

Excerpt from recording of Ruth First speaking at the social science conference in Maputo, afternoon session of 13 August 1982

Clearly I must begin with some of the questions that have been asked us, only to say that they're very good questions, and that makes them very difficult to answer. I think they're questions of force and of value, and they haven't been fully answered here. The kinds of questions I'm referring to, for instance are the problem of how we teach students who have different histories of education, have achieved different standards of education, come from a widely different range of structures, the universities, ministries, mass organisations and so on.

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And I think that whereas we should probably admit that we started off rather romantically about this, saying it's so important to crash educational barriers and break this elitist monopoly, we shall do it with sheer will-power, in the course of teaching we have come to acknowledge that there are problems. I don't think we've resolved them yet. We do record, as I think Aquino said, that some of our best students are not students who've had the most education, that that's not the only criterion that involvement in work is very important, that political formation, political experience is extremely important, because understanding the relevance of questions, knowing that you've got to resolve a problem and you must find out how to do that. That in turn arms the student in order to learn.

Now I don't say we've resolved it. We struggle with it. Where we find that some students need more attention, we try to give more attention. It's an extremely exhausting system of teaching. I must also say about our teaching that we don't have any private classrooms, in the sense that you go into your class and you give your lecture. We organize our teaching in such a way that all the teachers plan the programme, all teachers approve the texts, and all the teachers listen to the lectures we give in turn. We have a division of labour on our teaching staff. Not all the members of the centre - because there are about twenty now - are teaching simultaneously in the classroom but if eight, for instance, are involved, have a course responsibility, and they are doing more teaching than research at that particular time, all eight teachers are present in the classroom and they hear the lecture. And they have discussed very often, if it is a difficult lecture, they have talked it over beforehand and then we break into what we call supervision groups, which are really work groups, and one or two teachers take, say, seven or eight students.

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And we work our way through texts. We want to know what they can't understand. They've had the texts beforehand. We are not working with texts. We are working. We have taught a course called 'Class and Struggle in Africa', and we have drawn on chapters and parts of chapters, of quite well known books and authors - perhaps we should have paid copyright for some of these it is the first time they will have appeared in Po. Maybe some of them don't ^{even} know it, because we haven't had time to send them ~~copies~~ off copies of the texts we've translated. The Tanzanian literature is rather well represented, because we do teach a comparative course on problems of politics and analysis of economies in Africa, and at the end of the course the students get the text ahead of the lectures. At the end they have what you might call a book, ^{It's} a set of notes. It is not a text book, because we're trying to say there is never one text, you have to confront theory in such a way that you must learn how to read a text, you must learn how to do textual analysis, but that doesn't mean that one text is going to give you all the answers.

We're very interested in provoking. If students don't ask questions then we are failing. We are really quite serious about our pedagogical method, and I wouldn't like you to think that in the interests of doing interesting things ^{that} ~~that~~ sound relevant and contemporary, that we are not really very preoccupied with principles of good pedagogy.

That's a problem that we struggle with all the time: how to teach students of different formation.

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Another problem which we have is how do you have genuine student participation in research? How do you organize research in such a way that you do not use students as cheap labour. In other words, we prepare the questionnaires, we prepare the conceptualization of the course, and then we have these people and they're all ready and they ~~box~~ pack their suitcases and they go into the countryside and they've just go to fill ^{so} many questionnaires every day. Well, of course, it's a great temptation to do the thinking for somebody who hasn't done it before, because you can think and work faster, and we are better ~~now~~ at ^{more} total involvement of students in the actual conceptualization of the project than we were in the beginning. We're struggling.

Of course, writing: people write at ^{an} uneven speed, some people write with less difficulty, some people struggle, but if you do a collective project like this and you try to do a division of labour through all the processes of the project, well at least you acknowledge the problem. And where you acknowledge the problem, you have to set out and find a solution. I think a good question asked is how do you contest bourgeois ideas, not just in an argumentative sense, but how do you actually train specialists to have capacity to resolve real problems - in other words, Marc's way of putting it, is generally we get boxed into our corner as the people who teach political economy and political economy is ~~the~~ a sort of narrative account, another alternative account of the world.

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also handle questions of pricing policy? Can we also analyse
as of production in a factory, or on a farm? Can we deal with
tics? Can we analyse a labour force? Can we ask the kinds of
ons and provide the answers ^{that} are actually involved in the
ing process? And of course we are trying not to be separate,
se we have a grand political economy theory and we want to teach
ut we believe that you've got to be good. You've got to pprove
you're good, and you're better at handling those technical
tions, and you are not marginalized ~~because your work is not good~~
use your work's not good. We all of us have to be able to excel
these ~~tasks~~ different tasks, and not see them as different. We
e to be able to master the technical apparatus and deal with the
otions. But of course we say, put the questions in the context
use they are options. There are different answers to different
otions - as the example of the jam factory showed.

I think very often radicals do get themselves easily marginalized
use in they fury of the debate, perhaps they don't have time -
~~perhaps~~ they don't realize the importance of actually achieving
s technical accomplishment and showing that we are better able
~~to answer~~ answer these problems. So we ask questions which are
ated to the planning process, and of course the planning process is
lated to options of policy and these questions should come together.
it's not the one or the other.

(end excerpt)