
Travel and Challenge

It was fortunate for Fritz that he was working for Alf Robens when the idea of intermediate technology really began to take off. Not long after the Group's registration and independent establishment from the African Development Trust in 1966, he began to receive invitations from presidents and policy-makers throughout the world. They all wanted to know how the concept of intermediate technology could be applied to their particular problems of poverty. Fritz discussed each step with Robens. They were good enough friends to talk about wider issues than just coal business, and Robens realized that Fritz took intermediate technology very seriously indeed, seriously enough to leave the Coal Board if it stood in the way of progressing I.T.D.G.

So began a new phase of Fritz's life where half his time was spent travelling to the peoples of the third world with the purpose of upgrading their standard of living and means of production, and the other half spent on the problems of what he had come to believe was the 'overdeveloped world', where the desire for surfeit was threatening the whole economic structure.

Extensive travelling was not in itself a new way of life for Fritz. Much of his time had been spent in the air or on the train between lectures and conferences all over England and Europe, but such trips were generally never longer than a week, usually a few days, so that although there was a great deal of coming and going Fritz could count on spending at least some evenings

a week at home with the family. His frequent trips taught him the maximum economy in packing his luggage. He would leave the house for a week carrying only his briefcase and a small hold-all which was supposed to contain his ironed shirts and suit jacket as well as his night attire. It was sometimes a nightmare to Vreni wondering how he would look at an important lecture. One afternoon the secret came out. The family had a lazy hour in the garden while Fritz went upstairs to pack his things for a week on the Continent. I was to drive him to the airport. When it was time to leave I went upstairs to ask if he was ready. I found him in his shirtsleeves looking a little sheepish as if he had just escaped being caught out at something naughty. As we drove off I remarked on the economy of his luggage. He chuckled and confessed that I had almost caught him at his packing. He had been very worried that someone would come in and conclude that he was completely mad. 'You see,' he explained, 'I have developed a very clever way of packing things in a small space without getting them creased. First I put on my pyjama jacket, then on top of that my shirts, then my suit jacket and last of all my dressing-gown. Then I carefully take it all off together and roll the bundle up and put it into my hold-all.' His dread had been that someone should have come in while he was standing fully clothed in his entire week's wardrobe with his arms sticking out stiffly like a scarecrow.

With the advent of intermediate technology this type of travel changed. That is to say, the short hops to Europe and around England were interspersed with much longer absences of four or six weeks. It was an extraordinary process of history repeating itself. Once again, as in the 1940s, Fritz was engaged in work which he believed was vital for the future of mankind, and once again his family life was threatened with impoverishment as a result. Vreni, who lived for the moments when Fritz came home, for the evenings when she could sit by the gas fire in his study, surrounded by his books, and listen to him talking about his work, his life, his ideas, who felt that his words and his warmth nourished her soul and her spirit, was suddenly faced with the prospect of not seeing him for weeks on end. For six years she had lived with him at the centre of her life. It seemed as if the purpose of life itself was to be taken from her.

Yet if the opportunity presented itself to accompany him on his trips abroad she was generally reluctant to go. The small children seemed an insuperable obstacle. Fritz on his part valued a travelling companion. He hated to travel alone. He did not find that he could really enjoy himself alone, or appreciate the experience of a new land without someone to share everything with, to talk to and listen to his reactions and new ideas. Above all he knew that he needed the warmth of human companionship in the impersonal life of hotel existence. He had matured sufficiently since he was alone in Oxford in 1943 to recognize that what he thought then was the pursuit of freedom and openness in his marriage was in fact weakness, but he knew himself well enough to realize that he was still susceptible to his weakness, particularly as his charm reached nearly every woman he met. He was most susceptible when in the company of women who admired him for his ideas, with whom he already shared a lot mentally. Vreni, aware of this ever-present threat, withdrew more into her life at Holcombe.

At first, however, as intermediate technology took up more of Fritz's time Vreni had hoped that she might see more of him than before. Early in 1967 Fritz was beginning to find that the demands on his time were getting beyond his ability to do all his tasks justice. He had also become a Trustee of Ernest Bader's Scott Bader Commonwealth, a task which took him to Wellingborough in Northamptonshire for a day every month and it seemed sensible to try and reduce his commitment to the Coal Board. Robens agreed to let Fritz work a three-day week. The glorious prospect of a four-day weekend at Holcombe, writing, gardening and generally allowing himself time to think out the many new implications of the concept of intermediate technology never really materialized. Many Mondays were taken up with Scott Bader, Fridays generally disappeared in lectures, meetings, fund-raising efforts for I.T.D.G. Then came the first of the invitations to the Third World: from Peru. Fritz was glad to accept the invitation, not only because it was a sign that his message was reaching across the world but also because it was another contact with his roots. South America, the Andes, took him back to the adventures of his father and Uncle Fritz in the wilds of Colombia exactly a century ago. Recalling the primitive travelling con-

ditions of his ancestors, Fritz felt that he must go well prepared on his travels, even if that only meant carrying a full wallet to cope with all eventualities. Unfortunately it was the autumn of 1967, a time of stringent currency restrictions when money was not allowed out of England. As I was travelling with him I was very anxious about our financial resources, but he seemed unperturbed. When he unpacked our bags in Lima I saw why. His socks were stuffed with five-pound notes.

The first person we met in Lima was a man by the name of Michael Lubbock. Fritz, still smarting from his encounter with Eric Lubbock, was horrified to discover that Michael was a cousin of his sworn opponent. He trod gingerly at first in establishing the views of a man who was to play a vital role in his trip and was relieved when he found him to be of 'sound' opinions. Peru confirmed all the conclusions Fritz had come to in India. Poverty had the same characteristics world wide: rural depopulation, mass migration into the capital city, in this case Lima, at a scale which made nightmare conditions. He was also impressed by the spectacular landscape of Peru and its contrasts: the moonscape of the coastal desert plain, the imposing Andes and the steamy jungle to which he was taken by presidential plane. When the invitation came from President Belaunde to visit the interior of the country Fritz was as pleased as a schoolboy with a treat. He flapped around searching for his least creased clothes as though he was going to a ball rather than a journey into the jungle. He had had his share of ridicule from the economists in Lima, who could only see the advantages of modern economies of scale in factory production and failed to grasp that the detrimental effects the cheap goods had on the rest of the primitive economy eventually destroyed their market. He was delighted that this time the man who really mattered was taking him seriously. Unfortunately a coup not long afterwards ended any immediate hope of intermediate technology in Peru, but Fritz retained a life-long affection for President Belaunde.

On returning from Peru, Fritz received an invitation from President Nyerere of Tanzania. This invitation also pleased Fritz as he had been encouraged and impressed by Nyerere's Arusha Declaration, published that summer, pledging Tanzania to self-reliance and a socialist form of development. Fritz,

too, had long wanted the chance to see a bit of Africa, as he had found it difficult to identify with the people he was trying to help in the African Development Trust when he had no visual image of the type of society, traditions, or culture with which he was dealing. Again I accompanied him. This time his contraband was whisky rather than five-pound notes. As soon as we arrived at Heathrow Airport he bought four bottles, leaving his ticket at the Duty Free shop in his agitation. But even Fritz was unnerved when he discovered that the customs officials were as active in darkest Africa as in Western Europe. Before reaching Dar es Salaam the plane touched down in Nairobi, where an acquaintance was waiting for him to exchange a few words over the barrier. Fritz quickly offloaded a bottle and we both breathed a little easier.

A day or two after arriving in Dar es Salaam in June 1968, we were taken to the presidential residence to be received by Nyerere. Knowing that the President was a Roman Catholic, Fritz had brought him a gift of four volumes of *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*. Fritz was delighted with his choice of gift and showed more pleasure over his offering than his host. Then he asked Nyerere what he wanted him to do. Nyerere's answer was simple and direct: 'I want you to help me implement the Arusha Declaration,' he said, and added that a trip had been arranged to show Fritz the work that was already in progress in the key areas of the country. It was a fascinating tour: an unforgettable experience for me, and an eye-opener to Fritz. Although many of his conclusions about the problems of poverty were once again confirmed, there were significant differences from the other parts of the Third World with which he had become acquainted. India and parts of South America were places whose history stretched back to periods of high culture. India had decayed because it had gone through and beyond civilization into stagnation; Africa was still an infant society, pre-civilization, a traditional society that had not yet reached the heights of culture that so many other societies had reached. Nevertheless, the remedies for their poverty were similar, even culturally. One of the recommendations Fritz made to Nyerere was 'to bring culture into the rural areas'. 'The elements of culture are visual matter, music, reading matter, industrial skills . . . and body culture,' he wrote. 'In

all these respects the rural areas are poverty stricken.' His argument was that culture was not the luxury of a rich society but a prerequisite of development, that agriculture itself was no basis out of which culture and development could grow, but that culture 'stimulates the mind and that is the starting point of everything . . . it is too often overlooked that culture, and not money, is the primary motive power of development.' It was the same point he had made in India in the years before the idea of intermediate technology was born.

The second major difference that struck Fritz was the role of the non-indigenous population. In East Africa it was evident that the major entrepreneurial initiatives were coming not from the Africans but from the Asian population. It was also evident that feelings ran high in some areas because of Asian economic superiority. Fritz thought hard about this problem throughout the trip and eventually came to the conclusion that the Tanzanians had the choice of either 'using the Asians or losing them'. He believed that it was in Tanzania's interests to keep the Asians and use them as a sort of internal source of aid. They had the entrepreneurial talent, business flair, and skills lacking in the community. Fritz recommended that every established Asian firm should be encouraged to expand and diversify into African ventures, to which it should give technical and commercial assistance free of charge. In this way the Asian community would not only be able to continue its own business ventures but would also create good will and really useful assistance to the African community. In addition to this suggestion Fritz added some practical advice on how the state could become involved in successful business without over-centralization or bureaucratization.

Fritz's trip to Tanzania had a strange and unexpected spin-off. It was during this absence that Vreni fully realized the implications of his new crusade. She was deeply unhappy while he was in Africa, suddenly aware of how much she depended on him to fill her life and to provide her with strength, inner harmony and a purpose in life. She wrote to him of her loneliness, of her desolation, hoping for the vacuum to be filled by his letters. But Fritz no longer wrote the long, informative letters of his youth and early adulthood, through which his personality came so strongly to his correspondents. As his

travelling became more hectic, never spending more than a few days in one place, his letters became correspondingly shorter and to the point. No heroic words of comfort but, 'Keep your chin up,' was all the response Vreni received. It made their separation complete and she was thrown entirely on to her own inner resources which she found to be inadequate. She knew that unless she developed some inner resources of her own she would remain desolate and unable to live a proper life in the many lonely weeks she knew the future held.

Vreni's inner dependence on Fritz had become apparent to her before his trip to Tanzania but in a less intense form. Then she thought the answer was a career: this time she felt more was needed than keeping busy. She needed help but Fritz had passed through his evangelizing days and no longer tried to shape his wife's inner life or her beliefs. Never did he try and force down her throat his diet of St Thomas Aquinas, St John of the Cross, Joseph Pieper, The Early Church Fathers, Jacques Maritain and Friedjof Schuon. He was content to see her reading Dickens and Jane Austen or the occasional biography of someone he admired such as Goethe. Perhaps the experience of Muschi's death had taught him humility. Anyway, Vreni's own inclinations had not been of a spiritual nature. Since coming to Holcombe she had reacted very strongly against a religious institution in which she had spent some of her youth, and Fritz had to some extent taken the place of God. When Fritz left for Tanzania, in desperation she turned to the local Catholic priest for strength and comfort.

Father Scarborough was an old and experienced priest, who received Vreni kindly but not with the open arms she had expected. Far from welcoming her into the fold of the Catholic Church as she had anticipated, he merely suggested that if she was interested she should try and come to Mass from time to time.

When Fritz returned from Tanzania he found his wife regularly attending Mass. The next time she went he accompanied her. Although he was so well acquainted with Catholic writers ancient and modern, he knew next to nothing about the actual form of worship in the rites of the church. He was fascinated, struck particularly by the reverence with which the priests handled the chalice and the paten after they had distri-

buted communion, the care with which every vessel was carefully wiped and polished.

A few weeks later the Catholic Church hit the headlines. Pope Paul VI issued his famous Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, in which he reaffirmed the Church's belief in the sanctity of marriage and marital love and its rejection of the uses of artificial methods of contraception. The day after it was published Harry Collins came into Fritz's office. Since they worked together on the Collins Committee, Harry had provided Fritz with a number of Encyclicals after discovering that Fritz had quoted from an Encyclical on work to make a point.

'I've got a spare copy of the latest Encyclical if you'd like it, Fritz,' he said.

'Is it *Humanae Vitae*?' Fritz asked.

'Yes it is.'

'I've not only got a copy, but I've read it,' Fritz replied.

'What do you think of it?' asked Harry.

The answer was surprising. 'If the Pope had written anything else I would have lost all faith in the papacy,' Fritz said.

Vreni too found great comfort in the Pope's controversial pronouncement. For her, the message it conveyed was an affirmation and support for marriage, for women such as herself who had given themselves entirely to their marriages and who felt acutely the pressure from the world outside that shouted ever louder that homebound, monogamous relationships were oppressive to women and prevented them from 'fulfilling themselves'. She returned to Father Scarborough and asked him to accept her for a course of instruction in the Catholic faith.

At the same time, but quite unbeknown to Fritz or Vreni, I had also been going through a period of soul-searching. It had come to a head in Africa when the whisky, the irritation at the incompetence surrounding our arrangements and, it seemed to me, the constant repetition of obvious truths (in other words the by now familiar practical application of the concept of intermediate technology) had changed my view of my father. Until then he had been superhuman, a god. In Africa he was revealed as having feet of clay. The discontent and restlessness this induced forced me to face issues I had striven to avoid for some years. One of these was a strong attraction to the Catholic

Church which I had felt since my schooldays but had always feared to explore.

Shortly after the publication of *Humanae Vitae* I went to Holcombe to inform my father of the step I was going to take. I was more nervous of Vreni's reaction than his. By this time she had become my closest friend and I dreaded jeopardizing our relationship. But the evening turned out very differently. To my astonishment it was Vreni who was sympathetic and my father who bombarded us with a barrage of aggressive questioning. We were both taken by surprise. We knew of his sympathy with the Catholic Church and his devotion to many Catholic writers. Some time later he explained that he had wanted to make sure that we knew what we were doing and had therefore taken up the position of Devil's advocate. At my reception into the Catholic Church some months later he presented me with the same gift as he had given Nyerere earlier that year, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, inscribed with the words: 'To Barbara, with love and good wishes, joy and fullest approval. Papa.'

After this, Fritz's support and approval was so unreserved of the step that wife and daughter had taken that it naturally prompted the question, 'If you agree with the teachings of the Church, why don't you become a Catholic too?' His answer was, 'I couldn't do it to my mother.' It seemed a strange answer from someone whose life had already consisted of a series of dramatic changes that had caused his parents anxiety or even sorrow. Generations of antagonisms and suspicion since the Reformation had left their mark and Fritz seemed to regard the step into the Catholic Church as more revolutionary than his involvement with Marxism or Buddhism.

Vreni was now better armed to cope with Fritz's frequent absences abroad. She had a source of new meaning in her life and was not left with the feeling that she had been put on ice every time he left. When Fritz confessed later that year to having succumbed briefly to female temptation, she had the strength to smile and say, 'I don't blame her', and developed a particular affection for the lady in question.

The most important trip in 1969 was to Zambia. He was delighted to be travelling together with Julia who was by this time married to Bob Porter, a senior official in the Ministry of

Overseas Development. Julia knew Zambia well and they were both welcomed warmly by Zambia's President, Kenneth Kaunda. Fritz found his host to be a man wholly understanding of his way of thinking and ideas. Their meeting lasted late into the night and Fritz was so excited at the real contact they had made that he felt compelled to wake Julia and give her a blow by blow account of their conversation until the early hours of the morning. There had been a complete exchange of trust and confidence with Kaunda which was to be proved in the following year when Fritz visited South Africa.

The invitation to South Africa came from the Christian Institute to look at the African homelands and advise on black development. Fritz had no hesitation in accepting, this time taking Virginia with him. He was not concerned about the political implications of the visit or its repercussions on other African nations. His only consideration was that desperate people had asked for help and that it was his duty to respond to such a cry. He did not accept the argument that to promote the development of the homelands was to assist the South African Government in justifying their policies of apartheid, nor did he in fact consider the *theory* of separate development iniquitous. As a concept he thought apartheid, or separate development, was a perfectly sound approach to balanced and healthy economic development, and completely in accordance with the views he had evolved since his first contact with the Third World in Burma. Then he had advised the Burmese to cut themselves off from Western influences and develop their own resources, replacing every Western adviser by a Burmese counterpart as soon as possible; in India he had witnessed the effect of the West creating havoc with the very deepest levels of self-confidence and self-esteem of a nation. In Africa he had seen that wherever the white man had appeared, the black man had been exploited. Again and again the story was the same. White men with their superior skills and technical know-how, built up over generations, trod the black man underfoot, stole his land and made him his slave. That was what Fritz found iniquitous, the fact that in a mixed society the white man always came out on top, whereas the bottom of the social, economic and political pyramid was always black, either trodden under or sinking under because of a lack of skills and

experience. The only way to give the blacks a fair deal, Fritz believed, was to allow them to develop without white domination, which meant separate development.

To this extent Fritz was a supporter of the concept of separate development. This was not the same, however, as supporting the South African Government's practice of apartheid. He abhorred what he called petty apartheid, the discrimination against the blacks within the white areas. He saw too that within the white areas separate development was not in fact practised, but precisely the type of social and industrial organization which he condemned: the whites using the blacks as their slaves, disrupting the stability of black family and community life. But this evil did not in his eyes make it wrong to help the blacks in their own areas. On the contrary, he believed, the stronger they became the less they would ultimately be forced into situations where they were exploited.

In the emotionally charged arena of South African politics an attitude quite free from political considerations, such as Fritz's, was unacceptable and incomprehensible. Again and again he was pressed into discussions and arguments about South African politics. When he said he was impressed by what he saw in the African homelands, someone in his party would immediately jump up and say that he might not be so impressed if he knew about the politics behind the appearances. This sort of thing soon began to irritate Fritz. If the conditions of the people were improving, then the political machinations behind the improvements did not concern him. What concerned him was that human beings who were suffering desperate poverty were beginning to get the chance to do something for themselves without white domination.

It was this emphasis on letting the people help themselves that eventually got him into trouble and made some people believe that he had carried his refusal to acknowledge political realities to a level of dangerous naivety.

Included in his tour of the South African homelands was a visit to Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. The presence of the secret police throughout the trip should have warned him of the dangers but he was merely amused that he should be regarded as a potentially subversive agent. He chuckled at the fact that the texts of his speeches were grabbed for scrutiny by

the security forces as soon as they were delivered (it was a novel way of reaching an unlikely audience), and he was vain enough to assume that the red carpet laid out on the Botswana runway was for him (until his aircraft taxied by to make room for the country's President who had just landed).

As Fritz viewed the development projects in the British Protectorates he noticed that the white man was very much in evidence in these black countries. There were white shopkeepers, white administrators, white teachers, all along the line. It was the very opposite of what had impressed him in the homelands where these posts were all filled by blacks. As he observed this contrast he commented on it, and as his comments were made in public they threw him headlong into a huge row. Only the South African Government was delighted and claimed him as a champion of apartheid. A man like Schumacher, friend of the very countries so bitterly opposed to South Africa's policies, was a coup indeed.

When Fritz returned to London he found himself in an even more furious hornets' nest, the principal hornet being one of his closest friends, Julia Porter. Fritz's remarks had put her in an embarrassing position. Her connection with Fritz at I.T.D.G. naturally identified her with his views, but these views had been interpreted as an attack on British Government policy in the Southern African Protectorates, the very policies represented by her husband in his capacity as a senior member of the Ministry of Overseas Development. There was a bitter scene from which Fritz retreated hurt and bewildered. He could not understand why he had elicited such fury.

He soon learned too, on his return to London, that his incautious remarks had caused offence further afield. President Nyerere was reported as being very annoyed and this rumour was lent credence on a subsequent visit to London by the Tanzanian President when Fritz, although invited to a reception for Nyerere at 10 Downing Street, was not asked to meet him privately to discuss the aftermath of his Tanzanian report. Fortunately the ripples caused by this incident did not appear to extend any further. Kenneth Kaunda at least continued to support Fritz and showed that he understood the purity of Fritz's motives by not taking offence at his political blunder.

Fritz's refusal to take account of the political implications

of his visit to South Africa was reflected in a general refusal to be drawn into a discussion of the political implications of the concept of intermediate technology. For him intermediate technology was the way in which it was genuinely possible to help the poor. He said from his German experience that it was easy for the rich to help the rich; it was just a question of money. He further added that it was possible for the poor to help the poor. But for the rich to help the poor was very hard indeed. Intermediate technology was the great vehicle of breakthrough, the means by which the poor could be helped without the handouts and welfare inherent in Western thinking. In fact intermediate technology had tremendous political implications and was closely connected with Fritz's thinking on socialism. It is the ideal way of attaining the sort of socialism that Fritz advocated, a socialism which did away with the concentrations of economic power, a socialism which gave people work that allowed them to be fully human, fully conscious members of the body politic instead of automatons serving machines that served rich or powerful masters as remote as the state. Small-scale technology, small-scale enterprise, workshops and small factories serving a community and served by a community; that was real socialism in action, where no one need be exploited for another's gain. Fritz had argued for smaller organizational units. Intermediate technology was the technology to go with such units.

It is not surprising that Fritz was intensely interested in what was going on in China at the time. There, it seemed, was a living example of intermediate technology with its widest implications in action. He subscribed to a magazine, *China Reconstructs*, and glowed over the examples of intermediate technology, even though they were often sandwiched between pictures of uniformed ladies with guns. The good struck him more forcibly than the bad he could do nothing about. He read Mao's little red book with as much interest as he had read Tawney and Gandhi before that. Mao was another great man who had understood some basic truths, truths about never forgetting one's responsibility to the people. Mao also knew how to communicate with the people and there was a lot to be learnt in his direct and straightforward method. Fritz was, after all, rather partial to inventing slogans himself.

There was another line of argument about intermediate technology into which Fritz refused to get drawn. It was generally voiced by students of philosophy and went roughly as follows: 'Well, what happens after intermediate technology? Isn't it just a way of getting to where we are now in the West? On the one hand you criticize the West and on the other you are trying to get the Third World on the same road.' Such talk would annoy Fritz intensely. He would become extremely impatient and show less than polite respect for the sincerity of the questioner. He regarded such a question as completely invalid - a non-question. First of all it showed a complete lack of understanding for the realities of poverty, which it is man's duty to try and alleviate at whatever cost. But secondly, it showed a total lack of understanding of the philosophical thinking behind intermediate technology. It was so much part of Fritz's thinking, so much the foundations on which all his thinking had come to be based, that perhaps he took it too much for granted and eventually omitted to explain to people that it was not a contradiction to describe his philosophy as a statute of *liberation* at the same time as calling it a statute of *limitation*.

It was a paradox which was explained by a true understanding of the nature of work. 'The Buddhist point of view takes the functions of work to be at least three-fold: to give a man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his egocentredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence.'¹

The West concentrated on the third of these functions and had become trapped in materialism. Recognizing that work was necessary to one's personal development and one's relations with others introduced limitations of a material nature but liberated the real essence of the human being. Intermediate technology was the technical means by which this balance could be achieved. It made possible the step from misery to sufficiency essential for man to be fully human. It was not merely the means to an end of material surfeit.