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The Struggle For Parents' Rights

THE LONG and bitter controversy over language policy in our schools has become hopelessly involved by the confusion of two separate disputes in one. This often happens in politics and when it does many of the disputants never really succeed in sorting what it is they are arguing about.

In this case the two points at issue are:

- (1) Single-medium or parallel-medium education; and
- (2) The right of parents to decide on the character of their children's education.

Ideally, the first would be a matter for calm discussion on an educational level, and the second would be a question of principle, it is to be hoped equally calmly considered.

However, owing to the fiercely racial attitude adopted by the Nationalist fanatics in the Transvaal Provincial Council, all hope of calmness was ruled out from the start. The thing soon became a political dog-fight, into which normally retiring parents were dragged against their will and in which school-going children themselves became involved.

To take the first controversy first. The Nationalist onslaught on parallel-medium schools stems from the Broederbond conception that Afrikaner children must be preserved at all costs from danger of contact with the "foreigner" in case they should stray in any way from the rigid path of Nationalism. To preserve the child's "purity" of thought and

Die Stryd Vir Ouerregte

DIE lang en verbete geskil oor die taalbeleid in ons skole het hopeloos vertroebel geword deurdat twee aparte strydpunte as een beskou is. Dit gebeur nogal dikwels in die politiek en mens weet dan nie waaroor die twis nou eintlik gaan nie.

In hierdie geval is die twee strydpunte soos volg:—

- (1) Enkelmedium of parallel-medium onderwys; en
- (2) Die reg van ouers om die aard van hulle kinders se opvoeding te beslis.

Die eerste is 'n saak vir kalm bespreking op 'n opvoedkundige basis, en die tweede 'n beginselsaak wat ewe kalm oorweeg behoort te word.

As gevolg van die fel rassehouding wat deur die dweepsieke Nasionaliste in die Transvaalse Provinsiale Raad ingeneem is, is alle hoop op kalmte egter uit die staanspoor uitgesluit. 'n Politieke hondegeveg het gou ontwikkel, en ouers, wat gewoonlik terughoudend is, is teen wil en dank ingesleep. Selfs skoolgaande kinders is ook in die warboel.

Laat ons eerstens die eerste strydpunt behandel. Die Nasionale aanval op parallel-mediumskole spruit uit die Broederbond se begrip dat Afrikanerkinders ten alle koste bewaar moet word teen die gevaar van kontak met die „uitlander", wat hulle moontlik kan laat afdwaal van die noue pad van Nasiona-

background the single medium school was the obvious device. There is no secret about it. Nationalist speakers in the Provincial Council have openly admitted it.

This conception naturally ran straight into opposition from the more liberal idea that the way to build a united nation is to let the children meet in the schools and learn each other's language in the playground. There is no doubt that the vast majority of parents want this to happen. They want their children to mix at school and one of the few heartening aspects of this whole unhappy dispute is the way in which English and Afrikaner parents have united to defend the parallel-medium system. It is as if they had said: "We have suffered enough ourselves from this wretched racial cleavage. For heaven's sake let our children grow up together in friendship."

With the faithful, I would keep faith;
with the unfaithful I would also keep
faith, in order that they may become
faithful.

—Lao Tsze.

This desire of the parents to see their children getting on together is one of the brightest hopes for the future, but it has to be stamped out by the Nationalists.

In the face of this "get together" philosophy of the parents, the Broederbond had, of course, to do something drastic in order to save its creed of sectionalism from being swamped. Somehow the "volkswil", which had taken the wrong turning in this case, had to be brought to heel. The obvious course was to take the whole thing out of the hands of the parents, who could not be trusted to follow the party line, and to put the child's education entirely into the hands of people who could be relied on to carry out Nationalist policy to the letter—that is to say school inspectors, departmental officials and ultimately the Administrator of the Province himself.

That is the historical and only reason why the right to choose the language medium of their children's education has been wrested from the parents. The Nationalists have often tried to claim that this step is educationally

lisme. Die enkelmediumskool was voor die hand liggend as 'n wapen om die kind se „suiwerheid" van denke en agtergrond te bewaar. Dit is g'n geheim nie; Nasionale woordvoerders in die Provinsiale Raad het dit openlik erken.

Hierdie begrip het natuurlik gebots met die meer liberale idee dat 'n verenigde volk gebou moet word deur kinders toe te laat om met mekaar in die skole kennis te maak en mekaar se taal in die speelgronde aan te leer. Daar bestaan geen twyfel dat die oorgrote meerderheid van ouers wil hê dat dit moet geskied. Hul wil hê dat hul kinders in die skool moet meng, en een van die weinige bemoedigende aspekte van hierdie twis is die wyse waarop Engels- en Afrikaanssprekende ouers saamstaan om die parallel-medium stelsel te verdedig. Dit is asof hul sê: „Ons het self genoeg gely deur hierdie ellendige rassesseiding. Laat ons in hemelsnaam toesien dat ons kinders in vriendskap groot word."

Hierdie begeerte van ouers dat hul kinders met mekaar oor die weg moet kom gee hoop vir die toekoms, maar die Nasionaliste wil dit uitwis.

Hierdie saamstaan-filosofie van die ouers het die Broederbond natuurlik verplig om iets drasties te doen. Hul moes sorg dat hul dogma van seksionalisme nie oorrompel sou word nie. Op een of ander manier moes hul die sogenaamde „volkswil", wat in hierdie geval afgedwaal het, onder beheer bring. Hul kon nie op ouers reken om die partybeleid blindelings te volg nie, en hul moes dus die kind se opleiding aan diegene toevertrou wat die Nasionale Party se bevele stiptelik sou nakom—skoolinspekteurs amptenare in die Onderwysdepartement, en uiteindelik die Administrateur self.

Dit is al rede waarom ouers die reg ontnem is om hul kinders se voertaal aan te wys. Die Nasionaliste beweer dikwels dat hierdie stap uit 'n opvoedkundige oogpunt gewens is. Dit is geensins hul beweegrede nie. Dit is vir die Nasionaliste uit 'n politieke oogpunt wenslik, en dit is al. Dit het niks met die welsyn van die kinders of hul opvoeding te maak nie. Dit is eenvoudig 'n gruwelike voorbeeld van rasseskynheiligheid.

desirable. It is nothing of the sort. It is politically desirable from the Nationalist point of view and that is all. It has nothing to do with the welfare of the children or the interests of their education. It is simply a display of racial bigotry at its worst.

The parents' right to choose the language medium of their children's education — for which they pay as taxpayers — should never be in dispute. It should be as freely granted as religious freedom of choice. Everybody knows that nine times out of ten the best medium from the point of view of the child is the home language, and no parent is going to be so stupid or so cruel as to jeopardise a child's chances in life by wantonly making a wrong decision. But that decision must be the parent's and not the decision of a government official working to regulations born of a political doctrine. This invasion of a traditional parental right is intolerable, and the resultant claiming of the child by the State is in principle as bad as Nazi indoctrination or Communist brain-washing.

The Transvaal has, of course, borne the brunt of this controversy because the Transvaal Nationalists have pushed the matter further than it has been taken in other Provinces. But the whole tragic issue is really a national one and members of the Black Sash throughout the country should be as alert to what is at stake as their colleagues are in the Transvaal. This use of children as pawns in a bitter political struggle and this denial to parents of a fundamental right could easily come to the rest of the Union. Temporarily the Broederbond rules in Transvaal education, but it will not rest content until it has control over the schooling of every child in the country.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question: Six of the delegates at the National Convention were Boer War Generals. Name them.

Answer: Generals Botha, Smuts, Burger, De la Rey, De Wet, Hertzog.

Reference: F. S. Malan, Convention Diary, page 20.

Die reg van ouers om hulle kinders se voertaal te kies—iets waarop hul as belastingbetalers geregtig is—behoort nooit betwis te word nie. Dit behoort net so vryelik toegestaan te word soos vryheid van Godsdiensoefening. Iedereen weet dat die huistaal in nege gevalle uit tien ook die beste voertaal is, en geen ouer gaan as dom of wreed wees om sy kind se toekoms in gevaar te stel deur onverstandig te beslis nie. Maar die beslissing moet op die ouer rus, en nie op 'n amptenaar wat handel volgens regulasies wat uit 'n politieke ideologie voortspruit nie.

Hierdie inbreukmaking op 'n tradisionele ouerreg, wat tegelykertyd beteken dat die staat op die kind beslag lê, staan gelyk aan Nazi of Kommunistiese metodes.

Die Transvaalse Nasionaliste het hierdie saak natuurlik verder gevoer as hul kollegas in die ander provinsies. Gevolglik het Transvaalse ouers tot dusver die swaarste gely. Dis egter essensiëel 'n landsvraagstuk, en Swart Serp-lede die hele land deur moet besef hoeveel op die spel is. Oor ons kinders se toekoms wou 'n verbete politieke stryd, en die versegging van 'n basiese ouerreg kan maklik oor die hele Unie sprei. Oor opvoeding in die Transvaal voer die Broederbond alreeds heerskappy, maar hul sal nie rus totdat hul die opleiding van elke kind in die land beheer nie.

BLACK SASH A.B.C.

(Continued)

Irksome Iona likes practical jokes,
As long they happen the others to hoax.
Ideal Irene lives up to her name
And works for the peace of the blind and the lame.
Joking Jacoba's the kind of a girl
Whose fun is TODAY and Society's whirl.
Judicious Jasmine's aware that it's wise
To plan for the future, not suffer surprise.
Kimono-ed Katie gets dressed at high noon—
If you wanted her earlier she's probably swoon.
Keen-minded Katharine is always on time
To aid those in trouble or help stop a crime.
Languishing Lulu is always too sweet
To those who come bearing a gift or a treat,
But Lively Lucinda, though feminine too,
Is the first to come forward when there's a to-do.

P.B.