



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Black South Africans boycott Bantu education system, 1954-1955

December

1954

to: July

1955

Country: South Africa

Location City/State/Province: Johannesburg, Sophiatown, Kirkwood

Goals:

The goal of the campaign was to end the implementation of the Bantu Education Act. In order to do this, campaigners made a goal of complete and unified participation of Native Africans in a non-compliant campaign against the Bantu Education Act.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 048. Protest meetings
- 124. Boycott of elections
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Methods in 4th segment:

- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Methods in 5th segment:

- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 179. Alternative social institutions

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- African National Congress (ANC)
- Black South Africans
- Ministers
- students
- teachers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

African National Congress (ANC)

Women's League & Youth League sections of ANC

Partners:

Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW)

National Executive Committee (NEC)

External allies:

South African Journal "Alliance"

Congress of Democrats

former Communists

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Save Our Children Committee
- Sophiatown

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- East Rand students
- Johannesburg students
- P.Q. Vundhla (exit)
- Roberta Resha

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Kirkwood students

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 40 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Supporters of the Bantu Education Act (1953)

Commission on Native Education

Dr. Hendrik F. Verwoerd, minister of native affairs

"Eastern Province Herald" and "Bantu World" newspaper editors and journalists

Society of Young Africa (SOYA)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Port Elizabeth anti-boycott movement

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Arrests

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign climaxed in April but continually lost support until it ended in July. Although Native African parents wanted to

revoke the Bantu Education Act, campaigners were not legally allowed to create adequate alternative schools for the boycotting students. Because government run schools were the only realistic option for Bantu children, only the students who were expelled from the schools, due to continual boycotting, continued the campaign against the Bantu Education Act. The campaign initially experienced growth in participants, but after April the campaign continually lost participants and support.

In 1953 the South African Government passed the Bantu Education Act into law. This act gave the South African government the power to structure the education of Native South African children, separate from White South African children. This law was intended to organize a federal education system that would ensure that all students received an education. But it also engrained an apartheid framed education system that was predicted to impede the advancement of black children. Many ANC members, African parents, teachers, and ministers were unhappy with the way that the Act was created to educate black children in preparation for the jobs that white oppressors deemed appropriate for their social class.

By November 1953, members of the African National Congress (ANC) were speaking out against the Act. The members of the educational institutions themselves also took action. The Act required that all schools hand their operation over to the South African Government within two years' time unless they could secure outside sources of aid. In response, many mission schools either closed or attempted to raise their own funds. An example of the later is that the Education League was formed to establish a trust fund intended to fund the continued operation of St. Peter's School.

Due to the discontent that the Act had triggered, ANC members began to come up with methods to organize and protest against the Act. During the 42nd Annual Conference of the ANC in December 1954, Congressmen agreed to actively oppose the Bantu Education Act and they encouraged African parents to withdraw their children from schools in a 1 April boycott. The ANC then gave the Women's League and Youth League sections of the ANC control over future campaign organization and execution. The goal of the campaign was to revoke and create an alternative to the Bantu Education Act. By March 1955, the campaigners had agreed that, "Withdrawal of the children remained the ultimate aim, the resolution now called only for nonparticipation in the elections of school committees and school boards for the present."

Although the campaign organizers had difficulty agreeing on an adequate and effective method of protest, by April some schools had begun boycotting the South African education system and creating methods of alternative education. The ANC recognized it was their duty to support the people in their action in opposition to the Act. On 23 April, ANC volunteers held early morning meetings and prayer sessions followed by a march to ten schools to formally enact the boycott. Each school was closed by noon that day due to the boycott. Campaigners enacted a similar procedure the following day. It is estimated that 6,000 to 7,000 students in mostly Johannesburg, East Rand, and Kirkwood participated in the boycotting.

Campaigners peaked in their activities during April. However, only one South African journal, *Alliance*, was sympathetic to the cause of the protestors.

During this time, supporters of the Act organized an anti-boycott movement. Dr. A. B. Xuma, former ANC President-General, publicly denounced the boycott. Police arrested parent campaigners during the April boycotting.

The most influential force of opposition against the boycott was the federal threat issued on 15 April 1955. This statement declared that boycotting children would not be re-admitted into any South African school if they did not return to school within ten days. It is estimated that 3,000 to 4,000 students who participated in the boycott were not readmitted.

Although most Black parents did not approve of the effect that the Bantu Education Act would have on the education of their children, they did not reject the value of education in general. Parents thought of a successful education as the key to social advancement and betterment. Despite the efforts of campaigners, organizers could not develop their own schools because unregistered schools were deemed illegal. In order to evade this prohibition, campaigners developed "cultural clubs" to provide a limited but alternative education for students during the boycott. A key disadvantage in the boycott was that campaigners were not providing effective forms of alternative education at the rate that many parents needed in order to trust that their children could receive an education that could support a better future.

The campaigners attempted to continue expanding the boycott but the forces of opposition prevented successful growth after April 1955. In July the campaigners voted against continuing the boycott.

Cultural clubs remained an educational alternative, especially for those students who were not readmitted into government controlled schools. In 1957 1,515 children continued to attend cultural clubs.

Research Notes

Sources:

Feit, Edward. African Opposition in South Africa. "Ch.5 The Conception and Planning of the Bantu Education Campaign." Hoover Institution Publications. Stanford, California 1967.

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