

## WE DON'T WANT NO EDUCATION\*

By

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On the weekend of the 12th April 1980, about 100 pupil delegates from schools in the Cape Flats district of Cape Town met to discuss their grievances and make demands to the government. The pupils issued an ultimatum to the government to meet their demands before the end of the month. But by Tuesday of the following week more than 60,000 pupils in and around Cape Town began a boycott of the schools. The pupils, aged between 13 and 18, were led by a Committee of 81 (originally 61) which they had elected to represent all the Cape Town schools participating in the boycott action.

By the end of the first week the boycott had spread to Johannesburg. In the next eight weeks it was to involve at least 100,000 pupils at any one time, and was to remain in force without final resolution in many parts of the country some three or more months after it started in Cape Town. The boycott action spread to all the other major urban centres such as Pretoria, Durban, Bloemfontein, and Port Elizabeth; and to the mining towns Boksburg, Kimberley, and Randfontein; and to numerous small towns such as Middleburg, Cradock, and Grahamstown in the rural areas. Not even the "independent" Bantustans escaped the action of the pupils. Two thousand pupils in Qwaqwa, a rural Bantustan town, joined the boycott in its fifth week. Black university students at all the bush colleges boycotted their lectures and organised protest marches to lend considerable support to the pupils' action.

The pupils, after a number of meetings, some on their own and others jointly with their parents, listed a number of grievances among which were:

- \* free access to school grounds by the Special Branch police;
- \* police detentions of pupils, students, and teachers;
- \* dismissals of teachers on political grounds;
- \* ministerial permission to study at racially and "tribally" segregated educational institutions;

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- \* failure to repair damaged schools;
- \* lack of textbooks and/or inferior textbooks;
- \* unequal pay for teachers;
- \* disparity in education spending on the different colour groups;
- \* racist education and the organisation of education into racially separate departments of education;
- \* an inferior education preparing them for what the pupils themselves saw as a "cheap labour force for capitalism";
- \* denial of the right to free assembly and the consequent lack of autonomous student councils.

#### *An Active Boycott*

The boycott was an *active* one in which the pupils did not simply issue a call to boycott nor simply stay away from school. Unlike groups who in the past preached a boycott of undemocratic and powerless statutory bodies like Advisory Boards but maintained a passive boycott because of a reluctance to mobilise people towards action, the pupils' boycott of schools--as its predecessor in 1976--involved an *active* organisation by means of public meetings and protest marches. The pupils marched to and gathered at their schools--a tactic used by the 1973 Durban strikers who marched to and gathered outside the factories at which they were employed. The pupils refused to attend classes; used the occasion to conduct an awareness programme, or a political rally either outside or inside the school grounds with their placards hung on the fences; or they marched through the streets of the ghettos at the same time as they drew attention and support from the adults on their way to join in with pupils gathered at other schools. Their marching song which so strongly pointed to the centre of their grievances with the line "we don't want no education" in Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall* was immediately banned by the government who declared it to be "prejudicial to the safety of the state." The pupils, not to be outwitted, then sang to its tune:

*We want equal facilities  
 We don't need any forced control  
 Hey, cops leave us kids alone  
 All in all, it's just another peaceful protest.*

#### *The Indivisibility of Oppression*

The black student movement in South Africa, unlike its

white counterpart which in any case exists at university level only, has never conceived of itself as a mere "trade union" representing the sectional interests of students but *always* as part of the movement for national liberation. It could not be otherwise when the black students and their worker parents are alike denied even the most elementary democratic rights such as the vote, free assembly, and trade unionism. The black student has *always* been aware, again unlike his white counterpart, that his grievances and demands are political and that their resolution depends upon the attainment of national emancipation. The present generation of school pupils and university students is not an exception to this awareness. But more than any other generation they show a determination to intervene *actively* in the national struggle for liberation.

It was thus natural for black pupils in their action to look for support from the oppressed and exploited as a whole. They sought to conscientise themselves and the whole black community by inviting their parents and other adults to attend their meetings. As one pupil was reported to say:

*We let our parents come to the meetings and ask questions about why we are boycotting classes. Usually we persuade them we are right. But we don't ask them to help us. We don't know if they would.*

Subsequent events showed that the pupils were not lacking in support from the community. To the collaborationist element in the community, the pupils adopted a different stance. In Boksburg, for example, 1,000 pupils broke out into shouts of "Sell Out, Sell Out" as they marched past outside a shop belonging to a member of the Coloured Management Committee which, along with the Urban Bantu Councils and the Bantustans, is regarded by the pupils and the majority of the oppressed as sham to be equally boycotted.

In their street marches and public meetings, the pupils carried placards inscribed with slogans whose political appeal went far beyond the immediate issue of schools, and demonstrated quite clearly that their grievances and demands cannot be divorced from the conditions induced by oppression. Thus:

- \* Equal Education for All
- \* One Department of Education--One Education System
- \* Away with Race Classification
- \* To Hell with "Coloured" Affairs

\* The Black Middle Class is a Tool of the White Bass.

This last slogan was inscribed on a poster which was widely used by the pupils in Johannesburg. Depicted on the poster is a smartly dressed black man whose mouth waters at the carrot dangling just above his nose--so he could never reach it. The carrot hangs from the end of a whip held by the Prime Minister Botha who is seated in a ricksha cart drawn by the black man--obviously middle class by his appearance.

### *The Oppressed are Black*

The origin and centre of the 1980 schools boycott action was Cape Town. Except for the ghettos of Langa, Nyanga, Guguletu, and now the Crossroads slum area, the black population of Cape Town is "coloured" by statutory classification and they constitute the majority in this region of the Cape. Most of the pupils in Cape Town are thus "Coloured" and the massive response to the boycott by pupils outside of Cape Town and its periphery came from the "Coloured" and "Indian" ghettos of Johannesburg and Durban. In Johannesburg where support was strongest for a long time at the beginning, the response came from Coronationville, Eldorado Park, Westview, Bosmont, and Lenasia. However, the pupils in 1980, as throughout the seventies under the influence of Black Consciousness, itself of student origin, did not allow the differences in pigmentation among the blacks to deny the indivisibility of oppression and exploitation of all the blacks. Speaking to a British journalist, a group of pupils referred to conscientisation in terms of making people aware of being black. One pupil said:

*We're not Coloured or even so-called Coloured.  
We resent the term. We are black.*

During the 1976 Uprising students at all black university campuses sang the people's national anthem *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika* and chanted the cry of "Amandla Ngawethu" at their meetings. But they could easily be written off as elitist students who can clearly perceive on which side of the colour divide they lie. Yet on the 22nd April in Bosmont, at a mass meeting held in a public square and attended by 5,000 pupils whose home language is either English or Afrikaans, the same chant punctuated the delivery of speeches and the national anthem brought the meeting to a close. In between the speeches they sang the traditional freedom songs in the vernacular of the majority of the blacks. This was their custom, too, at the daily gatherings on or off school premises. To their parents and teachers these scenes not only spelt the strength and extent of the underground politicisation of the pupils but also showed that the pupils by both deed and word are black.

### *The Intervention of the State*

As is always the case in all black struggles, the state reacted to the boycott of schools by denying the pupils' grievances, and seeking mythical agents to hold responsible for the boycott action. Speaking in the white Parliament, Botha warned that those "behind the uniforms of school children are going to get hurt." Thus the government blamed the boycott on "agitators" and even the imperialist press was said by Botha to be "promoting revolutionary aims" by reporting on the boycott. An ironical statement as nearly all newspaper reporting of ghetto protest in South Africa is dependent on press releases by none other than the police. The few journalists who deem it a social responsibility to report the facts are held in police custody and the ghettos are sealed off by the police as soon as there is a spark of protest.

By the end of the second week of the boycott, at least six members of the Executive Committee of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) were taken into indefinite police detention. Some of them, including the acting President Mrs. Nombulela Melane and Dr. Yusuf Joe Variava, were to remain in detention for the duration of the boycott, and more were detained during the course of the boycott. Amongst others detained were Curtis Nkondo, later banned and former President of AZAPO, Achmat Cassie, member of the banned South African Students' Organisation (SASO), Vuyisili Mdeleleni, executive member of the banned Black People's Convention (BPC), and Trevor Wentzel, a member of AZAPO. The number of school children who were arrested and detained must have run into thousands. In Johannesburg alone, a total of 854 pupils were brought before a hastily convened court which sat from 4 p.m. and all through the night. In batches of 30 the pupils were charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act. Several times during the course of the schools boycott the police arrested and detained hundreds of blacks whom they considered to be popular or potential leaders of the people.

On the 22nd April, the police fired tear gas and what they cynically called a "sneeze cannon" to disperse more than 20,000 school children marching in Cape Town. The street demonstrations and marches were in flagrant defiance of the ban on political gatherings under the Riotous Assemblies Act. On the outskirts of Johannesburg, at Eldorado Park, pupils attending a rally were baton-charged by the police. A week later, another baton-charge was made on 4,000 pupils demonstrating in the grounds of Westbury High School. The fleeing children were chased and followed by the police into their homes. Many of them, seriously wounded by the police, were dragged out of the houses and flats, and "tried" in the kangaroo court which sat all night. Everywhere and every time the state was to react in the same way to break up peaceful demonstrations--by ruthlessly using gas, batons,

and bullets.

During the weekend of the 25th May, in what they euphemistically code-named a "crime prevention exercise" in Soweto and elsewhere in Johannesburg, the police seized and detained about 2,000 people. This was obviously an action to pre-empt the commemoration of the Soweto Uprising on the 16th June. On the Monday, they detained overnight and charged the next day the 50 clergymen led by Bishop Desmond Tutu in a march to John Vorster Square to protest the detention of a fellow priest.

#### *A Call to Suspend the Boycott*

The pupils in the Cape Peninsula met on the 19th April to decide whether to continue with the boycott. The meeting, at which 62 schools were represented, decided to go on. The reaction of the state in the form of detentions, violence, seeking scapegoats for the boycott, and denying the students' grievances could only confirm the pupils in their resolve to press their demands by intensifying the boycott. Only the day previous to the pupils' meeting in the Cape, the boycott had spread to Coronationville and Bosmont in Johannesburg.

At the end of five weeks, on the 17th May, the pupils in Cape Town again met and this time decided to suspend the boycott action. The pupils made it clear that the suspension was only to give the government time to respond positively to their demands. In support of those pupils detained as a result of participating in the boycott, they called for the suspension of the June examinations. A statement issued by the pupils after a seven-hour meeting declared:

*We have decided to return to classes for three weeks and to submit an ultimatum to the authorities. If the ultimatum is not met, we will review our decision and call upon the community to come out in active support. The ultimatum must not be met with promises, it must not be ignored, nor should it meet with police violence and detentions.*

The boycott, as pointed out earlier, was an *active* one. Its suspension was equally an *active* suspension. On the Saturday following the suspension (which never took effect), a protest rally of more than 4,000 pupils in Cape Town was brutally and mercilessly charged and dispersed by police with batons. At least 70 of the pupils were taken into police detention. The pupils, perfecting a technique they had used during the 1976 Uprising to successfully break through police condoms usually thrown around the ghettos, arrived in their hundreds in the Cape Town city area to protest by way of disrupting the Saturday morning shopping. They entered supermarkets in large numbers,

removed goods from the shelves, and loaded trolleys with which they jammed checkout points or joined checkout queues carrying small items for which they refused to pay. At Belville, on the outskirts of Cape Town, other groups of pupils used similar tactics to which the police reacted with a baton-charge and made 29 arrests. The method of disrupting shopping was used the previous year during the community boycott of Fattis and Monis products.

The suspension of the boycott action was not implemented. The pupils were not going to drop their action, even if only temporarily, in circumstances of police provocation and intimidation. But a more compelling reason was that the pupils in Cape Town were not going to suspend their action just at the time when the boycott was gaining greater momentum and spreading to other towns where pupils were then coming out for the first time to boycott their own schools. On the 20th May, three days after the call in Cape Town to suspend the action, pupils in Bloemfontein set up barricades and joined the boycott.

#### *Extension and Intensification of the Boycott*

In Bloemfontein--a fortress of white chauvinism and fascism--the pupils and the working population brought the bus service to a total standstill on the 21st May. As in every action by the people, the police were quick to move in order to seal off the ghettos, the mortuaries, and the hospital so that news of their brutality does not reach the outside world. From this point onwards, the practice of the already-hostile media and the overseas dispatches is invariably to rely solely on police press releases for "information" of what is taking place inside the ghettos, on how many people wounded or shot dead at the hands of the police who reacted only in self-defence! Hence the newspapers' unquestioning references to "riots," "tsotsis," "students on the rampage," and so on. The numbers of the dead or injured as a result of police fire are always made out to be far less than the actual numbers. In Bloemfontein, on the 22nd May, the police reported wounding *only* two black women and an attack by stones on *only* one white man, a national service rifleman. After three days of continuous protest, at least 31 people were taken into police detention, a cinema burnt down, and a petrol-bomb thrown at a black policeman's house. At the beginning of June, 26 schools in and around Bloemfontein, Witzieshoek, and Welkom were being boycotted. On the 9th June police set up roadblocks to prevent the pupils from demonstrating in the centre of Bloemfontein. Buses and taxis from the ghettos were stopped, and the pupils forced to turn back.

At a meeting of 2,000 pupils in Grahamstown, on the 14th May, a man was reported through the medium of the police to have been stoned to death by the school children. The man was one of nine

"mediators," all armed with sticks and, still according to the police report, "appointed by the parents to persuade the pupils to end the boycott of classes." This tactic by the police had been employed in Soweto 1976 but there, too, to no avail.

On the 6th May, university students at Fort Hare decided to boycott lectures. Their march to neighbouring schools was dispersed by teargas. On the second day of the boycott of lectures, more than 2,500 out of a total of 2,700 students at Fort Hare held a mass meeting on the campus. They called for the abolition of bush colleges, the release of Mandela, and called upon the government to negotiate with:

*leaders recognised by the people and working for the people and not people who in the opinion of the government are the true leaders.*

The boycott action at Fort Hare was meant to last for two days--an act of solidarity with the pupils in action throughout the country. Indeed, on the second day the student leaders called off the boycott. But the call went unheeded. A week later, with the boycott still on, the students took a decision to continue with their action which they maintained for at least the next nine weeks. On the 20th May, the rector closed Fort Hare indefinitely. The students left for their homes in various parts of the country. In their home areas, particularly in Soweto and the Vereeniging districts, they joined students who had also returned home from other bush colleges and together set about organising meetings in order to coordinate activity in support of the pupils' action.

On 26th May, the pupils of Hwiti High School in Pietersburg decided on a boycott of their classes. In anticipation of ruthless police action against them, the pupils left the boarding school for their homes two days later. They were joined by the students of the bush college of Turfloop and the Stofberg College of Technology.

In Port Elizabeth on the 28th May, boycotting pupils marched to the police station to demand the release of four comrades arrested during the weekend. About 200 children aged between 10 and 15 demonstrated outside their lower secondary school, and at least 275 were arrested in the march. In the nearby town of Uitenhage, the police prevented 400 children from staging a protest march. The Divisional Commissioner of Police for the eastern Cape admitted the growth of active support for the boycott when he disclosed the number of schools affected. He mentioned a total of 35 schools in Port Elizabeth, five in Uitenhage, two in Fort Beaufort, one in Grahamstown, and one in Humansdorp. To this list Post added two schools in East London, one in Queenstown, and one in King William's Town.

In Lenasia, a strong centre for the boycott action in Johannesburg, the pupils marched to protest at the arrest in only one week of at least 600 children from their area. On the 6th May, they decided they would continue with their boycott until all detained pupils and members of the parents' action committee had been released from police custody. A demand was made for the dismissal from office of the Minister of "Coloured" and "Indian" Affairs, Mr. Marais Steyn, whose name the pupils aptly used in the slogan, "Steyn on the Brain."

At the bush college of Zululand support for the pupils' action expressed itself in the form of opposition to Chief Buthelezi who had been loud in his orders to the children to go back to school. The students requested that he should not turn the college's graduation ceremony into an Inkatha rally. On previous occasions he, as college chancellor, had come accompanied by a large retinue of followers in Inkatha uniform. Buthelezi announced that he would ignore the students' plea and that Inkatha supporters would attend the ceremony in full regalia. At the ceremony police fired shots to disperse the demonstrating students. At Westville-Durban, with the police standing by, the university students were asked to vacate their dormitories within an hour after the rector had suspended lectures until further notice.

The students at the black dental school in Cape Town tore up their examination papers to show solidarity with the pupils. At nearby Elsie's River, the "first shootings" were reported at the end of the sixth week of the pupils' action. An 11 year old was shot dead. The media's report, again basing itself on the police version of the event, stated that a white civilian shot at the youth after stone throwing incidents by pupils. Another shooting occurred two days later because--so it was reported--between 50 and 100 youths stoned a police car. The police justify their shootings by claiming that they were being stoned. The truth of the matter is that the pupils act in self-defence by stoning the police. No longer as in the days of Sharpeville can the police fire at a peaceful demonstration or a dispersing and fleeing crowd and expect not to be hit back.

On the 20th May, the pupils' action spread to include schools in areas hitherto unaffected--Pietermaritzburg and, adding to the mockery of the independence of the Bantustans with their "own" schools, to Umtata, the "capital city" of the Transkei. In Pietermaritzburg the pupils applied the tactic used in Cape Town. They disrupted shopping and mingled with whites to prevent the police from shooting at them. Inanda and Ohlange, two well known schools in Natal, were forced to close indefinitely when their pupils decided to boycott classes. In Umtata the pupils set fire to a building that would not pass as a school for whites nor in any country claiming a developed economy. On

the same day, pupils in Cape Town erected barricades of burning tyres. In Johannesburg, too, there were demonstrations. All these demonstrations, the Transkei's not excepted, were violently charged and broken up by the police.

On the 2nd June, all the full-time students at the "university" of the Transkei in Umtata boycotted their lectures. As the part-time students are mostly state employees, teachers, and civil servants, only the full-time students took to action. The collaborator Chiefs George and Kaiser Mantanzima threatened boycotting students that they would be refused readmission to the bush college.

The black teachers in the western Cape gave their full support to the pupils. They strongly rejected claims by the government that the pupils were incited by "agitators." One thousand of these teachers decided on a sympathy strike to back the pupils. A motion passed unanimously at a teachers' meeting in Athlone, Cape Town, declared their identification with those who were "striving for a single, non-discriminatory education." Asked by the Minister of Police to use their influence to end the boycott, 72 headmasters refused to act as agents of the government.

In Johannesburg the education authorities summoned head-teachers to a meeting at which they were addressed by both the Inspector of Education and the chief of the regional Special Branch police. The headteachers were bluntly told that if they did not return the schools to normal then the police would intervene with violence. On the 26th April, 300 teachers from 30 lower primary schools decided to join the boycott by going on strike.

And, 900 members of the Black Students' Society, joined by other students of the white University of the Witwatersrand, boycotted lectures "in solidarity with those detained fighting an inferior education." On that day, the 26th April, the Society's Chairperson, David Johnson, and other executive members were taken into police detention.

#### *The Campaign at Turfloop*

In a long struggle dating back to February, the students at Turfloop campaigned for the boycott of the 21st anniversary of the founding of the bush college. They campaigned also for the disaffiliation of the college football team from the South African Football Association, a body which is a front for apartheid in sports.

The celebrations held on the 3rd May were cancelled after the students disrupted them. Two days later members of the

Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO) were assailed with knives and pangas by pro-celebration elements said by the media to be members of the football team. On the next day more than 300 students were arrested by the police in a pre-dawn raid on the campus. The police intervened officially only after the students had hit back at their attackers--who included plain clothes police.

The graduation ceremony on the 10th May had an audience which was wearing helmets and carrying shields in place of academic gowns and caps. Almost the entire police force of the Lebowa Bantustan was in attendance to ensure that the event was not disrupted, and to bestow it with an appearance of success. The programme of the day was kept secret until the very moment of the ceremony which the students boycotted.

On the 28th May only 20 students attended lectures at Turfloop. All 20 were extremely vulnerable to government reprisals because of their position as student nurses in state employment. The rest of the student body had decided to pack their bags and leave the campus in pursuance of their demands. They were joined by all the students from the nearby Stofberg College of Theology. Stranded in Pietersburg for lack of money to travel back to their homes were 300 students. The police used the presence of these students in Peitersburg together with the 20 student nurses to announce on radio and TV that all was normal at Turfloop. The students issued a statement in which they rebutted what they called:

*propaganda from the SABC that the situation is normal and that we are back in class. We want our brothers and sisters who are already home to know that there is nothing like that. The sit-in continues from home until our demands are met.*

The student sit-in at Turfloop originated in their decision to boycott the celebrations. With the bush college teeming with police, it was not easy for the students to sustain a peaceful sit-in from the campus. Accommodated in hostels, as is the case with the "guest" working class in compounds, they are an easy target for the police and their actions are quickly broken up by the police. When the students decided to leave the campus for their homes, their campaign had extended to a solidarity action with the pupils' boycott of schools which had engulfed Pietersburg and many areas of the northern Transvaal. At a special meeting convened in Soweto they resolved to continue their boycott of Turfloop until the government abolishes the system of inferior education.

The students returned to the Turfloop campus on Monday the

9th June after a two-week stay-at-home. They returned at a time when examinations were due to start. But, except for four students, the entire student body continued the boycott and refused to take examinations. On the Wednesday they were baton-charged by the police who had resumed standing guard at many points on the campus since the beginning of the week. On Thursday the boycott of the examinations was total with not a single student turning up. Rumours persisted though that the four students scabbing the boycott continued to write their examinations under heavy police invigilation. By the following week all the students were once again preparing to leave the campus for their homes.

### *1980--A Year of Total Struggle*

In later sections we shall refer to the manner in which the pupils linked the issue of inferior education with the general conditions of rightlessness of the blacks and the exploitation of their parents as a working class. Their boycott action must therefore not be seen in isolation from the numerous working class and community based struggles which took place before, during, and after their own action against the schools.

In the four months preceding the pupils' action, at least 30 industrial strikes by black workers took place in various parts of the country. In the course of the schools boycott there was even more intense industrial action: the meat workers in the western Cape and the active support they received from the black consumers, the bus boycott and June 16th stay-at-home in Cape Town, the strikes in the motor industry in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage area, by textile workers in Durban, sugar workers in Johannesburg, and mine workers in Stilfontein.

The commemoration of June 16th, itself a political event which met with strong action by the state, intensified the boycott action in the eastern Cape and the Orange Free State. At the level of local communities in many parts of the country there were protest meetings against rent and bus fare rises, and action against collaborators with the state.

In spite of roadblocks and other forms of intimidation by the police, thousands of people came to Mamelodi on the 25th April for the third attempt--again frustrated by police intrigue--at the unveiling of Solomon Mahlangu's tombstone, and numerous vigils in Alexandra and other places were held in his memory. Mangoyi and the Silverton dead all received heroes' funerals attended by thousands who held their clenched fists high.

All these struggles alongside the pupils' boycott action when taken together add up to reveal that the black oppressed and exploited are waging a total struggle which is both open and

active in contrast to a silent class struggle. It is to some of these that we now turn.

#### *Some Community-Based Struggles*

Prior to and throughout the period of the schools boycott action the people of the ghettos in many areas organised meetings to protest at announced increases in their rents, and passed resolutions refusing to pay the increases. Spearheading the protests was the Soweto-based Committee of Ten. In Soweto and elsewhere, the Committee fostered the formation of local civic associations to take up issues such as rents. Those in Soweto, without loss of local autonomy, came together to form the Soweto Civic Association. In addition to the rent protests, they called upon the people to boycott the celebrations of the founding of the Soweto ghetto, to prevent the celebrations from taking place, and to drive the Urban Bantu Councillors out of Soweto to the white suburbs whence "they were chosen and whose interests they serve."

In this latter regard, it is pertinent to recall that the Soweto Urban Bantu Council--its latest name makes not the slightest difference to its nature--was elected on a 6% poll, all of which was most probably drawn from those who like the black police are coerced by the state into voting. The so-called Mayor of Soweto--official population 1,000,000, unofficial 2,000,000--received 98 votes in all. By reason of this low poll, the participationists in government-imposed institutions have come to be contemptuously known by the people as the "six-percenters" and the Urban Bantu Councils as Urban Bantu Circuses. So thoroughly discredited are the UBCs that the government, in a self-gratifying act, renamed them Community Councils.

In Cradock in the eastern Cape, on the 12th May, collaborators in the local Bantu Community Council were unable to continue with their meeting because of the intervention of Masakane, a civic association opposed to participation in apartheid institutions. The collaborators locked themselves inside the meeting hall until they were freed by the police. Four black security policemen were trapped inside their homes which were surrounded by anti-participationist crowds. The police opened fire and reported that one person was seriously wounded. A municipal beer hall was later set on fire. These events were the climax of a week-long boycott of public transport, and a call for the Bantu Community Council to be abolished and house rentals reduced.

In evaluating the popular rejection of inferior institutions specifically created by the state to deny black majority determination in the running of the country, account must be taken of the role played by the Black Consciousness organisations,

AZAPO, the students' movements, the Committee of Ten, and the Black Civic Associations. These organisations have stood out prominently and, for most of the time, alone in their fight against the participationists and Chief Buthelezi.

#### *Commemoration of June 16th*

With June the 16th approaching, preparations were made by AZAPO, AZASO, and COSAS for the commemoration of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. To allow for maximum mass participation, Sunday the 15th rather than Monday the 16th was the day for which the major services were arranged. The service organised by AZAPO for Sunday at the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto was to be the focal one. In Cape Town, the Athlone Business and Professional Association decided that their shops would remain closed on June 16th and 17th. The Soweto Chamber of Commerce, as in previous years, announced that its members' shops would close between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. on the Monday. Since 1976 people have come to accept that social arrangements like concerts do not take place on the 16th June. Thus socials which had been scheduled in advance for the Sunday were cancelled in response to calls to make that day for honouring and remembering those who died in the Uprising. There were those, of course, amongst the middle class shopkeepers and cinema owners who prevaricated true to their historical role; they'd only close if approached by one or other of the popular movements.

Since 1977 the government has taken annual measures to try to prevent the public demonstrations which have commemorated the Uprising. Thus, for example, the mid-year school vacation was gerrymandered so that June 16th did not fall within the school term when pupils would have honoured the Soweto dead by boycotting classes. In 1980 the government prepared itself by taking additional and even stronger measures. There was the arrest of 2,000 people in Soweto at a time when the pupils there showed no signs of actively joining in the schools boycott. A week before the anniversary the Minister of Police was making hysterical noises to justify the harsh measures that were shortly to come. He dubbed any talk of the commemoration as "instigation" and "intimidation," and declared that "we've had enough." In an extraordinary government gazette issued late on the Friday evening preceding the 16th, the Riotous Assemblies Act was invoked further to ban all commemoration services and meetings of more than 10 people until the end of the month. Police road-blocks were mounted on most major roads throughout the country and on all roads leading into Soweto and other ghettos.

The people were not deterred by the prohibition on meetings and services, nor by the warnings of the Prime Minister and the Police Minister that "their fingers would get burnt." On Sunday the 15th, hundreds gathered outside Regina Mundi Church in open

defiance of the ban on meetings. The crowds started forming at 12:30, and were to continue swelling for the rest of the day. The use of teargas, "sneeze" cannons, dogs, and batons by the police to disperse the crowds led to a continuous battle of regroupment waged spontaneously by the people. Time after time the crowds scattered following police violence only to form themselves into another group, always keeping as near as possible to the church, so determined they were to honour their dead at the place of their choice. There they knelt in prayer and, with clenched fists, sang the songs of freedom and the national anthem. When threats to shoot failed to disperse the people, the police declared the area around Regina Mundi Church an operational zone. Every area in the country where people defied the ban on meetings was likewise declared an operational zone to keep out those journalists whose reporting is not favoured by the state and thereby to allow the police absolute freedom to use any means to suppress the demonstrations. It was in such circumstances that the order came from the cabinet to "shoot to kill."

The events of Sunday were repeated the next day, the 16th June. Groups of people continued to gather near Regina Mundi in Soweto and at other places in other parts of the country. All business in the ghettos came to a standstill as shopkeepers and shebeens responded to the call to close their shops. In Noordgesig and elsewhere in Soweto barricades were erected by the pupils. The police opened fire, wounding, amongst others, two boys aged nine and eleven. In Port Elizabeth a march by pupils and 800 parents to a commemoration service at St. Stephen's Hall was fired upon and dispersed by the police. In Bloemfontein and Durban street marches were also dispersed by the police. Only the five services held in and around Pietersburg passed without violent interruption by the police.

#### *Bus Boycott and June 16th in Cape Town*

In Cape Town, following a two-week bus boycott, the people commemorated June 16th by staying away from work for two days. This only added to the exasperation of the state which, in spite of all its violence, the media had up to now been commending for its relative "calmness." On the second night of the stay-at-home, the police killed at least 39 people and wounded another 200 in Cape Town. The usual story of stone throwing incidents was fed to the press. But according to the people the police vans simply "pulled up and police just poured out shooting like mad." It was the night of the declaration of an operational zone in Cape Town.

The youth of Cape Town retaliated in the only way possible under the circumstances. They stoned, overturned, and burned police vehicles, and they set fire to supermarkets. A white

policeman was stabbed to death. The highway to the airport which runs through ghettos, and the Crossroads slum which lies adjacent to the airport, became fronts for pitched battles between the people on the one side and the police and white motorists on the other.

The boycott of buses in Cape Town started on the 2nd June--the day on which fares were increased. The rise in fares immediately caused 400 construction workers at a water treatment site to strike in support of a demand for higher wages. The cost of fares to work accounted for 25% of the wages of most of the workers from Crossroads, Nyanga, Guguletu, and Langa.

From the first day the bus company set out to break the solidarity of the boycotting commuters by deliberately maintaining a service of empty buses under heavy police and army protection. The service was said to be made available for the "law-abiding" worker, the police for his "protection." The masses had an answer to such provocation. On the first day of the boycott 80 buses were stoned and their windows broken, and on the second day 67 buses were damaged.

The bus boycott was no nearer ending ten weeks after it had started. The boycotters enjoyed considerable support from taxi drivers, many of them pirating, who took them to work for the old bus fare. Police action against the taxis led some employers to say that it was leading to greater politicisation of their employees. In addition to covert go-slows which reduced production, the anger of the workers caused, in the words of one industrialist, an "increasing number of inexplicable plant and machinery 'breakdowns.'"

### *Black Working Class Struggles*

The black meat workers at the Table Bay Cold Storage Company in Cape Town staged a one-day strike on the 7th May against management's refusal to recognise their democratically elected workers' committee. Management reacted to the strike by dismissing the workers from their jobs, calling upon them to collect wages due to them, and, those treated by law as "guest" workers, to return to the Transkei.

The workers' committee represented all the black workers. It was for this reason that management would not recognise nor negotiate with it. Management demanded workers' committees to "represent" the workers racially in terms of the statutorily defined colour groups. In refusing to recognise the workers' committee, the managing director of Table Bay Cold Storage disclosed to the press that he had the "unanimous support" of the employers in the Cape Town meat industry. At this stage management was deliberately misrepresenting the workers' demand for

negotiations with their elected committee as a demand for recognition of the Western Province General Workers' Union to which most of them belonged.

The reaction of Table Bay Cold Storage Company was of course an expression of support for and the actual implementation of the policy of the state and capital as a whole. This, coupled with its refusal to negotiate with the workers' committee and wholesale sackings of workers, led the Western Province General Workers' Union to declare a general strike of meat workers in the western Cape, and to raise demands which included union recognition. The black students at the bush college came out on the 21st May in support of the workers by staging a two-day boycott of lectures. In the ghetto of Langa the people initiated a community boycott of red meat. This first led to the closure of two butcheries, and then within a few days, Langa was joined by black consumers in the rest of the western Cape and other parts of the country. Meat sales in Cape Town dropped by 60%.

On the 12th June, 42 of the striking meat workers from Guguletu were brought to court under charges of being illegally in the western Province. The arrests were all made at the company compound in which Table Bay Cold Storage keeps its black workers. All of them were refused bail on the grounds that they would "intimidate" those who had been drawn from the "Homelands" to replace them.

In the fifth week of the pupils' boycott action, 1,200 workers at a Frame Group textile factory in Durban came out on strike for higher wages. The earnings of many of the workers were less than half the subsistence level. About 500 workers who gathered outside the factory gates were dispersed by the police using teargas.

Support for the strike grew to involve 60,000 workers in the Frame Group. Towards the end of May, management sacked all 60,000 workers and called on the police to arrest the strike leaders. The firm with the help of the state then drew replacement workers from the KwaZulu Bantustan.

The workers refused to regard themselves as dismissed and ignored management's call upon them to collect their outstanding wages. On the 28th May they organised a mass meeting in Clermont, Durban. Over 5,000 workers attended the meeting, packing the hall and overflowing into the surrounding streets. On the previous day three of the workers' leaders were arrested on the factory premises, revealing clearly the collusion between the employers and the state. The leaders were arrested during or immediately after "negotiations" with management representatives led by Mr. A. Frame. They were charged with participating in and abetting an illegal strike. When on the 4th June it was

reported that the strike had come to an end, between 70 and 100 workers had been refused reinstatement. The majority of these were union leaders and activists. To sow confusion, the state had intervened by banning meetings between 7 a.m. on Friday, 30th May and Sunday, 1st June so that the workers could not meet to discuss the conditions under which they would be prepared to return to work.

In the week the strike at Frame started, another involving 120 sugar workers broke out at Ullman Bros. Cartage Contractors in Johannesburg. The reasons for the strike were irregular working hours, non-registration of workers, unpaid overtime, and underpayment. One worker said to a newspaper reporter:

*This company makes a lot of money and still rejoices in exploiting us.*

The spectacular bombing of the oil-from-coal Sasol installations on the 2nd June was followed by a prolonged period of resistance amongst the black workers at the Sasol Two and Three plants in the Transvaal. The workers' resistance was in response to security measures introduced after the bombings, and the killing of a fellow worker by the security police. On Monday the 14th July, a white man at Sasol Three in Secunda was killed when his car was stoned and overturned by the workers. In addition to the humiliating and racially discriminatory measures such as body searches and enforced confinement to the compounds after 7 p.m., over 2,000 workers at the two plants were confined to the compounds for a whole day on the 15th July. A day later, construction work at Secunda was halted after nearly 18,000 workers withdrew their labour on pain of being sacked from their jobs and forcibly returned to the "Homelands."

On the 3rd June, 4,500 mine workers on the Stilfontein gold mine near Johannesburg went on strike and brought work on three shafts to a standstill. Police assisted by the Chamber of Mines' own security forces stepped in with the use of batons and tear-gas to "contain" the strike. They shut out newspaper reporters and later stated that the reasons for the strike were unknown!

In Uitenhage, 3,500 workers at the Volkswagen car plant went on strike, coupling their demand for higher wages with a protest against the ban on meetings and services to commemorate the Soweto Uprising. Leading the workers was the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO) which had in the last year also intervened in the strike at the Ford Motor Company. With PEBCO coordinating black community support for the strike action in the car factories of the eastern Cape, it became difficult for management to use their usual strikebreaking tactics. Few people, if any, came forward to replace the workers in the strike-hit factories in spite of a level of black unemployment

greater than 20%.

Industrial action at Volkswagen quickly spread to include workers in other car plants and car accessory factories in the area of the eastern Cape. The ban on meetings did not deter workers holding meetings, which were dispersed in the customary way. By 19th June, 1,300 workers at Goodyear tyre factory were on strike over a pay dispute, and the Ford plant in Port Elizabeth was forced to close because of a shortage of components. On 20th June, 1,000 workers from Goodyear staged a protest march which was dispersed by teargas and bird-shot. Goodyear and National Standard issued an ultimatum to the workers: return to work on Monday or face dismissal. The workers at Goodyear chose to collect their pay. In order to break the organisation of the workers, Goodyear made the by now traditional declaration that they would not negotiate with the strikers as they had refused to elect representatives. Goodyear maintained this attitude even after all the other factories affected had reached agreement with unions representing 10,000 workers.

#### *When Teargas and Baton Charges Failed*

At the beginning of June the schools boycott action still did not show any sign of coming to an end. On the 5th June, it was reported that the Committee of 81 had decided to call off the boycott in the western Cape and to recommend a return to classes on Monday, 9th June. The decision, according to the report, was said to be conditional to the continuation of awareness programmes during school hours. The report was subsequently denied by the Committee which stated that it had only asked the pupils to decide on whether to continue with the boycott action or not. On the Monday, the boycott continued unabated following the arrest of nearly 1,300 people, including 300 pupils and students, and the setting up of police roadblocks throughout the country. To make some of the arrests the police in civilian clothing joined student gatherings. In addition to dispersals by teargas and other violent methods, the state was now to resort to mass arrests and mass expulsions from the schools.

In late May, the Department of "Indian" Education instructed schools in Natal, particularly Durban, to suspend pupils and seek the help of the police in clearing boycotting pupils from school premises. At the beginning of June, 3,000 pupils were consequently expelled from Durban schools. On the 5th June, 2,000 were suspended, and on the 9th June, 200 were arrested on charges of trespass.

The 700 black medical students in Durban were told they would not be allowed to sit their examinations unless they stopped their boycott and returned to lectures by the 9th June. None of the students resumed lectures. At the bush college of

Ngoye (Zululand), students who were boycotting and did not sit their examinations starting on the 13th June received a warning that they would not be allowed to remain on the campus. On the 11th June it was reported that the government had suspended 15,000 pupils and students, and had withdrawn their "scholarships" and "loans" at 15 teacher training colleges.

Chief Buthelezi appealed to a meeting on the weekend of the 7th June to "fan out agitators" from their midst. During that same weekend, after the police detained leading members of the Natal Indian Congress, the pupils and students resolved to continue the boycott action.

The resolve to continue the boycott was endorsed at pupils' meetings in Johannesburg and in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage area where a Committee of 41 was elected. Students at the Soweto Teacher Training College decided on a sit-in and refused to take their mid-year examinations in protest against the authorities' refusal to recognise a students' representative council. On the 3rd June, 120 student teachers were expelled from the Transvaal Indian College of Education. The students refused to accept the notices of expulsion and resolved not to apply for readmission.

In an act of the utmost desperation to break the schools boycott, the "independent government" of the Transkei declared a state of emergency on the 5th June. The terms of the promulgation were specifically aimed at all the pupils, students, and teachers in the Transkei who were now to be confined by a 24-hour curfew either to their homes or schools. On Sundays, movement was permitted only for purposes of attending a church service. Teachers and pupils were prohibited from absenting themselves from classes, organising meetings other than "bona fide" school gatherings, and from organising any person to support the schools boycott. Expulsion and dismissal from school or employment were among the various penalties for contravening the emergency regulations.

The boycott was three months old when the empty schools officially closed for the mid-year vacation. Government hopes that the three-week recess would dampen the spirit of the pupils were not realised. Most schools in the western Cape reopened on the 14th July with threats by the government that schools would be closed altogether if the boycott continued. A week earlier, when other schools reopened in the rest of the country, the Minister of Police warned that he would not tolerate further unrest and the gathering of pupils on school premises. The warnings not only went unnoticed, especially in Guguletu, Nyanga, Langa, and Crossroads, all in Cape Town, and in the eastern Cape, but the boycott was joined by schools hitherto unaffected.

A two-week boycott of schools in KwaThema, Springs, starting

on the 7th July, the day the schools reopened, was initiated when five members, including a pupil of the local AZAPO branch, were detained by the police. In Soweto, there was a 100% boycott of Thomas Mofolo High and Orlando High, and where attendance at other schools was poor the gates were locked to prevent the pupils from staging a walk-out. In Bloemfontein, pupils at all schools undertook to continue the boycott until the 1st August. In Pretoria, too, the situation remained unchanged, and the Principal at Hofmyer High was asked by the authorities to temporarily stay away from school after his office was stoned.

In Grahamstown, on the 9th July, 2,000 pupils staged a demonstration march which was dispersed by the police. The pupils responded by stoning the ghetto schools, and shattering 117 windows in one school. On the following day the police opened fire. One woman was reported dead and 27 people wounded. In Zwelitsha, Ciskei, 127 pupils appeared before a magistrate on charges of "public violence." By the end of the week the boycott escalated in Port Alfred and Queenstown. In Port Elizabeth alone, 21 schools were being boycotted. Students at Fort Hare received another ultimatum to return to lectures or leave the campus by the 16th July. Over 90% of the 2,700 students continued to boycott lectures when the college reopened on the 15th July, and at the end of the week hundreds decided to return to their homes.

On the 8th July, 66 people under indefinite detention at Victor Verster prison near Paarl in the western Cape started a hunger strike to protest at their continued detention. A week or so later they were joined by detainees at Modderbee prison in the Transvaal and women detainees at Poolsmoor prison in the Cape. A news blackout on the condition of the hunger strikers was immediately imposed by the Department of Prisons. Amongst those on strike were the Black Consciousness leaders Peter Jones, detained with Steve Biko in 1977, Nombulela Melane, and Yusuf Variava.

The Committee of 81 decided on the 11th July to continue the boycott until all the short-term demands had been met. The demands, the Committee declared, must be met at all black schools. These included the unconditional readmission of all pupils and students expelled or suspended, the right to independent and democratically elected student councils, the supply of textbooks, and the repair of damaged schools. On the 15th July came the news that the Committee had decided to suspend the boycott. But in the eastern Cape the boycott showed little sign of slackening. On the 22nd July, 160 pupils in King William's Town were injured in a police baton-charge. A week later the newspapers were reporting an "almost total" boycott still continuing in the eastern Cape.

### *Puppets on a String*

During its third week the boycott of schools was extended to KwaMashu in Durban, the self-declared constituency of Chief "Patriotic Participation" Gatsha Buthelezi. Here, as in the Transkei, the state had no need to appoint ad hoc mediators. Buthelezi, a salaried appointee of the state, correctly perceives any boycott as a threat to his position. He stands implacably opposed to the armed struggle, the overseas boycott, and divestment campaigns. An active collaborator in Bantustan schemes, he now contemplates extending his participation to the Soweto Urban Bantu Council. In 1976, with the connivance of the police, in order to save a bloodbath, they claimed, he provoked a group of compound dwellers in Soweto to unleash violence on the pupils and their parents. In 1980, he and his so-called Minister of Education, Mr. Oscar Dhlomo, were threatening "strongaction against school children who continued to boycott classes." The threat was issued before a meeting called for Sunday the 18th May by Buthelezi to "mediate" with the pupils.

In language that strongly echoed that used by the state, Buthelezi and his Inkatha also sought phantoms on whom to assign responsibility for the pupils' boycott action. In thousands of leaflets distributed in Durban's black ghettos, they alleged that the pupils were being used as "instruments by adults who were enemies of the liberation struggle." The enemies of liberation *a la* Buthelezi were presumably the black medical students who, without the kind of police protection enjoyed by Buthelezi, had distributed leaflets expressing solidarity with the pupils and were themselves boycotting lectures at university. Buthelezi arrived at his meeting protected by the police and accompanied by Inkatha supporters adorned in the colours of the African National Congress (ANC) and dressed in a style reminiscent of the volunteers in the 1952 Defiance Campaign against Unjust Laws. He seized the opportunity afforded by the meeting to once again express his well-worn opposition to the armed struggle. The pupils and students--with whom he was to "mediate"--boycotted the meeting. Instead, they held a counter-rally which the police also protected by dispersing it with the help of teargas, and shooting to death one man.

The boycott action in Natal, of all places, proved an acute embarrassment to Buthelezi. With the pupils, students, and large sections of the people making it clear that they did not acknowledge his leadership, Buthelezi attached responsibility for the pupils' action to persons whose names are not of Zulu origin and thus outside what Inkatha regards as its sphere of influence. Taking advantage of the legal immunity bestowed on Bantustan "parliaments," Mr. Stephen Sithebe accused three black Durban lawyers of "orchestration" of the schools boycott. The lawyers Griffiths Mxenga, Justice Poswa, and Louis Skweyiya

threatened to sue if the accusation were repeated outside the KwaZulu Assembly. Sithebe, using the same words Botha had used barely two weeks before, had said that Inkatha could tell who were:

*standing behind the school uniform of our children  
. . . . It smells like Poswa, like Mxenga and  
Skweyiya standing behind the uniform of our  
children.*

Speaking on behalf of the three, Mxenga said they were disgusted by the tribalism of Inkatha and regretted that the statements were made under the protection of what he described as "their" Parliament. A journalist, Murimuthu Subramoney, was also blamed for the schools boycott. Mr. R.R. Mdongwe, also a member of Inkatha, resorted to an unmistakably racist metaphor when he warned Subramoney that he "must be very careful as he is close to the Indian Ocean and the Inkatha current is very strong." Not surprisingly, on the 28th May, Subramoney was taken into police detention.

We have noted the consistent opposition of the students' movements and the Black Consciousness organisations to Buthelezi throughout the seventies. To this opposition, Buthelezi maintained, in his speech in Jabulani on the 21st October 1979 and on numerous other occasions, that in all his actions he acted with the knowledge and blessing of the African National Congress (ANC). In the absence of a rebuttal by the ANC of his claims, Buthelezi made some of the most virulent attacks on the Black Consciousness organisations. But not for long could the ANC remain silent in the face of Buthelezi's role with respect to the schools boycott and the condemnation he made of the Sasol bombing. The restraint was explained by Alfred Nzo, Secretary General of the ANC, in a speech he delivered on the 30th July:

*. . . we have avoided public condemnation of those  
whom we felt were proceeding in wrong directions  
from genuinely mistaken positions.*

*But the conduct of one such as Chief Buthelezi  
of the KwaZulu Bantustan, especially over the  
recent past, can no longer be seen as proceeding  
in wrong directions from genuinely mistaken  
positions. Rather, it has become clear that  
Buthelezi has placed himself in the position of  
an interlocutor between the oppressed and the  
oppressor in favour of the oppressor.*

#### *The People's Support for the Boycott*

The ideological apparatus of the state in the form of the

government, the police, and the Bantustan functionaries were loud in their claims that the pupils lacked the support of the black oppressed. It is unthinkable for children whose ages averaged 15 to sustain a schools boycott for more than three months without at least the tacit support of their parents and other adult members of the community. In many areas where the boycott was strong committees of parents, parents and pupils, or university students were formed to express support for the pupils. The reference by both Buthelezi's Inkatha and Prime Minister Botha to "those behind the uniform of school children" was in fact an admission of the support the people were giving to the boycott.

Perhaps the most illuminating example of the degree of co-operation between pupils and the adult population is in the involvement of Dr. Yusuf Joe Variaba. A prominent spokesman for Black Consciousness, a member of the national executive committee of AZAPO, a chairman of the Solidarity Front, he was also an executive member of the Lenasia Parents and Pupils' Action Committee formed to lend support to the pupils. His detention by the police on the 4th May provoked an unprecedented protest by nurses and other staff at the Coronationville Hospital where a march and a meeting were held on the hospital grounds.

Many of the children attending boarding schools in towns many miles away from their homes were stranded for travel fares after they were expelled from the schools they boycotted. The local communities gave assistance by accommodating them until arrangements were made and money available for the pupils to go back to their homes.

In Eldorado Park and Riverlea parents accompanied their children to attend the rallies held on school grounds. The parents' support for the pupils was often expressed in the words "ons kinders is reg" (our children are right). These were parents who witnessed the police baton-charges into the pupils' rallies without any provocation or warnings to disperse, only to hear the news on TV later the same day that their children were baton-charged after they had failed to comply with police warnings to disperse or had been throwing stones.

The boycott of schools on a nationwide basis dates from the 14th April. But the genesis of the action goes back to 6th February 1980, when pupils at Fezeka High School in Guguletu, Cape Town, presented the headmaster with a list of grievances. These included the shortage of textbooks, compulsory fees and uniforms, the enforced homework period of two hours a day, the bad conduct of a teacher, and the lack of pupil representation on issues affecting pupils. The announcement on the 15th February that their grievances would not be conceded was followed by a short boycott. The pupils returned to classes after a meeting

they had held jointly with parents and teachers. The pupils thus enjoyed the support and involvement of their parents from the outset.

In February, too, the pupils at the Mountainview High School in Hanover Park, Cape Town, began to boycott their classes. The boycott was preceded by a series of meetings to which their parents were invited to participate in the discussion of their grievances. On the 13th March an ad hoc committee with joint parent and pupil representation was formed. A meeting they organised for the 20th March was joined by parents and pupils from another school, Crystal Senior Secondary. The meeting was called to discuss the "system of gutter education" and to formulate a list of grievances.

A meeting of the 7th April drew even wider support. The number of schools involved had grown from two to 19, and representatives from the bush college of the Western Cape and from Hewatt Training College also attended. The ad hoc committee formed earlier was now transformed into the United Education Front which resolved to fight the education system "at all levels." The meeting formulated a list of short-term demands to the government. If the demands were not met within a week, the pupils, students, and parents warned that they would convene a meeting to consider a boycott of schools.

The initial grievances and demands listed by the pupils, taken at their face value, did not appear to be political. In addition to those already mentioned, the apparently non-political grievances included the compulsion to purchase expensive school uniforms, the failure to repair schools damaged in Cape Town during the Soweto Uprising, and the abuse of corporal punishment, especially in regard to girls--a catalogue of grievances which would draw the support of all parents. These grievances appeared to be so reformist that the government conceded some of them on the 9th April. The conciliatory reaction of the government must, of course, be seen to be a result of parent involvement and thus a fear of mass support for the pupils. However, that the boycott action in the Cape Flats and the country as a whole was started after and in spite of government concessions shows unmistakably that the grievances were *anything but* reformist.

There is also the fact that the pupils, as their Cape Town ultimatum to the government testified, have learnt through bitter experience not to take the state and its functionaries at their word. The pupils' action would not be stopped by mere promises from the government. They have learnt from the Soweto Uprising and many other experiences that concessions by the state are not real and that they carry a sting in the tail. The concessions are seen for what they are--no more than an exercise in semantics.

The pattern of joint meetings and consultations between pupils and parents was established very early in the boycott and long before the boycott assumed a national scale. It was a pattern that was to become an essential and characteristic feature of the boycott action throughout the period of its duration. In this respect the pupils were helped by articulating their grievances as a working class issue. On the 7th April, for example, they placed placards on the fence of the Wynberg offices of the Administration of "Coloured" Affairs which proclaimed that:

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

On the 11th April the schools from the ghettos of Langa, Nyanga, and Guguletu joined the United Education Front. A further mass meeting was held on the 13th April. Attendance at this meeting had increased to include representatives of pupils, students, and parents from all the black ghettos of the western Cape. At this time the government had conceded some of the demands: the removal of certain headmasters and a promise to repair damaged schools. In view of these concessions the meeting decided to extend the one-week's notice previously given to the government to meet their demands. The government was now given time until the end of the month to meet the rest of the short-term demands, and until then the decision to boycott schools was to be held in abeyance. But the pupils did not wait for the end of the month. The very next day hundreds of them began to boycott the schools in Cape Town. By the end of the week they were joined by thousands, and the boycott had reached Johannesburg.

#### *Every Issue a Political Issue*

In the Alexandra Bus Boycott of 1957, to take one example from many, it became clear that every issue on which the people act, no matter how remote from politics it may appear at first, soon assumes political proportions. A spontaneous mass action by the people of the Alexandra ghetto to boycott buses in order to resist an increase of a penny on the fares immediately revealed that on the other side of the struggle the bus company, PUTCO, was not standing alone. The state and its crucial supports--industry, commerce and agriculture, the military and the police, and all manner of racist ideologues inside and outside Parliament--came out to turn the issue of a penny increment on the fares into a political confrontation. Reaction such as this is in the nature of a totally repressive system. Every issue is politically overdetermined by the lack of the most elementary democratic rights.

We have observed that the nationwide boycott was itself preceded by the voicing of grievances which on the surface appeared to be non-political and even reformist, and that some of these the government had no difficulty in conceding if only by way of promises. But very soon these grievances were transcended by an awareness that their resolution could not be effected within the present socio-economic structure. The demands that the state should supply adequate textbooks and make repairs to damaged schools grew to become only short-term demands as against a resolution to fight the "system of gutter education" and to fight it "at all levels." The compulsion to wear expensive school uniforms and to buy stationery began to be seen and articulated as working class grievances. Thus, in one of their pamphlets, the pupils and students stated:

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

And, in explaining the concessions they had won in active struggle and how to mediate the short-term demands with the long-term demands:

*These short-term victories, however, are incomplete until they are linked up with long-term goals. We must see how these short-term demands are linked up with the political and economic system of this country. We must see how the fail/pass rate in schools are linked up with the labour supply for the capitalist system, how low quality school buildings are linked to the unequal allocation of funds to education for children of the oppressed and children of the oppressor, how inadequate library facilities are linked with the need to confine and limit the thoughts of the oppressed, how distorted history textbooks are linked with the need to obscure and propagandise against the proud history of resistance of the indigenous people against economic slavery, how, in fact, the whole educational system against which we are rebelling, stems from the fact that we are denied basic political rights and thus political power.*

#### *Where to Begin*

There are those who already wishfully read into the statements of the students a move away from a black/white struggle to a struggle in which colour plays no part at all. Invariably

none of these people are involved in struggle at the level of the ghetto or grassroots. They appeal to a vulgar marxism to claim that the struggle is simply between the working class and the capitalist, and thereby deny to the struggle the specificity which derives from the black/white divide. Unfortunately, this is a division which cannot be wished away by one's advanced understanding--"the most wonderful rubbish has been produced from this quarter too," Engels said of the fervent "marxists" of his day who were also in the habit of making unmediated reductions from superstructure to base.

Whatever the economic laws underlying the South African social formation, the fact is that the boycott of schools was an action by black pupils, and the militant struggles in both factory and ghetto are the actions of the black working class *alone*. It was black children who rebelled against a system of education which affected them in a way different to white children; children of a black working class affected by the entire socio-economic system in a way different to the white working class. Doting, for it is nothing more than that, upon the fact that it was three white teachers dismissed from Crystal Senior Secondary School whose reinstatement the pupils demanded does not prove that the question of colour was absent from the pupils' boycott action. If the pupils demanded the reinstatement of *any* teacher, it was only because the teacher stood on their side. That is as it should be--there can be no other side for *anyone* who is progressive or revolutionary in outlook.

None of the issues which presently motivate the black working class or their children in struggle are issues that can unite them in struggle with what remains of the white working class--at least not for a long time this side of the socialist revolution. It cannot be otherwise when the racism which fragments the class of workers in South Africa is an economically structured one with effects permeating *every* level of the society. Who are the workers who cannot afford shelter, food, and education for their children? Which children? Which working class children are forced into cheap labour? Who are the cheap labour force? Low-quality school buildings and inadequate teaching and library facilities for whom? Who are politically rightless and politically powerless? The answer to these questions does not include the word "white." At either end of the linkages the students so brilliantly made between the short and long-term demands are issues which at this present juncture pertain only to the black working class and other blacks in South Africa. The "we" in their statements refers to none other than the black working class, and will be readily understood to mean just that by those to whom the statements are addressed--the black working class.

The emmiseration of *this* working class cannot and must not

be explained boldly in terms of the workings of something called "capitalism" which determines the conditions and consciousness of something called "the working class." Our "advanced understanding" of material processes must enable us to see that beyond this explanation is a capitalism which affects the black working class in a particular way, in a way different from the rest of the working class. It is this fragmentation of the class that will help us understand the consequent fragmentation of consciousness as well--into black and white consciousness, the persistence of *black* struggles--in South Africa and, for that matter, in the countries of advanced capitalism themselves.

Thus, for a considerably long time into the future, the struggles of the working class and of the masses as a whole, especially those struggles emanating from their self-activity--bus boycotts, schools boycotts, resistance to rent increases or forced removals, strikes against below subsistence wages, and so on--will emerge and manifest themselves in terms of colour, or as black struggles. We in the Black Consciousness Movement, as our name implies, do not shun struggles which will of necessity continue to exhibit the manifestation of colour. The manifestation is only an appearance, but an appearance with a material base. At root the struggle is a class struggle, and so are all struggles. The manifestation of colour constitutes a terrain of struggle which is not of our own making. But it is a terrain upon which the self-activity and consciousness of the masses, the working class included, is predicated. Under capitalism there can be no level other than that of appearances at which a mass consciousness forms itself. For us there is no other starting point for consciousness raising. As a bonus, the starting point is not a false one because the consciousness of our people is in response to their oppression and exploitation.

To refuse to interpellate this consciousness so we can harness it into militant struggle and help it along in the direction of socialism; to ignore this terrain, these appearances, and the consciousness to which they give rise, is to surrender ourselves to the wilderness and to abdicate the leadership of both the mass movement and the working class to the likes of Buthelezi. To believe that this consciousness is merely a psychic phenomenon is to indulge in self-delusion and, in fact, is to deny that very "advanced understanding" which should inform us that while consciousness is materially based it is a material force in its own right.

#### *Development of a Revolutionary Class Consciousness*

What is class consciousness, how it is developed and transformed into a revolutionary class consciousness, is one of the most vexed questions in scientific socialism. We do not wish to pretend that we can give the answer. All we do now is to

sketchily indicate some of the problems, and indicate some elements in our present situation that facilitate the growth of a revolutionary class consciousness.

The fragmentation of the working class takes place not only along the black/white lines. It takes place within the black working class itself, taking the form of tribal or colour/caste divisions which lead quite often to obstacles in the way of the unity of struggles. The differential treatment of the various colour groups, primarily at the economic level but with effects at other levels, gives rise to an uneven development of consciousness. Hence even in the schools boycott action the various groups and areas did not all spring into action at once. Even the response of the state to the pupils' action, when it spread to embrace every black group throughout the country, was to try hard to fracture the solidarity of the blacks: promising reform of "Coloured" education, equal pay for "Coloured" headteachers, talk of "brown Afrikaners," and so on. Reflecting and extending further the strategy of the ruling class, Buthelezi's announcement of a common examination "with whites" for pupils in Natal was an attempt to fragment blacks along tribal lines. The "total strategy" of the ruling class now includes an orchestrated effort by all its supports to entrench a black middle class and dress up its cosmetic changes so it will look as though the urban black worker is privileged as compared to the rural workers and those marginalised to the so-called resettlement areas.

These are some of the impediments which, added to a repressive labour and political system, hamper the development of a revolutionary class consciousness. But even without these impediments, a revolutionary working class consciousness is not given like manna from the heavens. It does not miraculously develop from an objective working class position. It does not even necessarily emanate from class struggle. It it were so, then class struggles--all written history "is the history of class struggles"--in the countries of advanced capitalism would long ago have been consummated into a socialist revolution. *Revolutionary* class consciousness is something we have to fight for through our active intervention in ongoing struggles which take place under very definite conditions--conditions which in our special case affect the black working class in a particular way and give rise to a particular consciousness. The black working class in South Africa will turn to us for leadership only if we intervene to play an active role in their struggles and only if we can correctly articulate their consciousness with a socialist one.

The development of a revolutionary class consciousness is not only helped by the *active* intervention in struggles of those of us who proclaim a socialist understanding. The racist nature of South Africa and the way that affects our people, embedded as

it is within a primitive accumulation of capital that does not allow for the enjoyment of nominal freedom, is a powerful catalytic agent in the formation of a radical political awareness, especially when South Africa is placed side by side with many "nationally independent" countries of the Third World. Our people, probably the most politically conscious anywhere, are all the time comparing their own position in South Africa with that of working people and others in the independent states. This they do because their own freedom is late in arriving. Their present position makes them follow with the keenest interest the progress of independent states and other liberation movements, their programmes, triumphs, and setbacks. As a result our people know by now that the "political kingdom," the "African personality," "negritude," and what have you, do not bring in any meaningful social change. It has become a commonplace saying among ordinary people that "we do not wish to exchange white rulers for ones wearing black masks." With this experience, the "Viva Frelimo" rallies organised by the Black Consciousness organisations in 1974 were not simply celebrating another event of independence. They were celebrating the victory of a movement which like us has learnt from the experience of others that political or national independence is not enough without social control of the commanding heights of the economy.

As a result of experience our people do not now make purely formal demands. But even where the demands are couched in formal terms they now bear a content which makes them different from yesterday's. Parity in education spending is a demand which has always been made in the past. However, we have seen that in the hands of the pupils and students the content of the demand superseded its formal aspect. By means of articulating short-term demands with long-term demands, they added a dimension to struggle spelling a radical transformation of society by the working class itself.

We must emphasise, however, that the growth of a revolutionary class consciousness cannot be taken for granted. "Working class consciousness," Walter Rodney explained, "is a very important factor. . . . The discussion of socialism is a part of a response to a popular outbreak, a demand for change." With particular regard to the ethnic polarisation of the workers and peasants in Guyana, Rodney traced the uneasy path along which consciousness develops:

*But even as the demand is made for change, the content of the demand is sharpened. People move from one erroneous perception, perhaps to another erroneous perception, but always towards a clearer perception in the long run. Take the idea of national independence. Twenty-five years ago people in the islands and in Guyana imagined that*

*national independence would bring about some betterment in their social condition. When their independence came around and there was no change in their lifestyles, it was inevitable that they would make new demands. These would be couched in--let us say--racial terms in a few societies--another false start. Then they began to make their demands in more specific class terms. So, even if the first demands led to the emergence of the "hero" in Caribbean politics, or to specifically anti-communist national movements, or even to the rise of mini-dictatorships...; indeed, even if these demands led to the entrenchment of racism, as they did for a period in Guyana and allowed for CIA penetration, this was all still part of the emergence of the marxist presence.*

Fortunately for us in South Africa, no liberation movement is making the false start of racial demands nor has the fragmentation of the black working class had any serious effects on the political struggle. The liberation movement as a whole has a long tradition of proclaiming the unity in struggle of all the blacks. In the recent past we have even, and without fanfare, moved away from multi-racialism and the racial alliances. In the seventies the students from all the bush colleges joined the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), the leading exponent of black consciousness at the time. In 1980, too, the pupils and students proclaimed and achieved the unity in struggle of all the blacks. They asserted that "we are all black" to counteract the ruling ideology of assigning caste according to colour. The action of the meat workers in the Cape, to name one example, testifies to the progress made in breaking down divisions based upon colour. What was significant about this strike is that at issue were differential "rights" to severely restricted forms of worker representation accorded the "African" and the "Coloured." The solidarity of the workers in insisting that management recognise a single workers' committee representing all the black workers received considerable support from the whole black community. All this because the South African social formation as a whole, in spite of cosmetic changes, continues to operate in such a way that fragmentation of the blacks at the material level is overridden and rendered largely superfluous at the political.

Lastly, we must not overlook the fact that the pupils' action was centred on the most important conurbations--Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Bloemfontein, and Pietermaritzburg. The children involved were largely children of the working class--a fact that the children never lost sight of. All this augurs well for the development of a *revolutionary* class consciousness among the workers. Equally

important and encouraging was that the rural areas moved along together with the towns in boycotting schools so that consciousness has not been balkanised by the imposition of Bantustans.

*Concluding Note on Open and Active Struggles*

1) The decade of the seventies has shown that open and active mass political struggle, however difficult and fraught with risks, is still possible under South Africa's totally repressive regime. The students and workers pay heavily for their actions: shootings, loss of life, sackings from school or work, endorsements out of the urban areas, police detentions, exile, etc. The same price is paid by those who articulate the aspirations of the people openly in political and student movements like AZAPO, AZASO, and COSAS. In no other country is so high a sacrifice made for standing up to fight oppression and exploitation.

But it cannot be gainsaid that these active and open ideological and political struggles are the highest form of struggle: the class struggle *par excellence*. Without these struggles, consciousness cannot be preordained to rise beyond the solution of the most immediately pressing issues. In and through these struggles, in and through our active intervention in these struggles, the realisation comes that every issue is political and must be contested politically, that the struggle is not merely for a political kingdom in which the oppressor and exploiter will wear a black mask. The raising of political consciousness means nothing less than the realisation of ever widening sections of the people that the key to their problem lies in the solution of both the national and social questions; that struggles which do not involve the working class are either doomed to failure or open to co-optation by imperialism; that to enlist the support of the working class and to enhance class consciousness amongst them we must centre our political and economic demands on the black working class, and show the greatest determination in the struggle for these demands.

2) Without these open and active struggles the armed struggle would not gain new recruits in large numbers. Indeed it was only as a result of the open activities of the Black Consciousness organisations leading up to the Soweto Uprising that the largest number of young people to date joined those constituents of the National Liberation Movement with military wings and the international support to train and provide logistics for a guerrilla army. In two separate articles for the Johannesburg *Post* Zwelakhe Sisulu wrote of that "class of 1976" which now forms the "core of the guerilla force and recruiters." For only in these open and active struggles is it realised that, within South Africa's totally repressive system, the political/ideological struggles and the gains that accrue as a result of these

struggles need to be defended by a people's army.

3) To demonstrate openly and actively around any issue, however limited or short-term in appearance, is to unequivocally assert a right which the system denies--the right to action. Struggle, when the struggle itself is outlawed, is struggle for the right to struggle. In this sense, the present ongoing struggles inside the country by students, workers, or those marginalised and forcibly resettled out of sight in remote corners--all these struggles are prefigurative in the highest degree. Out of these struggles are forged those instruments of worker, student, community, and mass organisations which alone will guarantee our freedom in the future. How easily the working class in a country like Britain, for example, forgets that the rights to trade unionism, to free and universal education, to universal suffrage, to a national health service, to "free" speech--that all these rights were not handed down to them by a benevolent ruling class but are rights fought for and won by their forbears in *active* struggles over the course of a century and more; and that these rights can only be secured and extended in active and continuous struggle.

The present struggles of our students and workers, emanating from their self-activity, are prefigurative in that they mirror those rights of assembly, protest, and strike which they must enjoy in the society for which they are fighting, and in every stage towards that society. The ongoing struggles are not limited by their explicit objectives: against *no* education, for higher wages and trade union rights, and so forth. They are, albeit implicitly, also struggles about the right to struggle, struggles to end all struggles, struggles for a classless society. Only when rights are won in actual struggles, only then will these rights have the greatest chance of being guaranteed and enshrined in the future society.

4) The importance of an open and active struggle once it breaks out at one level within a totally repressive system, in which struggles are unlawful and consequently suppressed over long periods of time, is that it makes possible or opens up spaces for struggles at other levels. That is, within such a regime open and active struggle has a multi-effect: struggle over one issue leads to struggle over a whole range of issues which question the system in its very foundations. The decade of the seventies was one in which the reactive effect of one struggle made possible other struggles. The militant assertion of Black Consciousness in the late sixties cracked the granite wall of repression after a decade's hiatus in political activity. The cracks provided a space for the militant struggles that were to characterise the seventies. These spaces for further action on political and economic fronts, it must be emphasised, have been created only as a result of open and active struggles and

defiance of prohibitive laws, by the students and workers. The pupils and students, in exercising autonomous control over the schools boycott action and simultaneously waging relentless war against the collaborators, have shown that these spaces must neither be occupied nor surrendered to those poised for co-optation.

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It was said of the Soweto Uprising that after it South Africa would never be the same. In that Uprising the workers and a generation of future workers were schooled and conscientised in political action. The pupils' action of 1980 and the youthful sections of today's working class were born out of that Uprising. It is a generation which has learnt to struggle actively and continuously to win its demands. The promises and detentions and shootings will not stop its active struggle, open or otherwise. We have a lot more to learn from the youth than we can impart to them.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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