

# THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY BILL

## SOME COMMENTS FROM NATAL

by Prof. J. MacQuarrie

WHEN the four South African States gave up their relative independence and identity in 1909 and entered the Union as provinces, they retained control of certain services, of which the chief was education "other than higher", i.e. almost all education in their areas except university, technical and vocational education. The provinces have developed, or rather, continued to develop, their educational systems in the light of their own needs, their traditions and their general way of life.

But throughout the decades since 1909 the Cape and Natal, and the non-Nationalist element in the Transvaal, have watched developments with growing apprehension. They have seen their educational ideals and policies progressively eroded. They have seen the policies of a narrow Nationalism, and particularly of that peculiar and repellent movement misnamed Christian National Education, steadily and systematically introduced into South African education. First African, then Coloured and then Indian education have been removed from provincial control and provided in a centralised, circumscribed Nationalistic context. Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking children have been kraaled off, to an increasing extent, in separate schools. Mother-tongue instruction, whatever the wishes of the parents and, often, whatever the particular circumstances of the child, has been made compulsory in three provinces.

Now, as we write, the National Education Policy Bill, which carries the Nationalising process a good deal further, has passed its third reading in the House of Assembly. Its main purpose is to break the power of the provinces, to transfer control of White school educational policy-making from the provinces to the central Government, from the Provincial Councils to the Minister of Education, Arts and Science. The key clause reads: "The Minister may, after consultation with the Administrator and the [National Education Advisory] Council, from time to time determine the general policy which is to be pursued in respect of education in schools . . . within the framework of" certain principles which the Bill proceeds to define.

It will be noted that there is to be consultation. There is no provision that the Minister need act on advice. He is given full power "to determine the general policy" of any or all of the provinces.

Not that he is likely to get unpalatable advice from an Administrator or from the Advisory Council as long as Nationalism remains in power, and that looks like being a long time. Administrators are not likely to be recalcitrant; they are in our time invariably hand-picked, dyed-in-the-wool, trusty functionaries of the Nationalist hierarchy. The Advisory Council is certain to be equally reliable, equally docile. Each member of this new and no doubt improved edition of the 1962 Council is to be appointed by the Minister; its Chairman, its Vice-Chairman and its Executive Committee are all to be designated by him. If the unexpected should happen (and in this imperfect world it sometimes does), if a well-tested tool should turn in the Minister's hand, he is given wide powers for terminating membership — for misconduct, for unfitness or "if for reasons other than unfitness [the member's] removal from office will promote efficiency or economy".

To consider the ten principles. "Education shall have a broad national character." In the deepest and best sense our schools **do** have a broad national character. A visitor from, say, England or Australia will find that we have as heterogeneous a collection of schools as has any other country. St. Anthony's varies from Blikkiesdorp High or Brown Street Primary as much as does Eton from Camden Town Central. But our visitor will have no difficulty in perceiving that they are all distinctively South African. They can't avoid it; education is, unless interfered with, a manifestation of community life.

Education in, say, Britain has a "broad national character" in so far, at least, as we can tell a tree from its fruits. We think, for example, of the unity of the people fighting alone against Hitler in 1940. Yet Britain has in practice four distinct educational systems emphasising the four main distinct elements in the population — England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. And even these four divisions are again sub-divided. The true national spirit of a country is best fostered on a healthy regional basis and on a frank recognition of differences in history, tradition etc. We can't be good South Africans if we are not proud of ourselves, of our heritage; and some parts of our heritage in Natal differ, must necessarily

differ, from the heritage, say, of Afrikaans-speaking Transvaalers.

How does the Minister define his aim? "Education", he says, "should build on the ideal of national development of all citizens of South Africa, so that our own identity and way of life can remain safeguarded . . ." So far we are with him. We want to preserve our own identity and way of life; that is why we — as, say, in Wales and Northern Ireland — must have some differentiation in education. He continues: ". . . and so that the South African nation will continue to comprehend its task as a sub-section of Western civilisation." "Comprehend its task"? The phrase might have come straight from the tablets of the law, the policy statement on C.N.E. What the Minister and the Government mean by a "broad national character" is a "narrow Nationalistic character". If we must, as the Bill indicates, be made to conform to one standard, uniform, nation-wide pattern, we can be sure that it will be the Transvaal Nationalist pattern.

"Education", says the Bill, "shall have a Christian character." If this means what it says, it is superfluous. All our provincial schools have, and always have had, a Christian character. All our Provincial Councils have always made detailed legal provision for religious education in every class of every primary and secondary school. Then why bring this clause into the Bill? The only possible construction, unless of course the Minister is marking his approval of present practice, is that to Nationalist South Africa the present provisions are unsatisfactory. In Natal, for example, we have a conscience clause for teachers; a teacher may opt out of religious teaching and still teach, say, mathematics. Must that be changed? In principle and practice, there is freedom to Catholics, to Jews, to non-Calvinists etc. to abstain from classes held in religious education. In some areas Catholic schools are State-supported. Do such practices detract from the Christian character of the system? Are we here up against the crude precepts of Christian Nationalism for all? Is a Roman Catholic teacher of music or a Jewish teacher of typing "nothing less than the deadliest danger to us"? We are assured "that the religious convictions of the parents and the pupils shall be respected in regard to religious instruction and religious ceremonies". If this means what it says, then why attempt to change the prevailing arrangement?

Whatever the desires of the parents, "mother tongue, if English or Afrikaans, shall be the

medium of instruction". There must be few White children in South Africa who do not receive education through the tongue of the parents. Where one parent speaks English and the other Afrikaans there may, however, be undue pressure by what C.N.E. calls "the parents in community" to force a particular medium upon the child. Again, in many parts of South Africa Afrikaans-speaking parents may be in an English environment, or vice versa, and the child may be more familiar with the other language. Or again, the parents may have an enthusiasm for bilingualism, no unworthy ideal, and want the child to master the other tongue. Why should the parent be deprived of this, one of his inalienable rights, unless he is a criminal or imbecile? He has been deprived in the three other provinces. Now it appears to be Natal's turn.

Until the end of the second reading of the Bill the position of what we in Natal know as the government-aided schools has been obscure, but in his reply to the debate on the second reading, the Minister appears to have made clear the Government's intention. With the very few wholly-private schools such as Michaelhouse, Cordwalles and St. Anne's the Bill makes no attempt to interfere. But most of what are popularly called our private schools — the Convent High Schools in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, Epworth, St. Charles', St. John's, Hilton, Kearsney, Collegiate, Wykeham, Durban Girls' College, St. Mary's, Marist Brothers etc — are technically Government-aided schools. The list of names alone reminds us of how well the system has worked. These schools derive their revenue from pupils' fees, from donations, bequests etc., and from provincial grants. Thus, on the one hand, they have been enabled to supply an excellent education, to group the pupils in smallish classes, to provide praiseworthy amenities, and to build up enviable loyalties and traditions. On the other hand, the Province and indirectly the State, have been spared much of the expense of educating the pupils in these schools. The system, we repeat, has worked well.

But this type of private school — and it includes almost all the so-called private schools of the province — seems to be in danger. These schools will still be allowed to charge fees. But here comes the rub. Fees may be used for the "improvement of sports facilities, film projectors, library books over and above those provided by the State, mural charts, models and other visual aids". No fees, however, may be levied for the salaries of teachers, and at

present a proportion, possibly a large proportion, of the teachers in such schools receive no Government grants. We do not know to what extent the various schools are dependent on the Government grant for the payment of teachers. We can only conclude that the principle aims at embarrassing, or hindering, or crippling or destroying these schools.

"The parent community [is] to be given a place in the educational system through Parent Teachers' Associations, School Committees, Boards of Control, School Boards or in any other manner." The principle seems superfluous in that it is wide enough to cover the present practices of the different provinces. Three of the provinces have School Boards and Committees and Natal fosters Parent Teachers' Associations and similar organisations. But Natal, with some reason, fears School Boards and School Committees. There seems to be general satisfaction with the present varying systems of administration, and boards and committees are, to echo a well-worn C.N.E. phrase, foreign to our way of life. Also, "the parent community", the C.N.E. "parent in community", smacks of the parents regimented by the local Fuhrer or Party boss.

There will be universal agreement that "education must be provided in accordance with the ability, aptitude" (is there some subtle difference here?) "and interest shown by the pupil" and that "requirements as to compulsory education and the limits relating to school age must be uniform". A most unexceptionable principle. Extend it to all races and it will receive the approval of every Liberal.

Another principle aims at bringing about uniform conditions of service and salary scales. We here in Natal look with some distaste upon the possibility of conditions of service which, as in other provinces, may bring party politics into the classroom. In general, however, we should welcome uniformity in salary scales, leave conditions, completely-transferable pension rights and similar conditions of service. But such a principle could easily be implemented within the present framework and without disturbing the essential autonomy of the provinces. Yet another principle aims at "co-ordination on a national basis of syllabuses, courses and examination standards". We should welcome the co-ordination of examination standards, but the co-ordination of syllabuses and courses in, say, history offers us the most alarming of prospects.

The central and fundamental evil of the Bill, however, is the usurpation from the provinces

of the right to control education. The people of Natal should protest and resist in every way open to them. We quote from a man who is both a true son of Natal and a true son of South Africa, Edgar Brookes. If the people of Natal are not ready to protest, "they deserve what is coming to them. They are selling their own children and grandchildren down the river for the sake of immediate peace and comfort for themselves. As for the provincial system by which Natal has set so much store, there will soon be nothing left except the building of hospitals and the preservation of crocodiles. With the loss of control of education goes its main function."

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## HAVE WE BEEN JUST TO THE NATIONALISTS ?

An attempt at a **positive** and **constructive** contribution to the great Bantustan debate, as recommended by the *Natal Mercury*.

by "Vortex"

LIBERALS have not always done perfect justice to the subtlety and complexity of the Government's thinking on the question of the Bantustans.

For example, Liberals often accuse the Government of refusing Africans the right to express their own views about their political future. But this is clearly an inaccurate accusation. The Nationalist Government believes profoundly in the Bantu's right to self-determination. Indeed it is so insistent that the Bantu shall have this right that it is certainly not prepared to allow the opinions of mere Africans to stand in the way of so great an aim. After all, if Africans are to say what they desire politically (a most untraditional concept anyhow), what will become of Bantu self-expression? No, the Government is determined to implement a policy of self-determination. (It goes without saying that the old African political parties became unpopular with the Government because, instead of putting forward the views of the Bantu people, they selfishly and rashly put forward their own views.)