

## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION.

by Comrade Jack Simons.

### 1. Education and Society.

Most writers on education agree that whether formal or informal, the process of educating members of society, both young and old, reflects the traditions, customs and culture of the people. More precisely, the system of education expresses the dominant values of the ruling class in a given society. In classless societies the values expressed are those of the group of people who shape the policies and perpetuate the structure of the social order.

These general statements hold good for the traditional African society in the period before colonial conquest; they are equally valid in the capitalist society and in the socialist one.

In South Africa, education introduced in schools and institutions of higher learning preserves the interests and reflects the outlook of the dominant white minority and is saturated through and through with the structural elements of race discrimination, national oppression and class exploitation - the main characteristics of apartheid.

#### Education Under Apartheid

My task is to outline an alternative system of education to that which exists at the present time in South Africa. Before tackling this theme, I ought to say something about the existing system. Firstly, because, as all educationists know, the process of raising children, which is one aspect of education, starts with what is known. Parents transmit to children the religious, ethical, moral, scientific and cultural knowledge that they (parents) possess. To identify an alternative system, we must have adequate knowledge of education under apartheid. Secondly, such knowledge is necessary for us to specify the defects, shortcomings and inadequacies against which the national democratic revolution is directed. I need not remind you that the starting point of the present phase of our revolution was the revolt of students and scholars in the Soweto uprising of 1976. The direct cause of their revolt was the hatred of apartheid in education, complicated by the compulsory introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

The Soweto revolt and the continuing upsurge of the intellectuals among black South Africans provide us with some insight into the nature of education under apartheid.

Firstly, it is wholly undemocratic, imposed on Africans, Coloureds and Indian communities without their cooperation or consent. Secondly, the system is alien to their aspirations and fundamental needs. Thirdly, it is part of a network of institutions designed to perpetuate a social order based on white supremacy and the monopoly of power in all spheres of social activity.

Looked at historically, and within the social system, the education of the Africans, Coloureds and Indians is intended to equip them for subordinate position within the total South African society. Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, when introducing the Bantu

Education Act in 1954, said that its purpose was to educate the 'native' for and service within his own community. He (the 'native') could aspire to the top positions in a segregated Black society, but could never attain a higher position which was a monopoly of the whites.

Bantu Education, together with the Apartheid system disqualified Africans from competing on equal terms with whites in all forms of skilled and technical employment, excluding them from a wide range of professional occupations, leaving only those which Blacks could practise among Blackes.

There are no African pilots or engineers in the South African Air Force and Civil Aviation. There are no African electrical engineers in charge of power-stations and telecommunication systems. There are no Africans employed in the mining industry above the level of 'baas boy'. There are no Africans with certificates authorising them to carry out explosions in the shafts and stopes.

The list of professions and occupations from which Africans and to an almost similar extent Coloureds and Indians, are excluded, covers the whole range of our industrial society. Education under Apartheid is organised in such a manner as to maintain the white group's monopoly of power in all areas, including the Bantustans.

### 3. Transition to Majority Rule

Our national democratic revolution is preparing the way for a new social order in which all South Africans will participate in decision making and the government of our country. This can be achieved only by the abolition of the Apartheid system. The dismantling of Apartheid, however is a long term process which will continue for many years after the transfer of power to the majority of the people.

This workshop, like many other gatherings, which are taking place within and outside our country is calculated to prepare people for a new social system that will take the place of the present Apartheid regime.

An alternative system of education must necessarily embody the value-system and institutions of a liberated South Africa. What form the new South Africa will take can be visualized only in broad outline. The Freedom Charter provides us with a guide. It is however, of a general nature and has to be supplemented by a detailed analysis of goals, objectives and possibilities in every area of social organisation.

This task of setting out the ground work of an emancipated South Africa in accordance with the broad principles of the Freedom Charter has only begun. The questions that arise in formulating the programme of action for the new South Africa cover issues familiar to us but for which we have no answers. For instance, what are we to do to correct the grotesque imbalance in the distribution of land which leaves 87% of the surface area in the hands of the white minority?

The Freedom Charter says that the land will be given to those who work it, but does not indicate whether the system of agriculture will be based on individual commercial farms, state farms, co-operative or collective farms - or indeed what action should be taken to provide Africans with sufficient land for the requirements of the whole society.

Similarly, questions arise about the ownership of the mines, the system of a profit, and the claims of capital and labour in the distribution of that profit. If the mines are to be nationalized, who is to manage them on behalf of the people when a great majority of the people possess neither the managerial nor technical skills for such an undertaking?

#### 4. Crisis in Education

The primary and secondary school pupils in the townships, Coloured and Indian residential areas have been a leading force in our revolution. They've demonstrated militancy in schools and among urban communities for the past decade, beginning with the Soweto Uprising of 1976. The revolutionary spirit never subsided. It might fluctuate but periods of lull were succeeded by new waves of resistance to the social order.

The present phase of our struggle dates from September 1984. The three revolutionary forces, consisted of workers, local communities and students the intellectuals whose presence in every revolution is necessary for its success.

The world has witnessed on TV screens and heard over radios graphic accounts of the continuous battles between pupils, young and old, and the security forces of the state. African students in the Vaal Triangle, in the Eastern Cape, Coloured students in Western Province, Indians in Natal have participated in varying degrees in the struggle for the new kind of education and, more than that, a new kind of society. The security forces had used sjamboks and dogs to break up demonstrations and gatherings, attacked them with tear gas and rubber bullets, and have not hesitated to shoot at them with live ammunition. Youngsters of all ages resisted, fighting back with sticks, stones and petrol bombs in a continuous battle that demonstrated to the world not only the harsh and cruel treatment inflicted by men in uniform, but also the heroism, endurance and determination that captivated the attention and aroused the sympathy of people in all continents. One of the things they have been demanding has been the democratization of schools; meaning participation by students, teachers and parents in the formulation of education policies, the management of institutions of education that will equip the students for a meaningful contribution to the restructuring of the social order. These demands are contained in the slogan "People's Education for People's Power."

#### 5. An Alternative Education System

The upheaval in townships and, more especially, the schools are slowly penetrating the consciousness of the white minority. Segregated in high-cost, low-density residential areas, the white bourgeoisie and middle-class exist on a level of luxury, privilege and power, so far removed from the townships that can be said without qualification that



our society consists of two civilisations: one for the rich and middle-class white, and the other for poverty-stricken, down-trodden and oppressed black people.

The racist regime is determined to keep these two worlds apart. That is what apartheid means in practice; the separation of upper class, well-to-do whites from the poverty, sufferings, struggles and aspirations of the black majority. It is this separation, the enormous gap-power, prestige and privilege that constitutes South Africa's internal colonialism, a relationship between a colonising power and the colonised.

Unlike the colonial system of the classical type in which the colonised and the colonizer are separated geographically as well as culturally, South Africa constitutes a single society.

The ANC was formed to liberate Africans from colonial domination which takes the form of race discrimination and national oppression. As the revolution unfolds, however, we have come to recognise that the historic mission of the ANC is to emancipate all sections of the population, including the whites, from the chains of the feudalistic type of servitude that distinguishes the African social order.

This message is slowly penetrating the walls of isolation and superiority that the racists created to perpetuate their monopoly of power. Under the impact of the revolution, some members of the white community are reaching out to include black students in what were formally, until recently, exclusively involving white schools. This racial departure primarily private church schools began in the Western Cape. It has been echoed in the action taken in two major white universities of Witwatersrand and Capetown. They have started discussion with the ANC in an attempt to undergo an internal change corresponding to the upheaval against the apartheid system.

These universities, together with groups of students in some Afrikaaner institutions, together with a number of church leaders, have begun to pose the question whether it is possible for the exclusively white universities to prepare for the new society which looms ahead. What can they do, they ask, to "Africanise" themselves, to promote the integration of Africans, Coloureds and Indians on campus - the classroom among lectures and the administration? To provide meaningful answers, the revolutionary movement must arrive at a clear undertaking of what it has in mind for the re-shaping of education under majority rule.

A simple answer is to insist that there must be a correction to the enormous imbalance that exists today between whites and blacks - in the field of education. A liberated South Africa will insist that the doors of learning should be opened to citizens of all races. This is an essential goal, but is only the start of a long process of changing the outlook and habits inculcated by generations of discrimination and oppression.

If all the universities in South Africa were thrown open to admit black students who wish to study for higher degrees, how many would qualify? Under the existing system which limits the number of students who graduate with a secondary school certificate to approximately thirty thousand (1983) out of a total of eighty-seven thousand admitted to Standard 10, these enrolment made up only 1,6% of all African schools.

Africans have shown an enormous enthusiasm for schooling. The enrolment figures for 1983 were 3,146,666 in lower primary classes, 1,399,555 in higher primary, making the total of 4½ million in primary schools as compared with 1 million in secondary schools, and a total of 5½ million enrolled in all standards. This was an increase of 4,6% on enrolments in 1982.

The steep rise in the number of African pupils has far outstripped the provision made for their education. Random samples of standards 9 and 10 pupils show that 40% do not have teachers for all subjects at school, or textbooks for all their school subjects; 52% do not have access to a library and 5% have between 70 and 80 pupils in their classes.

The major reason for poor performance of African pupils is the absence of a sound educational foundation, the insufficient pre-primary school facilities, the double-session system and the poverty of the households from which the students come.

The most serious deficiency, however, results from discrimination in the allocation of resources. The state expenditure on pupils of the various racial groups in 1983/84 amounted to R166 per African pupil, R501 per Coloured, R965 per Indian and R1,511 per White. These figures exclude capital expenditure. With it included, the per capita expenditure on an African child is R234 and R1,654 per White child.

Our alternative education will set out to eliminate this gross inequality and to provide the same facilities for pupils of all national groups. That is an objective for the achievement of which the entire population will be mobilised under a people's government. Our target is free, equal and compulsory education with the establishment of the democratically-elected SRCs.

These objectives can be attained only if the state increases enormously the expenditure on the education of black pupils, the construction of well-equipped classrooms with laboratories, well-qualified teachers in all subjects and a radical transformation in relations between students, parents, teachers and education authorities.

Much more is required, however, for an alternative system of education. Generations of white supremacy have set an indelible mark on curricula, textbooks, teacher training and instruction of pupils. They operate within the framework of racist determinism under apartheid. How are they to be liberated from the straitjacket of racism?

A necessary step towards this end is the introduction of political education to take the place of the familiar "Civics", a subject used to indoctrinate children of all national groups with the ideology of apartheid.

Our alternative education system will provide compulsory political instruction at all levels along the lines developed in our military academic and educational establishments. This syllabus will include the history of our struggle, the origin and aims of our revolution and the elementary principles of political economy under capitalism and socialism.

To achieve our revolutionary objectives, the alternative system of education must establish links with the great Oriental civilisations of India, China, Japan and their offshoots in South-east Asia. The Westernised bias of the education system both in schools and universities will have to be changed so as to provide students with adequate knowledge of achievements and problems of planned economies in the socialist countries.

The elimination of apartheid must surely include a break-through out of the narrow confines of the white-dominated society which is entrenched and alienated from the rest of the world.