

J.S. You are internationally known as a philosopher, as an educator, as a man who was exiled for his views and as a man of the church. Were you trained in the church?

P.F. Many people think that I am or was a priest but it is not so. I am a Roman Catholic but a layman. I am married and have five children. I got married 27 - 28 years ago and it was the best thing I did in my life.

J.S. Your religion is no handicap to your work in the world Council of Churches?

P.F. No - in some ways it is a help.

J.S. Why were you exiled from Brazil?

P.F. I think because I began to put into practice in many places the things I had been doing in North East Brazil and the things I had been writing about. After a time my methods and my writing, which was a result of action and reflection, became known. So the Minister of Education asked me, in 1963, to be responsible for a campaign for adult literacy in my country.

J.S. A national campaign?

P.F. Yes - the whole country. Many people think that I only worked in North East Brazil because this is where I started - I am from Recife and live my life there. Now I went to Brazilia as Director of Adult Education, but of course, the educational approach I proposed and tried to put into practice could not be accepted by the ruling class. I suppose it is naive to expect the ruling class to allow the kind of education which makes it possible for the oppressed to perceive the real

reasons for their oppression. Perhaps if I had just written I would still be in Brazil but to do things is to upset some people because actions are always political.

J.S. It is this idea of action and awareness - what you call consciatisation - that has excited so much interest. Would you elaborate it?

P.F. Yes of course because this is one of my central pre-occupations - the basic one. In the last 3 or 4 years I have been trying to clarify some dimensions of my theoretical work because earlier I did not discuss the political implications of education or what I really meant by consciatisation.

People should become conscious and aware of themselves - of their social and political conditions through education.

Education should try to do this - to consciatise people.

Only then can people gain the insight and the confidence to change their conditions.

J.S. This is a radical, indeed, a revolutionary view of education.

P.F. Yes, but one that sees the oppression^{ors} as also oppressed by their situation; a full understanding of the process requires love, not hate for otherwise, you will replace one oppression with another.

Because I did not clearly define consciatisation some people in Latin America, perhaps naively, perhaps shrewdly, are using it as a magical tool which ^{they say} will save the masses, transform reality and so on. Really, it is a process which may make these things possible but it is not a formula, a prescription or a doctrine. How it can be used is inevitably political so one of my preoccupation is the political aspect of education. I cannot think of education without thinking of

power.

J.S. This is a huge task you have set yourself.

P.F. Yes and it becomes more difficult. I have to avoid falling into the idealistic perspective for consciousness cannot be changed in itself by itself but only through praxis - that is action and reflection. So we avoid the mistake of the idealism perspective which says that change of consciousness in people leads to change in reality.

But on the other hand we have to avoid the other mistake which is mechanical objectivism which says that if you transform the infra-structure of society you change consciousness.

J.S. This would seem to be a mistake made by some Communist Parties

P.F. Yes but it is a distortion of Marxist thought. It's not Marxism and Marx criticised mechanical objectivism. But there ^{are} ~~is~~ a lot of revolutionaries who ^{are} ~~we~~ conditioned by the ideology of the petit-bourgeoisie - who believe in mechanical objectivism.

I think we have to be dialectical through process and growth to understand what consciatisation really means.

So now I am writing a book in which ^I ~~we~~ analyse my naive days - my own experience.

J.S. I begin to understand why you were exiled after the right-wing takeover in 1964. What reasons did they give?

P.F. They complained that I was an international subversive - very dangerous people. And that I was also an ignorant man. That I was against God, against the people, the President and so on. Oh... and that I gave false explanations.

J.S. And then they exiled you?

P.F. Yes, but first I was expelled from the University and experienced 75 days' jail. That was important - I am not a masochist but that was a good experience for one. Initially I wanted to stay in my country but finally I decided that it wasn't possible because I wouldn't have anything to do so I went to Bolivia as a political exile, but 15 days after I arrived we had a coup d'etat so I went to Chile where I lived for 5 years.

J.S. Were you able to teach?

P.F. Yes, I worked very hard in Chile and learned very much from the Chilean people, but in certain moments I also thought that I would have to leave Chile in spite of my ^{great} love for it because I thought it was time for me to have different experience. I had to move from Chile, from Latin America, to experience the so-called First ~~and~~ World. First I went to the United States as visiting Professor at Harvard University and this was a ^{rich} ~~rich~~ experience.

J.S. You taught there?

P.F. Yes, I gave seminars about my main ideas, and afterwards I came to Geneva to work for the World Council in Asia & Africa

J.S. What is your work here?

P.F. I would say I am a kind of vagabond of the obvious. That is, I go to Tanzania, to Egypt, to Zambia, to the United States, to different countries in Europe in order to help people see that there is no possibility of a neutral education. We don't have neutral science or neutral technology. It's obvious. But I am convinced that we have to break down the obvious to discover what there is in its interior. Many times we are alienated by the obvious so we have to perceive what there is

J.S. If you are in Africa talking to, say, Nyerere what do you say to get behind the obvious; for example, of how to avoid importing Western systems of education?

P.F. Nyerere isn't a good example because he sees beyond the obvious.

J.S. Yes, *it was a mistake to choose him* ~~he isn't a good example in this case~~ because he is a great enough man to keep refreshing himself at the grass-roots of his people.

P.F. He is a very great man - a wonderful educator who is completely immersed in the history - ~~aim~~ ^{cum} - culture/waters of Africa. But I agree that very often Africans are still blinded by colonialism - they are still often alienated because they are so near the colonisers. Africa is trying to escape from this in a few years - 10 or 15 - but remember, in Latin America, after 150 years we are still alienated. So what you say about importing systems is very important. Sometimes people would like me to give them prescriptions. I also say no, I don't have prescriptions. I don't believe in that. You have to discover how to work according to your experience and your historical and concrete situation. *Until you do this you are alienated from your own reality.*

J.S. What do you say to people in advanced societies?

P.F. In advanced societies we have a different kind of illiteracy. We don't have to worry about linguistic illiteracy but we do have to learn to use our literacy to understand our situation. This makes it a political action - every educational activity is a political act either by encouraging action or, more often, by preventing it. *You mean that*

J.S. ¹⁴ We have often prostituted our literacy?

yes... Yes... Now in the so-called First world we must discover new ways of using it, new ways of teaching it. The principles are the same everywhere but each society must find its own way of using them. It is the way you do it that can open the eyes - sharpen the consciousness...