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**PEOPLE'S EDUCATION SEMINAR**

**21ST-22ND AUGUST, 1989**

**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION**

**CDE SERETSE CHOABI**



ADDRESS BY SERETSE CHOABI, SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION,  
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, PRESENTED TO THE SEMINAR  
ON "PEOPLE'S EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE'S POWER" AUGUST,  
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It is most fitting and appropriate that this seminar on "People's Education for People's Power" takes place as part of the 10th Anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, SOMAFCO is a concrete and practical expression of the search for an alternative and meaningful education by the oppressed people of South Africa, through the African National Congress. Ten years ago the African National Congress took the decision to build this school. We took the decision to build a school through which we aimed, as we put it then, to produce a new man. We calculatingly and deliberately ~~set~~<sup>set</sup> as our goal the aim to train, at this school, young men and women in natural and social sciences, and, at the same time, condition this training with the development of a character and personality in our young people committed to utilising knowledge for the service of the society. We have sought, at this school, to promote and develop an ethnical attitude, among our young people, that accepts service to others as a duty, an admirable quality and an acceptable ideal.

The ANC has always been committed to the overthrow of white supremacy, formerly called "segregation" and now known as Apartheid. This basic aim is built into the conception and



structure of our college, as its official title indicates. Solomon Mahlangu was a young hero who laid down his life on the gallows in the struggle for freedom, equality, social justice and democracy for all South Africans. His name and sacrifice live on in SOMAFCO, inspiring its members and the entire community of Mazimbu and Dakawa. Our vision of "social service" has been shaped and stamped by this political outlook.

We are proud that the majority of the products of this school have, over the years, gone out to obtain higher university education in different parts of the world and returned to participate in the struggle for social change and justice in South Africa, through the African National Congress. To a large measure we have been successful in our effort to promote and develop the ideal of a new person who accepts, social service and liberation as a categorical imperative. This achievement, alone, provides ample and sufficient justification for this celebration.

As we engage in this justified celebration we have a duty to re-examine our education programme with the view to improving it and injecting into it new ideas which will, even more, render it an educational programme in true and genuine service to the people. An educational programme



directed and aimed at the authentic and genuine intellectual, political and moral emancipation of our people.

The African National Congress has created this opportunity for us, through this seminar, to be together, so that we can exchange views on the important subject of People's Education for People's Power. This subject has, for many years now, been one of the centres and focal points of struggle in our country. Our people, both young and old, in increasing numbers, are demanding a people's education linked to the achievement and exercise of political power over all affairs affecting them including the management and control of education and the determination of its content, orientation and methodology.

It is vital, in our efforts to formulate our views on the meaning of people's education, to locate it contextually, in the struggle of our people for freedom and independence. The popular demand for people's education derives directly from separate Apartheid education for the different national groups of our people. At the centre of this differentiated education system is Bantu Education. Bantu Education was from its inception a negation of education. It advocates, the racist minority regime in our country, made clear their intentions to provide a type of education,



for the African child, that would ensure that, he, forever, remains subject to the authority, demands and wishes of white Society. Bantu Education declared its intentions to be, to train the African child minimally in skills necessary and consistent with transforming that child into a loyal, unquestioning, obedient and docile servant.

From the outset the African people rejected, resisted and campaigned against Bantu Education. In this they were supported by progressive and enlightened people from among the other oppressed peoples of our country and white South Africans who abhor Apartheid and all its machinations. Resistance to this evil abhorrent system of educational oppression has continued to the present day. The resistance is as powerful as ever it has been.

Bantu Education negates creativity, originality and the individual's right to aspire to higher and greater achievements in life. This is not education. It is simply barbaric oppression and injustice. Our people are justifiable angry and provoked by this monstrous system masquerading as education, in shameless defence of blatant racism.

And, as we search together to define people's education,



we must always bear in mind that one of the principles of people's education has to be the restoration of human dignity and self-esteem to our people.

We are fortunate that destiny has imposed this task on those of us, fortunate to be living, at this time. Our privilege is to originate and formulate new ideas that are to constitute the foundation and basis for an alternative education system and to usher in a new social order - an era of democracy in education and the South African Society. We have a duty and inescapable responsibility to search honestly and truthfully for the meaning of our concept of people's education. Our efforts must, in this intellectual enterprise, be inspired, unconditionally, by our love for all our peoples and nation.

One of the distinguishing features of the human individual is the capacity to think. This capacity to think has for centuries already been organised into fields of human understanding that we call sciences.

The capacity to think places man, within the animal kingdom that populates this earth, into a special category. The ability to think is the ability to create and to originate new thoughts.



Human scientific discovery and civilisation arose out of human creativity and was made possible by this ability to invent and to innovate. Our "people's education", when we shall have defined it, must not omit to ensure that our centres of education and learning are for human beings who are best placed and empowered to handle the problems of life through having their imaginative and creative capacities inspired, encouraged and developed in addition to being trained in skills. If our definition or understanding of "people's education" omits to handle the issue of creativity and to make provision for its encouragement and development it shall have failed our future nation dismally.

I have recently been visiting the German Democratic Republic. The purpose of my trip was to learn from them on matters educational. We must always understand that, we, all, on this planet, can teach each other something of value from our experiences as people. I was most impressed by what I saw being <sup>done</sup> for young children educationally.

There is a schooling system in the German Democratic Republic known as schools for young pioneers. At these special educational centres young children are brought together outside the formal education system. They are formed into interest groups from the very young six olds to eighteen year olds.



In each interest group the children are given practical work or tasks based on their individually declared interest. They may be working with cloth and other fabrics. Working with paints and doing paintings or drawings. Working with model rockets or space-ships. Working with wood doing wood-work. Working with electronic computers and other related scientific instruments. In all this variety of activity, it is the imagination and creative powers of the children that are sought to be developed. The children, young as they are, encouraged and supervised by specialist teachers and instructors, have produced most impressive imaginative creative work and handcrafts. These children are real pioneers in the true sense of the word. They have the opportunity for it. They produce wonderful things.

It must be stressed that imaginative ability, if not stifled can rise to great heights raising man's innovative skills to high levels and standards. That is empowerment of human individuals, through education, at its best. It is the only available best method of giving people complete control over their lives and their future. The Pioneering spirit and the endeavour to explore new territory of uninvestigated uncharted physical and intellectual terrain must be incorporated into a future system of education for South Africa in order to achieve



genuine people's power. This demand is absolute. It is a categorical imperative. For without it we would be lost as a people. We shall forever be training our people in skills which are at best, repetitive, uninventive and without originality. This condition for human existence is unacceptable. It is disservice to humanity.

I am certain, I have no doubt in my mind, that "people's education" must mean education for all people. Education is a right and not a privilege. It must be available to all who need it, young and old alike. If this condition is satisfied then it will be a genuine people's education. Education should not be for sale to the few who can afford to pay for it. It must be made available to all for no fee. It is a birthright. This requirement is not negotiable.

Secondly, people's education should aim to train people by equipping them for life. This means that education is the process of cultivating skills among members of the society to enable them to participate fully and effectively in the life of the community. Education is empowerment through the acquisition of skills. It is irrelevant whether these are "practical" or "vocational" skills or



"intellectual" or "professional" skills. All these are processes of acquiring expertise to do things well.

Doing something well is doing that thing in accordance with the rules for doing that thing. A good or skilled driver drives well. Driving well is driving safely in accordance with the rules of driving and the rules of traffic. It is the ability to avoid accidents and effectiveness in ensuring the safety of your passengers. Similarly a good or skilled surgeon does surgery well. He carries out his operations according to the rules of surgery. He certainly does not search for the patient's heart in the patient's foot. If unforeseen complications arise he has the ability to steer through them by taking appropriate action.

It is immaterial and of no consequence that the surgeon is called a "professional" and a product of "educational" training and the driver a "practical" worker a product of, "vocational" training. Elitism does not belong to people's education. Democracy in deed and word must be its aim its motto and armour in our march to genuine freedom for our people.

Thirdly, people's education must aim to train people to



care for the well-being of society through their training as professional mercenaries for their personal financial advancement. This means that people's education must aim to produce a new type of person who thinks always about the good of the community when he uses his training in the community and not just of his own personal well-being. However, legitimate the latter may be, it cannot justifiably pursued without regard for the well-being of all society. This is civilisation. That is humanity.

Fourthly, people's education must be intellectually emancipating and scientific. It must be objective and have no tolerance for supersition and prejudice. It should be completely revolutionary in emancipating the human mind, so that the human individual can take full control of his life and also serve the genuine interests of people and not those of bigots and social parasites.

Karl Marx wrote loftily and laudibly about capitalism despite his political opposition to it. Somewhere he wrote that capitalism has achieved wonders far surpassing Egyptian Pyramids, Gothic Cathedrals and German Acquiducts. It has put in the shade what all past generations have achieved put together. Marx was referring to the advent of scientific inquiry. That



questioning of everything, from religion and superstition to tradition, custom and the authority of kings, dukes and popes. We cannot afford to sacrifice this great human achievement in our definition of people's education. Human creativity and the pioneering spirit, properly cultivated will guarantee the future of our nation among nations.

We come now to the discussion of people's power. People's education is and should be for people's power. This has been said many times. I can only reinforce it here. It should be stressed that the idea of people's education, coupled with the slogan "for people's power" arose out of the students' revolt that followed the Soweto massacre of June 16, 1976. It has been a major factor since then in the upsurge against white domination.

People's power means that state authority and all authority in society derives from the people. People's power rejects arbitrary exercise of authority which is not accountable to those over whom such authority is exercised. People's power means elected government, elected by the people to serve the people. People's education for people's power, therefore, means education of the people that ensures and guarantees that the people shall govern. This includes



peoples participation in the running of educational insituttions, including the participation of the learners.

The call for the participation of learners in the runnings of the affairs of centres of learning is justified on two grounds. To satisfy the principle of participatory democracy, and, to provide training in responsibility, for the young. Through this training in responsibility we will ensure that we do not develop a sleeping stagnant people's republic of South Africa but a vibrant, innovative, advancing peoples republic. A peoples republic lofty in purpose, lofty in determination, lofty in principle and lofty in its conception of itself and the future of its people.

Comrades and dear friends, a word now about SOMAFCO, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. The African National Congress has for the past ten years been endeavouring to establish people's education here at this school. Thanks to the support of the Government of the <sup>United</sup> ~~People's~~ Republic of Tanzania who generously offered us land on which to establish this school. Thanks to all our friends and donors who generously provided us with the means to establish this



magnificent institution, visible, for all our friends and people to see.

We have sought here, through our educational methods of instruction, to bridge the gap between intellectual labour and practical or vocational labour in the minds of our students. We are still struggling with this problem. Old traditions, habits and beliefs die hard, but, we are committed to our perception that this approach is the only one capable of restoring genuine democracy and establishing people's power to a free and independent South Africa. We must finally and definitively, once and for all, do away with the practice that places higher value on work done by "intellectuals" and "professionals" as against work done by those who possess "practical" or "vocational" skills. This is an obsenity. It is the social value of work that is important and not its alleged status or standing.

We have had serious problems in the recruitment of qualified and competent teachers. We have been grappling with these problems for years and we have finally decided that in order to achieve positive and better results in our efforts to provide high quality education aimed at the promotion, development



and achievement of educational excellence, we must now accept the principle of salarizing our teachers. UNESCO have agreed to fund this. This is the only realistic and viable solution to the practical problem confronting us; that is, attracting qualified staff, in sufficient numbers, to raise the quality of educational training at this school to a level of educational competence and excellence that we aspire for.

We have decided that the intellectual developments of our young people is of equal value in importance to the value we attach to the production of the new person politically committed to the service of his people. Our young people have a right to proper scientific education competently taught, if they are to be equipped to participate fully and effectively in the life of their community, and, to participate in nation building when Apartheid is eventually eliminated, which will not be long from now. We have an urgent task to prepare our youth for nationhood now, for the future. We have a duty to develop clarity of thought on this important subject of People's education, and to liberate our people from the tyranny of mediocrity and a low level of human existence.



Dear compatriots in the struggle, we have a collective responsibility to train and develop a trained manpower for our country. We appeal directly to those of you from home to help us here in exile, in our efforts to find qualified competent and committed teachers and educators from among our people for this institution, the first genuinely people's school of the people of South Africa, to ensure that our young people are provided with a high quality education and to ensure that this school develops and retains a South African identity and character. We make this appeal in the full knowledge and assurance that your response will be positive and that you will not fail us. We know this because your actions speak for you. You are here with us to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of this school. You would not be here if you did not support this school. Your being here, on this special occasion is recognised by us as an act of commitment in support of what we are doing here.

It is necessary in dealing with the subject of "PEOPLE'S EDUCATION" to examine the role of the teacher in the delivery of education to the community. Education is a process involving teacher and learner; the instructor and the recipient of knowledge.



The provision and delivery of People's Education to the people to a large measure, is dependent upon the full and effective participation of the teacher. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers be intellectually and professionally united in purpose regarding the delivery of People's Education to the people. The teachers have to understand that People's Education is an instrument for the national emancipation of the oppressed people of our country. That education is the key both to the successful re-organisation of present day South Africa into a genuine people's democracy and the promotion of a decent and respectable quality of life for the people. That the acquisition of skills by the people is a process of empowerment of the people to take control over their lives. That the provision of People's Education for People's Power should be seen as part of the struggle for the national emancipation of all the suffering and oppressed people of South Africa.

Teachers are vital to the successful implementation and realisation of people's education for our people. We cannot afford differences and rivalry among teachers associations at this time in the struggle of our people towards national emancipation. It is a



duty and a responsibility for all teachers to identify themselves to be part of the national liberation effort of the oppressed of South Africa. The African National Congress expects and appeals to all of you in teaching profession to unite and work together towards the total, unconditional freedom of all the oppressed people of our country. It is not acceptable that we should have rival competing unions of teachers at this period of struggle for nationhood.

We are convinced that the Unity Talks you are holding should be vigorously pursued to result in an agreement among you aimed at the realisation of people's education in our beloved land. For it is only through people's education that our people will take control of their lives and realise themselves as an emancipated nation. The African National Congress calls upon you and appeals to you as professional teachers, to unite in the pursuit of people's education which represents for us the national liberation of our people. What we want is unconditional freedom for the individual person in our land. Freedom is realisable easier through educational empowerment. As teachers you, therefore, have a responsibility imposed on you by fate to be catalysts for the emergence of the new



democratic and emancipated society.

My dear people, I hope that what has been said in this presentation has provided a basis for thought for us to explore together the concept of People's Education for People's Power. We must search for truth and real knowledge in all educational matters. The ideal of People's Education for People's Power is very dear to our people, and correctly so. As we search for the meaning of this ideal we must search for the best and be thorough in searching for the best. The destiny of our people commands this as a sacred duty.

I trust that I have spoken meaningfully to you. I know we all care for justice. I consign the views expressed here to your judgement, as my revolutionary compatriots, in our common struggle for the true emancipation of all our people.

I love you all.

Seretse Choabi  
Secretary for Education

21st August, 1989