



APDUSA VIEWS

JANUARY 1986

THE STUDENT STRUGGLE AND YOU

What you as Parent,
Family member, Teacher and
Student should know about
the student boycotts

INTRODUCTION

Since 1976, the students of the oppressed population in South Africa have engaged the State in a continual series of clashes. The armed might of the State was ruthlessly employed against the revolting youth. Thousands of young people have been either killed or wounded in the numerous pitched battles which raged in the streets. The confrontation has turned out to be an endless one. Brutal repression far from subduing the youth seems to have infused greater militancy. Even the insensitive rulers have realised that the gun and the sjambok have failed to bring the youth to their knees.

STUDENT POWER came into its own in the decades of the seventies and eighties.

ROLE OF STUDENTS

For as long as there have been students, for so long has this layer of society been both a catalyst and an initiator of revolts and resistance against an unpopular ruling class. This characteristic, peculiar to students, can be attributed to a variety of factors. Some of these factors are:—

- 1 Students receive training in ideas and use that training to see through the designs of the oppressors.
- 2 Students have the time and leisure to work out things by studying, discussing and analysing.
- 3 Because they are in a transitional world, between childhood and adulthood, they do not, nor are they expected to conform to the adult code of conduct. They are rebellious, courageous and uncompromising in matters of principle.
- 4 They are not burdened with the responsibility of maintaining a family. Therefore, they are not open to threats of dismissal from work or fear that their actions might deprive their family members of a livelihood.
- 5 Students are imbued with noble ideals and ambitions which have not been contaminated with timidity, conservatism and a lack of faith in a better future.

These and other factors have made students into a powerful force — a force which, usually, is the first to react to oppression.

EDUCATION BEFORE LIBERATION

The picture painted about the characteristics of students is not as simple as that. For a start it does not apply to all students. Then, as a rule, students are targets of great pressure to refrain from taking part in activities against the ruling class. The pressure comes mainly from the ruling class via its flunkies in the schools and universities. Parents out of natural concern for the safety of their children unwittingly carry out this policy of the ruling class. Students are encouraged by their elders to engage in “normal student activities” like studying, playing sport, dancing, going camping, for picnics, etc. The strategy is to advise students to postpone their participation in the political struggle until they have passed their final examinations.

In most cases the advice of **EDUCATION BEFORE LIBERATION** is not given in good faith. It is hoped that by the time the student completes his or her studies and stands on the threshold of a career, that student would have developed non-political interests which would exclude political involvement.

In recent times a contrary trend has come to the fore. Parents and teachers in certain areas have been supporting the students in their struggle for a better education and a new society.

Despite the pressure of "EDUCATION BEFORE LIBERATION", serious students have ignored this advice. This history of liberatory movements in modern times has shown that students and a section of the intellectuals forge an organic link with the workers and peasants. Without this organic link resistance by the toiling masses has invariably ended in rebellions which were crushed by the ruling class.

The acceptance of the advice of EDUCATION BEFORE LIBERATION is nothing less than that first big step towards surrender to the oppressive regime. Non-involvement in the political struggle on the part of the oppressed student is something that the oppressors hold very dear to their hearts. Their policy is "no politics in schools". Therefore, any student who refrains from participating in the struggle or any parent who advises his or her child to place education before liberation is in truth practising and expounding the politics of the oppressors.

For reasons stated above, the approach of EDUCATION BEFORE POLITICS has been soundly condemned by the entire liberatory movement.

LIBERATION BEFORE EDUCATION

The year 1985, has witnessed the escalation of student revolt and resistance to unprecedented heights. Hundreds of students have made the supreme sacrifice because of their utter abhorrence of a racist and debased system of education. Students and the youth have dramatically demonstrated their rejection of a society that promises them nothing but a vast emptiness as their future. There are no prospects of creative and meaningful employment or any employment. There is no escape from the dreary and soul destroying environment of poverty, filth, police brutality and disease.

It is realisation of this grim future that students and youth are desperately seeking deeper causes of their plight. It is this realisation which makes some of them merciless towards collaborators, informers and policemen. It would also explain the ferocity and determination with which they challenge machine guns and armoured vehicles.

From this "crucible of fire" emerged the slogan of LIBERATION BEFORE EDUCATION.

The slogan is a reflection of total lack of hope in the present system. It is a declaration that no good at all can come from the existing system of education. It is an expression that students are sick and tired of the mass indoctrination which masquerades as education.

All this we understand and fully appreciate.

However, it is our view that the advocates of this slogan have not worked out its full implications. We believe that the implications are so serious and far reaching that we would be failing in our duty if we did not spell them out and analyse them.

IMPLICATIONS OF "LIBERATION BEFORE EDUCATION"

- (a) The great thinkers and leaders of all major liberatory movements in the modern era received their education in institutions set up by the very system which those leaders sought to destroy. It was in such institutions they received their initial knowledge in complex subjects like economics, philosophy, history, sociology and so on. It was by making a profound study of human knowledge first that they were able to reshape and refashion ideas and then to make their own contribution which changed the face of earth.

Without that formal education it is unlikely that those struggles would have taken place.

- (b) No system of modern education can avoid teaching students to read and write. Likewise there can be no avoidance of the teaching of how people in other parts of the world live and their history. The access to the written word has been one of the most powerful methods of spreading political education and raising consciousness. Censorship of political writings is clear admission by the rulers of their fear of the written word. But the written word presupposes the education to do the writing and the education to read and understand the written word.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that illiteracy and ignorance can never be considered as assets in the struggle. On the contrary, they have been considered as obstacles to be surmounted in process of struggle.

- (c) If the call of "Liberation Before Education" were to be heeded, millions of students of varying ages would be out of the institutions and in the streets. That, in turn, would give rise to numerous questions:

What are the students to do? Who is to take care of students of tender age? Who is to provide food and clothes for them? Who will educate them?

The advocates of the slogan have not come up with any answers to these questions. Their silence is understandable because they have no answers. Common sense will tell us that to cater for the needs of millions of students requires massive organisation and material resources – both of which are not available.

- (d) In the earlier decades, most skill -- medicine, law, technology, etc. -- was concentrated in the hands of Whites only. The situation was a direct product of a deliberate policy which relegated the black population to the status of "drawers of water and hewers of wood". Skill and expertise became associated with a white skin and the myth of the superiority of the whites was strengthened. It should come as no surprise when in those days blacks actually believed in their inferiority.

When World War II took place, the myth of the Master Race took a hard knock throughout the Third World. South Africa was no exception. The economic demands of those years and the high consciousness of people as to their real worth, increasingly made the black person assert himself as a human being.

In order to stem the rising tide of militancy and the clamour to be treated as human beings Dr Verwoerd passed the notorious Bantu Education Act. To revive fading memories, we quote from Dr Verwoerd's speeches:

"There is no place for him (the African) in the European Community above the level of certain forms of labour . . .

For this reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European Community . . . What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use in practice . . ."

When Dr Verwoerd spoke of the "European Community" he was referring to people who had access to and enjoyed all the benefits and fruits of Modern Civilisation. As far as he and his ruling class were concerned the African people belonged to a tribal society which did not entitle them to enjoy Modern Civilisation.

If, therefore, the slogan of "Liberation Before Education" is implemented, Dr Verwoerd's fondest dreams would be realised. Ignorance and lack of skill in black persons must once again drive the oppressed to seek the services of the Whites. Once again the myths of racial superiority and inferiority would raise their ugly heads.

- (e) The process of liberation involves at once the destruction of the old order and the preparation for the construction of the new society.

Experience has shown that while an oppressed people can readily see the need to put an end to an unjust system, they do not as readily understand the full implications involved in the construction of a new society, whether it be democratic or socialist. The requirements for reconstruction from the ruins of the old are essentially the same.

No person was more conscious of the immense problems encountered in the construction of a new society than V. L. Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution. In an attempt to give balance to the thinking of the youth of those years – youth who were inclined to believe that slogans and idealism were sufficient to build the new society – Lenin stressed the need to study and become educated as absolute essentials for the construction of the new society.

Let us read Lenin's own words:

" . . . We must distinguish between what was bad in the old school and what is useful to us . . . We have no need of cramming but we do need to develop and perfect the mind of every student with a knowledge of fundamental facts . . . He (the youth) must realise that he can create it (the new society) only on the basis of modern education . . . We can build only on the basis of the totality of knowledge, organisation and institutions, only by using the stock of human forces and means that have been left to us by the old society . . ."

Lenin was driving home common sense. He was telling the youth that in order to work for the building of a new society, they had to assimilate "the wealth of knowledge amassed by mankind" including "human knowledge acquired under capitalism".

And it is common sense that the new South Africa we are striving to build, must have the skill and expertise in every field – government, economics, industry, agriculture, health care, transport, engineering, trade, etc. Where are these skills to come from? Liberation would be a dead letter if we cannot rely on our own people to carry out these highly complex functions.

If it is answered that we can import skill, then our hard-won liberation would be placed in great danger. If we, ourselves, cannot run a liberated South Africa, then we do not deserve that liberation. We would be dealing a mortal blow to the principle of **SELF RELIANCE** and placing ourselves at the mercy of outsiders to run our country. That would, in fact, be inviting a form of foreign domination.

Let us be clear on this aspect. We are not suggesting a rejection of all outside help. We will need help, but that help must do **NO MORE THAN SUPPLEMENT** our own pool of expertise. But we will not acquire that pool of experts if we keep students out of the institutions of learning until liberation is attained.

OUR STAND ON THE STUDENT STRUGGLE

We salute the brave and courageous stand of the students. The schools' and universities' boycotts have forcefully demonstrated that students do not intend getting educated first and then offer to fight for liberation. Already students have laid down their lives for their beliefs. However, clarity of direction and clarity of perspective must not be clouded by emotive slogans. On the one hand we regard the attitude of **EDUCATION BEFORE LIBERATION** as downright reactionary. On the other hand we regard the slogan of **LIBERATION BEFORE EDUCATION** as ill-conceived and lacking in perspective.

Our attitude is that the fight for liberation and necessity for education must go side by side.

IN TRUTH BOTH ARE PART OF THE ONE AND SAME PROCESS. There can be no liberation without education, and education without involvement in the struggle is not true education.

OUR STAND ON THE STUDENT BOYCOTT

We support the boycott of schools and universities and other institutions of learning. When a people are denied the right to elect and be elected to the policy making organs of the land, they are entitled to employ all legitimate forms of struggle. The student boycott is one such form.

Like the consumer boycott, the student boycott has proved itself in real life. It has demonstrated the rejection of the system. It has committed students, parents and teachers to the struggle. Most important of all the student boycott **UNITES** people.

As to the duration of the boycotts, there can be no hard and fast rules. The concrete conditions and aims prevailing in a particular area must determine the duration. It is a decision that has to be taken jointly by students, parents and the teachers in **DEMOCRATIC MANNER.**

A boycott of educational institutions reaches a peak by way of demonstration, commitment and unity. To prolong it thereafter will earn diminishing benefits until a time is reached when it becomes counter-productive. It is at this stage that the boycott can become a **DIVISIVE** element. There will be some who would want to continue the boycott. There will be others who up to that stage fought with flying colours for the boycott but who now feel that the boycott be reviewed and

suspended. It would be the height of folly to brand such people as collaborators. Folly of this nature is bound to lead to a division in the ranks of committed people. It would lead to witch-hunting and name-calling without real justification. The term "collaboration" will lose its sharp definition and become meaningless abuse.

If prolonging a boycott leads to a division amongst committed people, then that boycott is doing the work of the ruling class.

We must bear in mind the boycott being a tactic can be called off and on with flexibility. But once the unity of committed people is broken, the damage cannot be easily repaired.

CONCLUSION

The student boycotts have demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, that the struggle for a democratic system of education can only be attained in a democratic society.

Therefore, the priority is the struggle for a democratic society, free of oppression and exploitation.

This lesson has been written out in bold letters with the blood of the hundreds of students who have laid down their lives for the cause.

IT IS A LESSON WE DARE NOT FORGET!.

SUPPORT THE STUDENT STRUGGLE!

DOWN WITH THE COLLABORATORS!

UNITY YES! DIVISION NO!

IMPERIALISM AND THE FAMINE IN AFRICA

In an interview published in "Newsweek" of 24 June 1985, EUGENE WHELAN, the President of the World Food Council, and for 12 years prior to that, Canada's Minister of Agriculture, makes a dreadful prediction:

"Some 34 million people could die from malnutrition, exposure and disease because of drought and famine in Africa over the last three to four years"

Africa is reaping the bitter harvest of centuries of rape, pillage and plunder at the hands of countries which, today, parade as enlightened democracies.