

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE, REVOLUTIONARY PRAXIS

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“The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialist doctrine is its failure to recognise that it is not only the circumstances that produce men but the men that produce circumstances; that the educator need be educated”.

Marx- Theses on Feuerbach

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGY

The traditional class room which is characterized by the situation in which the teacher teaches and the pupil learns is the reproduction of the State in miniature, in the sense that it seeks, by way of its single-track transmission process, to train the would-be-citizens in the habit of willing submission to the diktat of the authorities above. The criticism of the school therefore turns into the criticism of the state and vice-versa - all radicals, from left Parties to Action Groups to critical-minded individuals are quite justified in making this loud assertion. But the moot point that arises in the wake of this realisation; how to effect the alternative model of education in which the people become self-taught just as they would be self-ruled in an alternative system based upon people's power. What the most of the political parties and individuals that call themselves Left and Radical do is to call the people for the revolution against the system-that-be as a precondition for the establishment of alternative mode of education. Some of them go a bit far and assure; “Yes, we can also compel the ruling class/ party on the strength of the people's agitation to introduce many a desirable reform even before revolution takes place”. Without ignoring a whit the rationale of their call for revolution, we are but led to observe one common alien tendency that runs through all of them, that is, to think that the people being ignorant and complacent as they are need to be roused and roused into any action only by their call against the establishment following which any reform or revolution is only possible. For them they themselves only are the vanguard and the people rearguard in any reform or revolution, the change of /pressure on the class/party at the top is the chief engagement of the people, and a new system, be it of society in general or education in particular cannot be generated or experienced by the people within the framework of the existing order; the people have to wait until after the revolution to experience the new order. A new Messianism in deed !

But the question arises; if the people are architect of the new order, why can't they experience its advent at every stop and to the degree they effect it. Such a query leads us into the quest for a different kind of political and educational praxis. The party, Action Group or the individual who wants to intervene into the social-human process with the emancipatory project in view cannot and should not take for granted the role of vanguard or teacher for itself in any of the stages. Since a person intervenes into the historical process basically in the interest of his self-liberation which coincides incidentally with the goal of universal liberation. One's self-liberation can be attained to the degree he or she gains the self-knowledge. Self-knowledge from whom, from where? Obviously from the people, from the reality outside. The traditional teacher who goes to the pupil with the avowed purpose of teaching and coaching him but blames the latter for failure to follow his teachings just like the traditional leader who goes to the masses to lead them, but blames the latter for their refusal to be led by him. Not the pupil and the people but the teacher and the leader are at fault here.

The teacher realizes the limitations of his pre-conceived knowledge only after getting involved into pupil just as the leader is awakened to his own limitations when he comes face to face with the masses who to his dismay defy all his pre-notions on them. There is thus a profound need for going ever deeper into the pupil and people on the part of the teacher and leader and getting their own pre-conceived knowledge expanded, transformed and transcended in the continuous process of dialectical interaction. The relatively final goal being the obliteration of the very dichotomy between fixed categories like leader and people, teacher and pupil, vanguard and rearguard.

It is not to an unknown and indefinite future that we can afford to postpone the very need and possibility of realization of this new dialectical and dialogic interaction on the safe plea that unless the system changes, the new social or educational practice cannot find its fructification. Rather, just the opposite. For the birth of the new system, the architect of which is the masses themselves cannot materialise if the masses be not awakened to its need through their own experience of the new social and educational practice itself. The taste of the new practice however small to begin with, goads the masses to seek after an ever-larger measure of it, and ultimately the fundamental change of the system is thus a cumulative process of changes small and big, within the matrix of interrelations of living and struggling human beings, not a sudden volta face of the system either caused by some unknown, inaccessible forces, or engineered by a band of super-tricksters called 'professional revolutionaries'. If not understood thus, the talk of fundamental change turns, as it has already on a global scale, into an abstraction, a fetish which the Establishment not only not resents, but relishes and helps it flourish.

The Alternative Mode of Education is thus to emerge from within the existing order by degrees by the people themselves aided of course by the intervention of all conscientious individuals and collectives. If not here and now, then never, never and never. What is objective to is not the intervention as such, but the very mode of intervention that the most of the Left have been adopting hitherto from a position of self-appointed teacher and liberator of mankind.

What is proposed here is an alternative pedagogic praxis for everybody, literally everybody whether a partyman or a group Activist, a school teacher or a welfare personnel whosoever is bent on intervening into the on going historical process with an emancipatory project in view.

No doubt, a mountain of literature, workshops, and deliberations has already been produced on this score here and abroad. And not always without impact. But the mountain of vanguardism, messiah cult and leaderocracy still persists. So the inescapable need for continuing the debate.

Keeping this end in view, we reproduce below the excerpts from the book i.e. Cultural Action for Freedom by Paulo Freire, the author of the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" which though written in the background of Latin American experiences and addressed mainly to the cultural activists are still of relevance to all those in our country who are on quest for a new pedagogical praxis in their respective domains.

CULTURAL ACTION AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION- PAULO FREIRE

It would be unnecessary to tell the revolutionary groups that they are the antagonistic contradiction of the Right. However, it would not be inexpedient to emphasize that this antagonism, which is born of its opposing purposes, must express itself in a behaviour which is equally antagonistic. There ought to be a difference in the praxis of the Right and of

revolutionary groups which defines them to the people making the options of each group explicit. This difference between the two groups stems from the utopic nature of the revolutionary groups, and the impossibility of the Right to be a topic. This is not an arbitrary distinction, but one which is sufficient to distinguish radically the objectives and forms of action taken by the revolutionary and Rightist groups.

To the extent that real utopia implies the denunciation of an unjust reality and the proclamation of a pre-project, revolutionary leadership cannot;

1. Denounce reality without knowing reality.
2. Proclaim a new reality without having a draft project which, although it emerges in the denunciation, becomes a viable project only in praxis.
3. Know reality without relying on the people as well as on the objective facts for the source of its knowledge.
4. Denounce and proclaim by itself.
5. Make new myths out of the denunciation and annunciation- denunciation and annunciation must be anti-ideological in so far as they result from a scientific knowledge of reality.
6. Renounce communion with the people, not only during the time between the dialectic of denunciation and annunciation and the concretization of a viable project, but also in the very act of giving that project concrete reality.

Thus, revolutionary leadership falls into internal contradictions which compromise its purpose, when, victim of a fatalist concept of history, it tries to domesticate the people mechanically to a future which the leadership knows a priori, but which it thinks the people are incapable of knowing. In this case, revolutionary leadership ceases to be utopian and ends up identified with the Right. The Right makes no denunciation or proclamation, except, as we have said, to denounce whoever denounces it and to proclaim its own myths.

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true revolutionary project, on the other hand, to which the utopian dimension is natural, is a process in which the people assume the role of subject in the precarious adventure of transforming and recreating the world. The Right is necessarily opposed to such a project, and attempts to immobilize it. Thus, to use Erich Fromm's terms, the revolutionary utopia is biophilic, whereas the Rightist's necrophilic, as is a revolutionary leadership which has become bureaucratic.

Revolutionary utopia tends to be dynamic rather than static; tends to life rather than as death; to the future as a challenge to man's creativity rather than as a repetition of the present; to love as liberation of subjects rather than as a pathological possessiveness; to the emotion of life rather than cold abstractions; to living together in harmony rather than gregariousness; to dialogue rather than muteness; to praxis rather than 'Law and order'; to men who organize themselves reflectively for action rather than men who organize for passivity; to creative and communicative language rather than prescriptive signals; to reflective challenges rather than domesticating slogans; and to reflective challenges rather than myths which are imposed. It does not prefer

static to the dynamic; the future as a repetition of the past rather than as a creative venture; pathological forms of love rather than real love; frigid schematization rather than the emotion of living; gregariousness rather than authentic living together; organization men rather than men who organize; imposed myths rather than incarnate values; directives rather than creative and communicative language; and slogans rather than challenges.

It is necessary for revolutionaries to witness more and more to the radical difference which separates them from the Rightist elite. It is not enough to condemn the violence of the Right, its aristocratic posture, its myths. Revolutionaries must prove their respect for the people, their belief and confidence in them, not as a strategy but as an implicit requirement to being a revolutionary. This commitment to the people is fundamental at any given moment, but especially in the transition period created by a coup d'etat.

Victimizing the people by its violence, the coupe imposes, as we have said, the old climate of the culture of silence. The people, standing at the threshold of their experience as subject and participants of society, need signs that will help them recognize who is with them and who is against them. These signs, or witness, are given through projects proposed by men in dialectic with the structure. Each project constitutes an interacting totality of objectives, methods, procedures and techniques. The revolutionary project is distinguished from the Rightist project not only by its objectives, but by its total reality. A project's method cannot be dichotomized from its content and objectives, as if methods were natural and equally appropriate for liberation or domination. Such a concept reveals a naive idealism which is satisfied with the subjective intention of the person who acts.

The revolutionary project is engaged in a struggle against oppressive and dehumanizing structures. To the extent that it seeks the affirmation of the concrete men as the men freeing themselves, any thoughtless concession to the oppressor's methods is always a danger and a threat to the revolutionary project itself. Revolutionaries must demand of themselves an imperious coherence. As men, they may make mistakes, they are subject to equivocation, but they cannot act like reactionaries and call themselves revolutionaries. They must suit their action to historical conditions, taking advantage of the real and unique possibilities which exist. Their role is to seek the most efficient and viable means of helping the people to move from the levels of semi-intransitive or naïve-transitive consciousness to the level of critical consciousness. This preoccupation, which is alone authentically liberating, is implicit in the revolutionary project itself. Originating in the praxis of both the leadership and the rank and file, every revolutionary project is basically 'cultural action, in the process of becoming cultural revolution.

Revolution is a critical process, unrealizable without science and reflection. In the midst of reflective action on the world to be transformed, the people come to recognize that the world is being transformed. The world in transformation is the mediator of the dialogue between the people, at one pole of the act of knowing, and the revolutionary leadership, at the other. If objective conditions do not always permit this dialogue its existence can be verified by the witness of the leadership.

Conscientization is more than a simple prise de conscience. While it implies overcoming 'false consciousness', overcoming that is a semi-intransitive or naïve transitive state of consciousness, it implies further the critical insertion of the conscientized person into a demythologized reality. This is why 'conscientization' is an unrealizable project for the Right. The Right is by its nature incapable of being utopian, and hence it cannot develop a form of cultural action which would

bring about 'conscientization', There can be no 'conscientization' of the people without a radical denunciation of dehumanizing structures, accompanied by the proclamation of a new reality to be created by men. The Right cannot unmask itself, nor can it sponsor the means for the people to unmask it more than it is willing to be unmasked. With the increased clarity of the popular consciousness, its own consciousness tends to grow, but this form of 'conscientization' cannot convert itself into a praxis leaning to the 'conscientization' of the people. There can be no 'conscientization' without denunciation of unjust structures, a thing which cannot be expected of the Right. Nor can there be popular 'conscientization' for domination. The Right invents new forms of cultural action only for domination.

Thus, the two forms of cultural action are antagonistic to each other. Where cultural action for freedom is characterized by dialogue, and its pre-eminent purpose is to conscientize the people, cultural action for domination is opposed to dialogue and serves to domesticate the people. The former problematizes, the latter sloganizes. Since cultural action for freedom is committed to the scientific unveiling of reality, to the exposure, that is, of myths and ideologies, it must separate ideology from science. Althusser, in *Para Leer el Capital*, insists on the necessity of this separation. Cultural action for freedom can be satisfied neither with the 'mystifications of ideology', as he calls them, nor with 'a simple moral denunciation of myths and errors', but must undertake 'a rational and rigorous critique (of ideology)'. The fundamental role those committed to cultural action for conscientization is not properly speaking to fabricate the liberating idea, but to invite the people to grasp with their minds the truth of their reality.

Consistent with this spirit of knowing, scientific knowledge cannot be knowledge that is merely transmitted, for it would itself become ideological myth, even if it were transmitted with the intention of liberating men. The discrepancy between intention and practice would be resolved in favour of practice. The only authentic points of departure for the scientific knowledge of reality are the dialectical relationship between men and the world, and the critical comprehension of how these relationships are evolved and how they in turn condition men's perception of concrete reality.

Those who use cultural action as a strategy for maintaining their domination over the people have no choice but to indoctrinate the people in a mythified version of reality. In doing so, the Right subordinates science and technology to its own ideology, using them to disseminate information and prescriptions in its efforts to adjust the people to the reality which the 'communications' media define as proper. By contrast, for those who undertake cultural action for freedom, science is the indispensable instrument for denouncing the myths created by the Right, and philosophy is the matrix of the proclamation of a new reality. Science and philosophy together provide the principles of action for 'conscientization'. Cultural action for 'conscientization' is always a utopian enterprise. That is why it needs philosophy, without which, instead of denouncing reality and announcing the future, it would fall into the mystification of ideological knowledge.

The utopian nature of cultural action for freedom is what distinguishes it above all from cultural action for domination. Cultural action for domination, based on myths, cannot pose problems about reality to the people, nor orientate the people to the unveiling of reality, since both of these projects would imply denunciation and annunciation. On the contrary, in the problematizing and conscientizing of cultural action for freedom, the annunciation of a new reality is the historical project proposed for men's achievement.

In the face of a semi-intransitive or naïve state of consciousness among the people, conscientization envisages their attaining critical consciousness, or the maximum of potential consciousness. This objective cannot terminate when the annunciation becomes concrete. On the contrary, when the annunciation becomes concrete reality, the need becomes even greater for critical consciousness among the people, both horizontally and vertically. Thus, cultural action for freedom, which characterized the movement which struggled for the realization of what was announced, must then transform itself into permanent cultural revolution.

Before going to elaborate upon the distinct but essentially related moments of cultural action and cultural revolution, let us summarize our preceding points about levels of consciousness. An explicit relationship has been established between cultural action for freedom, conscientization as its chief enterprise, and the transcendence of semi-intransitive and naïve-transitive states of consciousness by critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is brought about not through an intellectual effort alone, but through praxis – through the authentic union of action and reflection. Such reflective action cannot be denied to the people. If it were, the people would be no more than activist pawns in the hands of a leadership which reserved for itself the right of decision-making. The authentic Left cannot fail to stimulate the overcoming of the people's false consciousness, on whatever level it exists, just as the Right is incapable of doing so. In order to maintain its power, the Right needs an elite who think for it, assisting it in accomplishing its projects. Revolutionary leadership needs the people in order to make the revolutionary project a reality, but the people in the process of becoming more and more critically consciousness.

After the revolutionary reality is inaugurated, 'conscientization' continues to be indispensable. It is the instrument for rejecting the cultural myths which the people retain despite the new reality. Further, it is a force countering the bureaucracy, which threatens to deaden the revolutionary vision and dominate the people in the very name of their freedom. Finally, conscientization is a defense against another threat, that of the potential mythification of the technology which the new society requires to transform its backward infrastructures.[see my Pedagogy of the Oppressed].

Let it be clear, however, that technological development must be one of the concerns of the revolutionary project. It would be simplistic to attribute responsibility for these deviations to technology in itself. This would be another kind of irrationalism, that of conceiving of technology as a demonic entity, above and opposed to men. Critically viewed, technology is nothing more nor less than a natural phase of the creative process which engaged man from the moment he forged his first tool and began to transform the world for its humanization.

Considering that technology is not only necessary but part of man's natural development, the question facing revolutionaries is how to avoid technology's mythical deviations. The techniques of 'human relations' are not the answer, for in the final analysis they are only another way of domesticating and alienating men even further in the service of greater productivity. For this and other reason which we have expounded in the course of this essay, we insist on cultural action for freedom. We do not, however, attribute to 'conscientization' any magical power, which would only be to mythify it. 'Conscientization' is not a magical charm for revolutionaries, but a basic dimension of their reflective action. If men were not conscious bodies capable of acting and perceiving, of knowing and recreating, if they were not conscious of themselves and the world, the idea of conscientization would make no sense but then, neither would the idea of revolution. Authentic revolutions are undertaken in order to liberate men, precisely because men

can know themselves to be oppressed, and be conscious of the oppressive reality in which they exist.

But since, as we have seen, men's consciousness is conditioned by reality, conscientization is first of all the effort to enlighten men about the obstacles preventing them from a clear perception of reality. In this role, conscientization effects the ejection of cultural myths which confuse the people's awareness and make them ambiguous beings.

Because men are historical beings, incomplete and conscious of being incomplete, revolution is as natural and permanent a human dimension as is education. Only a mechanistic mentality holds that education can cease at a certain point, or that revolution can be halted when it attains power. To be authentic, revolution must be a continuous event. Otherwise it will cease to be revolution, and will become sclerotic bureaucracy.

Revolution is always cultural, whether it be in the phase of denouncing an oppressive society and proclaiming the advent of a just society, or in the phase of the new society inaugurated by the revolution. In the new society, the revolutionary process becomes cultural revolution.

Finally, let us clarify the reasons why we have been speaking of cultural action and cultural revolution as moments in the revolutionary process. In the first place, cultural action for freedom is carried out in opposition to the dominating power elite, while cultural revolution takes place in harmony with the revolutionary regime although this does not mean that it is subordinated to the revolutionary power. All cultural revolution proposes freedom as its goal, cultural action, on the contrary, if sponsored by the oppressive regime, can be a strategy for domination, in which case it can never become cultural revolution.

The limits of cultural action are set by the oppressive reality itself and by the silence imposed by the power elite. The nature of the oppression, therefore, determines the tactics, which are necessarily different from those employed in cultural revolution. Whereas cultural action for freedom confronts silence both as external fact and introjected reality, cultural revolution confronts it only as introjected reality. Both cultural action for freedom and cultural revolution are an effort to negate the dominating culture culturally, even before the new culture resulting from that negation has become reality. The new cultural reality itself is continuously subject to negation in favour of the increasing affirmation of men. In cultural revolution, however, this negation occurs simultaneously with the birth of the new culture in the womb of the old.

Both cultural action and cultural revolution imply communion between the leaders and people, as subjects who are transforming reality. In cultural revolution, however, communion is so firm that the leaders and the people become like one body, checked by a permanent process of self-scrutiny. Both cultural action and cultural revolution are founded on scientific knowledge of reality, but in cultural revolution, science is no longer at the service of domination. On two points, however, there is distinction between cultural action for freedom and cultural revolution. Both are committed to conscientization, and the necessity for each is explained by the 'dialectic of over-determination'.

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