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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

**ENGAGING APARTHEID:  
The Teachers' League of South Africa in the Western Cape, 1985-1989**

**A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
MASTERS OF EDUCATION**

**BY**

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## Abstract

The study concerns the politics and practices of one of the oldest teachers organisation's in the Western Cape, the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA/League), during the mid-to-late 1980s when it was operating secretly underground. Specific attention is paid to League members attitudes and responses to the 1985-1986 school boycott and to the educational initiative 'People's Education For People's Power'. Key sources for the study are interviews conducted with League members who were active during the 1985-89 period, and an examination of *The Educational Journal* among other relevant archival and documentary material.

The history of the League from the early 1940s, as an affiliate of the Non European Unity Movement (NEUM), to the mid-1980s when it aligned itself with the New Unity Movement (NUM) is traced broadly. This contextualises the organisation and attempts to illuminate the politics that informed League members thinking and practices during the 1985 to 1989 period.

There is a common perception of the League as a narrow band of "coloured" teachers with a peculiar brand of politics. This identity was established over a period of time, as a result of the fact that the TLSA's membership was drawn exclusively from the racially classified "coloured" schools. The League, nonetheless, bequeathed a distinct non-racial and radical intellectual and pedagogical tradition which has left an indelible mark on the political and educational landscape of the Western Cape, and particularly on the students who attended League oriented schools.

This dissertation challenges simplistic interpretations of the TLSA and its members. While perceptions are powerful social constructs, so too are misperceptions. This in a sense adds grist to the study, as appearances are at times intermingled with the opposite of what is being perceived.

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## CONTENTS

	Pages
ABSTRACT	(i)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(ii)
CONTENTS	(iii-iv)
INTRODUCTION	1-2
METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES	2-7
1. Chapter One: The history of the Teachers' League of South Africa: an overview, 1943 - 1976	8-9
2. Chapter Two: A background history: Black teachers in crisis, 1976 - 1985	10-12
3. Chapter Three: The Teachers' League of South Africa 1976 - 1985	13-19
4. Chapter Four: The TLSA and New Unity Movement	20-23
5. Chapter Five: A Weapon of Struggle? The School Boycott 1985-1986	24-43
6. Chapter Six: People's Education For People's Power?	44-60
7. Conclusion	61-65

8. References and Bibliography	66-74
9. Unpublished Documents/Papers	74-75
10. Teachers' League of South Africa: Publications, Documents, Pamphlets	75-76
11. Tape recordings and Interviews	76
12. Dissertations	77
13. Government Documents, Articles	78
14. Newspapers	78
15. APPENDICES:	
Appendix One: Synopsis of the extended study	
Appendix Two: Interviewer's guiding questions	

## Introduction

**Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.**

**Karl Marx (1975:96)**

This dissertation is the first part of what it is hoped will be a wider political and pedagogical history of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA/League) [See Appendix One]. The influence of smaller organisations within the liberation movement on the post-apartheid 1994 political dispensation has been largely ignored by writers on education. It is the author's opinion that the lack of research on the TLSA has been due mainly to the clandestine and anti-establishment character of the organisation until its public re-emergence in March 1992. It was only at its annual conference in 1995 that the League became more inclusive by opening its ranks to people of other political persuasions. Then, according to an internal discussion document, the League unanimously adopted a resolution to "operate as a critical voice inside of forums and state structures while at the same time projecting an independent philosophy and programme with a critical presence outside forums."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is a preponderance of documentation and historical writing on the ANC which gives credence to the perception that the Congress movement qualified, numerically and therefore in terms of its ideas, as the most representative role player in the liberation movement. This perception will be challenged by this study.

There is a dearth of academic information about the TLSA during the 1980s (and in preceding years), apart from articles by Bill Nasson (1989 and 1990), Linda Chisolm (1990) and Mohammad Adhikari's (1993) thesis *The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1940*. The latter study is valuable in terms of elucidating the early history of the organisation. It is also the only writing of significance on the League during its conservative phase when the organisation was more favourably disposed towards the establishment, before its affiliation to the anti-

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<sup>1</sup> TLSA pamphlet 1995.

establishment NEUM<sup>2</sup> in 1943. The space to research the TLSA's resistance to the apartheid system is therefore evident.

The author is aware of the limitations of this study of the TLSA. A central limitation is logistical, framed by the academic focus of the dissertation. He is also aware of the vexed nature of this topic for many cadres of the League who have sacrificed and given-up large parts of their lives in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. Many of these activists continue to make a sterling contribution to education in working class communities and the communities of the poor, and are working under extremely difficult circumstances. This study is an acknowledgement of the tireless, indefatigable and selfless political and pedagogical work that many League members prosecuted prior to, during, and beyond the period covered by this dissertation.<sup>3</sup>

## Methodology and Sources

The principal research for this dissertation is based upon documentary material and interviews with key members of the TLSA. It explores the response of the League and its members to critical events during the mid-to-late 1980s, and whether the organisation presented an effective

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<sup>2</sup>The NEUM was a federation of organisations. Its main constituents were the anti-Coloured Affairs Department organisation (Anti-CAD) and the All African Convention (AAC). The TLSA formed the main component of the Anti-CAD. The TLSA's close relative in the NEUM was the African teacher affiliate of the AAC the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA). CATA, however, ceased to operate as an effective teacher organisation after severe government repression during the mid-1950s, resulting in most of its teachers being dismissed from their teaching posts. The journal of CATA *The Teachers' Vision* was also banned. The TLSA and CATA had joint conferences with the introduction of Bantu Education. These organisations were central to the formation of the Cape Teachers Federal Council (CTFC), which attempted to bring like-minded teacher organisations together against the government's racially divisive and repressive measures in education.

<sup>3</sup> The death of Harry Hendricks, 79, (12 June 2002) during the completion of this study, is a notable loss to the liberation movement. A liberation he was convinced South Africans had yet to achieve. Mr Hendricks was one of the outstanding stalwarts of the League and NUM. He contributed significantly to non-racial sport, as a founder member of the South African Senior Schools Athletics (SASSA) and later South African Council on Sport (SACOS) and non-racial swimming. His eminent leadership qualities as a sports administrator, teacher, principal and later rector of Bellville College of Education (BOK), meant he not only left an indelible mark on the educational landscape, but also the political movement in South Africa. The author remembers him as an activist, a person of stature, principle, and resolve, which was accompanied by a positive attitude to life. He was extremely encouraging of endeavours to take forward the struggle in education, sport and civil society in general.

alternative to recognised teacher organisations like the Cape Teachers' Professional Association (CTPA) and later in the 1990s - SADTU.<sup>4</sup>

The documentary sources are gleaned firstly from an archival study of TLSA literature, the primary sources being *The Educational Journal* and League pamphlets, including literature published under the auspices of the Cape Federation of Civics and the NUM<sup>5</sup> newsletter, the *New Unity Movement Bulletin*. The primary material enabled a deeper understanding of the League's public or official policies regarding certain historical benchmarks during the 1980s. Secondly, interviews with present and former members of the League and others were conducted. Individual interviews were conducted with twelve League or former League teachers' who were active during the period under investigation. Certain members were interviewed twice. Interviewees were located within different branches of the organisation. There were six branches of the TLSA functioning in the Western Cape during the 1980s. Respondents were selected on the basis of age, social status, gender and political persuasion in an attempt to present a broad section of opinion. The respondents, composed a balance of: experienced/less experienced, executive/ordinary, male/female and NUM/non-NUM aligned members during the period investigated. Most League members approached for this study were willing to be interviewed. The identity of these interviewees has been coded for the purposes of this study and will remain confidential.

The research techniques utilised explored ways in which League teachers' translated their analyses into practice. The interview schedule<sup>6</sup> was structured to consider the various ways that League teachers' understood their social, economic and political circumstances, e.g. their place of teaching, staff dynamics, parent-teacher or teacher-principal relationships and political

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<sup>4</sup> National legislation allowed only teacher organisations who were registered with the racially classified departments of education to be recognised teacher organisations. The TLSA during the apartheid era was not a formally registered teacher organisation.

<sup>5</sup> The NUM was launched in Cape Town, April 1985. The Teachers' League and the Cape Federation Of Civics were pillar members of the NUM. R.O. Dudley, a former teacher at Livingstone High school and a prominent member of the League, became NUM's first president.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix Two: The guiding questions of the interviewer.

affiliation *inter alia*. This background, it could be said, shaped League teachers comprehension of, and responses to, the political and educational struggle.

The study poses the question: "How did the League respond to the Western Cape education crises during the 1985 to 1989 period?" The author is aware, due to the examination of the *Educational Journal* and through a pilot interview with a senior and high profile member of the organisation, that particular events and issues engendered sufficient information to allow for an investigation of League politics and pedagogics. The areas decided upon for this research, has therefore been comprehensively covered in *The Educational Journal*, and has been given sufficient consideration by the organisation. Access to this information on the League required substantial insight into the ideas and practices of the organisation and its members politics and pedagogy. The historical background to the issues being examined, was characterised by political change, proceeding from the student militancy of the mid-1980s, to the state repressive measures of the late 1980s. While the study could have considered the League in relation to non-racism, non-racial sport, teacher professionalism, the student movement, the PTSA movement, and the Bush Colleges among others, it focuses instead on the salient events and concepts in education that emerged during the mid-to-late 1980s. Given these key considerations, this paper will examine the League's organisational role and its members responses to the critical events and issues germane to the 1985 and 1986 school boycott and people's education.

The above information will be analysed broadly within a radical leftist oriented theoretical framework. This perspective includes the social historical approach to South African studies, which has as one of its concerns the writing of history from below, capturing subjective experiences and perceptions. The theoretical framework accepts the notion that social and political consciousness is derived historically and shaped by developmental processes. There is an attempt to reveal the political and pedagogical ideas, theories and practices League members brought to the period.

Agents of social change however, a perception the League had of itself and others of it, do not operate in a vacuum but within a political and economic context. This study locates itself within the political and economic structural framework of racial capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Structural frameworks arguably limit the possibility of change (Dan O'Meara, 1996:422),<sup>8</sup> making it opportune, to state that: "Men and women make the history that is possible, not the history that they would like to make or the history that sometimes they are told should be made" (Paulo Freire, 1988a:xxviii).

The League's analyses, similar to NUM's, are located within the left or the Marxian socialist school of thought in South Africa. It is within the latter school of thought that the League will be examined, to enable consistent critique of the organisation's theory and practices. An assessment of NUM/TLSA policy and statements using radical or socialist references<sup>9</sup> is considered to be appropriate to support the chosen theoretical framework. The citations at the beginning of particular chapters attempts to inform the reader of a central idea or theme relevant to that section of the study.

The author is also aware of the post modernist theoretical discourse of the past decade. The emergence of post modernist theory in the late 1980s and the 1990s has challenged master narratives such as Marxist theory as partial. Post modernism has been critical of all readings of scientific, cultural and social texts, interpreting them as historical and political constructions (Appignanesi and Garratt, 1995:108-109). According to this perspective history is simply a 'discourse' among many others, a 'text' that could be reconstructed and was thus open to reinterpretation, since: "History (historiography) is an intertextual linguistic construct" (Jenkins, 1991:7). Post modernists therefore claim that no true history or universal concepts, "heartlands of history" (Jenkins, 1991:16) exist within history methodology. Marxists have taken issue with post modernists and have criticised their relativism - the view that all interpretations are equal or 'textual constructs'. Radical theorists such as Rosenau (1992:159) have criticised the post modernist discourse which tended towards interpreting history through

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<sup>7</sup> According to N. Alexander (1980), racial capitalism defined the South African state during the apartheid era.

<sup>8</sup> Dan O'Meara (1996) claims that the possibilities of change are limited by the structure of political economy.

<sup>9</sup> Nasson (1989;1990;1991); Alexander (1985;1989;1990); Fine and Davis (1990).

constructing texts, claiming: “There is the real danger that the ‘linguistic turn’ in history may make us forget this brute fact ... the notion of society as something real and with it ‘what used to be called social justice’ .” Linked to Rosenau’s assertion, is the notion that “postmodernist concentration on words diverts attention away from real suffering and oppression and towards the kinds of secondary intellectual issues that matter in the physically comfortable world of academia” (Evans, 1997:185). The post modernist discourse is therefore rendered questionable when engaging social issues associated with social justice such as race, gender and class oppression.

In addition, post modernism also fails to pay sufficient attention to oppositional and alternative politics, which the central tenets of radical humanism place most emphasis on, namely “radical change, modes of domination, emancipation, deprivation and potentiality” (Odora, 1995:43),<sup>10</sup> which are important criteria in this study. As far back as the late 1980s, Morris (1988), cited in Aronowitz and Giroux (1991:80), claimed that post modernism failed to link the emphasis on difference with oppositional politics. Thus, while post modernists emphasis a pluralistic approach to history which acknowledges multiplicity, such as “historians’ histories, ... teachers’ histories, ... black histories, ..., white histories, women’s histories ...” (Jenkin’s, 1991:66), leftists point to history constituting conflict and class struggle<sup>11</sup> that should culminate in radical change or the conquest of political and economic power.<sup>12</sup> This conflict theory approach to historical change, intersects with the League’s emphasis on linking the political and educational struggle, which involved the demand for free compulsory education, based on equality of opportunity in a democratic society.<sup>13</sup> Noteworthy moreover is Bradbury (1988:159), who contends that the post structuralist [and post modernist ] insistence on the play of “difference”, where as he puts it “concepts are simultaneously accepted and rejected”, is an argument which does not present the possibility “of breaking out of a mode of thought”, or as Aronowitz

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<sup>10</sup> Burrell and Morgan (1979).

<sup>11</sup> Marx and Engels, authors of the *Communist Manifesto* state that: “the history of all hitherto society is the history of class struggles” (1975:35).

<sup>12</sup> *Communist Manifesto (1850)*, Rosa Luxemburg (1908) *Reform or Revolution*, Vladimir Ilych Lenin (1907) *What is to be Done?*

<sup>13</sup> The TLSA constitution.

(1992:177) states, “a series of hypotheses rather than a real theory.” The importance of theory and its link to practice is underlined by notable leftists such as Lenin (1907:29), who declared: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”

A cynicism about the possibility of change is therefore implicit in post modernist theory. Indeed, “the language of possibility has been discarded for the language of critique which offers no possibility for counter hegemonic struggle” (Giroux, 1983:131). Aronowitz and Giroux (1991:81) instead, posit an alternative social theory which will “...contribute to a politics of radical democracy (or) ... that must extend and broaden the most democratic claims of modernism.” The Marxist methodological approach and the sociological radical humanist discourse, which have been central to modernism, are therefore deemed by the author to be effective analytical tools for this study.

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## CHAPTER 1

### The Teachers' League of South Africa: an overview, 1943-1976

The TLSA was established in 1913 as a professional teachers organisation composed of and representing mainly “coloured”<sup>1</sup> teachers. In 1918 the League adopted the aphorism “Let us Live for Our Children”, which has remained a distinguishing feature of the organisation<sup>2</sup> and encapsulates the TLSA’s vision and philosophy at different periods in the organisation’s history. Until 1943 the League had a pro-establishment character. Its decision to affiliate to the anti-establishment NEUM in 1943 altered the political character of the TLSA. In Alexander’s view, the TLSA formed the mainstay of the Anti-CAD (Anti-Coloured Affairs Department)<sup>3</sup> movement and in the 1940s “at its height ... [it] embraced more than two-fifths of all coloured teachers in the country” (1989:184 ). In 1943, the League in keeping with other organisations in the NEUM adopted an anti-collaborationist policy. Non-collaboration or anti-collaboration<sup>4</sup> for the League meant that it boycotted establishment,<sup>5</sup> state or government structures at local and national levels. It viewed and labeled organisations and individuals who participated in these structures as ‘collaborationists’ or ‘quislings’.

Sarah Mokone (1982) in her broad historical writing on the Anti-CAD and NEUM during the 1940s, commented on the campaign of these organisations against the “collaborationists” and “quislings” of the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) and Coloured Affairs Department (CAD). Mokone (1982) highlighted the prominent role which the TLSA played in education, after it had adopted the anti-collaboration policy in 1943. Alexander (1989:187) however, argued that from 1948 when the NP came to power, the militant tactics of the NEUM declined rapidly. He

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<sup>1</sup> According to the League and other left organisations that subscribed to the non-racial ethos, the term “coloured” denoted a racially descriptive term which was racist, derogatory and had no scientific basis. In this paper the term “coloured” will refer to ‘so-called coloured’.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “Let us Live for Our Children” remained inscribed on the cover of *The Educational Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> The Anti-CAD was one of the principle organisations of the NEUM and was composed of largely “coloured” political activists and intellectuals. Refer to the footnote elaborating on the constituents of the NEUM.

<sup>4</sup> Non-collaboration was a method of struggle and a philosophy. It came to mean non-participation and non-cooperation with the ‘capitalist’ class or the oppressor, nationally and internationally. Non-collaboration, according to Tabata a founder and leading theoretician of the NEUM, also emerged out of the need to break the ‘slave mentality’ of the oppressed, in order for them to assert their humanity (Cited in Kayser 1997:36).

<sup>5</sup> The League boycotted the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) and Coloured Affairs Department (CAD), because these bodies collaborated with the United Party government in perpetuating segregation.

claims that NEUM politics were dismissive of what it called the 'ad hoc', 'reformist' and 'adventurist' campaigns of the anti-apartheid movement, that is, the defiance and civil disobedience campaigns of the 1950s (See also Gentle, 1978 and Simons, 1983:545).

The NEUM was critical of the ANC and labeled it 'reformist' and 'adventurist' because the ANC did not make revolutionary demands and was only interested in populist or mass struggle, such as the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s.

The State of Emergency in the wake of the Sharpeville-Langa massacre of 1960 was an event which significantly affected the League's method of operation. The Anti-CAD group decided voluntarily to organise underground and thereby protect its members from government repression. The TLSA nevertheless continued to organise in a clandestine way until its first public conference in 1992. Between 1960 and 1992 the TLSA's main organ was the organisation's journals, *The Educational Journal*. *The Educational Journal* appeared regularly during the thirty-two year period in which the League operated secretly.

The 1980s and 1990s were characterised by significant ruptures in education, with phases of resistance and challenge by the oppressed black community to the apartheid government's repression and reforms (Pratt, 1988; Lodge and Nasson, 1990; Christie, 1991; Hartshorne, 1992). This was the context in which the League had to operate, and in which the organisation had to consider either abstaining from or performing a leading role in the education struggle and liberation movement. The implications of this decision for the League, will unfold in the course of the study.

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## CHAPTER 2

### A background history:

#### Black teachers in crisis 1976-1985

The student uprisings of 1976 ended the political lull of the 1960s and early 1970s. This historic event heralded the revival of mass resistance to apartheid repression.<sup>1</sup> The events of 1976 changed the position of teachers in society. The turmoil in the education arena sparked by the student uprisings of 1976, challenged the traditional esteemed role of the teacher, since: “after 1976 when ‘the System’ had lost all legitimacy in the eyes of Black youth, teachers began to be seen more and more as a willing part of the System” (Alexander, 1991:173). The emerging student confidence and militancy upset the balance of power in the schools of the oppressed, as teachers found themselves caught between the militant students and the repressive apartheid state.

After 1976, the state courted the disenfranchised teachers and introduced a series of benefits including “increased teachers salaries, with service conditions equal to whites; new teacher training centres and in-service programs” (Kihn, 1993: 73). Certain black moderate teacher organisations, for example, were part of state inspired attempts to reform the education crisis from within and were party to investigations which preceded the De Lange commission report<sup>2</sup> (Moll, 1991: 188). At the beginning of the 1980s the state therefore sought to maintain its influence over teachers through co-optation, in order to fragment black opposition.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Contributory political and economic factors supplemented these uprisings, which according to Davies (1988:342), “included economic recession; a new pattern of militant industrial unrest among blacks that began with the Natal strikes of 1973; heightened military anxiety after the collapse of the Portuguese African empire, world wide condemnation of apartheid, a marked decline in foreign investment in South Africa, and to renewed demands for the use of economic sanctions against South Africa”. These factors prompted the ruling NP to alter its strategy from ‘total onslaught’ or repression, to one of ‘total strategy’, namely, reformism.

<sup>2</sup> Educational reform, propagated by government and big business, as embodied in the De Lange Report of 1981 and the subsequent government White paper of 1983, contained recommendations linking educational provision with the needs of the economy, and importantly, the building of a pliable educated and moderate black middle class of which teachers were an important part. Bantu education therefore had to be altered to address the labour demands of a modernising economy. This set the context for general restructuring and reforms.

<sup>3</sup>Reforms on the labour and African urban settlement fronts saw the government concede to the Wiehahn and Riekert commissions of 1979. The former granted statutory recognition to trade unions for African workers, a concession made by the state after over half a century of refusing to recognise such unions, the latter allowed for settled urban Africans subject to the availability of housing and employment.

When the education crises came to a head again<sup>4</sup> in 1980, “teachers experienced growing pressure to redefine their traditional race, class and “professional” locations, more pressure than at the end of the preceding decade”<sup>5</sup> (Kihn, 1993:69). The pressure exerted on teachers was due mainly to the period of political ferment that saw the growth of student organisations such as COSAS (Congress of South African Students), the Committee-of-81, AZASO (Azanian Students Congress) and many others. During this period, students attempted to ally themselves with worker struggles, and located their demands within the broader political and economic struggle: “We have got to link up our struggle with the struggle of the black workers. ... Together with our parents we must try to work out a new future. A future where there will be no racism or exploitation, no apartheid, no inequality of class or sex”<sup>6</sup> (Christie, 1991:247). This period was critical for League teachers’, as their attitude towards the boycotting students seemed to cause further fracturing of the fragile student-teacher relationship. This breakdown may be deduced from a League members comment: “Youth began to accuse the teachers who argued that way with them, of underestimating their independence, of trying to suggest to them that they were too young to understand politics.”<sup>7</sup> The League, or elements in the organisation, appeared to overlook critical evidence, namely, that the proliferation of student organisations in the early 1980s testified to a developing student political consciousness.

Within this changing terrain of organised struggle, an ad hoc group of anti-government pro-student teachers responded by forming the Teachers’ Action Committee (TAC). According to Kihn (1993), TAC, comprising approximately 1200 teachers, embarked on a “chalkdown” and established an active working relationship with the militant coordinating student group, the Committee-of-81 (representatives of SRCs in the Western Cape). The TAC initiative however, was short-lived, due to government’s victimisation of its leadership and ironically, “because it was perceived as being arrogant by many of the students with whom it was trying to

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<sup>4</sup>The school/class boycott started in Cape Town in 1980 when students came out against poor conditions in schools and unequal and inferior education. The state responded with repressive action by banning political meetings and arresting student leaders.

<sup>5</sup> Molteno (1987) covered the invidious position of teachers during the 1980 boycott intensively.

<sup>6</sup> Pam Christie (1991: 246-247), claimed that students responded to genuine grievances concerning conditions of learning, namely: “poorly equipped schools, shortage of qualified school teachers, security police at schools, corporal punishment and independent SRCs”.

<sup>7</sup> Interviewee C.

ally itself' (Molteno, 1987:85). A TAC with similar aims and methods of struggle was formed in the Department of Education and Training (DET)<sup>8</sup> schools during the same period. This group also had a short life-span. These teacher initiatives pointed to the need for teachers to free themselves from departmental racial divides. The formation of TAC indicated that teachers wanted to reclaim their legitimacy which had been undermined in 1976 and 1980. It also established a precedent for progressive teachers, which arguably set the bases for the establishment of WECTU (Western Cape Teachers' Union) and DETU (Democratic Teachers Union)<sup>9</sup> in 1985.

The early 1980s also saw the proliferation of political organisations being formed in opposition to the government's 'New Deal' or racially defined tricameral parliament for "whites", "indians" and "coloureds". The most prominent political formations were the National Forum (NF)<sup>10</sup> and United Democratic Front (UDF)<sup>11</sup> formed in 1983, with the NUM and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)<sup>12</sup> launching in 1985. A year later the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU)<sup>13</sup> was established. A variety of anti-establishment political organisations with different ideological perspectives, but who constituted the broad liberation movement, had therefore been set in place prior to the outbreak of the schools unrest of 1985.

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<sup>8</sup> DET refers to the "African" department of the government's apartheid education schooling system. It excluded the homeleands.

<sup>9</sup> WECTU was formed to organise predominantly "coloured" teachers in the DEC (Department of Education and Culture) schools, while DETU was to organise teachers in the DET schools.

<sup>10</sup> The National Forum (NF) was launched in mid-1983 and constituted elements from the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) and Cape Action League (CAL). The NF was formed to oppose the Koornhof Bills and the constitutional reforms or Botha's 'new deal'. The *Manifesto of the Azanian People* became the unifying document of the NF.

<sup>11</sup> The UDF was also formed in opposition to the government's constitutional reforms. The UDF was launched in Cape Town on 20 August 1983 and constituted a broad front or an alliance of autonomous organisations.

<sup>12</sup> COSATU was formed at the end of November 1985 and embraced 34 unions with 450,000 paid-up members and 565,000 signed-up members. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), arguably the largest union in Africa, made up the core membership of COSATU with Elijah Barayi of NUM the new federation's president. UDF supporters were heavily represented in the COSATU leadership. COSATU initially launched itself as an independent union but later in July 1987 adopted the Congress Alliance's Freedom Charter, the ANC's programmatic document, thereby indicating its political allegiance.

<sup>13</sup> NACTU was COSATU's nearest rival and was formed in October 1986, through the fusion of two unions CUSA (Council of Unions of South Africa) and AZACTU (Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions). It claimed a membership of 450,000 signed-up members. NACTU rejected the Freedom Charter and had a greater leaning towards black consciousness.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Teachers' League of South Africa 1976-1985

The TLSA emerged from the political lull of the 1960s a weakened organisation, with many of its former members in exile and its leadership operating under a veil of secrecy to avoid political harassment and possible arrest by the security branch. The League's leadership activities were therefore confined in the 1970s to the *The Educational Journal*. The League had a protective attitude towards its leadership, since according to a prominent member of the organisation: "In a political struggle individuals do make a great contribution and you don't replace people easily."<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the constraints on their organisational capacity, the League continued to operate underground during the 1970s by meeting at certain members homes. Thus according to Interviewee C, one of the leading members of the organisation:

The Teachers' League was functioning semi-publicly, it was forced to have meetings in the homes of people. The Department of Education had sent a circular to schools to deny the Teachers' League the use of classrooms ... They said, a teachers' organisation that was in opposition to the administration couldn't use the administration's property.

The League's branches remained active underground, and through its members activities the organisation was able to exert considerable influence, in terms of its ideas, on certain schools within the former CAD. The most prominent schools were Trafalgar, Harold Cressy, Livingstone and South Peninsula High. These schools became known in the "coloured" community for their academic and sporting achievements.

The League's members were also central to the formation of the Western Province Senior Schools Sports Union (WPSSSU) and the national senior schools sports body, the South African Senior Schools Sports Association (SASSSA), both bodies later affiliated to the anti-establishment sports organisation, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), formed in 1972.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewee C.

The League, as one of the pillars of the NEUM and the Anti-CAD, emerged from a tradition of working alongside like-minded organisations within the framework of principled unity.<sup>2</sup> During the period that followed the split of the NEUM<sup>3</sup> in the early 1960s, and the growth of new political tendencies in the 1970s and early 1980s, the possibility of working with organisations in the liberation movement remained politically problematic. The politics of the League appeared exclusive, critical and seemingly sectarian.<sup>4</sup> The validity of this perception is developed later in the paper, suffice to comment briefly on the particular issue -of unity- as it pertained to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)<sup>5</sup> the UDF and the NF.

The emergence of the BCM in the late 1960s and early 1970s gained popularity amongst the black communities in the 1970s, since according to Tom Lodge (1985:325): “Black Consciousness percolated down to a much broader and socially amorphous group than African intellectuals.” Hirson (1979),<sup>6</sup> while critical of the BCM’s influence during the early 1970s, acknowledged the movement’s influence in sparking the ‘May Revolt’ or ‘Tiro Affair’, which had affected many universities and colleges nationally and which was to become the precursor

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<sup>2</sup> The Unity Movement advocated principled unity that opposed the ANC’s notion of ‘utility unity’ or ad hoc unity. The latter was referred to as unity in struggle. To Tabata in *The Awakening of a People* ‘unity in struggle’ meant in practice: “... that a loose unity or ad hoc combinations [were] to be decided on from time to time ... [which was] not acceptable since they would open the door wide for opportunism.” This concept of principled unity established the basis for the Ten-Point Programme.

<sup>3</sup> There are various perspectives on the claimed separation in the NEUM. The Anti-CAD under Kies among others, appeared to follow a different trajectory to the Tabata section. Whilst the Anti-CAD went underground, Tabata and those who continued to represent the NEUM launched the African People’s Democratic Union of South Africa (APDUSA). APDUSA adopted the Ten-Point Programme and the policy of non-collaboration, and continued operating inside S.A. In 1964 the NEUM changed its name to the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA). Under the leadership of Tabata, UMSA decided to operate in exile. Tabata held the view, “that no fundamental change could be brought about in South Africa except through physical force” and attempted to prosecute the armed struggle in exile (See Kayser, 1997:84-101).

<sup>4</sup> R. & J. Simon (1952:546) were critical of the “holistic concept of ‘principled struggle’”, which according to the authors was tantamount to an all or nothing attitude to the liberation struggle. Refer also to Roy Gentle (1978:61-62), who argued that the Anti-CAD and the NEUM were sectarian due to them subordinating the unity of the working class and class struggle to academic points of theory.

<sup>5</sup> Black Consciousness emerged when the South African Students Organisation’s (SASO) broke from the ‘white’ National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in 1968. SASO believed that black students should organise on their own - independently. For SASO, ‘black’ referred to all the oppressed people of colour: ‘africans’, ‘coloureds’ and ‘indians’.

<sup>6</sup> Hirson argued that the worker uprisings in the early 1970s was a result of the economic capitalist crisis, and that this crisis was responsible for the 1976 uprising rather than the emergence of the BCM. He, for instance, argued that an atmosphere of confidence, resistance and revolt among the black oppressed was instilled by the riots and wild cat strikes of the early 1970s, “... affecting mines on 54 occasions between 25 February 1973 and 15 April 1975” (Hirson, 1979:147).

to the 1976 school uprising. Sites of struggle were developed by the BCM around enclaves which challenged the apartheid doctrine of “separate development” or rule by consent, namely, classrooms, the church, press and townships generally, amongst a host of other areas where revolt and defiance were nurtured. Regarding the pervasiveness of the black consciousness influence, Lodge (1985:329) states that the “student advocates of black consciousness were to become school teachers, priests and journalists, and its basic themes were to be taken up in the popular press, in township cultural events ...”<sup>7</sup>

The League’s perception of the BCM was extremely critical and condemnatory. *The Educational Journal*<sup>8</sup> of September 1981, for instance, lambasted the BCM as the “brainchild of the United States Intelligence Services ... to break down the policy of non collaboration” (Chisolm, 1990:254). The League, through a series of controversial articles in *The Educational Journal*, titled *Black Consciousness A Reactionary Tendency (1976)*<sup>9</sup> attempted to vilify BC (Alexander, 1990:240).

The League responded in a similarly critical manner to the schools boycott of 1976, and viewed the event as another adventurist ploy by BC politicians to mislead the students.<sup>10</sup> According to certain left activists however, the League misread BC in the 1970s. A prominent activist at the time argued that the League failed to see the boycott as a strategy being applied in a different historical context under particular conditions by BCM militants:

What the BC movement had led to in effect, if not necessary with intention, was the use of the boycott in practice, in mass form, as opposed to, lets say, the orthodox classical Unity Movement position, which was the boycott of particular controlling racially defined institutions like school bodies, school committees, under apartheid regimes, Bantu education school committees like advisory boards, municipal advisory boards and those sorts of things. In

<sup>7</sup> Lewis (1987:278) claims that the BCM in the Western Cape spread rapidly among sections of the “coloured” youth and urban “coloured” elites.

<sup>8</sup> *The Educational Journal* served the organisation in two ways: to counter the government’s apartheid policies and to criticise elements in the liberation movement such as the BCM.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Alexander’s (1990:240) *Black Consciousness: A Reactionary Tendency?* See also Chisolm (1990:254,263). The author Neville Alexander revealed that a breach of trust resulted in the article becoming a “strident name calling indictment of the BCM” (1991:240), and that the article should have read *Black Consciousness A Reactionary Tendency?* See also A. Drew (1996:11).

<sup>10</sup> The TLSA’s influence in the schools was reduced because of its negative reaction towards BC “as a racist and reactionary ideology” (Lewis, 1987:279).

other words, things where by not voting for them, by not participating in them, you actually showed your rejection of the system, and that was of course okay, there was no problem, in the earlier period before mass street battles and so on. ... But for students to stay away from school on the grounds that they did, to reject the system, the educational system, and for that not be understood as a, ... manifestation of non-collaboration, was to me completely incomprehensible. I couldn't understand why the TLSA didn't seem to be able to see this as such, and the only conclusion I could come to was that the TLSA couldn't see it as such because they were not in the leadership, they were not leading the struggle, and to me that was a completely hopeless sort of political position to have, because you know Marxism teaches one that it is not necessarily the Marxists or the communist party or the vanguard party, whatever you call it, that initiates struggle. I mean struggle on the ground is initiated by very ordinary people with completely diverse objectives, you know, but it is the objective movement of history that you must be able to assess, and I somehow felt that they were completely wrong in this regard ... (Alexander, 2001).<sup>11</sup>

The refusal to ally itself with organisations more clearly on the left of the ANC such as the NF, resulted in the League failing to profile itself on a broader public level among more radical and progressive elements, since for the League the NF represented an "American Imperialist plot" (Alexander, 2001). The UDF similarly, was perceived as a front for the Congress movement. An official of the League and practising teacher at the time, expressed his perception of the rising Congress influence among the youth quite emphatically:

... it wasn't an intellectual situation, it wasn't one where you could reason with the school leaders, the student leaders, there was just no way you could, they had been so deeply affected, or brainwashed, should I say, by the very teachers inside of the school who were joining the UDF and the MDM, and of course we knew that was the cover for the ANC. And we simply knew that because we would watch and watch ...<sup>12</sup>

An exploration of why the League was unable to develop a united front or alliances on the left against the apartheid regime in the 1970s and 1980s should be viewed and analysed within its

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<sup>11</sup> The interviewee is the author of the book *One Azania One Nation* where he similarly argues that the BC had progressive elements within its ranks, and was not completely reactionary. In a letter, Tabata (1980), writing from exile in Lusaka commented on Alexander's book, and in a disclaimer stated: "The imposition of the BCM ideology, far from being progressive, was a retrograde step." He also accused the author of mystifying and distorting history.

<sup>12</sup> Interviewee L.

historical context. It could be said, that the debilitating effect of the state's repressive measures on the League, resulted in only remnants of the Anti-CAD continuing to function in the 1970s. These organisational fragments could be found in only a few structures, which included the TLSA, Cape Federation of Civics, a few cultural societies, and the discussion forums of SPEF (South Peninsula Education Fellowship).<sup>13</sup> The 1970s had also witnessed the continued exile of I.B. Tabata, H. Jaffe and A. Fataar among other leading intellectuals within the former NEUM. Also, prominent and influential members of the Anti-CAD had died in the late 1970s, most notably Victor Wessels (1978) and Ben Kies (1979). They were some of the foremost thinkers of the Anti-CAD, and it could be presumed that: "Their passing at a critical time when the log jam was beginning to crack was a grievous blow" (Rassool, 1997:7). The passing of this intellectual component of the Anti-CAD leadership was more significant considering: "The new situation required a radical rethink of the aims and objectives of the organisation that seemed becalmed in the ideology of the past" (Ibid.).

The author therefore contends that the unwillingness of the TLSA (not all its members)<sup>14</sup> to work with certain individuals and organisations on the left is rooted in the organisation's history, since organisations presumably carry their birth marks with them: "the tradition of all the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, ... they anxiously conjure up the spirits from the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes ... " (Karl Marx, 1975:96). The intolerance by elements of the Unity Movement (UM) and the League towards sections of the liberation movement brought vitriolic criticism from individuals within the movement, which included utterances such as "sectarianism, abstentionism, and absolute principle. The one flowed into the other, since any course of action or any alliance with another group was likely to involve compromise with an eternal principle supposedly enshrined in the Ten Point Programme, ... " (Fine and Davis, 1991:72-73).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The League voiced its politics through the remaining structures of the Anti-CAD. Interviewee C therefore claimed that: "members of the Teachers' League propagated Teachers' League philosophy ... but under the banner of other organisations ...."

<sup>14</sup> Certain members of the TLSA were instrumental in the formation of the independent socialist orientated organisation in the Western Cape called the Cape Action League. League teachers were also active in WECTU (Western Cape Teachers Union), a non-affiliated teachers union.

<sup>15</sup> See also Gentle (1978:61-62); Drew (1996:9).

*The Educational Journal* located the League's education policies, theoretically at least, within the progressive anti-establishment bloc. Ideologically and theoretically then, it could be contended, that the League was presented with possibilities for cooperation within a broader anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist front. This potential, as an example, was exemplified by the League's critique of the De Lange commission's report.

The De Lange commission was appointed by the government in 1980 to investigate, under the auspices of the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), the causes of the crises in education following the 1976 and 1980 upheavals in education, and to make recommendations for an education policy.<sup>16</sup> In short, the report proposed reforms designed to "streamline", rationalise" and "deracialise" the education system (Chisolm, 1983:149). It recommended a vocational oriented<sup>17</sup> approach to education that would satisfy the "manpower" needs of a modernising economy.<sup>18</sup>

The League defined the De Lange report as an attempt to prepare students for, what they termed, "werkgeredheid" or the labour market, and located these recommendations or reforms in education within an internationalist framework of imperialism and the entrenchment of a racist and class society.<sup>19</sup> As an alternative to the De Lange report, the League argued for a single unsegregated education system within a social system of political and economic equality.<sup>20</sup>

Many radical and left authors such as Lodge (1983); Alexander (1985); Kallaway (1988), had similarly underscored the connection between the De Lange proposed restructuring in education and the reforms in the labour sector.<sup>21</sup> These authors' saw the proposed reforms in

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<sup>16</sup> Kallaway (1988); Christie (1990); Hartshorne (1992).

<sup>17</sup> De Lange recommended an academic further education and a general vocational education stream. The latter stream meant the linking of education to work by advocating a skills based technicised approach to education.

<sup>18</sup> Chisolm and Christie (1983); Kallaway (1988); Christie (1990).

<sup>19</sup> *The Educational Journal*, October-November 1981; December 1981; June 1982.

<sup>20</sup> *The Educational Journal*, October-November 1981; December 1981.

<sup>21</sup> Reforms in the labour sector through the Riekert and Wiehand commissions, resulted in the legalisation of black trade unions.

education as an argument for the modernisation of the apartheid economy, which required a more vocational and technical oriented education to meet the demands of the South African economy. The analyses of these educationists therefore largely coincided with the League's assessment of the De Lange recommendations. In this respect, the League shared common ground with certain left educationists. Moreover, resistance educationists, notably Smart (1990) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) posited an alternative education which "engage[s] in an ongoing attempt to eliminate forms of subjective and objective suffering", this they claim "is as much a political as it is a pedagogical project" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991:82).

The League's emphasis on linking the political and education struggle, dovetailed, in the main, with the theories of resistance and radical educationists. Common ground therefore existed politically for the League and other left tendencies or individuals, to develop a united front or a strategic alliance against the apartheid state. Central to this perceived shortcoming of the League, is its historical relationship with firstly the NEUM and later the NUM.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Teachers' League of South Africa and the Unity Movement

The League's political and educational theory and practice were not distinct from the NUM, but much the same as its relationship with the NEUM. NUM as a federation of member organisations, of which the TLSA was a part, continued to subscribe to a Ten-Point Programme of minimum demands of the oppressed in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> The policy of non-collaboration with government institutions and individuals, including an irreconcilable position on non-racism, are distinguishing features of the movement (Bam, 1993).

For the NEUM, the boycott was viewed as a practical application of the policy of non-collaboration (Tabata, 1952). The application of the boycott for the TLSA had historical significance which dated back to the 1943 boycott of the CAC by the Anti-CAD. Alexander (1989:183) is insightful when he states that the Anti-CAD "applied the weapon of the boycott with devastating effect and ruined the careers and reputations of those who dared to work the CAC or pleaded for a CAD." Tabata expanded on and tactically formalised the use of the boycott as a political weapon in his 1952 paper *The Boycott As Weapon of Struggle*.

The boycott, as developed by the NEUM, was conceived as a method of struggle for the oppressed<sup>2</sup> to undermine ruling class policy and influences which had divided people according to class and colour. The purpose of the boycott theoretically, was to develop the unity and independence of the oppressed, which for the NEUM were important tenets for Nation Building. The latter concept was clearly articulated by *The Torch*, the newsletter of the Anti-CAD and the NEUM, as involving: "removing blinkers and prejudice ... teaching that all people belong to one human family and are of the same quality" (Hugo, 1978:146). The boycott was therefore deemed an important facilitator in, what the NEUM and later the NUM termed, Nation Building.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ten-Point Programme was not part of the TLSA's constitution even though the TLSA was an affiliate of the NUM post-1985. It could therefore be deduced that the League held a fairly autonomous position within the NUM. As a result, all members of the TLSA were not automatically members of the NUM. The significance of the League's independence will be elaborated on later in the study.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'oppressed' refers to the black working-class and the landless peasantry according to NEUM analysis.

An important factor of the nation building process for the League and UM was the political and pedagogical role of the teacher, who was seen to be advantageously positioned between the parent and the child, or home and school. Due to the strategic location of the teacher, for the League, s/he was therefore able to perform important transformative tasks, of changing or influencing people's thinking and behaviour and countering the segregationist policies of the government. The teacher therefore played a valuable role for the NEUM and TLSA. Ben Kies, a former teacher and later a lawyer and also leading theoretician within the NEUM, elevated the status of the teacher to one of intellectual and professional, who held a leading position in the oppressed community:

...the emancipatory theory and the practical leadership always come from the intelligentsia ... who provide the fusion of theory and practice which is known as leadership ... (that) has sprung straight from the loins of the working-class. They do not have to go to the people. They belong to the people and the people are all around them. I refer, of course, mainly to the teachers .... (Mokone, 1972:29; See also Lewis, 1987:215).

Kies however did not perceive the teacher corps as an homogeneous entity, and was scathing of those teachers who were not seen as part of the liberatory movement:

We must blot out the shame cast upon our profession by those teachers who have helped to mislead and betray the people, who have helped to put on the chains and to keep them on. We must turn our faces to our people and we must be among them and with them and of them. Teaching and leading them (Mokone, 1972:29).

The above characteristics separated the League politically and pedagogically, as a professional teachers organisation,<sup>3</sup> from other teacher organisations, notably the Cape Teachers Professional Association (CTPA) who were registered with the then Department of Coloured Affairs. The latter organisation operated publicly as a "coloured" teachers' organisation, whereas the League had a distinct anti-establishment identity. The influence the League

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of teacher professionalism is a complex one and is beyond the scope of this paper. However, when referring to teacher professionalism relative to the TLSA, it is within the framework of political-professionalism, where teacher status and subject methodology are topics rarely discussed in *The Educational Journal*. Instead, the TLSA journal was more concerned with issues of serious political, socio-educational and economic struggles nationally and internationally. Teacher professional organisations, on the other hand, which are more conservative: "are usually narrow in scope and are relatively apolitical. Their main concern appears ... looking after narrow sectional interests and publishing journals mainly concerned with classroom issues ... they are not centres of serious political or ideological concern or struggle" (Harris, 1982:150).

exerted on disenfranchised teachers in the Western Cape is succinctly captured by Chisolm (1990:259) who states that: “through its teachers, its schools and its reading groups it [the League] has helped to create and inform, against all odds, a section of the political culture in the Western Cape in decisive ways.”

In 1985 NUM was formed as the successor to the NEUM. The League became one of the main affiliates of the NUM and many NUM members’ held leadership positions within the League. The principles of non-collaboration and non-racism remained central to NUM/TLSA policy. The implementation of the principle of non-collaboration manifested itself again with the rejection of the 1984 tricameral parliamentary system, such as the local government Regional Services Councils (RSCs ) and the House of Representatives (HoR) education department inter alia. The League and NUM nonetheless, remained relatively small and composed of predominantly “coloured” professionals and political activists. The League continued to criticise the apartheid regime and the ANC, and teacher organisations such as the CTPA, and later in the 1990s SADTU (South Africa Democratic Teachers Union).

The unbanning of the organisations of the liberation movement in February 1990 and the subsequent negotiation process between the ANC and NP, was rejected by the League and NUM as a betrayal of the liberation struggle. The NUM and the League therefore remained politically consistent in their criticism of rival political organisations and continued to see the liberation of the oppressed within the framework of the non-negotiable and minimum demands of the Ten-Point Programme. R.O.Dudley, then President of the NUM, crystallised their position:

The New Unity Movement therefore believes in the light of its political analysis, that the liberation of the oppressed will be a long and intense process of struggle. Negotiation now will be a gross betrayal of that struggle. Negotiation cannot empower the democratic movement, it cannot provide the basis for solutions to the grave economic, socio-educational, health problems generated by the present socio-economic order. It can but confer a new lease of life upon the ruling class. ... that section of the liberatory movement that has actually been involved in the arrangements to have these talks, has whittled away the base of the approach that they will adopt during the course of these talks, and in fact they have actually arrived at the position, that they say that ‘everything is negotiable’. And it underlines the fact that

negotiations now can be no more than a charade, it can be no more than a hopeless yet dangerous piece of make-belief that will shatter the entire decades of struggle on the part of the oppressed of this country, and it is a monumental and tactical victory of the rulers of this country over the exiled freedom fighters whom it feels strong enough to invite to parley with them. To parley what for actually? I think that it is to run the upgraded apartheid society as junior handy-men in the service of the state. It's an inescapable fact, that at this juncture of our history, the liberation movement in this country is in no position to negotiate from the position of a victor in the struggles so far. Let us not deceive ourselves in this regard, or deceive the masses struggling for emancipation. It may not be a very nice thing to say, but it is the correct thing to say, it is the very necessary thing to say.<sup>4</sup>

The League and the NUM later also called for the boycott of the April 1994 election which they denounced as a "fraud" and "undemocratic" (See the 50th Anniversary *Unity Movement Bulletin*, 1994).

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<sup>4</sup> R.O. Dudley presented the position of the NUM on the question of negotiations at the Centre for African Studies, UCT, April 1990. The cited extract is taken in part from the paper he delivered (ending at the ellipsis) with the second part a response to questions from the floor. The presentation was tape-recorded.

## CHAPTER 5

### A Weapon of Struggle?

#### The School Boycott 1985-1986

**Nobody in his senses would advocate taking our children away from the present segregated schools, since there are no other schools they can attend. This would be worse than cutting off our noses to spite our faces. In the one instance we have no choice in the matter. We must educate our children in the cause of liberation itself; they must acquire the intellectual equipment even though only segregated schools are open to them.**

I.B. Tabata (1952:19)

The year 1985 marked a historic watershed in the education crises of the Western Cape. The intensity of the conflict between the state's coercive apparatuses, viz. the police and army, and the parents, teachers and students of the oppressed community may be compared only to the student uprisings of 1976 and 1980.<sup>1</sup> However, the imposition of the state of emergency that followed firstly on 21 July 1985, extended to the Western Cape on 25 October of the same year, lifted in March 1986 and then reimposed in June 1986, was unprecedented and underscored the impact of the 1985 challenge to state authority.<sup>2</sup>

The historical precedent established by the NEUM leadership already in 1980 on the boycott, resulted in a sharp criticism from certain League teachers regarding the student boycott of classes in 1980:

being a teachers' organisation and being teachers at the schools, our emphasis was on the need for children to be educated, we were beginning to argue with the youth that they should first get their education and they could then join the political struggle.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the League's perspective on the application of the boycott in education, the 1985 school boycott posed the central question regarding the efficacy of the TLSA to intervene in

<sup>1</sup> Hirson (1979); Lodge (1983); Callinicos (1990); Molteno (1987).

<sup>2</sup> The government's implementation of a state of emergency in 1985 and again in 1986 had no precedent in the aftermath of the 1976 or 1980 crisis in education. This action by government signified the seriousness with which the ruling NP viewed the 1985 student revolt.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewee C. Bam (1993:58-61) also supports this position of the League.

the schooling crisis. Directly related to the latter question, was the declared unwillingness of the League to become a public organisation and give political direction to pupils and teachers. Interviewee C's justification is informative: "If action had been taken against the leadership of the Teachers' League, then the Teachers' League would have collapsed, the Teachers' League in fact would have disappeared, our job really was to keep the last fragments of the organisation together ...". While this type of rationalising is indicative of the protective and defensive character of the League in the 1980s, it is also a manifestation of an extremely weakened and fearful organisation, certainly not a combative one.<sup>4</sup> The League however may have been vindicated in its concern for the organisation's leadership, as the apartheid-state had begun intensifying the use of its coercive apparatuses against the anti-apartheid movement. The NP government, for example, shifted from the earlier reformist 'total strategy' to a new coercive WHAM<sup>5</sup> strategy in 1986.

The WHAM strategy fulfilled an important intimidatory function for government which included the systematic elimination of perceived revolutionaries. This change in government's approach became immediately evident with the introduction of treason trials in an attempt to neutralise leading political activists. Thus, for instance, prominent UDF operatives Popo Molefe, Terror Lekota and Moss Chikane were charged with conspiring with the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP). Also, before mid-1985, Matthew Goniwe, Fort Galata and other leading comrades who were part of the Cradock Residents Association, an affiliate of the UDF, had been assassinated.<sup>6</sup> The clandestine strategy of the League however, raises important questions about the *modus operandi* of the organisation and its members

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<sup>4</sup> The League also ceased publishing its *Journal* from 12 June 1986 due to the imposition of the State of Emergency and because of press regulations. *The Educational Journal* reappeared in January 1988 ( See *The Educational Journal*, January - February 1988, p.7.).

<sup>5</sup> WHAM was an abbreviation for 'winning hearts and minds'. The WHAM strategy was associated with the securocrats of government and defined as a counter-revolutionary strategy which assumed that: "resistance is a product of grievances exploited by revolutionaries. It follows that if revolutionaries are annihilated, the worst grievances addressed, and communities re-organised under trustworthy leaders supported by the security forces, then the ultimate political questions disappear" Swilling and Phillips (1989:147). This strategy emerged in response to the failure of the government's reforms of the early 1980s. These reforms were unsuccessful in suppressing the uprisings and rebellions that came with the constitutional among other reforms in labour and civil society.

<sup>6</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) investigations post 1994 revealed the role of the security police in the Cradock murders.

during one of the most critical periods of the educational struggle in South Africa. The foremost questions being: “How active were TLSA rank and file members?” and “What was the scope of their activities or contributions to the struggle in education during 1985 and 1986?” These questions will be examined within the context of the youth based school boycott that disrupted formal education in the schools of the oppressed.

The imposition of the state of emergency in the Transvaal, Reef and Eastern Cape in June 1985, was instrumental in igniting the unrest in the Western Cape schools and tertiary institutions that eventually embraced the entire oppressed community. Youth-based resistance initially spearheaded the opposition to state repression, activating many student and youth based organisations formed pre-1985. Bundy in his analysis of the Western Cape school boycott, asserts: “youth based resistance ... was the most dynamic element in local politics” (1987:12). Tertiary-based student organisations<sup>7</sup> also played a significant role in informing student activity, and certain of these groups attempted to link the declaration of the state of emergency to the struggles of communities and worker struggles in other parts of the country:

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY- was declared because of the courageous struggles of our people against low wages, unemployment, racist gutter education and murder of our community leaders ... the struggle in the W. Cape is the same as the struggle of our people in the E. Cape and Vaal Triangle (SOYA, 1985).

The alliances forged between workers and students<sup>8</sup> over the 1985 period, saw students linking themselves to community activities like the consumer boycott and worker strikes. A League member when reflecting on the nature of the 1985 youth resistance in comparison to the 1976 unrest remarked:

I saw the '85 boycotts as an improvement in the sense that people had a better perception of reality, of the South African political system, and how the economic, political and education system were interwoven, and certainly I did support the philosophy, the ideas that were emerging to an interesting

<sup>7</sup> Students of Young Azania (SOYA), Azanian Students Movement (AZASM), Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO) inter alia.

<sup>8</sup> The Western Cape Youth League (WCYL) came out in support of working class struggle, asserting: “Students must assist to make workers aware of their historic role in bringing about a new society free of exploitation and oppression” (1985:5). Molteno (1987:196) noted that if the students objective was to attain socialism, then the students should support working class leadership in the struggle. He therefore concludes: “... students should conduct their struggle in a way that supports the interests and the struggle of the working-class.”

extent especially among young people, ... the population comprised mainly young people. So the battle for the minds of the youth, that battle became even more important, and to me it was very pleasing that more and more young people and student movements became aware, you know, of the connection between ... their struggle in the education field and the struggle of their parents as workers ...<sup>9</sup>

The development of the worker-teacher-student alliance resulted in communities demanding and in some cases taking greater control of the schools.<sup>10</sup> Reaffirming the link between the community and the struggle in education, a League teacher stated: “It was your moral duty to side with the students, it was their education and their parents of course, so one had to form part of this whole movement of protest.”<sup>11</sup> Education then, as Giroux (1989:138) avers, became by implication a “terrain of struggle” where “teachers undertake social criticism ... [of] important social and political issues of their community and nation.” Particularly pertinent is the comparative study by Colin Bundy (1987), which revealed parallel features between youth student resistance in the Western Cape in 1985 and student unrest in Europe and Latin America during the 1960s and early 1970s. Bundy’s reference to the Latin American case studies, 1930-1950, concerning student militancy unveils instructively how: “Student revolutionaries learned that without allies elsewhere in society they could not topple regimes: ‘...coalitions were necessary’ ” (Bundy, 1987:6). Youth resistance therefore, at the beginning of the boycott, was endorsed by the League, as it was premised on parent and teacher support.

During the 1985 schools unrest many League teachers involved themselves in student programmes at their respective schools in order to engage and “to try to steer the students.”<sup>12</sup> These teachers attempted to assist with alternative lessons by arranging classes outside of school hours, including ‘awareness programmes’ during school hours. A League teacher who was active in the civic movement in his area for instance recalled:

<sup>9</sup> Interviewee I. See also *The Educational Journal*, December 1985, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> The bond between school based youth and the community was tested with the closure of schools by the then HoR (House of Representatives) minister of education Carter Ebrahim on 6 September, and its subsequent reopening by the communities. See for example *WE RE-OPEN OUR SCHOOLS: on Tuesday 17th September 1985 at 08h00*. A pamphlet issued by the Elsies River Community Organising Committee.

<sup>11</sup> Interviewee H. League members became involved in the PTSA movement and were elected to prominent positions, notably the chairpersons of Harold Cressy and Athlone High PTSAs, to mention two examples.

<sup>12</sup> Interviewee D.

I was a member of the Heathfield-Retreat District Ratepayers Association and they had taken a position that we would have afternoon classes for example, ... so these children would come and we would make arrangements for the hall, and some of us would go teach them, ... as against formal schooling. ... Awareness programmes, initially we supported them, there also, gave them material, helped them, ... the children weren't getting any schooling ... it was a strain for me also, and others also, and we tried very hard to cope with this situation.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the methodology employed in these awareness programmes a League member commented informatively:

Discussions mainly discussions ... pupils would introduce or ask questions and teachers would respond and we would have mini-lectures, and they would go off to rallies at other places and come back again and discuss what had taken place there, and many of them were honest and some sought guidance and got guidance, not only from Teachers' League teachers, there were other teachers also.<sup>14</sup>

This explanation is useful for its elucidation of League teachers methods of engaging with students at certain institutions, particularly those teachers attempts to give direction to the students struggles during the boycott period. These interventions by League teachers and others it appeared, gave rise to what Giroux has termed "a more political theoretical, and critical understanding of both the nature of domination and the type of action opposition it should engender" (1988:162). Many progressive teachers thus seemed to undertake the role of 'transformative intellectuals' or individuals who performed 'counter hegemonic' actions.<sup>15</sup>

A further development on the education front during the 1985 period was the emergence of an alternative teacher organisation, the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU) in September 1985. The impact of the educational crisis for teachers, students and parents acted as a catalyst in the formation of WECTU. A WECTU newsletter of December 1985 asserted: "WECTU

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<sup>13</sup> Interviewee J.

<sup>14</sup> Interviewee H. This point was confirmed by Interviewee L.

<sup>15</sup> Giroux (1988) defined 'transformative' intellectuals as functioning in a social critical role that critiqued and challenged dominant views of society. He claimed that the hegemonic views of society perpetuated unjust social relations. He therefore focused on the role educators played in producing and legitimating these existing social relations, and posited a 'counter hegemonic' strategy to alter these social relations.

was formed in order to unite progressive teachers in the Western Cape, and to provide them with the organisational machinery/structure to arrive at a position vis-à-vis the political struggle in general, and the present student struggle in particular.” WECTU therefore perceived its mission in 1985 to encompass largely the defence of students and teachers during a period of intense crisis.<sup>16</sup>

The League viewed WECTU’s politics as broadly progressive and therefore allowed its members who were predisposed to the union, to join the new teacher structure:

there were several of us, quite a few of us who joined WECTU ... with the idea of steering it. ... there were some very good elements inside of WECTU who were not League members who were very favourable ... who looked upon League members and its influence in a very favourable way ... there were others also who were anti-League ...<sup>17</sup>

The decision by certain League teachers to involve themselves in WECTU activities, arguably influenced the union’s politics. WECTU’s reaction to the viability of the boycott in education for instance, was politically informative: “We are reminded that the boycott is a political tool and not an end in itself and therefore has to be reassessed constantly as a matter of strategy ... [thus] it is our resolve that students return to classes” (*WECTU*, 1985 No.2.).<sup>18</sup> Also, the non collaboration clause in WECTU’s constitution, among other political statements, point to possible League influence in shaping the union’s programme and policies.<sup>19</sup>

The League’s organisational response to the school boycott was strategic, since although the organisation opposed the use of the boycott in education, “because you must have education in order to achieve liberation ... education had to be used to advance the progress of liberation,”<sup>20</sup> the League adopted a pragmatic approach to the vexed problem of the school boycott, guided by its members experiences at the schools where they taught. An official of the League attempted to clarify their strategic approach:

<sup>16</sup> Bundy (1987); *New Era*, 1986, pp.23-24; Christie (1991: 263-264); *WECTU*, June 1986, No.6.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewee J. Also confirmed by Interviewees C, O, D, E.

<sup>18</sup> Western Cape Teachers Union newsletter.

<sup>19</sup> There were other progressive supporters in WECTU who propagated ‘similar’ politics to the League. WECTU also included SACHED employees (teachers, lecturers inter alia).

<sup>20</sup> Interviewees K.

because there were different responses at the various schools, ... within the League there is scope for differences of opinion, and there's a very much more complex situation than our critics perceive in terms of divergence of opinion and differences in approaches and flexibility in terms of staff situations, because always our basic point is we must try to do what's in the best interest of the children. ... there was scope for, you know, difference in approach in terms of the particular circumstances at a school.<sup>21</sup>

Interviewee K, a high profile League member during the 1980s, put the position succinctly:

“No member of the organisation was expelled from the organisation because [s]he did support the boycott or did not support the boycott, you know, it was never an issue in that way.”<sup>22</sup>

This accommodating strategy of the League, perhaps well intentioned, seems to have created a degree of confusion among the organisation's members, as they were compelled to grapple in different ways and under difficult circumstances with the school boycott at their place of work.

A member described the difficulties of the situation in part:

there was also conflict on the staff because there were some very conservative people you see ... there were also radical elements on the staff, who deliberately encouraged, went out of their way to encourage the boycott and so on ... then there were hangers on ... then also the League's position at times was conflicting, wasn't clear, they wouldn't say that this ... like we don't support the boycott, ... [therefore] you have to take the position your staff takes.<sup>23</sup>

It appears that by accommodating the divergent experiences of its members, the League left its rank and file to rely on their own political acumen or level of political experience to inform their decisions. Some League teachers therefore responded to the dictates of their political convictions. In certain cases League teachers undermined the boycott at the institutions where they taught, and consequently faced heavy criticism from students and colleagues. These members tended to defend their political views by using the orthodox League arguments on occasion, to counter the dominant elements who supported the school boycott. A League teacher who decided to continue with lessons at the institution where she lectured claimed:

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<sup>21</sup> Interviewee I.

<sup>22</sup> Interviewees K. Members of the Teachers' League had divergent experiences at the schools in which they taught. These experiences informed the organisation's position strategically vis-à-vis the school boycott of 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Interviewee J.

I decided to teach while the school boycotts was, you know, happening, I was called a scab, I was called different names, but I could go out there and challenge people, say to them “one day I want people to respect me for my educational role that I played and for my political beliefs and not to just run the gauntlet because I want to be popular” ... So it was quite a traumatic time for me, in the sense that I felt that I had to teach ... to remember that while the struggle continues your education should also continue.<sup>24</sup>

This declaration is indicative of the ‘pro-education’, ‘pro-teaching’ and therefore ‘anti-boycott’ attitude of particular League teachers. These teachers regarded their primary role as educators to mean continuing with their teaching. This apparent ‘pro-teaching’ and probable ‘moralistic’ “I know better” attribute, appeared to convey an antagonistic attitude towards the prevailing anti-government, anti-schooling disposition of the students. The aforementioned scenario, though complex, might have been based on an inability of the teacher to communicate her ideas meaningfully to the student body at the school, or may have indicated a hostility toward the student body. Irrespective, the decision to continue with daily classes at school during the boycott period can be regarded as a tactical and strategic error, resulting in a possible breakdown of League teacher legitimacy at the school, with negative consequences for future intervention. In addition, and more generally, League teachers were reputed to have antagonised rival organisations and individuals in the liberatory movement because of their scathing criticisms and remarks. A former NEUM and League member Alexander (2001), for instance claims that the language employed by the movement, “was the polemical style which the TLSA and Unity Movement had always cultivated ...” and that “... the TLSA always erred on the side of polemical hyperbole.” Appropriate to this context is the advice of Mao tse Tung regarding intervention in mass struggle: “All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well intentioned ... we should wait patiently. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses.” (Cited in Freire, 1972:67). Intervention then, during the school boycott, required among other qualities patience and tact in order to secure the confidence of students.

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<sup>24</sup> Interviewee M. Interviewee F also opposed the school boycott.

In addition to engaging with students on a daily basis, League teachers encountered political differences among the staffs with whom they taught during the 1985 period. These dynamics created further anxiety for those League teachers who found themselves in conflict with their colleagues on the issue of the school boycott,

We had quite a mish-mash on the staff, a group of teachers who were religious and voiced all their decision-making on religious grounds, then you had the super radicals and the not so radical more liberal, then you had a few guys who (were) wholly and solely departmental. We had among the twenty-five, quite a mixture of people. It was healthy, it was good, and up to that point I think, it was a very harmonious group of teachers. ... (however) ... the upheavals that started to take place - the boycotts - one soon discovered that people took sides to such a divisive degree that we were no longer the kind of colleagues or comrades that we were previous or prior to that situation. The lines were very clearly drawn.<sup>25</sup>

These conflictual and adversarial staffroom dynamics resulted in members of rival political tendencies in the liberation movement accusing League teachers of being reactionary, since the League's anti-boycott politics appeared to coincide with the NP's opposition to the student boycott. The damage caused by these perceptions left an indelible scar on the League, as a stalwart in the organisation recollected:

There were attempts of course by the enemies of the Teachers' League to put us in the same camp as the Nats ... that we were reactionary, that we were against change, and so on, that claim to the League (remained) for a very long time, even when we went out on recruitment campaigns ... I went to a primary school in the Salt River area and I addressed the staff ... one person got up and said, but excuse me, "weren't you a reactionary body that sided with the Nats, you are now painting your organisation as progressive, but I think you were very conservative in fact you were down right reactionary." And I had to counter that argument ... and showed him extracts from the *Journals* of that time.<sup>26</sup>

Events reached a climax for teachers at the affected schools when students decided to embark on a protracted and indefinite boycott of classes by October 1985.<sup>27</sup> The student-youth politics

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<sup>25</sup> Interviewee L.

<sup>26</sup> Interviewee I.

<sup>27</sup> The Western Cape Students Congress (WECSCO) an umbrella body representing the majority of secondary schools, decided on 28 October not to write the year end exams (Anonymous, *Work In Progress*, 1986, No.45. p.25.).

took on a more directly confrontational form of “militancy” and “immediatism” against the state’s coercive machinery. This led a section of the youth to believe that the government was near defeat (Bundy, 1987; 1989). Their rationale formed the foundation for the logic of an indefinite boycott (Bundy, 1987; Alexander, 1990; Christie, 1991). The League, though initially sympathetic towards the students’ grievances, criticised the students decision to embark on an indefinite school boycott and not attend formal classes. It argued that the indefinite character of the boycott was incorrect, since instead of it being utilised as a tactic it had been elevated to a principle.<sup>28</sup> The League and its members opposed the call for the indefinite boycott of classes and its corollary the anti-educational and popular student slogan “liberation before education”,<sup>29</sup> which it associated with the strategy of ‘ungovernability’.<sup>30</sup> Once again, discord arose within the liberation movement as the TLSA lambasted the perceived “charterist” (ANC) influence on the boycotting students (Nasson, 1990:219; 1989:98).<sup>31</sup> A League teacher declared: “There was a call by the UDF especially, and as part of their strategy which involved students and teachers, to destabilise schools and to make schools the sites of struggle.”<sup>32</sup> Another League teacher was more vitriolic and aside from pointing to the divisive nature of the indefinite boycott, also linked the anti-educational youth based slogan ‘liberation now education later’ to the emergence of the Congress Alliance and UDF politics:<sup>33</sup>

This (the indefinite boycott) simply deepened and widened the chasm between those who were attempting to retain the education of the children during that period and to take it forward, and others who were simply: “You make the schools ungovernable, you are on the way to making the country ungovernable”. That was the kind of stupid logic that they had, and the kind

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<sup>28</sup> *The Educational Journal*, December 1985, p.3. The same December journal accused the students of resorting to ‘kamakazi’ politics or having a ‘masada complex’. WECTU similarly distanced itself from the students decision to continue indefinitely with the school boycotts (*WECTU*, December 1985, No.2. and January 1986, No.3.).

<sup>29</sup> Interviewees K. This assessment is corroborated by Callinicos (1990:10) and Pratt (1988:113,141,146,161) who also referred to the call for the indefinite boycott of classes, and popular call for the townships to become ‘ungovernable’.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Ungovernability’ was associated with the collapse of government control in the townships. Control was maintained by the police, military or government boards, committees among other structures. These ‘ungoverned’ areas were referred to as ‘liberated zones’ where ‘people’s power’ had been established.

<sup>31</sup> *Deduct*, UCT Education Faculty, 1985, pg. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Interviewee C.

<sup>33</sup> Alex Callinicos (1986:74-76) clarifies and contextualises the strategy of ‘ungovernability’ and the call for ‘liberation before education’ within the general strategy of the ANC’s “people’s war”. See also O’Meara (1996:325).

of misperception, that to instil in the minds of children to accept or believe that they could lead the struggle. That through their sacrifices, and what have you, that forgoing their schooling they would take the country through a revolutionary process, and revolution, and into freedom and hence 'liberation before education'. ... We gradually fought on as a core of teachers then, and got the students and the teachers who were, you know, the radical group, so to say, to accept the fact that the students had to be at school.<sup>34</sup>

This apparent hostility was indicative of the deep-seated differences between the anti-establishment groups that prevailed on staffs as a result of the boycott during the mid-1980s. These groups can be divided broadly into, what may be termed, the "populist"<sup>35</sup> elements, and the "principled" or "disciplined" component, whose approach to the struggle seemed closer to most League teachers perspectives and practices.<sup>36</sup> The latter group usually declared their rivals political practices 'emotional', 'misleading' and 'naive'.

The perception by League teachers that the Congress movement was exerting influence on the student body was not completely unfounded. An ANC aligned pamphlet circulated during the period maligned what it termed the reactionary coloured bourgeois teachers who were calling for a return to school, and attempted to rally the militant youth who were receptive to its message:

Never before has the revolution in our country reached such a critical stage. The enemy is weak. He has lost the initiative completely ... Nelson Mandela cannot be imprisoned in his jail any longer. It is only a matter of which day now.<sup>37</sup>

The students adoption of the slogan 'liberation before education' also resulted from the perception that schools simply reproduced passive products (students) for the labour market,

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<sup>34</sup> Interviewee L.

<sup>35</sup> The term 'populist' is usually interpreted negatively by leftist elements in the liberation movement. It was associated with a 'popular front', multi-class approach or perspective to struggle. It is also viewed as being politically re-active rather than pro-active when engaging the state. Populism is therefore associated with ad hocism and is viewed as the opposite to an accountable, organisational and disciplined approach to struggle.

<sup>36</sup> The League associated the populist movement with "chaos" and the practices of 'ungovernability' (*The Educational Journal*, October-November 1990, p.16.).

<sup>37</sup> *Congress Review* (1985:8). The negotiation process between government and Nelson Mandela, through the intercession of the EPG (Eminent People's Group) had begun. Negotiation was premised on the ANC abandoning the armed struggle.

and that most students from the oppressed community simply ended-up unemployed irrespective of their level of education (Pratt, 1988:30-34).<sup>38</sup> This perception was provided with evidence when the growing unemployment in the Western Cape in 1985 was qualified by Bundy (1987:42), as ranging between 15 and 30 percent.

The League responded to the students anti-educational slogans with the dictum “education for liberation.”<sup>39</sup> The interpretation of this slogan, for the League, was elaborated upon by an official of the organisation, who explained the ways in which League teachers intended the education environment to be used to politicise students and to transform schools into sites of struggle:

“Education for liberation” in League thinking ... was a very broad thing, it didn’t focus only on school curricular, it also in fact emphasised, and some people said over-emphasised, ... giving children especially high school students, an understanding of what was happening in South African society, especially on the economic and political fronts and preparing people, in that sense, to equip them to change society through understanding the mechanisms that were being used to oppress them. We thought that it was very important for the schools to function in that context, because ... the battle for the minds of the youth, and we from our perspective saw government and a state and all the reactionary forces, wanting to use the schools as a tool to reinforce their particular prescriptives, and in other words to consolidate their view of South African society. ... I, we believed in fact that the schools ... could be used as a weapon against the oppressor if we, through our teachers, ... and also our parents, PTAs and so on, could get our students to focus on what was happening not only in schools but in society as a whole, and to understand the various ways and means being used to oppress them, we could further the struggle, further the cause of liberation. So we felt the schools had to continue to function.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> E. Pratt (1988), claims this was a perception among certain students during the 1985 boycotts. This analysis echoed what could be termed a synthesis of “reproductive” and “correspondence” theories. This theory was based on the South African education system retaining its racial and class character. These two theories of education were associated with Althusser (1968) and Bowles and Gintis (1976). WECTU defined the student slogan “liberation before education” as a reflection of the “reproduction” and “correspondence” theories within a South African context.

<sup>39</sup> The counter slogan “liberation for education” was also the rallying call of WECTU (*WECTU*, December 1985, No.2. and January No.3. 1986; Pratt 1988). WECTU teachers’ opposed the students analysis of the education crisis. WECTU posited an alternative ‘resistance’ theory of education that was critical of the reproductionist and correspondence theorists. The theory of Paulo Freire (1972) was propagated by WECTU members, as it promoted critical thinking for learners as opposed to the passive acceptance of authority (*WECTU*, December 1985, No.2. and January No.3. 1986).

<sup>40</sup> Interviewee I.

This thinking was consistent with League philosophy and had historical antecedents dating back to 1952, when Edgar Maurice, a high profile member of the organisation, presented a paper, *The Role of the Non European in the Liberatory Struggle*. Maurice claimed that the political and the education struggle were interlinked. He therefore coined the concept ‘education for social change’, where the teacher was expected to challenge the social and political system by utilising the tools and materials society provided. Hence, for Maurice (1952:9), the teacher had to be “actively involved in the liberation struggle and armed with liberatory ideas.”

The way in which League teachers hoped to apply the above philosophy, given the background of the indefinite boycott of schools, presented them with a dilemma, as the student ‘liberation before education’ strategy had created deep divisions in a community which up to that point had collectively opposed government harassment of students and teachers. In addition, the potential and dynamism of the boycott began to wither, translating eventually into what was termed a ‘borecott’ as awareness programmes lost momentum at many schools and social misdemeanours set-in. A League teacher remarked:

alternative programmes turned out in most cases a complete farce. They spoke for half-an-hour about politics and so on and then people became restless ... many of them used the break from formal schooling for their personal agendas, you know, parties and drug taking and boozing and so on ... there was a terrific increase in pregnancies during that period.<sup>41</sup>

Bundy’s (1987:25) claim, regarding the political character of student-youth movements, supports this League teachers allegation, since according to him: “it is difficult for them [the youth] to sustain continuity of activity, organisation or perhaps even programme and ideology.”

For League teachers, events unfolded in a complicated manner, due in the main to the organisation’s response to the students anti-educational strategy. The League continued to accommodate its members divergent positions, because conditions at the various schools

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<sup>41</sup> Interviewees K.

differed. Consequently, while many students by October 1985 had received little if any tuition for the year, certain League teachers persisted with preparing students for their final examinations and were severely criticised:

So you would have this position, where my past neighbour, he taught at Crestway and they had no exams ... and we had the strong position that we (are) going to let the children write, and it was a helluva fight that. Yes, that came towards the end of the year. Livingstone of course allowed their children to write, we allowed our children to write. Crestway no, Cressy not. I know people always pointed to Cressy and they pointed to Crestway. In fact I had it said directly to me, sort of thrown to me in my face, that we claim to be so progressive and here we are setting exams and letting the children write and look at a school like Crestway, ... they were seen as progressive people...<sup>42</sup>

A League teacher at a school in Grassy Park also found himself in an invidious position regarding the final examinations;

I wasn't very happy about the situation being forced upon us ... But the parents insisted they wanted their kids to write the final exam, they couldn't see their children losing a year's education. Whether they were in std 6 or whether they were in matric. So yes, we were forced into that situation, and that was what was happening, it was almost becoming reactionary. The good work that we had done to keep the children at school, in order to carry on the educational process was actually turning against those of us who regarded ourselves as being progressive, ... in fact, if I had to I would've said, no the children are not ready, the exams should have been postponed.<sup>43</sup>

This was clearly a perplexing and difficult period for League teachers, who were forced to make tactical and strategic decisions and had to accept the consequences of those decisions. At certain institutions teachers were divided among themselves, and in a few instances League teachers took decisions against their colleagues. A League teacher described her opposition to the writing of the exam, which ran counter to the staff decision to have students write the final examinations:

Our school kids had effectively three months of teaching, and I said to the principal at the time ... that there is no way that you can set an examination and test these kids and let these kids go over, they've done nothing. ... I said

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<sup>42</sup> Interviewee J. Another alleged League school which decided to write the final exam was South Peninsula High.

<sup>43</sup> Interviewee L.

that it is either that or they forfeit the year, ... No, he did not want that, and in the end he insisted on having an examination, and I said sorry I can't be part of that. ... I didn't support the end of the year exams. How can you promote a child say from std 7 to std 8 if they, and they haven't done any work. What was the std 8 teacher going to do, you see, I just, I couldn't understand ... at some schools people sort of decided that look just get them into the new standard and, and do some patchwork in the new year ....<sup>44</sup>

A prominent League teacher, who was an official in the organisation, likewise supported and sympathised with those students who refused to write the final examinations:

The reason why the students had decided that they weren't going to write was because they weren't prepared. They were not mentally, intellectually prepared for an examination, right, and you will recall that I think it was during that year also that the schools for a short time had been closed by Carter Ebrahim .... I felt that the state was responsible, to a large extent, for the position in which the students were, that's number one. Number two, the students were after many years, engaged in what I regarded as a just cause. Many of them had decided that, that year wasn't really going to be lost, because they had lost the year in any case. Their argument was they had lost the year in any case .... if they passed at the end of the year, if they wrote the examination and passed, then it wouldn't have been of their doing, but the results would have been crooked because they felt they weren't ready for the exams ... even emotionally they weren't prepared to actually write, and it was going to be a sham ...<sup>45</sup>

Many students nevertheless decided to write at alternative venues and under armed guard, to avoid being singled out and victimised by those students who had decided to sacrifice writing the final exam. League teachers who had opposed the boycott in this volatile context, refused to assist with the supervision of exams and decided to risk possible dismissal:

Students didn't want to write here at the institution and ... they were forced to go and write at the sports ground and under the guidance of the army, and I know we were then four members of staff that decided we were not going to participate in managing or administering what was happening. So the department threatened us, that we were going to lose our jobs if we not going to invigilate and mark and do that, and we were prepared to do that, so we wrote letters and I remember Harry Hendricks was our rector at that stage. He called us in, he told us the implications and we wrote our letters and we handed it in. We were not sacked and nothing happened, and we don't know

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<sup>44</sup> Interviewee F.

<sup>45</sup> Interviewee O.

what happened between him and the department, but four of us decided that we won't participate in that.<sup>46</sup>

These lecturers were fortunate as Harry Hendricks was also a long standing member of the League. It can be said however, that the willingness of these lecturers to resist departmental stipulations while being threatened by government was consistent with the League's history of opposing apartheid policies. This opposition to government was not unprecedented as League teachers were guided by their political and pedagogical convictions. Understood in this way, these teachers' acts of defiance, and their "solidarity of resistance alert(s) [one] ... to the historical conditions that construct such experiences" (Giroux, 1988:xxxiv). Experiences of other League members who also refused to administer the final examinations, highlight examples of League teachers resistance to the status quo during 1985.

The most noteworthy example of League resistance during the boycott period was the Harold Cressy High experience.<sup>47</sup> The Harold Cressy school community decided as a collective not to have their students write the final exam. This community decided that their students had not been adequately prepared for the year end exam. The principal and senior staff at Harold Cressy including the chairperson of the PTSA were League members. A leading League member explained concisely the reason for the Harold Cressy PTSA taking the decision not to write the exam, also the plan they adopted to assist teachers victimised by the education department, and his position regarding the boycott:

Mr Richie and the senior members of staff were dismissed from their posts because of their hard-line decision that the students were not going to write ... I was party to that decision. ... I was determined my son wasn't going to write, and Harold Cressy PTSA set-up a fund-raising committee to raise funds for those teachers. .... We raised sufficient funds to pay those teachers at least a part of their monthly salaries, because they also lost salary. ... I couldn't square my position in relation to Harold Cressy which was a hard-line, and the fact that here teachers were suffering because of that decision,

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<sup>46</sup> Interviewee M. According to reports a few teachers responded to the call to administer exams, which resulted in teachers being victimised as: "Police threatened teachers who refused to administer exams with detention, while the DEC threatened dismissal" (*Work In Progress*, 1986:25)

<sup>47</sup> See Houghton's (2000) dissertation outlining the details of the events as it unfolded at Harold Cressy during the 1985 school boycott.

and then find myself at my institution taking a different position ... I had to be true to the position that I had taken in relation to Harold Cressy ...”<sup>48</sup>

League teachers and those not aligned to the organisation who were dismissed at Harold Cressy, embarked upon a short and intense struggle against the department and were reinstated early in 1986. Their victory could be ascribed to the support given by the League and WECTU, as part of their ‘hands off our teachers’ campaign, which had successfully elicited popular support from teachers and school communities.<sup>49</sup> This action indicated to teachers and to the League that solidarity mass action could achieve critical victories against the apartheid state. This victory however did not influence the League’s clandestine and veiled method of struggle. The League, for example, did not register its support for the return to school campaign as outlined in the pamphlet entitled *Let us return to formal academic classes Let us continue the struggle inside and outside of the schools*, which was endorsed by over 155 organisations in the Western Cape.<sup>50</sup> By refusing to place itself in the public eye, it could be deduced that the League and its teachers contributions to struggle during 1985 probably remained unknown to large numbers of teachers and students.

Nonetheless, the choice of whether or not to write the final exam split the student body, due to pressure from parents and certain institutional authorities:

You could actually see on a daily basis students ... beginning to have a rethink as to whether they were going to write or not, ... and I remember students in the corridors actually crying because very close friends had come to tell them that morning that they were going to write. Until eventually there was a small group, because they were risking their careers now, and I would assume their parents at home had told them that ‘we can’t afford to sacrifice another year’ ... There were people who were opposed to the boycott on the staff because they were fairly close to the administration or they were in promotion posts ... and who were constantly almost on a daily basis talking to the students, and telling them that they were stupid, that they were actually jeopardising their chances ... of getting through that year. ... Then students were told that at the department there was a black book . So their names would get into the black book, okay. Amongst the students also the administration had spies ... actually watching who the leaders were ... so that kind of intimidation

<sup>48</sup> Interviewee O.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *Work In Progress*, 1986, pp. 26-27.

<sup>50</sup> Pamphlet titled, *Let us return to formal academic classes Let us continue the struggle inside and outside of the schools*. Athlone, 28 January 1986.

eventually began to have an effect upon the students, ...by the end of the year, ... there was a small group that held out towards the end.<sup>51</sup>

The students protracted boycott actions however did not only lead to divisions within their own ranks, but also to the fracturing of a community spirit which had persisted through most of 1985.<sup>52</sup> Thus the notion of the schools of the oppressed being conceived as “public spheres where both teachers and students work together to forge a new emancipatory vision of community and society” (Giroux, 1988:xxxvi), experienced a serious set-back. This scenario supported Molteno’s (1987:88) observation regarding the preceding 1980 Western Cape school boycott:

A school boycott will generally achieve whatever it can achieve within a relatively short period. A protracted boycott will yield diminishing returns to the point of becoming counter productive when disillusion and division set in.

The schools boycott of 1985 dissipated leaving many students disillusioned because: “They realised they had naively underestimated the strength and resilience of the state.”<sup>53</sup> A League teacher commented on the demoralisation of students after the boycott at the school where she taught:

In a sense, many of the kids at our school who were actively involved and who dropped out, they dropped out completely, ... they thought that at the end of it all they would, they would receive some kind of favour, whether it would have been that, “okay we’ve missed out all these lessons they going to pass us”, or “we will at least get a job or something.” It didn’t happen for them ...<sup>54</sup>

A notable parallel in describing the consequences of the protracted boycott for students, is Willis’s (1983) ethnographic study in Liverpool England, where he showed how resistance lent itself to the reproduction of social relations. Willis describes how, what he termed, “the lads” counter cultures or anti-intellectualism created an element of ‘self damnation’ that contributed to their working class underprivilege, and thus the reproduction of the capitalist social order.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. The division in the student body was elaborated on by WECTU teachers in the *New Era* (1986:24).

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, *Work In Progress*, 1986, p.26. See also *The Educational Journal*, December 1985, p.3.

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, *Work In Progress*, 1986, p.28.

<sup>54</sup> Interviewee F.

This correlation between anti-educationalism and the reproduction of social relations is akin to Alexander's (1990:15) assertion which extends and contextualises a similar point of view:

The 'indefinite boycott' leads students onto the labour market long before they have to go there and, for many, to a condition of political apathy which becomes an obstruction to the liberation movement.

Historical precedent had revealed two-and-a-half decades earlier the divisive consequences of an extended boycott of schools. Pertinent is Giroux's (1988) concept of 'liberating memory',<sup>55</sup> when events repeat themselves in a different time and context. Indeed, significant historical lessons existed regarding the use of the boycott in education. The 1950s had revealed how the ANC and Congress Youth League's advocacy of the school boycott against Bantu education failed because "little consideration was given to the fact that parents ... depended on the schools to occupy their children while they were away from home" (Hirson, 1976:50). This strategy had resulted in many children not returning to school and many being expelled. The CATA and League alternatively implemented a boycott of the Bantu School Committees' and Bantu School Boards, the "very pillars" upon which Bantu Education was built (Kayser, 1997:68). As a result, repressive actions were taken against CATA<sup>56</sup> and League teachers, and many of them were dismissed from teaching (See Molteno, 1988:96-101).

The consequences attached to the withdrawal of children from the schools (then termed segregated schools) exposed the anti-schooling strategy as unrealistic. Alternatively, as the *New Unity Movement Bulletin* in 1985 pointed-out, and as Lenin proposed in the wake of the Russian revolution, regarding the construction of a new society: "We must distinguish between what was bad in the old school and what is useful to us ... by using the stock of human forces and means that have been left to us by the old society."<sup>57</sup> According to this outlook, knowledge acquired under the prevailing system of education may be construed as necessary

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<sup>55</sup> 'Liberating memory' has many features. The appropriate feature for this study is: "uncovering and analyzing those forms of historical and popular knowledge that have been suppressed or ignored and through which we once again discover the 'ruptural effects of conflict and struggle'" (Cited in Freire, 1988a:xxxv).

<sup>56</sup> Hyslop (1999:87-93) acknowledges the League and CATA's role in the 1950s boycott of the 'bantus' schooling administrative structures. He however also highlights the sectarianism of the NEUM, concluding that the demise of CATA was self inflicted, and that the "inquest on CATA must return a verdict of suicide by sectarianism" (1999:92).

<sup>57</sup> *New Unity Movement Bulletin*, 1987, Vol.1. No. 3. p.10. See also V.I. Lenin (1977:603-604).

building blocks for a future alternative society. This perspective on education coincided with the League's educational vision, notably "to strive to bring to the oppressed, in the shortest time possible, literacy, scientific skills - upon which modern civilization bases its creation of wealth - and as much as possible of what colour-bar society denies them."<sup>58</sup> Historical precedent appeared to guide the boycott strategy of the League in the 1980s.

The League was not absent from the educational struggles of the 1985 period. Instead, what is apparent is that despite the absence of the public face of the League, its membership played a significant role in the schools and colleges where they were located and taught, and where they had to operate under trying circumstances. It can be argued, however, that the organisation's inability to intercede on behalf of its members with clear political direction during the boycott was its shortcoming. The League leadership was also hesitant or unable to make clear strategic decisions, premised it seems on fear for the organisation's survival. It thus allowed political rivals to capitalise on the, at times, ambiguous decisions of its members, who on many occasions were representing the organisation. The League was consequently branded either progressive, conservative or reactionary, depending on their members public disposition and practice. The TLSA's strength however, remained in the realm of political and educational theory, which its membership was able to inject on occasion into the education struggle through their activities in various institutions and or organisations.

The collapse of formal schooling in the oppressed community due to the failure of the 1985 school boycott, resulted in a call by the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC) to reclaim the terrain of schooling and education for liberatory purposes, and to install people's education. The concept of people's education and the League's response to this initiative will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

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<sup>58</sup> *The Educational Journal*, January-February 1988, p.3.

## CHAPTER 6

### People's Education for People's Power?

**Manipulation, sloganizing, 'depositing', regimentation, and prescription cannot be components of revolutionary praxis, precisely because they are components of the praxis of domination. In order to dominate, the dominator has no choice but to deny true praxis to the people, deny them the right to say their own word and to think their own thoughts. He cannot act dialogically; for him to do so would mean either that he had relinquished his power to dominate and joined the cause of the oppressed, or that he had lost that power through miscalculation.**

P. Freire (1972:97)

For the TLSA the concept of people's education was located in what could be broadly defined as alternative education. As indicated in the previous chapter, the League posited the term "education for liberation" otherwise referred to as "education for social change" as the rubric under which the organisation could present its alternative ideas on education. An alternative educational perspective was not necessarily viewed as progressive and liberatory by the League. This political and pedagogical stance, it will be contended, influenced the League and its members response to people's education. Moreover, though the League officially, and many of its members individually, viewed the mid-to-late 1980s popularity of people's education as an ANC initiative given impetus by the Congress movement, League members comprehended and interpreted the concept in different ways. The government's repressive measures form the background to this account but are not accorded a particular emphasis. These issues are key to examining the League's attitude and response to the notion of people's education and 'People's Education for People's Power'.

Various writers in education have attempted to explain the rationale for the emergence of people's education. Johan Muller (1987:321) and Pam Christie (1991:268-269) et. al., locate people's education in the aftermath of 1985. These writers both point to the adoption of the slogan 'People's Education for People's Power' as a strategy intended to off-set the anti-educational slogan "liberation before education." Smangaliso Mkatshwa (1985:240,246)

therefore attempted to define the educational initiative: “The call is now for education for liberation, justice and freedom. It is a demand for full participation in all social structures ... That is why current schools must be taken over and transformed from within, ....” Other educationists such as Petjie (1989) and Alexander (1990:73-176), have focused on the break down or dislocation in the student teacher relationship. These writers claim that students continued to question the political credibility of their teachers, particularly after 1976, and therefore perceived their teachers as agents of the ruling class. Petjie (1989:60) asserts for instance, that for teachers: “The disappearance of legitimacy might lead to antagonisms between students and teachers.” Richard Levin, Ian Moll and Yogesh Narsing (1991:232) have furthermore attempted to place People’s Education within the oppositional politics of counter hegemonic action. They allege that the formation of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC)<sup>1</sup> in March 1986 did not involve “the establishment of alternative curricula (although this was clearly important) ... the real issue [was] the struggle for political control of education.”<sup>2</sup> Wolpe (1991) also located his analysis within the broad liberation movement, and argued that students failed to secure schools as alternative sites of struggle because they boycotted the schools, whereas oppressed communities were able to alter townships into alternative organs of people’s power (See also Christie, 1991:274). Thus for Wolpe, students had no alternative but to return to schools to struggle towards people’s power in education.

Although the above mentioned authors differ on the rationale for the establishment of people’s education, all of them seem to view people’s education as a mid-1980s concept. It was with this ahistorical conceptualisation of people’s education that the League took issue:

It started with 1976 as the beginning of people’s history, its almost disregarding the forty or fifty years that went before, that produced a 1976 ... it was limited because it attempted to produce almost an instant history and a

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<sup>1</sup> The NECC was formed, March 1986, in Durban and included parents, teachers and students as part of a broadly based democratic and non-racist educational process. It became the organisational vehicle to take forward the concept of people’s education. Regional committees were to be formed, via the NECC, to assist with local regional implementation of conference decisions. Educational institutions such as Natal University, University of Witwatersrand and the University of the Western Cape formed centres to promote the concept and stimulate debate on people’s education.

<sup>2</sup> The government’s repressive state of emergency resulted in the NECC’s implementation of people’s education being curtailed: “It was almost impossible to hold meetings with parents, teachers and students, and to move forward in shaping People’s Education” (Christie, 1991:286). The contest for political dominance therefore superseded the struggle for an alternative education.

revived history of the ANC version of the liberation movement, you know, that was its limitation.<sup>3</sup>

The tradition of alternative pedagogy was not new at all to League teachers'. Indeed, they were well known by the "coloured" community for their politicisation of education and their influence on their students.<sup>4</sup> Edgar Maurice (1952:7), a leading member of the TLISA, stated as early as the 1950s already:

we must all be aware of the intimate relation which exists between the educational system of a country and its political system ... it is this employment of the educational process to foster opposition to the *status quo* which is the vital force in education for social change. ... there are definite indications among both the teachers and the rising generation that this is being done.

The leadership role assigned to the teacher-cum-intellectual is embedded in the League's history, as these intellectuals had a choice, to "place themselves at the head of their people and launch a struggle against the government or to side with the rulers against their own people" (Tabata, 1952:15).<sup>5</sup> The concept of 'teacher as intellectual' parallels the Gramscian 'organic intellectual'<sup>6</sup> and Giroux's 'transformative intellectual',<sup>7</sup> whose liberatory tasks were ascribed, hence: "intellectuals can play an important role in empowering individuals and groups within oppositional public domains" (Giroux et. al., 1988:153).

Certain League members interpreted people's education broadly, and did not perceive it as novel but rather an important dimension of their teaching when presenting alternative ideas to students:

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewees K.

<sup>4</sup> Schools like Livingstone High, Harold Cressy High, Trafalgar High and South Peninsula High were well known as NUM/League schools but also schools who excelled academically.

<sup>5</sup> *The Educational Journal*, June 1988, p.3. echoed this perspective.

<sup>6</sup> The 'organic intellectual' or the 'new intellectual' of the working class implied the "development of its own political leaders, its own organizers, who are indispensable to its political constitution as a class. ... here then we have Gramsci's definition of the 'new intellectual', the organic intellectual of the working class, the synthesis of the 'specialized and the political' " (Guiseppe Vacca, 1982:63-65).

<sup>7</sup> The 'transformative intellectual' for Giroux (1989:152), involved intellectuals who "emerge from and work with any number of groups which resist ... their social formation." He furthermore states that: "The epithet 'organic' in our case cannot be reserved for those intellectuals who take the working class as the only revolutionary agent. ... radical intellectuals define their political terrain by offering to students forms of oppositional discourse and critical social practices ...." (Ibid.).

If you were a member of the Teachers' League at that particular time then this was something which you had to do. It was a question of stepping out of the formal education arena and addressing social problems. ... So I didn't see it as something new. ... People said that we were already busy with this kind of thing ... I'm not talking about a few, but everybody must see their role, you know, as a person who is busy with alternative education, you (are) supposed to already, when you (are) a teacher in the Teachers' League, to step out of the formal curriculum also, and to address certain social issues whether by the way of debate or whether by way of a discussion in the classroom ... It was part of our duty, I think it's part of everyone's duty to be part of this whole alternative education if you regard yourself as a true educator.<sup>8</sup>

The League members cited, were not only clear on the significance of people's education as an alternative to CNE, but also on their role in implementing it. The notion of the educator being willing and able to step outside of the formal curriculum was pedagogically significant for League teachers. This approach was explained by a long standing member of the organisation, when commenting on the interventionist and professional role of the teacher:

The professional has political forces at play in his/(her) life, and engages both the academic and political and brings them into the classroom in order to broaden the framework of understanding of the pupils and shift the horizons of the pupils away from the ghetto and into the larger world. Make him/(her) aware that he is a player not inside of his/(her) little ghetto, but that (s)/he is in fact a person who can play a role inside of a larger world outside there, and then I think you are (not only) being professional in that sense, but being politically professional.<sup>9</sup>

This conception of the political and pedagogical role of the teacher, seemingly converges with the notion that educators should not merely be seen as: "Performers professionally equipped to realise effectively any goals that may be set for them. Rather [they should] be viewed as free men and women with a special dedication to the values of the intellect and the enhancement of the critical powers of the young" (Giroux, 1989:133). Premised on this mode of thinking, the League teacher was to perform a custodial role for the oppressed.

This notion of liberatory theory can be given substance when examined more closely in the context of classroom practice, since for the League, the teacher could operate subversively

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<sup>8</sup> Interviewee L.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewee B.

“against the ‘dispensers of gutter education’ ” to transform education.<sup>10</sup> Informative is the perspective of a League member who explained his approach to history teaching:

We encouraged students to go out and talk to the elderly people ... and point out to students, the bias, the propaganda of the text books. Also, is reading between the lines, and point out to them why some things maybe were deliberately confusing ...<sup>11</sup>

This approach to teaching when translated into pedagogical theory reflects firstly, a ‘history from below’ that intersects with what Luli Callinicos (1988:4-6) refers to as a “popular history”, espousing hidden or “ordinary people’s” history and not that of the “great, famous and powerful”. Secondly, in terms of “people’s history”,<sup>12</sup> ‘history from below’ mirrored attempts “to give ordinary people the historical tools to engage with the past; to empower ordinary people to become producers of their own history” (Witz, 1991:370). Thirdly, this approach to history teaching questioned the prescribed text book ‘top-down’, ‘chalk-and-talk’ teaching methodology employed by certain educators that usually resulted in a history removed from people’s experiences, since as Bam and Visser (1994:11) state: “History classes and textbooks are remembered as repetitive and dull, and seemed to involve little more than a never ending burden of rote learning.”

It was not only in history teaching that the influence of people’s education impacted League members. To a League teacher who taught the sciences, people’s education also appeared to present an alternative method of teaching: “For me it was a vehicle not only to be conscientising people politically, socially, but also to be teaching them ... mathematical skills from a different angle, from a different perspective ....”<sup>13</sup> In this instance, it became evident

<sup>10</sup> *The Educational Journal*, March 1986, p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Interviewee J.

<sup>12</sup> Although ‘people’s history’ was seen as a subset of people’s education similar to “people’s mathematics” or “people’s English” among other subject variations and therefore a South African invention, the concept probably predates people’s education. Cultural Marxists writing in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the English historians E.P. Thompson (1968) *The Making of the English Working Class* and Christopher Hill (1972) *The World Turned Upside Down* focused on ordinary people in their writings (J.Tosh, 1991:174).

<sup>13</sup> Interviewee G. Interviewee M also commented on the possibilities of implementing ideas associated with people’s education in the sciences.

that alternative education fulfilled an emancipatory role for certain League members that went beyond the boundaries of the formal curriculum, since “the ideological and political terms which people use to represent and to concretise their struggles are not drawn from within the confines of the classroom, school or community. Instead, they are mediated by political relations in general” (Levin, 1991:237).

While the above assessment of the League points to a particular perception of its liberatory theory and practices, the efficacy of this strategy was brought into question when a League teacher noted that the organisation’s political focus tended to overshadow the methodological aspects of teaching. According to this teacher: “The organisation wasn’t there for me to help me to be a better teacher. It helped me to be a better thinking teacher in terms of my political understanding and to be able to contextualise things but not to be a better science practitioner.”<sup>14</sup> There may be merit in this statement, as it is apparent that the organisation neglected to explore the possibility of establishing subject committees,<sup>15</sup> where teachers as part of their liberatory role could interact and share their methodologies and knowledge of their subject or areas in which they had expertise. Although it could be contended that the responsibility of organising subject related committees rests to a large degree on the initiative of members and should not be a directive from the officialdom or executive, this matter nevertheless points to an area that requires closer investigation in terms of examining the pedagogical practices employed by League teachers’ during the apartheid era.

The League’s perspective on people’s education, when scrutinised, was also guided by pragmatic concerns associated with the implementation process rather than a rejection of the educational initiative. A League official recalls:

We were wondering how you were actually going to do it ... if the inspectors were going to come around and listen to your teaching ... And we were wondering whether it was possible ... to make an all-out assault on the existing education system ... In other words had the struggle reached the stage where you could say ‘f-off’ with the present syllabuses, and how were

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<sup>14</sup> Interviewee M.

<sup>15</sup> These subject committees could cover aspects of the syllabus such as history, geography, art among other curriculum related subjects.

you going to in fact introduce your own syllabuses? ... So on purely technical grounds, not on political grounds ... there was a hesitancy. ... So probably, we would say good ideas, marvelous ideas, we support the ideas completely but are they capable of implementation.<sup>16</sup>

Another League official concurred: “the main outline, ... was progressive, ... it was the elaboration we found fault with.”<sup>17</sup> The organisational position of the League regarding people’s education was therefore arguably one of qualified support. League members who were operative on the ground in a daily teaching capacity engaged with the alternative people’s education phenomenon in different ways. Thus, while certain members supported the concept: “People’s education, I ... saw it as not what the syllabus prescribed, what people prescribed, I was very supportive of it”,<sup>18</sup> a central concern and criticism was the practicability of people’s education. It appeared to the League that people’s education was “unrealistic” and “insubstantial” within the current political and socio-economic system, and that “the liberation movement [could not] afford facile sloganising about People’s Education ... This must give way to serious political thinking and education planning.”<sup>19</sup> The League therefore questioned the alternative content proposed by people’s education, since “the substantive content of people’s education remained undeveloped ... with little or no focus on the development of alternative policies and structures to replace the institutional structure of apartheid education” (Ahmed Essop, 1992:3). Particular League teachers were vitriolic in their criticism of people’s education, and disputed the alternative and progressive character of the concept:

What is people’s education? What is alternative education? Why are we using words like alternative education? If there is an alternative, then if you were a progressive political, then why were you not using those alternatives in the first place, because that is the work of a cadres, is the work of a politico, that is the work of a teacher ... I can only say to them that are you guys saying actually that what you have been doing in the classroom was the alternative to what you proposing now? In other words, you were actually brainwashing the kids, you were teaching them Eiselen-De Vos-Malan CNE education ... and now you want to put an alternative into the classroom ... Why do you want to teach them alternatives now ... And I disagreed with that, because I

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<sup>16</sup> Interviewee O.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewees K.

<sup>18</sup> Interviewee J. Also Interviewee E and Interviewee O.

<sup>19</sup> *The Educational Journal*, January-February 1988, p.3; June 1991, p.4.

said you can't have this concept of the alternative, you supposed to be doing these things all the time.<sup>20</sup>

Instead, *The Educational Journal* proposed an "alternative" form of education that advanced the concept "education for liberation",<sup>21</sup> which focused on the emancipatory role of the teacher specifically, and which required the support and co-operation of students and parents. Via the collective 'triad' of teacher, parent, student, the League envisaged turning schools into centres of resistance.<sup>22</sup> This strategy of attempting to transform schools appears to correspond with the Gramscian conception of 'war of position',<sup>23</sup> whereby schools become repositories of resistance to fulfill 'counter hegemonic' tasks. The League therefore had a particular interpretation of liberatory education that was at variance with the NECC's understanding of people's education.

A section of League teachers aligned to the NUM were critical of people's education and the popular call for 'People's Education For People's Power', which they branded as sloganeering:

It was very emotional and it worked on people ... What I had a problem with, was what was the content of it, and I couldn't see behind the slogan, where they were going with this, and because of that, because I couldn't understand it I didn't believe in it.<sup>24</sup>

This observation was supported by other League teachers': "I thought it was a populist slogan just to capture people with 'power to the people', that kind of thing. It's fine as a slogan but how does one translate it into practical terms. How do people take power?"<sup>25</sup> These concerns were echoed by non-League educationists as well, such as Levin (1991:125) who claimed that "people's education was plunged into crisis, not only because of state repression, but because

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<sup>20</sup> Interviewee L.

<sup>21</sup> *The Educational Journal*, January-February 1988, p.3. October-November 1990, p.3. See also June 1988, pp.1-3.

<sup>22</sup> *The Educational Journal*, March 1986, pp. 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> Gramsci conceived of the war of movement 'manoeuvre' to encompass a frontal attack on enemy lines, which had resulted in the success of the 1917 Russian revolution. The strategic value of the 'war of position' on the other hand pertained to civil society as a terrain of contestation where "the dominant class organises its hegemony and the terrain on which opposition parties and movements organise, wins allies and build their social power" (David Forgacs, 1988:224). Educational institutions therefore constituted sites of struggle where a protracted 'war of position' played itself out between the state and elements of civil society.

<sup>24</sup> Interviewee M. Interviewee F similarly questioned the content of people's education.

<sup>25</sup> Interviewee H.

of considerable lack of clarity over what it precisely meant. It is always easier to coin a slogan than to give it serious content and direction.” The ambiguity of people’s education then, and its implications for the League and its members, require closer political inspection.

The term ‘people’s power’ was a politically problematic phrase for many League members. These members held the view that the notion of ‘people’s power’ was linked to party political allegiances. Some League teachers therefore claimed that people’s education was being abused and used for the incorrect party political reasons:

People’s education I think was possibly another ... vehicle for specific organisations to ... get people to support certain organisations philosophy rather than ... for them to be expressing their ideas and their aspirations and their wishes, as struggling people should have done ... its been that whole grand plan that I began to see emerging and this was possibly just another vehicle of ... getting the necessary support ... from common people ... to support a certain philosophy or certain ideas ... So for me the abuse of that, to some extent can be considered to be anti-educational.<sup>26</sup>

This remark may be interpreted as League politicking. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that the people’s education initiative soon became identified with the Freedom Charter and thus the Congress movement. This party political tendency of people’s education may be garnered from various sources, starting with the address by Zwelakhe Sisulu (1986:266) at the second March 1986 conference, where she refers implicitly to the Freedom Charter: “When we fight for and achieve democratic SRCs and parents committees, we are starting to realise our demands that the people shall govern and that the doors of learning and culture shall be opened.”<sup>27</sup> Also, alongside the second people’s education conference in Durban, a separate educational gathering had been convened by the NF, which accused the NECC of “sectarian practices” (National Forum, 1986:273). Alexander (2001) a leading member of SACHED and the NF and who was part of the first December conference, articulated his perception of the sectarianism of the Congress movement:

The whole thing is a complete example of the disengeneousness of the ANC activists at the time, and the Machiavellian way they used other people’s energies, other people’s work, other people’s ideas in order to twist it in their

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<sup>26</sup> Interviewee G.

<sup>27</sup> Christie (1991:297) also claimed that people’s education’s aims were closely tied to the Freedom Charter.

direction ... without understanding it, and that is the point. ... So all I'm saying is that it was a political project - a party political project. From the start 'People's Education for People's Power' was virtually the opposite in a sense of 'people's education', 'education populaire'- where most of the innovative work was done in pre-schools and adult education because those were the two sectors that the government didn't control.<sup>28</sup>

Party political differences seemed to bedevil people's education from its inception. This perception was corroborated by the League's critique of people's education and the notion of 'people's power':

We were in favour of people's power but not in the same way as the ANC or the UDF forces would have formulated it. The ANC, UDF was a more or less racist formulation, ours was a Unity Movement formulation. In other words all the oppressed, the unity of the oppressed must be achieved, you know, before we can have people's power. But who then is people's power in this loose incoherent way, it would be directed towards the liberation of the forces that were denying progress to the oppressed, economic progress, political progress, achievement of the franchise for example, achievement of all those other items on the Ten-Point Programme for example, the freedom of expression so on and so on- that would represent people's power.<sup>29</sup>

This statement is significant in that it raises many political and pedagogical issues pertaining to the League and NUM. These concerns need to be interrogated in terms of how the League understood the relationship between people's power and people's education, and the ways in which this educational alternative impacted the organisation's thinking and practices. Firstly, it is apparent that the nexus between the "unity of the oppressed" and "people's power" remained central to the League and NUM's claim to speak on behalf of the interests of the oppressed in South Africa, since for them these struggles were viewed as "similar to the struggles of all oppressed people throughout world history" (Tabata, 1952:2). The analytical conception of the oppressed in South Africa however, constitutes a heterogeneity which implies differentiation that includes racial, economic, gender among other social categories, since it "unites a wide

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander (2001) claimed that the initial agreement of an inclusive 'united front' formulation of people's education was hijacked by ANC elements who adopted the Freedom Charter and coined the slogan 'People's Education For People's Power'. People's education for Alexander therefore "had nothing to do with the liberation movement as a whole, was no longer education for liberation, it was education for the ANC basically." See also Alexander (1990).

<sup>29</sup> Interviewee K.

range of political, social and economic categories, the most fundamental of which are social classes” (Levin, 1991:121). Politically for the disenfranchised and oppressed people then, the level of antagonism or hostility to the apartheid capitalist state varied according to the impact of the government’s repressive measures on people which, in turn, was attached to racial classification, social, gender and economic standing of the individual in society.<sup>30</sup> This conception of the heterogeneity of the oppressed people, renders problematic the conception of the ‘unity of the oppressed’ as defined by Kies of the TLISA, who claimed that:

We must take the road of unity. We must unite the struggles of the oppressed African, oppressed Coloured, oppressed Indian into the unified struggle of the Non-European. (Mokone, 1982:28).

It appeared as if the League in the 1980s had not parted from its 1940s formulation of the ‘unity of the oppressed’ and therefore accepted the sub-ordination of class analysis to colour consciousness, thereby endorsing a two nation divided South Africa, that of the white oppressor and black oppressed,<sup>31</sup> which implied racial separation. This two nation theory gives credibility to J. & R. Simons (1983:545-546) claim that “colour dichotomy had come to displace class dichotomy in the polemics of the Anti-CAD as it lumped all whites together under the herrenvolk label.” The League therefore in the 1980s, allegedly, continued to define the oppressed within the racial category of the disenfranchised, namely, ‘black’ ‘indian’ and ‘coloured’ people. This racial construction of ‘the people’ for the League, dictated its political and pedagogical practice as it continued to organise in predominantly “coloured” schooling communities where it believed the oppressed, “our children”, resided.

The League’s foremost disagreement with the ANC’s concept of people’s power, as expressed by the last interviewee, was largely owing to its association with the Freedom Charter, that acknowledged separate races and cultures, and thus multi-racism and multi-culturalism. The

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<sup>30</sup> The disenfranchised constituted a multi-class alliance which included the professional class that had access to state benefits such as medical aid, pension, housing subsidies, car allowances among other benefits, and thus were susceptible to being courted and coopted by the state. This group were generally referred to as the petty bourgeois stratum of the oppressed. Gender differentiation in terms of social benefits were also skewed in favour of the male, for instance, women teachers did not qualify for housing subsidies and were forced to resign from the teaching profession when pregnant.

<sup>31</sup> Kies referred to this racial divide as that of the: “Idea which has enslaved South Africa to the idea of white trustees and non-white child races” (Mokone, 1982:28).

League interpreted the acceptance of discrete races and cultures as a racist and divisive formulation that ran counter to the building of a unified non-racial South Africa or Nation. On the other hand, it seems that the League's comprehension of people's power was defined within the tenets of the NUM's Ten-Point Programme, a programme that was, from a left-wing and NEUM/NUM perspective, a bourgeois democratic programme of minimum demands that could be achieved within capitalistic norms.<sup>32</sup> This conception of an alternative society with its implications for education was questioned by Peter Kallaway (1987), who refers to it as a liberal call for schooling based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Kallaway (1987:36) claims that this liberal schooling approach to education, which did not consider how reform in education is related to the fundamental redistribution of power, wealth and privilege in society, "ignores the massive evidence available that mass education strategies in capitalist society do not empower the people, nor do they increase equality, nor do they work to increase the chances for working class children in the employment market."<sup>33</sup> The rationale regarding the inequality of outcomes which mass schooling entrenches, appeared to be ignored by the League and its members when they analysed the notion of people's power and its corollary people's education.

Another aspect of the League and its members analyses of people's education was the imprecision around the meaning of the pivotal concept 'the people'. This ambiguity has been noted by some educationists, notably Ken Hartshorne (1992:346), who refers to the possible parallel interpretation of "die volk" (the people) as in Afrikaner Nationalism, thus creating, he tacitly warns, "a new sectional, exclusive ideology."<sup>34</sup> Levin (1991:129) also claims that because of the NP's reformist strategy, "the imprecise notions of the people ... enabled

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<sup>32</sup> The Ten-Point Programme does not challenge the economic relations of the capitalist system particularly capital accumulation and profit seeking. Point seven of the Programme resulted in a split in the NEUM in the early 1960s, due partly to a conflict of interpretation on the agrarian question, notably whether private ownership of land was permissible.

<sup>33</sup> Kallaway (1987) argued that people's education did not challenge the notions of mass schooling strategies in capitalist society. He noted that many core elements of capitalist schooling also underpinned Bantu Education.

<sup>34</sup> Kallaway (1988:51) also referred to the term "people" as lacking clarity.

government to attempt to take over the concept of people's education and mould it for its own purposes."<sup>35</sup> League members however did not take their critique of the enigmatic character of people's education further, by examining in greater detail the reformist features<sup>36</sup> or altering manifestations and therefore the possible consequences of the concept. A League teacher stated that her perspective on alternative education was "other than what is offered by the state. Simple as that. ... It might not have been as formal as the school system was ... I mean the thrust for many was to provide education which the majority of children lacked."<sup>37</sup> This uncertainty or lack of clarity on what constituted an alternative curriculum or the form it should take, overlooked a critical point, namely, that funding agencies also attempted to redefine the notion of people's education or an alternative curriculum in the 1980s. These agencies promoted private schools, that included the "upgrading of educational facilities and the technical procedures of developing educational skills. ... [which were] 'top-down' and managerially instituted; and they take as given the existing structures of apartheid South Africa."<sup>38</sup> By not rigorously challenging and examining the mentioned issues as it pertained to the idea of people's education, the League and certain of its members did not unravel the ambiguities and liberal notions of people's education<sup>39</sup> that attempted accommodation within the apartheid capitalist system.

Also disturbing, was the League and its members silence on the notion of an alternative education that countered the ideological dominance within schools which constructed and reproduced unequal social relations. The reproduction of social relations in schools has been illuminated and explained by radical theorists. Thus, Bowles and Gintis (1972) and Althusser's

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<sup>35</sup> Levy (1991), contextualised people's education through historically tracking government's policies in education from the 1950s. He claimed that in the mid-1980s when government instituted a combination of repression and reforms, the 'win hearts and minds' strategy, it, when applied to education, "compelled the regime simultaneously to increase spending on African education, ban student organisations which demanded greater education provision and detain leading activists in the NECC, which was campaigning for a transformed education system" (Norman Levy, 1991:67).

<sup>36</sup> This refers to changes in education which fails to challenge or alter the status quo.

<sup>37</sup> Interviewee H.

<sup>38</sup> Harold Wolpe & Elaine Unterhalter (1991:13). These educationists state that funding was facilitated and encouraged by Western governments and multinational and local corporations (Ibid.). Michael Cross (1992:161) was also critical of alternative privately funded schools who defined themselves within the framework of people's education.

<sup>39</sup> See Kallaway (1988:49-52) on the link between mass education and people's education.

(1968) theories noted that: “the school carries out two fundamental forms of reproduction: the reproduction of the skills and rules of labour power, and the reproduction of the relations of production” (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1987:75). Related to these dynamics of social relations in the schooling process, was the issue of whether League teachers seriously contested the hierarchical and authoritarian relations in terms of the way schools were organised, as defined by the principal-teacher-pupil relationships.<sup>40</sup> This hierarchical system according to Freire (1987:76), “mandates a curriculum which socializes each new generation into the values of private enterprise. ... to get pro-elite outcomes ... to control what teachers and students do in each classroom.” This discerning statement of Freire’s is particularly pertinent to the League, as it viewed the “battle for Black minds”, specifically the minds of the youth, as a central liberatory task of teachers in opposing not only apartheid but the values of the “Free Enterprise” economic system.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, and central to the students struggles in South Africa since 1976, was the demand for democratic SRCs that involved student participation in democratising schooling,<sup>42</sup> where, in Giroux’s and McLaren’s words, the “overriding goal of education is, then, to create the conditions for student self-empowerment and the self constitution of students as political subjects” (Giroux and McLaren, 1989:167). The League instead, seemed to forfeit the opportunity and abstained from either challenging or working alongside elements of the liberation movement most notably the NECC, which had as one of its chief aims the facilitation and establishment of PTSAs.

It should be noted that although the NECC was viewed as the strongest initiative to emerge in the education arena since 1976, its authority and leadership was continuously challenged by different political groups within the liberation movement (Ken Hartshorne, 1992:341). The League’s commitment to collective action can be questioned, as it did not endeavor to ally itself with these elements either, to contest the terrain in which PTSAs were being formed and

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<sup>40</sup> Chisolm (1992:260) questions the “conventional” practices or pedagogies of League teachers.

<sup>41</sup> *The Educational Journal*, July-August 1980, p.7. Wolpe (1991:7) cites the 1989 NECC conference’s opposition to not only apartheid education but also the privatisation of education.

<sup>42</sup> Bowles and Gintis (1976:131) correspondence theory revealed how alienation in the workforce was seen as analogous to alienation in schools: “Alienated labour is reflected in the student lack of control over his or her production.”

informed.<sup>43</sup> One could also question their conception of the role of PTAs, vis-à-vis the traditional power relations in schools, particularly in League oriented schools.<sup>44</sup> These concerns however were germane to the entire liberation movement, since despite the sporadic development of PTAs during the 1980s, these structures tended rather to address the question of external relations between schools and government, and not to engage “more directly in transforming internal power relations within educational institutions” (Levin, 1991:239).

While the growth of PTAs failed to endure the late 1980s, the League avoided contesting this aspect of people’s education, since many of them viewed PTAs as “a reaction”, and that people simply “reacted at the time, but as the crisis period ... blew over, people just relaxed and became apathetic again.”<sup>45</sup> This attitude meant the League seldom, if at all, linked its alternative educational perspective with other organisations in the liberation movement that were also demanding a democratic system of schooling,<sup>46</sup> particularly the democratic organisation of schooling. Thus, although League teachers claimed to ideologically challenge apartheid education in the classroom, they overlooked the advice of educationists like Freire, who claimed that: “those whose political dream is to reinvent society have to fill up the space of the schools, the institutional space, in order to unveil the reality which is being hidden by the dominant ideology, the dominant curriculum” (1987:36).

In conclusion it can be said that there were numerous complexities related to the concept of people’s education that impacted the League and its members. The perplexities surrounding people’s education resulted in a range of interpretations which were assimilated by League members. This assimilation process was unavoidable, as progressive oriented teachers increasingly attempted to engage with alternative curricular sources to offset the dominance of

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<sup>43</sup> Harris (1982:150) points to the importance of teachers engaging in collective action, and according to him “the lack of a disposition towards collective action is a serious impediment for teachers.”

<sup>44</sup> The hierarchical structure of League schools were largely male dominated. Anecdotes persist to this day of the authoritarian top-down leadership styles that prevailed at many of these schools.

<sup>45</sup> Interviewee A.

<sup>46</sup> The WCYL for instance, promoted the idea of PTAs to link the struggles of students with that of parents and workers generally, since for them “this much needed forum could be the spring-board for discussion not only around the boycott of classes, but broader issues of the day, where joint action could be decided upon” (1985:38).

CNE and to gain political legitimacy in the classroom and the schools of the oppressed.<sup>47</sup> The ambiguity of people's education however remained a disorientating feature of the initiative. This ambiguous characteristic or "mystique" as the League termed it,<sup>48</sup> appeared to stem from the imprecision of the concept, notably its meaning and what it was expected to achieve. Also, party political divisions within the liberation movement resulted in people's education becoming perceived largely as an ANC initiative. Political controversy appeared inextricably tied to people's education and further obscured the relevant educational issues.

This investigation has unveiled the invidious position of League teachers who grappled with the educational issues relating to people's education. The evidence reveals that League members responded in a non-monolithic way to people's education. Instead, they were guided by their individual political and pedagogical experiences. This, in turn, indicated an incoherence in the organisation and an apparent neglect of political direction. Consequently, League members forfeited many valuable opportunities to intervene in educational struggles, by not consolidating gains made via the establishment of PTSAs prior and during the 1985 to 1986 period, particularly as structures like the NECC looked to teachers to implement people's education.<sup>49</sup>

The people's education initiative then gave impetus to the development of PTSAs in the aftermath of the 1985 schools boycott as "basic organs of power", to democratise decision making at school level and to connect the school with its feeder community (Christie, 1990:281). This development, though affected by party political dynamics, created the possibility for intervention by progressive educators in the schooling process and allowed them the space to develop alternative educational opportunities. Organisationally however, the League defaulted on giving political leadership to its membership, apart from being extremely

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<sup>47</sup> Examples of attempts by teachers to engage alternative and progressive methodologies took the form of exploring history from below. This approach to teaching was supplemented by the use of learning material such as; the NECC (1987) teaching aid *What Is History?* Leslie Witz's (1988) *Write your own history*, Luli Callinicos's (1981) *Gold and Workers* and (1987) *Working Life Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand 1886-1940*. Other popular history publications included *Upbeat* magazine and *The New Nation* and the Ravan Press's *History Workshop Topic Series*.

<sup>48</sup> *The Educational Journal*, March 1986, p.1.

<sup>49</sup> Teachers were central to the implementation of people's education according to Ihron Rensburg: "Teachers, not activists, will be most important in implementing People's Education" (Cited in Christie, 1991:281). The NECC was also mandated to work towards the unity of different teacher organisations (Reeves, 1994:86).

critical of the ANC's influence on both 'people's education' and the notion of 'people's power'. The policies of the League were historically consistent, as its predisposition suggested that the organisation still viewed its aims and programme in terms of Kies, who wrote in 1955 of the League:

Our ends are not the same as those of every cockerel or opportunist or sentimentalist or tribalist who claims that "we all want the same things" for "our children" and "our people". And because our ends are not the same, our means too are sharply differentiated from those of the agitative mushrooms and discredited "tried and tested" misleadership as well as from those who make a vocation and a career out of *ad hoc* committees and congresses and seasonal charters (Kies, 1955:50).

The TLSA therefore continued on its unique political and pedagogical trajectory when engaging apartheid.

## Conclusion

The question posed at the beginning of this study was: “How did the League respond to the boycott of 1985/86 and to People’s Education for People’s Power?” The answer is not straight forward, and as the study has revealed, is irreducible to perceptions generated by *The Educational Journal*. This response acknowledges the diversity in League members thinking, and the divergence in their actions in relation to the issues examined in this study. This dissertation therefore points implicitly to a further investigation that should consider the effect the League and its members practices may have had on the political and educational landscape of the Western Cape during the late 1980s. A study of this nature would require oral accounts from League and non-League members who were active during the period, to give substance and credibility to the possible influence in education of League politics and pedagogy.

The study has, in addition, unearthed several areas of prospective research which are beyond its scope. These include exploring the League in relation to the influences its teachers exerted at the schools at which they taught, the influence of its teachers in WECTU, “education for liberation” or “alternative education”, “political professionalism”, the United Front, non-racism in practice, political leadership, identifying the agents of social change.

As a result of the largely descriptive-cum-narrative character of the research, the study lends itself to educators or teachers of history as a reference for exploring the historical significance of the TLSA in the Western Cape. The inquiry, from a League perspective, should contribute to a comprehension of the politics and pedagogy of a small and less visible yet distinct and uncompromising left formation in the Western Cape. Thus, for instance, while many left organisations acknowledged the limitations of the political victory the election of 1994 bequeathed, the League and NUM appeared to view the democracy that emerged from the election as neither a political nor economic victory, as it failed to deliver on the central demands outlined in the Ten-Point Programme. The liberation struggle for these leftists was incomplete, since the League taking its lead from the NUM, saw the post-apartheid Government of National Unity’s (GNU) political and pedagogical reforms as inseparable from the country’s

economic imperatives. Hence, continuity in the economic sphere preceding and post-1994, pointed to continuities in the political and pedagogical realms for the League.

The League's distinctiveness, during the period relevant to this study, was the emphasis it placed on politics and education and the pivotal role the teacher was expected to perform in combating apartheid 'gutter' education. Within this context, a central feature of the League teacher's role was his or her responsibility to emancipating the minds of the youth while remaining politically active in the liberation movement - preferably the NUM. Schooling remained a critical area of struggle for the League, with its members affirming the non-racial ethos and academic achievement that typified the tradition of the organisation and its schools. League teachers also played leading roles in their community, through PTSAs, civics and sporting bodies among other forums. Thus political education for the League continued to happen inside as well as outside of school, through discussion, debate, reading and activist work.

Many League organisations and forums continued to function throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s contrary to notions that they had disintegrated in 1985.<sup>1</sup> These forums dated back to the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and had nurtured prominent intellectuals including Ben Kies, I.B. Tabata, Neville Alexander, R.O. Dudley among a host of others. These teachers-cum-intellectuals contributed significantly to developing a political consciousness that contributed to shaping an alternative leftist tradition to that, for example, of the SACP and the ANC. Certain of these individuals were active in the late 1980s, notably Alexander and Dudley. These political activists impressed many people with their rigorous analyses of the political and educational situation, their clarity of thought and oratory skills. The League thus bequeathed a distinct attitude to the role of education in the struggle for liberation, which this study acknowledges.

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<sup>1</sup> Chisolm (1990:260) claims that forums established by the NUM and TLSA prior 1976 broke-up in 1985 and "signalled a profound defeat."

Due to the lengthy tracts of oral, archival and other primary evidence used in this research on the League and its members' theories and practices, the study may appear to be biased towards the organisation relative to others in the liberation movement. This partiality has perhaps been given a particular bent due to the polemical and analytical nature of *The Educational Journal* articles and other League sources, which have been culled to form the basis of this dissertation. An impromptu reading of League and NUM literature will reveal a polemical and coded discourse, which has remained a hallmark of these organisations and many of their members.

The study has attempted to off-set the author's apparent predisposition towards the League by critiquing the organisation and its members' political and pedagogical practices and ideas. This approach has informed the theoretical discourse which guided the research, and has attempted to ensure that the study is not reduced to "a purely ideological function" which denies "any autonomy or value to intellectual work and hence to the critical yet essential function of such work" (Wolpe, cited in Badat, 1991:33). To achieve this goal, the League and its members ideas and practices were examined according to two critical components: firstly, their political and organisational coherence, and secondly, the possible perceptions they engendered. The second element is particularly significant as it affected the League's ability to recruit and develop as an alternative and progressive teachers organisation.

The League's questionable political and organisational coherence stemmed initially from the seeming ambiguous practices of its members during the 1985-6 school boycott. This period witnessed League members operating in diverse ways when responding to the school boycott at the institutions at which they taught. The League avoided taking an unequivocal position on the boycott, despite its political opposition since the 1950s to the use of the boycott in education. Instead, members of the League were expected to support the staff decision at their respective institutions. Certain League members therefore supported the boycott in practice because they abided by their colleagues decision, yet remained politically opposed to boycott action. In other instances, League members operated independently irrespective of staff decisions, and were consequently ostracised and perceived as either conservative or reactionary

by fellow teachers and student bodies. There were also variances to these two positions taken by League teachers. The upshot of the latter experiences meant that the League itself was perceived and branded as either progressive, conservative or reactionary depending on non-League teachers and activists among others, perceptions of the organisation's teachers practices. This perception appears to have left an indelible mark on non-League teachers, drawing certain teachers closer to the organisation while deterring others.

The foregoing comments are equally relevant to the League and its members reaction to people's education. League members had differing opinions on people's education, despite it being perceived as ANC inspired and thus a ploy to gain political mileage for the UDF and MDM. Many League members went along with prominent educationists who viewed people's education as progressive in relation to CNE, while others saw the phenomenon as nebulous and not a viable and a practicable alternative to CNE or mass education. The League was therefore unable to capitalise strategically or tactically on the more progressive ideas which people's education presented, at least in terms of critical support through its *Journal* - of PTSA's and the alternative curricular initiatives emerging from within the ranks of the liberation movement. Although a few League members may have been involved in curricular initiatives through WECTU, it is difficult to ascertain the effect of their intervention due to this strategy not being given serious enough consideration by the League. The League therefore lost an opportunity to draw progressive teachers to its politics, and possibly to its ranks as well.

The political and pedagogical practices of the League indicate a liberal attitude by the organisation to its members actions. League teachers were allowed to operate almost autonomously when engaging in matters related to political choice, and took independent tactical and strategic decisions at the institutions where they taught. Political direction therefore seemed to be lacking as members practices occasionally compromised League policies, thus creating skewed perceptions of the organisation. This breakdown of coherence between the League teacher and the organisation implied the practices of the former influenced perceptions of the latter, as much as the organisation's *Journal* had shaped a view of League teachers as largely hardlined or hard-nosed politicians and pedagogues. This study has attempted

to challenge the conventional political and pedagogical perceptions of the League and its members. These perceptions had serious ramifications for the League's potential to grow numerically and to sustain itself, and thus continue to engage apartheid. This assessment presupposes that the politics of perception is persuasive and indeed unpredictable, since: "The most important reality is human perception ... because people act on what they perceive ... perceptions have consequences, they move events, they shape lives" (J. Kincheloe, 1991:149).

The League however was out maneuvered by historical events, and impelled because of labour legislation to transform itself into a workers union in 1999. Due to its small membership, the League was faced with a choice, either 'close shop' or to merge with a representative teachers or public sector union. It opted for the latter and disaffiliated from the NUM. The former NUM affiliate aligned itself with nine independent unions in the public sector and decided to take forward its political and pedagogical philosophy under the banner of the National Union of Public Servants and Allied Workers (NUPSAW). At the first session of the NUPSAW educators sector conference,<sup>2</sup> 28 March 2000, the former President of the League Mr Steenveld attempted to clarify the new strategy, and declared that the name was not significant, but that the vision and philosophy of the League was, and that members should strive to ensure it became a reality in the public servants sector. It is apparent that the route adopted by the League in the new millennium was the outcome of a particular set of ideas, ideas which had to be adapted to the new democracy in South Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> The first NUPSAW educators sector conference was held at the Peninsula Technikon in Bellville Cape Town, 28-30 March 2000.

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## Appendix One

### Synopsis of the extended study

The present dissertation has been limited to the period 1985-1989 in order to comply with length restrictions. The author has made a preliminary investigation of the TLSA up to the late 1990s. The themes of the study include the League in relation to the emergence of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS), the 1994 election, and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The politics of teacher unity was fraught with ideological differences between the moderate and anti-establishment teachers organisations, and between elements from the Congress movement,<sup>1</sup> Black Consciousness (BC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and leftists.<sup>2</sup> The League avoided participation in the teacher unity process on political grounds and thereby abdicated a significant site of struggle. Evidence suggests that the organisation could have developed a radical alternative for teachers outside of mainstream teacher politics and the negotiation forums of the early 1990s. Instead, the League avoided developing united front alternatives to the dominant Congress aligned teacher unity that emerged. It opposed the educational practices of SADTU, particularly strike action, and felt that unionisation was an inappropriate way of organising teachers. The League moreover argued that the union represented ANC interests. Interests, which it contended were linked to negotiation between the Nationalist Party (NP) and the ANC. The latter process was viewed by the organisation as premature and a betrayal of the liberation struggle. Strategically then, the League seemingly failed to present teachers with the possibility of developing an alternative and independent teacher formation.

In addition, the League's exclusivist policies towards for instance the "bush colleges", alienated younger teachers who had attended those universities. Thus, when the League emerged once again as a public organisation in 1992, many factors militated against it developing a large

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<sup>1</sup> The Congress movement was led by the African National Congress (ANC) and included the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the Coloured People's Congress (CPC), the Congress of Democrats (COD) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). These organisations subscribed to the Freedom Charter which was adopted at Kliptown, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Leftist organisations and individuals are usually associated with a radical socialist and Marxist orientation.

membership, the most telling being a small and older - close to retirement - membership, an exclusivist politics, and a relatively young teaching fraternity which had a predominantly trade union consciousness and who considered working conditions and salary important facets of the teaching process. There were numerous factors the League had to consider in its endeavor to become an alternative teacher organisation that could rival the mass based union types, most notably SADTU.

The release of the ERS report was viewed by the TLSA as part of government's reforms in education. Implicit in the ERS was the transformation of 'white' only schools into non-racial 'open' Model C schools. Although the League initially opposed the Model C option, it reluctantly withdrew on its opposition to those schools. Particularly concerning for the League was the advocacy of Grade 9 as an appropriate exit point for early school leavers, thus privatising schooling from Grade 10 onward. The League interpreted the exit point option as a route which prepared working class students for vocational education, or as they termed it "werkgeredheid". Also embedded in the ERS was the notion of pupil:teacher ratios which resulted in the subsequent rationalisation of the teaching fraternity. The rationalisation process included teacher retrenchments and the option of an early retirement package. Many League teachers were close to retirement age, and readily chose the retirement package despite the organisation's stated opposition to it. The loss of in-service League teachers, translated into the organisation forfeiting its ideological and political presence at schools where it may have had sway. This in turn, impacted the potential for the League to recruit new members particularly those who may have been inclined towards the organisation's politics. Recruitment at that stage may have been appropriate considering SADTU's allegiances to the Congress movement and negotiations, and the union's declared support for the ANC in the 1994 election.

The anti-election position of the League may have indicated a political New Unity Movement (NUM) exclusivity, which arguably alienated teachers and activists within the liberatory movement. This political allegiance of the League appeared to contravene the organisation's 1995 annual conference decision - to open its ranks to members outside the NUM including Model C teachers. The League's association with the NUM remained firmly intact post 1994.

The political and pedagogical thinking of the League and its members after the first democratic election can be gauged from their response to the NQF and the issues pertaining to redress in education. The League's opposition to the government's equity plan of redress manifested itself in its members resistance, through schooling community structures such as the Western Cape Parents, Teachers, Students Forum (WCPTSF), to rationalisation, redeployment, and the retrenchments of teachers. For the League, the economic and hence political continuities between the apartheid education system and the post 1994 reformed one, pointed to a liberation yet to be achieved. This appeared to vindicate the Non European Unity Movement (NEUM) writer Dora Taylor alias Nosipho Majeke, who wrote: "Economic forces, however, are stronger than man made laws, stronger than even indoctrination with false ideas" (1952:138).

An examination of the theories that informed the League's political and pedagogical thinking, practices and its influence in the Western Cape during the 1990s, should yield valuable information that contributes to the politics of resistance in South Africa.

## Appendix Two

### Interviewer's guiding questions

1. When did you join the TLSA?
2. Why did you join the TLSA?
3. What was your view on the school boycott of 1985?
4. How did you perceive your role as an educator during the 1985 disruptions in education?
5. The 1985/86 schools unrest gave rise to the call for "People's Education For People's Power." What were your thoughts about the slogan and what was your response to this call?
6. People's Education was proposed as an alternative to CNE. Did you view this as a viable alternative?
7. The emergence of SADTU as the first democratic, non-racial, non-sexist teacher union in South Africa was perceived by many educators and activists as the emergence of a progressive organisation in education. What were your perceptions of SADTU?
8. The Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) was presented by government in 1993 as a shift from apartheid education policy, since "race" had been removed as a criterion for acceptance into schools. What was your view of this strategy?
9. What was your perception of the inclusivist Model C policy of 1992/3?
10. In which way did you participate in the first national elections of 1994?
11. The TLSA decided to boycott the first election of 1994. What was your opinion of this decision?
12. The NQF was seen by many educators and analysts as a fundamental shift in education policy in South Africa. What were your thoughts on the NQF?
13. In hindsight, was the League's response to the above events the optimal response?
14. Have there been any shifts in your views on the above issues?
15. Are there any relevant issues that you think are important which have not been touched on in this interview?