

Congress Militant

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Paper of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC

Stop De Klerk's attack on teachers!

On the eve of the final exams De Klerk and his government have launched a devastating attack on the education system. Their plan is to retrench about 6000 teachers; force early retirement on 1500 teachers; reduce teaching staff by a further 5% and freeze posts for next year.

This attack on coloured teachers is not isolated. It is part of a general attack by the National Party against the entire education system. It is also integral to their strategy of privatising large sections of the public sector.

Attack on the youth

The consequence of their "rationalisation" policy is going to be that less of our children will get a decent education. The illiteracy rate in South Africa is already 45%. Our youth will be denied the possibility of a stable future. Many will simply join the long unemployment queues or turn to crime.

Education crisis deepens

NP policies over the last 40 years have left education in tatters. The teacher pupil ratio in black schools is 1:40 compared to 1:17 in white schools. Schools are overcrowded and understaffed.

In 1990 alone 325 000 more African students attended school compared to the previous year. This required the building of 13 000 classrooms and about 10 000 extra teachers. Yet the government has only built an average of 2874 classrooms a year since 1985!

In 1989 De Klerk (then Minister of Education) said the goal of equal education for all was impossible. He said "the economy" (capitalism) could not afford it.

The government and bosses have shown nothing but contempt for our education. The reality is that we need more schools and more qualified teachers to cope with the increasing demand for education. Yet, they want to retrench teachers. Already thousands of white and Indian teachers were forced to accept early retirement this year.

The retrenchment of teachers and the increase in student numbers will increase teacher pupil ratios. It could go as high as 1:50. At the demo at the Transvaal regional office a teacher said, "It is already very difficult to teach 35 students at a time. If this increases anymore we will not be able to give students proper attention. The whole education system will suffer."

A student at a public meeting echoed this: "Our teachers are overworked. When it comes to the afternoon they are tense and frustrated. Everyone suffers then. What we need is more teachers and smaller classes!"

Government corruption

DEC says rationalisation is necessary because they have a deficit of R94 million. Parents have said that there is no evidence of this money having been spent on education. "Where has the money gone?" many have correctly asked.

The government wastes taxpayers money by spending up to R10 billion a year on the army and police. Millions have been spent to finance gangster organisations like Inkatha. The 14 apartheid education departments are hives of corruption. Millions are spent to maintain these inefficient bureaucracies.

De Klerk's government says that there is no money, but he earns R528 a day! A parent from Newclare said the whole Tricameral parliament must be retrenched before they touch our children's education.

Model C schools

One of the main aims of the government's rationalisation programme is to impose "Model C schools". This will be a further setback for the education of future generations.

A white teacher speaking at a Westbury meeting said that his child is at a Model C school. The school fee is R985 a year, plus R120 entrance fee. On top of this parents have to pay for all the text books, toilet paper and still contribute when there are fundraising efforts! In this way the government want to shift the responsibility of education onto the shoulders of parents.

Low wages, high unemployment and the ever increasing food prices means that parents will not be able to afford to send their children to schools.

Attack on public sector

The government's overall plan is to privatise and downgrade large parts of the public sector. They have started to do this with the hospitals, post-office, railways, etc. The first step in this rationalisation plan always is to retrench workers.

The retrenchment of teachers will not only throw them on the unemployment heap. Thousands of students at colleges and universities will have no prospect of a job once they have qualified. This is why we must reject the retirement package. Every retirement accepted on this basis will mean the permanent loss of a job.

By selling these public sectors to the bosses they are turning peoples' basic social needs into a profit-making business. For the majority this is going to mean more gutter education, expensive health care, no housing and a poor transport system. The cut in social expenditure has already resulted in a serious crisis in hospitals as at Corrie and JG Strijdom. This is the "new South Africa" of De Klerk.

The NP's aim is to prevent a future democratically elected government from using the state to provide for the basic needs of the majority. We must stop them!

De Klerk must go!

The NP has been assuming that they will get the vote of coloured people in democratic elections. Now the real De Klerk has been exposed. It is now necessary for all voters to remove this government and vote in a majority ANC government which will implement the Freedom Charter.

Cosatu and ANC should lead campaign to defend teachers

Teachers nationally have taken up the struggle to defend their jobs and our education. In the Transvaal they have embarked on a "chalks down". In the Western Cape, Natal and other regions teachers have marched, picketed and held mass meetings to mobilise support.

Thousands of parents and students have come out in full support and have organised their own action. This shows that the oppressed will not sit back while the government attempts to devastate our education.

This action has already forced the department to retreat and say that they have "suspended" their proposals. But we know that they are only waiting for an opportunity to push ahead full steam.

It is therefore necessary that we step up our campaign nationally to stop them from implementing their plans. We must build on the strength and unity already achieved.

Teachers in the Western Cape have organised support from other public sector unions. This should now be done nationally. A united national campaign by all public sector workers will be able to fight back more effectively against the governments attack on this sector.

But we should not stop there. Education affects everyone in our society. Teachers, parents and students should therefore call on Cosatu and the ANC to lead a national campaign against De Klerk's attacks. In this way millions can be mobilised behind the demand for decent education. Cosatu and the ANC should organise a day of national action to support the teachers' strike.

Because this issue affects the whole education system it is vital that unity be built between coloured, African, Indian and white teachers. A successful struggle by all the teachers will send a very clear signal to the government that they are prepared to fight for their jobs. It will effectively overcome the racial divisions which the government uses to divide us.

In every school we should ensure that SRCs are built so that all students can be successfully mobilised in the campaign. Strong student and parent organisations will strengthen the teachers' struggle and severely weaken the hand of the government.

In the coming weeks the government will unleash a propaganda campaign to undermine the struggle and to divide our forces. This must be countered with regular campaigning by organising house visits, factory meetings and public meetings in communities.

By Weizmann Hamilton

**Majority rule elections now
For free, equal non-racial education**

Mass action to support teachers

WE DEMAND

- * Scrap rationalisation of education
- * No retrenchment of teachers
- * Scrap the model C system
- * Free, equal and compulsory education for all
- * One non-racial education system
- * Massive state spending on education
- * Democratic control of schools by elected PTAs
- * A guaranteed job for every school-leaver