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**REPORT ON THE
SECOND NATIONAL
CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE
ON THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION**

Durban 29 - 30 March 1986

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1. Introduction

The Second National Consultative Conference on the crisis in education which took place in Durban on the 28 th and 29th of March 1986, is a sequel to the first one held at Wits University in December last year. This conference was attended by 1200 delegates from 200 organisations from all over the country.

Delegates to the conference were representatives of parents, students and teacher organisations. There were also observers from trade union, youth and other organisations. This broad spectrum of people from all sections of the community reflected the seriousness with which the crisis in education was understood.

Despite the denial of conference facilities by the universities of Pietermaritzburg and Natal and also attacks by Inkatha impis, the conference finally took place, but had to be cut down to one all night session on Saturday

Consequently the mood among delegates was one of uncertainty and fears of yet other attacks. However, the determination to address the crisis in made resolve to continue with the conference whatever the circumstances.

The major objective of the conference was to assess tactics and strategy in the light of the governments response to the demands presented at the December conference.

2. Attempts to disrupt the conference

The Conference was initially intended to take place at the University of Natal, Durban over two days. However at the eleventh hour the university refused to allow the conference to take place on its premises. Two weeks earlier the university offices of Prof L Schlemmer were gutted by fire by unknown people.

While delegates from all parts of the country were making preparations to travel to Durban, conference organisers were engaged in a bitter struggle to save the conference. At the last minute a venue, 30 km south of Durban was secured.

Inkatha impis were the second obstacle. Below is a chronology of incidents that occurred:

- Early in the evening of Good Friday, March 28, 1986, three cars full of Inkatha supporters armed with spears and sticks smashed the cars of conference delegates. One delegate was injured.
- In the early hours of Saturday morning, a car in which a Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC) and NECC member had been travelling, was petrol bombed outside a hotel where delegates were sleeping.
- Another petrol bomb had been planted between two other cars, but it did not explode.
- On Saturday morning a combi being used by conference organisers had its windows smashed by unknown gunmen.
- That morning the NECC sent a delegation of Vusi Khanyile of the SPCC, Dr Beyers Naude of the SACC and an attorney, Yunus Mohammed, to appeal to the police to restrain Inkatha whom they believed were going to try and disrupt the conference.
- At about 12.45 pm on Saturday afternoon, two light blue Putco buses filled with Inkatha supporters armed with guns, sticks and knives arrived at Pioneer Hall. Congella where conference delegates were registering and eating lunch. Cars and buses were smashed. Two Inkatha supporters were killed and others were injured. Eight

conference delegates were hurt. The police arrived at the scene later and ordered delegates to get into their buses and leave the venue.

Despite these incidents conference delegates resolved to go ahead with the conference and it was changed to a single all night session. Delegates took it in turns to guard the venue against further attacks.

At a press conference after the conference, the NECC said they were saddened by the fact that innocent men were misled to their death by the Inkatha leadership bent on committing murder. They announced that it had been confirmed by Putco that a senior Inkatha official had booked the buses.

The NECC also disputed Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's statement that the NECC did not concern itself with education. All the resolutions passed were concerned with efforts to resolve the education crisis, it said.

3. Opening Address

"People's education and freedom go together." This was said by Dr Beyers Naude, the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in his opening address at the National Education Conference.

He said that it not only black education that was in a crisis. White education was also in a crisis. White children were being indoctrinated into supporting the interests of the majority.

He went on to say that whites have a role to play in the struggle and appealed to white students, especially Afrikaans speaking students to "break those fetters leading them to national suicide."

He paid tribute to all those had died in the struggle for a non-racial, free and democratic education.

Dr Naude also stressed the need for united action in the educational, social, religious and labour spheres.

4. Keynote address

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The key note address was delivered by Zwelakhe Sisulu, editor of New Nation and son of imprisoned ANC leader, Walter Sisulu and UDF president, Albertina Sisulu. Here is an edited version of what he said.

"This is truly historic conference in the tradition of earlier national meetings such as the Congress of the People of 1955 and the 1961 All in Africa conference.

It is an important lesson to the apartheid forces. The people stand united. Ten years after the 1976 uprisings we remain united in our demand for an end to apartheid education and the establishment of a democratic people's South Africa.

Let us now turn to the critical question which concerns us all - all oppressed and democratic South Africans. The December Conference gave the government until today to meet our demands. Has the government met our demands? Your answer is No. They have not met our demands. They lifted the emergency because they were forced to do so, because they were afraid of the united mass action coming after March 31.

The emergency in fact continues to exist throughout the country. There is little difference now from when the official emergency was in force. It was after the emergency that our children were shot in Kubekweni in the Eastern Transvaal, in Wintorveld, Bophuthatswana.

The demands of the conference have not been met. As we meet:

- Cosas remains unbanned.
- Students are still in detention.
- Teachers continue to be dismissed and forcibly transferred.
- Attempts are still being made to stop democratic SRC's from functioning.
- School buildings are unrepaired.
- Troops are still in the townships.

Boycotts have taken place throughout the country because of the intransigence of the authorities and their refusal to meet

our demands.

The Current Situation

We are at a crossroads in our struggle for national liberation. We hold the future in our hands. The decisions at this conference will be truly historic, because they will help determine whether we go forward to progress and peace, or whether the racists push us backwards and reverse some of the gains we have made.

I want to make it clear that these aren't empty slogans. When we say that we have reached a decisive moment, it is based on a careful assessment of our current reality. In any struggle it is important to recognise the critical moment, the time when decisive action can propel the struggle into a new phase. It is also important to understand that this moment doesn't last forever, that if we fail to take action that moment will be lost.

This moment has a number of important features:

- The state has lost the initiative to the people. It is no longer in control.
- The masses themselves recognise that the moment is decisive, and are calling for action.
- The people are united around a set of fundamental demands, and are prepared to take action on these demands.

Having said this I want to strike a note of caution. It is important that we don't fail to recognise the moment, or understand it to be something it is not. We are not yet poised for the immediate transfer of power to the people. The belief that this is so could lead to serious errors and defeats.

We are however poised to enter a phase which can lead to the transfer of power. What we are seeking to do is decisively shift the balance of forces in our favour. To do this we have to adopt the appropriate strategies and tactics, we have to understand our strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the enemy, that is, the forces of apartheid and reaction.

Despite the heavy blows against our leaders and organisations, there was a real strengthening of the democratic forces, and a weakening of the forces of apartheid. Let us look

at the situation in the enemy camp.

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When the régime declared the emergency, all sections of the white ruling block supported it, in the belief that the resistance of the people would be crushed. Barely a month later this appearance of unity had crumbled. Mass resistance had spread and taken on new forms. The régime stood more isolated than ever before at an international level; and the economic crisis reached new proportions with the loss of investor confidence in the stability of the South African régime.

Doubts amongst whites in the ability of parliament to provide a solution to the country's problems reached a peak with the resignation of Van Zyl Stabbert. Politically, therefore, the régime had become totally isolated, both locally and internationally. Morally it had been exposed as totally bankrupt and without any legitimate right to rule. Economically it faced its worst crisis ever.

It was in this context that the government lifted the emergency. It did not do this from a position of strength. The people forced it to lift the emergency.

Advances of the people

When the emergency was declared, a situation of ungovernability existed in some areas, but at the beginning of this year the situation was very different. Ungovernability had extended to more areas.

The period of emergency saw very important advances made by the people. Structures were built and survived the period of emergency and beyond.

As a result, in many cases our organisations matured and grew under the guns of the SADF. Action taken against the leadership did not result in the collapse of organisations. So we saw the emergence of areas of people's power in a number of townships.

— Another feature was the highly political character of the struggle we waged, and the tendency for the struggle to develop in a national direction. The masses linked up local issues with the question of political power. A set of national demands emerged which transcended specific issues or regional differences.

The transformation of the SPCC from a locally-based education initiative into a national body combining educational and political issues is an important instance of this development.

Our struggle took on an increasingly national character in another sense too. From being youth-led, the struggle began to involve all sections of the population. Greater involvement of parents gave rise in turn to such initiatives as the SPCC. This development was not confined to education however. Parents and workers began to take a more active involvement in all issues.

Complementing this was the development of a close relationship between the trade unions and the rest of the democratic movement.

The formation of COSATU was important since it took a strong stand supporting trade union involvement in community and political issues.

In terms of developing the struggle nationally, we made our first significant advances in the last months of the emergency. For the first time in decades people took up the struggle in the rural areas. Areas which the enemy could previously rely on as zones of subservience and passivity were now areas of struggle.

Defend, consolidate and advance

We have said that we must have no illusions about the type of regime we are dealing with. The increase of atrocities since the lifting of the emergency shows that we can expect no lift-up. The regime may be losing control, but as it gets more desperate, so its actions get more criminal.

That is why the system is adopting new methods to try and destroy us.

Our people are being attacked by apartheid vigilante squads in areas where apartheid authority has been challenged or destroyed. From Moutse to Welkom to Lamontville these agents are operating to try and prop up the rejected community councils and tribal authorities.

Apartheid death squads are operating to assassinate important leaders of the people. The SADF and the SAP have also been given powers to act as they please, to use emergency

powers, whether there is an emergency or not killing and maiming our people.

In areas where we have developed strong people's committees, these attacks have been resisted and frustrated. The people have seen the need to defend their leaders and their organisations in order to consolidate and advance

People's education for people's power

The struggle for people's education is no longer a struggle for the students alone. It has become a struggle for the whole community. It reflects a new level of development in the struggle as a whole.

The struggle for people's education can only be won when we have won the struggle for people's power.

Any gains which we make are only finally guaranteed when the enemy is finally defeated.

It is true that where we are strongest, where people's power is most advanced, we are able to frustrate the state in its objectives.

What do we mean when we speak of people's education? We are agreed that we don't want Bantu education, but we must be clear about what we want in its place. We must also be clear as to how we are going to achieve this.

We are not demanding the same education as whites, since that is education for domination.

People's education means education at the service of the people as a whole, education that liberates, education that puts the people in command of their lives, education that prepares our people as responsible citizens of our country rather than mere tools of industry and commerce.

To be acceptable, every initiative must come from the people themselves, it must be accountable to the people and must advance the mass of students.

This means taking over the schools, transforming them from institutions of oppression into zones of progress and people's power.

Our task is not only to build democratic organisation, but to build these in such a way that they can withstand the harassment of the apartheid government. We know that our

greatest strength lies in the power of the people, in our mass based committees, in the schools, streets and factories; in our coordinated strength, in our national organisations, such as the NACC.

Long live the struggle for a democratic people's education!

Long live the united popular struggle against apartheid!

Forward to a free, democratic people's South Africa!

5. Assessment of demands

First on the agenda were regional reports. It was clear from the regional reports that not all the demands set by the December conference had been met by the government.

The situation had been made worse by the government ignoring some of the demands and closing down schools.

5.1 Demands partially met by the government.

* The state of emergency has been lifted. However, the power of the police and army it seems, will be entrenched in legislation, resulting in a permanent state of emergency.

In spite of the lifting of the emergency, the army and police still have a strong presence in the townships.

* Many detained students and teachers have been released, however other students are still in detention. Dismissed teachers have been reinstated in some areas.

* The government conceded to the demand that all examinations be written in March. However, matriculants are to write in May or June 1986.

* In some areas textbooks and stationery have been supplied. However it has been inadequate and the stationery of inferior quality. The DET has said that free setworks will only be supplied in 1987.

* The DET responded to the demand that no school fees be paid by saying that school fees were not compulsory. Hence, the decision to charge or not to charge school fees is at the discretion of school principals and their unpopular statutory school committees. However in most parts of the country, parents are no longer paying school fees.

5.2. Demands not met by the government

* The Congress of South African Students (Cosas) remains banned.

The DIT has not officially approved the implementation of democratic SRC's. Though students and parents have gone ahead establishing democratic structures without the DIT's approval.

Many school buildings which were damaged last year have not been repaired. As a result students in some regions have had to use the "platooning method" of attending school

6. Conference resolutions

The major decision taken at the conference was that students should remain at school. Where schools had been closed down, students should occupy them and demand the right to education.

Student organisation should use the presence of students at school to regroup and build student organisations.

Alternative education programmes should be started at once

Thirteen resolutions were taken at the conference. They are reprinted below.

RESOLUTION 1

MAY DAY - NATIONAL STAY AWAY

This second National Education Crisis Conference noting that:-

1. This is the 100th anniversary of May Day celebrated internationally as Workers' Day.
2. Cosatu and Cusa has called upon workers to declare May Day as a public holiday.

Hereby resolve to:-

Call upon students nationally to support the May Day celebrations in the most appropriate form.

RESOLUTION 2

INKATHA

This Conference noting that:-

1. Inkatha has attacked all the democratic forces struggling against the apartheid regime.
2. It attacked life, limb and property of the organisers and

delegates of this conference.

Therefore declares that: -

Inkatha is an enemy of the people and wholly in league with the Nationalist government.

And resolves to: -

Expose, isolate and fight against this fascist organisation.

And further: -

Condemns Puto for aiding and abetting the criminal activities of Inkatha against our people.

RESOLUTION 3

REPRESSIVE ACTIONS AGAINST TEACHERS

This Conference noting: -

1. The hardships being experienced by Progressive Teachers Organisations in mobilising and organising teachers.
2. The negative and collaborating role of certain teachers and their obstructive teacher organisations.

And believing: -

That there is an urgent need for a United, Democratic, National teachers organisation and that no one should handicap the development of unity among teachers.

Therefore resolves:-

1. To condemn all repressive actions taken against teachers (eg. dismissals).
2. To urge all obstructive organisations and teachers to stop their negative and repressive roles and stop collaborating with the authorities against democratic teachers.

RESOLUTION 4

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NATIONAL STAYAWAY IN JUNE

This Conference noting that:-

1. June 16, 1986 marks the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprisings.
2. None of the fundamental demands for which thousands of our comrades died have been met.

And believing that:-

We must engage in united mass action in support of our education and other demands.

We call on: -

All sections of our people to launch a national stayaway on June 16, 17 and 18.

And we declare: -

June 16, National Youth Day.

RESOLUTION 5

UNBANNING OF COSAS

This Conference noting: -

1. Our call for the unbanning of Cosas.
2. The intransigence of the government in meeting this demand.

Hereby declare that: -

Cosas is unbanned forthwith.

And resolve to: -

Call on all students to plan for national united action to give effect to this declaration.

RESOLUTION 6

POLITICAL PRISONERS

This Conference believing that: -

In order to find lasting solutions to the fundamental problems of education in our country we need to involve as a pre-requisite genuine leaders of the people.

Therefore demands that: -

1. Banning orders on all organisations including the ANC be lifted.
2. All political prisoners and detainees be released and all exiles be allowed to return home.
3. All treason trials be stopped and charges in all other political trials be withdrawn.
4. The banning order on meetings be lifted
5. The unconditional release of the Sharpyille Six who have been sentenced to death.
6. Apartheid be completely dismantled.

RESOLUTION 7

NATIONAL ACTION COMMITTEE

This Conference noting :-

Numerous calls for decisive action.

Hereby resolves:-

To mandate the NECC to form a National Action Committee which will be made up of representatives from all National organisations that subscribe to the decisions/ recommendations of this conference.

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SANCTIONS

This Conference noting: -

1. The importance of the international campaign to isolate South Africa.
2. That some western governments still continue to collude and to connive with the minority Botha Government in the oppression and exploitation of the majority of South Africans.

And believing that: -

The effective isolation of this regime cannot be achieved by mere condemnation and posturing in world forums alone.

And further believing that: -

1. Foreign capital is involved in the bolstering of apartheid and its structures.
2. The position of blacks cannot be worse off than it is now from any withdrawals of foreign capital.
3. Progressive and Democratic mankind can and must play a greater role in the intensification of the campaign for the total isolation of South Africa.

Hereby resolves :-

1. To call on all those countries, corporations and individuals with investments in South Africa to immediately withdraw such investments. For as long as political and economic power is still vested in the hands of the white minority, these investments can never be in the interest of the oppressed and exploited majority.
2. As a decisive punitive measure, to call upon all those countries that still afford the South African Airways landing rights to cancel such forthwith.
3. That a call be made on workers, students and the community at large to embark upon direct action in support of sanctions.

And furthermore demands that: -

1. The social wealth of the country be returned to the ownership of the people.
2. That the illegal transfer of funds by foreign and South African owned companies out of the country be prevented.

RESOLUTION 9

IMPLEMENTATION OF PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

This Conference noting: -

1. That resolutions 9 and 10 on people's education at the first national education conference are still relevant.
2. The report of the ad hoc commission on people's education.

Therefore resolves: -

To accept recommendations 1, 2, and 3 of the commission.

And urges: -

All progressive teacher, parent and student organisations to take immediate and urgent steps to implement the above recommendations.

We further urge that this committee should report within a period of three months.

RESOLUTION 10

ANGOLA

This conference noting: -

1. The collusion between the apartheid regime and the Reagan administration as shown in the United States Government's policy of constructive engagement.
2. The attempts by the South African government to destabilise

Frontline States and particularly the role of the SADF in Angola.

3. The decision by the Reagan administration to offer aid to the terrorist Unita organisation.

Therefore resolves: -

1. To make it known to the entire world that we consider the Reagan administration as accomplices in the crimes of apartheid.
2. To call on all freedom loving people all over the world to further isolate the apartheid regime internationally.
3. To call on all American people not to support the murderous policies of the Reagan administration, particularly their attempts to destabilize the the legitimate and popular government of the MPLA in Angola.

RESOLUTION 11

COMMUNITY ACTION ON EDUCATION STRUGGLES

This Conference noting: -

1. The impact of the education struggle on the community.
2. The increasing hardships experienced by our people with respect to rents and costs of other necessities.
3. The source of our problems in the community and the educational sector is the same.
4. That the government has consistently ignored our demands for reduced rents and charges, scrapping of GST and reduction and control of food prices.

Heroby resolve: -

To urge all communities and democratic organisations to launch appropriate regional and/or national mass action campaigns, by considering all forms of rent consumer and other boycotts.

RESOLUTION 12

CHILDREN AND EARLY LEARNING

This Conference noting:

1. That many women are forced to work and to support their families.
2. That working women experience extreme difficulty in ensuring the safety and happiness of their children.
3. That working women do not have the right to maternity leave.
4. That there are extremely few child care facilities available to African children and at least 50% of women do not have other family members who can look after their children.
5. That only 137% of African pre-school children are in creches.

Believing that: -

1. Women have the right to work and rear children.
2. Women have the right to have access to facilities that keep their children safe and exposed to opportunities for their full emotional, physical and intellectual development.
3. Women have the right to keep their jobs while they are pregnant and to maternity leave before and after the birth of their babies.
4. Children have the right to be properly cared for.
5. Children have the right to have access to education from an early age.

Resolves to demand that: -

1. The state should provide creches, nursery schools and after school centres for all children.
2. Legislation be implemented giving women the right to job security and adequate maternity leave.

RESOLUTION 13

RETURN TO SCHOOL

This conference having carefully considered the conditions set by the December Consultative Conference for the return to school and noting: -

1. That the demands have not been adequately met.
2. That the situation has been exacerbated by the government's intransigence and irresponsiveness to our demands, and in particular the large number of schools which have been closed by various authorities.

But believing that: -

1. Education struggles must increasingly involve parents, teachers, students and all democratic organisations.
2. We will have to use new and creative tactics to advance the education struggles.

Therefore resolves that:

All students should return to school when the new term starts to:-

1. In such cases where schools have been closed, they must be occupied and we must demand the right to education.
2. Use the presence of students at schools to assist in building and regrouping of our student organisations.
3. Implement alternate people's education programmes immediately.

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