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Education and a Centralization Policy in South Africa

by R. G. MACMILLAN

THERE has been much heated discussion in recent years in South Africa about the "centralization" of education, culminating in the announcement that the South African government intends to introduce legislation which will allow of the setting up of a National Advisory Council on Education.

One may well ask to what end and purpose? In 1910 when the four self-governing colonies, each with its own system of education and each with its own ideas, came together to form the Union of South Africa, the provincial system became the basis of the legislative pattern. It must be remembered, however, that South Africa is not a federation but a union of states. Section 59 of the Act of Union states that the Union Parliament shall have full power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the country and that, in establishing provincial councils, the legislative power of Parliament was in no way diminished. Indeed, the Act states that the provincial control of education would hold for five years only; thereafter until Parliament provided otherwise.

A division of control was effected in 1910 which placed education "other than higher" under the provinces and "higher education" under the central government control. This looks fairly reasonable, but the problem has been the actual line of demarcation. Surely the training of teachers is a form of higher education, and technical education at secondary school level "other than higher"? And yet, because the provinces were given control of primary and secondary education, a compromise has resulted in the provinces taking charge of the training of the great majority of teachers. At the same time, however, the universities also carry on teacher-training, overlapping and waste of time, money and energy being the result.

Technical and vocational education came under the control of the provinces at first, but financial difficulties resulted in the transfer of this form of education to the Union Education Department by 1925, although it could not be described as "higher education". In the Financial Adjustment Act of 1922 the Minister of Education was authorised to declare as "higher education" the education provided in technical institutions like schools of art, music, domestic science, technology, mining, etc., and such part of education provided by other technical institutions as he, after consultation with the provinces concerned, wished so to define. Notice that the Minister was given a great deal of power which, through the years, has been wielded in favour of the Union Education Department. This centralizing tendency is seen in stricter control of the universities in certain respects, the 'taking over' of the semi-autonomous technical colleges since 1955 and the transfer of Bantu Education from the provinces to the Native Affairs Department.

At present, the control of vocational and technical education and special schools is strongly centralized at a national level through a government department. The provincial systems are also under centralized control, but at the provincial level. In Natal, for instance, there is as highly a centralized system of education as is to be found almost anywhere in the Commonwealth. It is interesting that the most "English" province in South Africa has the most "un-English" administrative pattern of education, local areas having no real say in the control of the schools. Were an unsympathetic political party to come to power in Natal, this province would rue the day it had emphasized as strongly as it has the merits of its rigid system of control from Pietermaritzburg.

The other provinces all control education from the provincial capital, but allow for local participation in the educational system by a system of school boards and school committees. The school board is a link between the Departments of Education and the parents of a large area. There are twenty such boards in the Transvaal, the largest comprising over one hundred and fifty schools and the smallest some twenty schools. The Witwatersrand Central School Board has over 70,000 children, more than the Free State or Natal. In the Cape Province there are over a hundred school boards.

These boards usually have a full-time secretary and consist of nine to twelve members, the majority elected, but about 25% are nominated members. They advise the Department of Education on many matters, but particularly on the provision of sites and buildings. They also enforce compulsory school attendance and take a prominent part in the appointment of teachers, particularly in regard to recommendations for promotion.

An important point is the fact that, unlike many overseas local units of educational control, the school board in South Africa has no power to tax, education being paid for by central government subsidies and provincial taxation, each contributing approximately 50% of the total expenditure. Generally speaking, school boards have limited functions but they have the right of direct approach to the provincial authorities. Political parties as such do not participate in school board elections but the last decade has shown just how much importance is attached to victory at the board polls. Today, school boards in South Africa are, in the great majority of cases, under the control of the ruling party.

A further form of local participation in the control of education in South Africa is the school committee. In the Cape, Free State and the Transvaal such committees have statutory status; in Natal advisory committees only are permitted. School committees are composed of the elected representatives of the parents of children attending a particular state school. The people of South Africa, and in particular the Afrikaans-speaking community, have always favoured the existence of some authority representing the parents. Many people consider, however, that a Parent-Teachers' Association fills the bill.

The functions of such committees are rather vague, but they do have considerable power. playing a very important part in the recommendation of teachers for appointment and promotion. One may well ask why a qualified, professional body like the teaching profession tolerates a system in which local people with no knowledge of the exact value of a teacher's qualification and experience, sit in judgment upon members of the profession. An extremely good case can be made out for local participation by parents in the control of education but the appointment and promotion of teachers should be a matter for a body equipped to carry out this extremely responsible task. It is not difficult to envisage a scheme whereby parents can really help with the general control of schools, but not appointments.

It may be of interest to examine briefly what some other countries do in this matter of educational control.

In Canada, the Constitution enacts that the Queen may lawfully make laws in relation to all matters not assigned exclusively to the Provinces. Each province may make its own laws in relation to education, each Canadian province being autonomous in this respect, having its own Minister and Director of Education within a federation of states. Australia is much the same, except that centralization at individual state level has been strong. Some of the states have, in recent years, divided their areas into regions each under a director who is responsible to a Director-General for the whole state. There are no official lay bodies between school and controlling authority, however.

France and New Zealand are examples of highly-centralized state systems of education, control and direction being exercised from a central headquarters for the whole country, the Minister of Education being responsible for all aspects of education.

In the United States the Federal Government has little say, education not being mentioned in the Constitution. The Tenth Amendment, however, reads that all powers not specifically assigned to the Federal Government belong to the individual state. There are, therefore, as many systems of education as there are states — fifty-one. The American public desired passionately to control its own affairs in education and so local communities provided the necessary educational facilities. The need for compulsory education and for adequate financing of education has resulted in state legislatures gradually taking over more and more control, a trend which has become more pronounced in recent years.

The English pattern of control in education is the result of a process of evolution and provides an excellent example of effective balance of administrative power and duties between central and local authorities. Traditional distrust of state intervention in matters affecting education made the central government slow to enter the lists. Gradually, over the years, however, Whitehall assumed more authority until the 1944 Act crystallized the position, the Minister of Education being required "to promote the education of the people of England and Wales and the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose, and to secure the effective execution by local authorities, under his control and direc-

tion, of the national policy for providing a varied and comprehensive educational service in every area". This places the Minister in a strong position but the authority of the 146 major units of local government in England and Wales has also been increased under the Act. The Minister's control is to be exercised towards ensuring that the Local Education Authorities are left with as much initiative as possible. In other words, a fine balance has been effected between the central and the local authorities in education.

It is futile to argue that centralization of education is necessarily undemocratic and totalitarian. In most countries the educational system is a reflection of the general pattern of government. There are a number of countries which are democratic in outlook where centralization of education at a national level is practised. It all depends upon *why* the country wants a particular form of administration and to what purpose. A completely decentralized system is one in which education is in local hands entirely, e.g. a city, a town, rural area or even village which conducts its own system. A centralized system is one, on the other hand, in which education is run from a central headquarters, usually at a provincial or national level. Most systems lie between these two extremes.

Some of the advantages which are claimed for a centralized system of education are that it is administratively more efficient; that all areas are equally served; that reforms can be put into operation quickly and effectively; that services like medical inspection can be operated more easily and economically and that the organisation in general can be more economically run. On the other hand, the criticisms are very strong indeed. that centrally-controlled systems really rule by remote control with resultant loss of local interest; that it brings about bureaucratic control in which precedent and tradition become very important indeed; that political parties are close to the source of educational direction and so are able to bring pressure to bear; that such control results in officials being limited in their powers; that all essential change has to be placed before a legislature which usually results in excessive conservatism on the part of those putting forward the legislation.

In South Africa many commissions have investigated the problem of the divided control of education, and the absence of any kind of national policy has been stressed time and again.

The Jagger Commission (1916) recommended the abolition of the provincial councils and the setting up of district councils responsible for education to the central government. Later the Hofmeyr Commission (1923) stressed that there was a strong tendency for the provinces to drift apart and that a Union Board of Education should be set up with full power to bring all groups into line. This Board was not to supersede the provinces which would control all education carried on in state and state-aided schools. It would have statutory powers and could only be dismissed by Parliament and not by the Minister of Education who was to be present.

The Provincial Finances Commission (1934) considered the matter to be so serious that they recommended that if the provinces could not voluntarily achieve a sound measure of co-ordination the Parliament should "enforce it". As a result, the Inter-Provincial Consultative Committee came into being and did good work, mainly of an administrative nature. This Committee did not, however, tackle matters of fundamental and major educational importance.

In 1937, the Union Parliament adopted a resolution to the effect that the government be requested to consider the advisability of establishing a national education board. Nothing came of this, however.

In 1948, in evidence to the Commission on Technical and Vocational Education, one of the strongest teachers' associations said that the divided control of education was not only untenable but had a deleterious effect on the development of education. The Federal Council of Teachers' Association also pleaded for a national council for education of an advisory nature. The Commission in its recommendations went further, calling for the creation of a national council to be set up by Parliament.

It would appear then that there has been and still is considerable dissatisfaction with the general administrative pattern in South Africa. Is the answer centralization of education?

It could only work if all of the various racial sections in South Africa had confidence in the motives of those who advocate such a development. There is, however, suspicion, distrust and fear abroad. It is stated throughout the country that the centralization of education is merely the next and final step in the "Afrikanerisation" of South Africa; that uniformity and conformity will be the watchword and that Christian National Education will then receive legal sanction at a national level.

These are very grave criticisms. There is no doubt that education has been a political matter

for a long time and that a determined attempt has been made to take over the state systems of education (financed by *all* the taxpayers and which should serve the people equally and impartially) in the interests of a racial group. The traditions and natural ambitions of the English-speaking people have been largely ignored; deteriorating human relationships are seen on all sides. Has the way in which the education of children has been managed made its contribution to this state of affairs? Where are the English-speaking leaders in education? Are the views of the English-speaking section really taken into consideration in the framing of policy? Those English-speaking teachers who have endured the frustrations of the last years will answer with a categorical "NO".

These remarks are very restrained; one could amplify so as to paint a picture of education in South Africa being largely responsible for recent and continuing disturbances and for a malaise which affects the whole country. Schools are not appendages of the state placed there to carry out a policy. A large group of South African citizens do not accept the view that the individual exists for the state, but rather that the state is there to serve the individual and the people. There is a conflict of philosophy here which is fundamental. Leaders, therefore, in South Africa should be most circumspect in their handling of matters like education, which forms part of the warp and the woof of living. Most of all, the Afrikaans-speaking South African who has had a long struggle to achieve his ambitions, must see to it that he accords to others the rights that he demands for himself.

Indeed, opposition to full-scale centralization of education has grown, particularly in the Orange Free State. As a result a change of tactics has taken place. We hear now of "Nasionale beleid, maar provinsiale beheer" (National policy but provincial control). The Provinces are to be left alone, but a National Advisory Board or Council is to be set up by law. This Board is to be European apparently and is to advise on matters of policy affecting the provincial and the Union education departments. Who is to serve on this body? How will they be chosen? By whom? As all education departments in South Africa are controlled by political bodies which are under the hegemony of the ruling political party, the Advisory Board is likely to become a useful and legalised mouthpiece on educational matters for the Union Government. Whom does the Board advise? Is the receiver of advice in any way obliged to conform? Obviously not — at first. It is, however, only too clear that the Advisory Board is in the nature of a rehearsal for the centralization of education once the provinces have been carefully conditioned.

It is indeed tragic that it is so difficult, in South Africa, to discuss educational matters objectively and calmly. Speaking on educational grounds alone, there is a very good case for an Advisory Council at a national level. Its functions should be restricted and there should be no interference with the way in which the provinces carry out their own educational policy. If the Council's views are of value, the provinces would be only too happy to co-operate. In other words, the Council would stand or fall by its own works. If the government were wise they would, of course, nominate men and women to the Council who would be accepted by all sections of the community as being persons of the highest standing in the field of education and whose integrity was unquestioned; political and religious affiliations should not come into this matter.

What suggestions can be offered in regard to the organisation and administration of education in South Africa? Firstly, that education belongs to the people and not to a government department; therefore the need for regions which are not too big and in which the community could develop a sense of belonging. Secondly, any educational authority over a region should control *all* educational activity within that area except, perhaps, university education.

The present provinces are in many ways unwieldly and they lack homogeneity. As industrialization and urbanization accelerates, so there will come about a need for a smaller (geographically) but larger (numerically) unit of local government. South Africa could be divided into regions, e.g. Eastern and Western and Central Cape Province; Northern Cape and the Orange Free State; Northern and Southern Transvaal; South-eastern Transvaal and Northern Natal; the Midlands of Natal and Southern Natal. At first they could be sub-regions of the present provinces but gradually assume their true position as autonomous units of local government. The question as to whether large borough units like Johannesburg should not form a region could be investigated as well.

These regions would organise and control European, Asiatic, Coloured, African, nursery, primary, secondary, vocational and technical education, each with a Director and a Board of Edu-

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conformers of the world, and this diversity in unity is a heritage we must not lightly cast aside, least of all in religion. There is no desire for all to get into one kraal or laager — it's so dull, besides being fatal to man's search for truth.

Jt is fashionable to attack Christian National Education in a negative way — they shouldn't do this, and they shouldn't say that. Mere diagnosis of an illness does not automatically bring about a cure. Wherever possible, there must be positive treatment. We say we know what is wrong with C.N.E. It is possible that we can take preventive measures — isolate ourselves, or gargle meaninglessly with words. This may serve our own ends, but what about the children in our care? Surely they are worth some positive effort? Or do we feel that if we all thought the same way, then wrong would obviously be right, and we could live happily ever after? That, at any rate, is how the political arm of C.N.E. thinks. It is hardly likely that the English-speaking teacher will bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image, however sweet the music of the sackbut and psaltery. The danger is there all the same.

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should help to co-ordinate and prevent unnecessary duplication, that the state should act in full publicity in these matters, etc. It is, however, also true that private initiative may fall short of its task, that the state will have to take over where stimulation fails to elicit a satisfactory result, that the state has a right to know what is done with subventions, how it is done and to what extent the general interest has been served.

A nation in so intricate a situation as the South African knows this. Yet we must help to develop an all pervading sense of educational responsibility in all its citizens as individuals, as citizens of their country and as representatives of Western culture. Just like charity, education begins at home and educational responsibility begins with those who produced the child. There is no apology for parents — and for those who are loyal to them — to confine their educational responsibility to the home (or: the school). Educational responsibility *begins* at home but then it appears to be one of the most fundamental responsibilities of the citizen as a member of a community which finally embraces a whole world.

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cation. Grants to cover at least 60%—70% of total expenditure would come from a properly-constituted central government. Each region would raise the rest of the money by taxation, but an equalisation formula would ensure that less privileged areas would not suffer.

Under this system, as is the case in England today, a number of National Advisory Councils could be established e.g. for "The Training of Teachers" and "Technical Education and Industry" and so on.

There is a need for reform in the organisation and administration of education in South Africa. Rather, however, than have unacceptable ideas and patterns of organisation foisted upon the country, it is obvious that those who fear further domination through education will cling to what they already have and will resist any change. It is clear, therefore, that the present is not the time to attempt any such change which can only result in deeper division than is unfortunately the case.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE MORAL QUANDARY OF 1960 AFRICA

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may be accomplished sooner than the pessimist might imagine. The second disaster that has fallen on Africa is the state of neurosis into which people of all races have been led. This shows itself in an inability to choose: somewhat like the induced neurosis that modern Conditioning has produced in dogs. Indeed, the formula that neurosis was basically an inability to make a choice could hardly be gainsaid by any modern psychologist. Presented with pairs of alternatives both of which are disagreeable, the ordinary person abstains from choice and produces ultimately a conflict of indecision that can only be seen at a community level as a massive maladjustment. The tragedy lies in the fact that the choices are really manifold, and that the two offered seldom operate at an immediate and functional level at all.

This whole problem would make the theme for a national or even international conference of educationists, a departure that might well mark the beginning of new adjustments throughout African society. To the intelligent person of whole mind, Africa offers unlimited opportunities.