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## Can Separate Mean Equal?

A COMMENTARY ON THE  
WHITE PAPER ON EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The long process which has brought the White Paper into being started in Soweto on 16 June 1976. It was the turmoil of the years 1976-1980, during which violent expression was given to the rejection of separate, discriminatory education systems, that finally led the government to ask the Human Sciences Research Council to appoint a committee to investigate all aspects of education.

The de Lange Committee met for the first time on 24 August 1980 and handed its main report (together with eighteen sub-reports) to the government on 31 July 1981. In October 1981 the government issued an Interim Memorandum with provisional comment on the de Lange Report, and appointed a government Working Party to advise the Ministers concerned on what should be done about it. The Education Working Party reported to the government in November 1982, and it is important to note that it is to this report (which has not been made public) and not the de Lange Report as such, that the government has now finally responded in the White Paper of November 1983.

In the three-and-a-half years since June 1980, when the investigation was first mooted in parliament, there has been intense public interest and debate of a kind seldom seen before in South Africa. What this revealed above all was the politically sensitive nature of reform in education. There is no doubt that the work of the de Lange Committee raised expectations in those communities which perceived their education systems to be isolated, discriminatory and inferior.

However, many of its ideas were seen as threatening to those interests supportive of the existing structures. The Interim Memorandum of October 1981 on the whole supported the latter groups and dashed the hopes of the former. Since then there has been a loss of impetus in the reform idea, a withdrawal of support initially given to the de Lange Committee and a growing scepticism as to the government's intentions. It has been noted how education has had to stay in the wings while, in turn, the schism in the National party, the by-elections and the referendum have taken the stage. Because of the highly sensitive nature of education in national housekeeping it is not surprising that the White Paper was delayed for so long, until the political and constitutional context in which educational reform was to operate had been confirmed.

The context is now clear. The central statement of the White Paper is that segregated, vertically segmented forms and systems of education are to continue, reinforced and further institutionalised by being placed in the context of the new constitutional arrangements. Education is to be maintained firmly within the apartheid model : there is to be little, if any, structural reform. In accepting the eleven principles (Appendix A) enunciated by the de Lange Committee as underpinning all its recommendations, the government again stresses (as in the Interim Memorandum) that this acceptance is subject to a number of "guiding principles" or "points of departure" (Appendix B).

## THE 'NON-NEGOTIABLES'

The 'non-negotiables', as they have come to be known in the education debate of the last two years, have to do with:

- The Christian and broad national character of white education as laid down in the 1967 National Education Policy Act;
- the maintenance of the principle of mother tongue education (see also p37);
- the reaffirmation of government policy that each 'population group' should have its own schools and its own education authority/department.

Specifically, freedom of choice for individuals and parents is to operate within this framework, and within the framework of the new constitution, "the cardinal premise" of which "is the distinction drawn between own (sic) and general affairs".

As far as education is concerned the Group Areas Act is to stand. "The government is not in favour of waiving" its requirements "when schools are established". Further, the proposal that under-utilized facilities should be made available to other 'population groups' is rejected as constituting "interference with the policy of having separate residential areas for the various population groups". (p46)

Within these guiding principles there is clearly and logically no place for a single ministry of education of the kind recommended in the de Lange Report. Instead there are to be, for example:

- Four separate ministries (for the four major groups) and a minister for "general education affairs". The ministers for white, coloured and Indian education will be responsible for their own Houses, while those for black and "general" education will be members of Cabinet and responsible to Parliament. However, "the government wishes to state unequivocally that the ministers responsible for own education matters will not be subordinate to the minister responsible for general education matters". (p6) The latter may also have other Cabinet responsibilities ;
- four separate advisory councils, but also a South African Council for Education (the potential of which will be discussed later in this paper);
- four separate Teachers' Councils, with a central registering authority; and
- four separate committees of Rectors of colleges of education.

## THE CONCEPT OF CO-ORDINATION

However, in an attempt to reconcile the separate ('own') with some move towards common purposes ('general affairs'), the concept of co-ordination emerges very strongly in the White Paper: umbrella bodies are to be used to try to hold things together. It is therefore important to look more closely at the major mechanisms set up for this purpose: the ministry for "general education matters" and the SA Council for Education which is to advise this ministry. The White Paper (p5) defines the following as "general affairs":

- "The provision of bases in accordance with which and limits within which, deviation from the principle of own education in separate educational establishments for each population group may be authorised, insofar as this is the wish of own education departments" (our emphasis);
- norms and standards for the financing of the running and capital costs of education;
- salaries, conditions of service and professional registration of teachers;
- norms and standards for syllabuses, examinations and the certification of qualifications;
- "co-operative supporting services, as far as this is authorised by the own education departments" (our emphasis);
- the conclusion of interstate agreements with the 'national states' and TBVC countries; and
- "the assembly of data". (The Working Party included the evaluation of such data to establish whether parity was being attained/maintained, and clearly had a monitoring function in mind. This is not included in the government statement.)

If the SA Council for Education (SACE) is to advise the general ministry then it would seem that the above functions should be its concern - certainly both the de Lange Committee and the Working Party, both of which saw it as the only advisory council, recommended so. However, the government regards salaries and conditions of service of teachers as a 'specialised function' to be dealt with by the existing Committee on Education Structures (CES). Further, SACE, which is to "consist of approximately 20 specialists from all population groups", is to concern itself with "education at school level, including teacher training". Higher education is to be the concern of the Universities and Technikon Advisory Council (UTAC), the legislation for which has already been adopted.

As SACE's establishment, functions and composition are to be regulated by legislation, it is difficult at the moment to predict what part it can play and what influence it will be able to exert. If it is allowed some initiative it could serve a highly useful monitoring role in those areas regarded as "general affairs" in education. It has also a potential bridging role that to a limited extent might compensate for the highly segmented nature of the proposed education system. Much will depend, however, on two factors:

- The nature of its membership: how widely representative can "20 specialists" be? How strong will be the representation of the "users" of education? How independently will they be able to act without an independent, professional secretariat? (this is to be provided by public servants in the ministries); and
- the nature of its relationships with, and the strength of its position as regards, the four separate advisory Councils.

The SACE has some potential, although it is quite clear that the government does not see it as having either the power or the wide representation envisaged in the de Lange Report. Its authority will inevitably be circumscribed by the fact that it is to advise, not a single ministry, but one of five, the relationships between which are

yet to emerge.

### CAN SEPARATE MEAN EQUAL?

Behind the concept and mechanisms of co-ordination lies a fundamental ideology which informs the whole of the White Paper, which can best be characterised by the slogan EQUAL BUT SEPARATE. At the same time as re-affirming the existence of separate, central education authorities for the four major groups, the government has nevertheless been moved to accept formally the first de Lange principle (Appendix A) and to state that the "pursuit of the over-riding objective of equal opportunities for education and equal standards in education for all inhabitants of the RSA" is government policy. The centre of gravity of the education debate has therefore shifted significantly: the issue is no longer the acceptance of the idea of equality, but whether and how it can be implemented. The challenge to the government is now to keep its word. The questions to be faced are:

- Can the government achieve both equality and separation?
- If equality is to be achieved will separateness not have to be surrendered?
- If separateness is a 'non-negotiable' is there real meaning to equality?
- Are separateness and equality reconcilable?
- Which of the two is the ultimate political driving force?

In considering these questions, policies for the financing of education become the crucial issues. The White Paper (pp 26-29) appears to propose the following:

- The setting up of a subsidy formula, based on "financially realistic norms for the provision of a functionally adequate quality of education, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex", under which the central government would determine its financial responsibility towards the executive (ethnic) education departments; and
- that the education authority for each 'population group' would have authority to supplement these central financial resources by means of levies.

The possibility of direct parental support of schools and the institution of local levies is also under consideration (although there is a proviso that the children of needy parents should not forego educational opportunities because of this).

Given the very different economic and financial capability of each 'population group' to supplement the resources granted by central government, whether at legislative or local level, these proposals would seem to be a recipe for the maintenance of inequalities, albeit at a much less discriminatory level than before. Nor is one reassured by the lengthy justification (p29) for the present position of black education, which is also evaluated as one in which "great success" has been achieved. Perhaps most disturbing is the statement (p28) that while the State can be expected to ensure that there are equal opportunities and equal standards for all, "it will depend on the community concerned to what extent education of an equal quality does in fact develop from this

basis". Apart from the paternalistic distinction between 'State' (white?) and 'community' inherent in this statement, it can hold little comfort for disadvantaged communities who, in the race for equal opportunity, stand way back from the starting line.

#### SOME POSITIVE ASPECTS

In more positive vein there is support for maintaining educational provision in the 'national states' (which in recent years have been severely discriminated against) and the 'independent states' (TBVC countries) at the same level as for blacks in the RSA who would fall under the new general subsidy formula. There is also special mention (p19) of the need to upgrade farm schools. Both these measures should bring some relief to schools in the rural areas where the greatest backlog in educational services has built up.

The White Paper also accepts an extensive range of sound professional recommendations on matters such as:

- The need for a bridging period of one or two years of what is called "pre-basic education" aimed at promoting school readiness in children;
- the strong link between formal schooling and non-formal education, the need for horizontal flow and interaction between the two and the importance of the private sector in the field of non-formal education;
- the importance of improving curriculum, guidance and school health services;
- the increased use which should be made of various forms of educational technology, such as television and computer-supported instruction; and
- school buildings, facilities and equipment.

#### TEACHER TRAINING

Of major importance is the section (pp41-3) concerned with the training of teachers: the Working Party quite rightly comments that "no other single factor is as decisive in determining the quality of education in a country as the quality of the corps of teachers, lecturers and instructors". The government views the recommendations "in a favourable light", refers them to SACE and those involved in teacher education, but specifically states that -

- it considers it essential that qualifications of teachers in all 'population groups' should be of a uniform standard;
- Standard 10 plus three years should be the minimum requirements for admission and duration of training respectively;
- technikons should be used more extensively and that both they and colleges of education should work closely with universities in the education and training of teachers.

However, the White Paper shows very little sense of urgency about the need for the upgrading and in-service support of the some 100 000 black and coloured teachers in the system who do not have the minimum qualifications laid down above, and on whose professional competence, in the end, the achievement of parity in quality will depend.

## CAREER EDUCATION

Another major issue taken up by the Working Party, following de Lange, is technical and vocational education (career education). In accepting the recommendations that much greater attention should be paid to this (pp34-5) the government reveals two things:

- First, a high degree of sensitivity, perhaps bad conscience, about the "big backlog" in the provision of career-oriented education for blacks; and
- second, in a cautionary note on the need for balance between 'academic' and 'career' education, it has this to say about the purposes of education:

"All learners are given education with the purpose of guiding them towards good citizenship, enabling them to make a productive contribution to the economic life of the country and to fit in to ordered society as well-adjusted and civilised people. Education should contribute to the moulding of people into civilised citizens and can never be one-sidedly directed at the needs of the working world." (p34 - our emphasis).

Many educationalists would share the general concern about balance, but in a country with our particular history and make-up, and in the light of the 'non-negotiables' listed in Appendix B, the phrases underlined have strong overtones of conservatism and the status quo, and do not perceive education as regenerative or as a change agent in society.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the White Paper has failed to address the fundamental issue which originally brought the de Lange investigation into being - the separation and isolation of the black education systems and their failure to meet the needs and aspirations of the people they were set up to serve. African leaders in South Africa must needs see the White Paper as a further rejection of fellow-citizens who believe they have a right to play a part in the shaping of a new South Africa. The tragedy will prove to be that many of the reforms, educationally sound in themselves, will not have the effects hoped for, because they will have to operate within a system to which the White Paper has not restored legitimacy for or acceptance by the people who have to use it. The 'non-negotiables' of one sector of our society have been placed before the needs of our nation as a whole, and yet one more opportunity for reconciliation has been lost.

However, there are some limited gains. The commitment to equality, in spite of all the caveats and constraints, has moved the education debate into a significant new phase. The attempt by the government to reconcile separate systems with broad common purposes, by means of the concepts of "co-ordination" and "equal but separate", has placed it in the position of having to prove that this can be done. The White Paper is important because the government has had to go 'on record' for its citizens in a way that has never happened in the history of education in South Africa. It must be constantly tested and monitored against these statements of intent. In the process it will become increasingly clear that fundamental reform in the direction of parity of provision in

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education cannot be achieved within apartheid structures, either in the education systems or in society. The contradictions, and attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable, inherent in the White Paper are a clear indication that South Africa has taken reform as far as it will go under the present framework of society.



### 3. THE PRINCIPLES ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN CONSIDERING THE HSRC REPORT

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#### 3.1 Principles for the provision of education

The Government confirms its acceptance in October 1981 of the principles for the provision of education as proposed in paragraph 2.3 of the HSRC's Report, and of the fact that this acceptance is subject to the Government's basic premises, as contained in paragraph 2 of its Interim Memorandum, which are repeated below. The Government again emphasises that these principles should be interpreted in conjunction with one another and that no single principle can be understood in isolation. The accepted principles are the following:

***“Principle 1***

*Equal opportunities for education, including equal standards in education, for every inhabitant, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex, shall be the purposeful endeavour of the State.*

***Principle 2***

*Education shall afford positive recognition of what is common as well as of what is diverse in the religious and cultural way of life and the languages of the inhabitants.*

***Principle 3***

*Education shall give positive recognition to the freedom of choice of the individual, parents and organisations in society.*

***Principle 4***

*The provision of education shall be directed in an educationally responsible manner to meet the needs of the individual as well as those of society and economic development, and shall, inter alia, take into consideration the manpower needs of the country.*

***Principle 5***

*Education shall endeavour to achieve a positive relationship between the formal, non-formal and informal aspects of education in the school, society and family.*

***Principle 6***

*The provision of formal education shall be a responsibility of the State, provided that the individual, parents and organised society shall have a shared responsibility, choice and voice in this matter.*

***Principle 7***

*The private sector and the State shall have a shared responsibility for the provision of non-formal education.*

***Principle 8***

*Provision shall be made for the establishment and State subsidisation of private education within the system of providing education.*

***Principle 9***

*In the provision of education the processes of centralisation and decentralisation shall be reconciled organisationally and functionally.*

***Principle 10***

*The professional status of the teacher and lecturer shall be recognised.*

***Principle 11***

*Effective provision of education shall be based on continuing research.”*

The Government is investigating the way in which the accepted principles for the provision of education outlined above, as qualified in its Interim Memorandum, could find concrete expression in an Act or Acts.

### 3.2 Principles adopted in considering the HSRC Report

In October 1981 the Government laid down the following guiding principles, in paragraph 3 of its Interim Memorandum, as points of departure in the consideration of the HSRC Report:

- "3.1 The Report distinguishes between the principles for the provision of education in the RSA, which it proposes, and the more philosophical connotation of "principles of education", which it does not go into. In the light of this, the Government reaffirms that it stands by the principles of the Christian character and the broad national character of education as formulated in section 2 (1) (a) and (b) of the National Education Policy Act, 1967 (Act 39 of 1967), in regard to White education and as applied in practice or laid down in legislation in regard to the other population groups. Any changes or renewal in the provision of education will have to take these principles into account, with due regard to the right of self-determination which is recognised by Government policy for each population group.*
- 3.2 The Government remains convinced that the principle of mother tongue education is pedagogically valid, but appreciates that in the case of certain population groups the question of the language medium in teaching may give rise to particular problems of a special nature.*
- 3.3 The Government reaffirms that, in terms of its policy that each population group should have its own schools, it is essential that each population group should also have its own education authority/department. The need for co-ordination is recognised, but this policy will have to be duly taken into account in any proposals relating to structures for central co-ordination and co-operation between the educational structures for the various population groups, and also in any proposals relating to educational structures at the regional or local levels. Education departments of their own are also essential to do justice to the right of self-determination which is recognised by Government policy for each population group.*
- 3.4 The Government finds acceptable the principle of freedom of choice for the individual and for parents in educational matters and in the choice of a career, but within the framework of the policy that each population group is to have its own schools.*
- 3.5 All decisions taken in terms of the recommendations in the Report will have to take due account of, and fit in with, the constitutional framework within which they are to be implemented."*

With regard to paragraph 3.5 of the Interim Memorandum, Parliament has formulated a new constitutional dispensation in the new Constitution. The standpoints adopted by the Government in this White Paper, and particularly in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, with regard to the recommendations of the Education Working Party should therefore be interpreted within the context of the new Constitution, of which the Education Working Party naturally had no knowledge.

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