

Educating to build democracy



STUDENTS 86



Western Cape students during boycotts last year

"THE CHALLENGES of 1986 necessitate serious and disciplined student organisation that can create a firm base for building people's power", said delegates at the Cape Town UDF conference on education.

The conference was held on March 8 in preparation for the NECC gathering. After discussion a democratic mandate could be presented to the national conference.

Over 289 delegates — representing 66 schools and 36 organisations — attended. These included delegations from the Boland, the West Coast and the South Cape.

The national consultative conference in December was seen by delegates as a "significant event in the struggle to end Bantu and gutter education" and delegates resolved to popularise the demands it set out.

The conference said that the crisis in education was but one element of the general crisis of apartheid and capitalism and that the education struggle must be part of the broader movement working for change in South Africa.

The need to define clear roles for SRC's was stressed.

Problems to be acted on were identified as continued corporal punishment, harassment and victimisation of students, the presence of security guards at the schools and the continued presence of troops in the townships.

The conference noted a lack of coherence and consistency in implementing awareness programmes. To this end, it recommended that students consider implementing such programmes on fixed days every month. SRC's should also

engage in a wide range of activities like sport and cultural events to win general student support.

The lack of organisation in private schools and the selective and individual expulsion of students were also seen as problems.

Priorities for the future included the need to build, extend and consolidate student organisation on a local and national level and at a regional level to strengthen the Western Cape Student Congress (WECSO)

"The achievements of the previous year showed the maturity and ability of students to decide on issues affecting them. It is important that SRC's and students take the decisive action to defend, extend and consolidate these gains" said delegates.

"Reactionary principals who refuse to allow democratic student structures must be challenged".

It was seen as necessary to develop strong links with teacher and com-

munity organisations due to "the general conservatism of teachers and an inadequate understanding by parents of the education struggle".

The need to facilitate community control of education was emphasised. Students should also link up with and support community struggles. "The struggle for a democratic education is part of the general movement to build a non-racial and democratic society".

Students oust principal

In Bloemfontein the students are taking control of the education.

At VULAMASANGO High School, outside Bloemfontein, students have expelled their principal. And classes have been suspended until April 20.

There has been a boycott at the school in solidarity with detained pupils. A teacher said that SRC reps had approached the acting principal to inform him they would not attend classes until detained pupils were released.

It all started when the principal accepted the children of local security police early this year without even asking for their school reports.

But when two parents from Upington brought their daughter to the school, "he used vulgar language and told them to get out," says White Mohapi, former Cosas organiser.

A student saw the mother crying and when she heard the story, she mobilised other students.

They told the parents "you can leave your kid with us, she will school here, no problems" and took her to a class where she was registered by a teacher.

The students then sent a delegation to the principal, but he said he was not interested in talking to them.

They called a mass meeting where they decided that if this was his attitude, there was no place for him in their school, and he must leave by 11 am tea break. A delegation



Student organisation is strong in Bloemfontein

told him this, and he packed up and left.

The school committee called a meeting of parents where they tried to defend the principal, and before the meeting he tried to rally support from parents by visiting them in the township. He wanted to get three teachers expelled as the instigators. Meanwhile, students discovered that he kept a walky-talky in his

office, and had written a letter to a police magazine praising the actions of the police. This was exposed at the meeting.

The letter began: "I have found it appropriate to write this letter of appreciation because of the outstanding and commendable service rendered by Major A.H. Coetzee for black children of school going age in Bloemfontein. I have written

this as a law-abiding citizen of the RSA.

"Teachers and parents then supported the students decision, and decided the school committee should be disbanded and replaced with a parent-teacher committee.

Vulamasango students have now elected an SRC. Each class has elected two representatives. There are 34 classes, and so there are 68

representatives. These 68 elect an executive of 12 - the others go to the subcommittees.

While the principal saw fit to praise the police action, students at all the local schools came together to commemorate the death of Moses Kaibe, killed last year.

The commemoration was broken up by police - an estimated 15 were detained and many injured.

Students have also had to face other forms of harassment and interference.

● Recently someone phoned a higher primary school principal saying he is White Mohape.

He said the principal must take the students out of school and send the prefects to Mohape's school. The principal phoned a teacher at Mohape's school who informed Mohape.

Mohape went to see the primary school principal, and after the principal spoke to White, he said the voice was definitely not White's.

They all realised it was a hoax and said "it must have been the system".

They agreed that if student leaders wanted to speak to principals they wouldn't phone, they would meet them personally.

● A meeting in March at another Bloemfontein school was surrounded by police.

Student leaders feared for the safety of students if they went out. About 160 students were barricaded in and had to stay there till 6am the next morning.

Student leaders then accompanied the woman students to their homes. The riot squad followed them. At the homes, students explained to the parents what had happened.

The parents were very angry with the police. When some went to the police station to ask where their detained children were, they got no proper response.