

# Education and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa



Essays and speeches  
by Neville Alexander  
(1985–1989)

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The Estate of Neville Edward Alexander,  
PO Box 1384, Sea Point 8060, South Africa

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## PREFACE

THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS AND SPEECHES have been selected from among numerous attempts to address the relationship between education and the national liberation struggle. All of them were written or delivered in the period 1985–1989, which has been one of the most turbulent periods in our recent history, more especially in the educational arena.

I hope, of course, that the documents speak for themselves. In order to preserve the atmosphere in which they were presented, very little by way of editorial changes has been made. A few paragraphs have sometimes been omitted in order to avoid unnecessary and large-scale repetitions. I have been emboldened to publish these essays and speeches by the belief – reinforced by friends and by my publishers – that at the very least some of them will give rise to lively and useful debates at universities, colleges, schools and elsewhere. If they generate this effect and even if some of them are eventually judged to be hopelessly propagandistic and inaccurate by the majority of readers, I shall be perfectly happy. For, if there is one feature of the current intellectual environment in South Africa which ought to concern those who are bending their minds to the ‘post-apartheid’ era (however we define that!), it is the lack of serious debate. We are surrounded by sloganising and Viva shouts. Litanies with their choric responses have taken the place of the fructifying dialogue that comes out of the confrontation of independently conceived but divergent visions, ideas and arguments.

If this little volume could help to bridge the gap between these two modes of articulation, it will indeed be an important contribution to the intellectual and cultural life of South Africa/Azania.

*Cape Town, June 1990*

# WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS AND WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

## The economic crisis of the ruling class

FOR MANY YEARS NOW it has been obvious that South Africa has been caught up in the general crisis of the world capitalist system. The ways in which this crisis has shown itself in South African economic life are many and difficult to understand. However, every worker knows about the following things which we have experienced, especially in the last two years or so:

**Disinvestment:** Long before this became a political issue of the first order in the USA and elsewhere, major foreign companies had begun not to invest new capital in South African enterprises and generally to run down their interests in the country. The main reason for this was directly less 'political' than 'economic'. It has been calculated that profit on foreign investment in South Africa has fallen  $\pm 30\%$  to  $\pm 7\%$  during the last few years.

**Unemployment:** Since economic growth depends on new investments, one of the results of disinvestment has been to make worse the problem of unemployment in South Africa. Foreign capital has always played an important role in stimulating growth and therefore employment opportunities in the South African economy. For many reasons, South Africa's export performance during most of the last five years has been extremely weak so that growth could not be stimulated in this way either. It has been calculated that in order to increase the living standards of all

sections of the population, it is necessary that the South African economy should expand at an average of 5% per annum. In actual fact, during the last few years growth has been either negative or well below 3% per annum. The result has been the large-scale unemployment that has become so typical of South Africa's cities and of its rural areas. In certain cities such as Port Elizabeth up to half of the adult population is unemployed. In the country areas, the situation is disastrous.

**Inflation:** Those who have the good fortune to be in a regular job have not escaped the edge of the crisis. As South African money has lost its value mainly because the government has printed more and more money in order to meet its own commitments, the prices of almost every basic item on which the lives of workers and their children depend have gone up almost on a monthly basis. Rents, bus fares, train fares, electricity, heating materials, food prices, clothing, just about everything has become more and more costly every year. While the price index has shot up by over 15% per annum for the past few years, the wage index has not kept pace with it at all. In fact, trade unions have had to concern themselves more with keeping their members in employment than with the wage level itself!

The capitalist system is periodically and more and more frequently subjected to such crises and South Africa's system of racial capitalism cannot escape this fate. In order to restore profitability to the system, a great deal of resources has first to be destroyed or aborted. Once inventories have been run down and supply and demand brought into line with each other, the system can function 'normally' again. But these periods of 'normality' become shorter and shorter. The long-term prospects for the South African economy are, to say the least, dismal. Even if we go

into short-term mini-booms, the fact of the matter is that the South African economy, given the present system, will not be able to employ all our employable people, pay them a living wage, make it possible for them to live in decent adequate houses at prices they can afford, give their children free and compulsory education up to the age of 16 or matric. And so forth. None of those things that we, the working people of this country, are fighting and struggling for will be ours under the present regime of crisis. Only a completely new order can change the situation.

### **The political crisis of the ruling class**

Verwoerdian apartheid has come to the end of the road. Economic and political changes both within and outside South Africa have rendered unrealistic the racist vision of the 1940s of independent Bantustans where the 'Black' people would largely live out their lives except when they were needed to work in the towns and cities of South Africa. In that vision, all the people of the country were to be neatly divided according to 'racial groups' and were to be schooled separately, live in separate ghettos and even in separate 'ethnic' pockets within the same ghetto. All of life was to be regulated and regimented, books and the media censored so that only sound and healthy Christian-National ideas would be available to people. In short, South Africa was to be turned into the bureaucrat's and racist's utopia, a kind of human zoo.

For a while, right into the early '70s, the rulers pursued this policy with a large measure of success and it was supported by the vast majority of whites, some middle-class blacks and the major imperialist powers despite certain ritual criticisms, simply because it remained profitable and appeared to be stable. Then, from 1973, and especially from 1976 onwards, the whole edifice began to crumble. The great Soweto uprising starting in June 1976 was the

warning signal that the racist fantasies of the Verwoerd-Vorster era were about to be blown away by the winds of change. The onset of the economic crisis of the South African ruling class coincided with and was reinforced by a profound political crisis.

A new constitutional dispensation had to be worked out and new class alliances had to be forged in order to save the system of racial capitalism. The increasing industrialisation of the economy, proletarianisation and urbanisation of the population had taken place in spite of all efforts to prevent the latter and had produced political and ideological results that ran directly counter to the plans of the ruling party. Under P.W. Botha, who became Prime Minister of South Africa in 1978, the attempt was to be made to reform the unreformable.

To cut a long story very short: as we all know, the result was the racist monstrosity of the tricameral parliament which excluded statutory 'Blacks' from the formerly whites-only parliament!

Progressive people, of course, rejected the whole concept of a racially qualified franchise and not merely the fact that 'Blacks' were excluded. However, even this doomed and crude attempt at political 'reform' was still tainted by the legacy of Verwoerdian fascist and Herrenvolk thinking. Only at the end of 1985 after epic struggles conducted by black workers, students and youth did P.W. Botha seem to say that this tricameral fraud was no more than an interim measure and held out the empty prospect that 'Blacks' would at some point be included in the system.

This was a belated but, of course, completely inadequate attempt to respond to the events of the past year and more which have spelt final doom to the 'new' constitutional dispensation. The black people of Azania have rejected almost 100% this pernicious scheme of the racists to maintain white domination by buying off the black middle class and dividing up the black working class. In a sense,



the events since September 1984 are forcing the ruling class to go back to the drawing board in order to probe other constitutional 'solutions'. The latest magic formula that is being whispered aloud all over the place is some kind of combination of a federation and a confederation. The ruling class are desperate for a set of constitutional clothes that will cover the nakedness of their greed and their lust for power.

Another significant feature of the recent and continuing struggles has been the very clear indications that the black people in general and the workers in particular have been radicalised beyond all expectation. It is undoubtedly correct to say today that the majority of the people of this country do not believe that apartheid can be 'reformed'. They are convinced that it has to be overthrown. One of the most spectacular demonstrations of this conviction is the consistent and often extremely violent manner in which all tertiary and many other collaborationist structures have been destroyed. To serve on a community council, a management or local area committee or even to be a policeman today has become an act of suicidal folly. The rulers are hard put to salvage their system of collaborators and sell-outs at all levels. Ideologically, the people are armed to the teeth; they are no longer taken in by anything the rulers or their agents try to sell them. Botha's reported claim to Van Zyl Slabbert that he has the support of more than 50% of the black people is one of the most pathetic examples of gobbledygook in modern political history!

These, and other, consequences of the uprising spell doom to the rulers of this country and to the ruling class in general. Under these circumstances, they know, revolutionary ideas find ready access especially to the minds of young unemployed workers and students. This has been the main reason for the open and apparently counter-productive brutality with which they have tried to beat down the uprising.

## **The education crisis of the ruling class**

Schools, generally speaking, reflect what is happening in society at large. The vast majority of black secondary school students are the children of the black working class. There is no way that they can be unaffected by the devastation and desolation around them in the ghettos. As idealistic young people with a measure of formal education and many opportunities to compare their situation to that of white students and more especially to that of students in recently liberated countries, they are less restrained by caution than their parents are. This is a universal phenomenon.

But the economic and political crises of the rulers are also reproduced in the educational arena and the consequent conditions in the schools themselves are the most immediate cause of the anger of black students and of their willingness to make so many unprecedented sacrifices. Thus, even though the racist state has spent relatively more on the education of blacks since 1976 than it did before that date, very little has in fact changed. This is largely because too little is spent per annum, the apartheid separate educational facilities devour three or four times the funds which a unitary system would require and because no serious attempts were made to upgrade the skills of teachers in black schools. The result is the same old dismal list of educational statistics that we were used to before 1976: very high pupil-teacher ratios, pupil-classroom ratios, a majority of under- or unqualified teachers, school fees, books, uniforms and travel expenses that have to be paid for by the poorest section of the working class, anti-educational environments inside and outside of schools, a paternalistic, chauvinistic and authoritarian pedagogy: in short, all those material and ideological conditions which we know to be at the bottom of the student uprising.

As far as the ruling class is concerned, the appointment

of the De Lange Commission as the direct result of the 1980–81 uprising was clearly a time-buying device. Even the harmless liberal, technocratic and ethnic recommendations of that commission were partially rejected. Hardly any of them was implemented. It has taken the present explosion to move the governing party from 1976 to 1981! Only now are they willing to implement some of the less controversial recommendations of that very inadequate commission.

The rulers will undoubtedly attempt to defuse the seriousness of the education crisis once they have spent the force of their repression. They will spend proportionately much more money on education for blacks than they have done hitherto. Teachers will be subject to even larger financial temptations and they will allow the private sector to start some of the most attractive education and training programmes in order to siphon off those students who show initiative and ability. The capitalist class and their foreign backers are motivated by both economic and political considerations. For the expanding and modernising economy of South Africa they will need increasing numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers, civil servants, professionals and small-business people. Hence they are about to invest billions in the education of blacks.

It is quite possible that certain concessions will be made regarding Students' Representative Councils although, as with the trade unions initially, attempts will be made to limit their effectiveness and their democratic functions. In the area of the content of education, we can expect major changes in syllabi and curricula, simply because the old-style apartheid/racist stuff no longer washes even with relatively uninformed black pupils and students.

More and more education or training for special purposes will be introduced in line with De Lange. That is to say, we must expect that most pupils will be forced to

specialise from the moment they enter the secondary school, to the detriment of the general level of education and culture in South Africa. An attempt will be made to produce well-drilled and competent but extremely limited technicians and technocrats who will tend to be either apolitical or anti-political. The vast majority of the workers will continue to be barely literate in any language.

All these adaptations of the system are doomed to fail because they are based on the false assumption that the new generations of youth can still be won over to support the discredited slightly black-washed system of white supremacy which we know as racial capitalism. No National Party government will ever be able to win the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the black youth. One might as well ask a Hitler-Goebbels-Himmler regime to govern the Israeli state with the consent of the Jewish people there!

## **The crisis of the oppressed**

The national liberation movement has made progress in these brief months beyond the expectations of even the most naïve and sanguine enthusiasts. That cannot be doubted. For the first time in our history, we can speak of a genuine national movement which links up all struggles of the people irrespective of which ghetto they come from and regardless of whether they are taking place in the towns or in the rural areas. Amid many signs of real or potential divisions, this one fact has stood out for all to see. The movement has been profoundly strengthened especially by the addition to it of tens of thousands of activists who have emerged out of the struggles of the recent past. The more the rulers try to repress, the more they produce their own gravediggers in the form of dedicated, disciplined, highly motivated, politically conscious young cadres.

And yet, there are grave problems, serious weaknesses,

which threaten to pull us right back to square one unless we manage to solve them within the next few months. Most of these problems have become obvious within the educational arena. One could demonstrate the point with countless examples drawn from all parts of the country. For our purposes here, however, it will suffice if we remind people of a few important recent developments that have seen the schools boycott end up in an 'education crisis' not only for the oppressors but also for the oppressed.

To begin with: there has developed a tendency in different parts of the country (except perhaps in the Eastern Cape) to divorce the struggle of the students from that of the workers, their parents. The view has become widespread that 'education' is a matter that concerns students only and one, therefore, about which students alone must make all the decisions. This is a recipe for isolation, division and defeat. For nothing can be further from the truth. By its very nature, education always concerns all three of the sectors that are involved in it, namely, students, parents and teachers. While the interests of these three sectors in the educational process are not identical, they have to be brought into line if the educational struggle is not to degenerate into counter-productive conflicts and clashes between the sectors. This is a complicated question because none of the sectors is homogeneous; there are contradictions in and between all of them. Yet, it remains correct to say that in any educational struggle, it is the progressive community as a whole (parents, students and teachers) that has to take the major strategic decisions.

Many students have become the victims of the romantic illusion that the students are the vanguard of the national liberation struggle and that they can make decisions without any reference to the workers movement. This is a dangerous delusion and it will lead to disastrous defeat for the most heroic actions of the student mass. Let us state it

clearly once again: the workers alone, as an organised body, have the strategic strength to bring about fundamental change in our society. *All* other struggles, no matter in which arena they start, whether it is a struggle begun by women, youth, the churches, students or by other groups, have got to link up with the struggle of the organised working class if they are not to be defeated or to be deflected into reformist and even collaborationist paths.

Another major weakness that has become evident in the student movement is the fact that the student leadership, speaking generally, is lamentably unclear about the nature of the boycott as a weapon of struggle. Students have begun to use this weapon in ways that can only be called suicidal. This matter is so important that we discuss it in detail below. One of the most unfortunate aspects of this question is the now almost automatically accepted view that one can put preconditions to the ruling class in matters where they in fact control our prospects of success. Politically conscious activists have begun to use the formula: unless you do this or that, we shall continue to boycott school, etc. This is like handing over our weapons to the enemy and inviting them to fight us! This approach to political struggle must be rooted out if we are not going to continue to programme defeat into all our campaigns.

## **Strategic perspectives**

Many of the obvious mistakes that have been made in the recent and continuing struggles can be traced to the view that the National Party government is about to fall. This is, to put it bluntly, a completely false reading of the situation. There is no doubt, of course, that the apartheid government has never been as vulnerable and as open to pressure as it is at present. But to imagine that it is about to be toppled by revolutionary mass action speaks of total ignorance about the nature of the state and the nature of revolution.

Before we reply to this view, however, it is necessary to make the point that those who hold this position feel morally justified in demanding that students should be prepared to sacrifice a year or even two or three years of schooling in the interests of the liberation struggle. And, indeed, if it were in fact true that the National Party government is about to be toppled even if not by a revolutionary movement, even if only by some more liberal capitalist government, then, of course, there would be very little to argue about. Most people would immediately be prepared to consider such an argument.

The logic of the argument is faultless if we accept the correctness of the premises on which it is based. It leads infallibly to the slogan: *Liberation before education* (inkululeko ngoku, idegree ngomso). If, on the other hand, the premises of this argument are wrong, the slogan becomes a death trap for a whole generation of students. If, in other words, it is *not* true that the National Party government is about to fall, then the words *Liberation Before Education* are turned into a false prophecy which one can only compare with the fateful events connected with the name of Nongqause and known in South African history textbooks as the *national suicide of the amaXhosa*. The story of Nongqause is still shrouded in mystery but there is no doubt that she prophesied that if the amaXhosa slaughtered all their cattle and refused to plant any crops (the very basis of life for the people at the time), then the 'White men', i.e., the colonial oppressors, would on a certain day disappear into the sea from where they had come. When the fateful day came and a large majority of the people had slaughtered their cattle and were dying of hunger under the spell of the prophecy and led on by certain chiefs, nothing happened: the white men did *not* disappear into the sea and freedom did *not* dawn. Instead, the brave men and women of the amaXhosa had to seek refuge in the very Cape Colony they hated. Most of the able-bodied young men and

women ended up on the labour market enslaved as wage workers to the new colonial-capitalist system.

If we do not stop in our tracks, if we do not get away from the idea of so-called indefinite boycotts of schools and similar institutions, we are going to re-enact, in a modern form, the tragedy of Nongqause! Already thousands of young men and women, who have not been able to complete their studies, are walking the streets looking for work in an economy which is increasingly retrenching even those who *have* completed their studies. Already, after just more than a year of the school boycott in most parts of the country, serious divisions have appeared in the student mass, divisions that could have been avoided by proper attention to strategy and by proper leadership.

For the simple fact of the matter is that the National Party government is not about to fall. One can say this without being a supporter of apartheid even though some naïve people don't believe this. If one is at all serious about the struggle for liberation, then one *has to* say this. For no struggle can be successful if it takes as its point of departure a clearly wrong assessment of the strength of the enemy. If you believe that the giant you are challenging is a baby, you are bound to end up in abject defeat. We can say this without in any way detracting from the heroism and from the constructive actions of our youth who have – in many cases – gone into battle against the apartheid state with this false slogan on their lips. What *is* important is that we should have the political and personal courage to *admit* that it is a false slogan, that our assessment of the balance of forces was wrong. And we should then be willing to review our strategy and to work out a different set of tactics to meet the new situation.

Internally, the National Party is still supported by the majority of whites who still have a virtual monopoly of military power, industrial and scientific skills and of material resources (wealth). As against this there is a



majority of black workers with few skills, hardly any resources and a minimum of military power. This is the present balance of forces stated very simply. That balance is changing all the time in favour of the forces of liberation. While the oppressed people are undoubtedly in a position today to dislocate the economy and the society of the apartheid state for longer or shorter periods of time, they are not yet in a position to overthrow the present order. This fact we should accept for the moment in the full knowledge that even though the struggle will still be long, it is going to be victorious. Once we realise that we still have to struggle for many years and that we are still going to have to make many sacrifices, we will necessarily change our tactics on the day-to-day level.

Internationally, again, there is no doubt that 'the racist Pretoria regime' has never been as isolated as it is today. Even its best friends, such as Reagan, Kohl and Thatcher, are forced to criticise it publicly and to take certain symbolical actions against it in order that they will not be condemned as supporters of racism in the world. Despite this, however, there can be no doubt that as long as there is no prospect of a viable alternative *capitalist* government in South Africa, international imperialism is going to make sure that the National Party together with all its repressive brutalities remains at the helm of affairs. What the imperialist powers (and local business tycoons, despite all the rhetoric) will *not* do is to undermine and topple the Botha government in favour of some unstable uncertain governing group that may not be able to confine the radical upsurge of the masses within the framework of the capitalist system.

For a number of reasons that cannot be entered into here, the Nats are the only possible bourgeois government in South Africa at present. Liberals inside and outside South Africa know that unless the Nats reform the existing apartheid-capitalist system rapidly, it will be overthrown

sooner or later by the radicalised movement of the oppressed and exploited people who will be inspired by an anti-capitalist programme since they have begun to understand that apartheid and other forms of racial inequality and racial discrimination (segregation, separate development, homelands policy, etc.) are the mode of existence of capitalism under the peculiar historical conditions of South Africa.

The liberals, therefore, are trying to push the National Party government to introduce certain major reforms such as the abolition of influx control, freehold rights for all South Africans, a unitary system of education, abolition of the Group Areas Act, etc. Their ideal is a government of national unity that would include all those parties that have significant support among the people of this country including the Nats, the PFP, Inkatha and sections of the national liberation movements. In this way they hope to restore legitimacy to the South African government. This, they hope, will come out of a 'national convention'. Hence the most recent moves of the liberals led by the Progressive Federal Party. Hence, also, Van Zyl Slabbert's and Boraine's migration out of the parliamentary into the 'extra parliamentary' arena.

For many reasons, this particular option is not going to work in the very short term. In fact, if the South African government is placed under too much pressure internally and/or externally, the country will be placed under a military government openly and the economy will be allowed to shrink back (the so-called *siege* economy) in the belief that this would be the only way to 'save South Africa', i.e., capitalism in South Africa. The ruling class will not take this route lightly but they will do it if they see it as the only option. Whichever way things develop, from the point of view of the national liberation movement, it is very clear that the struggle is going to continue for a long time and that we have to inspan all our energies in order to

change the balance of forces systematically over the long term in our favour.

Against such a background, the slogan *Liberation Before Education* can clearly be seen to be against the interests of generations of young people. Against such a background, the 'indefinite boycott' leads students on to the labour market long before they have to go there and, for many, to a condition of political apathy which becomes an obstruction to the liberation movement. Already we hear many voices complaining bitterly that it is through 'politics', i.e., the boycott of schools, that our children are now walking the streets, taking to drugs, etc.

## **The boycott as a weapon of struggle**

Once it is clear that the struggle for liberation from apartheid-capitalist slavery is still going to continue for many years, the tasks of the student movement present themselves to us in a different light. We shall return to these below. Let us first throw some more light on the question of the boycott as a weapon of struggle.

To start with, we have to stress that *the boycott is not the only weapon of struggle* in our arsenal. There are very many other ways in which we can conduct the struggle for liberation inside and outside of the schools, the colleges and the universities. In fact, the boycott is a weapon that has to be used very sparingly precisely because, under certain circumstances, it can easily be turned against those who are deploying it.

The boycott is essentially a *political* weapon. It depends for its effectiveness in this arena on the fact that any government needs the cooperation and consent, or at the very least the neutrality, of those whom they govern. When, for example, government wants to get support for a new scheme, a new constitution or a new institution, the people have the advantage if they are opposed to the new thing

because they can make it unworkable or ineffective by boycotting it. The most recent example in South Africa is, of course, the effective boycott of the tricameral parliament elections for 'Coloureds' and 'Indians'. But before that, as we know, the urban Bantu councils and recently the community councils and management committees were boycotted out of existence or into ineffectiveness by the masses of the oppressed people. In fact, the oppressed people of South Africa have a long history of deploying the weapon of the boycott successfully in the political sphere. In the *economic* sphere, it is more difficult to use the boycott successfully except for the short periods of time or under very favourable political and economic circumstances. The reason for this is that the oppressed and exploited people do *not* have control over the sources of economic power. Even if they can temporarily dislocate things and even send a few smaller firms to the wall by means of a *consumer boycott*, unless the circumstances are exceptionally favourable, the people are always forced to go back to buy from the big firms and supermarkets because they have to eat and to live and they cannot afford to go without certain necessities. The nature of the capitalist system is such, moreover, that no matter which firms one is boycotting, the wholesalers and manufacturers in any case pocket the money (wages) of the workers since *all* but a very few shops have to get their goods from the manufacturers or the wholesalers. In the Eastern Cape recently, especially in Port Elizabeth, both the economic and the political conditions for the conduct of a consumer boycott were extremely favourable and this explains the large measure of success that the movement had there. In other parts of the country, especially in the Western Cape, these favourable conditions did not exist, with the result that the consumer boycott never really got off the ground.

These basic considerations are equally relevant when we look at the boycott of educational institutions in an

oppressive society. The question we have to consider is: Who needs schooling of the children of the working class, the ruling class or the children themselves? The answer is not always straightforward and that is why the boycott can never be more than a tactical weapon.

Through the schools in a modern industrialised society, the new generation of youth is indoctrinated to fit into the old, tried and tested pattern of things. *In this way, the ruling class, which controls the levers of power in any society, manages to reproduce the existing order.* (The school is not the only arena where this process takes place even though it is probably the most important of these reproductive institutions.) Besides the 'correct' attitudes, values and beliefs, students are also taught certain skills at school which they need in order to follow a particular trade or profession. *These skills are not only necessary to reproduce the existing order; they are also necessary to reproduce the individual students/persons within the existing order.* Or, to put it more simply, *unless the students get this necessary training, they will end up on the unskilled labour market as long as the existing order continues.* If we had some superior knowledge of the exact date when the existing order will pass into history, we could, of course, advocate an 'indefinite boycott' and hope that our students will get the necessary skills shortly after liberation. Since we do not and cannot have such exact knowledge in social affairs, to advocate indefinite boycotts is clearly a suicidal policy. It is a kind of grand delusion whereby we sacrifice a whole generation of youth in the child-like belief that the day of freedom is about to break, even though we have no scientific basis for such a prediction.

Since students do not have the power to force the state to do their bidding, unless their struggle is integrated with the broader national liberation struggle under the leadership of the working class, an indefinite boycott becomes in fact a death trap in the context of a protracted, long-term struggle

for liberation.

This is also the problem about unrealistic preconditions. To say to the authorities 'We shall not return to school unless you do (a), (b) and (c)' may be a good form of propaganda and even an effective method of mobilising the student masses. But to believe that we can seriously challenge the state in this way unless we have the military and economic might to paralyse or to overthrow it, or at least to create an alternative system (e.g., guerrilla schools in Vietnam, Zimbabwe, etc.), is to disarm ourselves completely. As we have said previously, it is like handing your weapons to the enemy and inviting them to fight us. If we cannot in fact force the government, for example, to release all political prisoners and detainees, to withdraw the troops from the townships, etc., we may be walking into a self-made trap if we put these demands as preconditions for a return to classes. These are extremely serious questions. We cannot raise demands and preconditions in a light-minded fashion without consideration of the balance of forces in the country. To do so, as we have seen recently, is to inflict serious wounds on ourselves, to sow unnecessary divisions among ourselves, and even to put the struggle back by several years.

## **The opportunity of the oppressed**

No government on earth can control the process of schooling completely. In fact, the schooling system is one of the Achilles heels of any ruling class. The beginnings of trouble in any modern society usually make themselves felt in the schools before they become evident in other institutions precisely because it is so difficult in a modern state to control this process completely. Teachers, as the instruments of indoctrination, play a decisive role in the education process. If they are not loyal to the state, the ruling class in that state is confronted with a fifth column

that undermines its authority and the values on which the system is based. Under these circumstances, it is a mere matter of time before the first explosions take place in the schools.

Indeed, this is in large measure the explanation for the explosions of 1976 and subsequently. In spite of the many retrogressive and reactionary effects of Bantu education, the ruling class failed hopelessly to produce the mindless labour units of Verwoerd's Christian National mythology precisely because the black teachers and their students in general rejected the system and felt no loyalty towards it. Even the gutter education of the racist system could not produce the slaves that the rulers wanted. It is, therefore, a self-defeating and historically inaccurate approach that says *We don't want gutter education and therefore we won't go to school*. This is merely a convenient and opportunistic slogan worthy only of being used by drop-outs. History teaches us that *the very system of the rulers can be transformed into a weapon against them provided we have politically conscious, i.e., really educated teachers and a disciplined and organised student body and student leadership*. Rather than vacate the schools and abandon a major terrain of struggle to conservatives and reactionaries, we have the task of transforming the terrain to suit our liberatory purposes.

And we all know that *the struggle for liberation can be and is carried out every day in our classrooms, in our schools*. For, let us remember, these are *our* schools, not theirs. It is our taxes that are used to build these schools. We should make sure that the rulers' control of the state does not turn the schools into weapons against us. We can and should turn the weapon of education against the ruling class as a whole. That it can be done is attested to by generations of student activists who have emerged from Verwoerd's education factories to continue the struggle in all the different arenas of struggle.

Without going into any detail here, we all know that we

can, inside the classroom, tackle the curriculum, the syllabus and the textbooks in such a way that our students know exactly what is true, what is half-true, what is simply false, what has been omitted, and why. A good, politically conscious teacher and, especially in the higher standards, disciplined, conscious and organised students can turn any lesson, no matter what the subject, into an awareness session, at least in part. And precisely because students gain greater insight into the subject (the 'hidden agenda') they tend to understand even the textbook matter better and, thus, to do better in their examinations!

Even the question of students' rights can be tackled in this way. Democratic procedures in the classroom can be initiated either by enlightened teachers, or by enlightened students, or by both acting together. The relations between teachers and class representatives or students' representative councils, and between these structures and the rank-and-file students are extremely important as a basis for similar democratic practices outside school. If they are practised consistently their radicalising effects must carry over into the society at large and eventually affect all social relations.

## **'Alternative' education**

One of the consequences of the slogan *Liberation Before Education* has been to throw into high relief the demand for 'alternative education'. The advocates of the slogan realise that if you call on students to boycott classes indefinitely, i.e., until freedom day, you have to provide them with a progressive alternative. Most people, incidentally, have begun to use other terms instead of 'alternative' education, since this term has simply come to mean any education that is not state-aided or state-controlled, no matter how conservative it is in form and content. In this pamphlet we use the term liberatory or progressive education, since we



understand the concept of alternative education to mean that education which is directed towards the liberation of the oppressed and exploited people.

Here, again, we are faced with a major dilemma. If students are going to boycott classes indefinitely and if the struggle will take many years still, how are we going to provide our children with a systematic progressive or liberatory alternative? Even if we leave aside the question of state repression of any liberatory education programmes and projects outside the formal schools, where are we to find the human and material resources with which to provide a constructive alternative to the millions of *high-school* students and *university* and *college* students who would be on boycott? Is it, in principle, correct to try to do the basic skills training functions of state-provided education?

Should we not, instead, continue, as we have done hitherto – but much more consciously, much more systematically – to use the schools to train the new generation in the necessary life-skills for today and tomorrow but make sure that we spread liberatory political and cultural education among teachers, students and parents so as to subvert the reactionary content and form of the existing syllabi and curricula? We should, instead, see liberatory education as a spectrum of practices some of which can be implemented in the government schools, colleges and universities while others, for the present, have to be implemented extramurally. As the general struggle intensifies, we shall find that more and more of the practices that can now only be implemented extramurally will be ‘accepted’ by the government of the day and introduced in a more or less distorted fashion into the schools. By way of comparison, one can look at the way in which the right of existence of the progressive trade unions has had to be accepted by the government. Today, because of the recent and continuing upheaval in the schools, we are

in a position where we can give much more systematic attention to the question of alternatives to the present system. This is, however, a very large subject that requires a separate discussion.

## **A national programme of action for 1986**

As in any other large and complex country, the struggle in South Africa is characterised by uneven development as between one region and another. Because of regional differences and because of the artificially imposed 'ethnic' differences, we find that in most arenas of struggle, affected people tend to concentrate on local and regionally important matters. There is nothing wrong with this, of course, but we have to be careful that we do not fall into a regional or 'ethnic' approach to the education crisis or to other problems. We have to force ourselves at all times to take a national perspective and to try to harmonise our approach with that of other areas or communities in our country.

Besides tackling immediate local or community problems, we should be part and parcel of a nationally agreed upon programme of action for 1986, the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising. Parents', teachers' and especially students' organisations should agree on a programme of concrete action that will have the full support of the community of the oppressed and exploited people. Such a programme of action cannot consist of the simplistic call to boycott formal schooling and to participate in some vague 'alternative' education programme. This, as we have stressed before, is a recipe for disaster.

Let us, instead, between now and the end of March meet in thousands of workshops throughout the country to work out a serious, realistic but radical programme of action which can be agreed to nationally at the conference to be held in April 1986. In this way, every single student, teacher

and parent will be united against the state without interrupting the continuity of the necessary aspects of the education process!

And let us remind ourselves: whatever we plan to do, the rulers will always try to confound us by undertaking actions that will sidetrack us. For example, we undertake some protest action, let us say, to demand a democratically elected SRC. The police intervene, someone may get shot or detained. And what happens? Because we have no clear idea of strategy, we allow ourselves to be sidetracked by, for example, refusing to go to school until the person(s) concerned have been released. In this way, we place ourselves at the mercy of the enemy, instead of pursuing our goal as one does in a battle even if one's best friend and comrade is shot dead beside one. By allowing ourselves to be sidetracked, we relinquish the initiative to the enemy. By not leaving ourselves room for retreat, we end up in suicidal battles of attrition against an enemy that has vastly superior resources at present.

## **What should we do?**

The National Forum Committee, after extensive consultations throughout the country with the organisations associated with it, has arrived at the following recommendations:

- Appropriate forms of commemorating the tenth anniversary of the great uprising of 1976 have to be workshopped, agreed upon regionally and where possible, nationally. These should then be implemented with a maximum of discipline and consistency.
- Besides local reasons, which might dictate otherwise, we should not get drawn into any long-term or indefinite school boycotts.
- We need to involve every single student of the oppressed and exploited people in a constructive

national programme in order to enhance unity and solidarity. We recommend an English language programme at different levels. The entire nation should 'go to school' and learn, improve or perfect English and their knowledge of other South African languages. It would be historic irony if in commemorating the great uprising of 1976, which started with the rejection of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction, our youth should tackle a language programme that will increase our national unity and help to put an end to Afrikaner chauvinism and imperialism.

# TEN YEARS OF EDUCATIONAL CRISIS: THE RESONANCE OF 1976

*(Address delivered at the National Consultation on Education for Affirmation 27 August 1986 – Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, Johannesburg.)*

## **Introduction: From protest to challenge**

IN THE SEAMLESS WEB of South African history, the 16th of June 1976 represents both an end and a beginning. Those great events, which began as innocently and undramatically as most significant moments in the history of a nation, were the culmination of decades of relatively peaceful protest by black students against the inequities of segregation and apartheid in the educational institutions of South Africa. The most striking feature of all the years of protest and resistance since the introduction of a modern system of schooling for black people after the inauguration of the Union of South Africa, was the fact that all the students' actions were motivated by the desire on their part for equality of the conditions of learning and of the content of education with those enjoyed by whites. (For a schematic and general account of the resistance to separate and inferior schooling, see SACHED *The Right to Learn*, Chapter 9.) This feature was enhanced after the introduction of Bantu education and other forms of tribalised schooling. The systematic and provocatively articulated Verwoerdian policies of retribalisation of the oppressed, industrially orientated people of South Africa generated the most intense opposition ever on the part of almost all black parents, teachers and students at all levels of the schooling system. So much so, indeed, that even the paternalistic

missionary education of previous years began to seem desirable. Some of the middle-class beneficiaries of that system, in fact, began to present it as a kind of golden age of black schooling by blurring over all the reactionary elements that inhere in all golden ages! Be that as it may: the fact of the matter is that the rifles and ammunition that laid low Hector Peterson and his comrades and that sent the Tsietsi Mashininis into exile and the Dan Motsitsis into prison, put an end to all illusions about achieving equality of conditions and of educational content as long as the system of racial capitalism obtained in South Africa.

But they did more than that. In a dialectical fashion, those events made ordinary school students begin to examine more attentively what it was that they were fighting for. The very hopelessness of the struggle for the will-o'-wisp of 'educational equality' made students and eventually many progressive educationists believe that education, properly so called, was only going to be possible in a liberated South Africa. Education and liberation were seen to be clearly related, the struggle of students for better conditions in the schools, colleges and universities was seen to be inseparable from the struggle for liberation (i.e., the struggle for democratic rights for all) and eventually from the struggle for class emancipation. And, as these things go, once this link had been established in the consciousness of the new generation and in the concrete fact of thousands of Soweto students fleeing into neighbouring territories to find refuge in the guerrilla training camps of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress as well as in transit and other shelters run by South African political organisations or by international relief agencies, the Freirian idea of education for liberation came to express precisely the dialectical shift that had, quite unintentionally, been brought to the surface by the volleys of rifle fire that drowned in blood one of the most heroic episodes in the history of our people.

From that moment, protest changed into challenge. The class of '76 and every subsequent generation of black South African school students rejected even the superficial legitimacy on which South African governments had until then prided themselves and in the faded garments of which they strutted about on the stage of world politics. What is called the battle for the hearts and minds of the black youth was finally and decisively lost on the streets of Soweto and of every other major city in South Africa in the course of 1976 and 1977. And let it be said here once and for all: *there is simply no way in which this government or any other white minority government is going to regain the trust and the consent of the black youth.* Neither the sjambok (now called the quirt) nor the casspir, and no amount of cooing and wooing is going to undo or reverse the thorough demystification of black schooling begun by the bullets of 1976. Instead, the challenge to state power, state legitimacy inherent in the concepts and practice of liberatory education, people's education or even alternative education will continue to grow ever stronger, no matter how many retreats will have to be made, no matter how many reverses are suffered.

It is not part of my brief to look back at the causes of the uprising of 1976; I am not expected to repeat the now well-known and even well-worn phrases about the role of the Black Consciousness Movement, of organisations such as SASO and SASM, or even of the link between the renewed stirrings in the urban black proletariat and the actions and sentiments of their children in the schools of the ruling class. These and other relevant questions have been repeated *ad nauseam* in one conference after another and in one publication after another. Instead, I have been asked to summarise as succinctly as possible what we consider to be the most significant consequences of the uprising of 1976 and of the subsequent actions of black students, parents and teachers in the educational arena. By way of explanation, it is necessary to stress that this introduction to the subject is

intended to do no more than to draw your attention to what I consider to be the most relevant resonances of those events. I have deliberately refrained from overloading the text with tables and graphs, since these are readily accessible in numerous publications. Moreover, I have to stress that this introduction represents no more than a summary of conclusions and ideas reached by very many scholars and activists in countless workshops and conferences. While I take full responsibility for the formulations I use, I want to insist that this is not an original document in the monadic sense of that term.

## **The crisis**

It is as well to begin with a statement of principle. For the sake of analytical convenience, we isolate particular phenomena in order to identify their specific qualities and features. In reality, however, all things are interconnected. The events in the educational arena since 1976, important as they obviously are, cannot be treated in isolation from the critical developments in the rest of the social formation and in Southern Africa as a whole. Any monocausal approach leads to blatant distortion of reality and inevitably to disastrous interventions. In short, we have to be clear at all times that the then years of crisis in the educational arena represent at the same time ten years of crisis of the system of racial capitalism as a whole. The crisis in education both reflects and reflects back on the larger crisis in which the system is encoiled politically, economically and ideologically.

Again, even though there are a few competing analyses of the crisis, the broad outlines are known well enough to permit us simply to state the obvious briefly. There is, first of all, the crisis of capital accumulation. The intensified labour-repressive option represented by apartheid in 1948 and chosen by the white electorate as against the gradualist



liberalisation option recommended by the Fagan Commission in 1947, pushed up against ceilings inherent in that option, in particular shortages of skilled labour, a severely restricted domestic market that led to recurrent crises of realisation of value, and shortages of new (especially foreign) investment because of international political pressures against a regime that was seen increasingly as not only racist and genocidal but also dangerous to world capitalism insofar as it bred conditions conducive to socialist revolution in the industrial heart of Africa. This economic crisis has deepened to the extent that by the mid-eighties, the once unstoppable South African economic engine had not only come to a grinding halt but in some years was even going in reverse.

Socially, this has meant that the increasingly proletarianised black population has been locked into the vicious circle of a kind of third-world hell of unemployment and poverty, terrifying in the urban ghettos, unbearable in the rural slums. As is well known, even in some cities such as Port Elizabeth, unemployment among black youth (under 25 approximately) is placed as high as 70%. And this is not exceptional today. Indeed, as I shall point out presently, this layer of young, mostly semi-schooled, unemployed black workers is going to be the nemesis of our liberation struggle, the rock on which the solid future of a socialist Azania will be built or upon which the entire struggle will founder.

The existence of this layer of people reminds us that the rapid economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s brought about the major changes in the class structure of South Africa. Today, only a few nostalgic analysts would still insist that the 'peasantry' (however defined) constitute the majority of the oppressed people and thus the driving force of the struggle for liberation. Proletarianisation (and increasingly the urbanisation of the proletariat) has been the visible feature of social development in the post-war period.

By way of precluding any analytical short circuits, let me say parenthetically that the acknowledgement of this indisputable fact of South African history does not in any way detract from the importance of the agrarian question in our struggle or alter the fact of national oppression. New demands, new aspirations, new methods of struggle were placed on the agenda through this process of social evolution. The workers demanded a share of the commodities and facilities which their labour produced; they, therefore, demanded higher wages and better working and living conditions. In this, they were no different from workers anywhere in the world. But, in doing so, they were challenging one of the pillars of the alliance between maize and gold that ruled supreme before World War II. That is to say, they were demanding that the restrictions on the growth of the domestic market for the products of secondary industry be lifted, that the political economy of cheap black labour be jettisoned and that the importance of the manufacturing sector be given legislative recognition. The trajectory of these demands and aspirations tended in practice towards the many manifestations of class struggle that have become the very ambience in which we live today. I refer, of course, to the struggle for the right to form independent trades unions and all the struggles attendant on that, the struggle for freedom of movement, for efficient and cheap transport, for decent and cheap housing and health care and, above all, for free and compulsory education for all our children as well as for continuing education for those who are forced to leave the schools prematurely because of poverty and racial oppression.

These demands were, as we all know, made more urgent and more dramatic by historic events in the subcontinent. The victorious liberation struggles in Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in the mid- to late '70s and the ongoing saga of Namibia, have lent to the demands

of the urban proletariat of South Africa, and especially of the more than 50% of them who are younger than 20 years, an urgency and an impatience that were unknown in the previous decades. South Africa is often portrayed as 'the last colony'. This analogy happens to be very wrong and misleading, for we are not involved in an anti-colonial struggle but rather in a civil-war situation. Analysts and theoreticians may differ on this point but there is no doubt at all that the anti-colonial struggles against Portugal, Britain and South Africa in neighbouring Southern African countries have resonated in the liberation struggle being waged by the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa against the system of racial capitalism. They have, in short, made the black people impatient to get rid of the racism that springs from the same colonial regimes overthrown between 1975 and 1980 on our borders.

The strategic answer of the ruling class to these socio-economic developments has been the inept attempt to encourage the growth and the co-option of the various black middle-class elements ranging from Bantustan and other ethnic politicians to the upper echelons of their respective civil services, a large segment of their teachers and other professionals as well as the traditional middle class of small shopkeepers and other business people. In effect, the state has attempted to counter the strategic leverage which the black working class has acquired within the South African economy by building up a black middle class as a buffer. This has meant, among other things, doing away piecemeal with various aspects of Verwoerdian apartheid that are immediately repugnant to middle-class people. This, in turn, has meant effectively downgrading the white workers who were previously the junior partners in the class alliance that constituted the power bloc in South Africa.

We are living through the many tragi-comic contradictions that arise from this attempt to construct a neo-

apartheid system that will successfully co-opt the black middle class and simultaneously make the white minority regime more acceptable in the community of nations. Never mind that this is an impossible dream. It is one of those unavoidable adaptive mechanisms imposed by the dynamics of the unique history of nations by which ruling classes desperately attempt to salvage the old order. Sometimes, as in our own case for reasons that are too obvious to recite, such transitional moments seem to last an eternity. But this is all the more reason why it is essential to divine the limits as well as the possibilities of the historical moment. Miscognition so often leads to suicidal action or retreats along the line of march that previous generations have painfully established. There is no need for me to analyse all the manoeuvres and deceptions of a Heunis or a Pik Botha on the one side or of a Le Grange or a De Klerk on the other side by which the regime is trying to make the world believe that Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum are totally compatible elements of its total strategy of benevolent despotism. Suffice it to repeat that far from gaining legitimacy, this leprous regime instead taints everybody that chooses to collaborate with it. That is a story which every Bantustan leader, every community councillor, every member of a management committee and even the reprobates in the tricameral parliament and in the President's Council can tell in great and vivid detail.

Hegemony, according to Gitlin, is a relationship between the dominant and the dominated class in a social formation. It refers to

the successful attempt of a dominant class to utilise its control over the resources of state and civil society, particularly through the use of mass media and the educational system to establish its view of the world as all-inclusive and universal. Through the dual use of force and consent, with consent prevailing, the dominant class uses its political,

moral and intellectual leadership to shape and incorporate the 'taken-for-granted' views, needs and concerns of sub-ordinate groups. In doing so, the dominant class not only attempts to influence the interests and needs of such groups, it also contains radical opportunities by placing limits on oppositional discourse and practice. (Cited by Sue Philcox in an unpublished seminar paper: 'Understanding the school boycotts of 1980', p. 3.)

By this or by any similar definition, it is clear that even though the South African ruling class continues necessarily to be dominant, it has, since 1976, become progressively less hegemonic. Barring exceptional historic developments, this is a situation that cannot be reversed.

### **Too little too late**

The campaign of 1976–1977 was followed by the even more deep-going crisis in the schools in 1980. Since 1980, schooling for blacks has been in a state of permanent disruption even though the focal points of the crisis have shifted from one region of the country to another and there has not yet been a situation where all regions have been equally disrupted. The climax, for the moment, was reached in 1985 when large parts of the schooling system simply collapsed under the sustained assaults of students and mobilised working-class communities. These are well-known facts. It is more important for us to understand, however, that the organic connections between the different arenas in which the crisis of the system becomes manifest lead to the intensification of contradictions in each of the arenas of struggle and thus to ever more radical solutions or proposed solutions. This has been the story of the struggle in the education arena since 1980.

Early on, i.e., before the emergence of the large trade union federations and the national political fronts and their

active participation in the hurly-burly of township struggles, one of the consequences of this radicalisation was the belief among many students that students as a group constitute the vanguard of the struggle. In some respects, this was a legacy of the epoch of black consciousness and of the particular history of SASO during the repression of the 'sixties and early 'seventies. We are all familiar with the lament on the part of students that if their parents had acted while they were young, there would have been no need for them to wage 'the struggle' as they were doing. In a forum such as this, where some knowledge of the history of South Africa may be presupposed, it is unnecessary to discuss this assertion. The point to be made here is simply that there was, in historic-ideological terms, a long march ahead of the students out of this student-centric universe through the plains of the 'student-worker alliance' into the hard realities of the 'worker-student alliance'.

Those who are interested in what one may call the phenomenology of student boycotts in South Africa could hardly do better than to read the journalistic gem by Brian Pottinger and Siphwe Ralo in *Frontline* of March 1981, entitled 'The Eastern Cape Boycotts. Where Crisis has become a way of life'. Here is set out concisely but meticulously the causes, course and consequence of a particular regionally defined boycott of schools, a process described in a framework that could be applied to almost any similar boycott anywhere in South Africa since 1976. Here we find the stubborn statistics of educational deprivation and inequality from which all boycotts start, the general background of turmoil in the black schools of the country, the specific grievances at a specific school in the region that become the proximate cause of the regional boycott campaign, the inept intervention of the authorities on the one side and/or the activation of an existing or submerged infrastructure of pupil/student representation, often the deposit of previous school boycotts and usually

including student activists from neighbouring 'bush colleges', the rapid escalation of the conflict, the formation of a parents' (crisis) committee, often leading to negotiations or talks with the authorities to defuse the situation, generational conflict between parents and students over such supposed collaboration, and so forth. The rest of the story and all its repercussions must be present to the mind of every member of this audience!

As in the struggles of the black workers at the point of production or in the townships, the response of the state – from the point of view of the exploited and oppressed – is either too little or too late. Of course, it has never been the intention of the rulers to satisfy the needs of the workers. What is for Botha and his National Party a giant leap is not even a small step towards the realisation of the goals to which the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa are committed!

Essentially, the actions of the generation of Soweto imprinted on our minds the invaluable lesson that the black working class is the primary source of all radical change in South Africa. It marked the beginning of the end of the epoch of mere reactive strategies and tactics in which the liberation forces had been held captive for six decades and more. Parliament was no longer seen as the *fons et origo* of all socially significant initiatives. Instead, the ruling class was forced to react overtly to the initiatives of the working class. 'Reform' was placed on the order of the day. The liberal antennae of the ruling class in the guise of the South African Institute of Race Relations picked up the signals from the turmoil on the streets. They established the first of the series of reform-orientated ruling-class commissions to investigate the education provision for blacks. The report of this (Bozzoli) commission was entitled *Education for a New Era* and was published in 1979. Neither the subsequent De Lange Commission Report published in 1981 nor the Buthelezi Commission's report, completed in 1982, despite

their volume and detail, went beyond the reformist principles established by the SAIRR's Bozzoli Commission. Of these, the most relevant for our purposes is the stipulation that the acknowledgement of the 'multicultural nature of South African society' (p. 7) should be the point of departure for all educational reform. Moreover, the Commission assumed that 'some form of consociational structure will evolve, possibly for a transitional period preceding the establishment of a unitary political system' (p. 4).

It is tempting to consider in detail the various panaceas that have been put forward by those who wish to reform the unreformable. But this would be a waste of the time of this gathering. These voluminous documents have generated numerous academic and political analyses according to the law whereby all paper produces more paper. We need not get onto that particular merry-go-round! More important, of course, is the fact that for the present the ruling party, out of a consideration of its power-political position, is not even prepared to transform all this paper into some kind material reality. On the contrary, it has itself produced white papers in order to negate *for the present*, let us repeat, the recommendation of its own commissions! The point at issue is no more and no less than that the rulers have been forced to react to the historic initiatives of the oppressed and exploited even if only to conjure up the mirage of a slightly different future. In doing so, they have unwittingly strengthened the forces of liberation. The very recommendations of their commissions are found to be too little. Alternatives are, therefore, necessarily put forward and in this completely objective manner, the process of radicalisation is intensified. The regime, as has been often said, is in a no-win or catch-22 situation. It is a pre-revolutionary regime, clinging to the steering wheel of power for as long as it may but in no position to alter radically the fatal course on which its own policies have set the ship of state.



## **AK47s, petrol bombs, driver's licences and matric certificates!**

Bearing in mind that we are always speaking of a situation of uneven development both in space and in time, it is none the less possible to maintain that in the present state of education in South Africa, schooling for blacks has become devalued to the extent that only a very few black students in the urban areas expect to complete their secondary schooling. Apart from the 'normal' economic political mechanisms that push out whole phalanxes of black pupils at the annual points of exit from the system of tribalised schooling, since 1976 economic, political and ideological pressures generated by the crisis of the system and the maturation of the struggle for national liberation have put in question profoundly the legitimacy and usefulness of secondary schooling for the majority of black pupils.

There is, first of all, the rapidly growing army of young people who leave school in order to join the guerrilla fighters, those who have come to the conclusion that they will serve both themselves and their people best by taking up arms. This group of young men and women, most of whom go directly out of school boycotts into exile and – usually – into training camps (which include further education, of course) numbers several tens of thousands already and has become in many a township the role models for our children. For them, sitting around in DET or other tribalising schools is a waste of time; they represent the most conscious and impatient vanguard of the alienated post-'76 generation and will become a factor of increasing significance in the overall situation. Their option, or alternative, will present a challenge to all other proposed or executed alternatives and it is, therefore, of national importance that those of us who are concerned for the future socialist dispensation we believe in consider the most appropriate ways and means whereby this vanguard

element can be synchronised with other equally important and equally inevitable groups and layers of young (*and* older) South Africans.

A second 'alternative' is that in which more than a million young black South Africans find themselves trapped willy-nilly at any given moment. This is the rapidly growing army of unemployed black youths who have begun to take control of the townships and rural slums of South Africa at night and increasingly also in the day time. Insofar as their way of life is not the result of a conscious decision, it does not represent an alternative in the normal sense of the term. On the contrary, they are the pathetic by-products of the system of racial capitalism just as much as are the fascist-minded young toughs that gravitate towards the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB), the vanguard organisation of the counter-revolution. Some allegedly liberal journalists and commentators have compared this army of young men and women with what they call the Khmer-Rouge youth (a myth of modern journalism if ever there was one)! In doing so, they deliberately evoke the picture of a brainwashed, moronic, ant-like mass of youngsters who at a command from (usually 'ANC') activists will kill and destroy anything, even their nearest and dearest, a kind of debased, dehumanised mass that acts in a paroxysm of self-delusion for 'freedom', 'democracy' and for all the other noble words that we read in the pamphlet literature of every organisation engaged in the liberation struggle.

This is not only adding insult to the injury inflicted on our youth by the system; it is, in fact, a counter-revolutionary misreading of the sociology of modern South Africa. For this youth, as we all know, constitutes the basis of the militancy of the townships. They are the ones who wield petrol bombs, stones and even more lethal weapons usually in self-defence against the system and its agents. That some of them have on occasion been exploited and

misled by criminal elements or by *agents provocateurs* does not detract from the overwhelming reality of the fact that they are the ones who have pushed the struggle across the Rubicon and that they and their successors will be in the front ranks of the victorious struggle. I shall show presently why I believe that they, more than any other groups of people, represent the most appropriate audience for any serious liberatory education projects regardless of the names by which they are called. There is certainly no reason to accept fatalistically that all these young people should become criminalised members of anti-social gangs as in the perhaps not untypical case of 'The Hobos' in Bonteheuvel in the Western Cape, whose members were 'too clever for the gangsters' because they were 'school boys dropped out of school during the demonstrations' (see George Gibbs, 'A community in crisis: the need for overall involvement in planning'. University of Cape Town Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, *Educational Crisis in the Western Cape in 1980*, p. 25).

For this group, clearly, formal schooling does not represent an option anymore. They are the ones who have begun to realise that even a matric certificate does not lead to a guaranteed job as it did even ten years ago. They see their older brothers and sisters struggling to help their parents make ends meet in the situation of the well-known advertisement where the system is constantly pulling the ends further and further away from each other. Those who continue to try to find a job have realised that a driver's licence is more useful in South Africa today than is a matric certificate (see Colin Bundy's brilliant vignette entitled 'Street sociology and pavement politics: some aspects of student/youth consciousness during the 1985 schools crisis in Greater Cape Town' – unpublished mimeo, 1986, p. 10).

There remain 'the lucky few' who make it to and remain in the senior secondary courses of our schools, including our schools in the 'independent' and self-governing Bantustans, let me stress, since the insidious process of

talking about our country as though we accept the partitionist strategy of the ruling party has to be countered actively if we are not to aggravate our problems. This has become one of the most analysed and written about groups of people in South Africa since black students (besides unionised black workers) have been so visibly in the frontline of the resistance against the consequences of the system of racial capitalism. Indeed, it is difficult to summarise in a few paragraphs the complexity of the dynamics that structure the situation in which black secondary and tertiary students find themselves today. However, certain features are crystal clear.

It is clear, for example, that the pressures on these students to discontinue or disrupt their schooling are constant and increasing. Conditions of crisis both inside and outside the schools simply make it impossible for black students in South Africa today to enjoy the luxury of even the segregated inferior normality of yesterday. There are very many analyses of the reasons for this situation and I do not intend to repeat these here. Besides some of the reasons that have been implicit in what I have said hitherto, I should like to draw your attention to two factors that contribute to the shaping of the schooling environment of our children.

The first of these is, of course, the socio-political context. Schooling is seen to be, and is in fact, so inseparably part of the total situation of unequal life chances which defines racial capitalism, that almost anything can spark off a schools boycott. The then president of COSAS, Lulu Johnson, is reported to have said in October 1984 in an interview with the *Financial Mail*:

Before they are students ... the students are members of their community. Students are affected by rent hikes because it affects the amount of money their families have for their schooling ... The schools and the community are inseparable. (Cited by

## *Education and the struggle for national liberation*

Monica Bot in *School Boycotts 1984: The Crisis in African education*, p. 5.)

What had been in the 1950s and 1960s an insight shared only by a few thousand 'educated' black people, viz., the fact that a democratic and adequate system of education is only possible in a democratic non-racial and united South Africa, has become a fact of mass consciousness today. So much so indeed that it is spelt out clearly by academics at most universities, those seats of 'higher learning' which have so often obfuscated the simple truths of the South African situation. In the words of Professor Owen van den Berg:

Equal education is a fiction in an unequal society: schooling – any brand of schooling – will always be unacceptable to the majority if it occurs within an economic, social and political framework that is unacceptable to the majority. And that is the crux of the education debate. (See his article: 'Education equality: Central issue in the education debate?', University of Cape Town Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, *The Education Debate*.)

The demands put forward by progressive students' organisations of all political tendencies have become more and more overtly political. Some, indeed, have become explicitly socialist or anti-capitalist. In such a context, given the reactionary intransigence of the ruling party, periodic disruptions of schooling for black adolescents and university students are unavoidable. The bush colleges of yesteryear that were deliberately designed to mass-produce Eiselen men and women have instead become the centres of student militancy and political activism. Just as their Afrikaner counterparts of the 'thirties and 'forties produced the *Herrenvolk* leaders of the 'fifties and after, they are assiduously producing the political and cultural leadership of a free Azania. So much for the 'good' intentions of politicians and social engineers! Because so many of these

students come from remote rural areas, their interventions simply guarantee that the political resistance and upheaval will continue to have a national, albeit uneven, spread.

The radicalisation of the student movement is predictable in the circumstances I have sketched. This is as it should be. Our students are no different from any other group of students similarly placed in other parts of the world. However, we would be failing in our duty if we did not point out certain dangers inherent in the relationship between the schools and society. False perceptions or analyses of what is going on in the society at large, a euphoric desire to see only the possibilities in the situation and to ignore its limits, can wreak havoc among the millions of our children at school. It has been said again and again by various progressive organisations and individuals since October 1985 that the optimistic perception of the South African regime as one that is ready to be toppled can only lead to demoralisation and apathy among our children. This false view of the situation generated, among other things, the Nongqause-like slogan *Liberation Before Education* and beliefs such as that indefinite or long-term boycotts will weaken or even topple the regime. Fortunately, saner counsels have prevailed. A pamphlet underwritten by more than 100 organisations in the Western Cape in January 1986 put the matter clearly and prophetically:

Although most students have decided to 'return to school', there is much confusion about whether or not to return to formal classes. One view is that the boycott should continue until all our demands are met ...

This view is based on a completely false reading of the political situation in South Africa, since it supposes that the National Party government is about to fall and that an indefinite schools boycott will hasten this fall. While it is true that the

apartheid state has never been as weak and as open to internal and external pressure as at present, it is a disastrous illusion to believe that the government is on its knees. We believe, instead, that the government will be forced to make certain 'reforms' but that it will be kept in power by its imperialist supporters in the Western world until a more suitable liberal government become possible. If this should prove not to be possible, we should prepare ourselves for an open military government supported in deed, if not in words, by all the imperialist powers for the salvation of capitalism in South Africa. In other words: let us not be misled into believing that freedom is already within our grasp. The struggle is going to be a long one yet and is going to demand many more sacrifices from us.

This may not be the popular thing to say but it is the correct and responsible thing to say. There is no moral, political or education reason for continuing the boycott of classes 'indefinitely'. Indeed, to do so would be like plunging a knife into the heart of our struggle. The boycott is one of the most important weapons of an oppressed and unarmed people. But it is not our only weapon. It is but one of a whole arsenal of weapons at the disposal of our people and of our movement. Like all weapons, if it is not used correctly, it can become a suicidal instrument. (*Cape Times*, 27 January 1986)

A similar assessment of the situation was articulated in the keynote address to the conference of the National Education Crisis Committee in March 1986. At various points in his address, Sisulu warned against euphoria and delusion:

It is important that we don't misrecognise the moment, or understand it to be something which it is not. We are not poised for the immediate transfer of power to the people. The belief that this is so could lead to serious errors and defeats. We are

however poised to enter a phase which can lead to transfer of power. What we are seeking to do is to decisively shift the balance of forces in our favour. To do this we have to adopt the appropriate strategies and tactics, we have to understand our strengths and weaknesses, as well as that of the enemy, that is, the forces of apartheid reaction. (See *Transformation* No. 1, 1986, p. 98.)

On the general political level, I need merely refer here to the increasingly clearer realisation on the part of the student leadership that without the organised black working class, their heroic struggles cannot bring about more than a few episodic improvements in the schools. I have already referred to the path of development from student-centric actions to the idea of a student-worker alliance and beyond that to the hope of a worker-student alliance. There have been and are many practical examples of these developments, spectacular ones like the November 1984 stayaway in the Transvaal and countless unpublicised examples of organised students helping at trades union offices or at crèches in working-class areas or at workers' conferences or meetings. It is such developments which are among the most hopeful signals of the future direction of the student movement in South Africa.

The second important factor that shapes the schooling environment of our students is the teaching corps. The situation of teachers in black schools has become acutely problematical since 1976. The sharpening of the contradictions between the oppressed and exploited people and the ruling class has led to a situation in the schools where increasingly teachers have to decide to support the demands and actions of the black students or face the fact that they are no more than agents of an oppressive and repressive state once all the pious prattling about 'vocation' and 'duty to our children' has been bracketed out. Again, this is an area that has been analysed often in recent years.



Among the earliest, quasi-contemporary analyses, I recommend two contributions to the compilation of the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies of the University of Cape Town on the *Education Crisis in the Western Cape in 1980*. I refer to the article by Trish Fledermann, 'Some effects of the boycott on the role of the classroom teachers under the Department of Coloured Affairs', and that of Henry Joubert on 'Coping in a crisis: a headmaster's case study'. The latter, with a few deft strokes of the pen, paints what he calls 'the dilemma of the headmaster in a black school' as follows:

Under normal circumstances he is seen as a tool of the state who has to implement government policy (or 'gutter education'). He has, in many cases, withdrawn himself from the community which he should serve, lives in an exclusive suburb and maintains a standard of living which few of his pupils can hope to achieve. Headmasters were therefore in the first line of attack by pupils, parents and the public in general. After an initial phase of an increased authoritarianism by principals and after the dismissal of certain principals in March, it was 'open season' on principals.

What emerges clearly from all these analyses is the fact that inside the black schools as they are structured at present, the most fundamental need of all is the professional and academic training and the political and ideological retraining of the teaching corps. All attempts by students, progressive teachers and parents to insert and to widen the scope of liberatory education alternatives within the framework of the state schools will simply come to nought unless this process is taken in hand. The state, clearly, has a vested interest in obstructing the process. Hence, the struggle in this sector of the educational arena is going to be sharpened. Teachers are *not* inherently part of the enemy as young students have sometimes maintained. They constitute a layer of people for whose allegiance and

commitment we have to contend with the ruling class. The developments since 1976 have led overwhelmingly to the conclusion that all progressive organisations of the people, political, civic and education, have to focus their activities on gaining the total commitment of the vast majority of our teachers. If we succeed in this, the educational arena, or at least the schools as institutions, will have been finally lost to the powers that be. The practical implications of this position need not be spelt out here.

### **Alternative education and cultural revolution**

Other papers delivered at this National Consultation on Education for Affirmation will be dealing with the concept, problems and practical manifestations of alternative education. I need only point to the fact, therefore, that particularly after 1980, the cry for alternative education went up until today, in the forms of 'People's Education', 'Workers' Education', 'Liberatory Education' and 'Popular Education', almost every black student and teacher and many a black parent sees the realisation of this ideal as the answer to the crisis in education. It is as well, therefore, to insist on a sober appraisal of what is possible at present both inside and outside the schools.

We need, above all, to get rid of the naïve idea that an 'alternative education system' can be set up as long as the apartheid state lasts. At most, we can encroach on the control, content and methodology of education within the schools. This is one of the fronts on which we are doing battle in the 'war of position' against the ruling class with a view to establishing a counter-hegemonic thrust that will shift the balance of forces in our favour. It is an extremely conflictual, see-saw process in which we will gain much and ever so often be compelled to relinquish ground that we believe to be firmly controlled by our forces.

Outside the schools, opportunities are much greater,

although we must not forget that

[under] the present dispensation, our room for manoeuvre is very limited indeed, and some of our opportunities present serious problems of compromise'. (A.P. Hunter, 'The present situation in education: constraints and opportunities'. Unpub. mimeo.)

I wish to draw your attention to an area that has been hopelessly neglected by progressive educationists, viz., that of the unemployed youth in the townships and rural slums, many of whom have attained a fair level of literacy and numeracy. Real alternative pedagogy is possible among these people. They have no faith in or desire for state-sponsored certificates. They *do* wish to acquire life skills for survival in and beyond the apartheid state. Their rebellious energies can be transformed into a power for radical and constructive change provided that they can be recruited into a cultural revolutionary movement that is integrally part of the movement for national liberation.

Another question that should perhaps be given special mention here is the need for development-oriented organisations to consider carefully and to implement long-term liberatory educational projects in town and country. I am thinking here of fundamental interventions that spring from fearless analysis of the structure and dynamics of a rapidly changing South Africa. Rural development projects of a cooperative kind, language projects, labour and community education projects, preschool programmes, literacy programmes, distance education programmes: these are some of the more obvious and more important areas in which slow, plodding progress made today will ensure solid foundations for a democratic socialist Azania tomorrow.

We have a long way to go even though we have already come a long way. As in so many other areas of life in South Africa today, what is happening in the educational arena is

unique, exciting and creative in spite of the heartbreak and the suffering that accompanies every breakthrough and every advance. What we need to do above all else is to spread the consciousness of what is actually taking place and what can take place and constantly to weigh up these considerations against what we believe ought to take place. Only in this way will we be able to acquire and to sustain a sense of direction amid the turbulence and the confusions that have turned the educational institutions for blacks into a minefield that can be negotiated successfully only by those who have clarity of vision and a realistic appraisal of the means at our disposal.

# LIBERATION PEDAGOGY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

*(This is a slightly amended version of a keynote address, delivered on Wednesday 3 August 1988 at the conference of the Media Resource Centre, Department of Education, University of Natal (Durban) on the theme of 'Experiential learning in formal and non-formal education' held on 3-5 August 1988.)*

## **Introduction**

WE HAVE ARRIVED AT a time to reflect on what has been done in the field of education for liberation, alternative education or People's Education during the last few years. We have to analyse and theorise our experience in this country because it is imperative that beacons be set for future action, that direction and goals be determined so that energies now being expended are not wasted or misdirected. That there has been an explosion of liberation pedagogy, in the form of a multiplicity of educational projects and experiments inside and outside of the formal system of schooling since the early 'seventies more or less, is a well known fact. In recent years, many learned articles have appeared that attempt to contextualise this renaissance of learning in South Africa. Most of these have been programmatic and rhetorical or prescriptive insofar as they have dealt with the macro-educational issues involved, or descriptive and tentative insofar as they have confined themselves to micro-educational issues. Certainly, anyone who is at all conversant with education in South Africa does or can have exhaustive information on what is wrong with the system and on the reasons for the 'educational crisis'. So diverse, contradictory and even esoteric have been (and are)

most of the counter-hegemonic alternatives being probed in different parts of the country under the aegis of different cultural, educational, political, labour and community labels, that no serious attempt has yet been made to generalise and theorise our experience in this vague and undefined field of 'alternative education'. A recent booklet co-authored (in German) by Ludwig Helbig and myself represents a first, undoubtedly inadequate and essentially descriptive intervention. Fortunately, more and more compilations of primary materials and of some analytical essays are being published so that we can soon expect a generation of titles that will undertake the difficult task of showing on which road we are walking, how far we have gone and how far we can hope to go along that road.

For the present, I want to do no more than place the question in a relevant historical context and to indicate why all these developments are taking place at this particular historical moment. Is there anything special about the conjuncture in South Africa during the last ten years that explains why various experiential learning projects have made their appearance in that period? The importance of this question has to do with our understanding of how long the particular conjuncture will last and thus with the shifts that we can anticipate realistically on the terrain of struggle.

## **The international context**

In post-war Europe and North America, the revolt of the youth against the authoritarianism of their parents and against the acquisitive society to which an unfettered capitalist system had given rise, saw the rapid development on all levels of the superstructure of challenges to the conservative elitist, patriarchal-capitalist practices that went almost unquestioned in the inter-war period except to some extent in the explicitly socialist movements. The holocaust, the countless millions of soldiers and civilians who died in

the two world wars, culminating in the unthinkable at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, all these wondrous achievements of Western Christian Civilisation spelled the same things to the post-war European and American youth, viz., disillusionment, scepticism, alienation, a general sense of betrayal. Their rejection of that which their fathers had 'built up' and bequeathed to them took many different forms. In one direction, it led to the suicidal radicalism of 'Hitler's children', i.e., the Baader-Meinhof – Red Army Faction phenomenon; in another direction, it led to the hippy, flower-children counter-cultural phenomenon and in yet another direction it ended up in strengthening the non-Stalinist left-wing, radical socialist movement throughout the world. Existentialism, the Frankfurt School and various permutations of a new Marxism became the philosophical sources that nurtured these generations.

At the same time as the youth of all classes were rejecting the inheritance of their parents in Europe and North America, all other oppressed nations and groups began to rise up and to demand their rights to equality, dignity and the means of life. The movement for women's liberation reached a peak in the 1960s and 1970s at the same time as blacks in North America and in Europe began to fight relentlessly against racism in the so-called democratic and civilised West. In the colonies, one anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement after another gained victory, beginning with the Asian giants of India (1947) and China (1949), regardless of the fundamental differences between these movements. Capitalism on a world scale was under siege but it was able eventually to ride out the storm for reasons which we cannot stop to examine here.

More important for our purposes is the fact that in educational theory and practice, the pre-war norms and certainties which were based to a very large extent on positivism and crude behaviourism were confronted with a formidable challenge from more liberal and radical

conceptions of education and learning. Starting with John Dewey in the United States, educationalists and social theorists began questioning the outmoded methods and psychological theories of a simple, essentially 19th century capitalist education system. The development of the productive forces, especially the technological and communications revolutions, simply swept away the crude ideas about learning and education that had been hegemonic in the stable bourgeois world before 1945. The new pedagogies tended to be linked more or less to a critique of the orthodoxies of the received capitalist system and were, therefore, intended and perceived to be politically committed in one direction or another. This particular debate continues today. Particularly important is the debate between liberal reformists who realise the need to overhaul the outmoded pedagogies generated by less complex earlier forms of capitalist exploitation and radicals who are no longer satisfied with cosmetic changes to the system of class domination. A useful example of this debate is that which continues in the question of 'compensatory education' for lower-class, i.e., working-class people. Ironically, the examples and models on offer in what Bahro called 'the actually existing socialist states' of Eastern Europe, with notable exceptions in the sphere of cognitive psychology, were of little if any value to the critical theorists and activists of the 'sixties and 'seventies.

As is well known, European and North American youth experimented with all kinds of 'alternative life styles' and forms of communal living. Extremes of individualism and collectivism were attempted and these have changed the face of the world quite literally. What is common to all of them is the attempt to realise democracy and self-determination in practice. Inevitably, of course, these grassroots developments – even though they were largely confined to the intelligentsia – found a deposit in the academic and intellectual practices of Western European,



North American and ex-colonial universities and other educational institutions. In particular, theories of education were also revolutionised by new, radical pedagogies.

### **Paolo Freire (a digression)**

There would be little point in elaborating on the development of the new pedagogies, whether they were conceived of in terms of a more sophisticated behaviourist, a humanist or a cognitive approach. Today, most educational theorists operate within one of these paradigms or in eclectic combinations of the three. (An excellent summary of the development of post-war pedagogical and psychological theory can be read up in Youngman 1985: 111–149.) I have based much of what I have to say in this chapter on Youngman's insights. Suffice it to say that the bridge between these, essentially European and North American, developments and the more turbulent if less articulate developments in the 'Two-Thirds World' (usually called the Third World!) is the enigmatic figure of Paolo Freire. His ideas, in the words of Youngman:

... coincided with (and indeed reflected) a number of international developments, such as the growth of Catholic radicalism in the period around the Second Vatican Council of 1965 and the rise of the New Left in Europe and North America during the 1960s. Freire's Third World origins and political-religious radicalism synchronised perfectly with the Zeitgeist of the late 1960s in the West, which was characterised by support for anti-imperialism, the growth of the movement of blacks, women and students, and the revitalisation of the Marxist intellectual tradition. The English language publication of his work in 1970 took place at a moment of crisis in bourgeois hegemony in which many aspects of capitalist society were being brought into question, including education. (Youngman 1986: 151)

It was at precisely this moment that Freire was discovered in South Africa by the fledgling Black Consciousness Movement or, more correctly, by the University Christian Movement and the South African Students' Organisation. But more of that presently.

The fundamental difference between Freire's pedagogy and most other radical pedagogies of this period was his insistence on the link between personal and social liberation, that which he called *conscientização*. The basic education methods he espoused were not very different from what more and more theorists had been and were propounding in order to renew education and to get out of the rut of alienation in which all schooling in the capitalist world had got stuck to the point that some, like Illich, were advocating in deadly earnest the abolition of the school as an institution. Experiential learning, learning by doing, 'discovery' methods, all these and many other empiricist approaches to learning used the same basic educational technology as did Freire and his teams. Yet there were fundamental differences. The central difference was that which revolves around the concept of *praxis*. For Freire, the decisive difference between animals and human beings consisted in the ability of the latter to reflect directly on their activity. This ability is, for him, the unique attribute of human consciousness and 'self-conscious existence is what makes it possible for people to change their situation. It is the philosophical basis of the very notion of conscientisation' (Youngman 1986: 164). Through his emphasis on the essentially Marxian concept of *praxis*, Freire ensures that in his method, there is a unity of theory and practice without which we end up with either 'empty theorising' or 'mindless activism' (Youngman 1986: 171). Education, therefore, must help the learner(s) to objectify the world, to understand it critically and to act to change it. In brackets I might say that Youngman's critique of Freire's idealism (his ambivalence concerning an independently existing reality)

and his vacillation concerning the role of theory (and, thus, of the teacher) in the dialogical situation (see Chapter 5 of Youngman 1986), appears to have been addressed in part by Freire in one of his latest works. According to Youngman:

... Freire shows a profound ambivalence. His dilemma lies in how to relate the authority the teacher derives from a correct theory to his humanist antagonism to imposition. (Youngman 1986: 177)

This eventually leads him to embrace what Lukàcs called 'messianic utopianism', i.e., the glorification of the middle-class leader who commits class suicide and joins the ranks of 'the people'. The classical example of this kind of leader-teacher was, for Freire as for so many others, the shining figure of Che Guevara (see Youngman 1986: 184).

Be that as it may, Freire seems to be groping towards a more decisive position on this very important question. In one of the 'dialogues on transforming education' between himself and Ira Shor, he arrives at the conclusion that teachers and students are 'together, but not equal':

... I don't know whether you are also asked by students and teachers about this question of authority in a dialogical classroom, whether the teacher is or is not equal to the students ... The experience of *being under* leads the students to think that if you are a dialogical teacher you definitely deny the difference between you and them. All at once, all of us are equal! But, it is not possible. We have to be clear with them. No. The dialogical relationship does not have the power to create such an impossible equality. The educator continues to be different from the students, but, and now for me this is the central question, the difference between them, if the teacher is democratic, if his or her political dream is a *liberating* one, is that he or she cannot permit the necessary difference between the teacher

and the students to become 'antagonistic'. The difference cannot allow this to be antagonistic if I am democratic. If they become antagonistic, it is because I became authoritarian. (Shor and Freire 1987: 92–93)

Perhaps I should just say by way of rounding off this digression that Freire's method has been co-opted in thousands of different ways in the pursuit of ruling-class, *status quo*-preserving projects all over the world. This, indeed, is one of the criticisms made against the uncritical acceptance of the Freirian method by various authors (see, e.g., Youngman 1986 *passim* and Prinsloo 1987). Indeed, in a brief discussion of the Brazilian state-promoted literacy project, Celia Da Rocha Reufels has shown that '... the military government and the state literacy agency (MOBRAL) used ... [Freire's] techniques to do just the opposite of what Freire intended' (Da Rocha Reufels 1983: 77).

## **Crucial role of Black Consciousness**

In South Africa, the discovery of Freire's method and his concept of conscientisation came at just the right moment, so to speak. Helbig, basing himself on various South African sources, has shown how Freire's ideas were introduced to the University Christian Movement and through it to SASO in about 1970 by Rev. Collins. Although the government banned Freire's works, about 500 or more copies of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* made the rounds at the 'bush colleges' and were eagerly studied by the young activists of the Black Consciousness Movement. In Freire's works, they saw the mirror image of that which they rejected in the Bantu Education system as well as the possible way out of the *cul-de-sac*. Informal courses in Freire's methods were conducted at these unintended 'breeding grounds of communism' (an accusation levelled

by Verwoerd and his minions against the liberal English universities in the 'fifties!) and soon some of the SASO students and others had begun conducting literacy and other conscientisation projects in urban and some rural townships. The banning of the BC organisations in 1977 temporarily brought many of these projects to an end but they were carried on by others in more or less adapted forms (see Alexander and Helbig 1988: 67). I can do no better than to quote at length Helbig's summary of the reasons why educational activists and theorists in South Africa accepted Freire's pedagogy so readily. According to Helbig:

1. Freire's anti-capitalist social theory accorded with the experience of and the insights at which the liberation movement in South Africa in general and the educationists active in it in particular had arrived increasingly;
2. the pedagogical situation out of which Freire's pedagogy had been formed resembled that which existed in South Africa's ghettos and homelands;
3. Freire's pedagogical method of combining education/culture with conscientisation and politicisation accorded with the views of the BCM and was subsequently adopted by the broader liberation movement;
4. the specific organisation of the liberation movement in the late 'seventies and especially in the 'eighties as a grassroots movement anchored in small groups and projects in the 'community', brought with it an exceptional sensitivity regarding democratic principles. This sensitivity, reinforced by Freire's pedagogy, consequently also became integral to the practice of 'alternative education'. (Alexander and Helbig 1988: 68–69, my translation)

The whole concept of an alternative education in South Africa was deeply influenced by Freire's visions and methods. I shall refer later to this integral relationship between national and international developments and to the consequent importance which we ought to begin placing on studies in comparative education. For the present, however, I want to stress that transplanting Freire to South Africa in the decade of the 'seventies meant inevitably the radicalisation and overt politicisation of the educational arena. This was particularly the case after the Soweto uprising in 1976 and we are all fully aware of the dramatic developments that have followed in rapid succession during the last twelve years, developments which are equally significant when viewed from a narrow pedagogical perspective or from a broader political point of view.

It is enough, therefore, if I try to put in a nutshell what has happened in these twelve turbulent years. To all intents and purposes, post-war South Africa under the Voortrekker-like guidance of the National Party was moving in a diametrically opposite direction from the rest of the world. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, the consequence of the world-wide process of the explosive development of productive forces, far from resulting in the liberalisation of the South African economy, policy and society were made to intensify as far as possible the pre-war labour-repressive system of racial capitalism. The people of South Africa, especially the black people of South Africa, had to walk on the *via dolorosa* from segregation to apartheid.

But, as everyone knows today, apartheid was one of the most dangerous social engineering experiments in the history of the world. The black working class and their children began clamouring for the rights which were so perversely, as they and many liberals believed, withheld from them. From the Defiance Campaign to Sharpeville, to

Soweto a red line of blood and suffering gave continuity to our struggle through its many valleys and over its few but memorable peaks. That line represents the deepening disillusionment of the nascent black middle class, the irrevocable alienation from the system of the vast majority of the black people regardless of class, colour or language, the total loss of legitimacy of the National Party government and all white-supremacist options. The liberation struggle, in the nice phrase of the Carter and Karis volumes, graduated from protest to challenge until we reached the pre-revolutionary position in which we find ourselves today, where only the timing, not the principle, of radical social change is still at issue.

Black students, like their counterparts in Europe, North America and in the ex-colonial world, resented and eventually rose up against the stifling embrace of outmoded capitalist and racist norms and taboos. In our context, it is of the utmost relevance to stress that the system with which they were confronted was that of racial capitalism in which they were confined *a priori* to an inferior status no matter what genius they manifested as individuals or as a collectivity. Unlike their counterparts in other parts of the world, they could not isolate even nationally the struggles in the educational arena from those in the broader social and political sphere. Black power movements and revolutionary movements in the ex-colonial world consequently played a major role in shaping their consciousness. Inevitably, their questioning of the pedagogy of capitalist domination and racial privilege went deep even though they did not have the technical expertise to articulate this critique in a generalised form. That process of theory building has continued since the late 'seventies and is now acquiring a self-consciousness which augurs well for the future.

What was happening on the political and economic fronts of the struggle had its inevitable but uneven accompaniment on the broad cultural front. In education,

both in the formal and in the non-formal arenas, more and more alternatives were being probed and established. Organisations such as SACHED and many others played the decisive role in this area throughout the late 'seventies and early 'eighties. The rapidly developing civil society adumbrated the revolutionary alternative to the apartheid state, an alternative the development of which that state could obstruct but not prevent. The war of position shifted the balance of forces strongly in favour of the black working class especially when the state was compelled to recognise the right of independent trade unions to exist. In the specifically education arena, ideas such as the formation of SRCs at high schools, PTSAs, awareness programmes and all the other innovations which are all but taken for granted amongst us today, could be and were often suppressed by state action only to resurface in more radical form with every new wave of mobilisation.

### **The present situation**

Even from this brief reference to the preceding period, it ought to be clear that People's Education did not fall from a cloudless sky as so many simplistic and unhistorical accounts maintain. The prehistory of people's education for people's power is in fact a long and important one since it demonstrates Santayana's precept that those who are not willing to learn from history are condemned to repeat it! The particular political and educational conditions that led to the propagation of people's education for people's power by the NECC starting in December 1985 are too well known for us to have to dwell on them. Suffice it to say that one of the important links in the chain of causation that is usually left out of the 'historical' account is the crucial national consultative workshop called by SACHED, the SACC, the Institute of Black Research and the Council for Black Education and Research in Johannesburg on 28 November



1985 under the chairpersonship of Bishop Tutu. At that workshop, the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC) represented by, amongst others, Rev. Tsele, was present and agreed to a larger, more representative national consultative conference being reconvened on 28 December 1985. For reasons that are unnecessary to canvass here, the convenors subsequently agreed to forego that date in favour of the now historic conference called by the SPCC at Wits University on that day.

There is no doubt, of course, that in those first months, the National Educational Crisis Committee (NECC) and many other organisations spread the idea of people's education for people's power throughout the length and breadth of South Africa. Important educational and pedagogical initiatives were taken and continue to be taken. It is exceptionally important, however, to stress that the campaign around people's education which is often promoted in a sectarian, party-political manner, did not in any way diminish either the fact or the importance of the hundreds and even thousands of small and large projects that continued to be promoted outside of the particular political framework within which the organisers and leadership of the NECC chose to work. I should like to stress that I am not saying this in order to belittle or devalue the many important actions and projects initiated, promoted and encouraged by the NECC. On the contrary, I have great respect for these but I believe that the new radical pedagogy that all of us are trying to understand and to concretise has no place for undemocratic and even totalitarian suppressions and falsifications of the historical record and of important social practices with which we happen not to be directly concerned. To tolerate this kind of philistinism and intellectual timidity is to undermine everything that we say we believe in. To believe that only those groups who pay allegiance or genuflect to the NECC are 'kosher' is to negate *a priori* everything we say about so-

called democracy.

Education in South Africa, we are never tired of saying, is in a state of crisis. But so is that which we call alternative education, education for liberation, or people's education. Whatever the major and peripheral differences of approach, the fact is that we are in serious danger of stagnating at the level of slogans. Already when one reads some of the descriptions and analyses that attempt to define people's education or alternative education practices, one is often deeply disturbed by the hopelessly myopic, uninformed naïveté that underlies some of these pretentious essays. Unless we face these things head on, we are going to connive at the nurturing of the weeds that will fatally strangle the fragile plant that has sprouted from the seeds I have described previously. Liberation is not some apocalyptic event that will suddenly happen one day!

The real situation in which we find ourselves today is one which has been called a situation of 'violent equilibrium'. In a nutshell, this means that the ruling group cannot in the short to medium term be displaced by the organised force of the popular masses. At the same time, however, the repressive organs of the state cannot eliminate spontaneous uprisings and various forms of organised mass resistance as well as vanguardist actions of guerrilla activists. In effect, therefore, we are confronted with a future of zigzag development in which the rulers will continue to try to effect so-called reforms within an ethnic, multinational framework based on elite-level cooperation, while the leadership of the liberation movement and the working people generally continue to hold out for a unitary non-racial democratic solution based on universal suffrage. This insoluble contradiction means quite simply that for the next decade or so the emphasis in proactive liberatory activity will shift to the social and cultural terrains of struggle while the day-to-day resistance will continue to manifest itself on the political and economic terrains. On all

levels, also on the level of education, we have to plant the seeds of the socialist future in the capitalist soil of today. Struggles in the educational apparatuses have to be integrally part of the broader liberation struggle if they are not to become dead-end initiatives that result in learners and educators turning in on themselves. To avoid such a situation from arising, we have to undertake a number of urgent tasks. Concretely:

We *have* to encourage and make possible the proliferation of alternative educational (and other cultural revolutionary) projects on a very large scale. Hundreds and thousands of such projects involving millions of people in formal and non-formal situations have got to grow. Democratic procedures have to be observed so that none of these practices boomerangs on our movement. Only if we augment our direct experience of radical pedagogy can we get beyond the rhetorical, often mere party-political propaganda that now is sometimes marketed as 'people's education'.

We have got to recapture *for ourselves* professional standards based on competence, skills and scholarship. The inane nonsense that is sometimes passed off as learner-centred education even at universities has got to be exposed and disregarded for the (usually) bourgeois mystification that it actually is. We *must* learn the rudimentary lesson that in a class-divided society the dominant ideas are the ideas of the dominating classes and that 'education' that doesn't challenge these ideas is simply reinforcing the reproduction of the *status quo*, no matter what fancy names we give it. Most learners come to their place of learning with all the excess baggage of ruling-class ideology. Left to themselves, they will seldom arrive at a pedagogy in practice that takes them beyond the *status quo*. Hence the importance of radical social theory and of a teaching corps (whatever it is called) that is suffused with that theory. From what I have said about the co-option of Freire's method for ruling-class

purposes, I think it ought to be obvious that this is a matter of the highest priority. It is *not* a question simply of the politicisation of teachers; it is a question of liberation pedagogy in the most fundamental possible sense. Teachers have to acquire a viable theory of society and the individual that will equip them to act as guides to learners without imposing their particular views. They have to become catalysts that unleash the latent creative powers of their students.

We have, thus, to refine our theory of education. This will be an agonising process for many, especially the majority who have to operate in state-funded educational institutions. The kind of contribution made by works such as that of Frank Youngman (*Adult Education and Socialist Pedagogy*) and some of the more recent works written in the Freirian tradition constitute a valuable point of departure. Education faculties and teacher-training colleges especially have to begin to re-examine their curricula and their practices urgently. They need to look closely at what has been happening in the so-called non-formal arena where major pedagogical advances have been chalked up more easily, if more shakily.

Comparative education studies should receive high priority. Developments in Africa, Asia and Latin America particularly are of profound relevance to what we hope to do in this country. In line with Professor Dias of the Institute for Pedagogy in the Third World at the University of Frankfurt, I believe that alternative education for us means the rediscovery of the real meaning of education, the re-establishment of the continuity between our African past and our Azanian future that was ruptured by colonial-imperialist conquest. In the unique conditions of South Africa, this means no less than the building of a nation and the initiation of the process of creating a national culture out of the diverse strands (the African, the European, the Asian and, to a lesser extent, the modern American) out of

which our emerging nation is being woven together. The fabric of this culture has to be patterned by socialist values imprinted on it by the day-to-day activities of the working class. In doing this, we can learn much from the experience of other nations similarly situated. Indeed, we can learn from the experience of every nation on earth.

We need to take every possible opportunity to test theory against practice and to theorise experience. Like Youngman, I believe that we have to

... challenge the ideology and culture of capitalism and create a counter-hegemony; [and] ... to develop the general knowledge and technical expertise necessary to re-organise production and society in a fully democratic way. (Youngman 1986: 197)

Moreover, we need to get to the point where we accept in practice and not merely in words that 'the linking of learning to production and political action is the key to the unity of theory and practice that socialist pedagogy seeks to achieve' (Youngman 186: 211).

At the same time it is necessary and appropriate to warn against the danger of method for method's sake. While there can be no question about the primacy of the learners' experience and of the issues that face them in ordinary life, the crucial dimension that we as teachers have to guide them towards is the critical analysis of that experience. The learners' interests must influence the direction of the learning process but the educator cannot and should not '... accept the students' view of their interests and experience uncritically' (Youngman 1986: 203). We have to get away from false Aristotelian alternatives; our pedagogy should be neither learner- nor teacher-centred. Instead, as Youngman has pointed out, we have to transcend this dichotomy 'by a democratic collaboration between the educator and the students' (Youngman 1986: 208). Above all, we have to avoid the demagogic pitfalls of manipulation masquerading as 'participatory democracy'. Such a deviation will saddle

us with the terrible burden of generations of ill-trained, ill-disciplined and pretentious charlatans. As Francisco Vio Grossi has said in another context:

‘It is widely known that participation is sometimes allowed only to give the impression that things are managed collectively, rather than in an authoritarian way, but in fact that participation has so many limits that it helps to consolidate domination ... (Grossi 1983: 109)

Clearly, there is room here for educational practice to lead the way out of the unresolved tension between our recognition of the reality that teachers/educators are different from their students by virtue of their theoretical knowledge on the one hand, and our warning on the other hand against the ‘demagogy’ of pseudo-participatory methods. We have to find ways of avoiding the catch-22 situations in which educators might begin to feel that anything they did might be either too ‘egalitarian’ or too ‘authoritarian’. Perhaps the answer to this conundrum lies in what is only an apparent contradiction in terms when I suggest that educators have to earn from learners the status of first among equals!

Most of us have gained crystal clarity about the distance we still have to travel towards our goal of a South Africa/Azania free of all oppression and exploitation. We have a very demanding itinerary ahead of us and we have to set out today armed with the compass of a feasible social theory. ‘History never stops. It is true that the pace of that process has been slower than most of the earlier literature predicted, but the tendency is clear’ (Grossi 1983: 110).

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# EDUCATION, CULTURE AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

*(Speech delivered at the Department of Education, University of the Witwatersrand on 14 October 1988)*

LET ME BEGIN BY saying thanks for the invitation. I have been doing quite a lot of this kind of talking on different campuses recently as well as at Colleges of Education, Training Colleges and other educational institutions and it has become very clear to me in the last few months that a lot of people are thinking very deeply, are compelled to do so in fact, because of the situation that has emerged in our country about education and about how the educational practices in which we are already involved or which we hope to initiate are related to what has become more than obviously a struggle for liberation in South Africa. Hence my contribution today which is entitled 'Education, Culture and the National Question' is going to concentrate on the relationships between what we are trying to do in our educational practice and the struggle for national liberation.

Now I am going to approach the question in reverse order; I am going to look at the national question very briefly because I trust that most of you from general knowledge will have few problems in this regard. In South Africa it remains controversial to speak of the 'nation'. Because of National Party policy but even because of preceding governments' policies the concept of a single nation either already in existence or coming into existence is not yet one that is taken for granted. If we lived in England or in Germany or even in Zambia or in Botswana the question of nationhood would simply be taken for granted. That is, speaking very generally because in any of these



countries, of course, other problems are emerging. For example, the Turks in Germany, the Welsh, the Scots in the United Kingdom and so on. The point is that nationhood, nationalist is simply taken for granted in these countries whereas in South Africa one cannot do so.

That is also the short answer to those people on the left, and there are many of them, that maintain that there is no such thing as the national question in South Africa. If you permit me, I shall not go into that; I have written about it in a paper that was published in *Transformation* No. 1 1986 in which I have tried very briefly to reply to that kind of argument. They say that there is no national question simply because the passing of the South Africa Act in 1909, resolved the question of nationhood. Since then the South African nation exists and what we have is a problem of racial oppression and class exploitation and so on. Now that is true but obviously the point is that the nation has to be constructed in all the dimensions of the social formation, the economic, the political and the cultural/ideological. The fact of the economic entity which is bounded by national boundaries doesn't mean that the nation exists or that the national question has been solved, because for as long as politically and culturally/ideologically the nation has not been constructed, for so long the national question remains a question.

Now to put the same thing from another angle: the question of national unity remains a problem in South Africa. For our present purpose I want to assert quite dogmatically that today there is no question about it but that the working class (and I am using the word in the broadest sense possible) the working class can in fact lead a struggle for national unity, for national liberation, the working class can build a nation, can bring about national unity at the same time as it is bringing about a different socio-economic and socio-political system. I am simply asserting dogmatically that this is possible and that I believe

in fact it is being done and that what people at universities are doing is precisely to sort out how they as the intelligentsia or as intellectuals can in fact systematise the discourse of national unity, the discourse of building the nation and thereby change technically the conceptions which people on the ground, as it were, have of what they are doing. So, the nation has got to be constructed both politically and ideologically or culturally and the reason why this issue is of relevance to what we have to discuss today is that I believe that what is happening in South Africa is that despite the ups and downs, ebbs and flows of the political struggle – and we happen to find ourselves at the moment in one of the downturns, or if you wish in one of the valleys of the struggle – despite this, in the cultural dimension or in the ideological dimension that struggle continues unabated, in fact even more intensely. Much of the energy of the masses and of the radical intelligentsia has necessarily been transferred to the cultural sphere.

To put it in another way: the cultural revolutionary aspect of our struggle has to continue, does continue and the more consciously we as people involved in educational practice link it to that particular struggle, the more certain we can be of a certain measure of success in the longer term. I am reminded of what Charles Elliot, a former Director of Christian Aid, once said at the Conference of the Second Carnegie Enquiry into Poverty in South Africa, that only those revolutions have succeeded where people have thought through the strategies and the tactics of the first few years after victory. Now it might sound like a really simplistic statement but when you study the history of revolutions you will realise that it is a very profound statement, that in fact the conservative elements, the elements that had hitherto monopolised skills, knowledge, power, are denied the opportunity or the opening to recapture that power after formal political victory if those who challenge them have thought things through the first

few years after victory. There are many actual examples.

To look at the question of culture then, i.e., national culture, which will lead us eventually into the question of education, let me start from the concept of culture. Now, what has happened is that the concept of culture has been in a very static, Cartesian mode and because of National Party ideology particularly, culture is broken up into different so-called cultures. Now, this is a worldwide phenomenon and the National Party is not unique in this at all; in fact, the greatest purveyors of this Cartesian concept of culture as far as I am concerned are to be found among sociologists and anthropologists in the United States and in the Soviet Union.

It may sound like some sort of impossible task for a small people like ourselves in a small country like this to try to question that and yet I believe that one of the historic tasks that our struggle against racist repression has placed on our shoulders is precisely to do that, to question precisely that conception of culture. I want to go back to the origins of this term. Raymond Williams has been one of the people in Britain, one of the radicals in Britain who have written, as you probably know, at length on this question and he makes a point somewhere that it was only in the period of the rise of nationalism in Europe, i.e., at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at the end of the eighteenth century that culture came to be viewed in terms of discrete 'cultures'. Culture, this 'noun of process' was in its origins seen as a unilinear development of civilisation, i.e., a movement of people into a more complex world, a movement into literacy, into numeracy and into cities. It was through nationalist movements in Europe, coupled obviously to capitalist ideas of ethnic differences, that the whole concept of culture as a universal unilinear process, a development of civilisation on a world scale, came to be viewed more and more in terms of discrete entities, national entities – 'cultures', so-called. The first one actually to use

the term culture in its plural form was Herder, the German romantic philosopher.

It is quite paradoxical, of course, that what has happened now as the result of the communications revolution, as a result of interaction on the world scale, what with things like fax machines and similar super technology, the whole idea of cultures, the idea of discrete entities called 'cultural groups', is becoming more and more unacceptable in practice. Not in theory, as I say, but in practice and in fact already in the 'fifties in his book *What Happened in History* Gordon Childe made the point that 'cultures are becoming culture'. He didn't realise the paradox because he didn't realise he was actually putting Herder on his head, so to speak. So that through the development of the communications revolution 'cultures' have tended to become more and more 'culture' and therefore it has become possible to conceptualise culture differently in the same way that it has become possible to conceptualise nations differently. Those of you who know the book by Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities* will realise what I am talking about when I say that it has become possible to imagine the nation as a group of people that does not share the same language. I shall come back to that point. I want to stress that for related reasons it has also become possible to conceptualise culture differently.

Let us come back to the question of nationhood: because of the fateful influence of the nationalist German romantic and European idealist movement in the early nineteenth century, language, nation and culture tend to be viewed as coterminous entities. That is to say, the language group, the national and the cultural group are seen as the same thing viewed from different angles. Now there were very good reasons for this; if you study Anderson carefully you begin to understand why the language group became, as it were, the entity upon which the market was built up. It becomes very obvious that it facilitated transactions simply because

people were able to communicate with each other in one language and therefore the domestic base for a market for capitalist expansion was, as it were, ready to hand. Now, it is fascinating to study how national languages emerged and I will refer to it later again but what is important is to see that language was not simply seen as a means of communication but was also understood to be a bearer of culture. It thus became impossible to disentangle language and culture; the culture was integral to the language and vice versa. They were somehow linked in a dialectical embrace that made it impossible to separate the two. To put it differently: it was thought that only a particular language can convey a particular culture. I think that if this is true then obviously we have got very serious problems in South Africa. I think that in a very rudimentary way if this is true as a philosophical proposition then we've got major problems in this country and in many many other countries.

Now that is why we need to go back to the fax machine and we say that it has become possible to see language differently. We have come to realise, together with people like Benedict Anderson, that national unity is not a question of speaking the same language, it's a question of being able to communicate with one another. Only those people can constitute a nation who are able to communicate with one another. They don't have to communicate in one particular language only. In fact, even a group of deaf mutes could constitute a nation theoretically. Now, the point I am making is that the development of communications after the second world war in colonial countries were multilingual polities or multilingual entities had been thrown together as colonial administrative units, in the words of Anderson, meaning had been created. In brackets, I should say that some of the Bantustans are beginning to do this and it's going to become a big problem because many people are already acquiring vested ideological,

economic and political interests in perpetuating the meaning created by these artificial units.

Now colonies have done exactly that and that is why one of the basic tenets of the OAU is that all boundaries must remain and by implication all the Eurocentric ideas of the yoking together of language, culture and nation, all that is simply ignored in political practice because these ex-colonies have become nations, because people are able to communicate with one another through bilingualism or multilingualism and through many other media such as TV, of course. In a country like South Africa we are constantly listening to the same adverts in different languages; we see the very same people in such adverts speaking different languages and we all get basically the same message. Now once we understand that, we begin to understand that culture has to be approached dynamically. You can't see culture as God-given or perhaps even as historically evolved but somehow frozen, never to be changed again. The South African regime insists that the Xhosa have their own culture, the Zulus, the Coloured, the Malays, etc., etc. You know that these are all supposed to be different 'cultures' and 'cultural groups'. Now somehow we have got to get out of that track and in order to do so we have got to go back into history, we have got to re-theorise the whole question of culture more dynamically and find out whether it is possible to say that 'cultures are becoming culture'. This means that we have to try to discover whether the core of cultures or universal civilisation, if you wish, is expanding through the communications revolution, TV, radio, printed media and so on. Through these things, everybody reads the same thing, hears the same thing, begins to believe the same thing, act in the same way, and so on. So the core of what is common to all humanity is expanding, cultures are becoming culture. I often say that I am not too sure that one can also validate the corollary that the periphery is becoming smaller. In fact, I think it isn't so,

I think that the core and the periphery of unique elements are expanding simultaneously. Those elements that are peculiar to specific nations or regional groups are also expanding for reasons of class emancipation, i.e., by reason of the fact that the 'lower classes', the working classes and the peasants, the toiling masses throughout the world, are coming into their own nearer to the centre of power. Hence the culture that they have evolved, the culture that they bring with them is becoming more and more accepted. Hence, I think, it doesn't follow that because the core of common elements is expanding that therefore the periphery is shrinking.

There is no doubt at all that throughout the world, more and more through people's power, people's culture, workers' power, workers' culture, throughout the world, the working classes, the 'lower classes' so called are coming into their own and more and more their interests, their life styles, their tastes are beginning to be recognised as the national norm, the international norm. Now, without going into that matter in any more detail, I want to resolve what might appear as a contradiction, namely, the fact that at the same time as we are saying let us build a nation we are asserting the dying away of separate and separable cultures. The short answer is that as long as the nation state remains the major entity for political and economic interaction in the world, for so long the national boundedness, as it were, of culture will remain even if it is essentially the core of what is common to all humanity that is expanding. There is in fact no real contradiction, there is only an apparent contradiction and one does not want to become a prophet and say that the national state will disappear in such and such a period of time because it is inappropriate to make those kinds of predictions, but certainly the trend is indicated by developments like the European Economic Community, like the SADCC and so on. These are larger and larger transnational political units

and of course transnational economic units. A corporation is a multination corporation even though it is based essentially in a particular country for reasons of economics rather than of ideology. Now, I leave that there. It's a tantalising thought just thrown in to show that in fact there is no real contradiction.

Let us move over to the question of education in South Africa. To start with, I believe that it is essential to re-conceptualise culture in South Africa as capable of being transformed by the interaction of all positive and constructive elements in the different traditions that have constituted South Africa. These traditions are firstly, and the order of priority is important, the African tradition, the European tradition, the Asian tradition and also the modern American, if you wish the urban tradition which is often in our country associated with the United States. Now, out of these major currents we are to reconstitute a single national culture. The National Party, the present governing elite of the ruling classes in this country, is obviously moving in the opposite direction or perhaps I should say has been forced by events, particularly by the Conservative Party, to appear to be moving more and more in the middle of the road. However, as the State President and others are fond of demonstrating, the Nats still believe in the primacy of the group, i.e., the cultural group or ethnic group, call it what you will. They are moving, as I say, in a direction opposite to what I am talking about. At the beginning of this century, Olive Schreiner made the point (and I refer to this in a book which I published under a pseudonym, *One Azania One Nation*) that in the next few decades in this country the hallmark of what she calls 'Statesmanship' will be whether or not politicians and cultural activists can create a situation in which all the different strands in this country can be woven together as a single nation. At the time it sounded crazy because people like Jan Smuts and others were talking about two streams, two nations among the *whites*,



never mind the African people. The Jan Smuts' of the world were saying, look we must build a white nation and of course eventually they converged, merged Afrikaans- and English-speaking whites. Olive Schreiner in her visionary genius looked way beyond that already at the beginning of this century and said, look we must build a single nation such that wherever Jew, African, Afrikaner, Dutch, Coloured, Malay, etc., come together, there are only South Africans. Now it sounded crazy at the time and I came to the conclusion after studying this question very deeply that only the black working class is in a position, as it were, to throw all reservations to the wind and to set about doing this. Now by saying that, by putting it in that way, by saying that the black working class are the only group of people that can do this I am not for one second simplistically trying to suggest that ideologically the black working class is homogeneous, that they are not in fact subjected ideologically to the ruling class in many many ways; I am not suggesting that, but I am saying that their economic, their political and their social position, their location in the social structure is such that only they constitute the base upon which it will be possible to unite the people of this country. Perhaps I can demonstrate it simply by putting it this way: How am I going to persuade the University of the Witwatersrand to issue all possible announcements in all the major languages of the people? There are simply too many vested interests, there are too many apparent economic restrictions on that kind of thing to make it possible for the University of the Witwatersrand or Cape Town or Rhodes or any of them to issue their statements not just in English and Afrikaans but in Zulu, in Sotho, in Xhosa as well. This despite the fact that there are more people out there who read those languages than people who read English and Afrikaans. How much easier is it to persuade black working people? They accept much more easily than even black (or white) middle class people

that if we could issue all these pronouncements in all the languages of the people it would actually make for unity much better than the present practice. That gives you some sort of concrete idea of what I am talking about when I say that that is the class of people in this country who can constitute the base of the revolutionary transformation of the country in such a way that in fact the unification of all the people becomes possible and that it will become possible for people to create a new identity for themselves, call it South African, call it Azanian, call it what you will at this stage, it doesn't matter too much.

That brings me then to education and I want to start by saying clearly that in the modern world the school is the main agent of socialisation. Educational institutions are the main agents of socialisation and for that reason it is in schools where in a sense culture is manufactured. In a modern state it is through compulsory education that children are given the same access to what is either the existing or the emerging national culture. So, for that reason, in our case too, education is important. Now, the most fundamental sector of education is not the university, despite what university dons and academics might think, the most fundamental sector is in fact the preschool. If you look forward rather than simply inwards, you realise, as I always say, that even if we do not live in a non-racial, democratic South Africa the children who are now in the preschools are going to live in a non-racial democratic South Africa and I am not expressing a hope, I am expressing what I consider to be a scientific prediction. Now, that being the case it becomes vital that in the preschools the foundations of non-racial democracy are laid and in my view education faculties need to start looking particularly at preschool education and primary school education. I believe that that is where the most important work needs to be done. A concrete example of what I am talking about is the Vumani Preschool Project. The name of

the project was chosen to give a sense of consensus, of being together, of agreement, of coming closer together. We are in that project attempting to take out of all the cultural traditions, out of all the currents that constitute our society, all that is best, all that is constructive, all that is not divisive. The project is attempting to take out of the different traditions those stories or songs or nursery rhymes or parables or fables or whatever, and suggesting that those be translated into all the languages that are used in these preschools. For those who need an analogy, perhaps the best one is the Christian Church. The Bible is available in virtually all languages spoken in the world, so that the Bible, and to a large extent the Hymnal, is available in all these languages. A sense of Christian solidarity emerges out of that whenever Christians come together. So it is entirely possible to create meaning, to create solidarity in different languages by transmitting the same cultural content. Somewhere else I have used a metaphor where I see the individual, every individual as the centre of a concentric universe such that the concentric circles radiate out from each individual but each individual is also encircled so that overtones are similar for people as the circles of solidarity grow wider and wider. They don't become identical ever but they are similar. Thus, for example, I am someone from the Western Cape, a male first of all, an older man from the Western Cape, someone who is English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking, who is South African, who is an African and so on, all these are concentric circles. And, again, you come back to that idea of the core of what is common to all humanity. We are not suggesting some uniformation, what the Germans call *Gleichschaltung*, some sort of drab uniformity, we are not suggesting anything like that. Culture doesn't mean that, and that is why I use that metaphor of the individual as the centre, not a centre, but the centre, of a concentric universe. By putting in front of these kids all these different stories, songs, and so on in the

language(s) they speak, we make it possible for them whenever they are together and whenever they are able to communicate with one another in a particular language, to draw from the same universe of metaphors, the same pool of metaphors and they are able to communicate relatively easily with one another.

Of course, one can go far beyond that; there are preschools, certainly in Cape Town, and I am sure here as well, where, for example, children from different language backgrounds are put together. They are trilingual preschools and the children are learning all three languages simultaneously, Xhosa, Afrikaans and English simultaneously. Now, that is completely possible. I just want to mention that since I cannot go into the sort of detail that the subject deserves, it is my view that university education departments have tended to play down the importance of preschool education and yet you are dealing right now with more than a fifth of the population both actually and potentially who either are at preschools or should be at preschools. And, of course, in a really fundamental sense you are dealing with the people who are going to constitute the nation of tomorrow.

Another question I want to raise is the question of language. I'll do so very briefly because I've touched on it already but the whole question of national unity in South Africa, and of non-racialism incidentally, that whole question pivots on a democratic solution of the language question in this country. The language question has been submerged beneath the obvious superficialities of 'race', racial prejudice and of racial discrimination. Most people haven't in fact given the attention to the language question which it deserves simply because other things are up front. Because of the Group Areas Act, because of the nature of racial capitalism, people don't realise the importance of the language question. I say because of the Group Areas Act because usually people who live in one group area speak

the same language and therefore language doesn't appear to be a problem. People who come to the market place to look for jobs have to do so, generally speaking, either in English or Afrikaans. Good English, bad English, indifferent English or Afrikaans, but they get their job only if they know one or both of these languages to a degree. So, again, it doesn't appear to be a problem but you take away the question of racial discrimination and the language question is going to be on to us like a time bomb. The point I am making is that both from the point of view of bringing about national unity and from the point of view of doing away with racial prejudice (notice I say racial prejudice, not racism as an integral ideological component of capitalism in South Africa), we have got to solve the language question: our people have got to be able to communicate with one another.

Very briefly I would like to suggest that the answer lies in a multilingual solution. It is true we now have to promote, indeed, many of us have already begun promoting, English as a linking language, as a *lingua franca*. English is, as you know the *lingua franca* of the intelligentsia, of the business community so called, of the middle classes generally in South Africa, but it has to become the linking language of the vast majority of the people in the near future. I believe from my study of language in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa, that English will not necessarily remain the *lingua franca* of South Africa. When the majority of the people of this country come to power, as they must in the not too distant future, they will put their imprint on the state and on the society and one important aspect of that imprint will be the language question. Since the majority of the people are not English-speaking at home they are never going to be satisfied if English is decreed to be the main national language. Forget it; it doesn't happen anywhere in the world; there is not a single country in the world where this has happened. We

will be a major and a unique exception if it did happen here! Of course many people, especially those in 'high places', are going to be very upset by the implications of what I am saying here. But that is as it should be. Those of us who have a realistic historical perspective on the future of our country are saying that we should start learning Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, etc., and argue that the ultimate answer lies in the trifocal, trilingual solution. When we consider that in the case of only eight percent of the population of this country, their home language and English are the same language, we quickly realise that any simplistic suggestions about English as the only official or national language have to be smothered in their conception. In addition to promoting English as a universal second (or third) language, we should – as part of a general language policy – encourage all our people to know at least one of the regionally important languages in South Africa at a conversational level. One should be able to greet people, ask how they are, give them directions, ask them whether they are satisfied, and so on, in the language they normally speak. You have got to be able to do that (a) because often people don't speak English, or they don't speak it well enough and (b) because it is a matter of courtesy and it is a matter of building a nation, to be able to do so. We do occasionally have lecturers at Wits or at Cape Town, where more and more of the student population are not English-speaking, who can switch from English into one or other regionally important language, be it Zulu, or Afrikaans, or Sotho or Xhosa. When we have many people who can do that you will find that your students are going to be able to work together much better than is the case at the moment.

In regard to textbooks: if you had major textbooks that were accessible in other languages, not every single textbook, but the central or core textbooks, if they were available in other languages so as to make it easier for people to refer to the major texts in the language that they

best understand, you will find that studying becomes much easier, you will find that ASP (Academic Support Programmes) will become a very different kind of thing from what they are at present in many cases, i.e., programmes which simply expect the students to adapt to the university. Instead the university will also be adapting to the students. Indeed, when we consider the whole question of standards, the whole question even of standard languages, from the point of view of class interest, when one starts doing that you realise that there are many different things that need to be done at universities, in secondary schools, in primary schools, in preschools in order to make possible a democratic solution of the language question.

I could go on at great length but I shall make only one other point. It is a controversial point but I shall make it nonetheless. I believe that we need to and can reduce the complexity of the language question. The National Party strategists and language planners are saying that we are dealing with ten languages in this country, at least ten languages, and I believe that it is possible to reduce the complexity of the problem to a position where we are dealing with four major languages, two Germanic languages (English and Afrikaans) and two Bantu languages (to use this term in its scientific sense) namely Nguni and Sotho. There are definite minority languages like Tsonga and Venda, the position of which we need to consider carefully. The moment we start talking in those terms, we realise that it is possible to produce through language planning, properly understood not as some sort of alien intervention in the language sphere but as a matter of social consensus, as a matter of democratic discussion, that we can produce a standard written Nguni and a standard written Sotho language of which the other varieties will be spoken and written varieties. The moment you realise that, you also realise that it is possible from both an economic

and political/ideological point of view to so structure the language problem in this country that it becomes of great advantage to us to resolve it along those lines.

I am sure you will have many questions on that, but by way of concluding, let me touch on the question of Africanisation. Africanisation does not mean that we change our curricula and our syllabuses simply to accept things because they are 'African'. It must mean that we take the Eurocentric focus out of the syllabuses, out of the curricula. Take the simplest possible example; in a mathematics textbook, instead of using foreign English and European examples, use African examples, South African examples, examples from other African countries. Fundamental concepts, such as class or mode of production in subjects such as sociology or anthropology can and should be taught with reference to African societies and not in the inherited Anglo- or Eurocentric way. All that we would be doing would be to make our teaching less Eurocentric without expelling the universalistic element out of our syllabuses and our curricula. Africanisation must also mean using more examples from Asia and America. If Africanisation comes to mean a new myth, a new claustrophobic dogma, which we'll have to destroy twenty years hence, then we are simply putting obstacles in our way. Africanisation, I say there must be but we have to be very very careful that it does not become some sort of sacred thing. It must make it more possible for us to link up with the rest of Africa and for the rest of Africa to find access to us in South Africa. It must not make it impossible for us to link up with the rest of the world.



## **THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

THE 'O'BRIEN AFFAIR' AT the University of Cape Town has raised the public profile of a question that has occupied lecturers and students at tertiary education institutions in South Africa and abroad since the mid 'fifties when the introduction of university apartheid was first mooted by the Verwoerd regime. It would, however, be a serious mistake to allow the specific aspects of the so-call O'Brien affair to cloud the real issues involved in this question. To draw the attention of those who are directly affected by this question of an academic boycott of South Africa to the history of the question is entirely relevant since we could easily find ourselves in the absurd situation of having to reinvent the wheel with every generation of university students.

### **The cultural boycott**

For decades now, many radical and liberal academics, cultural workers and sportspersons abroad have refused to lend credibility and legitimacy to the institutions of apartheid South Africa by accepting invitations to come here to work, hold lectures, conduct debates, etc., in apartheid institutions such as the universities, most of South Africa's theatre and opera complexes, entertainment halls, sports stadiums, and so forth. In other words, the academic boycott has always been an aspect of the more general cultural boycott. Certain anti-apartheid organisations such as those in Holland, in fact, have succeeded in pressurising their governments into cancelling the cultural agreements that they have traditionally

maintained with South Africa.

In all this, however, there are a few principles and issues that are crystal clear and that ought not to be obscured by ambiguities and evasions. One of these is that many liberals outside South Africa are genuinely motivated by an intense revulsion against the perpetrators of racist exploitation and oppression. This is one of the deepest-going legacies of the anti-fascist, anti-Nazi movement in Western Europe and of the civil rights movement in North America. It is, however, often inseparable from a certain political naïveté and myopia which can be traced to an anti-revolutionary class position. For what happens in practice is that such moralistic liberals abstract from the real situation, equate the South African government with 'South Africa' by a curious process of mystification of the problem and cease to be concerned about the political, economic and cultural consequences of their action.

No revolutionary could adopt such an approach. No revolutionary could support or encourage a policy that punishes both the robber and the robbed simply because it is 'the morally right thing to do'! It is axiomatic that any cultural boycott has to be aimed at the rulers and the oppressors, not at the ruled and the oppressed! Any such boycott action has a dual purpose: it aims to weaken the position of the South African government and ruling class and, by doing so, to strengthen the position of the oppressed and especially of the black working class, which alone is capable of ending white minority rule and the capitalist system. These two purposes are, however, not logically implicit in one another. Weakening the South African government does not necessarily and automatically strengthen the black working class in the short to medium term, and vice versa, strengthening the position of the black working class does not automatically weaken the South African ruling class in the short to medium term. However, for any individual or group concerned about the future

dispensation in this country, strengthening the working class is necessarily the priority and thus the main criterion for the assessment of the desirability and feasibility of any anti-apartheid action or campaign. In regard to the cultural boycott specifically, it ought to be clear that it is necessary that any cultural boycott be complemented by deliberate and systematic efforts to help the oppressed, to equip them with the skills and resources that will enable them to survive and to structure the transition and to take control in the post-apartheid, post-capitalist era.

## **Sanctions**

Something needs to be said briefly about the relationship between the sanctions campaign and the cultural boycott since the latter is in many respects merely the extension to the cultural sphere of the strategy of economic sanctions against and diplomatic/political isolation of the apartheid regime. It is necessary to state quite bluntly that insofar as sanctions are advocated as a substitute for the more general liberatory struggle, insofar as it is put forward as the last hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in South Africa, it is one of the most treacherous and deceitful political manoeuvres being tried out on the oppressed. This is not the place to examine the whole range of the sanctions question. However, the dangerous illusions that this question of the isolation of the South African regime can give rise to may be gauged from the following words of a UCT lecturer who is an admired writer. According to a letter she wrote to the *Cape Times* on 15 October 1986:

The campaign for the complete isolation of South Africa is a last attempt to force change by non-violent means. As a tactic it cannot be effective unless it is swift, hard and thorough-going in its implementation. Each wavering concession and each small breach – including each unsolicited

violation of the academic boycott – is only going to prolong the terrible waiting.

Let it be said clearly: selective sanctions flexibly deployed and chosen on the basis of the criterion of whether they will strengthen the position of the revolutionary classes, as one of the weapons in the entire arsenal of the liberatory war in South Africa, must be supported by any person or party fighting for radical and fundamental change in our society. But sanctions as a means of avoiding the inevitable is a trap for the oppressed. There are many more aspects to the question and we certainly do not wish to imply that the writer quoted here has herself such a simplistic view of the matter, especially since we are quoting from a letter which was shortened by the editors of the *Cape Times*. However, we need only ask the colonially exploited and oppressed people of Namibia how long one can be forced to wait for the Godot of a 'freedom' that depends on outside powers and capitalist cliques!

## **Do we support the academic boycott of South Africa?**

In the light of what has been said above, it is clear that all progressives throughout the world support the academic boycott insofar as it is intended to question and to undermine the legitimacy and the counter-revolutionary capacity of South Africa's universities and other relevant tertiary institutions. On this point, there ought to be no doubt at all. All of us would like to see the academic boycott in this sense being extended to all the universities (including the Afrikaans universities) and not confined – for what it is worth – to those few institutions where there is a relatively well organised militant student body, as at UCT, Wits, UWC and elsewhere. In this regard, if we are honest,

we have to admit that precious little has been done inside South Africa to implement any academic boycott. The task that confronts us is enormous. If we judge simply by the number of foreign academics that are working at or visiting any single South African university at a given moment, we shall soon realise the magnitude of the task.

According to Dr James Moulder, UCT's Director of Public Relations:

... he had no statistics on hand but in one week it could be three and in another week 24. He said UCT encourages its academics to attend international conferences and spend research leave in overseas departments, and encouraged both visits of academics to UCT and to overseas universities 'as it believes only in this way can it attain the kind of academic excellence to which it aspires'. (*Cape Times*, 11-10-1986)

If one adds to this one university all other South African universities, the real character and scale of the task facing us ought to be obvious.

### **The 'total academic boycott'**

A major reason for the confusion and opaqueness of the present controversy is the equation of the academic boycott with what is called a 'total academic boycott'. To the extent that those who put forward this notion are able to articulate it clearly, it is more than obvious that they have not thought through the implications of this slogan or that they are quite ignorant of the complex reality into which the slogan is being inserted. For it is immediately obvious to anyone who has even the slightest knowledge of the situation that the call for such a total boycott, were it feasible, would be tantamount to expressing a self-destructive, masochistic urge, a kind of death wish that derives from political desperation and hallucination.

The demands for a total academic boycott comes from the same kind of political simplicity that gave rise to the slogan: *Liberation Before Education*, i.e., the belief in the imminent collapse of the apartheid regime. Recent history has buried that particular folly but others are generated as easily as mushrooms after the rain. The consequence of this pathetic political 'vision' is always the same, that is to say, the relentless process whereby the revolution devours its own children. It is as well to remind ourselves that no matter how angry we are and how emotion-laden an issue may be or may become, it is the task of leadership to lead, to anticipate and to identify the pitfalls in the way of our actions, to help to prevent avoidable catastrophes. It is not our task to follow the first one who raises a shout in anger irrespective of what s(he) is shouting!

A total academic boycott, if it is to be more than a hyperbolic slogan, implies, among many other things, ruthless self-censorship since we would thereby prevent ourselves from access to some of the world's most important books, journals, magazines, newspapers, sound tapes, records, videotapes, etc. One cannot eat one's cake and have it! We cannot prevent all academics from coming to South Africa while we are prepared to buy and use their works.

There is, of course, a variant of the total academic boycott which would keep the relevant, i.e., progressive, radical, academics off the university campuses while tolerating and even encouraging their interaction with community and other organisations of the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa.

While there may be many practical problems attached to this view, it is clearly much more in line with the criteria we have suggested previously. It is not, however, part of a strategy of 'total academic boycott' in the strict sense of the term. In this strict sense of the term we would deprive ourselves voluntarily not only of the opportunities for

intellectual exchange with some of the most insightful people in the world but also of opportunities for scholarships, bursaries and fellowships tenable both inside and outside our country. We would also cut ourselves off from any other forms of financial and material assistance, all of which is vital for the strengthening of the position of the working class in South Africa.

## **Academic freedom**

It ought not to be necessary to stress that our reasons for opposing any so-called total academic boycott have nothing to do with the liberal myth of 'academic freedom'. Most English-speaking university administrations and organisations such as NUSAS have since their inception spread this kind of nonsense among our students at the universities. The most recent authoritative statement on the question hails from the Senate of UCT which on 21 October 1986 by 85 votes to 47 passed the following resolution:

Senate recognises that academic freedom is a constitutive element of any university community. Academic freedom is based on the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, and it pertains to all teaching and research that is undertaken at a university.

Senate therefore supports the statement by Council following the recent episodes of violence on the campus and rejects in the strongest possible terms any actions aimed at further curtailing academic freedom. In particular, it regards the disruption of lectures or any other infringement of freedom of speech on a university campus as unacceptable and rejects any form of academic boycott against or within a university. Senate believes that any person or institution that wilfully disrupts or prevents any of the teaching or research activities or any examinations undertaken under the auspices of UCT or who contributes to, organises or

propagates such disruption, has forfeited the privilege of being a member of an academic community.

It is almost a waste of time today to expose in detail the elitist, reactionary and romantic assumptions that underlie this kind of liberal cant. It is the typical indulgence of people who are or want to be imprisoned in ivory towers, far from the madding crowd. As though we are not living through a revolutionary situation! As though freedom is divisible! As though the universities are somehow exempt from the storm and stress of the rest of our societies in Southern Africa! This is the attitude that welcomes a Koornhof and any number of other reactionaries to UCT and to other campuses in the name of the mystified concept of 'academic freedom'! As though we should encourage reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries to spread their poison (which means death to hundreds of thousands of our compatriots) anywhere in our midst!

We stand firmly opposed to the coming to South Africa of any racists, reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries whether to the universities or anywhere else in our country. We are totally opposed to reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries going outside the country to speak 'for South Africa'. Where the line is drawn between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' people is an empirical political question about which there will and should be disagreement. But the principle of excluding right-wing elements from the sphere of freedom so as to prevent them from obstructing the process of liberation cannot be questioned. We should try to realise this principle whenever we can and wherever we are. This, indeed, is an important part of what the struggle for liberation is about at this stage. We should, moreover, be mindful of the fact that today's liberal or radical often becomes tomorrow's reactionary!



## **The selective boycott**

The total academic boycott, properly so-called, throws out the baby with the bathwater. We can, obviously, have no objection whatsoever to visits by or the employment of progressives and radicals in the universities and other isolated institutions. On the contrary, we encourage this interchange of people and of ideas since it can only enrich and accelerate our struggle for the total liberation of the oppressed and exploited. In principle, there is absolutely no difference between South African and foreign academics. The question of tactics is determined by other considerations.

This is all the more important since, in the short to medium term, any total academic boycott is in fact impracticable. It may take many years, for example, before such a campaign could get off the ground at the Afrikaans universities. There is also a glaring incongruity in the advocacy of a boycott of South African universities by all foreign academics while the very advocates tolerate South African academics who are openly racist, reactionary and counter-revolutionary. For most radical and progressive foreign academics, it is impossible to visit South Africa unless they are sponsored by their universities or by other foundations. In most cases, as things are at present, this implies that they have to be attached to some university or other in South Africa. A few can manage and have managed to come to South Africa without this requirement. Clearly, it is better that they come, whatever the links with South African universities, provided their skills and insights are made accessible to the relevant groups and individuals among the oppressed people.

There may well be short-term or conjunctural reasons why in a particular period either generally or at given South African institutions it may be tactically correct to call for as complete a boycott of such institutions as possible. Clearly,

such situations have to be judged on the basis of the relevant political criteria. They can, however, not be generalised into some absolute rule that ties us down forever regardless of changing circumstances. The academic boycott is not a principle: it is a tactic which, like all tactical weapons, has to be used with due regard to time, place and circumstances. The so-called total academic boycott is impracticable but, to the extent that it *does* work, it in fact deprives mainly the oppressed and exploited of life-giving international exchanges of ideas and resources. We must oppose the 'total academic boycott' because it weakens us and we should, instead, support a carefully planned selective boycott.

Should we agree on the need for the practicability of a selective academic boycott we need to be very careful that we do not get suffocated in another set of contradictions deriving from power struggles and divisions within the liberation movement. Contrary to suggestions that are making the rounds, the academic boycott was not 'called' recently by any group or organisation, whether located inside or outside South Africa. This whole question of who has the right to call or decide on such boycotts is fraught with grave problems but these have to be addressed if we are not to cause even deeper divisions than already exist in our movement.

## **Who decides?**

First, let us look at the question of democratic consultation. Many students and lecturers have been heard to say that 'the people' must be consulted on whether or not foreign academics, or which foreign academics, may be invited to South Africa. This is in line with the more and more general revolutionary practice of consulting with representative organisations of the people. But, frankly, an imperceptible shift has taken place here. People who raise this kind of

demand are pretending (or simply believing) that universities are part of the 'community' and that they are therefore subject to the discipline of that community. In principle, there can be no objection to such a demand and in a post-capitalist Azania we will certainly have the relevant structures whose members will be accountable to representative organisations and subject to recall. But to suggest that the Department of Nuclear Physics at the University of Pretoria, for example, should first consult 'the people' (through the NECC or some other representative body) before they invite some Israeli or German maker of bombs to South Africa is to live in a world of make-believe!

The universities (all of them) are part and parcel of the South African Establishment, i.e., ruling-class institutions. As such, their main purpose, and the one for which they receive bounteous subsidies from the apartheid state, is to promote and ensure capitalist rule and white supremacy. This is the very reason why they are sites of struggle today and why all talk of 'People's Universities' in an apartheid South Africa is such infantile nonsense. We have to judge every question from the point of view of the interests of the black working class and of the liberation struggle as a whole. For this reason we use the universities and treat them as sites of struggle without compromising our principles. As the balance of forces gradually tips in our favour, the universities – like all other institutions in the country – will themselves become a stake in the struggle. At that stage, the divisions in the ruling class may even make it possible for us to run some universities in 'liberated zones' against the wishes of the nominal rulers but we are, clearly, nowhere near such a situation.

This means quite simply that the relevant groups and individuals in the camp of the oppressed and exploited have to be vigilant (as they proved to be in the case of Conor Cruise O'Brien). They have to alert the community to the comings and goings of reactionaries and counter-

revolutionaries, whether they are 'academics' or not is quite besides the point, and mobilise against these elements as effectively as possible. A leaf should be taken out of the book of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) with due regard to the different terrain in which this struggle is being conducted. A selective academic boycott, as defined here, is a logical necessity inherent in the very process of our struggle for liberation. In this sense, no genuinely anti-apartheid group or organisation needs to obtain a mandate from 'the masses' before it tries to launch such a campaign. Any organisation which, through constant mobilisation and struggle, has earned the acceptance of the oppressed and exploited people has the right to initiate such a call in any given case if it can succeed in winning the support of other relevant organisations for such a campaign.

We must beware of all attempts to restrict this right to any single organisation or group of organisations. Of course, it is quite conceivable that some kind of sole authentic representative status may be acquired by one organisation or alliance of organisations. But this is certainly not the case at present and any attempt to impose such uniformity on the liberation movement should be opposed for the totalitarian ploy which it is. Unity does not imply uniformity of views. While all of us must strive for maximum unity in our movement, we cannot wish away real ideological, theoretical, state strategic and organisational differences. To do so would be the first step towards relinquishing the democratic rights we are fighting for even before we have acquired them.

In short, whether or not a particular foreign (or South African!) academic (sportsman, cultural worker, etc.) should be boycotted has to be decided in the normal course of democratic debate within the liberation movement. One person or organisation, having become aware of the imminent or proposed arrival of some individual will, as normally happens, raise the matter in the relevant forum(s)

and from there the discussion will circle out and one or other relevant group in the liberatory camp will take up the matter, appeal for support from other groups, and so forth. This is the democratic way and we must defend and protect this way of doing these and other things in our movement!

## **O'Brien revisited**

The visit of Conor Cruise O'Brien was the catalyst that set off the discussion on the academic boycott. It split the English-speaking universities – especially Cape Town and Wits – into moderate, liberal, neoliberal and radical fragments. For some individuals employed at these universities, deeply held, ideologically rooted convictions are at stake; for others, possibly, bread-and-butter questions are involved; many are simply confused and take up now this, now that position depending on which way the waves of the voluminous debate are flowing. What is beyond doubt is that student reaction to O'Brien's bull-in-a-china-shop behaviour has catapulted the universities into the more general education crisis from which they have been relatively insulated up to now. Questions are being posed seriously about the governance of the universities, the structures that control them and the procedures by which decisions are arrived at and implemented. The dictatorship at the heart of every bourgeois democratic institution is being exposed for all to see. These are important gains for our struggle at this level, even if actual victory may continue to elude our grasp for a long time. It is an inestimable gain when a struggling people gets to see in practice the structure and the dynamics of the society and the institutions it is fighting to change. For this, we salute our students.

We should build on these gains without becoming frivolous or adventurist. We need to consider strategy and tactics carefully and not jeopardise our gains by ill-

considered demands and actions. O'Brien was merely the tip of the iceberg. There are hundreds of foreign academics in South Africa at this very moment. Compared to many of them, O'Brien is almost a 'communist' in the government's sense of the word. There are even more South African 'academics' who ought not to be teaching at any university at all. The issues are complex but clear. The debate on these issues should be intensified and widened among students, parents, and teachers so that more and more consistent and democratically considered positions can be arrived at.

# THE TACTICS OF EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

*(Transcript of College Lecture delivered on 23 September 1987 at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg)*

LET ME FIRST THANK the University and the Education Faculty in particular for the invitation and for the opportunity to share my not uncontroversial views on this matter with you today.

Clearly from the title of my talk it must be obvious to you that there is some problem about the tactics of education for liberation. But I think even before we begin to talk about the tactics we need to talk about the concept, the fact and the process of education for liberation. So I want to start off from there.

I assume that those people who have come here will accept without further need for evidence that South Africa is undergoing a process of rapid transformation. Some of us may not believe it if we only read the newspapers or if one listens only to the speeches of National Party politicians. But I think all of us are agreed that this country is being transformed very rapidly, especially from below by those people who historically have been at the receiving end of what is known as justice and the privilege of being so-called citizens of South Africa. Now whether one believes in a revolutionary process, in the sense of a process that also involves violent transformations, whether one believes and accepts that or not, I think one has to start off by accepting that our society is caught in a process that involves violence in some degree or another. Now people may differ and people do differ on, first of all, whether or not such violence should be condoned, encouraged, promoted; and secondly,

the extent to which if one does accept that it is inevitable in some degree or another, the extent to which such violence ought to be tolerated on both sides of the line. It is not my purpose to elaborate any further on that matter. I want to put it on record that, viewing the situation historically, there is no doubt whatsoever that South Africa is undergoing a revolutionary process which involves at various levels, and to a certain degree, violent transformations.

Now the problem starts, and I am going to concentrate now on what we call the liberation movement. In other words, those people who, because of their structural location in the social formation, have been compelled to undertake certain actions to initiate certain processes that will lead eventually to a radical transformation of our society. Initiative, there is no doubt since 1976, has passed over from the ruling group to the dominated, to those who have hitherto merely been objects of government, rather than subjects of history. There is no doubt about it that since 1976 the initiative has gone over to those people. There is no doubt about it that all the certainties of yesteryear, the ruling class certainties of yesteryear, have been shattered and the people, many people, have been catapulted into an agony of doubt. And that is as it should be. Francis Bacon, none other than Francis Bacon, is reported as having said that those who start with certainties will end in doubt, those who start with doubts will end with certainties. I think that is as it should be, that is where progress actually comes from.

Now within this liberation movement, first of all, there are very many different views about both the goals, the ends of our struggles, and the means by which these ends have to be attained. The point of course is, and this is how I want to link it up, the point is that the educational process, however conceived, however you define it, does not take place in isolation from the rest of the social processes. And



that is why our conception of the social processes, our conception of the social formation in which we are living, is vital to our understanding, first of all of the education process, and secondly, therefore, to our approach to the question of transformation in the educational arena. That is vital, that conception of the social formation.

Now there are differences, I say, between various currents within the liberation movement about both means and ends. Everybody nowadays speaks very fashionably about post-apartheid South Africa, some will say Azania. Everybody speaks fashionably about this, very few people have given it really serious thought, what they are talking about. And even fewer have begun to understand that all talk about a post-apartheid South Africa is so much nonsense if you haven't given thought to the processes by which you are going to reach that desirable situation. Those processes are vital; the ends determine the means. You must be clear about this. Now, in the liberation movement there are many who believe that the South African government is a quasi-colonial government. In other words it is something similar to the government of Ian Smith, the governments of previous British/French/Portuguese/Belgian colonial powers in Africa. It is something like that. There are still some who believe that it is no different from those particular governments. (Now I am starting at a very deep level in order to get to the subject of this afternoon's discussion.) As a result, a discourse of anti-colonial struggle has become prevalent in the liberation movement. People speak about transfer of power, to take an example. They speak about negotiated settlements and so forth. Now, I do not want to go into too much detail. The point I am getting at is simply that in some sense people have an idea that at some point the White minority racist government (to use the usual phrase) is going to hand over power to an up-and-coming – well, some would say Black working class; others would say a Black middle class; others might say a non-

racial democratic and all the rest of it – up-and-coming middle class. Now be that as it may, the basic point I am trying to make is that some people have that analogy in their minds, and they operate on the basis of such an analogy. Others believe that we are having to do in this country, not with the colonial or quasi-colonial government but with an indigenous African people, an aristocratic caste, that for various reasons that have to do with the history of racial capitalism, is not going to transfer power, that in fact is going to have to be forced out of power in order for the situation to be changed.

Now, yesterday when I spoke at the Durban Campus I used the analogy of the French nobility in 1789 and the Russian aristocracy in 1917. Of course, it is a different historical epoch and circumstances are totally different, but the typology is the same. That is the kind of situation we are involved in, not an anti-colonial situation. And that makes a huge difference to one's conceptualisation of the struggle and therefore of the tactics that one has to adopt in this struggle.

Now I am going to leave it to your hopefully fertile imagination to extrapolate all the implications of what I am saying on other levels. I want to, as it were, zero in on the educational arena directly. And I would like you to cast your minds back some two years or so, and you will remember that one of the more fashionable slogans of the time was 'Liberation before Education' in various forms. That particular slogan was being propagated, condoned, used by particularly high school students, even by others, and clearly the expectation was that the Botha government of ill repute was about to fall. It would very soon all be over, and therefore one was morally justified in calling on particularly Black students to sacrifice one or two years of education, one or two years of schooling, because there would be more than enough time very soon to catch up. You might remember that this was a fairly general

perception some two years ago. It is not the first time in our history, by the way, that this happened. There have been other moments in recent South African post-war history, when very similar illusions were rampant amongst the oppressed. Any oppressed people, especially a people that is in such a slave-like situation as the Black people of South Africa are, must needs have illusions, must needs have these kinds of utopian fantasies in the very short term in order simply to stay alive. So I am not blaming anybody. What I am trying to say is that this was nonetheless an illusion, and the tactics that emanated from that particular perception of the situation were therefore flawed in their very conception. Now I want to make the point firmly and provocatively, hoping that there will be people here who will take it up with me, either now or after the lecture.

What does this mean? Am I saying that the concept of alternative education, people's education that emerged out of this period in the particular form in which it emerged was flawed? Answer: 'no'. I would like to make the point that the whole concept of alternative education and even people's education goes much further back. It goes right back in fact to the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, and even before that, to the setting up of the Eiselen Commission to investigate what was then called Native Education. From that time onwards, when the Christian National Dogma was imposed on all and sundry, and the Afrikanerisation of education in South Africa started in a systematic way under Verwoerd and company, people began to consider what alternatives were possible, what alternatives were feasible, and there have been many attempts. The initial attempts were backward-looking – people might not understand why I use the term – they were backward-looking in that progressive people, particularly liberal people, thought in terms of re-establishing, restoring the pre-Verwoerdian liberal democratic missionary-type of education as an ideal, a sort

of golden age of native education. And this remained essentially the idea of the alternative right until approximately 1969, when SASO was formed and when the Black Consciousness Movement transformed radically our perceptions and our conceptions of politics and of mass political action in this country. I'll come back to this point in a moment because it is a little known fact that that year is indeed a watershed year in both our politics and our education.

Until 1969, approximately, most people in the liberation movement, most political activists, wanted, and said so in so many words, an education that was equal to the education of Whites, the same education (as it was said in very many political programmes) as the Whites. And it didn't strike them until the Black Consciousness Movement came into being that that education was an education for domination, that it was a racist education that prepared people for an oppressive and exploitative position in society. This particular realisation found its culmination in the speech of Zwelakhe Sisulu at the NECC Conference here in Durban in March 1986, when he made the very point I have just made that education for Whites is an education for domination and we don't want it. But the point is that it was only from 1969 onwards that people started asking what is an appropriate education for a non-racial democratic South Africa. It is only then that people began to ask the question seriously and started by initiating projects and other processes that in a sense gave the impetus to what later on became People's Education and all the rest of it.

Now, of course, these things did not come out of the fertile minds of the Bikos and the others who formed the BC movement in South Africa. They were certainly essential to that process but they were part and parcel of an international realization that educational processes, contents, methods and so on had to be democratised in

order once again to become relevant to a rapidly transforming world, a world that was being transformed by communications revolution, by technological revolution generally and by the interaction of cultures throughout the world. Thus, those of you who are aware of what is going on in places like Europe, the United States, in other so-called Third World countries, would understand that alternative education in South Africa is merely one part of a universal process that is taking place, as I say, throughout the world. The fact that it is so highly politicised in our context has to do clearly with apartheid and apartheid practices and the fact that we are caught in a resistance movement which makes it essential that a government will oppose every attempt on our part to institute education for liberation. In other countries governments either encourage or tolerate this renewal of education. In our country that is out of the question at the moment.

To come back to the BC movement, I was making the point that it was people like Paolo Freire and their theories, Illich and various others, that influenced these people, but it was their genius, if you wish, that made it possible to indigenise these ideas, to naturalise these ideas, to give them a particularly South African timbre, a particularly South African flavour. Now, since 1976, after the Soweto uprising, alternative education has become a very serious business in this country and indeed in the very literal sense of the term, we have now reached a point where the private sector itself, from the biggest multinational companies to some of the smallest little groups, is beginning to ask 'How can we get involved in people's education, in alternative education?' What does this signify? It signifies very simply that even the pillars of the establishment are beginning to understand that the foundations of the society have become very shaky, and that they have got to take out an insurance for the future. They have begun to understand this. That the people, some of them inconspicuous, some of them most

unlikely individuals in our society, were busy establishing all these alternative education projects, alternative health projects and so on, that these people will more likely than not in the next decade or two be ruling this country and they will be the very people from whom you will have to get your licence to operate in this country. Thus it becomes necessary for business to begin to consider whether it isn't actually better to give some money to this project and that project and so on. I know, I have had hundreds of discussions with such people in recent years, recent months particularly, and it is quite astounding how historical events concentrate one's mind. Quite astounding. A lot of people have suddenly begun to understand that non-racialism is actually a very serious principle. Not something you just talk about and forget about, the moment you have spoken the words.

Now it has become a very serious business, as I said, because of the fact that in our context, education, alternative education is necessarily education for liberation. It can't be otherwise, because this government and no other White minority government will ever be in a position to encourage or to tolerate alternative educational experiments because alternative education in a sense goes back to the real essence of education, which is to question the established practices, the established modes of operation. That is one of the main tasks of a progressive education. Of course, and I must say this in parenthesis, it is important to understand that for ruling classes generally in any class society, not simply in our society, education is necessarily a conservative process, because they want to preserve the *status quo*. They want simply the new generation to acquire the skills, the knowledge, the beliefs, the customs, the practices of the previous generation; they want to reproduce society more or less in the image and likeness of what has gone before. The more liberal people in the establishment are prepared to allow certain space for

adaptation so that the society does not stagnate, that is true, but by and large ruling classes consider education purely in terms of conservation of the *status quo*. Whereas in the same societies the oppressed and exploited strata necessarily (even when they cannot articulate it as such) concentrate on education as a subversive process. In other words, that aspect of education that questions the established modes.

There is a book which most educationists I am sure are aware of, called *Teaching as a Subversive Process*. That is almost, one could say, the watchword of the oppressed. To try to enhance the subversive aspects of education, to question the existing and the oppressive reality which entrenches the rulers and the ruling strata.

Now, the point then is that alternative education in South Africa is necessarily education for liberation. In other words, only those educational practices, projects, programmes which further the liberation of the oppressed can be categorised as alternative education in our society today. It could always be like that, but today that is undoubtedly the case. Now I am deliberately abstracting from a whole lot of polemics that have been going on within the liberation movement around the very words people's education, education for liberation, alternative education and so on. Those things are a sort of flotsam and jetsam of history, it is not worth talking about that at any great length. The point is that the fundamentals are very clear, namely that people's education as conceived originally is education for liberation in the sense in which I have defined it just now.

Now, what is important then is to understand that as far as our tactics are concerned, we have got to understand that it is necessary to initiate long-term transformational projects in the educational arena. That does not mean that we do not also have to see to short-term reactive needs that arise from strategic intervention on the part of the rulers. For example, if the government closes down a school or dismisses a

teacher or something, we have got to react to that. It is a highly political act, it is a highly politicised act necessarily in our country. But we have got to deal with that because this is part and parcel of our struggle; it is part and parcel of our ways of defending ourselves. But much more important are those interventions on our part which actually help to transform the entire situation, to shape consciousness in ways that are looking forward, in ways that are preparing people for a liberated, non-racial, democratic, and many of our youth would insist, socialist, anti-capitalist, at the very least, South Africa. I deliberately throw that in in case people want to discuss that also. I could be very curt to you and just stop by saying non-racial, democratic South Africa, but I don't think that would be anywhere near the reality. Most of the young people in our townships today are at the very least anti-capitalist, if not socialist, in their aspirations. Be that as it may, the point I am making is that it is in order for us to be able to shape consciousness, if I may use a term from Antonio Gramsci, it is for us to build up civil society against the repressive apparatuses of the state. It is in order for us to do that that we are involved in alternative education, that we are involved in people's education, in education for liberation. In other words, those projects, those organisations, practices, are very important as they will constitute the base upon which a non-racial, democratic future becomes conceivable. It is our duty to initiate those projects, it is our duty to create such organisations, to initiate those processes, those practices. And that is what people like myself and many many others see ourselves doing.

Now, to take my favourite example, one which some-time last year I also spoke about here: one could take an example like language. Now language policies that obstruct communication among different language groups have been deliberately used by government in the schools and outside the schools. Language projects that counteract that,



a sort of counter-hegemonic project on a large scale, a generations-long project, will do much more than all the most militant sloganising in the end. I shouldn't compare them, because both are necessary as I have stressed, but because most people, and especially conservatives, only see this militant sloganising and think that is alternative education. Alternative education has got to do with very mundane things, like helping people to communicate by, for example, becoming multilingual, trilingual, bilingual, whatever it is. That is part and parcel of alternative education. Of course it is not simply a grammatical and morphological question. It is clear that the sort of materials that you use in order to teach language are equally part and parcel of education for liberation. You know the usual sort of thing, you know the example if you ask children to write a composition on a thunderstorm rather than on how the Casspirs came to the school. The materials that you use to teach people language are very important; they are an intrinsic part of education for liberation. So even though I am simplifying for effect by saying that helping people to become multilingual is very much a highly political act today, I actually mean just that. I mean that very seriously. Similarly, to take another example. We have, and one can say this very openly, I like to say it, if I may use an Afrikaans word, '*uittartend*', in an *uittartend* way, we have a position at the moment where there is nothing the government can do about it. Preschools are not as yet, certainly for most Black people, under the control of the government. Preschools embrace more than a fifth of our population. They also happen to embrace the most important segment of our population, namely those who will definitely live in a non-racial democratic South Africa. And therefore in more senses than one, it is a fundamental arena of political activity, both vis-à-vis the little children (and one has to be very careful there as you know) and vis-à-vis the parents of those children, workers in most cases,

and the teachers who have to be trained in order to prepare these children for a non-racial democratic future.

Now this is an area that most educational activists who fondly believe themselves to be militant progressives and so on have completely ignored, haven't even begun to understand the significance of, because they think the government is going to fall next year. That is oversimplifying it of course. But it is because the tactics are conceived in this short-term way that we can only concentrate on militant sloganising and not on the necessary medium- to long-term strategising which is required in order to turn things around, in order to reshape the consciousness of masses of people in this very fundamental and lasting manner.

I want to end off by saying that the best metaphor I could think of, it is actually a mixed metaphor, but it doesn't matter, the best metaphor I can think of to understand and explicate this question of education for liberation is that of space. In other words we see the educational arena as a totality of spaces, some of which are occupied by the government or more generally even by the ruling class, but certainly by the ruling party through its repressive and other state apparatuses, others of which are either left unoccupied because the government does not even know that they exist, very often, or which now are gradually being occupied by the oppressed, by the progressive forces, by the forces of liberation. So that for argument's sake if we take the entire preschool arena as such a space, it is a relatively unoccupied space, one which we as progressive people need to occupy, and which will be contested of course by the rulers who, necessarily after all, have their own agenda. It will be contested, but that is the nature of struggle. That is the nature of the struggle in which we particularly are involved and as in a battle what we are trying to do is to gain superior positions, what Lenin called the commanding heights in a battlefield from which

you will be able to launch the final struggles that lead to victory. It is only if you have strengthened your position, if you have changed, have altered the balance of forces in the favour of the oppressed, that eventually victory can be assured, no matter under what circumstances the final battles are fought.

Perhaps my own prognostication is too pessimistic, perhaps a negotiated settlement is after all possible. That will be a different endgame from the sort of endgame that I believe is really likely to happen in this country if you extrapolate it from what I said earlier. And I am not saying this because I am trying to be unnecessarily provocative, I am saying that if we are serious, you know we will not adopt Canute-like strategies and tactics, we will not try to stop the oceans with our hands, our bare hands, we will rather try to harness the forces of progress and the forces of liberation in ways that will really structure the future as we today desire to see it, namely as a future where all or the vast majority of our people will have a genuine chance to live in the way in which human beings ought to live and are capable of living in the modern world.

Thank you.

# EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

*(This is a slightly revised and updated version of an article written for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty in South Africa.)*

## Approach to the question

A 'NEW SOUTH AFRICA' in the title of a chapter on educational strategies could suggest a Utopian point of departure. Of course, Utopian exercises are never simply fanciful. However, there is little point in trying to describe educational strategies in a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania. There are simply too many variables to permit of even an approximate prediction.

Hence the attempt is made here to consider what strategies are going to, can be, and should be, initiated and sustained for the realisation of the post-apartheid South Africa. The reasoning is simple: we are totally convinced that apartheid or the racial capitalist order will sooner or later vanish from the stage of history by whatever means turn out to be effective. While the means are decisive in determining the eventual outcome, there are certain fundamentals common to all visions of a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania. Consequently, as far as these fundamentals are concerned, it is quite realistic to consider how we can, as it were, accelerate the process of transformation by intervening in the dynamic reality of the present with a view to arriving at a general constellation in which the realisation of the desired goals will be possible.

Our approach cannot, therefore, be a revivalist, tub-thumping, rhetorical one. It has to be a transitional or transformational one that is fully cognizant of the

complexity of the historical process in Southern Africa as a whole. We have to attempt to capture in words the subtlety that characterises the South African reality if we are to help provide strategists and activists with tools that can reasonably be relied upon to impact in the desired manner on the present situation as it is developing.

If we use a spatial metaphor, we can conceive of our task as one in which we are confronted with a dynamic whole in which spaces exist and are continually albeit slowly and erratically coming into being. By filling these spaces, we have the power to alter both the dynamic and the direction of the totality that confronts us. Provided it is at all times clear to us that the educational arena is one of many such totalities that are themselves dynamically interconnected, we ought to be able to obtain a realistic idea of the possibilities as well as of the limits which educational activists have.

Let us put the matter a little more concretely. We need to determine what the real policies of government are, i.e., those implemented rather than those professed. We need to establish, further, which spaces inhere in the formal educational system across the entire range from pre-schooling to tertiary and continuing education, i.e., we have to identify those areas ignored or neglected by government and those areas over which government have little or no ongoing control. What spaces have been and still can be created by intervention on the part of students, parents or teachers and by all three sectors acting together? How can we expand those spaces over which we now exert or can exert some (or even, for short periods of time, total) control? We need to know what reverses have been suffered and what the reasons were for such setbacks and we must be able to anticipate conditions and circumstances which could lead to future defeats. These are some of the questions that need to be researched if educational activists are to get a sense of direction and of purposeful action.

Finding, creating and exploiting spaces within the system can be seen as a process of shifting the balance of power in the system. The government will not knowingly surrender the schools from its control. Recent actions of the government in locating Casspirs manned by armed police and members of the South African Defence Force in the schools indicate this resolve. As a consequence, any strategies developed will have to be subtle in order to be effective. An analogy can be drawn with the trade union movement which, by dint of painstaking attention to its economic role during the 'seventies, has managed to shift the balance of power in commerce and industry, and also to create space for itself in political terms.

### **The question of values**

It is axiomatic that all spheres of life in a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania will be informed by a completely different set of values (or value clusters) from those that determine action today. It is true, of course, that there are many important differences between the many diverse groups of people who are struggling 'for liberation' and that all of these motivating centres have different, even sometimes hostile, motivations for their anti-apartheid activities. None the less, as I have already suggested, there are some basic common values to which all (or most of) these centres subscribe. Since the realisation of these values in and through our education practices is in fact one of the main determinants of the form and content of our struggle in the educational arena, it is obvious that the consideration of these value clusters is a useful starting point for a discussion of strategies. While it is true that no ruling class may yet have realised in full their underlying set of values as set out in manifestoes and party programmes, it is also true that the articulated value system of any class of people is one of the most important determinants of their action.

This identification of values together with the situation as it now exists in both the formal state system of education and in the realm of 'civil society' (Gramsci) will make it possible for us to plot the most likely and the most desirable trajectories of educational action.

Let us begin by listing those things to which we are opposed. These include: racism, sexism, social inequality based on wealth, values that come from overrated and overemphasised competitiveness such as aggression, egocentrism and selfishness, undemocratic and individualistic attitudes as expressed in elitism, authoritarianism and the desire to be on top, to be the most important person regardless of what this does to other persons.

On the positive side, all anti-apartheid political, quasi-political, cultural and religious movements and organisations believe in, and promote, values such as equality in regard to all socially relevant features such as colour, gender, sex, language and religion.

All of us believe in a cooperative ethos that plays down individualist tendencies, i.e., we all wish to find ways of realising the Christian injunction to love our neighbour as ourselves. Consonant with this is the ideal of participation by all, opposition to domination by the few or even by the Chosen One. The third large value cluster is freedom and the right to hold a view even if it differs from that of the majority provided it does not subvert the basis on which the new society is to be erected.

Equality, liberty, participatory democracy and cooperation: we need to draw lines around these large and shifting concepts even though we cannot spell them out absolutely. Within each of these large concepts there are subsystems of value which need to be carefully identified and related to the larger notions of which they are corollaries.

## **The thrust of present government policy**

The heroic struggles of the past ten–twelve years have led to a few major shifts in government policy. One of the most important pertains undoubtedly to the question of medium of instruction. Recent oracular pronouncements from Minister Gerrit Viljoen would indicate that more flexible policies in regard to curriculum design and Africanisation of syllabi (in response to the wave of mobilisation under the general heading of People's Education) may be in the offing. However, any statistical analysis based on the usual variables and ratios such as number of pupils, teachers, classrooms, qualifications of teachers, pass rates of students, etc., leave us in no doubt whatsoever that the fundamentals of apartheid education policy have not yet been changed.

What is happening, though, is that in line with overall government strategy, concessions are being made in order to accommodate the aspirations of the sons and daughters of the black middle class. Universities, private schools, some technicons and business schools are being allowed to 'open up' somewhat in order to catch middle class or aspirant middle class individuals and to slot them into the system where they are required.

In addition to these adaptations at the top of the educational system, a quantitative expansion of black schooling has been tolerated although in the most recent period, school boycotts and government policy have tended to put a brake on this expansion. Perfunctory, system-bound attempts have been made to 'upgrade' the academic and professional qualifications of black teachers, to provide more books, audiovisual and other educational aids, textbooks, stationery, etc., largely in direct response to the demands emanating from the sustained student resistance since 1976. However, apart from the blatant opportunism and manipulativeness of some of these 'reforms', they are usually bound up in a package of conditions and



prohibitions that render them worthless in educational terms. The most eloquent example is, of course, the posting of armoured vehicles and security guards on school premises, both of which simply negate any educational atmosphere and, instead, underline the fact that the black schools have become sites of class struggle and even of class warfare!

These policy adaptations are in line with certain recommendations of the De Lange Commission's report but, as is well known, even the essentially harmless recommendations of that Commission that tended in the direction of opening up the system and giving a greater say to parents in the determination of what shall be taught, who shall teach it and how they shall teach it were unacceptable to a government for which group identity, i.e., the maintenance and promotion of ethnic consciousness, remains a holy cow. In sum, we can say clearly that neo-apartheid as practised by P.W. Botha's government represents, also in the educational arena, a historic step away from the crudities of Verwoerdian apartheid, a greater willingness to recognise social markers other than 'race' as determinants of social status and power but, in the final analysis, it is, like its predecessor, calculated to entrench ethnic divisions in the population and thus to keep down the vast majority of the black people.

## **Formal schooling and the role of teachers**

Spaces within the educational system exist at all levels. State control tends to be the greatest in the middle stretches of the student's career. At the lower and upper ends, control is necessarily less direct and less rigid. This is so because lower down (preschools, primary schools) the quantitative aspects of control are formidable while at the upper levels (universities, teacher training colleges), the qualitative aspects render direct control embarrassing, demystifying

and directly counter-productive.

Primary school teachers, for example, have much greater control over the syllabus they actually teach and the methods they actually use (as opposed to the prescribed syllabi and methods) than do teachers in secondary schools. Since the entire edifice of formal schooling from the point of view of the state rests centrally on the cooperation of the teaching corps, it is clear that any strategy to influence the practices and direction of schooling should concentrate on the training and retraining of teachers, more particularly of primary school teachers. The preschools and primary schools are fundamental in any modern educational system since the children's mould is set in these early years. Hence, primary school teachers ought to occupy pride of place in any training or retraining programme.

Such programmes can and should be organised by teachers' unions, educational service organisations and subject teachers' associations. In most cases, they will necessarily be scheduled for weekends and vacations. The cumulative effect of such programmes will none the less become evident within a short space of time. While such programmes will inevitably become targets of hostile government attention, there is no way in which the government can actually stop them even if teachers' unions and similar organisations were to be driven into the catacombs in order to give effect to their plans.

Re-education programmes are essential not only because they are an imperative for more effective teaching in order to satisfy generations of increasingly critical, sceptical, and even cynical students. They are also essential because they are the only way by which teachers can be helped out of the systemic dilemma in which they are trapped. Teachers in black schools in South Africa have, especially since 1976, been thrown into a collective identity crisis. They are rubbed between the upper and the nether millstones of the state that pays them and the people (students and parents)

among whom they mostly live and whose deprivations and oppression they share to a very large extent. This is especially true in the case of grossly underpaid primary school teachers. Student radicalism and mass action in the educational arena have created the anomalous situation in which black teachers, whose vocation it is to render their students critical and knowledgeable, are seen, and often see themselves, as part of the system. They need to be rescued out of this situation and be brought to see themselves as, and to be in fact, part and parcel of the liberation process.

Only if teachers' unions and political organisations of the oppressed people take up the task of re-educating and retraining the entire teacher corps in their spare time, as it were, can such a major shift in consciousness take place, a process that is bound to be reinforced by student action inside and outside the schools. Such a programme must have as its major components: the upgrading of academic and professional qualifications (an essential component if teachers are to be attracted to it at all); the systematic and deliberate political education of teachers, as far as possible without getting embroiled in the sectarianism that disfigures the formal political arena; the improvement and correction of teaching methods; and the creation, production and reproduction of teaching materials and educational aids, including the establishment of large teachers' resource centres throughout the country.

Of course, the success of this kind of programme is predicated upon the establishment of strong and disciplined teachers' unions and subject teachers' associations. The experience of organisations such as NEUSA and WECTU is invaluable in this regard. The establishment of a Federation of Teachers' Unions or of a single national union of teachers that promotes a consistent but flexible policy in all matters is an urgent need if some of the major problems confronting teachers in black schools are to be overcome. These organisations can and should

play an important part in monitoring the situation in classrooms, ensuring that members and non-members teach in ways that are compatible with an education for liberation. Like Parent-Teacher-Student Associations, they will not be able to 'take over' the schools for any length of time as long as the neo-apartheid system continues, but they can exert considerable influence on the modalities of education in the schools and they can begin to accumulate invaluable experience for the administration and design of the post-apartheid educational processes.

### **Changes in curricula and syllabi**

Teacher, student and parents' organisations through mass mobilisation have already influence the curricula and the syllabi being implemented in black schools. This is especially true in subjects such as literature and history where textbooks and sections of the syllabi have been changed because of objections from students and/or teachers. This is a process that needs to be systematically and consciously directed. Much more pressure should be brought to bear on the eighteen or so racially and geographically fragmented Departments of Education to change the curricula and the syllabi in a direction that will facilitate the process of education for liberation. It should, clearly, be one of the goals of teachers and students to raise the ceiling of tolerance as specified by the government via, amongst other things, prescribed textbooks, areas of study omitted (or included) in syllabi, subjects given (or denied) priority in the curriculum, budgetary provision for libraries, audiovisual materials, and so forth. Every facet of schooling can be attacked and changed provided a unity of purpose and consensus on tactics can be organised.

Teacher training colleges and education faculties of universities should be prodded to become much more adventurous than most of them are at present. In most cases

they can move beyond what the rules and regulations appear currently to allow. They could be powerful instruments to pressure the government to concede more space. The fundamental principle of these institutions ought to be to fight for as much discretion for the individual teacher as is compatible with the efficient acquisition of necessary skills. The obligatory component of the syllabus should be reduced to the bare minimum. Teachers should demand more discretion in the determination of what they teach. They would then assume responsibility for a proportion of the final assessment, leaving the state to be responsible for the rest. Of course, the inescapable corollary to this is the existence or creation of credible, well organised subject teachers' associations which can oversee the teaching of their subject and monitor standards in ways that are not amputatory and restrictive.

In regard to pedagogy and methodology, insights which have become well-nigh universal should be implemented in our schools. In the South African context, such a process must inevitably have liberatory significance beyond the formal educational horizons which it is establishing in different parts of the world.

The approach to knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is acquired have to be reconsidered. Present approaches rely on the unidirectional transmission of knowledge from a superior possessor of this knowledge (the teacher) to a relatively empty vessel (the student), whereas the new approaches entail a negotiation of knowledge in a two-way, horizontal process in which both the teacher (with more experience) and the student (with fresh approaches and capacities) participate. Teacher styles, therefore, have to become more democratic and less authoritarian. There should be more group activities and less emphasis on individual work. Learning should be more community-orientated with direct empirical activity rather than simply the passive absorption of foreign or historical

examples. It is of the utmost importance that our theory of knowledge and our teaching methods do not subvert and negate the values which we intend to realise. This is crucial because, ultimately, education for liberation consists precisely in the discovery and entrenchment of these values (anti-racism, anti-sexism, cooperation, etc) as far as is possible within the present system already.

## **Educational resources**

There are many other areas in which space exists that can be exploited for purposes of implementing educational strategies geared towards the transformation of the present racist and oppressive situation into its opposite. Because of the political spring called into being by the heroic action of the students since 1976, the area of educational resources is one of the most important of these. State control over secondary schooling was (and in many regions continues to be) tenuous, uncertain and cautious. Teachers and students are able to introduce into classrooms and to put to relevant use outside the classrooms many different kinds of resources that were never even dreamt of a decade ago. Well organised educational activists have begun to pursue the goal of mass-producing such relevant resources in a self-conscious and systematic manner. A demand has been created among both teachers and students that only such groups are able to satisfy. State attempts to co-opt some of these projects and to reoccupy the space thus created can be expected to increase as the repression intensifies in the next few years.

In recent years, enterprising and far-sighted activists have begun implementing publications strategies that, in some cases, have been remarkably successful. The South African Committee for Higher Education, for instance, produced educational bestsellers with works like *Read Well*, *Write Well*, *The Cell*, *The Right to Learn* and others. The

publishers Shuter and Shooters' series *History Alive* and some works published by Ravan Press, Skotaville Publishers and David Philip Publisher have altered the educational ecology in which students move about. Yet none of these works was commissioned by any government education department nor has any of them been prescribed. Because of the heightened political and cultural consciousness of teachers and students, these books are used almost as widely as though they had the imprimatur of the state. It is clearly important to study these, and other, examples in order to derive a generalised strategy and tactics in the field of publications.

Through mass student and teacher action, it is very likely that even in the short to medium term, education departments will be forced, however reluctantly, to change their textbook policies. It is to be expected, for example, that the Africanisation of the syllabi will proceed apace, that more African history and African literature (as opposed to general history and English literature) will be prescribed at the relevant levels. The same can be said of other disciplines in the social sciences, but even in the natural sciences, textbooks that depend on socially relevant examples and illustrations rather than on foreign, abstract or exotic references will be in great demand. New subjects, such as Ecology and Cultural Studies, can be expected to expand, and the demand for innovative textbooks and other materials relevant to these will grow. A well designed publications strategy should subject the whole area to careful analysis in order to anticipate the most likely progressive developments.

Other printed and audiovisual resources for use in classrooms and in other learning situations have begun to be produced by educational service organisations and by other groups of activists on a local basis. In a few cases – such as the magazine *Upbeat*, a SACHED publication for higher primary and lower secondary students geared

towards the improvement of English reading – resources with a national scope have been produced successfully. In general, however, this is a very underdeveloped area.

Few of the attempts undertaken have actually galvanised people and helped to change basic attitudes about the subject(s) concerned. One of the main reasons for the relative ineffectuality of these programmes is the fact that most of the resources created either by groups of teacher and student volunteers or by full-time or part-time education activists are stop-gap responses designed to meet an immediate perceived need. Such resources, produced in the heat of the moment, as it were, are seldom informed by the long-term proactive perspective which alone can guarantee the fundamental transformational character of any intervention in the educational arena. Much more thought and preparation need to go into the production of resource material, especially as regards relating what the resource is attempting to do more closely to what is realistic and economically possible. It is essential that students see that what they are learning with the aid of these resources can be applied to what they can do outside the classroom.

Experience in Cape Town has shown that it is possible – especially in subjects such as History and English Language and Literature – to organise resource centres which teachers and students find useful and inspiring. Many of these ideas have been taken up by university education departments which, in turn, have sometimes been able to do pioneering work in this area. This is obviously of great importance since it means that at least some trainee teachers are making contact with creative ideas concerning teaching methods and the use of appropriate resources. In this sense, this kind of activity represents one of the ways in which a shift can be effected in perceptions about what a good teacher or a good student is. It is quite feasible, and in some areas this is already happening, that state-run libraries can centralise such resources in order to service clusters of schools.



More important, however, are the attempts by people's organisations, churches and education service organisations to establish joint or interlinked resource centres for use by teachers and students in ghettos. A good example of this is the Resources Catalogue being developed by the National Language Project. In this catalogue, resources of diverse language-related organisations and projects are listed and a central catalogue is updated on an ongoing basis. Every participant organisation has access to the catalogue and this facilitates research preparation of lessons, seminars, workshops, etc.

While the ghetto, like Carthage, must be destroyed, it is clear that as long as we are compelled to live in it we need to do everything in our power to make it possible for our children and for ourselves to rise above the crippling confines of the ghetto without becoming dependent on circles and forces that have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the *status quo*. There is no doubt that the proliferation of resource centres would make a major contribution to counteracting the anti-educational environment of the townships. To be effective, these centres have to be properly organised with trained and discipline staff that can help to bring about a dynamic relationship between teachers and students. Resources centres also provide study space. Given the conditions of overcrowding in the townships and the frequent lack of basic facilities such as electricity, it is often quite impossible to study at home.

## **Private schools and privatisation**

This is a controversial subject because of the elitist and ruling class origins and traditions of these schools. Recent moves towards racially integrated private schools are obviously a half-measure which is determined in part by the parameters set by government policy, in part by the

conservatism of white parents and teachers.

Despite widespread rejection of and ignorance about private schools amongst black people, it would be mere blindness to deny that they represent space within the system over which some measure of control is accessible to progressive educationists. In order for them to become discussable options, however, they would have to shed their elitist practices and image on all levels. This will be a very difficult process if one were to judge by what has happened in other independent Southern African countries. In this area we are dealing with deeply felt, long cherished aristocratic traditions and beliefs which will not disappear, or even change, unless many objective developments that favour the democratising of Southern African societies take place and without agonising attempts at re-educating the parents who send their children to these schools.

In the context of a more general thrust towards the privatisation of education as one of many manoeuvres in the war of position between the rulers and the ruled, even if it is only a temporary expedient, some private schools could acquire a new lease on life.

The development of the Association of Independent Schools is a positive move in the direction of removing elitism and other ruling class features from private schools. It is of great importance that such schools undertake deep-going analyses of their situation and the ways in which they relate to the constituencies they serve. Even more important is the relationship between themselves and those constituencies which they do not and cannot serve for largely economic reasons. A leavening of genuine community schools, initiated as a matter of necessity and administered and funded by marginalised (largely 'squatter') communities would serve to make the Association of Independent Schools not only more relevant but also more able to play a larger-scale liberatory pedagogical role.

Because of the unstable situation in black schools in recent years, many cram colleges and some more pretentious institutions have been established for profit. In general, very little can be expected to emerge from these organisations in the short to medium term but they can constitute space that could be occupied by progressives in the educational arena. Certainly, an option that ought to be investigated is that of establishing teacher training colleges under private ownership. Although the present government is not going to allow a majority of teacher training colleges to be privately owned, the catalytic effect of such colleges may be much more important than the actual numbers of teachers involved.

By way of rounding off the area of formal schooling, we need to make the point that all attempts at vertical integration and synchronisation of the education process (from preschooling to university/tertiary education) should be encouraged if they are undertaken within a liberatory framework. Objectively, if not from the point of view of the architects of the present system, the system fails since most children who enter it drop out of it, maimed by the experience of 'education' rather than emerging from it equipped for a future of relative self-sufficiency. Such coordination is something which the present government is not only unwilling to aim for but, in any case, incapable of achieving. On the other hand, a well-organised teachers' union could initiate the process without much hindrance.

## **The non-state sector**

A very large area in which movement is possible is the non-state sector, that which is often loosely referred to as non-formal education. It is not possible to give an absolutely clear definition of the kinds of organisations and projects we are referring to in this category. Suffice it to say that, generally, we are talking about projects usually run by

community-based groups or by elected representatives of communities. In some, usually significant, cases we are talking of educational service organisations (such as SACHED, CRIC, COBERT, TCOE, etc.,) which are run by professional and semi-professional education activists who in many cases are rooted in community or labour organisations. All the projects we are referring to are completely independent of the government in the sense that they do not accept any state aid or supervision beyond what the law of the land prescribes.

Most of the organisations and/or projects are largely dependent on funds from the private sector in South Africa or on funds derived from foreign sources of one kind or another. But this is where the complexity of the subject begins to preclude any further definition. To mention but one facet of the problem: does one include under this rubric those organisations or projects that are funded directly by monies of foreign governments; if not, which governments' monies are acceptable and which are not? And why? Does non-state mean that any projects funded by any sources other than the South African government should be included here? What other criteria are relevant? The distinction between 'formal' and 'non-formal' education is a futile one since most educational projects have to a larger or lesser degree a formal component. We could raise many other possible criteria (e.g., content, methodology, control, presence or absence of democratic decision-making, etc.) but the basic issues ought to have become clear from the examples cited.

More and more of the projects we are referring to are being designed, initiated and implemented in a development perspective. But in South Africa, this is not a sufficient criterion and not yet even a necessary one. For even those that have no development aspect to them can and do make significant contributions to the pushing of educational strategy and policy-making way beyond the confines set by

state policies on education for blacks.

Unlike the formal arena, the non-state sector lends itself to long-term interventions of a fundamental kind. Examples are legion but for present purposes, some explanation of the promotion of the language and preschool projects would serve to illustrate the point. In the case of the National Language Project (NLP), initiated by the Education Coordinating Council of South Africa (ECCSA) before the latter was dissolved, we are dealing with an initiative that was conceived of as an ongoing project stretching over two generations ( $\pm$  30–35 years) or more. The fundamentals of the project are quite simple and straightforward. Its protagonists believe that South Africa's destiny is a multilingual one, irrespective of the socio-economic system that will prevail beyond apartheid.

They believe, further, that English is destined to be the *lingua franca* of a free South Africa/Azania, at least in the initial post-apartheid phase, however long that may last. Since they accept the inherent equality of all languages both as media of communication and culture and as regards their right to flourish, they constate that all languages shall – within the limits set by democratically determined economic policies in any given period – be encouraged at all levels. It is assumed that English will probably be an official language as will other languages spoken in the country, except that other languages will initially have official status within those geographical areas where mother-tongue speakers of the official languages will be concentrated. Policy in this regard will be flexible and pragmatic to the point where one or other of the indigenous African languages (such as a 'consolidated Nguni') might one day become the new *lingua franca*.

Since this vision of the future is derived from projections that are based on present statistical and political realities, the activists concerned believe that it is correct to step back, as it were, in order to consider (in the mode of all self-

fulfilling prophecies) what can and should be done now in order to facilitate the realisation of this vision. With a view to doing this, they have, therefore, set into motion an ambitious programme which aims at coordination and mutual fertilisation of all progressive language-related projects in the country at all levels such as literacy, conversational language classes, second-language classes, etc. The programme involves, among many other things, putting similar but isolated projects into touch with one another in order to facilitate interaction, helping to produce language teaching/learning aids, producing a newsletter in which projects can report on progress and problems, and eventually producing a more theoretically orientated journal for language and communication in South Africa.

At one level, the NLP does not set out to do anything more than facilitating communication among the different language groups in South Africa. Most of the activists involved, however, realise that, if properly approached, such a language movement could be a powerful vehicle for breaking down ingrained racial and ethnic prejudices.

Beyond that, a democratic language policy, developed from below with maximum participation by the majority of the populace, could become one of the foundation stones for the realisation of the dream of all progressive South African, i.e., the building of a single nation which, while it accommodated the pulsating diversity we have inherited from our often bitter history, will make every South African or Azanian proud of belonging to his/her nation. The battle now being waged between those who believe that only a socialist-orientated movement led by the working class can bring about such a situation, and those who believe that bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leadership still have the capacity to do so, does not alter the fundamental significance of the NLP and is, therefore, not germane to the point being made here.

Projects such as the NLP cannot be stopped by this or by

any other government. They are truly people's projects calculated to enhance the power of the people. Indeed, the Afrikaner nationalists are only too well aware of both the potential and the difficulty of suppressing a language movement. Their own rise to power in South Africa had its origins in a language movement, even though in their case it was led by a petit-bourgeoisie that manipulated Afrikaans-speaking white workers and farmers divisively in order to gain parliamentary power for their own economic, political and cultural aggrandisement.

The most pressing need in the non-state sector is to devise a typology of educational projects that have come into being in response to the felt needs of groups or even of representative individuals. Such a typology would have to identify:

- (a) what fields are already being occupied;
- (b) whether they are effectively occupied; and
- (c) which fields are currently not being occupied or are not effectively occupied.

Another important concern is the need to connect what are essentially formal educational initiatives with development processes and/or with job-creating projects. It is not enough to speak about 'adult education' or even 'worker education' projects.

It is essential for success in the sense of education for liberation that such projects be rooted in the economic needs of the learners and start from the levels of cultural and political consciousness at which the learner find themselves. Only in this way will they acquire a sense of direction which will be reinforced by direct economic reward however small this may be.

In the rural areas, people must in the nature of things become involved in development rather than merely education projects. We have to take as our point of departure what people are actually involved in. One cannot come into a community from the outside and determine

project priorities unless the people themselves are open to these priorities and there is an objective basis for such priorities. If one starts with what people are actually doing, programmes can be developed so that they can do it more efficiently, or else their indigenous activities can be used as a base from which one can proceed to other activities. The education process involved, i.e., the discovery and transmission of knowledge and the interaction between people to produce knowledge, should grow naturally out of the particular activities.

By way of example: certain education service organisations in the Western Cape, in response to the disastrous unemployment situation and to the pressure from the people among whom they work, have helped them to establish an interconnected chain of sewing cooperatives.

Now, around such a cooperative enterprise, which is itself an organic product of objective social and economic conditions, people can learn a variety of skills. It is possible, for example, to design learning modules through which they can improve the quality of their sewing while at the same time they are imbibing relevant arithmetic, book-keeping and language skills. The learning takes place around the practical, economically motivated activity; out of the successful learning that may take place some of the people may be encouraged to proceed to more abstract kinds of learning situations. A person who starts out with no more than an interest in learning how to sew in order to earn a little money may discover a real interest and latent ability in bookkeeping and may be inspired to go on to a more formal study of that subject.

In sum, alternative education projects should ideally be part and parcel of development projects and should as far as possible be linked to productive work. This productive work for the ordinary market should preferably be under community or cooperative control rather than under private



management for individual profit. In this respect, service organisations such as the Environment and Development Agency (EDA) and SACHED, as well as trades unions, can play an important role in helping people to understand both the potential and the pitfalls of cooperative learning and working. In highly technical formal situations, the formally qualified teacher is likely to exert most control over curriculum, syllabus and methodology. This is not so in the real-life situation outside of the abstract laboratory of the classroom. There, the people involved will themselves tend to exert influence and control should they be afforded the opportunities to be creative and constructive. Even in the more formal spheres, as the general level of education in the country is elevated, more and more 'ordinary' people will be in a position to participate in the shaping of their own consciousness and that of future generations.

## **Preschooling**

From the point of view of a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania and of the building of a nation, the preschools are fundamental in more senses than one. Very little thought has in fact been given to this area despite the existence of a variety of laudable projects, some even on a national scale. It is obvious that short-term perspectives of the liberation struggle in South Africa have tricked progressive education activists into ignoring this all-important field.

This is an area not yet occupied by the government, or even by the ruling class defined more broadly. The need for creative preschool people to come together in order to formulate a comprehensive and realistic strategy and to draft a programme of action encompassing questions such as curriculum development, resource production and cataloguing, teacher training, publications, etc., has become urgent in the extreme.

In the preschools, the foundations for a common or core

South African/Azanian culture can be laid. Few politically conscious South African would question the desirability of such a development; some might question its feasibility given the present mountainous obstacles in the form of legislation, prejudice and virtually incommunicado language or regional groups. Certainly, the problems should not be under-estimated but the economic dynamic in South Africa coupled with integrative political endeavours and cultural interaction at all levels means that there is an objective basis for such a development. Moreover, the idea of an evolving core culture does not run counter to the retention and development of regional or historically evolved sub-cultural differences that do not negate the greater unity of the nation.

Ethnic consciousness, which now looms so large in the South African reality, can be countered at the source, so to speak, if a systematic and democratic process of creating the building blocks of the nation within the family and the preschools is initiated. It ought to be unnecessary to stress that such a process can only hope to attain success if it is not imposed on people; if, in other words, the essentials are derived from the people in an organic manner and are supported by the people. Let us take an obvious example. It is completely possible that all children in South Africa, regardless of language group, learn a common core of stories, songs, myths, fables, nursery rhymes, etc., drawn from the three main cultural traditions or currents that constitute our country, i.e., the traditions of Africa, Europe and Asia. The basic material of this core treasury will be internalised by all our children through different language media, much as the thousands of Christian communities throughout the world imbibe the material of the Christian Bible and, by and large, of the Christian hymnals. In the same way as generalised brotherhood and sisterhood is generated among Christians throughout the world despite the Babylonian diversity of the millions of faithful, so we

can expect a broad national solidarity to emerge among our children. Certainly, such a development would constitute a base on which successful communication can take place either in the prevailing *lingua franca* or via a second or third language known to the relevant interlocutors.

Again, this approach does not in any way preclude regional or other peculiarities. Indeed, one of the fundamental assumptions of such an approach must be that sub-cultural diversity can only enrich the overall culture if it does not promote destructive divisions. A general climate of tolerance in cultural matters would come into being and the education system in a free Azania/South Africa would reinforce this by all possible means. What ought to be clear in any case is that this approach rejects altogether all notions of primordial ethnicity. It assumes that culture is made by people and that they have a certain measure of control over what they produce. Provided this process of control and decision-making is a democratic one, i.e., one in which the majority of the people are directly involved and provided it is not some theoretical construct of intellectuals imposed on the unsuspecting and unwilling 'masses', it is perfectly legitimate to promote the initiation and development of such processes.

## **Literacy and other projects**

Preschooling and language policy are only two areas in which this nation-building process can be started, or in which it is taking place. There are many other aspects of education in which similar impulses are latent. Among these are literacy projects and distance education projects. Here, too, we are dealing with relatively unoccupied space. However, experience from other parts of the world has shown that for a literacy programme to succeed on a national scale, a credible political movement has to take up the question as part of its programme. This happened in

countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Mozambique, in the main after liberation. While it is not impossible that such a cultural-political movement could gain some success even before the demise of apartheid, it is more likely that the regime would do everything in its power to prevent the movement from striking root among the downtrodden masses of the people since they know precisely what the liberating effects of such a movement are. In the present phase, we can expect no more than community-based literacy programmes, fuelled by particular local circumstances. Functional literacy programmes sponsored by the private sector and depending essentially on economic motivation of learners can also attain a measure of success in certain areas where semi-skilled labour is in great demand.

Both kinds of programmes do, of course, have great importance as models for future practice. For this reason, it is vital that as many community-based literacy programmes as possible be instituted particularly by activists who have already obtained experience in the field. In a semi-industrialised country such as South Africa with an average illiteracy rate of  $\pm 40\%$  and given the importance of literacy programmes for conscientisation processes, these projects represent vital experience.

Distance education and correspondence courses, as well as educational projects at tertiary level are other areas in which important transitional or transformational activity is possible and, in some cases, actually in progress. The best known projects are those initiated by the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED), in particular SACHED's Turret Correspondence College (distance education) and Khanya College (university education). These projects are constrained by numerous legislative, customary and economic factors. Apart from being extremely costly, they necessarily operate in a grey area between formal and non-formal education. They are, in

other words, not completely free to experiment in respect of curriculum development, content, methodology, or even assessment. None the less, they have been quite consciously conceived as catalytic projects rather than as alternative in any physical sense to the state system. Both projects are being exhaustively documented and should eventually provide invaluable material for policy determination in a post-apartheid South Africa.

## **Conclusion**

In the formal, state-controlled sector, limited initiatives are possible. Pressure can be applied systematically, so that the whole system is forced to shift in a more progressive direction. Control, content and method of education are the main battlegrounds. Students' Representative Councils, Parents', Teachers' and Students' associations as well as teachers' unions and subject teachers' associations have to be formed and should embrace all institutions of learning. They have to acquire as much control of the education process as possible. In particular, teachers should fight for a maximum of discretion in their subjects.

Science, mathematics, languages and technical education should be given top priority in all campaigns related to curriculum development and methodology. The urban-rural gulf in resources and opportunities should be narrowed as rapidly as possible. The whole area of textbook publication ought to be opened up to public scrutiny so that vested interests can be revealed and shaken loose. Ethnically and racially based policies have to be challenged even more militantly than in the past, for it is in the schools of South Africa that the historic question about South Africa is being decided, i.e., whether we are to become a federation of 'ethnically'-based states or a united nation with a national culture in a democratic Azania.

In the non-state sector, certain long-term alternative

projects (language, preschools, cooperatives, development projects, labour education projects and others) can be developed without much fear of successful government repression. These are essential building blocks of the future. They constitute, together with other cultural, economic and political structures being thrown up in the liberation struggle, the realm of civil society as against the state (in Gramsci's sense of these terms). As such, they are the guarantors of a democratic socialist future. Other alternative education projects have to operate under conditions of more or less restraint depending on transient political conditions. They are none the less important both as responses to immediate needs and as transitional mechanisms or launching pads for more deep-going processes. This is particularly the case in areas such as literacy and adult education at all levels.

Above all, it has become imperative that a Journal of Alternative Education be initiated. Thousands of small and large projects with an alternative education dimension are at present operating in South Africa. In too many cases, they are operating in a vacuum without much or even any connection with one another. Such a journal would not only help to reduce the relative isolation of projects but it could become a vital instrument for refining and correcting existing ideas and practices and for generating new ones. Provided it does not set out to preach the one and only dogma, it could also represent an important contribution to the process of entrenching the democratic ethos within our movement for national liberation.

# THE FUTURE OF LITERACY IN SOUTH AFRICA: SCENARIOS OR SLOGANS?

*(Introduction to panel discussion at the Weekly Mail Book Week, Funda Centre, Soweto. Thursday 16 November 1989)*

## Why literacy?

THERE IS, I AM SURE, no need to explain in detail why the highest rate of literacy should be striven for in a modern industrialised country such as South Africa. The many different but related reasons why literacy is deemed to be 'good' in the modern world are well known and can, for example, be read up in a simple form in Rachel Jenkins's article, 'What is the meaning of literacy?' (*SA Outlook*, February 1986).

Much more relevant for our purposes here today is the realisation to which many literacy practitioners and activists have come that:

The significance of writing in a culture and in the everyday life of a people has to be determined specifically for every society, for every historical epoch, for every social group, indeed, for every individual, since it depends on numerous factors. Only such an assessment can indicate the needs and the perspective of the learner(s) and point to the possible significance of literacy in the given situation. (Merk 1989: 29. My translation. This mini-thesis has come at a fortunate moment and has influenced my own presentation considerably.)

For reasons connected with my particular view of the world and of South Africa, I consider it extremely important to record the fact that just about all of the

estimated 9 to 10 million illiterate people in South Africa are working-class people, since this fact has an important bearing on the capacity of the workers' movement to conduct a struggle for emancipation in the context of sophisticated technological conditions and market relations.

Fuchs, writing from within the context of Mozambican experience, develops this kind of reasoning further. She warns against the romanticisation of literacy and against the simplistic notion that literacy can only do 'good'.

Literacy is not neutral. It is not automatically a progressive element in the society in which it is being promoted, it is subject to all the social tensions that hold together contradictory social forces. State programmes for the poorest of the poor can be taken over by conservative governments and perverted to such an extent that they become harmless, as happened, for example, in Brazil where the MOBREAL formally adopted the method developed by Freire but voided it of its dynamic and its revolutionary content. Literacy must, therefore, always be analysed within the specific situation in conjunction with the power issue on all levels, i.e., international, national and local. (Fuchs 1988: 11. My translation.)

In undertaking such an analysis, the crucial questions to answer are the following:

- Which interests are behind the literacy programme?
- Whose power does it enhance?
- Where and how do the participants make decisions?
- Which interests and what influence do they have? (See Merk 1989: 44.)

### **Some important issues in South Africa**

It is abundantly obvious to those in the field that a national literacy campaign, however desirable it might be, is simply not on the cards in the foreseeable future. The apartheid



state even if it wished to do so, cannot undertake such a campaign because it lacks all legitimacy, but it will oppose tooth and nail any alternative campaign because it recognises the mobilisational potential which it would unlock. For the moment, in spite of important advances in literacy work by anti-apartheid grassroots and service projects in recent years, the fragmentation of literacy organisations and efforts, the absence of effective coordination, the very small scale of most alternative operations and, above all, the extreme lack of resources in the context of the complex multilingual reality of South Africa, all these together, as well as other factors, preclude the successful initiation of a national literacy campaign at present.

What *is* clear, however, is that the groundwork for a future national literacy campaign can and should be done now. In a post-apartheid South Africa, such a campaign will enjoy a very high priority and will without doubt be fully supported by the state. This realisation is now general in the literacy field and is being spotlighted in view of the imminence of World Literacy Year in 1990 (see, for example, the ELP Annual Report, September 1988 – August 1989).

### **Pluralism, decentralisation, complementarity and coordination**

Because of the peculiarities of our history of resistance to oppression and exploitation in South Africa, literacy projects have had various and, in some cases, even diametrically opposed reasons for coming into existence. I need not do more than mention the fact that most so-called adult literacy projects have been spawned by the immediate need of capital for workers who had acquired a certain ability to read and (sometimes) to write. Such functional literacy programmes inspired and initiated by the bosses, the state, or their agencies, are an organic requirement of

the particular political economy and are by definition an exploitative mechanism. They can, of course, like any other educational or cultural practice be turned to the relative advantage of the workers but this is usually a conflictual process, since those who initiate and sustain such projects know how to watch over their interests.

Most of the rest of the literacy and adult basic education projects arise from the realisation by workers themselves that they need to be able to read and write in order to gain more or improved control over their environment and over their lives. Their immediate motives may differ along a spectrum which includes the basic economic or survival need to earn a living wage, through the desire to improve their social status and self-esteem – a perfectly natural desire in a society where status and esteem are to a large extent defined in terms of book learning – to a more self-conscious political urge to read political and cultural literary productions. Because of the political pluralism which continues to characterise the local, regional and national terrain in South Africa, the vanguard elements who have usually responded to these needs of the workers have been (and are) drawn from different political tendencies. This is a well known fact, but one which has caused unnecessary mistrust, sectarian conflict and, inevitably, divisive and counter-productive actions and practices in this field, as in others. It is sad to record that this reprehensible sectarianism has often been connived at and exacerbated by (particularly) foreign funding agencies which have been more interested in buying credibility and inducing a dependency situation than in the intrinsic value or developmental potential of specific projects. One is constrained to question the commitment to democratic ideals of people who at home will fiercely defend what they consider to be their precious heritage of democratic institutions and practices, including multi-party parliamentarism, but are quite happy to blunder into a

complex political set-up such as we have in South Africa with simplistic analyses that seem to be premised on a belief that all blacks are or, if they are not, ought to be, the same!

It is, consequently, essential to state clearly once and for all against all triumphalist illusions that individuals or groups might have that political pluralism in the camp of liberation is a fact of life, no matter how unequally the balance of political power may be distributed at any given historical moment. Since literacy, like other social needs of the working people, affords the political vanguard elements in our country opportunities for political and cultural mobilisation, among other things, it is inevitable that ideologically differently orientated literacy projects will come into being. It is futile to try to wish this away. Indeed, in so far as these different tendencies are authentic reflections of different visions of the past, present and future of South Africa which are held by significant segments of our people, it is of the essence of democracy not to try to deny them or, worse, to go about suppressing and intellectually necklacing 'anderdenkendes'!

At the same time, of course, it is very important to stress that any attempt to turn genuine grassroots literacy projects into mere party-political enterprises is doomed to failure, since the workers in fact come from all the different political tendencies. Emancipatory literacy is not the same thing as party-political literacy. After all, if prominent members of the Democratic Party, the National Party, the Conservative Party and even of the HNP can coexist peacefully inside the Broederbond, it ought not to be beyond the capacity of activists coming from different political tendencies in the liberation movement to cooperate without undue friction in the cultural-political arena, to which literacy work belongs.

Hitherto, no particular political tendency has managed to spearhead a national literacy project, even though Azapo a few years ago resolved to do so within the context of a

national language programme, and the MDM appears to be poised to launch such a project in 1990. Consequently, decentralisation and localisation of projects characterise the terrain of literacy. In view of the political pluralism referred to previously, this feature has complicated and even prevented attempts at cooperation and coordination. And yet, cooperation and coordination are absolutely essential if resource wastage through duplication and inadequate training is to be avoided. This was realised as long ago as September 1983 when the now defunct Education Coordinating Council of South Africa (ECCSA) at its first conference concluded that:

... small community programmes are the optimum form for literacy projects under our present conditions. It was felt, however, that ECCSA should coordinate these programmes at a national level, [and]

National political organisations can and should take up literacy campaigns since this is a vital issue affecting the exploited and oppressed people. ECCSA should, however, have no truck with any ruling-class organisations engaged in so-called literacy campaigns. (ECCSA 1983: 46)

Here we see a clear acknowledgment of and commitment to political pluralism, decentralisation and complementarity of projects. It is completely appropriate here to encourage all moves towards effective coordination of efforts and rationalisation of resources provided that such coordination does not become a cloak for a suffocating centralisation of resources and decision-making.

## **Ideology and methodology**

Another inevitable by-product of the failure to understand the peculiarities of the history of resistance in our country has been the tendency to reinforce a hubristic arrogance on

the part of some vanguard elements who *genuinely* but tragically believe that they have discovered the one and only method of conducting literacy work among the urban and rural poor. Such theoretical infantilism is no more than an expression of the territorial imperative, whether it is justified in terms of 'class', 'race', 'culture' or something called 'pedagogy'. Of course, there is a definite connection between the kind of materials used in an educational situation, the methods used to arrive at that which is learnt eventually and the fundamental purpose of the exercise, i.e., whether it is an exercise in education for domestication or of education for liberation. But, as Frank Youngman in his recent work, *Adult Education and Socialist Pedagogy* which, among other things, is critical of certain aspects of Paulo Freire's approach, reminds us: *techniques are neutral*. Like tools of any kind, they can be used for good or evil, however we define these values. Again, it is pertinent to recall the Brazilian experience where

... the military government and the state literacy agency (MOBRAL) used ... (Freire's) techniques to do just the opposite of what Freire intended! (Da Rocha Reufels 1983: 77)

Of course, methodology is not simply an ensemble of techniques. Ideology is crucial in any process of indoctrination, properly so called. But whether the process is successfully consummated depends not simply on the inherent value of the particular ideology but on whether it corresponds to the real needs of the learners as perceived by them. The idealistic notion that mere methodology can move mountains always takes its revenge in the form of exhausted, demoralised and frustrated learners who vote with their feet by staying away from classes! Every learning situation is unique and is structured as much by the motivation of the learners, the ability and personality of the educator and the general context in which it takes place. No

methodology can automatically eliminate such differences even though a method tried and tested for the realisation of particular educational effects can narrow the gap between different learning situations. To me, at any rate, it seems much more sensible to accept that if one is helping people to learn how to read and analyse, let us say a wage packet or payslip and one hopes simultaneously to lead them on to understanding, let us say the elementary relationship between wages and profits, that one's method can be improved by reading about or listening to others' accounts of similar attempts rather than by imbibing some abstract formula about teaching method, as useful as such a formula might be as a guideline. Periodic workshops and discussions about methods, about successes and failures, among literacy coordinators are a thousand times more important than any number of theoretical disquisitions on method. A Literacy Bulletin in which experiences are described and commented upon would be of invaluable assistance to people in the field.

## **Conclusion**

By way of concluding these remarks, let me draw your attention to the fact that we have been speaking about *adult* illiteracy. In our country, however, there is an ever-present threat of the growing monster of *child* illiteracy because of the ravages of 'Bantu' and 'Coloured' education. The dropout rates are well known but the implications in regard to literacy of children between the ages of 9 and 16 are not always realised. At SACHED in Cape Town, an attempt is being made to confront this problem and to arrive at eventually replicable models – as is being done by most groups in the field of adult literacy. This is clearly an important area. After all, if illiteracy can be confronted in childhood, there will be less, or even no, need for adult literacy programmes.

In the more general area of language policy, we are faced with the complex question of the power gradient of languages in a racially defined, multilingual society. As in other postcolonial and neocolonial countries, we are faced with the tragic problem of 'double illiteracy', i.e., a large majority of people who do not understand the main Language of Wider Communication (in our case, English) *and* are also unable to write their mother tongue (see Merk 1989: 38). This inevitable question of whether to give priority to other-tongue or second-language literacy is not susceptible to a general solution. There is no simple formula even though there is a general preference on pedagogical grounds, to begin with mother-tongue literacy. According to Coulmas, speaking at an international seminar on 'Linguistic minorities, national languages and literacy: language policy in developing countries',

... [i]t became evident in the course of the discussions that these questions, as well as many others concerning language planning and policy, do not allow for all-encompassing answers. Rather they must be adapted to the specific socio-economic, cultural-educational and linguistic conditions of the countries. (Quoted in Merk 1989: 38.)

In the final analysis, of course, it is the learners themselves who have to make the decision once the options are clear to them.

In the area of literacy in South Africa, to echo Linda Wedepohl's remarks (1986: 17), the magnitude of the problem precludes any suggested 'solutions'. At present, we can hope to do no more than lay the groundwork so that we can proceed to eliminate illiteracy with the utmost expedition in a new, democratic South Africa/Azania.

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## CAREERS IN AN APARTHEID SOCIETY

*(Speech given at the CRIC AGM on 30 November 1987)*

I WISH TO THANK the CRIC staff with whom I have been associated for many years, in fact since the beginning of this project, for this invitation and I would like to say that although the subject is not completely new to me since I have once or twice in the past spoken about it, it's always a very daunting task. I am of that opinion because in September 1983 in Port Elizabeth I addressed a meeting of a similar organisation called Coric on the subject, Careers in an Apartheid Society. In that speech I made a number of points which at the time proved to be exceptionally controversial because of the nature of my audience. The point being that there were very many business people present and one of the major points that I was making was that unless one problematises the whole question of careers guidance you in fact merely entrench apartheid and racial discrimination. I am not going to go over all that ground again, I just want to state very briefly what the basic approach to this question in our country must be.

As I have said, if one approaches the question in some sort of unproblematic manner, you inevitably end up entrenching and reinforcing the racial division as well as the class division of the working population. In other words, I need not stress that the framework, the frame of reference determines everything and unless you question the frame of reference you are in fact merely reinforcing it. Now this is particularly so in the case of education where the very nature of the education process as a conservative social process, is one which from the point of view of the ruling class is intended to conserve the *status quo* relatively

unchanged. The *status quo*, in other words, has to be reproduced via education, amongst other means. Education is one of the main means of social reproduction, one of the main means by which a society reproduces itself. And therefore any educationist, teacher, careers counsellor, professor, lecturer, or other educationist, that does not question the character of the society in which he/she operates can only end up entrenching, reinforcing, reproducing that society more or less as it is. Now this is something that is no longer new; when we first started saying this sort of thing many years ago people were extremely surprised because education was seen in isolation, it was seen in the abstract, it was seen as some sort of action which it was a privilege to be able to carry out. Nowadays, we are much more modest as educators, nowadays teachers are no longer the cat's whiskers in the community/society, teachers are only one of many, many other black middle class elements. Therefore people don't think any more of education, teaching and so forth, as being some sort of special vocation. However, it remains true that unless you question the direction of social development you are merely going to reinforce it so that the dilemma of every educationist especially in this country, in our South Africa, is whether you are going to act as a conservative force or a subversive force. This is really the basic question. If you approach the matter unproblematically, no matter how radical you might think you are, no matter how radical your stance is, you are simply going to act as one of many conservative forces. What we have been saying in the last few years, what has become more and more manifest via things like people's education, alternative education, is that we must look at the other definition of education, namely education as a subversive process. A process that questions the basic tenets, the basic values which the ruling class wishes us as educators to inculcate in our students, to indoctrinate our people/children with. It is only if we adopt

that attitude that our whole approach to something such as careers guidance is going to become relevant. Otherwise we are merely handmaidens, we are merely handymen of the business class.

Now let me come at it from another point of view; namely that today for both economic and political reasons the South African government is quite deliberately, calculatedly trying to create, if that is possible, a so-called black middle class. There is a basis on which they can do this; it is not falling out of the sky, like some sort of bolt from the blue, but it is being done in a calculated way. Economic developments necessitate more and more blacks with skills and semi-skilled personnel in the workforce, people who can supervise at junior management level, middle management, even top management in some cases and there simply aren't enough people classified white to go around. There are all sorts of reasons for this which we can't go into here now. The point is that for economic reasons, the black middle class has got to be created but also for political reasons because if the black middle class doesn't exist as some sort of buffer between the ruling class and the working people then you are indeed heading for a major confrontation of these two primary basic classes in our society. In South Africa, as you know, the whole matter is complicated by the fact of colour, by the perception of colour discrimination and colour polarisation in our society. This is important, because it means that your careers counsellor has to think very carefully what s/he is doing when giving people advice about this or that particular job. In other words, the moment you start mystifying your task, the moment you start isolating it as though it were possible to isolate it from the rest of society, you are going to end up because of the logic of the frame of reference, you are going to end up simply slotting people into the apartheid machinery, you are going to put round pegs in round apartheid holes, that's all you are going to end up doing.

Now, I am going to argue a little paradoxically that our job as careers counsellors is to put square pegs in the round holes of apartheid, that is what we need to do. The point about this is of course that with industrialisation and particularly urbanisation there is very much room for careers guidance. The last ten-year history of CRIC has proven that over and over again, and I just glanced at the annual report now and it is indeed extremely impressive. There is no doubt that the kind of guidance, the kind of service that an organisation like CRIC is providing, is not only essential now but is essential also for the future and that is of course the point that I am going to make in a moment or two.

There is just one other point that I want to make about the fallacy of gradualism. There is the liberal theory, that if we simply adopt a *laissez faire* approach, if we allow economic processes to take their course then at some point or other the whole thing is going to collapse. Apartheid is going to be reduced to its logical absurdity and everybody is going to wake up one day and you'll find that you don't need to struggle; everybody has come to their senses and we are all equal and happy, and all the rest of it. Of course we all know – I don't in this audience have to undermine that particular position – that this is not true. That you need to do something quite conscious, systematic and deliberate in order to undermine the system. I make no bones about it, wherever I speak I make it quite clear that our basic task is to undermine the system whenever we can. It's a waste of time to mince your words on this sort of matter; we are living in very serious times.

Careers guidance/vocational guidance clearly is concerned with that aspect of education which we call education for employment. In other words, there are lots of people, especially business people, I am not saying this in a derogatory sense, please note, there are lots of people who think that the only thing, the only real purpose of education

is to prepare people for employment. In other words, the study-work continuum is seen as the main focus of education. Now of course there is no truth in that, it is not the main purpose, it is one of the important and inevitable purposes of education in a modern, industrial society. But it is important for us to try to see education, careers guidance, careers education, from a different angle and not simply in terms of the transition from school to work. The relationship between study and work is today very well known and very well theorised amongst educationists. The theory in all progressive democratic countries promotes life-long education, in other words, there is a simple transition from school to work. The focus of the individual while at school is on study but work takes place and there are sound reasons why this has to happen; when the person passes out of school and goes on to earn a living, the focus is on work but you have to continue to study, you have to acquire new skills, renew old skills and so on and so forth. Now there is no problem with that. Clearly there is, as I said, a space for careers counselling and in fact we have in some Southern African countries already and even in our own country people who are experimenting with what they call education with production. Where progressive forces are in control of the state and of society, it is certainly feasible in a country like South Africa to adopt a theory like education with production but today it is extremely difficult because we haven't got full control either of the education processes or of the production processes.

However, on the purely technical side I think what CRIC has been doing is very clear and is also very successful. The whole gamut of necessary skills and transmission of skills, whether it is from aptitude tests to information about bursaries opportunities, individuals' training, and so forth, all these things have to be done. That is part and parcel of the reason for the existence of an organisation like CRIC. I must just insert here an extremely important parenthesis,

namely that we must not allow ourselves to be misled by the excitement, the exhilaration and the euphoria of people's education or alternative education, call it what you will, to believe there is no need to receive at this moment formal education. In other words, even while we are living in an apartheid society, which we reject with all the force at our command, we must be prepared to receive that formal discipline/training. The reason is both technical, in the sense that you cannot actually study anything unless you know the basic disciplines of whatever you are studying, but also we cannot be so naïve as to believe that we are about to be free in the next year or two. In other words, you may still live for a very long period in this apartheid South Africa and then you are going to need certain things that make it possible to earn a living in this particular society but, obviously, all of us, I trust this particular audience, certainly all the members of the CRIC staff and the people they are associated with are committed to radical social change in our country. It is not our virtue, it is simply the fault of the present government and of the powers that be that our society has been radicalised to the extent that somebody like myself is standing up here and telling you that there can be no two ways about it, we simply have to be committed to radical social change. What the content of that change is, is still being discussed, and in debate we have got to formulate for the future generations who themselves will have a part in the formulation of that content. I am not trying to sell you a particular line, a particular political programme at all. I am simply saying that as careers counsellors, as educationists, unless we are committed to radical social change, to liberation in this country we are simply time servers, we are simply deceiving ourselves and certainly the people whom we are advising and counselling.

As I said earlier our job must be to put square pegs in the round holes of apartheid. We cannot be putting round pegs into round holes. We cannot be making the system

work. But this is our dilemma. How do you tell somebody: 'Look, become a nurse or become a doctor or whatever it is. This is what you need to become a doctor, a nurse, a carpenter, a pilot and so forth'. How do you tell somebody that when you know if that person simply carries out that task, that profession, that particular skill, job or whatever it is, they will simply be reinforcing the existing set up? As you can see I am coming to the point: while it is unavoidable and extremely essential for us to give people guidance so that they can make the informed decisions that are necessary for which our particular oppressed communities are very inadequately prepared, I mean to make those decisions, we must at the same time use the opportunity to politicise the people whom we counsel. In other words, we must use the opportunity to show clearly where the jobs, the professions that they wish to go into, fit into the system, where in other words they can begin to undermine the system as doctors, as lawyers, as teachers, as what you will. Unless that goes with the counselling, you are simply doing the work of the rulers. I mean let's be quite honest about it, this happens to be the case in every single thing that we do. We have got to indicate that as a doctor you are going to be earning a hell of a lot of money whether you work at a hospital or as a general practitioner, you are going to earn a lot of money and what you are going to do with that money is going to be vital as far as not only your own respectability and credibility are concerned, but as far as the promotion of the movement for social change in this country is concerned.

I believe that the careers counsellors, CRIC in the van of all of them, have got to look very carefully at jobs, at professions, at counselling generally in terms of how the counselling process can be used in order to make people critically aware, to give them a critical attitude towards the very jobs they are going into. This is a burden, it is a responsibility that our history imposes on us. Even in our

preschools, as far as our toddlers, our little children are concerned, we have got to have this, I could almost say interrogative attitude towards our society. Nothing can be taken for granted in this country. We have got to always show both sides, viz., what is now happening and what will happen particularly if we put our resources behind that. All values, all legitimacies are being questioned today. Our students, our youth particularly, are in the vanguard of this movement in Africa. All values are being questioned. The very concepts of career, of certificates, all these other hierarchical things, degrees and so forth are being questioned. People don't understand why it is if somebody has a BA or a BSc or whatever it is, he or she gets a job more easily in our situation today than somebody who has 10 or 20 years' experience of the very job that is being advertised. A lot of us in so-called alternative organisations have begun to search for different criteria. We simply don't take somebody as a typist or whatever it is because he or she has a diploma, we want to see whether you can type before we employ you. Again, I think that careers counsellors particularly have a duty to begin to undermine these hierarchical concepts and practices which in fact, even though they may not be shot through with racism, are shot throughout with classism, ideas of class, and inequality and so on.

The concept of excellence is one of the things that everybody talks about, I don't want to get into a polemic, since there are many university people here but I just want to make the point that in my experience and I am sure the experience of most people who have had to do with this sort of thing, nine out of ten people whom you interview for a job can do the job adequately, no matter what job it is. In most cases you'll find that that is the case. Therefore, it is not the percentage pass that a person receives that ought to decide whether he or she is going to get the job. There ought to be other criteria. Some of them may be quite



whimsical, even arbitrary, but nonetheless there ought to be other criteria and not the question of degrees of so-called excellence and so on. This, by the way, is not a South African phenomenon, it's a world-wide phenomenon. We know that in other parts of the world there is a revolt against this old order; the entire world is living in an era of transition from old-style capitalism to new forms of socialism and these hierarchical practices, practices that are based on an assumed inequality of people, these practices and values are being questioned all over the world. They are being questioned more intensely in our own country because we are living in a pre-revolutionary situation, because we are, if not on the threshold, then certainly on the road to a totally different situation. So they are being questioned more intensely in our country than probably in most other countries today. But we are not unique, I think we need to get away from that, it's a terrible temptation, it's a terrible weakness on the part of all South Africans that they want to be unique. In fact we are very much like other people, only that we are worse off.

I just want to stress here that I think, therefore, that what is required for careers counsellors is a series of workshops and seminars in which they can study particularly how careers and radical social change slot into one another. How do you at the same time you are giving people valid advice for today, prepare them to use the jobs, the knowledge, the skills they are going to acquire in order to accelerate the process of social change? This is even more important today when, as you know, there is an average rate of unemployment in this country of up to 40% in some parts, much more than that regionally. It is even more important today for people to realise that it is only the cream of the crop in terms of our apartheid society that actually even get to the CRICs of South Africa to ask for advice; the rest don't even smell the threshold of these places here. It is important for us to make people aware that this is the reality into which

they are going. The nature of our society, the relationship between making a career and promoting radical social change, these are things I believe that every single student who comes here for advice, every teacher, whoever it is, has got to be instructed in. There, I think another point that I'd like to stress is that specific problems that relate to professions or jobs need to be emphasised in terms of the apartheid society in which we live. In other words, being a doctor (just to take the most eloquent example) in a screamingly poor community imposes on one wittingly or unwittingly a sense of guilt. I am not one of those who go around wearing their hearts on their sleeves, but I want to make the point that unless as a doctor you become aware of ways and means in which you can empower the community in which you are operating, unless you are doing that you are merely going to underscore the exploitation and the oppression of those people. I am sure every one of you knows what I am talking about. There are thousands of doctors regardless of colour in this country who are making their millions or let's say their hundreds of thousands out of the pockets of people who very often haven't got bread to eat. Instead of empowering those people, finding ways and means of promoting community medicine or training health workers or showing people the ordinary principles of first aid which, by the way, I know nothing about but even just showing people those sorts of things, I am taking a very simple example which you know; one could become more and more complicated, but I'm saying that unless your careers counselling draws the attention of students to the specific problems of professions and jobs in that way you are merely sending students into this cloud-cuckoo land of wealth, prosperity, happiness for the individual at the expense of the masses and it is because of this that I believe that unless you undermine, unless you question that morality you are really just, as I say, a time server. Your organisation doesn't deserve the reputation

which it has. Individual achievement so-called and social justice have to be juxtaposed. Class equality and social equality, even more so racial equality in our society, have got to be juxtaposed and we have to ask in very concrete ways, not in the sort of rhetorical phrases I have been using here today, but in very concrete ways we have got to demonstrate to students that it is not a simple matter of becoming a pilot which every young boy wants to be, it's a matter of also seeing where you steer your society to, how you can use the skills that you acquire in order to change that society.

I think that every careers counselling session has got to end up with those who are coming for advice being made to understand that they have got to commit themselves to the struggle for liberation in this country. In other words careers counselling is also a question of social counselling. No matter how simple it is, it doesn't matter what you are talking about, they have got to end up by understanding that to choose a so-called career, to choose a path in life has got to be a simultaneous choice of the goal of liberation. In other words, as an individual while you are deciding how you are going to earn your living, how you are going to fulfil yourself, you need also to understand that you can only do that in a particular kind of society.

I would like to end off by saying, then, that we as careers counsellors have got to find ways and means of inculcating creative attitudes towards all disciplines, towards all kinds of professions and jobs which we are advising the people who come to us on. We have got to find ways of inspiring people. I think it is terribly important to understand that despite the seriousness of the message that we bring, despite the seriousness of the task in which we are involved, we have got to find ways of inspiring people, to make people do the things that they have to do in a light-hearted way, with a sense of humour so that life actually is not just tears but also joy. We have got to find, in other

words, in every discipline alternative methods for an alternative society. We must not go for gimmicks. I think a lot of what is going on in the so-called alternative educational sphere today consists of gimmicks because people haven't really thought through how the whole thing is rooted in the soil of a changing society. We have got to find alternative methods, as I say, for an alternative society. I'd like to end off, finally, by saying that all dogmatism is opposed to real knowledge, to real scholarship. No matter how sure you are of yourself you always have to leave a little bit of doubt in order to be able to make progress. I never end off with an aphorism but I think that one of the most beautiful things that I have ever read is a little statement by Francis Bacon to the effect that those who begin with certainty, will end with doubt, those who begin with doubt will end with certainty.

## RESTORING THE STATUS OF TEACHERS IN THE COMMUNITY

*(Address delivered at the Conference of the Council of Rectors and Deans of Teacher Education in Kwa-Zulu Natal (CORDTEK) on Saturday, 22 July 1989, at Indumiso College of Education, Pietermaritzburg)*

IN AGREEING TO DELIVER this short address here this evening, I was well aware that I was, perhaps recklessly, treading on ground with which I am not too familiar. My determination to do so nevertheless is fired by the realisation that gatherings such as this one are, for reasons that will emerge presently, among the most important that are now taking place in our country in our fervent search for possible solutions to what all of us call 'the education crisis'. Many of my friends and colleagues will consider this particular judgement to be idiosyncratic, if not opportunistic. After all, does a gathering such as this, in the context of the Manichean world in which we live in the last quarter of the 20th century, not belong more properly on the side of the 'System' rather than of the 'Struggle'? I hope that this foretaste of the problematic in which my thoughts are brewed, as it were, is enough of a signal that the main course may be a trifle heavy this evening! My only hope is that because of my relative ignorance of your practices, I shall not be carrying too much coal to Newcastle.

It was clear to me that one of the main reasons why I was honoured with the invitation to speak to you this evening was the nature of the theme of your Conference. Since I *do* have an inexplicable reputation as an 'educationist' whose feet, at least, are supposed to be firmly planted in 'the community' and who is known to have expounded regularly on the subject of alternatives in education, I was

not too surprised to be asked to deliver a pre-dinner address at a Conference where 'Community Needs and Alternatives in Education' would be chewed upon. However, you will have to permit me the luxury of indulging a perverse streak in my make-up. For, I want to speak only very briefly, even summarily, about the educational priorities of an oppressed people, i.e., 'the community', that is inexorably on the march to freedom in a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania and, instead, dwell on that aspect of the subject with which you are professionally concerned most immediately and of which I have only the most tangential experience, viz., the training of teachers. I have no hesitation in doing this because I have no doubt that most, if not all of you, are *au fait* with the latest published (and even unpublished) versions of the educational scenarios that are circulating in the body pedagogic.

Those of us who have been studying the disastrous effects of the tribalisation of education in South Africa since 1949, when the Eiselen Commission was appointed, are only too painfully aware how educational priorities and alternative pedagogies have been generated among our people through conflict, confrontation, and catastrophe, especially after 1976. Even now, it is the dubious privilege of a thin (mostly white) line of academics who are usually removed from the scene of battle in the classrooms, to be able to theorise the confusing and at all times traumatic experiences of our students, our teachers and our parents during the past forty years. The protest against Bantu Education became the challenge of People's Education by way of a decade-long exploration of alternatives under the heading of 'Education for Liberation' (courtesy Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, Steve Biko and others). That process had led us to understand clearly what the 'community needs' are and, less clearly, how to explore the alternatives during the transition from an apartheid South Africa to a post-

apartheid South Africa.

Today, there is general agreement that in the short to medium term, we have to get rid of segregated education while we apply whatever first-aid (usually called 'compensatory education') measures we are able to devise without breaking the ubiquitous 'law' of the rulers who have been imposed on us. That, in a sentence, has been, and remains, our magic formula at least since the early 'sixties. Priority number one is the eradication of segregated, tribalised schooling together with all the other evils of apartheid. This political task is taken for granted by all Black people in exactly the same way that slaves desire their emancipation. And yet, there are so-called educationists who believe that it is possible to speak about 'change' and 'progress' in the field of education outside of the framework of a struggle for liberation. It is as though by merely giving the slave more food you are setting him/her free, or to advert to a more topical case in point: to have tea in the Tuynhuys is not to be free at all!

At the second, more specifically educational, level there is a package of priorities which is becoming part of the conventional wisdom. They remain priorities, in fact, only because the powers that be are unable or unwilling to deprioritise them by providing adequate resources for the purpose, resources, let me add, which in most cases are more than adequately available! The tragic lack of foresight that comes from the myopic pursuit of racist goals is evident in the fact that the System will only facilitate adjustment to the extent that its albeit slightly altered survival is promoted. Thus, to mention a programmatic example, crash programmes to produce Black land surveyors, health inspectors or computer programmers, among others, will be supported lavishly because of the dire need resulting from the demographic fact that the 'Whites' as an ever-decreasing proportion of the population as a whole can no longer service the (expanding and)

modernising economy. This is band-aid, compensatory action as it has become characteristic of the present socio-economic set-up in South Africa. We are experiencing all the agonies of what is called the law of uneven and combined development in that we have the worst of both worlds, i.e., the crises associated with a so-called 'first world' economy at the same time as we suffer the pangs and convulsions of a so-called 'third world economy'! The stop-gap approach I am referring to is often graced with the euphemistic explanation that the nurturing of a Black middle class is the best, if not the only, guarantee of the survival of the much vaunted free-enterprise system. What is not understood, however, is that it is the height of folly to believe that such *ad hoc* measures can guarantee anything at all. In the end, it is the flourishing of a pulsating culture that guarantees the creative renewal of the past in the changed form of the future. In short, to produce generations of youth capable of being competent land surveyors, health inspectors, computer programmers, etc., you have to raise the general level of education as part and parcel of a cultural revolution rather than to erect a few elite schools and colleges to service the transient needs of the ruling class.

I do not need to do more than to list the items that constitute the package of priorities as we see them at this level. The promotion of literacy and language skills, of numeracy and mathematical skills, raising the quality of scientific education and increasing exponentially the provision of technical education for Blacks. That, in a nutshell, is what is required in the short to medium term, if we are even to hope to overcome some of the more obvious shortcomings and inequities of the System. The structural and administrative adaptations that are required to give effect to such a programme of action would test to the limit the ingenuity of the apparatchiki of the apartheid state. Consequently, the initiative has to be taken by autonomous



and semi-autonomous centres on the not unrealistic assumption that sufficient pressure would eventually be generated within the System to counteract its tendency towards the state of repressive inertia. This programme implies compensatory, remedial and bridging action at all levels of the System. How such action will be implemented will have to be discussed in the concrete context of each and every institution with due regard to the availability of material and human resources. Needless to say, bitter battles will be fought between conservative, liberal-reformist and radical approaches to the problem.

There is a third category of priorities which is seen to be such only if one looks at our society in the historical, or longer-term, perspective. Obviously, all the priorities I have mentioned previously are subsumed by definition under this category. However, a radically new educational culture will only eventuate if we begin to restructure the foundations of the educational system. This means that we have to pay attention in detail to the two crucial areas of basic education (preschooling and primary schooling for me) and teacher training.

About preschooling and primary education, I will simply repeat what I have said in numerous contexts. This sector is the most important of the entire educational domain. We ought to maximise the investment of resources in this sector instead of trying to compensate and repair in the secondary and tertiary sectors when the educands have already been crippled. Let me remind you that it is the children who are now entering this primary phase of the education process that will *definitely* live in a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania. They will be the real builders of the new nation and will constitute the nation itself. It is our task and privilege to provide them with the requisite building materials and expertise today.

It is on aspects of the training of teachers, the second main pillar on which any educational system rests, that I

want to dwell for a few minutes. In 1943, at the inaugural conference of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD) Movement, Benjamin Kies, the Editor of the *Educational Journal* of the Teachers' League of South Africa delivered a seminal address on *The Background of Segregation* in which, among other things, he traced the historical, socio-economic and socio-political roots of ethnic division and ethnic consciousness. In discussing the ways and means open to the oppressed non-Europeans (as they were then referred to) to bring about Black unity, Kies stressed that a whole people would have to be 'taken to school'. For this reason, he saw teachers as 'the vanguard of the struggle'. At the time, this was almost literally true even though the particular formulation may have been open to misinterpretations when one viewed them in the general context of political action and class struggle. The point I wish to make, however, is that fifty-odd years ago, teachers were seen as the natural leaders of their communities. Together with preachers and a handful of lawyers and doctors, they were 'the mission elite', the chosen few who had had the good fortune of some level of secondary, and rarely also tertiary, education. Ironically, among Afrikaners, teachers had a similar status at the time and for identical reasons. In the class hierarchy of the oppressed and disfranchised, teachers were at the very top. Because of their education and their relative grasp of the workings of the system as a bureaucratic organism, they were the eyes of their communities, those without whom the people would have perished. Their status was undoubted and their creative energies had considerable scope for deployment.

But let us leap over the three decades during which all the mischief was concocted that led to the disaster of Soweto in 1976. Fundamental changes had taken place. The poison of Bantu Education and other forms of tribalised schooling had wrought havoc in the body politic of the oppressed. Economic developments had begun down-

grading the social status of teachers. They were now only one element of a numerous and growing class of relatively well-paid civil servants who themselves were on a par socially with other groups of middle-class people thrown up by the modernising economy. Teachers were no longer the only ones who had a relatively 'high' education and who could live in decent, well-appointed houses and drive about in shining cars. They were also no longer the only ones who had some understanding of how the system works.

On the contrary: especially after 1976 when 'the System' had lost all legitimacy in the eyes of Black youth, teachers began to be seen more and more as a willing part of the System. Teachers, more than any other group of the older generation, were the targets of the (largely unwarranted) accusation of the rebellious youth of the period 1976–1980 that 'if you had done something about this System earlier, we would not now be compelled to sacrifice our education, our youth and even our lives!' Teachers were particularly vulnerable precisely because they had been the ones who by virtue of their 'education' ought to have known. Today, many of the younger generation realise that this simplistic political abstraction violates the real historical developments that neither parents nor teachers passively submitted to the atrocious system of apartheid and Bantu Education. They are uncovering the eloquent facts of the 'years of silence' from 1963 to 1976 when thousands of men and women vanished into prison or into exile. The fact remains, however, that because of the indefensible inequalities, inadequacies and downright untruths of the racist education which black teachers were expected to dispense, they were caught in the crossfire between an intransigent, backward-looking governing elite and a resurgent mass movement of the oppressed people who were beginning to visualise a life after apartheid in the aftermath of the victories of anti-colonial struggles in Angola, Mozambique,

Zimbabwe and, at this very moment, in Namibia. The National Party government, partly because they had to but also because it was good political strategy, had been buying off the teachers as a group by means of benefits of occupation, such as housing subsidies, medical aid, insurance schemes, etc. Most teachers were, and are, hopelessly trapped in the constricting coils of the System.

And yet, this is the very first step we have to take if the status of teachers is to be recovered, i.e., if they are once again to become the inspiring role models for the youth of today and tomorrow which, by and large, the teachers of yesteryear had been for us. By means of systematic political education and organisation teachers in their thousands will have to be made aware of the sociology of education in apartheid South Africa so that they can see clearly where they fit into this complex and tragic system. For, only if the majority of teachers acquire that vision will they be able to re-establish the umbilical connection between themselves and the children they are expected to teach as well as with the parents of those children. Let me stress, even though it ought not to be necessary, that it is not only the teachers who have to be politicised and organised: the same processes have to be activated among students and parents. For the present, however, let us continue to train our focus on teachers.

No adult would willingly administer poison to his/her children no matter how small the doses may be if the cumulative effect is likely to be the same as a once-and-for-all suicidal dosage. And yet this is exactly what generations of teachers have been doing in our schools if the metaphors we use to characterise Bantu Education are not simply ornamental. Since 1976 especially, the vast majority of teachers in the schools of the oppressed who had not known this before have realised with irreversible clarity that this is what they have been doing for all the many years. This is one of the main sources of their feelings of

guilt, impotence and frustration and one of the main sources of the alcoholism and immorality that have been gnawing away at the fibre of the educators of our youth. I am generalising, of course; we all know that every teacher daily subverts the System consciously or unconsciously in a thousand different ways but on balance and at the end of the day, most teachers are the willing tools of social reproduction. Through their uncritical activities, the *status quo* is perpetuated even though their children emerge – or, more likely, are jettisoned – from the System frustrated, rebellious and homicidal.

In order to change this situation, a radical transformation of pedagogy in the formal school system is essential. The present generation of teachers will have to be retrained and the student teachers will have to be trained in the light of the requirements of a non-racial, democratic South Africa/Azania. Since, as I have indicated before, we cannot expect the mandarins of apartheid to initiate this process, we shall have to find ways and means of doing so ourselves. And that, if I may go back to where I began, is why a conference such as this is such an important event. Men and women in your positions have the leverage with which to get some things moving. Unless we begin to do so, not even the most progressive-seeming educational initiatives can be implemented with some hope of success. We shall have to produce a core of well trained educators at all levels of the System, people who can go on into the 21st century to run the educational system of a new South Africa.

Such training or retraining is just as much pedagogical as it is 'political'. In this regard, I should like to mention only a few of the more relevant issues. Provided we are able to infuse in teachers the requisite self-confidence which comes from academic and professional competence, we ought to be demanding the maximum discretion for teachers in regard to prescribed textbooks and other

materials as well as in respect of elective areas of syllabi. The present situation where a given number of approved textbooks restrict the choice which teachers have, besides nurturing the soil in which all manner of possible corruption due to vested interests can thrive, leads to alienation of teachers who may have serious objections to the ideology and methodology of the prescribed texts. As long as the core skills and knowledge at the appropriate levels are being addressed, it seems to me that teachers ought to be given a free hand in the choice of books and materials. In order to anticipate the objection that this could lead to chaos and to a disastrous lowering of standards, I hasten to add that the corollary to this particular demand or goal must be the establishment of subject-teacher associations which will be competent precisely to monitor standards and to facilitate the exploration of new methods.

Since I assume that other papers will address the details of alternative curricula and syllabi, I shall only draw attention to new ways of ascertaining the relevance of what is taught. We are living through a period in which practices of democratic consultation are becoming obligatory among more and more constituencies. It is certainly no longer acceptable that parents and senior students as well as the relevant business, labour, community and cultural organisations and institutions be left out of the process of curriculum development. The days when groups of bureaucrats and most-favoured teacher representatives could incestuously churn out syllabi are fast coming to an end. Ordinary people have begun to realise that what their children learn at schools is not a matter of indifference to them. Parent involvement in education is becoming a demand and a slogan that cannot be ignored. This means and will increasingly mean that democratic means of curriculum design and course development will have to be found. All of us know how problematic such a process can be but most of us, I am sure, realise that if we can find such

mechanisms and entrench such practices we shall have gone very far along the road of empowering local, regional and national communities in this vital area.

Authoritarian, top-down, talk-and-chalk methods of teaching are beginning to be questioned even in the conventional classrooms and schools. However, there is a very long road ahead because the tenacious hold which such methods have on teachers is a function of their insecurity and academic/professional incompetence. Teachers should be encouraged to find the best methods to teach particular segments of knowledge or skills. These methods are always dependent on the unique personality of the teacher and for this reason any attempt to find neat Spencerian formulae such as working from the concrete to the abstract or moving from the particular to the general, all these hallowed truths of classical pedagogies are quite simply futile and irrelevant. Situations are never identical and what works in one situation will not necessarily work in another. Principles are everything, the tactics of translating them into practice must remain within the control of the individual teacher.

It ought to have become abundantly clear by now that I have focussed on the problem of teacher training within the broader socio-historical context of the restoration of the status of teachers in the community because I believe that this is one of the keys to our escaping from what one can only call the Nongqause syndrome which has taken hold of so many of our youth. Let me hasten to say that it is a matter that in most cases is quite beyond their control. Knee-jerk, long-term and even indefinite school boycotts as a weapon with which to retaliate to some real or supposed act of oppression or repression on the part of racist authorities inside or outside schools have taken their devastating toll. In many parts of the country and in many townships a vicious anti-educational cycle has come into being. It is my contention that besides the authentic

representative political organisations of the oppressed people, much can be done to break that cycle by teachers' organisations as well as by colleges and faculties of education.

For this reason, as I have said before, it is indeed a significant step that has been taken at this conference yesterday and today. I hope that it is only the first vital step and that you will find the strength and the inspiration to continue along the road that is indicated. This road will lead you into many confrontations with some who are walking in the opposite direction but you will meet up with many more who are surging ahead in the same direction as the one you have chosen. If you decide to explore that road, all I can say is that you will carry the good wishes of the vast majority of the people of this country who are desperately hoping to experience in their lifetime for the benefit of their children the realisation of our vision of a democratic system of education in a non-racial, democratic and unitary South Africa/Azania.



## **BURSARIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DRAFTING A FIVE-YEAR PLAN**

*(A short input paper prepared for the International Workshop on Education Initiatives for Black South Africans held at Bellagio, Italy, on 17–21 April 1989)*

THERE IS CLEARLY NO POINT in wasting the time of this gathering by expounding at length on the kinds of policies bursary-granting organisations are likely to follow in a post-apartheid South Africa. While such an exercise would not be entirely useless there are simply too many unknown variables to permit of even approximate prediction. All that we can and should do at present is to try to formulate a strategy based on our knowledge of what is actually happening on the ground, what the potential resources at the disposal of associated bursary-granting organisations are, what our educational and vocational priorities ought to be in consonance with the democratic and egalitarian principles which we hope to see realised in a South Africa beyond apartheid. Only when we have an approximate idea of all these matters can we consider the best means of implementing strategies we agree on. In order to do this, we need to find a transitional transformational approach based on an understanding of the complex historical and social dynamics in South Africa specifically and in Southern Africa more generally. If we are to assist strategists and activists to make the desired impact on the present situation as it is developing, we must try to capture in words the subtlety that characterises the South African reality. In another context, I have used a spatial metaphor which allows us to conceive of our task as one in which we are confronted with a dynamic whole in which spaces exist and

are continually albeit slowly and erratically coming into being. By filling these spaces, we have the power to alter both the dynamic and the direction of the totality that confronts us. Provided it is at all times clear to us that the educational arena is but merely one of many such totalities that are themselves dynamically interconnected, we ought to be able to obtain a realistic idea of the possibilities as well as of the limits which educational activists have.

From the record of the Oxford seminar held in September 1988, it is clear that most of the relevant questions and even some of the solutions have suggested themselves. In a few cases, quite elaborate proposals have already been made. What this workshop should try to put together is a plan of action based on all preceding bi- and multilateral discussions and consultations so that the activities of every actor and potential actor in this particular corner of the educational arena will be informed by the targets and the strategic and tactical elements of such a plan.

This short input paper is an attempt to draw together some of the more important thoughts that have been doing the rounds among us and to put in a nutshell some of the more immediately relevant elements of a first five-year plan for bursary-granting organisations operating in or in relation to South Africa at the tertiary level. Such a plan, I believe, could get off the ground in 1991. Two of the indispensable suppositions behind this input are that our activities are a consciously designed aspect of the liberation process in which our people are engaged and that it is possible, because it is necessary, to bury all destructive divisions so as to facilitate the coordination of all our resources and our efforts. This latter supposition is itself corollary to a prior supposition, viz., that in the present historical conjuncture in Southern Africa, the oppressed people and their allies have the power to initiate alternative thrusts in most of the major arenas of social activity, in spite

of the seeming omnipotence of an intensely repressive state. Not only can such thrusts be initiated by the people but in many cases they can be sustained without being co-opted because of a certain parallelism that has come about in the realm of the state and the realm of civil society. These two realms are frictionally in contact with each other without either of them being in a position to erase the other!

### **The need for research and data**

Out of the record of the Oxford seminar, the need for structured research and reliable data on which to base planning became manifest. So much so that follow-up workshops in South Africa as well as other activities designed to begin the process of meeting this need were suggested. To what extent this has happened, I am in no position to say. However, the following data are indispensable if any serious strategising and planning are to be possible:

- the magnitude of direct state provision of funds in the form of scholarships, fellowships and research grants;
- the magnitude of private-sector provision of funds for the same purposes;
- the magnitude of other (church, community, labour) involvement in this sphere;
- the proportions in each of the above categories in which available funds have been distributed over the past five years as between: men and women; 'urban' and 'rural' candidates; black and white candidates; natural sciences, mathematical sciences, business sciences, social sciences and humanities; universities, technicons and training colleges and institutes; under-graduate and post-graduate candidates.

NB: All these categories are here used in the loosest possible sense. Any systematic research would have to be based on carefully refined and defined categories of the kind

suggested here.

If a centralised or coordinated data bank containing these and other relevant data could be set up by the end of 1989, we should be able to get as accurate a picture of the quantitative dimensions and of the dynamic trends of the problem area in which we are attempting to intervene. How (and where) such a data bank is to be organised and coordinated (or centralised) is a matter that should be speedily negotiated.

### **The determination of priorities**

There is general agreement on what our priorities ought to be in the best of all possible South Africas. However, there is much idealism about as well. Two stark questions have to be answered before we can realistically set our priorities.

To begin with, it is essential to get some macro-economic idea of where South Africa is heading under specified national and international conditions. We need to get together a group of competent South African economists to tell us what the more likely scenarios in the economic sphere are, given certain predictable political developments in the subcontinent and in the world at large. Secondly, we have to ask ourselves whether collectively – as bursary-granting organisations – we are in a position, in the event of any of these scenarios being realised, to influence significantly the profile of the elite/educated layer over a five- to ten-year period and, if so, to what extent we would be able to do so in consonance with economic realities and, therefore, with employment opportunities. Unless we are able to find answers to these questions we would simply be continuing the proverbial act of throwing a stone into the bush and waiting to see what will jump out!

Having said which, it is clear, of course, that certain secular trends have to be corrected regardless of the scenarios that are possible. Amongst other things, the level

of general education of all black students has to be raised, a much greater proportion of resources should be invested in improving language, mathematical, natural science and managerial skills among most black students, the quality of teaching at primary and secondary schools has to be raised in geometric leaps and all of this has to be embedded in a framework of critical pedagogy where the emphasis is placed on the how much more than on the what of knowledge.

It is extremely important to understand that if we believe we have the power to make a tangible impact on South African society within the next five- to ten-year period, then the obligation devolves upon us to concert our forces and our resources so that we can maximise that impact. No organisation, acting alone, can hope to come up with any results which would have more than sporadic significance. But before any planning can actually take place we have to formulate the most important questions that require to be answered so that we can create a point of departure based on hard facts. Such a list of questions emerged out of the Oxford seminar. This workshop and any committees that emerge out of it will have to elaborate on and refine the more relevant of those questions and will have to consider how the necessary research team(s) is/are to be brought together so that the main body of required facts can become available towards the end of 1989.

### **Academic support programmes**

At the tertiary level – as long as segregated tribalised schooling underpins all education – this raises inevitably the controversial question of academic support programmes. Much heat and not too much light has been generated by recent debates on this matter inside South Africa. In most respects, this debate is at least ten years out of date when measured in American terms and almost

twenty years too late when measured in European terms! However, the simple beacons in this discussion are threefold:

1. Some measure of academic support (called by any name) will be essential as long as the system is based on racially discriminatory facilities simply because at the output side, businesses, the state and other employers of graduates will continue to be influenced by existing (Eurocentric) standards.
2. Academic support programmes cannot be based on any magic formula. There will be many different formulae ranging from ultra-flexible off-campus, Khanya College-type projects to extremely artificial, rigid ASP courses which may or may not be credited for degree purposes. As long as the interchange of views and methods is encouraged, all of these ought to influence one another and – unless people or institutions become trapped in debilitating dogmas – the best of all methods should become accessible to all so as to be ‘mixed’ and adapted according to the specific requirements or historical environment of each institution.
3. The withering away of all academic support programmes deriving from racial discrimination must be the fundamental goal of all such programmes. This places on tertiary educational authorities the obligation to intervene in the political process directly, to restructure university courses in accordance with the fact that we are an *African* country within the global village of the world today. The irrelevant discussion around first-world/third-world priorities ought to be brought back into focus around the questions that matter *in South Africa today* and not those which preoccupy the ‘first world’ or the ‘third world’ except insofar as they happen to intersect with our own preoccupations. Ongoing attention has to be given to the root causes of the problem which are to be found in the socio-political

structures of South Africa and in the incredibly backward and discriminatory practices in the lower reaches of the educational system(s). Unless we begin at pre-primary education, we shall be condemned to ASP and other forms of compensatory education in perpetuity.

As for the question of standards, I continue to believe in the adage that if a thing is worth doing it should be done right. That is to say, we are not simply interested in *excellence* but *perfection* itself! The question of 'dropping of standards' is a non-question since the prior questions are: who sets the standards? And for what purpose are they set? Only once those questions have been answered on the basis of as democratic a procedure as possible can we seriously look at whether generally accepted standards are being maintained.

There is much more to be said on this complex question, of course, but I believe we have constantly got to bring the discussion back to these three issues if we are not to erect another irrelevant academic word factory!

## **The need for coordination**

Everything points to the fact that more and more people and organisations in the anti-apartheid movement inside (and outside) South Africa are beginning to understand the unquestionable need for coordination of resources and skills if we wish to maximise our impact on apartheid society in the short- to medium-term. Moreover, most of the significant groups have also begun to understand that what is needed (and possible) is coordination and not centralisation. As long as there are significantly different political tendencies and thus political agendas, any attempt at centralisation is bound to be futile and, worse, divisive.

It is necessary, and possible, for all the bigger bursary-

granting organisations in the anti-apartheid fold inside South Africa to set up a coordinating structure immediately. Such a structure could also try to maintain degrees of contact with other, less prominent and less overtly politically defined or related bursary-granting organisations. This coordinating structure would – on the basis of the established data bank and agreed upon priorities – draw up a five-year plan (1991–1995) in terms of which each of the major organisations would carry out its tasks with a particular focus derived from its own history and its own agenda.

Although such a coordinating structure will necessarily involve some expansion of the administrative and bureaucratic burden on each of the participating organisations, this is an essential development since we will be aiming to capture in our strategic net, as it were, elements that have slipped through previously and which have the potential of multiplying our impact a thousand times. The specific tasks of the coordinating meetings or conferences are a matter of detail which can be worked out at the initial meetings. The more important tasks – such as avoiding duplication and promoting the rationalisation of resources – are in any case self-evident.

After the first three years of implementation of such a plan, a major national review or evaluation of the process would have to be undertaken so that the beacons for the second five-year plan can begin to be set. It would be an excellent start if the relevant organisations gathered at this workshop would seize the initiative by agreeing on a date to meet formally inside South Africa and identifying the titles of necessary position papers and the names of individuals or organisations who may be willing and competent to draft them.



## **Two important bursary-related issues**

### **Funding from within**

Most bursary funds which do not derive from the apartheid state, appear to come from donor organisations/ governments abroad. This is an unhealthy situation but one which under the present circumstances cannot be circumvented very easily. We can, however, begin to do two very possible things so as to lessen the degree of dependency on foreign funding.

I believe it would not be unethical or unreasonable in the context of a liberation struggle to require a contractual commitment from bursars who complete their professional studies to donate a reasonable monthly or annual sum to a *Central Bursary Fund* for a minimum period of between three and five years after they begin to earn a salary. Such a requirement would have to have the legal status of a contract in case we should ever have to enforce it.

This possibility points to another source of internal funding, viz., the thousands of professionals and small business people who – probably – give very small and very dispersed sums of money towards the education of people other than their kith and kin. Again, a Central Bursary Fund could pursue this issue with the utmost vigour and, by centralising the potential funds, make possible significant interventions especially at the level of secondary education. It also has the obvious advantage that an important sector of ‘the community’, i.e., the oppressed people, is in this way directly brought into this process of ‘planning from below’. Wherever possible, loans rather than grants should be offered, obviously on the easiest possible terms.

### **Student support**

At the Oxford discussion, it became clear that most people involved in the bursary/scholarship field have come to realise that in South Africa, the mere granting of financial

assistance toward the completion of a course of study is not adequate. Because of the many ways in which the apartheid system destroys, disrupts, prevents or aborts a wholesome family and community life and because of the anti-educational climate created in the ghettos by the culture of poverty and by deliberate efflux-producing policies, students generally and bursars in particular need as a matter of course a support network which includes normal counselling and careers advice services as well as such structures as resource and student centres, community libraries, reading rooms, etc. A national coordinating structure should ensure that every church and every relevant community organisation establish and run such centres. This is the most practical way in which parents individually and as part of 'the community' can become involved in the education of their children and participate directly in the activities of bursary-granting organisations. Regular discussions between educationists and community organisations regarding the problems and the significance of the events in the educational arena have become imperative from the point of view of maintaining the continuity of the educational process itself. Again, there is no need at all to promote any standard, uniform or stereotyped study centres. Let each community find its own way but let all of them through interaction influence one another's practices by adopting or adapting strong points from one another.

Vacation and weekend schools, at which especially language, mathematical and political skills should be focused on, are an invaluable method of stimulating and identifying leadership potential. Bursary-granting organisations should organise such events for their students at tertiary level at least once per annum. Considerable pressure should be brought to bear on bursars to attend these since more than most other measures they represent strands of a progressive and new educational culture in

which the values and the dynamics of a post-apartheid educational system are the immediate subject.

Another important aspect of student support services has to do with employment opportunities and follow-up. In most cases bursary-granting organisations cannot themselves initiate or administer linkage between students and the private or alternative sectors. However, there are organisations (such as CRIC in Cape Town) which have accumulated a certain measure of expertise in this area. Liaison with these organisations and carefully designed research on the trends in the development of the workforce (so-called 'manpower' projections) definitely represent one of the major backward linkages with bursary organisations.

## **Conclusion**

There have been wide-ranging bilateral and multilateral discussions over the past several years concerning the most appropriate strategies for intervening in the education arena with a view to meeting the immediate and short-term needs of the victims of apartheid while at the same time helping to equip them to become effective agents of social change in the medium term. Hence, both the perturbing quantitative and qualitative realities of apartheid have to inform and shape the plan of action which, I hope, will emerge out of this workshop. This outline of a five-year plan will then have to be taken to all relevant organisations inside and outside South Africa so that feedback can be obtained by us here, i.e., if we believe we have the right to set ourselves up as a steering committee for this purpose. Depending on the political climate, such a plan could then be launched at a public conference inside South Africa or in one of the frontline states so as to enable people in exile to participate. But even if such a conference should be deemed to be unwise, we should proceed to implement the plan after the most extensive consultations possible with all

relevant organisations regardless of their political tendency.

In sum, therefore, I propose the following steps towards the drafting of a five-year plan for bursary-granting organisations operating in South Africa or in relation to it:

1. This workshop to finalise the formulation of the main economic questions that will set parameters for short- to medium-term action in the educational sphere.
2. This workshop to appoint a small steering committee to commission and oversee research on the above questions.
3. This workshop to recommend to all relevant bursary-granting organisations to meet and to agree on proportions of funds (starting in 1991) which will be earmarked for bursaries/scholarships for particular priority areas.
4. A Central Bursary Fund and a coordinating structure to be set up by all the relevant bursary-granting organisations and that, among other things, this structure commission research on and oversee the operation of such aspects of student support services as ASP, community-based reading rooms, vacation schools, post-scholarship employment opportunities and other follow-up as well as the collection of funds from ex-bursars and other professional or monied people inside South Africa.
5. Other aspects of the activities of bursary-granting organisations to be taken up as they arise and provision be made for periodic evaluation of strategy and implementation of agreed-upon plans.

## **A DEMOCRATIC LANGUAGE POLICY FOR A POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA/AZANIA**

SPECULATION ABOUT THE PERFECT society after apartheid is as fatuous or as useful as all other utopian writing has ever been. In the final analysis, only actual historical experience and power politics can provide the specific answers to the problems faced by policy makers, strategists and would-be social engineers in given historical situations. This, at any rate, is the conclusion to which one comes after decades of preoccupation with and research on the language question in a multilingual polity. In actual practice, a creative (or destructive) tension is set up between that which is objectively possible at a given historical moment on the one hand, and the relevant principles or 'givens' which are taken as their point of departure by policy makers on the other hand.

### **Language, culture and nation**

Soon after coming to power in Uganda, former President Milton Obote had occasion to address the very question I am trying to open up for discussion in this essay. He said, among other things:

The problem of culture ... is essentially a problem of how best we can maintain and develop the various cultural forms in Uganda through a common language. I have no answer to this. I am well aware that English cannot be the media [sic] to express Dingidingi songs. I have my doubts whether Lwo language can express in all its fineness Lusoga songs, and yet I consider that Uganda's policy to teach more and more English should be matched

with the teaching of some other African language.

[W]e are trying to think about a possible answer to the question of why we need an African language as a national language? Do we need it merely for political purposes, for addressing public meetings, for talking in Councils? Do we need it as a language for the workers; to enable them to talk and argue their terms with their employers? Do we need an African language for intellectual purposes? Do we need such a language to cover every aspect of our lives intellectually, politically, economically?

I would not attempt to answer that question but it appears to me that Uganda at least is faced with a difficult future on this matter and the future might confirm that a decision is necessary to push some language deliberately and to discourage the use of some other languages also deliberately. (Obote 1975: 212–213)

This rather lengthy quotation from a speech by one of Africa's least successful political leaders reveals the complexity of the language question as well as the grave responsibility that those people have who, for whatever reasons, formulate, promote and/or implement language policy.

One of the most intractable of the problems in this area of social policy is that of our understanding of the relationship between language, culture and nation. Ultimately, the problem reduces to differences in our understanding of the scope of the concepts of 'language', 'culture' and 'nation'. The simple truth of the matter is that no amount of argument will disabuse a neo-Fichtean in cultural matters, even if they are as radically different from one another as Dr Eiselen of Bantu Education notoriety and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who is of the opinion that:

... a specific culture is transmitted through language not in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific

history. Literature ... and orature ... are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. (Ngugi 1984: 118)

Similarly those who believe in what has been called 'the Risorgimento definition of nationalism' (see Alexander 1986: 67) are unlikely to be persuaded by mere argument that the principle 'one language, one nation' is not a universally valid formula. All of us, I am sure, have at one time or another had the depressing experience of having to plough through the acres of books and articles on the subjects of nationalism, ethnicity and related questions. All of us, I am equally sure, have come away if not hopelessly confused then with a strengthened conviction that our original premises were perfectly correct!

The neo-Fichtean approach, of course, *does* reflect a certain order of reality. It is, however, based on the Cartesian Order 'which is suitable for analysis of the world into separately existing parts...' (see Bohm 1980: xiv). It is, in other words, a description of the world as unchanging and given. As such, it bears the same relation to the historical view of reality as does, say Euclidian mathematics to post-Einsteinian mathematics. That is to say, at a certain level it is a tenable hypothesis but at levels much above or much below that, it begins to deviate more and more from what actually happens.

As against what I have labelled the neo-Fichtean approach to language, culture and nationalism, we have the view of a growing number of social scientists who have realised that the communications revolution in the 20th century has rendered all the shibboleths of the 18th and 19th centuries if not obsolete then at least marginal to the main trends today. In the words of Benedict Anderson:

Language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language ... Print languages is what invents nationalism, not *a*

particular language per se ... In a world in which the nation state is the overwhelming norm, all this means that nations can now be imagined without linguistic communality ... (Anderson 1985: 122–123)

As for culture, leaving aside the indefinability of the term, the development of communications and the media is undermining all notions of separate and separable cultures generated by relatively isolated communities. When even the remotest Asian and African villages can mourn the death of some character in some TV soap opera made in the USA at the same time as every city slicker in every city in the world, then, indeed, in the words of Gordon Childe, 'cultures are becoming culture'. In such a world there can be no doubt that for a large and increasing segment of it, this common core of cultural experience can be and is transmitted and carried by means of any language. As with any experience, the connotations are different for every group of people located deeper in the concentric universe which is our world, until we reach the uniqueness of the experience of each individual at the centre. Where we draw the lines for defining 'a culture' is becoming more and more arbitrary as the communications revolution gathers momentum. South Africa, often described as a microcosm of the modern world, is a country where African, European and Asian cultural traditions have intersected for some three centuries and more and in which an emerging national culture is being carried and given expression to by means of many different languages.

## **Transitional approaches**

In South Africa today, the failure of apartheid has, generally speaking, reduced the danger of partitionist ethnic approaches to the problems of the country. Ever since 1910 and even before when the dominance of the capitalist mode of production was formally recognised, the cultural-



political contingency of a single multilingual nation inhered in the situation. The successive white bourgeois governments, for obvious economic and political reasons, consistently promoted the path of divide-and-rule policies by inventing and reinforcing ethnic identities and racial consciousness among the people. For this reason, the neo-Fichtean concepts of culture and nation became pivotal in the ideologies of segregation and apartheid, which legitimised the racial capitalist order. So successful have these policies been that, in my opinion, we are faced with the more and more real threat of a separatist ethnic movement in Natal should either a left-inclined revolution or a counter-revolution led by the right occur in South Africa.

Economic and political developments since the mid-'sixties have put high on the agenda the task of uniting the emerging nation at the level of culture and ideology where the bonding of the peoples has been weakest. It is necessary that all of us adopt a historical (diachronic) rather than merely a contemporary political (synchronic) view of the overall development of the people of this country. We need to understand the integrative and unifying dynamics of the socio-economic and socio-political forces operating in South Africa. We have to understand that the centuries-long processes of integration that eventuated in the nations of Western Europe and during which languages and cultures merged organically, though not without conflicts and wars, are now taking place in South Africa under very different technological, ideological and social-structural conditions. It is essential that we see ourselves as being inside this process at the same time as our historical imagination places us outside the process. Only in this way can the real significance and status of developments in the different social domains become evident. Only in this way can we make decisions, for example, about language policy which will not only objectively accord with the long-term interests

of the majority of the people but which will, by and large, be supported by the people.

Of course, the historical imagination when projected into the future can deceive one. We are, after all, speaking about hypothesis and speculation. To correct the eccentricities of such crystal ball-gazing, we have to call in the assistance of reliable research and, if necessary, submit as unwillingly as possible to the stubborn facts of real historical action on the part of large masses of people. This caveat should, however, not diminish the import of what I am trying to convey, viz., the need for all scientists in a rapidly and dramatically changing South Africa to get away from the crass empiricism that is usually hegemonic in a stable bourgeois world, one in which the tenets, categories and conceptual universe of the dominant class are taken for granted as common sense, self-evident truths. Only transitional thinking based on the conceptualisation of a society in motion can help us to anticipate and thus to prepare effectively for the developments that are going to turn everything upside down in this country.

## **Towards a democratic solution of the language question**

At the Silver Jubilee Conference of the English Academy of Southern Africa, held in Johannesburg on 4–6 September 1986, I presented the outline of an approach to the formulation of a democratic language policy for a socialist South Africa/Azania. In summary, I maintained that such a policy will necessarily bear features that accord with the cultural aspirations and political programmes of the working people, who are the main agents of radical change in South Africa. Our point of departure must be that all languages spoken by the people of South Africa have an equal right to flourish, having due regard to the economic and technical constraints that inevitably limit the

implementation of policy. This position is not based on sentiment or on some ethnic mystique but rather on the fact that no language is inherently superior or inferior to another. The fate of languages is decided in the course of class struggles in which the linguistic elements are never, or perhaps only seldom, pertinent as such.

I stressed further that our approach should be neither utopian nor should it assume a static situation. We need, through a process of democratic debate based on practice, experience and theory (i.e., the experience of other people), to arrive at the most probable scenario for a post-apartheid South Africa in regard to the development and use of our languages and adopt a dynamic language policy that will take cognisance of ongoing socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic changes.

While it is abundantly clear that I am pleading for the recognition that we are involved in a nation-building process (in which the interests of the majority, i.e., the black workers, are and should be structurally dominant) and that we should therefore base our language policies at all levels of the social formation on this fact, we accept the truth of the admonition that:

... the deliberate use of language policies for purposes of creating a national identity and fostering sentimental attachments is usually not desirable. Rather, language policies ought to be designed to meet the needs and interests of all segments of the population effectively and equitably, thus fostering instrumental attachments out of which sentimental ones can emerge ... A sense of national identity is more likely to develop out of functional relationships with a society than out of deliberate attempts to promote it. (J. Rubin and B. Jernudd (eds), *Can Language Be Planned?*, cited in UNIN 1981: 48)

Our main goal in the sphere of language policy in the

period up to a liberated, post-apartheid South Africa/Azania must be to facilitate communication between the different language groups that comprise the population of South Africa, in order to counteract the isolating effects of Verwoerdian apartheid language policy. Just how effective the neocolonial policy of successive National Party governments has been, has been shown in eloquent detail in a work that ought to be translated into English so as to become accessible to more South Africans. I refer to Jennifer Dunjwa-Blajberg's dissertation entitled *Sprache und Politik in Südfrika. Stellung und Funktion der Sprachen unter dem Apartheidsystem*. The corollary to this policy goal of ours is the encouragement of multilingualism or at least bilingualism (not in the ruling-class sense of a knowledge of English/Afrikaans, of course). In accepting this policy goal, we would in fact be doing what most African and Asian nations have been doing for many years since independence from colonial rule. The UN Institute for Namibia's study has found that:

... multilingual citizens able to switch between international and indigenous languages as contextually appropriate are becoming the rule rather than the exception. (1981: 56)

## **English as a linking language**

Subject to consultation with legitimate and relevant organisations of the people, the most appropriate scenario appears to be one which assumes that English will be the *lingua franca* (in the sense of a universal second language) of a liberated Azania, regardless of the socio-economic system that will prevail. In accepting this, we are far from embracing what Chinua Achebe called '[t]he fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature' (see Ngugi 1981: 112). On the contrary, our advocacy of English as the *lingua franca* has nothing in common with racist or

purist Anglo-centric notions of language policy.

Besides the reasons generally advanced in comparable African countries for tolerating and promoting the language of the former colonial overlords, be it English, French or Portuguese (see, e.g., Obote 1975), in South Africa there is an added, if paradoxical, reason for the fact that most progressive students of this question have adopted this position (see Dunjwa-Blajberg 1980: 3). In a perceptive essay, Kathleen Heugh has asserted that:

Whereas, elsewhere, a certain amount of resentment against the use of the ex-colonial language (English) has been expressed, the situation has taken an ironic twist in South Africa. The antagonism against the colonial language, English, has manifested itself within the ranks of the current (Afrikaner) rulers, certainly, but these rulers are not seen by the majority as representing their interests. Rather, the government is seen as a mutation of the colonial power. Consequently, the antagonism against English has, to a very large extent, been played down in black politics, and the opposition to the colonial language has been and is currently directed towards Afrikaans in black circles. The irony lies in the emergent attitude toward English as the vehicle for ideologies of freedom and independence. (Heugh 1986: 2)

Moreover, we can accept as a perfectly feasible projection the idea that after an initial phase of the dominance of English, one or other of the indigenous African languages, such as a consolidated 'Nguni', for example, might well become the *lingua franca* of a free Azania/South Africa. Such a trajectory would certainly be quite consistent with developments in many parts of the world, especially in Africa (see, for example, Mazrui 1975 and Heugh 1986).

It is also necessary to stress that advocacy of English as the *lingua franca* for South Africa should not be confused

with the recommendation that English become *a*, or even *the*, official language of a liberated Azania. Whereas SWAPO has, for example, decided that English shall be the official language of an independent Namibia, I believe that we need much more research and discussion in South Africa before we can reach finality on this not unimportant question. What would appear to be a most likely scenario is one where English is universally accepted as an official language together with other languages, which would enjoy official status on a regional basis depending on the initial concentration of mother-tongue speakers of the respective languages. Another scenario is one which assumes that English, 'Nguni' and 'Sotho' are the official languages with Afrikaans, Venda and other languages understood by relatively few people in certain parts of the country enjoying regional status. These are, of course, speculative ideas that may or may not help to initiate debate and research in this area.

In the interim as regards English, it will be necessary to promote English as a linking language. We should, however, guard against the very real danger of entrenching elitist and classist attitudes and divisions among people.

This is a complex domain but, clearly, it is most important that we understand that unless the vast majority of the population are organically motivated to learn and use English for the conduct of their affairs, English will become, as in so many African and Asian countries, the language of the privileged neocolonialist middle class. In India, for example:

English, the language of the colonial dominance, was allowed to continue as the link language. But this was fraught with dangerous socio-economic consequences. It perpetuated a small English-knowing elite, largely urban, who clamoured for a policy of keeping education, as one commentator put it, 'in a linguistic polythene bag'. In sharp

contrast, 80 percent of the population living in rural areas continued to be a disadvantaged group further hampered by their ignorance of English ... (UNIN 1981: 51)

For this reason and because of the cardinal principle of the equality of all languages enunciated previously, the promotion of English as a linking language has to be accompanied by the encouragement of all the languages spoken by our people. Initially, especially at the level of the men-and-women-in-the-street, at least a conversational knowledge of the other regionally important languages has to be proliferated. As political and economic developments in a free Azania will necessitate, more and more people will have to and thus want to get a sound knowledge of languages other than English.

In sum, therefore, it may be accepted that if most people of South Africa have a sound knowledge of the *lingua franca* and a sound knowledge of one or more of the other languages other than their home language, communication between the different language groups will become less and less of a problem. Moreover, since it can be expected that economic, political and other cultural developments will reinforce integration and unification, this easier communication will in fact be midwife to a new (national) culture. In this, quite different, non-exclusivist sense the words of Ngugi will begin to make sense in the South African context:

Language as communication and culture are ... products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication ... (Ngugi 1981: 118)

## **Language medium in education**

Because of our special interest in educational matters, it is fitting that I outline briefly what we would consider to be an appropriate framework for a policy on language medium in schools.

Though there is still some debate on the matter, the weight of opinion among scholars worldwide is that formal schooling should begin with mother-tongue instruction. For as long as we are going to have to switch over to English-medium instruction at one or other stage in the student's career and for all the other reasons that we advocate the acquisition of a sound knowledge of English by all Azanians/South Africans, English should be introduced as soon as possible as a subject, preferably during the second school year already. Switching over to the English medium for purposes of instruction will be determined by factors such as the availability or not of teachers who are proficient in English, and so forth. No hard-and-fast rules can or should be laid down in this matter.

What is clear, of course, is that we are committed on principle to encourage and to promote the creation and production of materials in all the indigenous languages for all school subjects so that instruction and learning can proceed in those languages as far as possible.

It goes without saying that this process will be accompanied by the spread of English as the universal second language in the first decades after liberation. In addition, all children should be encouraged in creative and imaginative ways to acquire at least communicative competence or a conversational knowledge of other regionally important indigenous languages where this is relevant.

Because of the peculiar demands made on language users at different levels of maturity, no rigid prescriptions can or should be made. Certain principles are, however, beyond question. For example, parents will be allowed to



send their children to the preschools and schools of their choice provided that they accept that their children shall learn the language(s) used at those schools. Though this will mean, for example, that mostly Xhosa-speaking children will attend crèches and preschools where Xhosa is the only or the main language of communication, such a provision would not preclude any parents from choosing to send their child(ren) to such a school.

Because of the dynamic conception of culture to which we subscribe, we assume further that at all preschools and primary schools, a common core of cultural materials will be transmitted to our children, regardless of their home language. This 'core culture' will be constituted from all the currents that have flowed together to constitute South African society. Specifically, I refer to the African, the European and the Asian traditions together with those progressive elements in the universal Americanised urban culture which no modern nation can escape. Such an approach will obviously facilitate communication between people coming from different language backgrounds and thus also the nation-building unifying process. The core cultural elements which are being referred to here should not be understood as precluding or even discouraging regional and local emphases and peripheral elaborations which are consonant with one or other language or regional grouping. In other words, there is no intention to suggest some soulless social engineering; on the contrary, we are speaking about an organic merging of what is desirable from the point of view of a socialist Azania and what is possible in terms of the peculiarities of our history. The outcome ought to be an indefinable totality which is an authentic expression of the unity in our diversity. What we have to avoid at all costs is some dogmatic vision of a procrustean bed on which all possible developments will be agonisingly standardised and all our creativity will be transformed into a totalitarian nightmare.

## **Interim action in tertiary education**

From the principles and the suggestions outlined here, certain initiatives and practices in all spheres of life can be inferred. Many such practices and policies can be initiated and sustained now already in preparation for the post-apartheid South Africa/Azania in the preschools, the formal state schools, primary, secondary and tertiary, as well as in adult education and the so-called non-formal sector generally. To discuss all of these here would require too much space. By way of example, I will try to spell out some of the implications of our position at the level of tertiary (in particular university) education.

It is clear, for example that *all* persons involved in tertiary education should have a sound knowledge of English and a conversational knowledge of at least one other relevant South African language. In particular, *all* prospective teachers *have to be* thoroughly grounded in English and, again, should be able to speak at least one other language of the people.

It is essential that a massive investment of resources be made in this area in the course of the next five to ten years. Although it ought not to be necessary to do so, I should like to point out that on this principle most established academics at all our universities are hopelessly under-qualified to teach there. How many of the English- or Afrikaans-speaking personnel at the University of Natal, for example, could converse in Zulu? No student at the University of Natal ought to be allowed to graduate unless he/she has acquired at least a communicative competence in English and Zulu. This principle ought to be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to all tertiary institutions. While the implications of such an inference are mindboggling, they are unavoidable. The sooner they are translated into practice, the better for South Africa.

What is true of communication in general is *a fortiori* true

of all other facets of the problem. I refer in particular to publishing and bibliographical policies. All the most important textbooks, encyclopaedias and other reference works, among many others, ought to be available in translated versions in all the languages of our country. Economically, this would appear to be an impossible demand. But, I shall not do the predictable thing by spelling out how little of the Defence budget, if diverted, would cover the extra outlay in materials and people!

Finally, a word about the problem of the medium of instruction. At the tertiary education level, this ought not to be a problem. Yet, as we all know only too well, one of the most baneful legacies of the Verwoerd-Strydom era has been that most non-English speakers in South Africa are barely literate in English. Since a reading knowledge of English is for all practical purposes the inarticulate major premise for any successful conduct of university studies in South Africa today and for a large part of tomorrow, we are confronted with a near-disastrous situation.

At the University of the Western Cape and at most Afrikaans universities, we still have the situation that most instruction takes place through the medium of Afrikaans whereas more than 90% of the relevant reference material in most cases is available in English only. This is not an unusual case in an ex-colonial country and it is, of course, a complex question. However, unless a serious commitment to systematic large-scale translation of pivotal works is made, we shall continue to disadvantage our students and thus retard our scientific advancement.

Education faculties at universities and teacher training colleges have a special responsibility in anticipating future developments along the lines I have sketched. Teacher trainees ought not to be certificated unless they have a sound knowledge of English and communicative competence in one or more of the indigenous languages. To make this possible, it will be necessary to upgrade the level,

content and methodology of language classes throughout tertiary institutions and especially in education departments. A well-trained and properly prepared core of teachers will be one of the main guarantees of successful implementation of policies agreed on as being appropriate to the new realities which are emerging in South Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Language is one of the pillars on which all communities rest. While we have to be careful not to fall prey to totalitarian ideas of social engineering, it would be naïve on our part to go into the new Azania/South Africa without at least adumbrations of the policies that will be necessary to meet the changed circumstances. Research, debate, experiment, planning and implementation of policies legitimated by consultation with relevant organisations of the people: this is, in the sphere of language and related activities, a programme of action which all progressives should promote assiduously. For us not to do so would be tantamount to amputating a limb in order to run a race.

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# AFRICAN CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF NAMIBIA: CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OR ASSIMILATION?

*(Address delivered at the conference of the Council of Churches in Namibia on the theme 'The Responsibility of the Church in Underdevelopment in the Namibian Context', held at Döbra High School, 4–8 July 1988)*

## **Imperialism and its impact on African cultures**

... Kenya was integrated into the British imperialist system from about 1888, first as a company property and later as a settler colony. This meant that land was forcibly taken from the people and given to a white settler minority. Kenyan people's labour worked the very land taken away from them. People were also taxed and this went to build the infrastructures for effective economic occupation.

Thus our labour, our capital, our land all helped develop the settler economy. This was effected through military conquest and the subsequent political domination and repression. But cultural domination and oppression were necessary for effective economic and political control. People's songs, poetry, dances, languages, education were attacked and often ruthlessly suppressed. British imperialism for us took the concrete form of economic, political and cultural settler occupation. Racism became the dominant ruling ideology. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1988: 35)

WHAT NGUGI SAYS HERE SO succinctly holds true for every African colony subjugated during the 19th century by European colonialism-imperialism. German imperialism

and South African sub-imperialism carried out the identical action plan on the territory and the people of Namibia during the same period. It is important to note that Ngugi stresses the centrality of cultural domination against the tendency of historians and other social scientists to dwell on the economic and political facts of European expansionism. I shall indicate briefly later on how crucial the role of the Church was in precisely this matter of cultural oppression and domination.

Before we consider that question, however, let us approach the subject of this paper by way of summarising some of the main points about it made by Amilcar Cabral, one of the main contributors to our understanding of the process of the imposition of colonial-imperialist rule on the economies and societies of the African continent. Together with people such as Fanon, Walter Rodney, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and others, Cabral has in fact opened the way to finding viable cultural strategies in the course of national liberation struggles in Africa and elsewhere. The following brief summary of Cabral's ideas is based on his two seminal lectures entitled 'National liberation and culture' (delivered on 20 February 1970 as part of the Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture Series at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York) and 'Identity and dignity in the context of the national liberation struggle' (delivered on 15 October 1972 at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania when he was awarded an honorary doctorate by that university). In summarising Cabral's main insights on this question, I am relying heavily on a BA (Honours) dissertation by Karen Press (1988):

1. Cabral's point of departure is 'an opposition between the imposed culture of a colonial power (the religion, education, literature, music, lifestyle that the colonizers import with them) and the indigenous culture of the colonized society which is fundamentally disrupted by this imposition. Resistance to the colonial regime is seen to begin with the rejection of this imported culture, and a

desire to reassert that culture which it displaced' (Press 1988: 19).

2. Unlike other revolutionary Marxists, Cabral does not believe that the 'popular masses' are 'without culture' or else trapped in some kind of 'cultural backwardness'. On the contrary, he postulates the value of the people's indigenous culture and argues that 'revolutionary consciousness begins with their reassertion of their own creative initiative' (Press 1988: 19; emphasis in original). This point is clearly very important for our subject since it rejects any theory of assimilation in favour of a strategy of cultural development.
3. Related to this point is Cabral's belief that in most African countries the period of colonialism was too short to eradicate the culture of the people with the result that the dominant imperialist theory of 'progressive assimilation' had to fail except in the case of the tiny elites which the system generated:

Repressed, persecuted, humiliated, betrayed by certain social groups who have compromised with the foreign power, culture took refuge in the villages, in the forests, and in the spirit of the victims of domination. (Cabral 1974: 61)

The capacity of the indigenous cultures to survive is enhanced by the strategic dilemma of the imperialist ruling class which, on the one hand wants to eradicate popular culture in order to perpetuate its domination of the masses of the working people but, on the other hand has to maintain and strengthen the power of the chiefs and other traditional ruling groups in the colonial structure. Since this power rests on the maintenance of the organically evolved cultural matrix to a very large extent, this means that the imperialist ruling class has to retain the ethnic customs, practices and beliefs among the different social groups in the colony in order to keep them divided. (See Cabral 1974: 66–67.)



4. In the cultural dimension of the national liberation struggle an understanding on the part of the leadership of the national liberation movement of the complex dynamics that influence the limits and possibilities in this sphere is indispensable, since culture is one of the main weapons of struggle of an oppressed people and indeed national liberation is in one sense an 'act of culture' (see Cabral 1974: 43). The realisation of the nation-building goal of the struggle for national liberation depends critically on whether or not the leadership of the movement has undertaken the careful historical-sociological analysis which alone can equip it with the tools and materials that will facilitate the effective bonding of the different social groups that provide the forces for the liberation struggle:

In order for culture to play the important role which falls to it in the framework of development of the liberation movement, the movement must be able to conserve the positive cultural values of every well-defined social group, of every category, and to achieve the *confluence* of these values into the stream of the struggle, giving them a new dimension – the *national* dimension. Faced with such a necessity, the liberation struggle is, above all, a struggle as much for the conservation and survival of the cultural values of the people as for the harmonising and development of these values within a national framework. (Cabral 1974: 48; emphasis in original)

5. Having due regard to the abridgement of Cabral's ideas on this question by means of this summary, it would amount to a serious distortion of his ideas, were we to omit mention of two distinctive aspects thereof. Cabral insists against the purveyors of *negritude* and romantic Panafricanism that there is no single African culture, only many different African cultures (see Cabral 1974: 51). He opposes all attempts to approach this

question from a 'racial' point of view although he does not completely avoid the pitfalls of a superficial populist rhetoric (see Press 1988: 22). Instead of a narrow Africanist position, it is his view that every culture – including, therefore, every African culture – is a contribution to world civilisation. Cabral, moreover, insists on analysing specific cultures in class terms:

It is true (he says) that the multiplicity of social and ethnic categories somewhat complicates the determining of the role of culture in the liberation movement. But it is vital not to lose sight of the decisive significance of the class character of culture in the development of the liberation struggle, even in the case when a category is or appears to be embryonic. (Cabral, as cited in Press 1988: 21)

Consequently, the culture of the people has to be mobilised selectively in the struggle for national liberation. In the context of the goal of building a nation, for example, it is vital that the ethnic separateness promoted by the colonisers should be counteracted, i.e., '... respect for people's traditions should not imply an endorsement of their "ethnic" separateness from other people in the emergent nation or class' (Press 1988: 22).

How to develop a national culture rooted in the organic traditions of the popular masses without falling victim to reactionary parochial, ethnic or nationalistic practices: this is the challenge in the perspective of Cabral that faces every national liberation movement in Africa:

The validity of (the) tradition as a weapon of cultural resistance is undeniable. The difficult task facing a liberation movement with revolutionary goals is to accept such forms of resistance (often quite spontaneous) on the part of the oppressed people, while simultaneously initiating a move beyond dependence on these traditions. (Press 1988: 23)

## **A dynamic approach to the question of culture**

Up to this point, I have used the term 'culture' unproblematically. In order to answer the question posed in the title of this talk, we can no longer postpone a brief discussion of this subject. The definition of culture is an ongoing process and no single definition suffices for all purposes. There is broad agreement, of course, that when we use the term we are concerned largely with the making of meaning, i.e., with the 'intellectual' (as opposed to the material, specifically economic) products, practices and interconnections of a social formation. While we can say definitely that when we use the term we mean to refer to the songs, poems, religion, education, beliefs, customs, tastes, fashions, etc., of a group of people, it is clear that all such attempts at definition represent arbitrary delimitations of a completely fluid concept.

A more promising route is to consider the question in terms of static and dynamic conceptualisations of culture. Most writings on the subject, including incidentally Cabral's, approach it in the Cartesian mode. That is to say, they assume that there are discrete 'cultures' which interact antagonistically or non-antagonistically with one another. At a certain level and for very short periods of time under well-defined historical conditions, such a conceptualisation *does* correspond to social reality. Thus, when Bartolomeu Dias and his merry men first encountered Khoikhoi herders near Mossel Bay on the South Cape coast, two quite distinct, historically unconnected cultures came into antagonistic contact. In this highly abstract sense, the Cartesian approach can lead to relevant insights. But to adopt the same approach to the situation that had arisen by the time a Jan van Riebeeck was trading with some of the descendants of the men and women of the *Angra dos vagueiros* in Table Bay some 150 years later would simply lead to a violent falsification of the historical record since these two

'cultures' had by that time to a certain extent become interdependent.

This Cartesian approach has, I believe, been a fatal, if unavoidable, one in the world at large and in the modern African context in particular. Its popularity derived from the dominance before 1949 of pre-socialist modes of production and the hegemony of bourgeois modes of thought on a world scale. There is an alternative approach, however, one which is more appropriate to the rapidly changing technological, economic, social and political conditions of the ex-colonial world and, incidentally, even to those of the imperialist countries themselves. In this approach:

... one tries to move beyond the questions that are usually put, about the relation of a given body of culture or cultural practice to a particular social structure, in ways that allow one to see both structural and historical dimensions. (Williams 1976: 500–501)

Or, to quote the same source, we have to try to see 'tradition as both operative continuity and contemporary formation' by trying to discover (in terms of our goals) the most appropriate connections between that which is 'residual' and that which is 'emergent' (see Williams 1976: 501).

Let me come at the question from a completely different angle: if you here in Namibia and we in South Africa want to counteract the negative and divisive effects of the deliberate and systematic National-Party policy of promoting so-called ethnic groups, we *have to* go right back to question the mystification of the concept of culture, among other things. Raymond Williams has shown how this 'noun of process' was gradually transformed to refer not to a unilinear process of civilisation on a world scale but instead came to signify different entities that were contrasted with one another as 'cultures'. This usage represented, as I have already implied, a reduction of vision

from the global to the national, even to the parochial, scale. Again, it is necessary to stress that this was a dialectical inevitability. Nationalist movements necessarily stressed that which is unique to their nation in order to resist feudal or imperialist attempts to 'assimilate' them so that they could dominate their people. Hence the reduction of scale of vision, especially in the 19th century when (in Europe) the ethos of nationalism was the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie. This approach was then simply transplanted by missionary linguists and literacy teachers who could only make sense of the chaos of peoples and the babble of tongues in Africa by imposing on it the Cartesian grid of cultures and ethnic groups they had come to know in Europe (see Harries 1988).

### **Assimilation or development?**

Be that as it may, the developments of the last fifty years or so have necessitated a shift in the scale of vision. In order to live in a rapidly changing world, we need a new pair of spectacles, one that will enable us to see things not only more clearly but also in a much larger context. The 'global village' is a fact of modern life and it is precisely in order to accommodate both terms of the phrase that a new, more dynamic, conceptualisation of culture has become indispensable. In the final analysis, we have to get back to the understanding of culture as a process, however and wherever initiated by whomever, a process which adds to the stock of human knowledge and enhances our possibilities of perception in such a way that any cultural practice can be applied with the necessary modifications and adaptation under different circumstances provided that it is relevant to the situation of the people concerned.

We have on the one hand to accept the tendency to retain that which is peculiar to our social groups and social formations because they deem it valuable, without on the

other hand falling into the trap of believing that such 'cultural treasures' represent more than a passing moment in the history of a particular group of people which is itself changing rapidly. We have to get away from the idea of a multiplicity of unique 'cultures' that have to be preserved in spite of the observable fact that they are subject to constant change which is generated both from inside and outside the group of people concerned. In doing so, however, we also have to avoid the bureaucratic tedium of a uniform universe in which everything, including all thought and creativity, is standardised. For, while it is true that 'cultures are becoming culture' (Gordon Childe), this certainly does not mean that that which is unique in time and space is disappearing. All it means is that the core of that which is common to all social formations is constantly expanding. Whether the periphery of unique elements is correlatively shrinking, it is more difficult to say. In all probability, both core and periphery are expanding as more and more individuals and groups are becoming capable of intervening consciously in the process of culture. In considering this question, I am reminded of a very illuminating statement by Paolo Freire which also underlines the class character of all culture:

In general, dominant segments of any society talk about their particular interests, their tastes, their styles of living, which they regard as concrete expressions of nationality. Thus the subordinated groups, who have their own tastes and styles of living, cannot talk about their tastes and styles as national expressions. They lack the political and economic power to do so. Only those who have power can generalise and decree their group characteristics as representative of the national culture ... (Freire and Macedo 1987: 52)

What, in the light of the above, is the situation in Namibia today? There is no doubt that the Christian church

was one of the main instruments of the colonisation of the mind of the indigenous people of Namibia. I need not go into this at any length since other contributions to this conference will have done so already. All of us know the study by Lukas de Vries on *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia* in which he accepted 'the positive work of the mission', especially in regard to the introduction of the agricultural revolution and education and literacy (see De Vries 1978: 195). On the other hand, he criticised the Church since:

... both the mission and the colonial power would permit the cultural uplifting of the native population of South West Africa only to a certain level. (De Vries 1978: 196)

In the light of my analysis, it is clear that De Vries's critique of the practices and strategies of the mission is that it did not promote complete assimilation. It froze, as it were, the indigenous people in some kind of in-between land where there were only bits of 'culture' that came from both worlds:

... thus the native had, in both the political and the spiritual fields, to remain 'inferior' to the ruling power. This subjugation of the native peoples not only destroyed their ability to engage in creative cultural development, but it created a gap between African and Western culture which has not been bridged to the present day. Cultural change gave the coloniser and the missionary somebody who could understand his language, but who was in reality still a stranger to him. (De Vries 1978: 196)

Without detracting in the least from the value of De Vries's study, I have to say that this is an essentially Eurocentric, liberal assimilationist point of view, one which acknowledges at best only in a qualified and paternalistic way the value of indigenous Namibian cultural production both before and after colonial conquest.

In order to obtain a different perspective on the matter, it is essential to get away from the approach that the Christian mission has to be washed clean of the guilt which accrued to it as a result of the actions of the European and some African missionaries during the colonial and neocolonial period. This is certainly a vital ideological task for a Church that wishes or has to establish a credible continuity between its colonialist origins in Namibia and the ethics of universal equality and solidarity which is one of the doctrinal pillars on which it rests. But we have to be very clear that that is a different task in many ways from that of the historian of culture and of society who tries to understand what happened, why and how it happened and where – in the light of real strategic options – the social forces are tending.

The truth of the matter is that the Christian mission in all colonial situations was usually the vanguard of the colonial conquest of the African peoples. The trader, the missionary and the soldier-administrator were three arrows in the quiver of an expansionist European capitalism. They were not always in agreement with one another on tactical questions. The missionaries, certainly, in many cases had no exploitative or oppressive intentions since they saw the 'sowing of the seed' as the greatest of all benefits that could befall the natives. They often lamented the fact that the Christian message had to be preached under the brutalising circumstances of colonial conquest but they did precious little to alter these circumstances. The fact of the matter is that they could not do otherwise. Christianity at the time of colonial expansion was one of the main ideological instruments through which the capitalist system was transplanting itself throughout the world.

It is futile, therefore, to lament, as does De Vries, for example, that 'because the mission saw "European Christian culture" as the only possible culture for Christians many good practices and folk-customs were broken down and destroyed ... True Christianity is not reflected in the



wearing of Western clothing ...' (De Vries 1978: 96). This is a transhistorical, theological judgement. The Christian missionaries could do little else. They were part and parcel of an objective process; their own subjective understanding of what they were doing could not alter the fact that they were in reality and usually the ideological policemen of the colonial-capitalist system or the fact that they were the main colonisers of the mind of the colonial oppressed.

### **Some remarks on cultural strategy in the liberation of Namibia**

An objective process cannot be halted by mere theorising or by prophetic lamentations. The colonial era, as I have already said, together with the revolution in communications, has turned our modern world into a global village. In Namibia, as elsewhere in the ex-colonial and neocolonial world, we have to build a nation and thus also a national culture but without isolating ourselves from the rest of the world. We have to learn to be national as long as the nation state remains the basic unit of political and economic operations, without, however, succumbing to the seductions of national chauvinism. This is the same as saying that we have to fight the capitalist and acquisitive system that divides the world into ruthlessly competing economic and political blocks. We have to break down the ethnic identities or consciousnesses generated or perpetuated by colonial divide-and-rule strategies by building a nation.

On the cultural level, this means allowing a core of common cultural practices, beliefs, customs, etc., to develop, a core that is derived from all the different social, regional and language groups. In practice, this would, for example, mean that songs or stories that at present are peculiar to Nama-speaking groups or to Ndonga-speakers, or to Herero-speaking people will become generally known

either in the original language or in translation. This particular example is a happy one in the context of this conference. For, it is precisely in the Christian church that the availability of the Bible and of many hymns in all the languages of the people shows us the way to go. Unity and solidarity, born in the struggle for liberation through common political and economic action, has to be and is reinforced by means of increasing the openings of what are still seen as closed circles of culture based on language, colour and sometimes religion. In this regard, I should like to stress the importance of the field of preschool education since it is in that field that the new generation of Namibians is being nurtured at a time of life when they are most amenable to new ideas. Also, it is necessary to stress the vital question of language and communication. How we treat this issue in practice in our schools, our churches and in other spheres of life can affect decisively the outcome of our struggle.

In conclusion: assimilationist policies assume that the culture of the conquerors is superior to that of the conquered and that the latter have nothing or little to put into the emergent nation. This Eurocentric, neocolonialist attitude to our situation constitutes a self-imposed disempowerment of those who are striving ever more consciously to create a new and better society in which justice will be the due of everyone.

As against this, a genuinely developmental approach would open the existing boundaries between the ethnically conceived cultures, or subcultures, in order to permit as gradual or as rapid a convergence of customs, practices, beliefs, institutions, etc., as suits the requirements of an emerging Namibia free of all oppression and exploitation. In this case, cultures are not viewed as though they were unchanging and unchangeable but are instead viewed as constantly changing. For certain analytical purposes, it may well be necessary and possible to view the situation as one

that is momentarily frozen, one in which a number of different 'cultures', or subcultures, coexist. But such instances should be carefully defined and circumscribed since they deliberately interfere with the flux of all reality, much as natural scientists do when they isolate and confine natural phenomena in laboratory or test-tube situations for purposes of the more convenient microscopic study of the phenomena. Social reality, however, will take its revenge on us the moment we try to formulate strategies of intervention on the basis of such statically conceived ideas about the social groups that constitute our field of action.

Hitler's propagandist minister, Goebbels, is said to have taken out his gun whenever anyone uttered the word 'culture'. His instincts were accurate. Culture, properly understood, is one of the most potent weapons in the arsenal of the movement for national liberation and it is high time that we understood this and gave the necessary attention to it.

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