



A DISTINGUISHED EDUCATIONIST EXPRESSES A HOPE — AND GIVES A SOLEMN WARNING

Those who burn neighbours' houses or dance on dead bodies inspire no confidence that their South Africa will be better than now

By FRANKLIN SONN

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IT HAS been said that education and labour will prove to be the terrains on which the forces of change will be played out.

We who are deeply involved in both education and union affairs are conscious that our successful functioning is no longer only dependent on our ability as educators or on our skills at collective bargaining.

We are required to keep the show on the road, while at the same time meeting the legitimate demands of students and union members, and we have an important role to play to bring about much overdue change.

From year to year we muddle through in the hope that the following year will be a better one. There must surely be a better way than this form of crisis management.

Whatever we do, we have to stick to certain fundamentals:

- Peace, development and security are goals worth striving for and must underpin all educational endeavour.

- Apartheid and lasting peace are a contradiction in terms.

- Apartheid is a violent system which must go, but must make way for a better order.

- Justice must be established without violence because just goals cannot be achieved by unjust means.

- True reconciliation must be our radical goal.

- Education is a very precious commodity and is not negotiable.

- Sound yet fair discipline based on respect is imperative.

Few will disagree with these objectives. Some will say that the die

is cast and these goals can no longer be achieved without burning our country to the ground and starting all over again.

Others, of whom I am one, believe that radical and dramatic action can still save the day.

After all, few are so unreasonable as to believe that those who perish in the streets stand to enjoy the fruits of a free and peaceful South Africa.

True radicalism means getting rid of what is wrong and building what is right.

Both must go together. If our hatred of the present system makes us so blind that we concentrate exclusively on the first, then we cannot claim to be radical.

Freedom

Anyone can analyse and protest. That is needed, but it is only one part of the final objective.

New structures built on new and widely acceptable value systems are the crucial other side of the coin.

On the other hand, mere suppression can be successfully maintained if one possesses the military wherewithal.

This, however, can also not last forever and is, as has been seen in the tragic event in Uitenhage, the antithesis of peace and confidence which form the basis for co-operation, growth and development and a sense of security.

If a gardener wants to transform a waste piece of ground from a mess of weeds to a display of which he can be proud, he knows he must plan two stages at once; even as he clears the weeds, he must have his new seeds and plants ready.

Otherwise the cleared ground will soon erupt into an even more flourishing crop of weeds.

Let us be honest and admit that we have seen too many examples of the freedom struggle ending in a new brand of exploitation and dictatorship.

Selfishness, arrogance and thirst for power are not the monopoly of the white man.

As we therefore work to uproot the weeds of apartheid, we must be preparing the seeds and plants of the new South Africa.

These new seeds and plants are people. Whatever new system is to emerge, its success or failure will depend solely on the quality of the people implementing it.

South Africa is entitled to a free and democratic social order. We need a society with equal opportunity for all.

The quality of freedom and democracy will be decided by how we treat one another as we pursue the struggle towards lasting peace in our land.

Democracy is our goal. Democracy, however, has its own demands. It compels us to respect the right of the other person to differ from us.

We certainly have the right to

question the principles, motives, tactics and aims of others. We do not, if we claim to be democrats, have the right to impose our opinions, motives, tactics and aims on others.

Whether we like it or not, it is as wrong to intimidate with threats, slander or violence those who have chosen a different course towards freedom as it is for the oppressor to intimidate with legislation, the media or the police.

Let me say outright: those who burn neighbours' houses or dance on dead bodies inspire no confidence that their new South Africa will be an improvement on what we have now.

Revenge

Similarly, the summary shooting of unarmed people in the streets of Uitenhage tends to confirm doubts about a peaceful future.

Authoritarianism is colour-blind. It is deeply embedded in the nature of people.

Some of these may be white reactionaries, while others may be among those on our own side who like to call themselves "progressive".

We must censure apartheid because it contains distinct elements of violence. We must equally condemn reactive black violence.

When the sword has once been drawn, hatred often blazes with such fury that the idea of a reasonable compromise is rejected with

scorn; and the conflict has to be continued till one or both combatants are exhausted.

The exploitation of atrocities in order to rouse popular anger into a frenzy is an art practised by belligerents who are not counting the cost in the long term.

Hatred and revenge are more impracticable passions than calculating selfishness; they disregard even the most obvious considerations of self-interest.

Nietzsche speaks of:

"... The deep impersonality born of hatred, the conscience born of murder and cold-bloodedness, the fervour born of effort in the annihilation of the enemy, the proud indifference to loss to one's own existence and to that of one's fellows."

The reproach has often been brought against Christianity that it has done so little effectively to deliver mankind from the evils of hatred and retribution.

Peace is a Christian calling, but peace is not appeasement. We can never come to terms with apartheid.

Apartheid must, however, be fought with better and more productive means as well as with higher passions.

Mahatma Gandhi led his people to freedom. He was fearless in his confrontation of the colonialist power. He led marches and went to prison.

He was, however, equally fearless in his challenge to his own people — that a new India would only be built by a new quality of life and higher moral standards of all Indians.

Martin Luther King, even when

his life was at risk, still had the radical courage to proclaim as follows: "While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist."

This is the radical struggle because it demands more and goes deeper. It requires restraint when sloganeering and sheer abandon seem popular.

It requires calmness when high emotion is asked for and it calls for tactical reasoning when physical action is provoked.

It furthermore seeks to establish a better order, rather than merely destroying the status quo. It calls for soul force rather than physical force and has real peace as its final goal.

This is radicalism because it is fundamental yet responsible. It seeks answers at the root.

None of us can afford to be moderate. In our context, moderate means to move with less conviction and not to disturb comfort.

Militant

Similarly, we must not confuse bloody-mindedness and militancy with radicalism. A man whom I respect challenges the restless generation:

"I do not say be patient; I say be passionate. A passionate pursuit of evil will only be mastered by a passionate pursuit of good."

Christ and Paul were radical, yet not willing to condone pettiness, hooliganism, empty demonstrative action and militant behaviour.

What do we tell our young and where do we tell our union members to stand amid the temptations of either militant leftist action or an overly compromising and materially beneficial rightist stance?

It is through education that we need to help our young to understand the justification of their indignation.

Similarly, education must be the medium to help them realise that hatred and rage are bad masters and that unbridled violence will exacerbate rather than solve the problem.

We must, in the words of the late Martin Luther King, meet physical force with soul force.

Education must help us all to understand that change can never mean merely changing the skin colour of the oppressor.

Education must instil in people an understanding of the importance of positive values like self-discipline and teach them to think for themselves and distrust slogans and easy options.

They must learn to develop convictions that are radical in that they present clear and positive options.

Education must open the eyes of young people to understand the limits of simple denunciation.

They must learn that reconciliation can only be established on the basis of mutual confidence in the genuineness of both parties to find real answers.

Educators must succeed in bringing across to their students that credible political action must go with success at one's job or one's studies, for in the end that will constitute the test of whether we can do better.

Jesse Jackson is right when he insists that no people can be expected to be led by failures and drop-outs. True leaders must demonstrate that they are, in the first

place, masters of themselves.

We must take courage to tell our students that victory includes overcoming the temptations of position, women, money and liquor. The leaders of the new South Africa must be truly incorruptible men and women.

Education must foster a clear understanding that power lies in the preparation of the mind, body and spirit.

It is the cumbersome and laborious way, but is, like our faith, an acquisition that can only be estranged from us with our own consent.

Option

The true radical is the peacemaker, the healer who is prepared to open the festering sore always with improvement in mind. Education must help people to understand this.

Some two years ago, I visited Zimbabwe. In Harare I saw two kinds of black Zimbabweans — those who walked the corridors of power and those who begged in the streets outside.

The first grasped education and prepared for the future, the second ate slogans and falsely believed that giving up one's stake in the future is a sacrifice worth making in the interest of uhuru.

The choice is not between breaking down and building up.

The only worthwhile option is to do both, remembering that success and achievement cannot be judged by what we have broken down, but by what we have created, and that calls for sacrifice, hard work, clean motives and radical action.