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CONTENTS

Editorial—Fighting Against Bantu Education	3
The A.N.C. Conference	8
The Future of the Bantu Languages	11
Can the Congress of Democrats Win Mass Support?	14
Letter to Editor, from W. M. B. Nhlapo	16
Trade Unions—Weapons for Freedom	17

Editorial

FIGHTING AGAINST BANTU EDUCATION

“Teaching should lead the child to do naturally, and therefore willingly, what society has prescribed as correct, good and commendable.”

—“Draft Higher Primary School Course.”
published in the **Bantu Education Journal**.

A YEAR ago, when the A.N.C. Conference decided to embark upon a mass boycott of Dr. Verwoerd’s “Bantu Education” schools, many people were shocked. There were different reasons for this reaction. Some people were shocked because they did not think it would be a good idea to boycott the N.A.D. schools, even if it could be done. They feared that the children would be missing a whole lot of good education, mixed up with a little propaganda which would soon be forgotten. They did not really understand that, poor as “Native Education” has always been, handicapped by inadequate schools and equipment and undertrained teachers, the new “Bantu Education” was not only worse

in quality but different in kind. No one has done more than Dr. Verwoerd and the Native Affairs Department to clear up this misconception. It has now become clear to all who have examined this matter honestly and intelligently, that the Bantu Education Act is a deliberate effort to use the schoolroom as an instrument in the implementation of apartheid and white baasskap. The new draft courses published by the Department leave no room for doubt on this matter: from now on African schooling will consist very largely of N.A.D. propaganda in favour of the Nationalist ideology.

“ALTERNATIVE” EDUCATION

There were other objections to the decision of the A.N.C. Prominent among those was the argument that it would be wrong to withdraw children from the N.A.D. schools unless and until alternative education could be provided for, outside the official state channels. In practice this argument amounts to unconditional rejection of the decision—although it sounds like conditional support. It is obviously quite impossible for private institutions to take over the functions of the state and to create an entire educational system on the scale that is required. Moreover, the Act will not permit private schools to be started unless they are registered with the Native Affairs Department. And, presumably, the Department will refuse to register schools unless they comply with the Verwoerd-Eiselen syllabuses. The Roman Catholic Church has collected large sums of money from non-Catholics, who are no doubt under the impresssion that their mission schools are opposing Bantu Education. But in fact the Roman Catholic schools **accept** the Verwoerd curriculum. They are going to teach Bantu Education in their schools, plus Roman religious dogmas. Thus any idea that by contributing to their funds one was helping them to make a stand against Bantu Education was quite misguided.

The idea that the boycott should be made conditional on providing “alternative education” is in fact quite wrong in principle. The boycott is not an end in itself. It is part and parcel of a political campaign to protest against the Bantu Education Act and **to secure the extension to African and all other children of the right to a proper education along the lines envisaged in the Freedom Charter.** It is not the aim of a political boycott of this sort to relieve the State of its obligation to provide proper education, but rather to compel the State to fulfil that obligation honourably.

NON-POLITICAL THINKING

Of course, once the children are withdrawn from schools, the democratic movement will have to try to look after them. Cultural clubs and other movements will arise for the school-less children. But this will not be a substitute for a proper state schooling; it will merely be a part of the movement to win such schooling for all. The difference is important. This wrong conception of “alternative education” is in fact the result of non-political thinking about the subject.

The general background of all South African problems is one of

vicious colonial-type oppression of the majority of the people; the minority dictatorship exercised through the Nationalist Party with its fascist ideology.

If one tries to consider education or any other problem facing the people without reference to this background, one is certain to make serious blunders. There will never be a true opening of the doors of culture and learning until freedom reigns. It follows that the struggle for proper schooling can only be seen in its true significance as part of the broader struggle for the overthrow of the dictatorship. The object of the boycott is limited; it is to oppose and defeat Bantu Education. It is therefore ridiculous to demand that a new people's educational system (only fully to be provided by a people's government) should be established before the boycott begins.

"PRACTICAL" CONSIDERATIONS

These, we believe, were the main "theoretical" arguments advanced against the decision by genuine opponents of apartheid: neither as we have shown, can withstand serious examination. The "half-a-loaf-is-better-than-none" argument overlooks the fact that Verwoerd offers no bread at all, but a stone. And the objection about "no alternative education" really derives from the same fallacy: it assumes that the children will really be deprived of something valuable if they are kept out of the Verwoerd schools, and that the Congress is therefore called upon to replace the State as the organiser of education.

More important than these objections are the practical difficulties raised by those who, while accepting the correctness of the proposed boycott as a method of struggle against Bantu Education, doubt the ability of the movement to organise an effective boycott in a short time. To organise so great a mass movement, they point out, requires time, hard work, steady patient explanations. The absurdly short time originally allowed by the A.N.C. leaders revealed a serious underestimation of this factor.

AFRAID OF FAILURE

There is a vast difference between this second group of critics and the first. For a while the first group we considered was afraid that the boycott might succeed, this second group is really afraid that it will fail, and that the prestige of the A.N.C. and the fight against Bantu Education will therefore suffer.

On the other hand, if we are afraid to act lest we might fail, we stand a grave danger of never acting at all, of always postponing action *on the grounds of unpreparedness until the fight is lost while we are getting ready for it*; our forces perhaps demoralised by continual inaction while the enemy strikes ever new blows.

We do not doubt that it was correct to postpone the original decision to commence the boycott on April 1. That decision has been correctly criticised by Congress itself—and we must say we find the present self-critical tendency of the A.N.C. the most heartening and inspiring phenomenon, and the surest guarantee that we are seriously heading towards victory. Unfortunately, the postponement of the boy-

cott has been taken by many people as a postponement or even abandonment of the campaign itself.

WHAT WAS WRONG?

What was **wrong** with the April 1st decision? Unless we are quite clear about that, we shall never be able to go forward with this campaign.

Was it that the date was set too soon? Not necessarily. Three months could be enough to get a campaign going properly, provided that massive, well-organised work was done. Was it that alternative education was not provided for? We have dealt with this idea above.

The real fault with the decision about April 1st was that it assumed that all that was necessary was to issue an order and the people would hasten to obey. It assumed that everyone would be ready to start boycotting on one particular day, and thus it staked the prestige of the Congress on a gamble. This fault was subsequently corrected by a more correct decision which saw the campaign to withdraw children from the Verwoerd schools as a process rather than as a miraculous sort of cataclysm. But the confusion created has not yet been cleared up, and the fact is that the campaign has made little progress during the year.

NO ALTERNATIVE WAY

The result of this failure of the campaign has been alarming. Many Africans, getting no clear lead from Congress, have tended to accept Bantu Education. The tension and the edge have left the campaign. Unless the original drive and fervour are restored, it will be difficult to implement the boycott in the near future.

Some readers may smugly say, "So what? It won't be the first boycott campaign that has failed. We shall find other ways of fighting the Act."

Such readers are making a terrible mistake. We dare not allow the campaign to fail, because there is no alternative way at present to fight the Act. The failure of the boycott campaign will be equivalent to the acceptance of Bantu Education.

LEADERSHIP WANTED

It follows that there is a most urgent duty falling upon the incoming executive of the A.N.C. and also upon every provincial executive, every branch committee and every rank and file member. And that duty is to really get down to work against Bantu Education without delay, in order to organise the boycott now.

Now that means real work. Meetings and door-to-door campaigns and election of parents' committees everywhere. It means explanation. Explain, explain, explain! That means that the National leaders must provide the material. Speakers' notes are needed. Articles and lectures, analyses of the syllabuses and courses. Never assume that the ordinary parent understands already: we have to show him. That is what leadership means—not issuing orders, but patient persuasion.

Look after these tasks, and the other things will follow! Once the campaign has started moving, it will develop a momentum of its own. It is instructive, in this regard, to look at those areas where the work was done earlier in the year and the boycott actually begun. It is precisely those areas where Bantu Education is a live and crucial issue today. It is there that cultural clubs have been started. The fact that those children are out of school, and those teachers out of jobs, underlies the whole of the country's attitude to Bantu Education. The children who are in the Bantu schools know that their comrades in other towns and other schools are out on the boycott. This very fact makes them vigilant and on their guard against the Nationalist lies they are supposed to learn. This campaign for the boycott, then, is no static thing. It is a snowball, that will build up to ever greater proportions as it grows and develops.

MUST BE FOUGHT FOR

Like every other sound decision, then, the boycott of N.A.D. schools must be worked for, fought for, even slaved for, against the bitter and determined opposition of the Government, the Native Affairs Department and its numerous allies and agents, open and concealed, among the African people and the "friends of the Africans" who are always ready with sound advice against militant action. The day that we find a decision of the A.N.C. Conference being publicised and supported by the daily press, English and Afrikaans, as well as by the various other gentlemen who at present have accepted office on Bantu school boards and rendered other services to the Government—that day we shall know Congress has made a big mistake.

But though the struggle for the boycott will be difficult, it is by no means impossible. It can be carried out during 1956, provided that it is undertaken in a serious and determined manner. Three main factors can lead to the success of the campaign:

1. That the campaign should be carried out continuously and flexibly, and that as soon as any parents in any area are organised and ready to carry out a withdrawal, even for a short period to start with, they should do so. No more **dates** should be "proclaimed."
2. That steady, planned, consistent propaganda and organisational work should be carried on in a businesslike, efficient manner, by the national, provincial and branch leaders everywhere.
3. That the campaign against Bantu Education should be regarded, not as a separate thing in itself, but as an integral part of the general struggle, the democratic South Africa for the Freedom Charter.

Given **such** a campaign, Bantu Education will be defeated. Every fresh area that comes out in struggle and boycott will make more impossible the position of Dr. Verwoerd's tame Africans who serve on the "Bantu school committees," his pet Principals who write fawning letters to "Bantu" praising his schools, his ex-Congress collaborators like Nkomo and Vundla. The people can defeat Verwoerd's schools of slavery. And this defeat will be an important step on the road to the free South Africa that will **open the doors of learning and culture** for all.