

MEDIA STATEMENT

2 NOVEMBER 2017

EMBARGO: IMMEDIATE

SCHOOL CAPTURE, VIOLENCE AND A SHORTAGE OF TEACHING POSTS

The National Executive Council of the South African Teachers' Union (SAOU) met on 31 October and 1 November 2017 to deliberate on a wide variety of concerns. Three matters in particular raised serious comment. They are clearly systemic in nature and will demand close attention from worried role players.

1. School capture by the state

The recently proposed amendments to the South African Schools' Act and the Employment of Educators Act take public education back to the pre- 1994 era. That is to say, to a system of state schooling in which each school is an extension of the political dispensation of the day. What this means is that schools will have no choice but to toe a specific political line and the noble notion of the school as a democratic institution will come to nothing. These amendments will in no way whatever, improve the quality of education and are without doubt, designed to 'capture' every school for the sole purpose of advantaging the state. The excuse offered is that not all governing bodies can fulfil their duties which clearly begs the question: What then has the government been doing for the past twenty or more years?

It is also important to note that the proposed amendments run counter to the Education White Paper and the National Development Plan. Both policy documents require school communities to enjoy the highest degree of autonomy. This explicit 'school capture' is a step backwards: one that, over the long term, will push an already ailing system, closer to the edge. It places schools in the hands of redeployed cadres who have absolutely no sense of the education needs of either schools or their communities.

The aspect that engenders the greatest worry is the plan to take the appointment of promotion posts in schools out of the hands of the school governing bodies and place it instead in the hands of officials. To date, it was a generally accepted principle that parents and schools were in the best position to objectively decide which principal, deputy principal and head of department most satisfactorily fulfilled the school's curriculum and cultural requirements while also fitting in with the nature and ethos of the school.

Other aspects that suggest school capture are the fact that schools can be forced to make use of centralised procurement systems and that education authorities can simply use school facilities, willy nilly, without the school being able to claim remuneration for maintenance or possible breakages. Furthermore, the prescript that the purchase of just about any article at all is subject to departmental approval is clear proof that the department wants to exercise control over schools' purse strings. To then further expect that the financial matters of an educator's spouse must be declared, is devoid of all reason.

The SAOU is already in the process of taking hands with other education unions and partners to fight this draconian attempt to capture schools.

The SAOU calls on every responsible citizen to reject this school capture which totally contradicts the requirements of quality education and makes a mockery of democratic education.

2. Violence in schools

Violence in a considerable number of schools is in the process of making such schools, ungovernable. Criminals in the guise of learners are driving a reign of fear, bullying other learners and especially female educators. The SAOU is generally recognised as an education union that upholds respect for every citizen's fundamental rights but the caveat has always been that the flipside of rights is responsibilities. The authority of educators and governing bodies is increasingly being undermined by education authorities who maintain that guilty offenders' rights to education weigh more heavily than other rights. The SAOU does not agree with that notion. Guilty parties that behave like criminals forfeit their right to education.

The SAOU is currently conducting a comprehensive survey among schools and educators regarding discipline problems and bullying. The SAOU is deeply conscious that schools reflect a community's attitude to authority and discipline, but that fact cannot prevent any responsible educator, parent or school from doing everything possible to make schools safe places again. The purpose of the research is to use the findings to engage with governing body organizations and education authorities to ensure that the right of the silent majority of educators and learners to a safe learning environment, is honoured. If no effective action is taken to curb the current situation, it can spiral out of control.

3. Shortage of teaching posts

It is a given that there is a direct correlation between smaller class groups and the quality of education. Exactly the opposite is happening, however, with the focus on post provisioning for 2018. The number of registered learners has increased by 463,778 to 11,7 million learners while the number of teaching posts has declined by 2,055 to 373,281. This reduces the learner: educator ratio from 31,75:1 to 32,09:1. The various provincial learner: educator ratios for 2018 compared to 2017 are the following: Gauteng (35:1 vs 33,1:1), KZN (30,2:1 vs 30,64:1), Limpopo (33:1 vs 33:1), Mpumalanga (30,6:1 vs 30,5:1), Northern Cape (30,6:1 vs 30,6:1); North West (31:1 vs 30:1), Eastern Cape (30:1 vs 30:1), Free State (31,6:1 vs 31:1) and Western Cape (36,9:1 vs 36,6:1).

It is important to note that this reduction in numbers means that approximately 3,367 educators will have to be declared redundant at their current schools and will have to be moved to other communities. The resultant emotional trauma and disruption to families, cannot be overestimated.

If the cost of subsidizing state controlled institutions like the SABC, SAA, Transnet, SA Post Office and ESCOM are considered, it becomes clear just how dearly education is also paying for state capture.

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