

# After the Revolution

Paulo Freire and  
Antonio Faundez

## The question of power

*Whenever my friends speak of the struggle in reference to Paulo Freire, they usually mean the struggle to understand what the hell he's trying to say. This excerpt from his "spoken book" with Antonio Faundez, proves that even when speaking, Papa Freire's thought processes are quite formidable—nevertheless, well worth decoding.*

*Freire and Faundez have given us a revolutionary theory, practice, and vision whereby every member of society participates in the rediscovery of power and democracy. The future is to be created by all the people together, including important economic decisions about what to produce, for which purposes, and for whose uses. This conversation between Freire and Faundez, both of whom served as consultants for the Adult Education Program of the World Council of Churches, took place in Geneva in 1984.*

*Paulo:* While you were speaking of these things, I was reminded of a conversation I recently had in Brazil with workers' leaders. "What we really want," they clearly said, each in turn, "is a just society, or at least to begin with, a less unjust society. A socialist society." But they went on to say: "What we do not accept is a predetermined pattern imposed from above. From the very

outset we want to share in the discussions about the sort of society we must create together, just as we want to continue to share in the process of reshaping society." As one of the leaders said: "This is a process which does not come to a halt: it is something which moves, just as history moves."

**T**his level of political awareness, of class consciousness, being displayed today by wide sectors

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viable, and not as  
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of the Brazilian working classes, is highly significant. It shows the need for a qualitative change in the struggle to change society. Moreover, it arises out of what the working classes are learning through their struggle in factories, trade unions, residents' associations and social movements.

The sad thing is that some authoritarian responses which are being made to this thrust towards independence by the workers regard it simply as an expression of populism, of mere spontaneism, or of nothing more than anti-revolutionary reformism.

I agree, obviously, with your analysis which, in its turn, is related to the attitude of those Brazilian workers' leaders. I am also convinced, Antonio—and I would like to hear from you on this—that we are experiencing and being confronted with certain challenges which in the closing years of this century are coming over very strongly. Basically, they are historical issues, which in almost all cases come down to us through the years, but which now require to be confronted in new ways.

One of these issues is power: the question of power. I am quite sure that the basic problem facing us today in the struggle to change society is not that of simply gaining power, but a gaining of power which is prolonged creatively in a rediscovery of power; creating a new power which does not fear to be called in question and does not become rigid for the sake of defending the freedom already achieved which, basically, should be a freedom constantly being achieved. Indisputably, this issue cannot be examined without re-examining at the same time the issue of democracy or, as I like to call it, democratic substantiality.

There is, I feel, an urgent need to correct countless prejudices which exist against democracy because of its constant association with the bour-

geoisie. When we hear the word "democracy," many of us think of conservatism, bourgeois exploitation or social democracy: I, however, think of socialism. And why not? Why should deep, radical social change be incompatible with freedom? This is the central theme of a book by the Brazilian professor, Francisco Weffort, to be published later this year.<sup>1</sup>

I think that these two trains of thought on the subject of the vision of the future lead us to the question of power, as do also the thoughts of the workers' leaders just mentioned, in which it is very clear that there is a need for constant critical participation by the popular classes in translating the vision of the future into reality and developing it—in other words, how this power will be generated and continue to be generated in the creation of a new society.

*Antonio:* Here, Paulo, you are putting your finger on the central issue for contemporary society—the question of power.

Following our line of thought, it would be interesting to ask what power is, where it is located, and who possesses it. Certainly, intellectuals are mistaken when they maintain that power is located only in the state, and that, therefore, to gain power means to take over the power of the state. I regard the state—its administration, its coercive power, and its ideological apparatus—as the point from which power is distributed. Thus teachers, educationalists and politicians possess a portion of power because they receive it from the state.

There is a hierarchy of power. Beginning from the state, power becomes diluted, and the state entrusts a portion of power to each one, while the classes at the top of the state hierarchy maintain their position as those who possess the greatest power of all: the power to confer power. However, to identify power with the



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over the power of the state (since state and power are identical) is a mistake—epistemologically, politically and even psychologically. I think you are right when you say that power must be rediscovered. And, if power is to be redis-

covered, Paulo, then the struggle to achieve power also needs to be rediscovered.

*Paulo:* Of course, I entirely agree. In fact, rediscovering power presupposes rediscovering the struggle.

*Antonio:* Exactly! I would want to say that rediscovering power involves identifying power with the struggle for power. Building this new sort of power requires a new sort of struggle for power.

And thus the old identification of the state with power can no longer be a guide to action for change or struggle for change.

I think that power and the struggle for power have to be rediscovered on the basis of the resistance which makes up the power of the people, the semiological, linguistic, emotional, political and cultural expressions which the people use to resist the power of domination. And it is beginning with that power, which I would call primary power, that power and the struggle for power have to be rediscovered. On the basis of their actual experience of participation, struggle, resistance, commonsense and good sense (which, according to Gramsci, is the positive element in the commonsense, the element of resistance to power) the masses have the power to resist this other power. It is on that basis that we must develop a fresh concept of power.

Gaining power begins with this power, both small and great, because this is the starting point from which power can be changed into power in which the masses share. This power must be manifested in all human activities. It must permeate all activities of the masses and intellectuals. We must, I insist, rediscover power by building on the power of the masses and thus rediscover the struggle for power. Because, when you begin with that concept of power, the struggle changes completely.

It is no longer a matter of taking over the power of the state in order to change society, but rather of changing society from the base so as to build a new society in which power and the struggle for power manifest themselves in a different way.

**P**ower will begin in the everyday struggles, in the everyday actions of men, women, children and teachers: in every one of the various professions and occupations human relationships will change and become democratic, relying on participation by all. Power will belong to all; each individual will claim his or her portion of power as a human being, and this will enable a society to be built in which power will be of all and not just a few.

If we wish to give concrete form to this new concept of power, the fundamental task will not be to take over the power of the state, because state and power are not identical, but rather to gain power beginning with our daily activities in the area where we live, in the factory, in the school, in all the most basic aspects of the life of the masses.

And this power is created out of the most basic elements of society, taking over the power of the state will simply be the outcome of this exercise of power in its totality. Thus a different concept of power and of taking over the power of the state will be nothing other than a transformation of the state itself as a power. The state will be changed and if we wish to continue using Gramsci's terminology, the citizens themselves will claim the state as theirs. That is, the state will be permeated by its citizens and thus power will be a power in which all will share, individually and collectively, by social groups. In short, it will be a state in which power will be of all and for all and exercised by all, not simply by a small group of individuals who determine what society, justice, solidarity, participation or

culture will be . . .

## **Redirecting production**

*Paulo:* When I was working for the World Council of Churches and, together with the team from the Institute of Cultural Action, was advising the government of Guinea-Bissau in the field of education, particularly adult education, I used to have conversations with the Brazilian economist Ladislau Dowbor, who was at the time adviser to the ministry of economic planning in Guinea. In those conversations we compared the power of progressive, and even revolutionary speeches on education and culture and the power of the actual innovations being introduced in the educational system, with the opposing power, created by the implementation of a number of economic projects suggested to or instilled in the minds of leaders by some

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multinational company. “Sometimes,” Dowbor would say, “the destiny of a country such as this is decided in one night by the acceptance of two economic projects which will distort the path



mapped out for the reshaping of education and culture."

The political dimension of the redirection of production inevitably involves the active participation of the popular masses. I am thus returning to a point you stressed when we were speaking of the rediscovery of power—the increasing participation by the people in power and the creation of power, which does not happen if the popular masses do not participate in some way in the economic planning of society.

How great is the participation of the popular masses in productive activity? Are they consulted through a variety of channels, through various local manifestations of power, as to what should be produced?

*Paulo:* . . . for what purpose and for whom. For what, for whom, against what, and against whom. Such questions will possibly cause some bureaucrats in power, or aspirants to it, to laugh. They are convinced that they alone must decide, because they already know what they have to do. In my opinion, it is precisely because we already know only too well what we have to do, that power is not being rediscovered. It is simply taken. It merely changes hands. In order for power to be rediscovered, it is essential that we do not know everything that should be done. We must not be too certain of our certainties! We cannot, however, for that reason dispense with proposals as to what to do, suggestions to be tried out. By saying that we must not be too certain of our certainties, I do



*Antonio:* . . . or for what purpose it is produced . . .

not mean that the correct course is to wander without direction trying to guess

what to do. That would be to lapse into the spontaneism we have already criticized, of which, as you said earlier, the positive counterpart is not authoritarian and elitist arrogance. What is the real extent of the participation and freedom of the unions? How can the working class take on its role also as the subject and not simply the instrument of production? Changing the direction of productive activity and having a democratic vision of it is absolutely essential for rediscovering power and culture, language and education. Basically, without

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such a change of direction we shall continue reproducing a technocratic and elitist understanding of production.

*Antonio:* I think that your analysis, Paulo, is simply the continuation of what we were already saying . . .

*Paulo:* . . . but none the less essential . . .

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*Antonio:* . . . but at a different level, the level of development. If we maintain that the rediscovery of society involves a

rediscovery of politics, power and education (which means that society should be changed in an ongoing process of renewal), this certainly includes as well a rethinking not only of the concept of development, but also its implementation, the productive process as such, understood not as productive process simply to satisfy economic needs, but as a process to satisfy genuine needs.

It seems to me here that in the field of development, we have to formulate the question of needs. I say this because a new pattern of development, a redefinition of the concept of the development process, has basically to be a response to the needs of the majority; and, for this to happen, it is imperative to discover what the needs of the popular classes are. And the popular classes themselves are the ones who should discover them, together with this new type of intellectual who has entered into the feelings of the popular masses and made their feelings his own. These are basically concerned with needs, or rather action to find a response to the pressing vital needs of the popular masses. I think that changing the direction of the productive process, Paulo, means resisting the situation where that process imposes needs by determining what the people should eat, drink, hear, wear and learn.

**T**he productive process, before being productive activity, should be an act of discovery of the needs of the people so that it responds to those needs. It is undeniable that, as it responds to the needs of the people, new needs will arise. Thus development is a rediscovery, a reshaping of the actual development process, because it will be an act of constant response to the essential needs of the people and fundamentally linked to those needs. And so we are back again at this issue of fundamental questions, and the answers to the essential ques-



tions which the people ask of themselves in order to achieve happiness. Because, in the final definition, the people are happy as they respond to their needs, which they should face as part of a process. They are not fixed immutable needs: they are historical needs, which should look to the development process for responses adequate to those needs.

**I** think that we should have to insist that it is the duty of the people to discover their own basic needs as an act of resistance to needs imposed from outside by an alienating productive process determined by the dominant classes of the world economy. Thus, the reproduction or rediscovery of the politics of the act of producing, of the economy of the productive process, involves redefining, rediscovering the needs of the people so as to do away with imposed needs and to identify or rediscover their actual needs. . .

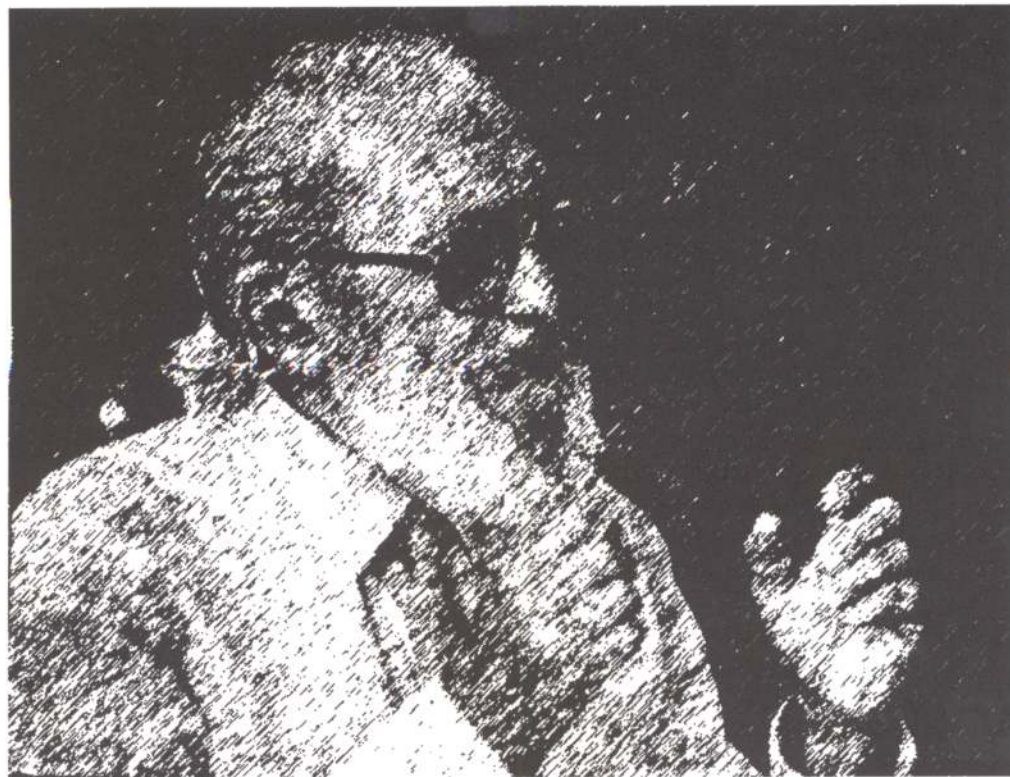
*Paulo:* I remember the comments made to me by government ministers in various countries in Africa, with whom I had a personal and not only a professional relationship, concerning the tremendous pressures they were under, both from governments and from private organizations specializing in development, who would arrive with their bags full of solutions to save the national economy. They would tell me of visits—sometimes unwelcome and wearisome visits—by technicians from companies specializing in development, who would arrive with their bags full of solutions to save the national economy. They tried as a rule to convince the government of how right and urgent it was, for example, to build a fruit-juice factory, or a cotton-ginning factory. Any sort of factory. Basically, what they were generally doing, with some probable exceptions, was imposing a need, as you were saying. Obviously, the projects are put forward as triggering off

development. The actual company proposing the project almost always sees to obtaining the necessary funding, and takes a substantial percentage of the finance raised. All in all, according to the information they gave me, these projects normally contributed to plunging the country into debt and not to its independence. They introduced technological equipment which finished up unused because it was not appropriate to the context . . .

### **The need to start where the people are**

*Antonio:* I think that any reshaping of the development process should begin not only by ascertaining the people's basic needs (which they themselves should rediscover, redefine) but also by using the knowledge the people have about how to respond to those needs. All these governments in which the people are the leader must learn to recognize these pressures from outside, from friends as well as enemies.

Any attempt to arrive at a new conception, a reorganization of development must, in order to respond to these needs, start from the knowledge and techniques possessed by the people. As we were saying, any political project should take into account this commonsense, these empirical responses made by the people to their own needs. And, starting from there, we open up a space for them to develop their technology and their knowledge yet further so as to respond to their needs, in this process of discovering needs and redefining them, or of recreating techniques, or using to the full techniques and knowledge which enable them to satisfy these needs. I firmly believe that we can put forward a different form of development which will gradually respond to the true needs of the people, but with their imagination and participation, with their actions, reflections and knowledge.



It would be a good idea to give some examples so that we can see how the knowledge possessed by the people to respond to their needs is not used and is unconsciously under-rated—not only by creating new needs but by ignoring the practical methods used by the people to meet their own needs.

I could tell, for example, of how, in Equatorial Guinea, various aid organizations which were wanting to contribute to solving the problems of the people of Guinea put forward a proposal to increase fish production, since they were aware that the people were undernourished and that it was therefore necessary to increase the protein value of their diet. To that end they gave assistance to mechanize production and proposed that the products should be preserved. Preservation would be by means of refrigeration. But producing ice in a tropical country—as in European countries—involves the use of energy. And

where was energy to be found? Energy is produced by means of oil or electricity. And how can it be obtained in a country which has no electricity and finds it difficult to purchase oil? But it does definitely become possible if we are open to appreciating popular techniques, or coming to appreciate them again, willing to seek out the methods of preservation traditionally used by the people. And their methods use energy found in nature, energy from fire (in a land covered with forests and woods, wood is readily at hand) or from the heat of the sun (in a tropical country the sun shines all the year round). So that the problem of preserving products is solved by traditional methods.

*Paulo:* You can see, Antonio, from this example you give, which speaks for itself, how even people and institutions motivated by the desire to help are strongly imbued with the authoritarian ideology which overestimates scientific knowledge and advanced technology,



and under-rates popular wisdom. According to this authoritarian ideology, this ideology of "whiteness," it is the centre which knows, while the "periphery" never knows. It is the centre that decides, while the periphery is the object of decisions made by others. In this example you have given, we can clearly see how this ideology "immunizes" its adherents against thinking even for a second that the popular classes of any country have learned in the collective activity in which they share how to develop techniques of food preservation. No one takes the trouble to ask, to enquire, since the "incompetence" of the population is considered to be a "characteristic of their nature." Once again, it's a matter of the primary question. The example you gave is further evidence of how the primary questions get lost beneath the overwhelming force of the answers. The organization in question did not ask the population anything. It brought with it the answer of technology in the form of refrigeration, of a refrigerator! If they had asked, they would have discovered how the population had in the course of time in their struggle for self-preservation found answers to some of their basic questions. It is quite incredible!

*Antonio:* Any project to assist the development of these peoples should aim not only to discover together with the people what their needs are, but also to discover the traditional forms of satisfying those needs. Only subsequently to those steps would we be able to suggest techniques developed by other cultures, simple techniques which can be quickly taken up by the people. We could call those techniques *appropriate technology*. However, this whole educational process—and it is an educational process—of solving the problems of the people must, I insist, start from empirical knowledge, which is the power of the people to solve their own problems.

Moreover, Paulo, not asking the primary questions in order to find appropriate answers entails considerable consequences at the cultural level. A population culturally accustomed to eating smoked fish would have to change its eating habits if an imposed technology, like refrigeration, were introduced.

*Paulo:* . . . and so change their taste. And taste is a cultural matter!

*Antonio:* Oh yes, a cultural matter (laughter). And then the question of resistance arises. Such a population is definitely not going to take to eating fresh fish, because that would mean breaking with tradition. Now I am not saying that such traditions should not change, if the people so decide.

*Paulo:* Of course! Amílcar Cabral used to speak of the need to overcome what he called "the negative elements in culture."

*Antonio:* If we can preserve people's tastes, their culture, while solving the basic problem of malnutrition, why then do we have to have recourse to other techniques which will change the cultural process which the people themselves are carrying out and which in some way is already providing a solution to the problems?

All this is thus a current leading to change and a creation of needs other than the true needs of the people.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Professor Weffort's book was published later in 1984 by Editora Brasiliense, São Paulo.