

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

(The Work of Paulo Freire)

It is not easy in a short report to describe what I have been trying to do since my appointment as Special Consultant to the WCC Office of Education. On the other hand, it is not our task at this moment to give such a detailed report. On the contrary, what is important now is to give some clarification and information about certain activities of the Office in which I am closely involved, and through which the Office is trying to respond to the new challenges with which we are confronted.

I would like to make an initial statement, and that is, that in all the projects in which I am involved, I always try to avoid any form of personalization which could give the impression that I am working for myself. Even when I participate in seminars to which I am invited personally, I always make it clear that I am representing the Office of Education. Only in very special cases do I avoid involving the Office.

I have travelled vastly throughout the world, participating in consultations which are sometimes sponsored by the Office of Education; in local, regional and international seminars which are at times coordinated by religious institutions, and other times not. However, I have nearly always represented the Office of Education. Now for the past two years I have been focusing my activities on a collaboration with four of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, working in the field of education in general, and adult education in particular. Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Angola are those societies in the process of reconstruction to which the Office of Education is giving its minimal collaboration. In the first place, I cannot hide my satisfaction at being able, through the Office of Education, to participate even minimally in the extraordinary effort that these societies are developing in order to reinvent themselves.

This year a small book will be published about the activities in Guinea-Bissau (the manuscript of this book has just been given to the WCC Publications Department). The book is called "Letters to Guinea-Bissau - record of an Ongoing Experience". I believe that this book gives a general idea of the work being done in Guinea-Bissau and which involves, on the one hand, the Ministry of Education of that country, and on the other hand, the WCC Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD) which finances the project, our Office, and the Institute of Cultural Action (IDAC). I must say in passing that the World Council of Churches, right from the beginning of the struggle of these people against Portuguese

colonialism, never denied support to the liberation movements who are today in power. This total WCC contribution was given even before the Office of Education initiated this minimal collaboration, and the WCC Inter-Church Aid Department (CICARWS) are also giving a substantial aid to these countries in other areas of concern.

The starting point of our collaboration with these countries was a request from their Government. Our Office had never visited any of these countries before being invited, in the same way as we never suggested any measures before discussing their reality on the spot with the national people. We rejected all forms of cultural invasion and did not claim to teach the national people without learning with them. This is a fundamental point in the way in which the Office of Education works.

Since we did not have the possibility to give material aid, which in any case is not one of the aims of the Office of Education, our help was focused on a contribution which involved discussions with the national leaders about their overall educational policy and, principally, about their literacy and adult education programmes. This contribution is extended, naturally, to leadership training and to accompanying the activities which are developed in this or that country, through seminars with the national teams to evaluate the situation. As it is not possible to consider education in general as something in itself, but rather in its relationships to production, health, politics, etc., our dialogue goes beyond just the Ministry of Education.

Another form of collaboration we give is to act as intermediaries between these Governments and some international organizations or funding agencies. Recently, three projects were approved for São Tomé and Príncipe: two by Développement et Paix, and one by the United Church of Canada. Previously the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) approved projects for Guinea-Bissau. In December last year, the North American Werner Erhard Foundation for EST made a donation of US\$ 10.000 to the Office of Education to be used in our work in Africa. And this is being rigorously fulfilled. It is interesting to note that this donation was completely spontaneous, we did not request anything. We used a minimum of this money to buy some necessary materials for the national teams of these countries, and we reserved the major part for the first printing of the "Primeiro Caderno de Cultura Popular" ("First Note-book for People's Culture"), which is the note-book for the "alfabetizandos" (1), to be used in the adult literacy programme in São Tomé and Príncipe. An identical note-book is being prepared, on our suggestion, for Guinea-Bissau, and we have suggested to the Ministry of Education that they request the contribution of UNESCO to cover the expenses of printing.

This "Primeiro Caderno de Cultura Popular" will be followed by others which will offer the possibility of constant reading to the "alfabetizandos", and which discuss basic issues for the

(1) "alfabetizando" is the person who is in the process of learning to read and write.

people, such as health, production, national politics, African and international politics. We are also thinking of having some such note-books written by the people themselves and with which they will inaugurate a type of Peoples' Library.

It is interesting to note that in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, our Office is working in collaboration with CCPD and IDAC, as I have mentioned earlier. In São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola, the contribution is ours directly. In Angola this contribution is not in the field of literacy, but of post-literacy and education in general, and is done in collaboration with the National Council for Culture.

In spite of all the time that these activities demand of me - since my contribution is not limited to the three annual visits which I make to each of the countries, but extends naturally into constant reflection, reading and editing of texts, letters that I write and to which I must reply - I still deal with other requests which are made to the Office of Education. Seminars with Christian or non-Christian groups in different European countries; international conferences; seminars in universities; constant interviews; in many cases small seminars in my office during the major part of the time that I am in Geneva. Meetings which, for those who have a bureaucratic mentality, would be mere pastimes and never work!

Recently, another door for activity opened - and no less important - with the invitation made by the Government of Costa Rica to our Office to study the possibility of our collaborating with the National University of Heredia. This collaboration will be focused mainly on the Faculties of Extension, Education, and the Religious School. The first visit, in the month of April, was quite fruitful.

To finish, I would say that among other ways of witnessing our participatory and fraternal presence, our Office of Education - as part of the Ecumenical Centre - links its efforts, however small they may be, and in a humble way, to the historical task that these people assume, which is that of recreating their societies.

Paulo Freire
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(Original in Portuguese)