

schools boycott

WHILE WORK IN PROGRESS WAS AT THE PRINTERS, EVENTS DICTATED THAT THIS EDITION CARRY SOMETHING ON THE SCHOOLS BOYCOTT, WHICH WAS SPREADING THROUGHOUT SOUTH AFRICA. BELOW, WE PRODUCE A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF SOME OF THE MAJOR EVENTS THUSFAR, AS WELL AS A FEW INDICATIONS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THESE EVENTS. (80.04.27)

WHAT follows is a brief description of some of the more important events relating to the schools boycott which began in the Western Cape, subsequently spreading to most other regions in South Africa. As a hastily compiled chronology of events, it is incomplete; but more important than this, it should not be seen as a 'history' of current resistance to racially-based education in South Africa. For to do so would suggest that both history and resistance consist of a series of short dramatic events, rather than an on-going process involving conflict and organisation, victory and defeat, advance and retreat. The current struggle of pupils to what they have called 'gutter education' and the system which it is a part of must be seen in an overall context of resistance to the nature of society, and the attempt to create a totally new social structure and reality.

In February 1980, students of the Mountainview High School, Hanover Park, began boycotting classes. A series of meetings were held by the pupils, where they discussed and formulated their grievances against the system of coloured education. On March 13th, students on the Cape Flats called a meeting to discuss the system of 'gutter education', and an ad hoc committee of parents and pupils was formed. Amongst those present at this meeting were three young white teachers

from the Crystal Senior Secondary School - Liz Everett, Brenda Liebowitz and Barbara Houghton.

A week later, on March 20th, some 800 parents and scholars drawn from Crystal Senior Secondary and Mountainview High Schools met in Hanover Park, where those present formulated their objections to coloured education. These included

- + a shortage of text books;
- + students being forced to buy stationery;
- + principals enforcing the wearing of expensive school uniforms;
- + a shortage of teaching staff;
- + the abuse of corporal punishment, including the beating of girls;
- + headmasters refusing pupils permission to form recognised representative councils (SRC's);
- + poor school facilities;
- + buildings which had been damaged during 1976 - 77 had still not been repaired.

Later that week, pamphlets calling for solidarity amongst parents, pupils and workers were widely distributed throughout the Cape Peninsula, and a specific call for the removal of the principals of Mountainview and Crystal Senior Secondary Schools was made.

On March 28th, the three teachers who had attended the previous meeting of pupils and parents were dismissed from their posts at Crystal Senior Secondary. 2 days later, pupils from Crystal and Mountainview met and called for the unconditional reinstatement of the teachers. "These teachers showed solidarity with us, and we must now show solidarity with them" was the way a student leader put it. A meeting of representatives from the two schools decided to inform all their classmates and parents of the victimisation of the 3 teachers. (It should be noted that Minister of Coloured Relations, Marsie Steyn, claimed that the teachers had been dismissed to make way for 'suitably qualified coloured teachers'. However, when school term re-opened in April, after the vacation break, no new teachers had been employed at Crystal Senior Secondary to replace the dismissed 3).

80.04.07. Student representatives from 19 Cape High Schools, as well as from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and

Hewatt Training College met, and resolved to fight the education system for coloured pupils "at all levels". They set out a series of short-term demands which, they said, if not met within a week would lead them to consider boycott action. The demands included

- pay increases for teachers;
- better provision of school books;
- immediate repairs to schools damaged during the 1976-77 riots;
- reinstatement of the 3 teachers dismissed from Crystal Senior Secondary school;
- removal of the principal of Crystal Senior Secondary.

Placards were posted on the fence at the Wynberg offices of the Administration of Coloured Affairs. They proclaimed that

"Our parents are forced to work because the bread price had increased. School books are not free. Rents and rates are increased. They have no say. Solidarity Workers Students Parents",

and

"Racist education to divide student workers of tomorrow. The education we are receiving is providing Cheap Labour for the Capitalist".

80.04.09. It was announced that the principals of Crystal Senior Secondary and Mountainview High schools had been transferred, and Minister Steyn said that repairs to damaged school buildings would be undertaken. The representatives of the 21 educational institutions which had met on March 7th (the United Education Front) rejected these moves as insufficient - "it just scratches the surface. The whole system has to be changed".

80.04.11. Pamphlets calling for pupil solidarity and resistance to gutter education were widely distributed on the Peninsula. They stated that most of the pupils' grievances involved "economic issues strongly felt in working class areas like Hanover Park. The burden of enforced uniforms, expensive stationary and text books and forced levies, hits working class families hard". The pamphlet went on to say that students had "mobilised against their inferior education which keeps them in their oppressed position".

Fezela High, IO Mkize and Langa High schools, all based in african townships, joined the United Education Front planning committee.

80.04.13. A mass meeting was held where representatives of african, indian and coloured pupils in the Western Cape were joined by students from UWC and Hewatt Training College. It was decided not to launch an immediate boycott of classes, as certain victories had been won from the authorities (the removal of principals, a promise to repair school buildings). Instead, Coloured Relations was given until the end of the month to fully meet the demands previously made.

A representative of Belgravia High school explained that the promises made by Steyn were insufficient.

"The steps undertaken by Mr Steyn, to supply proper text books and to keep the school buildings in good repair are the run-of-the-mill things any good administration should do.

What we are dissatisfied with is the general low standard and poor conditions surrounding coloured education".

80.04.14. Despite the decision taken the previous day not to launch a boycott of classes at present, hundreds of pupils do begin to boycott lessons at school. At Fezela High School in Guguletu, 800 boycotting pupils demand the right to form an SRC; the same demand is made at Wynberg Senior Secondary, while placards reading "reject racial education" are put up by pupils at Bridgetown and Steenberg High.

A mass meeting is held at Hewatt Training College, and there is a call for an immediate boycott of classes protesting against inferior racial education.

80.04.15. Pupils at Spies Bona High School, one of the largest schools in the Athlone area, boycott classes, and demonstrate by marching around the school, and placing placards on the school fence setting out their grievances.

A total stay-away from classes is reported from Parkwood High School.

80.04.16. Minister Steyn says that 'positive attention' is being given to the pupils' grievances.

Pupils decide to boycott classes until the end of the week, and then to decide on further action.

Many more schools join the boycott of classes.

80.04.17. Elsies River High, Elwood High, Bellville South High, Manenburg, Silverstone High, Manenburg High and Gordons High School in Somerset West are reported to be boycotting classes.

80.04.18. Cathkin High in Heideveld joins the boycott; pupils at Vista High School walk out of classes and demonstrate in the school quadrangle; for the third day running, pupils at Kensington High School refuse to attend classes.

The only Indian High School in Cape Town, Rylands, joins the boycott of classes. A statement is issued by Rylands boycotters dedicating themselves to "fight oppression and racist education which divides us from our fellow South Africans". It is further stated that education is an "ideological control on the part of the state" designed to "train people for the cheap labour market".

In Johannesburg, between 2 000 and 5 000 coloured school children march in protest against 'inferior education'. Security police and flying squad forces intercept and break up the march. Steyn says that the issue is not one of education, but of children being influenced by propaganda. He accuses suspended AZAPO president, Curtis Nkondo, of going to the Western Cape to incite scholars, and notes that Nkondo 'is not a coloured man'.

80.04.19. Over 25 000 pupils are reported to be boycotting classes. In the Western Cape, the boycott spreads to Strand and Somerset West schools.

At Hewatt College 248 representatives from 52 Western Cape educational institutions meet and decide that the boycott should continue the following week. They call on pupils to go to school/campus, but to stay away from classes. Representatives are present from almost every senior secondary school on the Peninsula, as well as from Paarl, Worcester, Stellenbosch and a number of tertiary educational institutions. They reject statements made on their behalf to the press by 'racist bodies' like the Labour Party, lecturers at racist institutions, and 'reactionary organisations like the Cape Teachers' Professional Association (CTPA).

An umbrella student body is elected at this meeting, to represent all institutions present. A series of demands, including the abolition of racial education, integration of all schools, the phasing out of armed soldier-teachers, and the creation of autonomous SRC's at schools, are made.

80.04.20. Students at the University of Natal medical school decide to boycott their graduation ceremony to protest against

discrimination in education.

A mass meeting of 2 000 at UWC decides to boycott all tests, assignments and classes. A meeting of 700 parents in the Grassy Park area decides to support the pupils in their boycott of classes and demands. Schools in George and Worcester join the boycott of classes.

The general theme of the boycott in the Western Cape suggests that education prepares scholars to become a cheap labour force for capitalism.

80.04.21. It is reported that more than 100 000 students from 70 schools in the Western Cape and Witwatersrand are boycotting classes. Eerats High School, Pretoria, Reiger Park High School, Boksburg, and Vredenberg Senior Secondary School in Saldanha Bay join in the boycott.

80.04.22. Boycott of classes spreads to Natal and Free State. Becket Training College, Durban, and Dr Blok High School, Bloemfontein closed when students demonstrate. Pupils at Lenasia schools begin boycotting classes, as do students at Fordeburg Teachers Training College, 2 Durban coloured schools, a Durban Teachers' Training College, and pupils at a Kimberley school.

10 000 pupils hold a rally in Bosmont, outside Johannesburg, and riot police in camouflage uniform fire tear-gas to disperse 8 000 marching pupils in the streets of Athlone. The pupils representative committee criticises the Athlone marchers, saying that they had violated a majority decision taken not to leave school premises during boycott action. The boycott reaches Port Elizabeth: 1 000 pupils at Bethelsdorp High School, and hundreds in East London join in demonstrations. Demonstrations of support are held at Dordrecht, Genadendal in the Little Karoo, on the East and West Rand, and at the University of Natal.

80.04.23. Police fire a shot, and baton charge 500 students trying to hold a meeting at Eldorado Park. Teargas is used to break up another meeting in Kliptown, and several pupils are injured.

In Natal, 6 000 students and pupils are reported to be boycotting, and police use teargas to disperse pupils at Wentworth.

Curtis Nkondo addresses students at Wits University, and calls for a white role in the boycott. Argues that white education is by no means perfect: it aims at indoctrination, while black education aims at domestication. A few hours later, Nkondo is detained by security police. This marks the beginning of a large security police swoop, with an ever-growing number of people being detained.

80,04,24. It is revealed that the government was warned six months previously that 'coloured education was in a mess, and headed for collapse'. Warning was issued by the Transvaal Regional Education Committee, with 50 000 children under its auspices.

Police baton-charge 500 Chateworth pupils holding a silent protest in their school grounds, and arrest two.

Pupils at Durban Indian Girls High School, Gandhi Desai, Orient High, Sastri College, ML Sultan Technikon, Wits University, Transvaal College of Education and Laudium High School join boycott.

Further reports of boycotts from Klerksdorp, Roodepoort, Potchefstroom, Middelburg (Transvaal), Grahamstown, Pietermaritzburg. Police say that in only three divisions - Northern Natal, Northern Free State and Namibia - have boycotts not been reported.

2 000 parents meet in Bellville and express solidarity with student demands.

4 000 pupils hold a mass meeting in East Pearl.

1 000 pupils in Grabouw boycott classes, while all senior secondary schools in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Humanadorp and Graaff-Reinet are reported to be boycotting classes.

80,04,25. Students at Actonville, Benoni, Randfontein, Eastern Cape and Durban reported to be joining boycott. 16 out of a total of 17 Indian and coloured high schools in the Eastern Cape are involved in the boycott of classes.

A NUMBER of important features have emerged from the current boycott of classes. These are most obvious in the Western Cape campaign, where pupil activity appears to be more organised and sophisticated than elsewhere.

1. The pupils have continually emphasised that the majority of them come from working class families, and that the financial burdens of racial education are being borne by the working class (their parents). In one of their pamphlets, they write that

"We are aware as students coming from working class backgrounds that our parents cannot afford to provide shelter, food and education for us. The policy of the state is to make it financially difficult for us to stay at school. We are then forced to leave school and join the cheap labour force".

(RESISTANCE AGAINST RACIAL EDUCATION).

The pupils have accordingly conceptualised their current struggle as a working class issue, rather than an educational issue. They have seen that while racial education affects all blacks in South Africa, it affects working class families in a more serious way than petty bourgeois black families.

2. Related to the above is the way the pupils of the Western Cape see the whole question of 'inferior' education. They have not, in general, argued for equality with white education, for they realise that white education is as functional to exploitation and oppression as black education is. They have stressed that the education they receive is functional to the maintenance of the ruling capitalist class in South Africa, and in rejecting that form of education, they also reject the political and economic system as a whole.

The pupils have not asked for technical improvements in the quality of education only - better laboratories, more funds etc. They have also demanded a change in the social content of education.

3. This is shown in the slogan they have adopted - AWAY WITH RACIAL EDUCATION. They have not called for equality with white education, but rather for an end to racially-based systems of education. Implicit in this is a critique of the nature and function of white education as producing oppressors, just as black education produces the oppressed.

4. The pupils' critique of the education they receive has included an anti-capitalist position. They have seen themselves as produced as cheap labour for a capitalist

economy:

"We reject apartheid and the economic system it is maintaining.

Every student in South Africa should realise that they are the workers of tomorrow and they will be exploited like their parents.

We reject the exploitation of our parents the workers".

The boycotting pupils have accordingly situated their education within a broader social context, seen the links between education and maintenance of an exploitative system, and realised that a change in education involves a change in the whole social system.

5. A strong current of non-racialism has been present in the activities of the Western Cape pupils. This has not only shown itself in the alliance between african, coloured and indian scholars, but also in the way the pupils of Crystal Senior Secondary School demanded the reinstatement of 3 victimised teachers who happened to be white. This non-racialism has manifested itself as an alliance of progressive forces, rather than an inter-racial solidarity for its own sake.

6. The pupils have worked hard in explaining the nature of their demands to other students, and to the community at large. Mass meetings of teachers, parents and others living in communities affected have been held, and the slogan of solidarity between students, workers and parents has been given a content and reality.

7. Related to the above has been the attempts to ensure that the whole boycott campaign is educative for its participants, and that the forms of organisation which have emerged are functional to consciousness-raising.

An important pamphlet issued explains that the short-term demands of the pupils must be linked to long term demands.

"These short term victories, however, are incomplete until they are linked up with long term goals. We must see how these short term demands are linked up with the political and economic system of this country. We must see how the fail/pass rate in schools are linked up with the labour supply for the capitalist system, how low quality school buildings are linked to the unequal allocation of funds to education for children of the oppressed and children of the oppressor, how inadequate library facilities are linked with the need to confine and limit the thoughts of the oppressed, how distorted history text books are

linked with the need to obscure and propagandise against the proud history of resistance of the indigenous people against economic slavery, how, in fact, the whole educational system against which we are rebelling, stems from the fact that we are denied basic political rights and thus political power".

