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DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A STUDY OF A CHRISTIAN DEVELOPMENT ACTION AGENCY

A thesis presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Philosophy
in Social Sciences at
Massey University

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1982

88880-28

ABSTRACT

Over the past twenty-five years the social teaching of both the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has produced critiques of the dominant capitalist and socialist theories of development. The teaching focuses on issues of justice and liberation, and on the poor and oppressed peoples of the world who must become the primary beneficiaries of development programmes.

In New Zealand the churches, which have a history of ecumenical cooperation, jointly established an agency to pursue development education and action in a manner consistent with this social teaching. The agency was established in the course of a conference which helped participants reflect on an exposure to situations of poverty in Auckland, and it has consistently followed this action-reflection methodology. Its founders committed it to a structural change approach to development rather than to concepts of incremental planned change.

The agency (The Ecumenical Secretariat on Development, ESOD) has employed the community organization techniques of Saul Alinsky, complemented by the conscientization methodology developed by Paulo Freire, as tools for the establishment of a socialist society.

These techniques, promoted amongst groups working for justice and liberation in New Zealand, provoked a demand for more disciplined analysis, as pieces of local action recognized the need to relate to a global perspective. In response, the agency developed a programme of structural analysis, "Education for Social Change", which is based on learnings from both historicist and structuralist marxist schools. Analysis in turn has revealed the limitations of the community organization approach unless it is linked to fundamental political processes.

Commitment to the need for structural change in society, and to the poor and oppressed as agents of change, inevitably brought the agency into conflict not just with the political establishment, but with elements within the churches.

PREFACE

This thesis was written to evaluate social action based on a particular philosophical approach, a Christian socialist understanding of development. It is as a consequence, an action thesis which describes an action project. It limits itself to discussing the background to the ideological and methodological development of the action agency in the process of testing its action, and to the issues which present themselves as problems to the Christian mind. It does not seriously examine other bases for development action, other than to suggest that the churches may in future discover the anarchist approach to development to be more in harmony with their social teaching.

The Ecumenical Secretariat on Development was from its inception committed to the action-reflection-action methodology, and it has insisted that its own development and effectiveness as an agency be monitored through this process. For this purpose it allowed its Executive Officer time for research and evaluation on a regular basis, and in the year it commenced work, a relationship was established with Massey University through which the agency contributed to the social work teaching programme and received assistance in evaluating its own work.

The thesis as an exercise has therefore emerged in the course of the agency's development. After three years' work, it was felt important to introduce empirical evidence of the level of acceptance of the agency's understanding of development and action in support of popular movements for change, amongst the clergy of the twelve supporting churches. It seemed more consistent with the agency's methodology however, to utilize a social survey not simply to elicit information from the clergy, but as itself a means of creating awareness about development issues. Thus, while the social survey incorporated in this thesis did not furnish sufficient returns for accurate information, it served the purpose of posing the question of appropriate development action to every priest and minister in the country.

The thesis falls into four major sections. The first of these, Chapters One and Two, outlines the major theories of development, and

the critiques of these which the churches at a global level have produced. The second section, Chapters Three and Four, discusses the personalities and processes in New Zealand which led to the establishment of the agency, the manner in which it clarified its understanding of the issues, and the importance of Alinsky's community organization techniques for its methodology. The third section, Chapter Five, shows how the social survey was used both to raise awareness of the agency's work and to elicit a response to it, and discusses the results of this approach. The final section, Chapters Six and Seven, discusses the use of structural analysis and Freire's conscientization methodology as educational and action tools, together with reflections on the Secretariat's learnings thus far.

The Ecumenical Secretariat on Development is a significant agency both as an ecumenical pioneer and in its espousal of radical action for change. Over recent years it has made an important contribution to international thinking, particularly by sharing its experiences and learnings through the commissions and consultations of the World Council of Churches. At its meeting in March 1982, the Secretariat affirmed once more that its energies should be directed only towards assisting in practical ways the struggles of the poor and oppressed in New Zealand. So despite criticism and quite formidable opposition, there is no turning back from the commitment to radical social change.

I would like to express appreciation to Mervyn Hancock for his guidance in supervising my work at Massey University, and to colleagues in the Secretariat's community development action-reflection group for their challenges to my perceptions. Thanks are due to Philip Richardson and Mark Gibson for their assistance with the national survey of clergy; to Michael Collins for his advice on computers; and to Auckland University's Computer Centre for assistance and access to a computer. I am also grateful to the Secretariat for allowing me the opportunity to present the thesis in this form, and for access to Minutes and Working Papers; to Elsie Blythe for undertaking the typing; and to Mark Mitchinson and Chris Anderton for their photocopying skills.

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