

# School Boycott - W.Cape

by a SOYA MEMBER

The class boycott by oppressed students in the Western Cape was called in protest against the State of Emergency, the nation-wide killings and detentions, the victimisation of community leaders and also to demonstrate their total rejection of this country's oppressive educational system.

## WECSAC

The Western Cape Students Action Committee (WECSAC) was formed to co-ordinate the actions taken by students during the boycott as increased repression by the state and its machinery caused increasingly intense responses from students. WECSAC consists of approximately 40 schools and educational institutions as well as two student organisations, Students of Young Azania (SOYA) and the Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO).

## 250 000 ON STREETS

The closing down of almost 500 educational institutions in the Western Cape, meant that over a quarter of a million students were out on the streets. Botha's army had already invaded the townships, brutally murdering our comrades.

The dynamism of the boycott action taken by students had been provided by a series of mass rallies and marches where students from various schools, tertiary institutions and student organisations came together to demand with one voice the unconditional re-opening of all schools, the resignation

of all community councillors, dummy MP's, and that the harassment of teachers and students by principals and school inspectors be stopped immediately.

## GAINS

Some of the most important gains made by the boycott had been an upsurge in the awareness of students, the development of democratically elected SRC's at schools where none previously existed, and the realisation by students that mass participation in the decision-making processes within the organisations of the oppressed and exploited is essential.

The boycott was characterised by alternative educational programmes, but these were difficult to sustain due to a serious lack of resources. An important development however, was the formation of a structure for progressive teachers and academics sympathetic to the demands made by students. Progressive teachers made their stand by downing tools for two days and assisted in the conducting of awareness programmes at the schools.

## SOYA

SOYA, as ONE of the oppressed student organisations in the

Western Cape, is in my mind playing a significant role in shaping and giving content to the struggles being waged there. It has been instrumental in the setting up of united front structures of oppressed students. WECSAC is one example of this. SOYA believes that non-sectarianism is important in the building of unity and democracy in the liberation struggle. As comrades fighting a common enemy, we should as far as possible find ways of working together in spite of our differences.

## EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

What is evident is that students alone cannot defend themselves against the violence of the state, nor can they alone bring about fundamental change in this country and achieve their long-term demand for a free and compulsory educational system geared towards the needs of working people.





The crowd of about 4 000 besieged the police in the school grounds after they arrested about 100 teachers, pupils and parents who had entered the school.

Policemen cut through the fence at the back of the school to allow the besieged police out. The clash began when pupils and parents decided on an unofficial back-to-school movement, defying the Government closure of 464 schools in the Cape Peninsula.

The boycott we had is not a rejection of education. We realise that education can be either an instrument of capitalist domination or socialist liberation. We must turn our schools into centres of liberation. We realise that liberation does not lie in the hands of one or two leaders, but can only be achieved through long, hard struggle by the majority, led by the working class. The boycott, we know, is only one weapon and cannot on its own bring about fundamental change.

## **THE FREEDOM CHARTER - for & against.**

The Freedom Charter is a very important document in South Africa. Many people believe that the demands in the Charter can bring about a society free of oppression and exploitation. Others among the oppressed doubt this. Some people are of the opinion that the Charter does not address issues such as class exploitation and is not an adequate programme for ending all oppression and exploitation.

Unfortunately, a debate among the oppressed on the Charter is almost always conducted in an emotional, sometimes even physical manner. Some adherents of the Charter have been accused of elevating the document into gospel, where criticism is seen as sacrilege. In Action Youth, we hold that comradely debate among those involved in the struggle should be encouraged, and is both healthy and necessary.

In March this year a group of organisations issued a statement commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Charter. They said, "Nothing short of the demands in this document (the Charter) will satisfy the people". The argument put by the state in 1956 that the Charter was a communist document was overturned last year. A former Chief Justice of South Africa, Mr. Justice Rumpff, could find no truth in this argument. In dismissing the prosecution case, he said the Charter was a moderate document and that it is now legal to distribute the document.

Recently a debate was held between an executive member of UDF and an organiser from MAWU, an affiliate of FOSATU. Generally, the speaker from MAWU felt that the Charter cannot satisfy the aspirations of the majority in South Africa - the workers. We print below a part of the debate and then Action Youth's own assessment of the Charter.

### (1) What sort of document is the Charter?

Executive member of UDF: The Charter is a popular document, it keeps with democratic principles and represents the aspirations of the majority of the people. The Charter expresses both anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist sentiments as can be seen from the clause on nationalisation.

Organiser for MAWU: The Charter is a popular document but the domination of the middle class can clearly be seen. The Charter makes important demands like 'freedom of speech', but these are limited as they do not address the primary conflict in society - the conflict between capital and labour. The Charter talks for the 'people' but are there not different class interests among these 'people'? The Charter is not anti-capitalist as the clause on nationalisation does not equate socialism. Production relations are not addressed.