

PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION STRUGGLE

INTRODUCTION

The significant and the pivotal role of parents in contributing to the learning culture at school cannot be over emphasised. However that role of parents in this sphere was ignored when SADTU decided to go on strike in August 1993. The education of millions of children of the oppressed was sacrificed without reference to or consultation with their parents.

Just as the schools mirror the hardships and conflicts of the communities they serve, it is equally true that homes have been seriously affected by the consequences of the breakdown in the schools.

The strong objections and revulsion felt by the majority of affected parents at the "chalkdown" and "strike" by teachers is justified when one examines the anarchy that presently prevails in a vast number of schools throughout the country. As a result of disruption of education in the past, thousands of youth today roam the streets uneducated, jobless and engaged in gang activities and violent crimes. Do we want the present generation of school going children to end up in the same way ?

Recent events, such as the decision of the SADTU leadership to support the ANC in its election campaign, have left no doubts that the strike

action undertaken by the union was, at least in part, nothing more than a cynical vote catching manouevre. What is disheartening is the fact that a vast majority of teachers allowed themselves to be manipulated to work against the parents desire for an orderly education for their children.

We must not be guilty of the same crime as the racist rulers of this country - that of a wanton destruction of the lives of our children through years of apartheid education. The true weapon of struggle lies in educating our children to shed off the shackles of oppression and exploitation - not in marches during school hours or shouting senseless slogans or handing memorandums to collaborators.

What then is the role of the parents in this continuing struggle for a truly democratic system of education? Parents must refuse to allow their children to be used as guinea-pigs by the opportunistic leadership of certain "liberation" movements. They must join forces with genuine Parent-Teacher-Pupil committees to voice their protest at the criminal misuse of their children's instruction time and work towards re-creating a conducive teaching-learning environment. They must not allow themselves to be misguided by mindless individuals with illusions of 'freedom around the corner' and claims of victory. They must engage in our struggle in a more disciplined and reasoned way. Teachers

should be made to realise that parents are not so insensitive to expect them to endure and work under punishing conditions - that there are other ways of engaging in our struggle for freedom without sacrificing our children's education.

If the struggle for democracy in education is to be won, the mutually supportive roles of parents, teachers and pupils is essential.



HANG OUR HEADS IN SHAME!

AMY BIEHL, a U.S. Fulbright student spent 9 months in South Africa working for her doctorate and also helping the process of transformation in South Africa. She worked closely with persons from the University of the Western Cape on matters affecting the rights of women.