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DRU News

James Lewis, Disaster Research Unit

Rarely any week passes without a reference to a quotation of 'the object of the University shall be the advancement of learning and knowledge and the application of knowledge to human welfare' and this week is no exception. Its source of inspiration is infinite and it has clearly been no mere coincidence that the Disaster Research Unit should have been formed at Bradford.

The motive of the co-founders of the Unit was, simply, that whilst at that time (pre-1974) international attention to natural disaster was wholly directed towards relief after each disaster event, it was clear that attention to pre disaster situations was probably more important and would probably be a more effective use of international and national resources. It was also clear that, whilst some developed countries had been able to take steps to look after their own disaster problems, there was a considerable catching up to be undertaken in this respect as well as many others, amongst the less developed countries where losses from disaster occurrence appeared to be particularly high. Clearly in the work that the Unit set out to do, knowledge had to be first advanced before human welfare could be improved by its application.

But if application was to be a by-word then little advancement of knowledge could take place in the relative isolation and safety of Bradford - in the North of England, an island off the North coast of Europe - a comparatively disaster-free part of the developed world. The Unit had to increase its overseas experience. It had to increase its first-hand knowledge of disaster events and of less-developed countries, and it had to relate itself to international bodies, intergovernmental organisations and governments - in short, it had to promote its aims and ideas in a subject which it had created and which was, and still very often is, unknown and unheard of. We held no conceptual

constraints except that of 'disaster' and the physical world and the world of ideas was 'our patch'. This has meant considerable absence from the University. Unlike many undertakings at Bradford we are obliged to go much further than our own doorstep to apply ourselves. There is much to be done to improve the lot of the Pakistani community in Bradford but our hope is to improve the lot of Pakistanis in Pakistan, or Bahamians in the Bahama Islands, or Gilbertese in the Gilbert Islands or Fijians in Fiji. Travel is our work, without it and the experiences it brings we could not work usefully in Bradford.

Such considerable attention to our overwhelming extra-mural commitment may have caused us to pay less attention than we would have preferred to our intramural activities and in-house affairs, particularly during the early part of the Unit's existence. We could do little more than rely on the University Newsletter to say what we were doing and at that perhaps not very fully. This is a situation which we have recognised and which, we hope, is improving, and we include the following summary of our activity in the University so far.

We are contributing to a course on the economics of production to Year 1, Industrial Technology and are responsible for a year's course to 2nd Year Science and Society students on natural hazards. In May we successfully produced and completed a week's intensive course to 1st year Science and Society students on disaster.

We have also undertaken to give four lectures in social studies and our other major teaching commitment is to the post-experience courses at the Project Planning Centre.

Work has also been undertaken within the current 'Issues' programme and with the University of Bradford Drama Group.

The production of this special page of the Newsletter is made possible by the co-operation of the University Information Office whose services we have relied upon heavily in the past and for which we continue to be grateful. We would like to take this opportunity of expressing thanks to the many other University services that, by the perhaps unusual nature of some of our expectations and requests we have abruptly confronted rather than gently introduced the presence and activities of DRU. The staff of the Finance Office deserve special mention here, as do the Union Travel Office even though they are perhaps more accustomed to the kinds of demands we have made. Educational Services have provided us with an excellent photographic service (for which we have not paid directly) and Printing Services have undertaken our newsheets, reports and Occasional Papers (for which we have paid). The Cartography Unit save us endless time in excellent

map production. To all we express our gratitude and our hope to be of continuing custom/nuisance in the future.

PS. It is often implied, directly or indirectly, that the worldwide travelling undertaken by members of the Disaster Research Unit is something of a 'perk'. In fact, travel is undertaken so that we may simply do the job required of us. In the past two-and-a-half years the three members of the Unit have travelled a total of 110,000 miles outside the United Kingdom and by the end of the year the total will be 160,000 miles. Rushing through or waiting endlessly in crowded airports, absences from home and family sometimes for long periods, and tiring journeys are, however, extremely wearing on us and our belongings and equipment. Clearly we would not be doing this kind of work if we did not usually enjoy travel, but we feel the need to point out that travel of this kind and to this extent is not a 'perk'.

Genetic Manipulation

The Secretary of State for Education and Science announced on 5th August that the Report of the Working Party on the Practice of Genetic Manipulation will be published shortly.

The Working Party was set up recently to draw up a central code of practice for laboratories working in this field and to consider the best means of providing advice and control. Its report includes a draft code defining various levels of safety precautions related to degrees of potential hazard: it sets out principles for categorising experiments according to the level of safety precautions required; and it recommends that laboratories should undertake experiments only with the knowledge and agreement of a central advisory group set up to assess the hazards involved and advise on the appropriate categorisation.

The conclusion of the Working Party is that a system on these lines, instituted initially on a voluntary basis would provide effective control and enable the Government to consider the introduction of specific statutory control later in the light of experience. It is recommended that regulations should be made under the Health and Safety at Work Act requiring laboratories to notify a central advisory group before beginning any relevant work. Members of the central advisory group will be appointed by the Secretary of State in the near future and the Health and Safety Commission will circulate for comment the draft regulations concerning notification of proposed experiments to all those concerned at an early date.