STUDENTS AND REVOLUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA[+]

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> "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the Proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class".
>
> The Communist Manifesto.
>
> "The revolutionary role, traditionally that of the industrial working class, has fallen to the Youth..."
>
> Rowntree.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Students have always been an important social force in history, very often acting as catalysts of change. They were a frequent source of tension in the middle ages in Bologna and Paris. They played an important role in Martin Luther's battles against the Pope and the Holly Roman Emperor. In F. Engels' words, "they formed the nucleus, the real strength, of the revolutionary force" during the 1848 revolution in Vienna (H. Chrismas 1960 p. 40). In the twentieth century, they have helped in the removal from office of the dynasty in China in 1911; Juan Peron in Argentina in 1955; Perez Jimerez in Venezuela in 1958; Kishi government in Japan in 1960; Sukarno in Indonesia in 1966; Ayub Khan in Pakistan in 1969; General De Gaulle in France in 1969; (Lipset and Altbach 1969 p. 4) Masamba Debat in the Congo in 1966; and even Emperor Bokassa in the Central African Republic in 1979. In a way, therefore, the Soweto student movement was not unique in history.

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Yet, when considered in the specific circumstances of South Africa it was phenomenal in a number of ways. First, South Africa, at least since 1910, had never experienced an uprising of Soweto's magnitude. Within two months of the fateful June 16, 1976, when more than one hundred students were murdered by the racist police, not less than eighty black communities all over the Republic had joined in the struggle. Within four months, the number had doubled to 160, by conservative estimates. (J. Kane-Berman 1979 p. 2). Indeed the protest activity spread into the Bantustans as well as into Namibia. This mass rising was to continue, up until the beginning of 1978.

Secondly, the movement was also phenomenal in its effects. The things destroyed in the country included more than 100 buildings belonging to the Boards of Bantu administration, 250 bottle-stores and beerhalls, 170 shops, 25 clinics, 8 banks, a dozen libraries, and a score of post offices, hotels, cinemas, clinics, churches, community halls, magistrate's courts, petrol filling stations; several hundred police vehicles, as well as about a third of the Public Utility Transport Corporation's fleet of 926 vehicles. More to this, millions of rand were lost through the workers' strikes and mass boycott of white shops; South African Western sympathisers and backers were embarrassed and forced to dissociate themselves albeit only in words, from the mass killings; and white South Africans were forced to scramble into their "Laager" having emptied all shops of firearms. Generally, the Soweto revolt sparked off a wave of mass activity which a lesser state machinery couldn't have survived. It was a wave which as Nkosi (1977) very well puts it, South Africa had never known since 1910. It shook the white power apparatus in South Africa as nothing else had ever done before.

In view of the above, it is no wonder that it has sparked off heated debates among revolutionary circles centred on such issues as the role of organisation as opposed to spontaneity, the utility of mass demonstrations in view of the high casuality figures, as well as the possibility of an insurrection in South Africa. Very important for our purpose, however, has been the issue of the role of students in Social Revolution in South Africa. To some the Soweto revolt has demonstrated their long argued view that students are now the leading revolutionary force in the struggle against capitalism for socialism, à la Herbert

Marcuse (1964); (1965). Indeed some have gone further to talk about the "Youth Class" replacing the working class as the leading force of the revolution. (Rowntree 1968). The tendency of the mass media (Western especially) of giving student activities more coverage than the workers', to the extent of sensationalising the former has consolidated this trend. (J. Woddis 1972 p. 317). In view of this situation, the task of probing into the causes of the revolt, assessing correctly its character, being fully aware of both its great potentialities and its limitations has never been more urgent. Before doing this however, we will start off with a few general observations on Social Revolution.

2. SOCIAL REVOLUTION.

Writing on the Revolutionary situation in South Africa, Professor Shamuyarira (1974) is of the view that:-

> "(a) Revolution entails the complete overthrow of the existing system of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Indeed the removal of all vestiges of colonialism and neo-colonialism, which are an integral part of international capitalism which has exploited African resources for centuries, is the central task of our epoch on the African continent. Colonial capitalism has created economic structures and trade patterns of domination and exploitation throughout the continent. ...a true revolution must destroy these structures, end the system of colonial capitalism, and introduce a new democratic, independent and socialist system". (page 1).

He goes on to say that:-

> "A revolutionary situation exists when the significant social forces among an oppressed people have been mobilised and are engaged in a systematic and violent confrontation with the incumbent forces, for the purposes of qualitative, systematic changes to the existing political and economic order". (our emphasis p. 1).

While agreeing with the general thrust of the definition we nevertheless are of the opinion that it fails to mention or assumes away the contradiction between the productive forces and the production relations, a contradiction which is basic as well as central in any social revolution, and the appreciation of which is essential in the study of any revolution. Writing on this contradiction, K. Marx, (1859) says:

> "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production-within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructive is more or less rapidly transformed". (our emphasis).

He goes on to state very categorically that:-

> "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. (pp. 503-504).

A clear appreciation of this point is essential for a number of reasons. First, it explains why a change is essential. In this case it goes beyond the issue of "exploitation of African resources" to point out the fact that the production relations together with all the attendant superstructural forms are now so many fetters. That time has been reached where the overall development of the society is no longer possible, hence, revolution. It secondly for the same reasons points out the inevitability of change. An inevitability which for a truly revolutionary situation to exist must not only be realised by the oppressed masses struggling for a new order, as Shamuyarira argues, but by the oppressor classes as well. Lenin (1920) is very clear on this issue. He says:-

> "It is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossiblity of living in the old way and demand changes, it is essential for revolution that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the 'lower classes' do not want the old way, and when the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way-only then can revolution triumph". (Emphasis original, p. 68).

This Lenin calls a fundamental law of revolution. (p. 68).

Thirdly, the appreciation of the fundamental contradiction between the productive forces and the production relations, gives a clear indication as to the magnitude of the change, that it has to embrace

the whole mode of production. This is a fundamental distinguishing feature of a revolution from a mere revolt, which as Heinz Lubasz (1966) correctly argues, is overt opposition, directed at particular laws, practices, or individuals, and aims at specific and limted changes. In his own words:-

> "Rebels demand the redress of specific grievances rather than a systematic alteration in the foundation of the whole existing order... Rebellion turns into revolution when the demand for particular and limited changes is replaced by a demand for general and fundamental change; when the sovereign power itself is held responsible for prevailing conditions; and when scattered rebellious elements join to form a more or less united revolutionary force". (p. 4).

Fourthly, and may be for our purposes very importantly, it gives a pointer as to the agents of this very fundamental change of the mode of production. Since the fundamental contradiction in the capitalist mode of production is a class contradiction, based on the contradiction between labour and capital, with labour struggling to free itself from the shackles of capital, the leading agents in this change inevitably are class forces or more precisely, the working class. However, as Lenin (1920) cautions:-

> "Victory cannot be won with a vanguard alone. To throw only the vanguard into the decisive battle, before the entire class, the broad masses have taken up a position either of direct support for the vanguard, or at least of sympathetic neutrality towards it and of precluded support for the enemy, would be, not merely foolish, but criminal". (p. 76).

It is important for the broad masses to be drawn into the struggle, a fact the vanguard recognises and works for, and which is equally facilitated by the inability of the exploiting classes to rule in the old way as mentioned above. The relevance of all these points will become clear as we analyse the concrete situation of Soweto, to which we now turn.

3. THE SOWETO REVOLT

3.1 CAUSES:

In explaining the causes of the revolt, F. Madikizela (1977) and N. Honono (1977) take issues with Boer Education system, which starting with the Bantu Education Act of 1953 had been a cause of discontent in Black circles. This was first and foremost because of its inadequacy which is demonstrated by a few variables.

First, the percentage of net national income spent on African Education had been inadequate and dwindling steadily since 1953. Thus while it was 0.5 per cent in 1954, it was 0.49 percent in 1957; 0.42 percent in 1962 and come down further to 0.39 per cent in 1964.

Secondly, partly as a result of this, the school facilities for blacks had always been very inadequate, with schools grossly overcrowded and inadequately equipped; children crowded on desks and many sitting on the floor or using their laps as desks; students doing without the usual school paraphenalia such as books, pens, ink, paper etc; many schools in the rural areas lacking proper sanitation facilities and their classrooms consisting of collapsing mudhuts among many others.

Thirdly the curriculum in all the schools had also been very unsatisfactory with, according to a UNESCO study:-

> "Roughly 25% of the time spent in religious instructions and health parades... and gardening, handicrafts, needlework, singing and writing (taking) 25% of the time".

Fourthly, this was made worse by the low calibre of teachers, as only 1.69 percentage of them had degrees in March, 1976; 11 percent had junior certificate or equivalent, and 25 percent had a professional qualification but only standard six education; not to mention the low pay they got, and the strict discipline they were subjected to all of which were very demoralising. In the final analysis, the inadequacy of Bantu Education was reflected in the fact that not only did nearly 95 percent out of every 100 pupils drop out before they reached secondary school, and only 0.1 percent of black secondary school students reached the O level but very significantly, out of a total economically active population of 6.5 million in 1975, only 80,000 blacks had passed metriculation; less than 60,000 had vocational diplomas; and less than 6,000 had University Degrees.

Apart from being inadequate, the Bantu education was also segregative and divisive; with Africans educated separately from coloureds and whites; and also significantly, with Africans divided along ethnic lines, with every ethnic group going to a separate University and with compulsory instruction in the vernacular in the lower levels of education.

Oppression permeated the whole education system, with the teachers as well as pupils subject to draconian laws and rules, and with no African history taught in the schools purposely because Africans had no history. Connected to this was the exploitative nature of this system, with very little money spent-on Africans as opposed to whites. While the money spent on a white child was R128 and for an African Child R17.08 in 1953, it had gone up to R644 on whites and R42 on blacks in 1975 - thus the ratio widening from 7.5:1 to 15:1. More to this, African parents had been contributing large sums in taxes towards the education of their children as well as towards the building and maintenance of schools, paying teachers' salaries and maintaining their children at school. By 1972 for example in Soweto, families were contributing 38 cents a month.

All in all, it is submitted by Madikizela and Honono, that the Soweto revolt was a long overdue reaction to this inadequate, segregative, exploitative and oppressive system of education.

While all this is essentialy true, these explanations suffer from three related shortcomings. First and foremost, they attempt to explain the revolt in terms of education alone as if education was not part and parcel of the overall Apartheid System. Secondly and partly as a consequence of the above, the revolt is seen somehow in isolation from the overall class struggles in South Africa. Despite superficial references to the mass revolt, this revolt is in the background. Thirdly and as a result of the above, the students are somehow isolated from the other social classes and categories in South Africa. An elaboration follows.

While it is true that the 1953 Bantu Education Act is situated in its proper historical perspective, and seen as a result of the coming to power of the Nationalist government in 1949, from there on, it is the education system which is concentrated upon. This narrow focus however leads to certain problems in the analysis. First, reference as to how much the African parents contribute every month in Soweto towards the

Education of their children, for example, don't make the impact it could have made if we had also been informed of how much they earned. This could have enabled us to see the contribution as part of the income; and put us in a position of a real appreciation of the burden the Education System puts on African parents. Secondly, having found almost all the shortcomings in the Education System alone, one is at a loss as to why the students did attack railway installations, buses, power stations, factories, government buildings, etc. This was definitely not due to "blind fury" for as Kane Berman (1979) says:-

> "The destruction... was generally not mindless and indiscriminate. There was logic in the selection of targets - symbols of the apartheid apparatus, collaborators with it, and economic exploiters"...(p. 18).

Nor can one adequately explain why the masses in the townships joined in the revolt. This was not out of "parental sympathy" as Kane Berman seems to imply. These two phenomena were a consequence of concrete reasons which a narrow focus on the Education system leaves by the wayside.

Thirdly due to this narrow focus, they completely fail to unveil the Bantu education system's relationship to, and role in the overall apartheid system, a relationship and role very crucial in understanding the cause, content, and course of the revolt. Although reference is made to Verwoerd's infamous "Enter to learn, leave to serve" speech (Madikizela 1977 p. 3), the role of the education system in reproducing relations of exploitation and condemning the overwhelming majority of youth to a life of wage slavery is not mentioned at all. This however, was uppermost in the demands of the students. Khotso Seatholo who succeeded Tsietsi Mashinini as President of the Soweto Student Representative Council said for example, that:-

> "We reject the whole system of Bantu Education whose aim is to reduce us mentally, and physically into "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the white racist masters. ... The type of education we receive is like poison that is destroying our minds. It is reducing us to intellectual cripples that cannot take a seat within the world community of academics. It is killing our inherent sense of creation and thus frustrating us. Twenty years ago, when Bantu education was introduced, our fathers said: 'Half a loaf is better than no loaf', but we say: 'Half a gram

> of poison is just as killing as the whole gram'. Thus we strongly refuse to swallow this type of Education that is designed to make us slaves in the country of our birth". (Our emphasis. Kane Berman 1979 p. 24).

The Bantu education system was therefore also rejected because of its role of facilitating the supply of cheap docile labour for the system as a whole.

Fourthly and may be very importantly, the above mentioned problems are inevitable in Madikizela and Honono's analysis because they fail to take into account the general historically determined socio-economic and political developments in South Africa. It is only when the Bantu education system is placed in this perspective that Soweto is clearly understood.

The South Africa "rolling sixties", a period of immense Economic. growth had started slowing down towards the late sixties. Being part and parcel of the world capitalist system, she also imported the west's inflationary tendency, the rate of which reached 9.1 in 1972 and was further exacerbated by the oil price hikes in the early seventies. This brought to bear immense pressure on the economy, the pressures which were made worse by her limited home market due to her emasculated modes of production, the low income of the African people, the high rate of exploitation etc. By the end of 1975, the growth-rate of the economy was already behind the targets set in the Economic Development Programme in 1974. The decline in growth-rate was 2.2 percent in 1975 and deteriorated to 1.5 percent in 1976. (Financial Mail, 9/4/1976).

This trend had a marked impact on wages. The real increases in wages (not absolute) which African workers experienced in the sixties began to erode. By January 1976, as Table I shows, the average African wage was a mere R109. This was happening however, when the household subsistence level for Africans was rising. As Table II shows, in Johannesburg, an African family of six needed at least R134.67 to live for a month, in Cape Town R136.47 and in Pretoria R131.35. Indeed things were worse for as the South African Institute of Race Relations (1971) observes, the Household subsistence level is "more remarkable for what it omits than for what it includes". It does not include tax, transport for other members of the family,

medical care, education, entertainment, savings and dozens of other items whites take for granted. (Nkosi 1977 p. 22). Actually, according to Edward Batson, it is by adding 50 percent to the Household subsistence level that one could arrive at what he calls the effective minimum level. And if this yardstick is applied to the Household subsistence level figures mentioned above, approximately 80 percent of Soweto households were below it (Kane-Berman 1979 p. 54).

The economic recession also led to increased unemployment among Africans as very few job opportunities were created to accommodate the numbers joining the labour market. This was made worse by other related factors, notably the trend among many employers who in a bid to reduce their losses due to the recession, reduced the portion of variable capital against the constant portion through more capitalisation; and the more rigid enforcement of the industrial colourbar, characteristic at all times of economic recession in the Republic. All this was taking place when, according to the Department of Bantu Education (1976), the number of secondary schools in Soweto had increased from 19 in 1972 to 41 in 1976. Consequently, between 1971 and 1975, the number of Soweto pupils passing senior certificate examinations tripled.

By the end of 1976, unemployed Africans were estimated to be more than two million. While most of these were in the reserves, increasing numbers managed to find their way into the urban townships so much so that by 1975, there were 86,000 unemployed in Soweto alone (Nkosi p. 23), a fact which further increased hardships for those who had to support them. The Association of Chambers of Commerce of South Africa for example, reported that the average number of people per house in the townships had grown from 13 in 1970 to 17 in 1975. (Kane Berman p. 50).

This situation was met by resistance from the Africans led by the workers in the numerous workers' strikes starting from the early seventies, as well as other actions of protest. The South African state, true to its character, let loose further repression on the one hand, and urgently perfected its plans of Bantustanizing the Africans on other, in its bid to pre-empt the people's struggles, all of which

TABLE 1: AFRICAN WAGES IN SELECTED INDUSTRIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

INDUSTRY	RAND PER MONTH
Printing	130.00
Tobacco	117.00
Electrical Machinery	128.00
Beverage	110.00
Furniture	83.00
Rubber Products	116.00
Footwear	96.00
Transport Equipment	119.00
Leather and Products	92.00
Food	96.00
Machinery	123.00
Miscellaneous	103.00
Metal Products	109.00
Wood and Cork	71.00
Paper and Products	123.00
Clothing	79.00
Non-metallic Mineral Products	96.00
Textiles	84.00
Chemical Products	104.00
Basic Metal	118.00
AVERAGE	109.00

Source: Financial Mail, 16th January, 1976, based on figures of t. Department of Statistics.

however, led to further resistance from the Africans of which the Soweto one was but a part. More will be said on this below; what needs emphasis here is the fact that the Soweto Revolt was a result of systematic abuse suffered by all African peoples in South Africa. It was in this context that all the shortcomings of the Bantu education system and especially its role in condemning all the Youth to slave labour became completely intolerable. Contrary to Honono and Madikizela, R. Botha (1976) is for once on the right track when he says:-

TABLE II: HOUSEHOLD SUBSISTENCE LEVELS: AFRICAN FAMILY OF SIX. (OCTOBER, 1976).

CITY/TOWN	HOUSEHOLD (in Rand)
Cape Town	136.47
Port Elizabeth	124.95
Durban	127.61
Pretoria	131.35
Johannesburg	134.67
Bloemfontein	126.36
SMALLER CENTRES:	**HOUSEHOLD (in Rand)**
East London	129.13
Kimberley	128.05
King Williams Town	116.24
Umtata	111.36
Peddie	110.43
Brits	118.48

Source: Monthly Statistical and Marketing Digest. Vol. 13 No. 1, January, 1977.

> "But it was said that the use of tne Afrikaans language as the medium of Instructions which is detested by blacks was the main reason. This can't be true". (our emphasis p. 23).

Not only had the question of languages of instruction in African Schools been a recurring source of contention for almost twenty years, (Kane Berman op. cit. p. 11); the use of Afrikaans was actually lifted in early July 1976, but it did not stop the protests which indeed thereafter moved to a qualitatively higher level as we shall soon see. We are not saying it was of no importance at all, all we are saying is that it must be seen within a wider context. To use Kane Berman's words, for the Afrikaans issue to have been the last, there had to have been countless other straws laid upon the camel's back before. The students' revolt was to use Lenin's words (1908), "A political symptom... of the whole present situation). 218).

Put in this perspective, the failure to locate the student revolt within the overall mass revolt in South Africa is a serious shortcoming. Indeed the Soweto revolt, was but a culmination of a series of struggles which had re-emerged after the "lull" of the sixties when African political organisations were banned, many of their militants killed or sent to jail, and others forced to leave the country. Beginning in late 1960's, a series of strikes had been staged by the workers; South African Students Organisation (SASO) and the Black People Convention (BPC) had been formed; while outside the country, the Liberation movements had activated international pressure against the South African regime. The Soweto Revolt was a culmination of all these events. Indeed the student struggle cannot be understood without this perspective. Other social groups especially the working class had been part and parcel of this process. To leave them out of any explanation is inevitably a serious omission. Having discussed the causes of the revolt, let us now turn to its course.

3.2 COURSE OF THE REVOLT.

Actually, the student action began in April 1976 with boycotts and strikes at several schools in Soweto and around Johannesburg, although June 1976 is taken as the landmark, largely because this was when the massacre of students by South Africa police en mass began. The revolt was sustained throughout the year and calm was not really restored to the townships until the beginning of 1978.

Two general phases can be distinguished in the movement. These are: a more or less student revolt and a more generalised revolutionary struggle, a la Heinz Lubasz - (mentioned in section two). The demarcation is by no means rigid and of course there were a lot of elements which were common throughout the struggle. All the same, a rough distinction can be made based on five variables. These are the leading agents in the struggle; the demands and targets of the struggle; the nature and tactics of the struggle; forms of leadership and organisation of the struggle; and lastly, the government response to the struggle.

While it is true that it is the students who sparked off the struggle and sustained it through rebellion and boycotts to the end, they soon realised their blows were not only "light". but were aimed at "un-

important" targets in the system. In the words of three of them, they realised that among other things:

> "What happens in Soweto affects no one outside, in the 'white' areas. We want to do what will hit the enemy hardest- the people have recognised their economic power". (Kane Berman p. 133).

They thus turned to the wielders of this economic power - the masses in general, and the black workers in particular. From this moment onwards, the momentum and power of the struggle emanated from the working class, as they flexed their muscles through the numerous strikes and boycott of 'white' goods. This fact had a bearing on the course and effect of the struggle as a whole, and indeed provided the fundamental demarcation between the first and second phases.

Demands at first had been centred on the Bantu Education system and the target had been the schools. This later on evolved into an assault on the total system of oppression as Railway installations, Government buildings, etc. were attacked, a fact which may have contributed to the entry of the working class into the struggle as the demand and scope of the struggle widened to include their interests. With the coming in of the working class however, the targets were further refined. While the general system of oppression remained the target, there was now a pointed attack on the system of production, with the workers' refusal to avail the system of their labour power; the burning of farms; and the refusal to shoulder any rent increase. Commented the President of South Africa's Association of Engineering employers: "the emphasis... had switched from being anti-government to being anti-business". (RAPE No. 7 p. 108). What had begun as a specific attack on the particular aspects of the system: its Bantu education system, had grown into an attack on the overall system, with sharp, pointed deep thrusts into its base - the economy.

More to this, street demonstrations and mass groupings of people, very predominant in the first phase, gave way to what Lenin (1971) called "the specifically proletarian weapon of struggle" (p. 173), namely strikes, stay at homes, and numerous other clandestine activities. While this may have been due to the increasing casualties sustained in the earlier forms of struggles, the entry of the working class was again a very important contributing factor - not only

because they were the hinge on which the new tactic depended upon, but may be also because of their accumulated experience of struggle and organization.

Although spontaneity is one of the elements which marked the whole struggle, in the latter stages of the struggle, conscious meticulous organization was evident. Newsweek reported that:

> "There were indications that in their later stages, some of the riots were indeed organized... Identical slogans calling for more violence appeared on walls in various parts of the country simultaneously". (July 4, 1976).

In a latter issue, we are informed that:

> "A well organised leaflet campaign by hundreds of school children in Soweto and other townships around Jonannesburg succeeded in achieving a nearly total strike by black workers that crippled industry and commerce in Johannesburg" (September 6, 1976 p. 7).

In the later stages of the struggle therefore, spontaneous action was blended with organised action. This organization as evident above is commonly attributed to students. While this is very true as students formed an underground in the townships to maintain contact with other regions, it is also true that other non-student bodies were involved in the organisation of the struggle. The call for the workers' strikes for example, originated simultaneously both from the Johannesburg students and from the African National Congress underground (RAPE No. 7. p. 122). Furthermore, workers in Natalspruit (Germiston) had made thousands of copies of strike leaflets on their bosses' office machines and then passed them to the students for distribution (Kane Berman 1979 p. 117). More to this, we are informed that Hostel men were among the active promoters of the third stay-away 13th, 14th and 15th September 1976 (Kane Berman p. 114). In any case, the strike response, 100 percent in some cases, tends to suggest an effective worker participation in the organisation process.

Finally, the government response to the struggle, was generally marked by arrogance and a refusal to curve in to any of the demands, and often harsh reprisals against the participants characterised by massacres. Indeed the Government response in the early phase of the struggle, had been the appointment of Dr. Andries Treurnich, reknown for his extremely anti-African views, Deputy Minister in charge of African Education. The entry of the working class into the struggle changed the response dramatically. Nkosi (1977) describes the change very well:-

> "The white establishment racists and Liberals alike, reacted either not at all or with wild deprecation when school children were being shot down in cold blood in the townships. But when their workforce was removed during the two successful three-day strikes in Soweto which brought commerce and industry in Johannesburg to a halt, the shots of alarm rose on all sides". (p. 33).

The all-white associated chambers of commerce, the South African Federation of the Chambers of Industry, and the National Development and Management Foundation, all met after the crippling strikes and urged the abandonment of racial discrimination. To crown it all, Prime Minister J. Vorster summoned leaders of the ruling National Party to a summit conference in Pretoria for September 1976. As Newsweek commented, this was:-

> "The first time such a meeting has been called since June 1960, when South Africa broke away from Great Britain and proclaimed itself a Republic" (August 3, 1976, p. 26).

A shopkeeper near Johannesburg for example lamented:

> "Soweto people are really showing us what they can do. One cannot ignore the buying power of a million people and its really hitting us hard now" (Kane Berman p. 122).

Of course the cumulative effect of the struggle had something to do with this change in response. What we are emphasizing is the

important role played by the working class in the process. As the South African Congress of Trade Unions (1977) correctly observes:-

> "It was the strike action of the black workers which really shook the confidence of the regime and of the whole capitalist ruling class". (Workers' Unity No. 9. 1977 p. 1).

4. CONCLUSION:

At this juncture, we cannot but conclude that contrary to the commonly held view, the Soweto revolt was actually not a purely student affair. The working class played a very key role in the movement, and indeed as we have seen above, transformed it both quantitatively and qualitatively from a mere student revolt, into a generalised revolutionary movement by refining and sharpening its demands and targets; perfecting old tactics of protest while at the same time devising others which were safer and more effective; evolving new methods of organisation and leadership; and lastly, providing it with immense social power, thus greatly contributing to the overall effectiveness of the struggle.

In restrospect, this was to be expected for as Lenin (1908) said:-

> "The proletariat will not be behindhand. It often yields the palm to the bourgeois democrats in speeches at banquets, in legal Unions within the walls of the Universities, from the rostrum of representative institutions. It never yields the palm, and will not do so, in the serious and great revolutionary struggles of the masses" (Like the Soweto one - R.S.M) (Our emphasis p. 219).

This is so, and objectively inevitable for a number of reasons. As mentioned in section two, a social revolution in a class society, is a class issue. And in a capitalist society, this role objectively falls squarely on the shoulders of the working class. A class with a definite and crucial place and role in the capitalist mode of production. As opposed to this, the student body is a social category, composed of elements from various classes in society. As Lenin (1908) ably describes the phenomenon:-

> "... Thousands and millions of threads tie the student Youth with the middle and lower bourgeoisie, the petty officials, certain groups of the peasantry, the clergy etc..." (p. 219)

This among other things leads to students submitting to confused ideas and vascillating from the extreme left, through the center, to the extreme right of the political spectrum, a fact very evident during the Soweto struggles. When examination time approached in February 1977, Some students who earlier on had been in the fore front enforcing the 'Azikhwelwa' (we don't ride) call, now wanted to sit for the examinations. They argued:-

> "It is our sincere wish that Bantu Education should be totally scrapped, but we cannot afford to foresake Bantu Education and be left with no relevant alternative at all... The boycott of classes and examinations does not affect the oppressor. Instead he rejoices that we are defeating our own ends". (Our emphasis. Karne-Berman 1979 p. 135).

The working class, as producers of surplus value, is strategically placed in the mode of production, both in terms of being at the core of the mode - the production process - as well as being dispersed throughout the society. The student body however, is not strategically placed. The society can shut its schools and Universities even for a year, as was the case in Soweto, which would be impossible with factories and industries. The working class also suffers from continuous direct exploitation, oppression and alienation. Students however, do not suffer directly from exploitation in the production process. It is significant that recently, when the state in the former Central African Empire of Bokassa required students to put on new uniforms, a student retorted: "pay my father first, I will then buy a uniform".

It is because of all these reasons that the working class forms the backbone of all revolutionary struggles against the capitalist mode of production. Thus in the case of Southern Africa, Shamuyarira (1974) who is a seasoned freedom fighter says:-

> "From my own experience, most of the militants who form the backbone of the guerrilla wars are men and women who have had work experience in one or more of the major cities and mines of Southern Africa. ... Even among the peasantry scattered in the thousands of villages in Southern Africa, it is those who worked in the cities or mines at some point in their youth, who readily and willingly support the armed struggle". (p. 15).

More to this, the working class struggle is a permanent one, their target, the entire mode of production as their grievances can only be resolved with the complete overthrow of the existing social arrangement and thus organizationally, they aspire to include all the oppressed classes and sections in the mode of production. Thus, the South African Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in the 1920's, "functioned as a Trade Union, political pressure group and mass movement" (L.D. Dekker etal. 1975. p. 212). As opposed to this, student struggles are sporadic, more often than not directed at specific social ills until they adopt a working class position and thus join with the workers in their relentless struggles against the system. But as Jack Woddis (1977) well puts it:-

> "Once the heavy weight of the working class movement is thrown into battle it quickly becomes clear as to which is the decisive force". (p. 345).

This is the historical reality which the Soweto movement, contrary to misguided interpretations, confirms. A reality, which luckily enough has been clearly and correctly understood and its implications clearly appreciated and accepted by the Liberation movement in South Africa. In the words of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (1977):-

> "The events of the past six months have shown that the road to victory is the road of the worker's struggle. The task now is to build up the organised strength of the working class". (p. 2).

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