RESA

RESEARCH ON EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

3

PAPER NUMBER THREE

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID EDUCATION: TOWARDS PEOPLE'S EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

CONTENTS

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID EDUCATION: TOWARDS PEOPLE'S EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

Over the past twenty years education has been a focal point of political contestation between the apartheid regime and a range of oppositional forces.

Opposition to the Bantu Education Act (1953) began in the 1950s and, after a hiatus in the 1960s, crystallised in the 1976 student uprisings in Soweto and countrywide. Soweto 1976 was a turning point in two ways. Firstly, it sparked, together with the industrial workers' strikes of 1973, the process which led to the revival of organised mass political opposition to the apartheid system. Secondly, although in 1976 the focus was narrowly on *opposition* to Bantu Education, the objectives of the struggle were soon broadened and eventually expressed in demands for 'people's education'.

The object of this paper is to situate the educational struggle in the context of the changing economic, political and educational structural conditions which emerged at different points in the period from the mid-1950s.*

Each phase of the conflict is situated first, within the major political and economic, and second, within the education structural conditions. These conditions established the limits of, and shaped the struggles and processes which tended to maintain or threaten and transform those conditions. The point of departure, therefore, is a periodisation of the political and economic structures.

The 1950s Opposition to the Bantu Education Act and its Implementation

The instrument formulated by the regime in the 1950s to restructure African education was the Bantu Education Act. This restructuring was part of a policy aimed, firstly, at protecting white workers from the threat of African competition for skilled jobs which emerged as a result of economic expansion coupled with African rural-urban migration during the Second World War; secondly, at meeting the

---

demands of white farmers for unskilled African labour and, hence, to stem rural-urban migration.

It was hardly necessary to recall that the st_d purpose of the Act was to implement Christian National Education in the sphere of African education and that this meant, in Verwoerd's notorious words:

> 'There is no place for him (the Native) 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, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze.' (Quoted in P Kalloway, *Apartheid in Education*).

This view, as is well known, informed the provisions of the Act which empowered the government to establish 'bantu schools' and to ban any school or educational programme which did not conform to the conception of 'bantu education'. It then became a criminal offence to run schools and educational programmes which had not received state approval.

One response to this policy came from the churches which, through 5 000 state-aided mission schools, provided an important complement to state education for Africans. Rather than teach the imposed bantu education curriculum, many of these schools were closed down by the churches.

Little opposition came from within the African schools themselves. On the one hand the teachers, although organised to a certain extent, were largely concerned with their own conditions of employment. On the other hand there was no national student organisation within the schools and although there were many regional and local organisations, they were not politically significant due, at least in part, to the fact that there were very few secondary school students — students, that is, who were likely to have the knowledge and maturity to conduct independent political work — and furthermore, these were scattered throughout the country. Of the 860 000 African pupils at school in this period, only some 35 000 were in secondary schools.

In this situation opposition to the proposed Act was organised by the ANC, outside of the schools, in the black communities. The ANC tried to win broad support to prevent the Act from becoming law. When the Act was, nonetheless, passed the ANC called for a boycott of the Bantu Education schools and attempted to provide alternative schools. Although many students observed the boycott at the behest of their parents, support for it was by no means unanimous. Furthermore, the alternative schools could not be sustained because of lack of resources and because the state used its powers under the Act to close these schools (or cultural clubs as they were called for the purpose of evading the law) and prosecute the teachers. As a result, organised opposition to Bantu education petered

2

out and the state was able to impose its control over the education of black people. Or apparently so.

1960/63 to 1973/76: Structures of Repression, Economic Change, Workers Strikes and the Soweto Uprisings

When the National Party came to power in 1948, there existed a relatively weakly developed extra-parliamentary political terrain which was, to some extent, protected by law. That terrain was immeasurably strengthened by the mass struggles in the 1950s and became defined by a matrix of organisations — trade unions, ANC, PAC, Indian Congresses and so forth — through which the struggles were conducted.

The reaction of the regime was to continuously attack the constituents of the extra-parliamentary structure and to reduce such legal and judicial protection as they enjoyed. Increasingly, legal protection was undermined, the organisations subjected to harassment and restrictions and the 'relative' autonomy of the judiciary narrowed not only by legal enactment but also by the shift from parliamentary supremacy to executive domination over both parliament and the judiciary.

Despite this, the arena of 'civil society' persisted until the early 1960s. Sharpeville 1960 and the turn to armed struggle in 1961 provided the occasion for a decisive restructuring of the political sphere which had far-reaching political and economic consequences. The political restructuring resulted in the overall subordination of parliament and the judiciary to the executive. Within the executive, the cabinet assumed dominance over both the bureaucracy and the coercive apparatuses of the state.

Paradoxically, this restructuring occurred within a context in which parliamentary legislative 'supremacy' continued. The legislation adopted by parliament created discretionary powers for the executive, shrank the jurisdiction of the courts, and substantially transferred municipal authorities' administrative powers over urban Africans outside the bantustans to a ministerial department. In the sphere of education, the policy-making powers of the provincial councils was limited and those of the Department of Bantu Education increased.

These and other laws contributed significantly to the establishment of the dominance of the executive over other state apparatuses.

At the same time, proscriptive legislation, the enlargement of the bureaucratic apparatuses involved in controlling the political sphere, and the expansion of powers and size of the state coercive apparatuses, resulted in the virtual abolition of the sphere of extra-parliamentary politics — for instance, the banning of the African National Congress and of the Pan Africanist Congress, rendering inoperative the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Transvaal Indian Congress and so forth.

Thus, a structural closure was effected which severely limited the formation of new, and the functioning of existing, extra-parliamentary oppositional organisations, whether legal or illegal. The possibilities of mass politics were drastically

curtailed and, instead, organised activity became confined to small-scale underground work and the actions of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC.

In turn, this narrowly circumscribed the political demands that could be made. If the struggle for reforms is to carry with it the possibility of the social transformation of the existing system, rather than simply its modification, then mass organisation and participation is a *sine qua non*. Since this was, in this period, in general, precluded, the immediate demands (albeit with radical connotations), around which the mass campaigns of the 1950s were organised — pass laws, education, living conditions, wages etc — could not be raised. In this situation, the armed struggle and underground work could only pose directly, and abstractly, the goal of overthrowing apartheid.

While general political organisation and mobilisation remained very limited, two processes within, and indeed, facilitated by, the structural constraints, provided the conditions for the emergence of struggles which, in turn, led to the transformation of these structures.

Firstly, through most of the 1960s, the economy was characterised by a general boom — the political 'stability' described above was an essential condition of this boom which further blunted mass opposition through an expansion of black employment and a rise of wages in some sectors.

Of considerable importance is the fact that economic growth was accompanied by an increase in the concentration of capital with a number of large mining companies, pre-eminently Anglo-American, acquiring shares in and taking over enterprises in the non-mining sector including agriculture.

One effect of this was capital intensification — vastly increased investment in technology and an expansion in employment — particularly in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. This gave rise to a demand for an increasingly differentiated black labour force. There was both a demand for more semi-skilled and unskilled low-wage labour in the mines as well as in other sectors and *also a demand for more skilled, manual, technical, administrative and clerical black workers,* chiefly in manufacture, in the service sector, in state bureaucracies, particularly in the bantustans, and to a lesser extent in mining.

Secondly, the growing demand for a more skilled black workforce contributed to the great increase in the number of schools and universities for black students and to the vast expansion of the school-going population. The statistics show that in 1954 there were 680 000 African pupils at school, but by 1968 the total was 2 397 152 and by 1975 it had reached 3 697 441. Of considerable significance was the numerical increase in secondary and tertiary students (although the ratio to primary school students remained virtually unchanged) as Table One indicates.

This expansion of the black educational sector took place under an administrative structure established in terms of the Bantu Education Act of 1953. The Department of Bantu Education, established by the 1953 Act, combined centralised bureaucratic control over educational planning, examinations and registration of

schools with regional directorates controlling teachers and inspecting schools and local school boards, and school committees managing schools, employing teachers and planning and carrying out the building of new schools.

TABLE ONE
Total Enrolment of African Primary and Secondary School Pupils, 1953-1958

	Primary	Secondary
1953	852 000	30 700
1955	970 200	35 000
1960	1 452 300	47 600
1965	1 833 000	65 600
1970	2 615 400	122 500
1975	3 378 900	318 500
1980	4 061 900	773 900
1981	4 229 600	829 700
1982	4 391 100	912 500
1983	4 546 300	1 001 200
1984	4 699 200	1 096 700
1985	4 820 100	1 192 009

In the bantustans the school committees consisted of two members appointed by the Secretary of Bantu Education and five members appointed by the tribal authority or the chief (two to represent the chief and three to represent the parents). In the urban townships outside bantustans the school committees consisted of two nominees of the local Bantu Commissioner, two nominees of the Secretary of Bantu Education and four elected representatives of the parents. The school boards, which employed the teachers, were made up of nominees of the tribal authority in rural areas and the nominees of the Secretary of Bantu Education and the Bantu Commissioner in urban areas with the parent members of school committees electing four members of the board in their area.

It can be seen that the considerable decentralisation of administration did not entail democratisation as control of school committees and boards remained with the bantustan authorities in rural areas, and to a somewhat lesser extent, with the local Bantu Commissioners in urban areas. It did, nevertheless, devolve functions on to the school boards and committees and, furthermore, decentralisation provided a degree of insulation of the educational institutions from other coercive apparatuses of the state to the extent that they exercised a certain relative autonomy in the educational sphere.

Furthermore, the functioning of the black schools and universities as educational institutions entailed and was premised on the daily concentration and interaction of students. Nothing turned on this when the preponderance of students were in

5

the early, primary years of schooling, but with large concentrations of secondary school and higher level students new political possibilities came into existence. The schools and the universities, that is, provided a legitimate space for students to meet and develop their ideological and political positions.

Thus, the expansion of the secondary and higher educational student population within the administrative structure described above, was politically of great significance because, above all, it resulted in the establishment of a partially 'protected' political space relatively shielded from the repressive state apparatuses. This constituted a necessary condition for the possible development of new forms of ideological and political opposition to the apartheid system.

Conditions favourable to realisation of this possibility also occurred in the economy where, through a parallel process, the way was paved for the resurgence of the black trade union movement in the early 1970s.

The non-racial trade union movement collapsed in the early 1960s and left black workers largely unorganised for a decade. What organisation there was was rudimentary and underground, or strictly focused on narrow trade union issues. However, the increasing demand for labour, both skilled and unskilled, opened the way to important changes. To begin with, the desire to avert mass strikes and worker political mobilisation led to the granting of limited strike rights and the establishment of the Work Council system, which paved the way for large-scale union recruitment in the 1970s. The conditions in the economy also encouraged employers, in certain sectors, to make wage concessions and a limited right to strike was included in the 1973 Black Labour Regulation Act, which also established works committees. Strikes and worker organisation re-emerged in the early 1970s amongst skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled black workers.

To return to the education sphere. It was pointed out above that the central objective of Bantu Education was devised to produce a black population not only educated to a level considered adequate for unskilled work and subordinated, but which would also accept its subordination and inferior education as natural, as fitting for a 'racially inferior' people. Hence, firstly, an extremely low level of state funding resulting in poorly trained and unqualified teachers, the virtual absence of laboratories, decrepit buildings and inadequate facilities. Secondly, syllabuses which virtually excluded science subjects and mathematics and required the teaching of racist histories proving the 'superiority' of the whites, devaluing pre-colonial African societies, denigrating the role of black people in the construction of modern South Africa, and asserting the incapacity of black people to exercise political power and democratic rights.

Undoubtedly, Bantu Education generally succeeded, only too well, in limiting the educational advancement of the black people and in blocking the acquisition of basic skills — numeracy, literacy and so forth, (although, it should be noted, that this 'success' seems to have boomeranged in the present changed economic conditions for it has contributed to the persistent shortages of skilled labour).

But, despite the ideological weight of its institutional structure, the project of

Bantu Education to create a servile population failed. Towards the end of the 1960s the classrooms, particularly in the secondary schools, and the lecture theatres in the black universities became venues for the development and expression of an oppositional ideology — indeed, given the virtual obliteration of the extra-parliamentary opposition and the pervasiveness of state terror, these were virtually the only places, at that time, where such an opposition could develop. Black Consciousness emerged first as an ideological movement focusing attention on such issues as the unequal nature of the education system, the poor health of the black population, poverty, low wages, and mass pass arrests.

It was this virtually exclusive concentration on ideological activity, on debate and discussion, made possible by the character of the educational institutions, which enabled the Black Consciousness Movement to exploit the relative protection enjoyed by these institutions.

In the early 1970s due, perhaps, to the rising unemployment and falling living standards brought about by economic recession, and the deteriorating conditions of black education resulting from its 'massification' without adequate funding, the ideological and political debate began to be translated into organised political action, in the schools and universities, directed, in the first instance, against Bantu Education as an instrument of white domination. The schools seethed with activity — the record shows literally thousands of protests, strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations against the conditions of Bantu Education in the period from 1969 to 1976.

These oppositional struggles erupted in the Soweto student uprisings of 1976. They were triggered by the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in black schools. The explosive effect on Black Consciousness movements of a decision that the 'language of the white oppressor' had to be utilised was revealed in the massive revolt which spread to many parts of the country as students came out in solidarity with Soweto. A period of extreme state violence followed. The police shot and killed, in 1976-7, some 1 000 students and others and arrested countless more as the state attempted to crush the student revolt.

The character and trajectory of the education struggles in 1976 (and, indeed, in the following years) contrast, in a number of significant ways, with the struggles of the 1950s.

Firstly, in the 1950s, as already pointed out, the struggle against Bantu Education was initiated by non-student organisations outside of the educational institutions; in the 1970s it was initiated inside the schools and universities and by the students and their own organisations. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasise two features to which I have already drawn attention. In the first place, virtually no political organisation existed outside of education — indeed, this was a major characteristic of the political structure. In the second place, the demographic changes in the schools and universities (*35 000 African secondary school students in the mid-1950s, over 318 000 by 1975; 1 571 African university students in 1955, 9 181 in 1975*) established the possible basis of a political constituency — it was within this constituency and among the black university students that major

oppositional politics began to develop in the late 1960s.

Secondly, in the 1950s, once the Bantu Education Act was in place, the political struggles against the Act gave way to the campaign for a school boycott which was coupled with the attempt to establish alternative schools. The struggle for education became, to a considerable extent, focused on the task of setting up and maintaining independent schools.

In the 1970s, although from the beginning student actions took on a variety of forms — demonstrations, rallies, walk-outs, occupations and so forth — a frequently used tactic of the struggle was, as in the 1950s, the boycott of the schools. But, in the Soweto period, the boycott became part and parcel of a strategy to politically mobilise the students to struggle for the abolition of Bantu Education; the objective was not to defeat Bantu Education by setting up alternative schools.

Thirdly, while in the 1950s the 'community' (through the ANC) made the schools boycott part of its broader struggle, in the 1970s the students brought the community into their own struggle not merely by conducting their political activity in the townships, but more directly, by attempting to mobilise parents, workers and other members of the communities.

Although, in the first stages of the Soweto revolt, the students themselves were the actors and their demands centred more or less narrowly on education, broad sections of the population were rapidly drawn into confrontations with the state. The broadening of the struggle into the communities reflected the understanding, which was soon brought home to the students, that Bantu Education could not be overturned unless apartheid itself was dismantled and that this could not be achieved by the students acting alone and without the involvement of the workers, parents and community. These groups, however, despite the revival of shop-floor struggles in the factories from 1973, were largely unorganised and quiescent. Indeed, the failure of Bantu Education to produce a compliant and quiescent generation of youth was dramatised by the fact that it was the parents of the students, subjected to the power of the state at the work place and in the communities, who, despite continuing underground activities of the ANC and the Communist Party, had become either fearful or incapable of acting.

The story of the student-led community struggles, which included stay-at-homes, demonstrations and other actions, is complicated and cannot be traversed here. Suffice it to stress that, for a period, a relatively short period, the school and university students, the black youth, occupied the centre stage and provided a vital stimulus which accelerated the formation and regeneration of extra-parliamentary political organisations and, in due course, the intervention of the masses as a political force.

This leadership role of the students, however, was not to be maintained for long and, paradoxically, this was precisely because of the restructuring of the political terrain to which the student movement contributed so much.

From Soweto 1976 to the UDF 1983

This period saw the crystallisation of two contradictory sets of structures — on the one hand, the increasing centralisation and militarisation of state power; on the other hand, the increasing strength and breadth of the terrain of civil society expressed through the developing organisational structure of the opposition. While the process began under the conditions set out above and was propelled forward by the student struggles in the previous period, the emerging structural conditions shaped the ensuing struggles.

The widespread organised political opposition that began after Soweto and included the development of an independent trade union movement posed, once again for the regime, the question of control and stability. The political stability of the decade from 1963 to 1970 appeared to be over. For the regime, the only way to contain the opposition within limits, given changes within the economy and divisions within the white power bloc, seemed to be through a vast strengthening of the centralised power of the executive. This took shape as part of the 'total strategy'.

In the first instance, parliament was further subordinated to the cabinet and, as a complement, the control of the National Party conference over policy was weakened. But centralisation was accompanied by strong divisions between branches of the executive over the direction of policy, in particular over African administration, security policy, and the economy. Certain branches of the executive acted autonomously, without reference to collective cabinet decisions.

This was brought to an end by an increase in the power vested in the office of the Prime Minister and a reduction in cabinet control over policy. The Prime Minister's control of the cabinet was fully consolidated by the end of the period. At the same time the military and security forces were brought centrally into the organs of civilian administration.

The position of the judiciary changed to some extent, although it continued to be restricted in many areas of jurisdiction. Certain judges, given courage by the rise of the mass struggles, began to utilise the judicial space to challenge some accepted interpretations of the law, particularly with regard to influx control and labour law — in both areas there was some support for new interpretations from within the cabinet. Yet, judicial autonomy continued to operate on an extremely narrow terrain.

Coupled with the centralising and militarisation process, there occurred an increasing decentralisation of African social affairs to bantustan administrations and, in non-bantustan areas, community councils with a minority of elected members. These bodies remained (and remain) under ultimate central control but carry out functions which significantly affect people's lives because of their powers to collect rents and allocate housing in urban townships and administer health, education, social welfare, land policy and the labour bureau system in bantustans.

This devolution of functions to local structures opened space for political action and organisation, particularly in the non-bantusan urban areas which were exploited by the emergent organisations to mobilise the people and strengthen

themselves. For example, the elections to the community councils, by creating a space for 'legitimate' politics, provided the opportunity for new community organisations to be formed and for new and old bodies to deepen their links with the people in the course of campaigns to boycott the elections.

Indeed, utilisation of the spaces opened up by changes in the labour law and in African administration made possible the growth of youth, women's and civic associations, locally and then regionally, which opposed changes in educational administration, township administration, rent and bus fare rises, and the repressive features of bantustan administration.

While the restructuring of the political terrain was the direct result of the political struggles and the response of the regime, at the same time, the introduction of such structural reforms (however limited) and their consolidation was encouraged and facilitated by pressures which were related to changes in the economic structure.

The effect of the economic decline and reduced growth in the GDP, which began in the early 1970s and continued to 1978, was further monopolisation and concentration of capital in the large mining houses, the Cape agribusiness companies, and a few large manufacturing and retail conglomerates. This occurred, in part, because of the capacity of large-scale capital to take over weaker and, indeed, bankrupt companies. The decline was temporarily reversed with the increase of investment capital following the rise in the price of gold (1977-80). Foreign multinationals increasingly engaged in joint ventures with the local monopoly sector, which itself increasingly took on state contracts in the defence and other industries.

One crucial consequence of the growing economic dominance of corporate capital in all sectors of the economy was the further intensification of mechanisation in production. In agriculture, this resulted in halving of employment between 1970 and 1980. In mining, manufacturing and the tertiary sector there were increases in employment but, nonetheless, this was accompanied by changes in the labour process and the division of labour which resulted in a vastly enlarged demand for more skilled black workers. A similar process occurred in the bantustans with the expansion of manufacturing, commercial agricultural production and the administrative structure into these areas. At the same time, it should be noted, there was also retrenchment of unskilled and semi-skilled workers leading to a sharp rise in unemployment between 1977 and 1980.

These different tendencies in the economy had contradictory effects. On the one hand, the conditions of vast sections of the black population were worsened. A massive removal of farmworkers from white-owned farms into the bantustans resulted in a huge army of unemployed being situated in these undeveloped areas. In addition the wages of unskilled workers fell, particularly as in the times of recession employers cut overtime which accounted for 20% of take-home pay.

Retrenchments and falling wages, combined with emerging union organisation, led to a high degree of worker militancy with exceptionally large numbers of

strikes in 1981-2. This was followed by a rapid growth in union membership. In a number of strikes (eg Fattis and Monis and the Johannesburg night shift workers) links were made between unions and community organisations.

On the other hand, wages continued to rise for skilled and clerical black workers. Rising black wages led to an increase in the black consumer market, particularly among skilled, clerical and professional workers. The large corporations, having saturated the white consumer market and facing increased competition for their goods on international markets attached considerable importance to this development and so did a section of the cabinet, which believed that material advance could serve to buy off more fundamental political demands.

In addition, a reformist tendency, which had both economic and political roots, emerged among corporate capital and provided support for the reformist elements within the regime, even if particular policies pursued by the latter were thought to be insufficient or inadequate. As far as the corporate sector was concerned, the reformist tendency was expressed in corporate support for the legalisation of black trade unions and recognition of their role in industrial relations, in the provision of black housing and in contributions to the expansion of the educational infrastructure.

Despite the strengthening of the coercive power of the state, the political and economic changes outlined above resulted in the emergence of political, community and trade union structures which facilitated the development of the organisational basis of mass struggles against the regime.

This resurgence, which followed on the student-led actions in 1976 and after, amounted to the resurrection of the extra-parliamentary terrain. The main features of this reconstructed terrain were: firstly, the re-emergence of the leading role of the ANC, the revival of dormant, and the formation of new, organisations in the black communities; secondly, the rise of the independent black trade unions, a significant part of which associated itself with the national liberation struggle.

These developments shifted the centre of gravity away from the student movement. That is to say, issues other than education and non-student organisations — that is community and political organisations and, to some extent, the trade unions — assumed an increasing importance. This is not to suggest either that the students' struggles lost their importance or that educational issues became detached from the broader opposition to apartheid. But the educational struggle and the students' organisations and activities were no longer either the sole or, indeed, the centre of the struggle against the apartheid regime. They became part of an extremely widespread, frequently highly localised, array of organisations engaged in political activities, often organised around specific local issues which were increasingly cast in the broader framework of the Freedom Charter.

Indeed, it was the integration of the student organisations and struggles into this matrix of political opposition that made it possible for the education struggles to continue despite the fact that in education, in response to the Soweto uprisings, the regime implanted highly centralised and authoritarian structures of control.

It was precisely the devolution of powers over appointments and the running of the schools to the township school committees and school boards in the earlier period under the Bantu Education Act which had made them susceptible to popular pressures and demands. The Soweto uprisings led to the virtual collapse of the system in 1976-7 when a large number of school boards and committees resigned in protest at the actions of the Department of Bantu Education (DBE) at that time. When the DBE was restructured according to the legislation of 1979, school boards and school committees in urban townships had their powers drastically curtailed and provision was made for the minister to assume their functions if he deemed it necessary. In 1978 and 1979 key features of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 were replaced by new legislation. Education policy was no longer to be decided solely in parliament but by the Minister of Education and Training in consultation with an Advisory Council for Education, consisting of 20 appointed members. The Minister was given the power to establish or dis-establish state and community schools. Community schools, erected by local African communities and managed by school boards and committees, could be taken over by the Minister and converted into state schools, as in fact happened.

Local management of schools, however, became displaced by local consultation. The Minister acquired the power to replace a school board or committee with his own appointees, and divested these local committees of their powers to employ teachers. From 1979 all teachers were employed directly by the Department of Education and Training (DET) and subject to its disciplinary code. The Minister assumed direct control over the syllabuses taught and the examinations set.

These changes in the structure of educational administration shifted the focus of student opposition from the school boards and committees to the central state, and for this reason the education struggles shifted from the schools to the general political arena. This, as will be discussed below, facilitated the further development of the boycott strategy.

Various student organisations played important roles in the period from 1976 to 1980: the South African Students' Organisation in the universities and the South African Students' Movement in the schools were initially the most important; later the lead was taken by the Soweto Students' Representative Council, which was formed in August 1976, and after it was banned in 1978, by the Soweto Students' League. A number of student organisations came into existence at the turn of the decade; the most important of these was the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), organising secondary school pupils, and the Azanian Students' Organisation AZASO, organising tertiary level students.

Both these organisations supported the Freedom Charter and both focused their politics on the educational arena with demands for a non-racial and democratic educational system in a unitary, non-racial democracy. The themes were: 'The doors of learning and culture shall be open', 'Education towards democracy', and 'Organising for people's education'. Political activity was organised around immediate educational conditions. These demands were linked to the struggle,

under working class leadership, for democracy which was seen as a necessary condition for the reform of education. An important campaign for an Education Charter was launched in 1982. The object was, by elaborating the educational clause of the Freedom Charter, to formulate a charter of immediate and long term education demands in a mass campaign involving students, community groups, unions and so on.

1983-87: Mass Participation, Dual Power and the State of Emergency: People's Education for People's Power

The deepening and consolidation of the extra-parliamentary political terrain and of the establishment of authoritarian structures of educational administration and control reinforced the tendencies which had begun to emerge in the period up to 1983 — the framing of general educational demands by the students, directed at the state in campaigns outside the educational structure and linked to the community and other organisations.

In 1983, the regime introduced the Tri-cameral parliament. In opposition to this over 600 of the extra-parliamentary organisations came together in the United Democratic Front (UDF). Student organisations, which had played such an important part in preparing the ground for this unification, became part of the UDF.

The development of the extra-parliamentary opposition from local and regional organisations to national bodies was marked by two significant features. On the one hand, it involved a more precise linking of local, immediate, issues to the Freedom Charter and, in this way, to the ANC. In fact, the symbols of the ANC became widely adopted and much open consultation with the ANC by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), student organisations, the UDF, church bodies and others took place.

On the other hand, it was accompanied by an expansion and intensification of mass involvement in political actions. Politics was conducted through mass funerals, rent boycotts, large-scale street demonstrations, very widely supported stay-at-homes and similar activities. In this way, the masses became a structural component of the political arena.

During this period too, the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, increased its striking power and there was an escalation of armed actions.

Political opposition to the regime began to take the shape of an insurrectionary movement. This was expressed in two ways: firstly, by the rejection, in the black townships, of the organs of local and central government and, secondly, as is discussed below, by the establishment of incipient centres of people's power in street committees, people's courts, people's education, worker organisation on the shop floor, and alternative organisations in medicine and health, non-formal education, social work and so forth.

The regime, unable to offer a reform programme acceptable to the popular organisations, attempted to meet these developments by a further concentration of power brought about by the restructuring of certain central and provincial state

apparatuses. Firstly, the State Presidency was redefined and considerable power concentrated in this office and in a number of appointed committees, such as the President's Council, the State Security Council and Interdepartmental Committees comprising senior civil servants, military appointees, and various designated experts. Legislation and policy formulation originated in these apparatuses. The cabinet and the various houses of the tri-cameral parliament were accorded only the power to rubber stamp the decisions of these bodies and, if they failed to do so, could be over-ridden by the President's Council.

At the provincial level, the old form of white elected councils was replaced by appointed regional executives. Municipal authority was also circumscribed by the appointment of Joint Management Committees, part of the National Security Management System directed by the military, with responsibility for the co-ordination of coercive apparatuses and the 'reformist' administration of education, transport and housing policy.

Secondly, in 1985 the regime declared a state of emergency, increasing the already considerable powers of the coercive apparatuses, and rendering them virtually (although by no means completely) immune from judicial restraint.

This process was echoed in the sphere of education. The DET, headed by a member of the cabinet, continued to administer African education outside the bantustans on the basis of policies formulated both within the cabinet and in a number of advisory committees, like the President's Council and interdepartmental ex-executive committees, many with a strong military presence.

There is evidence that some of the local planning for African education, particularly in the wake of the mass student militancy of 1984-5, was carried out by the appointed Joint Management Committees (JMCs), which were (and still are) normally chaired by a member of the military or security forces and include local businessmen and others prepared to co-operate with the JMCs.

The JMCs, which operate at local level with central direction, have both a security section and a welfare section. The security section co-ordinates with military commanders and has probably been partly responsible for the use of the military in attacking and terrorising students, detaining student leaders, preventing the dissemination of people's education materials in schools and regularly patrolling schools inside and outside the bantustans.

The welfare section, also acting in consultation with the military, has organised re-education centres for ex-detainees, often co-ordinating with the DET, and has made considerable funds available for repairing and upgrading certain schools. The 'hearts and minds' approach to African education became a key element in the regime's security strategy.

In brief, the further centralisation of the executive and the increased power of the military and security forces within the executive at the national level was replicated in the educational system at both the national and local levels. Against this there was a mounting tide of opposition and by 1985 the key question had become reform or revolution, signalling an enormous shift in the balance of power

between the contending blocs by comparison, say, with the 1970s. Yet, the situation was characterised by an unstable equilibrium in which the white power bloc, while holding state power, was unable to suppress the revolutionary opposition which, in turn, did not yet have the capacity to overthrow the regime and the system.

One of the essential conditions which brought this 'unstable equilibrium' into existence, and which created the possibility of dislodging the regime and of setting in motion the process of transformation, was the strengthening and deepening of the mass democratic organisations, which occurred during the 1985 emergency. This was expressed in the slogan of 'Build the Organs of People's Power', as an addition to 'make South Africa ungovernable' and was reflected, above all, in the construction of alternative structures of dual power at the level of street and block committees. In his keynote address to the Second NECC in March 1986, Zwelakhe Sisulu expressed this in the following words:

> The slogan 'Forward to People's Power' expresses the growing trend for our people to move towards realising people's power **now** in the process of struggle, before actual liberation. By this we mean that people are beginning to exert control over their own lives in different ways. In some townships and schools people are beginning to govern themselves, despite being under racist rule. These advances were only possible because of the development of democratic organs, or committees, of people's power. Our people set up bodies which were controlled by, and accountable to, the masses of the people in each area. In such areas, the distinction between the people and their organisations disappeared. All the people, young and old, participated in the committees from street level upwards. (Z. Sisulu, 1986 'Keynote speech to the NECC Conference People's Education for People's Power in NECC, 1986, *Speeches and Resolutions from the Conference People's Education for People's Power* p.14-15, CIIR, London)

While the students participated in the struggles in the community through which the structures of dual power began to be erected, the character of that struggle precluded the construction of organs of people's power in the schools.

The utilisation of the regime of the JMCs as instruments of administration of black education reinforced the tendency, to which reference has already been made, for the education struggles to be directed against the regime and state rather than against the immediate organs of administration in the schools. It also reinforced the tendency for these struggles to occur in the communities rather than in the schools.

This tendency became solidified when, from 1983, the school boycott, which had previously served as one among other tactics, began to assume increasing importance. Indeed, the conception which developed of 'long-term' boycotts tended to turn the boycott weapon into a strategy, rather than a tactic, of political action.

In 1983, a school boycott was launched in the Pretoria area around demands for free text books, properly qualified teachers, the abolition of corporal punish-

ment, the ending of sexual harassment of young girl students and official recognition of the democratically elected Student Representative Councils (SRCs).

As the boycott movement gathered momentum and spread over the country the demand for democratically elected SRCs was pushed increasingly to the fore and, indeed, the struggle tended to shift from demands for the radical reform of the existing education system to a contestation with the state over control of the school — as it were, for 'people's power' in education.

In 1984 and 1985 the boycott strategy gained very widespread support — at one point some 650 000 students and hundreds of schools were involved. The DET responded by closing many schools. Student activists were harassed, arrested and detained (particularly during the emergency in 1985) and many killed in demonstrations. The major student organisation, COSAS, was banned in August 1985. The South African Defence Force occupied numerous black townships and the school yards. The presence of troops became a major focus of opposition.

By October 1985, schooling had been comprehensively disrupted and nowhere more so than in Soweto. Although the boycott remained the main form of student action, there were moves to re-open schools closed by the DET; there were also opposing strategies at work in relation to the examinations, with sections of the students wishing to sit them and others maintaining the boycott.

Be that as it may, the boycott had clearly succeeded by 1985 in rendering the schools unworkable and ungovernable and in this sense the shift of the objectives of the struggle from educational reform to control reflected, in the sphere of education, the call of the ANC to render South Africa ungovernable, although not the related call to institute people's power. In any event, in this situation, the slogan around which a more-or-less indefinite boycott (the boycott as strategy rather than as a tactic) became organised, at least in certain quarters, was: 'Liberation first, education later'.

People's Education for People's Power

By the middle of 1985, the effects on the student movement and the education struggle of the boycott strategy, which had played such an overwhelmingly important part in mobilising both students and the communities, came under scrutiny from outside the student movement. A conception of a crisis in the conduct of the education struggle began to emerge. The detailed history of the events which followed need not detain us here. It is sufficient to note that the concern over the effects of the boycott strategy led, firstly, to community conferences on the education crisis and then to the formation, in 1985, of the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee. Two conferences followed, the first National Education Crisis Conference in December 1985 and the second one, in March 1986, at which the decision to form the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) was taken. What is most important, however, is to ask what provoked these initiatives.

The central issue which pre-occupied the various conferences was the failure of the student organisations to exploit the conditions, brought into existence by

the struggles of the students themselves and the mass democratic movement to win specifically educational demands because of the continued adherence to the boycott. A range of issues were discussed at the conference, but the major considerations underlying the decisions taken at the December 1985 and March 1986 conferences can be analysed as follows.

In the first place, the breakdown of the schooling system meant that large numbers of secondary school students (the major sector of the schooling population involved in the boycott) were being deprived of further schooling and therefore of even the limited 'skilling' offered by Bantu Education. For many parents this overshadowed any political gains of the boycott actions. But the collapse of the educational system also had potentially extremely negative consequences for the entire national liberation and trade union movement. A major role in the resurgence of trade union and mass struggles from the early 1970s had been played by a generation of young black people educated to secondary and tertiary level under Bantu Education; the educational deprivation of the present generation of secondary school students threatened to weaken their contribution to a movement which was becoming increasingly organised and complex in its functioning.

In the second place, while there had undoubtedly been a great increase in the level of mobilisation of students and the involvement of an extremely large number in the boycotts, especially around the issue of democratic SRCs, over the previous two years, nonetheless the boycott of the schools had deprived students of a daily meeting place in which discussion and organisation could take place. As a consequence, the capacity to organise the students was reduced and the organisations began to lose coherence and also tended to disintegrate. A direct result of this incoherence was a breakdown in communication between students on a mass level, between students and leadership within organisations, and, at times, between the leadership themselves.

For this reason also there was a breakdown in communication between the students and the communities, resulting at times in a lack of community support for student campaigns and struggles. The community organisations were thus left uncertain as to the situation in the schools and the school boycotts. And with the banning of COSAS, the students found themselves without a means of co-ordinating strategy. The result of this was the further isolation of the student movement.

In the third place, the tendency to regard the boycott as an end in itself had the effect of obscuring its limitations under changed conditions. Furthermore, however successful in mobilising support, the boycott could not be sustained indefinitely. Indeed, it was the very success of the boycott in rendering the schools inoperative which posed the question of 'What next?'

To this question the student movement apparently had no answer (other than 'liberation first, education later') except to continue with the boycott. But the continuation of the boycott meant that the student movement and the students could not attempt to implement, in the education sphere, the call of the liberation movement to advance the establishment of structures of dual power. Thus the students

could not begin, in practice, to organise democratic control of the schools through SRCs or parent, teacher, student committees; only the *demand* for such bodies could be made and then only from outside of the schools themselves.

The boycott strategy, that is, permitted, in reality, only a struggle **against** Bantu Education and not **for** people's power in education. The contrast with the community struggles is instructive.

In the black townships, the opposition and resistance of the communities to the apartheid system as demonstrated in the struggles against the local administrative institutions and the army and police forces, created the conditions for the emergence of rudimentary forms of 'people's power' in the shape of street and block committees. That is to say, the capacity of the mass movement to render the townships ungovernable led to a situation in which alternative organs could begin to be put in place. However, the boycott movement, which, to begin with, played a vital role in increasing student (and popular) mobilisation against the apartheid regime, made a parallel development in the schools virtually impossible — the reason, of course, being that the very constituency which would have made this possible was absent from the schools (no longer present and interacting in the institutional site of contestation) due to the boycott.

Thus, whereas the communities were able to move from defiance of state structures to commence to replace them by organs of people's power, the students were left with only the boycott which put them outside the schools, that is, outside of the 'place' where alternative structures could be built or, indeed, alternative courses initiated.

The analysis made at the December conference led to the conclusion that it was necessary to break from the slogan 'Liberation now, education later'. To quote Sisulu once again:

> It is no accident that the historic December Conference (i.e. the First National Education Conference) took place at a time when our people were taking the struggle for democracy to new heights. At a time when the struggle against apartheid was being transformed into a struggle for people's power. In line with this, students and parents were no longer only saying: 'Away with apartheid gutter education!' We were now also saying 'Forward with People's Education, Education for Liberation'.

In rejecting the slogan of 'liberation first, education later' and adopting, instead, the slogan 'people's education for people's power', the conference, at the same time, criticised the opposition to Bantu Education which was purely negative in character and thereby failed to project a fundamentally different educational system, or failed to consider the way in which the struggle could be carried into certain of the apartheid institutions in order to begin their transformation, even before the overthrow of the regime had been accomplished, indeed, as part of the process of dislodging the regime.

18

In the view of the December conference, then, the attempt to win control of the schools or to substitute new teaching programmes would be impossible if the boycott strategy were maintained and the students remained outside of the schools.

For this reason, a major resolution of the conference was that students should return to school although conditionally upon certain demands being met by the DET. These demands included withdrawal of the SADF and SAP from schools and townships, release of students and teachers detained, reinstatement of dismissed teachers, unbanning of COSAS, recognition of democratically elected SRCs, and the lifting of the state of emergency.

The meaning of this decision was that the long-term struggle for 'people's education' could, and should, be conducted inside the schools and other educational institutions. Thus, the return to the schools was not to be understood as an acceptance of Bantu education, but rather as a recognition of the fact that the schools, in the conditions which had come into existence (partly as a result of the boycott), provided the fundamental terrain for the struggle towards people's power in education. Implicit in this position was a recognition that by the insertion of oppositional demands and teaching materials within the schools and universities, the contradictions within the sphere of education could be intensified.

This position was reinforced in the resolution of the National Education Crisis Conference of March 1986, which stated:

'... believing that:
a) education struggles must increasingly involve parents, teachers and students and all democratic organisations;
b) we will have to use new and creative tactics to advance education struggles.

Conference therefore resolves that:

All children should return to school when the new term starts to:
i) demand the right to education and occupy schools which have been closed;
ii) use the presence of students at school to assist in building and regrouping our student organisations;
iii) implement alternative people's education programmes immediately.

If the December 1985 and March 1986 Education Crisis Conferences echoed the earlier demands for control of education (and, indeed, the NECC attempted to organise the struggle for democratic students' representative councils and parent, teacher and student committees) but coupled these with the insistence that the struggle had to be conducted inside the schools, the demand for the immediate implementation of 'alternate people's education programmes' represented a new departure or emphasis.

In the struggles over education in the 1950s and 1970s described earlier, the aim

was, primarily, to end Bantu Education. But what was to replace it was by no means clearly spelt out. What seemed often to be implied and, in fact, what was sometimes stated explicitly, was a contention that black education should be resourced on a par with white education and that the same education as was provided for whites, freed, of course, of racism, should be made available to black people.

The formulation of the object of the education struggle in these terms seems to have been the inescapable consequence of the traditional criticism of Bantu Education, which was based upon a comparison of its inadequacies and impoverishment with the supposed adequacies and riches of white education. White education was not, itself, subjected to a critique and thus, for example, its undemocratic organisation, its individualistic orientation, its internal inequalities, its élitism and its methods of teaching were never put into question. The underlying assumption was that white education would give black people access to the opportunities in the labour market and elsewhere which were, at present, the monopoly of the whites.

But even when this position was not adopted, the major thrust was a rejection of Bantu Education with little or nothing being said about an alternative education system. Nor was this deficiency corrected when, in 1985, the students put forward the slogan of 'Freedom Now, Education Later', for, although the starting point was a criticism of Bantu Education, the question of what shape education should take was to be postponed until liberation had been won. There was no room here for demands, expressed by students' actions within the schools, for an alternative education to be combined with the broader demands for national liberation.

The notion of 'people's education' began to be defined at the Education Crisis Conferences. There were a number of similar broad definitions advanced: 'people's education is education which serves the people as a whole, which liberates, which puts people in command of their lives and which is determined by and accountable to the people.' (Sisulu, keynote speech, March 1986). Or, in slightly different terms, as 'education which prepares people for total human liberation, and for full participation in all social, political or cultural spheres of society, helps people to be creative, to develop a critical mind and to analyse.' (Mkhatshwa, keynote speech, December 1985). In this sense, as Sisulu, expressing a widely held view, put it: 'People's education can only finally be won when we have won the struggle for people's power.'

But what the National Consultative Conference wanted to do in the context of the South African situation in 1985 was to define people's education less generally and, above all, **in a way which did not simply postpone its construction entirely until after liberation.** Indeed, for the NECC, the struggle for people's education has a threefold character: it does define certain of the elements of a future education system, but at the same time it projects them as being objectives which can, to an important extent, be struggled for and realised in the present, thus

putting in place the structures and practices which would constitute the indispensable foundation for a future education system.

The Conference declared that people's education is education that:

i) enables the oppressed to understand the evils of the apartheid system and prepares them for participation in a non-racial, democratic system;

ii) eliminates capitalist norms of competition, individualism, and stunted intellectual development and one that encourages collective input and active participation by all, as well as stimulating critical thinking and analysis;

iii) eliminates illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation of any person by another;

iv) equips and trains all sectors of our people to participate actively and creatively in the struggle to attain people's power in order to establish a non-racial, democratic South Africa;

v) enables workers to resist exploitation and oppression at their work place.

By formulating people's education in this way, the Conference laid the basis for the organisation of student action aimed at the immediate construction of alternative educational programmes and structures which would co-exist in contradiction with, and begin to displace, the content and undemocratic, racist structures of Bantu Education.

The decision of the Crisis Conference and the policies pursued by the NECC to end the school boycotts and to organise the struggle around the slogan of 'people's education for people's power' as against the boycott strategy around the slogan of 'liberation first, education later', raised in a very direct way the issue of the role of the students and the student organisations in the current phase of the struggle.

The National Education Crisis Conferences of December 1985 and March 1986 recognised both the obvious point that the students and the student organisations are crucial to the implementation of alternative structures of education and the more general point of the centrality of the educational struggle to the national liberation struggle.

It has already been noted that the student organisations long since held the view that the transformation of education was conceivable only as part of social transformation. The same position was adopted by the Crisis Conferences and the NECC. Thus, by way of example, the National Education Crisis Conference in March 1986, after noting the hardships experienced in the communities because of the rise in rents and of prices for other necessities, and that community and educational problems had the same source, resolved:

'to urge all communities and democratic organisations to launch appropriate regional and/or national mass action campaigns, by considering all forms of rent, consumer and other boycott'(p9).

Such a broad view of the education struggle carried with it a conception of the social forces and organisations outside of education, together with whom the struggle for people's education and power was to be conducted. Thus, on the one hand, the allies of the students were defined as the workers ('who are, in turn, the parents of our students'), parents, teachers and the community and political leaders. On the other hand, this alliance depended for its strength, according to the NECC, on 'close links between students, workers, and community organisations' and on the co-ordinating of action in the different areas.

This restructuring of the organisational intervention in educational politics raised the question of the character of the links between the student and other organisations and, in particular, the role of the student organisations within this sphere. Although, as pointed out earlier, the student organisations lost their leading role quite soon after Soweto 1976, they retained a high degree of autonomy and a leading role within the struggle for education. It is clear that the emergence of the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee, the holding of the Education Crisis Conferences and particularly the formation of the NECC was bound to affect the relationship between student and other organisations by reducing the autonomy of the former through their incorporation into the broadly based co-ordinating organisations. As has already been suggested, this effect was also facilitated by the changes in the administrative structure of education which displaced the school committees and boards in the control of schools by organs of the central state and the JMCs.

However, despite the strong support given to the NECC by community, political and various student organisations, it was not immediately able to shape the character of the education struggle and win the adherence of students and students' organisations after March 1986. From March to December 1986, notwithstanding the call of the NECC, and the student organisations associated with it, to terminate the boycott, the stayaway from the schools continued at a very high level, although it virtually ended in January 1987. The scene was set, it seemed, for the continuation of the education struggle within the schools.

This possibility was encouraged by the 1987 conference of the Azanian Students' Organisation (which renamed itself the South African National Students' Congress, SANSCO, at the conference) and by the formation of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) at a clandestine national congress in the same year. Both SAYCO and SANSCO committed themselves to carry forward political action and people's education in the schools. In addition, the NECC set in train the preparation of new textbooks, (in particular a text for the teaching of people's history), which were to be used to develop people's education in the classrooms through the appropriation of a certain number of teaching periods each week.

However, the openings for political action in the schools had been, by this time, radically limited by the effects of the continuous deployment of the army in the schools and townships and by the increased emergency powers taken by the state.

The emergency declared in June 1986 was designed to overcome the weaknesses

of the geographically limited emergency of 1985 which, despite the far-reaching powers it accorded the regime, far from paralysing the mass democratic movement, enabled it to strengthen itself, develop structures of dual power and mobilise the masses as a major weapon of the political struggle.

The regime has maintained the state of emergency since June 1986 and has assumed draconian powers which have been utilised both to black out information to imprison activists at all levels of the organisations and to ban or partially ban major organisations. The political power of the security and military forces has been increased, particularly through the National Security Management System and the intensified deployment of the JMCs, which were referred to above. Through this system, the military and security apparatuses have secured control of the administrative structure at both the local and national level and obtained a considerable degree of immunity from judicial constraint. The area of deployment of police and military has been widened and has led to increased reliance on hastily trained (often untrained) state vigilante groups (kitskonstabels). The most important effect of the emergency is that it has slowed the tempo of *mass* intervention in the political struggles and also weakened many of the organisations.

The emergency powers have been utilised to impose specific constraints on activity in the schools. Thus, amongst other things, there are prohibitions against the introduction of unofficial teaching and other materials into the schools and against the entry of people on to the premises who are not connected with the school or the DET.

In these conditions of a lowered level of overt, organised mass intervention, with the partial impairment of the mass democratic organisations and with the continued occupation of the townships and the schools by the army, it has become extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement the decisions of the March 1986 NECC conference. The emergency has clearly put enormous obstacles in the way of the struggle to democratise the schools through the restructuring of the organs of control of the Bantu Education system or the implementation of alternative teaching programmes such as the new history syllabus. That is to say, the conduct of political action within the interstices of the system of Bantu Education as envisaged by the NECC has become more complex and more circumscribed than previously.

The emergency powers and the presence of the army do not, however, totally determine the situation. The students, like other sectors of the mass democratic movement, are being compelled to find new methods of organising actions against the apartheid system in education. The bitter opposition of the popular masses and students to the apartheid system, both within and without the education system, is clear from the continued functioning of the NECC and from the numerous reports of student actions, including, once again, the boycott of schools in different areas. But what form the resurgence of organised student opposition will take will depend to a significant extent on how the mass democratic movement regroups itself in the face of the effects of the emergency. That process is still under way.