Stephens (Michael D.) *Universities, Education and the National Economy*. London; New York, Routledge, 1989. (Eng). MFN: 1887-CALL No.: GB-712 STE. 138 p. £25
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This collective publication is written by six renowned professors and the Assistant Secretary-General of a University. It throws light on the way in which relations between the university sector (polytechnics are rarely mentioned) and the economy in the United Kingdom are envisaged. C. Shinn and G. Sims deal with the topic by describing their history and offering more strictly contemporary data. They set the general tone of a book that is a documented plea in favour of the University. They feel that if it is useful, it is so in its own way, and that it must not lose its soul by trying to be too useful to the world that surrounds it.

Between the two wars, the Universities Grants Committee (UGC) enabled British universities to develop with public resources without their autonomy and their academic freedom being threatened or their excellence being put in doubt. According to C. Shinn,

to a certain degree they suffer today from the same dilemmas as those they were confronted with in the Middle Ages. The fact that they must count on public funds introduces a bias in favour of the partisans of a professionalization of higher education to the detriment of educational lawyers. This debate, however, takes place today in a much more sophisticated society where universities find competitors, more especially in the public sector. In their British context, universities, proud of their élitist tradition, remind one that they are the only universities in the world to offer high-level qualifications after only three years (four years in Scotland) and to award them to a proportion of the young generation comparable to that of 'any other country of the civilized world'.

The five chapters that follow are case studies illustrating the general theme. They deal with the principal group of disciplines taught at university. First of all are arts and social sciences which, according to L. W. Martin, suffer in the United Kingdom, just as on the continent, from the suspicions of the decision makers of this world, but play an irreplaceable role in the elucidation of social problems, the development of taste and the search for harmonious relationships.

The departments of teacher training and educational sciences see their history traced by W. Taylor. From 1810, when the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted that the teaching profession was one of the most respectable and less recognized, until 1980 when the accent was often put on the performance evaluation of educators, teacher training schools and their qualifications did not always carry the same prestige as other university activities. The chapter puts its finger on the contradiction between the faith that citizens and society put into education and contemporary pessimism *vis-à-vis* the benefits of science: what is the point of encouraging the teaching of humanities that are dehumanized, of social sciences that are ideologically biased, and of exact and natural sciences that have become more and more destructive? The author puts the question but does not answer it.

G. Sims deals with engineering sciences with great finesse and aptness but, rather like his colleagues, he avoids the debate on the number of engineers which post-secondary education should train to enable Great Britain to improve its industrial position. The fact that there is no reference to polytechnics here is particularly embarrassing.

Of the long chapter devoted to medicine by R.E. Coupland, the reader will, above all, retain an analysis of the costs of medical training.

In the last few pages, Sir Alan Cook offers a brilliant and concise – although rather one-sided – exposé of the interaction between sciences taught at the university and society. One remembers Julien Benda when he concludes that the denigration of knowledge for its own sake in the name of economic efficiency is a sin of the mind. One will also remember a few biting remarks on decision makers' lack of scientific culture and on the potential role the faculty of science could play in the basic scientific education of British citizens.

M.D. Stephens' conclusion denounces the lack of planning of governors in matters of basic and school education, and the illusionary facility of a government calling on the business world to solve problems that have less to do with the incompetence of universities than with the absence of educational projects in a society that is the victim of its anti-intellectual prejudices.

Altogether, this short book offers a precious testimony to the morale of university troops traumatized by ten years of Thatcherism, but the educational doctrine that lies behind it seems implicitly to lack scope. How, in particular, will the young English who do not have the luck to be part of the few accepted into a university or a polytechnic at the age of 18 avoid being the victims of the economic rat race and of unemployment through lack of qualifications?

(Translated from the French)

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