

# Young victims of poor education

*So little has been done to deconstruct the inferior system put in place by Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, writes Siviwe Feketha*

**E**ACH year on June 16, Youth Day speeches are delivered across South Africa to commemorate those killed and injured on the day in 1976.

Defying an oppressive regime, about 20 000 black pupils took to the streets of Soweto protesting against Bantu Education and being forced to learn in Afrikaans.

Determined in their resolve, these pupils risked everything and took on the merciless apartheid establishment in their quest for quality education.

One hundred and seventy-six pupils, including Hector Pieterse, paid the highest price in their fight against subjugation and deliberate miseducation.

Their sacrifice was not in vain as it helped pave the way for a democratic dispensation almost two decades later.

As we celebrate Youth Day to honour the legacy of these brave young men and women, we should also pause to reflect on the plight of today's youth. Sadly, not much has changed for them.

One can even go as far as to say that the government has failed to provide proper education to the majority of young black people post-1994.

Although billions are spent on basic education every year, many young people leave school without the skills required to meaningfully participate in the economy.

Unsurprisingly, unemployment among the youth remains high.

Because of their inability to find decent work, they remain caught in the poverty trap.

It does not help that our government proclaims the importance of quality education, but fails miserably in ensuring it becomes a reality for millions of young people.

A significant proportion of the money allocated to basic education annually is diverted into the pockets of tenderpreneurs who do not deliver the essential materials like books to schools.

One would think that the South African Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu), the biggest teachers' union in the country, would be on



Modumaane Senior Secondary School, outside Modjadjikloof, in Limpopo, is an example of neglected schools in the region. Pupils have to share books because of the lack of resources.

PICTURE: MUJAHID SAFODIEN

the side of learners, but instead it only promotes the interests of its members.

For example, Sadtu is successfully opposing competency assessment measures for matric markers, and its members often down tools at the expense of young people in desperate need of proper education.

As if this isn't bad enough, pupils who make it against all odds

often find the doors of tertiary institutions slammed in their faces due to a lack of funding.

It boggles the mind that the government continues to commit less than 1% of its GDP to higher education, despite its grandiose statements about the importance of education and skills development in ensuring a better future for all. What future are we building if young people are not the founda-

tion of such a future? What youth are we building if education – proper education – is not the foundation with which we build them?

Apartheid architect Hendrik Verwoerd once said: "There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, ac-

cording to the sphere in which they live." It's then fair to say that those in whose name Youth Day is commemorated would be disgusted to learn that the government is failing to decisively change the roles defined by Verwoerd.

Unlocking the potential of our youth and empowering them through quality education is the only way to commemorate those who died on June 16, 1976.

Monotonous speeches and increasing subsidies without proper controls and planning will neither capture the imagination of the youth to self-actualise nor hide the plundering of public funds through tenderpreneurship from the eyes of the public.

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