

Introductory Notes :

The original title suggested for this paper was "African Education in the Western Cape in 1977". This would imply a survey of what happened in the schools in the townships last year, and while this would have some validity as an historical document, it is doubtful whether it would have any further usefulness. We have, therefore, concentrated on the students' grievances which were voiced at the time of the riots and unrest in 1976, referred only briefly to the situation during 1977 and have devoted considerable space to proposals aimed at improving the situation in African schools. It is felt that this is a more constructive approach which would hopefully give the Black Sash and other agencies a lead in identifying problems and helping the African students to attain their aspirations.

In gathering material for this paper we hoped to obtain first-hand information from the people concerned with African education, namely, the Department of Education and Training, as the Bantu Education Department is now called, and teachers and scholars themselves. We thought that this would give us both sides of the picture and that we would then be able to draw fair and impartial conclusions. However, this was not to be and we thus had to rely largely on written information available through the press and other publications.

We think it would be both relevant and informative to recount our experiences in attempting to obtain first-hand information. Our first course was to approach the local circuit inspector, with whom we had contact last year, always on a friendly and cordial basis. He gave us information for a branch meeting at which African Education was discussed, and it was at his suggestion that the local Director of Bantu Education addressed the meeting. On visiting his office we were well-received and, having explained our purpose, he gave us an hour and a half of his time, describing as fully as he could the situation last year and at the beginning of this term. The following week we were fortunate enough to be invited to visit some of the schools in the townships with Dr Margaret Elsworth of the African Scholars' Fund. She was going to pay out bursaries and offered to introduce us to some of the headmasters so that we could arrange to discuss our survey with them. However, we discovered that we not only needed a permit to enter the townships, (which we had), but a permit to speak to the school principals ! So back to the circuit inspector's office we went, only to find that 'Pretoria' had that very week issued a directive that no persons other than officials of the Department of Education and Training were to visit the schools during school hours. We then asked whether we might visit after school hours and were told that this would be very difficult as we would need to contact the principals during school hours to arrange an after-hours meeting, and that was not allowed. In any event, we would have had to have a special permit to speak to a school principal or teacher, and it was clear that the local office was not prepared to issue us with one. Nevertheless, the circuit inspector understood that it was difficult for us to make a report on schools we had not seen so he offered to take us himself and show us what he could. Thinking that half a loaf of bread was better than no bread, we agreed.

In the meantime we reconsidered our position and decided to make a different approach. We had prepared a short questionnaire which we had hoped to use when interviewing principals, teachers and students, and we decided to take the matter up with the Regional Director. Unfortunately, he was away in Pretoria and we were received by a deputy whose attitude was rather less than sympathetic. He took great exception to our questions, considering them to be inflammatory, and although our intention had merely been to enquire whether we would be permitted to use them in discussions, he tried to insist on keeping a copy of the questionnaire. We could not allow this as it would possibly have implied that the Black Sash was already using the questionnaire, and it was clear that the official intended to use it against us, meaning the Black Sash. It took twenty minutes of hard talking to persuade him to return the copy of the questions. Our hopes of meeting with school principals, teachers and students, let alone discussing things with them, were dwindling, but, we thought, at least we will be able to see conditions for ourselves during our tour with the circuit inspector. No such luck. Two days later a very flustered circuit inspector telephoned to let us know that 'Pretoria' had forbidden him to let us accompany him on a tour of the schools and had further instructed him to let us know that we were to make no attempt to contact any of the schools, principals or teachers at any time. We enquired whether this included any after-hours contact and were assured that it did. We did our best to explain our position to him, emphasising that our purpose was constructive and that if the Department took exception to our questionnaire, we were quite prepared not to use it. However, it was clear that he himself was in a difficult position and unable to reverse the instructions he had received, although he did offer to help us in any other way he could - by giving us statistical information or by discussing the schools in his office.

From our side we must accept the explanation that the situation in the African schools is very delicate and that the Government is suspicious of the Black Sash's motives as a political pressure group. Nevertheless, it is a sad reflection on our community that it is impossible to obtain interviews with what in essence are local schoolmasters.

Finally, we think it is important to emphasise the tremendous pressures under which African school principals, teachers and students are forced to work. We all know that the Security Police run an efficient network of informers, but even this knowledge did not lessen the shock of learning, first-hand, of the agonies of people who are put under pressure to become informers. The atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion which this sort of thing engenders is very effective in demoralising and dehumanising a community, preventing the growth of the community spirit that is needed to improve the conditions in African schools. If the condition of Langa High School was representative of the attitude which its teachers and pupils have towards the school and the education system which runs it, it indicates appalling apathy. The buildings were neglected and filthy and it was clear that no attempt had been made to clear the fire-damaged classrooms. Charred beams lay rotting in cesspools right opposite the fire-blistered door of the principal's office. The scene imparted an atmosphere of gloom and despair more proper to a bomb site than a Secondary School. The two junior secondary schools which we had seen prior to visiting Langa High had been clean and tidy, but somehow this served only to heighten the lack of self-respect we felt at Langa High. We

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think that this, more than anything else, is reason enough for bringing about changes in the education system for Africans. Intrinsic to education is the imparting of self-respect and pride, which will only come when the African scholar feels proud of the education he or she receives.

Footnote :

After completing this report we heard rumours that reconstruction work had begun at Langa High. Unfortunately, the rumours were just that - rumours. The local Education and Training Department office spokesman said that application had been made to renovate all the damaged schools, and that the rebuilding of Langa High was a priority. However, the scholars at Langa High have cleared away much of the debris and done a lot to clean up the buildings since the beginning of the term. The new Minister of Education and Training, Mr Cruywagen, was taken on a tour of the township schools on 6 February and, according to the local circuit inspector, Mr Cruywagen said that the renovation of fire-damaged schools was to be the Department's first priority in expenditure this year.

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African Schools in the Western Cape

"To say that the present crisis in the African townships has been generated by a desire to break away from imposed institutions ... is to catch at the shadow of the problem and lose the substance". (Temba Nolutshungu in the December 1976 edition of 'Race Relations News'). Students and parents alike are opposed to apartheid, but the students, unlike their parents, are activists, vigorous for change, and "they began their protest where it concerned them first, in their schools". (Margaret Elsworth, in her article, 'The Rejection of Bantu Education', published in the August 1976 edition of 'South African Outlook'). So the rejection of apartheid was focussed on education and became a struggle for education equal to that of white South Africans.

In Cape Town the African pupils presented a list of grievances and recommendations to the Regional Director of Bantu Education at a mass meeting on 28 September 1976. The recommendations stated that the immediate aim of the school pupils was to ensure that those who were capable and wanted to learn were given every possible help to complete full training so that they could contribute useful work to the community. This policy of priority education would feed back properly trained teachers into the schools. Their ultimate aim, said the scholars, was parity with white education. Detailed recommendations regarding curricula, quality of teachers, facilities, bursaries, post-school training and job opportunities were given in terms which can only be described as responsible.

The question of job opportunities for school-leavers is particularly frustrating in the Western Cape, as it is a Coloured preference area, and the difficulties experienced by job-seekers add fuel to the grievances of pupils and teachers who claim that Bantu Education ends in a cul-de-sac. It has been suggested that much of the responsibility for arson attempts, etc., can be laid at the feet of frustrated school-leavers.

The Department of Bantu Education in Pretoria issued a full reply to the students' grievances which was published in 'The Cape Times' on 2 November 1976. It denied that Bantu Education was inferior but conceded that there were 'differences', "related to the fact that the Department is serving developing nations and the fact that a sudden demand for education necessarily creates shortages of funds, schools and classrooms, of well-qualified teachers, of equipment and so on". Indeed there is no doubt that the Department of Bantu Education is aiming for high standards and that the syllabi for the African schools are based on the same core syllabi as those for white schools. The problem is that the standards are not being attained because of poor facilities, too few books, too many pupils and not enough teachers, many of whom are under-qualified and, therefore, do not command the respect of their pupils. Enough money would go a long way towards alleviating many of these difficulties and this begs the question as to whether an immediate injection of finance into the African schools would be more satisfactory than an immediate change in Government policy. The scrapping of apartheid would not necessarily result in improved education for Africans as the main problems

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are financial. 'The Argus' of Wednesday, 22 February 1978, published an article in which the Secretary for Education and Training, Mr G.J. Rousseau, was quoted as saying that the Government has launched a crash programme to upgrade black education in South Africa. R220 million was budgeted for black education, (including Transkei), last year, compared with R27 million in 1972 and R15 million in 1955, and it was expected that the 1978-1979 budget would be higher than last year's. This sounds like a very impressive increase, but when one realises that even this enormous increase still means that about R60 is being spent on each black pupil per annum compared with R664 on each white pupil per annum, it is still not enough. It is estimated that it would cost at least R300 000 million to overcome the disparity between black and white education.

The students, however, felt that the Department of Bantu Education had offered nothing tangible in reply to their demands, saying that they would have been satisfied if the Department had outlined immediate steps to scrap Bantu Education and give them the same education as whites. As a result, the boycotting of schools continued and the year ended without exams. being written. The new term, in January 1977, began much as the previous one had ended, with a massive stay-away on the part of the senior pupils. However, the situation in primary schools was fairly normal, 'The Cape Times' reporting that "There was a meeting on Sunday where the older pupils agreed with the parents that the primary children could go to school". (7 January 1977). The older children stated that they would not return to school until their grievances were met. There was an air of relative optimism in the primary schools, where large-scale clean-up operations were undertaken by the pupils to clear up the mess caused by five months of neglect and abandonment, which compared sharply with the empty high schools. High school pupils continued their boycott despite appeals from the local Director of Bantu Education and the Chairman of the Lagunya Action Committee. (Note: The Langa, Guguletu, Nyanga - Lagunya - Action Committee was formed in October 1976 in response to the crisis in the African townships. It aimed to provide help to those immediately affected by the crisis and to work to seek long-term solutions to the problems besetting the Black educational system. It helped parents whose children had been detained with bail and legal advice and sought to liaise directly with various official bodies - from the Dependants' Conference to the Bantu Education Department).

However, a week later newspapers reported that the then five-month long boycott of high schools in the Peninsula might be ending when 200 high school pupils returned to their lessons in Guguletu, despite arson attempts at 6 schools. According to officials of the Bantu Education Department, headway was being made in negotiations between students and the Department. But, as is the wont of crucial negotiations, they lapsed into deadlock - after five days. The students wanted to meet the Regional Director, Mr Owens, at a mass meeting, while he insisted on meeting with a small group of student representatives. The students claimed that this would be 'giving themselves to the police'. Finally, the students held a mass meeting at which a representative group to meet Mr Owens was elected, but again the students backed down, fearing police victimisation. Despite this, attendance figures at high schools continued to rise, and hopes were high that the boycott might end. Eventually, officials of the Department

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spoke to a large gathering of students saying that the pupils could not achieve anything more by staying away from their schools and whatever "battle they wanted to fight", they would be able to do better if they had "certificates". ('Cape Times', 13 January 1977). It was also announced that books would be free and that education would become compulsory, moves which the Department felt encouraged the pupils to return to school. (There was some debate on whether it could be regarded as an improvement to make the system of Bantu Education, which had been manifestly rejected by the black community, compulsory). Finally, pupils were assured that detainees would also be allowed to study for and write the special examinations, (to make up for the ones unwritten at the end of 1976), scheduled to begin on 14 February.

About 3 000 black pupils were eligible to write the special Senior Certificate examinations which were held in February/March. Exact figures are not available but it seems that the majority of the high school students were keen to write their examinations and did so. However, no arrangements were made for detained students to study for or write these examinations, as had been promised, neither were they able to write examinations at the end of 1977. When the examinations were over, special arrangements were made by the Bantu Education Department for these high school students to attend classes while waiting for their results. A night school was set up by the State to assist pupils who had sat for the matriculation examinations until their results were released.

Statistics from the Department of Education and Training indicate that attendance at township schools improved as the year progressed, and by the last term few pupils were absent in the primary schools. However, the situation in the three high schools, Langa, Fozekka and I.D. Mize was less normal. There were sporadic arson attempts and stone-throwing incidents throughout the year, both on schools and the homes of school principals and teachers. One principal tragically lost his son when his home was set on fire.

The atmosphere in the high schools was tense throughout the year, and many teachers found it impossible to maintain discipline in the face of their intimidating pupils, some saying that they feared for their lives. In October the burning down of classrooms at schools in Nyanga in the wake of Stephen Biko's funeral increased the tension once again. 'The Cape Times' reported that "Black education authorities in the Peninsula kept a low profile, but informed observers generally conceded that the open door policy and tolerant attitude of the inspectors and Director of Bantu Education in the Cape to student grievances might have defused a potentially difficult situation". (8 October 1977).

Thus the year ended relatively well. Attendance figures were good in the last term and most students sat for the final examinations.

The 1978 school year began optimistically with newspapers reporting that it appeared that the 2-year partial boycott of African schools had ended as hundreds of black high school pupils streamed back to school. It was also reported that there appeared to be a positive spirit among pupils and that there was none of the tension which had marked the start of the 1977 school year.

The announcement that the Department of Bantu Education had changed its name to the Department of Education and Training gave many of us hope that this might herald changes in the education system for blacks. However, when we raised this point with the local circuit inspector the reply was an emphatic 'No' - 'No changes are envisaged'. He explained that there was no possibility of a change in official policy and reiterated that the main problem was a lack of funds. This is all too true. The building and maintenance of all schools in the Western Cape is the responsibility of the BAAB, which obtains money from the Department of Community Development in the form of a loan. The BAAB then finances this loan from the revenue it obtains from the townships - namely, rent, profits on liquor sales and a 20-cent levy paid by all rent-payers which goes towards school building costs. The only other sources of revenue are the Bantu employers' tax and the voluntary school funds paid by pupils. This amounts to R4,00 per annum per pupil and if one multiplies this by the estimated number of pupils in the townships, which is approximately 20 000, (these are official figures), school funds could contribute as much as R80 000 per annum to BAAB's revenue. However, not all pupils pay, and the R4,00 figure is a maximum amount. This year the BAAB's funds are so low that it is budgeting for a deficit. The main reason for this is that 10 of the 11 bottle stores owned by the BAAB have been destroyed. Thus it is clear that unless there is a radical change in the method of financing the BAAB, its future planning is unlikely to leave the drawing-board. There is insufficient money to cope with providing for the increase in the school population - which has risen from 860 000 in 1955 to 3 320 000 in 1977 - let alone for raising standards to a parity with those enjoyed by white schoolchildren.

Despite these enormous obstacles, efforts must be made to "breathe new spirit into the situation" for "even if the children go back to school, there is the danger of a repetition of the kind of thing which happened in 1977 and the ending up in a breakdown at exam. time". (Dr Ken Hartshorne, retired Director of Planning in the Department of Bantu Education, 'Argus', 31 January 1978). This point was also made by the local circuit inspector who said that 'unless there is change we're heading for a worse crisis than we had before'. It is in the light of these statements that we would like to make some suggestions for improvement, despite the obstacles already mentioned.

Firstly, Dr Hartshorne's proposal for an increase in the education budget for the next four to five years should be given serious consideration by the Government.

The Government would gain credibility with black scholars and teachers alike if it were to place black schools under the authority of the Provincial Administrations, as apart from the lack of funds, a major hindrance in the attainment of higher standards in black education is the attitude of blacks to the present system. They have felt that the system is inferior ever since it was introduced in 1954, and this feeling was reinforced by Dr Verwoerd's stating that black men should not aspire to white men's privileges.

Institutions for higher learning should be opened to all races. This would be an immediate practical step towards improving the calibre of teachers, which in turn would be a tangible response to the first aim stated by the black students of Cape Town in their recommendations of 1976. It would also help alleviate the frustrations of school-leavers in the Western Cape who are at present forced to go to a homeland if they wish to study further, which sometimes leads to the Authorities claiming that they have lost their right to reside in the Western Cape. The number of black students who would qualify for enrolment at local institutions such as nurses' and teacher training colleges and universities is so small that it would not result in undue strain on existing facilities.

The concept of 'sister schools' was mooted at the time of the original unrest and deserves further investigation. It would involve the sharing of resources such as laboratories and playing fields. The obvious advantages of such a scheme are that much-needed facilities would be provided for black students without vast expenditure.

Since there is a shortage of qualified black teachers, we suggest that qualified white teachers be allowed to fill vacancies. In one township school last year Form III students had no maths instruction for the last 3 months. We feel sure that the students would not have objected to instruction from any competent person. There is, in fact, an over-supply of white teachers, particularly at the primary level. In the Transvaal the primary teachers' training course has been extended from 3 to 4 years in an attempt to cope with this over-supply.

It is important that teaching conditions and salaries be made attractive enough to retain qualified teachers in the profession. It is thus vital that the salaries of black teachers be put on a par with those of whites. At present they are about 65% of those of white teachers.

The following proposals are all urgent, and should be carried out merely to maintain minimum standards :-

1. The nine classrooms damaged during the unrest need to be rebuilt. This is a matter of urgency as students are having to 'double up' in already overcrowded conditions.
2. Langa High School was badly damaged by fire and is in a poor state of repair. Rebuilding it would provide the essential accommodation for high school pupils.
3. None of the schools in the townships have playing fields. If these cannot be provided, urgent consideration should be given to using existing amenities in Cape Town. It is also a matter of urgency that the area immediately surrounding the schools should be paved or tarred. All of the schools are built on the Cape Flats sand which, depending on the weather, is either blown into dust-storms or transformed into a quagmire.
4. Only two of the schools have telephones - Fezeka High and Langa High. This means that 29 schools are operating without any

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means for ordinary communication, not to mention the occasions, such as fire, when a telephone is required in an emergency.

5. Only four, (Langa, Fezeka and I.D. Mize High Schools, and Sizamile Secondary School), of the 31 schools are supplied with electricity. This means that ordinary teaching aids such as projectors and other audio-visual equipment cannot be used by the majority of the schools. Further, in winter school hours begin when it is still dark, resulting in the loss of valuable time while waiting for it to become light enough to commence lessons. Although it is not within the scope of this report, we feel the question of electrifying homes should also be raised. Being able to study at night with the aid of electric lights would go a long way towards relieving the burdens of most black students who usually have to work in overcrowded, noisy conditions.

Supplying telephones and electricity would place additional financial burdens on the parents of pupils, as the present system requires that they pay for these services.

6. When the BAAB was established 4 years ago it inherited a backlog of about 70 classrooms in the townships. It is estimated that at least 72 new classrooms are required immediately, just to cope with the present number of students. This would cost about R500 000 if they were built according to existing standards. Perhaps consideration could be given to enlisting the help of students and teachers in a crash building programme. This would lessen costs while involving people in a community project.
7. Subsidies are needed to provide stationery and setwork books. The Department of Bantu Education is in the 4th year of a 5-year programme to provide free text books to African schools. This has alleviated financial pressures on some parents, but has not done away with difficulties, as books are supplied according to official figures, which are always lower than the actual number of scholars. It must be noted that all setwork books and stationery are provided free in white schools, and that African scholars may not take books home with them.

Mention must also be made of the language problem. Present policy is that the mother tongue is the medium of instruction up to standard five, when a change is made to English. However, it appears that many Africans favour the use of English as the medium of instruction from sub-A level. Lack of proficiency in English results in poor communication and low academic performance. The Transkei Education Department permits the use of English as a medium of instruction from Standard two level, and it is suggested that consideration be given to doing the same in schools here.

This survey would be incomplete if mention of St. Francis Cultural Centre in Langa were not made. It has grown from very small beginnings

six years ago into an adult education centre which last year catered for 1 500 students. Staffed by Sister Veronica, former principal of Loreto Convent in Sea Point and 100 part-time teachers of all races, the Centre offers a wide education programme from basic literacy classes through to the full syllabi for the National Senior Certificate matriculation examinations. The students are all adults wishing to further their education and school pupils are not admitted. This year the Centre is to offer a 2-year diploma course in nursery school education for 20 students, something which is badly needed as at present there are only 3 creches, 6 pre-schools and 2 church-run creches in the townships. St. Francis also runs evening classes for teachers. These classes have proved invaluable not only to the vast number of under-qualified teachers in the townships, but to those teachers who want to further their qualifications and improve their background knowledge. About 240 teachers attended last year. In this connection, winter and summer schools could be run on a regular basis. Last year highly successful winter schools were held in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth for matric. pupils and teachers at matric. level of maths., science, history and geography. A significant point about St. Francis' is the high morale and the evidence of a burning desire to learn. In spite of the many difficulties, people use their spare time to learn as they clearly see the value of and need for education.

In conclusion, we feel that the relatively peaceful atmosphere presently prevailing at schools in the Peninsula, while welcome, gives no cause for complacency. African scholars have sacrificed a great deal in their bid for a better education, and although the schools are full now, (indeed, the Department of Education and Training reports higher enrolments than last year), it would be foolish to believe that students will be content to return to and continue with the present system after all that has happened.

Changes must be made as rapidly as time and money will allow, otherwise we fear with Dr Ken Hartshorne that "we are heading for a very dangerous situation ... The general breakdown of the educational system, with all the tragedy that this means for the people themselves and for the country as a whole".

BLACK SASH - CAPE WESTERN REGION
Cape Town.
Sue Drerup.
1978.