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Education & The Ruling Classes

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THE ONGOING DEBATE ON THE GOVERNMENTS proposed changes in the field of education- the so-called New Education Policy-has brought to the fore one important question. What are the factors that determine the extent and type of education that is provided at any point of time in history; and under different social system? The history of human civilisation shows that at all points of time and under different forms of social organisation, the determining factor has been the requirements of the ruling classes.

Marx and Engels observed: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideas the ideal expression of the dominant material relations; dominant material relations, grasped as ideas: hence of the relations which made the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things, consciousness, and therefore think. In so far therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch." (German Ideology, Moscow 1976, p. 67 emphasis added)

In class societies, therefore, the ruling classes consciously seek to regulate the production and distribution of ideas. Education as a method of transmitting these ideas develops only within the confines of the interests of the ruling classes. However, as class antagonisms develop, sharpen and express themselves in the struggle of contending classes, these also find expression in the realm of ideas

and consciousness. Engels observed, "And as society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality was always a class morality: it has either justified the domination and interests of the ruling class, or, as soon as the expressed class has become powerful enough, it has represented the revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed." (Anti Duhring, 1977, p.117)

In all societies prior to capitalism, the process of education is essentially confined to those sections belonging to the ruling classes, i.e., to those who, consequent to the division of material and mental labour, have leisure at their disposal to conduct the affairs of the society and plan productive activities. The examples of Greek institutions and more specifically the Indian system of 'Gurukuls' illustrate this fact. The story of "Ekalavya" illustrates the fact that not only was education confined to the ruling classes but that the laboring classes were disallowed from the learning.

It is only with the emergence and development of capitalism that these confines are broken. With the development of productive forces it becomes necessary for the bourgeoisie to impart literacy, technical skills and knowledge to the proletariat.

While the spread of education beyond the confines of the ruling class is necessitated by the development of capitalism, this does not mean that the class purpose in education is eliminated. It continues as long as the society is divided into classes. Studies in the development of education in the industrialised countries confirms the pattern that the mass of working people are to be educated to the necessary extent, determined by the development of the productive forces along.

In Britain, "The key issue in education at the turn of the century was related to the spread of education for the lower orders'. In this, the influence of religion was dominant. The aim was to produce a god-fearing, law-abiding and industrious workforce: sober, honest, literate citizens imbued with a with a sense of duty... Training of the mind and formation of character were paramount objectives of the private schools and grammar schools, largely the preserve of the upper classes..." (*Education and industry in the 19th Century*- G W Roderick and M D Stephens Longman, 1948)

Education was also seen as an element of capitalist social control. The following quotation of one, the Reverend George Washington Hosmer who led a struggle for public education in the 1840s, sums up the role of education as envisaged in that period. He said, "Thousands among us have not dreamed of the effect of popular education: they have complained of its expensiveness, not foreseen that it will diminish vagrancy and pauperism and crime, that it will be an antidote to mobs; and prevent the necessity of a standing army to keep our own people in order. Every people may make their own choice, 'to pay teachers or recruiting sergeants', to support schools or constable and watchmen."

With the emergence of monopoly the education system develops in such a manner that science and knowledge are regulated and placed more decisively at the disposal and service of capital. Marx's analysis in *Capital* reveals that in a capitalist society science becomes "a productive force distinct from labour and pressed into the service of capital". (*Capital*, Vol. I, p. 361). In the era of monopoly capitalism, scientific research is more highly organized than ever before, but always with the overriding aim of private profit, and devoted increasingly to war. The training of natural scientists is so departmentalised as to make it difficult to acquire a theoretical grasp of natural science as a whole, and they receive no training at all in the study of human society. Conversely, social and historical studies are cut off from the natural sciences and from each other. Economics is separated from history and both from politics. History is taught it was not a branch of science at all. In the natural sciences, a student may know nothing of Marxism, yet at least he recognizes the dialectical processes in nature, even though many may not know them by that time. But the laws of dialectics mean nothing to the bourgeois historian, who may not recognize, or deliberately conceal, class struggle.

II

The development of the education system in India under the British was directly determined by the needs of the colonial powers.

Following the transfer of power, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) decided, in January 1947, to set up two Commissions- one to deal with university education and the other to

deal with secondary education, recognizing the fact that the requirements of independent India would be different, and hence a restructuring of the system was imminent.

This decision came at a time, when the promises made to the people in the field of education during the Freedom Struggle, were to be implemented. Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 was being debated in the Constituent Assembly, which ultimately found expression in the Directive Principles of State policy. The scheme that seems to have been worked out was that universal elementary education would be achieved by 1960, and necessary changes in the secondary as well as higher education would have to be made in accordance with the needs of an independent India.

The first of the Commissions to be appointed was the University Education Commission in 1954, under the chairmanship of Dr S Radhakrishnan, "To report on Indian university education and suggest improvements and extensions of the country."

This commission, which produced a comprehensive and voluminous report, set for itself the task of re-orienting the education system to face the "great problem, national and social, the acquisition of economic independence, the increase of general prosperity, the attainment of an effective democracy, overriding the distinctions of casts and creed, rich and poor, and a rise in the level of culture. For a quick and effective realization of these aims, education is a powerful weapon if it is organized efficiently and in public interest. As we claim to be a civilized people, we must regard the higher education of the rising generation as one of our principle concerns." (p.411)

Implicit in this was the task that was also repeatedly stated by Nehru, that the achievement of political independence must be transformed into economic independence. Towards this end, there was a need to increase the trained and skilled personnel who would undertake this task. The transformation of political independence into economic independence, in class terms, meant that the progress of capitalist development adopted by the Indian ruling classes was to be rapidly ensured. Economic independence, in terms of propaganda, was equated to the increase of general prosperity.

The essential task of the Commission corresponding to these class needs therefore, were to reorient the educational system towards

achieving economic independence and attainment of value to ensure an effective democracy.

Towards this end, the report of the Commission discussed the re-orientation of higher education in relation to the five basic tenets of our Constitution-Democracy, Justice, Liberty, Equality and fraternity. The idea of the report was to remould the education system as an ideological support to parliamentary democracy. "We know what Hitler did in six years with the German youth. The Russians are clear in their minds about the kind of society for which they are educating and the qualities required in their citizens.... Our education system must find its guiding principles in the aims of the social order for which it prepares." (P.19)

On the question of economic independence, the report noted the "urgent need of technicians" – "there is an urgent need for such occupations and skills all over the country, which "will train a large and growing body of ambitious youth for employment as technician, and various existing industries. They will ensure a continuous flow of skilled workers for several modern industries which are being started... we are strongly of the opinion that each province should have a large number of occupational institutes, preferably one in each district, giving training in an many occupations as possible." (p. 59-60)

This was reinforced by the Secondary Education Commission appointed in September 1952, with Dr Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar as the Chairman. The report was submitted to the first Parliament in 1953.

Reflecting the needs of the ruling classes, the report in the Chapter, *Reorientation of Aims and Objectives*, notes "one of its (India's) most urgent problems-if not the most urgent problem – is to improve productive efficiency to increase the national wealth, and thereby to raise appreciably the standard of living of the people." (p. 23)

Further it outlines the "dominant needs" – "training of character of fit students to participate creatively as citizens in the emerging democratic social order; the improvement of their practical and vocational efficiency so that they may play their part in building up the economic prosperity of their country; and the development of their literary, artistic and cultural interests." (p.23) Needless to add the thrust of the recommendations that follow refer only to the first

two needs. And of these it clearly emphasizes the second: "Side by side with the development of this attitude, (new attitude to work-dignity of labour however 'lowly'), there is a need to promote technical skill and efficiency at all stages of education to as to provide trained and efficient personnel to work out schemes of industrial and technological advancement. In the past, our education has been so academic and theoretical and so divorced from practical work, that the educated classes have, generally speaking, failed to make any enormous contribution to the development of this country's national resources and to add to national wealth. This must now change...." (p. 27) An eloquent expression of the needs of the ruling classes of an independent country.

The report went on to recommend the setting up of technical schools, polytechnics, strengthening multipurpose education, central technical institutions, etc. --- in fact the infrastructure that would produce the large technical manpower.

In conformity with the aspirations for rapid capitalist development, the ruling classes required to draw in the maximum number of young people into this process. This necessitated, in addition to the demands of the national movement, that education should be imparted in the mother tongue. Accordingly the commission recommended that, "the mother tongue i.e., the regional language, should generally be the medium of instruction throughout the secondary school stage." In addition it suggested the teaching of English and Hindi but at different stage of education. (p. 226)

These two reports put together sum up the necessary reorientation of the education system in conformity with the needs of the ruling classes aspiring for the speedy development of capitalism. Following this came the recommendations of increased financial allocations, and the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, with a view to creating a large skilled manpower reserve necessary for capitalist development. These were subsequently abandoned as the crisis deepened.

Whilst the recommendations of these Commissions were being implemented and a rapid expansion of education taking place, howsoever distant it may have been from meeting the requirements of the people, the objective situation was calling for a halt, if not reversal, in this expansion. By the beginning of the 60s signs of a

growing educated-unemployed were being noticed. The situation now necessitated a review of the education system as a whole-previous Commissions had dealt with separate aspects-university, secondary education, etc. -and the Education Commission of 1964 was appointed with Dr D S Kothari as Chairman, and popularly known as the Kothari Commission.

The Commission presented an extremely comprehensive report-to date still the most comprehensive- in 1966. The report, entitled *Education and National Development* noted in its forward:

“Indian education needs a drastic reconstitution, almost a revolution. Tinkering with the existing situation and moving forward with faulty steps and lack of faith can make things worse than before.”

The report in fact was reflecting the social and political expression of the economic crisis of the period. On the one hand it made recommendations that reflected the democratic aspirations of the Indian people regarding free and compulsory education, increased outlays for education, etc., on the other, recommendations leading to the restriction of higher education.

The policy resolution following the submission of the report was adopted in 1968, at a time when the economic crisis arising out of the capitalist path of development was finding sharp political expression. Mass discontent against the Congress policies, the rising protest of the student community against the deteriorating situation and fall in employment opportunities, etc., had culminated in the rejection of the Congress in several States of the country in the 1967 general elections, and the active role of the student community in this process was viewed with great concern by the ruling class.

The education policy resolution of 1968 in fact, had very little to do with the overall recommendations of the Kothari Commission. Only those aspects, which suited the ruling classes, the three- language formula, the centers of excellence, governance of universities, etc., were incorporated. In relation to governance, the government found the Kothari Commission lacking in many respects and appointed the Ganhendragadkar Commission in 1969 to go into this question. The recommendations of this Commission regarding the appointment of Vice-Chancellors, structure and composition of University Senates,

etc., which gave the state a greater control over the administration of higher education, corresponded to the ruling class interests, and hence was implemented.

The increasing, general drive towards authoritarianism in the country by the ruling class and its Government became all embracing penetrating also into the field of education. Recognising the need to effectively control education and educational institutions, one of the major developments of this period was the constitutional amendment during the Emergency to remove education from the state List and place it in the Concurrent List.

The formation of the Janta Government after the defeat of the Congress in the 1977 elections saw another attempt at tailoring the educational system with the draft education policy of 1978. This emphasised, amongst other things, 'non-formal' education, giving the Gandhian model as the ideological support to its argument. In essence, it comprised non-formal education for the poor, and formal education for the rich. With the early fall of the Janta Party; this education policy was never implemented.

III

In the face of the deepening international crisis of capitalism, the ruling classes in our country today, find it increasingly necessary to rely on capital-intensive technology, in order to successfully compete in the international market, particularly when exports are increasingly determining their level of economic activity, as to maintain and increase their profits levels. This necessity finds expression in the recent shifts in the economic strategy-the thrust of the Seventh Plan, the 1985 budget, the heavy concessions given to the private sector, liberalization of the imports, etc. The Seventh Plan document expresses this eloquently.

“The success of policy adjustment will therefore depend, among other things, on the responsiveness of large firms, and on their willingness to equip for, and invest in, a substantial expansion of export operations instead of continuing to rely mainly would mobilize finances, organize supplies and develop commercial contacts to

establish export markets.” (*Seventh Five-Year*, Vol. I, p. 77, para 6.54.)

Having already narrowed the domestic market, dependence on exports becomes necessary for the ruling classes to perpetuate their rule. This requires the induction of modern foreign technology, leading to an increase in foreign collaborations and opening the doors of our economy wider to exploitation by multinationals. As the Plan Document states, “... virtual freeing of exports from the adverse impact of import restrictions.” (Ibid Vol. II para 6.55)

There is an important consequence here of relevance to the field of education. The large-scale induction of modern technology requires a manpower capable of manning it. This is what is implied when the Plan Document talks of “high quality and excellence” in education, and ‘removal of obsolescence, and modernization of technical education”, (Vol. II, p. 255 para 10.22) meaning that a small volume of intellectual manpower, trained in modern methods, is what is the need of the hour, while the vast masses can remain illiterate. The education system, therefore, must be reoriented to suit the contemporary needs of the ruling classes. This need was aptly expressed by the Prime Minister at the Conference of State Education Ministers in August 1985: “We cannot cut ourselves off from rest of the world and carry on in a bullock-cart age. Not because we want to advance and we want to have fancy gadgets and fancy things, but because it is just too expensive to do so. We cannot afford old technology that costs us very much more. And when we look at the cost of our technology, *it is not just a matter of seeing how many people are employed and how many are not employed, but what is the productivity for a given investment.*” (emphasis added)

The document, *Challenge of Education – a Policy Perspective*, recently released by the Government is to seen in this background. Notwithstanding all the usual rhetoric the document, in essence, contains recommendations that reflect the needs of the ruling classes at the moment. The severe indictment the document makes of the present state of affairs is put forward as a plea for change. The Education Minister’s foreword to the document ingenuously notes: “If resources constraints and resistance to institutional change had not circumscribed educational orientation, the present scenario of education would have been qualitatively different.”

The document upholds many criticisms made up the democratic movement regarding the present education system. But such an indictment only reflects the fact that the education system that the ruling classes themselves had built in the past, no longer suits present interests.

For example the document states; "History has established beyond doubt, the crucial role played by human resources in the development of nations. And the development of human resources is the main function of education."(Vol. I para 1.4) An undisputed fact. But, development in which direction? This is clarified by stating; "While the content and methodology of education can be determined on a priority basis for the development of the individual personality, in so far as the specific tasks in respect of technological, economic and social goals re concerned, *education must respond to the imperatives flowing from the native and direction of national development.*" (Vol. I para 1.18)

The document in fact while bemoaning the existing state of affairs, expresses a great deal of concern for the future. The foreword again notes; "If the new generation entering the 21st century, finds itself ill-equipped, it will hold the present generation responsible for its inadequacies."

The class nature of this concern is expressed thus: "Our position in respect of elementary education, even in comparison with the majority of developing countries, is highly unsatisfactory. If adequate provisions are not made even now for school facilities, the requisite number of teachers, restructuring of the syllabi and methods of teachings, we will be marching into the 21st century with an unacceptably large corpus of illiterate people. The poor will thus stand doubly deprived, the adults will be living at a low level of subsistence, while their children will be condemned to a life of ignorance and squalor. *Even for those, who are more happily placed, the poor and the ignorant will be like millstones around their necks. Moreover, it is highly improbable that the country will go on tolerating the double deprivation depicted above. To do nothing is to invite tensions beyond the control of the law and order machinery. As a democratic country interested in socio-political evolution in a peaceful and orderly fashion, India must firmly rule out the default option.*" (para 3.9, emphasis added)

On the one hand, therefore, the ruling classes see the need to reorient the education system to make it capable of producing the intellectual manpower corresponding to the needs of modern technology and, on the other, the vast millions condemned to ignorance and squalor must be controlled so that they may not create problems, "beyond the control of the law and order machinery". Populist propaganda to mislead and enlist the support of these sections, and repressive measure against the democratic movement of students, teachers and the non-teaching staff, are combined to ensure the implementation of these changes.

On the position with regard to the promise of *universal education*, the document admits that the Constitutional Directive on free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years, which had fulfilled by 1960, but subsequently extended to 1990, remains a distant target even in 1985. It states: "The age specific population in the age group of 6-14 in the year 1981 is calculated to be approximately 15 crores. In 1981, 9.3 crore pupils were enrolled in elementary education, 0.95 crore in secondary, and 0.31 crore in higher education. Assuming that the growth rate of the population would be 1.5 per cent, then the age specific population in this age group would be 17.4 crores in 1990. if the past pattern of educational development continues, particularly in terms of the growth of enrolment and the retention rate, 11.2 crore children will be enrolled in elementary education under the formal system, while another 1.15 and 0.38 crore will be in the secondary and higher education levels respectively." (Vol. 1, para 4.61)

In other words, in 1990, there will be 467 lakh children outside the schools. These calculations are based on an estimated population growth of 1.5 per cent, whereas for the decade 1980-90, the growth is likely to be around 2.5 per cent. In reality therefore at least 800 lakh children will remain outside the schooling system in 1990.

The document further states: "Assuming that universal elementary education is achieved by 1990, out of the total age-specific population of 17.4 crore, 11 crore pupils should be in the primary stage and the remaining 6.4 crore in the middle stage. It may be noted that this achievement implies that primary education *will be 1.5 times, and the middle 3.2 times of its present size*. Such an expansion will have a significant impact on the education expenditure as well. It is estimated that in terms of 1980-81 prices, and assuming the per unit costs of 1977-78 to stay put, the

budgetary requirements for the year 1909-91 will be doubled to Rs 3200 crore (the 1980-81 expenditure being Rs 1537 crore). On the basis of an eight per cent per annum rate of inflation, the budget in current prices would be more than four times the 1980-81 allocations." (Vol. 1. para 4.62, emphasis added).

The assumption of constant per unit cost is not tenable. The document itself notes in Table 13 of Volume II, that the average cost per pupil increased by seven per cent between 1950-1975. For primary schools, the cost rose from Rs 20 per pupil in 1950, to Rs 95.5 in 1975, i.e., a five-fold increase. Taking this into account the budget for 1990-91 would have to be at least eight times the 1980-81 allocation. This in turn means, as the document states, additional expenditure on teachers who will be twice as many in 1990. Considering that the document itself notes that expenditure on teachers' salaries is 95 per cent of total expenditure, (Vol. II p. 1-18, para 3.73), this will mean that the budget would have to be sixteen times that of the 1980-81 allocations. "In addition, the universalisation of elementary education by 1990 will also imply that even at the existing transition rates, enrolment in the secondary and higher education levels will increase to nearly twice their 1980-81 enrollments. However, keeping in view the fact that the per unit cost of secondary and higher education is several times higher than the per unit cost of elementary education, the overall impact on the educational budget would be tremendous." (Ibid para 4.63) In other words, the achievement of universal elementary education means that at the minimum, the allocation for 1990-91 will have to be Rs 25,000 crore at 1980-81 prices.

This may appear a staggering amount in comparison to the existing allocations. But in reality, it works out to only around six per cent of the Seventh Plan outlay. This was precisely the recommendation of the Kothari Commission. The democratic movement in our country has been demanding an allocation of least 10 per cent. Such an allocation would not only allow universalisation, but also expansion at the higher levels.

However, having made the above analysis the document not surprisingly, fails to make any concrete suggestions in this regard. An increase in expenditure on education is not in tune with the requirement of the ruling classes. On the contrary, the need is to reduce this 'unproductive' expenditure and utilize the allocation for training only that level of manpower as is required. Reflecting this,

the document asserts: "Policy deliberations vis-à-vis universalisation have to be matched by hard financial decisions." (para 4.64).

And the Government has taken such decision. The Seventh Plan document reveals that the allocation for the entire period of five years ending 1990-91, for General Education, including Adult Education, is a mere Rs 4775.3 crore. Elementary education receives only Rs 1830.45 crore. And, in doing so, the Government is announcing, for the first time since independence, that it is abandoning its social responsibility of implementing the Constitutional Directive. It is abandoning universal elementary education.

Notwithstanding all talk of according priority to universalisation, the Seventh Plan document clearly states; "Increasing enrolment in full-time schools beyond this level of 137 million in classes I to VIII might not be feasible." (Vol. II p 255 para 10.25) This is with reference to 1990-91, when the estimated population in this age group will be 174 million, *on the unrealistic assumption of a 1.5 per cent population growth*. Taking into account the actual rate of population growth, this means that, assuming the fulfillment of targets, which itself is unlikely, the Plan has ruled that around 60 million students will be outside of the schooling system.

These figures moreover, are on the basis of what is known as the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER). What is thereby concealed is the fact that a 100 per cent GER does not imply universalisation. Volume II of the draft, whose circulation was deliberately restricted, notes that, "GER is a rough indicator for measuring our efforts to achieve the growth of Universal Elementary Education (UEE). It is used in the absence of actual age-wise break up of enrollment. The ratio can go up above 100 per cent to account for over-age and under-age children in enrolment at particular stage-class. On the basis of the Fourth All India Education Survey, we have to *achieve a GER of 127 per cent for attaining the goal of UEE, i.e., 100 per cent net enrolment ratio*. (pp 1-9 emphasis added) This means that many more than 60 million will be outside of the schooling system.

It is for this reason that the document emphasizes 'non-formal methods'. Having abandoned the responsibility of universalisation, the document states; "Alternatively, other educational approaches, such as non-formal distant education and vocationalisation have to be worked out in detail for a large-scale implementation, and

replication.” (para 4.65)

Non – formal education through the use of T V video and INSAT, IB cannot be a replacement for formal education, particularly at the elementary school level. The relationship between the teacher and the taught is an essential ingredient of the schooling system. Non-formal education seeks to replace the teacher and thus reduce 95 per cent of costs, as we noted above. This is the real intention of the document – to do away with the teacher, on the one hand, and pursue the chimera of achieving universalisation through non-formal methods on the other.

Given the class divisions in our society and their expression in the system, this again only means formal education for the rich and non-formal for the poor. But even here the Government has gone one step further by stating that “the number of children to be covered in the non-formal programme is reckoned to be of the order 25 million.” (*Seventh Five-Year Plan*, Vol. II 256, para 10.26), meaning that even through the non-formal methods, universalisation will not be achieved. The Directive Principle of our Constitution is thus a dead letter, only waiting to be buried.

While universalisation is abandoned, the document notes with approval “the decision to set up peace-setting model schools in the Central Sector in every district of the country...” (para 4.24). This comes in the background of the fact that one-fifth of all populated areas in our country have no schools. In the other four-fifths, 40 per cent have no *pucca* buildings, 39.72 per cent have no blackboards, 59.5 per cent have no drinking water and 35 per cent have only one teacher to teach three or four different sections. (para 3.7) The already inadequate financial allocation, instead of at least ensuring functional schools, is devoted to the establishment of these model schools.

This is the clear expression of the contemporary needs of the ruling classes. “It would be appreciated that one of the perquisites for modernization for survival is the establishment of institutions of excellence at the level of the school as well as higher education. For this, it will be necessary to identify young people of merit. Give them the best possible education, train them in frontier areas of knowledge and having done this put them in an appropriate work environment so that they can come up with ideas which will keep

India at par with other countries.” (para 4.39)

Apart from strengthening the already elitist character of the education system, from now on from the school level, two separate streams are to be created. One that will meet the requirement of modern technology and the other-the dispensable millions – consigned to ignorance and backwardness.

Concealing this reality, populist propaganda is playing up the fact that every district will get a good quality school. But then why only one? As far

As the working class is concerned the issue is not quality versus quality, it is quality for the entire quantity. Every school in our country must be a model school. The struggle for this forms an integral part of our struggle against this class rule.

On the question of *dropouts* from school, the document discloses that at the primary stage the percentage is 62.1, and at the middle stage it is 77.1. And yet, apart from vague reference, the document skirts the basis issue. In a country where a child is necessary to augment family income in the millions of families living at the barest minimum level of subsistence, education is a luxury. Even Volume II of the Education document quoting from a survey and generalizing it for the country, states that: “the main reason for not attending school and dropping – out is poverty: 96 per cent of children who never attended schools and 84 per cent of the drop – outs come from families whose annual income from all sources is less than Rs 4,000.” It continues, “80 per cent of dropouts and 88 per cent of children not attending schools come from families whose occupations are agriculture and labour.” (para 4.52)

Talking of universalisation without reference to these conditions and the necessity of radical socio-economic reforms, especially land reforms, vividly expose the hollowness of the government’s commitment. In this connection must be noted the treating of the Constitutional Directive on free and compulsory education as synonymous with universalisation. This is wrong and deliberate. The former implies the commitment of the Government that children in the age group of 6-14 remain in school, whereas the latter means only enrolment. The former means that the Government is obliged to provide support services like free mid-day meals, uniforms, stationery, text books, etc. By changing definitions the Government is

reliving itself of this responsibility. Despite the assertion of the Seventh Plan document, "the emphasis will shift from mere enrolment to retention" (Vol. II paras 10-24), the financial allocations, discussed above, will bring this to naught. Neither universal enrolment nor retention will be achieved.

Adult Education: Universal elementary education and adult education are the twin elements essential for eradication of illiteracy. Illiterates in our country today number over 500 millions or 66 per cent of our population. This constitutes roughly one and a half times the entire population of India at the time of independence. While expressing 'concern' this is what the document has to state: "That removal of illiteracy is possible has been demonstrated by many countries which regarded it as an essential pre-condition for the meaningful participation of the masses in the process of political decision-making and national reconstruction. *Whether such a perception would be valid for India has to be decided after careful consideration, once and for all*, so that the type of equivocation which has characterized Adult Education Programmes comes to an end, and decisive action gets taken in this regard." (para 318, emphasis added)

Thirty-eight years after independence it has still to be decided whether removal of illiteracy is necessary! Could there be a better reflection of the desires of the ruling classes.

The working class and the democratic movement in our country have since long been demanding that removal of illiteracy must be based on a people's movement drawing in the army of educated unemployed. Necessary programmes and adequate financial allocation must be made for this.

Instead, the Seventh Plan has allocated a mere Rs 360 crore for the entire Plan period. Compared to the First Plan, this constitutes a reduction of 3.2 per cent, from the then low 3.5 per cent of education allocation, to the present 0.3 per cent. Taking into account the rate of inflation, even in absolute terms, this allocation, as against Rs 325 crore in the Fifth Plan, represents a reduction.

Once again the reliance is on non-formal methods. The concept of 'distant learning' is advanced, meaning that TVs will be installed in

community centers in villages, educational programmes for a couple of hours will be shown (usually during working hours) and a year later, statistics will be compiled to show an increase in literacy based on the numbers that watched these programmes!

Vocationalisation: was trumpeted with great fanfare all over the country at the time of the introduction of the 10+2+3 system. That there was little seriousness about this is proved by the woeful conditions of vocational training at the +2 stage today. The democratic student movement has repeatedly brought to the notice of the Government the totally inadequate facilities at this level. The draft approvingly quotes the late J P Naik, Member Secretary of the Kothari Commission, as stating that the latter's proposals were not at all connected with the adoption of the 10+2+3 pattern. (para 4.108) In doing so the document is virtually endorsing the existing state of affairs at the +2 level. Retaining it therefore, as an additional stage results in eliminating students from the education system and restricting entry to higher education.

The curtailment of education by lengthening the process is an old formula of capitalism under crisis. In 1959, the Carnegie Commission Report of the USA titled *The American High School Today* suggested a three-tier system introducing the concept of junior colleges, which were the only method through which college admissions were to be made. By mid 70s this process became the biggest eliminator of students from higher education.

The failure of vocationalisation is partly traced to the "cultural prejudice toward skill-oriented education" (para 4.30). Nothing could be more absurd. Vocationalisation has not made headway because the economy has shown little capacity to create employment. Every Five Year Plan sees an increase in the backlog unemployment, i.e., those waiting to be employed. Thus the economy has been able to absorb neither this backlog, nor the new entrants into the labour market, not even the minute fraction of those young men coming with vocationalised training. The registered educated unemployed in this country, while adding up to an appalling 112 lakh, still constitutes only a fraction of the total educated unemployed, and a still smaller proportion of the total population.

Instead of dealing with this issue in earnest the document skirts it by stating, "It is still to be decided as to whether one of the streams of vocationalisation would be an integral part of the +2 stream or the

entire system of vocational education would constitute an entirely independent institutional arrangement, or an altogether new model should be evolved... (para 4.112) The issue is therefore left wide open only compounding the existing anarchy.

In 1953 the Lakshmanswami Mudaliar Commission on Secondary Education had made a passionate plea for expansion of vocational education based on the fact that it would be impossible to transform political independence into economic independence without technicians and skilled personnel. The Government had then accepted these recommendations but refused implement them as the course of development in the last three decades shows.

The deepening economic crisis, the need for only a limited personnel, given the shift towards capital intensive technology, warrants the further restriction of vocationalisation. The thrust of the recommendations of the document is directed at this.

Higher Education: Here too, brazenly advocating the needs of the ruling classes, the document states: "The problem is not of access and equity but of preventing waste of scarce resources in producing a large number of unemployables." (para 4.83) Access to and equality of opportunity, rights guaranteed by the bourgeois constitution, are not applicable to higher education. Accordingly the document suggests the curtailment of existing facilities, freezing admissions and not opening any new colleges.

At the same time the needs of the ruling classes to develop the manpower corresponding to the demands of modern technology is reflected in the recommendation to "strengthen and establish new centers of excellence". The imperatives arising out of the recent shifts in economic policy us reflected in the Seventh Plan document when it outlines the task of higher education as, "consolidation, improvement in standards, and reforms in the system to make higher education more relevant to national needs and to forge forward and backward linkages with employment". (Vol. II p. 251 para 10.48)

While 'quality is for privileged sections who will enter thee 'centres of excellence', for the 'quantity' who are destined to remain unemployed, the document suggest the open universities. "It will be a boon for those who, for economic or other reasons, cannot have

access to formal higher education.” (para 4.21)

This debate of ‘quality versus quantity is nothing new; the ruling classes always quantity to suit their interests. Lord Curzon, alarmed at the rise of Indian nationalism in universities, said in 1902, “It is quality, not quantity that we should have in mind.” The commission he appointment states:

“In all matters relating to higher education efficiency must be the first and paramount consideration. It is better for India that a comparatively small number of young men should receive a sound liberal education than that a large number should be passed through an inadequate course of instruction leading to a depreciated degree” (*Raleigh Commission Report, 1902, p.14*) Ironically, the present document talks in similar language of the system of higher education producing ‘unemployables.’

Thus, the model schools and centers of excellence on the one hand, and non-formal education and open universities on the other, are the changes in the education policy. The meager financial outlay is to be earmarked for the former. This is the requirement of the ruling classes.

Any expansion of higher education that may take place has been left to the initiative of private business: “Encouraging private entrepreneurs to contribute to educational development, particularly in respect of vocational and professional streams by giving suitable rebates on taxes; encouraging them for setting up of training institutions... ” (p. 87) In tune with the overall strategy, this recommendation strengthens the hold of private business over education and encourages the mercenary attitude of reducing education to a business racket. Implicit in this understanding is also the fact that the research facilities in universities will be placed at the disposal of private business for their research and development work to be conducted at state expense. While tax rebates are to be given to private business, the document justifies capitation fees and suggests increases in the fee structure to recover the cost of education.

In a situation where unemployment, and educated unemployment in particular, is increasing rapidly, the method suggested to tackle the

problem of educate unemployed as well as curtailing higher education is to de-link degrees from jobs. "It needs to be emphasized that if degrees are de-linked from jobs, there will be considerable relief from the pressure degree will not have any links with jobs, it is hoped that the concept of educated unemployed will cease to exist. Apart from legitimizing the corruption and nepotism that is already rampant, this decision is a clear expression of the ruling classes' preference for unemployed to educated unemployed. Through this slogan they are appealing to the backward elements by hoodwinking them that employment would no longer be confined only to the educated sections and though they cannot go to the universities, they would now be given jobs.

A lot of concern has also been expressed of late by leading functionaries of the Government about reorienting the syllabi in order to inculcate a sense of national integration. The document in the section on *Goal Orientation From Education Planning*, these do not mark any departure from the past and the document remains profoundly vague regard to suggestions.

In this regard it must reiterated that obscurantism has already played havoc with our social fabric as well as educational system. Obscurantism and communal values masquerading as 'moral science' continue to plague us and there is direct patronage to religious leaders and religious interference in education, while the need is to separate education from religion.

A change in syllabus requires that education must be oriented towards and based upon the accepted democratic secular values that generate an Indian consciousness. The country must be warned that unless this content is uniformly adopted, the social fabric and integrity of our country cannot be safeguarded. This is particularly true when we have to face the onslaughts of imperialism and the divisive forces.

Simultaneously the document calls for 'cleansing' the universities and the depoliticisation of education (para 4. 135). It continues to advocate the exercise of self-restraint by all concerned. However, apart from suggesting a national consensus on this issue, it does not make any reference to the serious attacks being made on the university community. While arguing for self-restraint, it fails to take notice of the fact that many legislative measures have been

undertaken that the directed at curbing the democratic right of dissent in the campuses.

The Central Government has enacted the Viswa Bharati Amendment Bill, which sought to scrap the right of the university community to elect its representatives to their unions and to the Senate and Syndicate. Many state Governments have adopted similar legislative measures, e.g., Maharashtra , which completely abrogated the rights of the university community and converted its participation in decision-making bodies to farce, in the name of 'consultation', Many State Governments appoint IAS officers and some go to the extent of appointing IPS officers as vice-chancellors. Governance of universities is seen more as a law and order problem. The Police Commission's recommendation for setting up a separate force and police posts in the universities is being implemented.

The ruling classes are clearly stating that the protests against the their class rule, specifically against these retrograde measures will be met with an iron hand.

The recommendations of the document in fact follow the suggestions of the World Bank which has laid down that for the developing countries, specifically the low income countries in which category it places India, "the development of upper levels of formal education will be selective and carefully planned, taking into account the limited absorptive capacity of the modern sector for labour, and the needs of both the public and private sectors for managerial and technical skills to meet the needs of increasingly sophisticated economies will have priority." (*Education Sector Policy Paper* April 1980, p.87)

Though the document supposedly still under discussion, all decisions essential for the desired re-orientation of the education system, namely financial allocations, the model schools, the open university, the centers of excellence, have already been taken. The country can continue to debate on the niceties and "logical inconsistencies" while the ruling classes effect the desired changes. In doing so they are acting directly against the interests of the vast masses of the Indian people.

Each one of the recommendations runs contrary to the demands

raised by the people of our country. Under this situation, the struggle of the Indian people for free and compulsory education, education in mother tongue, expansion of education opportunities, nationalization of educational institutions, etc., are an expression of the struggle in our country.

These changes are being brought about accompanied by an ideological offensive and populist propaganda of leading the country to the 21st century. New illusions are being created in the minds of the people and their support is drawn for implementing these changes. The pride of the people of a district is whipped up on the grounds that a new model school will be established. That this will be done at the expense of thousands of other children is camouflaged. Sections of youth are being mobilised on the grounds that they will be provided employment irrespective of their educational training. That the new modernization and capital-intensive technology will reduce the job opportunities is being camouflaged. While patriotism and defending the unity of the country are propagated, no attempt is made to instill these values and fight remnants of feudal ideology in the field of education. The ruling classes in fact are utilizing these divisions in society to consolidate their class rule.

In this class battle, achievements of the Left Front Government of West Bengal and the democratic reforms initiated by it are being attacked vehemently by the ruling classes. The conflict between the contending classes in society is once again finding expression in the field of education. That very Congress party which hailed Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee when he as the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University opposed the Curzon Reforms for changing the composition of the Senate, today withholds the Presidential assent for a Bill seeking to democratise the administration of the Calcutta University.

The changes that are being proposed in the field of education today, mean a greater regimentation of the university administration, subjecting the university community to servile conformism, curtailing education opportunities, in fact a strategy that will increase illiteracy to suit the interests of the ruling classes.

The fight against this new policy calls for the unity of all democratic sections of the country. It is necessary to understand that these proposals are not mere changes but reflect significant shifts in the

ruling class strategy for their continued rule. This clarity is essential in order to effectively combat the ruling classes' designs and to carry forward the struggle against this class rule.