STUDENTS AND YOUTH UNDER Apartheid

South African students and youth have historically played a critical role in opposing apartheid and working for the liberation of the majority population of that country. These courageous and committed young people have forged strong alliances with parents, teachers, academics, educational administrators, trade unionists, religious leaders and community activists in action against apartheid and its institutions.

Education, like all institutions in South Africa, is subject to the racial stratification of apartheid. All public education through the high school level, is racially segregated with racially differentiated curricula. White students enrolled in government schools enjoy a teacher/pupil ratio of 1:15 while their African counterparts are subjected to classrooms where the ratio is one teacher for every 41 students. Per capita government spending for educating white students is $1,027 while the government spends $114 on each African student. These disparities, coupled with the inferior education African students receive, have made schools hotbeds of activism against the inequities of apartheid.

The past few years have been marked by school boycotts involving more than one million African students. These boycotts have been called to protest, among other things, inferior education, segregated schools, detentions of students and the presence of troops in the classrooms. For example, students at Orlando East's Seleleleleka Secondary School in Soweto staged a spontaneous stayaway after an incident where a student and a teacher were affected by tear gas used by the security forces on the school grounds. The government has extended its armed onslaught from the townships into the school yards in an attempt to intimidate students, teachers and parents into silent submission.

Government Outlaws All Organized Dissent

As part of its overall strategy to maintain the status quo at any cost, February 24, 1988 saw the South African government declare war on most forms of organized opposition to apartheid and its institutions. Shaken by the extent to which mass based organizations have spread, the Minister of Law and Order declared that 17 organizations, including national political bodies such as the two million strong United Democratic Front and the Azanian Peoples' Organization, were prohibited "from carrying on or performing any activities or acts whatsoever." The regime simultaneously imposed crippling restrictions on South Africa's largest labor federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

Three national student and youth organizations were also affected:

* South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) - a 700,000 member strong national Black youth organization which was launched in secret in 1987 under the banner of "Freedom or Death - Victory is Certain [the Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO) and the Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO), both SAYCO affiliates, were also named and effected by the crackdown];

* South African National Students' Congress (SANSCO) - known as the Azanian Students Organization until 1986, SANSCO is the national umbrella body for Black university and college students; and

* Azanian Youth Organization (AZANYO) - the national youth wing of the Black Consciousness or Africanist oriented AZAPO.

This is the third time in the last 27 years that the government has taken such dramatic action to destroy the peoples' organizations. In 1960 the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania liberation movements were banned and leaders such as Nelson Mandela subsequently were sentenced to life imprisonment. In 1977, 19 anti-
apartheid organizations were banned following the massive mobilization of youth and students which culminated in the Soweto uprisings and the subsequent police murder of activist Steve Biko. Now, in 1988, the South African government has again moved to crush the spirit of resistance by outlawing those fighting for democracy today.

Attack on the Universities
In October 1987 the South African government issued a decree aimed at forcing university administrations to stop all anti-apartheid protests on their campuses. The state regulations require university administrators to prevent the use of their facilities by organizations which: (1) promote, support or organize boycotts, strikes or stayaways; (2) promote, support or organize campaigns for civil disobedience; and (3) promote the aims of vaguely defined "unlawful of affected" organizations, such as the National Union of South African Students [(NUSAS) the national body for progressive white university and college students which works closely with SANSCO].

According to the law the universities must report violations of these regulations to the government and must indicate how they will discipline the violators within 21 days. Failure to comply with the law can result in a reduction of state subsidies for the universities (subsidies often account for between 50% and 60% of total university income).

The recent government initiatives are viewed as the most serious infringement on university autonomy to date, and campus administrators and faculty have been among the most vocal critics of the legislation. University of Cape Town vice chancellor Stuart L. Saunders observed that the regulations are so restrictive, "that peaceful protest and peaceful assembly that should be part of normal activities of any university and of any society are illegal."

Government Control of All Educational Institutions
In an attempt to counter the effects of the educational crisis caused by inferior apartheid education as well as to fill the educational void created during the widespread educational boycotts, students, educators, parents and community activists came together to form alternative educational institutions. These alternative institutions taught "peoples' education," with curricula designed to achieve a number of objectives. According to the National Education Crisis Committee these objectives included the democratization of education so as to involve a cross-section of the community in decisions on the content and quality of education, the negation of apartheid in education by making education relevant to the democratic struggles of the people and the achievement of a high level of education for everyone.

As a response to the community efforts to deal with the educational crisis, legislation was introduced in 1987 designed to curb the development of "peoples' education." The government moved to ban literature regarding "peoples' education," and to detain students, teachers and the leadership of progressive educational organizations. Tactics included the sudden transfer of popular instructors to other schools and the introduction of government "students' study camps" which have been rejected by students, teachers and other educators.

A Luta Continua: The Struggle Continues
It is clear that students and youth are one of the key groups in the vanguard of the struggle against apartheid. Because of their crucial role in opposing apartheid as well as their relentless commitment to this fight, they have historically and will continue to be one of the most heavily repressed groups within South African society. There is no doubt that the militancy, and energy of South Africa's young people will make them instrumental in the dismantling of apartheid and the forging of a new society for all South Africans.

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