

Workers education day

Speech by Comrade Thami Mohlomi (Natal Regional Secretary of COSATU) at the SACHED Education Workshop, Pinetown, August 31 1986

Comrades

We are gathered here today to discuss one of the most important matters in this country which is education. The issue of education together with all the matters related to apartheid has led this country into the crisis in which it is today. So it is easy for us to be clear about what education is really all about so that we can come with solutions to this problem and work out a programme that will directly deal and overcome the problems facing us in this present apartheid education.

To be really clear about the role of education and its contribution to society we need to look at it historically. Since civilization an advent of class divided society education, like everything, fell into the hands of the ruling class, i.e., the slave masters. During slavery education was the privilege of the slave masters and their children. Only those slaves who were co-opted into the ruling class had that chance to get educated.

Education during this time served to justify the slave system and make it acceptable to the slaves. Under the feudal system the same thing happened. Education fell in to the control of the church which was one institution that was a great feudal lord, owning close to a third of European land. The church also used education to justify and defend the feudal system. People were taught that the order of things existing on earth was pre-ordained by God. The class structure of the world is the same as that in heaven where we have God at the top, the arch-angels, the angels and people. On earth we had the king, the feudal lords, the bishops down to the peasants and serfs. People were taught the order of things and no one could change it. Even during this system education was a privilege of the few from the ruling class and those individuals who decided to join the church from the oppressed classes.

The advent of capitalism brought a lot of invention which assisted in producing books and a lot of materials needed to advance education.

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This assisted a lot in democratising education and making it accessible to many people. However because of class division even under the capitalist system capitalism could not really allow education to be equal in the sense.

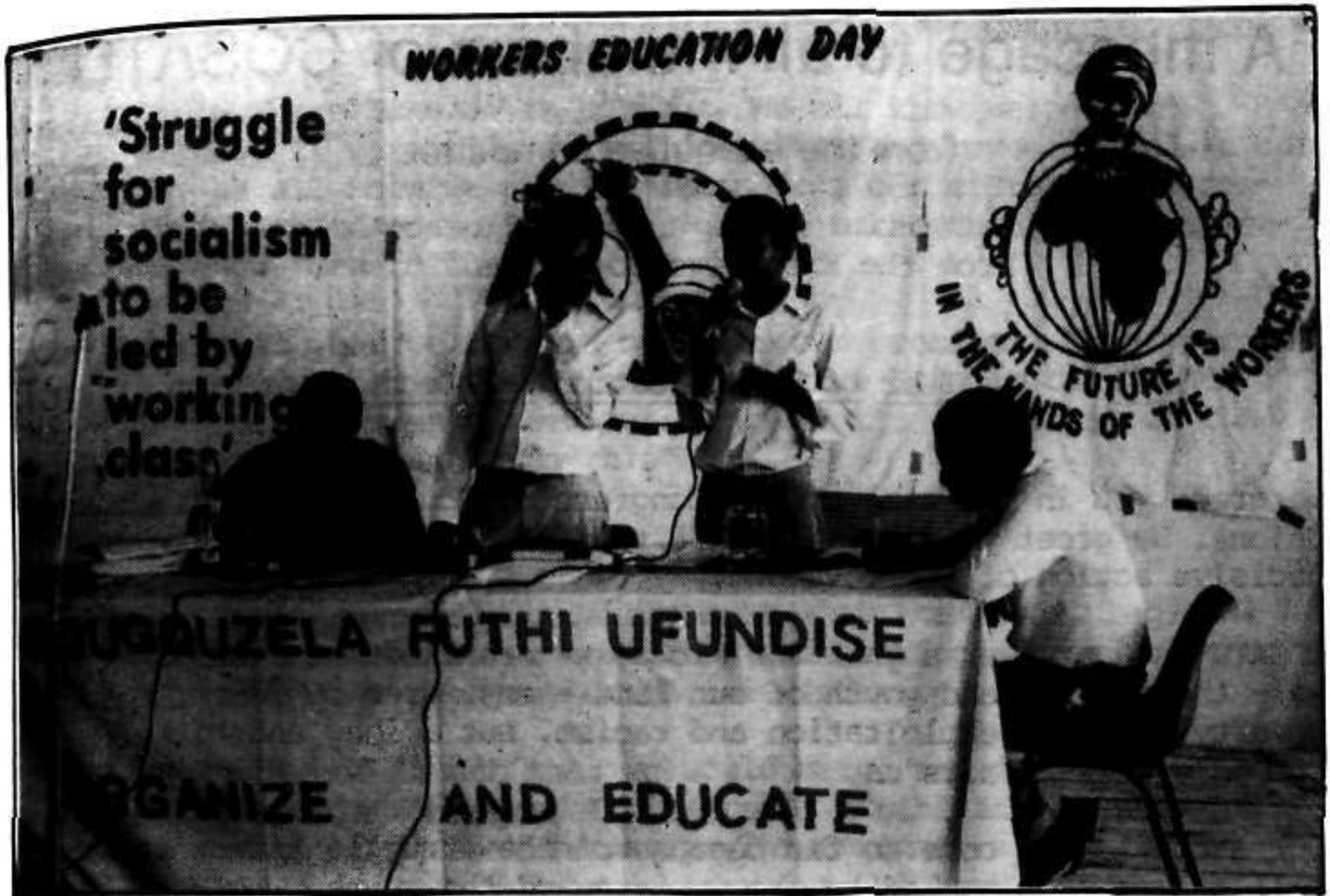
Today we find that there are differences between the kind of education offered to the African children is even of a lower standard than that offered to the children of the white working class. It is in fact not even a second but a third grade education which only enables us to be objects of exploitation.

The capitalist class also realised that education is a very powerful weapon in the hands of a ruling class and the capitalists are actually using education to reinforce their ideas of individualism and justifying the capitalist system. How often do we hear our teachers saying: "You must learn so that you don't become a street sweeper in future". This gives an idea to children that street sweepers are lowly people for whom one has to have no regard and the important people are doctors and lawyers ect. This is the kind of education that the children of 1976 challenged and were prepared to lay down their lives to see the destruction of. It was not of course the first time that this kind of education was challenged. From its inception the progressive organisations such as the ANC challenged Bantu education. With the banning of these organisations there was a lull to the resistance against Bantu education until 1976.

Since 1976 there have been a lot of developments in the education front. For the first time this year we saw the government agree to offer free education to the African children in the form of free books, etc. This is a major victory for the people and it is up to us the workers to see how do we advance this struggle.

Today there are organisations such as the NECC which has its structures all over the country on a regional and a local level. It is up to us to see how do we link up with these structures so as to strengthen them and advance their cause and at the same time strengthen our organisation. COSATU attended the 2nd Consultative Conference of the NECC and was party to the resolution taken at that conference. Now it is our duty to put those resolutions into practice and to decide how to do that. Organisations such as SACHED are doing a very good job by offering to workers alternative education to Bantu education. This is why COSATU encourages its members to attend education classes organised by SACHED because it helps to

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advance the level of education and of understanding among workers.

However, such organisations are short term measures and the ultimate solution to this problem is for the working class to assume power and to put itself in a position of the ruling class. Because as we have seen through the development of society it is only when one has put one in a position of a ruling class that one can decide what kind of education should be in operation.

Therefore we can see comrades what a heavy task lies ahead of us if we want to really solve one aspect of our lives which is education. We have to do away with the whole socio-economic and political system that exists and establish a new one where the workers will be the ruling class.

This is not an easy task comrades and it will need a lot of sacrifice and dedication on our part. However, this does not mean that we should not involve ourselves in the ongoing struggle to improve education in this country and to start short term measures to offer better education to our children and ourselves.

AMANDLA!! FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE'S EDUCATION