No End in Sight to Schools Crisis

For two years, black education in the Transvaal has been in crisis. Ongoing school boycotts, disruption of classes, school closures, and a now-permanent presence of troops in the townships brought the resented system of Bantu Education close to collapse. Local, regional and national crisis committees were formed, and developed and sponsored the slogan 'People's education for people's power'. JON CAMPBELL summarises some of the main events of 1986, and then interviews Eric Molobi of the National Education Crisis Committee.

In February 1986, after two years of sustained school boycotts and educational disruption, most black students in the Transvaal responded to the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee's (SPCC) call to return to school.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) scheduled 8 January for reopening African schools. But students returned on 28 January, on condition that the DET met their demands by the end of March.

This conditional end to the schools boycott was decided at the SPCC's December 1985 educational conference, attended by 160 delegates from a range of student, political, trade union and community organisations.

Demands to be met by the DET by the end of March included:

* Unbanning the Congress of South African Students (COSAS);
* Withdrawal of South African Defence Force troops from the townships;
* Recognition of Student Representative Councils (SRCs);
* Permission for internal examinations to be written on a date agreed upon by pupils and parents;
* Reinstatement of dismissed teachers;
* Lifting the state of emergency in all areas, and
* Release of detained students and parents.

Not everyone accepted the return to school. As students ended their boycott, there were some disruptions. At two primary schools in Mafola North, delivery vehicles were looted, youths armed with pangas tried to force students out of some schools.

The SPCC reiterated its call for students to return to school and referred to those disrupting the process as 'provocateurs'.

Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Tembisa, Katlehong, Sebokeng and Soshanguve were hit by sporadic class boycotts during February.

At Mabopane Technikon in Pretoria, some students were refused re-admission. National Education Crisis Committee spokesman Molefe Tsele commented: 'We have reached the stage where it is very difficult for us to insist that students remain in their classes in the face of the provocation that is going on'. He cited ongoing detention of students and expulsion of students who had not paid school fees as particularly provocative.

By March the SPCC warned that school attendance rates were dropping and that the situation was breaking down.

As the 31 March deadline for the DET to meet students' demands drew closer, the NECC met top DET officials in an effort to avoid further class boycotts.

But shortly afterwards, the DET suspended classes at more than 20 schools in the townships of Ikageng (Potchefstroom), Kanana (Orkney), Khuma (Stilfontein) and Jouberton (Klerksdorp) in the Western Transvaal. This barred 20 000 students from attending class.

Tension increased at schools in Nelspruit, White River and Bethal, as well as several Soweto high schools.

In the three black townships of Witbank, students began a boycott in protest against the detention of colleagues and the presence of troops in the townships. During March the DET responded, suspending classes at higher

National Education Crisis

primary and high schools.

Thousands of pupils in Alexandra, Ratanda near Heidelburg, and Bethal also boycotted classes: the DET suspended classes at these schools until 20 March.

During this period matric examinations were held. These replaced the aborted 1985 end-of-year exams. But only 6 858 matrics wrote nationally. In 1984, itself a year of sustained national class boycotts, 72 500 wrote the matriculation examination.

Commenting on the climate in education at this time, Molefe Tsele said the crisis was far worse than the previous year. Schools were disrupted, students harassed and teachers transferred from one school to another. And many students were still in detention.

Despite the worsening climate, the NECC conference at the end of March decided students should return to school when the second term began on 2 April. But dissatisfaction with the DET response to student demands remained strong. Some demands were resubmitted to the DET, including the unbanning of COSAS, withdrawal of troops from the townships and rebuilding of schools.

When schools reopened, about 80% of students returned - but the situation was by no means calm or normal. Many areas were still affected by boycotts, and in Vosloorus on the East Rand, a stayaway was called to honour a suspected ANC insurgent shot dead by police in the area. Unrest soon spread to Ratanda, outside Heidelburg.

School boycotts spread to the Free State. The DET responded by suspending classes there. Later that month classes were suspended at eight more schools - three in Sebokeng, four in Parys and one in Katlehong. In protest against the suspension students in the Vaal Triangle decided to stay away from classes.

On May Day, thousands of students stayed away from school; two weeks later classes at six Atteridgeville high schools were suspended after a two-week stayaway by nearly 25 000 students. Demands included the unbanning COSAS, repair of school windows and a refund of exam fees.

The DET postponed the third term re-opening of schools from 1 July to 14 July to plan 'normalisation' measures.

A few days later it announced shock new security measures. Students were to carry ID documents, schools would be fenced and security guards used. Then on the eve of the reopening, State President PW Botha gazetted an emergency regulation forcing all students to re-register when schools re-opened on 14 July. The regulation empowered the DET to bar any student from school without giving reasons.

Nearly 80% of students returned to school, according to the DET. However, at least 340 000 (20% of the 1,7-m students under DET control) did not go back. They refused to re-register, and many burned ID books. Disturbances at schools continued, mainly in protest against the presence of troops.

At the end of July an urgent NECC application to declare the emergency regulation on registration invalid failed.

Throughout August boycotts and educational disruptions continued. At the beginning of September the DET closed 33 schools - 20 in the Eastern Cape, ten in Soweto and three on the East Rand. The DET claimed that no one was attending those schools, and teachers would be transferred.

In Tembisa, students embarked upon a boycott on 10 September. They demanded release of student leaders, that the DET meet with the Tembisa Parents Crisis Committee and the removal of security forces from the township. Students returned to school on 24 September.

In the first week of October 80 000 pupils stayed away from schools in Soweto, Alexandra, the Vaal Triangle, the East Rand and Eastern Cape. This was a response to calls from student organisations to boycott classes until the DET met their demands. New demands were that the DET reopen the 33 schools, disband DET 'youth camps' and meet the NECC.

These calls were backed by the National Students Co-ordinating Committee, which embarked on a campaign of 'sustained national action'. 6 October was marked as the day to 'unite in mass action against detentions and closure of schools'.

The DET has warned that where educational unrest persists, schools will be closed.

Examinations began on 28 October and were disrupted on the first day by groups of youths. This was condemned by a wide range of organisations, including the NECC and the Soweto Civic Association. Despite strict security

arrangements, the number of students writing dwindled to a reported one in five in Soweto - about 4 000.

The Transvaal Students Congress (TRASCO) has called for exams to be postponed, for all students to be re-admitted, and for all teachers who were expelled, transferred or detained to be reinstated next year.

This is the setting for continuing conflict between students and the DET in 1987, with seemingly little chance of resolution.

The NECC: Doing Battle with the DET

ERIC MOLOBI is national co-ordinator of the National Education Crisis Committee. JON CAMPBELL posed some questions to him about developments in the education struggle.

How has the NECC developed since its Durban conference in March?
The conference decided to set up the People's Education Commission under the leadership of Zwelakhe Sisulu. The commission consists of civic associations, trade unions, parents, students and even some priests. Two subject committees have already been set up: a history subject committee and an English subject committee. A research unit for the development of a curriculum has also been established.

Some prominent academics have given support to the new system and others have shown willingness to do so.

A national office has been set up in Johannesburg and is functioning well, as are regional offices.

But the state of emergency has affected other structures, such as the parent-teacher-student associations (PTSAs), although SRCs are still functioning in some areas.

Has the NECC developed a national structure? And if so, what form has it taken and how does it operate?
The Wits Conference of December 1985, convened by the SPCC, decided that if the state failed to meet its demands, another conference, national in structure, would be held.

Three members of the SPCC formed part of a national structure (the NECC), with one member from each of the other regions. This is how the NECC developed a structure.

Notwithstanding state of emergency restrictions, every region holds

Eric Molobi - NECC

meetings from time to time. Reports are co-ordinated and sent to other regions to keep them informed. In these meetings students, teachers and parents participate.

The NECC has on occasion negotiated with educational authorities. What gains have been made through this, and is there a limit to these forms of negotiation? What conditons does the NECC lay down before embarking on such action?
The NECC operates on mandates. We consult and consult again. Conditions in South Africa, specifically in education, change so often. New situations of tension turn out new demands at every turn. This creates a need to remain keyed-in to students, parents and teachers at all times.

The type of negotiations we hold with government functionaries are not to be equated with talks that may occur between government officials and the

National Education Crisis

national leadership of the liberation movement. Our negotiations do not touch on issues of the transfer of power, or cessation of armed confrontation. Our negotiations result from unbearably repressive measures in the townships.

The NECC is sensitive to the national demand that discussions between it and the DET should take place. We are concerned with the deteriorating education situation, with thousands of our children condemned by ministerial decree to roam township streets and face SADF casspirs.

The NECC has already approached the DET. But government and the DET have to remove some obstacles before negotiations can begin. These include:

* Written permission for the NECC to consult with students. We must be able to report back and consult with our constituency. Otherwise discussions are futile;
* A guarantee that our detained members, students and teachers, once released, will be able to participate in discussions, and not be redetained;
* Release of our members and students from detention.

In addition, new issues thrown up by the changing conditions. For example, discussions on the examination issue are going on between students to finalise a position on it.

What kind of programmes has the NECC embarked upon, and how successful have these been?

One of the major programmes is People's Education. As mentioned, we are making progress, albeit under the restraining conditions of a clampdown.

Issues to be embarked upon will be curriculum development, gathering information, and in the long run suitable books will be written. PTSAs are being revived in some parts of the country. The SRCs were affected by the closure of schools but student structures continue, as seen in the emergence of the National Students Co-ordinating Committee.

What are the present demands and future needs of the NECC?

* We need to establish other regional administrative offices;
* Students need to broaden their structures and co-ordinate campaigns with those of workers and communities;
* While traditional educational demands must still be campaigned for, a broader strategy of opening people's schools, counter to the official policy of closing schools, needs to be embarked on. Structures like street committees must be fully used in this regard;
* Exams must be postponed, as students are not ready for them. The DET must be flexible enough to accomodate this;
* Propaganda camps must be stopped forthwith;
* Detained students, NECC leaders and teachers must be released immediately;
* The freedom to meet, consult and discuss with students and the community must be accepted;
* There are needs for resources and resource personnel, for example researchers. In this regard, NECC needs a stronger bond with resource organisations;
* PTSAs should be established nationally;
* There is a need for organisations such as the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) to start seminars on new methodologies to teach people's education.

How has the state of emergency affected the NECC?

Many PTSA members have been detained, as well as students and teachers. We have in most cases operated in semi-underground conditions, but much work has been able to go on.

The worst aspect has been the state's attempt to cut the link between NECC and the community. We have recently seen an attempted vilification of the NECC through SABC TV, pamphlets, radio news and so on. But this will not destroy the NECC. We have learnt new methods of operation. Regionally, decisions have been taken democratically and I believe we shall emerge stronger and more resilient.

What is the relationship between the NECC and other student and teacher organisations?

The NECC tries to maintain a very close relationship with students. On our executive is a member of the students' national co-ordinating structure.

The Azanian Students Organisation also has a member on the NECC executive. Students and academics will sit side by side on the people's education commission and different subject committees. Our policy is that we will

learn from students while they learn from us.

The NECC is an organic combination of student activism, parental caution and academic foresight all merging together under the broad guiding principles of the progressive, non-racial, democratic movement.

Traditionally, the NECC has had good relationships with teacher organisations, in particular the African Teachers Association of South Africa (ATASA) and NEUSA. At both our conferences, teacher organisations like the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU), the Democratic Teachers Union (DETU), ATASA and NEUSA participated.

We hope a broad teachers' federation will soon emerge. We also hope that traditionally progressive teachers' associations will take the lead in instituting seminars and programmes that will unify and strengthen the education struggle.

What relationship does the NECC have to the PTSAs?

PTSAs are an integral part of the NECC, involving teachers, parents and students at school level.

The PTSAs affiliate to crisis committees, for example the SPCC, and these in turn affiliate to regional crisis committees, eight of which form the NECC national executive.

PTSAs are to the NECC what street committees are to civics and the UDF. They are the basic organs of power in that they democratically take decisions at school level. They connect the school with the community it serves, involving parents and the community in the functions of a school. The school therefore cannot pursue a line ideologically and academically hostile to the broad community.

These are the concrete manifestations of the slogan 'People's Education for People's Power'.

In some regions the NECC's relationship with ATASA seems controversial. What is being done about this?

The NECC is aware of areas in which ATASA is said to be hostile to teachers that belong to progressive teacher organisations. The NECC believes that the ordinary membership of ATASA is not hostile and needs to be brought closer to progressive ideas.

The guiding principle directs the NECC's relationship with ATASA is that in this phase of the national democratic struggle, education has become the arena of sharpening contradictions between mass aspirations and repressive forces. The need is therefore to close ranks, and broaden the mass base in order to isolate the enemy. Though slow, there are changes within ATASA, for example a withdrawal from government structures. There must now be a move to join COSATU and a willingness to meet with other teacher associations for joint programmes.

However, progressive organisations need to be flexible, and understand that to cut links completely with ATASA is tactically incorrect. We can never throw willing allies into the hands of the enemy. Progressive teacher organisations must take the lead in devising strategies that benefit not only their sectional interests, but also those of the broad democratic movement.

Could you outline NECC's relationship to UDF and COSATU, and its role in the 'national united action' campaign? What are the aims of the campaign and what action is envisaged.

The UDF is the most advanced gain made by our people in recent history. So is COSATU. It is obvious that these organisations must play a role in NECC. The NECC does not intend to be another front. The UDF and COSATU are the leading organisations in their respective fields. Prominant figures within the UDF are to be found in the structures of the NECC. The People's Education Commission includes names like Stofile and Mkhatshwa, as well as COSATU people.

Our struggle is multifaceted, with many areas of activity. The present 'national united action' is a point that indicates the linkages of struggle dictated by conditions at ground level in this country.

The campaign aims to:

* Expose the effects of the emergency on our people; and
* Unite a cross-section of our people to stand up and show their abhorrence of apartheid.

Each organ, each facet, will devise a programme in this regard. Through constant discussion and consultation each will work towards a national manifestation of abhorrence of apartheid and repression under apartheid.

'DET Destroys Education in Duncan Village'

Since the beginning of 1986, Duncan Village residents have fought to run schooling on terms set by their community organisations. With information supplied by the East London Progressive Teachers Union and the Duncan Village Parents Committee, FRANZ KRUGER describes the struggle to find alternative venues for schooling in defiance of the Department of Education and Training.

East London's Duncan Village township has seen a particularly bitter schools conflict. It left the township as the only one in the country without any school facilities at all when, in August the Department of Education and Training (DET) closed all 11 schools 'for the rest of the year'.

On the face of it, the reason was obvious: no school buildings remain in which classes could be held. In mid-August last year, when violence erupted in Duncan Village, all school buildings but one were destroyed in arson attacks.

But during the first two terms of this year the DET partially lost control of education in Duncan Village, as the Duncan Village Residents Association (DVRA) arranged its own school venues in church halls in direct defiance of the department.

SCHOOLS ARE DESTROYED

It is difficult to say why Duncan Village's schools were attacked with such ferocity when, in August 1985, violence erupted in the wake of Victoria Mxenge's funeral in Rayi, outside King William's Town.

Teachers speak of rising tension in schools, particularly over the right to form SRCs. A DET official allegedly announced that SRC elections should be held, but then retracted the order. Security forces intervened in student demonstrations at various schools.

Relations between teachers and students were also tense. At one school students began locking the school gates once teachers were inside, alleging that teachers had collaborated with police. Just prior to this, the East London Progressive Teachers Union (ELPTU) was established in April 1985. It aimed to improve relations with students and the community by creating a clearly progressive teachers organisation.

One of the first targets of the violence, attacked in mid-August 1985, was the administration block at Qamqamba, one of two senior secondary schools in Duncan Village. The houses of community councillors and police were also firebombed at about the same time. Soon afterwards the other schools were destroyed, leaving untouched only Ebenezer Majombozi senior secondary school, which is on the outskirts of the township.

For the rest of 1985, the violent situation prevented any return to class. Attempting to salvage some of the year, the Daily Dispatch newspaper offered senior students supplementary courses in science subjects. There was no response. Exams were scheduled to take place at the Summerpride Showgrounds, but only three students are believed to have written any exams at all.

The 1986 school year was to start on 14 January. The Soweto Parents Crisis Committee's December conference in Johannesburg decided that students should register on 28 January. The DET accepted the new date, but announced that students in Duncan Village should stay at home until further notice as no schools existed. The DET told teachers to report to Ebenezer Majombozi from 14 January.

FINDING ALTERNATIVE VENUES

By this stage, the Duncan Village Corporation (DUVCOR) project was under way. Local National Party MP Peet de

Pontes, a businessman and others launched it to build temporary schools to accomodate students until the DET rebuilt the destroyed schools. The temporary classrooms would then be transformed into semi-detached housing.

DUVCOR was funded by the government employment creation fund in the Eastern Cape. It was hailed as a way of tackling the housing, education and unemployment crises together. The DVRA was involved from an early stage in discussions. It seemed a model initiative.

A week before the 28 January deadline, teachers reporting to Ebenezer Majombozi met. They resolved to follow the SPCC conference decision and register students, regardless of what the DET said. Students could be accommodated in church halls and other venues until the DUVCOR project was complete. A co-ordinating committee of four was established, and a press statement called on students to register on 28 January.

The committee attempted to enlist DET support for the arrangements. But King William's Town-based circuit inspector G van der Merwe rejected the plan.

Teachers said their decision had not been confrontationist, but simply followed the national decision agreed on by the SPCC conference and the DET. They had hoped the DET would erect prefabricated buildings, and saw Van der Merwe's response as individual obstructionism.

Nevertheless on Tuesday 28 January some 3 000 students, of a total student population of about 5 000, converged on Ebenezer Majombozi to register.

It was impossible to deal with 3 000 students in one school building. One of the co-ordinating committee's first decisions was to send home children from lower primary schools until venues were found.

The committee approached the development board to erect prefabs or provide temporary toilets at other venues. But the board refused assistence. Finally, teachers found four church and church hall venues, and Ebenezer Majombozi was used as well.

DIFFICULT TEACHING CONDITIONS

Teaching began under very difficult conditions. Though many students had registered, attendance was wildly irregular.

Teachers said that many students registered in response to the SPCC conference decision, but did not attend classes because of 'a lack of discipline' and poor conditions. Some venues had too few or no toilets. Overcrowding was severe and few educational aids existed. Blackboards and chalk had to be scrounged from the previous year's leftovers at Ebenezer Majombozi. No exercise books or even teachers' copies of textbooks were available.

Another problem was a student minority which actively opposed the SPCC conference decision, arguing against any

Students from Ebenezer Majombozi protest against the transfer of teachers

education until 1987.

DET ON THE OFFENSIVE

Meanwhile the DET launched the first of many attempts to break the community initiative and reassert its authority. It ordered lower primary teachers to attend courses at the Border Early Learning Centre, which concentrates on pre-primary education in the region. ELPTU's support was weakest among lower primary teachers.

ELPTU saw the DET's move as a divisive tactic. It sent a delegation to appeal to teachers to return to community venues. Some did, and began classes for the youngest children, often outside the halls. Others played an elaborate double game, reporting to the Early Learning Centre but spending most of their time at the church halls. Conservative teachers continued attending the courses.

The DET still believed that students were obediently waiting at home for the official go-ahead. On 7 February it called on senior secondary and junior primary pupils to register the following week. On 12 February, the Daily Dispatch quoted a DET official saying that registration was 'proceeding smoothly'. But, said the Dispatch, 'a tour of township schools could not confirm this and teachers said pupils had already registered with ELPTU and DVRA last month'.

Giving up the pretence a few days later, the DET blamed 'Duncan Village teachers' for preventing students from registering. Soon afterwards it ordered six teachers to report to remote areas in the Aliwal North circuit. These teachers were either executive members of ELPTU or active members. They were allowed to object to the transfer in writing and all did so.

THE DET BACKS DOWN

On 7 March DET circulars ordering the closure of schools for the following week were delivered to all school sites. Although a minority defied the order, most teachers and students stayed at home.

On 13 March, a high-powered DET delegation from Pretoria held talks with teachers. Teachers were summoned to three separate venues in town, according to which schools they taught in, and handed questionnaires.

Details were requested as to education arrangements in the community venues: who had drawn up timetables; who the principals were; what work had been covered; and times of operation. Officials told teachers to present their workbooks the next day.

After the three groups had been surveyed, the six transferred teachers were summoned to the Kennaway Hotel and addressed by the Pretoria delegation. One of the six said: 'For a long time, we couldn't work out their mission. But then we found they were on a reconciliation mission. They never explicitly said our transfers were withdrawn, but we could deduce it'.

The next day, the DET denied it had ever transferred the six teachers. ELPTU saw the DET's tacit withdrawal as a victory.

On 15 March the DET's regional director, Bill Staude, announced classes would reopen in the community venues. DET officials would visit the schools to help principals and teachers 'in their task of normalising education', Staude said. Soon afterwards, an unpopular inspector, whose resignation had been demanded previously, was transferred.

Teachers were jubilant. The DET's attempts to impose its will on the community had failed. It had been forced to accept the community's arrangements.

School attendance had climbed as the co-ordinating committee improved conditions. The DET's stepdown raised morale and attendance increased again. The newly-appointed inspector quickly developed a good relationship with the community organisations by consulting them on various issues and responding to needs as best he could.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

While school was held in community venues, teachers mostly followed the ordinary syllabus. They said they had waited for materials and a programme from the NECC, but felt unqualified to

Teachers kill time at the West Bank warehouse

teach alternative education without such materials. Nothing arrived. And many teachers were so steeped in Bantu Education that they did not know enough about subjects outside it to teach them. Further, the many organisational problems associated with teaching in church halls tended to leave little time for developing alternative programmes.

But alternative content did find its way into teaching. Some teachers injected new perspectives into subjects like history. In other classes, students raised topics for discussion, with the teacher functioning as a chairperson. Topics included the consumer boycott; Nelson Mandela; the role of organisations like the Cape African Teachers' Association, ELPTU's conservative rival; ANC history; sanctions and their effects; rebel sports tours; and critiques of newspapers.

Teachers remained concerned about the syllabus, thinking it important for students to gain matric certificates. They tried to schedule discussions at the end of a lesson for instance, so as not to disrupt ordinary teaching. But they still considered these discussions valuable: 'I learned things from my students', said one teacher.

Alternative content also entered the classes in other ways. Students put up posters with political slogans, or pinned up press clippings on current events. As one ELPTU member said: 'The first time I saw a picture of Mandela was when I walked into my class one day'.

CONFLICT OVER STATIONERY

However, the circuit office in King William's Town remained unco-operative. Teachers blamed Van der Merwe's 'lack of interest in education' for its slowness in providing much-needed materials. The DET never provided furniture, which teachers claimed was stored in an East London warehouse. And textbooks for senior secondary schools arrived only in May. Delegations from the parents' committee went to King Williams's Town to press for materials. But it took several visits even for scribblers for senior schools to be released.

Exercise books sparked a new conflict within the schools. Some of the more militant element which had opposed the return to school moved back into the schools to influence events. When books arrived the militants took the lead in burning them. Students at higher primary schools were also dissatisfied, as they had not been issued books. They organised a protest march on Ebenezer Majombozi.

These events substantially disrupted teaching. The East London Students Council called a meeting to discuss the books issue. After lengthy discussion, they decided that the books should be accepted. Books had been paid for by 'contributions from all sectors, and it was not democratic for the students to decide to burn them without consulting their parents and other groups'.

DUVCOR FAILS

Teaching continued until the end of the term despite teachers' growing

frustration with conditions in the church halls, which remained overcrowded and inadequate. Teachers were also impatient with the lack of progress in resolving the DUVCOR dispute.

DUVCOR lost its legitimacy in early March 1986, when it held a very public ceremony to hand over money for the project to community councillors, who had long-since stopped living in the township.

The DVRA saw this as an attempt to hijack the project. Not only did it feel the semi-detached buildings were unsuitable for housing, but early in the project it had insisted the community council should not be involved. The DVRA declared it would have nothing more to do with DUVCOR until the community council's participation was ended. It also wanted the Nationalist MP's involvement ended, as the DVRA felt he had acted in bad faith.

The DVRA was backed by students, but teachers felt less strongly about the issue, particularly with winter approaching. Classes were still being conducted outdoors at some venues. This would become impossible when it became really cold.

Some students arranged with their teachers to continue lessons in the winter holidays. The stayaway on Soweto Day would, of course, be observed. But classes would resume on 17 June, particularly for the Standard Nines and Tens.

Tension rose nationally towards 16 June, and the DET ordered schools to close early on 4 June for the holidays.

On 12 June State President PW Botha declared a national state of emergency, claiming there were plans for large-scale disruptions to mark 16 June. Acting in terms of the new emergency regulations, the Border commissioner of police barred access to all schools in 15 magisterial districts including East London. Only people with written permission from the DET would be allowed onto school premises from 15 June to 7 July.

'THE DET DESTROYS EDUCATION'

When schools reopened on 14 July, the the DET instituted its new get-tough policy: ID cards, re-registration requirements and guards at schools.

In Duncan Village, junior schools were ordered to start the third term at the DUVCOR site. Most teachers and students followed the instruction because of the repressive climate and dissatisfaction with conditions at the churches.

Senior scholars were to report back to Ebenezer Majombozi, but students refused to re-register, arguing that they had done so at the beginning of the year. They called a boycott for the second week of term in protest against the security arrangements. Afterwards teaching resumed, albeit under very difficult conditions, with a very high security force presence at the school.

Several weeks later, the DET instructed junior school principals to send teachers to report daily at a warehouse in the West Bank industrial area. There they sat idly, with no access to students or materials.

The DET justified this move on the grounds that there were too many teachers at DUVCOR for the pupil numbers. Teachers claimed that the DET was victimising teachers who had taught at the community venues. They said attendance had been high at DUVCOR, and those teachers left behind had to cope with up to 100 pupils per class. A few days later, pupils marched out of DUVCOR protesting against the transfer of teachers and walked singing down the road. They have not been back since.

At Ebenezer Majombozi, the DET notified teachers on 4 August that senior schools would close until the end of the year as students had not re-registered. Students were to go home, and teachers were to join their colleagues at the West Bank warehouse.

Teachers claimed Staude had told them the DET would tolerate the refusal to re-register as long as teaching proceeded normally. They accused the DET of being less interested in education than in reasserting absolute authority. 'It is the the DET which is destroying education', said one teacher.

Since then, there has been no education in Duncan Village, and it is still unclear what will happen next year. Delegations from the parents' committee have held numerous fruitless meetings with DET officials. They gained the impression that although regional officials would like to take a more conciliatory line, they are constrained by national policy.

Teachers Learn Lessons from Schools Boycott

The successful Cape school boycott of mid-1985 did not bear fruit this year. Political gains won by students then were not consolidated. Three teachers from Western Cape coloured schools, all active in teacher organisation, spell out the lessons of the 1985 and 1986 class boycotts of coloured Department of Education and Culture (DEC) schools.

Class boycotts in Cape Town began on 23 July 1985 in response to the declaration of the state of emergency in other parts of South Africa. By mid-August, 63 Cape Town educational institutions, as well as students from Worcester, Paarl and Oudtshoorn, had joined the boycott.

The student boycott met with heavy repression. Police fired at students with teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. They severely beat students, sometimes inside their schools, and arrested and detained them.

In the face of such severe student harassment, teachers in the Western Cape had to take a stand. At a mass meeting on 15 August, teachers from 79 schools and colleges met to discuss their response to the school boycott and police attacks on their students. Teachers felt strongly that they had sheltered behind their students for too long.

They agreed to demonstrate support for the student boycott by 'striking' for two days and helping with alternative education programmes.

At a meeting on 22 August, teachers discussed the need for a permanent progressive teachers' organisation. And on 29 September they launched the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU). Its aims were to struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist, unitary and democratic education system in a South Africa free of exploitation and oppression.

CONFLICT OVER EXAMS

The boycott continued for several months. During the last weeks of the school year, writing and administering exams became an issue of conflict for students, parents and teachers.

On 28 October WESCO (the Western Cape Students Congress), an umbrella structure, at that stage representing the majority of secondary schools, decided not to write exams. WECTU called on teachers not to administer exams because they were anti-educational. WECTU argued that while little schoolwork had been done, the department insisted exams cover the whole syllabus. In addition, exams were to be written under police control and in some schools police already patrolled school corridors.

Few teachers responded to the call. This was probably due to direct police threats to several school staffs. Police threatened teachers who refused to administer exams with detention, while the DEC threatened dismissal. Exams went ahead in November under SADF and police 'protection'.

WECTU's militant stand might also explain its fall-off in membership at the time.

According to teachers, quoted in the **Cape Times**, 'the police behaviour is bizarre. They go through the classrooms, check the scripts, not knowing what they are doing.

'Imagine writing an exam with a huge cop carrying a shotgun leaning over your shoulder checking what you are writing, especially when a week or two back those same cops were firing birdshot and teargas at you and sometimes killing your buddies.

'The exams are a complete and utter farce. The police think they are going ahead, but the students just sit there pretending, writing poetry, drawing, writing diatribes against the police.

National Education Crisis

'In the midst of all this, the police pull students out of classes at random, taking down names and addresses, and there is a real fear they will then go to those houses after school and intimidate the students into giving them information.

'There are kids who come to school prepared to write, but because the cops are right inside the grounds, in the classrooms, they change their minds and refuse. In effect, the police presence is making fewer students write exams'.

WECTU and 155 community organisations such as the Western Province Council of Sport, civic associations and trade unions like the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association and the Food and Canning Workers Union, declared the exams educationally fraudulent and farcical.

About half the students eventually wrote exams. The proportion varied from school to school with numbers ranging from 0-90%. The exams issue created deep divisions amongst students, parents and teachers. These were carried over into the new year.

Student divisions lay mainly between those who had written exams and been promoted and those who had not. Parent and teacher opinions also varied. For example at Harold Cressy High School the PTSA agreed students should not write exams, and not one exam paper was set. In Mitchells Plain large numbers of students wrote even though they were involved in protest activities.

RETURNING TO SCHOOL

At the beginning of 1986 most students responded to the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee call to return to school on 28 January.

Student promotion, even of those who had written their final exams, caused great confusion. At many schools SRCs 'promoted' students. Some students saw this as a way to regain support from their parents and heal divisions between students and parents. Some students and their parents argued that they could not afford an extra year in school.

On 7 February House of Representatives Education Minister Carter Ebrahim announced that schools could choose one of three options: promote students according to June 1985 results; hold exams in March; or make students repeat the previous year.

Most schools decided to promote all their students.

Uncertainty over promotions and exams probably explains the significant drop in school enrolment at the beginning of this year. In some schools students continued to drop out through the year. Many schools now anticipate a high failure rate as students battle to cope academically.

Progressive teachers must assess the exams experience carefully, considering what promotion policy should be adopted during long boycotts. It must be asked whether a decision can be good politics while also being educationally unsound within the present education system.

SUSPENSION AND DISMISSAL OF TEACHERS

Another factor causing confusion at the start of 1986 was the suspension and dismissal of teachers who had refused to administer exams. By the beginning of the December 1985 school holiday, 130 teachers had been suspended, dismissed, restricted or transferred.

WECTU decided to challenge the suspensions in court but lost the case.

In the new year WECTU initiated a 'Hands Off Our Teachers' campaign. It distributed bumper stickers, pamphlets and posters, and organised house visits to rally support for victimised teachers.

On 14 January, ignoring the state of emergency, WECTU teachers marched en masse to DEC offices in Cape Town. They handed over a list of demands which included immediate and unconditional reinstatement of all victimised teachers.

That night SABC TV announced that the suspended teachers had been reinstated but charges of misconduct against them remained. Soon afterwards dismissed temporary teachers were also reinstated.

The Department of Indian Affairs had also transferred and dismissed teachers at Rylands High School. In 1986 a well organised community campaign against 'scab' teachers resulted in reinstatement of transferred teachers. Dismissed teachers fought their case in court, but lost and were not reinstated.

Some managed to find jobs at other schools.

The events of 1985 made it clear to progressive teachers that their schools are and will remain a major site of struggle until there is fundamental social and political change in South Africa. Progressive teachers will be called on again and again to take a political stand. This necessitates building a national teachers' organisation strong enough to back this political stand and defend its members.

WINNING SUPPORT FROM PARENTS

Another crucial support base for progressive teachers is the community - the parents of the children we teach. But the lack of political awareness and political education among parents must be recognised. But why is a progressive political culture absent amongst parents? And what can teachers do to overcone this?

Initially the 1985 boycott was characterised by tacit community and parent support. Though parents were concerned for the safety of their children, they were not antagonistic to the boycott.

The closure of all DEC schools in September 1985 was a rallying point for students, progressive teachers and parents. It politicised parents: they complained they were paying taxes to have their children educated, not left to their own devices while parents were at work.

Politicisation of parents often begins through involvement in their children's struggles. But teachers and students must ensure this politicisation is developed and deepened. Parents' attitude was 'political' only in a limited sense. They did not question the form or content of their children's education. This indicates the debate about people's education has yet to reach parents in DEC schools.

PTSAs ARE FORMED

The high point of co-operation between teachers, students and parents was the community reopening of schools two weeks after their official closure in September 1985. This resulted in the formation of Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) at many schools. PTSAs raised questions about community control of schools.

PTSAs were short-lived. This was due to the declaration of the state of emergency at the end of October and to students' decision to continue boycotting in the fourth term.

A major issue discussed by PTSAs was students' right to decide when to call a boycott and when to end it. This question, although debated in PTSAs and WECTU, was never resolved. Most PTSAs argued that schooling involved everyone, and there should be consensus between parents, teachers and students regarding boycott. This needs more debate, especially in view of the NECC's decision to call off the boycott while students' right to decide was still being debated.

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

When the boycott started, functioning SRCs existed in many schools. These took over the co-ordination of boycott activities. Where SRCs were ineffective or non-existent, students formed student action committees. Through these structures student leadership genuinely attempted to inform students about political debates. But at the time, students were still isolated from the mainstream of political argument in the rest of the country.

Student activists also tried to involve the student body in democratic decision-making. However imperfect this process might have been in practice, credit ought to be given to students' efforts to establish a broadly democratic base in their schools. Often teachers were too dismissive of these attempts, saying that student structures were undemocratic and unrepresentative.

Students organised awareness programmes and mass rallies in an attempt to develop students' political consciousness. Awareness programmes tried to develop an analysis of South African society. Students found it difficult to sustain interesting and exciting programmes, especially as

teacher participation was limited.

More and more students began to stay away from school until only a hard core remained. Conflict between students, police and SADF heightened and erupted into direct confrontation. In some areas street battles became the main arena for student activity.

TEACHERS NEED POLITICAL EDUCATION

Initially teachers did not intervene in awareness programmes and their participation was limited. Some teachers saw the boycott as a student affair. But perhaps more important, teachers were incapable of intervening because they themselves lacked the political background and skills to help organise programmes.

Therefore one of the most important tasks of a progressive teachers' organisation must be political education of teachers. Teachers provide continuity from one student generation to the next. Students come and go in schools and repeat many of their predecessors' mistakes. Teachers remain.

So it is important for progressive teachers' organisations to continue examining the relationship between teachers and students and consider how to develop a disciplined and democratic political culture in their schools.

Teachers spend many hours each day with children of the working class. Progressive teachers must see it as their duty to contribute to the struggle for liberation by preparing students for future working-class struggle.

1986: A LULL IN STUDENT ACTIVITY

This year has seen a general lull in student activity and student organisation. Exceptions exist, notably in Bonteheuwel where close contact between students and political organisations has consolidated.

Students in DEC schools also supported May Day. Now, student organisations are attempting to break down the 'location barrier' between coloured and African areas in Cape Town. A joint SRCs' committee representing all township SRCs and Athlone Students Action Committee has been working to break down this barrier.

But we need to understand why student activity was limited this year.

At the end of 1985 student activists said the boycott had politicised students and made them aware of the need for effective organisation. They saw democratic control over the course of the boycott as a major achievement.

Yet 1986 showed little evidence of attempts to build on these gains, to deepen the political awareness of the mass of students or to build solid student structures. The space fought for and won by students in 1985 was not capitalised on in 1986.

Students returned to school this year after the holiday period, which tends to dampen student activity. Divisions created by the exams issue continued into the new year. And confusion over promotion was worsened by the large number of temporary teachers who had not yet been reinstated.

THE PROBLEM OF IMMEDIACY

Politicisation of students in 1985 never went beyond sloganising. Political education was initiated but never deepened and extended from the layer of student leadership. Issues followed fast and furious and there never seemed to be the time or necessity for political education in the ranks of the student body.

The popular slogan 'Liberation before Education' showed students thought freedom was just around the corner. This belief in the immediacy of victory was destructive and prevented more effective political development among students.

By 1986 many students were disillusioned. They realised they had naively underestimated the strength and resilience of the state. Again, this underlines the need for progressive teachers to intervene politically and extend our students' political awareness.

Next year, 1987, will be crucial as teachers and their students explore ways of transforming schools and developing more conscious and informed students committed to people's education for people's power.