

# What education for what development?

In speaking of education we must first ask what its function is in social reproduction. This function operates on two levels, that of ideological production and that of the development of the productive forces; and, in this dual context, education is not satisfactory or efficient—unless its functions in reproduction are correctly inter-related according to the specific requirements of the dominant mode of production characteristic of a society. And since society cannot be reduced to its base, how are we to define the relations between the base (the economic plane) and the superstructure (the politico-ideological plane) to which education belongs? These relations are not identical in the various modes of production. It is true that, whatever the mode of production, the economic plane is in the last resort the determining one, if we accept the fact that material life conditions all the other aspects of social life, i.e. that the level of development of the productive forces, by determining the

relative volume of surplus, conditions civilization. But it is important to distinguish between this ultimate determination and the question of whether it is the economic or the politico-ideological plane which is dominant.

## The economic and the ideological planes

In all precapitalist modes of production, the generation and use of the surplus are obvious ('transparent'). Hence the producers cannot agree to the extraction of this surplus which they produce, and know they produce, unless they are 'alienated' and believe that this extraction is necessary for the survival of the social and 'natural' order. Thus the politico-ideological plane necessarily assumes a religious form and dominates social life. In these cases, if the surplus extracted is no longer used 'correctly', i.e. to maintain, reproduce and develop the State and civilization, if it is 'wasted' by looting invaders or a 'bad king', the producers revolt in order to impose a 'just government', since the natural order and the divine laws have been violated. When, on the other hand, the maintenance and development of this social order require the smooth functioning of specific social groups, such as the civil or military bureaucracy or the theocracy serving the interests of the 'tributary State-class', these groups oc-

---

*Samir Amin (Arab Republic of Egypt). Economist. Director of the Institut Africain de Développement Économique et de Planification (Dakar). Has taught in France at the universities of Poitiers and Vincennes. Author of several works on economy, in particular: L'Économie du Maghreb (English adaptation, The Maghreb in the Modern World); Trois Expériences Africaines de Développement: le Mali, la Guinée et le Ghana; L'Accumulation à l'Échelle Mondiale; Le Développement Inégal.*

cupy a central place in the political history of society. When the empiricist observer of history thinks he can see in this the resultant of ideological struggles (religious conflicts) or political struggles (clan conflicts), he is the victim of the same alienation as the society he is studying.

In the capitalist mode of production, on the contrary, the generation of the surplus is concealed ('opaque'). This is certainly, as Marx himself pointed out, the essential contribution of capital: the transformation of surplus value into profit. Narrow-minded theoretical economists have seen in this transformation a formal contradiction (the supposed contradiction between Book I and Book II of *Capital*). This simply shows that they are themselves victims of economic alienation. For this transformation masks the origin of profit (surplus value), brings in 'capital' (a social relationship) as a 'thing' (the material equipment in which this social power is embodied) and endows this thing with a supernatural power: that of being 'productive'. The term 'fetichism' which Marx attributed to this process well deserves its name. Therefore, as regards appearances, in the capitalist mode capital appears productive, just as labour does; the wage seems to be the 'just' remuneration of labour (whereas it represents the value of labour-power), and profit the compensation for 'services' rendered by capital (risk-bearing, saving-abstinence, etc.). Society is no longer in control of its material life: the latter seems to be the resultant of the 'laws' which are imposed on it as physical, natural laws are. The 'economic laws'—the supply of and demand for goods, labour, capital, etc.—are the sign of this alienation. That is why 'economic science' becomes ideology—the ideology of 'universal harmonies'—and reduces 'social laws' to the status of laws of nature independent of the social organization. If economics is 'mystified', politics, on the other hand, is 'demystified': it is no longer a religion. The true religion of the capitalist society is 'economism', in everyday terms, the 'purse', that is 'consumismo', the

cult of consumption for its own sake, without reference to needs. The whole crisis of contemporary civilization is to be found here, because this ideology shortens the time horizon of society and makes it lose sight of the perspective of its future. At the same time, politics becomes a field of alleged rationality. The social groups which fulfil functions on this plane are naturally, and clearly serving society; at no time do they appear as its masters.<sup>1</sup>

### The crisis of education in capitalist countries

On the basis of these premises we can begin to think about the role of education in society.

It follows from what has just been said in analysing the relations between the superstructure and the economic base of society that the essential purpose of education in precapitalist societies is to provide an ideological training of a religious type, which alone is capable of ensuring society's acceptance of the extraction of a 'transparent' surplus. At the same time the other purpose of education—the 'technical' training of the producers—is not only limited by the low level of requirements (and largely acquired 'on the job' when learning the trade), but is also subject to the religious cosmology from which the technology and the natural sciences derive their justification. For the reproduction of the dominant—idle—class, religious training, but considerably more advanced, is sufficient.

Capitalism radically upset these conditions and hence the place of education in social reproduction. However, in the nineteenth century the reproduction of the bourgeoisie was ensured

1. See: Samir Amin, *Le Développement Inégal*, Chapters I and II, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1973 and 'L'Homme et la Société', *Éloge du Socialisme*, No. 31-32 of *Anthropos* (Paris), 1974; see also J. Habermas, *La Technique et la Science comme Idéologie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973.

quite simply on the one hand by the inheritance of fortunes (and the family) and on the other hand by classical and élitist education. The ideological content of this education is clear. It is based on a pseudo social science which fulfils its function perfectly. Industrial development requires the development of the natural sciences and their increasing specialization. At the same time social science must be alienated, and for this reason its purpose is defined by assimilating it to the purpose of the natural sciences: social reality can be observed from outside, the social (especially economic) laws are imposed like the laws of nature. Empiricism and positivism are the philosophies of this assimilation. Under these circumstances, the purpose of the social education of the bourgeois is not to increase his conscious mastery over society. On the contrary, this mastery involves the alienation of the bourgeois himself, who has to let the 'economic laws', like nature, operate autonomously (*laisser faire*). This education is a good preparation for the politicians of the system, who are the ideologists. Besides this, the fantastic acceleration of the pace of development of the productive forces, due to the essential fact that henceforth this progress is inherent in the economic machinery and no longer external, requires the complementary training of technicians and simultaneously the downgrading of 'simple' labour. The nineteenth-century European school perfectly fulfils this set of functions: the primary school for the ideological training (called 'civic' or 'citizenship' training) of the masses, while training in a craft is abandoned with the downgrading of labour, the secondary school and the university being reserved for the training of the bourgeoisie, mainly in 'politicking' and secondarily in technical subjects.

It is this education which has entered a period of crisis—and, clearly, on a world scale. That is why a whole series of manifestations of this crisis are common to the underdeveloped and to the developed countries, although the former, in this field as in others, have some specific features.

The basic cause of this crisis is first of all the crisis of the basis of the system. The gradual centralization of capital little by little abolishes the genuine operation of the market (objective foundation of commodity alienation) but keeps its form, because the motive force of the system—profit—remains. Under these conditions the system evolves towards a new mode of production in which the extraction of the surplus again becomes transparent, and ideology again becomes the dominant plane. This change was described by George Orwell in his futuristic novel *1984* and analysed by the Frankfurt school of philosophy, particularly by H. Marcuse<sup>1</sup> and J. Habermas.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the centralization of capital abolishes the capitalist, blows his functions into smithereens. Inheritance is no longer of major importance; transmission of property operates in an institutional framework. Hence there is a crisis of the family itself. The school would then have to fulfil more important functions than ever, by adapting the system to that of the intellectual élite ('mandarinate'). This corresponds closely to the requirements of a new totalitarian society, that of the 'one-dimensional man'.

Side by side with this, in the field of natural sciences and technology, the function of specialization is no longer scientific efficiency. It fulfils a new function, that of justifying an increasingly ramified division of labour, the precondition of a hierarchization of wages which is substituted for the former class alliances. But this division of labour becomes dysfunctional and the revolt against the division of labour threatens the system at its very roots. In order to reproduce itself the system must therefore undergo an ideological change: that of making science and technology an 'ideology', as J. Habermas has felicitously put it. Thus the whole educational system of the nineteenth century has become 'dysfunctional'.

1. H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man*.

2. Habermas, *op. cit.*

## The failure of imported educational models

Now, it is precisely at this very time that an attempt is being made to extend it to the developing countries, making, as always, the Rostowian assumption of a linear development according to which these countries are merely 'backward', whereas they are dominated and specifically shaped by this domination, which only yesterday was brutally colonial in many cases and which today operates through the more subtle channels of the unequal international division of labour.<sup>1</sup>

Colonial education had the merit of being consistent in its cynical brutality. It set itself two goals: on the one hand the destruction of the complex traditional system of autonomous education, with a view to uprooting the national culture and consciousness, and on the other hand the training of an 'élite' of subordinate servants. The main purpose of educating this group was neither to train a bourgeoisie in the likeness of that of the metropolitan country, nor to train scientists and technicians capable of developing technology, but only to produce individuals alienated by the very content of what they had been taught deliberately (a foreign language, the history of the metropolitan country etc.), as Abdou Moumouni has so clearly shown.<sup>2</sup> Neither the content of this education nor the quantity of men trained in this way could lead to any autonomous development of society.

At the beginning of the sixties, with the coming of independence, the sole objective assigned to the programmes in this field was the accelerated growth of this type of education. Yet it was obvious that the cost of this type of education was going to become exorbitant, for at least two main reasons. The first is that the educational target was in advance of the real needs of economic progress as envisaged, and hence too high for local financing facilities. It was indeed thought that by 'forcing the pace' of education, economic progress could be accel-

erated; but this was implicitly to reject the thesis of 'educational planning', because the latter is necessarily conservative: it 'adjusts' the educational flow to the needs of the market. The second reason is that the schooling envisaged was that of the developed world, which meant that the teachers, who belong to the élite given as a model, had to be paid according to criteria which would ensure them a life-style out of all proportion to that of the rural and urban masses. It was thought that these difficulties, mainly financial ones, could be overcome by massive foreign aid. However, even when there was sufficient finance to accelerate considerably the extension of this type of schooling, the failure was nevertheless obvious and was seen in various social phenomena—accelerated, 'rural exodus', unemployment of school graduates—while at the same time the efficiency of the education was diminishing.

The conventional thesis of 'underdevelopment=tradition=backwardness' had been accepted in the field of education as in the others. Therefore the models of the developed world had to be copied here, just as consumption models and production techniques are. Foreign 'aid' was to play the same accelerating role here as foreign capital with respect to economic development, and there was no questioning of the latter's external orientation.

Yet the very model of accepted dependent and outward-oriented growth was bound to culminate, as history has shown, in a very great inequality in its distribution and its effects. This inequality was first displayed on the world scale by the widening of the gulf between the developed and developing countries, secondly at Third World level, by the concentration of growth in a few countries and zones, and lastly at the national level of each Third World

1. W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, Cambridge University Press. For a criticism, see Samir Amin, *Le Développement Inégal*, op. cit.
2. Abdou Moumouni, *L'Éducation en Afrique*, Paris, Maspéro, 1964.

country by the accentuation of social inequalities. At the same time the accepted models of dependent growth meant a more profound integration into the world system, i.e. an accentuated transmission of the dominant models.

This real failure of development was to involve that of education. First, the growing integration into the world system amplified the demonstration effects, and secondly the economic system was less and less able to satisfy the expectations that had been raised. Of course these problems are common to all the countries of the Third World; but they are particularly acute in the so-called 'least-developed' countries because these have been the major victims of the outward-oriented development model.

At the same time, again here more than elsewhere, the growing inconsistencies which characterize the borrowed educational model at the world level itself, that is, in relation to the requirements of the system in its actual centre

(which is the goal proposed) are highlighted in a way which looks like a caricature.

We can then perceive why these countries are, in this field as in the others, 'weak links': the possibilities of an 'acceptable' growth for them in the system are necessarily slender. Hence we can clearly see the outlines both of a self-oriented development strategy and of an education radically different from the borrowed model. The strategy must start with a direct definition of the needs of the masses, without reference to the European model; it must necessarily be egalitarian; it must be essentially self-reliant; it must help to awaken a capacity for autonomous technological innovation. Corresponding to this strategy are the formulas for generalized and egalitarian popular education, directly adjusted to the needs of the masses by associating theory with practice, and able to demystify the 'civilization' model which has hitherto been imitated.