

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS: 42 THE FINALE: SOME COMMENTS ON  
THE INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD  
AFFAIRS

The Colleges - 133 Crosby  
State University of New York  
at Buffalo  
Buffalo, New York 14214  
April 12, 1974

Mr. Richard Nolte  
Executive Director  
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535 Fifth Avenue  
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Dear Mr. Nolte and Fellow Readers:

I take the liberty of addressing this newsletter to you and also those who have been reading over your shoulder for the past three years, because this will be my final newsletter as a Fellow of the Institute. Even now as I write, I am an Associate Professor and Dean of the Colleges at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

In this final newsletter, I want to take a moment to share with my other readers an explanation of the institution which has been so generous as to allow me to write about educational policy problems for the past three years and to turn, albeit quite briefly, the critical tools of educational policy analysis which we have developed in these years to the activities of the Institute. During the tenure of my Fellowship, I have reported on a wide variety of topics in education and used a varied combination of tools of evaluation. This very eclecticism has provided much of the perspective which has informed my past analysis: by not restricting my sight to one or another "level" or subject matter of education, I have had an opportunity to explore and come to understand, at least in part, the problems of diverse educational systems and various parts of particular systems. This diversity of experience and report has more than any other aspect of my experience led me to two quite different fundamental beliefs about the way to approach educational problems: first, that any educational problem must be put in its most general systemic and value context, because educational policy problems are essentially social and political problems; but, on the other hand, that grand ideas and discussions of systemic solutions are of little use in themselves unless they are couched in terms of the experiences of particular institutions dealing with specific problems. The paradox of these two observations cannot be resolved unless the wisdom of both is accepted and the possible contradictions accepted as well. One comes to understand the character of educational problems in a comparative perspective in the context of general social and political values, not by grand surveys of comprehensive problems but by a careful examination of the experiences of particular institutions and by the creation of limited solutions to those problems which affect the relationship between specific institutions and the larger system. The previous forty-one newsletters have illustrated this approach. I would like to illustrate it here once again by considering the educational role of the Institute of Current World Affairs and suggesting its place in the society of the 70's and 80's.

## I. ICWA -- PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The exact facts about the history of the Institute of Current World Affairs are not completely clear -- the definitive history is yet to be written. In the course of three years as a Fellow, I have developed my own capsule version of this history, which bears some relationship to reality but which may suffer from my desire for brevity and a good story. The Institute was founded in the 1920's by Charles Crane -- of the plumbing fixture family -- and Walter Rogers a young journalist who was to become The Institute's longtime Executive Director. The original purpose of the Institute was to provide young people of promise with an opportunity to be educated outside of the confines of formal institutions of higher education, in which Mr. Crane had little faith: he himself had quit school after high school and had become very much a self-educated man. The Institute of Current World Affairs would provide educational opportunities by sending unwashed Americans to equally unwashed parts of the world (some of both were more "washed" than others). The Institute would ask nothing more of its Fellows than that they write an occasional letter to the Executive Director in order to share with him their adventures and to give them an opportunity to write as a pedagogical experience about the culture and society in which they found themselves. So was born the Institute Newsletter.

In this idea of the Institute of Current World Affairs one can see much of the spirit which motivated other visionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the value of experience in foreign countries and the importance of written communication in the affairs of men. But whereas Rhodes sent his men to Oxford for Civilization, Crane wanted his men to learn from actually living in and experiencing the whole range of life and society of a foreign country. His fellows could learn from an Oxford, but they also must learn from the workers on Merseyside and the Cockneys of the East End. The Institute Fellows were to return to America to become men of affairs, which they could only become after actually experiencing the affairs of men.

Before the Second World War, the emphasis of the Institute was always on learning about the society and culture of a particular country and/or larger geographical area. In the list of Fellows, one finds a John Hazard studying Soviet society and a Tom Blakemore writing about his experiences in pre-war Japan. After the Second World War, there were still Fellows concentrating on a geographical area -- although now the area of concern was more often Africa, Asia, or, in two or three cases, the northern world of the Arctic. But in the '50s and '60s a certain number of Fellows started moving away from geographical interests and becoming more concerned with policy issues that cut across national borders. So one had Fellows (sometimes in the form of "Sisters") studying youth cultures in Europe or new towns in a number of countries. At present one finds a predominance of interest in general policy problems over studies of particular geographical areas.

Each Institute Fellow is selected by an informal but exhaustive ritual of enquiry and interview. There are stories from the days of Walter Rogers which have him arriving unannounced at the doorstep of a potential Fellow and putting the question: If you had your choice of places in the world to work and study, what would you study and where would you do it? Of course, Rogers would have previously investigated the potential Fellow in great detail. But the scenario seems to have been that of the 1950s television program, "The Millionaire", where an agent of the reclusive John Baresfoot Tipton arrived at the unsuspecting beneficiary's entryway with an offer of a million dollars. The Institute's offer is not quite so large -- although its generosity is a matter of record - yet it carries almost as few obligations.

The best way to communicate the selection process is to report my own experiences. But let it be made quite clear that this is not a representative case, only the one I know best. Just before graduating from Yale Law School I was talking to one of my professors about the prospect of finding financing for a year in England, where I would study the changeover in Oxford from the informal administrative system of centuries to a newly powerful system of a four year Vice Chancellor. This professor was the president of a foundation in New York City as well as a lawyer at Yale. He told me that his foundation had no money for such exercises of self-education and possible scholarly interest, but he knew of a foundation down the street on Fifth Avenue which did indulge a few lucky souls with such harebrained schemes. He said he had just had lunch with a member of the Board of that foundation the week before and told me to contact Mr. Richard Nolte, who was the Executive Director. In my case, as in most others, knowledge about the Institute was transferred through oral tradition. One seldom hears about the Institute through the press. Indeed, the Institute seems to have a fetish about anonymity.

I promptly contacted the mysterious Mr. Nolte, who turned out to be a genial, pipe-smoking Arabist and who seemed to know something interesting about almost everyone and every topic under the sun. In an extended first conversation at the Institute Offices, I told Mr. Nolte about my proposal to return to Oxford, where I had been a student in earlier years, and witness the expected transformation of this institution's policy making structure.\* But as I was talking to Mr. Nolte, it became apparent to me that my plans for the next year were too much "small potatoes." What he wanted was a project that indicated some "chutzpah" (untranslatable Yiddish for a quality something like gall). So as I sat there talking with Dick Nolte, an international study of educational policy problems took shape. I had always been interested in educational problems -- at Columbia, Oxford, and Yale I had written studies of various aspects of educational problems, although I had never studied education per se -- so when I saw that Nolte wanted something on a grand scale, I was quite prepared to provide it. By the end of the conversation my future appointment as a Fellow was on the way.

After extended luncheon conversations with my wife and me, which also included members of the Board, an informal offer of appointment was made. But by this time Dick Nolte and I had decided that my Fellowship would be more productive

\* Mr. Nolte seemed intrigued that I did not intend to practice law -- at that time I was considering accepting a teaching appointment at the Claremont Colleges. In fact, when I applied to law school, I had told all of the admission officers that I would never be a full-time practicing lawyer. I attended law school because I thought that it provided the best graduate education in the U.S. and because lawyers are usually in the best position to translate grand ideas into meaningful reality.

if I added to my long experience as a student (my parents kept telling me that my one profession was that of student) at least a brief tenure as a teacher. So I accepted an appointment at Pitzer College of The Claremont Colleges. After two years in Claremont, I accepted a formal offer of appointment from the Institute and took up my Fellowship in the Spring of 1971.

This brief narrative of my appointment to the Institute communicates three characteristics of most appointments to the Institute: (1) The appointee first hears about the Institute from some friend or colleague, with whom he usually shares a former affiliation with an Ivy League or British institution of higher education (an odd qualification for appointment to a program founded to replace formal education); (2) The process of appointment includes exhaustive evaluation on the part of the Institute throughout a long period of time but is based mainly on personal interviews by Mr. Nolte and other members of the Board of Governors. (3) Finally, after a period of courtship, the liason itself may wait until the new member-to-be of the family has accumulated the experience appropriate to make the most of the opportunities of the new association. Some Fellows have already started at least one career before taking up their Fellowships.

Once one takes up a Fellowship, the most difficult aspect of life to adjust to is the complete freedom. One is his own master. There are not demands on his time other than those of writing the occasional newsletter, which, at least for me, represented no more than 10% of my time. The other 90% of one's life is invested in experiencing and learning. This freedom is first quite exhilarating, but then it becomes in a strange way burdensome. I came to feel that I was not very usefully "employed", although "employed" is probably not the correct word. This psychology of the Fellowship explains my own predilection to accept assignment from local organizations: my work with the Inspectors and Schools Council in England and the Board of Adult Education in Kenya. I was available as a free resource to be tapped by local agencies; but this was not personal or institutional altruism, because my work with these groups contributed to my obligation to the Institute to write newsletters and to my own education.

The writing of newsletters is the one task set for Institute Fellows. Meeting this task requires that one come to terms with the written form known as an Institute newsletter. As in all other activities of the Institute, there is no set substance or style. But there is an audience to be served, which is made up of a particular list for each Fellow, drawn from those active in the area of substantive interest of the Fellow, and of a general list for all Fellows, drawn from a cross-section of mainly Eastern establishment types but with an interesting collection of people in a number of other countries as well. The usual Fellow in the past has served these audiences by writing general reports, which are supposed to appeal to the whole list.

Before I took up the Fellowship, I self-consciously rejected the traditional newsletter form, because I was not happy with the examples I had read. Instead, I decided to write each newsletter for a more particular audience of people with a special interest and background in the problem under consideration, so that the

newsletter might be more than an overly simplified and generalized report about a particular problem. However, I did try to write each report in a way which would be understandable to the more general audience, even if the newsletter itself was directed to a particular group. Whether or not I have been successful is a matter for debate. But it also seems to me to be a matter for debate whether the traditional newsletter still serves a useful purpose either for the education of the Fellow or the audience of readers. Given the resources invested in each Institute Fellow, one would expect the Fellow's newsletters to provide a source of special knowledge not available elsewhere, which means that they must be written as a form of more specialized journalism than has been the tradition. The norm for newsletters should be the provision of new and useful knowledge about a subject although not written just for an audience of specialists. By writing for the ever present Mr. Nolte, one always has at hand the exceedingly well-informed layman in almost every subject, upon whom he can test the intelligibility of his writing. But the Fellow's primary audience must always be those whose work can be most immediately served by the insight which time allows him to offer through his research and writings. This atypical view of newsletters has informed my past forty-one. I would argue that it should inform the writing of others as well: and, if this service of the particular as well as the general audience becomes a norm, others will do a better job than I have.

This change in direction for Institute newsletters reflects a view of the appropriate role of the Institute in the '70s and '80s. There does not exist another institution that I know of which offers its Fellows the flexibility and freedom of the Institute. This characteristic of the Institute must be maintained. But its resources must be committed in a way which provides the maximum continuing return from the investment in people which it represents. The past of the Institute has been evaluated in terms of the future contributions which its Fellows have made. I would argue that its future must also be measured by the continuing contribution which its Fellows make during their time as Fellows to the societies in which they find themselves and to those who are especially concerned with the particular interests of the Fellow. This emphasis on the contemporary contribution of current Fellows elevates the importance of newsletters and requires that one ask about their contribution to the literature of knowledge in each Fellow's subject area. Most newsletters do not contribute much to the advancement of knowledge. In the future this contribution should be an important goal of the Institute.

In order to encourage an enlarged contribution to the subject matter under discussion in Fellow's newsletters, I would suggest that the Institute appoint a Board of Editors for each Fellow, which would be drawn from those working in the area of a Fellow's interest. The Fellow would then choose particular topics after conversation with the Board, and the Board would review each Fellow's writing and improve the usefulness of the subjects written about by the Fellows. I should quickly add that this collection of Boards would in no way supplant the review which the Executive Director gives newsletters, because he is still the best judge of both the quality of writing and the needs of the larger Institute audience.

There is one further problem in the present operation of the Institute which has important implications for its role in the '70s and '80s: the mode of access to Institute Fellowships. At present, as is illustrated by my own case, one must be part of the informal network of knowledge which is often called an "old boy" system in order to know of the existence of the Institute. Although the Institute is listed in various publications, there is really little public knowledge about the existence and activities of the Institute. This low public profile has meant that the Fellowships have been awarded mainly to white, middle class males; and when there has been the exceptional female or black the exception has been someone with a special connection to the old boy (or girl) network. If the Institute is to play a role in opening up access to significant social and educational opportunities, then it must develop new ways to recruit Fellows from various minority and majority (women) groups. The first step must be to inform larger groups of promising young people about the existence of Institute Fellowships, which will require that the Institute indulge in selective publicity about its own activities. There may even be a need to increase the formality of the selection procedure to include certain application dates and more public competition. But such formality must be approached with care, because one of the Institute's greatest strengths is the flexibility which its informality has brought it. If the 70s and 80s are to be years of less injustice than the 50s and 60s, then the Institute must increase the justice of its own activities by providing fair notice about its opportunities to those who have not had access to them in the past. Justice as fairness requires the burning of old school ties in favor of public notice and affirmative recruitment of those who have not participated in the Institute in the past.

The Institute of Current World Affairs stands as an important alternative institution in the world of foundations and institutions of education. Its flexibility and informality have much to teach the bureaucracies which control other foundations and institutions of further education. But in order for an alternative institution to have an effect on larger institutions, it must clearly communicate its success (or failure) in dealing with problems supposedly dealt with by the larger systems. The Institute has been successful in providing a small number of people with a superb educational experience. If it can offer this opportunity to the same small number drawn from a large and more diverse population and if it can combine the education with a contribution to the advancement of knowledge of others, then its traditional success in terms of flexibility will have much to offer the large and more bureaucratic institutions. Viewed as an alternative institution -- and therefore evaluated in terms of its impact on other institutions and systems as well as in terms of its own internal criteria -- the Institute would have to pursue its activities in a more public manner and would have to make its choice about the future with this goal of further institutional change in mind. Such a goal would be new for the Institute; but this goal of contributing to systemic change seems to me to be incumbent on all alternative institutions seriously defining a role for the '70s and '80s.

And such a goal seems quite consistent with the ideas of Crane and Rogers in the early days of the Institute.

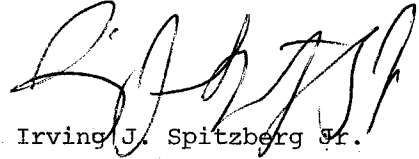
My comments on the past, present and future of the Institute of Current World Affairs rely on the two most important lessons which I have learned from my three years of exploration of educational policy problems in various countries: first, that alternative institutions provide the most effective mode of changing larger social systems -- that is, alternative approaches which have an institutional framework can affect larger systems, as in the case of open classrooms in Great Britain or neighborhood law offices in the United States; second, that these alternative institutions must be justifiable in terms of internal operation and larger systemic impact by reference to the most important social and political values which provide the norms for evaluating the larger social system. The insights of both lessons suggest that the Institute of Current World Affairs has a distinguished record in the past but that its contribution to the future will require some significant changes which maintain flexibility but which increase its contribution to the future of justice in its neighboring institutions by increasing justice in its own affair.

The evaluation of the Institute allows me to conclude by stating clearly the two components of my account of normative policy analysis -- a clear conception of the modes of social change and an account of the values which are important in society. Only by reference to both elements can one comment on particular institutions. The conceptual tools available to analyze both elements are still quite simplistic, but hopefully the Institute of Current World Affairs can contribute to both the analysis and the substantive improvement of policies through its future Fellows and their activities.

I can end my association with the Institute with no better contribution than to ask that its future live up to its past. And by thanking you, Mr. Nolte, and your fellow readers for your patience and support during the past three years. I have now submitted to you my comments on the past. In exchange, I would very much appreciate receiving your evaluation -- and that of your fellow readers -- of my newsletter, since a Fellow does not regularly hear from his readers. And perhaps my readers' comments would be helpful to the Institute in charting its future for the next decade. They certainly would help me in charting mine.

To you and my friends in England, Scotland, Wales, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Israel, Kenya, Tanzania and the United States, who have made my three years so meaningful, let me say thanks for my past and future.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. Spitzberg Sr.', written in a cursive style.

Irving J. Spitzberg Sr.

Received in New York on April 28, 1974