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## THE ABANDONMENT OF THE CHILDREN

- AN ANALYSIS OF  
THE TEACHERS' STRIKE  
OF 1993

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ABANDONMENT  
OF THE  
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## DEDICATION

This publication is dedicated to the NON EUROPEAN UNITY MOVEMENT which was formed 50 years ago, in December 1943.

From the Non European Unity Movement we learnt:

- The importance of principles and the need to live by them.
- To elevate the interests of the toiling masses - the workers and peasants - over and above all other interests.
- To strive for the unity of the oppressed on a principled basis.
- That there is only the human race and, therefore, no other races.
- To strive for the attainment of a single South African Nation for lasting peace and harmony amongst its divergent people.
- To wage an unceasing war against racialism, tribalism, sectionalism and ethnicity.
- To strive for the formation of a collective leadership and to abhor the disgusting practice of the cult of the individual.
- The absolute importance of a set of goals or charter or programme to guide all activities in the struggle for liberation.
- That oppression is indivisible and that there are no oppressors who can be described as "Lesser Evil."
- The policy of non-collaboration with the enemy on the basis that the interests of the oppressors and those of the oppressed are diametrically opposed.

- The absolute need to define who the enemy is and who the ally.
- Of the international brotherhood and sisterhood of all peoples suffering as we do and striving for the same objectives.
- To strive for the truth by way of study, effort, research, scientific inquiry, honesty and courage.
- The love and joy of struggle for objectives which transcend our personal interests and which makes living meaningful.
- That it is only by travelling on the road of true democracy and all its attendant freedoms that humanity will attain socialism, enlightenment and culture.
- To understand the true nature of inhuman, predatory and militaristic imperialism and to disregard the flowery but hypocritical mouthings of spokespersons and agents of imperialism and to wage an unceasing war against it.
- The importance of debate, discourse and discussion as a means to arriving at the truth without which no healthy society can function.

For these and many other things that the Non European Unity Movement has taught us, we are deeply grateful. The ideas and values imparted to us by the Non European Unity Movement have moulded our personalities and have made us better men and women than we would otherwise have been.

1 December 1993

## INTRODUCTION

1993 witnessed a bid by a section of black<sup>1</sup> teachers to assert themselves publicly by presenting a number of demands and then backing those demands by undertaking a chalkdown and later, a two week strike.

What is unique about this action is the deep involvement by teachers of Indian descent, also referred to as teachers under the House of Delegates (HOD), in the action launched by the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). This the first time that Indian teachers embarked on a course of action in open defiance of the education authorities.

All those involved in the strike action will never be the same again. These events are history-making and, therefore, it is essential that an analysis be made of such events while they are still fresh in our minds. The writing of history in this country is notorious for its falsification and distortion. Most of the history books written here are fit for the refuse bin because of the patent lies and political slant contained in them.

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<sup>1</sup> By black we refer to the oppressed African, Indian and "Coloured" people. We reject the Nationalist Party coined word for the African people, namely "Black". At first, it was "Cafres", then "Kaffirs" and after that a string of further racist appellations like "Natives", "Bantu", "Plurals" and now "Blacks".

## TEACHERS AS PART OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

The teaching profession constitutes the largest bloc of intellectuals. Intellectuals are persons who have received formal training in the field of ideas whether in pure science or the humanities.<sup>2</sup> Their stock in trade consists of ideas and the function of the teachers is to impart those ideas to their students.

It is a truism that in any society, the prevailing ideas are the ideas of the ruling class which has at its disposal a number of mechanisms to ensure that its ideas prevail. There is the press, the radio, television, the religious institutions like the church, and those attached to mosques, temples etc.

Education has played a particularly important role in implementing the policy of the ruling class. In South Africa, the role of education has been set out with brutal clarity:-

*"Practically considered, the aim in the two cases is not the same....The education of the White child prepared him for life in a dominant society and the education of the Black child for a subordinate society..."* (From the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on "Native Education" 1935-6).

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<sup>2</sup> People have also become intellectuals by their own effort and without having gone to institutions of learning. But the number of self-made intellectuals is so small that for all practical purposes it is the institutions which produce the intellectuals.



The policy referred to in the Report was to be effected by debased education which was designed to prepare the black child to accept that his place was in a subordinate society. He was taught to be different from the Whites; to be inferior; to be taught a history which would make him ashamed of his forebears and to believe that his people made no contribution to world civilisation.

And how were these debased contents of education to be passed on to the children? One of the most important agents in this process was the teacher. It was the function of the teacher to implement the policy of his employer which was the State. Byron, the poet, had harsh words for the intellectuals who were recruited to serve an unjust society:

*"The vulgarest tool that tyranny could want,  
With just enough of talent and no more,  
To lengthen fetters by another fixed,  
And offer poison long already mixed."*

For decades this "vulgarest tool" carried out assigned duties. Fawning on school principals and cringing before school inspectors, the teachers cut pathetic figures. Those who had the sensitivity to be aware of their helplessness and impotence to do anything about it, took to liquor in order to escape from the reality of their humiliating lot. Most were obsessed with promotions, salary increases, gossip, horse racing and other ways to make free or easy money. The children were of no consequence. They existed only to enable the teacher to earn a salary. Apart from the narrow confines of their specific teaching subjects, there was no evidence of wider knowledge or of a culture of learning and enlightenment.

## THE TRUE TEACHERS

Does what we have stated above apply to all teachers? NO! Most certainly not. There are and have always been noble exceptions.

### 1. THE TEACHERS' LEAGUE OF SOUTH AFRICA (TLSA)

This is one of the oldest organisations in the country. Up till the early 1940's, the TLSA was a conservative teachers' body with its centre in Cape Town. During the war years, young teachers in the Cape became radicalised and this process found expression in the TLSA adopting the revolutionary road. It was the first teachers' organisation in South Africa to throw its lot in with the struggle of the oppressed people for liberation. The hallmark of the TLSA was a very high level of consciousness of its members; their acquisition of knowledge which went far beyond the confines of their teaching subjects and their unstinting devotion to their students. The TLSA members have produced many publications which showed a high standard of scholarship and research.<sup>3</sup> "The Educational Journal" is the official publication of the TLSA. The contents of this journal belied its innocuous name. For decades the "Journal", as it became known,

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<sup>3</sup>. Examples of some of these works are:  
W. van Schoor: *The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa.*  
B.M. Kies: *The Contribution of the Non European Peoples to World Civilisation.*  
*Edgar Maurice: The Colour Bar in Education.*

espoused radical politics consistently. This was so even when naked fascism ruled the country in the 1960's and when a number of its issues were banned. The TLSA had as its luminaries people like B.M. Kies, Jane Gool, Willem van Schoor, Alie Fataar, Richard Dudley, E.Steenveld, Helen Kies, Ivan Abrahams and many others.

## 2. THE CAPE AFRICAN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (CATA)

This body of intellectuals took the revolutionary road and joined the peasantry in their struggle for Land and Liberty in 1948. Peasant and intellectual formed the organic link to fight against the notorious Rehabilitation Scheme, the Bantu Authorities Act and the Bantu Education Act. Both membership and leadership of CATA were brave and noble people who threw aside their class interests and challenged the might of the State. The State reacted with great wrath against these intellectuals who, according to the rulers, ought to have been meekly teaching Bantu Education. By the second half of the decade of the fifties, CATA was banned through administrative means. Its members were dismissed in large numbers; they were hounded, victimised and persecuted. Many had to leave the country and go to the then Protectorates of Bechuanaland, Swaziland and Basutoland.

People will long remember the names of Leo Sihlali, T. Honono, Livingstone Mqotsi, R.S. Canca, A.C. Jordan,

Mkentane, Maja, Joseph Bransby Vusani and many others who regarded the fight for liberation more important than their positions and the life-style of the petty-bourgeoisie.<sup>4</sup>

3. Apart from these two organisations, there was TICTA (Transvaal Indian and Coloured Teachers' Association) and the Transvaal African Teachers' Association led by persons like Isaac Matlare, Zeph Mothopeng and Mphahlele which also did very sterling work among the teachers in the 1950's.
4. Then there were individuals who, though not belonging to any of these bodies, nonetheless, carried unsullied the good name of true teachers wherever they were posted. They possessed an enlightened outlook and inculcated in students the correct values in life and a scientific approach to the problems of the oppressed people.
5. There were also those teachers, who were neither political nor did they belong to any progressive teachers' organisations. They, however, were dedicated teachers who considered their profession

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<sup>4</sup> By petty-bourgeoisie we mean that section in society consisting of the small shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, priests etc. This section occupies a position in between the rich and powerful, on the one hand, and the working class and the peasants on the other. As a class, the petty-bourgeoisie aspire to become the bourgeoisie or the very rich.

a CALLING. Their entire lives were wrapped round the challenge of educating new crops of students to whom they were totally devoted. They produced excellent results and students adored and revered them. These true teachers became legends in their lifetime.

6. There were a large number of teachers who fought the system of oppression through active membership of SACOS. They inculcated in children and sportspersons the basic value of non-racialism, non collaboration with the oppressor, anti-imperialism and the concept of one nation.

These teachers played a leading role in this aspect of the liberatory struggle at a time when the entire liberatory movement had been silenced and politicians who today occupy the limelight, were then either in prison, in exile or in their funk holes.

These teachers are presently fighting with their backs against the wall. They have to contend with the forces of the ANC through the NSC, the government, the white establishment sport and the despicable creatures who formerly occupied high positions in SACOS and are, today, using might and main to destroy SACOS.

Thus it will be seen that long before SADTU teachers learnt to toyi-toyi and carry banners, there were noble men and women who fought the system which wanted them to indoctrinate children and to create products with the slave mentality.

And they fought the system *at a time when it was dangerous to do so*. There was no ANC to hide behind; there was no television to inhibit the police from letting fly with their dogs and other weapons. It was when you were visited by the dreaded Security Police at the dead of night and you were given a punitive transfer hundreds of miles from your house (if you were lucky) or you were dismissed from your job and flung into a life of poverty.

These teachers were also deeply integrated in the community in which they lived and worked. In the community they were held in high esteem, for like Browning's Grammarian, they "decided not to live but know..."

## "THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH"

The defeat of P.W.Botha by F.W.de Klerk signalled the official change in the policy of the ruling class towards the oppressed and exploited people of this country. This was a move by imperialism and the local big capitalists to co-opt the ANC/SACP in the government so as to give the capitalist system legitimacy and that in turn would, in their expectation, bring an end to violence and restore stability. Today, stability is the most important requirement for the further development of capitalism in this country.

One of the first acts of the De Klerk regime was the unbanning of the ANC, SACP, MK, PAC, etc. Following this the regime permitted marches and demonstrations against the government. In doing this the government gave recognition to a long-accepted technique adopted by far-thinking ruling classes. This technique is based on the fact that in an oppressive and exploitative system great pressures build up. If there is no safety valve, a

tremendous explosion can ensue. Marches and demonstrations are recognised techniques to allow pressure to escape and thereby defuse an explosive situation.

The angry and frustrated people took to the streets in their tens of thousands. The streets reverberated with the sound of marching feet and song. The rest of the population waited with bated breath and awe. But they were amazed to see that in most instances there were no shootings; no baton charges; no teargas hurled into the crowd and no dogs attacking. Thus, gradually, other layers of the population took their first tentative steps in participating in marches and demonstrations.

When it became a certainty that it was quite safe to take to the streets in marches and demonstrations and after there was plenty of assurance that marchers and demonstrators would not be shot, beaten up or arrested, the teachers came out of the shadows and into the streets with a vengeance. Decades of fear and timidity had to be lived down and made up for. The opportunists among them, realizing that the ANC would form the new government, began joining the ANC in droves. It was a classic case of bandwagon climbing. Many of those joining did so without knowing much about the ANC, its history, its programme and policy and its role as a front for the SACP. None of all this mattered. What was important was to get into the good books of the new government and hope and pray that this blind loyalty will be rewarded with promotions and salary increases.

It has been an open secret that almost from its inception, SADTU had a leadership which was pro-ANC and that this leadership would hitch SADTU to the ANC wagon. There was a consistent denial from its leadership that

SADTU was aligned to any political organisation. That deception has now come to an end because SADTU's position at present is that it has applied for affiliation to the pro-ANC COSATU and has also taken a decision to help garner votes for the ANC in next years elections.<sup>5</sup>

This, then, is the explanation of the great contrast in the behaviour of the black teachers, especially those employed in the main by the House of Delegates.

## "LET US LIVE FOR OUR CHILDREN"

"Let us live for our children." is the credo of the TLSA. It captures the universal attitude of adults towards their young.

Most mammals, if not all, have a very special attitude towards their young, unlike the reptiles and other cold-blooded vertebrates which show no concern for their young. Children occupy a unique place in the hearts and minds of people. There are a number of reasons for this special relationship, some of which are:

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<sup>5</sup> There can be no objection in principle to a teachers' body affiliating to a particular political tendency. That would be exercising their right of freedom of association if those teachers wish to be linked to that tendency or organisation. What is wrong is to hitch a teachers' body to a particular organisation when its members belong to a cross section of the political spectrum plus those who are not attached to any specific organisation or who are not political at all.



- a. There is the all important consideration of survival and perpetuation of the species.
- b. The continuation of the blood-line and lineage. This consideration was especially important in the older societies.
- c. The extreme helplessness of the human young makes it necessary for there to be a long period of nurturing and upbringing. It is generally accepted that where there is a high degree of intelligence in a species, there is little provision by nature for instincts. Lack of instincts in turn necessitates a long period of dependence by the young on its parents or elders. The modern and enlightened view is that the human young requires at least twenty years of dependence, care, upbringing and training in order for the young to be sufficiently prepared to fend for itself in society. It can be longer than twenty years.
- d. The long period of dependence develops a close relationship between parent and child and which lasts for the life-time of the first dying.
- e. Children are the most prized possession of a nation or any other human grouping. Adults will endure great hardship and privation in order that the children be happy and safe. Nothing is too good for them; no sacrifice is too great.

As successors to the present generation, great care is taken to prepare the child for the responsibility and the functioning of the adult world. So

important and complex is the task of preparing the child for the adult world, special institutions are built (schools) where the preparation can take place. The task of preparing the child can no longer be left to the parents alone. Specialists (teachers) are trained in order to cope with the task. Today, the child has to be prepared to function meaningfully and to survive in the most difficult, the most sophisticated and the most demanding way of life experienced by human beings.

To these teachers is given the high honour of moulding tender minds in the values of society and of imparting to them a part at a time of the accumulated knowledge by the preceding generations. That, after all, is education. It is the process of transmitting knowledge and values from one generation to another.

It is because of this very special function, that teaching has been regarded as a **CALLING** or a **VOCATION** where service to the community is the primary consideration and not monetary or other material rewards<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> As a parent from SOWETO put it: "As a teacher you are expected to be different from a jam factory worker who can decide to drop tools at any moment." (Sunday Times - 29:8:1993.)

Teachers have long been revered by the communities. Julius Nyerere, the loved leader of the Tanzanians is called *Mwalimu*, a Swahili word for teacher. Edmund Wilson, biographer of revolutionaries, described Lenin as the Great Headmaster. Mao Tse Tung once told a journalist that he would like to be remembered as a teacher.

According to Henry Adams, "A teacher affects eternity; no one can tell where his influence stops."

Children are the infant humanity or as Gabriella Mistral called them: "...the fountain of life.." As infants, children are innocent of the vices of the world and are extremely vulnerable to all the dangers which can range from illness and climate to the action of other creatures and human adults.

All those who harm children are the enemies of humanity; all those who defend children and act in their welfare are the friends of humanity.

## THE ATTACK ON THE CULTURE OF LEARNING AND EDUCATION

The oppressed people all over the world have quickly realized the value of education and learning. Education has been proved to be one of the most effective methods of escaping from the full consequences of oppression. Education has also been found to be an effective weapon against the very system which both oppresses and provides the education. It is through learning to read, write and study that great revolutionaries and leaders in history have been able to understand the nature of oppression, the laws governing society, the latter's weaknesses and strength and what constitutes the nemesis of that society.

It is for these and other reasons that education and learning have been so highly prized by the oppressed. We all know of the tremendous sacrifices parents will make to ensure that their children get the best education their circumstances permit.

But long before the oppressed people came to realize the potency of education and learning, the oppressors knew of the importance of education as a tool in the oppression of the people. Hence it is they who designed educational systems to prepare different sectors of society for their assigned roles in order to preserve existing society.

The oppressed people, in the face of numerous obstacles, educated their children and were rewarded when a section of the educated assumed the leadership role in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. It therefore came about that the products of the system which was designed to perpetuate subservience of the oppressed turned against the very same system.

It was to stem that development which motivated the infamous Dr Verwoerd to pass the equally infamous Bantu Education Act. The essential purpose of the Act was to cut off the African people from the mainstream of humanity and to create a tribal zombie to be called the "Bantu" by the year 1980. It will be readily seen that the Bantu Education Act was one of the biggest and most vicious assaults on the culture of learning.

Because of the political milieu during which the Act was passed and implemented, it had to fail. And fail it did. By the 1980's, instead of there being a nation of zombies, there were extremely militant and conscious people, especially amongst the youth.

But while Bantu Education failed, certain very ominous developments began emerging in the African townships in the urban areas. This was a counter culture to that of learning. This was the era when the call came from the

ANC to make the townships "ungovernable". With the turmoil this call stirred up, the notorious slogan of "Liberation before Education" reared its head. Those responsible for formulating this slogan, with criminal irresponsibility, incited the youth to turn against the culture of education and learning. They were a section of the United Democratic Front leadership who today beat their breasts about the destroyed education of a substantial section of the African youth.

From that period onwards, chaos and anarchy took over the education of the African child in the urban and peri-urban areas. There were endless school boycotts; there was destruction of school property and study material; teachers were beaten and terrorised by young thugs and by the students themselves; school principals suffered a similar fate; severe assaults and even death visited those who dared to defy a school boycott. The adult population was helpless in the face of this onslaught. The young thugs and anti-education youth had the whole day to organise and plan whatever action they were to embark on. The parents remained hopelessly unorganised and were, therefore, unable to put an end to the activities of the anti-education youth. They were unable to provide protection for their children who were keen to study. Those who could afford it sent their children to private white schools. Others sent their children to the rapidly burgeoning industry of private schools (run by private individuals for profit) which were, of necessity, located outside the African urban townships. Others still were sent to the rural areas where schools were relatively unaffected by chaos. This was possible if there were relatives in those areas.

The above description has become a fixed feature of the African urban townships. At the end of each year, examination results, especially the matriculation results, became a national disaster. The failure rate rocketed; dropouts in alarming numbers swelled the growing army of the unemployed youth from which a large number turned to a life of crime in order to survive and to realise aspirations.

Apartheid has been blamed for this state of affairs. The alert reader will have noticed that it is becoming a regular blame-fixing for all sorts of heinous crimes committed. Apartheid is responsible for many of the ills of society. The question is for how long are we going to blame apartheid for our criminal acts? At what point in time are we going to stop blaming apartheid and like decent and honest people take the responsibility for our actions? Are we going to lambaste apartheid for wrecking the education of children by seducing them away from the schools and into the streets by the slogan of LIBERATION BEFORE EDUCATION? Why is there a silence on the part of people who never miss an opportunity to palm off blame on apartheid, about those who have led the African youth into the late 20th century version of the Nongqause cattle killing? What about those like Randall van den Heever who busied himself organising the teacher's strike in schools which he and his wife took care not to send their own children to? And what of those whose children are in schools outside the country, or those like Harold Samuel and Poobie Naicker who do not have any of their children in the schools where chaos has been let loose.

The destruction of the education of a section of the African people is so complete that it would make Dr Verwoerd laugh all the way to hell.

We think it essential to conclude this section of the pamphlet by quoting at length a very brave and thoughtful article by CHARLES RAMOROBI which appeared in the "The Echo" of the "Natal Witness" dated 26 August 1993:

*"In the township we can also look at lazy teachers who have no history of trying to remedy the eroded learning culture. They are seen either in shebeens or in bedrooms with school children. In that case it is very hard to instil discipline. A drinking teacher has no responsibility and loses dignity when he drinks with children.*

*Education in our society is not functioning. It is not meeting the aims it is designed to meet.*

*Will students from rural areas again be top matriculants? Will toyi-toying students from Sobantu and Edendale (both in Pietermaritzburg) again fail dismally? We cannot deny the fact that in these townships failure has become the norm.*

*Many teenagers wander without matric, while others have lousy senior certificates...*

*Schools like Pholela, Sukuma, Sacred Heart and Nkamane report 100% daily attendance, and at the end of the year they have 100% pass rates. Parents have four meetings a year to be briefed on children's performance and progress. They are fully involved in their children's future.*

*Education is a basic human right. We must fight to have good education, and our actions must not fail. It is us who will suffer at the end of the day. We must not accept suffering and failure as our culture. The government is pleased that another year of effective learning is lost.*

*It makes one fear for the future of black children in these hard and hectic times, and one wonders if their education will ever be formalised into something that will both develop their intellect and equip them with skills to cope with the future.."*

## **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INDUSTRIAL AND THE TEACHERS' STRIKE**

During the teachers' chalkdown and strike this year, one often heard teachers equating their strike with a workers' industrial strike. This is a fallacy which needs to be dispelled:

1. The consequences of an industrial strike in which production is brought to a standstill are, inter alia:
  - a. Loss of profit for the owners of the factory because each item which is produced contains profit created by the worker.
  - b. Although profit-making production comes to a standstill, yet there are certain constant or fixed monthly costs like



rent, or bond instalments, interest on bank overdraft facilities, salaries for the managerial component of the employees all of which have to be paid out of reserves or capital.

- c. Loss of goodwill from purchasers and suppliers for non delivery of orders and for not making regular purchases.

In short, in an industrial strike it is the profit of the owners of the industry involved which is under attack.

- a. In a teachers' strike, the **ONLY VICTIMS** are the stressed students and distraught parents.
- b. Where the strike is very prolonged and is nationwide, then the economy, the level of learning, knowledge and culture and obviously, the standard of living of the teachers themselves, will all be affected.

3. If by way of analogy it is sought to equate the State with the owners of a factory, then that too, is fallacious. While the SADTU teachers were on strike, Mrs Devi Govender went to Italy to see her newly-born grandson. During the same period, De Klerk went to Latin America for business, politics and fun. The State lost no profit, nor was it hurt by the strike. Neither De Klerk nor Mrs Govender lost sleep over the plight of the abandoned children.

Any person with an elementary knowledge of politics will realize that an oppressive ruling class cares as little for the children of the oppressed as for the oppressed generally. That would explain the soaring infant mortality rate in oppressive societies. Children, by virtue of their vulnerability, are always the first to succumb to disease, drought and famine.

What did SADTU hope to achieve by embarking on a course of action whose only victims would be school children who have not harmed the teachers under whose care and custody they are placed during school hours? There was diabolical thinking behind the strike and we will deal with this aspect below.

From the above, it will be seen that a teachers' strike cannot be equated with a workers' industrial strike.

## **REASONS ADVANCED FOR THE STRIKE**

In a campaign leading up to the strike SADTU presented a bundle of demands on the following matters:

- a.** The merit and special awards by the House of Delegates to the Indian teachers employed by it.
- b.** Salary increase for those teachers who earned under R1000,00 per month.
- c.** Unilateral restructuring in education.

d. Retrenchments.

e. Last, but certainly not the least, an across the board increase of 30% of the teachers' salaries.

At the initial stage of the campaign, SADTU focussed on and highlighted the demands on the issues of the awards and the under R1000,00 per month salaries. There was only fleeting reference to the other demands. The Natal Indian members of SADTU held that their main concern was the graft and nepotism involved in the granting of the awards. They also showed great concern about the plight of those teachers who earned below a R1000,00 a month.

As it turned out, SADTU used matters (a) and (b) above, i.e. the matter of the awards and the under R1000,00 a month salary issue to construct a MORAL FOUNDATION for the chalkdown and the abandonment of the children. This facilitated the strike action which had as its real purpose an across the board increase of 30% in salary. This amounted to an attempt to extract a substantial salary increase for a section of society which not only is relatively well paid but which also enjoys a high security in employment.

Negotiations between the various teacher bodies and the State about teachers earning under R1000,00 had been completed when SADTU went on strike. With the announcement by the State that the lowly-paid teachers would receive substantial increases, SADTU was quick to claim credit for the increases. The claim would have probably have gone unchallenged had not Andrew Pyper, Executive Director of the National Professional Teachers'

Association, disputed the claim. According to him, the minimum salary of R1437,75 had been negotiated at a forum consisting of SADTU, NAPTOSA, The Teachers Federal Council and the United Teachers' Association of South Africa *before the strike began*. The SADTU delegation furthermore, had arrived an hour late. (Our emphasis) - (The Natal Witness 28 August 1993.)

In the end the strike was entered into primarily for an increase in salary across the board.

The indecent haste with which the strike was launched and the extremely dangerous timing of the strike makes one wonder if there was another hidden agenda. We suspect that the planners of the strike had adopted a *NOW OR NEVER ATTITUDE*. The reasoning would have gone along the lines that once the ANC gets into power next year, the teachers could forget about a hefty salary increase. There would be much emphasis on redistribution of wealth and little sympathy for well paid teachers. Hence, it was important that teachers get whatever they could from the present government which was on its way out and which has shown a propensity to give in to cases of crisis-creating actions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It was reported in the "Tribune Herald" of the 10 October 1993 that under an ANC government, the civil servants, especially those employed by the Houses of Delegates and Representatives will receive substantially reduced housing subsidies.

## THE ABANDONMENT OF THE CHILDREN

A crisis has often been described as a moment of truth. And so it was with SADTU. The truth which glared at the public was the complete LACK OF CONCERN for the plight of the pupils by *a section of the membership of SADTU*. The clear effect of the strike was to deprive the pupils of their teaching lessons and pastoral care to which they are entitled.

It was bad enough that during the chalkdown no lessons were given. But then, at least there was daily supervision and parents, especially when both were working, were assured that their children were at school and safe and out of mischief.

But when the strike took place, those taking part in the strike, completely abandoned the children. "Instructions handed down" dictated that no teacher was permitted to do anything for the children - no teaching, no supervision, no advice. The routine during the strike was that the striking teacher came to school; signed a register (so as to get paid for NOT working); got into the staff room and remained there for the whole day. In the staff room, they played games, conversed, listened to music, knitted and read. The teachers encouraged the pupils to leave the school premises. Therefore, it was not uncommon to find large numbers of students in school uniforms walking around aimlessly. Some frequented hotels, shebeens and places of ill repute. Some sensitive teachers noticed that instead of the grouping of boys and girls, pairs of boys and girls began being formed and they would go off as pairs.

Sociologists, social welfare workers and psychologists warn that we are living at a time when young people face many dangers. There is the danger from the child abusers, psychopathic killers who prey on young and helpless children, drug dealers, shebeens and brothels. These circumstances make it all the more incumbent on parents and parents-in-loco ( e.g. teachers, priests, etc.) to take extra care with children.

Those teachers who chose to confine themselves in their staff room displayed a callous disregard for the plight of their pupils. Pastoral care was flushed down the drain. For all they cared, the pupils could fall into any one of the many pits of danger. It was not their concern. Their only concern was the salary increase they wanted. The increase in their salary was more important than the welfare of the pupils. Thus it came about that in Marburg, a pupil found no teacher or teaching as such available to him. Being a young person, that pupil decided to go to the beach for a swim and while doing so drowned! Who is to blame? Had the teachers been at their post either to teach or supervise, that pupil may well have been alive today. The striking teachers must take the full responsibility.

Abandonment of their pupils is not something new to the teaching profession. Their function was to inculcate the basic values of the ruling class in the pupils. They were to administer the "poison long already mixed." This the majority of the teachers did without murmur or protest. They dutifully taught the ruling class propaganda to the children. They did so because they were terrified of the authorities or because they believed the propaganda to be true i.e. out of ignorance.

In both these instances there was abandonment of the children. In the earlier case, children were brainwashed because of fear, timidity or ignorance. In the instant case it was also fear and timidity, but this time not from the authorities but from the atmosphere of intimidation mixed with a dash of greed for a hefty salary increase.

When, therefore, the SADTU officials publicly declare that they care for the children, the facts of their action scream out a denial. How can it ever be said that a total abandonment of the children is a sure sign of care for those very children?

## WHO COMES FIRST - CHILDREN OR TEACHERS?

Those responsible for the calling of the strike and those responsible for implementing the strike action must have taken a decision that *for the sake of a salary increase* the children would have to be SACRIFICED! There can be no dispute on this score because the very act of going on strike has the logical consequence of abandoning the children. What would be very interesting is the reasoning and justification that was employed to come to this decision.

Our interest in the reasoning flows from the well known fact that amongst the higher mammals, the adults always sacrifice for their young. More so with human beings. It is not a common feature in human beings to sacrifice their young for the benefit and comfort of the adults. Were there special circumstances which made the teachers depart from this universal practice?

At a meeting of the parents in Pietermaritzburg, one speaker put forward the following approach:

*"The children have a right to education while the teachers have the democratic right to strike. When there is a conflict between these two rights, a compromise must be worked out."*

We do not accept this reasoning. You cannot put *on par* a basic human right like education for children with the right of teachers to go on strike for a mere salary increase. A basic human right like education must always be **PRIORITY NUMBER ONE**. No lesser right like a salary increase must be allowed to undermine it.

The universal approach to children has been encapsulated in a beautiful poem by the internationally renowned Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral:

*"We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow' His name is 'Today'.*

(With grateful acknowledgement to "The Echo" of "The Natal Witness" of 16 January 1992)



## THE STRIKE AND THE ROLE OF INTIMIDATION

Despite triumphant claims of a high percentage of success of the strike, yet when one met teachers, one learnt that there was no unanimity in their reaction to the strike nor with the manner in which it was conducted. But more of this later.

What became abundantly clear is that intimidation was the principal basis of ensuring compliance of teachers who were unhappy about the strike. In this regard it was a section of the SADTU leadership and officials who were responsible for the employment of intimidation. This was one of the most disgusting aspects of the strike. Reports abound of threats of ostracism and physical violence against non-striking teachers in order to make doubtful or disagreeing teachers fall in line.

We set out hereunder a sample of the reports:

1. A high school teacher who was preparing his pupils for the matric exams wanted to give his pupils lessons after hours i.e. after the strikers had done whatever they had been doing the whole day. He was told by a Site Steward of SADTU<sup>8</sup> that if he proceeded to do what he intended doing, he would be regarded as a SCAB and that he and his family would have to take the consequences.
2. Although SADTU proclaimed for all to hear about the strike and how they will not return to the schools until their demands were met, yet

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<sup>8</sup> Also referred to as the Site Chairperson or Site Representative.

when it came to the crunch of their pay being docked, they were not prepared to stand up to be seen and counted as persons who went on strike on matters of principle. In fact school principals were threatened with death if they submitted names of the teachers who had gone on strike. Thus two weeks salary was considered more important than a human life!

3. At the Orient Hill Primary School, Isipingo Natal, eight teachers, all members of SADTU, took a considered decision that they were not going to abandon the children and therefore refused to take part in the strike. For doing their duty to their children, these brave teachers had to face nastiness, vilification and ostracism by the strikers. They even became objects of a picket. Notwithstanding the ugly pressure these six teachers stood their ground and did not allow the bullies from SADTU to intimidate them. Six of these teachers resigned from SADTU a few days after the strike had commenced.
4. In Soweto SADTU teachers chased school principals from schools and ordered them not to return until they were able to retrieve the docked salary of the striking teachers. This sounded incredible. Surely, not even the roughnecks in SADTU would dare to do so scandalous a thing. The feeling of incredulity remained until one viewed an interview in the feature "NEWSLINE" on television on the 26th September 1993.

The interviewer, Leslie Mashokwe, had invited Percy Ntsingila, a school principal, and one, Matakanye, a SADTU official, to give their views on the predicament of the school principals.

Percy Ntsingila explained at the outset that school principals had not given lists of names of strikers to the authorities. The DET had deducted salaries on the assumption that all SADTU members had gone on strike and used the names it had on its records for stop-order payments for monthly subscriptions for SADTU.

Matakanye sought in a very devious, unconvincing and arrogant manner to state that SADTU had not chased the principals away but merely EMPOWERED them, as managers, to retrieve their docked salaries. This statement is perhaps the most dishonest and cynical statement to emerge concerning a matter of great importance.

While Ntsingila came across as articulate, simple and candid, Matakanye was exposed as an arrogant, cynical and obnoxious person, who was unable to or who refused to give a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. The usually coolheaded Leslie Mashokwe was thoroughly exasperated with the evasive Matakanye. Nothing or nobody dealt a heavy blow to SADTU's image than did Matakanye.

The sequel to the SADTU terror tactics on the school principals surfaced at a conference of the Institute of Race Relations held in Johannesburg held on the 27 September 1993. Ismail Vadi, SADTU's Vice President, who was one of the speakers at this conference, was heavily attacked from the floor about the action taken by the SADTU teachers. After a "heated debate", Vadi is quoted to have said:

*"Our organisation is prepared to address the issue.*

*We recognise we should not have allowed the situation to continue for so long and to get so far."* ( Business Day 29 September, 1993.)

We are given to understand that SADTU repudiated the confession and the matter dragged on in this very crucial period until it was announced over Radio South Africa about a month later that the ANC had advised the affected principals to return to school and that they need not fear reprisal. From this statement, one can conclude that the ANC has put a chain on its minions in SADTU.

5. In the monthly supplement to the "Weekly Mail" of 9 October 1993 there is a report entitled: "The Struggle to Study and Pass". From this report we learn of the trials and stresses of a student, Rebecca Mokoena of Mzimhlope, Soweto. This what she said:

*"I doubt if any pupil can say that they are prepared for the exam....I tried studying in a group....We were all blind mice being led by other blind mice...I tried studying on my own, but even then my problems got worse because if I encountered a difficulty I did not know who to consult. I tried some teachers, but they said they feared intimidation from other teachers if they found out about them helping me.(Our emphasis)*

And in this manner, we can narrate incident after incident of intimidation, bullying, death threats and flagrant violation of the duties of a teacher.

What of the future of the children in the hands of such people?

The use of intimidation and bully-boy tactics is part and parcel of the strategy of violence employed by the principal role players in this country. Public pronouncements of peace and condemnation of violence are belied by what is being done by those organisations in their day to day activities.

Let us make it clear that the accusation of intimidation is not levelled against all SADTU members or all of its leadership. There are many who have been appalled by what their colleagues had done. In many schools, striking teachers and non-striking teachers functioned in harmony. The strikers respected the decision of the non-strikers.

## DO THE TEACHERS EARN ENOUGH?

Many well-meaning persons and organisations, while criticising SADTU for its strike action, nevertheless sympathised with the teachers' demand for salary increase. The sympathy is a knee-jerk reaction of an oppressed people. They will support any demand made by a section of the oppressed, as long as it is against the ruling class.

In this instance they have given support to the SADTU demands without careful consideration of the facts.

Our approach in this regard is as follows:

1. The teaching profession, by and large, belongs to the better-paid sections of society.
2. Compared with the millions of toiling workers and landless peasantry, the standard of living of the teachers is very high.
3. The majority of the teachers lead comfortable lives. They own solidly constructed homes which are generously subsidised.<sup>9</sup> Many (not all) own at least one late model motor vehicle. In their homes, one will find good and well-priced furniture, television with M-net and video recorder, hi-fi, well-priced stoves, freezers, fridges and all the other modern electric appliances. They enjoy two long and two short holidays plus 12 days a year paid service leave.

#### WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- i. Only 7.5% of the teachers employed by the DET earn under a R1000.00 per month. They earn R867,75 a month plus a thirteenth cheque, in addition to subsidies for housing, pension and medical aid.

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<sup>9</sup> Married women are discriminated in that they are not eligible for housing subsidies.

These teachers have a Standard 6 Certificate plus 2 years of teacher training (Grade a2) or a matriculation certificate only (Grade a2m).

2. More than 50.4% of the DET teachers earn between R2000,00 - R3000,00 a month plus a thirteenth cheque and the subsidies referred to above.
3. 21% of the DET teachers earn between R3000,00 and R5000,00 a month plus the thirteenth cheque and the subsidies referred to above.
4. The salaries of the more senior teachers and heads of departments and principals can be quite substantial and those in the higher grades can earn R9000,00 a month.

## SUBSIDIES

These can be quite considerable:

1. The housing subsidy can be as high as 66% of up to R70 000 of a mortgage bond.
2. Pensions of teachers employed by the DET are subsidised to the tune of R2,75 for every R1,00 paid by the teacher. Thus if the sum of R200,00 is deducted from the teacher's salary for pension, the State will pay R550,00 per month towards that pension.
3. Medical Aid is also generously subsidised. If a member's medical aid

contribution is R500,00 per month, the State will pay R320,00 and the teacher pays R180,00.

It will be seen from the above that most teachers are relatively well paid if account is taken of the salaries and the fringe benefits and if account is taken of the earnings of the vast majority of the population.

It will also be seen that there are no prospects of members of the teaching profession joining long queues for handouts from United Nation Relief or Operation Hunger.<sup>10</sup>

The contrary is the position. Here we see a section of society enjoying a relatively high standard of living, enjoying all the comforts and conveniences offered by modern civilisation. And when its members retire, there is a "pot of gold" waiting for them. Is it then a wonder that insurance companies and building societies vie with one another to lay their hands on that pot for investing the "gold" in it?

Having said the above, again we wish to make it very clear that we are NOT for a moment suggesting that teachers should not demand for a higher salary. All that we are saying is that bearing in mind the economic crisis in which the country has landed and bearing in mind the crying need

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<sup>10</sup> But that is not the case with the masses. While the teachers were demanding large salary increases, a report in the Natal Daily News of the 14 September 1993 read: "Scenes reminiscent of Somalia are being played out by starving people in Transkei's drought-ravaged interior."



for the alleviation of over 7 million unemployed workers, it is the height of selfishness for well paid and comfortable living petty- bourgeoisie *to plunge the education of the children into a crisis* so that they, the teachers, should enjoy even greater comfort.

More of this later.

## THE STRATEGY BEHIND THE STRIKE

Leon Trotsky, the great revolutionary, once said that when the petty bourgeoisie, as a class, adopts a high moral tone on an issue, then people must hold fast to their pocket books (wallets). He was saying, in effect that, as a class, the petty-bourgeoisie always acts in its own interests at the expense of whoever gets within its reach.

We have already dealt with the reasons put forward for the strike. It is now appropriate for us to look at the strategy behind the strike. Put simply that strategy was:

1. To abandon the school children completely.
2. The abandonment of the children would initially alarm the parents and with the continuation of the strike, parents would be infuriated.
3. Parents in their thousands would storm the offices of the various education departments and demand that these departments make peace with the teachers so that schooling could return to normality. Making "peace" obviously would mean salary increases.

4. Faced with massive demonstrations from parents and all the consequences flowing from demonstrations, the government would step in and negotiate a salary increase.

The message to the parents was meant to be clear. The children were to be held ransom by the strikers. The parents were told in so many words:

*"Look, your children are abandoned. We are not prepared to teach them nor take care of them. If you want us to teach them or take care of them, then you must do everything in your power to get us our salary increases."*

When parents did not react as the planners of the strike expected them to, one heard young teachers railing against the parents for not supporting the demands of the teachers.

## THE ECONOMICS OF THE SALARY INCREASE

1. When teachers demand a salary increase and the State agrees to an increase, it will not give an increase to the teachers alone but for the entire civil service. The State argues that it does not want to encourage a thinking among its civil servants that if they take to the streets or go on strike they will be rewarded with an increase.
2. When the State allocates a certain sum for salary increases in order to meet the demands of one section of the civil service, only 40% of that sum goes to education while 60% goes to the other sections of the civil service.

3. When the government decided to give an increase of 5% to the teachers, that amounted to R2,200 000 000,00. If SADTU's demand of a 30% increase were granted and if the government remained consistent in its policy of giving an increase to the entire civilservice, that would cost the country R13 000 000 000,00 of which 60% would go to the non - education sector.
4. If the State were to grant an increase, say of 20%, the teacher earning a salary of R5 000,00 per month would receive an increase of R1000,00 while a teacher earning R2000,00 would receive an increase of R400,00.
5. Thus it will be seen that increases granted would mainly benefit the predominantly white civil servants and those categories of teachers who are in the upper brackets of the salary structure.
6. At a time like the present, when the coffers of the country have been plundered dry, salary increases for the teachers would have to be funded either by borrowing from outside the country or by means of increased taxation from one of the most overtaxed people in the world.

On the matter of teachers demanding increases, our position is that they CAN ASK WHATEVER AMOUNT THEY WANT TO. They can ask for a 30% or a 300% increase. That is their right. Our objection is limited to the METHOD employed to satisfy that demand i.e. by sacrificing the children.

## THE ATTITUDE AND CONDUCT OF THE TEACHERS

For most of the black teachers, the SADTU strike was a novel experience. Although most of the SADTU members took part in the strike, their reasons for doing so were not the same. Talking to teachers about their strike elicited a wide range of responses:-

1. There is the leadership of SADTU at the national level. Its real agenda has never been made public. It has a political position which is pro-ANC although over the months they held out to be politically non-aligned. Now it has shown its real political colours and has hitched SADTU on to the ANC bandwagon.
2. This leadership has no track record of the political struggle for true education. Nor has it shown intellectual calibre or quality. Hence SADTU has produced no work in the field of thought or research concerning the all important problem of education for the oppressed youth who have been marginalised and on the methods of repairing the havoc wreaked on education by the ruling class. The absence of any such work is indicative of mental barrenness which is reflected in the manner in which the strike was conducted and the callous disregard for the plight of the children.
3. On the local level and regional levels the leadership of SADTU fell in the hands of young teachers, most of whom have no children of their own in the higher standards or have very young children. These are the teachers who are often elected as Site Stewards at schools. The functions of the Site Steward included the policing of the strike.

It was the Site Steward who ensured that the teachers confined themselves to the staffroom and did not teach or supervise the children. It was one such Site Steward who had threatened the teacher whose conscience made him want to help the children with those menacing words: "You will be treated like a scab and you and your family must take the consequences."

4. Our information is that in a number of schools, the most zealous Site Stewards or SADTU officials were those teachers who have earned the reputation of being the loafers and wont-works. These are the teachers who are continuously behind with their work; persons whose life's philosophy is to defer to tomorrow (of the variety that never comes) that which can be done today. This breed of individual is by no means peculiar to the members of the teaching profession. They are to be found in every trade and profession. They are the slackers and cheats; the ones who always take but never give; the ones who believe that they have a God-given right to a fair days pay for little or no work.

In times of turmoil and social change, this breed becomes especially adept in climbing on to the bandwagon of the victors or the power-to-be. By all means available to them, these creatures truckle up to the new masters. They will lie, lick boots and spittle; they will betray family and friend and they will sing with gusto the praises of the new rulers. The new rulers, to be sure, are desperate for support. They need the fawning but blindly loyal supporters. They then reward this breed of supporters with positions of power at various levels.

Those who are thus rewarded will cling to their position with all the tenacity they are capable of mustering. These are the creatures who just yesterday were despised and treated with contempt by their colleagues for failing to pull their weight. Suddenly, they are transformed. They have acquired power and authority. They are also consumed with hatred for those whom they suspect had seen through their disreputable habits. The newly-acquired power helps to divert and conceal their own professional weaknesses.

5. Then there are those teachers who were motivated purely by the seductive promise of a sizeable increase in salary with which they could buy the second or third car or that exotic Far Eastern tour during the long leave. This is your teacher we referred to earlier, the one concerned only about promotion and salary increment. These types are the ones who have always abandoned the children in more ways than one.
6. There was a large percentage of the teachers who were intimidated into participating in the strike. The threats of ostracism, insults and Indo-African race riots (the latter threat was apparently actually used!) made them comply. Although their entire training and sense of decency cried out against the abandonment of the children, they were without sufficient moral courage and intellectual strength to defy those who pressurised them into doing something which was alien to them.

There were a fair number of these teachers but they fought back as individuals, and often ill-prepared, against well-prepared and

organised cliques. Had these teachers banded together, discussed the matters fully among themselves and then confronted the cliques as a single bloc, we are certain that the outcome of meetings would have been different.

With the failure of the strike to obtain the desired increase and with the teachers facing a docking of their salaries, it was this element in the main which put paid to a resumption of the strike. SADTU leadership realised that if they pushed the issue, they would have been defeated.

7. Then there were those teachers, brave men and women, whose sense of duty to their pupils; whose love for children and who were disgusted by the greed and intimidation, made them show tremendous moral courage to oppose a strike which would harm only the children. As stated above, these men and women have had to contend with ugliness from the intimidators and bullies. Where many others succumbed, they stood fast and restored the honour of teachers.

To these brave men and women, the people of South Africa must be truly grateful. In a country wracked by violence and political intolerance, a moral position on a matter of principle is of tremendous value, both in itself and as an example to others. The weak and the dithering can take heart from the courage of these individuals and hopefully they will be able to use that courage as a prop to do what is right in future.

8. There were teachers who, while supporting the non-teaching part of the strike, refused to abandon their duty of pastoral care. They kept a watchful eye on the children and ensured that no harm befell them. They saw to it that at the end of the day, the children were sent safely on their way home whether by bus or on foot. They, too, showed courage and their love for children. We cannot help but respect them even though we disagree with their decision not to teach.

9. There were also many teachers who, while opposed to the strike, took part in it. In debates within the ranks of the teachers, they actively attacked the decision to strike for all the right reasons but did not defy the strike decision. The basis of their position was as follows:

a. They believed that once a person belongs to an organisation, then that person is bound by decisions taken by that organisation. In other words, it was a matter of loyalty to the organisation.

b. They also believed that democracy demanded that once a majority voted for a certain decision, then they were morally bound to accept and act on that decision.

Teachers who fall into this category must be admired for their courage in speaking out against the strike since they believed that it would not be in the interests of the children.



Our view on the matter of majority decisions is as follows:

- a. As a general proposition, it can be said that the basis of democracy is the prevailing of the views or decisions of the majority. As will be seen below this proposition is not and cannot be regarded as absolute.
- b. A decision is not necessarily correct just because it was taken by the majority.
- c. There have been and (can be) many occasions when the majority is wrong.
- d. Where the majority is wrong on a matter of fundamental importance, then it is the duty of the minority to actively oppose that decision, even to the point of making it unworkable.
- e. Where the decision is morally reprehensible and violates fundamentals, it is not open for any person who implements or obeys that decision to justify his or her actions on the grounds of being bound by a majority decision.
- f. Since the teachers' strike violated a basic human right, those teachers who opposed the strike and refused to go on strike, cannot be said to be acting undemocratically. On the contrary, by continuing to carry out their

duties as teachers, they are to be regarded as champions of the children's right to education.

10. Linked with this group of teachers are those who participated in the strike but did not turn against those of their colleagues who did not see their way to joining the strike. They respected the decision of the non-strikers and did not join the bullies and intimidators in victimising the non strikers. Their position was also one which we respect.

## REACTIONS TO THE TEACHERS' STRIKE

1. Most of the organisations of the oppressed people came out against the strike as would have any honest and principled organisation. All the oppressed people know only too well the importance and value of education. They also realize only too well that the upliftment of their children can best be attained through education. They also know the havoc wreaked by endless school boycotts and the disastrous consequences of the policy of "Liberation before education." Hence their spontaneous rejection of the strike.
2. Not unexpectedly, the ANC and its satellites supported the strike out of pure opportunism. When Nelson Mandela was questioned on television about how the strike was hurting the children, his response was:

*"It is unfortunate, but it cannot be helped."*

Thus spoke the future president of South Africa and the "father" of the Nation. Readers will also recall that it was the same Mandela who advocated the granting of the vote to the 14 year olds! He appears to want them not only young, but also illiterate!

3. The National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC), the education front of the ANC, stated that it was distressed by the "terrible cost to our nation", as a result of the strike; that the crisis had to be resolved immediately in the interest of restoring the culture of learning and teaching among millions of pupils. (Natal Daily News 25-9-93) Apart from expressing its distress, it did nothing. For that matter, to this day, this organisation with its full-time officials has nothing to show for all the publicity and money it receives. We do not know what it is that it is supposed to coordinate or whether it has coordinated anything at all. It will long be remembered for making the threat of storming white schools with pupils in attendance. It is the kind of things that agent provocateurs do to guarantee a blood bath. The ANC slapped down that notion and it stayed down.
  
4. COSAS, the student wing of the ANC, which is notorious for wild and irresponsible antics and which has done great harm to the cause of education among the African youth, came out in support of the strike. In answer to the crying demand of the pupils, COSAS, renowned for its thoughtless but dangerous aphorisms, came out

with: "Each one, teach one."<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Mokoena's judgement about the "blind mice leading the blind mice" is the most appropriate answer.

5. THE PARENTS of the abandoned children were subjected to acute anxiety during the period of the strike. Single working mothers suffered the most. SADTU did not even bother to consult the parents, who are directly involved, BEFORE taking the decision to go on strike. Those, incidentally, were the very parents whom SADTU wanted to dragoon into supporting them for their pay increase.

Most parents have their hands full in coping with their day to day problems. When a crisis engulfs them, they undergo great anxiety and unhappiness. They continuously worry about the welfare of their children who have no supervision. They, like everybody else, had hoped that the strike would be over in a day or two. When that did not happen, they began rallying. While attacking the various education departments for their failure to avert the strike, the teachers themselves came under increasing criticism.

- \* On a television panel discussion, Hindle, Vice President of SADTU, was castigated by a parent for the abandonment of the children.

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<sup>11</sup> The most notorious aphorism to be coined by these bright sparks is the one which says: "Pass One Pass All." This one is a recipe for absolute anarchy in the educational system.

- \* In Port Elizabeth, irate parents at a public meeting showed their displeasure at SADTU by refusing to listen to a SADTU spokesperson.
- \* In Soweto angry parents wanted to thrash striking teachers at the Regina Mundi Cathedral.
- \* In Pietermaritzburg, the parents formed the Concerned Parents Association in order to deal with the crisis. When this body met the local SADTU officials, they let the latter know in no uncertain terms their strong criticism of the strike and also that the teachers' right to strike had to be subordinated to the children's right to education.
- \* In Durban, parents entered a school and took over the supervision of the children there.
- \* Both in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, newspapers were inundated with letters from angry members of the public who condemned the strike in very strong terms.

It will be seen that, initially, the parents were slow in reacting. With the passage of time, however, there was a clear and discernible movement among the parents to deal with the fate of their children. As it happened, the strike was called off or in SADTU's language, "suspended".

The strike has had many consequences, a number of which will only crystallize in the future. The one serious consequence is the alienation of the teachers from the community. The latter has seen how the teachers, to whom they entrusted their children, betrayed that trust when, for the sake of money, they abandoned their children.

## LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

The teachers' chalkdown and the strike must have been a traumatic experience for the oppressed community as a whole. More so in those communities which had escaped, until then, the tragic consequences of the near total collapse of the system of education and learning culture as has happened in the African urban townships. It is the first time those communities have experienced chaos in education, or rather a whiff of it. Hence the parents in those communities were, initially, bewildered and helpless. Later anger stepped in and a determination to organise themselves as parents in order to take active steps to deal with the crisis.

From the crisis, there are valuable lessons to be learnt. We set out a few of them.

1. Parents need an organisation of their own since they face a number of problems as PARENTS. These problems are on-going. They never end. If it is not boredom leading to mischief and crime, it is drugs and liquor. With the advent of AIDS, there is even greater source of concern. The problem in many cases are the parents themselves. There is no better way to attend to and to try and resolve these problems than through a parents' body.

2. Parents have to be vigilant at all times against the various forces and elements which present a source of danger to the young. Parents must learn to react swiftly and decisively. This manner of reaction, in itself, will go a long way towards solving problems.

Parents must understand that in the end it is ONLY THEY who will be consistently concerned about their children. They alone do not have ulterior motives nor interests which conflict with those of the children.

3. The students of today are not only seen but they are also heard on a host of matters affecting them. When their education, that is their future, is in jeopardy they must protest loudly. They must realise that they are in school to learn, to write and pass examinations and to prepare themselves for adulthood. Their time in school is being paid for by their parents through their pockets and their contribution to social wealth through labour and taxation. Parents often make great sacrifice in this regard.

Students must learn to develop a serious attitude towards their studies. Very often, a correct attitude has a profound effect on their future.

We support the view, and always have, that it is essential for students to concern themselves with what is happening in society and where necessary, to intervene. In other words, to be political. But they must at all times have their priorities right. They must never abandon their studies and learning.

4. When parents and students are united in their common purpose for a proper education, they are in a position to exert considerable pressure on the conduct and behaviour of teachers. A strong presence of parents and students in opposing a destructive teachers' strike, will strengthen the hand of those teachers who are opposed to the strike but who are cowed into submission and silence. With strong support from parents and students, these teachers would be imbued with confidence to express their opposition with vigour and decisiveness.
5. If the leadership of an organisation, or the organisation itself, does not respond rationally to reasoned and logical argument, then it is always open to the members to tender their resignation from that organisation. That, after all, is the essence of the freedoms of conscience and association.

The Tribune Herald of the 17 October 1993 contains a statement by Dr Ramsamy Naidoo, a school principal from Chatsworth, Durban, in which he sets out his reasons for resigning from SADTU.

We dont know who Dr Naidoo is or what his political beliefs are. We do not agree with everything he says in his statement. That notwithstanding, we are impressed with Dr Naidoo's courage and his eloquent and cogent indictment of the manner in which teachers conducted themselves in the name of SADTU. As practical demonstration of his opposition to the sneakish manner in which SADTU was used for narrow sectarian politics and the fascistic



tactics employed by a section of its membership, Dr Naidoo publicly resigned from this body.<sup>12</sup>

6. The strike and the events surrounding it has also shown how the petty-bourgeoisie can push around the workers and working people by means of highfalutin talk, intellectual gymnastics and dishonest rationalisation.

It thus becomes the duty of every honest intellectual to rush to the defence of the workers when they are under attack. Intellectuals can carry out research; they can analyse data and statements and they are able to separate the wheat from the chaff. They can then make their findings available to the people. It is also the function of the honest and revolutionary intellectuals to crystallize the desires and aspirations of the people in clear formulations and thus arm the people to defend themselves and their children against dishonest and self-seeking petty-bourgeoisie.

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<sup>12</sup> Dr Naidoo's indictment of the strike and the disgraceful conduct of certain SADTU members did not impress us only. It clearly caused alarm within the ranks of SADTU. This is evidenced by a response by an official of SADTU, Nhlanhla Ngubane, in the Tribune Herald of the 31 October 1993. The response failed to deal with any of the trenchant criticisms levelled by Dr Naidoo. There is a rule in debate and argument that where there is an obligation to refute and deny allegations and that is not done, then those allegations are taken to have been admitted.

## THE SO-CALLED CATCH-UP PROGRAMME

The underlying reason for this programme was to assure the parents and the pupils that they need have no cause for concern following the teachers' strike. According to SADTU, the "Catch up Programme" would make up for the time lost because of the strike.

This programme sounded reassuring. But on investigation, it was found that there can be no genuine substitute for the normal teaching programme.

1. There were teachers who refused to take part in this programme on the grounds that they were not being paid for the extra effort. They coined the slogan: "No pay, no work."
2. There is the view of experienced educationists that the programme as enunciated by SADTU could not work. Children were placed under undue stress because of a change in routine and because of extra time in the class room before and after normal school hours and on week-ends. Senior pupils have complained about the additional stress, as did pupils Sunita and Shamaine:

*"By 2:30 p.m. we are tired and hungry. How do our teachers expect us to concentrate." (Sunday Times 29:8:93)*

3. It was easy for teachers who had to cover the syllabus for internal examinations, which they themselves set, to cut corners and leave

out sections. In setting the examination papers, they could conveniently not set questions on sections of the syllabus glossed over or not covered.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Our concluding remarks will be confined to the crying need for knowledge and skills so that our country can take a gigantic leap forward socio-economically. This can only be possible if the standard of performance is high. Our people, especially the youth, need to be imbued with the intense desire to attain excellence in all their endeavours - their studies, training and production in the widest sense of the word. Nothing less than that should satisfy them. No development is possible if the input is ignorance, indolence, arrogance, incompetence and anarchistic destructiveness.

If there is to be lasting peace in this country, one of the most important considerations is an equitable distribution of the resources of this country amongst all its inhabitants. That will only become possible if certain conditions are fulfilled. One of the vitally important conditions is the

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<sup>13</sup> On the evening of the 3rd November 1993, in the television programme "NEWSLINE", responses were elicited from affected persons about the efficacy of the so-called Catch Up Programme. Apart from SADTU's Randall van den Heever and a COSAS representative, there was really nobody who was prepared to say anything good about the programme. Even the spokesperson for the NECC criticised the programme. The PASO member stated that only one in ten schools attempted the programme.

availability of resources to be distributed. But these resources have to be created - houses, schools, hospitals, factories, capital, skills and training. Only dedication to the attainment of excellence through hard work will make these resources available.

The other equally important condition is that political power must pass into the hands of those who represent the aspirations of the workers and peasants, that is, the toiling masses. Only the fulfilment of this condition will ensure the equitable distribution of the resources.

Looked at from this perspective, it will be seen how absolutely important is the education of our children. We will also see that a sound education system is an essential prerequisite for the attainment of a democratic and economically prosperous South Africa.

