

Education, the new world order and national sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to outline some concerns about the future of New Zealand education and to situate these within a broader analysis of what has become known as the 'new world order'. In so doing, I will discuss some of the dangerous implications of the trend towards globalisation that is being welcomed and promoted in New Zealand by groups such as ACT and the Business Roundtable. This discussion will begin with an analysis of the main dimensions of the new world order and the implications of current trends for notions of nationalism and internationalism.

Introduction

In 1992, I presented a seminar in which I discussed some of the implications of separate Maori schooling initiatives for mainstream education in New Zealand. I advanced the view that these developments were exciting and positive not only for what they represented for Maori education, but also as an educational model for the rest of the country.

While the rest of the education sector was reeling from the restructuring that was being imposed upon it, Maori educationalists were making real progress towards addressing some long-standing concerns about the education of their people. Through kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Maori, a wide range of people within Maori society were becoming actively engaged in the education of Maori children. This was occurring at an administrative, teaching and support level, and also, crucially, it defined the content, orientation and process of Maori education. It represented a collective reassertion of Maori control over Maori education. As such, I argued, it stood in contrast to the steady undermining of collective control that had been occurring within mainstream education.

More than that, I believed that this approach contained two elements that could potentially be used to construct a solution to the impending crisis in mainstream education. The first of these relates to the origins of the initiatives. The kohanga reo movement was not set up as a recommendation of a government think-tank, nor did it begin in response to a 'crisis' that was manufactured by the Business Roundtable, like the 'crises' of accountability, efficiency and falling standards that, we were told, afflicted New Zealand schools. Rather, kohanga reo was a popular grass-roots initiative, set up out of exasperation with ineffectual governmental reforms and in a determined effort to re-establish Maori tino rangatiratanga over Maori education.

The other key aspect of the revolution in Maori education was that it was founded on a vision of the future for Maori people. Maori agreed that without a concerted effort to retain, nurture and develop what 150 years of assimilation had not destroyed of their language, culture and identity,

the future of their people was unthinkable depressing. And so they decided to establish an institutional mechanism to ensure that the knowledge, attitudes and philosophy that underpinned Maori culture would be systematically passed on from one generation to the next. They did not begin by asking "How much money have we got and what can we buy with it?", or "These are the constraints the world has set for us and how can we operate within them?" Instead, they asked themselves, "What is our most important task and how do we achieve it?"

These elements, I argued, could form the basis of a new approach to education and a new social vision for the rest of New Zealand as well. That is, there should be a collective, as opposed to a government or business-controlled, assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing education system, and the system should then be redesigned according to an agreed vision of what was most important for the future of the country. This seemed to be necessary, though not sufficient of course, if we were to avoid losing all democratic control of the New Zealand education system.

Soon after presenting some of these ideas, I heard the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (ACT) actively encouraging the very trends that I was seeking to resist, presenting kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Maori as examples of the types of educational initiatives that would flourish under their approach to education. With the support of high-profile Maori like Donna Awatere-Huata and Iritana Tawhahairangi, the head of the national Kohanga Reo Trust, ACT saw its education policy as a major attraction to Maori voters.

How is it that the same phenomena can be interpreted in such widely divergent ways? How does one assess the accuracy of these competing accounts? Although it has become quite unfashionable in many academic circles to seek to explain anything through the construction of meta-narratives, that is precisely what is required in order to answer such questions. Unless one analyses the accuracy of the broader world views within which these respective accounts situate themselves, it is not possible to establish a coherent account of their theoretical and political origins. Neither, more importantly, is it possible to assess the implications of these perspectives for the education of Maori and non-Maori or to organise an appropriate response.

This paper, then, is an attempt to outline some concerns about the future of New Zealand education and to situate these within a broader analysis of what has become known as the 'new world order'. In so doing, I will discuss some of the dangerous implications of the trend towards globalisation that is being welcomed and promoted in New Zealand by groups such as ACT and the Business Roundtable. This discussion will begin with an analysis of the main dimensions of the new world order and the implications of current trends for notions of nationalism and internationalism.

Nationalism, internationalism and the new world order

Nationalism has long been an ugly notion to socialists. It is a powerful concept that the ruling classes in capitalist countries have used with great effectiveness. It has been used to rally the support of working people and other marginalised groups against what is portrayed as a foreign enemy. People are implored to identify with the nation, 'their' nation, and rally behind it. Countless policies have been promoted over the years on the grounds that they promote the national interest. This approach has been used to justify everything from economic reforms to declarations of war.

For many years, as socialists have long recognised, competition between imperialist countries drove them to war with each other. A major imperative for such wars was the need to secure ever-cheaper supplies of labour and more abundant sources of raw materials. These could only be assured on the necessary scale by establishing and maintaining colonial empires. However, the earth contains only a finite supply of lands to be colonised. And as these lands became the property of one colonial power or another, would-be colonisers who arrived too late on the scene, and colonial powers that wanted to extend their empires, found themselves facing the prospect of not only conquering and subduing indigenous populations, but also fighting against the incumbent colonial authority.

As Steven (1990) has noted, the origin of the war imperative in such contexts lay in the *modus operandi* of classical colonialism. That is, colonies existed as the exclusive domain of a single colonial power. Each imperialist country had a monopoly on political and economic power in its own colonies. Colonies could not be shared.

In the decades following the second world war, all this changed. As nationalist movements throughout the colonies brought their peoples to independence, dozens of new nation states emerged which became collectively known as the Third World. Classical colonialism gave way to what has been termed neocolonialism, whereby formal political power resided within the Third World country, while economic structures continued to allow the exploitation of that country's supply of cheap labour and abundant resources.

An important difference between classical colonialism and neocolonialism was that, rather than being the exclusive preserve of a single colonising nation, Third World countries were open for exploitation by corporations from any number of countries. The effect of this was to remove a major factor that gave rise to inter-imperialist war. Imperialist countries had a shared interest in securing free and open access to the economic opportunities that were available to them all in the Third World. The price they had to pay for maintaining these open markets was to ensure the installation and maintenance of political and military elites, whose task it was to suppress any local dissent against the growing rate of economic exploitation that was taking place in virtually every Third World country.

Popular resistance was widespread and in many countries very strong. In some countries, for example Chile and Nicaragua, progressive movements succeeded in gaining state power. In other countries, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and El Salvador, strong revolutionary groups also appeared close to achieving this. The Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China offered support to many such movements, seeing in them, rightly or wrongly, opportunities to extend their own spheres of influence.

In recent years, however, nationally based resistance movements have been severely weakened and imperialism has evolved into a significantly more powerful force. Three factors can be identified as having contributed to this. First, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc has left potentially successful revolutionaries with nowhere to look to for support, should they achieve their objective and gain control of the state. Even Cuba, which staged the mother of all Third World revolutions and sustained it for over three decades, is facing an unprecedented and probably terminal crisis.

A second and related factor is the long-standing determination, notably on the part of the United States, to cripple any country that dares to break from the grasp of global imperialism. Witness the political, economic and military assault on Allende's Chile and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. And although one cannot compare Saddam Hussein's regime with the two examples above, the Iraqi experience of being economically ostracised has shown that even massive reserves of oil are no defence against an orchestrated campaign to impoverish a country.

The third element is debt. Economic policies based on the modernisation model of development which was promoted by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have generated massive levels of indebtedness in Third World countries as well as other small countries like New Zealand. This debt is steadily increasing with repayments being a major contributor to the net outflow of wealth from the Third World which is now topping US \$21 billion per annum. The debt trap is being transformed into a loss of political sovereignty, a process that Adebay Adedji, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, has described as the recolonisation of the Third World (ECEJ, 1990).

The IMF and the World Bank have been able to use the threat of down-grading a country's credit rating, and thereby increasing the cost of debt-servicing, to impose structural adjustment policies (SAPs) throughout the world. This restructuring involves privatising state assets and state-owned

enterprises, removing protectionist tariffs, taxes and subsidies, opening the economy to the unlimited free flow of foreign capital, cutting back on public services such as health care and education and strengthening the powers of the police and military in the name of law and order. In some instances, they have even placed representatives on the boards of directors of reserve banks (ECEJ, 1990).

The overall aim is to establish a global free-market which will allow transnational corporations free rein to move in and out of any country they please. This process is being facilitated by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GA TT) and the body established to enforce its provisions, the World Trade Organisation.

The combination of these factors - the use of the debt crisis to impose a global deregulated market place and the seeming impossibility of any alternative model of national development has left anti-imperialist movements, be they socialist or nationalist, in a state of disarray, division and disillusionment. It has been the undeclared backdrop to the much-vaunted 'peace accords' and transitions from military rule to civilian 'democracy' that have been witnessed around the world in recent years. Factions of national liberation movements that have accepted agreements that fall well short of their long-held ideals have been hailed as realistic pragmatists, while elements that have contested these compromises have been condemned as extremists.

One of the more intriguing aspects of this new world order is that its proponents are now preaching a brand of internationalism. "Nations face a very simple choice" according to Brierley Investments' Executive Director and Chairman of the Japan New Zealand Business Council, Andrew Meehan, "to accept the reality of globalisation or to attempt to fight against it. Those who accept globalisation will reap the benefits... Those that fight globalisation will forego such benefits and be increasingly marginalised, leading ultimately to a reduced level of national income" (Asia 2000 Foundation, 1995: 3).

There is a compelling and disempowering logic to this line of argument. When Roger Douglas, the Finance Minister in New Zealand's Fourth Labour Government and architect of one of the most rapid and radical economic restructuring programmes in the Western world, visited the University of Canterbury in 1994 to promote his new party's education policies, he did not begin by talking about education, or even about New Zealand. Instead, he presented his analysis of the global political economy, describing it - accurately - as being based on a hard, competitive, deregulated market place. New Zealand is now finally integrated into that global market, he continued, and one of the implications of this is that national governments have far less of a role than they used to have as private sector interests (read big business) assume greater responsibility for the provision of services such as health and education.

Globalising education

This view, it is argued, is reality, and education systems need to be reformed to reflect the new situation. They need to be oriented towards producing people with the skills to succeed in this new global environment. They need to be designed according to the way the world actually is and not according to the way woolly-headed liberals in the teaching profession would like it to be. Economic reality is the starting point, and education systems should be designed to match this reality.

Classical marxism has been subjected to considerable criticism, and with some justification, for proposing too deterministic a relationship between the economic base of a society and its superstructure. It is ironic, therefore, that at a time when fewer scholars are making use of marxist theory, ideologues of the right are increasingly using economic imperative as an argument to impose their programme of radical reform on education and other sectors of society.

The first significant attempt to introduce neoliberal ideology into New Zealand education was made in the Treasury's 1987 brief to the incoming government. The starting point of this philosophy, and the policy prescriptions that have flowed from it, was the following argument:

- Individuals invest in education in order to acquire skills and qualifications that they can use to generate income for themselves in the market place.
- The benefits of education accrue overwhelmingly to the individual who receives it, rather than to some notion of the greater public good.
- Education is essentially a commodity to be bought and sold like any other.

Once the commodified status of education has been established, arguments about the way in which education should be organised can be more forcefully advanced. As a commodity, it is argued, education should be distributed in a way that maximises consumer freedom (as expressed by their educational purchasing choices) and provides in the most efficient manner the skills and abilities that are needed by the New Zealand economy. It is then concluded that only a market-based approach to educational delivery can ensure that the education system fulfils the vital function of providing optimal congruence between the demands of individual educational consumers and the human capital requirements of the market.

It is not my intention to rehearse the many critiques that have been made of the key elements in this argument, such as the peculiar notion of individualised consumer sovereignty and the claims that education is simply another commodity and that it is principally a private and not a public good. Rather, I want to point out that we have not yet seen the full extent of the educational model that the new world order has in store for us.

Thus far, the expressed argument does not appear inconsistent with the existence of an education system which, while based on greater privatisation, would still operate according to a nationally designed plan covering, for example, curriculum prescriptions and assessment procedures. That is to say, while one may be outraged that the Education Forum (1995: 18-21) is contesting the requirements in the draft social studies curriculum statement for schools to "recognise and value the unique position of Maori in New Zealand society" and to "ensure the programme has overall and equitable gender balance", these are at least debates that can proceed and, one would hope, be won by the more progressive side.

In order to avoid this outcome, manoeuvres are already being made by which these types of debates are not won, lost or drawn but are rendered redundant. Such moves are made possible by the new world order and, in particular, the move towards global economic deregulation.

As has been shown, the global political economy is becoming internationalised to the point where nation states are becoming much less significant as units of economic organisation, and national governments are becoming increasingly backward as economic actors. Furthermore, if it is agreed that the market is the best mechanism for providing education, then it must also be acknowledged that that market is not national but global. The only thing likely to generate higher standards than open competition between all the educational providers in New Zealand, according to this logic, is open competition between all the educational providers in the world.

That this is indeed the shape of things to come in education is signalled in the provisions of the GATT, known as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). GATS is a mechanism for moving the drive for deregulation beyond the restructuring of the financial and productive base of national economies to include services such as transport, telecommunications and education. It prevents member countries from having policies that give a competitive advantage to local providers of services. Just as countries would agree not to impose protectionist measures that would restrict foreign competition in their manufacturing or agricultural sectors, so too under the GATS they would undertake to remove obstacles that might prevent foreign corporations from being able to invest and compete freely in the local market for the provision of services.

In education, measures deemed to be protectionist might include regulations about having a percentage of, or particular elements of, nationally defined content (say, modules about the Treaty of Waitangi), or recruitment policies that favoured a country's nationals or a particular group (say, strategies favouring the employment of Maori teachers). The New Zealand Government stopped short of fully embracing the GATS as it applies to education. It excluded state education, but offered to have the GATS cover the private provision of primary, secondary and tertiary education (MFAT, 1994: 17). However, the direction of change is clear, and it is a direction that is being welcomed and promoted in some quarters.

Roger Douglas and ACT are openly advocating the privatisation, or at least the corporatisation, of New Zealand's entire school system (Douglas, 1993: 193). Douglas argues that schools should be run like businesses, that this would encourage the spread of brand-name schools, and that "entrepreneurs and companies from overseas with an interest in education would seize the opportunity to start up in the business in New Zealand" (Douglas, 1993: 102). The increased competition this approach would generate, it is argued, would deliver greater efficiency, higher standards and more choice in the education available to New Zealanders in the same way that the privatisation and deregulation of aviation and telecommunications brought lower prices, better service and more choice in those areas. The privatisation of New Zealand education, together with the internationalisation this would bring, will be embraced by all but the most backward people, as a means of securing access to unprecedented heights of educational excellence and an extensive range of economic opportunities.

This line of argument holds more than a suggestion that the way of the future may be to abandon the task of designing an education system for the country in favour of an arrangement where every individual negotiates a separate educational relationship with the provider of her choosing. Information technology would make it possible for such a provider to operate almost entirely from outside the country. As Jane Kelsey (1994: 8) has noted:

Taken to its logical conclusion, GATS could mean a global education system run by transnational education corporations with branches in numerous countries, using uniform computerised teaching modules, based on one dominant value-structure and perspective, serviced by a small mobile staff who move freely between countries, which compete with each other for the education market in each country within which they operate.

Thus, in the name of individual consumer sovereignty, educational choice may come in practice to mean choosing between one or other global corporate provider. If the provision of education were restructured along these lines, individual consumers of education would be wooed not by a volunteer from a local school dropping a leaflet in their letterbox, but by the marketing machine of a major transnational corporation. As image came to dominate substance, it would not be beyond the bounds of possibility for Bill Gates and Saatchi and Saatchi to end up determining the content of the curriculum for large numbers of New Zealand students.

Resisting the irresistible

What strategies, then, might be effective in resisting the trends that have been identified? Should our energies be concentrated at the international, national or sub-national level?

Clearly, international trends can only be effectively resisted by an internationalist response. However, it is unrealistic under current circumstances to expect success in struggles waged at an international level. The capacity of imperialist forces to set workers and other marginalised people in competition with each other, both within countries and between them, has never been greater than at present. And a vast array of increasingly sophisticated international institutions, structures and forums are being constructed to facilitate this process. The establishment and rapid growth, both in size and influence, of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping is one such example.

Global initiatives of progressive forces like the campaigns around the GA TT, the fiftieth anniversary of the World Bank and People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21), though essential, appear quite ineffectual by comparison. Their relative weakness stems from the fact that such efforts at the international level can only be effective to the extent that they represent the fusion of people's movements that are active and organised in their respective national contexts.

With regard to the national context, people's movements throughout the world are increasingly facing the dilemma of how much energy to expend on seeking to win control over the national policy-making process. On one hand, it could be argued that this objective is not worth the effort since governments have been restricted to operating within such narrow parameters. One effect of a country reducing its economic autonomy at an international level is that it then becomes very costly for future administrations to chart an economic course that diverges significantly from the dominant free-market model. National economies with high levels of indebtedness, deregulation and foreign ownership are vulnerable to massive and rapid divestment. The impact of this retribution from the market, at least in the short and medium term, would be to inflict massive suffering on the poorest people in society. Add to this the absence of a proven viable economic alternative, and incoming governments with even the most progressive intentions risk an attack of impotence and paralysis followed by a reversion to right-wing policies.

On the other hand, it is also true that the globalisation that has occurred in recent years relied and continues to rely on the combined actions of national governments. It requires a concerted effort to establish and maintain a context in which the state's role is limited, besides military and law-enforcement functions, to ensuring a deregulated economy that is conducive to foreign investment and hostile to popular resistance. The very fact that the architects of the new world order are making such a concerted effort to disempower the nation state seems reason enough to resist this process. And governments do have some discretion about the extent to which, and the ways in which, they embrace the prescribed model. The Indian parliament's refusal to pass a bill designed to amend the country's 1970 Patent Act to meet the requirements of the TRIPs Agreement of the World Trade Organisation is, for example, a significant victory which, if it had been repeated in other countries, could have undermined the GA TT (Corso, 1995: 12).

However, victories at the national level can only be won as a result of popular pressure. In New Zealand, this sort of pressure has forced even right-wing parties to adopt anti-nuclear policies. But it was unable to prevent structural adjustment policies from being inflicted on the country, despite clear evidence that a sizeable majority of people opposed them. Significantly, it was Maori opposition, grounded on the rights of Maori under the Treaty of Waitangi and arguing that the Crown had no right to sell what it did not rightfully own, that presented the most formidable obstacle to this process (See Kelsey, 1990: ch. 5). By contrast, rather than perceiving these initiatives as a positive movement towards resolving injustices of the country's colonial past and resisting the further erosion of New Zealand's economic autonomy, too many non-Maori saw them as a grasping attempt by Maori to disenfranchise other New Zealanders of their heritage.

Acting in whose interests?

It is vital that New Zealand develops a clear and progressive sense of its own nationhood. Without it, the country will continue to be plagued by an unresolved colonial legacy that will mitigate against any effective resistance being mounted to the sophisticated brand of imperialism that is coming to dominate the world. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that ACT's policies, particularly in the area of education, have struck a chord with some Maori nationalists.

As part of a Maori membership drive, ACT has been publishing advertisements reading: "For 150 years our tupuna have sought empowerment. At last, ACT New Zealand, a political party with a mission to grant us our wish." Given that Maori were dealt a disproportionately heavy blow by the economic reforms of the last decade, it is unlikely that their principal architect will be able to attract

the allegiance of Maori in substantial numbers. However, it would be a mistake to underestimate the power of the logic that underlies ACT's appeal to Maori.

Pakeha middle-class opinion has been scornfully dismissive of the strategy of discrediting and dismantling free public education. Maori people, on the other hand, know that that system has failed them, and that it has done this so comprehensively that they have been forced to exit the system and reconstruct another with their own limited resources. Free tertiary education means little to a people that is overwhelmingly excluded from the system well before reaching that level. There is, therefore, an obvious appeal in an alternative, such as that proposed by ACT, that is structured in such a way that it gives Maori the space, as of right, to design and control the education of their children.

The point that should concern more progressive Maori and Pakeha is that the appealing packaging is being used to smuggle in some very undesirable baggage. The *quid pro qua* of ACT's policy allowing Maori to operate their own education system is that the same privilege is extended to any other group as well. This would officially sanction, and even facilitate, the backlash against 'political correctness' that is already emerging, and which is resulting in any hint of anti-racist or anti-sexist education being excluded from some schools. This is what makes ACT's 'pro-Maori' approach attractive to an anti-Maori constituency. It has the potential to allow those people to wash their hands of Maori concerns and to have their children attend schools with no Maori pupils and no Maori content. And they would be able to congratulate themselves for finally giving Maori people what they have long strived for.

ACT's approach does not represent a recognition of, or a commitment to, the right of Maori to regain tino rangatiratanga. It is part of a global trend towards the fragmentation of nations and communities, a process that is important to imperialism because these are the forms within which people can develop the capacity to organise strategies of resistance, and seek to build progressive alternatives to the new world order. If New Zealanders are to have any chance of defending themselves against the new imperialism, they need to begin by articulating a progressive vision of national sovereignty and using this to develop a collective sense of purpose. I believe that the establishment of kohanga reo represented for Maori people an important step towards this task. Hope for the future lies in the rest of New Zealand working out how to make a complementary step.

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