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A whole range of problems but good results: Interview with the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, Bonn

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INTERVIEW

Skilled Personnel for Developing Countries

Development aid has many aspects. It does not confine itself to the granting of credits. Highly qualified labour urging on the process of growth has to be employed in order to secure the development and industrialisation of developing countries. Such skilled labour and management personnel are the so-called development assistants from industrial nations as well as from the developing countries themselves, who are trained by the advanced states. In Germany this latter task is accomplished by several independent organisations. For an analysis of their work INTERECONOMICS* interviewed representatives of Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Bonn, the German Foundation for Developing Countries, Bonn, and Carl-Duisberg-Society, Cologne.

A Whole Range of Problems but Good Results

Interview with the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Bonn

QUESTION: The Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation is concerned with the practical side of educational aid. Can you outline briefly the scope of its duties?

ANSWER: The Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation is an independent organisation concerned with the question of political education in Germany and problems of international understanding, adult education in the Federal Republic, training skilled and supervisory personnel in Germany for developing countries, the promotion of similar institutes and establishments for adult education in developing countries and, finally, with scientific research into the problems encountered by developing countries.

QUESTION: From where are the necessary funds raised?

ANSWER: The biggest proportion comes from donations which we receive from all spheres of the German population. A large part of these donations comes from the trade unions; but donations come from industry too. In addition, we receive subsidies from public funds on the municipal, Land and Fed-

* The three interviews were arranged by Dr Christian Uhlig and Dietrich Kepschull.

eral levels, although generally only for carrying out specific designated projects.

QUESTION: What role is played in your activities by educational aid for skilled personnel from developing countries?

ANSWER: It plays a very considerable role. I might even say that the major part of our work is concerned with this, if the term "educational aid" is not too narrowly defined.

In the main, our work can be broken down into essentially two categories: education in Germany and education abroad, i.e. in a developing country. With education in Germany, we have specialised for many years in individual groups following special training programmes. These groups are made up of trade unionists, members of co-operatives and of journalists connected with the press, the radio and television. These are the major groups. Alongside these, however, there is a large number of individual programmes.

QUESTION: Is your educational aid based mainly upon theoretical and scientific training, e.g. the backing of foreign students in Germany, or upon the practical and technical

education of students from developing countries?

ANSWER: For the three groups mentioned previously, the education we provide is obviously chiefly on a practical level. Our Foundation also has another programme which has not yet been mentioned. This is the backing of students from developing countries. At the moment we are backing about 200 students who receive from us a grant sufficient to complete their studies and to obtain scientific training at German Universities.

QUESTION: In promoting educational aid, does the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation collaborate with other organisations in the developing countries and with institutions in Germany?

ANSWER: Yes, such collaboration does take place. It is essential, because this is the only way in which our programme can be organised. As far as organisations in developing countries are concerned, we naturally co-operate with the local trade union organisation for the "trade union group". As far as co-operative education is concerned, we collaborate with governments and in training journalists the min-

istries of information are our normal partners in selection and training.

QUESTION: What has been your experience in collaborating with institutions in developing countries? Do any particular problems arise here?

ANSWER: There is, of course, a whole range of problems, mainly connected with the selection of applicants and the employment of these after their return. To a great extent, this is a task for the organisations in the developing countries. Such selection is not always based on an objective outlook. Naturally, we try, as far as possible, to be objective about things by demanding certain qualifications or—before initiating an important programme—by sending a colleague to the organisation concerned so that he can help in selection in an advisory capacity. But ultimately we leave such selection to our current partner in the developing country.

QUESTION: Do you have any opportunity to test the qualifications of applicants from developing countries after they have arrived in the Federal Republic and then either to classify them accordingly or reject them?

ANSWER: We certainly do have such opportunities if a candidate does not measure up to the normal standards which we have established. I should tell you that our co-operation with such organisations and also with the embassies of developing countries runs extremely smoothly in this respect. Representatives of developing countries have a particular interest in seeing that those without proper qualifications are dropped as quickly as possible. In a great number of cases our experience in this area of co-operation has been a very happy one.

QUESTION: Do you also carry out a constant check upon the progress of your students' and trainees' work?

ANSWER: In educating the first three groups, i.e. trade unionists, members of co-operatives and jour-

nalists, we train these ourselves, so we always know whether a candidate is making good progress or not. For students, there is the usual type of term report from the tutor in charge to the schools and, in addition—and we find this of particular value—regular seminars where students from developing countries meet German students for discussions and talks. In this way we gain an absolutely reliable picture of the progress of students who follow their normal studies at institutes of advanced learning.

QUESTION: With training in Germany, do language difficulties form any considerable obstacle, compared to other donor countries, i.e. England, France, and USA?

ANSWER: Certainly they do. Language problems play a large part. Because of our experience, we have almost completely ceased giving instruction in German. We hold all courses in English, French, Spanish or sometimes Arabic—even in Germany—except for the courses for journalists and, naturally, the courses held at German universities.

QUESTION: How long do your courses normally last?

ANSWER: We now reduce the normal course conducted in a foreign language to 3-4 months. Besides this, we have a course for members of co-operatives lasting one to two years, conducted in German. The journalistic courses usually last 1½ to 2 years. We have found that there is really no happy medium between these longer-term courses and short courses lasting 3-4 months.

QUESTION: Would you recommend that University courses held in Germany should also be in English?

ANSWER: I should not think that sensible. When a student comes to Germany, he normally has special reasons for this. These may be connected with his subject or could be political. I think the student should take the trouble to learn German. It is perhaps slightly different for postgraduate studies in certain special disciplines.

Instruction in a foreign language by experts might be considered here, as is done, for instance in the Netherlands.

QUESTION: Is the main emphasis of your training aid currently slanted towards Germany or towards the developing countries?

ANSWER: Initially, there is no doubt that the main emphasis was upon training in Germany. However, we are increasingly tending to shift this emphasis to training in countries of origin, although it must be admitted that this presents much greater organisational and technical difficulties and is certainly not cheaper than training in Germany. We are trying to set up training establishments in the relevant countries. This makes it possible to solve more easily the ticklish problem of selection. In certain circumstances we bring top talents to Germany for more intensive education. We are also endeavouring to achieve a combination of education in Germany and in the developing country by attempting to complete in the developing country a course of training commenced in Germany. The purpose of this is to teach the application of what has been learnt under the actual local conditions prevalent in the place of employment.

QUESTION: Have you concentrated your training establishments in certain groups of countries or continents?

ANSWER: Naturally our resources are relatively limited and we cannot begin everywhere at once. But meanwhile, we have a whole range of foreign activities. We are currently working with permanent training establishments in Tananarive (Madagascar), Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda), and have a training centre in Santiago de Chile. In addition, we have opened a permanent training establishment in Tokyo, where it is planned to train students from developing countries in South East Asia, not Japanese students. Apart from this, we are currently holding educational television courses in Ghana. It is intended that these shall later develop into

a television school. In Colombo (Ceylon) we are planning to set up a new training centre.

QUESTION: Is it your opinion that educational aid should also cover the sector of political education?

ANSWER: That is a difficult question. The fact is that developing countries have to contend not only with technical and economic problems, but also with political and social ones. It would be false modesty or unrealistic if we were to say that we are unable to advise them on this. In this field, assistance cannot always take the form of education. So in speaking of political activity or a political

engagement, I naturally do not mean that German organisations or organisations from the industrial countries should, so to say, interfere in political technicalities, in the direct political dialogue in developing countries.

QUESTION: Finally, we should perhaps ask one other question, which we have already touched upon: how do you keep in contact with trained ex-students and are you able to influence the way in which they are employed?

ANSWER: I think I may claim that we are one of the few organisations in Germany to have an almost perfect system of subsequent contact. We have a special

department for this which is in permanent contact with 80% of all ex-students. As for the question of placing trained students or trainees in a developing country, it is scarcely possible to have any influence upon this unless such employment is agreed upon before a course commences. I must say quite openly that there are some cases where I am not satisfied with the employment of people we have trained here. However, although we should not delude ourselves about deficiencies in our educational assistance, I think—if we consider the general picture—we can be completely satisfied with the overall success of this assistance.

Combination of Practice and Theory

Interview with the German Foundation for Developing Countries, Bonn

QUESTION: It would be sensible to find out first how your Foundation is organised.

ANSWER: The German Foundation for Developing Countries has been in existence for about six years. It was founded by some German Members of Parliament, together with the Federal Government. Their intention was that the Foundation should organise short-term professional discussions for people in responsible position in developing countries who have no time to devote to longer periods of training, but who want to talk over their problems with colleagues from other countries and with West German specialists. This idea developed into management seminars for Asia, the Near and Middle East, English- and French-speaking Africa and Latin America. So far, we have held about 80 seminars for 2,000 guests from 86 countries. The Foundation is financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, although we also receive funds from certain of the Federal Lands.

QUESTION: Upon what sectors of development aid do the courses you hold to train specialists from developing countries concentrate?

ANSWER: There is practically no limit to the subject-matter of our international seminars. We deal with specialised subjects connected with agriculture, forestry and fishing, just as much as with aspects of culture, education and economics. Our programme even embraces special subjects, for instance, problems of local administration in a developing society or the administration of universities and hospitals, according to the requirements of such countries. In addition, we organise seminars for mayors and the like and hold talks with countries giving development aid so as to compare our methods. We invite to our functions guests from developing countries who are assuming responsible positions in specialities to be discussed. In addition, we co-opt German experts or experts from international organisations. On the German side, we act as a forum for German experts concerned with development aid, for example, for those who hold responsible positions in technical schools or hospitals, in technical information services, in forestry, agriculture, etc. Where agriculture and forestry are concerned, we consider one of our most im-

portant tasks to be the training of counterparts.

QUESTION: You mentioned the training of counterparts for German technical schools in developing countries. What type of training establishments does West Germany maintain abroad?

ANSWER: Contrary to the wishes of many developing countries, which would like to have a technical college or a machine tool laboratory, in these countries Germany only sets up schools for skilled workers so as to underpin the available technical training. At present, we have about 40 schools for skilled workers in the Far East, Middle East, Africa and South America and they are all working to capacity. About 30 more such projects are planned. Every such project abroad has about 8 German instructors, who work together with one technical instructor and one German project director, who must also have had experience in Germany as director of a technical school.

QUESTION: How are the counterparts for technical schools trained?