

**BEYOND THE
BARRICADES:
THE 1985 SCHOOLS BOYCOTT AND
THE VICISSITUDES OF THE
ATHLONE STUDENTS ACTION
COMMITTEE (ASAC).**

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Ché Vassen.

WE MUST PRESERVE THE BEST OF WHAT WE HAVE FOR OUR
CHILDREN - THEY ARE THE FLOWERS OF OUR STRUGGLE.

(Cabral)

In the hope that all children will one day reap the rewards of a bitter, long and hard struggle, but never forget how it came to be so. For it is the multiplicity of struggles like that of 1985, that will someday transform education from an education for domestication into a pedagogy of liberation!

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ABBREVIATIONS

AECC	- Athlone Education Crisis Committee
ANC	- African National Congress
ASAC	- Athlone Students Action Committee
AZAPO	- Azanian People's Organisation
AZASM	- Azanian Student Movement
BC	- Black Consciousness
BCM	- Black Consciousness Movement
BISCO	- Bonteheuwel Inter-Schools Co-ordinating Committee
CAL	- Cape Action League
COSAS	- Congress of South African Students
COSATU	- Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTCC	- Concerned Teachers' Co-ordinating Committee
CTPA	- Cape Teachers' Professional Association
DBAC	- Disorderly Bills Action Committee
DEC	- Department of Education and Culture
DET	- Department of Education and Training
DETU	- Democratic Teachers Union
HoD	- House of Delegates
HoR	- House of Representatives
IRF	- Inter Regional Forum
ISCC	- Inter-Schools Co-ordinating Committee
JSRC	- Joint Students Representative Council
NECC	- National Education Crisis Committee
NEUM	- Non-European Unity Movement

NF	- National Forum
NUM	- New Unity Movement
PAC	- Parents Action Committee
PTA	- Parent-Teacher Association
PTSA	- Parent-Teacher-Student Association
SACOS	- South African Council of Sport
SADF	- South African Defence Force
SAP	- South African Police
SASM	- South African Students Movement
SASO	- South African Students Organisation
SOYA	- Students of Young Azania
SPCC	- Soweto Parents Crisis Committee
SRC	- Student Representative Council
TASA	- Teachers' Association of South Africa
TLSA	- Teachers' League of South Africa
TRA	- Thornhill Residents Association
TYO	- Thornhill Youth Organisation
UDF	- United Democratic Front
WECSAC	- Western Cape Student Action Committee
WECSCO	- Western Cape Students Congress
WECTU	- Western Cape Teachers Union
WESCO	- Western Cape Students Council

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
DEDICATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABBREVIATIONS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: EDUCATION, RESISTANCE AND REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ORGANIC CRISIS, 1976-1985	14
CHAPTER 2: THE PRE-BOYCOTT WESTERN CAPE	31
1) Contending Progressive Ideologies in the Western Cape	
2) The 1980 School Boycotts in the Western Cape	
3) Student Organisation, 1980-1985.	
4) A Description of the Athlone Area and its Political Organisations.	
5) Schools in the Athlone Area	
 <u>A PERIODISATION OF THE 1985 BOYCOTT IN THE ATHLONE AREA</u>	
CHAPTER 3: THE START AND FORTIFICATION OF THE BOYCOTT (JULY - SEPTEMBER)	57
1) Main Triggers of the Boycott and its Initial Coordination.	
2) The ISCC, WECSAC and the Formation of ASAC.	
3) Initial Organisation and Problems Encountered at Athlone Schools	
4) Student Activities	
5) Attempts to broaden the support base	
a) Enlisting parent support	
b) Teacher support	
6) Summary	

CHAPTER 4: CONCERTED STATE REACTION TO THE BOYCOTT AND
 ITS CONSEQUENCES (SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER) 96

- 1) The closure of schools
- 2) The Return to Schools and Carter's New Edicts
- 3) The escalation in the tempo of violence
- 4) Examinations and the State of Emergency
- 5) Excavating ASAC's Thought and Some
of the Issues It Confronted

CHAPTER 5: THE RETURN TO SCHOOLS
 (JANUARY - MARCH 1986) 141

CONCLUSION: TELL NO LIES, CLAIM NO EASY VICTORIES 158

BIBLIOGRAPHY 164

INTRODUCTION

"To tell the story is little enough. Events do not occur fortuitously, nor are they preordained. Real live people have made the history recounted here, ... and it is their actions which have to be understood."¹

The 1985 schools boycott in the Western Cape, which began in late July in reaction to the imposition of the State of Emergency in other parts of the country, resulted in the boycott of the final examinations. It drew to a close early the next year, in line with the national call made by the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC) for a return to school. The schools boycott made 1985 a historic year in the Western Cape. During the course of 1985, this student-initiated struggle had not remained confined to the educational arena, but it augured a period of "resistance and mass revolt against the state on the largest scale since the establishment of colonial authority in the region in the eighteenth century."² Whether or not students supported, rejected or tried to ignore the struggles that ensued, the ramifications of the boycott - the closure of schools, the contentious issues surrounding the examinations, the naked acts of repression and brutality by the security forces, acts of arson and stone - throwing, the State of Emergency, - had made it extremely difficult for them, as well as the broader community to remain totally insulated from its experience.

This dissertation seeks to explore the schools boycott experience in the Athlone area. It is not merely an attempt to document the specificity of events which unfolded in the Athlone schools but, more significantly, it is an attempt to elucidate and understand an experience which operated at a myriad of levels, and as such, eschews a simplistic analysis or categorisation. One of the cardinal concerns of the dissertation is an attempt to comprehend the actions of the Athlone Students Action Committee (ASAC), the

¹ Hirson, B. Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution (London, Zed Press, 1979) p 1, my emphasis.

² Hall, M. "Resistance and Rebellion in the Greater Cape Town, 1985" (Paper presented at Roots and Realities Conference, University of Cape Town, 1986)

powerful area-based student structure which emerged to direct and co-ordinate the boycott in the Athlone area. In many respects, ASAC can be differentiated from other student structures and organisations in the Western Cape. Given its decisive role in the area, any endeavour to gain a proper perspective of the boycott in the Athlone area must delineate ASAC's thought and character, how it functioned, the issues it grappled with, the actions it undertook, its relation to other progressive organisations, and how these changed in the period under review.

This approach has been necessitated by the fact that while the boycott was indeed a momentous historic experience which had a profound effect on many, its impact was not always that drastic, but its meaning was varied, and needs to be recorded and understood as such. Despite this, much academic literature focusing on the boycott tends to blur differences and specificity where they existed by painting on too broad a canvas~~es~~ and by making sweeping generalisations. While the Athlone area is often regarded as an important constituent in the boycott process, its importance is often only alluded to in terms of the more high-profile events such as the Pollsmoor March, the Trojan Horse massacre, the ~~S~~Seige of Sinton, and so forth. Associated with such diaphanous journalism, the Athlone area is largely identified only with militant students engaged in courageous street battles with the security forces. By relying far too much on the headlines in the commercial press, in much of the literature, the Athlone area has become synonymous with blazing barricades. An example of such news-making media headlines can be gleaned from a two-page feature in the Weekly Mail which stated, "Is the border in Angola? Or Athlone?"² While it is true that during the boycott period, Athlone did exhibit something which bordered on a militant insurrectionism, the pertinence of the boycott encompassed much more than street action. As such, this dissertation attempts to look beyond the barricades by transcending and contextualising the boycott's more obvious traits, such as violence, by examining how it impacted on student

² Weekly Mail 25 October 1985

thought and vice-versa. The more important concern is therefore to understand the vicissitudes of student organisation in the area.

Conjuncturally, this thesis is an attempt to rectify some of the undue generalisations made about the boycott and the student movement. The uncritical use of the media (including pamphlets), the focus on street action, and a failure to conduct interviews with student leadership¹ (at least in the Athlone area) have resulted in a failure to understand ASAC's perspectives and thought (as well as other student organisations and the differences between them), and such have misconstrued or misinterpreted many aspects of the boycott. Such methodological shortcomings² have resulted in undue and inappropriate criticisms of student organisations. Kumi Naidoo has pointed out that the extent of weaknesses in the student movement are often exaggerated by academics who often accuse them of reckless militancy and "too much 'activism' without reflection [but] to expect that there will not be weaknesses among the student organisations in a repressive society is to be excessively naive."³ Through poor methodology, the prevailing academic orthodoxy ^{has} ~~have~~ misunderstood the discourse of student organisation. Criticisms of activism without reflection are prevalent in academic work on the 1985 boycott, arguing that the student movement actively propagated the slogan of 'Liberation before Education'. The period which has been characterised as 'Liberation Before Education' (from July to December 1985) is closely linked to Bundy's assessment of students as politically precocious and immature. Bundy argues that students nurtured a political perspective which one could dub 'immediatism' ie,

"an impatient anticipation of imminent victory, a hubristic assessment of progress made, and a naive underestimation of the resources of the state... The

* All student interviewees, (most prominent members of ASAC and easily identifiable as such) have indicated that nobody conducting research on the boycott for academic purposes, has attempted to contact them previously.

³ Naidoo, K. 'The Politics of Student Resistance in the 1980's' in Nkomo, M. (ed) The Pedagogy of Domination: Towards a Democratic Education in South Africa (New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1990) p 125.

popular slogan of 'Liberation before Education' is the best known example of this frame of mind..."⁶

In trying to demonstrate that a sense of immediatism was not only limited to the sections of the broader student mass, but was also prevalent at a student organisational level, Bundy quotes an ASAC pamphlet during the boycott which states

"Yes the boycott is temporary. But we cannot end it now - not when we have the government on its knees. If we end it now the government will be able to get onto its feet again."⁷

However, Bundy neither contextualises the pamphlet, nor examines its purpose, but assumes this to be ASAC's organisational viewpoint and evidence of its political naivety. Importantly, he omits the pertinent next line in the pamphlet which gives coherence to the quotation - "Can we afford to lose all the power that we have fought for simply because we feel that the boycott should end because of the exams?"⁸ If the pamphlet is seen in the context of the new harsh restrictions placed by Carter Ebrahim (Minister of Education in the HoR) on any organised activity at schools, the Emergency and the negative consequences for organisations, the resultant demoralisation at a crucial and potentially divisive period of the examinations, and an attempt to enlist the much-needed support on which a successful boycott of exams was dependent, such a pamphlet must be seen more as an agitational pamphlet, intended to boost morale, rather than an indictment of ASAC's level of political consciousness.

Only a deeper level of penetration into the thought of ASAC can adequately examine whether or not it suffered from immediatism. While those student leaders interviewed have argued that in 1985 they did not believe the state was on its knees, but that the

⁶ Bundy, C. 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth-Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985' Journal of Southern African Studies Vol 13 No 3 1987, p 322-3

⁷ Athlone Students Action Committee pamphlet quoted in *ibid* p 323

⁸ Athlone Students Action Committee The Boycott Continues!!! Until Our Demands Are Met October or November, 1985

declaration of the Emergency was a sign that it was in crisis,' it must also be realised that a disjuncture exists between the levels of consciousness of student leaders and those of the masses. Cabral has pointed out that leaders, "must never confuse what they have in their heads with reality."¹⁰, ie the reality of the masses. One cannot deny that in Athlone, as in every other area, at a lower level of individuation, (ie amongst segments of the student mass), notions of immediatism certainly did prevail. A possibility also exists that such notions existed in other student structures, in other areas, and that ASAC's position was more sophisticated and unique to the Athlone area. However, it is still imperative to examine whether the student leaders in ASAC could have been endowed with a sense of immediatism, consciously or subliminally.

Despite Richard Jordi's excellent thesis on the boycott in the (coloured) Department of Education and Culture (DEC) schools in the Greater Cape Town area,¹¹ it is still necessary for area-based case studies to be researched. Jordi himself points out that his thesis obscures the particular character and experiences of struggle within individual schools and areas through a generalised account and has emphasised the need for in-depth case studies. He argues that the historical framework of his thesis offers "both the reference points and the gaps through which such case studies could be pursued."¹² Such studies are also important as Jordi's thesis has periodised the boycott into distinct phases in an attempt to demonstrate that at the end of the boycott a dramatic strategic shift was occasioned as a result of the national conference convened by the Soweto Parents Crisis

¹⁰ Such a viewpoint is also held by Bulliah Umar, a prominent and seasoned political activist who has argued that "There is absolutely nothing wrong with the assessment that the state was weak. The state was indeed weak. No state reverts to a State of Emergency unless all other methods of maintaining law and order or maintaining control has failed, and this is what happened in South Africa." Interview 1: Bulliah Umar, chairperson of Thornhill Residents Association in 1985.

¹¹ Cabral, A. Unity and Struggle (London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1980) p 45

¹² Jordi, R. Towards 'Peoples Education': The Boycott Experience in Cape Town's Department of Education and Culture High Schools from July 1985 to February 1986 African Studies (Hons) dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1987.

¹³ ibid p 5

Committee (SPCC), and followed later by the NECC conference in March.

That both these conferences were invaluable and of historic significance as they invoked the new strategy of 'People's Education for People's Power'⁽¹⁾ is undeniable. They expressly rejected any notion of 'Liberation before Education' and called for a return to formal schooling, which combined the implementation of 'People's Education' with the formal syllabus in an effort to transform the classrooms into 'zones of liberation.' However, in attempting to demonstrate the fecundity of such a transition, Jordi's periodisation of the Western Cape boycott is too simplistic in its categorisation of 'Liberation before Education' as a distinct phase of the boycott.

In a circuitous manner, by explicating the specificity of the boycott in the Athlone area, this thesis shows that such a periodisation was not so dramatic or universal and, as such, further connotes the necessity for similar case studies in other areas. In addition to the fact that the boycott experience was somewhat different in the Athlone area, it is also evident that, in Athlone itself, the boycott was heterogenous, encompassing a myriad of tiers, which developed unevenly and, often, dialectically, sometimes resulting in quantifiable differences at the micro-level.

Genealogically, some of these differences can be traced to the different circumstances which prevailed at Athlone schools prior to the boycott. While at some schools the hegemony and prerogative of the school administration was palliated (albeit disparately) to a certain degree by the existence of active Student Representative Councils (SRC's), at other schools authoritarian control was unmitigated and uncontested. Naturally, during the boycott period, such differences invoked variations, for, at a lower level of individuation, the boycott was quintessentially a struggle for hegemony between the school administration and boycotting students.

Apart from the fact that some schools possessed SRC's while others did not, individual SRC's also varied according to ^{their} strengths and predilections, divergent levels of political consciousness amongst student leaders, and differentiated levels of support from students. In addition, ordinary teachers and parents formed an intermediate, but significant, layer between the school hierarchy and the students, with their support capable of vacillating between the two. Admittedly, teachers, by virtue of being employed by the state, and thus open to sanction, were placed in a precarious position. As a result, although many teachers supported students, some did so in a more covert way, while others managed to break from their "professionalism"¹³ and fidelity to the educational authorities, despite the substantial risk of jeopardising their jobs. These 'hidden transcripts'¹⁴ also need to be understood as a result of the variegated situation at individual schools. However, given that teachers and parents played a much greater role in this boycott as compared to the 1980 boycott, their influence, through their differential roles and levels of involvement at individual schools, further exacerbated differences between individual schools.

An added dimension of complexity was the fact that Rylands High, an affiliate of ASAC, was the only Indian school in the Western Cape which participated in the boycott.¹⁵ As a result it was the only school in the Athlone area which fell under the education department in the House of Delegates (HoD), whereas all other schools in the area fell under the (coloured) House of Representatives (HoR). Rylands High thus not only became an easy

¹³ Kihn, F. Players or Pawns?: 'Professionalism' and the Teacher Disunity in the Western Cape, 1980-1990 MPhil dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1993. Kihn describes 'professionalism' as those teachers more committed to their jobs and salaries, and as such acting quiescently, rather than openly supporting the 'democratic' movement or opposing the education system.

¹⁴ The term 'hidden transcripts' is borrowed from James Scott, Domination and the Hidden Art of Resistance (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990) p. 8. He points out the importance of accounting for those transcripts which, even in a period of great rebellion, 'must remain hidden in the face of domination.' This is of particular relevance in the relation between students and teachers before the boycott, and that of teachers and their superiors during the boycott.

¹⁵ Cravenby High was the only other Indian school in the region. While a few students from Cravenby did participate in the boycott in a very limited way, the school generally continued with the normal syllabus and was not really affected by the boycott, making Rylands the only Indian school in the region to do so.

target for the education 'authorities' to single-out and victimise, but the mere fact that it fell under a separate education department heralded differences. Thus, for these reasons and more, there is a compelling need to take into account the significance of the local and specific power struggles which took place within individual schools in the Athlone area.

While this points to the need ~~to~~ for specificity, it is precisely because the boycott engendered such a myriad of different local experiences⁽⁴⁾ that this thesis cannot hope to offer a comprehensive account of the boycott experience at all Athlone schools. For the sake of expediency, this concern, juxtaposed with the limitations of an honours dissertation, has disallowed a detailed cartography of the circumstances at all schools in Athlone. In addition, Levin, Moll and Narsing cogently argue that such detailed specificity alone, however useful,

"is always limited by the fact that it is a descriptive account only: the ideological and political terms which people use to represent and concretise their struggles are not drawn from the classroom and community [alone but] ... are mediated by political relations in general... Only once local power struggles in education are considered in the context of general political relations can their form and content be explained."⁴⁴

This lucid argument accentuates the need for a dialogic weaving together of the local and divergent with the ecumenical historic significance of the boycott. This approach not only contextualises differences where they exist but, equally importantly, it allows for an elucidation of the general significances of the boycott. This is essential as the 1985 boycott, unlike the boycott of 1980, was not initiated as a result of local school-based grievances or issues which focused on the narrow terrain of education, but, from its inception, was fundamentally linked to the broader, national political struggle. Furthermore, while we must take cognisance of the fact that differences existed at the local level, we must also recognise that the heady scale of the struggles which erupted in 1985,

⁴⁴ Levin, F., Moll, J & Narsing, Y. "The Specificity of Struggle in South African Education" in Unterhalter, E. et al (eds) Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1991) p 237.

made the period epochal. This means that, despite local divergencies, the cumulative effect of the boycott experience in the Western Cape was historically significant and as such spawned general consequences.

Firstly, the boycott in the Western Cape must be seen in the national context of what has been characterised as an 'organic crisis' of the state. However as chapter one and two demonstrate, there were counter-vailing tendencies in the Western Cape which inhibited the same drastic effects that took place in other parts of the country. The historical reasons for this are traced in chapter two. Secondly, the boycott had demonstrated the utter bankruptcy of the tri-cameral parliamentary system in its very first year of existence. Although in the Western Cape, the 1984 tri-cameral elections for the HoR was boycotted by 95.1% of potential voters, and the HoD constituency of Rylands by 86.61% of registered voters,¹⁷ the intransigent attitude of educational authorities and their cohorts in 1985, had stripped the tri-cameral parliament of the scant legitimacy it possessed in its entirety. It thus demonstrated that those claiming 'authority', apart from the fact that they were not elected, did not aspire to act in the best interests of the community. It thus raised the question of who controls education, and indeed all facets of social and political life, and who should control them, in a most succinct way. The boycott thus had the effect of eroding the very hegemony that the state attempted to shore up through these reforms. Thirdly, in the Western Cape the period of upheaval in 1985 increased the fortunes of progressive organisations, especially those with 'Charterist' tendencies - a factor which previously differentiated the Western Cape from the rest of the country. However, this too should not be over-dramatised, for its effects were not always absolute.

¹⁷ Patel, E. 'Legitimacy and Statistics: A Critical Analysis of the First Tri-Cameral Parliamentary Elections, August, 1984' SALDRU Working Paper No. 61 (University of Cape Town, Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit, 1985) p 13, 86. In addition allowances have to be made for the Rylands constituency as a large number of residents had chosen not to register. These low percentage polls must be juxtaposed with the widespread allegations that voting fraud - such as people voting twice or instances where deceased people voted - was permitted.

After much deliberation on whether this dissertation should adopt a thematic or chronological format, I elected the latter for several reasons. A chronological approach allows for a more succinct weaving together of the specific with the general, an elucidation of the changing emphasis of the boycott and the resultant options it afforded the student movement. It also allows a greater contextualisation of local differences within a particular time-frame, making for a better assessment, if other studies of local areas are undertaken. The periodisation which I follow is also generally applicable to other areas in the Western Cape, thus affording these future case studies a base from which comparative analyses may be conducted. In general, using a periodisation allows an easier weaving together of all the concerns of this thesis - understanding the student movement, the specificity of student struggle in the Athlone area and the shifting ideological slants within ASAC. Such an approach also allows for an easier interpretation of the boycott in historical terms as it more readily facilitates the ability to capture the changing focus of the boycott as it progressed. Of monumental importance in this respect, is the opportunity this approach enables an assessment of what the national call for a return to school and the implementation of 'People's Education' meant for student organisation in the Athlone area, at the beginning of 1986.

Three discernible 'stages' in the schools boycott were apparent. However, these three stages are not absolute and a fair amount of continuity and overlap exists.

- 1) The start and fortification of the boycott (from the 29th of July to the beginning of September)
- 2) A changing of foci to include and emphasise local and school-based issues which were ushered in as a result of the counter-offensive by the state. (from the 6th of September until the end of December)
- 3) The period after the SPCC Conference and the call for a return to schools in early 1986. (January to March 1986)

The first stage, looks at how and why ASAC was formed, the way it operated, and the teething problems it experienced. It gives some indication of how the boycott translated into individual schools. During this period, a fundamental concern of boycotting students was to demonstrate solidarity with struggles in other parts of the country and the central demand was the lifting of the State of Emergency. However, in this period local school-based demands and grievances were also taken up quite vociferously. Thus, at individual schools, this period witnessed the contestation of the 'normal' authoritarian nature of schooling. From the very beginning, the implementation of alternative education programmes at schools became a key activity. However, as inter-school rallies became more frequent, these more visible activities were broken up by the security forces in an increasingly brutal manner. The attempted march to Pollsmoor on August 28th, which was met by brutal force, marked a turning point and it drew students out onto the streets, leading to pitched battles between students and the security forces. Participation in the boycott at this stage was thus essentially student-based. However, the community, largely as a result of witnessing police brutality, and attending the numerous rallies that were held, became less averse to the idea of supporting students.

The second stage ~~began~~ was fomented by a marked counter-offensive by the state, in an attempt to thwart the boycott which was rapidly gaining momentum. On the 6th of September, in an attempt to isolate students from their organisational bases, Carter Ebrahim closed all DEC educational institutions in the Western Cape. Ironically, this served only to bolster the boycott by widening its support base, drawing in the broader community on a significant scale. The period saw the emergence of PTSA's and the formation of a mass-based progressive teacher body. On the 17th of September, in a widespread and successful campaign the community opened the schools in defiance of Carter Ebrahim's diktat proclaiming the schools closed. The closure of schools introduced a new dimension to boycott and, although a broader political focus was still visible, attention was redirected to focus on the school and its links with the community. An attempt

was also made to curb all student and community control over schooling and restrictions were placed on school activities.

Although much attention was redirected to focus on the schools, street action remained a marked feature and ASAC battled to draw students back into the schools. As the situation intensified, battles with the security forces became more pitched and led to the tragic Trojan Horse¹⁸ incident, which further exacerbated levels of anger. The State of Emergency was soon extended to the Western Cape, presenting many difficulties for both student and community organisations.

In addition to the state's endeavour to thwart the student boycott, a vast range of issues had emerged, posing numerous difficulties for ASAC. It was during this stage that ASAC had to consider the future of the boycott. The emergence of PTSA's, although it greatly assisted the student movement, was not wholly unproblematic. In political organisations the debate surrounding the future of the boycott was not unified, with one section arguing that the boycott should be intensified, while the other argued that a continuation was problematic as education, important and might result in a setback for the liberation movement in general. Thus, it was at this stage that the Liberation VS Education debate became pronounced. As the spectre of the final examination loomed large, these debates became more acute. As a result, although students' organisations, backed by all progressive political organisations and a significant percentage of parents and teachers, agreed that the exams would not be written, many divisions emerged. Thus, although this was the apogee of the boycott, it was also a period fraught with tensions, divisions and potential disasters.

The third stage, which can also be regarded as the concluding chapter, briefly examines the return to schools. This period was fomented by the national conference convened by the Soweto

¹⁸ On 13th October 1985, 10 policemen, deliberately concealed in crates at the back of a truck, cruised down Thornton Road to where students were burning barricades. When the truck was stoned, the police jumped up, and indiscriminately opened fire with live ammunition, killing 3 youths, aged 11, 16 and 21.

Parents Crisis Committee at the end of December. The conference was convened at a period when the student movement suffered many setbacks as a result of the Emergency and the divisive issue of exams. ASAC was also unsure how to proceed into the new year. The SPCC conference served to thwart this lack of direction by calling for a national return to schools on the 28th of January, the implementation of 'People's Education', in conjunction with the formal syllabus, and the suspension of the boycott option for three months, after which time another conference would convene to assess the situation nationally. Although this call engendered coherence and direction, its policies were not implemented uniformly and the return to schools was marred by a host of problems. In particular, departmental victimisation of teachers did not facilitate a smooth return to schools. The DEC's decision to allow promotions instead of an exam in March had further weakened the position of student organisations. The rest of the chapter looks briefly at student organisational realignments.

CHAPTER 1: EDUCATION, RESISTANCE AND REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ORGANIC CRISIS, 1976-1985

Education and struggles in education did not occur in a vacuum, but were inextricably linked to the political economy of apartheid and is but a microcosm of a much broader scenario. As such, an analysis of South African education, or the boisterous school revolts which it has spawned endemically since 1976, cannot be confined to the narrow terrain of the educational arena. Concomitantly, Nekhwevha argues that the "crisis of authority" within the schools in 1985 was a reflection of the socio-economic, political and ideological crisis which was engulfing South Africa.¹ This 'crisis of authority' is precisely a crisis of hegemony for the state. Drawing on Gramsci, a cross-section of Left political analysts² have argued convincingly, that from the mid-1970's, South Africa had been experiencing an 'organic crisis', or a crisis of accumulation, from which it could not escape. In a country already polarised and politically sensitised, this exacerbated existing disgruntlement and upped the tempo of opposition, which in turn accentuated the economic crisis. Gramsci argues that when such a crisis persists without signs of cessation, this could mean that

"incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making efforts to cure them within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts form the terrain of the conjunctural and it is upon this terrain that the forces of the opposition organise... in the immediate it is developed in a series of ... polemics"³

¹ Nekhwevha, F.H. The 1985 School Crisis in the Western Cape MA Sociology dissertation, (University of Cape Town, 1991) p 3.

² Adelman, C. "Recent Events in South Africa" in Capital and Class No 26 1985; Bundy, C. "South Africa on the Switchback" in New Society 3/1/1986; Callinicos, A. South Africa: Between Reform and Revolution (London, Bookmarks, 1988); Saul, J & Gelb, S. The Crisis in South Africa (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1986)

³ Gramsci, A. Selections from Prison Notebooks edited by Hoare & Smith, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1991) p 178.

However, as any activist knows, the mere existence of hardships, alone, do not in themselves create revolts. Instead, these hardships help to provide a base in which activism takes root and becomes more conducive to the forces of opposition. This tenet is not missed by Gramsci, who himself argued that

"economic crises themselves [do not] produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought... The specific question of economic hardship or well-being as a cause of new historic realities is a partial aspect."⁴

However, if such objective economic factors ~~does~~ ferment in virulent opposition, the state cannot rule interminably by relying on force alone and thus at a certain stage the ruling bloc may allow certain concessions or cosmetic reforms in an attempt to reassert its dominance or hegemony over civil society. However, if this fails and opposition continues, the state often embarks on a twin policy which embodies both reform, but also increased repression. This is precisely what transpired in South Africa during the 1980's.

The long international post-World War Two boom which was beginning to draw to a close by the early 1970's was exacerbated by the OPEC oil crisis of 1973, ushering in a period of world-wide economic contraction. As the South African economy was interminably linked and subordinated to world markets, this contraction was one of the factors which partially resulted in a crisis of capital accumulation and stagnation by the mid-1970's. Concomitantly, the spectacular economic growth rate that South Africa had experienced in the post-Sharpeville era of the 1960's had come to a grinding halt. Bundy points out that between 1962 and 1972 South Africa's gross domestic product grew at over 6% a year, with white South Africans enjoying one of the highest levels of consumerism and living standards internationally.⁵ In part, this was a result of the post-Sharpeville period, when opposition had been obliterated or driven into exile and any form

⁴ *ibid* p 164

⁵ Bundy, L. "South Africa on the Switchback" in New Society 3/1/1986, p 8.

of dissent, virtually absent. With black unionism barely existing, South Africa could not only rely on its entrenched system of cheap labour, but it also boasted one of the most strike-free economies internationally. This combination of stability and high growth rate had enticed foreign investors to make huge capital outlays. However, Bundy points out that beneath this idyllic veneer, as early as 1972, a number of negative factors were at work. While the boom had swelled the ranks of the black working class considerably,

"apartheid policies ensured that it would be deprived of housing, educational and welfare facilities. Economic growth remained precariously dependent on a high propensity for imports... from the more advanced capitalist economies. Barriers to black advancement continued to restrict the domestic market"*

Thus, after the OPEC-induced international contraction, the South African economy began to decline and by 1975 the growth rate had fallen by two thirds.⁷ As the recession and inflation began to bear down heavily on an already impoverished black working class, the quiescence of the previous decade had been bludgeoned into oblivion, both as a result of growing working class militancy (but also economism) as well as the revolts which erupted in 1976 as a result of the attempted introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of education. This not only reverberated nationally, spreading as far as Cape Town, but it also exacerbated the economic crisis by engendering a massive flight of capital from South Africa. In addition, the Southern African regional political profile had been fundamentally altered with the fall of the Portuguese colonies in Mozambique and Angola, as well as the weakening of the Smith regime in Rhodesia, leaving the white regime in South Africa almost isolated.

While the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of education ignited the powder-keg of 1976, this was but the tip of the iceberg. The revolt against Afrikaans was seen as a revolt against the central tenets of 'Bantu' education (introduced in

* 1976 p. 8.

⁷ 1976 p. 8.

1953). In the nefarious words of H.F. Verwoerd, Minister of Education, 'Bantu' education was to ensure that for Africans,

"there is no place in the European community above the levels of certain forms of labour... For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption into the European community where he cannot be absorbed. This... is uneconomical because money is spent on an education which has no specific aim."⁹

The ideological underpinnings of Verwoerdian education was to produce a subservient black population (largely proletarian in opus) which was not only poorly educated but which would accept its subordination. The paltry levels of state spending on African education, intended to limit access to higher education, facilitated under- or unqualified teachers, the absence of sufficient classrooms, textbooks, laboratories, and a host of other inadequate facilities. Secondly, as Wolpe points out, the syllabuses not only virtually excluded science subjects and mathematics, but it also taught racist history which "'proved' the superiority of whites, devalued pre-colonial African societies, denigrated the role of black people in the construction of modern South Africa, and asserted the incapacity of black people to exercise political power and democratic rights."¹⁰ While this policy succeeded partially by limiting the educational advancement of Africans by curtailing skills, literacy and so forth, this policy, in the context of the economic crisis and the acute need for a more skilled labour force, became self-defeating and contributed to a persistent shortage of skilled labour.¹⁰

Within the politically repressive post-Sharpeville period of the 1970's, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) which emerged and took root in organisations such as the South African Students Movement (SASM) and the South African Students Organisation

⁹ Verwoerd quoted in Mkatshwa, S. "Keynote Address: The National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education" in Millar, C. (ed) Breaking the Formal Frame: Readings in South African Education in the Eighties (Cape Town, Oxford, 1991) p 243.

¹⁰ Wolpe, H. "Educational Resistance" in Lonsdale, J (ed) South Africa in Question (London, Heinemann, 1988) p 202.

¹⁰ *ibid* p 203.

payments crisis, soaring unemployment and inflation, which in turn manifested in outright revolt, it nevertheless remained dominant and crushed the opposition with relative ease. However, it became increasingly clear that in order to restore hegemony over civil society, a viable solution would have to encompass more than repression alone.

The attempt made by the Botha government to resolve the organic crisis was however placed within non-negotiable limits which would not alter the essence of the prevailing mode of production. Instead, towards the end of the 1970's the National Party (NP) government embarked upon a 'total strategy' - a combination of "repression and certain 'cosmetic changes' to win over a small section of blacks [especially from the middle-class] to the capitalist structure, while at the same time tightening the control."¹⁴ This need was especially acute for the state, given the fact that race and class in South Africa intersected in a very obvious way and thus struggle had not only been directed at the apartheid state, but was also increasingly one marked by an anti-capitalist discourse.

A crucial aspect of this 'total strategy' was to win the 'hearts and minds' from the 'rooi gevaar' through a policy of divide and rule and an attempt to mystify and play down potentially contentious features of South African life. The Wiehahn Commission encouraged the legalisation of the burgeoning militant union movement in the hope of institutionalising it through compulsory registration, while at the same time attempting to desensitise its political content through legalisation. At the same time the Riekert Commission recommended that "a stratum of Africans should be accorded permanent residents rights in the cities while at the same time the government should tighten the control of outsiders"¹⁵ (ie. those in the homelands) entering urban areas.

¹⁴ Mchabane, F. op cit p 37.

¹⁵ quoted in *ibid* p 39.

Educational reform was a crucial component of the total strategy, both as an attempt to defuse student militancy (as witnessed in 1976, and later in 1980) and as an attempt to attenuate the shortage of skilled manual labour. Although there was an expansion of secondary black education (especially African education) affording more people the opportunity of attending schools, this was not marked by a substantial increase in the spending ratio on black education, with per capita spending on white education remaining at the apex, while, for Indian, coloured and African education respectively, spending decreased progressively.

The year 1980 witnessed the first large-scale boycotts after the 1976-7 revolts. Although the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) emerged during the struggles of 1976 and played an important part in directing the course of the revolt, Chisholm and Cross argued that the organization was still "embryonic."¹⁶ While in 1976 there were no real precedents or lessons to draw from, in 1980 the "lessons of 1976 were consciously extrapolated."¹⁷ In part this was augured by the existence of national organisations such as the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (AZAPO) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), formed in 1978 and 1979 respectively. These organisations sought to rebuild and salvage the remaining embers of organisation after the sustained period of repression witnessed after 1976.

The role and reaction of the state during the boycott was characteristic - schools were closed, teachers and students were detained and victimised, and the use of police batons, quirts, teargas and dogs were once again in evidence. However the state also attempted to palliate the effect of the boycott and, during its peak, directed the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) to conduct an investigation which would research an acceptable package of educational reforms. This investigation, also known as the De Lange Commission, was to recommend how to create a 'new'

¹⁶ See also Cross, *op. cit.* Chisholm, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

education system which would provide "the same quality [of education] for all population groups."¹⁸ This impetus was also partially a response to the demands of the big business sector which was arguing that the education system hampered economic recovery as it did not reproduce an adequately motivated or technically trained black workforce, which was rudimentary for sustained economic growth. As such, the Commission was keen to transform aspects of the curriculum in order to prepare black youth more adequately for the increasingly modern and technically oriented world of work. When the De Lange Commission reported in 1981, amongst others, it recommended that a state should establish equal educational opportunities and standards of education for all 'groups', under a single ministry of education.¹⁹

However, it is important to realise that the De Lange Commission must be seen as an integral facet of the 'total strategy' and thus part of the endeavour to cement the status quo via incremental reforms which were not intended to alter the dominant racial and class-based status quo. As such, its recommendations would remain fundamentally entrenched within a segregationist framework. Thus, the recommendations that the De Lange Commission conceived were not only an attempt to placate the political content of education, but also to provide an education system which would continue to reproduce a labour supply, albeit now a suitably qualified one. Thus, Nasson has argued that the central issue is not whether technological adjustments to the curriculum could enrich certain aspects of schooling or not, but rather

"how such reformed educational procedures might continue to relate to the reproduction of relations of economic domination and exploitation in South Africa. In some essential respects, the De Lange Commission did not signify much historical discontinuity"²⁰

¹⁸ Nasson, P. 'Modernization as Legitimation: Education Reform and the State in the 1980's' in Nkomo, M (ed) The Pedagogy of Domination: Towards a Democratic Education in South Africa (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1990) p 157 original emphasis.

¹⁹ Hartshorne, K. 'The state of education in South Africa: some indicators' in Millar, C. Breaking the Formal Frame: Readings in South African Education in the Eighties (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991) p 61.

²⁰ Nasson, P. *op cit.* p 132.

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¹⁹ Hartshorne, K. 'The state of education in South Africa: some indicators' in Miller, C. Breaking the Formal Frame: Reactions in South African Education in the Eighties (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991) p 41.

²⁰ Nasson, B. op cit. p 132.

In addition to the limitations of the De Lange Commission's recommendations, the government's 1983 White Paper on Education, while accepting the need for educational reform and educational equality for all 'population groups', was subject to its guiding principle of each 'population group' maintaining its 'own' schools and educational authorities. It was also made clear that this 'equality' should not affect the standard of white education. As such, education remained locked into a 'separate but equal' ethos, with 18 separate educational departments and per capita spending for 'population groups' remaining as incongruous as before. By 1984 per capita spending on education for whites, Indians, coloureds and African was R1654, R1088, R569 and R234, respectively. Thus, whereas Africans constituted over 70% of the population, spending on African education was less than 22% of the total expenditure of the education budget.²¹ While the De Lange Commission did engender a paltry mutation in state education policy, resulting in an expansion of black education, arguably its entire *raison d'être* had failed.

The primary functions of the De Lange Commission and the trifling educational reforms which followed, were intended to produce what Paulo Freire has called an 'education for domestication'²² It had a dual purpose which was intended to bolster the hegemonic political order and its nascent economic needs i.e. it was designed to act both an agency of social control, and to reproduce capitalist relations of production and the labour force necessary to revive the fortunes of the South African economy. However, both these functions had failed with the result that in the 1980's, black education had become a 'trojan horse'²³ and, as Alexander has argued, neither brutal force, nor any amount of 'cooing or wooing [could] undo or reverse the thorough

²¹ Bundy, C. 'Schools and Revolution' in New Society 10/1/1986 p 53.

²² Freire, P. Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York, Continuum, 1970) p 44.

²³ Kallaway, P. 'An Introduction to the Study of Education for Blacks in South Africa' in Kallaway, P. (ed) Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans (Johannesburg, Raven, 1986) p 26.

demystification of black schooling begun by the bullets of 1976"²⁴

After a brief period of economic recovery between 1979 and 1981, the economy took a severe turn for the worse and by 1982 began a steady course of decline. Although the period between 1981 and the beginning of 1984 did not witness any large-scale or protracted struggles in education, this by no means indicated that another era of black quiescence had begun. On the contrary, the slide into economic stagnation had the effect of magnifying the "yawning gap between the rhetoric of reform and the everyday reality of dispossession and powerlessness."²⁵ This period not only witnessed the prolific growth of black trade unionism, civic associations, youth and students' organisations, but also their unprecedented capturing of a grass-roots following in a mass-based constituency, on such a scale.

The political reforms engendered by the state did not have the effect of lessening the growth of organisations and on the contrary, the establishment of the tri-cameral system for coloureds and Indians and local community councillors for African residential areas led to an exacerbation of resentment and mobilisation. The United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella-body which banded together civic, youth, student, worker and women's organisations with broad Charterist affiliations, in a non-racial but multi-class alliance, was established to oppose the government's facile constitutional tinkering and its plans to create what was widely regarded as the 'dummy' and fraudulent tri-cameral system. The call to form the UDF was followed shortly by the launch of the National Forum (NF) in 1983, which represented organisations sympathetic to the ideological position

²⁴ Alexander, N. Education for Affirmation (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1986) p 6. This perspective is important as Wolpe & Unterhalter's essay "Reproduction, reform and the analysis of education in South Africa" in Unterhalter et al (eds): Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles (Johannesburg, Raven, 1991: 6-7) has pointed out that many education theorists have relied too heavily on a structuralist perspective, and have consequently accorded the reproductive role of education an undue weight. They argue that this is incorrect firstly because education must be regarded as a contested terrain and, secondly, the contribution of education to reproduction depends on the fit between education and the specific conditions of the social formation and 'cannot be derived from the concept of reproduction [alone].'

²⁵ Gross and Obendorf, op cit p 43.

of Black Consciousness (BC). However, in the 1980's it was possible to discern a movement away from a BC ideology and a concomitant identification with the ANC and Freedom Charter.²⁶

This ideological realignment could partially be attributed to the growth of COSAS (the UDF's largest affiliate) which had adopted the Freedom Charter, although it had remained a proscribed document until 1984. During the 1980's COSAS grew significantly and its demand for the recognition of democratically elected SRC's became an integral site of the education struggle. This demand was juxtaposed with the demand for full franchise rights in civil society. The activities of COSAS, however, did not remain confined to the terrain of the school and it took up many community-based issues in alliance with civics and unions. This conceptual link was made explicit by COSAS President, Lulu Johnson, who argued, "Before they are students, students are members of their communities. The school and the community are inseparable."²⁷

The combination of the tri-cameral elections, exorbitant rent increases in townships across the Vaal-triangle and Eastern Cape, and a number of school-based grievances which emerged, ensured that 1984 heralded a period of popular rebellion against the state. Once again, as in 1976 and 1980, the "spark which lit the insurrectionary fires came from the black schools."²⁸ As early as January, students, under the banner of COSAS staged a boycott in Atteridgeville (near Pretoria) in which they focused on educational grievances such as the excessive use of corporal punishment and the sexual harassment of female students by teachers. The schools in the area were soon closed, and lead to solidarity boycotts in other areas. Almost simultaneously, students in the Eastern Cape rural town of Cradock had begun a

²⁶ Kaidoo, N. "Internal Resistance in South Africa: The Political Movements" in Johnson, S. (ed) South Africa: No Turning Back (London, Macmillan, 1986) p 173.

²⁷ Lulu Johnson, quoted in Johnson, S. "The Soldiers of Luthuli: Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa" in Johnson, S. (ed) South Africa: No Turning Back (London, Macmillan, 1986) p 114.

²⁸ *ibid* p 113.

boycott of classes in support of Matthew Goniwe, a teacher and prominent activist, who had been threatened with a transfer to another region. By April a nationwide boycott had begun, which had been presaged by the extremely poor matriculation results and the refusal of the authorities to readmit 'overage' pupils. Consequently, by May, over 200 000 pupils were out on boycott in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape in support of a COSAS campaign which demanded the recognition of democratically elected SRC's; free books and stationery; the end to the age limit, excessive corporal punishment, sexual harassment of female students, and the politically motivated expulsions of pupils and teachers. COSAS also demanded the removal of unqualified teachers."

By mid-year, large parts of the country had witnessed a protracted period of confrontations with the authorities. In townships across the Transvaal and Eastern Cape, the UDF led a successful campaign to boycott the municipal elections of black local authorities. Despite widespread rejection, the local councils were still put into operation. Consequently, anger was vented at the municipal councillors who had become symbols of indirect state rule in the townships. This was exacerbated by the increase in rentals effected by these councils. From the end of the 1970's to 1984, rent levies had been increased by 400%.²⁹ In a period of economic decline, escalating unemployment and inflation, and heightened political activity, these increases certified widespread support for the rent-boycott campaign. Additionally, the concomitant excessive use of force by the security forces in an attempt to crush the campaign, served only to bolster the militancy and potency of the rebellion. This force was also reciprocated, and on the 'Third Day of September', beginning in the township of Sebokeng, an endemic spiral of violence had been initiated in the Transvaal. While the focus of activity and militancy had initially been the Transvaal, after

²⁹ Ibid p 114; and Lodge, T. "Rebellions: The Turning of the Tide" in Lodge, T, Nasson, B. et al (eds) All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980's (Cape Town, Ford Foundation and David Philip, 1991) p 66.

³⁰ Mami, A. Lessons of Struggles: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990 (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1992) p 11.

November 1984 the geographic focus of the revolt had shifted to the Eastern Cape. To a lesser degree, the anti-tri-cameral election campaign, culminating in late 1984, had also brought a heightened degree of political activity to coloured and Indian areas across the country. Ideologically, the rebellion engendered a marked shift in the balance of forces between contending political organisations, with the UDF's² status and hegemony, and its ideology of Charterism, ascending prodigiously over other organisations and ideological tendencies.

By 1985 none of the demands of boycotting students had been addressed and, as a result, the schools boycott had not dissipated. In addition, anger was radically enhanced when on the 21st of March, a contingent of heavily-armed police confronted a peaceful crowd marching from Uitehage's Langa township to a funeral in the nearby township of Kwanobhule, killing 20 and wounding a further 23.²¹ Crucially, it must be noted that while this period had greatly enhanced the fortunes of both unions and civic organisations, it was the youth and student structures which had grown the most and which had played an unassailable vanguard role. It was largely the efforts of youth, especially that of COSAS, which had canonised the ANC, enabling it to become an undisputable popular force within township politics. Despite the state's² increasing reliance on force, the invective fires of discontent which had erupted in 1984² had continued to rage undisturbed throughout 1985. In part, the impact of the rebellion was distended by the ANC's call at the beginning of 1985 to 'render South Africa ungovernable.' Lodge, in highlighting the scale of the revolt, has pointed out that from the start of the Vaal Rebellion of September 1984, to July 1985,

"the death toll rose to 517 with the killings reaching a peak of 96 in July. Between September 1984 and May 1985, 109 councillors were attacked and 66 of their homes or shops were torched. Petrol bombings of activists' houses by vigilantes ... the hirelings of the councillors, gave a new fury to the spiralling

²¹ West, M. 'Resistance and Revolt in Greater Cape Town' p. 11.

frenzy. Forty people were killed in three weeks in the East Rand alone in late June and early 1985³²

In addition, in June 1985, at its historic Kabwe Conference, the ANC had decided to increase its guerilla activities and attacks by Umkhonto we Sizwe and, in the second half of 1985, a total of 88 attacks were recorded, making for an unprecedented annual total of 136 in 1985.³³ Additionally, in late July the kidnapping, torture and murder of Matthew Goniwe and three other Eastern Cape activists by an apartheid death squad had not had its desired effect of stilling opposition, but had fuelled militancy beyond its previous heights. The rebellion had not remained confined to the townships which skirted the metropolitan areas in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape, but had also spread to numerous villages and dorps across the country. In addition, this rebellion had an adverse effect on the economy and, shortly after June, the United States loans outstanding to South Africa, alone, fell by an unprecedented \$500 million and the total lending by the US banks to South Africa, which had nearly tripled from 1979 to \$5 billion in 1985, had fallen to \$2.78 billion.³⁴ In the face of such an unprecedented and enduring revolt against the state, coupled with colossal financial blows, the state was beginning to lose its room to manoeuvre. As a result, in July 1985, a State of Emergency was declared in 36 magisterial districts (largely in the Vaal-triangle and Eastern Cape) in an attempt to crush internal opposition.³⁵

Clearly, what this had demonstrated was that the state's attempt to attenuate internal opposition, through the total strategy, had failed. Its facile attempts to institute reforms had boomeranged and these reforms, such as the local councils and tri-cameral

³² Lodge, T. *op cit* p 75.

³³ Lodge, T. 'The African National Congress after the Kabwe Conference' in Moss, G & Obery, I. (eds) South African Review 4 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987) p 7.

³⁴ Marx, A. *op cit* p 161.

³⁵ Webster, D. 'Repression and the State of Emergency' in Moss, G & Obery, I (eds) South African Review 4 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987) p 141.

system. had to be maintained through force. It is also obvious that every recent period of major upheaval (1976-7; 1980; 1984-6) has not only been initiated by the youth and students, but that they have remained at the helm of each of them. In his examination of the origins and significance of student and youth movements, Jonathan Hyslop has argued, that why students had played such a central role²⁶ can only be explained by pointing to the

particular factors in their situation in society which make them an explosive social force. ... although awareness of the profound inequality in education is an important factor in student movements' motivation, it does not explain its existence."²⁶

Hyslop has thus argued that there are in part, certain structural and conjunctural aspects which need to be taken account of in order to explain student activism and militancy. As such, student militancy must be placed within the context of the drastic increase in the percentage of youth in South Africa, and the deepening recession, and how these intersected with the content of black education.

The demographic factor is of monumental importance for, as Bundy has pointed out, South Africa has been in a phase of accelerated population growth. As the growth rate increases by an average of 2.6% per annum, this has meant that every 30 years the population doubles, resulting in almost half the population being under 21, and with those under 15 constituting 43% of the African population and almost 40% of the coloured population.²⁷ If the trajectory of growth is juxtaposed with the combination of the glaring defects in black education, the substantial increase in the quantity (but not quality) of black education, and the economic downturn with the resultant high levels of unemployment of black school leavers, the radicalisation of youth can quite

²⁶ Hyslop, J. "Schools, unemployment and youth: origins and significance of student and youth movements, 1976-87" in Nasson, D & Samuel, J (eds) Educations from Poverty to Liberty (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1990) p 66.

²⁷ Bundy, C. "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics : Aspects of Youth - Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985" in Journal of Southern African Studies Vol 13 No 3 1987 : 310 and "Introduction" in Everett, D & Steyn, E (eds) Black Youth in Crisis Facing the Future (Bracefontein, Raven Press, 1991) p 1.

easily be understood. Thus the poor black education system had deteriorated further by¹ the drastic growth of the youth sector. As such, student movements have seen the education system as acting as a transmission belt from the school gates to the gates of the factory.

Precisely because the school situation has been so obviously and interminably intersected with the broader realities of class and race, it has become a contested terrain, with students demanding better opportunities and facilities. However, given the discourse of the state, there had also been a growing realisation that a viable and democratic education system could only be implemented after the overthrow of the state. As such, the discourse of student movements and politics had been injected with an overtly political focus. These combined factors, in a period of burgeoning politicisation, had been multiplied by the particularly brutal manner that the security forces have tried to quell student struggles. For example, Bundy has pointed out that between 1984 and 1986, the state had killed 300 children, wounded 1 000, detained 11 000, arrested 18 000 on protest charges, with 173 000 still awaiting trial.²⁸ It must also be remembered that these figures and the discussion above does not take into account the psychological effects and general milieu of dispossession and racial oppression in relation to youth radicalisation.

In this chapter I have given a broad and brief overview of developments in other parts of the country, locating education and education struggles within the context of the South African political economy and overall state strategy, from the 1970's to the mid-1980's. As such, I have only focused on high profile developments at the national level. While any account of the 1985 schools boycott in the Western Cape must place it within such a context, as it was clearly related to the broader national scenario, this alone does not impart an adequate context. While the 1980's certainly did exhibit certain combined and coherent national developments in relation to the fermentation of

²⁸ Bundy, *Black Youth in Crisis* p. 3.

opposition and in relation to the economy, state strategy, the organic crisis, and education, there were also extremely uneven levels of regional development. This fragmentary development is seen most visibly when the Western Cape is contrasted ^{with} to other parts of the country. Here, the schools boycott, and the concomitant confrontation with the forces of the state, only began in late July 1985, whereas large parts of the Eastern Cape and Transvaal had already been ablaze since the last quarter of 1984. Given this contrast, the next chapter seeks to provide the historical local context of the boycott in the Western Cape. This is important as these differences had a major influence over the 1985 boycott itself.

CHAPTER 2: THE PRE BOYCOTT

WESTERN CAPE

1) Contending Progressive Ideologies in the Western Cape

"South Africa is ... a mixed bag of historically distinct localities, with different traditions and different social forces. And, perhaps more than anywhere else, the Western Cape possesses an 'exceptionalist' political constituency and culture."¹

By the 1980's the Western Cape had become renowned for its differentiated development of political ideologies. These differences should however be traced historically and partially attributed to the regions' peculiar development. Demographically, the Western Cape has been unique, given the fact that it is the only region where coloured people predominate and Africans only form 13% of the population.² This was essentially a result of the governments' deliberate attempt to restrict African urbanisation by 'endorsing' Africans out of the Cape Town area and implementing the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP). Although African urbanisation did grow in the 1970's and 1980's, largely through informal settlements, the artificial divisions between coloureds and Africans had been enhanced through the governments policy of 'divide and rule', the group areas, different educational systems, as well as through language, culture and occupation. In addition, the black population of the Greater Cape Town area also includes a small percentage of Cape Malays and Indians, who were officially classified as either coloured or Indian.³

¹ Nasson, B. 'Opposition Politics and Ideology in the Western Cape' in Moss, G & Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5 (Johannesburg, Raven, 1985) p 51.

² Todes, A. Watson, V. & Wilkinson, P. 'Local government restructuring in Greater Cape Town' in James, W & Simons, M (eds). The Angry Divide: The Social and Economic History of the Western Cape (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989) p 192.

³ Nasson, B. 'Political Ideologies in the Western Cape' in Loope, T & Nasson, B. et al (eds) All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980's (Cape Town Ford Foundation and David Philip, 1991) p 206.

Another differentiating factor is that in the Western Cape, unlike the Witwatersrand or parts of the Eastern Cape, heavy industry did not predominate. Instead, light manufacturing industries such as textiles, clothing and food processing, which employed a predominantly coloured labour force, were well established.⁴ Although the 'ethnic' stratification in the region is an important factor, for the purposes of this thesis, the political cleavages which presented themselves as a result are more crucial. Firstly, because the working class was stratified racially, with coloured workers (who were relatively more privileged through the CLPP) predominating, 'progressive' unions had considerably less support amongst the workforce compared to other regions where African workers predominated. Secondly, and more importantly, Cape Town's organisational tendencies and traditions have been conspicuously more diffuse than in other parts of the country, and as Bill Nasson has argued,

"For decades there have been many 'isms' contending for ascendancy within the various constituencies in the Western Cape ... No discussion of Western Cape politics, however partial and abbreviated, can fail to reiterate the point that it has remained a fractious politics of quite Byzantine complexity."⁵

In the Western Cape, the two most apparent ideological traditions within opposition politics was that of the Unity Movement on the one hand, and that of the Charterist\Congress tradition associated with the UDF and ANC on the other.

The Unity Movement tradition, which has its origins in the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) which was formed in the 1940's, is characterised by its two guiding principles of non-collaboration and non-racialism. Its commitment to non-racialism is based on the principle that race did not exist and as such derided any mention of the term 'national group'. After the NEUM officially disbanded in the 1960's its traditions continued in organisations such as the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and its

⁴ *ibid* p 208.

⁵ Nasson, B. 'Opposition Politics...' *op cit* p 92; 103.

Education Fellowships, where it concentrated largely on low key, and almost clandestine political education. Thus, while this was the most distinctive regional ideological tradition, it never engendered an active mass following and ironically, although it was committed to the establishment of proletarian hegemony, it had very little contact with organised workers or the working-class in general. Instead, its leaders and most of its membership were largely drawn from a small group of predominantly middle-class and professional coloured radicals, especially school-teachers. Thus, organisationally, the Unity Movement traditions' main impetus was found in the Teachers' League of South Africa and its mouthpiece the Educational Journal. Ideologically, however the Unity Movement tradition sought to create a 'united front' of revolutionary socialists in a non-sectarian, non-racial alliance. As such its claim to being an authentic and distinctive liberation movement was restricted more to its ideas and arguments than in its organisational strength.*

Although the Unity Movement tradition gave opposition politics a distinct local flavour, what really distinguished the Western Cape region from other regions in the mid-1980's, was that Charterist traditions (which predominated elsewhere) had relatively less support in the area. In part, again, this can be attributed to the regions' unique demography. While most of those coloured members of the community who were drawn to opposition politics and radicalism were largely supportive of the Unity Movement tradition, the loyalty of the smaller, African community was divided between supporting the ANC or the PAC. Ideologically, while Charterism was also committed to non-racialism, it sought to establish a 'popular front' against apartheid, based^{on} a multi-class alliance, with the Freedom Charter as its guiding document.

Although both traditions adhered to non-racialism, there were rancorous divisions between the two strands. The Unity Movement tradition was especially critical of 'popular frontism' and derided it as indicative of the 'pro-capitalist and anti-working

* Mason, F. 'Political Ideologies ...' p 111.

class nature of ANC bourgeois social democracy".⁷ It was also hostile to what it regarded as the ANC's acceptance of 'multi-racism which was embedded in Freedom Charter. In addition, it rejected the Charterists use of the boycott as a weapon, and instead argued that the boycott should be used as a principle of non-collaboration. In turn, critics of the Unity Movement have lambasted the organisation for its 'armchair politicking' and its "petty-bourgeois social base and the dominance of teachers within its organisational structures. ... To this is ascribed its failure to organise a mass base, to move beyond the realm of education and ideas."⁸

After the 1976 revolt there was a considerable growth of community organisations in the Western Cape, with eighty-five voluntary associations emerging between 1980 and 1984, in contrast to the seventy-two through the whole period of the 1970's.⁹ This gave a concrete organisational expression to the two distinct political traditions as most of these organisations identified themselves with one camp or the other. However, in 1982, despite the (often bitter) ideological differences, over 60 civic, in addition to progressive sporting, cultural and student organisations, from both tendencies came together to form the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (DBAC).¹⁰ This broad grouping was formed in order to facilitate a united opposition against the 'Koornhof Bills' which were designed to tighten the existing influx control laws.

From the start however, the DBAC was smitten by intra-organisational and ideological skirmishes. Organisations within the DBAC were divided over the participation of white 'liberal' organisations such as the National Union of South African

⁷ *ibid* p 212.

⁸ Chisholm, L. 'Education, Politics and Organisation: The Educational Traditions and Legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement' in *Transformation* 15, 1991, p 2.

⁹ Mafiwana, M & Walters, S. The Struggle for Democracy: A study of Community Organisations in Greater Cape Town from the 1960's to 1985 (Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of Cape Town, 1986) p 24.

¹⁰ *ibid*

Students (NUSAS) and the Black Sash, as well as black business groups such as the Western Cape Traders Association, in the DBAC. While the Charterist organisations accepted these organisations participation in the DBAC as part of their endeavour to build a popular front against apartheid, this was bitterly opposed by the Unity Movement groups. The Unity Movement organisations questioned the legitimacy of a structure which combined working class interests with the interests of the "children and wives of factory and mine bosses, and a middle class Western Cape Traders Association that was opposed to the real interests of the working class."¹¹ Bill Nasson has argued that for the Unity Movement, such an organisation was in direct opposition to the movement's anti-reformist and non-collaborationist principles. Thus, "drawing upon well established themes in Western Cape Trotskyist rhetoric, the unity movement called for 'the building of INDEPENDENT worker organizations, independent of bosses, based on PRINCIPLED UNITY.'¹²

As a result of the perpetual in-fighting, the Charterist group, led by the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) withdrew from the DBAC in 1983. However, the DBAC did not collapse and soon after the Charterists withdrew, those organisations which had remained in the DBAC, regrouped and formed the Cape Action League (CAL) as a "genuine United Front of all people's organizations, on the understanding that such a front shall be led by the black working class and does not include liberal or ruling class-organizations."¹³ Although CAL played an important part in the formation of the NF and its anti-capitalist discourse it digressed to a certain extent from AZAPO as it was committed to 'non-racialism' and not 'anti-racism' and as such, was more ambivalent towards the participation of the white Left in the struggle. However, CAL was also a direct outgrowth of the unity movement tradition and committed to its principle of non-

¹¹ quoted in Nasson, E. 'Political Ideologies...' p 221.

¹² *ibid* p 221.

¹³ *ibid* p 221.

collaboration. Although it claimed to represent over fifty-organisations, Nasson points out that these were generally not mass-based organisations.

The Charterist organisations had also regrouped and their ideological strand was greatly enhanced by the national formation of the UDF. However, in the Western Cape, did not gain the level of popular support it engendered in other parts of the country. Despite the divergencies between the two tendencies, 1984 heralded a degree of cooperation as both organisations called for a boycott of the 1984 tri-cameral elections. This joint call ensured that the boycott campaign was a success with the only a marginal percent voting in the Western Cape. While it cannot be denied that there was a growth of organisation, the low poll was not necessarily an indication of mass growth for either tendency as neither was able to influence the day to day lives of the Western Cape community. Nevertheless, in political circles, there was an increased level of support for Charterism. This was largely because the UDF's organisational structures and tactics were more congenial to drawing in layers of local activists and threads of popular charterist resistance, which CAL could not match.¹⁴

By the first half of 1985, the growth of political organisations in the Western Cape could still not be compared to growth in other areas. Similarly, the ideological divisions between organisational tendencies, which had existed for decades had not diminished and remained as marked as ever. Apart from these two tendencies discussed above, there had also been a third, but much weaker tendency, that of Africanism and Black Consciousness. In fact, developments towards the mid-1980's did not show any signs of moving towards a united front. Instead, these divisions were confirmed by the launch of the New Unity Movement (NUM) in 1985. Like its predecessor, the NEUM, it remained committed to the non-negotiable principles of non-collaboration and non-racialism and did not endeavour to build a mass-based organisation. However,

¹⁴ Ibid p 111.

unlike CAL, NUM remained hostile to the BC tradition and it condemned AZAPO as a reactionary tendency for its "overriding emphasis on black communalism instead of class issues."¹⁹

¹⁹ 1910 p. 224.

2) The 1980 School Boycotts in the Western Cape

In the Western Cape, as in other parts of the country, the expansion of black education without the concomitant increase in expenditure, eroded the already low standards of black education even further. Even in coloured schools, conditions had deteriorated to a point where in 1979, a meeting of school inspectors in Cape Town warned that "Coloured education was about to collapse."¹⁶ They had stated that the number of unqualified teachers had risen sharply and amongst these teachers there were some who had not even passed standard 8.¹⁷ There were numerous grievances by students as well as teachers and amongst others these included departmental harassment and victimisation of politically active teachers and students and the general lack of facilities at schools.

The year 1980 witnessed the first large-scale boycotts after the 1976-7 revolts. Conditions at the Hanover Park schools of Mountview and Crystal were the sparks that ignited the fuse of 1980. However, while the initial causes of the boycott related to poor facilities, the victimisation of progressive teachers, the unmitigated power of teachers, the use of force and corporal punishment, and other such authoritarian abuse of students by certain teachers, boycotting students also demanded a democratic and non-racial unified education system, the scrapping of gutter education, the right to form democratically elected SRC's, as well as other educational grievances relating to facilities etc. The boycott at coloured schools which began on the 14th of April, later spread to the African schools¹⁸ both across the Peninsula and the rest of the country. While in many respects the 1980 boycott was an action-replay of the revolts which began in Soweto in 1976, replicating both its spontaneity, militancy and the

¹⁶ Molteno, F. 1980: Students Struggle for Their Schools: Communications No 13 (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, 1987) p 22.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ However it must be noted that Feceka High was an exception and was the only African school to begin the boycott on the 15th, whereas all other African schools in the Western Cape began the boycott weeks later.

resultant repression, it was also more organised and relatively more sophisticated in its content.

The 1980 boycott also witnessed a greater level of involvement of parents, teachers, organised labour and the community both in the school as well as in campaigns such as the bus and red-meat boycott. The implementation of awareness programmes and political discussions in 1980 signified a marked difference and an amelioration as compared to 1976. Thus the concept of 'People's Education' which became the clarion call for all organisations after 1985 was consciously implemented during the 1980 boycotts already. Discussions and programmes centred around issues such as the need for an alternative history, the necessity for democratically elected SRC's, how to sustain democratic student organisations at schools, as well as general political and social issues. A teacher at a school in Cape Town attested¹⁹ that discussions were quite "sophisticated" with students analysing the interrelationship between the school system, gutter education, the apartheid capitalist system and the reproduction of cheap labour in South Africa.

While many lessons were drawn from the 1976-7 boycotts, the 1980 boycotts also displayed significant areas of weakness. A key weakness was the lack of significant unity evidenced between African and coloured students. In part this was a result of the events of 1976, when coloured students unilaterally decided to suspend the boycott despite the fact that none of the demands had been met and while African schools had remained out on boycott.²⁰ By 1980 this sense of betrayal was still evident. In addition, although African students were part of the Committee of 81 they began to feel that they had no real sway within it.²¹ This was exacerbated when the Committee of 81 decided to suspend the boycott soon after the mid-year vacation while, again, African

¹⁹ Finnegan, W. Crossing the Line: A Year in the Land of Apartheid (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1987)

²⁰ Molteno, F. *op cit* p 128.

²¹ *ibid* p 127

students continued the boycott. In a statement the Committee of 81 declared that

We have come to realise that the intention of the Government is to keep us black children uneducated. We have therefore decided to suspend the boycott indefinitely and resume our studies ... Our form of struggle will from now on take on a different complexion and tactics.²²

Consequently the unity-in-struggle which was slowly and painstakingly being built, despite the suspicion, had been forfeited and the relationship between coloured and African students had once again evinced a sense of betrayal. The resultant division that emerged is clearly in evidence in a newspaper interview with an African member of Committee of 81, after the termination of the boycott in coloured schools. He stated that

"to us it seems as if the so-called coloured students were not sincere when they advocated a schools' boycott because they ran back to school as soon as some of their problems were solved, forgetting that nothing had been done for us ... Whenever they cry, the cry is quickly answered. Are our voices so low that nobody hears us?"²³

Soon after the boycott the Committee of 81 had disintegrated leaving behind no co-ordinating structure for students in the Western Cape.

²² quoted in Samuel, J. in Nasson, B & Samuel, J (eds) Education: From Poverty to Liberty (Cape Town David Phillip, 1990) p 23.

²³ Student leader quoted in Molleno op cit p 138.

3) Western Cape Student Organisation, 1980-1985.

On the educational and school terrain too, developments in the Western Cape evinced a marked divergency from the situation in other parts of the country. After the 1980 schools boycott had ended (July 1980 in most coloured schools, but early 1981 in African schools) there were no significant school protests until the last quarter of 1984, when students staged a limited protest against the tri-cameral election, but returned to class shortly thereafter.

Soon after the 1980 boycott had ended, the Committee of 81, which was formed to co-ordinate the boycott had collapsed, leaving behind no inter-school regional body. In addition, African students felt betrayed as the Committee of 81 called off the boycott in coloured schools, while African students remained out on boycott for almost another 6 months. As a result, for most of the period from 1981 to 1984, there was little organisational cooperation and active collaboration between students from the DET schools and those from the DEC schools. During this 'quiet' period, most SRC's at DEC schools had acted in isolation and had focused predominantly on issues at their own particular schools.

Like other parts of the country, the Western Cape also experienced an increase in unemployment as well as a large increase in the proportion of youth. In the Greater Cape Town area, in the 1980's, 36% of coloureds and 23.3% of Africans were aged between 0-14, while 60% of the coloured population was under the age of 25. In addition, 65% of unemployed coloureds were in the 16-25 age bracket, with the figures escalating further towards the mid-1980's.²⁴ Despite this, in Western Cape during the period 1981-1984, student resistance and organisation could not hold a candle to the levels of developments in other regions. The two central tenets which conditioned this contrast, again, was the demographic make-up of the Western Cape and the lineages

²⁴ Bundy, J. 'Street Sociology...' p 210. also see McPherson, V. 'Coloured' Youth Unemployment in Cape Town Economic Soc.Sci (news) dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1987, especially pp 5-6; 25-6.

of the regions' political development. After the 1980 boycott, in the DEC schools (which formed the overwhelming majority of schools in the Western Cape) there was a relative improvement with regards to the provision of textbooks and stationery, although there were still many inadequacies with regards to facilities, especially in terms of the syllabus (gutter education) and spending^{on} black education. However the basic provisions of sufficient books and stationery, in addition to the fact that there were no new provocative moves by the government in the field of coloured education, helped to prevent a flare-up during this period.²⁹

Secondly, it is important to note that in those parts of the Eastern Cape and Transvaal where student protests did mushroom, these flare-ups did not exist in a vacuum and were not caused only as a result of the iniquities in black education or ~~the~~ because there was an economic downturn. Instead, the fervour of these revolts were interminably linked to the ground-swell of support for liberation organisations and the growth of organised labour, and struggles in the schools intersected with those in the community in a very concrete way.

As the preceding section has shown, in the Western Cape these organisations did not have as firm an impact as in other areas. In addition, the different political traditions that the Western Cape spawned also played a significant role. Although the TLSA was not an organisational force, it was however the only 'progressive' teacher organisation that existed. However its conception of education sharply distinguished it from Charterist organisations, and while it rejected the system of gutter education, it firmly believed that education remained a valuable asset. Importantly, it did not believe that school boycotts were particularly meritorious and argued that it should not be used as a tactic or weapon of struggle. Instead, through the Education Fellowships and its Education Journal, it encouraged the development of political education. However, despite the fact

²⁹ Interview 2 Student leader at Belgravia.

that in DEC schools "there was nothing else besides the Unity Movement, not even the ANC" in the 1980's it began to lose the support of the youth "when a more action-oriented generation displaying a certain 'impatience with ideas' emerged."²⁶ When this breach occurred between the older generation and the youth in the Unity Movement, even though "the youth lost, the Unity Movement lost the youth."²⁷

Nevertheless, student organisations which did evolve, still resonated the political cleavages which had existed in the Western Cape. Although the Charterist aligned COSAS had been formed in 1979 already and had strong organisational roots in DET schools, in the DEC schools its presence was not widespread. Where it had existed in DEC schools, it did not have a firm organisational basis. On the other hand, prior to the formation of the Students of Young Azania (SOYA), the Unity Movement tradition did not have an active student-aligned organisational base. However, its traditions were firmly entrenched in SRC's at schools such as Trafalgar High, Harold Cressy and Livingstone as well as the South Peninsula Educational Fellowship. Nonetheless these views did not permeate the daily activities of schools in the Western Cape in a significant manner. However some sort of cohesion was given to the Unity Movement tradition by the formation of the CAL affiliated SOYA, which sought to "unite all students of the oppressed and exploited under the mantle of the anti-racist, anti-liberal, anti-sexist student movement ... based on the policy of non-collaboration."²⁸ It also committed itself to remain independent of the 'reactionary middle class.' Jordi has however pointed out that it only had a small membership which put its energy "more into spreading and developing [its] political ideas than on attracting a mass membership."²⁹

²⁶ Chisholm, L 'Education, Politics and Organisation...' p 2

²⁷ *ibid* p 4.

²⁸ Students of Young Azania. Constitution (np, nd) p 1, 2.

²⁹ Jordi, E. Towards 'Peoples Education': The Boycott Experience in Cape Town's Department of Education and Culture High Schools from July 1985 to February 1986 African Studies (honor) dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1987. p 96.

Despite these weaknesses, during the period of heightened political activity, which was occasioned by tri-cameral elections, the Inter-schools Coordinating Committee (ISCC) was formed. It was a bulky structure which consisted of 2 representatives each from (DEC) schools with SRC's (or if no SRC existed, prefects). Although much of the literature on student activity in the Western Cape has claimed that this body was aligned to the ideological position of SOYA (such as Jordi, p 59) a student representative to the ISCC in 1984 has pointed out that this assumption is incorrect and that "The 1984 ISCC must not be confused with the ISCC that was formed around the beginning of '85" which was a predominantly pro-SOYA body.³⁰ The main focus of the 1984 ISCC was an attempt to ensure that schools implemented a two or three day anti-election campaign in which political education would take place, exposing the elections as a fraud.

Although the ISCC as an organisational structure did not last long after the 1984 protest, it did mark the embryonic beginning of a structure that could unite students from different schools in the Western Cape. When it reemerged in 1985, although it was predominantly associated with the ideology of SOYA, it nevertheless attempted to draw in other schools in an attempt to popularise SOYA. Although in late April it claimed to represent approximately 40 schools³¹, this was an exaggeration and in reality, only had contact with individuals in those schools, and not the active affiliation of all their SRC's.³² Despite the fact that it possessed this weakness, its existence still allowed some sort of inter-school linkages. Thus, in a non-sectarian pamphlet, it called for a stay away on May 1st (May Day) in solidarity with

"students who have been killed throughout the country in their struggles for a free, compulsory and relevant education for all; ... with workers in our country and worldwide on International Workers Day ... [and] with

³⁰ Interview 2

³¹ Inter-School Co-ordinating Committee - United Mass Stayaway Wed May 1st (Cape Town, late April 1985)

³² Interview 1

all progressive organisations of the people including
... COSAS, AZASM and SOYA³³

The call for the stayaway was fairly successful with more than 30 000 students at coloured high schools staying away. Although some schools reported a 100% rate of absenteeism, in areas such as Town, Athlone and Mitchells Plain the rate was 30%, 50% and 40%, respectively.³⁴ Although the ISCC would be eclipsed soon after the boycott began in July 1985, its prior existence, despite problems regarding representivity and ideological differences, had alleviated the arduous task of making initial contact with different schools across the Peninsula.

³³ ISCC op cit.

³⁴ Cape Times, 2 May 1985.

4) A Description of the Athlone Area and its Political Organisations.

The area which became known as Athlone (in the 1930's) is one of the oldest coloured residential and business districts in the Peninsula.³⁵ Although it is often described as a middle class area, the social composition of Athlone is far from homogenous. The Greater Athlone area, which stretches from the Athlone railway station down to Surrey Estate contains a mixture of middle and working class areas. However, the City Engineer has pointed out that even within the more middle class or 'affluent' areas such as Belgravia and Crawford, there are "pockets of poverty."³⁶ In the Athlone area however, Klipfontein Road serves as a dividing line between the more middle class areas and the working class areas such as Q Town, Silvertown and Bridgetown. (see Map). It must also be noted that the area which was designated as 'Indian' (Gatesville and Rylands) is also regarded as part of the Athlone area. For the purposes of this thesis I have altered the parameters of Athlone slightly and constituted it more in accordance to where the ASAC schools are situated. It has thus been extended to include the two Lansdowne schools of Oaklands and Groenvlei. In other respects, for the sake of expediency, I have excluded other schools which were not from Athlone but which were affiliated to ASAC, ie the Hanover Park schools, Mountview and Crystal, and the Bonteheuwel schools, Arcadia and Modderdam.

Prior to the 1985 boycott already, Athlone exhibited a mixture of political organisations. Amongst others, these included the UDF affiliated branches of the Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO) in Silvertown, Q Town and Belgravia, as well as the Unity aligned Gleemoor Civic Association and Athlone and District Youth. However neither tendency had a particular stranglehold over the political discourse of the area. It has been pointed out that the

³⁵ Abrahams, M. The People of Cashel Avenue, Circa 1980-1990: Exploring the Nature and Significance of Community in an Athlone Street History (hons) dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1991 p 15.

³⁶ quoted in *ibid* p 15.

CAYCO branches specifically, were struggling to take root before the boycott.³⁷ In addition, before the boycott, although the UDF had made itself visible in the area through the anti-tri-cameral election campaign and brought to the fore a "sense of recognition of the existence of political organisations ... it had largely remained on the periphery of the ... consciousness of the area."³⁸

Arguably, the most significant organisation in the Athlone area was the well established Thornhill Resident's Association (TRA - founded in the late 1970's and based largely in the area of Gatesville and Rylands). Its importance does not only reside in the fact that it was one of the more established organisations in the Athlone area, but its importance is signified more by the integral role it played in the 1985 boycott, through its relationship with ASAC. During the boycott, it was the only community-based organisation in Athlone upon which ASAC could rely ~~on~~ unremittingly for practical support and active collaboration. Not only were those students who fomented the formation of ASAC, TRA members, but as the boycott progressed, a large percentage of those representing their school in ASAC, joined the TRA and drew on its ideas, expertise and ideology.

Ideologically, the TRA could aptly be described as eclectic as its allegiance was not strictly bound to Charterism nor the Unity Movement tradition. Instead it straddled between the parameters of both, drawing on their more useful traits in order build the widest possible unity in organisations in an attempt to 'divert people away from the path of collaboration, towards confronting the state.' The ideological position they adopted was one of 'non-alignment' and it was inspired by the attempts of the Black Peoples' Convention (BPC) and the DBAC to draw in all liberation tendencies. While the TRA grappled with the debate surrounding that of popular and united front, it had rejected the simple dichotomy of frontism,

³⁷ Interview 5 Student leader at Sees Bona.

³⁸ Interview 1

... the one being good, the other being bad, the one representing the working class approach, the other one a bourgeois sell-out. We found through our own experience in the Western Cape that there was a need for a broad front ... We came to the conclusion that achieving victory on an issue basis was very, very important, and not just linking an issue with the total struggle. You can do that at a theoretical level, but when people's homes were being bulldozed and they were fighting against being 'endorsed out' it was necessary to band together... When it came to the mid '80's we reached the conclusion that the road we must take is the road of fighting with everybody who was prepared to fight against tri-cameralism. We were not prepared to adopt a purist attitude.³⁹

However, practically, while supporting the UDF's popular front, it shared the concern of the Unity Movement⁴ to impart a theoretical knowledge of socialism and the importance of working class ideas leading struggle. Similarly, while critical of a straightforward nationalist discourse, exhibited by the UDF, it had also rejected the Unity Movement's 'arm-chair politicking' and its rigid subscription to purist or doctrinaire politics. The TRA maintained this ambivalent position towards late 1985. Therefore, at its AGM in August 1985, speakers included Christmas Tinto and Hassan Solomons from the UDF, A. Fortuin from the New Unity Movement and Frank Van Der Horst from SACOS. Amongst its other resolutions, it called for the unbanning of the ANC and the PAC, and identified its struggle "with the struggle of the working class and support[ed] the building up of independent working class organisations."⁴⁰

³⁹ Interview 1 Dullah Omar - Chairperson of TRA, 1985.

⁴⁰ Judice News 9 August 1985.

5) Schools in the Athlone Area

The schools located in this study are Alexander Sinton, (with 1019 pupils), Athlone High (639), Belgravia (1280), Bridgetown (738), Garlandale High (841), Groenvlei (996), Ned Doman (520), Oaklands High (1340), Peakview (566), Rylands High (±900), Spes Bona (701), and St. Columbas (± 500).⁴¹ Amongst these schools, in terms of administration and so forth, Rylands, St Columbas and Peakview possessed notable differences. Rylands High, because it was designated an 'Indian' school fell under a separate department and as a result of the differences in per capita spending on Indian education, had slightly better facilities, such as the use of computers as well as better equipped laboratories. The authorities had made a concerted effort to distinguish and isolate Rylands High students from other schools. These measures included prescribing a manifestly contrasting uniform - rust trousers and skirts, with a dark brown blazer, jersey or tracksuit top, whereas other schools in Athlone wore grey trousers with black or blue skirts, and blazers, jerseys, or tracksuit tops. The only distinguishing feature in the uniforms of these other schools' were their different badges and ties. The department also tried to ensure that Rylands High opened and ended school-terms at different times. Through these measures, the department attempted to "put a blanket around Rylands High" by consciously trying to foster a differentiated 'Indian' identity for Rylands High students. The only links that Rylands had with other schools was in sports, through the SACOS affiliated Western Province Senior Schools Sports Union (WPSSSU) and a debating society.⁴²

While St. Columbas was slightly distinguished from other schools because it was a semi-private Catholic boys school where parents paid school fees and had to provide stationery and textbooks for

⁴¹ written response to question 6 by the Minister of Education (DEC) as to how many pupils were enrolled at Peninsula schools in 1984 in Republic of South Africa - House of Representatives Questions and Replies 1986 (31 January 1986 to 28 January 1986) Volume 9 19 March 1986, column numbers not visible on photocopy made. Also Interview 3 Student leader, Rylands High and Interview 4, Student leader of core group of students and St. Columbas.

⁴² Interview 2

their children, it still fell under the control of the DEC.⁴³ Peakview, situated in Silvertown, was a junior school and its most senior students were those in standard 7. Apart from the fact that Spes Bona was a boys-only school, all other schools were similar^m in terms of its administration. Although facilities at Athlone could not compare with those in white schools, none were desperately lacking in basic provisions such as textbooks and stationery, as in African schools. At some schools, however, classes were larger than others and by 1985 the majority of these schools did not have school halls.

Despite these differences, a common factor which cut across all these divisions at different schools, was the institutionalisation of a rigid system of hierarchy and authority. Each school was governed by a ladder of seniority, which began with the education department and decreased progressively from the principal to the senior teachers and heads of departments, to the ordinary teacher. This top-down power structure, which controlled most aspects of student life, as well as that of teachers, did not end with the staff members and even the student mass was hierarchically stratified.⁴⁴

In the pecking order, directly beneath the level of teacher are the prefects (chosen by the principal, not elected), the senior students and then the junior students. This entire structure served to reinforce the power of the administration, with the lower levels policing the decrees from above. To reinforce this authority, corporal punishment was prevalent at all Athlone schools. However while corporal punishment was legally permissible, there were numerous stipulations governing this action. Although legally it could only be meted out for grave offences, it had to be administered in private, by the principal or a staff member assigned by the principal. This stipulation was never adhered to and instead, at all Athlone schools, teachers

⁴³ Interview 4.

⁴⁴ Christie, P. The Right to Learn: The Struggle for Education in South Africa. Braamfontein, SACHED/Ravan Press, 1987, p. 101.

continued to administered it themselves, sometimes quite brutally, for 'offenses' as inconsequential as talking or eating in class.⁴⁵ Although there were many exceptions, authoritarianism was replicated in the classrooms through the teaching methods employed by most teachers. This method has been described by Paulo Freire as the 'banking concept of education', in which ...

"education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filling and storing the deposits."⁴⁶

While all schools in Athlone had prefects, corporal punishment, and a definite authority structure, students were not entirely powerless and in some important ways they challenged the unmitigated dominance of authority through their SRC's. However, prior to the 1985 boycott, only Sinton, Oaklands, Belgravia and Spes Bona had SRC's. These were predominantly inherited from the period of the 1980 boycott. However by 1984, despite the fact that these SRC's had been established for quite some time, they had no organisational links and each focused their attention on the problems at their individual school. The SRC's at Belgravia, Sinton and to a lesser extent Spes Bona, were known for their leading role in prior boycotts. By 1984 however, they did not have much say in the day to day running of the school. But, despite the fact that these bodies were not able to challenge local issues head-on, they had created the space to work in those schools relatively freely.⁴⁷

On the other hand, while Rylands did not have an SRC, in 1983 the administration allowed the formation of a student body. Although it resembled an SRC in that it had representatives in each class,

⁴⁵ Interview 8.

⁴⁶ Freire, P. quoted in Naidoo, K. 'The Politics of Student Resistance in the 1980's' in Nkomo, M (ed) The Pedagogy of Domination: Towards a Democratic Education in South Africa (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1990) p 121.

⁴⁷ Interview 8, student leader at Sinton, as well as interviews 2 and 5.

this body was not independent of the administration and it did not have any decision-making powers. Instead, its activities were restricted to

"mundane things like seeing to fund-raising for the matric ball ... and arbour day. It wasn't political, not at all. It was a structure that was drawn into the curricula activities of the school and it was not elected."⁴⁸

This body could not even convene unless the principal had given it permission to do so. Meetings could also not be held unless the principal or another senior teacher delegated by him were present. The principal could also veto any decision taken by the student body. Because of its structure, the student body was "not really influential as it could not mobilise students and it was forced to make representations to the administration, which always had the final say."⁴⁹ Thus although grievances such as corporal punishment existed, the student body was not even allowed to discuss the issue. In 1984, when students attempted to address the issue of their separate uniforms, "because [they] did not want this rust colour" they were simply told that it was "not their business to decide on issues such as that."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, amongst the upper echelons of the student body, there were some students who were members of political organisations. Although they were not allowed to spread their ideas through the student body, they still remained part of it because "this student body was still a start."⁵¹

On the other hand, while schools such as Belgravia, Spes Bona, Sinton and Oaklands had established SRC's which were independent of the school administration, it was not simply the case where students could discuss on an issue, vote on it, and enforce their decision upon the administration. Because corporal punishment was rife at all Athlone schools, those with SRC's attempted to

⁴⁸ Interview 3.

⁴⁹ ibid.

⁵⁰ ibid.

⁵¹ ibid.

address the corporal punishment issue. However, none had succeeded in imposing a moratorium which abolished corporal punishment. Although the SRC at Spes Bona "was not successful in raising the consciousness of students, getting them to challenge the whole issue of corporal punishment," they had achieved the most. This was because a large percentage of teachers had voiced agreement with the SRC and an agreement had been reached that only the principal could punish students via corporal punishment.⁸² While at other schools the campaign did not yield anything in terms of results, it signified that the SRC at least was taking up student grievances. However, SRC's could not just decide to embark on a campaign, even if they thought it to be a popular one. At Belgravia for example, in 1984 the SRC decided to embark on an anti-corporal punishment campaign because they felt that it was a short-term demand which would be supported by the overwhelming majority of students. It was also a reasonable demand which they felt they could win and thus score points with the students. However, when a vote was taken students had voted in favour of maintaining corporal punishment because they "preferred corporal punishment to staying in for an hour or two after school."⁸³ This had taught the SRC the importance of planning and mobilisation before embarking on a campaign. Before the SRC attempted to take the issue up again they embarked on an education campaign and released 3 or 4 pamphlets. It was only after this campaign that students had agreed to support the anti-corporal punishment campaign.⁸⁴

During 1984 the SRC's at both Sinton and Belgravia were professionalised and an attempt was made to ensure that the SRC's met regularly and became a visible presence at the school. Apart from taking up student grievances, such as Sinton SRC had done by addressing the compulsory wearing of blazers, which many could not afford, both SRC's were also involved in 'lighter' endeavours

⁸² Interview 5.

⁸³ Interview 2.

⁸⁴ ibid

in an attempt augment student support. Thus, at Sinton, the SRC held a stall at the City Fair, while the Belgravia SRC arranged an annual variety concert and continued to publish an annual magazine. Both SRC's also ensured that a number of clubs and societies, including chess, sports and debating societies, affiliated to the SRC, began to take root.⁵⁵

In 1984, given the large-scale focus on the tri-cameral parliament, SRC's began to focus more attention on broader political issues. However, apart from the COSAS branch which was established at Belgravia (which did not have a large active membership),⁵⁶ no other student political organisation existed at other Athlone schools. In addition, because the SRC was an elected body which represented all students and not a political organisation with a particular political affiliation, it did not espouse a singular tendencial current of the liberation movement. However those elected usually had a progressive Weltanschauung. Thus amongst those elected onto the SRC, some students did belong to 'outside' political organisations such as the UDF or the Unity Movement. However, a larger proportion of those elected did not belong to an organisation, but were more sympathetic to the ANC and aspects of the Congress tradition, than that of the Unity movement. These differences however did not lead to divisions and never filtered down to the broader mass of students.⁵⁷

While there was a greater focus on broader political issues at Belgravia, Sinton and Oaklands, at Spes Bona, most of the SRC leadership were more geared towards academia and their future careers than with broader political concerns. They thus paid more attention to arranging career programmes, excursions and sports tournaments, rather than political issues.⁵⁸ However, as the tri-

⁵⁵ Interview 2, d.

⁵⁶ ibid

⁵⁷ Interview 7.

⁵⁸ Interview 3.

cameral elections drew nearer, the SRC's intensified their political education and mobilisation and when the ISCC made the call for a week of protest and political education against the tri-cameral elections, Belgravia, Sinton Oaklands, and even Spes Bona supported it.

However because the programmes at schools were not coordinated, even though Belgravia was only about 200 meters away from Sinton, students did not know what was happening at the other school.⁸⁹ Resulting from this lack of coordination, the programmes that were held were not only inconsistent, but the majority of schools never held any programme because they lacked the structures to implement them. At some schools, the programmes were even run by progressive teachers.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the programme at Belgravia and Sinton was fairly successful as they had embarked on a mobilising campaign long before August already. Both schools had also held a mandate which favoured implementing the limited programme suggested by the ISCC. Because there was such widespread objection to the tri-cameral elections, and because teachers were informed before the time that a limited programme was going to take place and that arrangements should be made to catch-up with work that was missed, there was not much objection on the part of teachers.⁹¹ At Spes Bona however, the programme was poorly supported with only 200 out of the 800 students participating in the programme. While the SRC arranged an outside speaker, the main activity was "sitting outside singing freedom songs."⁹²

However, while this boycott did not have any significant repercussions on conditions at schools or the way the SRC's operated, it did have an important impact on the development of student leadership. Because of the "high" experienced, resulting from the success of the anti-tri-cameral campaign, many had

⁸⁹ Interview 2.

⁹⁰ ibid.

⁹¹ ibid.

⁹² Interview 3.

joined community organisations. Specifically, some of the leadership people from Belgravia, Sinton and Rylands had become involved in Thornhill.

Another significant influence which impacted on student leadership was the COSAS annual congress, held in 1984. A few students from Belgravia and Rylands attended the meeting and it was through that experience that the student leadership, especially at Belgravia, became more aware of the events that were unfolding in other parts of the country. It was at that meeting that Athlone students had established contact with SRC and COSAS members from the African townships in the Western Cape. The Athlone delegates were also particularly intrigued by some of the township students views on socialism. These students had learnt about the alliance that had been formed by COSAS and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the joint campaigns taken up. Athlone students had found that although COSAS had been affiliated to the UDF nationally, many students from the Western Cape townships had shared some of their reservations about aspects of Congress politics. These students held common views on the importance of socialism and thus placing the struggle under the leadership of the black working class. Athlone students had also learnt about the concrete alliance formed between FOSATU and COSAS in the Transvaal and how they had jointly taken up the rent boycott. This showed in practice the importance of a worker-student alliance. These examples had an important impact on some of the Athlone delegates, who had become "caught up in the phraseology about the dictatorship of the proletariat."⁴³ While these SRC leaders made a concerted effort to conscientise students about national developments, in 1985, apart from the May day stay-away, students undertook no other 'disruptive' action. In the DEC schools, right until July, there had been no indication that a boycott of classes would be called for. But, a boycott did erupt, which plunging large parts of the Western Cape into political maelstrom engendering widespread disaffection with the state and status quo.

⁴³ Interview 2.

**A PERIODISATION OF THE 1985
BOYCOTT IN THE ATHLONE AREA**

CHAPTER 3: THE START AND FORTIFICATION OF THE BOYCOTT (JULY - SEPTEMBER)

While we were adding 2+2, you were counting Rands
While we were learning chemistry, you were making bombs
While we were learning medicine, you were digging graves
Now you have the nerve to tell us, how we should behave!¹

1) Main Triggers of the Boycott and its Initial Coordination.

In contradistinction to many other parts of the country, by the first half of 1985, the Western Cape had not witnessed any large-scale or protracted struggles. The gruesome murders of Matthew Goniwe and three other Eastern Cape activists, the declaration of a State of Emergency in 36 magisterial districts and the detention of 113 activists shortly there-after, must be seen as an attempt by the state to dissipate the widespread and spiralling revolt which had begun in late 1984. However, these acts not only fanned the flames of disaffection in those parts of the country already in revolt, but it also resulted in the protest spreading to hitherto unaffected Western Cape. On the 19th of July, the day before the funeral of the 'Cradock Four', 1500 DET students attending a commemoration service in Guguletu for the slain activists, were dispersed by police firing teargas. Throughout the rest of the week, battles between youth and police in Guguletu, Nyanga and Crossroads had continued. After the death of a youth, the township of Crossroads was sealed off.²

A class boycott was embarked upon by students at UWC and the DET schools on the 23rd. Soon afterwards, the ISCC, representing 29 high schools in the Western Cape, released a pamphlet which deplored the killings and condemned the declaration of the State of Emergency. The pamphlet had also condemned the transfer of a progressive teacher, Mrs. Galant, from Scottsdene High, to a

¹ Inter-School Co-ordinating Committee - What Is Happening? (Cape Town, 1985)

² Press 20.7.85; Cape Times 20.7.85, Weekly Mail 2.8.85.

primary school.³ This transfer was in line with Carter Ebrahims' (Minister of Education HoR) decree at the end of 1984 which stated "from our point of view it is intolerable that people openly oppose Labour Party policy and undermine activities in our schools."⁴ The ISCC pamphlet, speaking on behalf of the 29 schools, had also called on students to embark upon a boycott of classes (not a stayaway) from Monday the 29th of July. The ISCC had demanded the immediate and unconditional reinstatement of Mrs Galant; an alternative non-racist education system; the unconditional opening of all schools that had been closed in other parts of the country; the recognition of all democratically elected SRC's; the immediate withdrawal of all troops from the township; the right for teachers to express themselves freely; the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and detainees; and the resignation of all community councillors, dummy MP's and all other collaborators. The boycott was also in solidarity with boycotting students in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape.⁵

On the 26th of July, a joint rally was hosted by the UWC SRC, COSAS and the ISCC, at UWC. At the rally, held to discuss the boycott, 8000-10000 high school and tertiary students had reiterated the ISCC call for a two day boycott of classes to commence on the 29th.⁶ The transfer of Mrs Galant, the murder of the 'Cradock Four' and the imposition of the State of Emergency became the key issues which united these students in their call for the two day boycott of 'normal' classes and the implementation of alternative education programmes. After the two days, the feasibility of continuing the boycott would be reassessed. However, at that stage, a protracted boycott was not envisaged. At the UWC meeting, which for the first time included representatives from the townships, the Western Cape Student

³ Inter-School Co-ordinating Committee What Happened At Scottsdene? (Cape Town, July 1985)

⁴ Ebrahim quoted in Sunday Times 30/12/84.

⁵ ibid.

⁶ Cape Times 30/8/85.

Action Committee (WECSAC) was formed. According to a later WECSAC pamphlet, it was formed because

students realized the need for united action in the Western Cape. It is an adhoc structure consisting of representatives from [45] high schools, colleges, universities and technicons ... to coordinate the joint action taken by students. Regular report backs from institutions were requested so as to assess the boycott carefully."⁷

On the 5th of August, via a press-release, a spokesperson for WECSAC had suspended the boycott because of the low attendance figures at schools and the weakness of the boycott in some areas.⁸ This decision was subsequently overturned the next day when 3000 students at a mass rally, at UCT, voted overwhelmingly in favour of continuing the boycott.⁹ WECSAC hosted another rally at UCT, on the 9th of August, to "assess the gains we have made and to plan ahead for a united response [for] our task is to strengthen student organisation"¹⁰ Although at that rally, 4000 students again voted in favour of continuing the boycott for another week, on the 12th, individuals in WECSAC again attempted to call off the boycott because of the "weakness of organisation in the Western Cape generally."¹¹ Once again this decision to return to class in order to 'consolidate' the gains made thus far, were rejected.

At this stage, the boycott, which was initially called for two days, was nearing its second week and had engendered "a momentum so great that we could not call it off at that stage."¹² A major factor which accounted for the continuation of the boycott and

⁷ Western Cape Student Action Committee - Student Mass Rally (Cape Town, August 1985)

⁸ Argus 6/8/85.

⁹ Hall, M. "Resistance and Rebellion in the Greater Cape Town, 1985" (Paper at Roots and Realities, University of Cape Town, 1986) p 13.

¹⁰ WECSAC op cit.

¹¹ Argus 13/8/85.

¹² Inter-ten 2.

its widespread support, was the actions of the security forces. At the very first regional rally, at UWC, on the 26th of July, students were teargassed and baton charged. Approximately 200 students from the Mitchells Plain school of Spine Road were also brutally assaulted when they attempted to attend the rally. Police had stopped their busses en route to the rally, formed a passageway at the exit of the bus, forced students to alight, whipping them as they exited. As a result five students were hospitalised. That same day, 18 year old Sithembele Matiso was shot dead by the security forces.¹³ Students were also baton charged and teargassed at both the subsequent regional rallies held at UCT. In addition, the petrol-bombing of the UWC SRC offices,¹⁴ and the general harassment of boycotting students by members of the security forces, induced a level of anger and resentment, which ensured that the boycott continued. As a student put it, "when students were beaten, it did not weaken their commitment to boycott, it strengthened their resolve to fight the system."¹⁵ Thus Jordi argues that the growing cycle of "resistance and repression had begun to give the boycott a momentum that pushed it beyond its beginnings as a solidarity protest."¹⁶

¹³ Interview 8; ADAC & SERG - 'A blow by blow account' in Repression Bulletin (Cape Town, October 1985) p 3. Also see video Children of God (African Studies Video Library).

¹⁴ ibid ADAC & SERG p 3

¹⁵ Interview 8

¹⁶ Jordi, R. Towards 'Peoples Education': The Boycott Experience in Cape Town's Department of Education and Culture High Schools from July 1985 to February 1986 African Studies (Hons) dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1987, p 56.

2) The ISCC, WECSAC and the Formation of ASAC.

Prior to the 1985 boycott, at the DEC schools, the ISCC was the only coordinating student structure in existence in the Western Cape. Ideologically, it predominantly espoused the views of SOYA. However, because there was no other coordinating structure, many schools which were not supportive of SOYA, still worked with the ISCC. While the initial call by the ISCC for a two day boycott was in protest against the imposition of the State of Emergency and the transfer of Mrs Galant, it was mooted by a number of people from Harold Cressy and Livingstone "with a particular agenda in mind - popularising and winning support for SOYA."¹⁷ They envisaged that after the two day protest, the boycott would be reassessed and students would return to classes. In the process, while it would demonstrate solidarity with struggles in other parts of the country, at the same time, when it ended, the boycott would have enhanced the influence of SOYA. "But, it did not work out that way, because once the two days were over, you had a momentum which developed, carrying the boycott further."¹⁸ Thus, from the start a tension emerged between the SOYA bloc who pushed for a return to classes, arguing that the boycott should not be used as a weapon of struggle, and those arguing that it could not be ended yet. However, even prior to the boycott, the ISCC was riddled with tendential currents. While students in the township (who supported COSAS) had already been out on boycott, the ISCC did not extend an invitation to them. In protest, a few schools from Athlone and Bonteheuwel (which incidentally did not support SOYA) walked out of an ISCC meeting.¹⁹

In the very first week of the boycott, the ISCC had been eclipsed by the formation of WECSAC. The formation of this body was mooted by tertiary students in an attempt to establish a more Congress-orientated student body. While the ISCC disintegrated as a

¹⁷ Interview 2 Student leader at Belgravia.

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ ibid.

result, most of the schools originally affiliated to it (such as Harold Cressy, Livingstone) had become a SOYA grouping within WECSAC.²⁰ Thus from its inception, WECSAC, even more than the ISCC, was bedeviled by ideological tensions and division. Although when WECSAC was formed it represented 45 tertiary and secondary institutions, and this soon increased to 80, by September, it had degenerated into a bureaucratic shell, representing only 6 schools, with a SOYA bias.²¹ The reasons for its regression were multiple.

In many ways WECSAC resembled the Committee of 81. Structurally, it replicated its cumbersome and ineffectual structure, with two representatives from institutions across a wide geographic area. Because of this, meeting regularly became problematic. Because of its structure, it not only became bureaucratic, but it was also ineffective as a coordinating structure. It could not give direction and practical assistance where and when it was needed the most, at an individual school level, on a day to day basis. It was thus unable to provide any assistance to students trying to establish SRC's, nor could it assist those schools which were unable to hold awareness programmes because they lacked political 'expertise.' The uneven levels of development between schools with established SRC's and those without, or those which had just recently acquired them, would not have shown any signs of levelling out. There was also widespread dissatisfaction because tertiary students, who were a small minority, and were pushing for a return to classes, attempted to dominate the structure and discussions. Thus, WECSAC while attempting to coordinate the boycott at a secondary and tertiary regional level, was not effective.

Another important determining factor in the decline of WECSAC was because of the ideological rifts that had surfaced within the organisation. Firstly, because WECSAC was not affiliated to

²⁰ Weber, K.E. Learning Through Experiences: An Analysis of Student Leaders' Reflections on the 1985-6 Revolt in the Western Cape Schools M.Phil, Education dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1992. p 61.

²¹ *ibid* p 61.

COSAS, the Joint SRC's did not join it formally. In addition, as in the Committee of 81, African students felt marginalised because no consideration was given to problems at their schools or their concerns in the planning process.²² The two political traditions that had torn the DEAC apart were also dividing WECSAC. This time, however, the division was between those schools or areas which were more supportive of the UDF and had pushed for a continuation of the boycott and the SOYA bloc, arguing that students should return to classes. It was at this early stage already that the debate around education and liberation had surfaced. This has transpired into a terminological debate surrounding short-term and long-term demands. Those more sympathetic to the Congress tradition and those from the Athlone area had argued that the boycott could not be called off as yet, because none of the original demands had been addressed. They argued that if the boycott was called off at such an early stage, when it still had so much of pull, student organisation would be seriously weakened because they would have returned to classes defeated. While the SOYA-affiliated bloc had argued that the lifting of the State of Emergency was a long-term demand, students from Athlone and other areas were arguing that it was an immediate, short-term demand. It was around the issue of continuing or ending the boycott that tendencies had begun to coalesce. One such example was the informal caucus group that emerged between schools in Athlone and the Joint SRC's. On two occasions, this grouping had staged a walk-out.²³

As a result of all these weaknesses and shortcomings of WECSAC, students in Athlone decided to form ASAC. ASAC was the first local student action committee that was formed and according to two of the student leaders who were involved in its formation,

because WECSAC was so fraught with ideological tensions and "never took root in any significant sense ... and COSAS structures in the region [except in the

²² ibid p 62.

²³ Interview I.

townships] could not sustain the boycott, [we] decided to set up ASAC as a stop-gap measure to coordinate the boycott that was extending itself week after week." We decided to form ASAC as "it would be easier to work on a local level and confront the issues at the school ... head on. Where there were no SRC's, or SRC's that were weak, we could assist."²⁴

Student leaders from Belgravia, Sinton and Rylands High, who had been in contact with each other through their involvement in Thornhill and WECSAC, decided to host a mass rally for schools in the Athlone area. With the assistance of a TRA member, contact was established with a few students leaders at other schools and their schools were invited to attend the rally held at the Samaj Centre on the 6th of August.²⁵ The rally, which could be regarded as the launch of ASAC, was attended by about 2000 students.²⁶ It was addressed by student leaders from Rylands, Sinton and Belgravia, as well as by members of the UDF and a NUM or SACOS person. Student speakers reminded the audience that the boycott should not be viewed in isolation, but as a facet of a single and united struggle. As such they asked teachers and parents to play a more active and significant role in guiding them and helping them to achieve their demands. It was also decided that the boycott at schools should continue until the situation was reassessed. However, before considering returning to classes, the State of Emergency had to be lifted, all political organisations had to be unbanned and all political prisoners released, and Mrs Galant had to be reinstated unconditionally at her previous post.²⁷

Before the meeting had concluded, student leaders had requested for a few representatives from each school to remain behind. Those representatives agreed to establish contact with students at schools in Athlone which had not attended the rally, inviting

²⁴ Interview 2 and Interview 5, student leader at Spes Bona.

²⁵ Allies Printers. 'Athlone Students Action Committee Account, 1985-1988) p 1.

²⁶ Muslim News 9/8/85.

²⁷ ibid.

them to an ASAC meeting two days later. Thereafter, ASAC ~~had~~ met virtually everyday for the rest of the boycott.²⁸ The main task that ASAC set itself was the establishment of SRC's and alternative education programmes at all Athlone schools. It was thus an attempt to address the unevenness of the boycott at different schools, which WECSAC was unable to do, making sure that schools acted in united fashion, thus consolidating different Athlone schools previously isolated from each other, into a single and coherent force. It also tried to ensure that the structures set up at schools, as well as ASAC itself, would endure well after the boycott had ended. Drawing lessons from the demise of the Committee of 81, it ~~had~~ argued that the divided regional structures were bound to collapse. Therefore, although ASAC would not isolate itself from regional developments, it would focus most of its attention locally.²⁹

As ASAC was the first student action committee to be formed, it ~~had~~ attracted a number of schools surrounding the Greater Athlone area, which were also dissatisfied with WECSAC, into its fold. These included schools such as Mountview and Crystal from Hanover Park, Cathkin and Heideveld from Heideveld, and Arcadia, Bonteheuwel and Modderdam from the Bonteheuwel area. It ~~had~~ even included the teacher training college, Sallie Davies. Soon however, these schools ~~had~~ congregated around their own local student action committees. Schools remaining in ASAC included Belgravia, Oaklands, Groenvlei, Garlandale, Rylands High, Ned Doman, Bridgetown, Athlone, Peakview, St Columbas and Spes Bona.³⁰ Each SRC or student action committee at schools sent a stipulated number of representatives (generally from their executives) to represent their school on ASAC. Thus ASAC as a structure, represented schools, not individuals. It also had no leadership or executive, but at each meeting a chairperson and

²⁸ Interview 2.

²⁹ Interview 7 student leader at Alexander Sinton.

³⁰ Athlone Students Action Committee. Students Reject Apartheid - Support the consumer boycott (Cape Town, September 1985); Student Mass Rally - Cine 400, Monday 30 Sept. 9.30 a.m. (Cape Town, September 1985)

secretary was chosen on a rotational basis.³¹ At its meetings, which took place almost daily, representatives from each school would report-back on the occurrences of the day, the mood of students, and if any problems were experienced with teachers, principals, students, parents and so forth. The meeting would also attempt to work out a unified programme of action for the next day. ASAC tried to remain democratic and accountable, and as far as possible, mandates from the student mass were taken on every relevant or significant issue.³²

Because the ASAC forum was a representative student structure and each delegation was chosen by their individual school, the delegates sent, were not from a single ideological tendency. As such, it would be difficult to ascribe ASAC a single tendency or ideological line. However, while it did not have a formal leadership structure, there were some "who were more vocal than others."³³ As such, those individuals and their ideas had more of an impact than others. While within ASAC, there were those who supported or were members of the UDF, as well one or two who supported Unity Movement or CAL, the most decisive grouping within ASAC (and who later became a hegemonic bloc within ASA) were those who became members or supporters of Thornhill.³⁴ As such, ASAC had propagated the policy of 'non-alignment. Although the ideological differences between individuals were certainly real, given the emphasis placed on implementing daily programme, strengthening student organisation, as well as the rapidity with which ASAC had to respond to the constantly changing situation, all interviewees concurred that these differences were not overriding. Emphasis was placed more on building the organisation and, as such, the representatives' first loyalty was always to promote and build ASAC. As one of the UDF members within ASAC

³¹ Interview 6.

³² Interview 3.

³³ Interview 2.

³⁴ Interview 3,6,7. When referring to ASAC or more specifically ASAC's thought, unless otherwise stated, it is to the effect of this group which I am referring.

argued "the differences were not overriding and whereas we concentrated on building a unified organisation and strengthening the impact of the boycott, areas like Bonteheuwel wrongly thought it more important to show that they were UDF."³³ Importantly, these differences never filtered down to the student mass. When they did present themselves in ASAC, they never went beyond the "petty haggling" over who should be invited to speak at mass rallies.³⁴ This too was not a problem, as, like Thornhill, ASAC was not averse to inviting speakers from both the Unity Movement and the UDF, as long as it was building the organisation or unity on the issue at hand. While generally more supportive of the ANC\UDF, as the boycott progressed, and as the Unity Movement increasingly began to object to the boycott, ASAC became less averse to working more closely with the UDF. Nevertheless, this was not unqualified and many delegates to ASAC continued to remain hostile to 'nationalism' and certain other aspects of Congress politics.

While ASAC had operated in a more middle class area than most other SAC's, it did not mean that it had a more middle class weltanschauung. To the contrary, and unlike many of the UDF supporting SACs in working class areas, ASAC displayed a particularly strong allegiance to working class politics, the building of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and socialism. In fact, this commitment to the struggle of the working class became one of the key defining characteristics of ASAC which separated it from the UDF aligned SAC's. From its inception, the slogan that it adopted was 'WORKERS AND STUDENTS MARCH FORWARD TO LIBERATION.' In discussions and speeches, many of the leadership in ASAC had always stressed the fact that the students struggle was not isolated, but part of a broader and singular struggle for socialism. They had also argued that apartheid was a product of capitalism and as such,

"the students' struggle alone could never topple the state, yet alone lead the struggle for socialism ...

³³ Interview 8.

³⁴ Interview 2.

At the end of the day, workers needed to be at the fore front of the struggle. As such ... students had a role to play in building student organisations to support a broader working class programme.³⁷

Given the middle class nature of the area, and the weakness of the organised working class in the Western Cape in general, often this did not translate into concrete action. However, while its position of non-alignment and its commitment to socialism did not lead to divisions at the local student level, and was advantageous because it in fact enabled people with divergent tendencies to come together, at the regional level it had led to 'isolationism'. After a mandate was taken at a mass level, ASAC had agreed not to formally affiliate to WECSAC. Another disadvantage was that ASAC's position had also lead to "sectarian responses which had made us reluctant to participate with other student action committees in the region ... one often found oneself isolated from Bonteheuwel and Mitchells Plain, although one had linkages with the Joint SRC's with a similar thinking around ideas of socialism."³⁸ In turn, because ASAC was in no-persons-land, it had received flack from both tendencial currents. Although it shared some ideas of socialism with the NUM, because NUM rejected the continuation of the boycott it was often in conflict with it, especially when the boycott had intensified. From the UDF point of view, because ASAC did not pledge an unconditional support to its ideas, it had reacted to ASAC with some hostility. For example, at a CAYCO meeting held later in the year(to which ASAC had been formally invited), when the ASAC delegate attempted to partake in the discussion, he was told to "shut-up, because you are from ASAC."³⁹ At other times because ASAC was non-aligned, and the other organisations did not know quite "what kind of political animal ASAC was, it was slandered and wooed simultaneously, by both tendencies."⁴⁰ In

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Interview 3.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

general however, it was only Thornhill that had formed a close working alliance with it and had assisted it practically, giving it direction when it ~~was~~ requested it.

Despite its relative isolation, both Jordi and Weber have argued that ASAC was the most influential and direction giving SAC.⁴¹ It became a popular force amongst Athlone students through virtue of its grassroots work at schools when it confronted the issues that students faced daily. It also became a visible presence in Athlone as a result of the numerous press statements and pamphlets that it released. ASAC ~~had~~ produced the most media in comparison to all other SAC's, even the regional bodies such as WECSAC and the ISCC. In addition to those printed at schools by SRC's for ASAC, from the 5th of August, until the 12th of March 1986, ASAC ~~had~~ printed 15 different pamphlets, totalling 138000 copies, at a cost of R3390, whereas WECSACs' total bill for the entire region only amounted to R1200!⁴² While the media that ASAC published was drawn up exclusively by students, it was also more direction-giving than the few published by most other SAC's.⁴³ Because ASAC ~~had~~ published vast amounts of media, it ~~had~~ spread ASAC's thought to thousands of students.

⁴¹ Weber, E. op cit p 64; Jordi, R. p 67.

⁴² Allies Printers, op cit.

⁴³ Interview 2,3,5,7,8.

3) Initial Organisation and Problems Encountered at Athlone Schools

Given the fact that some schools had well established SRC's prior to the boycott, whereas others had weaker ones, or no form of student governance at all, the boycott was bound to be a differentiated experience at individual schools.

At Belgravia and Sinton, because their SRC's had been party to the ISCC meetings, taken report-backs to their schools, embarked on a mobilising campaign and then taken a vote, which was in favour of boycotting, they had been well prepared for the launch of the boycott. Their programme of action, which included awareness programmes, had also been worked out in advance. At both these schools, the rigid authority structure that had existed prior to the boycott had been almost totally subverted once the boycott had begun. Although Sinton SRC had the support of a large section of its relatively young and progressive teaching staff, at Belgravia there was a much older core of conservative teachers who did not support the boycott. It was not even the case that teachers had been split with regards to the boycott, and apart from one or two teachers, "there was virtual unanimity of not supporting the boycott."⁴⁴ Many of these teachers had tried to manipulate and discourage students in an attempt to thwart the boycott. Nevertheless, even at Belgravia, the SRC, "had taken control of everything at the school, including the school bell, the notorious bell."⁴⁵ In the first week of the boycott students at both these schools had voted overwhelmingly in favour of scrapping the prefect system and corporal punishment. In a very diplomatic way, students had called on prefects to resign and hand in their badges, which the vast majority willingly did. The school administrations at both schools had also agreed to the abolition of corporal punishment. Students had argued that they did not need supervision or brutal punishment because they "were not sheep that needed to be herded

⁴⁴ interview 2.

⁴⁵ ibid.

around."⁴⁶ The level of organisation at these schools ^{was} were however not generally applicable to other schools in the Athlone area.

Although Spes Bona had a well established SRC, those elected onto the SRC "were only interested in furthering their academic careers and not in any social issues."⁴⁷ Thus soon after the boycott had begun, those on the executive had indicated that they were not interested in boycotting. A group of 'concerned students', who claimed to represent the broader mass of students, had approached them to either play a more active role or resign. They chose the latter and the concerned students were temporarily elected to represent students. However, the principal, who was the vice-chairperson of the CTPA, refused to recognise the authority of this body. He had also tried to intimidate students back to classes, threatening to call in their parents.⁴⁸ After students had disrupted the school, the principal had closed the school from the 12th of August until the 16th.⁴⁹ This however did not stifle the boycott at Spes Bona and the students had managed to embark on a full-scale boycott.

At Rylands High, although ~~there~~ a student body existed, it was tightly controlled by the school administration. Even though members of the student body attended ISCC meetings as individuals, because of the authoritarian nature of the school, they were not allowed to publicly discuss the prospect of boycotting. As a result, these individuals were forced into "using certain forms of terrorism."⁵⁰ Two of the leaders of the student body had consequently initiated a planned disruption of the school.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* Also Interview 6.

⁴⁷ Interview 5

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Western Cape Student Action Committee. The Schools Boycott Continues (Cape Town, August 1985).

⁵⁰ Interview 3

"The two of us, quite bureaucratically went in and bombarded the school. We just took it by the scruff of its neck ... got a couple of people to go around, disrupt the classes and bring everybody to an assembly. Students did not know what was happening. We took it upon ourselves to say that the student body was already party to the programme of action. Had we told students that we must still decide, because of the naivety of many of the students, we wouldn't go forward. We needed to take the initiative, maybe even lie. So it was just this merry group of armed bandits who disrupted the school and gave the message."⁹¹

Nevertheless, this initiative was well received by students, even though they were not sure exactly what was happening. The Rylands leadership had justified their action by pointing to the fact that they had no other alternative, as there was no other way of gathering students together. Although the principal and a number of senior staff members tried to force students back to class physically, with the result that a few heated exchanges took place, students did not retaliate physically. However the Rylands administration was "seriously surprised ... for them it was too far-fetched to see that those sweet Rylands 'Indian' students could become this rowdy mob."⁹² After the mass had gathered and student leaders had explained what had happened, and what was happening at other schools, students were informed about the programme of action and awareness programme that was worked out. A delegation was chosen to inform the principal about what was happening and what was required of him. While a heated exchange took place in his office, with him threatening to call in their parents, students did not back down. However before the student leaders could return to the mass, they had been dismissed.

At the assembly the next day, after the principal had spoken, student leaders ^{took} had taken over and told students to remain behind. Although the principal tried to disperse them, they had ignored him. From that point onwards, until the boycott had ended the following year, Rylands High had participated fully in the

⁹¹ *ibid*

⁹² *ibid.*

boycott. Immediately, it was decided that corporal punishment and the prefect system should be abolished. Students had also agreed that the student body had to be reconstituted along more democratic lines and as such an SRC was elected. Through participation in the boycott, Rylands had broken with its separate Indian identity and had instead identified themselves as part of the oppressed community. Although Rylands had begun the boycott with only an administration-controlled student body, by the end of 1985 it had emerged with one of the strongest and most well-supported SRCs in Athlone. The leadership at Rylands not only played a key role at the school, but they also played one in the formation of ASAC.

At other schools without a prior history of student organisation, organising proved far more difficult. At Garlandale and Groenvlei, only after intervention by ASAC and progressive teachers at the school, was a student action committee formed.⁵³ Schools that were particularly problematic were Bridgetown, Athlone High, Ned Doman, St. Columbas and Peakview. Peakview was in a particularly weak position as their most senior students were those in standard 7. Although there were a few interested students, no representative committee was ever established. Apart from the few disruptions that took place by students from other schools, no awareness classes or programmes were held. Nevertheless, a core group of students from Peakview still participated in ASAC. At St Columbas, although an SRC was formed early in the boycott, it was not able to embark on a full-scale boycott. While now and then students would attend rallies at other schools or awareness programmes at their own school, there was no continuing awareness programmes or other activities at St. Columbas. In part, this was due to a conservative and authoritarian principal, as well as the fact that it was a semi-private school. This was compounded by the role that parents played. Because they had payed school fees, they ~~had been~~^{were} more vocally opposed to the boycott than at other schools. While normal schooling occurred most of the time, students held

⁵³ Interview 9 Teacher at Groenvlei.

awareness programmes after school.⁵⁴ Ned Doman, Athlone and Bridgetown however proved to be the most problematic in terms of organisation. At all these schools, although there were no student structures, there was a significantly large support-base for the boycott. However, at each of these schools, the principals were staunch Labour Party supporters and ~~had~~ used every means available, including the police, to prevent the boycott taking place at their schools.⁵⁵

At the beginning of the boycott an 'action committee' or disruption squad known as the 'A-Team' emerged. The formation of this body of individuals was however fairly spontaneous. At an ASAC rally held at the Samaj Centre, a student from Athlone High ~~had~~ claimed that the principal had held students' leaders at the school hostage in his office in an attempt to intimidate them. It was also alleged that he had handed their names to the police. The meeting decided to march down to Athlone High in search of the principal to demand that he allow students the freedom to organise. While the principal had fled the school, some of the students ~~had~~ wrecked the staff room. In the first week or two of the boycott, the A-Team, ~~had~~ disrupted schools such as St. Columbas, Ned Doman, Bridgetown and Athlone High, at the request of students from those schools. While this was initially condoned by ASAC, because it was not designed to intimidate students into boycotting, but an attempt to allow students to organise at their schools, this grouping did not last long. While there were reservations initially about such activity, this reservation was reinforced by Thornhill members who pointed out that "that was not the way to conduct struggle."⁵⁶ Thereafter, ASAC ~~had~~ instead decided to send delegations of leadership from their schools, in an attempt to persuade principals to allow SRC's and so forth. If he did not agree, these delegates would have to attempt to bring students out to an assembly and explain how an SRC functioned and

⁵⁴ Interview 4.

⁵⁵ Interview 8.

⁵⁶ Interview 2.

what was happening at other schools. ASAC would also delegate certain schools to work with core groups of students from these schools. These unorganised schools were also invited to attend~~ed~~ the organised activities at the organised schools. It was in this way, rather than through force, that ASAC had~~ed~~ managed to establish functioning student structures at Ned Doman, Athlone and Bridgetown.

An important feature to note however is that even when there were established SRC's, support for it was not always absolute. Although by far^{ly} the majority of students supported the boycott, their acceptance of the boycott was far from universal. Those that opposed the boycott and wanted to attend classes were however not a significant force and generally just stayed at home.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

4) Student Activities

In the 1980 boycott, 'awareness programmes' or 'alternative education' had become a defining feature of student activity. Drawing on that tradition, when the boycott was launched, student structures had specifically called on students to implement awareness programmes and not stayaways. Even though students still came to school, the entire school routine had been subverted. In an attempt to show that students had broken away from the rigid authoritarian nature of the school system, students would come to school at about 8:30 as opposed to 8 am.⁹⁸ First, students would attend an assembly, addressed by the SRC where a report-back of the ASAC meeting held the previous day, as well as developments at other Athlone schools or significant events from other areas, would be conveyed. Depending on the programme of action worked out the previous day, students would either attend awareness programmes at the school or leave for a rally at another school. These two activities were the predominant way in which the boycott was conducted at that stage. Both these activities could however be bracketed under the category of 'education', as opposed to a stayaway, which is a more symbolic form of protest.

The awareness programmes were of immense importance as ^{at} its core lay a deeper level of thought on the part of the student leadership. The implementation of awareness programmes must be seen as an indictment against an education system which was irrelevant and debased, and it was thus part of the broader demand for people's education. At the start of the boycott however, discussions in classes centred mainly around why students were boycotting, the significance of the demands that students were making, the struggles taking place in other areas, both locally and those thousands of kilometres away. It was also an important forum in which, after a discussion, an informed mandate could be taken. "It was not simply telling students that

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

this is the issue and it must be voted on."⁵⁹ At Belgravia for example, when the vote was taken to decide whether or not ASAC should affiliate formally to WECSAC, two student leaders, with opposing views on affiliation went around to each awareness class giving their respective points of view, before the mandate was taken.⁶⁰

As the boycott progressed however, these discussions included more theoretical issues such as the ideological lineages, the Freedom Charter, the hidden curriculum, the role of the media and other "things usually only first learnt in a sociology 101 course."⁶¹ Conducting awareness programmes therefore required resources. Student leaders also had to be theoretically and politically equipped enough to conduct and lead discussions. Given the vastly different levels of organisational[^] (as elucidated in the previous section) their success obviously vacillated markedly. In addition, Weber has argued that at the school on which his research was focused (Crestway), often the awareness programmes were ineffectual as they lacked depth and they were conducted problematically. He therefore argues that their success in terms of developing 'consciousness,' should not be exaggerated.⁶² Student leaders from Athlone however, argued that the awareness programmes (at Athlone schools at least) were "extremely successful, because we were learning about things and events that we would not usually have learnt about - you don't learn about section 29 or death-squads, the ANC or UDF on T.V. or in the newspapers."⁶³ Perhaps Weber's indictment is too harsh, but nevertheless, given the enigma of trying to research how the programmes were internalised by students, I will instead briefly delineate what students' leaders were attempting to achieve in their programmes. It is also possible to adopt a middle-of-the-

⁵⁹ Interview 6.

⁶⁰ Interview 2.

⁶¹ Interview 8.

⁶² Weber op cit, p 155-160.

⁶³ Interview 8. also no 2,3,4,5,6

road approach, which argues that while awareness programmes were problematic and ineffectual sometimes, at other times they did manage to develop consciousness. Amongst other things, what student leaders in ASAC had tried to do was

"transform the kind of baggage that [students] arrived with ... to transform that and to accept a whole lot of things about the working class ... and how we should support them ... but it wasn't strictly political education. It was enlarging the horizons of knowledge"⁶⁴

Discussions also focused largely on issues in education and how these were related to the broader struggle. It was impressed upon students that they formed part of that working class struggle and that it is only the might of the organised working class that could change the status quo. As such, it was argued that the boycott was not going to do that. Students ~~had~~ also discussed the education syllabus and how it pushed students onto the cheap labour market. In addition, while student leaders have often made references to the distortions in the history syllabus, they also

"made references to the way biology was taught ... this kind of abstracted knowledge from what was happening in the community. In biology we are taught about disease, etc, yet it never impacts on our community."⁶⁵

In the class discussions, it ~~had been~~^{was} made clear that students rejected the ideologized system of gutter education and its relation to the labour market, and not education per se. While students ~~had~~ wanted the same facilities as those in white schools, they did not want the same education "as it was equally gutter."⁶⁶

Students ~~had~~ also tried to engender a sense of solidarity and the important slogan, 'an injury to one, is an injury to all' was discussed in depth.⁶⁷ Songs were also particularly important and were used in an attempt to create a sense of solidarity. It was

⁶⁴ Interview 2.

⁶⁵ ibid.

⁶⁶ ibid.

⁶⁷ Interview 3.

also an activity which students enjoyed. Some schools even sang the SOYA song, 'Students of Young Azania', not because they wanted to promote the ideology of SOYA, "but because it was a form of creating a sense of solidarity."⁶⁸ Students ~~had~~ also learnt to sing songs in African languages. This, student leaders argued, was an important part of building non-racialism.⁶⁹ Students were also taught the National Anthem. However, singing songs in an African dialect was not meaningless as students were taught the meanings first.⁷⁰ A few joint awareness programmes on an exchange-student basis ~~was~~^{were} also held with students from the Joint SRC schools. The 'song' that had the most impact was however the 'toyi-toyi'. It not only promoted the ANC in a very effective way, but singing about the armed struggle also created a very real culture of resistance.

Apart from 'struggle-songs', other creative methods, such as plays, poetry, as well as commercial music, were used to make the awareness programmes more exciting, thereby capturing students' attention. At Belgravia for example, students ~~had~~ analyzed Pink Floyd's song, 'The Wall' (which had become famous in the 1980 boycott because of its lyrics - 'we don't need no education, we don't need no thought control'). After that, students ~~had~~ critiqued the 1980 students' interpretation of it.⁷¹ At many schools, each awareness class would create their own play on a specific issue and the better plays would be performed for the student mass. An attempt was also made to try and bridge the gap between the school and the community in a real way. During the consumer boycott, for example, Belgravia students ~~had~~ chosen target areas and went out into the communities in an attempt to extend the awareness programmes beyond the school.⁷²

⁶⁸ Interview 2.

⁶⁹ Interview 2 & 3. Also see Cape Youth Congress (LOGRA Branch) - 'Song-sheet' (Cape Town nd)

⁷⁰ Interview 8

⁷¹ Interview 2.

⁷² ibid.

Although rallies formed part of the education programmes, their significance lies more in their visibility, mobilising powers and the "atmosphere which prevailed and the emotions they evoked."⁷³ Compared to the low profile awareness programmes, rallies were the public and visible signs that schools were out on boycott. Apart from the content of the rally itself, which were used to popularise the boycott demands, rallies were used as a means of attracting publicity and visibility. ASAC rallies were held at the most visible schools, "so that we could have a presence in the area."⁷⁴ These inter-school rallies had the effect of engendering concrete signs of unity between students from different schools and areas and it had allowed those schools which did not have sustainable student structures to see what was happening in other schools "and not be disillusioned because of their inabilities to build SRC's at their own schools."⁷⁵ Rallies had the added attraction of drawing large crowds through the use of high-profile speakers. The platforms at rallies were also important for making public announcements such as the decision to launch the consumer boycott or stage the Pollsmoor March.

From the second week of August, until the first week of September, students at Athlone schools attended many large regional and local student rallies, with crowds averaging between two and three thousand.⁷⁶ During this period, ASAC held rallies at Spes Bona, Rylands, Oaklands, Garlandale, Belgravia, and Sinton.⁷⁷ In accordance with ASAC's spirit of non-alignment, speakers from both the UDF and the Unity Movement were invited.

Rallies ~~had been~~^{were} one of the prime movers that led to the continuation of the boycott. However, it was not so much the

⁷³ Weber, E. op cit p 129.

⁷⁴ Interview 2.

⁷⁵ ibid

⁷⁶ Approximately 2 to 3 were held per week Interview B; Cape Times 28/8/85; Grassroots; September 1985, Vol 5 No 6; Jordi, K. op cit p 77.

⁷⁷ Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 7.

mobilising character of the rallies which ensured that the boycott continued, but rather the brutal way in which police had intervened. Just as these student rallies attracted multitudes of students, it had also attracted the attention of the police. In comparison to the awareness programmes at individual schools, where police did not generally intervene, rallies, which were regarded as 'illegal gatherings',⁷⁸ were dispersed. Although rallies in the Athlone area, at this stage, were not dispersed with as much force as had been done in areas like Mitchells Plain and the townships, it had nevertheless fuelled militancy and resentment. Towards the end of this period, police dispersal of rally^{ies} was the rule rather than the exception. Despite that, ASAC continued to hold rallies because they represented the right to protest in the open and to "engage in physical confrontation in defence of that right."⁷⁹ At the mass-level, the momentum of the boycott was sustained and enhanced largely through an indignation against what the state, via the police, were doing. ASAC was faced with the daunting task of attempting to channel blind militancy, redirecting it and giving it a concrete political content. Before the 28th of August, however, the epicentre of police violence and street violence had been restricted to areas such as Mitchells Plain and the townships, with events in Athlone remaining largely peripheral. Two events, the Pollsmoor March on the 28th of August and the 'Burial of Apartheid Rally' on the 4th of September, served to change that.

At a student rally held at the Samaj Centre on the 22nd of August, UDF patron Alan Boesak announced that "in a few days we will do something that will turn this country on its head."⁸⁰ He was referring to a march to Pollsmoor, on the 28th of August to demand the release of Nelson Mandela. Despite warnings from the Minister of Law and Order, Louis le Grange, that the march was illegal and that the police would take "stern action" against the

⁷⁸ Technically, this included any outdoor gathering that was not a bona fide sports function or for which the Minister of Law & Order or the regional magistrate had not given permission in writing.

⁷⁹ Weber, E. op cit p 141.

⁸⁰ Even Times 23/8/85.

marchers, the organisers of the march had agreed to proceed, because of the widespread support for the march.⁸¹ In the two days preceding the march, troops (including the navy) from outside the Peninsula were brought in.⁸² On the 27th, le Grange had also declared COSAS an illegal organisation (effective on the 28th - the first banning since that of SASO and 17 others in 1977).⁸³ Although police had arrested Boesak and other organisers of the march, it was not called off. Instead, it had been decided that the march would be lead by priests, nuns, imams and other religious people, in an attempt to offer the marchers some protection against police violence.

Athlone Stadium, the venue from where the march was to begin, had been sealed off since the early hours of the 28th, in one of the "biggest security operations seen in Cape Town for many years - police and soldiers lined Klipfontein Road from central Athlone to Vanguard Drive."⁸⁴ Police had also completely sealed off the African townships. Undaunted by the large security force presence, 300 aspirant marchers had gathered outside the Athlone Stadium. Although these marchers were dispersed by baton-wielding members of the security forces, they had regrouped and had congregated at Hewat Training College, which was initially designated as a first aid station. By midday, after holding a discussion on whether or not to proceed with the march, the crowd, which had grown to over 4 000, had overwhelmingly agreed that the march proceed, despite the implicit danger, "because the revolution goes forward on the blood of its martyrs"⁸⁵

⁸¹ Cape Times 26\8\85.

⁸² Interview 8.

⁸³ Government notice No. R. 1977. Ministry of Law and Order. "Declaration of Congress of South African Students as an Unlawful Organisation" in South Africa: Government Gazette No 9914 (27\09\1985)

⁸⁴ People's Express Vol 1 No 5, September 1985, Special Edition.

⁸⁵ Pratt, E. Education and Change: Quality or Equality? An analysis of the current (1985-6) opposition among pupils, teachers and parent communities in the Western Cape, M.Ed thesis, University of Cape Town, 1988 p 124.

The crowd, making its way towards the M5 Highway, to Pollsmoor, was stopped at the foot of Kromboom Road Bridge, by the security forces who were given the instruction to "maak skoon." Those in front, especially the clergy, were brutally assaulted with quirts and batons, while the rest of the crowd was dispersed with teargas. Twenty-two members of the clergy were arrested. Large sections of the crowd had retreated to Hewat, where they began stoning police cars and Casspirs.⁸⁴ The area surrounding Hewat, especially Thornton and Belgravia Road, ~~had~~ witnessed pitched battles with many attacks and counter-attacks taking place between the protesters and security forces. Only after 5pm, did some semblance of normality return to the area. In the course of that day, the security forces had killed 12 and arrested 24, in the Western Cape.⁸⁵ The brutality of police action however only served to further rankle an already vexed community. Burning barricades erected by youth, with the occasional assistance of adults, appeared daily in Athlone and other areas.⁸⁶ In the wake of continuing street battles, between the 28th of August and the 4th of September 28 people ~~had been~~ ^{were} killed, 200 seriously injured and 235 arrested on charges like public violence and arson.⁸⁷

During this period of heightened and open conflict, all secondary schools in the Athlone area, even schools like Ned Doman and St. Columbas, which were the weakest in terms of organisation, had been dislocated by the boycott. The St. Columbas interviewee ~~had~~ explained what had happened at his school.

"When things started blowing up here, everything was happening around us ... while other students were on the march and were moving we were just sitting here as normal, and that's not right, because we came from the community. That's when we got restless and we said yes, and after deciding amongst ourselves we came out."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ People's Express Vol 1 No 5, September 1985, Special Edition.

⁸⁷ Weekly Mail 30/8/85.

⁸⁸ Jordi, R. op cit p 91

⁸⁹ Weekly Mail 6/9/85.

⁹⁰ Interview 4.

Although the violence had become a positive feature for the weaker schools, its repercussions for the more organised schools were extremely problematic. Students, especially from schools such as Sinton and Belgravia had been drawn out onto the street and their respective SRC's (and therefore ASAC) had begun to ~~lose~~ the initiative of giving direction or coordination. Given that the street action was largely spontaneous, ASAC could not even offer any direction or control. Because this street action was regarded by most residents as linked to the boycott, there was also the danger that lumpen elements could use the opportunity for personal gain and so discredit ASAC. Most importantly, while students engaged the police "because they were serious about engaging the police, because they came to be seen as upholding the status quo,"¹¹ this street action fundamentally lacked any concrete political objective or programme.

In an attempt to regain the initiative and draw students back into the school premises and redirect their focus of attention back to the awareness programmes and the demands made, ASAC planned a huge rally at Belgravia. Much creativity had gone into the planning of this rally to which ASAC had invited 53 senior secondary schools across the Peninsula. Initially ASAC had considered burning the flag, as had been done at Spes Bona, in the 1980 boycott. However, because of the serious legal implications, this action would have given the police more reason to intervene. As such, ASAC had decided to bury the flag, which was concealed in a coffin. The day prior to the rally, Belgravia had sent most of its students off to an awareness programme at Garlandale, while the remaining students had stayed behind to demarcate the field and dig the 'grave'. The coffin was made by Rylands High. It was a well organised rally and the organisers had even planned a funeral procession. The funeral was also to be conducted by a student, dressed as a priest. While the rally was of symbolic significance and was "a good thing because it brought together all these notion of why we're struggling .. and we're

¹¹ interview 1.

going to bury this thing ... [to show] we had power,"⁹² it had a dual purpose. From an organisational point of view, the second purpose, which was to publicly crystallise the demands that students had made, was more important. In that respect, it was enormously successful as it had not only intended to draw a huge crowd, but it was also intended to attract journalists, especially those from other countries. It had also invited high-profile speakers like Joe Marks from the UDF and Frank van der Horst from SACOS, to show that the demands were backed by the community.

Although most of the papers ~~had~~ claimed that the rally was attended by 4000 students, the organisers have disputed this, arguing that it was considerably higher.⁹³ In any case, the turnout was considerably higher than was anticipated and it was considered extremely successful. In two respects, the events which flowed from that rally, ~~had~~ marked a turning point in the boycott for ASAC as an organisation.

Firstly, it was at that time that the Unity Movement had begun to argue more forcibly that students should return to classes, while the UDF was supporting the demands that students had made, arguing for the boycott to continue until the short-term demands had been met. The Unity Movement had chided the UDF for encouraging the boycott and "manipulating" students as "usable material." Instead, they argued that "a protracted boycott always decrepitates ... [and] a nincompoop cannot change societies."⁹⁴ As such, because ASAC had invited both these tendencies, the speakers from the platform had sent out directly conflicting messages, with van der Horst telling students to go back to classes, while the UDF speakers had urged that people to intensify the struggle, until their demands were met. Given the nature of the rally, van der Horst's message was not well

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Weekly Mail, 6/9/85; Argus 6/9/85 and Interviews 2,3,5,6.

⁹⁴ Dudley, R. President of NUM quoted in Pienaar, H & Willems, H. (eds) Die Trojaanse Perd: Onderhoude oor die Noodtoestand in die Kaap, 1985 (Emmentia, Taurus, 1986) pp 91;92;94.

received." From then onward, ASAC had become more cautious about inviting speakers from the Unity Movement."

Secondly, although ASAC had tried to prevent a confrontation with the police, who were provoking students by their presence at the perimeters of the school, students from the Hanover Park schools, Mountview and Crystal, had erected a barricade at the rear of the school. This had given the police, who were cautious because of the large contingency of journalists, the reason they needed to disperse the rally. A Casspir came crashing through the fence, firing teargas and rubber bullets into the school ground. ASAC student leaders, in an attempt to prevent injury, had evacuated the school. Because all other sides of the school had been encircled by the police, they had directed students to Hewat, via Belgravia Road. The dispersal of the rally had provoked an angry response by students, who had immediately erected barricades. Thus begun what became known as the "Battle of Belgravia" or "Cape Town's bloodiest twenty-four hours."

"Within 25 minutes, a 2km stretch had become a no-go area as barricades flamed. Running street battles erupted in Athlone, where youths erected burning barricades and flung rocks and petrol bombs at police vehicles. On Belgravia Road, in scenes of the worst violence, barbed wire was stretched across the street at Casspir height. Police say they are using live ammunition as well."

As a result, this drew even more students out onto the street. The vast majority had however simply begun to stay at home. Attendance at Athlone schools by this stage had dropped to a daily average of 16.5%." However, shortly thereafter, preempted by the forced closure of schools, there was a notable return of students to the schools premises, but not formal classes.

⁶⁶ Interview 2.

⁶⁷ ibid.

⁶⁸ Argus 6/9/85 Weekly Mail 6/9/85.

⁶⁹ Weekly Mail 6/9/85.

⁷⁰ Cape Times 5/9/85.

5) Attempts to broaden the support base

During the period August to September, the boycott was predominantly limited to the activities of students. Students however were not isolated and there were important links with other sectors of the community. The most significant were parents and teachers.

a) Enlisting parent support

When the boycott was launched, the demands of boycotting students in DET and DEC schools in the Western Cape was not a carbon copy of each other. In addition to the demand for the lifting of the State of Emergency, DET students also had school based grievances, and had demanded - the age limit regulations be scrapped, examination fees be decreased from R36,60 to R20,00 per year, that more schools and technicons be built; that the quota system be scrapped; and that there should be a choice of academic subjects offered.¹⁰⁰ In addition, parents had been drawn into the campaign from the very start, through the Parents Action Committee (PAC) which was formed in mid-August.

Jordi had^s argued that while in the DET schools, the PAC was formed as a supportive structure around the demands pertaining to the physical and local conditions in education, "the initial broad focus of the DEC boycott could provide little that was immediate and concrete as a means of effectively mobilising often very conservative parents."¹⁰¹ At the start of the boycott in the DEC schools, parents were not involved at any level. None of the interviewees were even able to recall what the initial reaction of the broader parent mass was to the start of the boycott.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Joint SRC's & Parents Action Committee - Meet Our Demands Now (Cape Town, August 1985) For a fuller analysis of the boycott in Cape DET schools see Nekwheva, F.H. The 1985 School Crisis in the Western Cape Sociology MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1991.

¹⁰¹ Jordi, R. op cit, p 83.

¹⁰² Interview 2.3.5.6.

Although from its inception, ASAC had argued for more parent and teacher involvement,¹⁰³ and was encouraged by the Joint SRC's to form PTSA's, by the end of August, not many PTSA's had been established.

However ASAC, like all other students' organisations had supported the consumer boycott, which had begun in the second week of the boycott. The campaign had been called in reaction to the State of Emergency and in solidarity with the boycotting students in the Western Cape.¹⁰⁴ It was coordinated by the Western Cape Consumer Action Committee (WCCAC,) which included all progressive political tendencies. Although there were different views about who the boycott should target, it was the first time in the Western Cape, since the DBAC, that Unity Movement and Charterist tendencies worked together in a single organisation. At a regional level, ASAC was part of the WECSAC delegation to the WCCAC. At a local level, in the Athlone area, it had been drawn into the local coordinating committee. This was an important linking together of the students' demands with that of the community. ASAC had also released a pamphlet,¹⁰⁵ which stated that the consumer boycott should be enforced until all the student demands were met.¹⁰⁶

Also, through its working relationship with Thornhill, ASAC had continually endeavoured to elicit both parent and community support. Jordi has also pointed out that in this period, ASAC was one of the few SAC's which had considered it important to secure community support.¹⁰⁶ Although this was done through media publications and speaking on the platform at rallies held by Thornhill, ASAC had not yet made a concerted attempt to draw in community support or parents in a practical way. Thus, during

¹⁰³ Muslim News 9/8/85.

¹⁰⁴ Consumer Boycott Action Committee - 'Briefing Document' (9 August 1985)

¹⁰⁵ Athlone Students Action Committee - 'The Boycott Continues Until Our Demands Are Met' (Cape Town, 1985)

¹⁰⁶ Jordi, *Re op cit* p 79.

this period, drawing in the community remained largely at the level of rhetoric.

As police violence had begun to become endemic in the Athlone area (in the post-Pollsmoor March period), and the community witnessed the naked acts of brutality meted out by the security forces, many 'fence-sitters' had begun to change their attitudes. A parent had explained

"we were normal people until those police and army people pointed guns at our children. When we saw their hatred and what they were doing to our children, we too would want to throw the first thing we could get our hands on at them."¹⁰⁷

It was the unrestrained police-violence, more than anything else, in this period, that had engendered a real empathy with boycotting students. However, when the schools were forcibly closed, it was entirely different and it drew in parents on a practical level.

b) Teacher support

When the boycott had first begun, many teachers were placed in a very precarious position with regards to publicly supporting the boycotting students. This had been compounded, as before the boycott already, at the beginning of 1985, the Education Minister in the HoR, Carter Ebrahim, had made it clear that he would not hesitate to act against any teacher who opposed the Labour Party. He had appointed an inquiry to investigate those teachers who were thought to be members of the UDF or SACOS. In addition, he had also made it clear that he would not hesitate to use his powers to dismiss or suspend any teacher who did not tow the line.¹⁰⁸

Adding to the danger that was implicit if teachers had publicly supported students, was the fact that no mass-based progressive teacher organisation had existed. Although the TLSA had been

¹⁰⁷ Interview 11: Parent from the Athlone area.

¹⁰⁸ Cape Herald 12/1/85.

established for a long time, it did not have a large following. More importantly, it did not have a recent record of activism, beyond its publications in the Teachers League. On the other hand, while the CTPA had quite a large membership, it was universally regarded by progressive teachers as collaborationist, and therefore out of bounds. During the boycott, it had continually called on students to return to "normal classes." Its main activity was in behind the scenes negotiations with the education department and through its intervention via the courts. At Rylands High there were teachers who were members of the Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA). This too was much like the CTPA, and those more committed to liberation politics had refused to join. However, a larger percentage of those teachers with 'progressive streaks' were affiliated to it.

Because of these problems that teachers faced, a number of teachers felt that, although they supported the students, they could not do so in a public way. Other teachers, despite the risk of being fired, had from the start of the boycott, played a tremendous role in assisting students and publicly and actively supporting them. At Athlone schools this, was true for a large number of teachers at Garlandale, Groenvlei, Rylands, Oaklands and Sinton.¹⁰⁹ At these schools, teachers played a role in helping to establish student structures, organise awareness programmes, assist in other practical and public ways. At Belgravia, however, despite the fact that it had a strong SRC, and was considered one of the leading schools in the boycott, it did not have the active support of the teaching staff. Although there were a few teachers who supported students quietly, the vast majority ^{did} had not. In the very first week or two of the boycott, a disjuncture occurred between the teaching staff and the students, when the SRC released a pamphlet accusing teachers of "viciously assaulting" boycotting students.¹¹⁰ In addition, when the Burial of Apartheid Rally took place at the school, the staff from Belgravia, unlike teachers at other schools, had not intervened when police

¹⁰⁹ WECSAC Student Mass Rally (Cape Town, August 1985) Interview 6,9,10.

¹¹⁰ Interview 2

attacked students. Instead, most of them had remained in the staff-room. The role of Belgravia teachers had become infamous and progressive teachers at other schools, began to speak about a "Belgravia teacher ethos."¹¹¹

On the 15th of August however, 1000 DEC teachers had gathered at the Samaj Centre at a meeting called by the adhoc Concerned Teachers Coordinating Committee (CTCC), to concretise the role that progressive teachers should play in the boycott.¹¹² It was also called to discuss the need for ~~the~~ establishing a mass-based progressive teacher organisation. Teachers at the meeting ~~had~~ decided to "down tools" on the 19th and 20th of August, refuse to teach any academic work and assist students with their awareness programmes. Thereafter, they would reconvene again on the 22nd.¹¹³

The downing of tools however was more a symbolic show of unity with students as in any case these teachers were already not teaching because there were no students to teach. In addition, most of these teachers were in any case assisting with awareness programmes. Some teachers who did not support the boycott however also came out on the two day protest. However their motives were not candid. Again at Belgravia, although after a staff-meeting, teachers came out, making a public declaration that they support the students' struggle, their motivations were deceptive. Students ~~had~~ judged by the expression on the faces of some of the teachers, as well as by knowing them and their views that this was a ploy by the administration in an attempt to get students back to class. Knowing what the teachers thought, students did not regard this as sincere and instead thought of the whole scenario as more humorous than a genuine show of solidarity.¹¹⁴ At

¹¹¹ Interview 9

¹¹² New Era. "WECTU Organising Teachers" in New Era March, Vol 1 No 1 1986 p 23. Concerned Teachers Co-ordinating Committee. Teachers Unite (Cape Town, August 1985)

¹¹³ Western Cape Teachers Union - "2000 Teachers Unite" (Cape Town, No 1, November 1985) p 4.

¹¹⁴ Interview 2, 6

many other schools however, it gave teachers the ability to publicly show their support.

Teachers however ~~had~~ played a much greater and more active role together with students in the period engendered by the closure of schools in September. They ~~had~~ ~~became~~ became an important constituent thereafter, playing a role in the re-opening of schools, and the refusal to administer exams. The concept of teachers as an organisational force, was embodied in the formation of WECTU on the 29th of September.

6) Summary

From its initial cautious beginnings, the boycott, which started as a two day protest, had extended into a protracted boycott. The decision to extend the boycott was however not a top-down decision at Athlone schools, but had generally been reached through decisions taken at a mass level. ASAC had assessed the boycott on a weekly basis and the continuation or suspension of the boycott was always discussed at awareness programmes. The feasibility of continuing the boycott was assessed in relation to the support that it had at schools. ASAC had insisted on reliable mandates and truthful reports from schools, the 'mood' of students. For example, the Garlandale representative had been severely reprimanded by the forum for giving an incorrect report.¹¹³ ASAC as a forum tried to remain as close as possible to the feeling on the 'ground'.

Organisationally, although the majority of schools in Athlone did not have any structures before the boycott, by September all schools had either an active SRC or action committee. ASAC had played a large role in trying to ensure that these functioned properly. On many occasions it had intervened when a principal acted in a particularly authoritarian manner. It had made a concerted effort to popularise itself through showing that it took up student concerns, by going to schools where students were experiencing problems. It had also popularised itself through media and speeches. Through its actions it had become a popular force at Athlone schools. In terms of regional developments, towards the end of this period Athlone schools had concentrated its focus on the local level in order to facilitate the daily activities of boycotting students. Thus delegates, while recognising that regional coordination was important, they had felt that WECSAC as a structure had become obsolete.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Interview 8.

¹¹⁴ Interview 2.

Ideologically, while student leaders in ASAC had personal reservations about the UDF and charterist politics, they had begun to distance themselves from the NUM, because they felt that they were not building unity on the issue at hand, ie. the boycott. The reservations that student leaders had of the UDF were however not discussed at a mass level. At the student mass level, therefore, many had been attracted to the politics of ~~the~~ Charterism, especially the ANC, because of the romantic notion of armed-struggle. It was ~~through~~ the awareness programmes, the toyi-toyi, the accessibility of UDF (populist) politics, and what the UDF people were saying on the platforms, that had attracted so many student supporters into its fold.

Although critics of the boycott have argued that it was the student leadership that was pushing for a continuation, while the mass had just followed, students have argued that this "view is extremely patronising."¹¹⁷ Such an approach would have as its basis a jaded conception that students were unable to think independently or that the boycott was the work of 'outside agitators and manipulators.' Although at first, many students were not totally committed to the concept of struggle, it was largely through police action that the wavering of many students had been fortified into a commitment to continue the boycott. While the violence that had erupted towards the end of this period was essentially a result of the state's actions during the Pollsmoor March, it would be a gross oversight to limit the causes of the street violence to that alone. The foundations of it lay even further than the declaration of the State of Emergency and must be seen in the context of the organic crisis. In the earlier chapters I have demonstrated that the Western Cape, like the rest of the country had been in the grip of the organic crisis. However, unlike other parts of the country, for the historic reasons delineated in chapter 2, the Western Cape did not give coherence to the quiet disenchantment of large sections of its population. In this respect, the boycott must be also be seen as channel to release the pent-up frustration of

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

having every aspect of life proscribed in some way. The fact that large groups of youth and unemployed young workers had been responsible for the erecting of barricades, can also be attributed to the decline in the economy.

Although the boycott had begun in solidarity with other parts of the country, students witnessed the brutality of the state first hand, especially in the post-Pollsmoor March period, even though the repression in the Western Cape had not been as severe as it had been in other areas. Police violence had the effect of accelerating the momentum of the boycott. Unfortunately, however, it was also true that it drew students away from the organised awareness programmes and onto the street so that, organisationally, the boycott was beginning to weaken. However, the boycott was fortified again by closure of schools and the anger that it induced in the community at large.

**CHAPTER 4: CONCERTED STATE
REACTION TO THE BOYCOTT AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES
(SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER)**

1) The Closure of Schools

"The state? I am the state ... It is legal because I wish it" Louis XVI, before the sansculottes took the to streets of Paris in 1789 .

"I will put an end to this sort of thing where parents, teachers and students think they can oppose [me], the minister. I have authority ... We will not give them an inch." Carter Ebrahim.¹

By the 6th of September, students in the Western Cape were already out on boycott for over six weeks. At the start of the sixth week, the Department of Education and Culture had acknowledged that only one high school in the whole of the Cape Peninsula was still functioning normally and had not been dislocated by the boycott.² In contradistinction to actions of the security forces, thus far, the only action taken by the education 'authorities' had been the noises that they had made in the press about radicals in schools. After the Pollsmoor March, street action had not dissipated, but intensified, especially after the 'Battle of Belgravia.' After Magnus Malan (Minister of Defence) and Louis le Grange (Minister of Police) had flown to Cape Town urgently on the 4th of September, to assess the situation, they had declared that the position in the Western Cape was "not satisfactory."³ Two days later, Carter Ebrahim had declared that 464 DEC educational institutions (including primary schools) were indefinitely out of bounds to all staff and students, during both weekdays and weekends, because

the educational authorities could no longer ensure the physical safety of the pupils and students at the schools and colleges ... as a result of the disruptive actions and intimidation of pupils by an organised

¹ Ebrahim and Louis quoted in Weber, K.E. Learning through experience M.Phil, Education dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1992 p 163.

² Arous 4/9/85; Cape Times 5/9/85.

³ Weekly Mail 6/9/85.

minority, the usual school programme cannot be proceeded with in an uninterrupted manner ... certain schools are no longer serving an educational function."⁴

This effectively meant that approximately 50 000 students were indefinitely barred from the DEC schools.⁵ In addition, Rylands High (the only Indian school to be closed) had also been closed by the Minister of Education and Culture, in the House of Delegates.⁶

Although no formal schooling was taking place, the closure of schools had enraged the entire community. Over the next few days, press statements from almost every community organisation, ranging from the obvious progressive political organisations, and students, teachers, and parents, to unions, civics, sports and church bodies, had condemned the closure of schools as authoritarian and illegitimate. The closure of schools was seen as an obvious attempt to remove the organising base of students. In so doing, Carter had hoped to thwart the momentum of the boycott, which was rapidly accelerating. However, it had completely backfired, not only intensifying resistance on the part of students, but this time, drawing in the entire community. A joint press statement released by, ASAC, Thornhill Residents, Thornhill Youth, Rylands PTSA, Sinton PTSA, the Chamber of Muslim Meat Traders Association and the Clothing Workers Union, the next week, had found it

"strange that the directive by Carter Ebrahim for the closure of schools should come only hours after the visit to these areas by Louis le Grange ... Our experience has shown that the perpetrators and instigators of violence against defenceless school children were none other than the police and the SADF."⁷

⁴ Press statement released by C Ebrahim, Minister of Education and Culture, HoR. 4pm, Friday 6th September 1985.

⁵ Cape Times 7/9/85.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Cape Times 9/9/85

schools on the 2nd of October,²² as opposed to the 1st, when Ebrahim decided schools would officially reopen. While the meeting had decided that students would return to schools, this did not mean a return to normal schooling. Instead, awareness programmes would be conducted, and the feasibility of continuing the boycott would be discussed and decided. The meeting had also ratified the students demands as reasonable and just.²³ At that stage however, students were not sure how long the boycott could or should be continued.

The Sinton school community however, at "an extra-ordinary meeting at the school on Thursday [26th] morning, decided to return to school on Monday [the 30th]."²⁴ This was done to demonstrate that despite their arrest on the 17th, it was the triumvirate of parents, teachers and students who controlled the school, not Carter Ebrahim. This not only showed that they did not recognise his authority by not returning to school on the 1st, but it also showed that they had the power to once again reopen the school when the community decided. It could thus be regarded as another reopening of schools, but on a smaller scale, in order to demonstrate their power. Drawing on the example of Sinton, Belgravia PTSA had also decided to reopen the school on Monday, for a brief meeting.²⁵

In the mean time, the state was not standing by idly. On the 27th of September, le Grange had banned all outdoor meetings, except bonafide sports gatherings. The banning which came into effect on the 27th, extended right until the 31 of March 1986. In addition, all indoor meetings convened to "advise, encourage, propagate or promote the non-attendance or the opposition to the attendance of

²² Athlone Students Action Committee Student Mass Rally - Cine 400, Monday 30 Sept. 9.30 a.m. (Cape Town, 1985).

²³ Interview II.

²⁴ People's Express October 1985, Vol 1 No 6.

²⁵ Interview II.

any school [wa]s prohibited.²⁶ Because in those areas under emergency rule, such a decree could easily be enforced, this ban must be regarded as a tacit announcement that in the Western Cape, in education at least, the state was facing a severe crisis of hegemony.

Regardless of the legal implications (ie contravening the Internal Security Act), this decree was simply ignored. On the weekend before the schools were to reopen (28th and 29th), mass parent-student rallies were held across the Peninsula. These were convened specifically to discuss the future of the boycott. At all these meetings, the decision to stayaway from schools on the 1st and return to schools on the 2nd to implement awareness programmes and discuss the future of the boycott was endorsed. One of the important meetings which took place that weekend was the one convened in the townships by the PAC, which had decided to endorse the continuation of the boycott until the pupils short-term demands had been met.²⁷

In addition, on Sunday the 29th, the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU), which grew out of the adhoc CTCC, had also been launched. WECTU, which represented 2000 DEC teachers in the Western Cape, had dedicated itself to fight for a unitary, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic education system, to work towards democratic control over the education system and militate against the propagation of oppressive education. It had also refused to collaborate with any state department or person who sought to preserve the status quo. It had thus specifically rejected the CTPA and TASA, as reactionary.²⁸ WECTU had decided that teachers would return to schools, but would not resume normal classes

²⁶ Government notice No. R. 2221. Ministry of Law and Order. 'Gatherings Prohibited Under Section 46(3) of the Internal Security Act, 1982 in South Africa: Government Gazette No 9951 (27/09/1985) p 1.

²⁷ Cape Times 30/9/85.

²⁸ Western Cape Teachers Union - Draft Constitution for the Western Cape Teachers' Union (Cape Town, September 1985) New Era. 'WECTU Organising Teachers' & 'Cape Comes Alive' in New Era March, Vol 1 No 1 1986 p 23.

until parents and students had been consulted. It had also agreed to assist students with their awareness programmes.²⁹

The brief meetings at Sinton and Belgravia held on the morning of the 30th, had very different outcomes. At Sinton, the parents and teachers endorsed the decision taken to return to schools on the 2nd to hold awareness programmes and allow students to decide the future of the boycott. In part such a position was a derivative of the fact that a large number of the Sinton staff were members of WECTU.

At Belgravia however, a few parents, teachers, and the administration (some of whom were on the PTSA) had "stabbed students in the back."³⁰ They had attempted to use the platform to argue that students had made their point and should now return to normal schooling so that they could try and catch up with the academic work that was missed. At that time, the Unity Movement was forwarding the slogan 'Education Before Liberation' and many Belgravia teachers had latched onto that, even though they had no other links or sympathies with the organisation.³¹ They had also argued, like the Unity Movement, that it was parents, teachers and students that should decide on the future of the boycott. At the meeting, an ex-SRC executive member who had resigned his position early in the boycott had also endorsed the stance of the administration. Students, after speaking at the meeting, walked out in protest. The progressive parents (who had remained behind), did not allow the meeting to decide the future of the boycott. Students, who were extremely agitated, stood nearby, chanting that the ex-SRC member "is a traitor"³² As a result, the ex-SRC member's father had assaulted one of the chanting students. Those parents that had remained, together with a few progressive teachers, had convinced the gathering to endorse the stayaway for

²⁹ Cape Times 30/9/85; Business Day 1/10/85; Cape Herald 5/10/85.

³⁰ Interview 2.

³¹ ibid.

³² Interview 11.

the following day.³³ After that, students had proceeded to the ASAC rally held at the Cine 400.

The rally, called mainly to endorse the stayaway on the 1st, had also demanded the postponement of exams. It had decided to hold a series of meetings at schools to decide whether or not to continue the boycott. A resolution adopted at the Cine 400 meeting however urged that the boycott continue until their short-term demands were met. These demands had included the release of detained teachers Mr Joe Adams and Mr N Swartz, as well as all other detainees, immediately and unconditionally. It had also demanded that a dismissed teacher from Steynsville High be immediately and unconditionally reinstated. A speaker at the rally had also urged that pupils remain united when they made their decision on the class boycott and to remember the issues which had motivated the boycott.³⁴ One of the factors underlying the reasons why the ASAC leadership had been pushing for a continuation of the boycott, was the decision taken by the PAC, which had endorsed the boycott in DET schools.³⁵ Parents had decided to embark upon a rent boycott in partial support of the students' demands. For ASAC it had become important not to repeat the historic mistakes of 1976 and 1980, when students at DEC schools returned while the DET students remained out on boycott.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Athlone Students Action Committee - The Boycott Continues Until Our Demands Are Met (Cape Town, October 1985); Business Day 1\10\85; Cape Herald 5\10\1985.

³⁵ Athlone Students Action Committee. Majority Vote To Continue School Boycott!! (Cape Town, October 1985).

2) The Return to Schools and Carter's New Edicts.

The day schools officially reopened for the last term, was marked by a well supported stayaway at all Athlone schools. At Sinton and Belgravia there was a 100% stayaway, while at Rylands High, although some teachers returned to school, there was "an almost total stayaway." The stayaway was well supported at the other Athlone schools as well, where the attendance rate varied between 10% to 30%.³⁶ At the ASAC rally the previous day, it was made clear that students would return to school merely to hold a series of meetings to decide the road forward.³⁷ The decision taken at the meeting was also important as many areas, which did not have an effective coordinating structure, were awaiting the decision taken at the ASAC rally, before they took a final decision. For example, the two high schools from afar afield as Kraaifontein (Scottsdene and Scottsville) had decided to continue the boycott, temporarily, until ASAC had taken a decision.

Despite the fact that the closure of schools was such a calamity for the state, Carter Ebrahim was "determined to re-establish order" in the DEC schools.³⁸ Ebrahim had referred to boycotting students as "savages who would not hesitate to exterminate the people."³⁹ He thus embarked upon a concerted, pro-active campaign in an attempt to ~~put~~ stamp out the boycott. Beginning on Sunday the 29th, police in an aircraft, using a powerful loudspeaker, had urged parents, teachers and pupils to "maintain discipline in the attendance of school" and "to avoid becoming involved in political rallies."⁴⁰ However, a much more determined effort was made to restrict all activities at DEC schools through legislation. Effective from the 1st, Ebrahim had gazetted

³⁶ Arens 1\10\85, 2\10\85; Cape Times 1\10\85.

³⁷ Business Day 1\10\85

³⁸ Cape Times 7\10\85.

³⁹ Arens 5\10\85.

⁴⁰ Cape Times 1\10\85.

stringent new rules governing the activities of schools. Under the new regulations some of the stipulations included,

No pupils ... or any other persons acting as members of a pupils' council or a student council or a member that is representative of any community of pupils ... shall assemble in or on the buildings or grounds of any educational institution or use such buildings or grounds for the purpose of furthering the objectives of such a council or any other organisation ...
No member of such a council ... or any other person or organisation that enters or is present in the [school] ... at any time shall communicate in any manner whatsoever, either orally or in writing with any pupils, ... the principal or ... any teacher or official in such buildings or grounds ... Any teacher, official, pupil, ... who is guilty of any action or attempted action to the detriment of the administration, discipline ... or performs or is allowed to perform or allows any action that is directed towards undermining the lawful authority ... shall forthwith be suspended by the principal... should such a principal fail to effect such suspension, the Director-General may order such a suspension either orally or in writing⁴¹

Additionally, under a separate act (Act on Control of Access to Public Buildings and Vehicles, 1985) the Department of Education and Culture had placed 370 'security assistants' to control access at schools.⁴² Their duties included locking all the school gates after students entered in the morning, except the pedestrian gate, which they guarded. Only vehicles whose registration number corresponded to a list supplied to them by the principal would be allowed into the school. In addition, anybody not a staff member or registered pupil at the school, had to be announced to the secretary and their names and addresses would have to be noted before they were allowed to enter the school.⁴³

⁴¹ Government notice No. R. 2248. 'Coloured Persons Education Act, 1963. Amendment of regulations' in South Africa: Government Gazette No 9960 (01\10\1985) p 1-2. ~

⁴² Cape Times 3\10\85. Also see Teachers' League of South Africa. 'Another CAB Ukase: Carters Crazy Clauses' in The Educational Journal, LVII, 3, October-November, 1985; South Peninsula Educational Fellowship (Affiliated to NUN) Education Under House Arrest (Cape Town, October 1985).

⁴³ *ibid.*

If these measures were not provocative enough, later that week, Ebrahim had announced that the normal school programme would continue and that the examinations based on the full syllabus, would not be postponed, but would proceed as normal.⁴⁴

These measures, if enforced, would herald grave consequences, not only for student organisation, but for all organised activities of parents, teachers and students at schools. It effectively meant that SRC's (and all other students' organisations or structures, except officially recognised and appointed prefect bodies) were outlawed at schools. For teachers, it would have meant that only the officially recognised CTPA would be allowed to meet at schools, while WECTU would have been banned. It would also have meant that parents or outside speakers would not be allowed to enter the school premises. This separation of school and community was a deliberate attempt to kill-off the PTSA's.

During the forced period of vacation, there were many doubts as to whether or not, students would still want to continue the boycott after they returned to schools. During the 'vacation', a high school leader alleged that "the general feeling among pupils in the Western Cape is that they should return to school ... there is a strong possibility that pupils would go back to [normal] schooling."⁴⁵ Ten years later, it is indeed enigmatic to attempt to validify such a far-reaching generalised statement. A strong possibility exists that this was the individual's own feelings, or that of her\his local area, school or ideological lineage. If however, before schools had reopened, there were any doubts as to whether the boycott would continue, these were spuriously dispelled by Carter's draconian edicts.

Given the time-period and the confrontational nature of the decrees, the reaction from students and the community was predictable. The UDF had declared it a "fresh recipe for chaos", while CAL had stated that the measures were "like declaring a

⁴⁴ Cape Times 6/10/85.

⁴⁵ Arcus 26/9/85.

state of emergency in schools."⁴⁶ A resolution adopted by parents, teachers and students at the ASAC affiliated school, Garlandale, argued that by banning effective student representation, prohibiting discussion and bringing security guards onto schools, Carter was

"destroying the constructive initiative taken by teachers and pupils at our school to solve the present crisis. More than anything else this high-handed action intimidates students and teachers and provokes confrontation ... we cannot consider constructive academic work when it is being imposed through the barrel of a gun."⁴⁷

When students had returned to school on the 2nd, attendance at all Athlone schools was near normal.⁴⁸ At Sinton, Belgravia, Spes Bona, Groenvlei and Oaklands, the diktat banning SRC's ^{was} ~~were~~ ignored and the security guards were thrown off the school premises. At Oaklands, the plastic booth erected for the security guards was fire-bombed.⁴⁹ However, at schools such as Bridgetown, Ned Doman and Athlone High, where organisation had been weaker and there was an inconsistency as to who controlled schools, the situation varied and the restrictions served to provide the school administration with an effective weapon. This was especially true at St. Columbas, where the effects were particularly far-reaching. At a parent meeting, called by the principal, a decision was taken which effectively banned the student structure that had existed. The principal, together with some teachers and parents, had also decided to close the school for the rest of the academic year. They had decided that the normal curriculum would be completed via correspondence. Students would not write exams, but would be assessed according to their completion of the work that was posted.⁵⁰ Thus the base of organisation at St. Columbas had effectively been destroyed, with

⁴⁶ Cape Times 2/10/85.

⁴⁷ Cape Times 4/10/85; Argus 4/10/85.

⁴⁸ Cape Times 3/10/85.

⁴⁹ Interview 7.

⁵⁰ Interview 4.

students retreating into the privacy of their individual homes, isolated from other students.

During this first week of the new term (the 11th week of the boycott) most schools in Athlone had decided via a ballot that the boycott was to continue. Additionally, most students had felt that they were not in a position to write the examinations, because they had not attended lessons since July. ASAC had thus felt that the department's decision to proceed with the full-scale examinations, covering the whole syllabus was a "further attempt to push us onto the cheap labour market."⁸¹ While the broader political demands for the lifting of the State of Emergency and the release of all detainees had remained consistent, as a result of the department's actions, the focus of the demands had shifted to include immediate local issues as well.

The new situation which confronted students was discussed in awareness programmes. After discussing the issue, a vote was taken and ASAC schools had decided that students would not consider returning to classes until their 10 non-negotiable demands were met. Apart from the initial demand for the lifting of the State of Emergency and the release of all detainees, ASAC had demanded the right to establish democratic SRC's and PTSA's at all schools; an end to corporal punishment; the disbanding of all prefect bodies; all troops to be withdrawn from schools and areas; the scrapping of the age restrictions at schools; the lowering of exam fees from R36 to R20; the reinstatement of all progressive teachers; that all charges on persons arrested during the period of the boycott, for related offenses, be dropped.⁸² ASAC had also demanded that principals stop meeting and negotiating with Carter.⁸³

⁸¹ Athlone Students Action Committee. Majority Vote To Continue School Boycott!! (Cape Town, October 1985).

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Athlone Students Action Committee - The Boycott Continues Until Our Demands Are Met (Cape Town, October 1985)

On the 8th of October, ASAC held a successful rally at Groenvlei, attended by more than 2000 students. The rally, called to popularise its immediate, short-term demands, lasted four hours, and included songs, music, poetry and speeches.³⁴ "The meeting was punctuated with chants of 'Viva ANC, Viva ASAC' and 'an injury to one is an injury to all'."³⁵ The education department had been severely chastised for its hard stance on the writing of the final examinations and had again been accused of pushing students onto the cheap labour market. A matric pupil had pointed out that even if those matrices who had wanted to write the exams had passed, very few would go to university and many would be unemployed. An Oaklands High student had informed reporters that they were handed forms asking who wanted to write the final exams. When parents had asked to be given the forms, students had objected because they argued that "we are the ones who receive gutter education and we are the ones who have to write, we want to decide for ourselves" ³⁶

The newspaper article had also reported that at the rally there were chants of 'freedom now, education later.' This newspaper article had been used by Bundy et al to forward the spurious view that student structures such as ASAC were infected with 'immediatism.' They have argued that leadership actively promoted the 'Liberation Before Education' perspective. This is taken to be reflective of their political precocity and naivety.³⁷ However, it would be perfunctory for an academic researcher to claim from this alone that ASAC was imbued with a 'Liberation Before Education' perspective or 'immediatism.'

It would be sheer sophistry to glean from that chant, an absolute connection with either 'Liberation Before Education' or

³⁴ Cape Times 9/10/85.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Bundy, C. 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics : Aspects of Youth-Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985' Journal of Southern African Studies Vol 13 No 3 1987, p 322-3

'immediatism', on the part of ASAC as a structure. The variables which present itself when making such a connection are too bounteous. Firstly, interviewees have claimed that such a perspective was not disseminated from the stage (by ASAC leaders that is). Secondly it cannot be ascertained whether or not this did indeed come from the platform. If it did, it could well have been by an individual from a school possibly out of the Athlone area, as representatives from each school present had taken the platform to give a school report. Thirdly, the meeting was called to popularise the immediate short-term demands, and not to argue that the boycott should continue until the apartheid state, propped-up by the international economic infra-structure of capitalism, had fallen. Given this theme, freedom might also well have meant the freedom to organise at schools. In addition, it will be shown later in this chapter that such a categorisation does not fit well with ASAC's thought.

3) The escalation in the tempo of violent confrontation.

While there was a notable increase in the number of students returning to school and attending the organised programmes, and so forth, this by no means indicated that there was a cessation in street action and the burning of barricades by students and unemployed youth. Beginning immediately after the Pollsmoor March, police brutality had become an enduring facet of life for many residents in Athlone. At a press conference, two young women had described the actions of the police. On the day the schools were reopened (September 17th), two sisters were travelling in a car in Athlone, when police had stopped the car, and arrested the occupants. They were taken to a police station and held overnight. At the police station both girls were made to do strenuous physical exercises and police had twice made sexually abusive suggestions. As a result one of them had begun to cry. She recalled,

"I was slapped across the face and told to shut up. I was so exhausted I collapsed to the ground. I was pulled from the ground by my hair by a black policeman and continuously slapped across the face. My breast were punched several times and ... the same policeman hit my knee with a quirt with tremendous force."⁵⁸

Apart from the many such experiences which took place in the seclusion of police stations, such brutality had more often been displayed openly. Papers were littered with community members recalling how police stormed into a house and attacked children playing snakes and ladders, or whipped a poodle as well as a chained doberman in a backyard. A woman who was six-months pregnant, was also whipped when she crossed the street to visit a neighbour.⁵⁹ Those burning barricades in Athlone, were however not only reacting to events in their own local area, but to those in other areas as well. At mass meetings, revelations of police atrocities were increasingly drastically. Street action and the engaging of the police was thus a broader reaction to events such as the next one. On September 19th, a youth in Elsie's River had

⁵⁸ Weekly Mail 27/9/85.

⁵⁹ Arouse 19/9/85.

fled when he saw police coming down the road. Police gave chase and when the order came to halt, he stopped. "But minutes later he was dead - shot by a policeman standing only four feet away. 'En toe, waar is Mandela nou?', a policeman was heard to say as he kicked the youth lying in the street."⁴⁰

Events such as these were by no means isolated. In addition, these events had occurred in September already, before the period around October, which Martin Hall had characterised as the 'apogee of the rebellion in the Western Cape.' From October,

security forces and residents in the townships from one side of the metropolitan area to another clashed daily, and by October 25th a Security Police spokesman estimated that sixty people had died since August 28th, that damages to property totalled R2.76 million and that there had been almost two thousand reported incidents of violent confrontation."⁴¹

By this stage, violence had become a very real part of the boycott experience. The often unprovoked and unjustified acts of brutality by the security forces had induced a substantially high level of acrimony, which in turn had profusely and continuously bolstered the fervour and support base of the boycott. Students and youth in particular had become the prime targets of police and army brutality. Athlone had become one of the areas most severely inflicted by such actions. However, as police brutality escalated so did the defiance and militancy. According to a youth, what was different in this period⁴² was that people had become less afraid of the police. He recalled, "I saw a girl walk right up to a Casspir, spit at it and then turn around and calmly walk away."⁴² By October, this new found bravery and militancy had resulted in youth, armed only with stones or petrol bombs, engaging the heavily armed security forces, more frequently.

⁴⁰ Weekly Mail 27/9/85.

⁴¹ Hall, M. 'Resistance and Rebellion in the Greater Cape Town, 1985' (Paper at Roots and Realities, University of Cape Town, 1986) p 19.

⁴² Weekly Mail 25/10/85.

Despite the fact that ASAC as a student coordinating structure was strong, this coordination and influence had largely remained confined to the organised programmes which were school-based. Thus as an organisational force it had very little direction or control over street action. This was problematic because indiscriminate street action was associated with student organisation. The indiscriminate actions of many individual youth ~~were~~ was thus tarnishing the public image of the boycott, and antagonising many parents, whose support for the boycott had become vital.⁴³ This was compounded by the role that some liberal newspapers, journalists and commentators had played, comparing students to

"the Khmer-Rouge youth ... deliberately evoking the picture of a brainwashed, moronic, ant-like mass of youngsters who at the command of activists will kill and destroy anything, even their nearest and dearest, a kind of debased, dehumanised mass that acts in a paroxysm of self-delusion for 'freedom'.⁴⁴

One such newspaper article is that written by the arrogant conservative-liberal journalist, Ken Owen. He wrote,

"isolated, segregated, under-educated, they don't know that they are simply cannon fodder ... They never heard of Marx and they can't spell dialectical materialism, but they are following a Marxist prescription."⁴⁵

ASAC had found it extremely difficult to direct street action because it was a largely spontaneous and voluntary action. Student leader could also not be present 24 hours a day in an attempt to give direction. Nevertheless, those involved in street action were not a homogenous mass. As one of the student leaders had pointed out,

of course there were many students who saw this as jolly good fun. The majority however did not get involved because it was fun because you could get killed ... People engaged the police because they had a sense of why they were engaging the police, the police became the enemy, the representatives of the state and

⁴³ Interview 2, 3

⁴⁴ Alexander, W. Education for Affirmation (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1988) p 17. Also see Straker, G. (ed) Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1992) esp p 2-3.

⁴⁵ Cape Times 12\9\85.

the status quo. Attitudes to violence varied, I don't think people were inherently violent and I don't think the boycott attempted to create a sense of anarchy"⁶⁶

In part, the street action can be viewed as a result of the economic downturn and increased levels of unemployment - a sort of venting of anger and frustration, which was compounded one-hundred fold by the brutal way in which the security forces had reacted to the prospect of students boycotting peacefully. Without a doubt, however, it was here, on the street, where students were infected with a sense of immediatism. Many had believed that each stone that they threw would weaken the state, which was ready to collapse.⁶⁷ The political reasons why some engaged in violence, also varied. While some had identified it as linked to the ANC's campaign to render South Africa~~n~~ ungovernable, others had linked it to their religious beliefs. A large percentage of Athlone's population ^{was} were Muslim and many youth had believed their actions to be part of a Jihad (Holy War). The targets thus chosen were sometimes different as on many occasions Muslim-led youth had attacked liquor trucks or bottle stores.

Even though ASAC had attempted to address the reality of violence and indiscriminate action, but was not always successful, it would be an iniquity not to consider the attempts made by the organisation to direct these actions. Because violence had become such a real factor, ASAC consciously decided to address the issue in awareness programmes. Students ~~had~~ looked at why organisations like the ANC had resorted to armed struggle and what their targets were. It was stressed that people engaged in armed combat, not to create anarchy, but for very specific reasons, with very specific targets. In particular, student leadership had come out⁶⁸ very strongly against indiscriminate stonings of busses and the injury of drivers. For example, at Belgravia, it was impressed upon students that they formed part of the broader

⁶⁶ Interview 2.

⁶⁷ Interview 3.

struggle of the working class. Those parents and workers who were travelling to and from work⁶⁹ were not the enemy, but were to be part of working class struggle. By stoning those people and injuring the drivers (who were workers) students were isolating themselves from the community and alienating those injured from the struggle.⁶⁸

ASAC had also attempted to engage in violence in a very practical way. Students at ASAC schools had decided via mandates that they did not recognise Kruger's Day and would come to school in defiance of the state declared holiday. A rally was held at Belgravia, where the concerns discussed above were reiterated. Students had then decided that they were going to build huge barricades in a symbolic rejection of the day. It was explained to students again that stonings of civilians were not in any way symbolic of struggle. Instead, they were told that barricades could be seen as a symbol of defiance and that "we control the area," by keeping the police out.⁶⁹ In a practical demonstration students built barricades around Hewat and held a meeting inside the grounds.⁷⁰ While the effects of this were minimal, it did represent an attempt to give political direction to the street action.

As a result of the continued levels of violence and counter-violence, security force presence in the Athlone area had been greatly increased. In Athlone the army and police had begun to patrol the area in armoured vehicles at three minute intervals.⁷¹ As the reaction of the security forces became more swift and harsh, so did the level of militancy, as well as the means employed. Hall has pointed out that from the earliest stages of the boycott, teargas, whips and birdshot had generally been used against barricades, stones and petrol bombs, but during October

⁶⁸ Interview 2

⁶⁹ ibid; Interview 3,5.

⁷⁰ Interview 2

⁷¹ Hall, M. op cit p 15.

"exchanges became more lethal."⁷² On October 9th, for the first time, people responded to police fire⁶⁹ with gunfire, from behind a barricade in Mitchells Plain. Again, on October 15th, a police patrol in Athlone came under gunfire.⁷³ Stonings and burning barricades had also become much more frequent. In an attempt to try and eradicate and contain the levels of 'unrest', on the 15th of October police had taken a drastic measure.

Just before 5pm, in Thornton Road, youths were stoning all municipal and government vehicles, while letting all private vehicles pass. A SA Transport Service railway truck, carrying large crates, cruised towards the area where the stonings were taking place. A journalist present had thought to himself,

"how silly, because ... people would stone it, I expected it ... I was wrong, it wasn't stoned ... but a few minutes later [the vehicle returned from the opposite direction]."⁷⁴

This time the vehicle was stoned. As soon it was stoned, the 8 policemen concealed in the crates sprang up, firing at the crowd. Their action was imitated by the two policemen sitting in front, disguised as truck drivers. Altogether 39 rounds of AAA buckshot ~~was~~ fired indiscriminately, even after the crowd had begun to flee. Altogether 3 youths were killed and 30 were seriously wounded.⁷⁵ The action was planned by 3 high ranking officers from the SAP (Colonel) SA Railway Police (Major), and SADF

⁷² *ibid* p 19.

⁷³ *ibid* p 19.

⁷⁴ Testimony of D. Cruywagen reporter for Argus Martin Stanley Mawood VS Pieter Janse Van Rensburg and 12 Others Judgement delivered on 11 December 1989 by Mr Justice Williamson in the Supreme Court of South Africa, Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division (copy held at Y. Ebrahim and Co, Athlone) Volume 6 p 520-1.

⁷⁵ Two of the three killed were minors and none were involved in the stoning. Mr Browde attorney acting on behalf of the father of the deceased in *ibid* p 489. It had been explained that live ammunition used for crowd control starts at birdshot 9, no 9. As the number decreases the strength of the shot increases. After surpassing no 1, it is called buckshot. This again increases in strength as the shot no decreases. Even more lethal than no 1 buckshot is however AAA, which is only surpassed by SSG. Even birdshot 9 no 9 is lethal at around 5 meters, while AAA is lethal at over 20 meters. p 484-5. A video tape recording of the event is held at Y. Ebrahim & Co. It is also on the Children of God video at the African Studies Library (UCT) In addition for a chilling written description see Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. The War Against Children : South Africa's youngest victims (New York, LCHR, 1986) p 48-9 and Pienaar, H & Willeuse, H. Die Trojaanse Perd: Onderhoude oor die Noodtoestand in die Kaap, 1963 (Ewarentia, Taurus, 1986)

(Lieutenant). The next day a police spokesperson ~~had~~ stated that unmarked vehicles would continue to be used in that manner.⁷⁶

An obvious consequence was a massive increase in the levels of street violence. On Friday the 18th, the SADF, in a massive display of force, launched the second largest internal military operation, in an attempt to 'restore law and order.' 100's of SADF members, armed with automatic rifles covered the entire length of Belgravia Road at 5 meter intervals. They were accompanied by 30 Buffel armoured troop carriers in Belgravia Road and Alouette helicopters, which circled the area. The troops conducted house to house searches and ~~had~~ stopped each car entering and leaving the area.⁷⁷ This however did not have the desired effect and, soon, barricades were ablaze again. The next day thousands ~~had~~ attended mass funerals in Athlone and Guguletu.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Argus 16\10\85. The Argus had also reported that the very next day a further two were killed and three wounded in a similar manner in Crossroads.

⁷⁷ Argus 18\10\85.

⁷⁸ Cape Times 21\10\85.

4) Examinations and the State of Emergency

On the same day that the Trojan horse incident took place, ASAC had released a press statement which had argued that it was impossible to write the exams under such conditions. In addition, ASAC had also stated that because the majority of students had not attended classes for the past two and a half months, writing exams on the entire syllabus would be fraudulent and would make gutter education even more gutter. It had urged those students that had wanted to write "to act in solidarity with the rest of the student population that was unable to write exams and not to take decisions as 'coloureds', 'Indians' or any other separate group."⁷⁹

Synchronously, Allan Hendrickse had announced that at the Labour Party Congress, Carter Ebrahim had supplied the names of 42 teachers and principals who may have assisted boycotting students. These teachers were now being investigated by the DEC. At the Congress, Ebrahim had also questioned the credibility of WECTU.⁸⁰ In response, Yusuf Gabru, Chairperson of WECTU had declared, "If Mr Ebrahim doubts the credibility of WECTU, we are certain that Mr Ebrahim, elected by a paltry percentage, has no credibility at all. The whole of WECTU will react against any action taken against the 42 teachers."⁸¹

While ASAC had already made a call, asking students to boycott the exams, it had also insisted that the final decision had to be taken via a secret ballot at all schools.⁸² However, for maximum unity, a collective decision based on democratic centralism, and not an individual decision would be taken. This meant that all schools had to abide with the majority decision. Six days later,

⁷⁹ South African Institute of Race Relations. 'The Political Crisis as it affected Educational Institutions under the Department of Education and Culture (House of Representatives), mid-1985 to early 1986' Regional Topic Paper: 86/2 1986 p 16.

⁸⁰ *ibid* p 16.

⁸¹ *Argus* 22/10/85.

⁸² *Interview 2*.

after all mandates had been taken, students themselves had democratically decided that the exams would not be written. Spes Bona was the one school, (out of the sixteen that ASAC had represented at that time) where the mandate had been in favour of writing.⁸³ In addition to declaring that the exams could not be written because they were fraudulent, ASAC had not only reiterated its ten short-term demands, but had also requested that all students, including matrices be allowed to return to school the following year and that the exams be postponed till March. It had also come out more strongly against any teacher victimisation.⁸⁴

At that stage however there was no regional consensus amongst students about boycotting exams or the minimum demands required to return to 'normal' schooling. In early October, although the Inter Regional Forum (IRF) was launched as a successor to WECSAC, and represented SAC's, not individual schools, to say that the thought of different areas were hybrid⁸⁵ would be a gross understatement.

Firstly, in the initial period, not all SAC's (especially the WECSAC SAC's) had affiliated to the IRF. WESCO, which was formed as a successor to COSAS, in turn did not enjoy the affiliation of the Joint SRC's. By that stage, the Joint SRC's⁸⁶ had already drawn up their own demands, backed by the PAC, and had already decided not to write the exams. Some of the WESCO SAC's, such as MIPSAC (Mitchells Plain) had individually decided on 16 preconditions before returning to classes, on the 21st already, (the day before ASAC) it had decided to boycott the exams.⁸⁷

On the other hand the SOYA aligned schools like Livingstone and Harold Cressy, had not been out on a full-scale boycott since

⁸³ At St. Columbas no mandate was taken because the school had been closed. Interview 4.5: "Minutes of ASAC meeting" in 'Athlone Students' box in P. Lulu Collection, Mayibuye Centre Archives, UWC (hereafter all references stored at the Mayibuye Centre Archives are referred to as MCA)

⁸⁴ Athlone Students Action Committee. Majority Vote To Continue School Boycott!! (Cape Town, 1985)

⁸⁵ Arcus 21-10-85.

they returned to schools on the 2nd of October, but had combined awareness programmes with academic work."⁶⁶ They were pushing for the demands to be cut. Thus on the 12th of October, the IRF had announced that the conditions for a return to school was - all exams be postponed; SRC's and PTSA's are unbanned; security guards are removed, all teachers transferred or dismissed during the boycott are reinstated; all charges against children arrested during the boycott are dropped; all state bursaries are paid out and awareness programmes are included in the school curriculum."⁶⁷ It had thus ignored the demands that the Joint SRC's were making. It had also omitted the lifting of the State of Emergency and the unbanning of organisations (especially COSAS).

In a pre-dawn swoop, on Friday the 25th, the day the DET (external) matriculation exams were to begin, police ~~had~~ detained 69 people under section 50 of the Internal Security Act. Almost the entire executive of the UDF in the Western Cape, as well as student leaders were amongst those detained."⁶⁸ The following day, the Emergency ~~had been~~ extended to the Western Cape. Under the Emergency regulations anybody could be arrested for an indefinite period without a warrant of arrest, without trial and with no access to family, lawyers or courts of 'law.'

Under the Emergency regulations, the Divisional Police Commissioners had been given discretionary powers to ban organisations and meetings and so forth. Alan Hendrickse had announced that the main reason that the Emergency was extended to the Western Cape⁶⁹ was to normalise the situation in education and to protect those students who wished to write examinations."⁷⁰ The Commissioner for the Western Cape had thus prescribed 100 organisations, including ASAC, CAL, the IRF, Joint SRC's, NUM, Thornhill, SOYA, the UDF, WECTU, WECSCO and all PTSA's and SRC's

⁶⁶ Cape Times 9/10/85.

⁶⁷ Argus 12/10/85.

⁶⁸ Argus 25/10/85.

⁶⁹ Cape Times 26/10/85.

from holding any meetings."⁹⁰ He had also gazetted a specific section on the "Control of School Boycotts" in which

"no registered pupil at any school ... whilst being on the school premises during the hours which tuition is normally given, may be outside a classroom, unless it is during a prescribed break, or during the period from entering the school premises until the commencement of the school programme. No pupil whilst on the premises may partake in any activities which are not ordered by the personnel of the school, and which does not have any bearing on his tuition at such a school... no person shall teach, address or speak to any pupils in any respect of any matter which does not form part of the officially prescribed syllabus or which is not necessary for the purposes of tuition in accordance with the syllabus or the continuation of normal activities"⁹¹

In addition, it was illegal for anybody who was not a staff member or a registered student at a school to be on the premises. It was also compulsory for all registered students to be at school during the time of lessons, unless express permission was given in writing by a member of the 'force'.⁹² Any failure to comply with these regulations was considered a breach of public safety and could result in indefinite detention.

As a result of the declaration of the Emergency in the Western Cape, the disparities amongst student structures had depreciated considerably and on the 28th of October, a more representative IRF which now represented 80 High schools in the Western Cape, had decided not to write the exams. In a statement issued to the Cape Times, the IRF had stated, that "we have democratically decided, and have been mandated by thousands of students, as students of the oppressed and exploited, we will not write any exams." They had also condemned those students who wanted to

⁹⁰ Government notice No. R. 2484. Ministry of Law and Order. Orders by the Divisional Commissioner of the South African Police for the Western Province Division" in South Africa: Government Gazette No 9960 (01/10/1985) p 4-6.

⁹¹ *ibid* p 3-4.

⁹² *ibid* p 4.

"stab our struggle in the back by going against the democratic decision taken by the IRF on the writing of exams."³

Later that week, WECTU ~~had~~ come out in full support of the decision to boycott exams and ~~had~~ argued that "to write examinations now, under these conditions would be perpetuating gutter education in its worst form" It ~~had~~ also called upon all teachers not to invigilate or mark the "fraudulent and anti-educational exams", and argued that it was the community which should set a date for the exams, not the department.⁴ The stand taken by teachers and students ~~were~~^{was} also underwritten by all progressive organisations including the UDF, CAL, NUM, SACOS, Thornhill and the vast majority of PTSA's.⁵

Despite the fairly wide support-network established by students with community organisations, even under the Emergency, the organisational space that had existed earlier had narrowed considerably. Regulations had not only banned public meetings, but it had also de facto banned all awareness programmes or boycotting. At many schools police and the SADF in Casspirs and other armoured vehicles had invaded schools where awareness programmes were taking place. At Belgravia, for example, while students were holding an awareness programme, a massive squadron of police and the army had entered the schools. Several students suspected of being student leaders were arrested (but in reality only one of the more 'senior' leaders at the school ~~were~~^{was} detained). Other students were taken into the classrooms, intimidated and interrogated.⁶ Such action had made it increasingly hard for boycotting students to go to schools. By the 3rd of November, already 316 people had been detained under the Emergency regulations.

³ Cape Times 28/10/85.

⁴ Weekly Mail 1/10/85.

⁵ Cape Times 29/10/85.

⁶ Interview 2.

The state had spared no expense trying to smash the boycott of exams. Firstly, the matriculation exams had been moved to military bases so that they could not be disrupted. Secondly, during the internal examinations (for students from std 6-9) many schools were overrun by security forces patrolling the schools with shotguns and batons. Thirdly, the department tried to harass and intimidate the over 190 teachers who had refused to administer the exams." During the examinations they were the only remaining members of the school community (except those students wishing to write exams) allowed onto the schools. As a result of their confrontatory stand the state ~~had~~ acted against them in several ways. Firstly, 13 teachers were suspended or dismissed, while 69 were had their salary cheques for November and December docked. In addition, by December more than 50 teachers had been detained."

During the Emergency at the time of exams, ASAC and SRC's were isolated from parents and teachers and students. The most that they could have done (and did) was to send letters to parents and students urging them not to write because a democratic decision had been taken. At Sinton, for example, the SRC had requested that parents support the boycott of exams in order to protect their teachers. They had argued that their teachers had taken a united stand of not administering exams, because students had only completed a fraction of the syllabus and could not possibly pass the exams. Even if they had passed, they would not be able to cope the next year. The SRC had also informed parents about the docking of teachers' pay cheques and had urged that if parents do not send their children to write the exams, the crisis that the teachers faced could be averted because there would be no students to invigilate." At Groenvlei too, 40 out of the schools 50 teachers had refused to administer the exams. Teachers

*7 Argus 26\11\85.

*8 Western Cape Teachers Union Education For Liberation (Cape Town, December 1985) p 3; Argus 20\11\85, 25\11\85, 26\11\85; Cape Times 21\11\85, 25\11\85; City Press 24\11\85.

*9 Alexander Sinton SRC - letter to parents (Cape Town, 1985)

themselves had sent out letters to parents arguing that the last formal lessons had taken place on the 29th of July and that the exams were anti-educational. They had also stated that the vast majority of students were not going to write the exams and it was therefore clear that the exams would be disrupted.¹⁰⁰

Again, given the repressive climate it must be remembered that because teachers were the only ones legally present at the school, they played a crucial[^] in this period. Again in Athlone, like everywhere else, this process was extremely uneven. Firstly, at Rylands High nobody wrote exams because the department had promoted students according to their previous results.¹⁰¹ At Sinton nobody had written the internal exams, because all 43 teachers had refused to administer exams. At Groenvlei, 3 teachers were arrested by the SADF in full view of the students. The SADF had then taken over the invigilation of exams. As a result very few students wrote at Groenvlei.¹⁰²

At Belgravia the SRC and PTSA had sent out a letter to parents informing them that a democratic decision had been taken and that it was not in the best educational interests of their children to write the exams. However only 1 teacher had made a clear stand and the few teachers who did support the students' decision had remained quiet.¹⁰³ Despite the mandate taken on the exam issue, many staff members had begun to contact parents, falsely informing them that the majority of students were going to write. As a result of this, about 300 students had come to write the exams at a school with one of the strongest SRC's. In a desperate and bitter anonymous letter to parents, Belgravia students had severely criticised the teaching staff. They had listed the names of 7 teachers (amongst others) who had played an overt role, in "selling out the student movement at Belgravia."

¹⁰⁰ Argus 20/11/85.

¹⁰¹ Athlone Students Action Committee Education in Crisis (Cape Town, November 1985).

¹⁰² Argus 20/11/85.

¹⁰³ interview 2.8.11.

"It would appear that these persons don't have the faintest idea of democracy... Are they true educators or do they only form part of the fascist state machinery that produces 'little coloureds' and 'little indians' etc? While 43 of their colleagues at Sinton were threatened that their salary cheques would be withheld, these 'Botha Boys' were administering exams."¹⁰⁴

Such resentment and bitterness was not isolated or one-sided, but represented the blatant reality of the severe division which had emerged between those who wanted to, or supported the writing of exams, and those that did not. At many schools students had disrupted the exams. Some parents, armed with guns had come to school to ensure that their children would be allowed to write. The police did not deter such action. At Groenvlei for example, after a teacher had suggested to a student that she could not write exams under conditions such as these, with troops all over the school, she stormed out and informed her father, who was sitting in his car, parked outside the school. He then rushed into the school, brandishing a gun and hurling abuse and started to search for the teacher. The teacher, who fled for obvious reasons, ran into the principal's office, where the officer in charge of the security forces at the school was present. Although the school was teeming with security forces, nobody disarmed the parent. The teacher was told by the officer that the police were there to protect students who wanted to write exams, not teachers who wished to stop them.¹⁰⁵ In many homes the question of whether or not to write was also a generational conflict, with students not wanting to write, while parents felt otherwise. Amongst the student mass as well, many divisions emerged. A teacher had stated, "those who are going to be promoted at the end of this year will be branded as sell-outs by their peers. The cleavage as time goes on gets more and more bitter and intense."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous. United Action For A Better Education (Cape Town, 1985)

¹⁰⁵ Interview 9.

¹⁰⁶ SAIRR, op cit p 18.

While it cannot be accurately ascertained how many students ~~had~~^{wrote} written the exams,¹⁰⁷ not all students who wrote were politically conservative. Some had merely come to write their names on the script so that they would be readmitted to school the next year, while others were forced to write the exams by their parents. Conversely, it is also incorrect to assume that every student who did not write^{en} did so out of political~~y~~ conscience or conviction. Many had not written for fear of recrimination.

The exams however, were slated by a broad spectrum of educationalists and community organisations, as farcical and fraudulent. Firstly, the exams ~~had~~ covered an entire syllabus, while students had only covered half the year's work. Secondly, there were reports of widespread and gross irregularities. A statement signed by over 155 political organisations, churches, sports, cultural and education bodies, ~~had~~ slated the exams as fraudulent. It ~~had~~ stated that the vast majority of students had not written exams. Those that had written^{en} were allowed to copy from notes and were shown the exam scripts before the time (at Manenberg Senior Secondary, for example, three days before the time). The statement ~~had~~ also said that students had been assured that merely putting your name on an exam script^o guaranteed a pass. This, these bodies ~~had~~ argued, was "the inevitable outcome of the decision to force students to write exams for which they could not be prepared."¹⁰⁸ The department ~~had~~ also attempted to disguise the high failure rate by adding up to fifty or sixty marks, to original results.¹⁰⁹

Rumours had been circulating from mid-September already that the department was going to ^{take} action against those teachers who opposed its official prescriptions. By the 4th of December, the day

¹⁰⁷ Weber, E. op cit has reported that the DEC had claimed that on the first day of the matric exams 13% wrote and by the time of the last paper, 38% had written. However, given politics involved in the writing of exams at this stage, and the gross irregularities that were reported later, there is ample reason assume that considerably less people had written. In addition, many had just written their names on the scripts to guarantee readmission to schools the next year.

¹⁰⁸ Cape Times 29/11/85.

¹⁰⁹ Vince, R. 'Education Canvas: Schools' and Examinations' Boycotts' in The Educational Journal LVII, 4, December 1985 p 17-18.

schools closed, 130 teachers had been dismissed, restricted or transferred.¹¹⁰ At DEC schools in the Athlone area, there were 9 from Sinton, 1 from Belgravia, 5 from Groenvlei and 2 from Ned Doman.¹¹¹ In addition, at Rylands High, although there were no examinations and therefore no question of invigilation, 11 'temporary' teachers were fired and 11 permanent teachers were transferred. All those transferred were sent outside the Cape Province, some to areas as remote as Piet Retief, Pietersburg, Brits, Barbēton, Vereeniging and Rustenburg.¹¹²

Once the schools were closed, ASAC as a structure, representative of students, did no longer exist. Under the Emergency, not only were its bases, the schools, out of bounds, so was any public meeting. The only terrain where a modicum of public organisational space remained, was in the well attended candle-light marches against the Emergency, in areas such as Athlone. These vigils (every Wednesday from the 13th of November), were well supported, with over 90% of Athlone residents switching off their lights.¹¹³ The other weapon that the oppressed could still wield, albeit on an individual and less blatant basis, was the consumer boycott. In December, a wide range of organisations had launched a 'Christmas of Concern Campaign' against the Emergency, in which they had advocated an intensification of the consumer boycott.¹¹⁴ Apart from these two means, and excluding the unorganised street violence, or organised, but clandestine armed-attacks, which had become more frequent in the Western Cape, there was very little other way for protest action.

¹¹⁰ SAIRR, op cit p 20.

¹¹¹ Western Cape Teachers Union Don't Be A Scab (Cape Town, 1986)

¹¹² Concerned Parents Committee (Rylands) Rylands Education Crisis: Victimisation of Teachers (Cape Town, 1986)

¹¹³ Argus 14/11/85, 28/11/85.

¹¹⁴ Consumer Action Committee This Christmas Don't Pay For The Bullets That Kill Us (Cape Town, 1985); United Democratic Front Use Your Spending Power To Put An End To This - Support the Consumer Boycott (Cape Town, 1985); New Unity Movement OUR Christmas under THEIR State of Emergency (Cape Town, December 1985).

5) Excavating ASAC's Thought and Some of the Issues It Confronted

During this period, beginning with the closure of schools, there were many new developments. These occurred with such rapidity that it pushed and pulled student organisation in a myriad of different directions. It is on this period that academia has focused much of its criticisms, that is with regards to 'immediatism' and 'Liberation Before Education'. However, many of their criticisms of student organisation are not always well-founded, particularly with regards to ASAC. In part, the 'ivory tower' approach which is adopted leads to a kind of detachment which eschews an examination of a very real situation. In part this is derived from the fact that it is written much later, in a totally different epoch, without accounting for the reality of a bygone era and the real issues confronting student organisation. Arguing against such an approach however, does not mean assuming that everything the student organisation did was inherently good or correct, but it is an attempt to rectify the often unwarranted and harsh criticisms that academia has often dished-out.

Carter's closure of schools and the restrictions placed on the activities at schools, had the effect of adjusting the broader political focus of the boycott, to include and elevate the struggle in schools, for control of education, in a concrete way. At its very first rally (August 6th), ASAC had argued for a link between the school (students) and the community. However, before the closure of schools, this link was more symbolic than practical. The closure of schools however, had effectively united students with the community in a "bond of anger."¹¹³ A direct consequence of closure and subsequent reopening of schools, was the proliferation of PTSA's and in this period, more than 21 PTSA's had been formed in the Western Cape.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Sunday times Extra 22/9/85.

¹¹⁴ Matsiana, M & Walters, S. The Struggle for Democracy: A study of Community Organisations in Greater Cape Town from the 1960's to 1985 (Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of Cape Town, 1986) p 27.

While the closure of schools and so forth had created a new found practical unity between the schools and the community, which was seen in the formation of PTSA's, these bodies often possessed internal schisms that pulled in different directions. Weber has pointed out that teachers and parents had lagged far behind students in terms of their mass basis and militancy.¹¹⁷ Many parents and teachers had not seen the PTSA as a vehicle to take control of the school situation from the department, but as a means to get students to return to classes. As such the unity within some PTSA's had been a fragile one. As the spectre of the final examinations loomed larger, the tension between these groups ~~were~~^{was} growing. The increase in the scale of police brutality during this period had only served to widen the gap, with students becoming more militant. Because there was an equal ratio of parents, teachers and students in these bodies, some of the more conservative parents and teachers had often formed an alliance, and attempted to bulldoze students into returning to classes. Many students had begun to claim that in their PTSA's, conservative parents and teachers had attempted to hijack the students' struggle. Consequently within these PTSA's, students had begun to form caucus groups with progressive teachers and parents.¹¹⁸

These tensions within the PTSA had been exacerbated by NUM and those with similar tendential currents (such as SOYA in the student sector, and the small TLSA group within WECTU) which had repeated its 1980 anti-boycott stance.¹¹⁹ In the pamphlets that NUM released during this period, they had argued strongly against continuing the boycott and had made the call for "Education Before Liberation." They argued that (formal) education was important because in a post-revolutionary country, it is important for people to be educated in order to maintain the infrastructure of the country as "only informed, thinking, adults

¹¹⁷ Weber, E. op cit p 89.

¹¹⁸ Interview 2,3,6,10,11.

¹¹⁹ see Molteno, F. '1980: Students Struggle for Their Schools' in Communications No 13 (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, 1987) p 67-69.

will be able to decide how the country is run in the interests of all its people."¹²⁰ Thus in the first week after the term had started, SOYA\NUM influenced schools such as Livingstone had either returned to schools and combined formal schooling with awareness programmes, or schools like Harold Cressy had returned to normal schooling, for a while at least.¹²¹ NUM had also believed that PTSA's, and not students via their SRC's or organisations, should decide whether or not to suspend the boycott.

ASAC's, following Thornhill's thought, was marked in its distinction to its position on PTSA's and Education VS Liberation. Based on the discussions that were taking place at the time with students (re liberation before education vs education before liberation) Dullah Omar^(c) had written a paper on the school situation, which was in circulation amongst the leadership from schools in the Athlone area. In it, he had argued that while

"slogans are very important in the struggle ... Obviously all slogans are not appropriate. Some have over generalised and over-simplified. Others disarm people. The slogan 'education before liberation' is designed to disarm. On the other hand 'liberation before education' reflects a misunderstanding of the process of social change ... The intention behind the slogan has been good, namely that there will never be a real and proper educational system in this country until liberation is achieved. But great care must be taken that in the struggle for liberation, that we do not reject the process of educating ourselves, which must go on all the time."¹²²

Largely through the influence of the Thornhill members in ASAC, most other leaders in the organisation^(c) had never forwarded the

¹²⁰ New Unity Movement - "Message To Students, Teachers and Parents" (Cape Town, 1985) Also see NUM pamphlets The Principle of Education As A Means of Liberation (Cape Town, 1985); An Open Letter To Parents, Students and Teachers (Cape Town, 1985) and TLSA publications by Sutton, K "Tribalised Schooling: History of Struggle - I-IV" in The Educational Journal LVII, 4, December, 1985; LVII, 5, January-February, 1986 LVII, 6, March, 1986; VII, 7, April-May, 1986; And TLSA Editorials "Once more on Fundamentals: The 1985 Watershed" LVII, 4, Dec, 1985; "Facing the Raw Truth" The Educational Journal LVIII, 5, July-Aug, 1988.

¹²¹ Arqus 2\10\85, Cape Times 9\10\85.

¹²² Omar, D. Some Thought on the Educational Crisis, 1985 (November 1985) Although this paper was only written in November, these issues had been discussed in prior meetings with students. Although every pamphlet that ASAC had written was drawn up completely by students, the ideas forwarded in this paper reflected them, even before November.

slogan 'liberation before education' in their speeches from platforms and in the pamphlets they produced, as had been done by a minority of the UDF supporting SAC's. Instead, ASAC had argued that the organised working class was the vanguard of the struggle for liberation and it was only under their leadership that the government could be overthrown. For ASAC, the students' boycott "was only temporary and it was only a weapon that was used, one of the many thousands that we used to challenge the system on particular issues."¹²³ These sentiments are also present in one of the few video-recorded rallies in 1985. At a joint rally called by Thornhill Residents and Youth and ASAC, just two days after the Pollsmoor March, when Athlone was ablaze and tempers had reached fever pitch because of the 28 deaths that had occurred, the ASAC speaker ~~had~~ told the audience that "we, as students, realise that on our own, we cannot overthrow the government, we need to define our role [more carefully]."¹²⁴ ASAC leaders ~~had~~ also argued that "we were not boycotting education."¹²⁵ At the same rally, the Belgravia SRC banner, which was prominently displayed, ~~had~~ read 'United Action For A Better Education'. This slogan, which was the Belgravia SRC's motto, ~~had~~ never changed as the boycott progressed and even in the bitter letter written to parents, about teachers, the slogan served as the header.¹²⁶

In all the student interviews it ~~had~~¹ been made patently clear that the demands that had been put forward^o were immediate and short-term demands. While ASAC members certainly wanted the overthrow of the state, this was not a precondition for the return to schools. Additionally, the fact that ASAC had not regarded the demand for a single democratic education system with an officially recognised syllabus of 'people's education', as a short-term demand, was based on the understanding that such an

¹²³ Interview 5, original emphasis.

¹²⁴ Video tape of the Thornhill\ASAC rally on the 1st of September 1985 at the Cine 400. (The video is kept by the Thornhill ANC branch.)

¹²⁵ Interview 2.

¹²⁶ Anonymous, United Action For A Better Education (Cape Town, 1985)

educational system could be attained after the overthrow of the state, which only the organised workers could do.

Why then did ASAC push so strongly for the boycott to continue when they returned to schools in October, whereas some organisations and individuals began to pull in opposite direction? Firstly, ASAC ~~had~~ argued that in the repressive climate that they had found themselves in, where security forces had flooded the Athlone area, and stringent prescriptions were placed on the activities of students, parents and teachers at schools, the climate was not conducive to return to 'normal' schooling. ASAC ~~had~~ argued that a return to classes at that stage would not only lead to demoralisation amongst the radicalised student mass, but more importantly, if students ~~had~~ returned to schools under such a repressive climate, student organisation, especially at the weaker schools, was likely to collapse. All the academic literature which has criticised students, for what they believed to be a 'liberation first' approach to the short-term demands, ~~have~~ never attempted to provide an alternative or consider the practicalities of what it would have meant for student organisation, if students had decided to return at that stage. Academics have praised the SPCC conference for forwarding the slogan People's Education for People's Power. However, this is done without ever questioning who would implement these programmes. ASAC had argued that, while the implementation of an alternative education system was not a precondition for the return to classes, they had argued that only if SRC's and other student structures survived, could the alternative programmes continue when students eventually returned. If students had returned with Carter's restrictions intact, alternative education could never be implemented. However, by the time that examinations had drawn nearer, students were not only arguing that they were not going to write because their short-term demands were not met, but, more importantly, that students were not equipped to do so because no formal lessons had taken place since July.

Another extremely important, but underlying consideration for not returning at that stage, was to avoid repeating the errors made in previous boycotts. In both the 1976 and 1980 boycotts, DEC students had 'betrayed' students from the DET schools, by returning to schools, while they had remained out on boycott. This created severe disunity and divisions and was one of the main reasons why there was no uniform student structure in the Western Cape before the boycott.¹²⁷ It thus was crucial that this should not reoccur because ASAC, which had formed a close alliance with the Joint-SRC's, had shared its proclivity to stamp what most other Congress structures regarded as the national democratic struggle, with a distinct working class and socialist influence. If DEC students had again retreated, just after DET students, backed by their parents, had taken a decision to continue with the boycott, a split would have been inevitable. As a result, ASAC, as a student structure, would have been regionally isolated because while it shared some of SOYA's thought on socialism, they did not agree with aspects of their ideology, and their method of struggle and organisation. On the other hand, while they shared a belief in the populism that WESCO displayed, ASAC did not share its views on socialism. WESCO schools from areas such as Mitchell's Plain and Manenberg were also very suspicious of ASAC's ideological thought.¹²⁸

Almost all the existing literature on the boycott has focused on the ASAC pamphlet which had argued that "the state is on its knees." Bundy has cited the use of such a phrase as an example of the student political naivety, immaturity, and precociousness, ie. 'immediatism'. He has described immediatism as, "an impatient anticipation of imminent victory, a hubristic assessment of progress made, and a naive underestimation of the resources of the state."¹²⁹ Another pamphlet published at the time had argued that "Recent events show that the South African apartheid regime

¹²⁷ Interview 2,5,6,8.

¹²⁸ Interview 5

¹²⁹ Bundy, G. "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth-Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985" Journal of Southern African Studies Vol 13 No 3 1987, p 322-3

is crumbling." The rest of the pamphlet states that the working class is being organised, that students throughout the country are on boycott, that parents and teachers are taking control of education, etc. These developments, the pamphlet argues, "All indicate that a crisis indeed, prevails in South Africa." While it had pointed out that the state had imposed an Emergency and that many detentions were taking place, it had argued that "This apparent show of strength by the state is merely the last kick of a dying animal! Victory is certain, the future is ours!"

According to Bundy's criteria, this pamphlet would be a classic demonstration of how politically immature and naive students were and that the publishers of this pamphlet suffered from 'immediatism.' Alas, the pamphlet quoted above is not a student pamphlet at all, but was published by a well respected and well established 'adult' political organisation, with a seasoned political leadership, ie Thornhill Residents Association.¹³⁰ The use of the "state is on its knees" or "apartheid regime is crumbling" evolved from Boesak's statement that the Pollsmoor March was "going to turn South Africa on its head" and the subsequent attempt by the state to charge him with subversion. The use of such phraseology thus became a means of pushing the restrictions placed upon organisations to the 'legal' limit. It was not an intellectual assessment of the reality that existed, but a mobilising and agitational pamphlet. In exactly the same manner, the use of 'the state is on its knees' in an ASAC pamphlet cannot be an indictment of ASAC's of political immaturity ^{or} of political precociousness as Bundy has argued, but must be seen as a purely agitational pamphlet, in the face of a massive state onslaught. It must also be seen as an attempt to engender support for the boycott, at a time when the community was divided and support for not writing the examinations was faltering. This is but one example of the faulty methodology used by academics to 'convict' students of 'crimes' they were not guilty of.

¹³⁰ The pamphlet quoted above is Thornhill Residents Associations' Apartheid Crisis (Cape Town, 1985). A similar perspective is also visible in the UDF pamphlets, State of Emergency (Cape Town, 1985) and State of Emergency - PW Botha Is Scared (Cape Town, 1985).

While the SPCC Conference in December¹³¹ had come out strongly against the slogan Liberation Before Education, it had argued that the slogan had first emerged in the commercial press and was promoted by them, in an attempt to link the school struggles to the ANC slogan of ungovernability. The advocacy of school boycotts to achieve this was strongly dispelled by the ANC.¹³¹ However, many youth in areas such as the Vaal and Eastern Cape, because of the power that they possessed locally, had assumed this was literal and, in many areas, students had been out on boycott for two to three years already. In the Western Cape however, the Education VS Liberation debate had originated more between NUM\SOYA group, who were pushing for a return to schools, arguing that the demand for the lifting of the Emergency was not a short-term demand, and those who argued that the demand was short-term. Again, the press had latched onto this debate in the Western Cape, comparing it to the situation in other parts of the country, thus blowing it out of proportion. In a letter written to the Cape Times, in reaction to the Cape papers' labelling boycotting students as promoting 'Liberation Before Education', Jeremy Cronin ~~had~~ argued that the characterisation of all students (nationally) as adopting this slogan was incorrect. He ~~had~~ argued that the majority of student organisations in the Western Cape had not promoted this slogan and "in the Western Cape ... the alternative programmes and demands for short-term concessions were testimony to this."¹³²

ASAC, like almost all other organisations, had distanced itself from the 'Liberation Before Education' slogan. Instead it had believed in the more dialectical slogans\tactics, 'Education is Struggle' or 'Education For Liberation.'¹³³ However, the organisation had never grappled with this debate publicly, on platforms, and such a position is not reflected in its

¹³¹ SAIRR, op cit p 21.

¹³² Cape Times 9/12/85.

¹³³ Interview 2.

literature. Therefore while the leadership was clear about the implications of the slogans, sections amongst the wider mass of students were not. If there are any criticism to be made of ASAC's strategy it was this - that the structure had failed to dispel, forcefully enough, the romantic illusions that the state was about to collapse.¹³⁴ This notion was particularly prevalent in the thoughts of those that were engaged in street violence. However it is perhaps understandable why ASAC could not make an impact on those in the street. As ~~it had~~^{has} been pointed out earlier, ASAC was not successful in drawing those in the street back into the organised awareness programmes where such issues were being discussed.

However, NUM had continued to argue that boycotting students were displaying a Liberation before perspective, by demanding that their short-term demands be addressed. NUM's concern that the boycott be ended, resonated with their twin argument that PTSA's, because they represented the community of interests involved in education, could decide whether or not to suspend the boycott. Again, ASAC's opposition to such a perspective was marked. ASAC ~~had~~ argued against such a position saying that it effectively disallowed for student democracy. In particular, the concern was that conservative parents on the PTSA's could take a decision for students. Again their position reflected a Thornhill thinking. The role of PTSA's envisaged by both organisations was to "control schools, determine what is learnt, how it is learnt and who teaches. PTSA's must not do the state's dirty work."¹³⁵ Because of the mounting pressure that was being put, students to allow PTSA's to decide the future of the boycott, ASAC ~~had~~ released a pamphlet in which it ~~had~~ argued that

"like workers have to decide wether or not to strike or teachers decide to down tools so we must DECIDE ON OUR OWN ACTIONS. STUDENT DEMOCRACY THEREFORE HAS TO BE PRESERVED - NOT UNDERMINED. Yes, parents do have a say

¹³⁴ Interview I Dullah Oaar.

¹³⁵ ibid.

in our decisions. They can help and advise us, - BUT NOT DECIDE FOR US.¹³⁴

Thornhill's perspective and that of ASAC was identical, as both had argued that the ultimate decision, of when students should call the boycott off, must be taken by students, in consultation with parents and teachers. In his paper Omar had pointed out that

in not a single instance has a [recent] class boycott been initiated by parents. Always at the resistance of students. And this is how it should be since a school boycott is an independent student action ... [and] is similar to that of workers in relation to a strike. If workers are on strike it is they alone who decide whether or not to end the strike. Other workers, their families, and the community in general, can and must support them, but never interfere in the decision making process. In a similar manner, parents and teachers can advise, criticise and recommend, but cannot share in the decision making process.¹³⁷

This however did not mean that either organisation equated student struggles with the power and importance of workers'. Instead, this analogy compares the independent decision making process of workers and students. ASAC and Thornhill had defended this as a principle of democracy. To illustrate this, they had argued that if parents and teachers had decided that students should come out on boycott, who boycotts? It is the students who decide "we shall boycott." Also, if students are already on boycott and want it to end, but parents and teachers decide that it should continue, "their decision is worthless except that it causes damage."¹³⁸

As a result of the conflictual position that NUM had adopted on the boycott, a very real junction had grown between ASAC and NUM. An Athlone student had argued that at that stage, NUM had become "obsolete" for ASAC. On the other hand, while the UDF had supported the intensification of the boycott, they had not been

¹³⁴ Athlone Students Action Committee. Majority Vote To Continue School Boycott!! (Cape Town, 1985)

¹³⁷ *ibid* p 20; 24.

¹³⁸ *ibid*.

working with ASAC as an organisation. At that stage, however, the only organisation to have very real and practical links, was Thornhill. Nevertheless its non-aligned position had become more defined as a structure, and its position notably altered. However, just as importantly, while many of the student leaders on ASAC were members or supporters of Thornhill, this did not simply mean that whatever Thornhill said would be adopted because issues and perspectives were always thrashed out at general meetings or at the workshops that ASAC convened.

CHAPTER 5: THE RETURN TO SCHOOLS (DECEMBER 1985- MARCH 1986)

The State of Emergency heralded disastrous consequences for both the student movement and political organisations in general. During the period of examinations (and therefore under the Emergency), the only active student force in existence, were the small groups of individuals who had attempted to disrupt the examinations. This grouping too, was not successful, as there was a heavy security force presence at schools, during the examinations. As the examinations had begun to draw nearer, so support for the boycott waned. Although approximately 30 000 students never wrote the final examinations,¹ many had written and as a result students were split into two definite and opposing groups. Adding to the demoralisation and division that had begun to manifest, during the long December vacation, when students no longer had any base and therefore could not meet, the sense of group solidarity that had existed during the boycott had diminished. In this period, it was becoming increasingly clear that support and enthusiasm for the continuation of the boycott was dissipating rapidly. In this respect, the Emergency had played a vital role.

In the face of such a decline, it was also become apparent that none of the demands had been, or were going to be met. Adding to this, student leaders were also concerned about pressing questions related to student and teacher victimisation and detention, and what should be done about it. Still further, the pressure of the daily crises, urgent organisational work, police harassment and so forth, had begun to take its toll on the student leadership itself. As one of the student leaders had recalled,

"there was just no stamina left. After meeting virtually everyday, organising rallies, speaking at rallies virtually everyday, it was just Burnout, capital B... I think we need to be candid, there's no

¹ Jordi, R. Towards 'Peoples Education': The Boycott Experience in Cape Town's Department of Education and Culture High Schools from July 1985 to February 1986 African Studies (Hons) dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1987, p 126.

sense in telling lies and sounding triumphalist about it ... we came out of that period extremely weak.'²

However, the conference convened by the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC), held at Wits University on the 28th and 29th of December, seemed to offer a way out of the quagmire in which ASAC and other student organisations in the Western Cape had found themselves in. The State of Emergency, SADF occupation of the townships, the banning of COSAS and the struggle for a proper education were the national issues around which the Conference was convened.³ The SPCC, which had been formed earlier by Soweto parents, had attempted to address the education crisis which at that stage had become a prolonged national phenomenon. In areas like the Transvaal and Eastern Cape, in particular, the crisis had become acute, with no schooling taking place for almost two years in succession. After a delegation of Soweto parents had met with the ANC in Harare, it had been learnt that the movement had rejected the concept of boycotting education until liberation had been achieved. The ANC had come out strongly against the position that armed insurrection would immediately overthrow the state. Such a perspective was especially evident in areas such as the Eastern Cape, where the community did control aspects of their own lives. The ANC delegation consisting of Chris Hani, Mac Maharaj, Thomas Nkobi and Pallo Jordan, had expressly rejected the slogan of liberation first and had backed the call for a return to schooling and a move away from class boycotts⁴ as the chief means of youth protest.⁴

Delegates from 161 organisations across the country had been invited to the SPCC conference. Also present were a number of parent, teacher and student delegates. Although it was heavily dominated by Congress organisations, it had also included delegates from the National Forum and the Unity Movement. This

² Interview 2, Student leader from Belgravia. A similar sentiment is shared by Interviews 3 and 5

³ Muller, J. 'Peoples Education and the National Education Crisis Committee' in Moss, G & Obery, I (eds) South African Review 4 (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987) p 21.

⁴ Business Day 30/12/85.

had been one of the most representative conferences since the All-Africa Convention. The conference, which had taken place with a huge banner calling for 'People's Education for People's Power' prominently displayed, had come out strongly against the slogan "liberation First, Education Later."⁵ One of the key speakers, Lulu Johnson, (President of COSAS at the time of its banning) had argued that while South African education is

"the product of colonialism ... the overall system which people are striving for cannot be achieved under the present reign of Apartheid terror ... we must learn to transform the existing structures into what we want them to be with the long-term goal of scrapping the entire education system and replacing it with another. At the moment, making use of the Apartheid structures to our favour becomes a burning question."⁶

The conference had decided that students suspend the boycott for a period of 3 months, and issue the government with an ultimatum. In the interim, the suspension of the boycott would however not mean a return to purely formal education, but would also include the setting aside of a few hours a week, for People's Education. The conference had decided on a set of limited and immediate national demands, and had given the government until the end of March to respond to them, otherwise the boycott option would be reassessed. The conference had recommended that all democratic organisations, "exhort students to return to schools"⁷ and to make the call for the following short-term demands to be met.

- a) The erection of school buildings where such buildings have been partially or completely damaged
- b) The postponement of all exams until March 1986
- c) The release of all students, teachers, and parents in detention
- d) The reinstatement of all dismissed and forcibly transferred or suspended teachers;
- e) The recognition of democratically elected SRC's;

⁵ Argus 30/12/85; Cape Times 31/12/85.

⁶ Johnson, L. 'Student's Struggles' in Soweto Parents Crisis Committee. Report on National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education (held at Wits, 28, 29 December 1985) p 17, 19.

⁷ 'Resolutions' Soweto Parents Crisis Committee. Report on National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education (held at Wits, 28, 29 December 1985) p 30.

- f) The unbanning of COSAS;
- g) The lifting of the State of Emergency in all parts of the country.

The conference had also called on all relevant organisations to continue to fight for the following long-term demands.

- a) The abolition of corporal punishment in all schools;
- b) the prevention of sexual harassment of female students;
- c) the abolition of all forms of racist education;
- d) the implementation of People's Education in our schools.*

At the conference it was decided that all students, irrespective of the fact that various departments had stipulated different official opening dates, to return to schools uniformly on the 28th of January 1986. Delegates from the Western Cape, who attended the conference, had attempted to organise a report-back meeting on the 7th of January, in order to discuss the resolutions taken at the conference and to form a "non-sectarian Western Cape Education Crisis Committee."⁹ However, the report-back meeting was banned in the Western Cape, in terms of the Emergency regulations.¹⁰

While ASAC was "upset" that it was not invited to the SPCC conference, they were satisfied that the Joint SRC's had attended the conference and would represent their interests and give them a full report-back when they returned.¹¹ ASAC had also aligned itself to implementing the national programme of action and not to break ranks with such an important national decision. Although students had decided to return to 'normal' schooling, a grossly abnormal situation had prevented this. The three major issues that loomed large were the demand for the rescheduling of the previous years' final examination to March 1986, and the issues

* *ibid* p 32.

⁹ *Cape Times* 4/1/86.

¹⁰ *Cape Times* 7/1/86.

¹¹ *Interview 2*.

concerning the victimisation of teachers and students, as well the future of student organisation.

During the period of examinations, progressive teachers had played a key role. In the vacation however, the only means of struggle available to teachers was through the courts, where they challenged their suspensions and dismissals. However, the courts upheld Carter's authority to act against teachers for not administering exams. Thus those teachers at DEC schools, who were suspended or dismissed, remained in the same predicament. The decision to transfer the 11 permanent teachers from Rylands High however, was overturned at court.¹² On the 15th of January, 300 WECTU teachers had marched to the Roeland Street headquarters of the DEC to demand that all disciplinary actions taken against teachers be immediately and unconditionally withdrawn. The following day, Hendrickse had announced that most suspended or dismissed teachers had been reinstated. However, he had still maintained that those teachers who had refused to administer the exams, would still face charges of misconduct.¹³

Instead of simply returning to formal education of the 28th of February, ASAC had decided to return to 'informal' schooling (alternative education programmes) on the day that schools officially opened. This was done

"in view of the fact that many teachers in our area had been dismissed or suspended, that many schools did not have SRC's or PTSA's, that in fact certain demands could not be met in 3 months but immediately at the time ASAC returned to schools on 15 January. The earl[ier] return was to allow schools to discuss ways of implementing the [SPCC] resolutions. Students also took mandates to return to class on 28 January and then wait for the next National Conference"¹⁴

When students returned on the 15th however, at many schools, the administrations had attempted to reassert their full authority.

¹² *Woodley and Others Vs Minister of Education and Culture, House of Delegates, and Other in South African Law Reports Vol 3 1989 (Cape Town, Juta Press)

¹³ Cape Times 15/1/85, 16/1/85; Western Cape Teachers Union. A Victory For Unity (Cape Town, No 3, January 1986) p 1.

¹⁴ ASAC Report (January - March 1986) in 'Athlone Students' box in P. Lulu Collection, MCA, p 1.

Many of the demands to which the local administrations had acquiesced ~~to~~ during the boycott, with regards to the establishment of SRC's and the scrapping of corporal punishment and so forth, were simply reversed.

Sinton SRC was the only ASAC affiliate not to incur any serious problems with their administration or students when they returned to schools. Conditions at Sinton made it possible for students to organise and conduct student assemblies and there were no problems with regards to reactionary teachers. There were also no security guards present at the school. Problems were almost non-existent, because the entire school community had rallied to the side of those dismissed teachers. At Sinton, there were also no severe divisions amongst its student population as nobody at the school had written the internal examinations. Thus when they returned to school on the 15th, they discussed the SPCC resolutions and ~~had~~ voted overwhelmingly in favour of implementing the SPCC resolutions, where it was applicable. In addition, Sinton students had made four internal demands which would secure their return to full academic work on the 28th - that students had the right to elect democratic structures; the right to use school equipment and facilities when needed; the right to call mass meetings when necessary; the right to implement awareness programmes. Students also felt that Nkosi Sikelele^{should} be sung every~~day~~ at 12pm.¹⁹

At Oaklands, when students returned on the 15th to 'informal schooling', they were informed by the principal that he would not tolerate the or allow the SRC to function. He ~~had~~ used the excuse that, under the Emergency, SRC's were banned. Former SRC leaders immediately formed a concerned students committee and during the interval managed to get students into classes. There they ~~had~~ informed students about the resolutions taken at the SPCC conference. The committee drew up a petition to demand that they be allowed to organise freely ^{at} on the school. 700 signatures were collected in favour of this. The principal however was adamant

¹⁹ Alexander Sinton Report p 1-2. (January - March 1986) In MCA.

that no SRC would be allowed to function. In protest, students held a demonstration in the quad and sang freedom songs. The principal called the police and the protesting students were dispersed by the quirt-wielding police. That evening senior teachers and the principal visited the homes of the 'concerned students' and informed them that if their activities were not stopped immediately, they would be suspended or expelled. As a result of the conditions at Oaklands, students voted in favour of calling a stayaway from the 24th until the 27th, whereafter they would return to formal classes on the 28th. Because the SRC was banned, the Concerned Students Committee and a History Society had tried to take over the role that the SRC had played previously.¹⁶ Oaklands was the only Athlone school to enter the boycott with an SRC,¹⁶ but end up without one at the end of the boycott.

At schools such as Bridgetown, Athlone High, Ned Doman and St. Columbas, where student organisation was weak during the boycott, the principals had regained virtual control of the schools. The SPCC resolutions were not even discussed at any of these schools, because no SRC was allowed to function. A few students from Ned Doman and St. Columbas were expelled and transferred, while others were given warnings. Except for St. Columbas, (which did not write the final examinations at all, but were passed on other criteria) a large percentage of students at these schools had written the exams. These schools also had ~~a~~ permanent security guards, which they were not able to remove. However, student organisation at these schools ^{was} ~~were~~ not totally obliterated and some embryonic form of student organisation had managed to survive. Given the repressive culture at these schools, students had formed concerned students societies or cultural societies, instead of SRC's. Organisationally however, these schools remained extremely weak.¹⁷

¹⁶ Oaklands Report, p 1-2. in *ibid.*

¹⁷ Bridgetown, Ned Doman, St. Columbas reports, in *ibid.*

On the other hand, although there was no SRC at Spes Bona, many students ^{had} written the exams, and the principal continued to victimise students, the Concerned Students managed to hold a meeting and popularise the SPCC resolutions. There was however a security guard presence at the school. Early that year students ~~had~~ also elected an SRC.¹⁸

Groenvlei and Garlandale emerged from the boycott quite strong and, at both these schools, the student action committees which were formed during the boycott were transformed into fully-fledged, democratically elected SRC's. Although many students wrote at Garlandale, students did not encounter any problems with regards ^{to} organising freely at the school. However, the students were extremely divided - 7 ways. These divisions were between students who wrote and had passed; those who never wrote at all, matrices who wrote, passed and left the school; those matrices who wrote, failed and wanted to repeat the year; those matrices who never wrote and also wanted to repeat the entire year; those matrices who never wrote, but ~~had~~ wanted to write supplementaries; and students who wrote, but chose to be demoted after attending awareness programmes. The Garlandale SRC was however given a tremendous boost by the large percentage of progressive teachers at the school.¹⁹ Groenvlei SRC was however in a stronger position as only 120 students wrote the exams. Of these, only 60 remained at the school. On the first day, only 8% of the pupils returned to school. That same day, 24 armed policemen and soldiers present at the school forced teachers to teach those students that were at the school.²⁰

At Belgravia, whereas the SRC ^{had} played a leading role in the boycott the previous year, in 1986 it was plagued with severe problems. Although the SRC had remained strong, teachers had played an extremely divisive role at the school. Antagonisms

¹⁸ Spes Bona report in *ibid.*

¹⁹ Garlandale report in *ibid.*

²⁰ Grassroots February 1986.

between teachers and students, which had surfaced in the previous year, had been exacerbated in 1986. Students themselves were extremely divided between those that wrote (1/6) and those who did not. Nevertheless, Belgravia students immediately and successfully managed to evict the department's security guards. However, the school administration had adopted a hard-line approach, trying to intimidate the SRC. As a result, in protest against those that wrote and the role of the administration, the SRC decided ^{to} embark upon a symbolic form of protest. It decided that since ~~those~~ students, ~~that~~ had written the educationally fraudulent examinations and had been passed to the next standard, they would act in just ^{such} a fraudulent manner. The SRC, therefore, in a symbolic protest, decided that students could promote themselves to whichever standard they pleased. This was however only a form of protest. Once students returned to normal schooling on the 28th, they experienced severe problems in terms of teachers victimising students, and corporal punishment had become more rife than ever, with teachers trying to reassert the control that they had lost the previous year. The school report which was drawn up ~~had report~~ stated that "teachers even go to the extreme of not allowing unrest related charts on the walls [so that] student defiance has created serious clashes with the staff."²¹

It was at Rylands High, that the most serious clashes had occurred with the department and the security forces. Because Rylands was the only Indian school that had embarked upon a full-scale boycott, and was therefore the only school under the control of the HoD to do so, victimisation had been acute. The department had attempted to vent its anger ^{on} at the entire Rylands High school community, by refusing to reinstate the 11 temporary teachers that were fired. The department's strategy had however backfired and on the first day of the term, the 14 scab teachers that were sent from Natal, to replace those dismissed, were forcibly evicted from the school. There were also no divisions amongst the students, because no exams were written. All students

²¹ Belgravia report in *ibid.*

were promoted. The action of the department with regards to the teachers had vexed the entire Rylands High school community and 300 students, teachers and parents had joined the protest, vowing not to return to normal schooling until the dismissed teachers were reinstated. As a result, the following day, in collusion with the old acting principal and the new deputy principal, the police had attempted to set-up hidden video recorders in the school. 10 policemen were also concealed in two locked classrooms. When students had entered the school, 12 Casspirs and a number of police vans had surrounded the school and forced students to class at gun-point. Earlier that morning (4am), an elderly member of the interim PTSA was detained under the Emergency regulations. This had only served to vex the community even more and students embarked on a stayaway. Although the 11 dismissed teachers were never reinstated, the scab teachers were sent back to Durban. The Rylands High interim PTSA had also adopted a hard-line approach and school inspectors were not allowed to enter the school grounds for the most part of the rest of the year.²²

These reports have indicated that when students had returned to schools in 1986, the balance of forces were tilted heavily against them at most schools. Nevertheless, the return to schools was not marred by weaknesses alone. At schools where the concerned students or SRC's were able to meet, this had been a step up from the period which began with the imposition of the State of Emergency, where ASAC was totally alienated from any base. Although for the moment, no inter-school mass meetings were allowed, the Emergency did not seriously affect the functioning of SRC's. Although the general situation was one in which student organisation had been weakened, ASAC still managed to function as a coordinating structure. Although their delegations were not met with much success, ASAC had still sent delegations to schools where students were experiencing severe problems with their administrations, in an attempt to negotiate with the principals.

²² Interview 3, 10; Athlone Education Crisis Committee, Parents and Teachers Unite to Protect Our Students (Cape Town, January 1986); Argus 15/1/86; Cape Times 16/1/86; Financial Mail 17/1/86; Leader 24/2/85 Grassroots February 1986.

However, because of the weakness^f of its organisation in general, ASAC had concentrated mainly on trying to secure two of their demands - the dropping of all charges of teacher 'misconduct' and the securing of supplementary examinations in March.

Although schools such as Sinton, Rylands and Belgravia had held awareness programmes once or twice a week in the first part of the year, at other schools, these programmes were non-existent. Where they had existed, these programmes did not endure and in a short while, enthusiasm for them had waned. While the demand for People's Education can be described as inherently advantageous, those academics who have lauded the 'strategic shift initiated by the SPCC Conference', have totally failed to examine the extent to which People's Education had been implemented practically at schools. In 1986, People's Education programmes were virtually non-existent and principals had regained their hegemonic positions. Some SRC's themselves were barely managing to survive, let alone implementing awareness programmes.

While there were severe weaknesses, ASAC had attempted to secure the postponement of the examinations until the end of March. The weaknesses were however exacerbated to its bearable limits, when Carter Ebrahim had decided to allow promotions to take place instead of the examinations. On the 7th of February, he had announced that all those students between standard 6 and 9, who had not written the final examination, or who had written and failed, would be, if so desired, promoted to the next standard, based on the merit of the previous year's June results.²³ This had not only created administrative confusion in schools, but it had further exacerbated the divisions that had existed in the student constituency. Divisions between those that wrote and those who did not, had now included those who wanted promotions and those who argued it was as educationally-unsound as the fraudulent exams, written the previous year. WECTU had come out against the promotions in the strongest of terms because it was anti-educational and because it was seen as an attempt to disrupt

²³ Cape Times 14/2/86; Argus 14/2/86; Financial Mail 14/2/86; Weekly Mail 14/2/86; Cape Herald 15/2/86.

parent, teacher and student unity on the question of writing exams in March.²⁴

A mandate had indicated that a large percentage of students at the majority of schools had wanted the promotions. Because ASAC had already been weakened as a coordinating structure, it had decided to let individuals decide for themselves, because, as an organisation, further divisions amongst an already stratified student mass could have spelt disaster for organisation. At Belgravia, for example, one third of the school had written, while one third had wanted the promotions, while the remaining third had found the promotions' option unacceptable and fraudulent.²⁵ While the student leaders themselves had agreed that the promotions option was not correct, because of the monumental divisions that had existed, they had thought that the safest, most conflict-free method of broaching the subject was to let individuals decide.

Sinton was the only school in Athlone which voted unanimously against the promotions option. The mass of students at Sinton, who were already extremely dissatisfied that students at other ASAC schools had written the examinations, had become more agitated. From the beginning of the year already a grouping of students at Sinton had emerged and had been making noises about pulling out of ASAC, because all its affiliates, except Sinton, had students which had written the exams. This grouping was given a considerable boost when ASAC had not taken a firm stand against the issue of promotions. The Sinton students had argued that ASAC had stabbed them in the back. Despite the pleas from the SRC leadership at Sinton, for students to understand that being an affiliate of ASAC was extremely important and necessary, and that other schools were not as lucky to have had a staff which unanimously decided not to administer the exams, Sinton students had become adamant that they withdraw from ASAC. After many fiery SRC meetings in which the SRC leadership had tried to convince

²⁴ Western Cape Teachers Union. Promotions: Motives Exposed (Cape Town, No 4, March 1986) p 1.

²⁵ Interview 2.

them, and after ASAC delegates had come to the school to explain their predicament, Sinton students had voted overwhelmingly in favour of withdrawing. Sinton SRC never officially joined ASAC, although the leadership had worked clandestinely ~~worked~~ in ASAC. Eventually, years later, Sinton had agreed that it would be prepared to be an observer in ASAC.²⁶

Despite the many weaknesses which had come to the fore, organisationally, ASAC had been boosted by the formation of an Athlone Education Crisis Committee (AECC). The AECC was formed soon after the SPCC Conference and was comprised of ASAC, Thornhill Residents Association, Thornhill Youth, the three interim PTSA's of Belgravia, Sinton and Rylands, the PTA of Belmore Primary, Western Cape Traders Association and the Chamber of Muslim Meat Traders Association. Although an invitation was extended to all progressive organisations in Athlone, neither the UDF Athlone Central Branch, nor its CAYCO-affiliated branches had shown any interest in attending the meetings or joining the structure. The organisation was also shunned by those with a Unity Movement bias.

Despite the fact that these organisations had not joined it, the AECC had played a constructive role in attempting to protect students and their rights at schools. It had sent delegations of parents and community members to schools such as Bridgetown High, Ned Doman and St. Columbas and even Belgravia in an attempt to negotiate with the principal to allow an SRC to function and to abolish corporal punishment. To this effect, it had also released a number of pamphlets, highlighting the problems at different schools.²⁷ It had also made a concerted effort to establish functioning PTSA's at Athlone schools.

²⁶ Interview 6; Sinton Report; Cultural Society of Alexander Sinton (CUSAS) CUSAS Bulletin No 2 (Cape Town, March 1986)

²⁷ Athlone Education Crisis Committee (AECC) Return To Schools? How? Why? (Cape Town, January 1986); AECC Parents and Teachers Unite to Protect Our Students (Cape Town, January 1986); AECC untitled (Cape Town, February or March 1986); AECC and ASAC Corporal Punishment Abuse & Victimisation Rife at Athlone Schools (Cape Town, 1986).

Why then was it shunned by both the UDF and NUM? Although there were members of the AECC from both tendencies, these were representatives of SRC's or PTSA's and not of their particular tendencies. However, again, Thornhill ideas were dominant in the AECC and at that stage, those with NUM tendencies had been attempting to form a Federation of PTSA's.²⁸ This was seen by both ASAC and the AECC as an attempt to secure the decision-making power of PTSA's²⁹ over SRC's. In addition, although the interim-federation had claimed to be non-sectarian, it was weighted heavily in favour of NUM, with all those on the interim-committee coming from a NUM or SACOS background. As such, the AECC not only had conflicting views on the functions of PTSA's, but by that stage a definite breach had occurred in Thornhill's position of non-alignment as it attempted to engage more actively with the activities of the UDF. An AECC or ASAC document had objected to the proposal to launch a Federation of PTSA's. The document had argued that while the idea of a federation is good in that it helps ensure that people go in the same direction, the idea cannot be imposed from above. It had argued that

"to form a federation without working from below and working at a grassroots level is not only senseless, but it can lead to bureaucratic control from above. It would be anti-democratic. Therefore the idea that a Federation of PTSA's be publicly launched now is unacceptable."²⁹

However, beneath the argument that the document was advancing, the main reason why those in the AECC had not wanted to be party to the Federation launched was its decisive bias towards the Unity Movement. Nevertheless, the position of the AECC had not stopped the UDF from keeping its distancing from the AECC. This was done because in the AECC as a structure, there was no definite and unconditional acceptance of a Charterist ideology. Nevertheless, Thornhill, ASAC and the AECC, although at that

²⁸ From the time that the SPCC conference had convened. Just before the NECC conference, a desperate attempt was made to launch a Federation of PTSA's, so that the Unity Movement could get a powerful foothold into the NECC conference.

²⁹ ASAC or AECC proposal against a Federation of PTSA's March 1986.

stage not affiliated to the UDF, had become a Charterist-sympathetic grouping. As Dullah Omar had³⁰ stated, by that stage,

It was our own practical experience of struggle [working for the broadest possible unity] which made us realise that the UDF at the time, and the kind of approach the UDF approach accords, [was] more with what we ourselves were experiencing. That therefore represented the road for us, and that took us away from this grappling in political no-[persons] land, into the Congress movement.³⁰

At the level of regional student politics as well, although ASAC had moved closer towards the UDF-supporting SAC's in WESCO, ASAC did not affiliate to it immediately. Even though ASAC was breaking with its prior position of non-alignment, there was still much mutual animosity between people in ASAC and WESCO. Instead of joining WESCO at that stage, on a practical basis, ASAC had begun to work even more closely with the Joint SRC's. In March, however, just before the NECC Conference, there was a *détente* on both sides. In early March, the UDF had initiated a regional student workshop in an attempt to foster a single Western Cape student organisation. The conference, which was attended by ASAC, the Joint SRC's and the WESCO SAC's, drew up a 'Plan of Action', based on the guidelines set-out by the SPCC conference.³¹ Soon afterwards, ASAC, the Joint SRC's, the AECC and the PAC convened a huge conference at the Athlone Civic Centre on the 22nd of March. The Conference, at which almost the entire newly elected executive of COSATU had spoken, was convened to discuss the NECC conference which was to be held the next week. More importantly³² was the message coming from the Joint SRC's and ASAC. The invitation to the conference had stated that

"Unity in struggle is important ... because it is important for us in the Cape to be part of a national united position - not an isolated and separatist position ... Let us identify ourselves as part of the mainstream of struggle in SA. Let us decide as part of the national struggle. Let us ACT as part of the nation in creation."³²

³⁰ Interview 1.

³¹ Grassroots March 1986. Bloch, G. 'Organisation as Education: The Struggle in the Western Cape Schools, 1986-1988' in Abrahams, S (Ed) Education in the Eighties: The Proceedings of the Kenton Conference 1988 (The Kenton 1988 Organising Committee, October 1988)

³² Invitation to an Education Conference, hosted by ASAC, Joint SRC's, AECC and PAC. (March 1986) p 2-3.

At the same time the NUM, CAL and SOYA had withdrawn from the NECC conference which was to be held in Durban on the 29th of March, because they had felt that it was too heavily dominated by the Congress organisations. Instead, the National Forum and the Unity Movement had held an education conference on the same day, in the same city.³³ This had been a clear indication that the apparent unity that had existed in the Western Cape, during the turmoil, was no more. In a directly contrasting position, the ASAC report to the NECC Conference had stated that

"ASAC believes strongly in forging a stronger unity in 1986. We must set aside non-political differences, work through political differences and build a student front on a workers struggle."³⁴

While there were vivid tensions between WESCO on the one hand and ASAC and the Joint SRC's on the other, both before and at the NECC Conference itself, there had been a clear indication from both sides that there was a need to forge a united student front based around aspects of the Congress tradition. Although ASAC had been unwilling at that stage to join WESCO, it had clearly been moving towards the Congress tradition. Towards the end of 1986, the three major student groupings in the Western Cape, ASAC, the Joint SRC's and the loose affiliation of UDF-supporting SAC's, had agreed to a process of unification and, in May 1987, the Western Cape Students Congress (WECSCO) was officially launched. Bloch has pointed out that the ideological position of ASAC and the Joint SRC's had not been completely submerged into a straightforward nationalist discourse, but that the unity between these three groups were "consolidated with the emergence of an ideological consensus (a leftist national-democratic approach) that allowed a clear active direction to emerge."³⁵ However, it must be pointed out that, although ASAC had later become a full-fledged Congress supporting structure, even adopting the Freedom Charter, it, together with members of the Joint SRC's, had adopted a left position with ~~in~~ the UDF. Although these two

³³ Cape Times 2/4/86.

³⁴ ASAC report op cit p 2.

³⁵ Bloch op cit p 5.

structures had been incorporated within the UDF, and although there was still much hostility towards their position, the broad frontism of the UDF in the Western Cape, had tolerated such dissension (at the time) within its ranks. Nevertheless, by 1988, tensions had even emerged within ASAC itself, as well as in WECSO, between the left position and the more mainstream Congress tradition. Beginning towards the end of 1987, within ASAC itself, severe tensions were beginning to emerge. This had led to the formation of two distinct caucuses - one a left position and the other a mainstream Congress one. There were a series of walkouts by the feuding tendential currents and at one stage this had almost torn ASAC apart. These hidden developments in ASAC and WECSO should however be followed up by another research paper.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: TELL NO LIES.
CLAIM NO EASY VICTORIES

That the 1985 schools boycott in the Western Cape was a significant historic experience is undeniable. The scale, duration and intensity of the boycott was unsurpassed in the region. Additionally, the lessons of previous boycotts were consciously extrapolated. However, given the reality of regions' low-comparative level of political development and resistance prior to 1985, the boycott experience was also mediated by factors in the Western Cape. The organic crises that so many have alluded to was certainly real, but its effects were palliated by the regions' differentiated developments. It would as such be ludicrous to suggest that a reasonable comparison can be made with regions such as the Eastern Cape or Transvaal. As such, a cautious approach must be adopted so as not to adopt an exaggerated and triumphalist interpretation of the boycott in the Western Cape.

With regards to the accusation that the student leadership, (ASAC in particular) had evinced a level of immediacy, I would argue that such an accusation is largely unsubstantiated. It would seem as if certain academics, while sympathetic to the cause of boycotting students, have tried to maintain their impartiality. While this is good and is indeed the correct approach, a number of problems have also arisen. Many academics have tried so hard to demonstrate their impartiality, that they have taken the concept of objectivity to the verge of a lunatic fringe explanation. Consequently, they have adopted a particularly harsh

and often unjustified critique of the students' struggle and have misconstrued or invented many aspects of the boycott. Immediatism was certainly one of these invented traditions. While this is not to deny that immediatism was prevalent at the level of the mass of students, this was not discernible amongst the ASAC leadership. I have demonstrated how a definition of immediatism was incorrectly constructed and moulded around ASAC, through a very uncritical approach, if not an approach which borders on a blatant distortion of its media. Comparative analyses with media published by other organisations, such as the UDF and Thornhill, would, according to the criteria used, also dub these 'mature' organisations as being imbued with a sense of immediatism, or a belief that victory was imminent. Additionally those who have labelled ASAC as promoting Liberation before Education, if not consciously, then through its actions, have at no stage examined the real situation that student organisations were facing. Neither have they suggested that a constructive alternative was possible. The term immediatism, which is closely associated with the slogan Liberation Before Education, therefore would have to be used with much caution and its parameters have to be redefined. I have not found any real evidence (nor concealed any) which suggests that the leadership in ASAC had believed that the state was about to collapse. While ASAC had made many mistakes, this was not one of them. While many of the student interviewees have admitted that they were imbued with a sense of romanticism during the period of heightened struggle, what else could be expected? Any notion of immediatism must be counter-posed to the effulgent view that the ASAC leadership had,

and which believed only the organised working-class could topple the state.

In one respect however, Bundy's notion is absolutely correct - ie. by pointing out that because the scale of youth political development in a period of upheaval, is so rapid, a large proportion of those youth who are politicised, in such a period, are politicised in a very superficial manner. Therefore, when these newly baptised radicals are plagued with a series of defeats, such as when they returned to schools, the enthusiasm and militancy that once abounded, wanes extremely swiftly. To a large extent, this is what happened to many students in 1986.

However, a purely defeatist perspective of the boycott experience is not altogether true, as through the awareness programmes which ^{were} held, many students developed at least an inkling of political consciousness, which otherwise would not have occurred. For others however, the boycott experience had a lasting impact. For example a student at St. Columbas, Robert Waterwitch, had joined MK largely through his experience in the 1985 boycott. Unfortunately, however, he was killed during a military operation. Additionally, the boycott had developed a fairly broad group of individuals who had become the next layer of leadership within ASAC. The Rylands High interviewee, for example, has pointed out that one of the students who was initially not interested in the awareness programmes or the boycott, had been caught running home, while other students were still holding an awareness programme. This student was then placed in a class. Three years later he had become the chairperson of the Rylands SRC and today,

still, remains a committed member of a progressive organisation.^{3*}

As far as student organisation was concerned, there were both advantages and disadvantages at the end of the boycott. In Athlone, some of the advantages can be seen from the fact that the 1985 boycott had spawned a strong area-based student structure which had linked previously isolated SRC's or students' structures, giving their individual struggles some form of coherence. Additionally, schools such as Rylands, Groenvlei, Garlandale and later Bridgetown, had emerged from the 1985 boycott with full-fledged SRC's, whereas no student organisation at all had existed previously. Even at schools such as St. Columbas, Ned Doman and Athlone High, if an SRC did not exist, at least some sort of student organisation existed. Even if this structure was not able to hold awareness programmes or other such organised programmes during school hours, after the boycott had ended, a core group of students were still coming to ASAC meetings, and, if nothing else, at least distributing pamphlets to their respective schools. On the down-side, after the boycott had ended, the power that SRC's and student structures possessed, were diminished considerably. At many schools, the agreements reached with the school administrations during the period of the boycott, when students had possessed real power, were all but ignored, when the boycott had ended. Even schools such as Belgravia, with a strong SRC, had continued to battle with issues such as corporal punishment. However, the situation, before and after the boycott, at all these schools, were not the same. In

^{3*} Interview J.

1986, most Athlone schools ~~had~~ for example implemented some form of an awareness programme on both National Detainees Day, Sharpeville Day, Mayday and June 16th, whereas, previously, most of these days would have passed by unnoticed by the broader mass of students. In addition, the formation of both WECTU and the PTSA's was a direct outcome of the 1985 boycott.

Lastly, there was a clear growth of an anti-government sentiment. Through the actions of the police and army, but especially the actions of Carter Ebrahim, the facade of reforms for coloured and Indian people, which the government was so desperately trying to secure, was drowned by what it had itself disgorged, even before it was able to gain a foothold in the community. Conversely, there was a real growth of support for the liberation organisations in the Western Cape, especially those with ANC sympathies. However, this growth was not absolute, in terms of the population of the Western Cape. This is reflected very clearly, almost ten years later, by the defeat of the ANC by the National Party (in the regional elections), in the country's first politically democratic elections. However, this was not a sudden or new development, and even after the 1985 boycotts, when national stayaways were called, for example, the Western Cape was almost sure to have one of the lowest percentages of people who stayed away from work.

Of more significance in this respect is the comparative growth of organisations such as the UDF, as compared to the relative stagnation of organisations such as the Unity Movement or CAL. While the UDF did grow, its growth was signified more by a growth

of hegemony within the discourse of liberation politics than anything else. While the Unity Movement was never a mass-based organisation, and its strength lay more in the power of its arguments, after 1985, its voice and ideas had lost the hegemony ~~it~~^{they} had possessed earlier, with many of its former supporters or members shifting their allegiance in the direction of Congress.

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ASAC Report

Alexander Sinton Report

Athlone High School Report

Belgravia High Report

Bridgetown Senior Secondary School Report Back

Garlandale High School

Groenvlei SRC.

Ned Doman

Oaklands High School Report

Spes Bona

St. Columbus.

ii) Mandates on Writing Final Exams

iii) ASAC Workshop Agenda (before June 1986)

iv) ASAC or AECC proposal against a Federation of PTSA's

v) hand written report which begins "ISCC → filled with Ideological problems..."

vi) letter of support to Rylands Interim PTSA (nd)

vii) Minutes of ASAC meeting

viii) Draft of letter which begins " Dear Comrade We, ... ASAC have for the past 3 months experienced serious problems with principals at our schools"

ix) Letter of invitation by Interim Committee for A Federation of PTSA's Western Cape for a meeting on 4th March 1986

x) Agenda and invitation to workshop of Interim Committee for A Federation of PTSA's Western Cape for a meeting for 19th April 1986

b) Collected privately

i) Petition "We the members of the oppressed community strongly condemn the dismissals, suspensions, and transfers of teachers in the Cape Province, and particularly the 22 teachers at Rylands High and the 2 teachers at Belmore Primary School"

ii) Conference to discuss resolutions taken at the NECC Conference

iii) Athlone Student Action Committee statement of accounts for 1985-88 for pamphlets printed - held at Allies Printing Service

iv) Invitation to an Education Conference, hosted by ASAC, Joint SRC's, AECC and PAC. (March 1986)

c) Videos

i) "Trojan Horse" video. Held at Y. Ebrahim and Co.

ii) Thornhill Residents Association, Thornhill Youth & ASAC rally" 1st September 1985. Held by Thornhill ANC.

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- Anonymous - "United Action For A Better Education" (Cape Town,
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- Anonymous - "Wednesday 11th, Thursday 12th September Stay-Away"
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- Anonymous - "Mass Stayaway Tues. 10 Sept. Wed. 11 Sept. '85"
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- Anonymous - "We Re-Open Our Schools" (September 1985)
- Anonymous - "Student Boycotts" (September 1985)
- Anonymous - "Mass Rally UWC Stadium - A Call For Unity" (Cape
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