

Transcript of Paulo Freire's speech to the Consultation at
Cartigny, 28th October 1974.

I will try to share with you my surprise and shock and how all my experiences have touched me and also have made me come back to some of the aspects, the first aspects, I thought about in my first experiences in Brazil some twenty-five years ago. And how these later experiences have led me beyond some of these first steps, of course. If I were the same Paulo Freire it would be very bad. Of course, I have many aspects I would like to put on the table but there is no time for that.

I would like to insist on one or two of these aspects which I remember from my work as a very young man in my experiences with peasants, for example, and workers in the urban centres. One of my preoccupations, linked to the process of education, was what I named at that time levels of consciousness. I remember I discussed at that time what I named the semi-intransitive consciousness, the transitive naive, the transitive critical and the fanatic consciousness, this last one, a distortion of the transitive naive, with a strong character of irrationality.

In my first book I discussed these ideas and I later developed them further in Cultural Action for Freedom, which I wrote in the United States.

And now, after my experience in the so-called First world, and above all in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, and my experience in the so-called Third world, in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America, these ideas continue to be a preoccupation. They lead me again to Lukacs and his study of the 'assault to reason', as well as to Horkheimer and Adorno and their 'Dialectic of Reason'. In this connection Habermas' work is also of interest although I have not yet read it. All of them, including Erich

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Fromm, some years ago discussed in a very serious way what was named the self-destruction of reason, the fear of freedom, the fear of confronting the truth. This fear of freedom, this fear of confronting the truth, and this kind of consciousness, is one of the characteristics of the levels of consciousness which I named fatalist consciousness, irrational consciousness. It is impossible, absolutely impossible, to deny this problem in the First world, the technological society. A certain irrationality which comes up because of the exacerbation of reason. It is a contradiction that at a certain moment of rationality, rationality becomes irrational. I made reference to this possibility in my first book.

In my walks around the world I have been touched by this. But precisely because I am an educator my preoccupation is how to answer this concrete historical fact. In a simple, but not simplistic way, I would say, again that one of the objectives, one of the main aspects, for education for both these worlds would be to emphasize critical consciousness.

The question, nevertheless, which we ask ourselves, is how to put into practice this kind of education, when we know that it is not education which shapes society but that it is society which shapes education. How can we increase a kind of critical consciousness, through a challenging education, in a society whose historical atmosphere, as a globality is irrational. And also in a society whose aspirations, in the case of the Third world precisely because of its dependency on the first one, leads its ruling class to make copies of the models of irrationality which the First world presents as a good model. How can we conduct such a kind of education - even within the churches which are also conditioned by the irrationality and are losing the hope, the meaning of hope? I emphasize this because of my real and deep preoccupation with theology, not as a professional theologian but as a theologian to the extent that I am a human being.

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And this leads me once again to Germany "to meet" Ernest Bloch and immerse myself in the concept of hope which marked Moltmann in his theological thought.

How can we put into practice this kind of education, this humanizing education, without falling into irrationality when the whole historical atmosphere is irrational? We are made made into machines, as a result of a certain model of production, which has to be overcome. The question is is not only to replace a certain social class by another one as regards the power over the means of production, but above all it is also a question of changing the whole approach towards production - the relationships between human beings and nature. In this connection I feel a strong sympathy with Tanzania which seems to me to be aware of this, and is trying at least not to follow the Western model of production and consequently of education in spite of being submitted to the conditions of the Western world. I have a great interest also in China and Cuba because they are trying to do something along these lines, something very humanizing.

My friends, I have no time to expand on this. I would like to tell you of my preoccupation which is the following. How can we be educators today without falling into, on the one hand, pessimism or cynicism and, on the other hand, naivete. That is to say, I know it is impossible to change an educational system, as a sub-system of the whole system, without changing radically the system to the extent that education is a sub-structure. But, even although I know this, I am not pessimistic and I don't say that there is nothing I can do. We cannot despair nor be naive. By naive I mean continuing to insist that by education we can transform reality. Not being naive, being critical, means that although we cannot transform all of society through education we can do something through education. The problem is to know what we can do in different historical spaces, and different situations.

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Finally, in my point of view, every time I have time and space to act as an educator my main preoccupation is to develop, in different ways, critical consciousness. This is how I see this question and maybe it is the result of my four years of work at the World Council.

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