

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

EXTRACTS FROM THE UNIONS FIRST INFORMATION SHEET

In May of last year a group of teachers and academics on the Witwatersrand met to discuss the responsibility of educationists in view of the education crisis in the country. An interim committee was formed to involve more teachers and to contact existing teacher organizations. After another meeting, to widen our base and advertise our initiative and after obtaining press and radio coverage, a properly advertised meeting was held in the Selborne Hall in Johannesburg, at which the 600 people present passed the following resolution:—

1. That this meeting elect a council of some forty members to constitute the governing body of a non-racial association of South African educationists.
2. That such a council be empowered to elect its own executive committee to foster the establishment of branches of the association throughout South Africa and to co-opt representatives from these branches.
3. That this council and its executive committee then organize a national convention on education, at which a permanent constitution for such an association will be adopted.
4. That the name of the new association be the National Education Union of South Africa.
5. That the National Union give priority among its aims to the focussing of professional attention on the education crisis in South Africa and that it work for the achievement of a non-racial South African Teachers Council and a single and equal education system in South Africa, providing this does not imply centralized control.
6. That the National Union seek maximum co-operation with all existing teachers' associations.

The meeting was addressed by Mr Fanyana Mazibuko of the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee, the Rev. John Thorne, past president of the S.A. Council of Churches, Mr Ralph Thomas, President of the S.A. Union of Teachers and Professor Phillip Tobias, Dean of the Wits Medical School.

Other prominent community leaders, academics, school principals and clergymen, including Professor R. W. Charlton Deputy Chancellor of Wits University and Bishop Tutu, identified publicly with our move by sitting on the platform. The Council that was then elected (all 60 of those nominated) then held a meeting, at which the present executive was formed, with powers of co-option, to make itself more representative.

THE STARTING OF BRANCHES:

We hope that recipients of this information sheet will start branches elsewhere with control over their finances and with

intensive membership drives, so that a truly national and professional union can be formed. Existing teacher organizations, into which the profession is fragmented at present, and through which it is co-ordinated with the apartheid system, will continue to have to represent their members' interests, but we feel that we need at least, as well, a single body through which we can represent and take responsibility for the educational needs of the country as a whole. Doctors, lawyers, engineers etc. all have bodies which transcend apartheid, as these professions all have Statutory councils from which no member of these professions is excluded. Given the recurrent educational crisis in the country, we feel that we should have a major say in designing a more equitable system than the present one which so many students feel has been imposed on them by insensitive and ill-informed politicians, all of them white. By assuming such responsibility together, we will enhance education as a profession to the benefit of all teachers and all students.

Some 600 children have died violently under the present system as a result of disturbances provoked by its inequalities, when we have a special responsibility for the welfare of such young people. At our proposed National Convention we hope to bring to bear our educational experience to ensure the most profitable redistribution of resources.

ONE EQUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM:

In this connection our aims are:

1. Equal per capita expenditure on schooling for all children.
2. Equal facilities, buildings, playing fields, libraries, laboratories etc. in open schools.
3. Parity of salaries for teachers with the same qualifications.
4. Equal and open teacher training facilities.
5. Scope for cultural diversity, but within institutions open to all.

We are aware, however, that equality of opportunity can lead to inequalities of the grossest kind and that where class replaces race as a basis for discrimination the profession has a special responsibility. Therefore we are committed to education for equality in the broadest sense instead of a system which promotes privilege. Higher education is a privilege for which community service is due in return.

THE STRUCTURING, DESIGN AND CONTROL OF EDUCATION:

We recognize the interest of Government, churches, business and the other professions in the structuring and content of education, but insist on a far greater say than at present for

parents and educationists and an appropriate form of consultation with senior students. This should be reflected in the role the profession plays in the design and control of education and in a new realization that teaching depends on the educator as an autonomous, competent and responsible professional, someone whose promotion, for instance, should not depend on his deference to authority and someone whose initiative should not be undermined by bureaucratic directives. Only if this condition is met will there be a real decentralization of control and the desirable degree of variety and experimentation.

OUR ATTITUDE TO OTHER TEACHER ORGANIZATIONS:

The ideal would be for them to establish a single professional body, but not in the form of a federation of bodies which would perpetuate the divisions between us and continue to weaken the profession. Could they but decide to they could establish the body we need in a very short time. If some of them decide to we will have a strong professional body and our National Convention on Education that much sooner.□

ORGANISED BLACK POLITICAL RESISTANCE 1912–1950.

PART 2 1930 - 1950

from a talk to NUSAS by Tom Lodge

(Part 1, 1912 - 1930, was published in REALITY vol 13 no 2 March 1981)

The 1930s was a decade when both the ANC and the CPSA reached the lowest point in their influence. The Communists, from being the best organised, most militant grouping active amongst black South Africans, were to lose much of their popular following. This was partly a consequence of the systematic policy of harassment pursued by the state, and particularly the Minister of Justice, Oswald Pirow, but the Communist decline was not simply a result of more energetic repression. From 1933, with the ascendancy of Nazism in Germany, Communist parties throughout the world in conformity with the advice of the Communist International formed so-called 'popular front' alliances with reformist anti-fascist groupings. In South Africa, confronted with the attempts by Afrikaner nationalist forces to capture the white Labour Movement, Communists from the mid-thirties concentrated on combating what they perceived to be fascist tendencies amongst white workers. An all-white 'Peoples Front' was established and tacit support offered to the Labour Party. Symptomatic of their approach was a pamphlet addressed to white workers entitled 'Communism and the Native Question'. Part of it read:

'If the Kaffir Boetie jibe doesn't get home, such people will follow up with the shameless assertion that it will end up by all the races getting mixed up and 'How would you like your sister to marry a native?'. This sort of talk shows a great want of confidence in South

African women and is a cheap and unworthy insult to them. It overlooks the fact that neither race **wants** to mix with the other. Where racial intercourse (sic) does take place, it is largely due to the poverty and backwardness of the native women which leaves them without self-respect'²⁸

Party newspapers carried less African news, and according to the memories of some of its African members, increasingly they felt that with its strivings for a particular type of respectability it was no longer **their party**²⁹. Revival was only to come slowly with the transfer of the party's headquarters to Cape Town in 1937 and its reintegration into the Cape radical tradition which had begun amongst African and coloured workers a decade earlier³⁰.

Meanwhile an ever-shrinking Congress floundered its way through the 1930s. Under the leadership of Pixley ka Izaka Seme tensions between different leadership cliques increased and Congress's popular impact dwindled. Seme's approach and the reason for Congress's decline are apparent in this quotation from an article written by him in 1932:

I wish to urge our educated young men and women not to lose contact with your own chiefs. You should make your chiefs and your tribal Councils feel that education is a really good thing. It does not spoil their people nor detribalise them. Most of the miseries which our people suffer in the towns and the country today is