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THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL

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THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL

The Spate of Strikes: Reckless Actions, or Cries for Redress?

The widespread strike action of recent months has generally been presented in an unfavourable light in the mainstream media. Striking workers have usually been depicted as rash persons who cannot grasp that they are harming their fellow-citizens, the economy of their country and their own long-term interests. The unsympathetic and even hostile attitude of establishment analysts to strikers was in evidence especially when doctors went on strike.

Their strike was at times depicted as a betrayal of the Hippocratic oath, which requires doctors to be committed to alleviating the suffering of the frail and the infirm. Very little publicity was given to the fact that the allegedly heartless strikers had established skeleton services to ensure that emergency cases would be attended to. Also glossed over all too often was the fact that the doctors' strike was a call not only for improved remuneration but also for the radical improvement of the facilities and working conditions at hospitals that at present traumatise patients and medical staff alike.

The doctors' strike stimulated public debate of a wide range of issues, such as whether health workers should have the right to strike, whether the existing trade unions had the will and capability to pressurise the government into making systemic changes desired by their members, whether the present administrative structure of employer-employee relations cause frustration that drives workers to strike. At times there was even discussion around the questions of whether the nature of the SA economy was fundamentally anti-worker and pro-employer.

In this often heated debate input from members of the public and doctors at State hospitals painted stark pictures of the terrible conditions prevailing at State hospitals, where patients urgently in need of treatment often wait long hours to be seen by a doctor, where seriously ill people are crowded together in makeshift wards, and crucial operations are postponed for months because of the acute shortfall of theatres and surgeons. Many doctors stressed the reality that the constitutional right to quality medical care is often a remote abstraction to citizens who cannot afford private hospitals. The crisis in the State health sector is the bitter fruit of the governments' rationalisation policies that have resulted in critical staff and material shortages in a period of an expanding need for

medical care. Many commentators have referred to the cruelly immoral State spending of billions of rands on weapons and sporting events when there is underfunding of healthcare facilities that desperately need more staff and equipment to do justice to the patients.

Yet there are politicians and their lackeys who are brazen enough to say striking doctors are heartless and money-hungry, when government policies are causing untold suffering amongst poor people who must depend on State health facilities. The money-hungry accusation seemed to some members of the public to be justified when doctors rejected an offer of salary improvements said by the Minister of Health to be up to 19%. But after analysing the "generous offer" spokespersons of the striking doctors came to the conclusion that most doctors would receive an increase of about three percent. No wonder, then, that some striking doctors held up posters that intimated: "We also did maths!"

Of course, the politicians and their business allies have the money to access quality healthcare for themselves and their families at well-resourced private hospitals – in the same way as their children can escape the trauma of State schools by attending posh private schools.

We believe that the main motivation for the doctors' strike was to force the government to give attention to improving the level of healthcare provided at State hospitals. It is remarkable that relatively privileged professionals used the strike weapon to further the cause of the working class struggle for adequate medical services.

A question that needs to be asked is: Why have the trade unions been so ineffectual in defending the interests of the working class? We believe the key reason is that Cosatu, the largest trade union, is along with the SACP in a tripartite alliance with the government, which is the biggest employer of

labour in the country. And the government itself has formed a *de facto* alliance with big business and is thus committed to following economic policies that favour the corporate world and undermine the interests of the working class. Its alliance with the government has undermined Cosatu's immense political power to promote the interests of its millions of worker members. For example, in 1996 Cosatu and other trade unions formulated a macro-economic policy for the country entitled Social Equity and Job Creation, that proposed systematic redistribution of the wealth and resources of South Africa which would lead to growth informed by considerations of social equity. A few months later the government put forward Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution), which emphasised economic growth that would ultimately lead to redistribution (the so-called "trickle-down effect").

The Cosatu leadership expressed its unhappiness with Gear but eventually agreed to the government's macro-economic policy – and so the union's social equity proposals were dumped.

The government's unofficial partner, the business cartel, was extremely happy, knowing that the Gear policy would ensure even greater wealth for the corporations and their executive. And so big business showed its gratitude to the influential leaders (actually their pawns/boys) who had placed the interests of the capitalists above those of oppressed workers. The business cartel used the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) component of Gear for the rapid creation of dark-skinned millionaires who rose to great financial heights on the backs of the poverty-stricken workers, especially in the mining sector. ... "Racial" oppression was out, class oppression was in!

The oppressed workers, humiliated as sub-humans under apartheid because of their colour, are learning, albeit slowly, that the presence of dark-skinned faces in high political, commercial and industrial positions is not necessarily a sign of transformation. They must needs see that their lives are being stunted by poverty while an elite class flourishes by virtue of an unjust system. The oft-repeated government refrain that there is a need to tighten their belts because of "financial constraints" simply won't wash. Even the plea for workers to exercise restraint because of the global economic

recession is falling on deaf ears.

Workers are realising that there is an elite class that is living off the fat of the land while they are made to exist in grinding poverty. For example, it is public knowledge that the government recently spent about R11m on luxury cars for ministers at a time when millions of people living in shacks are told that there is no money for houses. About 240 RDP houses could have been built for R11m. There is growing resentment of the economic gulf between the fat cats and the struggling majority that cuts across colour lines and is in fact a class division. Thus the workers are becoming increasingly more militant in their struggle to achieve the economic equity that the leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle had promised would be achieved after the establishment of a democratic parliament.

The growing militancy of workers was shown in, for example, the municipal workers' strike. Great publicity was given to some strikers' overturning of rubbish bins in urban areas, which seemed calculated to suggest to the public at large that the strikers were mindless persons who did not understand the need for discipline, financial or otherwise. Little publicity was given to the statement of Samwu (South African Municipal Workers' union) general secretary Mthandeki Nhlapo that workers had received below-inflation increases in recent years and in 2008 in fact suffered a 4.5% reduction in real wages as inflation eroded the buying power of meagre incomes. They rejected pleas of poverty by Salga (South African Local Government Association), saying "the largest component of the wage bill was salaries paid to municipal managers, mayors and executive councillors. Some officials and councillors earn more than R1m a year." (*Mail & Guardian*, 31 July 2009)

We see the huge gap in income/earnings as a reflection of the class division in South Africa, which results in the top segment of the economic set-up being flush with funds while a huge labour base struggles to obtain enough money to buy the bare necessities of life. This is a dichotomy that flows from the same system of economic oppression on which the apartheid system was grounded. Only the "racial" component has to a degree been removed.

The doctors' strike might have evoked the most heated debates but it was the strike of the workers

at the 2010 world soccer stadia that scared the authorities. For the government is spending billions of rands on building new stadia and upgrading existing ones for an event which it is hoped will bring great prestige to South Africa, not to mention a huge inflow of visitors and money. In this context it is instructive to have a look at the strike that arguably caused the most anxiety to the authorities, namely the downing of tools at the Green Point stadium in Cape Town, the mother city, the seat of parliament and the most popular destination in South Africa for tourists. The workers' representatives rejected a proposed increase of 10.4 percent on the basic monthly pay of R2 500, insisting on a 13 percent increase. The 2.6 percent difference is worth R65 a month! A union site committee member said: "Unions have about 550 members here, but almost all of the approximately 2 000 people are on strike. This is not only about wages. It is also about what we earn when it rains, and on our off days. I earn about R2 500 a month. You can't survive on that." (*Cape Times*, 9 July 2009)

Workers are indeed struggling to survive in the economic "free market" jungle in which the price of goods and services is determined by "market forces" with which the government must not interfere. The corporate world thus controls South Africa's economy and can inflate prices to ensure high profit margins. Increases in food prices are particularly exorbitant and vicious, resulting in workers' being unable to buy sufficient food for their families. On the other side of the financial divide huge profits are being made that constitute an obscene mockery of the workers' struggle to obtain the necessities of life.

Truly horrifying is the exposé of economic injustice pertaining to the World Cup by Eddie Cottle, co-ordinator of the Campaign for Decent Work Towards and Beyond 2010 for Building and Wood Workers International. In his article published in the *Cape Times* on 2009.07.13 Cottle suggests that the cost of the World Cup infrastructure and stadia has soared from the original estimate of R2,3 billion in 2004 to over R17 billion at present mainly because the construction companies are making huge profits while paying the workers a pittance. Consultant costs alone have exceeded R2,3 billion; the four construction companies' annual reports for 2009 "indicate mega-profits" ranging from 79 to

142 percent. Executive officers are taking revolting slices of taxpayers' money. For example, the salary of the chief executive officer of Murray & Roberts increased from R9m to R10.35m in 2009. In 2008 he was also able to realise a profit of R37.4m on share options granted over several years as part of his pay arrangement. "This was besides the R90m he received in 2009." By contrast, stated Cottle, about 70 percent of all construction workers earn below R2 500 a month. The 13 percent increase they had to strike for translates into R81 a week ... Cottle's statistics expose the deception used to placate opposition to the World Cup's being held in South Africa.

Readers will recall how government spokespersons painted a wonderful picture of the almost mystical way in which the billions of rands invested in the World Cup would trickle down to the majority and alleviate their poverty. The same rubbishy rationalisation was used to introduce Gear in 1996: foreign investment would trickle down to the poor. History has shown that the trickle is ever upward – indeed it quickly becomes a flood.

When South Africa has an economy characterised so blatantly by gross inequity is it any wonder that workers are more often resorting to the use of the strike weapon in order to secure a fair share of the country's wealth so as to improve the lot of their families and communities. Workers are beginning to realise that they have tremendous clout if they act in concert. It is interesting to note that less than a third of the workers at Green Point are unionised. There seems to be a growing realisation among workers that they are bonded together through being the sellers of labour that the economy needs and that unified action to advance their interests does not necessarily depend on union membership. One foresees more frequent use of the strike weapon, and strikes may not necessarily be controlled by "sweetheart" unions aligned to the government. This would be a very worrying development for the government and investors. For it would increase the risk of strikes that agitate for structural changes to the economy – such as the scrapping of Gear and the "free market" system. This would contribute to establishing a compassionate egalitarian dispensation that would make it possible for honest productive labour to be rewarded with the means for a life of comfort and fulfilment.

The Dinokeng Debate

Meeting intermittently in Dinokeng (on the north-west border of Gauteng) over the past few months a panel of 35 South Africans has been discussing possible solutions to the many "challenges" still being faced after 15 years in the "new" South Africa. The urgency of the debate is summed up in the following statement contained in a booklet issued under the title the Dinokeng Scenarios: "If we, as South African citizens, do not energetically engage with a more able and effective government to put the country on a path of renewal, we may face disintegration and decay." (Report in *Sunday Times* of 16 August 2009)

The "challenges" discussed included the growing class of unemployed people; the failure of the education system; homelessness and poor service delivery. The poor service delivery areas probably included the inadequate electricity supply, collapsing water and sewerage systems, an escalating crime problem exaggerated by a police service which is not prevailing, an inadequate health service and extremes of poverty.

It is refreshing to find an admission that the social fabric of our country is rapidly decaying and that the quality of life of the majority of South Africans is dropping severely. Normally the ministers (and their spokespersons in government and the media) try to give the impression that everything is just fine. What then is the state of the nation in the vital areas that affect the lives of all of us?

Service delivery protests

The recent huge outburst of civil protest is an indication of the suffering and dissatisfaction of the people as a result of our decaying infrastructures. There has been much newspaper coverage to substantiate just how advanced the stage of decay is and how imminent the collapse of South Africa's essential services.

Electricity

A huge number of poor people do not have access to this basic necessity. In 2004 60% (27 million) of the population had no electricity. (*Weekend Argus*, 3 February 2008, p.10) Some progress has been made since then but not much, especially when one considers how much the population has grown.

They are denied this access – and all the essential modern conveniences that go with it: appliances, technology, electrical lighting. But most of our fellow citizens, even if they had access, would not be able to afford it. There are also warning signs of even greater threats to the entire supply system.

Christo Viljoen (an electrical engineer and former Eskom council member) expressed his (frightening) opinion that the problem was not just a matter of too few power stations but that "a lack of maintenance and continued neglect of antiquated" machinery and transmission lines were at the heart of the problem. In his opinion this means that the expenditure required to sort out the mess would increase to hundreds of billions of rands.

Water

The problem of old, poorly maintained equipment urgently in need of repair and replacement is the case also with the water supply. This was the front-page story in the Business Times section of the *Sunday Times* of 3 February 2008. The shocking findings of a report in the *Times*'s possession claimed:

- 43% of dams have safety problems and require urgent repair;
- "An estimated R180 billion is needed to replace ageing water service infrastructure countrywide";
- "‘Immediate intervention’ is needed at 30% of municipal waste-water treatment works to prevent outbreaks of water-borne diseases – such as the recent outbreak of typhoid in Delmas".
- "Lack of proper maintenance leads to breaks and blockages in pipes that spill contaminated water on its way to treatment and purification plants."

Note that this report was not made public by the departments involved.

Most of the poorest citizens are without access to a wholesome supply of water too. The *Weekend Argus* (quoted above) also revealed that 36% (16 million people) had no clean water and 50% (22 million people) had no adequate (especially water-borne) sanitation.

Then we have scenarios such as the following:

- "All rivers in the Mthatha and East London areas of the Eastern Cape regularly tested by the national Water Department are contaminated with human faeces." (*Cape Argus*, 31 July 2009),
- "Eight people from the (Mpheko) village (in the Mthatha area) died during May and June after suffering from reportedly water-related diarrhoea and vomiting." (Most of the rivers mentioned above run through human settlements.)
- Major rivers flowing through the Kruger National Park are polluted with human faeces, affecting the health of the park's wildlife. (Several municipalities are to blame for sewage spills that cause human waste to be flushed downstream towards the park.) (*Cape Argus*, 26 July 2009)

It is interesting to note how housing problems lead to water problems and then to health problems – how the interaction of different areas of infrastructural failure magnifies the disastrous effect on communities.

Health

With very few exceptions, public hospitals in the major cities have been allowed to become physically run down and unkempt. In addition the Primary Health Care clinics which are supposed to be the cornerstone of the healthcare service are either non-existent or dysfunctional. The run-down condition of our public hospitals was dramatically brought to our attention in 2008 by the *Daily Dispatch* of East London's report of the unusually high death rate amongst babies born in the Frere Hospital in East London. This led to an unannounced visit to that hospital in August by Nosizwe Madlalana-Routledge the then Deputy Minister of Health. She found conditions there to be so bad that she called it a "national disaster". The Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, subsequently made a stage-managed visit with a task team that effectively contradicted the findings of Madlalana-Routledge, who latter was subsequently dismissed as deputy minister by President Thabo Mbeki.

The MRC's Saving Babies Report

Then hot on the heels of the Frere Hospital exposure

came a report (the Saving Babies Report) issued by the Medical Research Council of South Africa (MRCSA). It revealed shocking statistics about the infant mortality rate in the country:

- For every 1 000 live births 21 babies die in the first month of life, a total of 23 000 babies every year.

This report confirmed that the situation prevailing at Frere Hospital was no exaggeration and was in fact part of a national pattern.

The mortality rate mentioned earlier (the Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR)) is at the same time an accurate index of the frightfully poor social and environmental conditions in South Africa. To put this number into perspective, the NMR for South Africa is much higher than that found in other much poorer countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In most developed countries the NMR is smaller than 10 per 1 000 and in a country like Cuba it is 5 per 1 000. The NMR has not shown any decline since 2000.

Rural collapse

The degree of underfunding in the public healthcare system (and in the rural areas, in particular) can be gauged from the fact that there has been no increase in funds in real terms over the past decade. This in spite of the increase in the population; the increase in the disease burden; and in spite of the introduction of the ante-retroviral roll-out. Karl le Roux is adamant that "without a significant increase in the funding of public healthcare, the system is going to collapse." (Karl le Roux, *Cape Argus*, 22 July 2009)

There is an estimated 34% vacancy rate for doctors in the public service nationally.

Unemployment – going backward, not forward

We know only too well the severe hardship that is suffered by most of our population. The 2001 census gave the unemployment figure in South Africa as 41.6%. This is seriously unacceptable. It is unacceptable that nearly half the working-age population has no (or very little) income. And that they and their dependants are therefore condemned to brief and wretched lives, lives dominated entirely by the bitter struggle for survival. It is unacceptable also that this unemployment level is still increasing at a precipitous rate.

According to the 2001 census report, 750 000 new job-seekers enter the labour market every year. These include matriculants and university and technikon graduates, but also drop-outs ("non-matriculants" and "non-graduates") from all grades and levels of the education system.

An article in the *Sunday Times*, 10 August 2003, Business Times section gave further details: "The jobs gap has widened – figures suggest that between 1996 and 2001 only 600 000 jobs were created for more than three million new entrants into the job market." Therefore, a further 2 400 000 jobless people joined the ranks of the millions already unemployed before the year 1996.

Education

We use the information obtained from an Eastern Cape School and learner quantitative study to illustrate the appalling state of provision in the education sector. The study revealed the following:

- **Schools without an electricity supply:**
Mbizana – 107 schools; Lusikisiki – 176 schools; Mt Frere – 117 schools; Qumbu – 103 schools; Mt Fletcher – 86 schools; Mzimkhulu – 67 schools.
(Only the worst areas are mentioned.)
- **Sanitation:**
Schools without any sanitation at all – 347.
- **Drinking water supply:**
1 013 schools without drinking water.

School infrastructure

Forty-eight per cent of all schools in the province are in dire need of structural attention. A number of classrooms are not fit for learning and teaching and have been condemned by the department themselves as well as the Health Department and structural engineers. This situation has remained virtually unchanged over a number of years. Yet the Eastern Cape Education Department sent R300 million back to the national treasury in 2008.

Drop-out rate

In order to put the inadequacy of physical provision in education into perspective we must bear in mind that the existing accommodation (paltry as it is) is just about half of what is needed. That is because about half of all the pupils who enter in Grade 1

(or Grade R) drop out of the system before Grade 12. Government treacherously hides this fact because it obeys the instructions of its capitalist-imperialist masters in preference to the vital needs of its people. Under the policies of the Washington Consensus (see later) spending on education, health and social welfare must be cut to a minimum.

For the same reason, government cut education expenditure in the nineties under the "rationalisation" programme, which enticed thousands of the most experienced teachers to leave the profession with severance packages. This resulted in the overcrowding of classrooms and the decline in the working conditions of teachers, which in turn has caused the dropping of standards in the schools.

Housing

How big is the housing problem?

Pierre Venter (Banking Association of SA's financial services charter housing initiative coordinator): There is a backlog of 2,3 million houses for the (low-cost) subsidy market. That is, 2,3 million families live in sub-standard homes without sewerage or water. In 10 years the housing backlog will remain where it is unless annual delivery is TRIPLED.

The new Minister of Human Settlements (Tokyo Sexwale, a new BEE billionaire, incidentally) responded to the service delivery protests by sleeping in shack in informal settlements "in order to see first-hand what conditions are like". He said that he would visit every one of the 2 000 informal settlements in South Africa in the pursuit of his job. Moeletsi Mbeki, the former president's brother, claimed that every time he passed Diepsloot recently a new shacktown had sprung up.

And it's not just a matter of numbers. Here's the point: The lowest U-5MR is in the Western Cape (46). But in the Western Cape townships (Khayelitsha and Nyanga) it was three times higher than in the affluent areas (in 2002). Informal settlement housing is a threat to life (through fires and disease). Poor housing conditions, especially crowding and indoor fires for cooking, greatly increase a child's chances of developing pneumonia. Poor socio-economic status is the fundamental determinant of young child mortality

owing to diarrhoea. It also seriously hampers the education of children.

There are other scenarios as well. "Migration to cities, a growing number of informal settlements, street vendors and poor waste management by municipalities, business and home-owners are among factors responsible for the population explosion of these dirty pests." (*Sunday Times*, 2 August 2009) Millions needed to kill the vermin. Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town were "in an advanced state of infestation".

Xenophobia

The terrible persecution of foreign nationals that occurred in our country in May 2008 came as a shock to most South Africans. It was shocking in its cruelty; in its barbarity; in its mercilessness; in its exposure of the evil nature that lurks below the surface in human beings. There was disbelief. This was something that happened in other nations: in Rwanda; in Sudan; the Congo; surely not among the inhabitants of sunny South Africa. But there it was: a gross nightmare. Most commentators claimed that the basic cause of the brutality was the unbearable burden carried by people as they struggled for survival in atrocious conditions,

What are the reasons for this ghastly state of affairs?

We are repeatedly being assured by government spokespersons and former Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel in particular, that the country is experiencing an economic boom. (That was before the current recession, any way.) Why has the service delivery (which is so vital to the well-being of SA citizens) been so appalling?

The obvious conclusion is that (as with so many other aspects of life in South Africa today – education, employment, housing, health, to name but a few) a good life and happiness are for the

chosen few only.

- For them South Africa is a land of milk and honey.
- For them there is an excellent, modern health system.

The majority of South Africans, who cannot buy into this system, are cast aside.

In exactly the same way World Cup 2010 is there to provide world class entertainment for the minority who can afford it. The benefits are for this elite exclusively. Billions of rands will be spent on this spectacle. And what of those vast numbers who look in on this brief exhibition from the outside? No funds are left over to bring urgent relief to their serious problems. They are robbed of decent health, education, and other basic necessities in order that the privileged elite can have their moment of fun. The way this works is illustrated by the situation in the Nelson Mandela municipality (Port Elizabeth).

Nelson Mandela municipality has already contributed more than R1 billion to the World Cup – money which was diverted from normal service delivery programmes. The municipality was in the process of sourcing a R1,1 billion loan to meet its normal service-delivery programmes. Other host cities "are to varying degrees in the same dilemma". "Most of the cities are experiencing a shortfall, but Nelson Mandela Bay is the most severely affected." Qinga-Vika (*Sunday Times*, 31 May 2009).

Under capitalism we cannot have a stable country. Let the other countries of Africa, the outcome of capitalist "development", warn us. Many countries are looking for alternatives. The countries of the Middle and Far East and Latin America are among those looking towards socialism for a solution. We must also, for our own and the country's children's sake, become part of the movement towards a more just economic system.

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The Role of the Teachers in the Struggle

*What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
I learned our government must be strong,
It's always right and never wrong,
Our leaders are the finest men,
And we elect them again and again
And that's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.*

(From a poem by Tom Paxton, quoted in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner)

In this issue of *The Educational Journal* we pay tribute to two outstanding scholars, intellectuals, teachers and political activists who died recently, Ernest Steenveld and Richard Dudley. They were two teachers who for 66 years formed part of a team that kept this journal going, mostly in a hostile political environment – a remarkable achievement indeed.

A New Vision

Two months before his unexpected death, Ivan Abrahams, another member of the *Journal* team, recounted how, disillusioned with school, he dropped out in standard eight (grade 10). Working in *The Torch* office, he encountered a new breed of teacher, one of whom sternly ordered him back to school. Once he had qualified as a teacher, he joined the ranks of this new generation of teachers who had a new vision of a progressive system of education for South Africa – a vision which, as the editorial of *The Educational Journal* of October-December 2008 so beautifully reminded us, “inspired the liberatory struggle.” “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” proclaimed the Cape African Teachers’ Association, and “Let us live for our children” thundered the Teachers’ League of South Africa.

One of the outstanding qualities of progressive teachers’ organizations in the ranks of the oppressed has been the principled alignment of bodies like the Cape African Teachers’ Association (CATA) and the Teachers’ League of South Africa (TLSA) with the objectives and aims of struggle under the aegis of the All African Convention and the Unity Movement. Teachers in these two organisations as well as in other progressive teachers’ organisations in the other three provinces realized that, important as it was not

to countenance shoddy or substandard work in the classroom, the denial of educational opportunity to the oppressed could never hope to find an adequate answer within the confines of the classroom. “Throughout the country, in countless meetings, unfranchised teachers were reminded that they were the sons and daughters of workers. It was to the working classes that they owed their services, their support and their political loyalty.”¹² For the progressive teachers, especially those in CATA and the TLSA, the challenges inside the classroom were joined at the root to the systematic denial of political, social and economic rights to the oppressed.

They were the products of their time

The tumultuous events of the first half of the 20th century, like the Russian Revolution of 1917, World War II and the anti-colonial struggles, had a tremendous impact on young people in South Africa.

The period of the 1930s and World War II saw an upsurge of political activity – political organizations, struggles and intense debates in political organizations and educational fellowships became the order of the day. Young people were inspired by the anti-colonial struggles in China, India, the Middle East and elsewhere. Young people were indeed receiving their political education in the “university of the struggle”. The leadership came from the intelligentsia which in that period emerged mainly from the ranks of the teachers.

In his address to the Anti-CAD conference in 1943, *The Background of Segregation*, Ben Kies referred to the role of the intelligentsia in South Africa as follows:

“It is a known historical fact that the emancipatory theory and the practical leadership always came from the intelligentsia. The workers and peasants have always been so exhausted and bowed down by their arduous toil that they have never had the time to study and look deeply into the why and wherefore of their miserable condition. More than that, even if they had the time, most of them had not the education. So it was always the intelligentsia who came of a more leisured and educated class, who took ideas to the working class and who provided that fusion of theory and practice which is known as leadership.

“We have no leisured class, except amongst

the sons and daughters of a few merchants. But we certainly have an intelligentsia. And we are luckier than that, because our intelligentsia has sprung straight from the loins of the working class. They do not have to go to the people. They belong to the people and the people are all around them.

“I refer, of course, to the teachers, for almost the only persons amongst the non-Europeans who had more than just a mere smattering of education, are the teachers.”

Such were the stirring words which inspired young teachers in meetings, conferences and in political literature in the 1940s and 1950s, as they began to see their role in a country in which the majority of people were oppressed and exploited non-citizens. And so teachers’ organizations like CATA and the TLSA became educational organizations with a political perspective. Education was one of the fronts in the struggle for political and economic freedom. “Education for liberation!” became the watchword of progressive teachers.

In his address to the people of Zimbabwe, *Education for a National Culture* (1981), Ngugi wa Thiong’o had this to say:

For the oppressing class, ... education becomes an instrument of suppression, that is, an instrument for the conservation of the prevailing social order, and for the struggling class ... it becomes an instrument of liberation, that is, an instrument for the social transformation of the status quo. In such a society there are in fact two types of education in mortal struggle, transmitting two types of culture and hence two opposed consciousnesses or world outlooks.

During World War II the response of teachers in Norway to the Nazi occupation of their country, *The Oslo Declaration*, inspired progressive teachers’ organizations throughout the colonial world. It was a universal declaration of what the teachers of Norway regarded as the position of Norway to the mental castration of Nazi occupation, and their duty as teachers.

All these influences filtered into the classroom; teachers took their new world view into the classroom, freeing young minds from the “mind-forged manacles” – one world view, one human civilization, one human race.

Teachers’ roles in the schools

Progressive teachers realized that in order to defend

their charges in this “war” of “two types of education in mortal struggle”, they would have to:

- Improve their own education through reading, study and debate to equip themselves for their important task;
- Do their best to maintain high academic standards in the schools;
- Strive to give their charges a broad, multifaceted education;
- Provide cultural and sporting activities as part of this broader education;
- Become actively involved in community, educational, religious, sports and political organizations in the broad liberation movement.

The tributes paid by their ex-pupils, their former colleagues and parents to the two teachers to whom we pay tribute in this edition of *The Educational Journal*, attest to the fact that these politically motivated teachers did not neglect their duties as teachers in their classroom practice. Indeed, it was their political philosophy and their view of their role in the struggle that determined their classroom practice. Thoroughness was the hallmark of their teaching practice. Knowledge had to be imparted so that critical thinking could be developed. Whatever the subject, whether language, history, geography, science, biology or mathematics – it could be used to encourage critical thinking and raise social consciousness, and to expose lies, distortions and, in the South African context, racism.

Even teachers who were not overtly political saw how important it was for them to become good teachers. Year after year thousands of “ordinary” teachers performed miracles in the primary schools, teaching the children of the oppressed the three Rs. There was a time when many teachers in our schools had an academic education level of standard eight (Grade 10), plus two years’ teacher training. But when children had passed through their hands in kindergarten, they could read and write. And, after “sing-songing” their arithmetical tables through kindergarten, they were numerate as well. These were the teachers who truly had “grassroots” experience.

Greening the desert

Because of the new role they had carved out for themselves, teachers in the TLSA declared: “We are taking the whole nation to school.” Research, study and discussions took place in educational fellowships of which the New Era Fellowship was the outstanding

forerunner. Non-teachers, parents and students were granted associate membership of the TLSA. "Working class intellectuals" received their political education in the fellowships and in the TLSA.

Many language teachers could teach pupils to write well because they were writers themselves. It was mainly the teachers in the ranks of the oppressed who were the writers. The best known among them were Willem van Schoor, Livingstone Mqotsi, A C Jordan, Hosea Jaffe, Alie Fataar, Ben Kies, Es'kia Mphahlele, Victor Wessels, Neville Alexander and Richard Rive. Hundreds of political pamphlets, newsletters and monographs were written by teachers, and the main contributions to *The Torch* and *The Educational Journal* have been teachers. Many ex-pupils can attest to the ways in which teachers kindled their love of reading and their interest in literature.

In her dissertation "Contesting a Culture of Respectability: The radical traditions of the Non-European Unity Movement", Corinne Sandwith points to an aspect of literary criticism which has never been mentioned by academics in literary criticism in South Africa: that teachers in the Unity Movement used the Marxist method of literary criticism (as indeed they used the historical materialist approach in writing history).

Corinne Sandwith refers to A C Jordan's³ Marxist analysis of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at an opening address at the 1946 conference of the Teachers' League of South Africa. Sandwith says that "In Jordan's reading, *The Tempest* stages a critical unmasking of the operations of colonial rule ... *The Tempest* offers a corrective to the widely held assumption that participation in culturally elite forms could challenge notions of 'Non-European' inferiority, and lead to an improvement in economic and political status. In terms of this reading, *The Tempest* offers a clear message: no matter how educated Caliban becomes, he will always be 'Caliban' to Prospero." Just as "Caliban is taught Italian, as Jordan argues, so that he may willingly follow Prospero's instructions," so "the fruits of Western civilization were only grudgingly and partially apportioned in the interests of colonial rule ..." (our emphasis).

But A C Jordan said, "Shakespeare ... represents human culture, and his contribution to culture is the legitimate right of all mankind." As were the contributions of the scholars of ancient Timbuktu, the mathematicians of Africa, Asia, Europe and

America, the inventions of Chinese civilization, etc, etc, as Ben Kies portrayed in his *Contribution of the Non European Peoples to World Civilization*. (A rereading of these texts might prove to be a revitalizing antidote to all the mumbo-jumbo of "Eurocentrism" we have been hearing from all quarters lately.)

CATA and TLSA teachers exposed oppression by means of "cultural deprivation and exclusion", and part of their resistance to this kind of oppression was the development of an "oppositional culture" by means of "wide reading, exposure to radical ideas and a holistic approach." Sandwith says of the NEF that "one of its most valuable contributions to South African intellectual life was its emphasis on critical thinking and enquiry and its refusal to defer to established authority."

Another example of the "oppositional culture" developed in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s is the Wilvan School of Dance in Cape Town. A report in the *Cape Argus* of 11 August 2009 shows how even in a school of dance, teachers taught political lessons. The report relates how, through the voluntary efforts of teachers, parents and the community, the Wilvan Community Dance School was established in 1968 by Veronica Williams who was joined by dance teachers Elaine Cloete and Shirley Willenberg. "The teachers knew dance needed to be seen professionally for it to be understood, but they refused to apply for special permits to attend theatres. So they started their own library of books and hired projectors, using films, video tapes and slides to educate students." One of the students said, "We received a fairly good education about what and why things were happening during apartheid." The school also encouraged a kind of anti-capitalist, anti-competitive culture: "Stop competing and start working for and with each other," said Veronica Williams.

To be continued

In the next issue: Teachers' involvement in community organizations and non-racial sport, their role in the boycotts of 1976-1986, "trade unionism", teacher unity, persecution of teachers, teachers in the post-1994 period.

Endnotes

1. Transvaal African Teachers' Association, Indian and Coloured Teachers' Association, OFSATA, Natal Indian Teachers' Society, Natal African Teachers' Society
2. Unity Movement Anniversary Bulletin, 1993
3. A C Jordan was at that time a lecturer at the University of Cape Town, and a member of CATA.

A Tribute to Ernest W Steenveld

Ernest W Steenveld passed away in Grahamstown on 5 March 2009 at the age of 86. He was introduced to school informally when as a five-year-old he accompanied his sibling to school, and this enabled him to matriculate at the age of 15. After completing his training as a teacher at Zonnebloem Training College he taught for several years at the Chapel Street Primary School in Cape Town.

Always a keen student and a voracious reader he studied through UNISA and gained a BA degree with English and History as his major subjects. These were the subjects he taught when he was appointed to the staff of Trafalgar High School, where he was a teacher for more than 40 years until he retired from teaching in 1982.

During these years at Trafalgar he taught many hundreds of students and through them got to know their parents and their families. As a senior teacher, vice-principal and acting principal he exercised a great influence on the running of the school. More than that, as a teacher he was conscientious and stimulating and took a keen interest in the progress and welfare of his students, whom he encouraged to study further after matriculating.

Throughout his life he remained a scholar who gave generously of his knowledge and expertise to his students and colleagues. His past-students acknowledge the wider influence of the lessons they learnt from him about history and particularly about South African history. He encouraged them to read widely and critically so that under his guidance they were introduced to a well-grounded historical materialist approach to the study of History, which gave them an understanding of their subject that often differed radically from the interpretation in their textbooks.

He stimulated their interest and broadened their understanding to such a degree that many of them pursued the study of History at university level and some returned to the schools to teach the subject.

As a teacher of English he introduced his students to a Marxist reading of literary analysis and criticism, which he taught them to apply to their own wider reading, encouraging this by suggesting authors and titles and by getting students to review books that they had read.

The extra classes he gave his students before and after school hours and especially on Saturday mornings became a legend, with students attending in a more relaxed atmosphere that encouraged more intimate participation and keen effort.

They were also taught how to derive maximum benefit from the intelligent use of their school library and more especially from the public library, including the National Central Library in Cape Town which Ernie insisted they should enrol at as members. They learnt how to use libraries as resources in order to do research

and as sources of reading material through which their horizons were enormously broadened.

He put them on the road to a better understanding of their wider social milieu. Through all their experiences they were also being taught where and how they could contribute to the creation of a more truly democratic social order.

He loved people and with his warm personality he could relate to them comfortably. This was obvious in his dealings with his students who knew that they could come to him with their problems assured that they would be heard and helped. He had a great affinity with all who shared his humble beginnings. He took a special interest in those students who came from poor working class homes and whose parents were struggling to keep their children at high school. They appreciated his concern and the practical assistance he gave.

It is not surprising that his name became closely associated with that of Trafalgar by the many people in the Cape Peninsula and further afield who had been students of his or whose children or relatives had attended the school. By all of them he is remembered with gratitude and affection.

Ernie joined the TLSA as a young teacher, having also made contact with the New Era Fellowship where young people had opportunities to hear and participate in discussion with more mature progressive revolutionary thinkers like IB Tabata, Jane Gool, AC Jordan, Goolam Gool, Ben Kies, Alie Fataar, Victor Wessels, Edgar Maurice, Frank Grammer, Dan Neethling, most of whom were members of the TLSA. It was through discussion, study and wide reading that he developed a broad perspective of history, historical materialism, class struggle, and contending ideologies. He served on the executive of the League as well as on the Bursary Committee, which raised funds to award bursaries to deserving students at High School and university level.

As a member of the editorial board of *The Educational Journal* Ernie contributed many articles and notes. His writing was clear and incisive, always the result of careful research and analysis. His research into the effects of colonialism on African society resulted in his writing a notable series of 20 articles entitled Europe's Intrusion into Africa, which was published in *The Educational Journal* between 1999 and 2002.

Continued on inside back cover

A Tribute to Richard Owen Dudley

Because of the enormous contribution he made to the life and work of the many organisations to which he gave so much of his time, his understanding and his energy it is not possible to pay adequate tribute to RO Dudley in the space of a few paragraphs. Instead we shall highlight a few areas of his work in order to reveal some of those qualities that made him the comrade and friend who was so loved and respected by all.

Affectionately known as RO by his contemporaries and comrades and as Dick by his closer associates and friends, Richard Owen Dudley celebrated his sixteenth birthday in 1940 as a first-year student at the University of Cape Town. His fifth year ended in 1944 with his having completed the BSc degree in chemistry, physics and mathematics, the MSc degree in chemistry and the BEd degree as well as the Secondary Teachers' Diploma.

As a student he was involved in the political ferment of the post-war periods.

These were the times of the National Liberation League, Fourth International and Non-European Unity Front, the Coloured Advisory Department established by the rulers in 1943, the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD) with its policy of non-collaboration with the ruling class and all its systems – the boycott; also of the new road of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), when government collaborators were thrown out and went on to form the Teachers' Education and Professional Association (TEPA). The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) was established to include the Anti-CAD and the All African Convention. Then followed the Indian Representation Act, Suppression of Communism Act, Bantu Education; the Treason Trial in 1956 and the third Nationalist Party government in 1958 with Verwoerd as Prime Minister; the University Apartheid Act; Sharpeville; the Sabotage Act, the arrests at Rivonia.

There were protests, demonstrations, stay-aways, marches, meetings, pamphleteering. Dick was involved in much of the upsurge of broadly left-wing political activity, especially in the TLSA, Anti-CAD, NEUM and the New Era Fellowship (NEF) as a highly committed active participant, giving all his intellectual capacity not only to systematic study, analysis, discussions and writing, but to organising and addressing meetings, helping to extend the work of those organisations into new areas. He worked with comrades like Alie Fataar, Edgar Maurice, Willem van Schoor, Ben Kies, Polly Slingers, Victor Wessels, AC Jordan, Jane Gool, IB Tabata, Dr Goolam Gool, Hosea Jaffe, Dan Neethling and many others. And soon, in recognition of his abilities and commitment, he was appointed to executive offices.

After qualifying as a teacher he was appointed to the staff of Livingstone High School where he

remained for 39 years, first as an assistant and later as senior teacher, vice-principal and *de facto* principal, when the Department of Education refused to appoint him as the principal after he had on several occasions been nominated for the post by the school governing body. He had joined the TLSA as a student, and most of the members of the staff of Livingstone were fellow-members.

This strong TLSA presence gave the school a distinctive tone and reputation. This was a school where non-racialism and non-collaboration mainly with the rulers were practised as a matter of policy. Teachers opposed the segregation and apartheid policies of the State and the system of race-based education departments with their separate and debased curricula, syllabuses, examinations and certificates. RO and his colleagues addressed meetings of students, parents and teachers, public meetings, branches and regional and national conferences.

RO was mentor to university students who did their teaching practice at Livingstone, giving them guidance and assistance and also expecting them to do their work with the utmost dedication. Those were the standards he set himself and his colleagues and students. As an extremely highly-qualified teacher he brought to his work the expertise and knowledge derived from years of study, research and discussion, which enabled him to lead his students beyond the confines of the syllabus and the classroom to a better understanding of their world.

During all these years he was an influential member of the TLSA, playing a leading role with his fellow teachers and comrades in formulating a clear understanding of the politics of education. Together they gave the organisation a clear, unambiguous and focussed direction arising from an understanding of the intimate relationship of politics and education: that the philosophy of education, its policies and practices were directly related to the political programmes and policies of the rulers; that education was shaped to serve the political interests of the ruling classes.

Dick gave us all a clearer understanding of the role of education in the social order shaped by political oppression and economic exploitation, reflected in the schools attended by our children – that the financing, the commodification of learning and teaching, the curricula and syllabuses, the pupil-teacher ratios, books

and buildings, libraries and laboratories – everything about education was part of the political economy. He helped us to appreciate more fully our role as teachers, students and parents.

He was a member of the editorial board of the *Educational Journal* for which he wrote many leaders and articles.

He was also a leading contributor to the *Torch* newspaper published by the NEUM and later to the *Bulletin*, the organ of the New Unity Movement. Dick was a founder member of the Legal Aid Bureau of the TLSA, which advised and assisted teachers in regard to their applications and appointments to teaching posts, their conditions of service and their dealings with the Department of Education in cases where they had been charged with misconduct as defined in the education regulations.

Dick had an insatiable appetite for reading, which covered a wide range of subjects including politics, economics, literature, arts, science, medicine and education. His interest was not only in the academic body of knowledge, but also in how these matters affect people – their living conditions, outlook, occupations, interests – people living in society. We were all amazed at his intellectual capacity, his encyclopaedic store of knowledge which he shared generously, for he was always a teacher.

Dick loved people: he always had time for them. There was always time: time to talk, time to explain,

time to tell a story, time to remember, time to discuss, time to answer a question, time to advise, time to enjoy their company, time for a humorous story. And time to care: in the last five years of his life he cared for his ailing wife, his beloved life companion, Iris, who had been at this side all those eventful years.

At a special graduation ceremony on 7 April 2009 held at the Dudley family home the vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town conferred on Dick the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Education. The ceremony was a private occasion because of Dick's failing health. The citation recognised not only his immense contribution to education as a teacher at Livingstone High School for 39 years, but also his wider influence on the lives of countless students, teachers and parents beyond the limits of the school. It acknowledged his scholarship and understanding used for the benefit of his students, colleagues and all who came into contact with him in the organisations in which he worked. Always a teacher, even after formally retiring from the profession, he continued to engage, debate and challenge. Sadly Dick died before the more public recognition was given to the honorary award at the mid-year graduation ceremony at UCT.

We pay tribute to the life and work of Dick Dudley who shared so much of himself with us, and we extend our condolences to his sons Gary and Russell and the extended Dudley family.

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He was a founder member of the Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) which advised and assisted teachers in regard to their appointments and conditions of service. The LAB represented any teachers who were charged with misconduct in their interpretation by the education authorities. He helped to administer the Defence Fund and the Provident Fund of the TLSA, both of which were established to assist teachers who might have fallen foul of these regulations of the Department.

In recognition of his role he was appointed vice-president of the TLSA and as the *de facto* president when later the teacher elected to the post of President had banning orders served on him. During a very difficult period in the life of the organisation, when the apartheid State tried to eliminate the influence of all progressive anti-apartheid organisations by serving banning orders on some of their officials and members and placing restrictions on meetings and gatherings, Ernest Steenveld gave strong leadership when alternative ways of operating were required.

After 1948, when the Nationalist government rigorously pursued the policy of apartheid education,

with its race-based separate departments of education, separate syllabuses, separate examinations and separate certificates, Ernie and his colleagues exposed the iniquities of the debased and inferior schooling at League meetings, regional and national conferences, PTA, staff and students' meetings. They spread awareness and emphasised the vital need to subvert and undermine the processes of debasement by extending the scope of the syllabuses, by wide reading and by setting higher standards.

All those who were associated with Ernie Steenveld, especially in the TLSA – now in the Education Sector of NUPSAW – as well as in the Anti-CAD and the NEUM recall his warm personality, strength of character and his concern for the welfare of others. We value the clarity of his thinking and his efforts to pursue the struggle for a free, compulsory, non-segregated system of education in a democratic South Africa.

We salute Ernest Steenveld for the rich legacy he has left, and we extend our condolences to his widow, Catherine, his children and the extended Steenveld family.