

Man has not been recognized as the primary axis of development

** says Dr. Miguel Escotet, Advisor to the Ministry of Education in Venezuela, on matters of scientific investigations and educational innovations.



Dr. Escotet speaking on some aspects of the creation in Venezuela of a National Institute of Investigations of the Sciences of Man.

After having done a notable job of organization at the Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on New Forms of Post-Secondary Education, and after having presided over it, Dr. Miguel Angel Escotet continues to be one of the young people with the most responsibility in Venezuelan education. At present he is the President of the Advisory Commission of the Minister of Education for Scientific Investigation in the Human Sciences and Educational Innovations.

In his speech opening the mentioned meeting, which was titled "New Forms of Learning: a Challenge for the Future", Dr. Escotet referred to the philosophical aspect of higher education as a way to improve the lot of diverse sections of the working class through Post-Secondary Education, adult education, and even women's education.

The necessity is already established of improving the quality of education and of orienting it toward the areas of human and economic development; of attending the characteristics of massification and to give "he who learns" the type of individualized education he needs.

In the same speech, Dr. Escotet pointed out that in Latin America approximately 9 per cent of the feminine population works in productive activities, which means that on a developing continent and with a great scarcity of human resources, we are not using 40 per cent of the population. In Venezuela, 31 per cent of the work force is female.

It is on the future of education in Venezuela that we will digress for a moment, as Dr. Escotet is a dedicated investigator of our education. So much so that he has become, together with the Minister of Education — Dr. Luis Manuel Peñalver — the force behind the creation of a National Institute for Studies, of Human Sciences.

It must be pointed out that Dr. Peñalver is one of the men who has made the greatest effort in the creation and stimulation of Science and Technology Centers in Venezuela.

Upon creating this organization, technical solutions will be sought for the improvement of the Venezuelan standard of living.

More than a competitive organization, it will be a cooperative entity which will work with the other institutions of investigation and University Education of Venezuela, and even, will collaborate with other organizations such as the Fundación del Niño, AVEPANE, and the Planning Office of the universities.

There is no past experience in Latin America of the creation of an organization of this kind. It will make plans directed fundamentally toward the integral development of

man; because of this, it is absolutely necessary to know him thoroughly, on a world-wide and continental level and even more so on a Venezuelan level, in each of Venezuela's regions. It is necessary to know nutrition and health patterns, psychological characteristics, intellectual, anthropological, socio-economic attitudes, etc.

Human beings — according to Dr. Escotet's viewpoint — have been forgotten as a fundamental part of development; greater emphasis has been given to the way he can produce more. Ways have been found to widen the poles of economic development, but the true axis of development has been forgotten — man and his problems. Why do learning problems exist in children in Venezuela? These and many other phenomena should be fully studied in Venezuela, as for example: the importance of the parallel school, or in other words, the influence of the means of social communication; abandoned children; the lack of physical space to practice sports, and the lack of stimuli for creativity. Dr. Escotet classified the problems of education in Venezuela as serious, as we are not orienting the student for life nor to fulfill himself in his work. The student does not know his future nor his true vocation.

The implementation of a good system of orientation, applied throughout the whole educational system, could start developing a real wish to work in young people. This orientation should be centralized in the Diversified Cycle (last 2 years of high school).

Dr. Escotet could not understand how, in our country which has 65% of its population under 24 years old and which requires such a high quality of human resources, we permit that 80% of high school students "do not soil their hands", and do not even know how to hit a nail, when

in reality all the students should not only receive a general education on Literature, History, Mathematics and Physics, but they should also know, even though only basically, several aspects of technology.

He considers that our high school should be one year longer and should not only channel students toward Sciences or Humanities, but toward the point where men and women would know the universal principles of science, and at the same time have a humanistic sensitivity, and also know a definite technical trade. This step would be a very firm advance toward a true democratization of teaching.

The National Institute of Investigation of the Sciences of Man will work with Venezuelan investigators while forming personnel who demonstrate true aptitude for investigation. A part of this human team will be formed by the Venezuelan investigators; and other groups will be formed with European and North American methods.

Psychology, Anthropology, Biology, Sociology, Economics and Education will be the principal areas in which the investigations will start.

The new investigating organization could begin to function in Venezuela next year. "We hope," underlined Dr. Escotet, "to receive the support of Conicit, to which certain ideas have been presented, and in the near future a definitive report will be presented to them to solicit their advice."

Dr. Miguel Escotet was Director of Planning for the Ministry of Education and the writer of the philosophical part, in its original version, of the V Plan de la Nación, in educational material.

He was recently named Editor of the Interamerican Journal of Psychology; he is a social-psychologist and university professor.