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A.N.C. EDUCATION POLICY FOR SOMAFECO.

A contribution to the discussion.

London Education Committee, January 1983.

INTRODUCTION

The Secretary of the ANC Education Department has recently circulated to the Education Committees a number of papers dealing with ANC education policy. Two of these papers were earlier widely circulated by the London Education Committee, but the other papers received from the Secretary (written by Comrades Choabi, Simons and Mfenyana) have not previously been available to us. (We note in passing that a number of other papers relevant to the Education policy debate - mentioned in Comrade Simons' "References" have not been circulated.)

We very much welcome the initiative taken by the Education Secretary, for the circulation of these papers provides the opportunity for further debating and clarifying the different lines and hence for arriving at a clearer formulation of ANC education policy.

In some respects the papers by Comrades Simons, Choabi and Mfenyana deal either implicitly or explicitly with positions put forward by the London Committee in its papers. Before going on to discuss the contributions of these comrades we should make it clear that the LEC had a full discussion on education policy on November 13, 1983 and it modified and clarified some of its earlier positions. The LEC was on the point of circulating the conclusions of this meeting when the papers of the abovementioned comrades were received. It was decided to have a discussion on these first and the document which follows reflects the conclusions we have arrived at in the light of this discussion.

THE PRELIMINARY POINTS.

For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to state at the outset two matters which are raised in the papers under review, with which we will not be concerned in our discussion.

First, both Comrades Choabi and Mfenyana, in dealing with the principles of ANC Education focus on the implementation of these principles in a liberated South Africa - see for example, Comrade Mfenyana's comment on p.7. that the education system will be changed to provide "truly equal opportunities to all" and Comrade Choabi's description of the massive training programmes that will be required in a liberated South Africa. (pg 2 of his paper Priority Study Areas Under the ANC Education Programme). While we agree in general with their remarks on these questions and while we acknowledge the importance of further discussion of these matters, our concern is with the formulation of concrete education policies in the present period and hence with the interpretation, implementation and organization of these policies in the current period. Having said this, we want to make it quite clear that, in our view, to concentrate on the present does not at all involve a neglect of the question of the needs of the movement in the immediate post-liberation period. To begin with, the consolidation and extension of the revolution after victory will depend fundamentally on the presence of a large force of experienced and politically developed cadres capable of taking over the political administration of the country. That force will, initially, be produced in the course of the struggle for state power and, hence, insofar as the School



plays a role in producing cadres for the present phase of the struggle, to that extent it will also contribute crucially to the future needs of the revolution.

Furthermore, a similar argument applies in regard to technical skills. As we know, the movement has need (which will become more varied and extensive as the struggle develops) for personnel with a whole host of idfferent skills. All of those skills will, in one way or another, be of importance in a liberated South Africa. Hence, the production of cadres with skills required now will, at the same time, be the production of cadres with skills for the future. Of course, we will not be able to cover the whole range of skills which will be needed in a free South Africa, nor will we be able during the struggle for state power to produce anything like the numbers which will be needed. That, indeed, will have to wait for the massive training programmes which Comrade Choabi calls for, but the achievement of those programmes will be delayed unless we see SOMAFCO as part of the process of winning political power.

Finally, on this point, the organization of a school designed to meet the current needs of the movement will raise issues, (as, indeed, it already has) relevant to the establishment of an educational system in the post-liberation period. The school at SOMAFCO poses for us all the major questions of the relationship of education to political change, to culture, to the division of labour and all the major questions about the meaning, content and organization of a revolutionary education. The experience and understanding we gain in our work in SOMAFCO will be of direct relevance to the future.

Our second preliminary point is that Comrade Simons, while accepting the LEC's contention that our education policy demands an analysis of the concrete situation, argues that no concrete analysis has been made of SOMAFCO itself insofar as it has not been properly recognized that the school is only one part of a much larger complex. This may be correct, but Comrade Simons does not show how an analysis of the complex as a whole affects the formulation of an education policy. It is clear, however, that attempts have been made to analyse, however briefly, the mode of organization and functioning of the school itself and the implications of this for the movement. In our view, however, the concrete analysis relates to the role of the School in the present phase of the struggle and we can see no objection or problem in discussing the objectives and organization of the school outside of a detailed analysis of the entire complex. Hence, the discussion which follows focuses on the School as such.

#### THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHOOL.

All contributors to the debate recognize that the School must produce cadres for the movement, but there are extremely important difference in the treatment of this question.

Comrade Simons provides a useful definition of the idea of a cadre when he says that a cadre is ".....a revolutionary who combines a deep understanding of the relation between the national liberation and class struggle with a commitment to the life-long task of overthrowing the racist regime and replacing it with a new social order...The ideal cadre combines specialized skills, political consciousness, dedication and self-discipline in an integrated, balanced personality."

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Two issues flow from this definition which are directly relevant to the formulation of a policy for the school and hence a specification of its objectives. The first concerns the question of the considerations which are relevant to the decision as to what technical and political skills cadres should be required to obtain. It is not sufficient to merely state, as Comrade Simon does, that "The demand for cadres is almost endless and ranges from trained freedom fighters to many kinds of technicians and qualified professionals", for this neglects the question of what cadres for what purposes and in what number under specific conditions of the struggle. The second question concerns the means and methods by which politically conscious and dedicated cadres are to be produced. In this section we deal with the first question, leaving the second question to the next section.

It was suggested in the preceding paragraph that Comrade Simons raised the question of cadre skills but did not offer an answer as to how the movement should decide on priorities. This is not quite accurate, for, in two different contexts he argues that "the school will need to harmonize legitimate individual aspirations with the needs of the struggle" and that after SOWAFCO students graduate from university they must be deployed "in work selected to suit their preference and the needs of the movement. This kind of activity should be entrusted to the long awaited Personnel Department." But these formulations are unhelpful for two reasons. Firstly, while nobody would quarrel with the idea that as far as possible individuals with specific capabilities and preferences should be allotted tasks accordingly, nonetheless it needs to be stated quite unequivocally that the absolute priority is the needs of the movement and not the preferences of the students. Thus, where preferences and tasks cannot be 'harmonised', the tasks must take precedence. This being the case, the question we have to pose is: what, at the strategic level, are the priorities of ANC education and the School in particular? On these questions Comrade Simons has nothing to say, despite the fact that he was discussing documents which expressed different and opposing positions on this issue.

Comrade Choabi, on the other hand, has a very clear position, one which is echoed by Comrade Mfenyana. Comrade Choabi starts from the premise that the content of education is socially determined—that is to say, what is taught in schools etc reflects conceptions of social needs (at least as determined by those holding power). What are the social needs to which ANC education must respond? Comrade Choabi says:

"The ANC man-power training programme must be seen to relate directly to the envisaged revolutionary government take-over in South Africa. It would be most unfortunate if the ANC were to attain victory in South Africa and be unable to carry out an effective economic takeover of the South African economy because of the lack of suitably trained manpower." (pg 2.)

And again after outlining the massive training programmes which will be required in engineering, for industrialists and economists, in agriculture and for medical personnel, he says:

"... whilst there is nothing wrong in students choosing to study what they prefer, it is imperative that, as long as their studies are under ANC sponsorship, they exercise their choice within the eventual needs of our liberation effort." (pg.4. Our italics.)



For Comrade Ohoabi, it seems, ANC education must be geared exclusively to the future 'manpower' needs of a liberated South Africa. It appears that the struggle for state power itself generates no demands for skills, both political, technical and educational, which might be served by ANC education. It is difficult to understand how the pressing needs of the struggle for state power, which is the absolute priority at the present time, can be so utterly neglected in considering the direction of ANC education.

Contrast with this approach the recommendations of the Commission on Culture and Education at the recent ANC youth conference at Mazimbu. On page 10, the Commission recommended:

"Establishment of a Manpower or Personnel Planning Commission ..... The Commission recommended, amongst its functions, that this Manpower Commission examine the overall educational needs of our struggle for both the period of struggle for the destruction of the racist regime and the reconstruction period....."

This is also the view the LEC has supported for a long time. Comrade Simons, in fact, describes the LEC's position in his paper, but he did not comment on our view that the School should be geared towards the needs of the struggle for state power. Instead, Comrade Simons chose to make critical comments on other aspects of the LEC's proposals as to how the school should be linked into the present phase of the struggle. His first comment was that in proposing that the school should be organised so as to prepare some students for higher education, others for 'middle range' specialisms and still others for special skills in crash courses, the LEC's scheme was similar to 'streamed' education in comprehensive schools. Although Comrade Simons does not state which countries he is referring to or what he means by 'streaming', it seems that his implication is that the LEC was proposing a scheme which would result in students of allegedly different capabilities being grooved into educational programmes which were characterized not only by different types of training but also different evaluations of the status, desirability and value. Comrade Simon's answer to this is to insist that all students undergo both manual and mental educational experiences. It seems to us that it is very misleading for Comrade Simons to abstract our proposal out of context and to assimilate our insistence upon the need for the school to produce personnel with different skills to 'streaming' in a conventional school system elsewhere. An ANC school has to be flexible and it is imperative that it be organized to meet the requirements of the movement. This will clearly involve different amounts and types of education for different people and it is quite possible that this may generate invidious distinctions. But we are concerned with the school of a revolutionary movement and it is such invidious distinctions which the school must in its structure, mode of organization and ideology, struggle to combat. This is precisely what is meant by a political school - which we shall discuss in the next section - a feature which, we believe, is virtually absent from Comrade Simon's analysis as we shall show later.

The second comment which Comrade Simons makes is that the "underlying assumption" in the LEC's proposal ".....is that graduates are more likely to "drop out" of the movement than middle-range technicians and artisans. The argument is dubious: persons in both groups are liable to pursue individual careers at the expense of obligations to the movement." Now, once again this is totally to miss our point



and again this flows from the fact that Comrade Simons does not see the school in relation to the strategy of the movement - despite his excellent definition of the term 'cadres'. The contention of the London Committee is that the person-power needs of the movement in the present phase of the struggle (bearing in mind our preliminary remarks about the relevance of this for the future as well) must determine the structure and functioning of the school. It was this, and not some supposed stronger attachment to the movement of non-graduates, that was our 'underlying assumption.'

At this point, it will be convenient to set out the relevant part of the conclusions which we arrived at at our meeting of November 13th:

We begin by stating two propositions which we consider to be fundamental to a correct approach to SOMAFCO education. (We are not here dealing with other aspects of the complex.)

(1) SOMAFCO educational work must be concerned with and restricted to MEMBERS of the ANC.

The following points must be noted:-

(a) In the case of infants and young children, their presence and attendance at the infants and primary schools is conditional upon the fact that they are the offspring of ANC members or of non-ANC activists at the school.

(b) It is clear that even when the school reaches full capacity it will have to select who may attend the school since the exiles will exceed, perhaps increasingly, the number of places available.

This raises two problems:

i. Recruitment procedures. This has been discussed a number of times with a view to tightening up and improving selection. Clearly, steps must be taken to implement these procedures and possibly Dikawa could serve as a place where extended screening and assessment could occur before recruitment into the ANC and selection for SOMAFCO is made.

ii. The fate of those not selected for SOMAFCO  
Insofar as it is a political necessity for the ANC to make, at least some educational and residential provision for exiles who are not thought to be appropriate students for SOMAFCO, then such provision must be kept entirely separate from SOMAFCO - again Dikawa may be a suitable solution.

(2) The object of SOMAFCO is to educate/train cadres of the ANC

We take cadres to be active, militant members of the ANC who work through the various structures and organisations of the ANC. While cadres may be differentiated according to their functions and skills, for the purposes of SOMAFCO education we suggest that the priority is to distinguish between:-

a) Full-time cadres of the ANC.

b) Part-time cadres of the ANC (that is activists who, because of employment or otherwise, are not full-time but who, nonetheless, devote themselves to the work of the movement.)

The above definitions directly imply a fundamental division in the structure of SOMAFCO education:-

a) A school for the training/education of ANC members who immediately upon leaving the school, will enter full-time, designated jobs in the ANC

b) A school for cadres who are not intended (or not immediately intended) for full-time work in the ANC.



(1) Full-time cadre school.

(a) This school will be restricted to cadres intended for full-time ANC work.

(b) The purpose of this school, which will be seen as a quite separate unit, will be to raise to a high level:-

- i. The political understanding and organizational skills of the selected cadres,
- ii. The particular 'technical' skills required to carry out the work to which the cadre will be allocated, and
- iii. Basic command of language and numeracy.

(c) This school will be geared to intensive ('crash' courses) of high quality as quickly as possible.

(2) School for other ANC cadres

(a) This school is intended for cadres who will not serve as full-time activists or who will become full-time only after further training or education.

(b) The purpose of this school will be to raise to a high level:

- i. The political understanding and organizational skills of students,
- ii. Particular skills which will be of use to the work of the ANC, and
- iii. The culture and knowledge of the students.

(c) Through flexible teaching schemes the school must be organised to provide appropriate levels of education for those assigned to proceed to some form of post-school training/education. We emphasize the term 'flexible' since, in our view, the specific location of the school (the fact that it is 'served' by pupils from a catchment area of junior schools); the fact that most of the students have already had a number of years of secondary education which has generally left them badly off in terms of numeracy and of command of language (both necessary prerequisites for further education); these and other considerations lead us to the conclusion that it is necessary to break from conventional Form 1 to 5 arrangements and from many other conventional modes of organising education. The school must evolve its own schemes suited to the rapid fulfillment of its purpose.

One further point needs emphasizing. The conception of two separate schools does not imply schools which are separated geographically nor, indeed, does it imply a total organizational and educational separation. Clearly, the two schools will operate under the organizational structure of SOMAFCO. Nevertheless, the two schools will be geared towards different educational programmes. It does not follow that their paths will never converge. Clearly, there will be overlaps between them from time to time - for example in the political education courses and in a variety of other courses - and when that occurs, subject to decisions at the school, there is no reason why common teaching should not take place. Nevertheless, such convergence may be rare because of the different programmes towards which the schools are oriented.

A REVOLUTIONARY SCHOOL.

Thus far we have dealt with the strategic role of the school, but it is now necessary to turn to the question of how an ANC school can be structured so that it will be as successful as possible in producing political cadres, who to quote Comrade Simons again,



"combine a deep understanding of the relation between national liberation and class struggle with a commitment to the life long task of overthrowing the racist regime and replacing it with a new social order."

Although they approach the question in somewhat different ways, for Comrades Choabi, Simons and Mfenyana, the problem of a revolutionary school reduces itself to the problem of what is to be taught - that is, however conventional in other respects, a school is revolutionary if it teaches revolutionary ideas. That is to say, what these comrades miss is the distinction between the content of education and the structures and processes which are necessary to ensure that the aim of producing students of a "new type" is realised.

Thus, for Comrade Choabi, the content of what is to be taught is a highly 'normative' question, that is, as we indicated above, what is to be taught is prescribed. This implies that educational programmes involve choices and, furthermore, that these choices are the outcome of ideological and, indeed, political contestations. Indeed, he goes further, for it is not only the content of education which is 'determined by society', it is also the methods of transmission, 'the methodology of teaching'. (Education and Productive Work pg.1.) But, interestingly enough, Comrade Choabi does not relate the method of transmission of knowledge to the 'society' with which he is dealing, the school. He simply adopts a method which is determined by other types of societies, including South Africa. That is to say, he assumes that the method of transmitting knowledge is free of social determinations. Thus, in the paper "Priority Study Areas Under the ANC Education Programme" (pg.1.) he says;

The first point I want to make is that education is a process involving imparting and receiving knowledge. There is always the dual relation between the educator or teacher and the taught or the recipient of the education or knowledge. Knowledge being understood as the cultivation of skills, know-how or expertise in the different branches of human understanding. It is essential to grasp from the outset that the skill, expertise or know-how that are transmitted by the educator to the student are regarded as desirable and worthwhile because of their usefulness or utility for the society."

It would take us too long and too far afield to deal with this passage, nevertheless, its most important implications can be drawn out briefly. First, the gaining of knowledge is seen as a one way process - from the educator who bears the knowledge to the student who is seen as an empty vessel into which the knowledge must be poured; the student is the passive recipient of the teacher's knowledge. This conception of teaching as the mere imparting of knowledge fails to grasp the active, creative role of students in a process in which they produce the knowledge which they acquire. The student acquires knowledge by wrestling with teaching materials, challenging the ideas and representation of 'facts' in books and as expressed by teachers, by experimenting, by researching and so forth. That is, education is not merely receiving that, in Comrade Choabi's terms, "which passes for knowledge" but in developing analytical, critical and creative skills. For such a conception of education as the production of informed and thinking people to work, specific forms and methodologies of education are required.



This brings us to a second point, for Comrade Choabi's conception of the method of imparting knowledge implies, in two respects, a hierarchical structure and an unquestioning attitude on the part of the students. In his conception, the teacher is the repository of knowledge - he or she has a monopoly of the truth as against the student - and stands unassailable over and above the student and, furthermore, the teacher is the bearer of society's conception of what is desirable and useful and once more stands, unchallengable, above the students.

The challenge to this orthodox, hierarchical and submissive conception of education entails complex (and, indeed, not easily resolvable) considerations concerning the institutional structure of a revolutionary school, the forms of education organization, the modes of discipline, questions of democracy and other structures and processes, which Comrade Choabi does not address. In other words, the material conditions of educational practice are irrelevant to the tasks of education, including for the ANC, the task of politicization. The implication of all this is, of course, that a school can be revolutionary even when its work is conducted in an institutional and organizational context which is non-revolutionary.

Thus for Comrade Choabi, making education revolutionary is nothing more than "cultivating among our young people" revolutionary "values and norms". Even the ANC policy of breaking down invidious distinctions between manual and mental labour reduces itself to making our youth "understand that the contribution to the welfare of the nation, whether made intellectually or through manual work is of equal importance" - there is no hint of the educational structures required to achieve this or of a suggestion, similar to Comrade Simons', of students becoming involved in both intellectual and manual work. And so on.....

A final point regarding Comrade Choabi's views. The one point where organizational structures creep into his analysis relates to what he terms "Democratic Attitudes" in which he argues that democracy in education involves the right of teachers, students and the broad community "to participate in discussions and activities of the ANC education programme". However, the one concrete proposal which Comrade Choabi makes about ANC structures is to completely negate democracy - at least this is the case if we are to accept Comrade Simons' summary of a proposal made by Comrade Choabi in a document Re: ANC Education Council (1982) which we have never seen although it apparently carries proposals for a radical alteration of the present Education Department. Comrade Simons notes, without expressing any view of his own, the following ominous suggestion:

This seems to be an appropriate place to consider Seretse Choabi's proposed changes in the composition of the National Education Council ...Under the present arrangement Regional Committees have a free hand in the nomination of delegates to Council meetings. He considers that this procedure is unwise: it does not guarantee security or political reliability. In the interests of both factors he suggests that the NEC should appoint the Council members, thereby ensuring reliability, continuity and expertise."



9.

We find the proposal remarkable for its content, for the manner in which it has come to light and for the empty assumptions on which it is based. However, these are questions to be taken up in a different context.

The lack of concern with the organizational conditions of education are even clearer in Comrade Mfenyana's formulations. He poses the question: "What type of education do we want?" and his answer is direct:

"Are we simply going to say we want the same type of education that is given to white children? Yes, in so far as it is technically advanced. But we are very much aware also that the type of education given in white schools is permeated by the distortions and racism which form part of the Christian-National Education policy."

Thus, in Comrade Mfenyana's view the educational system developed in one type of society can be simply taken over, (minus, as he puts it, what is bad in it) and transferred to the new, revolutionary, transformed society. Indeed, he warns us, it is necessary to retain from the past what is progressive, and to see revolution only in terms of destruction is a vulgarization. But what is progressive and what must be destroyed? Judging by Comrade Mfenyana's paper, what is to be jettisoned from the existing educational structure in South Africa is racism. The hierarchical, anti-democratic etc organizational structure (even of white education) including narrow and authoritarian modes of instruction, are, apparently, not worth questioning.

For Comrade Simons, surprisingly, organization and structure are also irrelevant. Indeed, he questions whether politicization at the school is a problem at all. He says that the essence of the LEC's complaint is that the school produces 'careerists' and he then goes on:

"Such a possibility undoubtedly exists. Other liberation movements have had to deal with the same kind of problem. Self-seeking tendencies ought to be corrected or prevented at an early stage. Whether there are 'many' students in this bracket is debatable. Our experience indicates that the great majority place themselves at the disposal of the movement on completing their course of study..."

This statement of the 'facts' is not only contradicted by our own experience of the scholarship seeking, lack of politicization and disillusionment of many SOMAFCO students, it is also contradicted by the findings of the recent Youth Conference. The Education and Culture Commission stated:

"The Commission examined in depth, a number of problems besetting our educational programme, including - unavailability of personnel for SOMAFCO, resulting from the defection of students after completion of studies, expulsions etc."

At one point Comrade Simons, however, recognizes the importance of organization and structure. He says:  
Organization and structure the means to an end which for us is the production of revolutionaries."