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Education for Nationhood in South Africa

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There is no shortage of historical accounts which relate the progress or otherwise of popular movements. Some of these, such as the Slave Revolt under Spartacus, and the Peasants' Revolt (perhaps inspired by the ideas of Luther) failed to be successful. On the other hand, other complex social developments which took place much later, such as the abolition of slavery or the enfranchisement of the common man in the democracies of the West, have been markedly successful. Consultation of accounts of such social changes reveals that, where such changes have been successful, the social movements in question have displayed a quality of inexorability which has in the final analysis been irresistible. Whatever resistance has been offered very often appears, against the broad backdrop of Time, to have been mindless and perhaps even obstinately stupid.

One cardinal proposition that will be adopted in this speculative look at the future is, therefore, that in the affairs of men there are social and ideological developments which cannot be ignored, and which ultimately will become common currency irrespective of the nature and strength of the resistance offered to them.

The second main proposition upon which this paper is based centres around the admittedly simplistic, but hopefully not misguided, understanding which this writer has of certain economic issues. Shorn of the technical language, the caveats and the qualifications, the message from a number of economic theorists appears to be that the economic outlook worldwide is bleak, and that both short-term and long-term prospects point to rising costs on all fronts. Rising costs of raw materials, of labour, and of developing and more wisely exploiting existing resources are all contributing towards a measure of economic crisis, the full implications of which are understood only properly by those who have reliable crystal balls.

Given a situation of rising costs and escalating economic difficulties, it must further be accepted that the provision of services will either increase in cost if present levels of efficiency are to be maintained, or that the quality of services will decline if expenditure on them cannot keep pace with escalating costs. Furthermore, if the scope of the service has to be extended on an exponential basis (as would presumably be the case where population growth is related to the provision of services) one could predict either a very great decline in the overall quality of the service offered, or a staggering increase in the expenditure required to maintain the system at prevailing levels.

This problem is already confronting developing countries, of course. Striving as they are on the one hand to improve the quality of certain social services within a framework of rising costs, they are confronted by astronomical increases in expenditure. However, the problem is further compounded by rapid increases in population growth, which strain beyond tolerable limits already overburdened systems.

Arising from the issues mentioned, therefore, a second proposition is that, in a situation where economic stringency is likely to increase in any event, sheer economics must ultimately dictate the adoption of methods of providing services which are more cost-effective, even if certain cherished ideological shibboleths are overthrown in the process.

In the light of the two propositions outlined, a consideration of the South African situation raises certain interesting and decidedly thorny issues. The first of these, and presently the main one, is, of course, political. The march of African Nationalism across the face of Africa has gone on with increasing rapidity during the past two decades and more, if one takes the independence of the Gold Coast as a watershed date. That this march has not gone on unresisted is evident from the events of contemporary history. The British, the French and the Belgians have in the final analysis had to acknowledge the inevitability of resistance to colonialism, and have had to acknowledge as valid the national aspirations of formerly colonial peoples. The Portuguese and the Spanish have had similar experiences in Africa. Currently Rhodesia and South West Africa provide examples of the extent to which a vigorously entrenched, and defended, old order is making way for a new one.

It would be naïve to argue that the difficulties in Rhodesia or South West Africa are the same as those of yesteryear in Kenya or Nigeria. Quite clearly other, perhaps external, influences have been superimposed on Black nationalism. This has led to the tendency on the part of some to debase the motives of Black nationalism, and ascribe them to puppeteering Communist masters. While in the Southern African context there may be an element of puppeteering, it is mistaken to imagine that such superimposition renders any less meaningful the aspirations of Black people. Perhaps too the balkanisation of South Africa as an apparent means to the satisfaction of the national aspirations of Blacks is open to question — certainly if aspects of the Balkan problem of the last century can teach us anything, it is that fragmentation geographically is not necessarily a solution to problems pertaining to national identity.

The point, then, is this. Given the presupposition that certain tides in the affairs of men are irresistible, and that Black nationalism is one such tide, one must conclude that inevitably South Africa must ultimately take on certain of the overt political features of other states in Africa — that is, Black majority rule. White secession, which is theoretically possible in terms of principles underlying the Government's homeland policies, may be less easy than some would predict. Majority rule could well come before the turn of this century, if developments in Rhodesia are used as a basis for provision of a timescale. In short, within the space of 20 years or so from present date, South Africa as the last bastion of rule by caste privilege based on colour may well be no longer recognisable in present-day terms.

Such a situation must clearly have implications for education. In most countries of the world, education has at least some political overtones — and to this general principle South Africa is no exception. For generations the education system in South Africa has given *de facto* recognition, by virtue of its very structure, to the social realities of separate development and all that that implies.

The enormous privilege inherent in the education system for Whites, and the tremendous disabilities of the educational systems for persons of colour, have been fully documented. Such a system has been predicated upon assumptions political, social and ideological, which rapidly are beginning to crumble in the light of current realities in the international situation. In this context it is interesting to note the shift in emphasis of official statements on South West Africa since the time of the World Court hearings little more than a decade ago. The apparent radicalism of today is the orthodoxy of tomorrow, and this truism is as applicable in the South African situation as anywhere else.

The question then is whether or not recognition should be given to probable ultimate social changes by making adjustments to the educational system which will prepare for the future those who are exposed to that system. Quite clearly this is a matter of opinion, and this point will be taken up at a later stage.

The implications for education of current and future economic difficulties need also to be considered. The point has been made that the provision of services — and education is a service — is in the final analysis tied to an escalating cost structure, which given static consumer demand must necessitate either an increase in overall expenditure or a decline in the quality of the service offered. Where demand for the service increases, expenditure must necessarily increase at more than linear rates to take cognisance both of an escalating cost structure and of the need to expand the service.

Education in South Africa is caught, as is the case in many other developing countries, in the problematical situation where quality of existing service has to be maintained in certain areas of the education structure, while both quality and quantity in the major part of the overall structure have greatly to be increased. Given the general economic situation which prevails both in this country and abroad, it is apparent that even if the appropriate authorities had the will to do so, to provide a broad-based increase in expenditure to render possible expanded educational provision would be extremely costly. Corke[1] for example has arrived at a figure which is of the order of R4 000 million per annum in this regard — a figure which while large by any standards is extremely high when viewed in the overall context of the South African GNP.

The point needs to be made that in the foreseeable future it is unlikely that education will be made available as freely as it should be, or on as broad a base as it should be, to all of South Africa's peoples. And yet, the possible political future of this country renders imperative increased educational provision. Some alternative strategy might be a source of additional finance.

Given the economic impossibilities of the present situation, it is important that greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency be sought. It is almost impossible to determine what the benefit — in terms of money — of the structure to be proposed in this paper would be, as sufficiently accurate breakdown of current costs are, to the knowledge of this writer, not available. What is immediately apparent, when consideration is given to the overall structure of education within the Republic of South Africa, is the almost unbelievable duplication of administrative and management structures. At Cabinet level it can be noted that no fewer than four ministries are concerned with education: the Minister of Education concerns himself, amongst other things, with education for whites; the Minister of Education and Training is concerned with education for blacks; the two Ministers responsible amongst other things for Asian Affairs and Coloured Affairs respectively are concerned with matters pertaining to the education of the two groups mentioned.

Moving downwards hierarchically it can be noted that in addition to a Department of National Education, there are four provincial education departments, each responsible to the Minister through the Administrator, each determining aspects of white education within the Province. For each of the Black, Coloured and Asian groups there is a separate department, each with its own administrative hierarchy, procedures, regulations and the like.

It is self-evident that such duplication of structure produces grounds for suggesting that maximum cost-effectiveness is not being obtained.

Quite clearly educational administrators and managers are required — no sensible person would deny that. But the creation of a single department, whose overall concern would be a national education policy and the implementation thereof, would immediately see the amalgamation of at least eight separate Education Departments, and those sections of four ministries which are responsible for education.

Such amalgamation would have a number of advantages, not the least of them being that it would then be possible to develop a national education system which would be better able than the present multitude of systems to take the cognisance of educational priorities on good educational grounds, rather than on partisan or ideological ones. Additionally, at the administrative and implementational level, the allocation of resources could be far more rationally made, thereby in some measure at least overcoming difficulties such as chronic shortage of qualified manpower in one system, and an oversupply in another.

Furthermore, the gearing of the overall education system to perceived economic and manpower needs (insofar as this is considered desirable) could be much more rationally carried on, and would be done in co-ordinated, rather than in piecemeal, fashion.

Such co-ordination would manifest itself, for ex-

1. Corke, M A S, *The Application of Educational Resources in South Africa*, unpublished paper, Table II.

ample, in planning regarding expenditure on large capital projects — such as, for example, the building of expensive new universities. South Africa, bearing in mind the overall percentage of its population which might qualify to attend a university, sustains a remarkably large number of universities, the existence of not all of which can be justified on entirely educational grounds.

In terms of cost — both in terms of capital expenditure and running costs — the university system in this country has been rendered extremely expensive from the taxpayer's point of view, and funds which might have been allocated elsewhere have been put into the duplica tion of existing facilities. A national, co-ordinated system could help to ensure that this kind of expensive duplication does not take place.

The introduction of nation-wide systems of administration, inspection, salaries and the like would be possible if there were a truly national system. This would contribute greatly to the abolition of the disparities which exist across the present multitude of systems.

The reduction of the number of different systems could therefore have as a sheer economic advantage a diminuation in duplication of effect, a more effective rationalisation of manpower and resources, with resultant cost-effectiveness greatly improved over the present system. Rationalisation of the system would not by any means do away with the need for a reorganisation of national priorities to take cognisance of educational needs, but the additional expenditure required could well be less. The possible economic benefits to be gained from such rationalisation pale into insignificance alongside the benefits to the nation as a whole of a unified education system. For decades South Africans of all races have been determinedly and single-mindedly kept apart by the authorities. Meaningful contact on every level has been very much controlled, particularly across colour lines. Even within racial groups, separate-language schools and the like have encouraged ethnic separatism. This separatism has encouraged different attitudes to life and the world, different attitudes to knowledge and authority—a limitless catalogue of differences could be listed. In short, the South African system has encouraged tribalism, and has not been concerned with the building of one South African nation. Unification of the education system must be a necessary step towards the accomplishment of true national unity.

The fabric of South African society is presently completely unequipped to meet the strains which the future must place upon it. Black majority rule, when it comes, will mean full desegregation, including desegregation in the schools. Such desegregation, if brought about literally overnight, will clearly be traumatic for many people. But it need not be if, now, bold steps are taken to prepare the way for the future.

Obviously there would be enormous problems attendant upon any move in the direction outlined. But in a speculative article of this kind there are,perhaps, grounds for arguing that it is better to work towards the future than to wait for it to happen. What form of organisation would be required for such a system? The most rational form of overall organisation would probably be one similar to that used in the educational system of England and Wales — a central Department of Education and Science, with a good deal of autonomy at the Local Education Authority level. Such autonomy would be essential to enable each region to set up its own priorities and programmes based on perceived needs in the community in question. In addition, differences in overall population composition could then reasonably adequately be accommodated within the overall framework of a single system.

Planning for the implementation of a unified system would need to be done within the framework of a clearly defined set of criteria, specific dates and targets for each phase of the programme would need to be set, and the co-operation of all involved would need to be obtained. Clearly a formidable task. But one which nevertheless needs to be faced at once.

Obviously certain groups will stand to gain a great deal by the adoption of a unified national system, while others, at least initially, will have to be willing to make sacrifices and be willing to subscribe to a different basis of resource allocation over a period of years. Clearly major changes of the kind suggested cannot be made without some kind of trauma to many of the parties concerned. But changes will come, maugre attempts to hold back the tide of history.

The 'culture-lag' model of social change has been convincingly applied by many writers to education in institutionalised form in any society. Simply stated, the argument is that education tends to follow where society eads. But that is not to deny the possibility that education may, in fact, be innovative — a point which has been not unconvincingly made by opponents of the 'culture-lag' view of education. It was John Dewey who suggested that change will happen, irrespective, and that education should have as one of its goals to assist its 'clients' to control and direct that change.

In South Africa, faced as we are by the many problems that the future will definitely hold, the education system needs objectively to be considered. In the future there will be difficulties created by population growth, water scarcity, shortage of arable land, pollution, possible Soviet imperialism in this part of Southern Africa, and a host of other difficulties. No single one of South Africa's language or racial groups can unaided address itself to the challenge posed by these problems.

A strong, united South African nation has a far greater chance of surmounting the difficulties which confront her than has a divided, squabbling group of lesser tribes. If the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton it may well be valid to argue that the solution to the problems facing South Africa will depend on the degree to which all South Africans move closer to one another — and where better to start than in the schools, present c r a d l e of future generations?