

WCC FOCUS

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After ten and a half years as a consultant in the World Council of Churches' Office of Education, world renowned Brazilian educator Dr Paulo Freire is returning to his native country from which he was expelled in 1964. Author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and other books on adult education in third world situations, Dr Freire, who is now 58, has been invited to teach at the Catholic University of Sao Paulo. He was asked by One World to reflect on his experience at the Council.



One World: Dr Freire, you came to the Council with a reputation as an innovative, even radical educator and now you are leaving with your ideas much more accepted, even by many governments. How have you personally felt about your experience at the Council?

Paulo Freire: This has been one of the best times I have had in my life. In spite of the distance from my country, my roots, my people. This house (named the WCC) gave me the possibility to walk without being afraid. I am sad. I will miss the corridors of this house, the people, the openness of this house. I became precisely what I have been: Paulo Freire. Just Paulo Freire, a human person, a man who loves the flow of the falling snow, who loves life strongly, who loves thinking and acting in the world and who loves having been in this house.

OW: What do you mean by "openness"?

PF: I mean the inexistence of rigid schemes. I don't want to say we don't have a bureaucracy here. Of course, we know we have a bureaucracy. But here we also have an openness, a stimulating of thought. I have never felt under any kind of oppression or limitation about my thought or action. I never was requested constantly to be writing memos or reports. I am really a "tropical" man, unused to bureaucracy, and I am happy because I can say I was happy here. I don't know whether I made some contribution here or not, but I know that at least this house gave me a chance.

OW: What else has impressed you about your life at the Council?

PF: The ecumenical atmosphere. It is fantastic. When I remember my years of adolescence in a small city near Recife, when I remember the struggles between Protestants and Catholics at that time, I just could not understand why there had to be such struggles. I could not accept it. Even then, I thought of something like this (the ecumenical approach). So at the time when I have to say goodbye I also want to say thank you.

OW: You were expelled from your country in 1964, in fact after spending 75 days in jail, and now you are being allowed back in. Does this mean the government has become more moderate or you have become more accepted?

PF: Well, I would say the political structure in Brazil has changed a little bit. There is a concrete opening in Brazil. My wife and I thought that it was time to go back. Even though I feel myself a being of the world, there is no real internationality without locality. I can become a "being for the world" at the time when I can go back to my roots which enabled me to become a "being in the world". I am first a man of Recife.

I wouldn't say the Brazilian regime loves me. But I cannot say it is like five years ago. The regime is the same, but there is much more space for one to walk on. I have to take advantage of the existence of this space. I'm not going back to any paradise, but to my source of my history, to myself.

OW: In your ten years here you've had an opportunity to see many of the places in the world where your ideas have caught hold. What has been your major impression from these visits?

PF: I have been fortunate to have had over these ten years contacts with a great

variety of people in the popular base in Asia, Latin America, Africa. Many times I met people who had studied my work in serious ways. Sometimes I met people who did not know me but who were doing similar things.

In February in New Delhi there was a seminar with about 40 people from different states who were applying my ideas. The people were "re-inventing" and not just copying me. They were applying these ideas to their own situation. The many differences imply different tactics. There is a different kind of abstraction vis-à-vis reality — the very way of seeing things, of knowing things. So there must be some differences in the application of the process of mobilizing the people. I found differences which did not distort the essence of what we

OW: In some of the places you have mentioned the new forms of mass education look to some observers like new forms of indoctrination. Are you afraid your methods may be used to that end?

PF: To begin with, education itself is a political act. The nature of the being of education is political and because of that we always risk two dangerous positions. On the one hand to be "expontaneismo", to exacerbate spontaneity, is a situation where the teacher leaves the students by themselves out of respect for their freedom. It is the father who never says "no" to his children. It is the absence of rules. The other risk is the opposite one of becoming manipulative. Maybe we will never have the perfect system, but we must avoid both manipulation and the total absence of rules.



are saying about adult education and the need for people to do their own "naming" of the world, to be subjects of history not just objects. We worked with and trained national teams. I have also done this in many places such as Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome, and Angola. In Sao Tome we organized about seven books (for literacy). I also have worked in Grenada and Nicaragua. I have emphasized the role of education in the revolutionary transition in which they are now.

In the former situation, education was preponderantly what I have called a "banking" education, from "A" above "B". In the revolutionary transition it should be possible by decree to say that from tomorrow education will be an event of "A" with "B". Of course, the possible does not always happen.

OW: Your book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, came out in the English edition just about the time you joined the World Council staff. In English, the word "pedagogy" has a pejorative sense. Did you intend this in your title?

PF: This was also pointed out to me by my editors in New York. I didn't mean it in that pejorative sense, and the word doesn't have that sense in Portuguese. But before the book came out I had been giving talks on this subject in the US and the papers quoted my subject as "pedagogy of the oppressed", so my editors finally agreed to go along with that title. Of course, I didn't want to use the word "education", and we didn't know what else to use. All the other languages into which the book has been translated have also stuck with "pedagogy".