

COMMENTARY

Towards the day of hard choices

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When apartheid breaks down (as it must), South Africa will need a new, non-racial educational system. Moves to that end are already afoot.

LAST week the National Party was returned to power in South Africa. Although the party has promised reform, most South Africans expect that the essentials of the system of apartheid that divides South Africa from the rest of the world, and its people from one another, will not be fundamentally changed.

Since 1953, when Hendrik Verwoerd first enshrined racially divided education in the Bantu Education Act, education policy has been the cornerstone of 'separate development'. Rejection of apartheid education sparked the Soweto student uprising of 1976 and the ensuing 13-year-old crisis that shows no signs of ending. For several months now many schools have been closed. Police are regularly in school playgrounds and some university campuses have at times been occupied by security forces. F. W. de Klerk (himself until this month Minister of National Education) and his incoming administration have inherited this legacy — for them, as for their predecessors, educational issues will continue to be central as apartheid continues to disintegrate in the face of internal and external pressure.

Background

The National Party's policy makers, who codified the principles of apartheid into legislation from 1948 onwards, were quite clear about their intentions. White, coloured, Indian and African* were to live apart, and whites were to retain political and economic dominance. In consequence, education should be to the appropriate level. Verwoerd was explicit that, for Africans, this meant no more than the minimum training required for manual labour. Whites, on the other hand, had to be educated to lead and, in the case of Afrikaners, to preserve the Afrikaner heritage. 'Christian National Education' was based on the view that Afrikaners were a distinct Christian nation, with a language, history and culture of their own. The language of apartheid may be more sophisticated now than it was 40 years ago, and some changes have occurred, but racially segregated education remains the foundation of South Africa's education structure.

* In this article we use the term 'black' to refer collectively to all those denied full political rights by the system of apartheid. The racial designations 'white', 'coloured', 'Indian' and 'African' are those used by the state in administering apartheid.

Under the philosophy of Christian National Education, the school system is governed by a multiplicity of education departments, each with its own examination system, syllabuses and standards. A common feature is authoritarian control. The same philosophy has also divided the

Table 1 Comparative statistics for South African schools, 1987

	White education	African education
Pupil:teacher ratio	16:1	41:1
Underqualified teachers (less than standard 10 plus a 3-year teacher's certificate)	2%	87%
Per capita expenditure	R 2,508	R 477
Standard 10 pass rate	94%	56%

R, South African Rand

Source: J Hofmeyr & R. Spence *Bridges to the Future in Optima* Vol. 37, No. 1 (1987).

universities. Although some tertiary institutions were founded specifically to service apartheid, the four English-speaking open universities (Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes and Witwatersrand), as well as the University of the Western Cape, have vigorously opposed the imposition of apartheid framework. The Extension of University Education Act (1959), which introduced a 'permit system' for black students wishing to study at universities designated 'white' by the government, was vigorously fought. Legislation in 1983, which replaced the notorious permit with a ministerially determined 'racial quota', was also resisted, with the result that although the provision is on the Statute Book no quota has ever been enforced.

These five universities have consistently opposed the encroachment on academic freedom and freedom in general: from the imposition of successive states of emergency, banning and detention without trial, censorship and restrictions of the press, to restrictions and bannings of individuals and organizations. In 1987 the Universities of Cape Town, Western Cape and Natal successfully challenged, in the Supreme Court, a government attempt to link state subsidy to the control of political activities on university campuses. The five universities have usually stood alone, although staff and students at other universities, particularly the predominantly black universities, have not been silent.

Those tertiary institutions that have made a principled stand against apartheid

remain inexorably bound to the wider crisis in education. Black students at the open universities are tremendously disadvantaged, and academic support programmes are essential. Black candidates for university admission often require full bursary support if they are not to be denied further education for purely economic reasons. Political conflicts often erupt in the pockets of relative freedom on the open campuses. For these and other reasons, educational issues in South Africa have to be seen on a broad canvas.

Schools

A recurrent feature of popular uprisings since 1976 has been school boycotts by black pupils protesting against the iniquities of apartheid, including the education they receive. Although the state response to such boycotts in 1976, 1981 and 1984–1985 was to increase further the already harsh restrictions, the government announced in 1986 its intention to achieve parity in education according to a Ten Year Plan. This would have increased expenditure on education by 4.1 per cent per annum in real terms. But this year the Minister of Education stated that this goal could not be achieved. "As far as education is concerned we are in a tight spot", he told parliament, citing the main reason as the low growth in the economy, due partly to sanctions and disinvestment (*Hansard*, No. 11, cols 5555–5559; 1989). Thus although there have been some improvements in recent years (particularly in the greatly increased financial provision for black education which has expressed itself in better qualifications and salaries of black teachers and facilities for black schools), huge disparities remain. Table 1 shows the stark differences between white and African schools in pupil:teacher ratios, teacher qualifications, per capita expenditure and pass rates. At the same time, the white school-going population will decline from 954,000 in 1987 to 899,000 in the year 2020, while projections for the African school-going population show that it could more than double from 6,645,000 in 1987 to 14,977,000 in 2020. (Figures from E. Dorstal's *Notebook on Educational Trends and Perspectives*, Institute of Futures Research, University of Stellenbosch; 1988.)

More than a decade of instability coupled with inadequate resources has led to a situation in urban black schools today in which very little education is taking place.

Drop-out rates are high. Teachers, caught between the administrators of apartheid and their own communities, are demoralized. Pupils lack the will to learn. Parents have little control and discipline has almost completely broken down. Illiteracy in South Africa is estimated to be as high as 50 per cent.

Universities

A sustained crisis in secondary education obviously has severe effects on tertiary education. These effects and the response to them vary, and are modulated by the place of individual institutions within the framework of apartheid education.

Some 420,000 students are currently enrolled at higher-education institutions: 300,000 at universities, 68,000 at technikons and 53,000 at teacher-training colleges. These figures are part of a trend of rapid increase: in 1966 70,000 students were registered in South Africa's universities, while over the past three years alone an additional 60,000 students have been awarded places. Over the next ten to fifteen years the expected three-fold increase in the number of matriculants, the great majority of whom will be African, will continue this exponential demand for university places. But rather than challenging the structure of separate education, the increases in enrolment are having little effect on the system of racial segregation and discrimination.

Despite the abolition three years ago of the permit system, which restricted access to universities on the basis of race, the effect of apartheid is still starkly evident (Table 2). Ninety-eight per cent of students at universities designated African in the original structure of apartheid education are African, and 96 per cent of students at Afrikaans or dual-medium universities, are white (the University of South Africa, UNISA, is a non-residential, distance-learning university that has always been open). Looked at another way, although slightly more than a third of current university students are African, 51 per cent of them are at the eight African universities, 39 per cent of them are studying by correspondence through UNISA, 2 per cent of African students are at the University of Durban Westville (originally an 'Indian' university), a further 2 per cent are at the University of the Western Cape (intended as a 'coloured' university) and 5 per cent are at historically 'white' universities (almost all of them at the English-speaking universities). These figures must be set against South Africa's demographic structure: there are over 30 students per thousand of the white population and fewer than three students per thousand of the African population (see *Macroaspects of the University within the Context of Tertiary Education in the RSA*, Committee of University Principals, 1987). It is difficult to escape the conclu-

sion that, despite changes in legislation, Verwoerd's vision of separate education has been successfully realized in the university system as well as in the schools.

Additional biases are less immediately evident, but are of crucial importance. With the exception of Medunsa (a medical university established for blacks), the natural sciences are best developed at the 'white' universities. Together with the low standards of mathematics and science education in African schools, this has meant that Africans have mostly studied the humanities, social sciences and education and, to a lesser extent, law and commerce. Similarly, postgraduate study is concentrated at the 'white' universities: only 5 per cent of South African masters and doctoral students are African. It is not surprising that 91 per cent of the permanently appointed academic staff in South Africa in 1986 (the most recent year for which comparative figures are available) were white and less than 5 per cent African.

As with the schools, the present basis of financing is not sufficient to allow universities to do much about these inequalities. While the South African government allocates a respectable 20 per cent of public expenditure to education, and universities receive a sizeable 15 per cent of this, the joint consequences of past neglect and future demand have created a financial crisis. Thus the government has cut back its intended support for universities by some 25 per cent. Per capita income to universities is increasing at about half the rate of inflation. Government budgetary planning is based, at most, on annual increases of 1-2 per cent in real terms. Government policy is to rationalize the university system and to limit growth through the exclusion of marginally qualified entrants.

Although these forces act in concert upon the university system their effects vary from institution to institution. The educational challenges arising from inadequate schooling are faced primarily by the black universities, and on a lesser but perhaps more complex scale by the four English-speaking open universities given the wide range of educational backgrounds of their first-year students. Acute demand for university places is faced only by those universities committed to improving access for African students. The financial situation is worsened for these same universities. South Africa has no national student financial aid programme. The costs of a year of study at a residential metropolitan university exceed even the minimum annual wage levels negotiated by strong Trade Unions with more enlightened employers. In this context, universities committed to increasing African access have had to invest heavily in financial aid programmes, and to give them precious fund-raising priority.

Current debates

The crisis in South African education has aptly been described by Hartshorne as an interregnum in which (following Gramsci) "the old authority is dying and the new cannot be born" and where, as a result, "a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (*Post-Apartheid Education*, to be included in *Critical Choices for South African Society*, Oxford University Press, 1989). The South African government has consistently repressed organizations working towards a non-racial future. Hundreds of people involved in education have in recent years been detained without trial or have had severe restrictions imposed upon them. Nevertheless, there has been a great deal of debate about alternatives to apartheid education.

At school level the debate has centred on fundamental issues. Among them are the extent to which education should serve the individual, society and the state, the nature of a 'relevant' curriculum and who should determine relevance, and the question (given that South Africa is multilingual) of whether students should receive mother-tongue education and for how long. When in a school career should a common language (which one?) be used as the medium of instruction? Given the demographic realities of South Africa, is mass formal education possible? Who should pay for it — the state, private enterprise or both? Where does authority end and authoritarianism begin?

Both Christian National Education and Western-style liberal education are under scrutiny. Liberal education is viewed by some as fostering elitism and competitiveness, and entrenching capitalism, and as a vestige of colonialism. An emerging, alternative philosophy is 'People's Education', which can be regarded as a set of proposals which flesh out the educational principles contained in the Freedom Charter (a declaration of political aspirations and intent formulated during the Congress of the People, organized by the African National Congress at Kliptown in 1955). The structures envisaged in People's Education are unitary and non-racial, and organized so that all parties involved in education — students, parents, teachers, workers — have a part in its management.

These debates are echoed at the university level. Questions are being raised about how the curriculum and research priorities should reflect South Africa as a part of Africa; the role of the curriculum and the university in reproducing inequalities, not just by race, but also by gender and class; the balance between research generated by disciplinary interests and that initiated in response to national needs; the extent to which teaching and research should concentrate on the needs of government and big business at the expense of those of the broader community; links between universities and the

military and the armaments industry; and the democratization of university power structures and many other issues.

A wide range of educational programmes has developed in parallel with this broad debate. The English-speaking open universities and the University of the Western Cape are islands in a hostile environment, but it has still been possible to initiate imaginative projects in educational development, academic support for educationally disadvantaged students, and devising appropriate selection criteria. Large investments in personnel and in time have been made in order to build a non-racial ethos and appropriate industrial-relations practices. Financial-aid programmes have been introduced. Student residences were fully integrated in spite of the Group Areas Act.

There are also encouraging developments outside the universities. Within the state school system there have been calls for open schools from white-teacher organizations and white parents, and there are moves towards teacher unity on a non-racial basis. Some white-parent organizations, and business, have been questioning the relevance of the education white pupils are receiving. Innovative programmes are being negotiated and adopted elsewhere, in private non-racial schools, in organizations involved in informal, adult and worker education, in literacy programmes, in upgrading programmes for teachers, to name but a few. Attention is also being focused on the education departments in the non-independent 'homelands' and 'independent' states where 70 per cent of African pupils are at school. It is now recognized that the 'homelands' cannot be wished away and that their peripheral nature to the central system could offer opportunities.

Characteristic of the innovations taking place are painstaking attempts at community consultation in order to legitimize not only the programmes but the process used to derive them.

Underlying all of this activity is the explicit recognition that political transformation is a pre-condition for any real educational solution. The government's Ten Year Plan for education, its funding formula for universities and the noticeable lack of effect that changes in legislation have had on enrolment patterns across the university system all show that apartheid education cannot be reformed. Any real solution must be a post-apartheid solution.

Along with this political transformation will come hard policy choices. Should increased education expenditure take priority over programmes addressing health care, agricultural development, housing, water and sanitation, and energy and electrification? Post-apartheid South Africa, even with an improved economy and savings from reduced defence expenditure and the scrapping of separate sys-

Table 2 University enrolment in South Africa

Intended population group in terms of government policy	Number of universities	Total enrolment April 1989 (nearest 1.000)	Enrolment by population group (%)			
			White	Coloured	Indian	African
White						
(a) English medium	4*	47.000	74	5	9	11
(b) Afrikaans or dual medium	6†	67.000	96	2	<1	1
Coloured	1‡	12.000	2	77	4	18
Indian	1§	7.000	4	2	61	33
African	8	54.000	<1	<1	<1	98
UNISA	1¶	113.000	50	5	9	37
Total	21	300.000	52	6	6	35

* Cape Town, Natal, Witwatersrand and Rhodes. † Orange Free State, Port Elizabeth, Potchefstroom, Pretoria, Rand Afrikaans and Stellenbosch. ‡ Western Cape (UWC). § Durban Westville (UDW). || Medical University of South Africa (Medunsa), North, Zululand, Bophuthatswana**, Transkei**, Venda**, Fort Hare**, Vista. (** 1988 figures are used. These universities are situated in 'independent states'.) ¶ UNISA, although administered by the white education department, has traditionally been open to all. Source: Department of National Education.

In 1986 the South African Institute of Race Relations estimated the population of South Africa, based on the 1985 census but adjusted for undercount, to be: African 24,901,139 (74.1%); Indian 878,300 (2%); coloured 2,881,362 (8.6%); white 4,961,062 (14.7%).

tems of administration, is unlikely to be able to afford a university system that allows access at the rates currently enjoyed by white students, or a school system funded at the same level as white schools. What relative priority should literacy and numeracy programmes, pre-primary, primary and secondary education, adult and worker education, technikons and universities receive within the education budget? The issues are complex, the answers as yet unknown. What is clear, however, is that difficult choices are inevitable, and that the process by which such choices are made will need wide support and legitimacy if there is to be success.

Such support and legitimacy will be facilitated if those sectors of South African society that are currently excluded from policy debates and decision-making structures are drawn into them. Although the tempo of immediate political struggle often lowers the priority given to future-orientated projects, their importance needs to be emphasized. All concerned with education have to begin to address the questions of how the universities will deal with national personpower, with research and development needs, with ensuring an indigenous scientific technological and professional base, with contributing to the formation of a new South African nation, and with redressing the historical inequities of access across all universities and at all academic levels.

Competing social priorities in post-apartheid South Africa will probably mean that growth in university places is restricted, or even reduced. In higher education, preference may need to be given to the expansion of technikons, and to the natural sciences in both technikons and universities. Given that full-time student enrolment may be limited, increasing emphasis on distance education, part-time study, continuing and adult

education, and increased access to universities through the wide dissemination of research results and a broader availability of university expertise through consultancy and community projects may all become priorities. These issues need careful research and discussion before the day of hard choices dawns.

Conclusion

Although the government received a white mandate for reform in last week's election, the struggle for a non-racial, democratic South Africa will be a long one. The "old authority is dying" and there are indeed many "morbid symptoms", but there are also the signs of new life, a common culture on which a strong education system can be built.

Those within the South African educational system who have grasped the opportunity to begin to anticipate the future need help. Among the institutions and sectors involved are emerging non-racial schools, future-directed literacy and education programmes, the English-speaking open universities (of Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes and Witwatersrand) and the University of the Western Cape, and staff groups at the black universities who take the brunt of the challenge and work with most of South Africa's African students. Financial aid for black students is a key priority if lack of money is not to become the main inhibitor of black access to university. Carefully selected support for these and other areas will hasten the day when a unitary non-racial education system, that serves the needs of the new South African nation, will be achieved. □

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