Mitter, Wolfgang

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EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN A PERIOD OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

WOLFGANG MITTER

Abstract – The observation of the present global scene raises questions about the socioeconomic, political and cultural framework laying the ground for a constructive interaction between the three forces which greatly determine people's existence and survival, namely Development, Democracy and Education. In this approach reference is made to John Dewey's "classical remarks" about the interrelation between Democracy and Education. They are examined in the light of specific historical conditions which are exemplified by references to the history of the "Bohemian Lands" and the first Czechoslovak Republic as well as by a critical view of current events, revealing the "anti-human perversion of Dewey's model".

Zusammenfassung – Ein Blick auf die gegenwärtige weltweite Szene wirft Fragen auf nach dem politischen und sozio-ökonomischen Rahmen, der Grundlage einer konstruktiven Interaktion der drei Kräfte ist, die vor allem die Existenz und das Überleben der Menschen bestimmen, nämlich Entwicklung, Demokratie und Bildung und Erziehung. Dieser Ansatz bezieht sich auf John Deweys "klassische Bemerkungen" über die Wechselwirkung von Demokratie und Bildung und Erziehung. Diese werden im Lichte spezifischer historischer Bedingungen untersucht, welche gleichermaßen am Beispiel der Geschichte der "Böhmischen Länder" und der ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik veranschaulicht werden, wie durch einen kritischen Ausblick auf zeitgenössische Ereignisse, die die "menschenfeindliche Perversion von Deweys Modell" offenbaren.

Résumé – L'observation de la scène actuelle soulève des questions au sujet du cadre socio-économique, politique et culturel qui constitue le fondement d'une interaction constructive entre les trois forces qui déterminent essentiellement l'existence et la survie des peuples, à savoir le développement, la démocratie et l'éducation. Cette approche se réfère aux "remarques classiques" de John Dewey sur l'interrelation entre la démocratie et l'éducation. On les examine en fonction de conditions historiques spécifiques illustrées par l'histoire des "pays de la Bohème" et de la première République tchécoslovaque ainsi que par une vue critique des événements actuels, qui révèlent la perversion misanthropique du modèle de Dewey.

The interdependence of education, democracy and development is not a discovery of the present. Its modern history can be traced back to the threshold of the 19th century, when the emergence of notions of "democracy" – starting in the United States – and of "development" – seen at that time in Europe and North America as a concomitant and corollary of the Industrial Revolution – were becoming essential factors on the socio-economic and political scene. At the same time, notions of "education", in the sense of compulsory and

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systematized schooling, were increasingly recognized as indispensable instruments for promoting both "development" and "democracy".

It is not my intention, however, to review the history of these ideas. Instead, my emphasis in this paper will be laid on the revolutionary changes in which we ourselves are now involved as witnesses, agents, victims or commentators; in a good number of cases these qualities coincide with our own individual professional and existential roles.

We live in a revolutionary period indeed, conceiving the notion of "revolution" in its comprehensive meaning as the totality of radical socio-economic, political, cultural and educational changes. The collapse of totalitarian Communism in the Soviet Union and her western neighbouring countries has opened the door to the constitution of democratic structures as well as to "development" in the meaning of economic progress. Similar trends can also be observed in the Third World, where they are directly interrelated with reconsideration of socio-economic issues.

No wonder that this is a time for educational reforms whose initiators have, above all, started to revise curricula. Political education, social studies in general and humanities are the subjects occupying the first innovatory priority. "Humanization", "democratization" and "individualization" turn up as key concepts in speeches, programmes and preambles of new curricula. Curriculum innovation is, of course, only part of the current stream of change, since it is reinforced by efforts to radically alter the "ethos" of schools. "Child-centredness", "autonomy" and "self-realization" indicate the direction being taken at this level.

Yet, only two years ago, we had expectations which, even in the short retrospect of two years, seem to have been euphoric or even illusory. The "Velvet Revolution", proclaimed in Czechoslovakia by Vaclav Havel, following Tomaš Masaryk as a second great humanist President of that country, exemplified the departure from a period of inhumanity and depression in favour of a straight march into economic prosperity and democratic co-existence among people and nations. At the same time, far away in South Africa initial traces signalled radical transformation from apartheid to human rights and tolerance in the racist and anti-democratic society of that country.

Two years later the picture of which we are aware is far less hopeful. Expectations of short-term economic progress have given way to stagnation and even regression, accompanied by inflation and, even, sharp practice, frequently including Mafia methods. The former Soviet Union and some of her neighbouring countries have been caught by poverty and famine, while many regions in the Third World, instead of having the chance to improve their living conditions, are increasingly threatened by starvation and epidemic disease.

It should not cause any astonishment to observe that notions of "democracy" have also already lost part of the foundations which had so recently been laid. Liberated nations are haunted by disintegration and chaos, caused,

and at the same time reinforced, by fanatical outbreaks of nationalism, ethnocentrism and racism. Associated with these, physical violence and force of arms demonstrate anew the utmost elements of that "bestiality" which the Austrian poet Franz Grillparzer in the middle of the 19th century, while many of his contemporaries were believing in a stabilized alliance between human rights, democracy and nationalism, had foreseen as the true end of the decline from "humanity" to "nationality".

Education has been dragged into the present crisis too. Schools are considered as the most defenceless target of austerity policies which entail, among other deficiencies, neglect of equipment, closing down of educational units, particularly at the pre-school level, and dismissal of teachers, let alone the poor remuneration of those who survive in their professional field. Youngsters react with indifference, frustration, cynicism, aggressiveness or voluntary dropout, stimulated by expectations of "making quick money" somewhere on the "free" market.

Democracy, education and autonomy

These observations of the present scene raise questions about the socio-economic, political and cultural frameworks which lay the ground for a constructive interaction among the three forces which greatly determine people's existence and survival, namely "Development, Democracy and Education" – deliberately chosen in this sequence. In this approach it seems to be helpful to refer to John Dewey's "classic" remarks about the interrelation between Democracy and Education.

In his fundamental study *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey stated that "the devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact". To explain this statement he identifies "voluntary disposition and interest" among the citizens as an important feature of political coherence that extends beyond the rules of the political system. "Voluntary disposition and interest", he argues, "can only be created by education". The "deeper explanation", however, he finds in the essential quality of democracy as a "mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey 1916b: 93). Education "to personal initiative and adaptability" appears, in Dewey's conclusion, as a necessary prerequisite for the viability of democracy (idem: 94).

To obtain a clearer understanding of Dewey's conceptual approach, further help is provided by his earlier study *The School and Society* (1899), in which he had focused his attention on the structure of the social system within which education and democracy can interact successfully: "If our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation . . . To do this means to make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society". When the school comes up to training "each child of society into membership within such a little community . . .", Dewey

concludes, "we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious" (Dewey 1916a: 19–20).

At this point I want to leave direct reference to Dewey's thoughts in order to relate them to the theme of my paper. One cannot generalize John Dewey's view of the interrelations between development – being understood as social development – democracy and education, because the kind of society in which these interrelations are to function, is not without preconditions. The contribution of education to the building of an "embryonic community life" in schools, as much as the inevitable consequences through which he considers possible the creation of a "worthy, lovely and harmonious" society from its own "embryonic" cells, that is the schools, is equally not without preconditions.

What John Dewey, the representative of a dynamic expanding pioneer society founded in the solidarity of small communities, took for granted, are virtues that are accepted by all the members of that society. These virtues include, on the one hand, the will, readiness, and ability to shape and organize one's life independently and responsibly, and on the other, the willingness of all citizens to develop and consolidate the education system in order to pass these preconditions on to the next generation.

In order to meet this expectation – we can follow and conclude from Dewey's thoughts – the school needs the autonomy to offer its participants – headteachers, teachers, pupils, as well as parents and the members of the community – the opportunity to make choices and decisions. To all those concerned, the active use of these possibilities must seem the more stimulating the more it entails the prospect of economic prosperity.

Over the past decades the ideal of the autonomy of the schools – understood not only in a functional but also in a political-administrative sense – has inspired the thoughts and actions of "educationists" (in the widest sense of the term), stimulated by John Dewey and his colleagues in the European Educational Movement (*Pédagogie nouvelle, Reformpädagogik*). It is small wonder that, after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, this idea of autonomy has met with great resonance among the "reformists" of various schools of thought and has provoked experiments on the micro- and macro-level of educational activity, most of which have failed to reach the expectations of their initiators.

It is exactly this view of the topicality of a development revealing inconsistencies, or even contradictions, between "Development, Education and Democracy", that directly leads us to the discussion of Dewey's approach. "Autonomy", as a general legal and political condition as well as a structural principle of an "embryonic community life", cannot function as long as people live in economic misery. Admittedly, this remark implies the awareness of "misery"; but this thesis refers, without reservation, to people suffering from hunger and cold and in want of basic medical care. Individuals, and also closely defined religious communities may practice "autonomous" behaviour even under such circumstances. However, as a general principle, especially with regard to the "larger society", this ideal becomes irrelevant.

These thoughts, however, do not represent the conclusion of my interpretation of Dewey's thinking. His "embryonic community life" reflects a "self-generated autonomy", which the "concerned" created and developed of their own accord. What we encounter in many current concepts of autonomy can rather be classed as "decreed autonomy". Of this latter type of autonomy, history provides many examples, including failure, which their initiators themselves had to endure. Peter the Great may well serve as an example to demonstrate this.

To be sure, past and present also provide an "intermediate type", which I would like to call "promoted autonomy". This kind of autonomy is a matter of initiatives emanating from the steering centres of the "larger society", whereby those in charge can refer to models outside of, and within, their spheres of activity. As regards the education system, the states of Western Europe at present offer numerous examples of this type of autonomy, including France, Italy, Sweden and Germany. Also the Third World can provide examples, especially in the sphere of imparting literacy to adults.

"Promoted autonomy" is always in danger of two forms of "derailment". It either lapses into chaos and anarchy that impair the coherence of the "larger society", without helping those being "promoted" to attain the intended "embryonic community life"; or the promoters of this autonomy become "impatient" and search for a quicker solution in the passing of decrees. The latter derailment derives from the illusion of believing that it is possible to force the capacity and readiness for responsible action into existence. This "relationship between school and autonomy", as evidenced in recent times, might well prove to be a worthwhile subject of systematic international comparison.

It follows from this argument that "promoted autonomy" requires caution and patience on the part of both the promoters and the addressees. It also follows that one needs to be aware of the calculated risk that is taken in its promotion. Mistakes and setbacks are almost inevitable; and these can only be met by enlightened actors willing to take advice as required and to behave in an exemplary manner, whether at system level or in the classroom. Authoritarian persons who restrict themselves to preaching "autonomy" prevent the very formation of the "embryonic community life" which they seek to promote. Analogous points, of course, apply to the attitude and the behaviour of representatives of "developed" countries in their relationship with so-called "under-developed" countries.

The historical example of Czechoslovakia

Promotion, caution and patience are, of course, categories that are closely connected with the category of "time". In order to pursue this train of thought, it is useful to consider the case of Czechoslovakia and of its capital city. The reflection which follows aims to point to the interdependence between the

education system and its general socio-economic, political and cultural conditions. Prague is one of the oldest, most historic and most beautiful cities of Europe. The citizens of Prague in fact consider their city as *the* most beautiful, at least in Europe, sharing this judgement with many visitors and friends. As a political metropolis and a cultural centre, the city can look back upon manifold events witnessing human greatness as well as human failure and human misery. Three examples may serve to elucidate these contradictions.

- In the middle of the 14th century the city experienced a period of economic prosperity, extensive cultural activity, and internal and external peace under Charles IV, the "father of the nation" (*otec vlasti*). He was the founder of the first University in Central Europe and the builder and owner of many works of art, which we can still admire today. Yet, half a century later the Hussite wars, which lasted for more than 15 years, started from Prague, sparked off by the so-called "first defenestration of Prague".
- At the end of the 17th century major artists and scientists renowned throughout Europe worked at the court of Rudolf II; the astronomers and humanists Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler deserve special attention. Two decades later, though, the Thirty Years' War started from Prague, unleashed by the so-called "second defenestration of Prague".
- The peaceful and constructive years of the first Czechoslovak Republic were followed by the terror of the German occupation; it found its most brutal expression in the extinction of the village of Lidice, said to be in revenge for the successful attempt to assassinate the "Reichsprotektor" in office, SS General Reinhard Heydrich. To be sure, this observation does not conclude the content of this example because the three seemingly calm years of a new democratic beginning (1945–48) were followed by the communist takeover. The latter was associated with the voluntary or enforced death of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, an event which has been called the "third defenestration of Prague".

All three examples show the connections between economic development, education and culture, as well as a humanism which represents a necessary precondition for the progress of democracy. At the same time they tell of wars, atrocities and oppressions.

Let me dwell a little longer on my historical excursion. The nine decades between 1848 and 1938, which I would like to examine more closely, have not only had their impact on the history of this country. They have also established an exemplary connection with the theme of "Education, Democracy and Development". For Bohemia, Moravia and southern Silesia, the so-called "Bohemian lands", this period was characterized by an economic awakening and a high level of cultural activity. During this period the Czechs living in the Austrian part of the Habsburg monarchy, as well as the Slovaks living under Hungarian rule, developed and completed their development as modern nations.

In the "Bohemian lands" the Czech "awakening" came about in con-

frontation with the dominating "second nation", the Germans. The conflicts in this dispute are one side of a coin which, on its other side, shows the great advantages that both opponents gained from it. Thus, around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, great artists, poets, and writers of Czech, German and – not to be forgotten – Jewish descent lived in Prague. They attained worldwide fame either during their lifetime or, like Franz Kafka above all, many years after their death. The other side of the coin also shows, however, the construction of an efficient system of education that raised the "Bohemian lands" into a leading position in Europe with regard to enrollment in elementary schools, the duration of compulsory education and the development of the curriculum. Special attention should also be paid to the development of a differentiated system of technical education and, finally, to the international reputation of the two universities of Prague, for, in 1882, the "Charles University" with its rich tradition, had been divided into German and Czech-medium Universities.

On the one hand, the construction of the country's education system was the outcome of school policies of the Habsburg Empire; on the other hand, it was also a product of national competition. Here one can observe that, along with its dark side of furthering nationalistic currents, this competition also reflected an expression, by both nations, of public spirit and initiative. Cultural associations, youth and sports clubs, as much as a rich theatre life, which even extended into the small towns, bear witness to this expression. The first Czechoslovak Republic inherited this highly developed education system, with its strengths and, of course, also with its weaknesses. I do not want to delve further into this period which others, possessing greater competence than I, can develop. I would like to make only some remarks, based on my personal experience as a directly concerned witness at that time, who spent his childhood and youth in Czechoslovakia and has kept track from a distance of its later long-suffering development – up to the "Velvet Revolution".

My contribution, at this point, is not aimed at the intensively and controversially discussed question, both inside and outside Czechoslovakia, of the nationalities and their share in the sad ending of the first Czechoslovak Republic. My intention is rather to concentrate on the historical fact that, in spite of its inner weaknesses and unresolved problems, that state remained a democratic commonwealth until its extinction through the Munich Agreement and the German occupation which took place six months later. In this commonwealth, legal protection, political freedom of assembly, the existence of schools in the native tongues, were all guaranteed for *all* citizens and groups. This guarantee extended to the members of those ethnic groups that did not belong to the "Czechoslovakian nation state": Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Ruthenians and others.

Let us go a step further. At its end, in 1938–39, the first Czechoslovak Republic had actually survived as the only really democratic state in Eastern Central and Southeast Europe. At times, it had to fend off fundamentally opposed teachings. Viewed as a whole, however, manifold sources show that

the spirit of inter-ethnic tolerance in the field of education and the will to cooperate were comparably greater than elsewhere, especially in the period of Ivan Derer, Minister of Public Education in the late twenties and early thirties of this century. In the Czech part of the country, Czech as well as German educators participated in attempts at a school reform which was initiated by Derer. This was particularly significant even though the reform eventually failed because of "overriding" motives (Mitter 1990: 20).

I am able to consider this problem today without constraint, because the failed attempt to develop a future-oriented co-existence of Czechs and Germans *within* the first Czechoslovak Republic became an irreversible part of history as a result of the German occupation and the expulsion, after 1945, of the German population which inevitably followed. The protective rights, conferred on the small German minority which stayed behind in the re-emerged democratic State, including the welcome establishment of their own schools, did not belie this scission.

Reviewing what occurred did, however, point to possibilities, even if they are now lost, which might have been attempted on the basis of the then-existing fertile ground for the existence of economic stability, a democratic state and societal structure and a remarkable system of education. Had it been possible to ignore the dark effects originating from the "wider political stage", one might have wished the Republic the "fifty-year-period" that Tomaš Masaryk, its first President, considered necessary for its peaceful consolidation. Had this been available, it might have been possible for these chances to be taken successfully. In the event, however, the Republic was granted only twenty years (Pfaff 1987).

Present-day reconsideration of values

In our own time, 20, even 10 years, seems to us to be too long to wait for the solution to the various existential problems with which the whole globe is confronted. The recent World Conference held in Rio de Janeiro drastically underlined the need for a radical reconsideration of strategies and policies in the area of environmental protection. It goes without saying that the reconsideration necessary requires new approaches to development, but also, at the same time, to democracy. Unless these are developed, the task of linking development to fundamental values, focused upon human rights and human dignity, is likely to be left to self-appointed or empowered "saviours". In the final analysis, however, development and democracy must both depend upon the effectiveness of an education which supports both of them and also links their functions to the fundamental human values I have already mentioned. It must therefore be hoped that appropriate policies, taking proper account of all three of these concepts, can be arrived at.

In this respect John Dewey was right. In other ways, however, the world in which we live has little in common with the social framework within which

education could be thought of as guiding children and youngsters from their "embryonic community life" to the "larger society" with its socio-economic and political foundations. On the contrary, in many cases education has entered, or has been forced into, unholy alliances with fanatical and violent outbursts of nationalism and racism which inevitably end up in misery, distress and bloodshed.

In this context, I need hardly draw attention to recent and current examples, since they are too visible and horrible to be ignored. We should not ignore the fact that education is not infrequently directly involved in this kind of anti-human perversion of Dewey's model. It might be worth inquiring how many teachers, university professors and priests have taken an active part in committing cruelties on innocent people, including women and children. In certain situations, the number has certainly not been negligible. But that is not the end of the story which we should be prepared to face. For many others, who do not actually dirty their hands directly, have nevertheless incited their students to fanaticism, hatred and intolerance, not only by appealing to their emotions, but also by exploiting their cognitive dispositions and their receptivity of mind in order to indoctrinate totalitarian or racist ideologies. Fortunately, experience also draws our attention to educational theorists and practitioners who are committed to approaching and tackling development and democracy in a much more principled manner and on the basis of fundamental human values. It is this experience which justifies, to my mind,
explore and discuss the interdependence of "Development", "Democracy" and "Education". It is this kind of approach that invites us to pay particular attention to the crucial and controversial issues of their interrelationships as well as to the various factors which resist or impede reasonable solutions. It is also this kind of approach which, on the one hand, makes us think of how theoretical or philosophical models like that presented by John Dewey can be transformed into reality, and how, on the other hand, practical experience can stimulate our search for new relevant evidence.

Notes

Dewey, J. 1916a. *The Middle Works, 1899–1927*, Vol. 1: 19–20.

Dewey, J. 1916b. *The Middle Works, 1899–1927*, Vol. 9: 93.

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