

"EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS"

by Paulo Freire (Sheed and Ward, 164 p. \$8.60)

Reviewed by Cliff Wright

Healthy disturbance could occur in educators, those working in community development, social workers, and clergy, if they gave real attention to "Education for Critical Consciousness" by Paulo Freire. Freire views education as an effort to liberate and humanise people, rather than as yet another effort to dominate and domesticate them. What he writes, he knows from his own action/reflection as an educator in Brazil. He is now in exile, his "crime" being that he really committed himself to action for human liberation. Freire continues his work as a staff consultant with the World Council of Churches, Geneva.

The book contains two major essays. The first, "Education as the Practice of Freedom" was written in 1965 and the second, "Extension or Communication", in 1968. It is fortunate that Sheed and Ward have made the essays available, for they contain the essence of Freire's educational thinking, fresh from first basic formulations.

Many of the words he uses are unfamiliar and somewhat cumbersome, such as "massification", a state in which people do not make their own decisions even though they think they do, having been manipulated into a manageable unthinking state; and "assistentialism", a Latin American term used to describe policies of financial and social assistance which attack symptoms and not causes, using paternalistic "hand-out" approaches. Negative reactions to these and other words should not block off communication with Freire, for the terms are eloquent once their meaning is grasped.

In the first essay, "Education as the Practice of Freedom", the central thesis is that, society being unfinished, man can intervene in the world of nature, culture, history, in order to change it. "Conscientisation", in contrast to "domestication", helps to liberate people, so that they become aware of their power as "subjects", no longer mere spectators, fatalistically disengaged from the historical process. They can move into engagement, into a state of critical consciousness about their own power, with awareness of the objective situation and of their ability to bring about transformation.

The basic theory is supported by stories of the adult literacy process used by Freire in Brazil. He asserts, "Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness" (p. 37). The result was passive, fearful, naive human beings.

In a footnote, Freire tells that, under a bust of a candidate for public office - with arrows pointing to his head, his eyes, his mouth, his hands - this legend appears:

You don't need to think, he thinks for you!
You don't need to see, he sees for you!
You don't need to talk, he talks for you!
You don't need to act, he acts for you!

Various phases of the process Freire used are outlined in the essay. They include field vocabulary research; the selection of generative words and themes from this research data; analysis of the familiar local situations using slides, photographs, and posters, relating these to associated regional and national issues; and the operation of the literacy process itself.

"Instead of a teacher we had a co-ordinator; instead of lectures, dialogue; instead of pupils, group participants; instead of alienating syllabi, compact programs that were 'broken down' and 'codified' into learning units" (p. 42). The people were enabled to reflect about themselves and their world, and achieve critical consciousness about the situation in which they lived. Through this process they came to realize that they were creators of culture, makers, transformers of history.

"For men to overcome their state of massification they must be enabled to reflect about that very condition. But since authentic reflection cannot exist apart from action, men must also act to transform the concrete reality which has determined their massification" (p. 20).

It is no wonder the programme disturbed the established powers in Brazil. The method is dialogue ("an act of love") in contrast to anti-dialogue, which does not communicate, but rather issues communiques.

The second essay, "Extension or Communication" contains a critical analysis of the work of the agronomist operating as an extension agent in Brazil. The analysis goes far beyond the work of an agronomist, being a case study, the insights from which are broadly applicable in many situations and educational approaches. The essay contains a profound statement of what Paulo Freire understands by liberating education, which he sees as man being humanised as s/he co-operates in conscious action and reflection in transforming the world.

There is less attention given in this and the first essay to class struggle than in his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and "Cultural Action For Freedom", and less still than in spoken statements made during his Australian visit in April/May, 1974. In this respect the essays are reasonably comfortable. But the radical implications are there.

Freire critically analyses the term "extension", its linguistic meaning, and its operation as cultural invasion. He discusses agrarian reform and technological change, demonstrating his understanding of the contrast between "extension" and communication.

In too many cases, extension work is little more than propaganda from an alien cultural world, a handing over, a depositing of some one else's knowledge on others. The result, Freire argues, is alienating, dehumanising, ineffective. He tells stories illustrating magical aspects of Latin American culture and claims: "Magic thought is neither illogical or pre-logical. It possesses its own internal logical structure and opposes as much as possible any new forms mechanically superimposed" (p. 104). To confront such magical views with communiques and propaganda not only arouses defensiveness, but brings about a split-level result. The essay suggests ways in which awareness-making processes, related to subjective attitudes and objective situations may be used creatively, avoiding cultural invasion. This will occur through genuine dialogue, understood as the "loving encounter of people" - which awakens the awareness and overcomes fatalism, in a process of praxis as action and reflection on reality in order to transform it.

Too often agronomist educators, in discouragement, blame "the natural incapacity of the peasants". But Freire looks to new liberating, humanising possibilities. "The 'technical aid' concept of education 'anaesthetizes' the educatees and leaves them a-critical and naive in the face of the world" (p. 152).

Freire's basic analysis, as has been said, has far wider application than in the work of the agronomist educator in Latin America. It is of the greatest relevance to processes of "aid" of all sorts, to social work, work of clergy, and in particular to the educational task in Australia with children, youth, and adults. But the fact must be faced that, if education for critical consciousness is attempted in schools and universities, as well as beyond these institutions, profound conflicts will be normal and inevitable - a price to be paid for human liberation, for a transformed society in which men and women may thrive and grow