

The Soweto Riots June 16 1976

In a notorious speech in 1954, Hendrik Verwoed (then Minister of native affairs and subsequently Prime Minister 1958-1966) spelled out how African schools were to be yoked to the aims of Apartheid.

'The Bantu must be guided to service his community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above certain forms of labour. Within his own community, however all doors are open. For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has its aim absorption in the European community while he cannot and will not be absorbed there. Up until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and partially misled him by showing him the green pastures of the Europeans but still did not allow him to graze there.'(1954)

- He closed down a functioning system that included some good mission schools like Lovedale and Healtown
- His policy based on the assumption of an inferiority of black minds was designed to prepare blacks for a subordinate place in society.
- He discouraged the teaching of Maths and Science
- The policy starved black education of funds

In 1950 less than half black children between the ages of 7 and 16 were enrolled in school. The average black child enrolled spent less than four years in school. Schools were understaffed and there was a severe shortage of trained teachers. In 1954 the government took control of all black and coloured education. It was centralized.

Eight years of mother tongue instruction took place and in the 9th year students were expected to switch to learn through the medium of either English or Afrikaans. There was little support for these policies among the vast majority of the black population.

White supremacy was clearly incompatible with a rising better educated black population, if the quality of education of the subordinate people improved it would be impossible to maintain racial discrimination. If the state in the future tried to withhold equal rights from educated people it would lead to bloody clashes and revolutions.

Providing a good education to subordinate populations would sow seeds of the destruction of white supremacy. (J.G. Strijdom, leader of the Transvaal Nationalist Party)

Funding for black education was grossly inadequate. Verwoed allocated 13 million rand which was not increased for years and expected blacks to be taxed 2% of their wages to fund their schooling.

Given that blacks comprise nearly 80% of the population, the budget and expenditure was grossly underfunded. The system continued until 1976 when black youth rose up to protest against the compulsory introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in high schools.

A character in Julian Barnes' novel, "The Sense of Ending", which won the Man Booker prize remarks: If one can pin the blame on a single person no one else is guilty; but if one blames a process everyone is somehow complicit. Blaming Verwoed for the failures and current situation in black education seems to be so much easier. The alternative view- that we are all complicit- is perhaps too ghastly to contemplate.