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PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION STRUGGLE

INTRODUCTION

The significant and the pivotal role of parents in contributing to the learning culture at school cannot be over emphasised. However that role of parents in this sphere was ignored when SADTU decided to go on strike in August 1993. The education of millions of children of the oppressed was sacrificed without reference to or consultation with their parents.

Just as the schools mirror the hardships and conflicts of the communities they serve, it is equally true that homes have been seriously affected by the consequences of the breakdown in the schools. The strong objections and revulsion felt by the majority of affected parents at the "chalkdown" and "strike" by teachers is justified when one examines the anarchy that presently prevails in a vast number of schools throughout the country. As a result of disruption of education in the past, thousands of youth today roam the streets uneducated, jobless and engaged in gang activities and violent crimes. Do we want the present generation of school going children to end up in the same way?

Recent events, such as the decision of the SADTU leadership to support the ANC in its election campaign, have left no doubts that the strike action undertaken by the union was, at least in part, nothing more than a cynical vote catching manoeuvre. What is disheartening is the fact that a vast majority of teachers allowed themselves to be manipulated to work against the parents desire for an orderly education for their children.

We must not be guilty of the same crime as the racist rulers of this country - that of a wanton destruction of the lives of our children through years of apartheid education. The true weapon of struggle lies in educating our children to shed off the shackles of oppression and exploitation - not in marches during school hours or shouting senseless slogans or handing memorandums to collaborators.

What then is the role of the parents in this continuing struggle for a truly democratic system of education? Parents must refuse to allow their children to be used as guinea-pigs by the opportunistic leadership of certain "liberation" movements. They must join forces with genuine Parent-Teacher-Pupil committees to voice their protest at the criminal misuse of their children's instruction time and work towards re-creating a conducive teaching-learning environment. They must not allow themselves to be misguided by mindless individuals with illusions of 'freedom around the corner' and claims of victory. They must engage in our struggle in a more disciplined and reasoned way.

Teachers

should- be made to realise that parents are not so insensitive to expect them to endure and work under punishing conditions - that there are other ways of engaging in our struggle for freedom without sacrificing our children's education. If the struggle for democracy in education is to be won, the mutually supportive roles of parents, teachers and pupils is essential.

HANG OUR HEADS IN SHAME!

AMY BIEHL, a U.S. Fulbright student spent 9 months in South Africa working for her doctorate and also helping the process of transformation in South Africa. She worked closely with persons from the University of the Western Cape on matters affecting the rights of women.

Amy Biehl was one of those many thousands of persons from Europe and U.S. who left the comforts of their homes and braved it to the distant lands

of Africa, Asia and Latin America to do the "god work" amongst the people there. They went either as zealous Christian missionaries and nuns to convert, teach literacy, nurse the sick or as doctors to heal and to set up clinics and hospitals. Many never returned home. They were killed by the beasts, diseases or by the local inhabitants who feared and distrusted strangers who had begun to play an increasingly significant role in their lives.

A day before she was to return to her home, she gave a lift to three of her friends who lived in Guguletu. In hate filled times, like the present, it was not a wise thing to do. Her friends ought to have known better than a stranger who thought she understood the people of this country. Amy Biehl clearly did not realise the terrible dangers lurking in the explosive townships to both local people and to strangers, especially those regarded as whites.

She clearly did not realise how on the one day everything would be calm and serene and on the very next that same place would be transformed into a death trap filled with violence and hatred.

Maybe, her friends were too lazy to take a kombi or a bus. Whatever the case, in seeking to make her friends comfortable, Amy Biehl sacrificed her life. In Guguletu, an African township in Cape Town, Amy Biehl and her friends came across a mob of about a hundred youth who attacked her car. She attempted, vainly, to run away from her assailants. They caught up with her and plunged their knives into her until she died. Her last moments must have been sheer hell. She, who came to this country to help the oppressed people, should now meet her end in this terrible way. This was the screaming anti-climax of her life and work.

Whether we agreed with the kind of work she was doing or not is besides the point. What is in point is that Amy Biehl was a guest in our country. She was a friend and a well wisher and a helper. Is this how South Africans (or if you prefer, "Azanians") treat guests and well wishers?

This bestial act reflects on the entire country and its inhabitants. Therefore we must hang our heads in shame. Our kind has violated the time-honoured and universal law of hospitality to visitors. The act is unworthy of decent human beings. It is barbarous and uncivilized.

ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET!

From press reports we are told that the youth who are alleged to have killed her are members of the student wing of the PAC, the Pan Africanist Student Organisation (PASO). They described Amy Biehl as a "Settler". That racist and emotive slogan of the PAC, ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET has thus borne its hideous fruit. No PAC member has yet given a clear, intelligible and honest explanation of that slogan. The reason for that inability is understandable. What explanation in public is possible of a slogan designed solely to play on the lowest of feelings, namely, hatred for a person on the grounds of skin colour. Ordinary people and the youth have taken the slogan at its face value: - "Settlers must be killed. All whites are settlers." That was the immediate cause of the murder of Amy Biehl.

No amount of angry explanations from Patricia de Lille can wipe off this ugly and racist stain. Of what use is the mealy-mouthed condemnation by the PAC of this shameful deed? After all it is the PAC itself which is responsible for fathering this racist slogan for the sole purpose of attracting the untutored youth in its ranks.

But the PAC is not the only culprit.

ANC OPPORTUNISTS SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY.

Alan Boesak, not renowned for practising what he preached, was the first to point an accusing finger at the PAC. Performing for the camera and the press, he prayed over the slain Amy Biehl.

Tony Yengeni, the ANC leader in the Western Cape, claimed Amy Biehl as a comrade and considered her murder as declaration of war by the PAC against the ANC.

THE HYPOCRISY OF THE ANC.

The pious hand-on-heart attitude on the part of the ANC is a bit rich. With the publication of the Motsuenyane Commission Report, the ANC has yet to wash off from its hands the blood of its own members who were tortured and killed in Angola and elsewhere.

Take the slogan of "Kill the Boer! Kill the farmer!" In certain black political circles, the word "Boer" is used to refer to all whites. Among the people, the word "Amabunu"(Boers) means Whites. The assigning of the meaning of "Boers" to "Farmers" is untrue and dishonest. The term "Boer" has never been used in those political circles to refer to a farmer. When people sing or chant "Shaya Amabunu", they always refer to whites and never to farmers. In any event, the term 'farmer' is not restricted to a particular racial group since there are also 'Coloured', Indian and African farmers, no matter how small their numbers may be. Hence the slogan popularized by Peter Mokgaba is as racist as the slogan of the PAC about "Settlers." Racism is thus generated not from one source only. The atmosphere which led to the murder of Amy Biehl has more than the apparently obvious one.

The SUNDAY NATION, the newspaper supporting the ANC has also taken the PAC to task for the death of Amy Biehl.

Subsequent events have revealed the hypocrisy of the ANC on this score.

"OPERATION BARCELONA."

At a memorial service for Amy Biehl on the 26th August 1993, Tony Yengeni in a refreshing admission, stated that the killing of Amy Biehl was a direct result of the campaign called "Operation Barcelona." This campaign was launched with the object of burning vehicles and attacking strangers. COSAS, the student wing of the ANC was the initiator of the campaign. Therefore while the hands which did the killing may belong to youth who follow the PAC, the incitement to murder in this particular case came from COSAS.

What was "Operation Barcelona"? It was in Barcelona that the last Olympics was held. The burning torch is a well known symbol of Olympics. In South Africa, that symbol is regarded, not for the purpose of giving light or enlightenment, but as a weapon for arson and destruction. It will therefore be seen that the ANC in seeking to palm off the blame of the murder of Amy Biehl on to the PAC was indulging in political dishonesty of the worst kind. Sincere self criticism is something totally foreign to the ANC. Tony Yengeni's honest admission referred to above is indicative more of the exception than the rule.

CONCLUSION.

Many thousands of innocent people have been killed in the political violence. The death toll is daily rising. The claim that the announcement of an election date would help in reducing the violence has, like many other claims, turned out to be completely hollow. Amy Biehl's death is just one more death from this milieu. What is significant about her death is that it is a direct result of cheap, dangerous and racist appeal to win a following among the youth. The tragedy is that this act of murdering an innocent person was regarded by the killers as a revolutionary act. After all do not the slogans teach the young to kill the "Boer" and the "Settlers"?

VIOLENCE AND POVERTY

In the last issue of Apdusa Views, various reasons were set out for the violence which has made this paradise into hell.

One important contribution to violence is the grinding poverty that people suffer. They need land to erect a dwelling house and to demarcate an area one can call one's own. Water is required for drinking and washing of bodies and clothes. Hence there is a race for scarce resources like land and water.

Earlier this month it was reported that in the Loskop area there was a terrible carnage - 25 people slaughtered and 100 huts destroyed by fire.

This carnage and destruction is part of on-going faction fights between the Ngondini and Myangweni clans because of a land dispute.

**The Bambayi landless and land-starved inhabitants are at each others throats.
The principal cause is also poverty.**

**Land, water supply, sewerage system, electricity, etc, is what is going to help.
Not light blue ribbons.**

*** DOWN WITH ALL RACIST SLOGANS AND RACISM.'**

*** TEACH YOUTH TRUE NON-RACIALISM.'**

*** CHILDREN FIRST SALARY INCREASES LATER.'**

*** FIGHT FOR DEMOCRATIC DEBATE AND DISCUSSION!**

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