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Faith in Educational Exchanges

The increase in international educational exchanges since the close of World War II is an important development of American foreign policy. Most of us share the general impression that the exchange of persons is a good thing. The Department of State's recent publication celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Fulbright Act confirms this impression and promises a bright future. But exchange is not without serious problems, and the successes so far achieved have not come easily.

One of the fundamental problems is to determine the degree of control that the Government should retain in the various programs it sponsors. Two positions are taken. The first accepts the thesis that educational exchange is a part of foreign policy but maintains that it is foreign policy with faith—the faith that, in the long run, mutual understanding among nations will be furthered when people from different cultures meet in pursuit of educational goals. The other position is more hardheaded. It holds that the Government does not belong in the exchange business unless it can make sure that the money spent is serving our national security, in the present case by creating a favorable attitude toward our values and policies.

The two principal Government-sponsored exchanges are the Fulbright Program of 1946 and the Smith-Mundt Program, which in 1948 broadened exchange activities to include other kinds of grants and non-Fulbright countries. The two programs are based on the opposing theories of governmental control. The difference, as reflected in administrative machinery, is best illustrated by considering who, in each program, has final responsibility for the selection of grantees. In the Fulbright Program, this responsibility rests with the Board of Foreign Scholarships, whose ten members are appointed by the President, two from Government offices, but the rest from academic and other private professions. In the Smith-Mundt Program, the responsibility lies in the Department of State. This is not to criticize the valuable administrative assistance the Department of State gives both programs. The points at issue are the special interests and commitments of the people who make the appointments and the effect of the locus of power on foreign opinion.

Which of the two views of the role of government will prevail is by no means settled. In a recently published report, Walter Johnson, of the University of Chicago, former chairman of the Board of Foreign Scholarships, stressed that people in other countries are sensitive to our power and that foreign critics are prepared to interpret exchanges as a form of propaganda. But he goes on to say that the administrative arrangements of the Fulbright Program did much to allay foreign suspicion.

We suggest that the philosophy of educational exchange underlying the Fulbright Program is the superior one. True, the proposition that good will is best sought indirectly through the pursuit of other activities may be an article of faith. But it is a matter of experience that this faith itself helps create good will.—J. T.