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- GWYNETH HENDERSON:** Hello, Gwyneth Henderson here - and in this week's University Report - France, Francophone Africa, their relationship with each other and with the Commonwealth. Well, I don't know about you, but I've always slightly had the feeling that France, and to a lesser extent most Francophone countries, really think that French culture, language, education and so on are superior to anyone else's. And that one consequence of this has been a lack of interest from them in, amongst others, English language, education, English literature, and literature in English. Well now a new organisation has been set up which will serve to answer some such criticisms. Last spring in France an Inter-University Society for Commonwealth Studies was set up. Its President is Professor Maurice Pollet - Professor of English at the University of Dakar in Senegal. When Professor Pollet was passing through London he came into the University Report studios, and I asked him first to explain exactly what this new Society for Commonwealth Studies is.
- PROF. POLLET:** Well we have created in France a new group, which is inter-university, which can be joined by any member of the staff or, at that, anybody interested in the Commonwealth, to centralise the studies and organise them in order to sort of study the Commonwealth under two headings - the political evolution of so many new countries which are so interesting to study, and also the new literatures. It is an extension of our university programme in a new direction which had not been explored very much until now.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON:** Is it just a question of centralising what's already going on, or are you in fact aiming to do something new through the Committee?
- PROF. POLLET:** Well, it is first centralising the scattered efforts of so many people who, for the last ten years perhaps, have been working on this subject, and it is, I hope, to give a more greater impetus to the studies by extending our contacts with the sources of information which are primarily here in this country, and also in countries of the Commonwealth.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON:** What sort of role would, say, your own university, the University of Dakar, play in this?

This has played the role of a pioneer and particularly in African studies of English speaking countries because they were our neighbours, and for the last ten years we have given in Dakar a course on the evolution of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and East Africa and so on, for the benefit of French speaking students who I must say before knew very little about their neighbours.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What sort of things do you teach the students in terms of literature?

PROF. POLLET: In terms of literature we have integrated African literature to our programme of English literature very easily, and in fact we have Africanised our programmes, as it has been the case for other subject matters, so that we come to the situation where we start in the first year studying texts by Achebe and Ngugi and other writers. English speaking writers, to finish with Shakespeare.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: On the political side of the work this new organisation is going to do, what sort of ideas do you want to pursue? I mean is it a comparison between what happened in the French speaking ...

PROF. POLLET: Well everything will go according to the research done by people - it's a free field entirely, but what is new today is, you see, that before literature came first and civilisation was very much behind and was reduced to a first year course of initiation, but now with the changes in France in the new university system, something has changed and now we are able to place civilisation on the same footing as literature, and consequently these questions of Commonwealth evolution, the study of countries of the Commonwealth, can be made the subject of not only courses, but also a new thesis and doctorate thesis at that.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What do you mean by civilisation?

PROF. POLLET: I mean the evolution of the modern world, politically particularly, in the last ten years the accession to independence, what is of interest to the modern student today, who is intensely curious at what is happening in the world. You see the world has shrunk enormously, and the French student can no longer be contained inside that little surface of Europe. He is interested in what is happening elsewhere.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: So does this mean in fact it's going to make a great deal of difference to how much French students in France learn about?

PROF. POLLET: Yes, it means the eruption of Commonwealth studies in France in a big way.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: How is the organisation actually going to work?

PROF. POLLET: Well it's going to work in keeping with our professional Association of Professors of English, which meets twice a year and which will for the time being meet twice a year at the same date in those yearly congresses which go from town to town, from university to university. You see we shall devote one day perhaps to the study of the Commonwealth.

- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Well so now an organised interest in the Commonwealth from the French speaking world! Perhaps this new Society for Commonwealth Studies will also help to bring down the barriers between French and English speaking countries in Africa - the barriers may have been colonially imposed, but they are nevertheless still real ones. And it was to this area that I next moved with Professor Pollet - first I asked him what links his Department of English at Dakar has with its neighbours in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria?
- PROF. POLLET: Personal links mainly, but very many links indeed because for the last 15 years I have been in Dakar and travelled quite a lot there, and I must say I know most of the English departments in English speaking Africa.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: But there's no institutional link, there are no conferences?
- PROF. POLLET: Oh yes, yes. Periodically we have had many seminars and many congresses. The Leverhulme conference in Nigeria in 1961 on the use of English, French and Arabic and African languages, which I attended, and the Sierra Leone and Dakar Conference on the use and the teaching of African literature in universities, for instance, over two years was the subject of two very interesting congresses, and we have followed these directives set by these congresses, and don't forget that the Ministers of Education of these countries meet at least once a year to transform and improve the programmes.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: The educational systems of the English speaking African countries and the French speaking African countries are very different, in fact. Can you see a time coming when, say, the English speaking West African examinations council will be able to really work in with, say, the Senegalise system which is French?
- PROF. POLLET: I hope so, we are working towards this. There is certainly less difference now than there was ten years ago, because for one thing we interchange staff and for my own part, if I may say so, I go as external examiner to Ghana and Sierra Leone every year you see, and there in the French departments of these universities I find a team of eager French teachers, attache usually, who teach French inside an anglophone university.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: But on an institutional level?
- PROF. POLLET: At institutional level it's much more difficult. You see, institutions are very hard to change, and we like our French system of an examination which is open to a candidate and he gets his degree only when he is ready, so we can fail him if you like, without hurting him too much because he can try again, against the English system where you have to do your three years and then you pass the most formidable examination which will decide your life; and now I notice that in Ghana you can repeat a year, which is not always the case elsewhere.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: But in fact the French system tends to be - perhaps it's my own prejudice coming out - rather more rigid. The African countries

also appear to be still very much tied to metropolitan France's educational system, whereas, say, in Ghana or Zambia whatever...

PROF. POLLET: Yes all things you know, as we are now here round this time, all things are changing very fast and they are changing even in this subject here because in Dakar for instance we spent the last two years writing a new constitution for the university, which was adopted last year, and now you can say that the University of Dakar is under the Senegalese Constitution.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What proportion of the staff at Dakar are French or ex-patriot and what proportion are Senegalese?

PROF. POLLET: The proportion is about 35% Senegalese in the staff.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: 35% of the staff at the University of Dakar are Senegalese - a surprisingly low figure, I think, since at the University of Ghana, Legon, about 80% of the staff are Ghanaian, and at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria about 80% are Nigerian. In view of this fact - that there are considerably more Frenchmen still teaching in Francophone African Universities than there are Englishmen in Anglophone ones, one would assume that French/African qualifications and degrees would be accepted without question in France. Since in Britain a degree from an African University is accepted by universities here as the basis for further study as easily as a degree from another British University. Well is it the same with France? I asked Professor Pollet whether a degree from the University of Dakar, for example, is automatically accepted in France?

PROF. POLLET: Well this notion of validity of diplomas has varied in the last few years. The situation was at the beginning was that there was no difference whatsoever, and the diploma obtained in Dakar was valid in France - it was automatic. As you know, our diplomas do not bear the stamp or the name of any university; it is a universal diploma of the French University at large. But since Independence the University of Dakar has Africanised its programmes to such an extent that now there is a difference, and Dakar University has a tendency to be treated as any other foreign University by France - except for the first two years where the students can, French students (they are still 10% about in Dakar) French students can cover the first two years without any harm, but after that if they want a French diploma as against a Senegalese diploma or degree they will have to go to France to finish their degree.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: And this is because of the overall policy of the French educational system, which says that you come out with a university degree, not a degree of a particular university?

PROF. POLLET: Yes, it's because it's the logical consequence of independence. As Senegal is moving away from the French system it's normal that France should react by saying, yes, but such a diploma is African, it is no longer French.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: But nevertheless the standard of the degree that the students gain is surely the same?

PROF. POLLET: Oh the standard is the same, but it is treated as being different

now. It is treated as a foreign degree, so it is submitted to study for equivalent and no longer validity. If the substance of the programme is found to be adequate it will pass quite easily and be accepted in France as such.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: This is a bit of a difference in fact in the way that one views a university education, isn't it, that you're not trained as a sociologist then, you're trained as a French sociologist?

PROF. POLLET: No, because you're trained as a sociologist, but the subject matter of your study must be universal. If it is heavily African you cannot recognise it entirely.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: They are still a sociologist, and they still have the tools of their trade, and surely if these are of sufficient standard they make you well and truly educated in the true sense of university life, which is not only as a sociologist?

PROF. POLLET: Well I daresay that if you go further and if you do a thesis on sociology, even if it is African, it will be recognised as being an adequate tool for your trade anywhere.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Professor Maurice Pollet of the Department of English at the University of Dakar, Senegal, on the changing relationship between France and her ex-colonies.
And so we come to the end of another University Report.

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