

## PRINCIPAL REPRESENTS HOPE

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THE principal of Heathfield High, Wesley Neumann, with three other principals, called on President Cyril Ramaphosa recently to delay the opening of schools. The president, in consultation with all role-players, delayed the opening of schools. A request was made to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to do likewise.

The WCED was forced to follow the instruction of the president. Subsequently the WCED formulated 10 disciplinary charges against Neumann.

In the past, the WCED would bring charges in a case like this against several principals. Strategically, to break solidarity among schools, the department singled out Neumann.

Well-known activist in the Western Cape and South Africa, Derek Ronnie, wrote the following and has permitted me to quote him.

“The noble calling of teaching has come under attack by a repressive and autocratic education authority in the Western Cape.

The charges and allegations levelled against Mr Wesley Neumann smack of political opportunism and old-style kragdadigheid practised by the apartheid regime.

The only difference being that it is now done under the cloak of so-called democracy.

“The only crime Mr Neumann has committed is to live out his true humanity by caring for the wellbeing of those teachers and students under his charge.

“Mr Neumann has never denied the right to education or agitated for its cessation, rather to the contrary he has called for its protection and the advancement given the risk to human life.

Mr Neumann is now faced with possible dismissal through what appears to be vindictiveness.

“The threat faced by Mr Neumann is not only a personal one but an attack on the civil liberties of all free-thinking teachers.

“Education goes way beyond the mere accumulation of academic knowledge, but also the holistic development of the person as a whole.

“This principal has displayed the true face of someone who cares, a characteristic absent in the minds of many in the morally deficient education authorities.

“Mr Neumann has lived up to the well-known dictum of progressive teachers. Let us live for our children,” wrote Ronnie.

On Tuesday, the Labour Court in Loop Street, Cape Town granted an interdict in favour of Mr Neumann against WCED. The interdict was not opposed by WCED. Neumann’s disciplinary hearing, which was supposed to start on Tuesday, could not go ahead because of the interdict. This is seen as a major victory in this David versus Goliath saga.

A precedent has been set in education.

Never to my knowledge has a teacher been successful in getting an interdict against an all-powerful education department in South Africa.

Could this be a new progressive dawn where the rights of teachers are being recognised by our courts of law?

If it is so, then I think we are moving in the right direction.

The WCED must get to know the history of schools and their contribution to the struggle for excellence in education. It has a mentality that oppressed schools cannot achieve and are treated disrespectfully.

To me, Neumann represents hope for the future of education in South Africa.

Instead of the WCED assisting and giving all its assistance to a principal with vision, principles and political and educational fortitude, it sees Neumann as a threat to its hegemony.

The WCED has to transform.