

CONTROL IN THE S.A. SCHOOLING SYSTEM

A talk by Paddy Kearney at Natal University, Pietermaritzburg

Introduction:

In this talk, I'm not going to elaborate those aspects of the S.A. school system which you are very familiar with, and which reflect fascist concern with control, e.g. the obsession about length of hair, uniforms, keeping a rigid control of syllabuses, compulsory attendance at or participation in sport, cadets, assemblies of an authoritarian kind, youth preparedness courses, etc., etc. We have all suffered from some or all of these.

Nor is there need to say much about the fact that pupils have virtually no say over the control of schools. Even the authority of prefects is an extension of staff authority — a kind of police authority — rather than pupil representation in decision-making. Those very few Principals who have made an attempt to set up some form of joint pupil and staff Council have fared very badly — think e.g. of Chris Hurley, the Headmaster of Thomas More and Maurice Lewis, the Headmaster of Inanda Seminary, both of whom were summarily dismissed from their posts over the last 12 months.

None of these aspects of schooling is surprising in a country where the state keeps as rigid a control over its citizens as does the S.A. Government.

S.A. Teachers' Council for Whites

I would however like to devote some attention to the so called "S.A. Teachers' Council for Whites" about which much less has been heard. There has also been very little debate about it both because most teachers do not seem to be very political animals, and because they are not permitted (by law) to make public statements.

As you may know, each profession is controlled by its own professional Council, drawn from elected members of the profession e.g. The Nurses' Council, the Medical and Dental Council, etc. These Councils discipline their members, and decide upon the training and admission of members. Well, of course, the teachers want to have similar status — they would like to be regarded as professionals and so they have started their own Council — and a very strange creation it is indeed.

The purpose of the Council is described in the following words in the Handbook:

"The object of the Council is to uphold and promote esteem for education and the teaching profession and the prestige of those who are engaged in the teaching profession."¹

They make the rather presumptuous claim:

"For the first time South African teachers now have a professional teachers' Council — a fact which brings the teaching profession into line with the other professions."²

There are two comments I would like to make:

1. A very odd way to gain prestige for the teaching profession is to ask teachers to sign on as members before the Teachers' Code had actually been finalized! I'm told that precisely two teachers refused to sign in the whole of Natal — one in Durban, and one in Pietermaritzburg. All the rest went quite happily to meet their fate — being thoroughly disciplined and controlled civil servants! They signed what was virtually a blank cheque. One was heard to say rather mournfully afterwards, when some of the implications became apparent to him, "But why didn't the Natal Teachers' Society tell us not to sign?"
2. It seems to me that the establishment of the S.A. Teachers' Council for Whites has not only caused a further loss of esteem for teachers in the way suggested above — but has actually caused teachers to step even further **out** of line with other professions. A very important feature of all other professional Councils in South Africa is that they are open to **all** races. Isn't it unforgivable that the Teachers' Council — established in **1978** — is racially exclusive. In the first press conference given by the Council, the reason given for this racial exclusivity was stated thus: "In essence education and teaching are culture-bound and it is only logical that this should be borne in mind in the organisation of education"³ — a statement which has the authentic ring of Christian National Education philosophy, but which is hardly in keeping with the concept of education appropriate in a world that has become a 'global village'.

It's interesting to note from the **Wilkins and Strydom** book **The Super Afrikaners** that seven members of the S.A. Council of Teachers for Whites as listed on pages 4 and 5 of the Councils' **Hanbook** are members of the **Broederbond**. Most appropriately the Chairman of the Council, Mr J. D. V. Terblanche is a Broederbond member.⁴

I think we should hold in esteem those teachers who refuse to join this racially exclusive Council. Our esteem will not help them very much because if they continue to teach without having registered with the Council they will be subject to a fine of R100 and/or three months' imprisonment!⁵

Black teachers will, doubtless, have their own Teachers' Council, but for the present, at least those who are Zulus, have to contend with the pressure exerted on them to become members of Inkatha if they wish to hold onto their jobs. And Zulu pupils have compulsory lessons on Inkatha to match the lessons white children have on Jeugweerbaarheid.

The Teachers' Council further entrenches the non-professional nature of teaching, by continuing to require that teachers shall only use the "correct channels" to make complaints or representations. These, in case you don't know, are precisely the same channels as those customary for public servants. In practice this means that a teacher may not enter or communicate with "Natalia", the headquarters of the N.E.D. without the express permission of his/her Headmaster. What if you want to complain about that Headmaster? Clearly the control system is designed so that you may not.

During the year that has seen the establishment of the Teachers' Council, there has been another pernicious development which has further reduced whatever self-esteem teachers might formerly have had. They are now subject to assessment by senior colleagues and their heads, not only on their teaching ability (which would be forgivable), but, amongst other things, on "character" and such vague categories as "the teacher in society" from which it is not clear whether the teacher's morality, political views or ability at cocktail parties is up for assessment! The reason generally given for this assessment is that merit awards are now being made in the form of salary increments. In fact this assessment has given a marvellous opportunity for putting each teacher under the microscope and reminding them that some form of Big Brother is watching.

The Teachers' "Code of Conduct"

In the preamble to the "Code of Conduct" which teachers accept when they join the Teachers' Council, they pledge themselves "to honour and obey the laws of the country,"⁶ I need hardly emphasize how easily a teacher of English or History or even Religion might fall foul of such a clause.

The Christian National character of education receives due mention in the Code. In a section significantly entitled "Credo" teachers are said to practise their calling "in an awareness that education in this country is founded on the Bible" and to accept "that education has a broad national character".⁷

In keeping with Christian Nationalism is the statement that "a teacher accepts the principle that the school serves the community and respects the customs and codes of the community as far as this is educationally justifiable."⁸

The qualification is very interesting — why 'educationally justifiable' and why not 'morally' or 'ethically'? In any case, it sounds like a clause which could lead to the downfall of any teacher who interprets her task as one of assisting young people to become critical and compassionate citizens.

Origins of the Teachers' Code

Despite the comments I have made about the Code, it's actually on the surface not nearly as bad as I had expected, after seeing several of the drafts which were circulated among Teachers' Societies. A Professor of Education who attended the C.N.E. Conference in Durban commented that at least some of the speakers were using the opportunity to tell the "faithful" to play it cool at the moment, and clearly C.N.E. is played cool in the Code. The draft versions drew far more heavily on the type of philosophy enunciated in the H.S.R.C. Report on "Differentiation".⁹ In Chapter 14 of this document (an accepted national policy document, signed by representatives of all Provinces) C.N.E. aims are spelt out very clearly. I would like to give you a few examples, in the belief that this sort of philosophy is actually what lies behind the rather bland statements I have already quoted from the Code:

"... the white population of the Republic of South Africa has, over the course of three centuries, emerged with a communal aim which may serve as a broad foundation for moulding the young in such a way that they will achieve self-realization and render service to their fellow-men, country, nation and their God".¹⁰

"The South African attitude to life is characterised, among other things, by striving after the **retention of identity**, which implies that the South African national groups must, in the first place, retain, preserve and amplify their identities, which means that each South African who considers South Africa as his own country, and trusting in this, wishes to rear his issue, will give expression to separation of national groups in some form or other. **This national characteristic attitude to life is of a Christian nature**, and this means that those who prefer to be South Africans automatically throw in their lot with the inhabitants of the Republic of South Africa, and this goes deeper than language, deeper than descent; it culminates in the future. The white South African accordingly sees his attitude to his fellow-man in the light of the Word of God and grants his fellow-man, irrespective of race or colour, a living space of his own, in which his identity and culture can come into their own."¹¹

"In the first place education with a national stamp and national values and norms aims at focussing the attention on that which is specifically unique to this particular country, viz. the Republic of South Africa. In view of this it is the aspiration of the White population to **guard their identity** without sacrificing the necessary respect for the other national groups and the granting of reasonable living conditions to them. For this reason Whites are confronted with an ideological conception which affects their whole lives in the sense that each must labour to fulfil this ideal for the generations which follow.

However, on the strength of the fact that the entire nation must be fed and cared for from the heart of this country, education of a national character must concern itself with educating the young to **render service born out of gratitude** to only **one** particular country and nation, i.e. the Republic of South Africa and its citizens. It is only by means of the formal and formative education of the young towards conceiving the unqualified love, pride and trust as facets of sacrificing their all that they, as future citizens, will be prevented from flinching when they are required to shoulder the responsibility implicit in being a South African. This also entails a responsibility of taking up a discriminative and evaluative standpoint as regards occurrences abroad which may be of intimate concern to the country."¹²

Finally, it can be stated that education which is primarily Christian and national in character will mean that South Africans will be satisfied with nothing less than that their children should be moulded as future citizens. This implies that they have become acquainted with society's current demands of propriety and that they have been apprised of the generally accepted values. This being the case, it would seem that formative education is a vehicle for moulding the conscience according to the South African hierarchy of values, on the basis of which the child will one day display the characteristics of adulthood."¹³

I noticed with amazement that this document carries the signature of Dr G. Hosking, the present Natal Director of Education. Perhaps he should be challenged to say whether these are in fact still his views on education or whether they ever were and if not, how he brought himself to sign the document! Teachers who signed the unseen Code of Conduct and who joined a racially segregated Teachers' Council without making the slightest protest might be forgiven when they have been given such an example from above.

Control Looked at More Deeply

But I would like to look at the issue of control in education in a way that goes much deeper than tracing elements of Christian national education or the influence of the Broederbond and which transcends national boundaries. Here I will be drawing on criticisms that the "deschoolers" have put forward, and that have been most radically and eloquently expressed by Ivan Illich.¹⁴ In the time available,

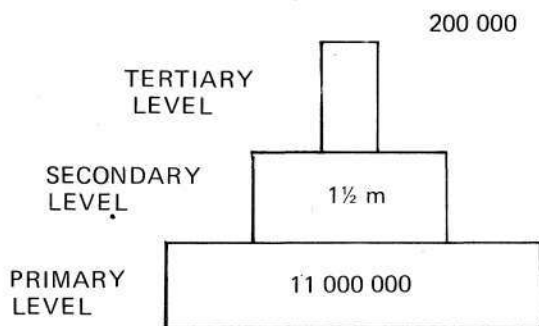
I can only select a few of these; and make only brief reference to each.

1. Compulsory schooling is a denial of the rights of free assembly:

Illich reminds his reader that one of the fundamental human rights is the right of free assembly, and that this right is denied by a law which **compels** people to gather. Such a law is the compulsory schooling law. Of course in a society where there is no right of free assembly, the gathering of pupils at school can be quite a useful opportunity for mobilizing, as students in Soweto have discovered!

2. Schooling as a form of regressive taxation:

There is clear evidence from all over the world that schooling operates as a form of 'regressive taxation' i.e. the poor pay the most and get the least out of it, while the converse is true of the rich. Let me give you an example to show what I mean and just for a change it's drawn from Brazil. In Brazil in 1967 there were 11 000 000 children in primary school, about 1½ m in high school, and just over 200 000 in tertiary education, figures which could be made more graphic by the following pyramid:



The South African figures for the same year (all races combined) were: Primary – 2½ million; Secondary – 500 000; Tertiary – 200 000.¹⁵

There are three main points to be made about these statistics:

- i) Sociologists have demonstrated the closest possible correlation between parental income and the position reached by the child in this educational 'pyramid'.
- ii) The bulk of the taxes which provide for education for the relatively few who get to secondary school and the very few (1 in 55) who get to tertiary education are paid by the parents of the 11 m. children, the majority of whom drop out at some stage during primary school.
- iii) The type of schooling in primary schools does not give rise to critical thought. It does however prepare people for obedient, subservient positions in factories. Some critical thought might be introduced in high school, and more at the tertiary level, and it is from these levels especially the tertiary, that professional and political leadership is drawn.

By and large, then, the schooling system operates as a marvellous way of controlling the majority in any country, especially the poor in a third world country. The poor actually subsidize the attainment of positions of privilege by the wealthy; they assist them to reach those positions from which they will be able to control the destinies of the poor!

3. Schooling has a monopoly over the resources available for education:

In order to ensure that this system of control works, it is necessary that all the financial and other resources available for education are monopolized by the school. This is of course the case in all countries. If a person wishes to learn then resources can only be obtained if that learning is done in or through a school. You cannot get state money to learn on your own, however successfully you may be able to do that. You can also get this money to learn at school during one specific age range, generally 6-16.

4. Only the certificated may get jobs:

But there's another loophole that must be blocked if the control system is to work. Only those who can prove by means of a certificate that they have sat in a certain way for a certain number of hours each week before a duly certificated teacher, can be admitted to jobs. It won't help you at all if you can prove you have the skill needed for the job (however you might have acquired this; at home, from parents, friends or even on your own). You must acquire that skill in an institution approved by the state – viz. the school.

5. The 'hidden' curriculum':

Illich holds that it is a waste of time simply tampering with externals of schooling e.g. changing the curriculum, making the school building more attractive, hiring jollier teachers, reducing class size, etc. This is why I said earlier that we need to pursue our analysis beyond C.N.E. or the control of the Broederbond (significant as each is on its own and in combination). There is a message that is communicated by the very existence of schooling, even for those who never get inside its gate (and that by the way is 2/3 of the world's population).¹⁶ This message is that some places are educational and some are not; that some age spans are educational and most are not; that to prepare for adulthood in society the only way is through 12 years of compulsory schooling; that only a few are worthy of such schooling – the majority are not; that if you are one of those who does not survive you do not deserve the "goodies" that are available in society because you were tried and found wanting – to put it more bluntly – because you are too stupid. The very existence of schooling makes people distrust their capacity to learn on their own or from peers outside an institutional framework.

6. Schooling leads to the alienation of the learner from her learning:

In the schooling process, the young child of six who is a natural questioner and explorer is put in an institution where the message is communicated quite clearly – don't trust your own questioning – we know the questions in which you should be interested, and will deal with those questions at the time we think appropriate. Knowledge is given out in little 40 min. doses. Even if the child has become interested in one of these doses – let's say a geography lesson, when the bell rings for maths that child must quickly alter her interest. Thus an alienation takes place between the learner and knowledge which is, of course, an excellent preparation for their work. But I'm sure you can see that people are actually drilled in school not to be independent seekers after knowledge. If they were to be self-seekers this would be far too subversive. And so in this way too schooling operates as a control system.

7. Schooling reproduces the established order:

Basically Illich sees the school as supporting the status quo, or reproducing the established order. Citizens, he says, "are schooled into their places".¹⁷ More graphically he describes school as "the advertising agency which makes you believe that you need the society as it is."¹⁸

The pattern of consuming instructions is learnt in the classroom and forms citizens who are "disciplined consumers of bureaucratic instructions ready to consume other kinds of services and treatments which they are told are good for them."¹⁹ Thus the highly destructive consumer style of life has its origin, according to Illich, in the classroom.

Conclusion

I hope I have convinced you of the need to look beyond Afrikaner Nationalism, the Broederbond and C.N.E. or even the politics of White survival if you want to come to an understanding of how school operates as a control system, and if you are concerned about genuine human liberation, I recommend very strongly that you study the writings of Paul Freire and Ivan Illich, in order to reach this deeper understanding. □

NOTES

- 1 South African Teachers' Council for Whites, **Handbook**, Pretoria, 1979, pg. 3.
- 2 Ibid pg. 4
- 3 South African Teachers' Council for Whites, **First Press Conference – 20th February 1978**, Pretoria, 1978, page 4.
- 4 Wilkins, I., and Strydom, H., **The Super Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond**, Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1978, pg 263.
- 5 S.A. Teachers' Council for Whites, **Handbook**, pg 18.
- 6 Ibid., pg 22.
- 7 Idem.
- 8 Idem.
- 9 Human Sciences Research Council, "**Report of the Committee for Differentiated Education and Guidance in connection with a national system of education at primary and secondary school level with reference to school guidance as an integrated service of the system of education for the Republic of South Africa and South-West Africa**," Pretoria, 1972.
- 10 Idem.
- 11 Idem.
- 12 Idem.
- 13 Idem.
- 14 Illich, I., **Deschooling Society**, Harper and Row, New York, 1972.
- 15 Simon, K. A., and Grant, W. V., **Digest of Educational Statistics (1971 Edition)**, U. S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, pg 130.
- 16 Reimer, E., **Second Annual Report of the Seminar on Alternatives in Education**, CIDOC, Cuernavaca (Mexico), 1969 pg 1.
- 17 Illich, I., **Celebration of Awareness**, Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1971, page 5.
- 18 Illich, I., **Deschooling Society**, pg 163.
- 19 Illich, I., "The Breakdown of Schools", **Journal of Research and Development in Education**, Spring 1972, pg 3.

THE MOFOLO – PLOMER PRIZE

1. The Mofolo-Plomer Prize (named after the writers Thomas Mofolo, 1877-1948, author of CHAKA and William Plomer, 1903-1973, author of TURBOTT WOLFE) is awarded for an unpublished novel or volume of short stories with a length of not less than 30 000 words written by a writer resident in southern Africa or a Southern African writer living abroad. Entries must be in English.
2. Two type-written copies of each entry must be submitted before 31 May 1979 to the Mofolo-Plomer Prize Committee, c/o Ad. Donker (Pty) Ltd, P O Box 41021, Craighall 2024
3. There is no age limitation for the 1979 prize and it is the intention of the Committee to encourage writers who are not yet established.
4. The prize is R500. – donated by Nadine Gordimer, the founder of the Prize, and three Johannesburg publishers (Bateleur Press, Ad. Donker and Ravan Press).
5. The names of the judges will be announced later.
6. The organisers regret that they cannot undertake to return entries without return postage, which should be enclosed in the form of a postal order or cheque. Nor can the organisers offer detailed criticisms of manuscripts received.

The Committee of The Mofolo-Plomer Prize is pleased to announce the awarding of the 1978 prize to the joint winners:

Deon Divigny for his novel, THE ISLAND OF THE BIRD and E. B. Lurie for his novel, THE BEGINNING IS ENDLESS

The judges were Athol Fugard and Ezekiel Mphahlele who made the choice out of 23 manuscripts submitted. The authors, both of whom come from Cape Town, will each receive R250.–

Previous Mofolo-Plomer winners were:

1976 Mbulelo Mzamane: MY COUSIN COMES TO JO'BURG

1976 Peter Wilhelm: AN ISLAND FULL OF GRASS

1977 J. M. Coetsee: IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY (published by Ravan Press and Secker & Warburg, London. Also won the CNA Literary Award 1977)

The 1979 Prize will be announced later this year and entries have to reach the Prize Committee by 31 May 1979. Two type-written copies of each entry should be sent to:

The Mofolo-Plomer Prize Committee
c/o Ad. Donker (Pty) Ltd
P O Box 41021
Craighall
2024

Entries sent to the previous address, c/o Ravan Press, will be forwarded to the Committee.