

The student struggle

Workers' Solidarity Federation

1995

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In February and March this year Technikons and Universities exploded with protest actions. Black students, sometimes supported by workers, have been FIGHTING to change tertiary institutions. They are fighting the legacy of apartheid.

The protests were organized by the South African Students Congress (SASCO) and other student bodies

EXPLODE

Protests were country wide. Students at the 7 Vista campuses called for the resignation of their Broederbond controlled University Council. They marched on the government calling on it to support their demands.

The Vista students were also calling for an end to financial and academic exclusions.

At University of the Western Cape students forced the management to allow 57 students to continue with their studies even though they had been excluded. This followed a successful disruption of classes. It was despite the deployment of police on campus.

At OFS Technikon, Black students demanding more representation on the Students Representative Council were attacked by armed right wing students. Students who defended themselves were dispersed by police and subsequently arrested. None of the racists were charged .

Wits University students and workers have fought for the reinstatement of 9 workers and 7 students. These were expelled or dismissed for 1994 protests against unfair dismissals, exclusions and the resignation of the university Council. The workers were organized by the National Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU).

The Wits students and workers used a number of tactics, such as a mass sleep- in, a strike and also a class boycott. Despite this, the admin refused to drop the charges and issued more notices of expulsion to student leaders. The admin is also charging the

NEHAWU shop steward and one student with “kidnapping”.

APARTHEID EDUCATION

Because of the legacy of apartheid, many Black students find it impossible to pay their fees. Even if they are told to leave. Black students are often also given inadequate academic support to deal with the legacy of Bantu Education.

Also, many of the Universities were reserved for Whites up to 1991. Students are fighting to make the staff, and student bodies more representative of the country as a whole.

Students have objected to the undemocratic practices of the University and technikon managements. These do not consult students or workers on policies which deeply affect them, such as fee schedules. Many of these managements were appointed by the apartheid government.

The student movement has been waging this campaign since the early 1990s.

The student protests have been condemned for the use of tactics such as trashing campuses and hostage taking. At the National Business Initiative in March, Mandela called on White rectors to take firm action against “unruly” Black students.

He had to quickly revise his statement’s when angry students and workers marched on the ANC headquarters at Shell House. Banners were carried such as “WHAT DID WE VOTE FOR?” and “WE WANT MANDELA THE REVOLUTIONARY, NOT MANDELA THE MESSIAH ..”

STRUGGLE FROM BELOW

The student movement must lose its illusions in politicians and MPs. Even though SASCO helped campaign for the ANC in 1994, the ANC has shown itself to be unwilling to intervene on their side.

Only through struggle, through mobilization of as many people as possible, can we transform Universities and Technikons. The government allocated R220 million for student aid after the protests rocked the campuses. Unite to Fight!

TRANSFORMING THE UNIVERSITIES: WHERE THE WORKERS SOLIDARITY FEDERATION STANDS

We in Workers Solidarity support the student and worker's struggle to transform the universities and technikons. We stand against racism. We are for equal access to education of all people and this means fighting against the legacy of apartheid.

We believe that we need to change the role of tertiary education, which is usually geared towards training experts and managers that make decisions affecting our lives every day, totally outside of our control.

It is the wealth that the workers produce that sustains the universities. So the universities must help address the needs of the Black working class.

We stand in solidarity with the workers struggle. Only united against the bosses can we win anything. We need to break the tradition of repressive labour relations in the public sector for once and for all. We also stand with our class because we believe that it is in struggle that people can be won to the need for revolution.

We agree with our comrades that the universities must be democratized. The old apartheid managements must go. But instead of replacing them with a new elite on top of the administrative hierarchy, we need to work out ways to genuinely empower workers, students and staff on campus.

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Retrieved on 29th October 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* Number 1 May/June 1995.

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