

CHILDREN

Soweto strike

IN REVOLT

Parents reject Afrikaans

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TENSION is high in Soweto after a week of clashes between schoolchildren and police and the spread of the strike that has virtually closed down seven schools.

Nearly 5 000 children are striking against being taught in Afrikaans. Pupils at Naledi High School rioted when police attempted to take one child for questioning.

The rioting children overturned the police car, set it ablaze and stoned detectives. The next day the children again stoned police at the school.

Parents are afraid the confrontation has escalated to the point where their children are in danger of going to jail.

One mother said she had given her son R5 in case he was put in prison and needed to buy food.

Symbol

The cause of the unrest is a new ruling that the children must be taught maths and social studies in Afrikaans. However, it has become clear that unrest are wider.

Mr Barney Ngakane,

By CAROLINE CLARK

an educationist, said: "This issue has become, in a way, a symbol of resistance among the youth to White oppression and White authority.

Hatred

"The children have learned that they can defy their principal, they can defy the school board, they can defy the inspectors — and they have in the process learned the lesson of solidarity, which is new to them.

"Their solidarity has succeeded in sharpening their hatred of the White man and White authority. It has been a political lesson to them."

Mr Ngakane, a former teacher and now director of university and technical bursaries at the South African Council of Churches said: "This trouble is a reflection of the feeling of the youth in the township. The children are in revolt and tempers are running high."

The unrest reflects new attitudes:

- Rejection of the schools system.
- Rejection of White authority.
- Rejection of the

passive attitudes of their parents.

"It symbolises a new movement of militancy among the youth," he said.

"Pupils used to be taught in Afrikaans and English on a 50-50 basis. Now maths and social studies, it has been ruled, must be taught in Afrikaans.

In many cases the teachers are not qualified to teach in Afrikaans. And the children cannot understand it properly. In some schools subjects supposed to be taught in Afrikaans are in fact taught in English.

There are also emotional barriers against Afrikaans.

Mr Ngakane said: "The surest way to make Afrikaans distasteful and hated is to try to force it this way. There are emotional attitudes involved in this matter.

Oppression

"All the oppressive legislation in this country, for which the Afrikaners are blamed, rightly or wrongly, does not induce the youth to like the language. They see Afrikaners and Afrikaans language and culture as a symbol of their oppression.

"In Afrikaans literature there are often insulting references to Black people. Also an Afrikaner doesn't want you to call him meneer; he wants to be called boss. And in the townships, Afrikaans is the lingua franca of the tsotsis."

Explosive

The children showed no signs of breaking and there was a danger the strike would spread.

The children, aged between 13 and 18, had the sympathy of their parents and teachers, although not active encouragement.

"The pupils don't trust their parents on this. They think they'll send them back to school before they've won their point."

Mr Ngakane condemned the interference of police on the schools issue. Police had visited schools and children had been taken in for questioning.

"Order in the schools should be maintained without the interference of the police. They are just hardening attitudes. The situation is potentially explosive."

In a number of schools, he said, principals had not attempted to enforce the new ruling.