

Open Forum 24 (1979)

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Josie Smith:

Sir Harold Wilson, before supper. After the buffet came the speeches. Sir Harold started his speech by saying that he'd done quite a bit before he came about the OU, one son works for it and the other son's within half a credit of his degree, and the whole thing was his idea anyway, back in 1962. But he'd learnt during the evening that the OU was not so much an educational institution as a way of life. He closed on a serious note, talking about conversations he'd had with students at York at another OUSA meeting.

Harold Wilson:

And I asked them because I was fascinated and I'd really like to ask all of you, how they managed. Rising at 6am, working late at night while still doing a full-time job? And some explained that they went hard at it to finish the course in the minimum time, often being seduced thereafter to go in for another course. I think a number I've heard from tonight. Others, particularly those with family responsibilities will take a sabbatical year off, and then resume the course, or vary it perhaps, with a little more variety. But what struck me that night as never before was their dedication. I couldn't help feeling and saying that if I were an employer in industry, commerce, public or private enterprise, if I had to interview people to take on for staff, I would be tempted to be biased in favour of recruiting Open University students, less for any technical qualifications they might even be in the process of earning, but for their proof of dedication and responsibility, their willingness and ability to absorb new ideas and to meet new intellectual challenges in the course of each day's study. In other words it is, I won't say a race of supermen and superwomen, but I think we have created something here going far beyond the ordinary standards of the old established universities.