT. In these institutional roles the international organizations have served the technical and distributive needs of national systems. They have allocated scarce resources which can only be adequately allocated on an international scale. I would suggest that in the future the role of these international institutions and their service will become the more common international model, and that the international services provided by grand institutions such as UNESCO may find a more congenial multinational base.

Before moving on to a consideration of multinational organizations, I should qualify my overall argument by stating that my perspective is that of the industrialized and post-industrialized world. International agencies may have contributed to the transfer of knowledge and resources to developing countries. At this writing I do not have enough personal experience to offer a judgment on this issue. But I do want to make clear that as I develop my criticism of various modes of transnational cooperation that I am not arguing against the development and use of international institutions to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and money from the rich to the poor; indeed my own disposition is to route as much of this transfer as possible through multinational, if not completely international, organizations.

In the area of multinational cooperation in enlightenment matters, we have relatively few examples available for close examination. Although many multinational defense and economic agreements raise enlightenment issues in their statements of goals, in fact the role of multinational defense and economic groupings has been minimal in the past in actually servicing the enlightenment needs of participating countries.

However, there are two organizations which deserve careful consideration: the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), which was founded after the Second World War to deal with high energy physics research in Europe; and the Nordic Cultural Convention, which was founded in 1972 and which is a compact to cooperate in a wide range of enlightenment activities among the Scandinavian countries.

The lessons to be learned from a consideration of these two exceptional multinational institutions may teach us much about the possibilities of transnational cooperation in matters of enlightenment. First I shall consider the more venerable institution -- CERN. Then I shall turn to the short history of the Nordic Cultural Convention. Finally I shall return to the general issues raised in this introduction and attempt to relate the lessons of the case studies to them. But first a consideration of CERN.

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