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Rose, Brian Waldron

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An Educational Blueprint

by BRIAN ROSE

THE need for clear educational statesmanship in Southern Africa today is essential because the problem is almost unique. No American, no Englishman can appreciate the complexity of the situation merely by reference to a few facts and statistics interpreted against the tidy and fairly homogeneous background of their own communities. But since Africans, white and black, must utimately solve their own dilemma, rather than depend on outside manipulation, we especially should rid ourselves of emotional and theoretic nostrums and come down to fact. It is by no means certain that senior educationists nor community leaders quite realise the fundamental nature of their task.

The heresy of our time and place is that conformity is necessary because diversity might imperil blueprints.

British and Americans alike tend naively to imagine that the mere application of adequate doses of education will change Africans in one generation into Black Europeans. But after generations of mission education and with the advantages of an improved education policy in recent years, under 200 Africans gained their matriculation in 1960. That some individuals do in fact become Black Europeans is true. They acquire the culture and education of the European, grow out of their own community in interest and aspiration, and then, finding no purchase for their new personality, reach a sort of no-man's land where a few similar people are caught between two fires. But here in Johannesburg it must not be forgotten that some of the children growing up now are third and fourth generation townsmen. There was the case of the little daughter of a well-known Bantu school principal who was delighted with a new "Reader", a colourful edition of a world work translated suitably into her vernacular. "Daddy, she said, "this says "K", doesn't it? But what is this?" Her father looked and saw a typical *Kraal*. Suitable enough for the non-urbanised and the sentimental, but this child born in the city township, had never seen one.

Brian Rose is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the College of Education, Johannesburg.

Not All Emergent

Not all Africans are emergent. *Only a slight fraction* of them are townsmen, people gradually acclimatising themselves to the techniques of industrialism, to the change from tribal duties and rural occupation to factory work and the skills of a workshop. Probably a majority of Africans are still organised and held by a primitive group psychology, the tight security of tribal control and the domination of sympathetic magic. In fact Africa, wonderful land that it is, domiciles a range of human endeavour that moves from the most primitive Stone Age to the most advanced thought of the atomic era. There is little homogenity. And it is this lack of cohesion, of social structure, that presents a very major and differential problem. That there is a small head of moderately educated and intelligent African opinion, none doubt. But Africa could do with less opinion and more ability. Ability needs training, discipline and a sense of ultimate direction.

It is not generally realised among non-African English-speaking peoples that a primitive society is highly centralised in its social function, that it is antagonistic to individualism, coercive in authority, static, and most uncritical and conservative. In fact as Dr. Hudson of the N.I.P.R. put it: "There is no place for individualism, for the enquiring mind, in a society where all phenomena have standard magical explanations . . . . The form of society and way of life evolved by the African peoples may be in equilibrium with a savage environment. It may allow them to survive, although in some cases this is doubtful. for in French Gabon the black population was dying from tsetse fly infection until the French saved them. In the Gold Coast, villages have been wiped out by the same plague. But their (the Africans') way of life is no preparation for entrance into a foreign environment with technological and unfamiliar ethical values." (Journal of the National Institute of Personnel Research, 1955, p. 28)

A society that is basically anti-individual, non-intellectual, a society that rejects curiosity, criticism, independence of mind, a society that fosters security in terms of group domination through witchdoctors and chiefs, is not easily and rapidly converted by the most up-to-date American know-how and capital into a modern industrial society in which the individual has to face the insecurity of personal decision and personal responsibility with decreasing group support. Long before one comes to the problem of the educability of the African in terms of intelligence and his economic prospects, one would do well to examine the social matrix from which this person is emerging. Possibly under the influence of some modern variety of quasi-philosophical Behaviourism, with its demonstrations of conditioning, many theorists assume that a human being is so subject to environmental influence that he can be psychologically redesigned within years. Even brainwashing can do little more than produce a neurotic dispersion of personality — which is hardly the aim of a healthy educational policy.

There is no need to suppose that because the English have taken a thousand years to move from their wode to their welfare state this period of time need be regarded as a pattern. The value of being civilised is that one can, in fact, manipulate and alter the speed and direction of natural processes. But the cultural shock of rapid and directed change would do incalculable damage to Africa, quite apart from the fact that even among their conforming communities it would soon breed so massive a resentment and resistance as to lead to breakdown. Africans, quite understandably, may not wish to become Black Europeans. But their small educated "upper classes" do wish to acquire the civilised usages and the techniques of our industrial age. Facing those who administer the overall educational programme in Southern Africa, a programme that ought to be meaningful for emergent stoneagers as well as those chilren who will ultimately play their part in the leadership of the atomic age, is the problem of diversity. Needs are different, so education should differ. And yet education is always a function of the community: but because of the diverse social components, the terrifying variety of levels of civilisation, it is most difficult to sustain a single system.

The economy of Africa will continue for many years to be labour dominated, rather than capital dominated. "No amount of liberalism can get over the fact that if the majority of Africans are to be employed at all in their present stage of emancipation, they will be employed as unskilled, and later as semi-skilled hands. Raising wages simply means all too often reducing labour, increasing machinery or capital investment, and paying higher rates to the few who can increase their productivity." Quite naturally, American and British leaders, rapidly rationalising their own industrial sectors to highly developed modern requirements, tend to apply their own workable criteria to our situation: a nice combination of capital, technical training based on a general educational plan, and an increasing commitment of the individual in the democratic process. This would, in effect, throw many emergent Africans out of work for a generation or more. It would waste capital as effectively as the British Ground Nut Scheme did in East Africa for very similar reasons, and it would not best serve the Africans themselves. Yet none can deny that the integration of the African into some form of Western Industrial economy is inevitable. African political leadership may have value in terms of pressure, but it cannot achieve value in terms of reality until a substantial sector of African society has acquired the discipline and technical content without which no civilised society can be manned and held.

It is this very consideration that throws upon the more advanced white community in Southern Africa the overwhelming responsibility of leadership. It will be maintained in this article that a rigid and conformist approach to education is wrong-headed, that one cannot plan educational reform for the whites without reference to the non-whites, in the same way that a cook may make two different puddings. This approach is not intended to hamper the African peoples at the expense of the whites, but to point out that the very matrix of social organisation from which the African is emerging places restrictions on his progress that no sentimental thinking can relieve, and throws onto the white group a burden of responsibility heavier than most whites would care to carry. But if African leadership, incidentally white at this moment in Southern Africa, fails, it carries not only the destruction of itself but the temporary disintegration of any form of advanced civilisation in this area. Whether the white community is accepting its responsibility and meeting its commitments realistically, we shall enquire.

Historically there have been ages of changes

and ages of stasis before today. On the whole agricultural communities tend to be conservative, to resist change and to seek security in the sympathetic magic so often embodied in the nature myth. Very easily, as in periods of the Dark Ages and early Middle Ages, society is not only conservative but stagnant, clustered around a monolithic dogma of some sort. A great divine said of Copernicus "People gave ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heaven or the firmament, the sun and the moon" (Luther Works, Walsch Edition, 1943, vol. xxii, p. 2860). Melanchton, by no means the most aggressive of people, remarked: "Certain men have concluded . . . that the earth moves. Now it is a want of honesty or decency to assert such notions publicly, and the example is pernicious." (Melanchthon, Initia Doctrinae Physicae: Corpus Reformatorum, vol. xiii, p. 216). The universities of Pisa, Innsbruck, Louvain, Douay and Salamance required from their professors an oath that they did not hold and would not teach the Copernican idea of the movement of heavenly bodies, for the university authorities conceived it their duty to protect students from such pernicious doctrine. It was this conservative attitude which discouraged any real thought or individual approach and resulted in an inertia that stultified human progress for generations. Probably it is peculiar to no land, people or time and is present in fairly advanced communities today. As David Riesman has said: "Today we stand in need of more impiety, cosmic and otherwise. It is pessimism that has become complacent." (Individualism Reconsidered, p. 214). Professor Adler, one of the most stimulating of modern American educationists, puts the same point in a different way: "What is unarguable — at least historically — is that the direct and overt objective of liberal education is the liberation of intellect from ignorance and its cultivation as a critical argument."

Clerks or Professional Men

The educational systems of all modern countries exhibit a common weakness, the tendency of clerks and administrators who were originally employed to relieve and to aid the professional man, gradually to invade the control of professional decision. The result of this can be to hamstring the profession in the name of a theoretic administrative tidiness of method. Time and Motion men, supporting statisticians, all too easily convert a subtle human relationship into a bare formula statistically valid but drained of human meaning. The Beaurocrat very rapidly forgets that he exists to serve the community or the profession to which he is attached, and fails to realise that the community does not exist to serve him. Such clerks are most useful in the current overload of teachers, but it is for the teacher finally to decide whether the techniques invented by the clerks are useful or not. And where a professional body allows control of its activities to pass into the hands of non-professional experts, paper centralisation and beaurocratic control converts resistance into resentment and soon leads to ridiculous penalties for nonconformity which cripple human content in the name of an efficiency practised as an end rather than as a means. The very thing that we must avoid in our education in Southern Africa is the sort of over-organised, clerically dominated beaurocracy which strangles initiative. We must continue to encourage diversity, not uniformity, experimentation and new ideas, not a dull copying of some drab central concept. And there are very good reasons why this should be so, that go far beyond either sentimental individualism or popular liberalism. As Levinson remarks, commenting on the American educational problem in terms of the authoritarian personality, "Our educational system, college as well as public school, is still far from realising its potential strength as a social force in the service of democratic values. It may be pointed out that even under the best educational conditions, exposure to the classroom is not enough, and that motivation to learn and receptivity to new ideas provide the only psychological soil in which democratic education can develop effectively." (The Authoritarian Personality, T. W. Adorno et al, p. 287). In concluding a study of Ethnocentrism, Dr. Levinson finds that "It would seem that an autocratic social structure is best suited to the particular type of rationality exercised by the authoritarian personality." (Ibid).

Conformity

Professor Mayer, a distinguished modern American educational Philosopher, says that "merely to conform is to end in a petrified wasteland in education." Later he remarks: "Smugness alienates us from our neighbour and almost creates a moral prison. Smugness is thus the prelude to spiritual isolation." (Patterns of a New Philosophy, pp. 41 and 82 variously).

Throttle initiative in education, insist on con-

formity, rule by clerical regulation, and the result is that sort of wasteland of buck-passing, time-serving, lack of responsibility and pride in work, lack of initiative. Conformity and initiative are mutually exclusive. We have seen just this happen when the proper goals of education have been throttled and political aims have been substituted. As Admiral Rickover says, speaking of the early approach to Soviet education after the October Revolution, the "Marxist dogma on education is of course paramount . . . hence the primary duty of the teacher to mould children into loyal members of a socialist society. Political orientation was more important than the presentation of factual truth. Meanwhile the experienced teachers left over from the old regime were rapidly replaced by unqualified but politically reliable Soviet teachers. Curricula were revised each year. Textbooks had to be continually rewritten to conform with political requirements . . . This hasty and ill-considered tampering with education went on for fifteen years before the disastrous results became evident to Russia's rulers. The universities and other institutions of higher learning began to complain that the schools sent them students who could not deal with fractions or solve second degree equations; who had never heard of Newton's binomial theorem; who knew next to nothing of geography and history and because of ignorance of foreign languages, could not understand scientific terminology. The whole matter came to a head when it was discovered that the five-year plans would remain blueprints unless Russia's schools provided well trained professionals and skilled workers to carry them into effect . . . . Either the Marxist dogma had to be given up or the plan to transform Russian into a modern industrial state had to be relinquished. Faced with this dilemma, which must have been painful indeed, Russia's leaders sacrificed dogma and did a complete about-face." (The Balance Sheet of Education, H. G. Rickover, pp. 18 and 19).

The problem of conformity that faced the Soviets faces all other modern communities. Survival now depends on producing leadership in sufficient numbers to man an industrial-urban civilisation. The strain of these demands has liquidated aristocratic leadership and the domination of the upper classes on an hereditary basis. despite the last ditch stand of so eminent a reactionary as T. S. Eliot. Our Industrial-Urban civilisation would break down unless constantly primed by what one might call "second-level leadership": the leadership of foremen, workshop managers, research supervisors, the vast array of management involved in business and industry, let alone in the professions. The old upper classes can no longer even hope to cope with a fraction of the demands made on their numbers. This has led to an extraordinary and unique revolution in human society, the appearance of the Industrial-democratic state, with a very mobile social structure in which it is possible for gifted and talented people to move fairly easily from one status to another if their merit warrants this . This concept of an open society is not idealistic, but a concept originating from economic pressure geared to community survival. The conforming personality finds it very difficult to move into these areas of leadership. He likes to be told what to do, to run in predestined grooves, to respond to situations with learned formulas. When something occurs that requires an entirely new judgement, the conforming personality is paralysed. Dominated by the authoritarian, he has surrendered his freedom and allowed himself to be bullied into acquiesence, for the authoritarian personality is also an insecure unhappy and maladjusted type. He manages his interpersonal dealings by assertion, coercion and fear. He feels, often with deep sincerity, unfortunately, that he has both a mission and an answer to all major social problems, and his desire to make his fellows 'good' in his particular pattern, alien to them, soon changes his attempt at persuasion to outright and outraged insolence of power. This idea that one has a duty to make people good even against their own wills is typical of the authoritarian, and even St. Augustine's final conversion was slowed down by too great an insistence, for he records having prayed in his unregenerate days: "O God, make me good; but not yet."

We recognise in today's social structure a philosophy of human behaviour that is based fundamentally on withdrawal, because its followers deep down trust neither the universe nor themselves; and from this attitude is evolved a mystique which is basically not christian in its thought. It assumes that man is destined to the devil, that his aspirations are wrong-headed. that his motives are doubtful. his will weak and his natural inclinations chaotic and bestial. Quite naturally such a philosophy tends to pessimism and a deep sense of mistrust of all human undertaking, and from this it follows that one must inevitably prop so weak a creature by sanction,

regulation and precept; one must see that man, wily creature that he is, is forced for his own good to co-operate. Plato, that stimulating forerunner of the author of Mein Kampf, leaves little freedom to any but leaders, and exhibits a profound dismay at common human nature. But there is an alternative philosophy which accepts the frailty of man but that believes that he is at heart sane and kindly and that slowly he has indeed raised himself from barbarity, and will continue to do so. Such people believe that others become what you think they are capable of becoming, and that affection and kindness do in real fact produce an inner confidence, a wish to engage in communal responsibilities, despite folly. Such a view is optimistic, creative, healing and near to the original Christian concept.

Dictated Tidiness or Chaos

By a not very clever sleight of hand, the authoritarian offers us a choice between his over careful tidiness and dictated society, or chaos. Naturally we don't want chaos. So we seem forced to accept his alternative. What foolish people we are! Beaurocracy is not the temple of order. Let us say to such authoritarian people as we meet: "We also believe in order . . . though perhaps a slightly different sort of order to that which you accept." All intelligent people know that without order there can be no civilisation. The democratic approach, like the truly liberal approach is based on order. But between authoritarian order and democratic order there is a massive difference. Democratic order in the adult world is based on consent. Authoritarian order is based on imposition. Men and women in a democracy contract into their community freely: they accept the legal system, support the law agencies, and are considerate of custom. This does not mean that they do not show divergencies: if these become important enough individually, there are thousands of acceptable and legal ways of seeking to change whatever aspect of society it is that one objects to.

At an educational level, we start by containing the child for its own physical and psychological security, in an order determined by custom and modified by constant usage, but aiming at advancing each child to its fullest maturity by allowing each to make decisions and choices and to accept responsibility for those choices. The rate of progress towards this personal autonomy is determined by the child's own capacity to accept responsibility, to tolerate anxiety and to handle insecurity. English education therefore avoids the formula, the rigid goal, the hamstrung method. To us order of any sort serves the community, not the community the order. We consent in order that we may live: we do not live to serve power groups dominating a particular order. The risk of the sort of dragooned conformity that authoritarian order produces is that one creates a nation of emotionally stunted adolescents rather than mature and autonomous human beings. Not only are people with initiative repressed by the authoritarian community, but those without initiative are sustained. If it prevents autonomy, the authoritarian state at least shields its members from individual responsibility. So does the Stone Age Congolese tribal organisation. The teacher with the open mind, interested, questing — and there are many — does not believe that there is only one method, only one consent, only one approach. The idea of an educational system so stratified that officials could look at their clocks and say "throughout our country all form two children are doing fractions in every classroom at this very minute," appals rather than impresses. Children are human beings, diverse in talent and ability, varied in interest, motivation and intention. Machines can be set: human beings need spiritual elbow room. Rigidity is sponsored by insecure minds as an answer to unstable times, and the educational system that offers formulas instead of techniques and tools (mental and physical) cripples its youth and condemns its posterity.

The Democratic School

We are thus in a position to make a positive statement about the democratic school. It is one that offers multiple opportunity for action and doing, being equipped with libraries and laboratories that are used daily by the pupils. It is through their experimental work, their questing, that a critical attitude is built up and the discipline and confidence resulting from soundly motivated interest is maintained. It knows that Newtons, Flemings and Oppenheimers do not arise from conforming minds, but from minds free to question. It encourages scepticism of all dogma, but it insists on evidence and rational support for opinion, so that it will not create another generation of intellectuals whose reason is divorced from their will, and whose opinion is not allied with reality. The democratic school offers as far as it can the stuff of history, the sources, presenting a round picture built from

documentary evidence or facsimile; it avoids all patterned answers and ideologically distorted views — even its own. The democratic school expands the spiritual horizons of the pupil, making him aware of a community at work in its hospitals, its law courts, its churches, its research centres: it promotes curiosity and a sampling of ways of life, but it does not make decisions for its youth. The democratic school creates a tolerance for divergency from its own order, encourages diversity of thought and the toleration of difference. Like Voltaire, the young democrat may hate a particular view but should give his life for the right of the other person to hold such a view.

Many of us who were brought to look upon life as a continuum find it a trifle difficult to accept Dr. Adler's statement that "fully developed industrial democracy is something new in human history." (The Revolution in Education, p. 9). But that, I think, is true. We have produced a situation whose dynamics are quite unlike those of the world of Plato, Bacon or J. S. Mill. Until about 1850 each civilisation has been a variation, sometimes an improvement, on a basic pattern: a generally hierarchical rural economy. But quite literally we have moved into a new era that neither Wordsworth nor Isaac Walton would be equipped to understand or cope with. Both the secularisation and the scientisation of contemporary society are new phenomena, not variations on old patterns. And we are faced with this realisation, that the whole fabric of any community can collapse for want of adequate leadership. We must, therefore, agree to:

(i) train to their fullest capacity all children capable of education, irrespective of any factor other than educability;

(ii) create a highly mobile society in which there is no rigidity dictated by birth, a society in which merit alone dictates status;

(iii) gear industrial and economic expansion to critical intelligence trained to enquire, to suspect nostrums and to test truth.

In times of social fluidity, of rapid change, conformity is so dangerous a commodity that it can wreck the very structure it mistakenly sets out to support. With an obvious American demagogue possibly in mind, Professor Mayer says: "The leadership principle in theory may appear attractive, but in actuality it stifles initiative and creates a parasitical beaurocracy. Initiative may not be so important in normal times, but in periods of crisis it may be decisive. The great advantage of a free society is its elasticity. Only in an atmosphere of freedom can the sciences, arts and philosophy prosper. Oppression and fear are like iron gloves which stifle the very fountains of civilisation. Coercion may be successful temporarily, in the long run it ceates the basis of its own doom." (Patterns of a New Philosophy, p. 95).

In South Africa the whites will have to bear the burden of leadership for some time. The infinitesimal leadership arising from non-Whites (and here we refer to the over-all community leadership, not just to noisy demagogues of any colour) would not have the least chance of holding together a complex society. Even the whites are very hard pressed and one may with justification feel doubtful of their capacity to carry on much longer without numerical assistance. But because there would be a normal distribution of talent, capacity, gifts and so forth, the education of the white should, in the interests of all peoples in this area, be geared to the type of leadership we have been discussing. This view, upon which our survival depends, would lead us to support diversity rather than centralisation, experiment rather than sanction, critical suspicion of dogma of any sort rather than conformity. It would lead one to see the educational system as providing through exciting challenge, a certain inner confidence and adventurousness of spirit. It advocates plasticity of educational structure, the toleration of multiple aims, the recognition of the rights of various communities, as Professor Chris Coetzee has suggested in another context, to their own views and their own educational aspirations. As Karl Manheim put it years ago: "Education itself is one of the major areas in which the spirit of enquiry is admittedly on the decline" (Culture, p. 67). The beaurocratic trend in education is inevitable. The increasing scale of industry, commerce, medical and public services (and, one might add, planning itself) necessitate the rational recruitment of skilled personnel and this means consistent training and selection through a mass education service. The difficulty is to resist the accompanying tendency to specialise and standardise instruction, jeopardising the impulse to question and inquire." (The Function of Teaching, A. V. Judges). If this is true of the British Welfare State, let it be a warning to all of us who have, each in a small way, some sphere of influence in the South African Educational system.