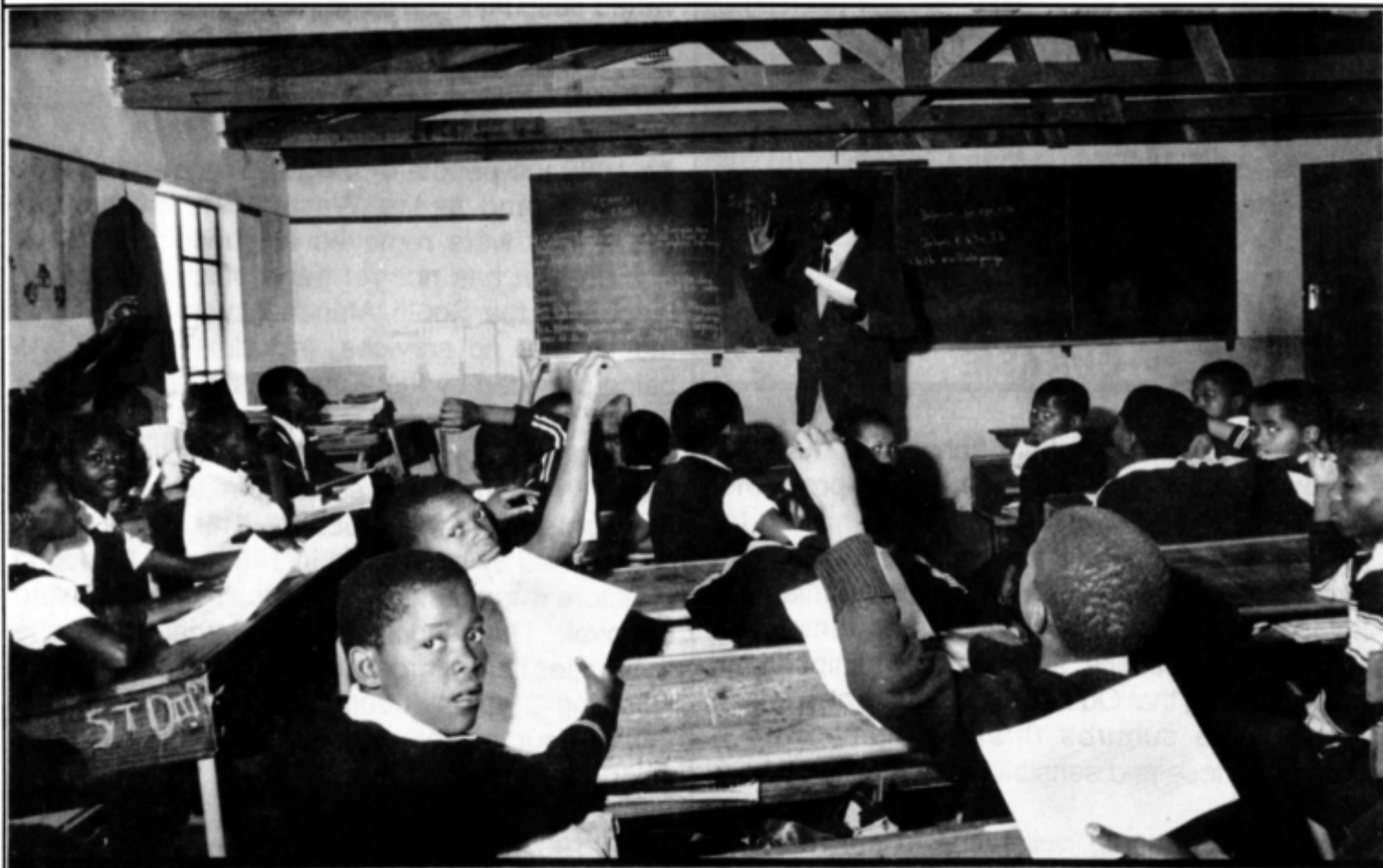


TRAC

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Transvaal Rural Action Committee

OUR CHILDREN HAVE NO PLACE TO LEARN



Children in the school at Braklaagte.

Pic by Gill de Vlieg

Around 60 per cent of black South African adults are illiterate, according to official estimates. In the "independent" homelands this figure rises to 70 per cent in some districts.

The education crisis is a familiar topic in current writings, but the particular plight of people living in the countryside is rarely mentioned. South Africa's racial education system is entrenched

through unequal government spending and duplicated functioning: of 19 separate education departments, 11 administer black schooling.

Communities with which TRAC works see schooling as a way of releasing their children from the web of poverty and illiteracy which had tied them to their precarious rural existence.

These are all rural areas or rural townships with histories of forced removal or incorporation into ethnic homelands. The common thread is disruption - the disruption of people's lives, and of the normal community life. Education is particularly vulnerable to disruption: The youth are generally sensitive to political interventions and schools rely on stability to function.



The Odi and Botshabelo schools in the Brits township of **Oukasie** face critical problems. The 59-year-old township of Oukasie has so far survived an onslaught aimed at its destruction through forced removal. In 1985, local parliamentarian, Dr JP Grobler announced the removal of Oukasie to Lethlabile, a "model" township 20kms away, arguing that Oukasie's "slums" which adjoin smart white suburbs threaten homeowners' property prices and sensibilities.

Through determined resistance to the removal, Oukasie is still a home to thousands of blacks. Strong trade unions in the Brits factories have played a crucial role in resisting the removal, and for now, the residents have won the right to remain, although Oukasie is still not recognised formally as a black residential area (it was disestablished by law in 1986).

The Oukasie schools crisis arose when the Department of Education and Training (DET) failed to appoint enough teachers, arbitrarily transferred and dismissed teachers, and appointed an acting principal without proper interviewing proce-

dures. These actions were seen by the community as part of a general strategy to neglect services in the hope that it would force people to move.

Teachers and students were involved in demonstrations and protests about the school problems. The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) helped set up negotiations with the DET. But it was only when Brits factory workers threatened to strike that their employers intervened pushing the DET to reinstate the teachers

MOGOPA

In 1988 the people of **Mogopa** returned to their original land in the Western Transvaal from which they were removed at gunpoint in 1984. Their return has not yet been officially acknowledged by the South African government. This means that no services, including schools are being provided by the authorities.

The Mogopa community built their first school by hand. Women carried each stone to the site and the men erected the structure. This building was demolished by bulldozers in 1984, and a second structure was erected in defiance of the proposed removal. The school was razed again when the authorities finally forced the people to leave. In the following 6 years (during which the community moved four times) the 300-odd children were without schooling.

Since 1987 the community has been engaged in negotiations with the government about their return to the land. They are still waiting for a satisfactory resolution to their problem. The people have grown impatient as they feel that the education of their children cannot wait for the government. Last month, for the third time, having returned to Mogopa, the community rebuilt their school. It has been erected on the foundations of the last school, rising out of the ruins, a visible sign of their intention to rebuild their lives.

In **Bophuthatswana**, many of the communities with which TRAC works are still locked in battles

with Mangope about their legitimate right to remain South African citizens; and the Bophuthatswana government continues to retaliate with repression. The disruption of schooling has been a serious side effect of this conflict, affecting thousands of young people's lives. The education crisis at Braklaagte, Leeuwfontein and Mogopa illustrate common conditions.

BRAKLAAGTE AND LEEUWFFONTEIN

Schools in **Braklaagte** and **Leeuwfontein** (in the Western Transvaal) were administered by South Africa's DET until 1978. In that year, 10 years before the communities were officially incorporated into Bophuthatswana, the administration of the schools was taken over by the bantustan. The change led to an increase in fees and a cut back in the supply of books.

The people tried unsuccessfully through legal means to challenge Bophuthatswana's control of education. After the official incorporation at the end of 1988 (which has been bitterly opposed by residents), schools remained open for a few months until a number of confrontations occurred between security forces and students.

On the 22 March 1989, a busload of high school students was stopped by Bophuthatswana soldiers and they were forced to state whether they belonged to Bophuthatswana or South Africa. Those who said they were South Africans were beaten. Since then, soldiers and police occupied the schools and students are too afraid to attend classes. In May 1989, 100 students from Leeuwfontein were sprayed with teargas and arrested.

Shortly afterwards, the Bophuthatswana authorities withdrew all teachers from Leeuwfontein and Braklaagte, except for one school which serves a few students from pro-Bophuthatswana families.

All six schools, which cater for about 3 500 students, have been closed for over a year. The buildings (except for one) were built by the communities and are now falling into disrepair. The



Schoolchildren in a farm school. *Pic by Gill de Vlieg*

parents are desperate. They are demanding that responsibility for education be taken over by South Africa. They argue that they are South Africans despite the incorporation into Bophuthatswana. Appeals have been made to various government ministers to address their plight with no success to date.

MODDERSPRUIT

Modderspruit, a community of 15 000 people, situated about 20km from Brits, officially falls within the borders of Bophuthatswana.

In the 1960's they lived in Albertsteyn near Johannesburg - a mixed community of peri-urban dwellers. A tornado flattened their settlement, leaving them homeless. The authorities offered them land near Brits on which they settled. In 1977 Bophuthatswana took independence and Modderspruit, unbeknown to them, fell within the new "state's" borders. They continued to be administered by South Africa, but were a forgotten community. There is no clinic or high school in the settlement.

In the early 1980s the local tribal authority, Bapoba Magale tried to assert control over the area. Levies were instituted and the non-Tswana started to feel the brunt of ethnic discrimination. The community then began a long struggle to have their democratically elected structure recognised and to regain their South African citizenship.

Members of the committee face constant harassment by the Bophuthatswana police.

The latest confrontation has arisen over allegations of corruption by school officials. Attempts by the parents' committee to call the principal to account for missing monies have met with no success. Finally on June 17, 1990 a stayaway from school and work was called to demand an investigation into the corruption. Police intervened to break up the demonstration. Eleven people were arrested and 10 allegedly injured by birdshot. After repeated enquiries by lawyers, those arrested were released on bail pending charges. The investigation into the school's finances has not been reopened.

SMALL SETTLEMENTS

At **Tweepoort** in the South Eastern Transvaal, the community lives on land owned by HL&H Forestry Company. Most adults work for the company. The present school goes up to Std. 2 and is in a broken down shed. The teacher is paid by the community. There are no desks, books or blackboards. The community is negotiating with HL&H to build a proper school which can be registered by the DET.

Stafford and **Syde** lie in South Africa, but their schools fall under Kangwane. Students walk 15 km to the nearest school. After meeting with the community and high school students. Kangwane has at last agreed to build a secondary school. The present primary school is a six-roomed pole and dagga building housing 486 children. There is no water on the site.

At **Stafford**, residents are trying to persuade the authorities to rebuild the school. While the Department has agreed to provide teachers, it will not register the school because the Department of Agriculture and Forestry have mooted the idea of removing the settlement to Syde. The Stafford community received assurances years ago that they can stay, but the education authorities are

now reluctant to invest in schooling when removal is again being contemplated.

FARM SCHOOLS

Four fifths of South Africa's land is owned by white farms with one out of five blacks living on them.

Farm schools are at the bottom of the education pile. They are entirely at the discretion of the farmer. The state will subsidize 75% of the building cost and will pay the teachers' salaries, but the DET does not control the school.

White farmers often oppose the establishment of schools on their land on the grounds that this leads to an influx of black families. In the Eastern Transvaal field workers report many instances where farmers prevent children from neighbouring farms from attending their school, or refuse them permission to cross their land.

Recommendations from a 1987 DET investigation into rural schools provides a glimpse of the kind of problems experienced by people living on isolated farms. The report suggests that the government purchase land on which existing farm schools are situated, or at least, enter into a long lease with the farmer. This has occurred on only five farms countrywide.

Although the use of pupils for labour on farms during school hours is illegal, the practise is still widespread when the families live as labour

tenants on the white farms. The DET recommendations are that no child should have to walk more than 5kms to school, but this goal is far from having been achieved. Progress will remain slow as long as the building of the school is at the discretion of the farmer, and involves his capital outlay. Five classrooms cost approximately R75 000, of which the farmer would have to pay R15 000. Where there is no opportunity for secondary education (there are only 49 farm schools which include secondary classes), hostel accommodation or transport to the nearest secondary school has to be found.