

EXPANDING RANGE

Which brings me to my closing issue: the reconstructive project that now holds in South Africa. A key part of this is an expansion of the dialogue between liberals and socialists. In this regard, Simkins's critique of Marxism is worth reflecting on briefly. To argue that at the heart of Marxism is optimism about power (**Liberalism and the Problem of Power**) is to raise one of the most telling criticisms of Marx. Marx, and Marxists more generally, have no good account of the concept of power.

Certainly for Marx, power, class, the state and politics were all forms of one another; the disappearance of one entailed the disappearance of all. The resulting account of future society – in which politics disappears but individualism does not – is quite implausible. In spite of

this, however, the political values to which Marx was wedded remain attractive: individualism, logically prior to community but compatible with it. Socialists generally have, it seems to me, learned a set of key lessons about power, about the importance of pluralistic political systems coupled with the defence of rights, and about the relationship between markets and industrial society. In this they have moved closer to liberals. Liberals, by contrast, have – some of them anyway – uncoupled liberalism from capitalism; in this they have moved closer to socialists.

My point is this. On page 71 of **Reconstructing South African Liberalism** Simkins offers an acid test, on which many socialists would qualify as liberals. Can socialists not devise the corollary of this – and claim Simkins as one of their own? □

by ELWYN JENKINS

CULTURE AND COUNTER-CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

The boys and girls of the late Victorian and Edwardian boarding schools of Natal, the Eastern Cape, Johannesburg and Cape Town; the Afrikaans-speaking children subjected to Milner's Anglicization policy; the students of Department of Education and Training schools in the 1980s; pupils of the schools of the House of Delegates and the House of Representatives – in fact, pupils at all the schools administered by South Africa's eighteen education departments and the country's private schools – share a common educational heritage. No separation or disparity has altered the homogeneity underlying the official and hidden curricula of South Africa's schools.

Ashley (1976) has traced the roots of the South African educational system to Scottish and Dutch Calvinism, the emergence of British secular education in the nineteenth century, and the Christian ideals of the British public school. Honey develops more fully the dominant part played by the late Victorian public schools in moulding the curriculum, extramural activities and organizational structure of South African schools:

The results of this predominance can be seen not only in the handful of boys' private schools established in South Africa in varying degree of likeness to Arnold's Rugby, from 'Bishops' down to the newest private school on the Rand, but, no less strikingly, in the English speaking government schools for boys up

and down the country, whose structure, ethos, and activities show many obvious derivations from the Rugby model, and many more resemblances to it than they show to other possible models in the English-speaking world or in continental Europe. Many of these characteristics can also be seen in Afrikaans-speaking government schools (1975/76: 22).

THE BRITISH SYSTEM

The same influence may be seen in the schools for other racial groups. British missionaries set out to develop their mission schools for Blacks into schools and colleges that would fall typically into the British public school pattern. Black schools today perpetuate sad vestiges of the British System – the uniforms, the conformity, the stress on unquestioning loyalty, the corporal punishment, being a travesty of what Arnold and Kingsley had once advocated.

Even in Britain the high ideals of Arnold and Kingsley became transmuted as the nineteenth century closed and the Empire was caught up in the militaristic and jingoist fever that presaged World War I. From an initial emphasis on character and leadership, as portrayed for example in *Eric, or little by little* by Dean Farrar (1858), the schools' aims had become, as Mangan (1985: 117) puts it, 'to create habits of respectfulness, obedience and loyalty.'

Individuality was suspect, non-conformity was discouraged, *esprit de corps* was exalted.' He points out how, to the educators in the colonies, 'Educational aims valued so highly at other times and in other contexts, such as the development of an inquiring mind, independence of thoughts and the questioning of established orthodoxies, were unacceptable in an environment of primitive backwardness.' Honey (1975/76: 25) has shown how the elitism of the system, which was embodied in exclusive admissions, 'houses', prefects, competitive games, military cadets and the old school tie network, took natural root in South Africa because it was 'functionally appropriate to the existing social and political system of South Africa'. Today the central role of organized compulsory sport in white schools is probably unique among state education systems throughout the world, and the institutionalized violence of corporal punishment, which is extremely prevalent in both primary and secondary schools, certainly sets South Africa apart from the rest of the Western world. Thus South Africa finds itself today still saddled with a brutalizing, anti-intellectual educational system which is a distorted descendant of what was itself an aberration in the history of the development of Western education – a particular version of education which was developed to serve a small section of the British population during the short period that it had to provide the rulers of the largest empire the world has ever seen or is likely to see again. To what extent this educational system has **produced** South African society as we know it today, or has simply lasted because it serves the interests of those who are inclined this way for other historical, cultural and religious reasons, is debatable; the answer is probably something of both.

ENGLISH

However, it is obviously an oversimplification to allege that all South Africans who have gone through our state or private schools have been moulded according to the degenerate public school model. The schools have demonstrably also produced intellectuals, aesthetes, rebels, socialists, liberals, conscientious objectors and individualists. Perhaps there is another thread of educational philosophy running through South African education in the twentieth century. I take as a case study some aspects of English teaching; an analysis of history teaching would probably be just as enlightening.

English teaching was dominated by British expatriates for the first few decades of this century. Lanham (1979) considers their influence to have been so strong that they successfully retarded the development of a typical South African English accent until the Second World War. English teachers' first concern was to make their pupils as 'English' as possible. Their task was not easy. This is how South African white boys were seen by Montague J. Rendall, former Headmaster of Winchester, who worked to preserve public school ideals in the British Empire through the Rhodes Trust and as Chairman of the Schools Empire Tour Committee from 1926-1939:

If I were to design a medal for one of these School-boys the superscription might be 'Child of the Sun'; the obverse a figure of 'Independence with a Shield', or perhaps 'Venator Intrepidus' like Pisanello's model of Alfonso the Magnanimous, where a naked

boy is riding astride of a fearsome boar; but a lion to replace the Boar, and the reverse should be just a bright Star to symbolize the Sun, 'radiatum insigne diei'. The rest of the field would consist of several Rugby footballs and a scanty heap of books. For indeed, truth to tell, this wholesome brown boy, with khaki shirt, khaki shorts and a pair of rough shoes, who looks straight at you from rather wild eyes half-hidden in a mat of hair, is just a Child of the Sun . . . They are by nature Children of the Sun, Sun-worshippers, and Culture has little meaning for them. Why should parents and schoolmasters disturb this happy dream? Why worry the boys with Culture? Well, this is the plea of all children since Cain and Abel first worshipped the Sun in the morning of the world, a plea urged with childish impertinence and irresistible grace; but these Schools are not meant for Mowgli (Quoted in Mangan 1985: 31-32).

Equally despairing was G.H.M. Bobbins, the only commentator on English teaching in South Africa who was writing before World War II. (He obtained his doctorate on the subject at the University of Cape Town in 1936.) His views on the decay in standards of English are encapsulated in the title of his collected essays, *The twilight of English*, published in 1951.

But teachers could not deny the South Africanism of their pupils forever. The solution was to tack a bit of local colour on to the traditional British syllabus, resulting in what I have called the 'Bushveld syndrome' (Jenkins 1977). To be South African, a topic had to be rural. Hunting adventures and debates on farm life versus town life were safe topics for pupils to write or speak on. When Victor Pohl's *Bushveld adventures*, an extremely prosaic collection of reminiscences, was published in 1941, it was seized upon as a book worthy to be read at school: first prescribed for Std 9 and 10 in 1946, it was still the most frequent source of passages for comprehension tests in the Std 8 internal examinations set by Transvaal Education Department teachers in 1972. As a topic for oral composition for Std 8, 'How to make butter' appeared at least as far back as 1942 in the Transvaal syllabus, and it was still there in 1959 (Jenkins 1973). It is encouraging to learn from an analysis of the essay topics for all the 1986 Senior Certificate examination papers that this fashion appears now to have died out (Jenkins 1987).

NEW INFLUENCES

World War II saw not only the espousal of the bushveld, but also the demise of part of the traditional, 'British', core of the English syllabus. In 1943, the year after Lanham's date for the advent of the new South African English, the Transvaal Education Department prescribed for the last time its double-bill of texts on the history of English literature. The desks were being cleared for South African English teachers to be introduced to the new criticism of Leavis, the romanticism of D.H. Lawrence, and the advocacy of creative writing by David Holbrook.

All three of these innovations had the effect of bringing an individualistic, solipsistic element into the formal school curriculum which contrasted with the philistine athleticism and conformity which prevailed. Since Leavis changed the nature of English studies from being an

imitation of classics or foreign language teaching to being a search for authentic meaning, English teaching has often been the troublesome conscience in educational institutions in the English-speaking world, including South Africa, fulfilling the role described in Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a subversive activity* (1969). The impact of these new influences began to be felt in South African schools in the 1950s. A dissertation on English teaching written at the University of Cape Town during that decade by M.I. Honikman (1959) gives evidence of the change. She saw English as a humanistic discipline, and in fact she equated it as a school subject with literature, which had to be taught by means of practical criticism. The emphasis on 'sincerity' as a criterion of excellence in literature was transferred to official expectations of what pupils' own writing should be like: the rubric of the Transvaal Education Department's Senior Certificate paper was changed in 1968 to exhort pupils, 'BE SINCERE' (sic) (Jenkins 1973: 82). Pupils were encouraged to write in response to sensory impressions ('kipper sniffing' as it was called), or to write introspectively, and Hemingway was held up as the stylistic model (for example, by Armstrong 1977). Through the reading of D.H. Lawrence teachers encouraged their pupils to respond directly to their instincts, and to find fulfilment in response to unspoilt countryside, natural materials and hand-made textures.

It is only to be expected that the climate created by English teaching of this kind should encourage children to give expression in writing to a counter-culture, particularly when they may choose their own subject matter. Most of this writing is unlikely to reach a wider public than the teacher, as it is too dangerous to appear in official publications. The Transvaal Education Department, for example, has instructed schools not to allow the use of school publications for 'sensitive or controversial' matters (Brodrick 1986). In spite of all the sifting and censoring, some material does eventually reach a wider audience, such as the following two pieces from publications of the South African Council for English Education.

Kathleen Dey writes a devastating indictment of the male chauvinism which dominates South African society, and Derek Mosenthal, in a passage of stream-of-consciousness produced at a week-end SACEE writers' workshop, attacks the rugby fetishism of a boys' school. In writing which becomes powerfully metaphorical, both writers convey the stifling effect of the hypocritical prudery and false manliness – the girl 'trembling in his unbearably hot jersey', the boy feeling the 'rugby jersey clasping my soul' – and underlying the veneer, they suggest, lies the perversion.

A Woman's Place

We had been swimming naked in the sheltered pool right at the northern end of the gully. In glorious abandon we had thrown off our clothes and plunged into the icy stillness, shattering the glassy surface with our small brown bodies and splashing up shreds of glittering water. Yelling and shouting we swam right to the bottom and became evil crocodiles preying on fish before our breath ran out and we shot upwards again.

Afterwards we lay in the sun, the five of us indistinguishable with our short hair and strong arms and fast legs. Adam and Joe tried to bully us because they were eight and we were all only six but there were three of us so we won that skirmish. Soon after this satisfactory diversion, Mr Lemmins, Adam's father, offered to take us fishing. Eagerly we piled into the back of his car and were taken to the trout pools, dressed in our shorts only because of the heat. I managed to catch three small fish of unknown origin and Adam and Joe each caught a trout but they were helped by Adam's father. We pooled our catch and I gloated over my three, looking to my brother for his opinion.

'Quite good,' said Joe, grinning.

'For a girl,' said Adam.

There was a short silence. Mr Lemmins stared at me, and suddenly terrified, I stared back. His mouth dropped open and he said, or rather whispered, 'You are a girl?'

I nodded. He was furious. He made me wear his jersey and all the way home in the car he shouted at me for being an 'indecent little girl' and how ashamed I should feel in front of the boys.

Trembling in his unbearably hot jersey I huddled against Joe. All the boys stared silently out of the window.

I never understood his anger then. But my mother did and she was angry with him.

Kathleen Dey (*English Alive* 1983: 17)

The Game

The game, supposed to think about the game, supposed to be glad; made the team. God, it's all so boring; they do all get excited though. Rugby, ruff tuff and jolly. Was it really formulated for closet homosexuals? I have to play though. 'Don't do enough for the boarding house,' you know – housemaster said so. Why did I jump through that window anyway? I'd just been caught bunking assembly. God, he really must think I'm lazy. I am, but he isn't supposed to know. I'll definitely have to play. I told him I'd planned to try for the team all along. Quick thinking, the thought had never crossed my mind. God, what am I doing here? Rugby jersey clasping my soul. How bloody romantic; it's really a tight fit. Why am I so out of it? Ha . . . the thought amuses me, I want to be a freak. Got to get old and fat, lie in same groudy bed all day, take Vallium, see an analyst. Perhaps a few wrinkles, a sweaty purulent face, moggy eyes, the occasional sniff. Why are my hands so big? The rest of me is so small. Scrum half! I'm a scrum half, small, a mouse; be able to catch the ball with these spades for hands. No, I won't, haven't played for years. Want to hide, run away. I'd be caught though. 'Oh, Derek's trying to be different again,' they would chant, beaming. God, they're boring. Boarding school.

The game, supposed to think about the game, perhaps a little anger, a little aggression. God, how I sell myself, choking, can't breathe, being ravaged.

The game, aggro.

Derek Mosenthal (*Karee* 1983: 12)

Although David Holbrook would consider that 'creative writing' such as 'The game' is validated by its cathartic effect for the writer (see, for example, Holbrook 1961), it can be criticized for excessive introspection. However, the kind of teaching that encourages this kind of writing also allows scope for pupils to engage with political issues. Here is a Johannesburg girl writing in 1978:

We (she and her friend) talked about Nirvana and the pill and discovered Lawrence and supported abortion and found delight in criticizing the 'system'. We cried out against social injustices, as we thought we should do. Remember how we were virtually inebriated by the turbulent crescendo of our ideas springing from within? We were incensed by our own banality, by the way our minds erupted while our bodies lay dormant. We were trapped within the confines of a society which took us for granted. We talked of how one day we would have the courage of our convictions and fight and agitate and help to change.
(Jenkins 1980: 50)

Somehow, a liberal political awareness has been kept alive among teachers. Recent concern within each of the three English-language white teachers' associations bears witness to this (Gluckman 1982; Natal Teachers' Society 1986; South African Teachers' Association 1986/87), and one may assume that these attitudes have been tolerated, or even passed on, in some classrooms.

As the violence in South Africa grows, the young white contributors to *English alive* can be seen trying to cope with their guilt and helplessness:

A thousand fists are clenching
our skies are still quiet
but the T.V. and newspapers burn
with news of their flaming hearts and skies
and we close our eyes
for it is enough
that our skies are quiet

Robyn Hirsch (*English Alive* 1986: 13)

Increasingly, in recent issues they turn to exercises in empathy in an attempt to understand what Black people are thinking and feeling; but the most powerful pieces are those that simply register shock: the 'individual sensibility' responding to a world that can no longer be ignored. □

Written during the State of Emergency

These things must be recorded
Tickle the words into the desert-white sand, gently
Chiding them for their ignorant forgetfulness.
Poke the mud to knowledge
With a stick, draw in the wide-shadow eyes.
Scrape a pebble of its dignity
Carve at the blackness of a rock in your desperation
Scream
at the cliff cliff cliff
Only to have that dark face turned from you
And stare past you.
Though Time chisels at the mute crag
and its ash drifts
and is dispersed across the land;
Still these things will be remembered.
deep scratches in the mind.

Cathy Boshoff (*English Alive* 1986: 12)

Vista University, Mamelodi

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Note:

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