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## **MESSY SCHOOLING MUDDLE**

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# **MESSY SCHOOLING MUDDLE**

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**(Cde Alie Fataar, aged 86, who has been active in the liberation struggle since the very early 1940s. His involvement has been uninterrupted and the mounting years have not diminished the sharpness of his mind nor his passion for the freedoms which drew him to the struggle while he was still a youth. In pursuit of those freedoms, Cde Fataar served the Unity Movement for over sixty years and continues to do so to this very day.**

**Very few people are more qualified than Cde Fataar to comment and assess the position of education in the new South Africa. Apart from being the Secretary General for 14 years of the Teachers League of South Africa which together with the Cape African Teachers Association were the only two revolutionary teachers' organisations until the 1980s when it became "safe" for teachers to take part in politics, he spent most of his life in the field of education.**

**Cde Fataar was banned in the early 1960s and fled the country soon thereafter to escape the clutches of the Security Police. Abroad, Cde Fataar continued his political activities. He spent his exile in Botswana, Zambia and finally in liberated Zimbabwe. In all the three newly independent countries, Cde Fataar performed as teacher, lecturer, curriculum developer and educational administrator.**

**Cde Fataar is therefore pre-eminently qualified to comment on the Education System in the new South Africa)**

**Never could I imagine the "new South Africa" would spawn a travesty of schooling such as we have had to endure since the democratic order "miraculously" engulfed us.**

**In a prime-time Radio 786<sup>1</sup> talk recently, some five linked-up teachers tried, once again, to crack open the OBE nut – in case you have forgotten, that is Outcomes Based Education. From the ministry of Professor Bhengu and now the ministry of Professor Asmal not much light has been shed to reveal how meaningful the magic OBE code word has been. Two of the "experts", allegedly official spokesman, were mere apologists who tried vainly to befuddle the other participants who were correctly critical of the OBE charade. Brian Isaacs of South Peninsula gave the views of the progressive**

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<sup>1</sup> A radical community based radio station in the Western Cape

teachers in the Cape ( he is old TLSA, now NUPSAWU and speaks also for the parents in the Parent Teacher Association) while a woman participant (referred to as Mrs X because she feared victimisation if her true name were revealed) read out a list of problems militating against any application of the OBE curriculum amongst the children of parents in townships and squatter camps where many teachers have classes of 50-60 pupils in overcrowded and ill-lit rooms lacking any useful resources for OBE, with many untrained teachers as well.

This debate must go on in earnest if education is not to revert to bantuisd gutter schooling for the poor and oppressed majority of the now enfranchised citizens of South Africa – for that tragic *outcome* seems probable. Time and space do not allow me to list more than a few of the pointers in this direction.

“The Educational Journal” of the TLSA (now a NUPSAWU trade union affiliate) has been consistent in its exposure of “Just what is happening in education?” a question the Journal has asked “with incredulous horror.”

In its November-December 2002 edition, the editorial asked: “Education traumatised: Whose Misconduct?” In it reference is made to the ugly opinion that teachers and schools were better off during the dark days of apartheid than they were at present. One of the many prickly issues is, of course, the number of teaching posts at schools and the drastic reduction of teachers in relation to learners: from 25-30 to 35-40 plus per teacher, which resulted in the dismissal of thousands of some of the most qualified and experienced staff - some given “golden handshakes” to get them out of the schools as rapidly as possible. The ultimate *outcome*? 50-60 pupils per teacher-facilitator in townships and rural areas, i.e. three-fourths of the schooling population. These “sacked” teachers were never to be employed in state schools again. But now that AIDS and other non-natural causes (emigration as one) have depleted teachers in posts, the call is for the experienced deployed teachers to return! Absolutely farcical!

An equally frustrating issue has been the tension and insecurity arising from the ill-conceived changes in school curricula foisted upon teachers who had no idea what the education planners intended. Thousands of teachers and pupils have struggled to adapt to a system patently unsuitable for a country still beset with the “destructive legacy of apartheid”.

Primary schooling is in a mess curriculum-wise: instead of 2002 being the year to see the first crop of learners to complete grade 9 (Standard 7) for the GETC (General Education Training Certificate), Asmal and his council of

educators have “ casually made it known that the new school-leaving certificate from the end of Grade 9 will be introduced at the end of 2004.”

**AND FOR THE Secondary area? Even more muddled and confusing: students , teachers, parents, publishers and book-sellers are concerned about the about the curriculum and syllabuses, for the 2003’s Grade 10; but Asmal and Co. ((of educators) have said the current Senior Certificate syllabus will be followed “because an OBE curriculum has not yet been worked out for Grades 10-12”. Teachers are expected to adapt to teaching techniques of OBE to fit the “Old” subjects! It’s like frying fresh fish in used left-over oil of the week before!**

**The very latest information from Minister Asmal (28 February) in a quiet announcement is that implementation of the Further Education and Training Curriculum (FET) – grade 10, 11 and 12 – will be delayed until 2006. At the end of last year, the date was to be 2004.**

**The most burning issue is the question of fee-paying and fund-raising by parents to keep their schools functioning. Despite what Asmal says (“schools to refrain from insisting that indigent children pay school fees”) his posturing as a defender of the poverty-stricken kids is “essentially hypocritical”, says the TLSA Journal. Government has gone back on the “Freedom Charter to establish a system of “free compulsory education for all”. The CODESA-Kempton Park deal/sell-out plus IMF-World Bank structural adjustments pulled the plug on all this “freedom” and in its place came “a you-get-what-you-pay-for “ (TLSA characterisation.)**

**Privatisation has meant to an increasing extent that the parents must find the money to pay for their children’s schooling – don’t forget that in most cases parents have two or more children at primary and secondary school. When the IMF/WB introduced adjustments in Zambia and Zimbabwe way back in the 1980s and all free schooling ended abruptly, most parents sent only boys for secondary education and kept the girls home. It can, and will happen here, too, since thousands of schools in poverty–stricken areas, overcrowded locations and squatter fire-hazard “informal housing” scrap heap dumps – cannot, because of low wages and the unemployability of the parents, raise the money through compulsory fees and other financial contributions and levies if the schools are to function at all.**

**The worst scenario of our education system could be as happened in Zimbabwe while I worked there: parents had their property attached and removed and sold to pay for arrear school fees and the children barred from**

school. It is already happening here , Professor Asmal! Where's the much-proclaimed Freedom Charter's "free, compulsory education" and the ANC's election promise of "a better life for all"?

The Cape Times of 5 March tells the sad story of a Humansdorp (P.E) high school youngster, Lunga Komani aged 18, who could not pay school fees of R50 after his mother died. Contrary to Asmal's much vaunted Schools Act which exempts pupils who cannot pay fees, the boy was "chased away from school" by getting debt collectors to demand payment of the fee, now R80 with interest plus VAT – R30 for the collector Snyman & Partners! What a shame! Yet in the Cape Times the day before, there was a headline : "Bid to ensure equity for all pupils...Asmal rules out free education, but plan targets poor schools"... According to Asmal, "free education inevitably led to the running down of the education system". What a damnable remark by a Minister of Education!

And to cap it all, there is the millstone of continued funding of education: the IMF and WB now dictate that education (like health and other social services) shall not get a larger slice of the budget – the MAIN PRIORITY is the debt repayments to the IMF/WB in terms of global "international obligations". This means that the financial burden of schooling would be "thrust on parents, teachers, governing bodies and pupils" and there would be No FREE education and that the State's funding policies would NOT PRODUCE EQUITY. Additional fees (the lowest fee is R80 per annum in African primary schools and R400 per term in other schools, while in former Model C schools anything from R1000 to R10 000 per term (no colour bar, only money bar!) in still "privileged" areas like Westerford, Pinelands, Constantia etc.

Let me bring this short account of mess, muddle and betrayal of hopes to its bizarre ending. In summary, it is about the Dept. of Education's (latest) "scientific way of organising schools into meaningful groups". Named "The Quintile System", it is neither scientific nor meaningful. Two factors are used in ranking schools – from 1 for the poorest, neediest to 5 for those in the wealthier, better resourced areas. The physical condition of the school building and the degree of the poverty of the community served by the school must be considered, each with a 50% weighting. Amazingly, an Eastern Province school in a very poor area, with 33% of parents unemployed and others in the low income group, the majority in a squatter camp or sprawling urban township, school building condemned by Health and Fire Departments: was placed in Quintile 4, just below schools in the advantaged areas – like Westerford, even Livingstone or Athlone High.

**Which raises the government's funding policies: quite obviously. School fees and fund-raising will have to be the responsibility of the parents to pay for water, electricity, telephone, maintenance and, even teachers (over the official number paid for by the Department according to the strict quota of one teacher for anything from 35-50 pupils. The school fees dilemma needs to be properly and democratically examined: How children are excluded from school if fees are not paid and parents handed over to private collection agencies which can appropriate house belongings to cover unpaid fees!**

**Not only are state assets being sold off to profiteers/shareholders in the privatisation of Telkom, Spoornet, SAA, Eskom etc, but there is the growing privatisation of water resources and health delivery and of all levels of schooling and tertiary education: fee-paying private clinics ( as in part of Groote Schuur Hospital ) and commercial-rated fee-paying former Model C schools and business colleges for mainly white and non-white novo-elite and the "developing" BEES – that's newspeak for Black Economic Empowerment Sharks. I would say with my colleagues in the TLISA-NUPSAWU and the Educational Journal: we are opposed to education's being reduced to a commodity...and to the funding of schools based on this misconception. Our demand is for free, compulsory state-funded education to at least Grade 12. This is what we have struggled for and must be the goal of our striving for liberation.**

**It is time some SAD-Teachers Union members stopped worrying about THEIR conditions of service and promotion and show concern for the conditions of the children they teach and of the parents.**

**I have great pleasure in commending the next generation born during the struggle years by mentioning what my grand-nephew, Dr Aslam Fataar has written about the government's socio-economic policy of the "narrowing" educational scope:**

**"The government's minimalised approach to school funding has not enabled the majority of poor schools in the country to rebuild their shattered physical learning conditions".**

**And in non-technical terms: post apartheid government policy in education (and other social welfare) was geared to the global capitalist environment, playing mainly a "symbolic role" in providing ineffective educational provisions, resulting on no real change.**