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Education and Attitudes in South Africa

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The process whereby an individual comes to acquire his particular racial and political attitudes is an extremely complex one, involving the action and interaction of many cultural, socio-economic and personality variables. Consequently to deal with only one of these variables, or even one group of these variables, is a procedure which is unlikely to lead to any really definite conclusions being formed regarding the precise role of such factors. "Education" is one such group of variables. It involves the content of courses followed, the institutions attended, participation in extra-curricular activities and so on. Each of these factors is of importance in any consideration of the manner in which attitudes are formed.

In this paper I do not propose to consider "education" in any great detail at all in the manner in which it is related to attitudes. Instead I propose to use one simple educational index—"level of education". This refers to educational attainment, expressed in terms of the highest educational qualification attained, or the number of years spent in educational institutions. It must be remembered that "level of education" is a shorthand description of all the educational experiences to which an individual has been exposed over a considerable period of time and is quite unspecific as to the details thereof.

Nevertheless, it has been shown in many studies to be strongly associated with the holding of attitudes. People with a high level of education invariably hold different attitudes compared with people with a lower level of education. None of the other variables usually investigated in the course of social and political attitude studies, viz., sex, place of residence, occupation, income, marital status, age, etc., compare with education in respect of its power to predict attitudinal differences. (Almond and Verba, 1963; 380). Although education is associated with other social characteristics, and individuals who achieved a high level of education are likely to have higher incomes, to be in higher status occupations, to live in more affluent areas, when these additional factors are controlled for, it usually turns out that people with higher and lower education still differ in their attitudes. Further, many studies, particularly American, have pointed to a constant association of higher levels of education with racially tolerant and politically democratic attitudes.

> "A growing body of evidence indicates that education leads towards tolerant and humanitarian attitudes . . . Level of education is related in this way even when the influence of age, occupation and income is "controlled" or ruled out." (Clark, 1962; 30).

In this statement Clark is obviously assuming "level of education" to be an index of the "performance" of the education system in the forming of attitudes in the most general sort of way and I propose to do the same in this paper. The consideration of education in South Africa in this manner would appear very relevant. It is concomitant with economic growth, urbanisation and a higher standard of living. Undeniably, the future holds the prospect of the White population becoming steadily better educated. (White student enrolment at the South African universities has increased from 19,651 in 1954 to 66,569 in 1968.*) What impact is this likely to have on their racial and political attitudes? Is education, as in the United States, a force impelling people towards racial attitudes which are predominantly tolerant and political attitudes which are democratic and egalitarian?

Unfortunately, most of the evidence to be reviewed here makes it impossible to distinguish between English and Afrikaans South Africans. They are distinctive groups in the cultural sense and the educational institutions serving each differ in their traditions and values. These differences are particularly evident in the universities.

Racial Segregation:

I propose first to examine the relationship between level of education and attitudes to racial

* *"A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa"*—South African Institute of Race Relations, 1955-6 and 1968.

segregation, then attitudes to White ethnic groups, and finally towards democracy and egalitarianism.

American studies have shown rising levels of education to be associated with liberal, anti-segregationist attitudes. Hyman and Sheatsley (1956: p. 38) investigated attitudes towards school integration and found "in the U.S. as a whole 61 per cent of the college-educated white persons endorse school integration, but only 36 per cent of those with grammar school education. In the South 28 per cent of the college-educated favour school integration, but only 5 per cent of those with 8 years or less of schooling." As we are concerned with the overall effect of education on attitudes, the introduction of a closely related variable, viz. level of father's education would not seem to be irrelevant. Allport and Kramer (1946; 9-39) found that 70 per cent of their subjects in an investigation claimed to have acquired the attitudes of their parents towards various groups and that the higher the level of parent's education, the less hostile were these attitudes. Elsewhere, Allport (1954; 79-80) comments, "It generally but not always appears from researches that people with college education are slightly less tolerant than people with grade school or high school education (at least they answer questions in a more tolerant way)". This last remark carries implications beyond the scope of this paper!

In their study of White Rhodesian attitudes, Rogers and Frantz (1962; (a) p.155) found occasion to comment on the important role of education. The purpose of the study was to determine the degree of support for or rejection of changes in the established pattern of race relations in the Colony.

> "One of the clearest relations that emerged in the study was between length of schooling and general attitude about differentiating practices. The greater the length of time spent at school, the more change-oriented the attitudes tended to be. Length of schooling was one of the best single predictors of attitudes about Africans."

In the South African case, it is as well to bear in mind the traditional differences between English and Afrikaner attitudes towards the racial issue, particularly as in some of the evidence presented of the education and attitude relationship, no account is taken of this difference, the two groups being taken as one. MacCrone (1937; p.206-9) and Pettigrew (1960; p.253) have both furnished evidence of attitudinal differences between the two groups in South Africa, and the Rhodesian study of Rogers and Frantz (1962; (b) p.306) confirmed their findings. All three studies point to the English-speakers having more flexible, less socially distant attitudes towards non-Whites.

In the South African context an important source of data is the *Pretoria Youth Survey* (Pieterse, 1967; (a) 102-109). Basing its findings on a representative national sample of 1497 young people under the age of 25 it reveals that education is related to the holding of attitudes towards segregation of the races. The higher the level of education, the greater the willingness to entertain the idea of having a black man as a neighbour; similarly the non-segregationist trend is noticeable for church, recreational, sporting and university segregation. Even attitudes towards mixed marriages were affected by level of education in the direction of greater acceptance. It must, however, be pointed out that the great majority of youth were against integration in these various areas. Nevertheless the well-educated were clearly disposed to take a more flexible stance than the others. The Survey lumped 363 English- and 944 Afrikaans-speaking bilingual youth together, and did not make a separate analysis of the education-attitude relationship for each group.

In May 1944, the Army Education Services of the Union Defence Force carried out a survey of opinions of people in uniform, undifferentiated according to language group, by means of an attitude test entitled "*What do you think — Wat dink jy?*" On questions concerning attitudes towards increased social and occupational opportunities, more education and political rights for Natives, the effect of education was evident in marked fashion. Seventy-seven per cent of the university graduates favoured wider political rights for Africans, whereas 73 per cent of those with Standard 6 and under were opposed. E. G. Malherbe (1946; 15) concluded "it would seem from the above data that education has a liberalising effect on the individual. The lower his education is, the more he is inclined to cling to his prejudices". It must be remembered that such an Army sample would not have been representative of the White South African population at the time, the Afrikaner Nationalist section of the population being certain to be underrepresented.

A study concerned with level of father's education has a bearing too. Lever (1968; 144-152) in his study of Johannesburg youth, found that level of father's education was associated with racial attitudes, but not attitudes towards other White groups, i.e. English-speaking South Africans, Afrikaners, Hollanders, Englishmen or

Germans. However, as far as non-Whites are concerned, i.e. Natives, Indians and Coloureds, "in English-speaking schools there was a general tendency for social distance to decrease with increasing level of father's education". (p.151). This did not hold good for the Afrikaans schools, however. In fact, "in Afrikaans-medium schools there were instances where a higher level of education on the part of the father was associated with social remoteness". (p.152). One possible explanation suggested by the authors was that this relationship might be due to the "cultural atmosphere" at Afrikaans institutions of higher learning (p.152).

Relations between White Groups:

An issue of some importance in the South African context concerns the attitudes the two main White groups have towards each other. E. G. Malherbe (1946; 15) noticed that higher level of education was associated with more favourable attitudes to integrated White schooling. "The percentage of those favouring separate schools for English and Afrikaans children decreased with level of education. It was twice as big among those who had only a Standard 6 or lower education than among matriculants". In Pieterse's *Youth Survey* (1967; 35) the young people were asked whether they thought it time that the two White groups forgot the differences of the past and merged to form a new people. Education had the effect of lessening consciousness of the need to preserve existing group identity up to the graduate level, and then there is a sharp reversal of this trend. In fact the group who are least in favour of forgetting past differences and merging into a new cultural group are the graduates.

There would thus appear to be no justification for drawing any definite conclusions in the light of available evidence. Level of education is not associated with greater tolerance and flexibility in the attitudes of one White group towards another. If anything, there appears to be a trend in the opposite direction, with university graduates less willing to accept integration of the White groups than the more lowly-educated.

Democracy:

To turn to the political aspect — democratic attitudes in particular. American studies have shown higher level of education to be associated with attitudes favourable to a democratic system of government. Specifically, a readiness to disagree with authority, an ability to tolerate ambiguity, an interest in political questions, and in acquiring information about them, an ability to think independently and objectively, and so on. "Consistently it has been shown that the higher the level of educational attainment, the greater the degree to which "democratic" attitudes are held. Similarly, education is a prime correlation of interest in politics . . . (College graduates) are more supportive of democratic norms such as having a multiparty political system; they listen more to serious programs and read more magazines". Clark, 1962; 30). Studies concerned with attitudes towards individual and groups rights to enjoy freedom of speech and assembly etc., have found that higher education level is associated with democratic attitudes in these respects. (Kornhauser, 1960; Stouffer, 1955). Lipset (1963 (a); 101-), working on data gathered by Stouffer, concludes as follows: "Although higher occupational level, other factors being constant". In another investigation conducted during the McCarthy era, Lipset (1963 (b); 331) found confirmatory evidence of the effect of education on political attitudes in the United States. "The relationship between less education and support of McCarthy is consistent with what is known about the effect of education on political attitudes in general; higher education often makes for greater tolerance, greater regard for due process and increased tolerance of ambiguity". Hyman and Sheatsley (1953; 6-16), found that higher level of education was associated with favourable attitudes towards the exercise of academic freedom, and also the right of Communists and other individuals and groups to exercise their freedom in society. In another American study, C. H. Smith (1948; p.65) found that "liberals, as defined by non-economic or inter-class values (e.g. endorsement of civil liberties and internationalism, opposition to prohibition) were found to be better informed and educated than conservatives".

Almond and Verba (1963; 384), in their study encompassing political attitudes in five nations, i.e. Britain, United States, Italy, Germany and Mexico, found education to be the variable most strongly associated with political attitudes in all five countries. Apart from the fact that the educated were more aware of the political system they lived under and more inclined to take part in its functioning and have opinions on political issues, all of which are favourable to democracy, they also appear to have greater trust in the social environment, "and insofar as this trust is an important precondition of the capacity to join with others to effect political goals, we may stress even further the importance of education as a factor affecting democratic capabilities". Evidence that a high level of education is a necessary condition for democracy to exist comes from cross-national

studies by Lipset (1963(a)). He observed that in Latin America there is only one country which can be included in the democratic category and which has a high level of illiteracy, Brazil. In the Middle East the nation which has best maintained a democratic system of government since the war is Lebanon, with over 80 per cent of its population literate. The most democratic nations in the Far East are Japan and the Phillipines, both Asian leaders in educational attainment. From this evidence it is tempting to suggest that a country with a well-educated population will automatically be a democratic one. But this is not the case. As Lipset points out, "Germany and France have been among the best educated nations of Europe, but this by itself did not stabilise their democracies". (p.40) In the German case, an educational tradition developed during the 19th century, coinciding with the struggle against Napoleon and the birth of the nation state, of stressing the need for the citizen, not the man. The state furnished both the means and goals of education.

Thus the evidence points to a strong but not unqualified association between a high level of education and the holding of attitudes favourable to a democratic system of government, also the necessary sophistication for full participation in democratic life. Evidence of the *Pretoria Youth Survey* (1967; 94) is that the higher the level of education, the greater the dissatisfaction with government policy. Whereas 69.1 per cent of those with Junior Certificate said they would not like to see any change in government policy, only 41.9 per cent of graduates were of like mind. The intermediate educational levels had correspondingly intermediate positions. A second item which is important is that dealing with the manner in which youth derive their knowledge about politics. The higher the level of education, the more frequent the resort to independent study of the political situation, the more varied the newspapers that are read, the less is the likelihood of reading only the paper carrying one's own particular point of view. Those with low education levels show greater dependence on family sources and political leaders for their opinions. (90). Another index of the more democratically inclined attitudes of the more highly educated is the item concerned with the legitimacy of secret organizations which have as their aim the promotion of the exclusive interests of one specific language group. Rising level of education is associated with disapproval of such organizations. (114). (43.5 per cent of graduates disapproved as against 26.7 per cent with J.C. or less). From this evidence it may be concluded that higher level of education is associated with attitudes favourable to democracy, at least in White politics. The large majority favouring racial segregation (p. 99) indicates an unwillingness to extend the right to participation in a common democracy to non-Whites. Evidence from the Youth Survey leads to the tentative conclusion that level of education is associated with attitudes and behaviour favourable to democratic institutions, or at least as far as White politics is concerned.

Egalitarianism:

The next important political aspect is that of egalitarianism. By this I mean attitudes which are favourable to the achievement of an equitable distribution of life chances among all the inhabitants of a particular society, and concurrence with the view that all men have equal social and political rights. Wendell Bell (1962; 427), in his study of the Jamaican élite, found education to be associated with attitudes favourable to egalitarianism. Specifically, equal opportunity and equal rights and freedoms for all groups on the island. "Differences by educational level are quite marked. Sixty-nine per cent of the highest educational group, persons who have attained post-graduate school, have equalitarian attitudes compared to only 29 per cent of the persons who have elementary education, the persons with least education. The intermediate educational levels have correspondingly intermediate positions with respect to attitudes towards economic and social equality". A colleague of Bell's, James Duke (1967), found that for boys and girls at both school and university there was an increasingly favourable attitude towards equality with more education. This relationship is not always prevalent. In an investigation in Poland, Nowak (1960; 219-231) found that the more university education students received, the less favourable they became toward egalitarian sentiments. In this case the attitude items referred to the distribution of income in Poland, suggesting that income differentials should be reduced as much as possible. Nowak explains the greater opposition to such proposals among students well advanced in their degree courses as being consistent with the Marxian postulate that those with privilege will resist it being taken away from them, while those without it will encourage change. Students nearing the end of their courses were beginning to identify with their future occupation group and all concomitant privileges. Advanced engineering students were particularly non-egalitarian, more so than other near-graduates, and Nowak explains this by saying that their expected incomes were likely to be higher than the others, and they would thus have more to lose.

The *Youth Survey* indicates that the relationship between education and egalitarianism in South Africa is closer to the Polish than the Jamaican. It is generally accepted in modern times that some form of State intervention in the economic life of a country is necessary to ensure that equal opportunities and access to equal facilities are afforded to all. The general orientation of the graduates in the sample was quite clearly conservative in this regard in that they were unenthusiastic about State intervention, whereas the lower educated groups were much more enthusiastic. 66.1 per cent of graduates believe that private profits are the property of the entrepeneur, not the State, whereas only 42.7 per cent of those with Junior Certificate or lower do. The intermediate educational levels had correspondingly intermediate positions, as they do in the examples cited below. Eighty per cent of graduates agreed with the view that the role of the State was merely to alleviate extreme cases of suffering,while allowing the individual the greatest possible freedom. Fifty-seven per cent of the lowest educated group felt this (p. 119). Should the State accept full responsibility for all welfare services such as care of old people, medical service, etc.? Eighty-four per cent of the Junior Certificate and less category thought so, but only 58 per cent of the graduates. (118). Finally, higher level of education was associated with rejection of the idea that wealth should be equitably distributed (88 per cent of graduates as against 58 per cent of the lowest category). (p.121). The effect of education on White South African youth would hardly appear to be influencing it in an equalitarian direction. The better-educated members of the sample would appear to identify, strongly, with their future positions of privilege and occupation of the top levels of a stratified society.

Conclusions:

In attempting to assess the influence of education on important attitudes of White South Africans, evidence from other countries, mainly America, was first reviewed. Conclusions to be drawn from the South African evidence are (i) that higher levels of education seemed generally to be associated with racial attitudes unfavourable to strict segregation, although there was no evidence of any meaningful rejection of the general principle; (ii) that higher level of education was not associated with more liberal attitudes towards other White ethnic groups (iii) that among both groups higher level of education was associated with attitudes favourable to democracy at least as far as White political institutions are concerned; (iv) that higher level of education was associated with weaker egalitarian sentiments among both White groups.

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