

PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED, by Paulo Freire. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. *Sheed and Ward*, London, 1972. 186 pp. £2.50. *Penguin Books*, London, 1972. 153 pp. 40p.

Even though *conscientização*¹ has become an essential topic when discussing radical views of education, the man who first introduced the concept, and whose ideas have influenced Illich and other 'deschoolers', remains relatively unknown outside of Latin America. Paulo Freire is a Brazilian educator, in exile since the military take-over in 1964 because of his revolutionary method for teaching illiterates. At the present he is head of the Educational Division of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. His call for *conscientização* has made an impact not only on education, but has also contributed to the fight against oppression in Latin America.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire analyses the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: 'to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well', and in so doing restore the humanity of both. We find Freire drawing from the psychoanalytic theory of Fromm, from existentialists, from Marxist humanists, de Chardin, Mao, Che and Castro. What emerges in the end, if one is patient enough to follow Freire's rather intricate and unsystematic reasoning, is a view of man and of the world which is very much his own. His basic assumption is that man's ontological vocation (i.e. the essence of his vocation) is to be a Subject, that is, one who knows and acts, rather than an object, which is known and acted upon.

Freire emphasizes the impossibility of a neutral education; education for him is either for liberation or 'domestication'. A pedagogy for liberation 'must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity'. How are the oppressed to contribute to their own liberation? Freire recognizes that as long as they live in the duality in which *to be is to be like*, and *to be like is to be like the oppressor* this contribution is impossible (p. 33). Only a liberating education, based on dialogue, can help the oppressed overcome this

¹The term *conscientização* means an awakening of consciousness; it refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.

contradiction. Dialoguing with the people will result in praxis, i.e. 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it'.

But the implementation of a liberating education requires political power. How is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution? Freire attempts to answer this question in Chapter 4, where he analyses theories of cultural action which develop from antidialogical and dialogical matrices. He emphasizes that dialogue is essential to revolutionary action, and goes beyond Lukács' requirement of 'explaining to the masses their own action'. Freire sees the requirement not in terms of explaining to, but rather dialoguing with, the people about their actions, to achieve what Guevara called 'communism with the people'.

Freire is aware that some people will regard his emphasis on dialogue as subjectively idealistic. Others, especially holders of power, will simply reject his denunciation of oppression. It is important to remember, however, that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the result not only of thought and study, but of concrete experience with the oppressed in several Latin American countries. At times, social dissatisfaction has been the outcome of dialogues, which explains why governments look with alarm upon Freire's work. Freire himself acknowledges his method as revolutionary. As his friend João de Veiga Coutinho put it: 'at the heart of the thought of Paulo Freire there is an experience and a vivid perception of what he calls the "culture of silence" and at the core of his project the decision to subvert it'.

Paulo Freire presents us with a challenge; that through dialogue we can transform the world and shape the human future. He knows that perhaps only radicals will accept the challenge. He is certain, however, that 'Christians and Marxists, though they may disagree with me in part or in whole, will continue reading to the end'.

PATRICIA O'NEILL

REVOLUTIONARY PRIEST: The Complete Writings and Messages of Camilo Torres. Edited and introduced by John Gerassi. *Jonathan Cape*, 1971. 460 pp. £4.

Camilo Torres was a priest in Columbia who studied sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain and was subsequently appointed to

a lecturer's post at Bogota's National University where he was also chaplain. He has become a legend and source of inspiration throughout

the Latin-American continent because he identified himself with the sufferings and the revolutionary aspirations of the South American peoples in the most positive and dramatic way.

Torres, having established himself as a national political figure, was forced to leave the city by persecution; he joined up with the rural guerrilla and was killed only a few months later, in early 1966, during a clash with Government troops. He had served as a simple soldier in the Liberation Army and was only 37 years old when he died in the struggle. His action has had such a wide resonance largely because Camilo was a priest and, moreover, in joining the revolutionary movement he renounced neither his faith nor his priesthood but, in his own words, 'took off his cassock to become more truly a priest'. He had been driven to the conclusion that the only way to realize the Christian commandment to love the neighbour in the modern world was to become an active participant in revolutionary politics. Camilo saw that only a complete social transformation could offer hope and dignity, as well as material improvement, to the poor and exploited. He came to believe that the existing economic and political structures were such as to preclude any real reforms and that the hopes of liberal Christians in the self-transformation of the established order were vain.

It is well known that the Church in Latin America is extremely powerful and that it has long been used by the establishment as one of its principal bastions. Consequently this crack in that oppressive symbiosis is extremely significant for revolutionary hopes. Camilo's example has inspired many priests and emerging Christian revolutionary groups in most countries of the continent, who have won sympathy even from certain bishops, notably in Brazil. (A Pastoral Letter from Third World Bishops, written under the direction of Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, and signed by himself and six of his fellow Brazilian Bishops, amongst others, denouncing the evils of capitalist exploitation and calling for a social revolution, is reproduced as an appendix to this book.) Of course the revolutionary Christians are still only a minority, but they are the most dynamic section of the Church with the most challenging and positive application of their faith. And because of their 'dangerous' example as well as courageous revolutionary acts they are subject to persecution, torture and murder by the outraged and fearful authorities; but this persecution

only serves to further alienate the Church and radicalize more Christians.

John Gerassi traces the growing influence of Torres amongst his co-religionists in South America very thoroughly in his long and valuable introduction. The editor does, however, dwell unduly on the question of violence and seems to judge the genuineness of Christian revolutionaries according to their degree of commitment to revolutionary violence; his admiration for Torres appears to be based mainly on this criterion. Now it is certainly true that revolutionary success and the overcoming of institutional violence is most unlikely in the majority of South American countries (even Chile has not yet proved otherwise and is anyway a rather special case) without violence, but the key to real and lasting revolutionary achievement is the consolidation and development of a mass base, both in the countryside and in the cities; it is usually a subtle strategic and tactical question to decide how much violence should be used, on whom or what, at which time and in what way to ensure that it has the maximum positive effect: it is simply too crude to say 'the more the better'.

The problem of violence gives rise to urgent moral questions, too, and these cannot be dismissed as mere hang-ups from an outmoded and irrelevant Christian tradition. I mean by this not over-simplified and artificial generalized questions like 'is violence right or wrong?', but very concrete considerations that arise during the course of the struggle that are not separate from and outside those of strategic and tactical effectiveness raised in the last paragraph but are intimately related to them. Revolutionaries need always to ask themselves about any particular action or series of actions: what obstacles to the cause will be removed? Whose support will be won and which groups antagonized? How far will consciousness of the nature of oppression and the oppressor be increased? To what extent are the potential victims guilty men? How far will the innocent suffer, directly or indirectly? And many other related questions which call for complex judgments by those involved.

These questions are very akin to those raised in traditional Catholic moral thinking about the 'just war' (a notion much abused to justify the imperialistic conflicts of the Great Powers of Europe and even their nuclear arsenals) and their resolution calls very much for the virtue of prudence (in its older sense of practical

wisdom rather than the debased contemporary usage which limits it to mere self-centred caution), pre-eminent among the cardinal virtues and the mother and moulder of the other three virtues of justice, temperance and fortitude, all more obvious characteristics of the revolutionary. These insights can not only provide a bridge between Christians and the revolutionary movement but mean that Christians should make their own contribution in the struggle and, provided they recognize the tension and ambiguity often inherent in the relationship between revolutionary means and ends, can help to keep alive the crucial 'utopian' perspectives of the cause.

None of these reflections should be taken to imply that Christians should organize in a separated revolutionary movement or party; indeed, such a development would be clean contrary to all that Torres stood and fought for. Camilo's main concern was to develop a United Front of all revolutionary and progressive sectors. He stomped the country trying to persuade people to adhere to the Front and its programme (which Torres drafted) and to support the printing press and weekly paper he helped to create. It is interesting that the Camilista Movement in Dominica, which is far from being exclusively Christian, believes that the principle of the united front is Torres' most significant inspiration although, like Torres, they do not see any way forward through the rigged and fraudulent electoral process and consider violent conflict unavoidable. Most of the earlier chapters in the book

are made up of rather dull sociological treatises which would probably never have been published outside Columbia if it had not been for Torres' subsequent political development, although the topics he chooses and the way he treats them indicate the direction of Torres' concerns and are directly relevant to this development. But it is in his later addresses to trade unions, workers, the unemployed, peasants, students, political prisoners, women as well as Christians and many other groups that Torres' writing really comes alive and demonstrates that he was an essentially pastoral priest in a uniquely contemporary way, as he seeks to persuade them, with passionate conviction and skilful analysis, of the need for revolution and of their own indispensable role in the process.

Torres frequently manifests concern that his own name is identified too intimately with the movement as a whole and calls for more and more to participate so that his own contribution will be less prominent and be the more effective for being shared and carried forward by others. Eventually, of course, Camilo chose to sink himself into the National Liberation Army but his subsequent martyrdom has ensured that his name can never be forgotten; but as well—and of supreme importance for himself and all of us—the cause of the dispossessed which he espoused so clear-sightedly and courageously has received immeasurable strength and inspiration from his witness.

KEN FLEET

POLICE POWER AND BLACK PEOPLE, by Derek Humphry; with a commentary by Gus John. *Panther*. 239 pp. 40p.

I hope you will read this book. It is well-written and honest, which makes it unusual; it is compellingly readable, so you will risk staying up late at night to finish it, and it says illuminating and important things about justice in England. The only trouble is that some readers are going to find it extremely difficult to accept what it says as true, although the documentation in it is clear, matter-of-fact and verifiable. If one believes what this book says, one has to face the fact that a great many generally accepted assumptions about the country we live in are false.

The authors have collaborated before, to produce a Penguin Special called *Because they're Black*, in which detailed accounts of particular experiences of individuals show more vividly than do most of the books on 'race

relations' what it is like to be a black person in modern English society. *Police Power and Black People*, in spite of the impression some may gain from its title, is not concerned only with one specialized and limited part of black people's experiences, when some of them happen to be involved in crime. It brings out how important to the daily life and expectations of all black people is the function of the police as officialdom's front line. It is far from being an all-out attack on policemen; on the contrary, it describes with great vividness the problems they have to struggle with:

'The real dirty work is at the scene of fatal accidents, suicides and sudden deaths. A constable recalled in horror how he had to lift a dead man into the police car who then messed all over the seat. On Saturday nights