



April 2022

New Unity Movement

The Worker is an official publication of the New Unity Movement

The Worker

No. 90

We Fight Ideas with Ideas

THE CLOSURE OF TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES IN THE 1990S CONTINUES TO HAUNT US

Article by Education Activist, Brian Isaacs (Published in the Cape Argus on 7 April 2022)

Teacher Training Colleges in South Africa - were they good institutions or institutions of inferior quality? In 1996 two years into democracy in South Africa most people who thought deeply about education were shocked that the State started to attack educational institutions. We were told by the first minister of education Sibusiso Bengu in 1994 that the pupil-teacher ratio would be 1:40. He agreed on the pupil-teacher ratio with the recognized teacher unions SADTU, NUE and SAOU. *Only the TLSA disagreed.*



The same unions agreed to the closing down of teacher training colleges. Again the TLSA disagreed. It was argued by the State that most of the teacher training colleges were not producing teachers of a high calibre with a few exceptions. In the Western Cape Hewat, Bellville Training College (BOK), Roggebaai and Wesley Colleges were closed in 1998. The lecturers at these institutions fought against it but the State was determined to succumb to the diktats of the World Bank and IMF. Instead of education being placed high up on the agenda of the new State, it was treated like

Inside this issue:

1	THE CLOSURE OF TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES IN THE 1990S CONTINUES TO HAUNT US	1
2	SOME THOUGHTS ON WORKERS' DAY	3
3	SOUTH AFRICA, A COUNTRY ON THE PRECIPICE OF DISASTER	6

a step-sister. 20 000 teachers were offered money to leave the system. Who suffered? The students and the teachers who now had to struggle with huge classes! Schools dropped subjects like Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Accounting and the Art subjects. The educational system was set back some people say never to recover

I attended the funeral of the teacher Terence Fredericks recently who played an important role at Bellville Training College (BOK) in Kuils River. He took over from the revolutionary teacher and rector Harry Hendricks in the 1980s who gave educational and political direction to the lecturers and students alike.

Terence Fredericks continued building BOK into a teaching institution known in SA, Africa and the world. He had a positive influence on education in SA. He retired in 1996 (sadly also the year which saw the State closing the teacher colleges in SA and his beloved BOK). The universities were very silent on this matter. What a shame! Fredericks

threw his weight behind people who were removed from District Six paving the way for them to return to District Six. He ensured that memory is the weapon and that people must be held accountable. We are a very forgiving nation and maybe that is the reason why so many people in our country continue to make selfish decisions! I hope that our young students will hold people like Terence Fredericks in high regard and follow in his footsteps.

I hope that in education we will now take decisions in the interest of our students. There is a tendency in our schools especially when it comes to the majority of schools not to offer students a wide

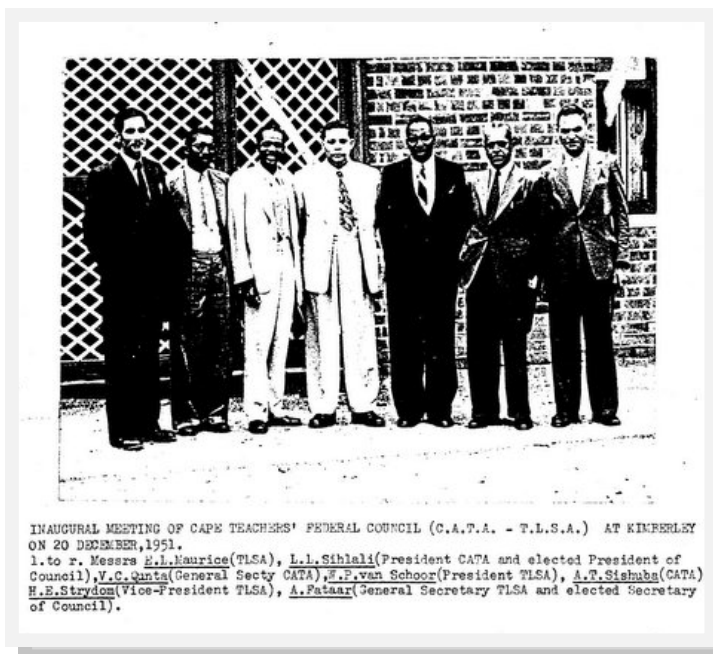
range of subjects. The education department has the wrong attitude—if schools cannot pay teachers to teach certain subjects at the school then they cannot have those subjects. Money is the buzz word. Charge school fees and then you can have these subjects is the attitude of the education department. I have always rejected this philosophy. We must oppose this attitude of the department. Our students deserve to be exposed to as many subjects as possible. I recently met an ex-student of mine, Sameera Ebrahim, who was one of my first Agricultural Sciences students to obtain a B.Sc in Agricultural Sciences. If the school had not introduced her to this subject at

high school she would never have chosen to do the subject at the University of Stellenbosch. She is presently reading for her Masters in this field.

We must give our students the best and the teacher training colleges nurtured excellent teachers especially in the primary schools. We must not make mistakes in education that set us back like with the closing of teacher training colleges.

I commend the teachers who were trained at these teacher training colleges. You stand shoulders above those who unfortunately did not receive the training you received.

*(The photo is of the executive of the **Teachers' Federal Council**, which was a merger of the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA) and the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) that opposed the introduction of the 1953 Bantu Education Act. The proposed education was aimed at training our children for manual labour and menial jobs that the government deemed suitable for those of their "race", and it was explicitly intended to inculcate the idea that Black people were to accept being subservient to white South Africans.)*



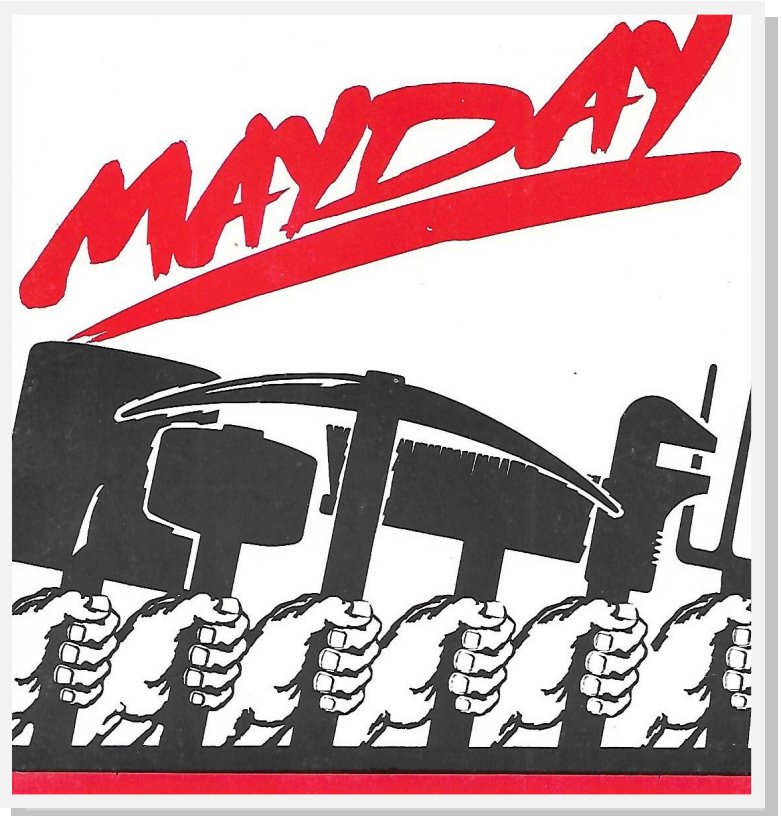
SOME THOUGHTS ON WORKERS' DAY

When contemplating Workers' Day on 1 May, there is little for workers to celebrate. Thirty-odd years of neoliberalism have exacted a severe toll on the living standards of working people across the world. A word that might come to mind is "precarious." Not only would this refer to jobs which are temporary or casual, and where conditions are almost wholly determined by profit-maximising employers, but also because "precarious" aptly describes the general state of working class life in South Africa and indeed, throughout most of the world right now.

The neoliberal era – which glorifies freedom, freedom to exploit – grants to the owners of the means of production—the capitalist bosses—the freedom AT THEIR SOLE DISCRETION, to distribute the value produced by labour. And so, not surprisingly, workers get barely enough to keep body and soul together, while capitalists apportion to themselves the lions share.

According to mainstream economics theory, both Labour and Capital are "inputs" to the production process, yet Capital gets the right to distribute the bounty. This is the harsh reality. This is the way the system works. In terms of the class struggle, it reflects the relative strengths of the two parties. Capital has expropriated to itself the right of distribution. Under a socialist system it would be the other way round – the owners of labour-power would decide on the distribution of the surplus.

And, so, logically, trade unions are worker-collectives whose reason-for-being is to alter the balance of power in favour of the workers. Even though this or that trade union might espouse socialism, the general role of trade unions is circumscribed by the needs of "workers-as-employees." Invariably, this puts the focus of struggle on the here-and-now, on day-to-day issues in the workplace. At one extreme, this could lead to a union being overly predisposed to winning immediate workplace benefits – economism – at the expense of the larger question of transforming the system. In a worse-case scenario, one would see the emergence of



a trade union bureaucracy – a worker leadership whose interests are allied to that of the capitalist bosses. It would then be correct to talk of a "captured" or "co-opted" union leadership whose interests are to maintain and perpetuate the system of capitalist class exploitation.

By contrast, a "progressive" trade union would be one which does not lose sight of itself as part of an emancipatory project, as an agent whose role is to bring about positive change for workers at a workplace level, but also to win irreversible gains for workers and, indeed, the working class as a whole. Such a trade union would see itself as part of the overall struggle to emancipate society. They would join their programmes of struggle-in-the-workplace with all struggles of

the oppressed.

It's a contradictory situation. On the one hand, workers depend on the system for their livelihood, yet on the other, need to destroy that system because it is the fundamental source of their woes. This goes some distance to explaining why there will never be total, all-round commitment (that is, by ALL workers) to a revolutionary agenda.

While the need for “non-transformational” forms of struggle cannot be disputed, neither can the need for revolutionary change. The question becomes, “How can we widen the commitment to revolutionary forms of struggle by workers? How can a critical mass of workers be won over to join the struggle for a transition from the capitalist to a socialist order? These are big and compelling questions; it is not an exaggeration to say that the current (capitalist) order is leading to the very breakdown of the planet. Whether we like it or not, we cannot simply continue along current paths. As ordinary citizens of Planet Earth, we have no choice; we HAVE TO change the system.

Capitalism does not have a flattering record for us ordinary South Africans. In the apartheid era, it was not only the capitalists who expropriated the spoils, but also an ally identifying itself as the “white working class.” In the modern era, a class of predators that has joined the capitalists at the feeding trough are those whose ethics permit them to steal billions-and-billions from state coffers while by every criterion, the living standards and conditions of the mass of South Africans worsens at an accelerating rate.

As the poet says, “things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.”

Anybody who has eyes to see will see that – globally – living conditions for the masses are on a downward spiral, with no mitigating factors in sight. Growth under capitalism is, at best, short-lived, and often jobless. Debt-levels, both private and public, are at all-time highs, and, perhaps most alarmingly, humankind's future is seriously compromised by global-warming.



To quote from climate activist, Andreas Malm:

To say that the signals have fallen on the deaf ears of the ruling classes of this world would be an understatement. If these classes ever had any senses, they have lost them all. They are not perturbed by the smell from the blazing trees. They do not worry at the sight of islands sinking; they do not run from the roar of the approaching hurricanes; their fingers never need to touch the stalks from withered harvests; their mouths do not become sticky and dry after a day with nothing to drink. To appeal to their reason and common sense would evidently be futile. The commitment to the endless accumulation of capital wins out every time. After the past three decades, there can be no doubt that the ruling classes are constitutionally incapable of responding to the catastrophe in any other way than by expediting it; of their own accord, under their inner compulsion, they can do nothing but burn their way to the end.

What is to be done?

We need to adopt the words of the erstwhile Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA): “LET US LIVE FOR OUR CHILDREN.” It is our children and our

children's children who face the prospect of inheriting a charred earth. We cannot let this happen.

If organised workers are going to be part of the solution, then a burden of historical proportions will fall on their shoulders. It means that within their ambit of struggle will fall not only the need to strengthen workers' power relative to capitalism, but also to take up broader social issues, such as imperialism, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and global-warming.

Worker organisations will need to avoid the pitfalls highlighted by history. We should avoid a "top-down" approach, in terms of which we put our faith in the owning classes. We should equally avoid the "top-down" approach in terms of which a worker-leadership-elite makes the decisions "on behalf of" the masses. The sooner we abandon the notion that parliament is the route out of our oppression the better. The watchword must be: "The working classes must be the agents of their own liberation." This is the basis upon which unity needs to be built. As Colin Barker puts it in a 2007 article: A "socialism from below" should arise through the *self*

activity of the workers' movement, which should foster the growth of directly democratic (people's) organisations created out of struggle.

As we move forward from Workers' Day 2022, we note that the organised labour movement in this country is in total disarray. With COSATU in decline for the past decade at least, the recent attempt to unseat Vavi as general-secretary of SAFTU and controversy surrounding Irvin Jim the general secretary of NUMSA. It is clear that our trade union movement is incapable of leading the working class on the revolutionary road. The question that then arises is what interventions are needed for the labour movement to regain its focus to unite the workers and the working class as a whole under the banner of socialism?

If 1 May gives us pause to reflect on the turbulent history of labour and the workers' struggle over the ages, its wins and losses, its highs and lows, then, moving forward with determination and optimism, we have to come to the singular conclusion that THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES.



SOUTH AFRICA, A COUNTRY ON THE PRECIPICE OF DISASTER

On 27 April, we celebrate “Freedom Day”. It is significant because it ostensibly marks the end of over three hundred years of colonialism, apartheid and white minority rule. The 1994 elections, with euphoric expectations by the masses, ushered in a new dispensation and a new constitution for the country. Of South Africa’s 22.7 million eligible voters, 19.7 million voted in the 1994 national election. In the recent municipal elections, a resounding vote of no confidence in SA’s parliamentary system was registered when only 12 million out of an eligible 42.6 million voters went to the polls. In 1994, the ANC won 12.2 million votes and in 2021, a mere 5.2 million votes.



OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN SCHOOLS OF THE POOR

Depression and gloom stalk our country.

The indicators reveal that after 28 years, government has failed to deliver the core functions to its people, especially the poor.

At Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, the third biggest hospital in the world, doctors and nursing staff were buying bread for their patients. Suppliers had stopped delivery of foodstuffs because of non-payment of goods. Wards at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital were closed due to a

fire that ravaged the building in April 2015. The delayed opening is impacting service delivery for patients. Questions remain over why and how the fire broke out, and why the fire could not be contained. There are also questions about the building’s fire safety compliance before the April 2015 blaze. This signalled years of neglect and lack of maintenance over time. At several hospitals, protests have erupted over the lack of Personal Protective Equipment as well as disputes over back pay.

The picture is little better on the educational front. For example, Amnesty International reports 239 schools are without electricity, and 86% of schools have no laboratories. 19% of schools still have pit latrines and 37% are without sanitation. The majority of the schools in the areas of the oppressed are without school halls or gymnasiums.

According to the 2019 *Trend in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)* 70% of learners in grade 9 are in classes that exceed 40 learners. Learners attending classes with fewer than “40 learners per class achieved significantly better results than classes with more than 40 learners”.

The TIMSS report also stipulated that school segregation in post-apartheid SA has remained virtually unchanged: According to the TIMSS report, “white” students, as well as the new “black” middle class, almost exclusively attend the elite public and private schools. The negotiated settlement that ushered in a new dispensation after 1994 conserved the excellent educational opportunities and infrastructure for a privileged few.

At 34.9% the official unemployment is at an all-time high. The expanded unemployment rate is at 46.6%, the highest since the introduction of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) in 2008. The updated unemployment data shows that there are now three provinces in South Africa with an expanded unemployment rate of more than 50%:

- The Eastern Cape (54.5%);
- Limpopo (54.5%);
- The North West (52.2%).

Official data reflects that two out of every three young people (under 35 years) in SA are unemployed, and this even rises to three out of four of the under-25s. The rising youth unemployment and its accompanying social unrest will drag down the economy and ferment unrest in the country. This is a ticking time bomb. What is the

ANC government to do?

As the July riots and looting demonstrated, South Africa is fast running out of time to solve the unemployment crisis. The Durban looting in the wake of the recent floods is also the result of famine and starvation in our country.

Disturbingly, we are seeing the strengthening of fascist tendencies, with *The Operation Dudula Movement* - which is campaigning against ‘foreign nationals’ having recently emerged. Support for it seems to be growing among South African communities who feel marginalised. This is nothing less than Xenophobia/Afrophobia. The ANC government is allowing this as scapegoating for their huge unemployment crisis. What is the solution of the South African government? They are considering introducing “old-style” **Job Reservation**. The cabinet has already signed off on an ANC proposal that jobs in some sectors of the economy be reserved for SA citizens.

No attempt has been made to eliminate spatial apartheid. SOWETO is a case in point: Soweto occupies 10% of the landmass of metropolitan Johannesburg, yet 40% of the population, stays in this windswept area where crime is rife, large areas are disease-ridden and housing, sanitation and transport are a nightmare. This is par for the course for all other townships of the oppressed in the country. What is the ANC government to do?

The absence of an affordable, efficient, integrated public transport system has exposed the soft underbelly of the transport system in SA. On many occasions has the rail system or the other modes of public transport left commuters in the lurch. The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) is a state-owned enterprise responsible for most passenger rail services in the country. It has been sadly neglected in favour of private sector road transport. On the other hand, roads are also in a parlous state. What is the ANC government to do?

Do we have a water crisis? SA is supposedly a water-scarce country, yet the amount of

groundwater is about the same as the surface water – about 7500 million cubic metres per year. The groundwater has only minimally been exploited. Every year we have floods, of varying degrees, mostly on the eastern seaboard. These floods have never been contained and the water harvested. Further, groundwater generally flows from the escarpment to the low-lying areas north and south of the Drakensberg. The groundwater flows towards the origins of rivers that are the low points in the landscape, therefore, the fast-flowing rivers of the east coast. In 2018, it was reported by then water and sanitation, Minister Nomvula Mokonyane that there were 5125 registered dams. Of these a total of 323 dams belong to the Water and Sanitation Department, 66 to other departments, 318 to municipalities, 4030 to the private (agricultural) sector and 336 to the mining industry. Besides water usage for soft drinks, beer, wine and spirits and of course bottled water, can we be classified as a water-scarce country?

SA is teetering on the brink of a catastrophe. A litany of indicators suggests that South Africa is a *Fragile*

State, if not already a *Failed State*. Taking the above into account added to corruption, fuel and transport hikes, the rising cost of living, the race-ridden society, the failed National Health Insurance, the housing crisis, poverty, inequality, and joblessness – all point to a failed state. The stench of corruption and an air of neglect engulf every city, dorp and village. Dereliction of duty, non-delivery of services and vandalism surround us

Does the Freedom Charter (as a political programme) advance a non-racial society or a multi-racial society? The governing party is alarmed at its waning popularity among voters. A leadership contest is months away, adding to pressure on President Cyril Ramaphosa to improve the lives of ordinary South Africans. What is the ANC government to do?

Can the ANC or any other mainstream political formation in our country rescue our country from the brink of disaster? The time for united action on the part of the progressive Left has never been more urgent.



DAMS IN THE EASTERN CAPE HAVE MOSTLY REACHED THE LEVEL IN THE PHOTO-

The Worker was produced by the Publications Collective of the New Unity Movement

The Secretariat

Michael Titus / Michael Steenveld

083 255 6329 / 071 645 1590

michaeltitus@vodamail.co.za / mikesteenveld2020@gmail.com

Visit us at <http://www.newunitymovement.org.za/>