

INPUT BY PROF S M E BENGU AT THE ANC EDUCATION CONFERENCE ON FRIDAY, 9 DECEMBER 1994

Comrade Chair, comrades, allow me to express my appreciation at the foresight of the organisers of this gathering.

This meeting gives us an opportunity to sit down as an organisation, take stock, evaluate our actions during the course of the year, and plan for the year ahead.

We have emerged from a very difficult period in which we have been mainly involved in the following activities:

- i) Policy formulation
- ii) Setting up of structures
- iii) Consulting with a broad range of stakeholders
- iv) Provincialisation
- v) Preparing for setting up the new department and
- vi) Maintaining the provision of education.

I am happy to say that we have been able to succeed in varying degrees in all these areas. Our success has not been without difficulties. Allow me to deal with some of the difficulties, we have encountered.

1. We have worked as a Ministry without a department, throughout the year, as Dr Manganyi was the only employee of the new department. This has meant that all the work described above, had to be directed from within the Ministry.
2. The Public Service Commission has also continued to frustrate our attempts, both at creating a new education department, and also transferring powers to the provinces.

3. We are all getting used to our new roles, of Ministers, MP's, etc, and this has also hampered our efforts of presenting a united front on many issues. We have failed to remain in constant contact, to plan and strategise together and more importantly to avail ourselves of the opportunity to caucus in order to map the way forward for the movement in education.

This has resulted in a breakdown of communication, frustration, destructive comments and a failure on all our part to deal with the forces ranged against us. We have not been able to use the caucus to debate strategic and tactical positions, to assist one another in areas of difficulty, to constructively and critically examine our actions with a view to correct mistakes.

4. Failure to consult, and provide information to important stakeholders like COSAS, SASCO, and NECC has also alienated these structures from the process. We have failed to bring them on board, both at a national and provincial level, in order for them to know and appreciate the difficulties we find ourselves in and the problems we anticipate for next year.
5. Lastly, the absence of an ANC structure on education, has for me, been one of the biggest problems we have had to face. This has meant that we all lack a political reference point, that would have directed the political process of creating a new education system. This is an issue that must be looked at in order for us to start the new year with a clear political vision of the road ahead.

As we enter into discussions about these problems I hope that we can have an honest, frank and critical debate that will allow us to build a common approach to tackling the formidable task at hand.

I personally welcome constructive criticism as it allows us as an organisation to do an introspection with the aim of emerging out of discussions more stronger and more focused.

Let me share with you some of our plans for next year:-

We are acutely aware of the anxiety of many comrades because of the problems likely to be encountered at a provincial level. Some of these problems are the result of the powers being granted so late, due to problems highlighted earlier, and this has not given MEC's an opportunity to find their feet.

We are firmly committed to assist all MEC's in tackling the herculean task that face them next year. In this regard we have the following proposals.

1. Head Office Task Team

A Task Team has been established at national level. Its task will be to advise the various authorities where necessary and assist any province which requires assistance with the process.

I must emphasise that this Task Team will not interfere in the work of the provinces, it will merely assist at the invitation of the provinces. This task team will offer technical expertise to the provinces, with a view of alleviating some of the problems.

2. New Department of Education

The process of appointing people into the department is progressing and we hope to have appointed all these people before 1 January 1995. The new department will also play a major role in assisting the process in the new year.

3. Ministerial visits

I have committed myself to regular provincial visits, next year in order to acquaint myself with the issues and problems facing and likely to face provinces next year.

4. Consultation with the Mass Democratic Movement

In our interaction with the democratic movement, we have made a joint commitment to remain in regular contact, in order to address whatever problems that will confront us next year. This process must be duplicated at a provincial level, as this will inspire confidence in our Ministers at a provincial level.

5. Role of the ANC

It is my considered view that the ANC must play a leading role in dealing with the issues to face us next year. Dealing with the expectations of our people requires maturity and political leadership, and it is only the ANC and all its structures that can complement the work of both National and Provincial Ministers. The movement will have to emerge from its congress with a clear view of the role it will have to play in dealing with the problems likely to be encountered next year.

6. Building the Culture of Teaching and Learning Campaign

The Ministry aims to launch a campaign around building a culture of learning and teaching next year which we hope will be concentrated on the provinces. In a meeting I recently held with the Bishops' Conference and the Deputy President, Mr T Mbeki, the bishops indicted a desire to play

a role in this campaign. We then decided on holding a national summit early next year that will begin to get all the players involved in this process. I have already briefed COSAS about this and have invited them to play a role in the preparations for this summit. I hope that we can discuss this issue today and also when we meet the MDM on Sunday. The success of this campaign depends largely on the co-operation of both MEC's and structures of the MDM at a provincial level and the role to be played by the ANC.

I hope that the discussion we will have will strengthen unity among ourselves, prepare us for the battle ahead and ensure that we are capable of delivering within the shortest possible period on the promises we made to the electorate. I trust that our deliberations will be characterised by honesty, frankness and an aim of building to ensure that this meeting becomes a success.

I thank you.