

2. DISASTER BENT

We could be forgiven for thinking that the South African Government has deliberately decided to copy the lemmings and embark on a course of national suicide. Early 1987 has seen it saying "No!" to talking to the ANC, "No!" to listening to the National Education Crisis Committee, "No!" to the Indaba, "No!" to the repeal of the Group Areas Act and "No!", in the most humiliating manner possible, to its only Coloured ally's swim on a 'white' beach.

It has seen it, more than once, rush out new Emergency proclamations in the middle of the night to block loopholes in old ones and to subvert a series of important Court judgements. These judgements had restored considerable credibility to the judicial system and at least partially reinstated the Courts in their role as defender and protector of the individual against state intrusions on his rights. It has

seen Mr Pik Botha spending as much of his time attacking the United States as he has ever done attacking the Soviet Union.

Is all this the inevitable response of Nationalist Afrikanerdom to sanctions? Is it saying to the world "There is nothing worse you can do to us now, so to hell with you. We will do as we like, and damn the consequences?" It would seem so. Against this bleak background the one bright spot has been the decision of Mr Wynand Malan, M.P., Dr Denis Worrall and other prominent Nationalists not to take the suicide course, and to resign from the Party. For the first time a number of Nationalists are leaving the NP because it is too reactionary and not, as has invariably been the case in the past, because it was becoming too 'liberal'. We must now wait to see, if there are enough of them for their defections to restore some sanity to Government actions.□

by Tony Morphet

"PEOPLES EDUCATION : WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED?"

Resistance to Bantu Education has been continuous and sustained for 30 years and more. The system has never won the support of the people who have been compelled to use it. Over the period the expression of the resistance has changed from the early reluctant compliance and strategic use of the resources, to outright rejection and revolt - the latter particularly over the last ten years. As yet the response of the State shows no sign of a willingness to relinquish its grip, nor to reorganise its position. The De Lange Report, which was the most significant attempt at reform, failed to achieve even its limited goals. A measure of the current position of the State is given in the "notice" published by the President under the Public Safety Act (December 1986) which makes any form of "alternative" education **within** the schools punishable by fines of R4 000 or two years imprisonment.

But the coercion of the State shows, better than any analysis, the degree to which it has lost the battle for educational authority. Since 1976 it has been driven steadily back from any claim to being the legitimate source of educational policy. The bid for legitimacy was the *raison d'être* of the reform movement and that is now plainly in ruins.

It is the disintegration of the framework of legitimacy which has caused the breach into which the new proposals for alternative education policies have moved. The State continues to exist as a coercive military/political unit, but where the policy making source for the society should be, there is little more than a vacuum. In an important sense, for Black people at least, there is no educational policy - only an imposed order.

Peoples Education is the most prominent grouping which has moved into the open space and it is busy working with the issues of policy, without having the political capacity to implement its decisions through an established legislative process. The movement openly and explicitly anticipates that, within a reasonable period of time, it will gain the necessary political capacity through the formation of a new state authority. At the present it appears as a part of the embryo of the new order.

The starting point for any examination and critical understanding of the movement must be its problematic political position. It is a necessary and constructive attempt to respond to the disintegration of the authority of the apartheid state; and it is part of an effort to build a new and

legitimate authority – in education first and later in the political state as a whole – and it is this position which sets the basic agenda of the movement.

There appear to be three principal overt thrusts:-

- to win and hold the support of the broad mass of the people through entry into the education conflict and its policy vacuum;
- to develop an educational policy which will meet the needs of the mass constituency;
- to direct the educational programme towards the construction of a new political order which will express the will of the people.

Behind these, though, there are other equally important, but covert, concerns, among the most important of which are maintaining strategic relations with the main political powers contending for the authority of the State – the Government on the one hand; the A.N.C. on the other.

Moreover, the movement is locked tightly into a “progressive” dynamic. It must be able to demonstrate visible advances to its constituency. The moment it begins to lose its forward momentum its support will begin to fragment and fall away.

It is under these conditions (or something approximating them) that one can put the central question “What can be expected from the movement in the form of educational change?”

Given reasonably favourable conditions (i.e. relative stability and a tolerable level of state harassment) there are important positive answers to be registered at the outset.

The movement will win support from students and, more especially, parents. At a recent education conference Fanyana Mazibuko spoke vividly of the roots of Peoples Education in the deep yearning of the people for an education which was **theirs**; which they could depend upon to nourish, support, enlighten and advance them. The yearning is nothing new since the mission schools tapped the same source. What is new is the intensity of the feeling, spurred as it is by the denial and deformation of Bantu Education, and now by the hope of some form of change after the bitter struggles of the last decade. Support will spring from these roots.

And the support will have immediate value because it will establish the movement as a focus of coherence in a very turbulent and anarchic environment. It is reasonable to hope, if not to expect, that the movement will be able to re-establish the idea of learning as a valued activity. It must be recognised that there are large and important areas of the country in which this has all but disappeared among students. In the brutalisation which children have suffered, learning, for many, no longer carries any positive significance, much less being seen as an activity in which to invest time and effort.

To sustain and develop the positive values of support, the movement will, however, have to be able to maintain its momentum with all the skill and resources at its disposal.

The second area in which one can expect significant advances to be made by Peoples Education is in the design of the school curriculum. Two conditions make this a very fertile field for development. The most obvious is the intellectual bankruptcy of the apartheid curriculum. The simple facts are that the existing curriculum (in both Black and White education) represents a systematic denial and

distortion of the daily experience of the majority of the people of the country. School learning is less about gaining knowledge and insight than it is about learning the rules of apartheid power. To introduce even the most self evident truths of daily experience into the curriculum will be a major advance. The field is open, and Peoples Education has already begun to mobilise the necessary intellectual resources to reconstitute the full range of school subjects in terms of a fresh interpretation of South African reality. The re-interpretation of history is the most obvious need and the work is already far advanced, but a good deal has been done in other fields as well including Science and Mathematics, Geography, Biology and English.

Whether Peoples Education will be able to implement the new curricula directly, depends on the problematics of its political position, but even if this is not immediately possible the importance of the work must not be underestimated. As resources for the future the new formulations and materials will have great value.

The third area in which we can look for advance is the policy basis for a new educational system. This is by far the most difficult field in which to work, not only because it is contentious, but because it is subject to so many variables and constraints. The movement has taken steps to begin the assessment of policy options from the ground up, by instituting a programme of baseline research. This involves everything from demographic projections to the assessment of potential financial resources, and it focusses on the possible dimensions of a national system.

Research is necessary because the existing information about education fits the skewed designs of the apartheid framework and fresh enquiry within a new framework will certainly reveal different dimensions to the problems and the possible solutions. But research will itself provide no answers to the policy issues. These require choices and it is here that Peoples Education will face severe difficulties.

Peoples Education is at present a populist movement. Its political predicament left it no option but the populist position. In terms of the social values of education this has meant a commitment to three basic value positions:

- education to meet the needs of the people
- education for equality
- education for the development of the economic and political life of the society under the democratic control of the people.

These constitute the ground rules of a populist position. The problem is that they cannot be coherently reconciled with a single policy. They are not, in any proper sense of the phrase, policy statements at all. They are gestures of good faith and signals of good intent. A policy position provides the framework within which rational and consistent choices can be made; and the three articles of the populist faith are aimed at avoiding just such choices.

But choices are inevitable and they will pose cruel dilemmas for the movement. South African society, like all others, and more obviously than most, is a historical creation, and it bears all the marks of a violent and radically uneven development. The “needs of the people” are not uniform; educating for equality means more than equal provision for all; the best education for social development may well mean unequal provision in denying some needs and oversupplying others.

These difficulties, which lie deep in the social historical inheritance, are amplified and exacerbated by the constraints of limited resources. Finances have strict limits; educational resources are seriously underdeveloped and distributed in grossly uneven ways. Sound policy requires that these conditions be carefully weighed against the perception of "needs".

The broad promises of a populist movement are therefore only the first step towards a new educational order. To build and hold the broadest possible support the movement naturally tries to avoid the necessary choices for as long as possible. It is this fact which lies behind the repeated statement from spokespersons that Peoples Education is a "process" not a "pre-designed programme". The point is made to stress the fact that the key choices have not been made – and that possibly some way can be found in which "the people" themselves will make them.

But this is disingenuous, despite the elaborate democratic rhetoric of mandates and elections. Such decisions are made by a political leadership and the difference lies in whether they are made openly or in secret. Populism can serve as the manipulative device of a secretive leadership or the opening of the way to a new democratic order. It is no answer in itself.

What we may expect in the form of educational change turns, therefore, in the end on the political character of the movement. This is neither easy to grasp nor to define because it is carefully masked by both the populist and the educational rhetoric. At least three traditions make their presence felt within the vocabulary of the movement. There is a clear socialist frame of reference but it is diffused within (and sometimes contradicted by) at least two other traditions – the nationalist and the liberal.

These three traditions have been in contest within South African political and educational practice since at least the early part of this century and they have played different, and important, roles in the development of South African educational practice.

The socialist tradition has been principally preoccupied with the recruitment and training of (black) working class leadership groups. As a corollary to this small-scale intensive educational endeavour, the socialist political programme has always been predicated upon the necessity for the leadership to define, for the mass following, the proper political steps to take along the road to the achievement of a socialist South Africa. South African socialism has long been characterised by both the high levels of abstraction in the theoretical debates between intellectuals, and the huge gulf between the intellectual culture of the leadership and the survival culture of the Black working class. The consequent effects in the socialist framework are a strong stress on the authority of the leadership, and on the need for rank and file discipline. Socialism, as a result, is generally understood to be the product of a planned society in which the planning is undertaken by those who by gifts and training have a deeper understanding of "the needs of the people". It implies centralised state authority.

That this relationship between mass and leadership is latent within the populism of Peoples Education does not need to be stressed. What does require stress is the point that any concerted move toward a socialist programme requires a re-definition of "the people" and their role. Under such

conditions the function of "the people" becomes the mere validation of the plans of the leadership – a scenario by now well established from East Germany to China.

The second tradition evident in the populism of Peoples Education is nationalism. "The people" (or "die volk") is a key concept within the nationalist framework and Volksonderwys was as well known to deprived Afrikaners in the 1930's as Peoples Education is to the deprived Black people now. Nationalism's answer to the key problems of choice is to provide a very strict **and very limited** definition of "the people". In the nationalist universe "the people" are those who can be said by birth, blood and belief to share in an exclusive inheritance. Anyone else is, by definition, not of the people and therefore a real or potential enemy. Thus resources are delivered to the chosen ones and support lies in the tight bonds of patronage interpreted through the semi-mystical categories of "the people".

South Africa understands nationalism better than most other countries. We have seen it at work, close up, for forty and more years. It is the social mechanism through which a minority group mobilises mass support to force their entrance into the full power and benefits of the society.

There are powerful nationalist themes in Peoples Education. The leadership is drawn from the same disadvantaged, educated, urban, petty bourgeois, class which mobilised for their own benefit the Afrikaner poor. Their strategies and their rhetoric are uncomfortably similar. The movement begins as something for all of the people but the definitions shift, and the broad promises of the movement are delivered ultimately to only a very few. Nationalism depends as much upon denial and exclusion as upon inclusion and reward – as Black people know to their cost.

The third tradition – the liberal – is at once the most pervasive and the most elusive presence in the formulations of Peoples Education. The promises of the liberal tradition are unspectacular and its capacity to mobilise support among severely disadvantaged people is minimal. It has nothing to say about the rapid transformation of educational and social structures nor is it able to produce a comprehensive theoretical plan of action. In South African terms the tradition has been deeply compromised by its close linkage with the history of white social and economic power and it has failed to halt the excesses of Afrikaner nationalism.

Nonetheless, when the full case against the tradition is granted, there remains a very important record of achievement and a form of engagement which yields a great deal. In education the liberal tradition has been preoccupied with broadening the definitions of "needs" and with small-scale incremental extensions of educational opportunities. The most obvious examples include the mission schools and colleges, the adult night schools and the "open" universities. All of these attempts fell victim to the narrowing Afrikaner definitions of "the people" but their influence remains important even 35 years later. Liberal educational practice is directed towards drawing marginal and excluded groups into a central common society and it follows the liberal political principle of incorporation of plural groups into a common political structure. Liberal approaches tend to be pragmatic though not uncritical in their acceptance of the importance of established institutions and practices and they lay more stress on

innovation and development than on radical transformations.

In considering the dilemmas of choice facing Peoples Education the liberal response is guided by the two central commitments of liberal political theory – that each person should enjoy liberty commensurate with the fact that such enjoyment does not deprive another of his liberty and that social resources should be employed to maximise the position of the least well-off persons in the society.

Taken together, these principles point toward a very open educational system in which a wide variety of resource inputs (private/public/parastatal) would be drawn together within a multi-path system designed to serve a number of different sectors of the population in different ways. The goals would be to maximise the volume of resources available for education and to stimulate the innovative capacities of the system as a whole. In the use of state

resources planners and administrators would be obliged to demonstrate the ways in which their programmes would maximise the position of the least well-off.

The liberal tradition in South Africa, in both politics and education, has been dominated by white people and Eurocentric perspectives, but there is no reason why this should be seen as something intrinsic to liberal thinking. Indeed, as Charles Simkins has recently argued, liberal traditions have taken deep root among Black South Africans. In the political formulations which must follow the populist origins of Peoples Education, it is not unreasonable to hope that liberal educational thought and practice will find a new group of proponents, new perspectives, and a new base of authority, within South Africa. The dangers inherent in a state centralised system, whether constructed on a nationalist or a doctrinaire socialist platform, are too serious to allow the liberal case to go by default.□

by M. van Wyk Smith

WHAT ARE WE EDUCATING THEM FOR?

A few months ago I was invited to address final-year students in the Rhodes University Faculty of Education. In a country where and at a time when education has become the very locus – indeed, a major issue – of ideological division and the struggle against repression, the topic on such an occasion dictated itself.

Within a few months of my talk, almost everyone of the young people before me would be standing in front of a classroom, and amid the chaos of settling in, preparing lessons, finding where the register, the chalk and the stationery were kept, coaching the swimming team, editing the school magazine, organizing the PTA, and marking 30 essays twice a week – amid all this one would hope that at least at the back of their minds there would be a persistent still small voice asking: “What are we educating them **for?**”.

I hoped that I would insult everyone in my audience if I were to have suggested that they might have been under the misapprehension that in January 1987 (or whenever) they would all walk into the sunny, smiling classrooms of South Africa, ready to impart wisdom.

Most of them knew that the reality was far otherwise, but the subject seemed worth pursuing, and readers of **Reality** might like to share these thoughts.

For a start, many of South Africa's classrooms are at this time cold and closed, locked up because of intransigence on the one hand, rejection on the other, and naive notions of education on both sides. “Revolution now, education later”, or “Pass one, pass all” or “Education of the people, by the

people for the people” rank about equal in naivety and intellectual stultification with old faithfuls such as: “Separate but equal education”, “Keep politics out of education”, and “Christian National Education” (which, as Ernie Malherbe pointed out many years ago, is neither Christian, nor national, nor education).

So the very first, and I should say the very least, task to which a new generation of teachers has to commit itself is to open up all the classrooms, physically and spiritually, to a new order, a new concept of an open society, and a new compassion among all South Africans. Their predecessors have failed to solve the problems; they and the children they will be teaching will have to do better; they can hardly do worse.

But not all the classrooms are locked up. What's happening in those (or at least some of them) that are open? The week before my talk Herman Gilliomee had quoted in his regular column in the **E.P. Herald** a speculation by Ken Harts-horne (perhaps this country's most respected authority on Black education) that by now irredeemable damage has been done to a large proportion of the black schoolgoing generation, expressed by the fact that only 7% of Soweto matric candidates last year were successful. A concept of education, based on rote learning and developed in a context of frustration, demoralization, and contempt for the very educational system itself, has emerged which makes its pursuit, even among the willing, virtually pointless.

In certain areas – certainly in the Eastern Cape, heartland of Rhodes University – 1987 will mark the third consecutive year