

EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING

Education and job training as the basis of a regional and inter-American partnership

Summary of the conferences and discussions on September 20, 1997

Chair: **Mr. Mark Lawrence**

Speaker of the Senate of the State of Maine

Vice-chair: **Madam Monique Gagnon-Tremblay**

Member of the National Assembly of Québec

Speakers: **Mr. Daniel E. Bosley**

Chairman of the Committee on Government Regulations, House of Representatives of Massachusetts

Mr. Francisco Xavier Salazar Sáenz

Secretary of the Committee on Education of the Senate of Mexico

Mr. Ruben Vélez Nuñez

Secretary-General of the Andean Parliament

Secretary: **Mr. Charles A. Bogue**

National Assembly of Québec

Mr. Daniel E. Bosley is currently Chairman of the Committee on Government Regulations, House of Representatives of Massachusetts, having previously chaired the Joint Committee on Trade and Labor for three years. Since 1993, he has chaired the working group on export promotion of the Council of State Governments / Eastern Regional Conference, whose mandate is to examine means of increasing the effectiveness of the export promotion programs on the international market.

Mr. Bosley underlined the scale of the technological changes that have occurred since the 1960s. Seen from the viewpoint of the United States, the challenges to be faced arise more out of the new technologies than out of the globalization of trade: the technologies of heavy industry, which was at its pinnacle thirty years ago, have given way to the communications technologies, which are rapidly evolving, to the extent that some 43,000,000 jobs have been lost in the traditional industries since 1979.

An increasingly high standard of knowledge is sought in today's workers: 80 percent of the jobs that will be created in Massachusetts between now and the year 2000 will require post-secondary training, and yet in the United States, one person out of six does not know how to read above grade six level. Retraining programs are too reactive: it is necessary to act more quickly to prevent job losses. In addition, it has become essential to learn a second language nowadays.

Two kinds of training should be perfected: specialized professional training, aiming to satisfy the needs and criteria of a precise job in a precise industry; and general training liable to provide students with basic knowledge. In the final reckoning, the latter is the more important of the two, since it makes students adaptable and versatile, and as a result, liable to develop and assume multidisciplinary functions in a job that will be done mainly on a teamwork basis.

In order to better provide the necessary training, a partnership between governments and businesses is essential. Professional training must become an integral part of the practices of each enterprise, and must be recognized as a commercial asset, not as a fringe benefit. But governments will always have an important role to play, particularly in the field of literacy training. In addition, in cooperation with the private sector, the public sector can enhance distance training, group together and coordinate the large number of existing occupational training programs, standardize the skills required and regulate training programs.

Mr. Francisco Xavier Salazar Sáenz is Secretary of the Committees on Education and on the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Nation, of the Senate of Mexico. He holds a Master's degree in Administration and has completed his courses for a PhD in social sciences. He has been Chief Executive Officer of many Mexican enterprises and has taught at the Esperanza Institute, at La Salle University and at the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí. During his years of teaching, he has worked actively within many unions, including the National Confederation of University Workers, which has a membership of 100,000 unionized workers, and of which he was Secretary General from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Salazar Sáenz stated that the central planned economy system has shown itself not to be very effective, and that the market economy, which is increasingly subject to the neoliberal ideology, is not able to solve all problems either. Indeed, with liberalism, problems such as unemployment, marginalization, exclusion and the gap between rich and poor have worsened.

Education cannot escape from the influence of the economy. In the context of a globalized economy, two approaches can be adopted in the area of education: training that is limited to making workers more productive, or training that allows them not only to survive, but also to live better within the community. It is the latter that must be favoured, as the harmonious development of the well-rounded human being demands the teaching of spiritual and ethical values, which there is a tendency to overlook nowadays. These values recall the ideal of a university, where the student is called on to discover truth on a relatively autonomous basis, through discussion and analysis.

Who must determine which values to teach? This is above all the responsibility of parents and of society. Firstly, a broad consensus must be established on a range of economic and educational policies that will stand up to changes of government, having been established within a long-term perspective.

What must the legislators do to promote education? Firstly, they must eliminate the obstacles to the forming of consensus — particularly over-bureaucratization, inefficiency and indifference — and encourage the citizens to participate more actively. Then, they must increase the budget devoted to education. Finally, they must situate their actions in the pursuit of a fundamental objective of education, namely the promotion and reinforcement of national identity, as each culture contributes to the global enrichment.

Mr. Ruben Vélez Nuñez holds the position of Secretary-General of the Andean Parliament, of which

he has also been Vice-President. He holds a licence in political and social sciences, a PhD in jurisprudence and is a lawyer. A Professor at the University of Buenos Aires, he is specialized in the field of international organizations and intellectual penal law. Notably, he has been a member of the National Congress of Ecuador and Vice-President of the Committee on Constitutional Reform.

Mr. Vélez Nuñez dealt with the theme of education from three angles. Firstly, while we can state that access to education has been improving over a certain period, it nevertheless remains true that the fight against illiteracy is far from having been won. The next century will be that of knowledge and the countries will perhaps no longer be divided according to their wealth, but rather according to the quality of education of their populations.

In the Andean countries, it will be necessary to create a high-quality educational project to build collective knowledge and thus a civilized community. It is indispensable to create innovative options in education, open to the marginalized sectors. Increased budgets are required for this purpose, as well as concrete solutions, such as virtual university and the itinerant school, which are apt to broaden access to education in all the regions.

Secondly, it is indispensable to create a democratic culture based on solidarity. Today, the political authorities are in a crisis in the Latin-American countries: the constant restructuring of the State, the depoliticization of civil society, the absence of clarity in the goals of governments and administrative chaos undermine the credibility of the political institutions in the eyes of the citizens, and are as many negative influences on the democratic processes.

Democratic culture is based on standards of conduct, roles and behaviours which enhance equality between all individuals, although without hindering their freedom. However, in actual fact, there does not currently exist a program of education in democracy that favours the participation of citizens in public life.

This brought Mr. Nuñez to speak, in the third place, about the training of parliamentarians themselves. The weaknesses that we can observe in the case of parliamentarians are numerous: structural dependency, dependency on the Executive, absence of laws, absence of controls, deficiency of procedures, lack of information, lack of knowledge on subjects dealt with by parliaments, poor method of examining legislative bills and a refusal to collaborate on the part of other institutions, to name only a few. Ultimately, better training for parliamentarians must be at the centre of the educational reform, although without detracting from the reform of the political parties and electoral systems. This is why the Andean Parliament has created, notably, the Andean Centre for the Training and Development of Legislators, in order to strengthen democracy within the Andean Community through the setting up of training programs.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

It came out in the discussion that the main concern of the participants lies in the teaching of moral and human values. Given the force of the new technologies, the transmission of traditional heritage is becoming increasingly precarious. School children of course learn how to operate computers, yet they are often unaware of the moral principles of their parents. Yet Man is not a machine and it is not only in order to find a job that one obtains an education; it is also for personal enrichment. Finally, sustainable development must mean that we can conserve traditional values, while enhancing healthy economic development.

Who must define the values to be taught? Is it the role of the legislator? Of the educator? Of the citizen? In the opinion of many participants, a dialogue must be triggered that is apt to create a consensus before establishing standards. All elements of society, including parents especially, must contribute to it. In this regard, the main value to be taught could be the importance of participating in all the facets of life in society, since this value, indispensable to democratic life, is not yet fully assimilated in several Latin American countries.

It was noted that in this area, as in many others, there exists a risk that the richest and strongest will impose their values on others, through the power of their economic and communications means. Indeed, how is one to react given the values inculcated in children by the modern technologies, which are more efficient than the transmission of cultural heritage by parents? It seems clear that it is no longer sufficient to teach traditional values at school and in the home: society as a whole must be mobilized to reach a consensus and defend the fundamental principles that it cherishes.

However, it was argued that the participation of parents is often hindered by real obstacles of an economic nature, among others. They will participate in the consultation process only if their opinions are listened to — which too often is not the case, since the political culture that prevails in the educational institutions hardly encourages participation. Moreover, even a minimal participation in activities relating to the education of their children could impose unaffordable costs on the poor, particularly for child care and transportation. A serious approach in this area should resolve these important obstacles.

The search for a fair balance between the respective roles of the State, of educators, of the private sector and of citizens was a concern for several participants. Some contended that the governments will not be able to assume all the education costs at all levels; instead they should provide the basic education, while at the higher levels, a sharing would be essential. Others maintained, on the other hand, that it is mainly up to the State to fulfill the needs of the educational systems at all levels.

Regarding the partnership between the State and the private sector which is advocated by some to face the requirements of the globalized economy, participants wondered to what point it was appropriate to subsidize for-profit enterprises that also benefit from this training. What should be the guidelines for such a partnership, for example, with regard to the choices of teachers and of subjects to be taught? The answer could lie in a sharing of responsibilities defined in accordance with the economic sector concerned as well as with specific local needs. It was also recalled that the State could not play its proper role without true communication between parliamentarians and the education system, which is essential to enable elected officials to intervene in a well-informed

manner.

However, the point was raised that the problem does not always lie in the amounts devoted to education by the State; several Latin American States devote a relatively high proportion of their resources to it. Where the problem lies is in the use of these funds: too often, excess bureaucracy, wastage, inefficiency and corruption have the effect of diverting these resources from their legitimate uses. Moreover, the preference manifested by many teachers to live in the city, and the presence of a large number of ethnic groups, in certain countries, complicates the search for solutions. In this regard, it is important to create innovative techniques, such as itinerant schools, in order to bring the teaching to the students, rather than to expect the students to travel themselves — many even go to study outside the country, at a high cost, — in order to receive an adequate education.

Finally, it is essential to establish the principle of accountability of educators, so that they are evaluated regularly and answer for their activities, especially to the parents. Educators resist the idea of establishing public and universally recognized standards, but the publication of the results of standardized national examinations — which would be quite lamentable in many cases — would be liable to mobilize public opinion.