

After the announcement of the fat-cat, prizes-for-all, election-year budget, New Zealanders are purring or vomiting according to their own lights. The power game is played on the instrument of our weaknesses; it is a mirror of us and of our culture. To many, and not least the articulate young, the politics of expedience seems a shoddy exercise in self-interest which has little idealism, little regard for humanity and no discernible moral base.

Perhaps I am unduly sensitive to the "I'm-alright-Jack" aspect of my own society. If so, it may be because I've been reading Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". (Herder & Herder 1970). Freire is a Brazilian priest who has devoted his life to the poor and oppressed first in his own country and, latterly, wherever man oppresses man.

With the many successful bourgeois revolutions behind us, we of the middle class, have come to fear the Marxists as the modern revolutionaries. Revolution grows from conditions^{and} from an awareness of injustice and oppression, not from the particular ideology which gives it expression. Our fear of Marxism may blind us to its ^{causes} ~~causes~~. Freire shares with the Marxists an awareness of the causes but where they generally see political change preceding social change, he reverses the order. In his work with Brazilian peasants, who are among the most oppressed people in the world, he rediscovered the simple fact that the most revolutionary force in the world is a man's conception of his own dignity. All great teachers, for such are the real revolutionaries, have known this. A new vision is effective only when it is communicated to others. Freire has the vision and has found the means of communicating it. He calls it the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

His message is simple and clear - that Man's vocation is to become more human. He is at one with those who place consumer civilisation at judgement, who challenge privilege, who question dehumanized institutions and who strike at those who exercise but do not share authority. However, he does not always agree with the

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tactics of the Left for, while they may provide the seed-bed of change, they are sometimes likely to cause such fear as to precipitate a revolution by the Right.

Freire goes beyond traditional revolutionary thought by rejecting all oppression. He sees that, though revolutions lead to long-term gains, in the short-term they most often replace one form of oppression with another. Men learn to impose or to be imposed upon through their upbringing and their education. Freire believes that it is possible for men to live without oppression and that, revolution need not be violent. He has no illusions about the difficulties of this view for it requires that men accept freedom and the responsibilities this entails to themselves and to all others. This frightens most people because it demands levels of moral judgement and love which few have yet achieved. Freire says that most can do it if they have the vision and if their learning encourages individual dignity, co-operativeness by choice and concern for others. The purpose and the style of education is the key.

Education systems are instruments of the societies they serve and, with rare exceptions, reflect the values of the dominant culture. Again with rare exceptions their organisation, curricular and methods are imposed and, to this extent, are a form of oppression. Freire wants education to be a liberating force, not one of imposition. His techniques have been forged in the toughest and most unpromising conditions in Brazil and this alone makes them worthy of attention. He seems to me to be discussing some important universal principles.

Almost by accident he discovered that education could be a liberating force when the learning was done ^{the} with ~~with~~ learners rather than being designed for them. A learner grows when he perceives himself at the centre of the process; he is unlikely to grow if he is subjected to education. Learning can take on a magical quality when it is a co-operative endeavour but it can be oppressive and deadening when it is an imposed task which is merely a prelude to living. Like good drama, music or art, it must have a feeling of ~~being~~ going somewhere; When it is a habit, a requirement or a ritual, it is already dead.

Freire helps people to learn as an essential part of conscious personal and social growth. Those who value order and form beyond all else will regard this view of education as subversive. Indeed the government of Brazil expelled Freire after the coup in 1964. Since then he has worked for Unesco in Chile and latterly for the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

As a result of his experience he describes the "culture of silence" of the oppressed. This is forced on them by the economic, social and political domination - ^{the} ~~by~~ paternalism - of which they are victims. It occurs to me that the so-called silent majority in our society may share this condition. Freire claims that such people become submerged and seldom respond to reality with the critical awareness of sentient beings. He places much of the blame on education systems which, as instruments of society, are more inclined to indoctrination than to the release of human possibilities. There is no such thing as a neutral education. It is predominantly concerned either with conformity to the present or with "the practice of freedom" whereby people act critically and creatively in transforming their world.

Paulo Freire is an idealist ^{idealism} which makes him something of a rarity. He has also shown that ~~it~~ ^{it} works and that it can be shared. This may be because he has fused several old and new attitudes and traditions round the concept of love. As an idealist he will be dismissed by many but I think, and hope, that a number of people share with me a growing distaste for public bribery and expedience, ^{and have a yearning for} some vision and some belief in the human capacity for good. ~~To such people,~~ ^{for}

To such people, Paulo Freire speaks with the clarity & urgency of the trumpet calling to the breach.