



# ORGANISING STUDENTS

by Silumko Radebe



Photo: Peter Magubane, 16 June 1976

**struggle continues**  
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## How youth have been characterised in the past years

The South African apartheid regime was surprised by the students who were brave to fight bullets with stones and set up the momentum for people to overthrow apartheid. In 1976 the uprising astonished the world and demanded that South Africa had to be a democratic state for peace and prosperity. Young people showed the world that they were not going to sit back and let injustices go without resistance. The events of 1976 re-enforced everyone's action and were instrumental in the way the struggle was to be waged. It is no exaggeration when one says that South Africa's young people liberated their country.

## June 16 2006, Today's youth

There has been a general feeling in the past 12 years in the country that youth have got new character and apathetic behaviour. The young generation has lost interest in politics and this loss of interest is reflected in the weakness of the youth and student movements generally. Youth ignorance and apathy is very disturbing and the youth today is highly materialistic and apolitical. They now concentrate on expensive clothes and jewellery. They are said to be carefree because they claim that they are free to do anything, even not voting. They think that "the transformation is complete" and democracy is an end to all. The feared foot soldiers of the revolution have been put in their place and moulded to fit the new, consumption-driven capitalist South Africa. The

media has also contributed to further marginalising youth with the nature of the movies and programmes they show.

## Every generation has its own revolution

The technological revolution that has swept the world, especially in information, communications, and transportation has dealt a blow to this present generation and a gain for the multinational corporations. This phenomenon has managed to separate or demobilise young people from meeting with other youth to exchange ideas or debate issues. They use technology as consumers and not to advance their common goal or identity but rather as individuals. It is clear with the government's drive to persuade students to do technology-based subjects like mathematics and science that this generation is degrading.

## Students

What is happening in communities and in the global village has been absorbed by the youth & learners. They are encouraged to conform to conventions that exist within in their given space or life without being critical. At school, learners participate within Learners Representative Committees that are democratically elected by the students but are controlled and accountable to educators, not the learners. This is a result of pressure exerted by the School

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Governing Body and educators to ensure the collection of unpaid school fees to raise extra funds for other learning material. So other learners' interests are compromised by the LRC structure and it has set learners' leadership against learners. Poor learners are often not represented in some of the structures at school. At the Annual General Meeting of the SGB when parents decide on the amount to charge for school fees, that decision is likely to be dominated by educators who have an eye on the budget that the school needs to cover its running or operational costs. Poor parents then are forced to agree to an amount that they can barely afford and other schooling costs like transport & food also add to their misery. All this demoralises some of the learners to the point that they feel it is their individual problem at school and they don't stand up for their rights.

**Challenges in building a new student movement**

The South African Students Congress's (SASCO) approach to building a Popular Youth Alliance attempts to reconcile youth radicalism with the organisations of tired struggle now in government.\*

"We must ensure that we put in the forefront firmly those forms of struggle and organisation which are best suited to the conditions prevailing during the flow and ebb of the movement at a given moment, and which therefore can facilitate and ensure the bringing of the masses to the revolutionary positions... One of the lessons that we have definitely learned in the struggle against apartheid is that the relative unity of all struggles working towards a common goal must be pursued and this is what ultimately ensured that our movement landed at the World Trade Centre negotiations and all that followed is now history... The ANC-led movement is now in government! It is the task of all progressive students today to appreciate the task of building a strong ANC, SACP and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South African National Civic Organisation and other MDM formations through all contributions to their programs... It is important that SASCO structures link up with those formations of the MDM that are roleplayers specifically in the sector. But also our engagement in other social campaigns that take forward the program of the NDR are critical as we highlighted earlier,

given the inherent contradictions in a state that is in transition... The critical question in this regard is to ensure that all our programs do not undermine the hegemony of the NDR as a revolutionary program and the capacity to pursue such to its logical conclusion. But the pressure to which the state and government is subjected from the forces of reaction must be counterbalanced by pressure from below."

**Who is the enemy if we follow this approach of SASCO?**

The challenge facing new student movements is to make sure learners understand who the enemy they are fighting against is so that they can direct their anger towards the system. Their anger is channelled in all the wrong directions, towards parents who are unemployed or can't afford to pay for their education, relatives who don't want to assist, student movements who are failing to solve their problems but are preoccupied in contesting power, other parents who can afford to pay for their children, and towards school educators. The government's policies and the Department of Education's implementation of these policies are excluded from the wrath of the youth and then it becomes an individual problem. Students are demoralised by the failure of the present education system and it takes a student movement that understands the impact of privatisation on the learners to motivate & unite learners.

The new movements that are emerging are not the same old traditional movements but have different forms of mobilising and interaction. Youth no longer trust politicians & political student organisations because older generations control these. They form new organisations that give them the space to voice their concerns without any fear of being undermined and this allows them to learn who the enemy is so that they can have the confidence to challenge the powers that may be in their way. So at the moment all the youth & learner movements are weak and it is a period where youth are finding their own identity in building their own movements outside the traditional student organisations that are aligned to the ruling class that is creating conditions for capitalists to continue to create inequalities in society.

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\* Taken from SASCO's *Strategic Perspective on Transformation (SPOT) A Political Guide to Action on the Strategies and Tactics of SASCO*

# The State of Education in the East-Rand

by Lekanyane Masetle (East Rand)

This year marks 30 years since the Soweto uprising, a symbol of student struggles for better quality education. The year 2006 also marks 12 years of African National Congress governance of the country. The ANC was voted into power by the majority of the South African people including those who believed in the dream of quality and free education.

This government has been massively mandated to transform education from the uneven development of the past regime to a free quality education as enshrined in the Freedom Charter. Since the euphoria and ecstasy of 1994, the policy direction of South African education and its practice is reflecting a gloomy picture and frustrations.

The state of education in the East Rand epitomises the snap of disappointment. These crises are not exclusive to our region; they find affinity in other parts of our country. The problems range from the exclusion of learners due to age or school fees, from not having a uniform to feeding schemes. The criminal proceedings against 14 educators from Katlehong High School for allegedly "intimidating" the Principal is symptomatic of the dead culture of education and embedded Teacher-versus-Principal conflicts in education. The eviction of parents to areas such as Buhle Park near Wadeville or Glovadene near a freeway in Daveyton, where transport is expensive and sometimes inaccessible, has not helped the situation for the community and the learners.

In many schools Grade 11 and 12 learners complain about the fact that they have to rely upon their fellow learners for learning and understanding subjects. There are not enough properly trained teachers in our schools particularly in subjects such as maths. The new education system in the schools has been challenging our educators because they have not been trained to adapt to post-apartheid educational challenges. These educators were trained under the apartheid era. They have not been introduced to new and progressive education methods. Students have called for the retraining of educators.



**"The struggle for free, quality public education continues"** photo: Education Rights Project

There are no sport facilities in our schools. Government has slashed budgets for these facilities. In schools where facilities are available there are no teachers who are interested and equipped to train learners in sports such as volleyball and netball. This leaves students with no option but to teach each other.

The libraries in schools and townships on the East Rand are not information centres. Newspapers that have reached a "sell-by date" are delivered to township schools. The lack of information in the libraries makes it difficult for students to improve their academic work.

There is a lot of talk about the fact that the pass rate for matriculants is improving. In reality, many of those who pass matriculation examinations are not absorbed by the labour market and the universities. Those who pass matric join the reserve army of the unemployed.

The problem in our schools is also perpetuated by the timid school governing bodies. The school governing bodies (SGB) were hailed as a democratic model for transforming schools. The SGB, a school management body comprised of parents, educators and learners, has a mandate of developing school policies and running the schools in line with the South African Schools Act. We call upon parents, students and teachers to struggle for SGBs that can defend the right to learn as enshrined in the constitution and other pieces of legislation.



# The State of education in the Vaal and the role of the Learners Representative Forum (LRF)

by Tshepo Thekiso of the LRF in the Vaal Region

The state of education remains a challenge in our country because of government's failure to provide free and quality education in the country. The government is unable to live up to the principles of the Freedom Charter i.e. opening the doors and learning. Just like many other places in the country, the Vaal working class schools are facing an education crisis. The schools in the Vaal area face infrastructure problems, shortages of equipment and teachers, non-payment of user fees and a lack of political direction from school governing bodies (SGBs).

## Equipment and infrastructure

Even though new schools were built, most of the schools in the Vaal area were built post apartheid. But the infrastructure is inadequate for proper learning. Subjects such as science cannot be learnt without the laboratories and the necessary equipment to demonstrate lessons.

Unfortunately the national and provincial departments of education are failing to solve the infrastructural problems and equipment in our schools. Government has been unable to close the infrastructure and equipment gap between townships and former Model C schools. Former Model C schools are able to provide better education as compared to township schools.

The schools in the Vaal area such as Kgokare Secondary School do not have laboratories. This impacts negatively on learners who have to do science practicals. In addition, this makes it difficult for them to get sufficiently high marks to enable their admission to an institution of higher learning.

Besides problem of equipment, classes are still overcrowded. In some cases classes are comprised of forty learners. The overcrowding of classes creates a problem for teachers because they are unable to give individual attention to learners. The shortage of infrastructure and equipment makes it worse as teachers are unable to do demonstrations and experiments.

Former Model C schools such as Riverside High School have all the equipment needed for both learning and teaching. The learners and teachers from the Model C have a competitive advantage because they do not face problems of overcrowding of classes and shortages of equipment.

Under apartheid there was also a shortage of textbooks. This problem is still there in the Vaal. What makes it worse is the fact that this problem continues to exist even under a democratically elected government. Learners have to share textbooks. The sharing of textbooks makes it difficult for learners to meet assignment deadlines.

## The SGB

There is still a problem with school governing bodies (SGBs) because the principals dominate them. The SGBs do not know their functions. This results in decisions being unilaterally taken by principals and the weakness of parent and student organisations leads to a miscarriage of democracy in schools. The involvement of parents and learners has become so slim that principals forget that the management of the school is a tripartite cooperation between the parents, learners and teachers. Most of the school governing bodies are not devising strategies to struggle for more resources, infrastructure and equipment.

## The rise and fall of the student movement

The student formations in the Vaal have been weakened. This explains the lack of student struggles in the Vaal area. The rise of the student movement in the Vaal was motivated by the 1976 uprisings in Soweto. Subsequent to the Soweto uprisings there was the rise of branches of student formations like the South African Student Movement (SASM), the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). Students were involved in many battles which shook the foundations of apartheid.

Today, youth and students are no longer active in the Vaal area. There are no longer strong Student Representative Councils. Learners are now represented through representative councils of learners (RCLs). Many LRCs are

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puppet structures and have frequently become the darlings of school principals.

### **The relations between Learners Representative Forum and Anti-Privatisation Forum**

The Learners Representative Forum (LRF) is one of the student formations that seeks to organise students in the Vaal area. Formed in 2003, the LRF realised that there was a need to

form a new student movement in the Vaal area. After its formation, the LRF affiliated to the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), a social movement opposing any form of privatisation and neoliberalism. The LRF feels that the APF is its home because the APF is committed to fighting against the privatisation of education, water, electricity and health. The LRF also believes that learners must also build alliances with community-based organisations so that the alliance between students and parents can be revived. We need to fight collectively.

## **Report of the June 16 Rally of the APF**

by Phineas Malapela

On 16 June 2006, exactly thirty years the uprisings of June 16 1976, about 700 community members and students gathered to remember students' struggles of 1976 at the Lesedi Lathuto Primary School, Zone 17, Sebokeng. The APF-organised event was meant to commemorate students' struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as to discuss challenges facing students and the youth of today.

### **Process leading to the commemoration**

As part of an attempt at building the APF and students formations in the Vaal, the coordinating committee mandated the education committee to organise a popular education workshop to plan the June 16 event. All affiliates were requested to send their delegates to the workshop which was scheduled for 3 June 2006.

The workshop was aimed at systematically learning about organising events such as workshops, seminars and meetings. It was important because it discussed various issues concerning organising events such as determining the date, time, venue, target audience and topics of an event. In addition, the theory of organising events that was discussed at the workshop was applied to the organising of the coming June 16 event. The content of June 16 and the message of the APF for that day were also discussed in detail.

### **The June 16 event and its assessment**

The general aims and objectives of the event were met because comrades were able to listen and engage with speakers who spoke about the significance of the Soweto uprisings. There

were also discussions and speeches on challenges facing the youth and students today.

An assessment workshop was held subsequent to the event. While it was agreed that the general aims were met by the event, some comrades argued that the event did not attract the youth in a significant manner. They argued that the organisation did not avail adequate resources for the event. But this point of view was disputed by a number of comrades who felt that the organisation did make provision for the success of the event. Some affiliates in the Vaal argued that there was no consultation but this was disputed by the fact that the coordinating committee, which is constituted by all affiliates, agreed on a democratic planning process. This debate raised a question about the role of affiliates and APF regions in APF events. The lesson is that affiliates and regions need to work closer with the office and office bearers.



# The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) Commemorates Thirty Years of Student Struggles since 16 June 1976

## Remembering June 16 1976

The Soweto uprising started on June 16, 1976 when students marched through the streets of Soweto demanding the scrapping of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. The uprising spread to other parts of the country. Students in places such as Cape Town, Klerkorp, Bothaville and elsewhere engaged in militant action, which challenged apartheid education and apartheid as a political system.

The events of 1976 were also important in boosting the morale of all those who were struggling against apartheid and capitalism. It is these events and struggles that produced a cadre that staffed the liberation movement in exile, and the trade union and civic movements that were vital in the struggle for democracy.

## The struggle for free education continued in the 1980s

The banning of student organisations - SASO and SASM - in 1977, the killing of activists and detentions did not succeed in destroying the spirit of resistance among students for long. In 1980 the committee of 81, a committee of representatives from schools in the area, led a Western Cape-wide school boycott which also spread to other parts of the country. In the mid-1980s, student struggles targeted the high failure rate in matric, corporal punishment, age restriction and the shortage of teachers and equipment. Students and the youth were also important in building strong local structures which rendered apartheid and capitalism ungovernable.

## Thirty years on, the ANC government betrays the traditions of 1976

Today the contribution of students to the struggle for democracy and student struggles of 1976 and 1980s have been undermined by the austerity measures of the ANC government. The ANC Government's adoption of the Growth Economic and Redistribution (GEAR) policy in 1996 did not improve the situation in education because the policy put an emphasis on containing expenditure in education and called for an increased private sector involvement in public education. Instead of raising adequate revenue by taxing capitalists and increasing expenditure on education in such a way that redresses the imbalances in education and deals with the problems highlighted in the School Register of Needs Survey of 2001, government has tended

to implement policies that favour big business.

In the mean time, education continues to be in crisis. Government argues that primary and secondary education is free but the reality is that working class parents, many of whom are unemployed, are forced to pay user-fees in schools. The same parents are also compelled to buy uniform for their children. There is always a shortage of teachers, textbooks and equipment in schools. There is also prevalence of HIV/AIDS in schools among students and sexual harassment of female students continues. Higher education is becoming more and more inaccessible to students from working class communities. State funding of higher education as a proportion of GDP decreased from 0.79% in 1998 to 0.7% in 2004. As a proportion of the GDP state spending on higher education did not even begin to tackle the problems of access to higher education for working class students.

## The APF demands free and quality education

The APF as a home of working class struggle recognises that working class students have been taking up struggles for free education in schools and tertiary education. Of course, these struggles cannot be compared to struggles of 1976 and the 1980s but are important in sowing the seed for rebuilding and reviving a combative student movement.

The APF has affiliates that are struggling for free and quality education. Students formations under the APF banner are demanding the following:

1. Free, compulsory and quality schools and tertiary education
2. Employment and training of teachers
3. The provision of textbooks, learning and teaching aids and equipment in schools
4. Access to quality libraries and internet centre
5. The provision of quality feeding schemes in schools
6. An end to age restriction in schools
7. Creation of quality jobs for the out-of-school-youth
8. An end to sexual harassment of female students
9. The provision of anti-retroviral drugs for HIV positive students and teachers
10. The provision of water and electricity in schools and working class communities.



# A short report of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the APF

by Noxolo Dlamini and Mpho Maduna (the APF Secretariat)

The Anti-Privatisation Forum held its second AGM from 24 to 26 March in Johannesburg. Attended by representatives from 22 affiliates of the APF, other social movements and progressive Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the AGM was a resounding success.

The aim of the AGM had three major tasks: namely, the discussion of the political orientation of the APF, formulating practical proposals on organisational questions and the election of new office bearers.

The political orientation of the APF was an important question debated at the AGM. Some comrades argued for an orientation to spontaneous uprisings in the townships such as Khutsong. Others argued for an orientation to COSATU and its unions. At the end there was an agreement that the APF should orientate to struggles in communities and unions.

There was also a discussion about the fact that many comrades in the APF are unemployed and that undermines their ability to sustain themselves as activists. Some comrades saw this as an important question and suggested that a project coordinator position be created in the office bearers. The meeting agreed with this proposal and added that the position needs to include campaigns. There was also an agreement that politics of projects be discussed in workshops. In other words, the APF has to develop an approach which uses projects and cooperatives as a tool for building solidarity



**Cde Johannes Malindi from the Samancor Retrenched Workers Crisis Committee addressing the AGM**

and sustaining unemployed comrades.

The AGM did not exhaust all the issues on the agenda. The constitutional amendments, organisational questions and affiliation were deferred to the next coordinating committee.

The AGM elected the following comrades as office bearers:

Chairperson:	Bricks Mokolo
Deputy Chairperson:	John Appolis
Secretary:	Noxolo Dlamini
Deputy Secretary:	Mpho Maduna
Treasurer:	Dale McKinley
Projects and Campaigns	
Co-ordinator:	Phineas Malapela

# The Coordinating Committee Adopts a Six-Month Plan of Action

by Mondli Hlatshwayo

On 27 - 28 May 2006, the affiliates of the APF met to discuss the six-month (June 2006 to December 2006) programme of action. Elected at the Annual General Meeting which was held in March earlier this year, the office bearers had a mammoth task of tabling a plan of action for the organisation.

Comrade John Appolis, the deputy chairperson of the APF, provided the meeting with a background to the programme of action. He argued that the programme is aimed at building the APF as an organisation that defends the interests of the working class in the townships. The plan, according to comrade Appolis, is to use the programme of action for building the APF subcommittees and affiliates. In other words, subcommittees and affiliates are going to be critical in the implementation of the water, electricity and education campaign as outlined in the programme of action.

## The Water Campaign

One of the important components of the six-month programme is the campaign for free water. It was also announced that the APF and formations that are part of the water coalition were preparing to launch a public interest case on water provision. In an attempt at undermining the constitutional provision of water, the state and its water agents have been privatising water and installing prepaid meters. The meeting agreed that the constitutional case would have to be backed up by mass mobilisation. A plan was developed by the coordinating committee for the holding of community meetings, the launch of the research report on water privatisation, and the organising of demonstrations and marches. Phiri, Evaton West, the Vaal region, KwaMasiza and APF subcommittees are the APF components that have to lead the water campaign.

## The Electricity Campaign

The AGM had resolved to struggle against the establishment of Regional Electricity Distributors (REDs). Government is setting up regional distributors, which will consolidate

existing local government systems into six REDs. The regional distributors would compete to buy electricity from generators and also ensure that the sale of electricity is market driven. Seeing that the Ekurhuleni municipality is advanced in the establishment of the REDs, the APF agreed that the East Rand had to be supported in the struggle against the REDs.

## The struggle for housing

As part of the struggle for housing, a workshop was to be convened in July 2006 on the East Rand. The Kathorus Concerned Residents (KCR) was asked to host the workshop because it has been leading struggles for housing in the area. KCR and housing affiliates in other regions were asked to lead this campaign. The plan is that the campaign should lead to a mass march on housing and electricity in the East Rand. There was also a proposal that the housing conference in October should also include water and electricity issues.

## Free and Quality education

The coordinating committee of the APF agreed on the event to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the June 16 1976 uprising, which was held in the Vaal. As part of an attempt at building the APF and student formations in the Vaal, the coordinating committee mandated the education committee to organise a popular education workshop that had the task of planning the "June 16" event. All affiliates were requested to send their delegates to the workshop which was scheduled for 3 June 2006. Initial findings of the HIV/AIDS research were to be presented at the "June 16" event.

## Solidarity

The APF will be taking issues coming out of the six-month programme to the water coalition, the Social Movements Indaba, the Southern Africa Social Forum and the World Social Forum in Kenya in January 2006. The APF understands that its programme requires support from other social movements and other forces committed to social change in the country.





Photo: Sam Nzima, 16 June 1976

# Student and worker alliance in the 1970s and 1980s

by Mondli Hlatshwayo

The year, 2006, marks the thirtieth anniversary of the student uprisings of 1976. The Soweto uprising started on June 16, 1976 when students marched through the streets of Soweto demanding the scrapping of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. The student uprising of 1976 and the subsequent students' uprisings in the 1980s, among other things, raised the debate on student and worker alliance.

Today, the Anti Privatisation Forum's campaign for "free and quality education" has also introduced this debate in the APF and its affiliates. This article seeks to review the debate on the student and worker alliance in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. There are a number of lessons that can be learnt from this period.

## Workers and Students in the 1960s

The crushing of mass resistance in the 1960s was accompanied by the growth and expansion of the manufacturing sector. The growth of the manufacturing sector led to the growth of the

black working class and residential areas near factories. At the same time, the manufacturing sector and the National Party regime needed workers with basic literacy to enable their participation in the production process and in the administration of Bantustans and black residential areas in the cities. As a result of this and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 there was an increase in the number of black students in high schools and primary schools, and later in black universities.

Apartheid laid the foundation for the mass mobilisation of workers and students in the 1970s and 1980s. By creating a bigger black student and worker population, the apartheid regime and capitalism were digging their own grave. It is the students who were created by the conditions of the industrial expansion in the 1960s who were part of the forces that confronted apartheid and capitalism in 1976 and the 1980s.

## SASO, NUSAS and workers in the 1960s

The new wave of resistance to capitalism and apartheid was given a big boost with the rise of

the black consciousness movement in the universities and the schools. Struggles between black and white students in NUSAS led to the formation of a black students' organisation called SASO, which was formally launched in 1969 in Turfloop. SASO's emphasis on black consciousness advocated that black people were to be their own liberators. The philosophy of black pride gained support among black university students and became a framework for students' resistance to white rule in universities and high schools in the 1970s. Black consciousness also found social and cultural expression among black communities in urban areas.

The rise of the Black Consciousness movement in the late 1960s led to the formation of a number of organisations which subscribed to its ideology. The Black Consciousness movement encouraged blacks to organise independently of whites, and through its community arm, it ran projects in black communities in the areas of education, health, co-operatives and culture. As part of this movement SASO initiated the Black Workers Project (BWP).

In 1972 a member of BPC launched the Black Workers Union (BAWU). BAWU was a general union, and the BWP serviced the union. However, the banning of various activists of the Black Consciousness movement, and the lack of resources, made the building of unions aligned to this movement extremely difficult. These difficulties became worse when nearly all the Black Consciousness organisations were banned in September 1977.

SASO did not make major breakthroughs in organising black workers. Some commentators have argued that the fact that SASO never saw workers as primary agents in the struggle against apartheid led to its inability to recruit a sizable number of black workers to its own ranks.

On the other hand, NUSAS and white academics' attempts at organising workers were inspired by viewing workers as important social agents. White NUSAS students and intellectuals, influenced by the radicalisation of black students in South Africa, and by the 1968 student uprisings in France, set up wage commissions. In 1971 the Wage Commissions in Natal were initiated by a group of radical white academics and students at the University



Photo: Sam Nzima, 16 June 1976

of Natal to formulate demands around wages and working conditions. As a result of these initiatives, black workers formed a General Factory Workers Benefit Fund. At a Benefit Fund meeting, Alcan workers called for the formation of a trade union. This led to the first branch of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) in Natal. It is trade unions like MAWU which were instrumental in the formation of COSATU in 1985.

The 1973 Durban strike wave started when 2,000 African workers at the Coronation Brick and Tile Company in the northern outer edge of Durban went on strike on the morning of the 9th of January 1973. The strikes spread to other parts of Durban and the country. It is estimated that about 300 strikes in which 80,000 workers participated happened between 1973 and 1974.

During this period there were a number of revolts in the mines. At least 152 miners were killed and 152 injured. Students confronted police repression on the country's campuses as they mobilised in defence of the miners'

struggle. SASO condemned the violence and the killing of black miners. Protest meetings were organised at the University of Durban Westville. Turfloop students dismissed their SRC for not organising protest meetings. Students at white universities also organised protests and marched to the head offices of the mining giant, the Anglo American Corporation.

### Students and workers in 1976

Initially, students were preoccupied with stopping workers from going to work instead of engaging workers as equal agents in the struggle against apartheid and capitalism. Students had forgotten that it was workers who came out and struck in 1973 with little student support. Some of the tactics employed by students in compelling workers not to go to work included the stoning of buses that were used by workers as a mode of transport.

At the beginning of August 1976 workers stayed away from work and marched with students to John Vorster Prison in Johannesburg. They also participated in the other stay-aways (azikhwelwa) in September 1976, but worker participation was seen as parents' support of their children. In November 1976 another stay-away was called and workers did not respond. Migrant workers from Mzimhlophe single-sex hostel went on the rampage in August 1976. The police backed the migrant workers who attacked students and parents.

The Soweto Students' Representative Council, which led the 1976 struggles in Soweto, issued a pamphlet ("To Town!!! To Eloff!!! To That Exclusive White Paradise!!! From Monday!!!") that expresses the secondary role expected of workers:

*TO TOWN! Town will be the centre of the demos [demonstrations]. We did it early this year and the SASO trial was transferred by the Racists to Pretoria. They have done it in Cape Town! What will Stop Us Now? TO TOWN is the slogan of the people in revolt. It is the very cry of an oppressed but determined people. It is a slogan of the most deprived part of humanity. Trains will [be] boarded not for work but for a violent Demonstration of our bitterness.*

Despite the problems in the student and worker alliance in 1976, a number of students who came out of the 1976 uprising fled the country and joined the liberation movement in exile. A number of people from the generation of 1976 also joined the trade union movement and became leading members of the workers struggles in the 1980s. Many students boosted the new trade union movement by joining unions as organisers, and as workers on the shopfloor once they were employed. By the beginning of the 1980s, the student movement began to establish strong links with the trade union movement. In 1979, for example, many



**Photo:** Sam Nzima, 16 June 1976



students supported the strikes of the Fattis and Monis workers and that of the Meat industry workers in Cape Town.

### Student struggles in the 1980s

On May 1980, the "committee of 81", a committee of students' representatives from 81 schools in and around the Western Cape, issued a pamphlet entitled, "STUDENTS!!! PARENTS!!! WORKERS!!! MANIFESTO TO THE PEOPLE OF AZANIA" during the student uprisings in the 1980s. The committee argued that the struggles of students in the 1980s had created consciousness among students who "now will enter into the factories and workplaces at the end of the year. A new layer of militant workers who would want to fight for equality, will feed the growing discontent on the factory-floor."

In other words, students who were part of student struggles and later joined factories as workers were seen as an energising force on the shopfloor. In terms of our long-term struggle, a struggle that will change the whole social order, the committee prepared the young men and women who would be committed enough to eradicate apartheid and capitalism. In the immediate term, the committee also viewed workers and parents as important social agents that had to be involved in the struggle against apartheid.

Unlike in 1973 and 1976, there was a concrete convergence of students', workers' and broader political struggles in 1984. This joining of forces was conceptualised politically, as argued by COSAS in a pamphlet issued in 1984 during the struggles in the Vaal:

*Workers, you are fathers and mothers, you are our brothers and sisters. Our struggle in the schools is your struggle in the factories. We fight the same bosses government, we fight the same enemy.*

As an attempt at linking education, workers and community issues, COSAS was also involved in the struggle against the Tricameral Parliament, a racially-based system of parliament. In August 1984 elections were held for Indian and Coloured parliaments. The UDF and NF organised a national boycott against the elections. COSAS and other youth formations called for a school boycott as part of the campaign against the Tricameral elections. Large numbers of students supported the boycott.

However, it was events in the Vaal region that transformed student protests into a major political struggle. In August 1984, rent and service costs were increased in the townships around Pretoria, the East and West Rand of Johannesburg, the Eastern Cape and the Vaal Triangle. The Vaal exploded. Rent and education boycott converged in a wave of anti-



Student and worker alliance July 14, 2000: Urban Futures conference, Wits University.

apartheid actions. More than 20,000 students and residents supported a stay-away in the Vaal. The state retaliated by sending the South African Defence Force to the townships.

The protest spread to other parts of the country. Students and the youth became militant. School issues were linked to the broader political struggle against apartheid and capitalism. Students waged militant battles against the police, the army, collaborators and vigilantes. People's courts were held and those who were suspected of being collaborators were 'necklaced'. Organs of working class power were built in the townships. The slogan of the youth became: "Liberation Now, Education Later."

Students also built alliances with workers. A joint campaign between workers and students was organised in Southern Transvaal on 5 and 6 November 1984. Organisations involved include FOSATU, CUSA; student organisations such as COSAS, AZASM and YCS; and also civic and community groups. Over half a million people participated in the stay-away.

In the Eastern Cape in Uitenhage there was also a successful stay-away organised by students, workers and community groups in March 1984. But there were also problems. For example, in Port Elizabeth, students, youth and workers could not reach an agreement on a stay-away in the early part of 1985. After the banning of COSAS in 1985, students were detained and also shot by the apartheid police force.

The struggles of 1984-1986 led to the growth and strengthening of democratic organisations. Street committees, and youth and student formations became strong in unprecedented ways. The trade union movement also grew stronger and hence COSATU was formed in 1985 during the wave of generalised political struggles. Many of the community structures were able to withstand repression led by the apartheid regime and its surrogates.

But there were also problems with youth militancy. In some cases the youth were unable to persuade workers and communities to join the boycott. Shortcuts such as intimidation and violence were used against fellow working class community members. There were people who also felt that students were turning a boycott tactic into a principle. The state responded by arresting a number of young people that crippled organisations.

### **What can we learn from the experiences of student and worker alliance?**

Unlike the generation of 1976, we have to see workers as important agents for social change. But at the same time, we also have to recognise the fact that unlike in the 1970s and 1980s, the neoliberal restructuring of the workplace has led to the weakening of employed and organised workers. We cannot be oblivious to the fact that a huge number of workers from the manufacturing sector, the backbone of the 1970s and 1980s workers uprisings, have been retrenched. The technological changes and the restructuring of the workplace have led to an increase in the number of casuals and subcontracted work. In addition, COSATU trade unions have not been able to respond creatively to this neoliberal attack on workers.

The APF, among other things, is also organising against the privatisation of education. As such, some of the members of the organisation are students. In a context where workers are employed in casualised or outsourced work and are generally unorganised, student comrades in the APF can play a meaningful role in engaging and organising these atypical workers in the townships. There are possibilities of forming township-based structures of these workers. Just like the NUSAS students of the 1960s and 1970s, our comrades can begin to look at concrete problems facing these workers and can devise strategies for improving the conditions of these workers.

There have been some debates about the role played by parents in the school governing bodies (SGBs). In many cases our comrades who are organising students have argued that these bodies are rubber-stamping the neoliberal policies of the state in our schools. One of the possible scenarios includes engaging working class parents to contest SGB elections on the basis of an anti-privatisation platform. Of course, this tactic can only work in places where we have strong student structures that can hold SGBs accountable.

The working conditions in schools have also contributed to the organisation of teachers in trade unions. We can begin to engage them about the need to build a democratic education system which treats students and teachers as equals. Our comrades can work with teachers in campaigns for improving conditions of learning in schools.

# FOR FREE, QUALITY AND EQUITABLE PUBLIC EDUCATION

*From the APF Office Bearers on the occasion of the 30th anniversary year of the 1976 student uprisings*

The enjoyment of free, quality and equitable public education remains a distant dream for millions of poor South Africans. Despite South Africa having more than adequate resources to turn that dream into a reality, the educational system in our country continues to reflect both past and present class and racial inequalities - a direct result of government's implementation of GEAR-inspired education policies that seek to privatise the provision of education by handing over increasing responsibility to 'private' communities, through so-called 'decentralisation'. Practically, this has produced a serious crisis in the system of public education in poor communities whose simply do not have the material or human resources to fill the 'gap', something that wealthier communities can easily take on. Some of the key PROBLEMS that result from this crisis are:

- An enforced migration of children from poor communities to those public (and sometimes private schools) in wealthier areas that parents know offer a better education than the public schools in their own communities. The financial burden placed on the parents who choose this option most often results in serious hardship and sacrifice.
- In most poor communities, a lack of government support for public schooling has resulted in over-crowded classrooms, weakening or non-existent infrastructure and an increasing decline of morale in schools and their surrounding communities. In turn, this feeds into a widespread lack of performance, bad school management practices and abusive behaviour by educational officials and teachers as well as disinterest from parents.
- The absence of adequate and quality provision of basic services such as water and electricity due to either a lack of necessary infrastructure or, where there is infrastructure, to the privatisation of delivery (including the installation of prepaid meters) leading to unaffordability in poor communities.
- The introduction of user fees (for things such as transport, uniforms and school supplies)

has meant that many children from poor communities are being denied access to any kind of education because either they or their parents have little or no income and thus cannot afford such fees. Additionally, school authorities often use this failure to pay as an excuse to de-certify learners from attending school.

- In order to make-up for the loss of government support, school authorities regularly enforce 'voluntary work' from those parents who cannot pay fees, resulting in unfair discrimination against poor parents and their children. In such circumstances, the community character of the school is severely weakened and it turns into a private 'space' where access to education, like other basic services, becomes commodified.

The unilateral implementation of age-restriction policies has meant the exclusion of older learners, leading to increased levels of illiteracy and hopelessness that often leads such older learners to turn to crime in order to survive.

- A situation in which education officials and school authorities in poor communities turn to the private sector for assistance and consequently adapt curricula to the needs of the capitalist market as opposed to the needs of society.

An almost complete lack of government support for pre-school education in poor communities, resulting in the youngest learners facing a serious disadvantage when entering formal primary school. Quality pre-school education has become the preserve of those who can afford to pay for private schools.

- A serious lack of sports/recreational facilities and equipment for learners in poor communities that often leads to the unproductive use of after-school time which in turn, contributes to boredom and anti-social behaviour.
- The unavailability of public transport for learners and teachers (to/from school as well as for extra-curricular activities) results in high levels of absenteeism and tiredness and only serves to place further financial burdens on poor families and learners that they simply cannot meet.





**Masiphumelele High School in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, where parents and teachers struggled to register the community controlled school.** Photo: Nic Bothma, the Cape Argus

Without a free, quality and equitable public education system, poor communities will forever be trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and desperation. Despite some improvements in our education system since the fall of apartheid, government has failed dismally to deliver on its educational mandate. We believe the implementation of the following DEMANDS can begin to realise that mandate:

- There must be free, quality and equitable public education provided for all, from pre-school to the tertiary level as well as for adult basic education.
- Government must implement an urgent and systematic nationwide infrastructural programme to build and rehabilitate schools, with priority given to the poorest communities
- All user fees must be immediately scrapped and all learner and teacher materials/needs provided and produced by the government, and where feasible in partnership with school communities, free of charge. These would include, daily and quality meals for

learners, uniforms, textbooks (delivered on time), sports equipment and kits, lab/computer equipment, regular learner support materials as well as public transportation for all school activities

- All public schools must have access to free basic services such as water and electricity and any existing prepaid meters must be taken out of schools immediately

- All enforced 'voluntary work' must be scrapped and adequate maintenance and security staff employed by the government for every school

- No learner can be excluded from receiving an education on the basis of age restriction or as a result of failure. Special educational programmes (including ABET) must be provided in the same manner as above, to cater for older and special needs learners. The facilities in all public schools must be adequately equipped for, and open to, such learners and government must provide ABET training centres where they do not exist.

- All permanent teachers in public schools must be employed by government, be paid a living wage and enjoy non-discriminatory working conditions. Those teachers who are presently 'employed' as volunteers must be given full employment under the same conditions as permanent teachers.

- All immigrants residing in South Africa must enjoy access to education in the same manner as South African citizens.

- The educational curricula in public schools must reflect the needs and aspirations of the majority of people in our society, not the needs and demands of the private (capitalist) sector.

- Public schools and their curriculum should be separate from religion (secular) without any discrimination against particular religious dress codes.

A LUTA CONTINUA!

## Frank Talk

### Benjamin in Rosebank (or Killing Biko)

Biko has become fashionable. Literally. Take a walk through the Zone in Rosebank and peek through one of the shop windows. You might be surprised to find Biko's face staring back at you from a T-shirt selling for over R300. Sit down at one of the snazzy coffee shops and try to listen in on the conversation at the next table. Don't be surprised if you hear the latest BEE executive expound on 'Corporate Black Consciousness' and the importance of Black pride. Biko is 'big' in Rosebank, no doubt about it. So 'big', in fact, that one can't help but be reminded that "not even the dead will be safe if the enemy wins. And the enemy has not ceased to be victorious."

Don't get me wrong, you can still buy an 'authentic' Biko T-shirt - the kind that would have marked you out as a subversive ripe for security branch harassment 'back in the day' - from one of at least two factions claiming to be the only legitimate heir to Biko's legacy. You know the type, right? Cheap yellow t-shirts, probably made by wage slaves in China, whose silk-screened image of Biko lasts for the first 20 washes before starting to look more like Lybon Mabasa or Mosibudi Mangena. One can't help but wonder if this wasn't part of the plan all along.

But there are other Bikos too. Bikos who are not content to be remembered on T-shirts, or prostituted in the boardrooms of a burgeoning class. This is a Biko that lives in spirit and works in struggle. This Biko waters the food gardens in Orange Farm, cares for terminally ill relatives living with HIV/AIDS in Mandelaville, reconnects her neighbour's electricity in Soweto and destroys a water meter in Kagiso. This Biko speaks through those social movement activists who refuse to surrender their voice to any academic or NGOista that claims to speak on behalf of the poor. This Biko is living and is shaped by the struggles of the here and now.

The other Biko is the dead guy; killed so that he could become a T-shirt and made to speak the words of the magnum leader... a commodified Biko whose image is proudly worn by the kids of the rich. Our fight is, in part, to claim Biko against those who reduce his legacy to an affirmation of our neoliberal present, to make Biko live in all those whose destiny is struggle...

### Hamba Kahle Cde Thandekile Dodo



**Cde Thandekile Dodo of the Bophelong Community Service Forum sadly passed away on 24 July 2006. As a young lion in the struggle against poverty, he is remembered for his love for his community and his fearless dedication to the struggle to change the rotten system.**

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