When I met Marx I continued
to meet Christ on
the corners of the street'

PAULO FRIERE is one of the few
contemporary educationists whose
ideas are being discussed through-
out the world. His book Pedagogy
of the Oppressed has been trans-
lated into 10 languages.

Until 1964 he was a professor in
Brazil, co-ordinating a national
plan to fight adult illiteracy. A
Christian and a Marxist he was
imprisoned and exiled by the
Juntas government. He became a
professor at the University of
Chile and a consultant to
UNESCO's Institute of Research
and Training in Agrarian Reform
and was until recently a visiting
fellow at Harvard University. He
is now a special consultant to the
World Council of Churches and
lives in Geneva.

Pedagogy is a theoretical book
but it is based on Friere's experi-
ence with Latin American literacy
programmes. It is mainly con-
cerned with political education of peasants, but Friere's
discussion of freedom, knowledge
and education practice give it
wider implications.

His term for the process of
creating critical personal and
social awareness is "conscientisation" — from his native Port-
uguese. His principle criticism of
traditional education is that it
proceeds as if the learner has
nothing to contribute and as if
the teacher knows all. He calls
this the "banking" concept of
education and argues that it
invites "deposit" learning — or
teaching based on propaganda
and slogans rather than teaching
designed to make people actively
free.

Friere talks of "problem-posing
education" where teachers are in
"dialogue", or equal partnership,
with students.

He believes in starting with
what people know about their
own lives. With peasants learning
to read, for example, he might
begin with the word "slum". The
word leads on to group discussion
and at the same time is a root (in
Spanish) to many other words.
The method is open-ended,
argues Friere, and based on hope
and faith in man. "If I do not
love men I cannot enter into dia-
logue," he writes.

— BARRY HILL

IN AUSTRALIA, Friere wants
to talk with Aborigines, union-
ists, Women's Liberationists,
students and educators. Despite
the luxuriant beard he is a
small man, quietly spoken,
with soft eyes, who butts his
cigar as very delicately. He
arrived from Geneva in a neat
fawn suit. He was asked
whether he ran the risk of be-
coming a sort of guru...

Ah, yes, indeed. One of my pre-
occupations is to fight against
this, to demystify myself.
You know, it is so difficult, be-
cause when I try to be what I
am — a common man — many
people think that it is me being
a simple man and it reinforces
my myth. So I don't know what
to do. When I have time to
spend with people, after some
hours, the myth disappears and
I become myself....

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to have been a teacher of children. After university I taught in secondary school, but that is all. I have no teaching experience, but the most important thing in my life. My marriage was more important than the Pedagogy of the Oppressed because if I had not got married I would not have had the book. I had a beautiful experience with my five children.

The curiosity of children is so important. If we cut out of their curiosity I think we can feature them. So the same process I described with adults can be developed among children. For example we never said "no" to our children without giving reasons. Why is power the most important theme "a teacher in dialogue with pupils should be concerned with?"

It is one of the reasons for dialogue. But dialogue with children must be about everything which interests the child. Maybe a teacher wants to have dialogue about flowers. If it interests him then maybe it will be about flowers.

To what extent can educators enter into dialogue with pupils or adults?

It depends on the free space we have in different societies. I'm sure that you have more free space to work in Brazil. That is, some educators can do much more, individually, with students than a professor can do in Brazil.

So maybe an Australian professor can begin the year with students by saying: "Look, I don't have a programme to give you. I think we can organise our programme because the seminar does not belong to me. The seminar belongs to us. We are here as subjects of knowledge, subjects of the process of knowing, so let us work together to create our programme."

Is it fair to say that your work is concerned with the Third World — not with issues that unite the whole world right now? I never sought to create a system which would explain everything. For me that's very difficult. It does not mean that the books do not make some general statements... but you are right. When I wrote the book, I was convinced that it would be a special Latin American edition of about 5000 copies. I thought I was writing something for Latin America, based on any experience in Latin America and the sophisticated language is explained by the fact that I thought only students and teachers would read the book. I never thought it would be read in Australia.

Yes, a Christian who uses Marxist ideas. How do you resolve the two?

I always receive this question. For me — no problem. Since I was a young man, very naive, I have not accepted that being a Christian means that a person is a reactionary. Another thing: I had a very difficult childhood. I experienced hunger. I know what it means to be hungry. I always say to be hungry is when you don't have anything to eat. I had to hunt, to fish, to kill birds with my sling shot. And yet there were two things I never had: a sense of duty that God was responsible for death. And, second, we never lost a sense of community. I was as a child of a collective as I was a kind of master.

When I was a young man, I went to the people, to the workers, the peasants, motivated, really, by my Christian faith. At that time, when I was 20 or 21 years — I talked with the people I learned how to speak with the people. The pronunciation, the words, the concepts. When I arrived with the people, the people knew which people I was the hope of the people, the friendship.

That is the reality of this reality sent me. To Marx I started reading and studying as I was the only way I could find Marxian traditions. Marx was really a genius. But when I met Marx, I continued to meet corners of the street — by meeting the people.

What are the limitations of your books — of your human beings on the reality which means that knowledge cannot be made and remade. I think I am touching one of your limitations.

There is also the question of consciousness, which is not something which belongs to the Latin American people. It's a human process... which means that consciousness cannot be made and remade. I think I am touching one of your limitations.

One mistake in understanding consciousness is to think as if consciousness created the objective reality and the truth of the objective reality it is only necessary to transform our consciousness... to change the heart of the thinker first, that when we are poor and hungry we can create a beautiful world. It's a terrible dream and an impossible one...

What does that mean for the education of children?

Ah yes. For children you must first of all respect their levels of development, from the psychological point of view. But you also have to give children the possibility to act on their own to create and to recreate. To use their hands, their bodies, their experiences, to know their own souls; to take their own experience, to encourage them to think, what is important is not to educate subjects, but for children to learn how to think.

When I was a professor in Brazil, I often was preoccupied with finishing the official teaching programme... My preoccupation was to discuss with the students what it means to ask a question... from the point of view of a theory of knowledge.

What questions should children be encouraged to ask?