
Political Systems

How They Affect SDA Education

By Gene Hsu

Education is one of the principal agencies of political socialization. Through education citizens learn the "correct" attitudes and values relating to the state, the government, political leaders, roles of citizens in politics, and other political aims each nation attempts to achieve. In other words, the educational system molds the political thinking of future generations.

Because of the significant role of education in the process of political socialization, it is in turn strongly influenced and often controlled by the political system in which it functions.

The educational system molds the political thinking of future generations.

This is particularly true when a country is undergoing revolution and change, for the establishment of new political ideology often makes educational changes imperative. The new government must transform the educational system in order to bring it into

harmony with the newly established institutional and ideological framework.¹

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its great emphasis on educational work, has established over the years a world-wide network of education. In 1988 the church operated 4,301 elementary schools, 775 academies and secondary schools, 35 worker-training schools, and 83 colleges and universities.²

Many of these schools operate in countries that have undergone revolutions and social changes. In what ways and to what extent have the church's schools been affected by changing po-

litical systems? Can we establish some correlations between SDA educational work and the political systems in which its schools operate?

Definitions

Political system refers to the entire scope of political process within a society. This term fits our present discussion better than *government*, which carries a narrower legal and formal connotation. Political process takes place both within and outside of formal governmental structures. Government may be at the core of the political system, but does not form the entire system. *Nation* and *state*, on the other hand, are broad terms referring to not only political, but also economic, social, geographical, and physical entities of a given society. But when *nation* and *state* are used in a political sense, as in this article, they are synonymous to political system.

Before one can establish correlations between SDA educational work and the political systems in which the church's schools operate, it is necessary to classify the various political systems. This in itself may present a problem, for nations may be classified in different ways by using different criteria.

Competitive vs. Noncompetitive

Using as a criteria the degree of liberty provided to citizens and the extent of competition allowed for them to gain political power, political systems can be classified as competitive or noncompetitive. Since the SDA Church has not generally been active in the political process, political competitiveness or lack of it in a country does not significantly affect the church's work. For example, the church's educational work in some politically less-competitive South American nations is doing as well as, if not better than, in some politically more-competitive nations of Western Europe. The same can be said about Adventist educational work in the politically less-competitive Philippines, as compared with the more-competitive Japan.

However, policy-making in political systems with more freedom and a higher degree of political competition tends to respond more readily to the demands of the public. In such systems, therefore, the church, along with other civil and religious organizations, will find more opportunities to participate in governmental decision-making, including policies about private education, if it should so desire.

On the other hand, schools, especially college campuses, in politically

The SDA educational system, with its unique philosophy and objectives is likely to run into difficulties in a centralized educational structure that permits little flexibility in its educational policy.

less-competitive systems tend to be centers of political and social unrest where intellectuals vent their political

frustrations. If such persons become too vocal or influential, political control and suppression inevitably follow. Though SDA schools are not generally active in political affairs, they probably would not be exempt from the restlessness if it should spread widely. It would be even more unlikely that the government would spare the Adventist schools if it attacks higher education.

In competitive political systems, therefore, the SDA Church, including its educational institutions, should actively participate in political processes. This does not necessarily imply involvement in party politics and electioneering. Instead, the church should participate in the decisionmaking process relating to religious and educational issues in the country. However, in noncompetitive or less-competitive political systems or countries where campuses are known for political

unrest and agitation, the Adventist Church and its schools should avoid political involvement as much as possible. In these countries, risks are high, and few benefits can be expected.

Egalitarian vs. Nonegalitarian

Political systems can be classified as egalitarian or nonegalitarian according to national social and economic policies. In egalitarian systems, governments generally spend more money on education per capita, including government aid or subsidy to private schools. The SDA Church has traditionally taken the position of not accepting government aid if at all possible, especially not for financing school operational expenses, such as teacher salaries.

Philosophically, the policy of not accepting government aid harmonizes with the principle of separation of church and state. Practically, it also provides more freedom for the church to operate its schools according to unique SDA philosophy and objectives. Governments rarely provide funding for private schools without attaching some conditions or restrictions. Even when the aid creates no immediate impact, accepting government money inevitably increases the school's dependence on secular funding. Should the government withdraw its assistance, such schools may be unable to operate.

However, in some situations Adventist educational work may be adversely affected if the church does not accept government aid. For example, in some countries the church's unwillingness to accept proffered aid may cause government suspicion and subsequent tighter supervision with or without acceptance of the aid.

Second, many of the egalitarian systems have highly centralized political and educational structures to ensure effective implementation of their policies. As a result, the government allows little flexibility for churches to develop their own unique systems of education anyway.

Third, in some lands the SDA Church previously operated expensive Western-oriented schools attracting youth from the elite class of a particular society. Accordingly, many SDA schools may still be viewed as bastions of inequality and exclusivism. This would make them subject to criticism and ridicule in egalitarian systems.³ This is especially true if Adventist schools refuse government aid that is supposed to benefit students of all socioeconomic groups.

Therefore, while refusing government aid is generally a sound philo-

sophy, exceptions may have to be considered. Decisions must be based on (1) the types of aid, (2) the short-term and long-term dependence on government the aid creates, (3) the overall consequences of accepting or not accepting the aid.

Totalitarian vs. Nontotalitarian

Political systems can also be classified as totalitarian or nontotalitarian, based on the extent of government control over the citizens' lives and the degree of autonomy subgroups enjoy within the country. Totalitarian states apply a particular ideology, such as dialectical materialism, to all aspects of social and individual life—economic, cultural, and scientific.⁴ The state may demand a total monopoly over education. In this case, no private schools are allowed to exist (i.e., mainland China).

In some countries SDA educational work may be strongly affected by political ideologies such as nationalism and Marxism.

In countries where the state does not exercise total monopoly over education and culture, some private and religious schools may be permitted, but only under close supervision by the government.

Totalitarianism permits no real religious freedom. In both the Soviet and Chinese constitutions, freedom of religious worship is granted to all citizens. But at the same time freedom of antireligious propaganda is stipulated, and it clearly receives governmental preference. Whereas atheists are free to propagate their ideas, religious groups are free only to worship.⁵

Freedom to teach and propagate religion is not provided for citizens in these countries. Religious instruction is either forbidden, or permitted only during religious services, not in the classroom. Religion is definitely barred from government-recognized schools. Seminaries are not usually recognized as educational institutions.

SDA educational work is either nonexistent or minimal in totalitarian systems. When Adventist schools do exist in these nations, the church has no choice but to follow government rules

and regulations relating to their operation. At times the regulations conflict with the church's fundamental beliefs or its educational philosophy. When this occurs, the church may have to consider closing the schools. Fortunately, the number of totalitarian systems in the world is decreasing. Many are moving toward liberalization.

Centralized vs. Decentralized

This classification is based on two criteria: (1) the degree to which an educational system has a centrally administered selection procedure, and (2) the extent to which the education is standardized. These two criteria often go hand in hand. Since the focus here is the educational substructure, we can simplify the classification: centralized, in which the selection process is centrally administered and the educational program is standardized; and decentralized, in which the process is decentralized and the program is unstandardized.⁶

The centralized structure is characterized by the following features: A specialized department within the national civil service that deals specifically with educational affairs, the inclusion of the entire population in a nationally organized educational program, and the absence of regional and local variations in the implementation of the program.⁷

Obviously the SDA educational system, with its unique philosophy and objectives, is likely to run into difficulties in a centralized educational structure that permits little flexibility in its educational policy. Possible areas of difficulties include, for example, objectionable material in government-mandated textbooks, required military drills on high school and college campuses, government-run teacher certification programs, required school attendance on Sabbath, compulsory enrollment in government-recognized schools, and standardized curricula prohibiting or regulating religion courses.

Not every centralized structure has strict requirements in all these areas, but these types of governments tend to impose more such requirements than decentralized political systems. Once national policy is established, few exceptions are permitted.

In a decentralized educational structure, on the other hand, even when problems do occur, the church can sometimes manage to obtain concessions from regional or local authorities. For instance, secondary school examinations are generally held on the Sabbath in Nigeria, but two local states have made exceptions for

Sabbath keepers.⁸

In India, another decentralized system, unofficial cooperation by some states has also made it possible to avoid Sabbath-examination problems.⁹ Even though, in both cases, concessions were made to Sabbath-keeping students attending nonchurch schools, the general spirit of flexibility and understanding could also apply to SDA schools. Again, using India as an example, quite a few SDA schools are now accredited by a private association whose accreditation is nationally accepted. This association schedules examinations only five days a week, so our students do not face Sabbath problems.¹⁰

Varying Political Ideologies

In some countries SDA educational work may be strongly affected by political ideologies such as nationalism and Marxism. *Nationalism* can be defined as a sense of belonging to a nation based on a shared history and heritage, a common language and religion, shared customs and traditions, and the feeling of sharing a common destiny. Especially in newly independent countries, many of these common features do not exist, or are not deeply established. The educational system is usually selected to foster this likemindedness within the nation's population.¹¹

SDA education, with its international, indeed universal, outlook may be incompatible with this swelling tide of nationalism.

Nationalism in some countries also calls for education for nationals, by nationals, and of nationals. Some SDA educational systems in Africa, for example, have basically followed the American or European models, and their curricula thus reflected what people in first-world nations thought was good for Africa.

These schools, at best, have been planned, built, and staffed for African people but not by nor of African people.¹² It is therefore understandable that governments with strong nationalistic feelings would resent these schools. The schools, in turn, will have difficulty operating unless they begin to adapt their curriculum planning and course content to local settings.

Nations with ultranationalistic inclinations or Marxist leanings may further regard SDA schools, along with other schools established during the colonial period, as instruments of "colonial imperialism."¹³ Even though mission schools and colonial schools were different in many ways, people in the respective nations often believe

Requirements of meeting nationalistic challenges include nationalization of school staff, especially in administration, and financial self-supporting status.

that they shared far more commonalities than differences. Both were the means of accomplishing the interests of the colonizers, be they missionaries or colonial administrators. Neither group consulted with the nationals in determining the scope and content of schooling.

Even today, when most of the former Western colonies are independent, the legacies of colonialism are alleged to remain in the form of neocolonialism. According to this view, foreign control of education still exists, even if it is exerted more subtly. It is expressed in international inequities of wealth and power instead of direct political occupation. "Money determines the path of educational development, and that money comes in part from outside the nation. This has meant that school texts, books, curriculum, languages of instruction, and even schoolteachers are imported from abroad."¹⁴ The developing countries are just as dependent as before on the educational goods and services of foreigners, which makes it very difficult for these lands to depart from the educational structures of the past.¹⁵

The description above does depict some SDA schools in Asian and African countries that are funded by overseas money and manned by missionary teachers. How to shed the image of foreign-controlled schools while continuing to benefit from needed missionary service and funding is a challenge that these schools, and indeed, the entire church will have to meet.

Several measures can be and have been taken without compromising the basic philosophy and primary mission of Adventist schools. For example, there is no reason why our schools cannot accept nationally planned curriculum and even use nationally mandated course content. A few years ago the Far Eastern Division encouraged

the establishment of national curriculum study committees in various countries for that very purpose.

To fulfill the unique mission of Adventist schools, the church ought to supplement the national curriculum with religion courses, and integrate faith and learning in other subjects. This is not likely to be a major problem in most cases. What is most offensive to nationalistic governments is that some SDA schools in the past have refused to include in their curriculum government-required courses such as those relating to political ideologies.

Other requirements of meeting nationalistic challenges include nationalization of school staff, especially in administration, and financial self-supporting status. These are aims that a healthy, strong SDA educational system ought to strive for anyway.

Other Cultural Traditions

Other semipolitical or nonpolitical cultural traditions may have just as strong, if not a stronger impact, on the operation of SDA schools in many countries. For example, attitude toward church-state relations held by a government and its people will affect the church's educational work in that country. Religious tradition, if it embraces the whole nation, could become an important national feature—one that is perpetuated through education.¹⁶ Obviously a school system that teaches alien religion as one of its main objectives will find it difficult to succeed in such an environment.

Degree of Political Development

Political development refers to the aspects of the political system such as efficiency, participation, and stability. The efficiency of the political system, when translated into economic terms, can be evaluated by the country's Gross National Product, per capita income, and economic growth rate. The correlation between education and these indicators has been well established.

For SDA education, especially in developing countries, the impact of political stability is also evident. Sometimes the church has lost its entire educational system as a result of a revolution and/or change of government. Even if the new government does not subscribe to a completely different set of ideologies, schools may still find it necessary to make substantial adjustments to continue operation under the new system. Although revolutionary governments seldom view SDA schools with favor, long-established stable governments may

Continued on page 45

ing. Of these, action or service learning seems particularly appropriate for Adventist schools. The following is an example from a geography class in an Adventist secondary school. The teacher had been discussing the spatial inequalities that exist in our world. Their sympathies aroused, the year 9 students wanted to do something. The teacher wisely advised that they organize their own project. The students decided to hold a "Third World Banquet." They invited their parents, who paid \$5 for the privilege of eating a small bowl of cooked rice. From the proceeds, the class sponsored a child from a developing country.

The teacher reminded the class that they must have a continuing commitment, not just a short-term burst of enthusiasm. The students have continued the commitment to "their" child. Not to be outdone, the year 10 students also sponsored a child. The stimulus for this caring relationship came from a geography lesson in an Adventist classroom. It was an experience the students will not soon forget.

Conclusion

Too often we have divorced the cognitive and affective domains, failing to show how Christianity relates to living.¹⁰ Geography has the advantage of containing in its curriculum a number of areas specifically relating to values.

We do not have to contrive material to teach values in a separate class unrelated to the regular curriculum. The core values of geography are environmental responsibility and concern for humanity. These concepts are also central to Christianity, and an important part of the education program of our schools.

However, even more important than the curriculum is the role of the teacher. We as Adventist teachers need to be aware of how Christian values can be demonstrated in the dynamics of daily life. Only then will our students catch a greater vision of Christianity, for education "often consists of putting people in the way of values of which they have never dreamt."¹¹ □

Harwood Lockton is a Senior Lecturer in Geography at Avondale College, Coorang-bong, New South Wales, Australia.

REFERENCES

¹ See D. Massey and J. Allen, eds., *Geography Matters!* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

² P. M. Cowie, "Geography: A Value Laden Subject in Education," *Geographical Education*, 3:2 (June 1978), pp. 136f.

³ S. B. Codrington, "Values Formation and Geography," *Geographical Bulletin*, 15:2 (April 1983), p. 1.

⁴ T. Crawford, quoted in J. Huckle, "Geography and Values Education," in R. Walford, ed., *Signposts for Geography Teachers* (Harlow, England: Longman, 1981), p. 148.

⁵ K. Blanchford, "Morals and Values in Geographic Education: Toward a Metaphysic of the Environment," *Geographical Education*, 3:3 (June 1979), p. 434.

⁶ R. L. Morrill, "The Responsibility of Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 74:1 (March 1948), p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 269.

⁹ These and several other examples are cited by S. Goodenough, *Values, Relevance, and Ideology in Third World Geography* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Open University Press, 1977), p. 20ff.

¹⁰ See Miroslav M. Kis, "Teaching Ethics," *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 49:2 (December 1986-January 1987), p. 6ff for a recent Adventist statement on the importance of teaching ethics in Adventist education.

¹¹ P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters, quoted in P. M. Cowie, "Geography a Value-Laden Subject in Education," *Geographical Education*, 3:3 (June 1978), p. 144.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND SDA EDUCATION

Continued from page 30

not always look positively upon SDA schools either.

The level of political participation has not affected SDA educational work significantly. However, in countries that have a higher level of citizen participation in the political process, civil and religious groups alike are allowed more input in governmental decision making. This can result in legislative or administrative decisions favorable to these groups. A determining factor, of course, is whether the church plays an active, ethical part in the political process.

Conclusions

There are some interesting correlations between SDA educational work and the political systems in which it operates. For example, we may conclude that it is easier to operate SDA schools and maintain their unique philosophy and objectives in politically more competitive, nontotalitarian states, with decentralized political educational structures, liberal and open attitudes toward church-state relationships, high levels of political performances, relatively stable government, without Marxist ideological

inclinations or dogmatic state religion.

Generalizations as such, however, cannot be accepted wholesale, for political system is a complex concept. It should be noted in classifying political systems, for example, that most countries do not belong to a pure model. They are usually a mixture of several different types.

The church must resist the temptation of trying to establish simple correlations between certain political models. For instance, it may very well be that totalitarian systems are politically noncompetitive, but not all noncompetitive systems are totalitarian. Competitive systems can be either egalitarian or nonegalitarian, as can noncompetitive systems.¹⁷

Equally complex is the problem of evaluating the success of the church's educational system. For example, we find tension between quantity and quality, especially in terms of maintaining a high degree of spirituality versus large student enrollment. This is often a difficult conflict to resolve.

Bigger is not always better, and quantity does not necessarily produce quality. But since quality is often difficult to measure, emphasis is inevitably placed upon quantity—which is measurable. Furthermore, only when some minimal quantity is reached in areas such as number of qualified faculty and student enrollment, can one legitimately consider the issue of quality.

Political elements are by no means the determining factors in the success of SDA educational work, however the concept is defined. Other national factors such as religious tradition, and church issues such as the quality and quantity of church membership may have equal, if not greater importance. But as governments continue to expand their regulative, extractive, and distributive authorities, even to the point of intruding into areas of religious liberty in countries with liberal democratic traditions like the United States,¹⁸ the impact of political systems upon SDA educational work will inevitably increase, and thus deserve the church's attention and study. □

Dr. Gene Hsu is President of the South China Island Union Mission of SDA, Hong Kong.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, ed., *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 551.

² *World Report 1988* (Silver Spring, Md.: Department of Education, General Conference of SDA, 1989).