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## **PRISON, EDUCATION AND THE MARKET.**

### **1. POVERTY AND SURVEILLANCE.**

« Proximity » poverty is more disturbing than world poverty. It disturbs anyone living right next to it as much as society as a whole (not to mention, of course, the individual who lives in it). It also disturbs the market than requires security.

Public opinion feels less at ease when faced with “proximity” poverty than with the poverty more distant – yet no less structural – induced by Third World debt, famine, destitution, AIDS. Public opinion – “threatened from all quarters” – calls for law and order.

The State, which has to manage at the same time this disturbing poverty, maintain the cohesion of the social fabric for the market whilst reassuring it, ends up entrusting the “proximity” police and the law with increasingly broader missions; the police forces becoming invariably the most numerous front-line protagonists.

New surveillance technologies, under the guise of efficiency and prevention, are thus massively resorted to with a view to permanently weaving the social fabric. As a result, pell-mell, vagrants, peace demonstrators in Genoa, lobby groups, environment activists, Human Rights advocates are being monitored and surrounded allegedly to claim back the public forum and to combat crime. Funds will be invested in police force training and new detection and surveillance technologies... rather than in education and prevention !

In this security-obsessed context, the privatisation of prisons, the privatisation of education in prison and the introduction of new technologies in prisons are, quite naturally, trends that do not worry public opinion.

### **2. FROM SOCIAL STATE TO PENAL STATE.**

Prisons are the easy way in for innovative technologies in the field of control, surveillance and repression. The conquest of the prison market may yet be only one step, some kind of test bed for an industrial sector that cannot be satisfied with the narrowness of this market and that desperately seeks new business opportunities in other spheres of activity of our society. Indeed, other groups that focus their energy on issues dealing with education and supervision will soon become this sector’s next targets: schools (in blighted areas), youth clubs, political associations, anti-globalisation associations, associative communities, etc.

The valuation of the technological model turns the prison into an antisocial area where inmates' rights are denied. Technological innovation must not be denied (how could it anyway ?) but praised for what it is really worth, i.e. an auxiliary and not a substitute for social relationship with inmates.

There is no denying the need for surveillance and security in prisons. However, educational staffs are convinced that educating inmates to become accountable, a long and painstaking task if ever there was one, is neither impossible nor incompatible in this environment.

Let's take an example :

It has been noticed that incidents relating to security in prison occurred when there were too few positive interactions between prison staff and inmates. Some have, as a result, introduced the so-called concept of ACTIVE SECURITY, defined as being "all the actions that contribute to developing positive professional relations between prison warders and inmates".

At first sight this concept may seem worthy of interest. Yet it is ambiguous. For sure, it makes provision for the dignity of individuals and their living environment but it also gives precedence to a security approach, putting on an equal footing the intervention of professionals and the introduction of new technologies, surveillance techniques, bio-metrical devices and other such control devices.

For sure the prison staff are present inside the premises but their presence is as much to keep an eye on the prison population as it is to see to the proper functioning of the surveillance equipment; thus reducing and modifying their interventions in the case of emergencies.

Human Rights activists and educators must be aware that the use of these new technologies, with the excuse of upholding law and order and thus reassuring public opinion, conceals issues which go well beyond prison institutions and concern society as a whole.

### **3) SOCIAL RELATIONS AND MARKET.**

(prison as an ... open door !)

Introducing technological innovations inside prisons first and foremost benefits a private sector eager to develop a new market. If its economic advantages cannot be denied, its social advantages have yet to be proven. Technology distils a security illusion which reassures public opinion whilst it seriously jeopardises fundamental liberties.

Traditionally, the correctional system puts the emphasis on sanction, seclusion and solitary confinement. There are some who believe that these confining and repressive practices should be maintained, indeed strengthened; and that is precisely what new technologies are only too willing to afford.

Others, by contrast, would like to foster social support, promote other forms of sanction, acknowledge other inmates' rights and encourage greater community involvement. Here too, there are some technologies only too willing to help..., a Trojan Horse within prison walls but also for fundamental liberties outside prison walls.

For the proponents of repression, privatising prisons is self-obvious:

- In the US, prison privatisation is an industrial sector which boasts a 35% increase per year.
- In the US, 5 firms share the running of 120 prison institutions, i.e. 120,000 inmates.
- New jobs are being created but new professions too: there are now “inmate placement consultants” : the aim is to organise the transfer of prisoners from overcrowded state-run prisons to private prisons which, in order to be profitable, have to be filled with inmates. When this happens, nobody seems to care about the consequences for the inmates’ families, about whether inmates can still be visited, about maintaining or rebuilding social links with them within the scope of their social rehabilitation. So, some inmates are transferred, e.g. last year, in the US, no fewer than 100,000 prisoners were shifted!

The prison management market is already bustling in Eastern Europe and one can easily imagine – without indulging in science fiction – that one day some international co-operation agreements will include the running of prisons alongside other “social” sectors. Prison privatisation (and quite naturally, education in prison) may well feature in the loan and renegotiation terms and conditions of the debt, such is the need of the neo-liberal market for peace and stability.

The private sector logic will aim to provide services at little cost: meals will be worked out to the strict minimum, health programmes will be no more than health programmes and there will be maximum security surveillance (the client and its public opinion’s main demand). Education will have to be both profitable and useful! It comes as no surprise that those countries where overall education is increasingly entrusted with the private sector have the most overcrowded prisons!

Prison privatisation will bring about a reduction in personnel costs. Money will be invested in electronic surveillance and new technologies (which both reassure public opinion); prison staff will be (even) less qualified since they will not have to keep an eye on inmates but instead keep a check on the equipment that monitors inmates!

Public opinion will believe that the education issue will be settled by simply providing inmates with CD-ROMs and other such tools for them to study by themselves.

Within the privatisation context, the issue of overcrowding is raised in a way altogether different: for the shareholders of private firms that run prisons, for the prison staff and for the new technology industry, there are never too many inmates, and this for two reasons: trouble-makers are locked up in prison, which is good for business and, outside, law and order prevails, which is also good for business.

We’ve come full circle: to do business there has to be as few hurdles as possible : less State intervention, fewer disturbing destitute individuals; to do business in prisons, in the new technology sector, prisons... have to be filled!

Poverty – delinquency – prison

And

Prisons – control – law and order!

Needless to say that the profit generated by firms than run prisons is unlikely to be reinvested in prevention schemes in blighted areas, in prevention campaigns against school dropping-out since... such schemes are incumbent upon the State, upon an increasingly absent State!

#### **4) THE EDUCATION IN PRISON CONTEXT.**

1) The preliminary question has to be raised once more: why do the less educated end up in prison ? This is an ambiguous, tricky question; also in the way it is worded.

For sure, illiterate individuals or poorly educated individuals are no more dangerous than others; for sure, these people are not delinquents by nature yet, and it's a fact, the proportion of semi-literate and illiterate individuals is greater in prison than in any other social group. This is, as such, one first argument that pleads in favour of a global education that takes into account the history of the learner. The second argument pleads quite logically for an education that is not first and foremost geared towards vocational training, re-conditioning or "re-education".

How come education, the joy of learning is meaningless to them, whether in the Third World or in industrialised countries?

2) State schools are increasingly starved of the means to give each pupil, each student the chance they deserve; "trash" schools are on the increase; private schools are thriving. Social exclusion is round the corner for a great many of us; delinquency follows suit. The reason is because education (for all) is failing – for lack of means and because it is no longer on top of the agenda – because people find themselves excluded, living in a "disturbing poverty". Prisons, in the meantime, are filling up.

3) Penal policies geared exclusively towards privatisation and mechanisation of tasks evade the whole debate as to the role society wants to see prisons fulfil. Is penal justice only meant to protect society by locking up dangerous or undesirable individuals or shouldn't it be involved in reintegrating delinquents into society?

4) It is most likely that when education will feature in the business contract passed between the State and the private sector, the book of specifications will specify which type of education is expected and the quantitative and "assessable" targets to reach: a functional, behaviourist education, an education that is geared towards the return to the job market: the return of a model worker, obedient, glad – as it happens – to be out. An education closely linked to the private firm, which manages the life of the inmate. The education requirements will boil down to professional requirements directly tailored to the needs of the market.

The model inmate – i.e. the model learner – the model worker will be he who will have clearly assimilated and understood the rules of the game and who, still having to pay back his moral debt to society, will help it operate as the "natural and self-evident" laws of the market have decided.

5) The private sector logic will make sure that scale economies will always be operated in the education sector (I didn't say the conditioning or training sector!) just as it has done with managing health, information, leisure and culture. Law and order will prevail; public opinion requires it and its relay – the client State – will be served!

Within such a context, what kind of joy of learning is emphasised when educating in prison?

## **WHAT IS EMPHASISED WHEN EDUCATING IN PRISON?**

### **FAILURES?**

Prison is everyone's failure: the inmate's failure of course who, for various reasons, failed to live some time with his kin, like his kin. He broke the law: he thus has to be punished.

It is also society's failure. The failure of a society which is increasingly structurally excluding the weakest, those who have no chance, those who are more troublesome. Those who go through school and that school education fails to keep; those who have never had access to education for no education is provided. At times there will be the so-called "second chance" education for some ... without wondering whether they were ever given a "first chance" education!

It is also the failure of governments individuals have been electing for centuries: faced with delinquency, deviation, and disobedience they – we – haven't been – are not – able to find other forms of sanction than internment.

### **ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE**

Education in prison is more and something else than re-education; it's more and something else than vocational training; it's more and something else than a means to ensure security within our society, ; it's more and something else than a rehabilitation process.

Education is a life-long process and prison is just one specific moment in the life of some individuals called inmates.

Inmates are not devoid of knowledge, of experience; they have a strong experience of life; they have learnt a lot of things. Yet, society has decided that this knowledge, this form of knowledge was not suitable. Therefore they have to learn something else, in a different way.

When discussing education in prison, there is not just one single education model, ... it is not like this that society is going to stir the willingness to learn among inmates, the eagerness to know, the irresistible attraction towards knowledge. Those who have failed at school can teach us too a few things about mainstream education.

Excellency and competition, however emphasised, are by no means the engines of success. At last we are beginning to realise this. These are models for the private sector, not for education.

Education in prison "locks up" and swells the ambiguities of any educational act: it provides a service and also aims to foster the demand; it aims to enable the expressing of oneself that is supposed to free oneself in a place where one is not free; it opens up universes which are all the more distant because they are inaccessible; it seeks to provide vocational training to individuals who, more than any others and faster than any others, will be denied the rare job opportunities available.

Despite all its ambiguities, education in prison remains a vital issue just like education for all other sectors of life. Indeed, there can be no (social) development without education, there can be no social and cultural programmes in prison without an education that enables the voicing of a demand, that enables to decode it and to gauge its dimensions and that, through the offers that are made, also mobilises governmental and non-governmental services within an often uneasy co-operation scope but very much like education in all the other sectors of social life.

### **EDUCATE: WHAT FOR?**

Education in prison is far from being an easy way leading to rehabilitation. Depending on its status in each individual prison, but also depending on the individual motivation of each inmate (dodge work, keep oneself busy, train oneself, see other people, etc.) education in prison provides each and everyone with an opportunity to decode each and everyone's individual reality, an opportunity to take stock of the situation, a new (or first) opportunity to learn, to discover the joy of learning, the opportunity to single out new fields of interest, new opportunities of exchange... or simply literacy opportunities for written exchanges with their family and friends. Yet all this presupposes that education in prison has to be something else and not exclusively mere vocational training or a more or less remote reminder of a previous educational experience which often left the inmate with few good memories.

To believe that the repetition of stereotyped actions, of stupid obedience are criteria for social integration, for a successful education, for an education that frees the individual, that arouses creativity, stirs the imagination, helps frame a consistent and dynamic personal project is both naive and dangerous. Those who believe that humiliating and breaking personalities to rebuild a new and properly conditioned individual in prison is an educational act ought to be countered.

### **EDUCATE: HOW?**

However, other dangers lie ahead of education in prison:

1.

The greatest danger would be to think up a common curriculum for education in prison... including inside the very prison institution where, for obvious reasons, individualised education is still not thinkable at this moment. This should not serve the excuse of resorting to simplistic solutions.

Just as a child is not similar to another, be it his brother or sister, an adult is not the replication of another, nor is a prisoner for that matter. Just as anywhere else, in prison education is first and foremost a social intervention, a social action: the social environment is vital, i.e. the inmate's environment, the prison environment, the history of each and everyone in prison. When being involved in education in prison, if one accepts to intervene at the social action level, one also has to accept to follow the process right up to its conclusion: one has to talk of social change and scrutinise how education in prison changes not only part of the inmate's destiny but also and above all social regulation, and the amplification of exclusion whatever its form.

2.

A second danger is definitely the privatisation of education in prison. The privatisation process of prisons has already begun so why not privatise education? Since labour in prison has already been privatised, why not be consistent and privatise training? Let us be cynical and see here opportunities for hefty profits: train future workers that have become obedient, willing more than anyone else to be hired and sometimes still under surveillance by legal authorities (you can be sure you won't see them leading strikes!). Enterprises stand to benefit for sure: training tailored to the needs of the market, even if this training has to remain rudimentary. If such a step is taken, the privatisation of education in prison will lose its prime function: success and performance criteria will be set. The best elements will be drawn from the batch: two classes of inmates will be drawn up: the elite and suitable inmates and the others, those who are definitely unsuitable.

And once more, education will become an engine for social exclusion, the breeder of inequalities instead of affording equal opportunities for all. Celebrations will be held where degrees are awarded to those who have answered the right questions correctly. And by celebrating, ... one will be celebrating nothing more than the prison institution, a certain form of education and one will above all seek to forget the social, economic and cultural environment to which the inmate is returning! How, in such circumstances, can one acknowledge the effort, the approach and the daily progress of each individual?

I believe education in prison must remain the exclusive competence of the State. Yes, the latter should resort to social and humanitarian organisations, NGOs, for I belong to those who believe that the presence of the Civil Society inside prison walls can remind or strengthen democratic requirements.

To combat these dangers, one has to:

### **1. Create literate environments**

The ideal is to create literate environments and prisons, obviously, are all but that. Prisons are no places where discovery, questions, all those approaches which underlie educational actions are given priority. On the contrary, prisons are designed to answer in a standardised and indistinct manner the need to confine inmates and satisfy the need for security felt by society.

### **2. Know the inmate, his history and his life environment**

When working with an inmate, one works with an inmate who has a history, an environment and one cannot underestimate the reality of a bleak future that awaits him even when he has followed a classical educational curriculum: once released, many inmates will return home, to their areas (or in another area, it doesn't matter!) and there, they will become prisoners of their areas, of that environment, of their economic, social, political, cultural conditions...

### **3. Involving the environment**

How then, in such conditions – i.e. in an environment that does not foster creativity – can one move somewhat forward in this direction, demarginalising education – when it is organised – so that it fits in a global vision in which warders, medical staff, the ENTIRE prison staff can contribute to encouraging and supporting reflection, raising issues, accompanying and respecting inmates ? Committing inmates to imprisonment far away from their natural environment and transferring them to make private prisons more profitable clearly goes against the concept of involving the environment.

What is required is the very contrary of these experiments where inmates are humiliated and, in exchange of a significant reduction of their time in prison, they are force-fed, like geese, with behaviourist reflexes and simplistic ideas. The human being is treated like a machine and pieced together in a way that satisfies a public opinion only too happy to see inmates chain-ganged alongside roads forced to do hard labour.

That is not education... at least not the education as defined in the Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasises on the dignity and respect of each individual.

### **4. Keeping a broad definition of education**

Education must not boil down to vocational training. However, as regards this vocational training, all avenues must be explored so that inmates may be allowed to follow courses outside prison walls. Clearly it won't always be easy but I do know that not every effort is being made to render this possible, where and whenever it is possible! One should never forget that an inmate has been sentenced to the loss of liberty. Nothing less. Nothing more either!

An inmate has not been sentenced to ignorance, to the denial of his other rights. Therefore, something else has to be organised in prisons! One must not forget that in most of the world, even schools are not accessible to all!

Paradoxically, prisons are at the same time places of solitary confinement and places of clustering for individuals who – pending conviction or who have been convicted – have not chosen each other. If indeed they all have a different individual history, it is public knowledge that most of them belong to the category of outcasts ... long before they are sent to prison.

### **CONCLUSION:**

It is no longer acceptable that individuals are still being excluded from education, even if indeed some of them have committed utterly blameworthy wrongdoings. Working in education is working in favour of more intelligence, more solidarity, and more peace. It is working so that prisons are not – no longer – ... schools of crime.

Educating and being an educator is to acknowledge and celebrate diversity, which expresses itself in our reference framework: the declaration of Human Rights. Only then will we be workers of dignity and creators of freedom.

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**SOURCES:**

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