

RADICAL EDUCATION

Its implications for an understanding education in Developing Countries, and for Black education in South Africa.

by Peter Kallaway.

In the light of my recent survey of the new literature on radical educational thinking, I would like to attempt to evaluate the role of education in Third World development strategies and then proceed to comment briefly on the meaning of these trends for an assessment of the 'Bantu Education' system in South Africa.

Two questions have recently been receiving detailed attention by radical educationalists. Firstly it is being asked whether education in general, and the structure of Third World education systems in particular, promote or retard development; and secondly, whether Western style formal education is indeed a force capable of emancipating 'backward' lands from ignorance and poverty as is so frequently claimed.

The 1960's can be described as the decade of great expectations about the development potential of education, and 'most Third World nations have been led to believe or wanted to believe, that it is the rapid **quantitative** expansion of formal educational opportunities which holds the basic key to the future of national development. The more education, the more rapid the anticipated development.' The accent was laid upon manpower planning and an increase in 'human resources' in the post-colonial era, and universal education became the sacred cow of politics and 'social engineering'.

The expansion of educational services, it was claimed, would encourage 'modernization'; it would accelerate economic growth; raise standards of living amongst the masses; generate widespread and equal employment opportunities, and eradicate ethnic and tribal conflict. Yet the expectations placed on education as an 'engine for development' and social transformation have clearly been unreasonable, exaggerated and frequently false. The spending of hundreds of millions of dollars on elaborate planning, 'experts', centralization and bureaucratization, more schools, * teachers, curriculum reforms and teaching equipment, failed to produce the desired results. It is still an open question as to exactly what benefit, if any, has been gained by the mass of the people in most Third World countries as a result of the educational expansion of the post-independence era. Indeed a number of writers **have** questioned the relevance of education to development, or even gone further to ask whether education of the kind to be found in many Underdeveloped Countries is not frequently a definite obstacle to development.

Sanchez and Waters have argued that school systems in less developed countries (LDC's) as presently organized hamper the progress of economic development because they distort

*A staggering 30% of the Third Worlds population are involved in Education (Todoro p. 226).

investment alternatives open to government and to individuals; waste too much money on bureaucracy and plant (e.g. prestigious high schools and universities); and tend to act as bulwarks against progressive change rather than the opposite. Yet the commitment to the idea that schooling is an unqualified 'good' persists virtually unchallenged in western educational circles, and it is my contention that this is a dangerous myth in that it offers seductive but illusory prescriptions for 'desirable' social change, and omits to take cognizance of the real role of education as a mechanism for social control rather than as an instrument for promoting development. (See *The Crisis in Education. Current Radical Thinking*).

Although it would be foolish and naïve to place all the blame for the failure of development plans in many Third World countries on education, close scrutiny of educational strategies does reveal some of the symptoms of that failure. It is frequently argued that education does not succeed in promoting development because those in power lack sufficient know-how and are not in touch with current educational thinking and research. It is also suggested that the people themselves force unrealistic demands for formal education on reluctant politicians and administrators, and that these popular attitudes to education are outmoded, conservative and irrelevant to present-day conditions, serving as a brake on constructive educational innovation. Some have also held that what is needed in order to place education at the centre of development strategies is an emphasis on 'relevant', vocational and agricultural training, rather than formal education.

It is not possible here to enter into a lengthy critique of these views. They have been examined by a number of writers, and shown to be largely unsatisfactory explanations for the failure of education to promote development. If politicians do not have up-to-date information and advice at hand, this surely needs to be explained. Why do they not see to it that this advice is available? If the mass of people want formal education which supposedly does not lead to employment or social advancement—how are their attitudes to be explained? Is vocational education really the panacea to development planning?

Much more satisfactory explanations for the 'failure' of formal schooling to promote development are to be found if educational policy is seen in the context of the interests of the particular social groups in power. Educational policies are frequently determined by group interests rather than by the best current scientific insights into the education-economy nexus. In the post-colonial era, the group that has come to power and that occupies top professional,

government and administrative positions often “legitimizes (its position of) leadership on the basis of the achievement criteria obtained in an educational system identical to that of the metropole.”¹ and its interests are bound up with the preservation of the ‘standards’ which give very few newcomers access to the ruling group. ‘Adaptation’ of the education system would be a threat to the interests of the Elite group. Therefore, although formal education may not in fact be the best system to promote development, it is the best system for those who wish to strengthen and formalize their political, economic and social control of the society. “Formal education not only attempts to impart knowledge and skills to individuals to enable them to function as agents of economic change in their societies, it also imparts values, ideas, attitudes and aspirations which may or may not be in the nation’s best ‘developmental’ interests.”²

Educational reforms are frequently based on the myth that whatever the elite or ‘the experts’ consider to be good for everyone—indeed a response to the needs of the masses—will automatically lead to an improvement of the lot of the nation as a whole. This view denies the possibility of a real conflict of interests between those in power who formulate educational policies. and the mass of citizens. There is an unwritten assumption in much writing on Third World education that more education for the masses will automatically lead to an improvement of their economic position. Yet the results of schooling are frequently anything but beneficial to the majority of the people—indeed Carnoy claims that this kind of schooling frequently leaves the mass of people worse off than if they had had no schooling at all, because it actually helps to adapt them to the needs of the ruling class. Schools establish, and perpetuate a cultural hegemony for the dominant group in the minds of the dominated along the lines indicated by Freire. Carnoy has argued that “the failure of western education to produce a mass of innovative, highly trained and self-actualizing individuals (in Third World countries) was not a failure at all but the direct result of the colonizing function of schooling in a capitalistic (and colonized society”.

Even if schooling does indeed, even partially, assist in this process of manipulation, the whole traditional conception of education as a vehicle of social mobility for the mass of people must be seriously questioned. Education in many ex-colonial countries is extremely formal in character. ‘The ruling class’ vision of society and its interests are presented as if they were ‘objective’. The so-called ‘objectivity of knowledge’ is directed against the poor and the politically powerless. All children learn to evaluate society on grounds favourable to the rich and the powerful, i.e. in terms of middle class culture, values and attitudes. Lower class kids learn about their own reality—poverty, crime, unemployment—as individual failings, rather than the result of an inequitable, or perhaps racist, economy. (M. Carnoy: Education as Cultural Imperialism: a reply).

Carnoy stresses the role of schooling in legitimizing grossly unequal access to goods and services by ‘colonizing’ children and parents to believe in the brand of meritocracy implemented in schools. In short, far from promoting personal economic and political freedoms and liberal values, schools help to maintain hierarchical structures in society, and help to ensure that these formations are self-perpetuating.

¹“Education: An obstacle to Development” T. Harf et al.

²“Education and Development” M.P. Todaro

‘Reforms’ are always applied in such a way as to reinforce the *status quo*, and if one is to understand the true meaning of educational reforms of this nature it is essential to explore the “dialectical relationship between access to power and the opportunity of specific interest groups to legitimize certain dominant categories of knowledge and certain attitudes, (through the school system) and to examine the relationship between the access of certain groups to specific kinds of education, and their ability to assert power and control over others. It would clearly be naïve to expect the ruling class to initiate radical school reforms of the kind alluded to by Freire, for this would imply a surrender of power by those in control—something they could not be expected to agree to voluntarily.

It is however possible for ruling groups to meet some of the demands made for educational reform, because many of these changes can be seen to promote their own best interests, (i.e. more technicians, more skilled manpower to supply the needs of a modernizing economy) as long as they are controlled from above, and ‘as long as they do not challenge the basic relationships of production in the society, or diminish ruling class power.’ (M. Carnoy Educational Change: Past and Present)

It can therefore be argued that many Third World educational strategies do not in fact aim at objectives that are frequently taken for granted by liberal and humanitarian reformers i.e. education for ‘liberation’. Critical thinking is not rewarded; education does not significantly promote the life-chances of the majority of educands, of itself, but rather ‘domesticates’ them to accept the *status quo*; and schooling does not have the effect of equalizing and redistributing wealth and abolishing poverty, but leads to an increase rather than a decrease in class stratification.

The need is then to carefully examine political policies if educational strategies are to be fully understood, for the root of the failure of education as a spur to development is not to be sought in a detailed study of school curricula and methodology (although this can also be important)—but rather in the politics of those who formulate educational policy.

It is only when these truths are faced up to that educational theory and planning will assume its rightful and vital role in overall Development Policy. Finally I would like to make a few brief observations on the applicability of the above views to an analysis of the ‘Bantu Education’ system in South Africa.

It has recently been argued that current developments in the sphere of black education reveal signs of significant change in the society. The demonstrable and dramatic quantitative expansion of black education in recent years (± 1960–1975) in the area of expenditure per head, school-going total, and class distribution of formal education amongst black children, are said to illustrate that “the means to welfare and the means to power are being multiplied rapidly and distributed sufficiently beyond the white boundaries to justify our speaking of the presence of endogenous tendencies to ‘progressive’(?) modification” (or change) in the society.

Increased schooling facilities for blacks in South Africa are therefore interpreted as being a sign of an undeniable ‘good’ and a token of blacks coming to have greater opportunities for upward social mobility and a larger share of the economic cake by holding a more competitive position in the market place. This in turn, by implication, is seen to be a sign of the weakening of the racial oligarchical structure by allowing

more blacks to move into higher earning brackets, and therefore giving them greater leverage for stimulating 'progressive' political change. In the last count these changes are seen to demonstrate the erosion of apartheid by the *de facto* absorption of blacks into higher socio-economic categories in S.A., and changing their structural position of subservience in the society to a position based on merit.

These claims are surely much exaggerated, if not grossly erroneous. They view education purely in terms of the 'social engineer' approach and assume that **more** education equals something that is in itself better and more desirable for everyone, and that it is unquestionably a 'progressive force for change'. But if it cannot be proved that increased expenditure on education necessarily entails increased development, economic growth or social mobility for all the people in the society (see above), equally it cannot be argued that educational expansion is an index of the economic or socio-economic advance of any particular group.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, the growth of educational facilities amongst the poor may well suit the needs of ruling groups, without it entailing that they relinquish any of their power or control. As Freire has argued, it is **the nature of the education** that provides the index of its potential for development, not the number of people schooled or the amount of money spent.

The denial of the possibility of a conflict of interests over access to goods and services lies at the centre of this view and it seems to me that this is an assumption that cannot legitimately be made in the light of our current understanding of the economics of education or radical educational thinking.

The degree of sophistication of the BAD system of 'education for subservience' and manipulation can hardly be questioned, yet many liberals still claim that it provides the key to the future of black development!!□

THE BENT PINE

the trial of Chief Langalibalele by Norman Herd

(The Ravan Press Braamfontein R6,90)

reviewed by Ged Martin

In 1873 the Natal government, concerned at the influx of guns into the colony from the diamond fields, decided to make an example of Langalibalele, whose small amaHlubi tribe had been settled on the Bushman's river as a buffer against raids from the Drakensburg. Langalibalele evaded government attempts to bring him in, claiming later that he recalled an attempt by John Shepstone, brother of Somtseu (Theophilus) to kill Matyana, another chief, by a similar ploy in 1858. The amaHlubi began to make plans to withdraw into the Drakensberg, and colonial forces, supported by African levies, set out in a carefully drawn pincer move to pen the retreating tribesmen within Natal.

Unluckily for the grand strategy one half of the pincer was ordered to march through a pass which did not exist, while the other, under Major Durnford, lost its way and arrived, hungry and exhausted, after a gruelling detour. At the Bushman's River Pass they found the amaHlubi making good their getaway, with the younger men of the tribe exulting and taunting the Natalians. Mindful of the order which was soon to brand him as "Don't Fire" Durnford, and apprehensive of their discipline under restraint, the Major began to withdraw his men. Some of the amaHlubi fired on the tail, killing five men, two of them Africans.

Colonial revenge was speedy and brutal. Langalibalele's tribe was hunted down and smashed, and several hundred lives

lost in the process. For good measure, the nearby amaPutini, whose main offence had been to avoid the fray, were similarly scattered. For the fugitive chief himself a remarkable dragnet was cast by British, Boers, Blacks and Coloureds throughout south-eastern Africa. Five weeks after the affray at Bushman's River Pass, Langalibalele was led into exactly the trap he had feared, by the Sotho ruler Malopo.

Then followed the most bizarre pantomime of all, episodes which form the main part of Mr Herd's book. The Langalibalele affair had already fractured the twenty-year friendship between Theophilus Shepstone and Bishop Colenso. While most of white Natal stood amazed and not altogether happy at its restraint, Colenso and Durnford himself were horrified at the bloodlusting incompetence which had forced Langalibalele into an untenable position. The governor, Sir Benjamin Pine, decided to put the captured chief on trial. However, he could hardly be tried by English law, partly because the only offences which could be proved against him were minor, such as failure to enforce gun registration laws, but more pertinently, because Langalibalele's guilt had already been affirmed by proclamation, and his followers, real and imagined, severely punished. The trial was thus held under "Native Law", which was codified only in Shepstone's head. In practice however, "Native Law" took no cognisance of disputes involving Europeans, and the 'trial' was conducted with a confused mixture of English and