

8 JAN 1991

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YEAR OF LEARNING

THE BLACK MATRIC pass rate of 36,4% announced yesterday has confirmed gloomy predictions that it would be the lowest ever. And as the 230 000 pupils who wrote the DET exam last year read the dismal results posted in schools all over the country, it would not be surprising if some of them again vented their frustration on school property and equipment.

But looking at the prospects for black education, there is also reason to believe that last year's appalling failure rate could be a sort of catharsis of anger, or the passing of a dark cloud heralding a brighter future.

Failure is hardly surprising when, according to the DET, nearly one in every four school days was effectively written off due to stayaways and boycotts as pupils marched, teachers downed chalk, and even parents staged sit-ins to protest against what they saw as an inadequate response to the needs of young blacks who heeded the National Education Co-ordinating Committee's 'back to school' call at the beginning of the year.

Even this change in the nature of protest, disruptive though it was, was some advance on the disastrous 'liberation before education' campaign of previous years, in which pupils were cynically used as shock-troops in the struggle, producing a 'lost generation' that is now largely unemployable.

Though there is still some

confusing ambivalence about the role of youth in the struggle, responsible organisations, including the ANC, are now strongly urging a policy of 'education for liberation'.

Having gazed into the heart of darkness in smouldering classrooms and seen the futility of militant pupil activism and blind rage, strong community-based bodies, such as the Soweto Education Co-ordinating Committee which drew 800 residents to a weekend meeting in one of the most troubled areas, are now passionately determined to make 1991 a 'year of learning'.

Particular emphasis is being placed on community action to protect schools against thugs, establish joint parent-teacher-pupil associations, fight drug and alcohol abuse, and inculcate a proud 'culture of education'.

Post-mortems on the failure of defunct 'Bantu education' are seen as non-productive. The challenge now is to improve the educational infrastructure.

To this end the Government, which has increased the DET's budget more than tenfold in as many years, will remain under heavy pressure to improve amenities and create a single education system, which this newspaper has consistently advocated. But impending 'mass action' for the opening of schools to all should be handled with care. As the Latin master might say, *festina lente*.

None of this means we condemn the ANC proposal. But even it must see that if such a conference is to take place there is going to have to be an awful lot of explaining first — and an extremely comprehensive and acceptable set of ground rules laid down.

For one thing, how will this summit, suggested for May, gel with the 'patriotic front' conference of extra-parliamentary opposition groups planned for March? Anything that smacks of a 'patriotic front' solution would hardly sit well, we believe, with Dr Andries Treurnicht or Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Then, too, there is the ANC's 'winner takes all' attitude, surely another stumbling block to any all-party negotiations.

All-party talks

ON THE FACE of it, there would seem to be no reason to oppose the ANC proposal for an all-party conference on constitutional negotiations to break the political logjam.

After all, any step to get things rolling towards the new South Africa must be a move in the right direction.

But it is one thing to propose such a get-together... and another to get it off the ground, especially if it is to be as all-embracing as is apparently envisaged.

Residents *MERU* flee after 8 JAN. 1991 raiders kill 17

'comrades'

By Philani Mgwaba
and Dominic Mitchell

A BLOODY raid by vigilantes left 17 ANC supporters dead and sent thousands of refugees fleeing in terror from residential areas near Umgababa yesterday.

According to a resident, Mrs L Kheswa, a large gang of several hundred vigilantes from the Inkatha area of Hlanzeni arrived at the ANC stronghold of Emagcino at 5 30 p m on Sunday.

The vigilantes reportedly said they had come to kill all 'comrades' in the area.

Any youths found by the gang were attacked.

The attacks continued sporadically throughout the night and yesterday further vigilantes were seen roaming the area.

A woman living in the area, Mrs Thembekile Khumalo, said the attackers were heavily armed with guns, spears and pangas.

Vigilantes

Most youths, as well as a number of elderly men and women with children, had fled the area. Many sought refuge at the Illovo Beach police station, and at Umgababa station.

A heavy S A P and SADF contingent was present in the area and senior police officers were making an 'on the spot' analysis of the situation.

Tension was running high yesterday following a threat by the vigilantes that they would return to attack Emagcino again.

An elderly woman, who declined to be named, said the attackers were after boys 'even from the age of seven upwards'. She said the younger members of her family had fled to Umgababa station.

Most of those killed were over the age of 20.

Police spokesman Capt Hamilton Ngidi said yesterday that police could confirm only eight of the deaths.

Natal, KwaZulu pupils best overall

MERCURY 8 JAN. 1991

Dismay over matric results

Education Reporter

NATAL and KwaZulu schools produced almost half of the top 20 black matriculants of 1990 and recorded an increased pass rate in the face of the worst matric result for black education in South Africa as a whole.

It was revealed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) yesterday that only 81 746 of the 233 411 candidates who sat the examinations in November last year, passed.

This means that more than 150 000 Std 10 pupils who wrote exams at 1 725 centres in the Republic, in six self-governing territories and in Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana, failed matric.

This dismal pass rate of 36,4% is an all-time low for the beleaguered black education system.

In 1989, 40,9% passed and in previous years the pass rate has been as high as 56%.

Only 17 397 of the 1990 candidates obtained matric exemptions.

A meagre seven candidates obtained 'A' symbol aggregates while 99 obtained 'B' symbol aggregates.

The low pass rate of 1990 will haunt educationists this year too, as most of the unsuccessful candidates return to their already overcrowded classrooms to make a second attempt to pass Std 10.

Top achievers

About 133 500 candidates who failed but got aggregates of more than 20% will be eligible for supplementary exams in March.

In spite of these poor national results, schools under the direct control of the DET in Natal's urban areas had six of the top 20 and Khonzinkosi Secondary near Greytown produced the top matriculant in the whole of the country — Angela Elizabeth Stott with five distinctions.

Two other candidates in the national top 20 — Pieter Jacobus Becker (four distinctions) and Neil Edward Witthoft (two distinctions), also came from the private mission school which is registered with the DET.

Ironically these top achievers are all white.

Other Natal DET pupils in the top group were: Nonhlanhla Ignatia Dlovu (three distinctions) and Nkululeko Sibusiso Gama (two distinctions) both of Inkhamana Secondary near Vryheid, and Ntokozo Susan Nakane (one distinction) of Mariannhill Secondary School in Pinetown.

These are all private mission schools.

Schools under the control of the KwaZulu Government, which make up the bulk of the black educational institutions in the province, also excelled and produced three of the best candidates in the country.

These matriculants were: Phindile Faith Thelma Mxguni (one distinction) and Albert Tsambo both of St Lewis Betrand's Secondary near Newcastle, and Phomulani Dennis Myeni (two distinctions) of Ongoye School near Mtunzini on the north coast.

In contrast to the rest of the country, the pass rate in Natal schools under the direct control of the DET went up to 41,4% from 36% in 1989.

And the KwaZulu Education Department pass rate was slightly higher than 1989 with 42,4% of the more than 30 000 candidates obtaining their certificates.

Other schools which produced the rest of the top 20 pupils are situated almost exclusively in the national states and self-governing territories, with the exception of one Johannesburg school and two in the Northern Transvaal.

The newly appointed KwaZulu Minister of Education and Culture, Mr Lionel Mtshali, said this result was pleasing in the light of the increase in the number of candidates in 1990 which had placed a

strain on the high schools.

The DET attributed the slightly better results in Natal and KwaZulu to the fact that fewer teachers in the region participated in strikes and 'sit-ins' compared with the Transvaal and Cape.

But the regional chief director of the DET in Natal, Dr Edward Ndaba, said the results were still very poor, pointing out that only

14% of the successful candidates in the province obtained matric exemptions.

'The results depict a picture of gloom and despair. The 1989 disaster has worsened as anticipated by realistic observers'.

The pass rate for the 56 544 candidates at schools under the DET in the urban areas of South Africa was par-

ticularly bad at 34,7%, with only 3 842 of these obtaining exemptions.

An appalling 26% pass on the Witwatersrand, including Soweto and Alexandra, was a direct result of the disruption of schooling and intimidation of teachers, according to the DET.

In a statement, the Minister of Education and Culture, Dr Stoffel van der Merwe, said a steady 10% increase in pupil numbers each year had put 'enormous pressure' on the resources of the system.

'Because of continual disturbances, any culture of hard work and study has obviously ceased to exist. For many candidates even the additional measures that were taken to aid them were not enough to compensate for the lack of a sound educational foundation.'

Dr van der Merwe said that 'extremely poor performance' in key subjects such as mathematics, biology, accounting, history, English and

Afrikaans had a detrimental affect on the results in general.

It had also been established that many teachers had not covered the entire syllabus with their pupils.

'Important factors were strikes by teaching staff and the absence of supervision by heads of department because their authority had been undermined.'

'The results would have been much better if thousands of teachers had not abandoned their professional integrity and their responsibility to their pupils for long periods for political and private ends,' Dr van der Merwe said.

Commenting on the results, the Democratic Party spokesman on education Roger Burrows, said the results were appalling.

Mr Burrows said one of the reasons for the poor results was that education was not funded on an equal basis by the Government.

● See Editorial Opinion