

THE CASE FOR A PLURALIST SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL HISTORY*

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1. THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORY

On the surface there is not much to comfort the history teacher of today. Doubts are multiplying about the relevance of History as a school and university subject in South Africa. The number of really bright pupils or students taking History is declining at a disconcerting rate. The new syllabuses for Secondary School which were approved in 1983 and have been gradually introduced over the past eighteen months are hardly a marked improvement on the previous ones. While recognising the need to move away from an exclusive concentration on "facts" they give little indication of how history should be taught so that it serves some of the general aims which are proclaimed. These include: to contribute to the development of "positive" attitudes and values, to contribute to an understanding of other peoples and cultures, and to contribute to the understanding of history as an academic discipline (JMB 1983:2)

Indeed the revisions of 1983 do not seem to have produced a really significant shift of emphasis in the general contents of syllabuses. Comparing the old and new secondary school syllabuses, Van den Bergh and Buckland (1983:19) concludes:

Our major criticism of the existing syllabuses, that they overemphasized political, constitutional and diplomatic history and that they reflect an essentially 'white' perspective on this history of the country, are valid here again. The economic and social effects of the discovery of diamonds and gold are given more prominence in the new

Std. 9 syllabus, but the socio-economic aspects of the Std. 10 syllabus are unchanged and again are reserved, with limited exceptions, for HG study. History from 1910 to 1970 remains very largely the saga of 'white' political parties and their struggle for power. The Std.8 syllabuses show the 'white' perspective by dealing with the history of nineteenth century South Africa simply in terms of the struggle between Boer and British, even such aspects as 'The annexation of Basutoland' being studied in that framework. The great struggle for the land is simply relegated to statements such as 'The Incorporation of the independent chiefdoms'.

Yet despite these disappointing developments it is farfetched to consider History irrelevant. The very opposite seems to be true. History is all too relevant in the critical struggle currently being waged to build a new South Africa upon the crumbling foundations of the apartheid order. Politicians all over the world know how vital it is to control History. In a sparkling recent analysis of American school texts, FitzGerald (1979:47, 59) notes:

(Texts) are written not to explore but to instruct - to tell children what their elders want them to know about their country. This information is not necessarily what anyone considers the truth of things. Like time capsules, the text contain the truths selected for posterity. The surprise is how quickly and how thoroughly these truths for posterity have changed . . . Changes in interpretation bring them new sets of facts or . . . the old set of facts used

backward. To read all the editions of texts is thus a bewildering experience. What changes is nothing less than the character of the United States.

The problem with History in South African schools is not that it is irrelevant, it is rather that it is too unresponsive to the dramatic political changes of recent years. Put differently, the rate of change in the "truths selected for posterity" is still far too slow in South Africa. It must of course be added that we still have largely unilateral (white) decision-making about the truths considered useful for posterity.

The History still taught in school stands in sharp contrast to the pronounced political shift in public policy with respect to white-black relations. The government has now accepted that the people of South Africa are dependent on a single economy. Blacks living outside the homelands are viewed as South African citizens with a right to participate as decision-makers on all levels of government. In the official view the South African population is no longer thought to be comprised of discrete "nations but rather of different "ethnic groups", "cultures" or "communities". Increasingly mutual concerns, shared interest and common decision-making are stressed.

This is not the place to analyse the degree to which the government has given concrete expression to these ideological shifts. We can merely note that the new shifts on a political level conflict sharply with the Christian National Education (CNE) philosophy which still seems to underpin History texts at school. CNE philosophy has as its basic point of departure that South Africa does not constitute a nationstate but rather a geographical area containing various "national groups", each of which must be allowed to achieve self-determination. The "group", for the purposes of education, is seen first in terms of racial classification and secondly in terms of mother tongue. (Van den Berg and Buckland, 1983; Shingler, 1973). It is this ideology and practice which promoted a visiting educationalist to remark that South Africa is the only country in the world which educates to divide its citizens rather than unite them.

Yet if the turmoil and violent conflict of recent years should teach us anything it is that division and racial separateness impose ever higher costs upon our society. We can clearly no longer afford to muddle along without any sense of direction. We are in fact faced with two stark choices: either we become a siege society ruled by an autocracy and ultimately the gun in the assumption that South Africa lacks a "centre" — a commonality of culture and interests — which can hold whites and blacks together and provide the base for a democratic system. Alternatively, we have to work urgently towards building a single South African nation and a political system in which both whites and blacks abandon their respective maximal options - white supremacy or black majoritarianism - and accept that compromise which each side regards as the second-best solution : power-sharing upon some group basis (Schlemmer, 1981).

Whatever choice is made - and the decision cannot be long postponed - the function of History will be radically affected. For history is not "bunk", as Henry Ford proclaimed. History is dynamite as Paul Valéry recognised when he wrote: "The past, more or less imaginary or more or less rationalized after the event, acts upon the future with a violence only equaled by the present itself . . . The real nature of history is to play a part in history itself." (Cited by Gordon, 1971 : 2). It will be our choice of history for our schools which will decide whether ethnocentricity is taught and destructive prejudices are kept alive or whether schools become places where unity is built and people are inspired to act in concert. The history teacher and texts will play a decisive role in our future. To paraphrase FitzGerald : they will change nothing less than the character of South Africa.

2. TWO OPPOSING APPROACHES

In this section I shall deal briefly with two opposing approaches which will strongly influence history teaching over the next decade or more. They are (a) 'separate nations' history and (b) (black) 'people's history'.

(a) "SEPERATE NATIONS" HISTORY — TEACHING FOR WHITE SUPREMACY

In research based on the old syllabus for white and black secondary schools Du Preez (1983) identified a set of dominating ideas, entitled "master symbols" which appear consistently in History and also in Geography and Afrikaans Literature. The first four of the study's dominating ideas are the following:

- (a) Legitimate authority is not questioned.
- (b) Whites are superior, Blacks are inferior.
- (c) The Afrikaner has a special relationship with God.
- (d) South Africa rightfully belongs to the Afrikaner.

Any judgment on whether the new History syllabus changes the set of master symbols will have to await the publication of the new textbooks based on them. My hunch is that there could be some interesting marginal shifts. For instance, with respect to the matter of legitimate authority the new syllabus incorporates the theme of "extra-parliamentary activity" and black "reaction" with reference to issues such as the National Convention and the racial policies after 1948. Clearly extra-parliamentary activities question the whole notion of a single legitimate authority.

One also anticipates the new textbooks moving away from an *explicit* characterisation of whites as superior and blacks as inferior. In its place will probably come a "separate but equal" doctrine which downplays the superiority/inferior dimension but still insists that "races" or "ethnic groups" are the fundamental divisions of mankind and that "cultural differences" are somehow permanent. (Thompson 1985 : 235).

Something of this new "separate ideology" is manifest in recent statements of political leaders. Responding to the Human Sciences Research Council report on intergroup relations, Pres. Botha (1986) declared: "It remains the convictions of Government that it must take the ethnic group basis of South African society into account in its regulating function." Mr. Piet Clase, Minister for Education and Culture, in justifying apartheid education spoke in similar vein: "The composition of this country is ethnically determined. This cannot be changed and the government accepts this" (The Citizen; 1 May 1986).

If this is the current ideological approach the new history textbooks will almost certainly reflect this. It will find expression in attempts to avoid seeing South African history as an integrated whole and rather approach it as the story of different "ethnic histories" occurring concurrently (Van den Berg and Buckland, 1983 : 50). Such a history, although superior to white supremacist history, will not remove the large question marks hanging over school education in general and the teaching of History in particular.

A recent study by two RAU political scientists, Susan Booysen and Hennie Kotze, (1985) assessed the way in which one white group, the Afrikaner youth, is being prepared for political participation by their parents and the school. They conclude that Afrikaner youth seems to be inculcated into a political culture of faith in authority and leaders together with an attitude of unquestioning loyalty they state: "Because of their high level of non-involvement, these youths become increasingly isolated. The lack of contact of outside-groups precludes new insights into political realities. Increasingly isolated seems to be the 'inevitable effect.'" (Booyesen and Kotze, 1985 : 39). A study by Schlemmer (1980) shows that the Afrikaner youth did not attribute the black uprising of 1976 to real

grievances but rather to artificial causes or to the role of agitators. In the view of Booysen and Kotze (1983 :39) the Afrikaner youth even today have a "preoccupation with internal trivialities at the expense of developing a consciousness of the issues pertaining to South Africa at large. In stark contrast with the Afrikaner students, students from non-Afrikaans universities invariably became politically involved - either or in sympathy in current political struggles."

This is of course not unwelcome to a ruling elite not only in South Africa but in most other countries of the world. FitzGerald (1979 : 178-79) in her study of American textbooks observes:

"Throughout history, the managers of states have with remarkable consistency defined good citizenship as a rather small degree of knowledge of and participation in state affairs. The fury of college students in the sixties came in part from their sense that with government officials, their textbooks and their teachers had concealed from them the truth about American politics and history".

In South Africa this anger is still largely confined either in the rage of black pupils who are burning their history texts and are demanding "people's history" in their place, or in the cold indifference of the brighter white pupils who conclude that school History offers them no preparation for the South Africa they will face.

The irony is that even in the eyes of our political leaders History has served them perhaps too well with the result that they are now looking for some new garb with which to cover up History's shortcomings. Mr. Piet Clase, remarked at the recent Free State NP Congress that he agrees with the view that there is a lack of "political literacy" among white pupils. Accordingly he has launched an investigation into the possibility of introducing political science as a subject or subdivision at school level. (*Die Burger*, 3 September, 1986, p.8). Surely this kind of thinking would never occur if History serves its primary educational function, namely to prepare the youth for participation in the life of the society in which they live. (Van den Berg and Buckland, 1983 : 45).

(b) "PEOPLE'S HISTORY" – TEACHING FOR BLACK MOBILISATION

There has been much talk recently about "people's history" replacing the current History taught at schools. Most of the thinking and activity is still spontaneous and unstructured. Among the few attempts to move beyond this the following stand out:

(i) SACHED AFRICAN STUDIES COURSE

Its objective is to offset the European-centred bias of the history people have studied at school, and is aimed primarily (although not necessarily) at a black audience. It states its aims more fully as follows (Sached, 1984:1-2):

AIMS OF THE COURSE

- * To provide a sense of history and through this develop awareness of the progression, structures, continuities and discontinuities of African history and societies.
- * To counter prevailing historical bias.
- * To provide as broad a perspective as possible of the continent of Africa, its development, problems, role and contribution to the world: at the same time as

presenting case studies to illustrate and illuminate general points made.

- * To provide a framework for the understanding of the past and its significance and influence on the present.

(ii) RESOURCE MATERIALS

Various attempts have been made to provide, what Kallaway (1986:2) calls "alternative" educational materials for use with extra-mural classes, youth clubs, worker education programmes or boycott teach-ins -- whether through direct personal contact or through the provision of resources for teachers or students.

"People's History" has obviously come to stay. It serves a function by correcting our current History which is essentially rich people's history. As Peter Kallaway (1986) states in the preface to the new Shuter and Shooter Std. X text "It is not only the rich and the powerful who make history, it is equally, and perhaps more importantly, made by ordinary people, and by the poor and the underprivileged." The American historian, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1979:99) puts it this way: "I am arguing for the overdue incorporation of the voices of those who did not win." Courage, forbearance and wisdom were obviously not the monopoly of whites in our history. We need histories in school which stress how the subordinate groups made their own history even if they did so under conditions which were not of their own choosing.

If History is to serve as the collective memory of all South Africans it must keep the record of all the social groups that enacted our past. It should do no harm to expose our white children to some of the resource materials of People's History. After all, if History is to have any value at all it must be taught as human experience. We must help pupils to enter into thoughts and feelings of those who had power and wealth and those who did not, and try to recreate the experiences which both groups lived through.

A note of caution which I would like to introduce with respect to People's History is that some of it may succumb to the temptation to present all history as a white/capitalist swindle. This would be a disservice to both the child and history. For if History has any lesson it is that like us often acted as best they could without knowing *what would come of it all* (Grieve, 1966:6). Moreover, the projection of history as a white/capitalist swindle can be as flawed as the white supremacist one which tries to project it as white/capitalist righteousness.

Recent interpretations show that both are quite wrong. Elphick (1977) has shown the incorporation of Khoikhoi as labour into the colonial economy was not part of any design but the result of unpremeditated actions of ordinary men on the ground, both Khoikhoi and white. And Harries (1982) has argued that the state or capitalists did not have a determining role in the origins of labour migration from the Delagoa Bay hinterland up to 1895.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH : PLURALIST HISTORY

(a) AIMS

The aims of a pluralist history will be three-fold.

First, it would want to build a nation. One of the most perspective analysts of our society, Heribert Adam (1986),

argues that we are already a nation being bound together by a single, industrialised economy, a consumer culture (Dallas and sport), a command of a *lingua franca* (English) and majority allegiance to the Christian faith. All that separates the peoples of South Africa is a different conception of history (Who created political order? Who produced the wealth? Who built a 'civilized' society). In turn, these historic conceptions (or misconceptions) shape the conception of what the kind of political order the different groups demand. Pluralist history would like to teach that public order, wealth and civilization have been produced by the common efforts of both whites and blacks, and that the conflicts of the past and the present are part of a legitimate struggle for power and over the distribution of wealth.

Second, it would want to build a democratic nation. Lijphart (1985) and other scholars have convincingly argued that majoritarianism is not the only form of democracy but that could also take the form of power sharing between groups which are formed through voluntary association (a requirement which our present order fatally lacks). As in the case of American history, majoritarianism can easily degenerate into an unbridled populism, which holds the view that the will of a popular majority should prevail in all matters, including politics, the production process, education, science and art, and morals. Our history should stress the contributions of political minorities and smaller cultures. It should, above all, give a key role to attempts to affirm legal rights and the Rule of Law in and the struggle to establish a government and a public order which operates under the law.

Third, pluralist history would strive toward a historically conscious, democratic South African nation. Much of our present school history is ahistoric attempt to sanctify the present by an interpretation of the past. The power of history lies ultimately in its capacity to *explain* the present. As historians and as history teachers we are confronted with the great challenge to explain to the privileged and the underprivileged, to whites and blacks, that all of our problems have deep and highly historical roots. For instance the white-black struggle for land in the nineteenth century and the cycle of under-development of the homelands in the twentieth century, and the pass laws all went into making of the squatter camps which we shall increasingly see on the perimeters of our cities.

This means that we must not in a misguided attempt to create "consensus" avoid discussing the conflicts in our history. Conflict is the stuff of which our history is made. But conflict is not the whole story.

(b) MEANS

I believe that we can try to build a new South African nation with a common historical consciousness by working "within the system" — the schools, the curriculum, the syllabus, or the examination system and through teaching materials in the hope of effecting change from within (Kallaway, 1986).

This means that textbook writers and history teachers will have to reflect seriously on how this reformist strategy can best be pursued despite the constraints of the syllabus, inspectors and external examinations. (For a very good theoretical discussion of the constraints and opportunities see Van den Berg and Buckland (1983:52-67).

In my view reflection should start with posing to school children the simple but crucial question: "What is history". For years I have accepted the famous definition by Huizenga that it is the spiritual form in which a culture gives an account of its past. In recent years I have become critical of this interpretation because it has been interpreted by some historians to mean that it is the form in which each ethnic group or "nation" remembers its history however self-justifying it may be. Such a conception of

history militates against an attempt to build a common nation. For a post-apartheid South Africa I want to propose the following definition: "History is the spiritual form in which a heterogeneous nation investigates the common processes which have forged them into a common society".

This means that we must write or teach history primarily in terms of the processes which affected whites and blacks alike, such as slavery, frontier conquest, industrialisation, the growth of ethnicity and nationalisms and the weak but nevertheless persistent influence of liberal values and ideas. As our point of departure we can do no better than the fundamental observation of De Kiewiet (1937:264) that the leading theme of South African history is the growth of a new society in which white and black are bound together in the closest dependence upon each other". In the political field there is Van Wyk Louw's (1986:505) observation about the tragic *impasse* in South Africa of two irreconcilable "rights" — White/Afrikaner nationalism, with its insistence on self-determination, and liberalism, with its insistence on freedom and equal rights and opportunities for blacks.

5. STUDYING THE PROCESSES

(a) POLITICAL

The great problem with history as it is taught at school and university is that it is often so mindless. We give the children so little sense of what passionately moved people about the politics of yesterday. We convey so little understanding of the great moral dilemmas people were confronted with, the cruel choices they had to make, the great visions that moved them or the strong principles that guided them. The kind of history I studied projected only a battle between misguided liberals and principled upholders of the white domination.

We have a wonderful opportunity of presenting the struggles of the past as of great relevance to the present. After all, the political process of the past are not much different from the political process of today. The essential element is the same: A smallish white community dependent on black labour confronted with the crucial choice whether to subjugate black by force (or partition), often using a stratum of black allies, or to build a common society which grants to all and incorporate them into a shared political system.

People are born into circumstances which are not of their own choosing. Many of us wish we were already rid of apartheid. It was much the same as 150 years ago when many Cape colonists detested the slave system. Yet the problem was that a whole social, economic and political system had come to be based upon slavery (just like apartheid). Something of the moral dilemma which confronted a reformer is reflected in the words of Willem Stefanus van Ryneveld in 1797 when asked by the Governor whether the importation of slaves could be abolished.

Question: If not prohibited . . . how may the same be regulated in order to . . . prevent the *inconveniences* that have been occasioned in other colonies by too great a number of slaves?

. . . *The treatment of the slaves here is in general on a quite different and much milder footing than it is in the said colonies (the West Indies), owing not only to the laws properly guarding in this respect, but also to the high price of the slaves themselves being a continual incitement to care, for such masters as are influenced more by selfishness than by any principle of humanity.*

The enforcement of the laws and institutes already established on the subject of granting protection to those that are oppressed, and by awarding a moderate punishment to those that deserve it, can the only means of

entirely removing apprehension of inconveniences arising from any number of slaves.

It is true, slavery is hard of itself. I have at the moment that I write the present memorial a feeling of all its weight, that ought to make an impression on the mind of every reasonable being yet, besides it not being my task to treat of slavery by itself, a subject on which so many books have already, particularly in the present century, been published, I cannot but observe that slavery in this Colony has now become a necessary evil, which cannot be removed without sacrificing the Colony, and perhaps the poor slaves themselves that are in it. Lucky however it is that this Colony is always ruled by a well-regulated Government which, though for the sake of good order, and preventing inconveniences it is obliged to make a distinction between a slave and his master, that by so doing the former may be kept in a proper bond of subordination, it will however never omit to adopt and pursue any means tending to alleviate the fate of these creatures, as much as circumstances will admit of. In the meanwhile, every impartial man, I think, cannot but own that the slaves are generally not ill-treated here and that every act, contrary to the principles of humanity, is always duly checked.

There is also the traumatic frontier conflict which can be presented as a tragedy in both whites and blacks sought achieve legitimate objectives - protection of land and cattle, and personal security. It will be quite easy to put a collection of documents together illustrating the ambiguities of the conflict by introducing the views of Xhosa spokesmen and of whites such as Stockenström, Philip; G.D. Joubert and Retief.

It will also be vitally important to give the youth some conception of the political process which resulted in our society having such a profound radical cleavage (along with the class cleavage), and the exclusion (or partial exclusion) of blacks from political representation. These developments can be explained in terms of needs of the economy, the male/female ratio in the white population, the white/black ratio and the dynamics of (white) party politics. There was nothing timeless about race or ethnicity - our current political identities are the product of a transitory, *historical* process.

In the Std.IX and X years it will be particularly important to give pupils a clear understanding of how ethnicity developed and counteract the impression that it was somehow pre-determined or fixed.

Recent work on ethnicity in Southern Africa has considerably clarified our understanding of the phenomenon. First, ethnicity must be viewed as a specific historical phenomenon *that itself can be explained* and must not be used as "given" to explain other phenomena. Second, while ethnicity is based on an idea (usually held by a racially-defined group who speaks the same language) its growth must be related to changes which have occurred in the general economy of South Africa.

Consider the case of the Afrikaners. A century ago there was no recognisable Afrikaner nation, no consensus about the term Afrikaner, and the Afrikaans language was a despised "kitchen" or "Hottentot" language with only the Malay people in Cape Town using it publicly without being self-conscious. Originally the term Afrikaner was not only used for whites but also (and perhaps more frequently) for the off-spring of slaves born in Africa, usually out of liaisons with non-slaves, including whites. From the 1770s onwards white Dutchspeakers began to appropriate the name but the meaning remained ambiguous. In 1868, an official list of Cape Town prostitutes was headed "Africanders", referring to people of mixed descent. The designation was also claimed by Africans. In 1883 Africans in the Eastern Cape established the Imbumbu organisation in response to the rise of the Afrikaner Bond founded a few years earlier by S.J. du Toit and "Onze Jan" Hofmeyr. The Imbumba members claimed that their organisation was

the true Afrikaner Bond while the organisation of the Afrikaners was merely the Boeren Bond.

Afrikaner ethnicity developed strongly in the century between 1880 and 1980 because the strategy of ethnic mobilisation offered a clear prospect of major political and economic gains up to the point of governing the country and redressing Afrikaner poverty. Ethnicity developed weakly or strongly in the case of the African groups depending on the political and economic context. To take the case of the two main African groups, the Xhosa and the Zulu. Peires (1981) writes that after the destruction of Xhosa independence in the mid-nineteenth century the Xhosa steadily became absorbed in the colonial economy and new social alliances were formed between landless Xhosa and their Khoikhoi counterparts. "The more the Xhosa nation became part of a wider South Africa, the less important did its ethnic specificity become."

A Zulu ethnicity developed more strongly as a political factor, mainly because the Zulu monarchy survived. In the 1920s and 1930s minor chiefs, the larger peasants, and the rural bourgeoisie rallied around the monarchy both to conserve tradition and control the forces of modernisation. They started the first Inkatha movement which aimed at commercialising agriculture and building ventures with Zulu savings. At the time of the Second World War, this movement was on the wane, even in the rural areas. In the cities, the trend was towards African nationalism. Control of the African National Congress passed into the hands of a radicalised intelligentsia who barely tolerated ethnic particularism. All over South Africa, ethnic institutions and affiliations were on the decline when the government in the 1950s decided to base the political system on the homelands upon them. However, once this system was introduced sections, particularly the chiefs and civil servants, became attracted to an ethnic strategy.

(b) ECONOMIC PROCESSES

The additional weight of the new Std. X syllabus gives the economic issues must be welcomed. John Dewey once said that economic history is more democratic than political history. Economically, whites and blacks cannot live without each other.

The real issue is how the wealth they jointly produced should be distributed. Why have some groups become rich while others are poor? Have the Afrikaners pulled themselves up economically by their own bootstraps?

It will be important to give pupils not only a sense of the achievements of free enterprise but also of the darker side of capitalism and white supremacy between 1900 and 1970. We have to impress on their minds not only the spectacular expansion of industry and infrastructure but also the hardships some suffered. For instance, we need to explain why black wages on the mines and farms did not increase at all in real terms between 1900 and 1970.

CONCLUSION

Calls for a new national history in schools will undoubtedly fall foul of two groups. The "Seperate Nations" school will take issue with an approach which questions the notion that it was whites who really made the history, which insists on sympathetically understanding the black experience, which emphasises the cultural convergence of whites and blacks and which stresses their common destiny. It is not surprising that there should be resistance. As Robert Heilbroner remarks at the close of his brilliant *The Future as History* (1960:196): "Contrary to our generally accepted belief, change is not the rule but the exception in life. Whether it is imposed from above or imposes itself from below, change must reckon with the reluctance of humankind to relinquish habits not only of a lifetime, but of life itself." Yet only by a bold new conception of our

history can we hope to negotiate our turbulent future. Whites used to consider themselves as the core of the South African nation. This is still barely conceivable today when there are about 5 million whites to more than 30 million blacks. But black numbers will rise to 50 million by 2000 and 80 million by 2020. Some genuinely multi-racial centre will have to be found if our society is not to disintegrate like that of Lebanon. To build such a multi-racial centre it is vitally important to start teaching the youth a history which will prepare them for a quite different future.

The kind of history that this article proposes may also be attacked from a different perspective because it is not radical enough. The radical critique of the history taught at school is not the first place direct against its racist quality. In their view history is part of *class ideology* which is designed first and foremost for control over the working people. A recent study notes: "Control over the working people through racial differentiation, and the ideological justification of it in terms of ethnic differences necessitating differential treatment, is the means whereby the dominant group preserves its power, privilege and prosperity." (Chisholm, 1981:136). Accordingly, an important strand in "People's History" is liberation from the capitalist ideology and the need for workers to recognise their true interests and identity. My paper argues that People's History can be a useful corrective to our glib assumption that our history was made by races or ethnic groups. Our history was in many ways also a class struggle. A pluralist approach can accommodate both the racial and class perspectives and indeed use them to teach children in the higher standards a multi-causal approach to history. My concern with "People's History" is about the tendency in some of the publications to present history as a mere bourgeois swindle. Like "Separate Nations" history this kind of "People's History" will be a source of division which will set groups and classes in our society even further apart.

The new syllabuses still fall far short of the crying needs of our current crisis. Matters such as pre-colonial history, African history or working class history are still outside the scope of the syllabus. To find this gap we shall need resource materials prepared by committed scholars or innovative publishers. Nevertheless the new syllabuses enable textbook writers and school teachers to go considerably beyond the confines of the past. We note especially the section in the Std. 8 syllabus allowing for the study of an aspect or aspects of the "history of one or more of the communities south of the Limpopo during the second half of the nineteenth century". The Std. IX syllabus includes a reference to a reaction to the National Convention and the Std. X introduces the theme of extra-parliamentary activities in response to the racial policies. The theme of economic developments on the Std. X syllabus can also be taught in a much more enterprising way than in the past to open up discussion on subjects such as the relationship between capitalism and segregation/apartheid and the whole question of who got what when and how.

It is no longer justifiable to blame the textbooks for the sterility of some of the history taught at schools. In a recent study Monteith (1985:12) correctly observes:

People often express a vague uneasiness that "they" would not approve for use in schools a textbook which was "too new, too daring, too ideologically different." It is my contention that if a book covers the syllabus, cannot be faulted on accuracy of information, is not emotive, is suited to the needs of pupils and meets a number of practical requirements, it is extremely difficult for a department to reject such a book. There are some departments which would welcome an "ideologically" different book.

We in South Africa face a very difficult future. Yet there is no need to replace a false optimism with a black and bitter pessimism. The fact that South African academic history is

more vigorous than ever with a constant flow of impressive studies must surely indicate that historians continue to hope that the past properly understood can be the basis for a better future. If our schools can become imbued with this spirit all talk of the irrelevance of history will be swept away.

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