THE HISTORY OF SADTU

SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS UNION
Preface

This book is a product of an ongoing historical research project conducted by the Wits History Workshop, at the University of the Witwatersrand on behalf of SADTU. It speaks to a number of important issues that present the apartheid educational conditions, which led to the formation of SADTU. While many publications have been written about SADTU, this booklet pays a particular attention to the voices of the founders and members of the union. It gives SADTU veterans and the younger generation of teachers and unprecedented opportunity to tell their story. This publication precedes a more detailed book that is due to be published in the following years. The research process went through different stages. From the beginning, a formidable team of scholars was formed. The team included three Wits History Professors, a post doctoral fellow, and a researcher who is one of the authors of this booklet. This team conceptualized the study and assisted the researcher to design the research plan. The project was fortunate to be fully supported by the SADTU union officials who opened the door for the researcher to visit SADTU provincial offices nationwide. One of the authors enthusiastically identified and reviewed literature that documents SADTU’s past. He also visited different provinces where he conducted interviews with different SADTU veterans whom through their visionary leadership and participation took part in founding the union. At the same time, he collected SADTU materials ranging from reports to minutes to develop a SADTU archival collection that would be stored at Wits Historical Papers.

Introduction: The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) is a product of multifaceted and prolonged negotiations amid racially divided teacher organisations that amalgamated with intent to pursue one progressive vision. The union was launched on the 6 October 1990. This birth day saw thousands of teachers from at least eighteen organisations from all corners of South Africa, signed the union into being. A historical event described by the then and current teachers as, ‘the day of victory’. SADTU became the first national non-racial and, non sexist union to have been formed in South Africa. Its leadership has continuously pursued and tied its objectives, as well as its education development programmes to the broader politics of the liberation struggle. This is evident in that many of SADTU leaders have moved into key strategic positions in government and society in the later years.

The history of SADTU would be patently incomplete without reference to the high levels of inequality that characterized the socio-political state of affairs in South Africa, and its schooling system. A consideration of the South African historical context and the nature of the apartheid political education, allows for an understanding of the emergence of teachers’ politics and the forces that compelled the formation of the union.

At the core of historical forces and complex socio-political waves that compelled SADTU’s formation, was the Bantu Education Policy, enacted in 1953. This legislation divided the South African society by implementing state control over education, with the intent to protect white privilege and power. The consequences were negative for the African teaching force- yielding to low qualification and poor morale. A story of the teachers’ union is what the compilers of this book seek to tell. Not only because it is more than twenty years since SADTU’s formation, but also for the reason that its history has not been written from the point of view of its founder members, as it is in the case of this book. The booklet deliberately focuses on the effects of apartheid education, and its set of forces that gave birth to teachers’ politics. The period of study begins from the 1950s when young militant teachers protested against Bantu Education. It ends in 1995 when SADTU, began to make itself felt in the political spectrum of South Africa.
A struggle in context

The history of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), would be patently incomplete without reference to the high levels of inequality that characterised the socio-political state of affairs in South Africa, and its schooling system. A consideration of the South African historical context and the nature of the apartheid education allows for an understanding of the emergence of teachers’ politics and the forces that compelled the formation of the union. SADTU is a product of deep-rooted historical forces and complex socio-political waves that transformed the South African society during the late 1940s and 50s. Therefore, its emergence signifies a direct reaction to apartheid government policy. The period between the mid and late 1950s was characterised by the African struggle against the implementation of Bantu Education policy. An advocate of the latter policy, Dr. Verwoerd asserted in his speech presented before the Senate of the Parliament of the Union of South Africa that, ‘where possible the various types of schools now in existence must be controlled by whites, in co-operation with bodies composed of Bantu members.’ This blatant segregation with a long entrenched history in the South African education system, was crystallised by the apartheid ideology. It divided the South African society by implementing state control over education, with intent to protect white privilege and power. The consequences were negative for the African teaching force, yielding to low qualification and poor morale. Prior to the National Party’s (NP)’s regime, the African education system was administered by the Department of Native Affairs. After the NP came into power, a Commission of Inquiry headed by Dr. W. W. M Eiselen was appointed in 1949, to transform African education. This Commission established the ‘Bantu Local Authorities’ in the reserves and white urban areas. The authorities thereof, would according to the commissioner comprise of chiefs and nominated members. These bodies were established to play an active role in carrying out educational plans, as well as to control the labour force in the reserves. In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act was enacted. Two years later, the Bantu Education Act was promulgated in 1953. In his statement, Dr. Verwoerd proclaimed that ‘education should stand with both feet in the reserves and have its roots in the spirit and being of Bantu society.’ By 1954, the Act was amended to eradicate missionary schools and training colleges such as, Adams College, Lovedale and many other schools. Government subsidies were terminated and missionaries were offered an option to sell their schools to the government. Arguably, it would be appropriate to say that no single legal measure proved more traumatic in the history of missionary endeavours in the Union of South Africa than the Bantu Education Act of 1953.

In South Africa, the politics of education displayed a distinct characteristics and core components of political culture that was generated in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In its inception, this political culture was spearheaded by the Ethiopianist movement- an association that was dominated by teachers and clergies who later formed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912. The founders of the ANC were against the limited African education in mission schools. They blamed the state for limiting opportunities for Africans and the church for forcing African Christians out of the orthodox denominations through factionalist, and paternalist, as well as segregationist means. They were of the perception that mission education stifled their ambitions and hindered their success. They often advocated for a comprehensive secular education that would construct ideas and attitudes that meet the unique needs of the African community. Under the auspices of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the Ethiopianists opened up independent schools such as, Bethel in Cape Town and the Wilberforce Institute in Evaton. The curriculum in those schools comprised of anti-colonial content that depicted the failure of white missionary schools to meet African needs. Thus, the AME Church stood as an exemplar for the African denominations that explicitly expressed in their policies, an understanding of the connection between education and the African liberation. Their cause was geared toward the notion of self-agency and upliftment amongst African communities. Such values would later shape the 1950s resistance against the Bantu education system. The Ethiopian political culture would once more be instrumental in one form or another in the 1970s and beyond. One
marked feature of the 1970s reflected on the 'Black Power' campaign against apartheid and unequal education. By this time, the African struggle was increasingly characterised by the classic language of protest that fused the old Ethiopianist conception of education for African self-upliftment.

After the Bantu Education was implemented, proponents for equal education began to advocate for a common syllabus. At that time, their activism was defined by multiple economic and political crises, which included a stance against the state’s control of the education system. The state had taken charge of the education system, by eliminating missionaries who were for the most part of the earlier periods, responsible for educating Africans. This caused uproar amongst the missionary educationist and further resulted to protests. Giving testimony to this, Harold Samuel describes how Archbishop Denis Hurley went to Verulam to give a speech that condemned Bantu Education. According to Harold, the Archbishop said the government is going to shut down all the mission- the black missionary schools are all going to be closed. They are not funding us but we are taking a vow today that we are going to keep the school open. The schools and I want those people who are here to pledge money to say that you will keep the schools open.

The archbishop and his colleagues believed that their religious organisation could maintain their schools even with reduced support. This matter stimulated further discussions internationally, about the possibility of closing the mission field in Natal.
TASA News takes a look back at the events and people that made 1990 a special year for TASA and teachers throughout the country. The year started slowly, then shortly after the Easter recess, teachers started shifting gear.

TASA News

1990
THE YEAR WE GOT IT TOGETHER

TASA Women Committee

SADTU Rally - Johannesburg, Sunday 7th October 1990

TASA March onto NEDLAC offices, 1 June 1990

Parks Nicolette, displaying the determination that characterized teachers during the year.
Educators and political response

Among South Africans, the transformation of education intensified opposition from political organisations, academics, teachers association and unions, as well as some non-government organisations that adopted the separatist political strategy. Among African academics, Dr. D.G.S Mthimkulu, a leading African educationist who testified during the Eiselen Commission clearly stated that, ‘Africans were not prepared to accept laws, policies and institutions that sought to relegate them into a perpetual position of subordination in the land of their birth.’ The anti-Bantu Education proponents agitatedly called for the integration of African education under one democratic non-racial structure. Bantu Education was perceived as having characteristics of domination that included conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion. This line of criticism began to be emotionally charged and politicised. The 1950s marked the tradition of resistance and militancy that was spearheaded by teachers who also belonged to the African nationalists’ movement. This radical stance, began in 1949- propelled by the Programme of Action of the ANC that later ushered the Defiance Campaign. This militant approach ended in 1960, when the ANC was banned. From then till the 1980s, the radical stance of the old teachers associations was quashed and they later became sweethearts of the government. However, their historical role should not be underestimated - they laid the foundation on which almost all subsequent political condemnation of Bantu Education had been built.

Pledging solidarity with teachers associations, many organisations, such as the South African Communist Party (SACP), represented by Moses Kotane voiced their dissatisfaction during the Eiselen Commission. Among these organisations, the ANC launched the

"ON BEHALF OF THE ANC, I AM DELIGHTED TO EXPRESS OUR HONOR FOR BEING ASSOCIATED WITH THIS LAUNCHING CONGRESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS UNION. THIS HAS BEEN EAGERLY AWAITED BY US, AND IT REPRESENTS A QUANTUM LEAP FOR THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT, AND FOR THE STRUGGLE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR."
Bantu Education Campaign alongside with the Defiance Campaign that started in 1952. The ANC advocated the school boycotts and made unsuccessful attempts to build its own school. This was opposed by two dominant teachers’ organisation of the Cape Province, the Cape African Teachers Union (CATU) and Teacher League of South Africa (TLSA). Their position called for children to stay in schools, arguing that the ANC’s stay-away campaign was detrimental to African children. It would have obviously been quite impossible for the ANC to establish private institutions at the time. The establishment of the school meant to take over the functions of the state and to create an entire educational system on the scale that is required. Moreover, a clause in the Bantu Education Act did not permit private schools to be built unless they were registered with the Native Affairs Department. And, presumably, the Department would have refused to register schools unless they complied with Verwoerd-Eiselen syllabuses.

In the Cape, the introduction of Bantu Education intensified radicalism among Cape African Teachers Association (CATA). Teachers from CATA pledged solidarity with All African Convention (AAC) and the Unity Movement (UN). When Bantu Education was implemented, CATA participated in preventing the establishment of school committees. At the same time, the association conducted propaganda campaigns amongst the local peasantry on the effects of ‘Bantu Education’, ‘Bantu Authorities’ and ‘Land Rehabilitation. In the Transkei region, chiefs were given extraordinary powers to control school committees and boards. Many of them were illiterate with no formal education. Taking a closer look at the local realities, CATA raised the concern that education is a highly specialised field to be administered by uneducated chiefs.

In the same vein, the National African Teachers Union (NATU) based in Natal, was hostile to Bantu Education and further called for the improvement of material conditions under which African teachers worked. In Transvaal, the rise of ANC Youth League (ANCYL), began to have a fundamental effect in changing teacher politics. During this period, a number of young teachers such as AP Mda, David Bopape, Oliver Tambo, Zephania Mthopeng, Eskia Mphahlele, Isaac Matlare, Ellen Khuzwayo, Moses Kekane and many others came into the teaching profession.

The political action of these teachers; most notably, David Bopape and AP Mda was intensified by the teachers wage campaign that culminated into a mass demonstration in 1944. During the campaign, marchers carried placards featuring slogans such as, ‘Hungry teachers can’t teach hungry children’... ‘We want education not Native Education’... ‘We want free and compulsory education.’ The march was victorious; it influenced the government to raise teachers’ salaries and to appoint a commission to look into teachers grievances. In 1951, the Transvaal African Teachers Association (TATA), under the young leadership of Zephania Mthopeng and Eskia Mphahlele embarked on a concerted campaign against the Eiselen Report on Bantu Education. TATA used clandestine pamphlets such as, The Voice and Education for Change. By these pamphlets, TATA explains, ‘we succeeded in influencing the teachers to such an extent that in 1952, at the TATA conference in Witbank [we] passed the resolution rejecting Bantu Education in toto.’ This led to the dismissal of three executive members of TATA namely, Eskia Mphahlele, Isaac Matlare and Zeph Mthopeng. After this campaign, many teachers who were identified as trouble-some were dismissed by the government. As a result, the Department of Bantu Education experienced mass resignations from teachers. Among them, was Oliver Tambo who left St Peters to join the legal fraternity. However, the dismissal –of teachers who were parents, as well as breadwinners had negative socio-economic consequences for their nuclear and extended families.

Teachers’ resistance can be attributed to the burden of responsibility vested on them. Under poorly-funded classrooms, teachers were held accountable for the behaviour and decorum of students. Principals were not an exception. A large portion of their time was spent writing memoranda- arguing for increased monetary support from the education department. They had to raise funds to purchase appropriate equipment, and in order to acquire additional schooling space. Thus, fairness and equity became a major concern for African teachers in the 1950s. In many instances, teachers and principals straddled between keeping a good reputation of their schools by abiding to departmental submissions, as well as safeguarding their reputation in their communities. Thus, South African teachers’ adopted militant tactics and political radicalism in order to mould the teaching conditions to suit their demands.
Segregation in education

This system of education was in consonance with the trend toward racially based forms of social control throughout South Africa. It cemented a long concerted effort that aimed to implement statutory segregation in education and extend the better quality public education system to all white children. This initiative was in harmony with white public opinion that harboured deep-seated antagonism toward the “over-education” of Africans. It was feared that educating Africans would ultimately undermine white supremacy. Bantu education was viewed as a means of reinforcing white supremacy and ensuring the effective exploitation of African labour. Politically, it aimed to frustrate the development of a national spirit among Africans. One of the first generation of teachers that worked under Bantu Education and a former member of Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA), Harold Samuel, recollects, ‘I was a young teacher in 1952 employed by a glorified government. As an employee of this government and I thought I was doing the greatest good for my country... I never saw injustice I was so myopic.’ This system of education gave birth to fragmented Departments of Education that were unequally subsidised by the government. This fragmentation resulted in a wasteful duplication of functions that were carried out by different departments of education. There were seventeen authorities that employed teachers. African teachers in these departments were poorly paid compared to their white counterparts. Chizana recalls that ‘In different departments of education, African teachers were paid differently. So you will find that in the Eastern Cape people will always say ‘our salaries are not the same as the ones from the Western Cape.’ Female teachers were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Their remuneration was not equal to their male colleagues.

In its policy, the National Party (NP) has always argued that education for South African citizen was of equal quality. However, the pattern of resource allocation contrasted the NP’s claims. Schools in the self-governing states that were treated as separate countries, were financed separately by the Pretoria regime. They were under the direct control of school boards and committees. School teachers and principals, as well as those parents who were considered ‘progressive’, saw the injunction of the school board system as the brain-child of a political, and not an educational motive. In the eyes of the government, the establishment of these boards and committees was seen as an active participation of the “Bantu”, not only within the educational machinery, but also in local government, in order that these institutions could be developed to reach their full social significance. No matter how problematic they were, school boards and committees were viewed by the government as inclusive modernised structures that induced community involvement in education. The committees and boards received funds from parents, and budgets allocated by the education Department. They were responsible for controlling and spending it judiciously.

Livingstone Vumazonke, a former teacher in Ciskei, revealed that, ‘In Ciskei, these committees were just deducting monies from teachers with an aim of bolstering the hegemony of power and state, whenever there would be a big tribal meeting in the mountain of Ntabakandoda monies would be deducted.’ In Bantustans, such as Ciskei, traditional authorities had, in effect, greater authority than government departments. They controlled and administered school funds. They also allocated land where schools could be built and the cost of these constructions was borne by the
community. In such context, the government envisaged that schools and teachers as well as, local communities formed an important means of raising funds. These boards squeezed African communities financially. They were also responsible for investigating complaints against teachers by members of communities, parents or inspectors. They also instituted whatever disciplinary action deemed necessary, albeit subject first to the approval of the Department. Members of Bantu School Boards were also expected to submit recommendations to the Department with regard to modifications of the syllabi in schools under their control.

Unlike in the post-apartheid South Africa, parents and teachers had very little say in school funding or the provision of school resources. In the realm of education alone, this impacted negatively on the quality of education. Adding to the woes, was the teacher training, school didactical content, guidance services and the educational tours that were not the same with those of the white counterpart. Inequality was also evident in schools infrastructure and facilities, such as, libraries, laboratories, sports grounds, text books and other educational amenities. Most learners did not have text-books because parents could not afford them. Some comparative statistics indicating the disparities in the school system records that in 1969, there were 810,490 white youth at school, and the total cost of their education was R241,600,000. In the same year, 2,400,000 African children were at school. The cost of their schooling was R46,000,000. These figures demonstrate that funding was made rather arbitrarily by a white government that was at best indifferent to the needs of African schools. In contrast, Coloured and Indian schools were better funded. Samuels a former principal in one of the Indian school in Natal outline that:

'We were comparable with the white, in fact there was a time when I thought we were even superior to the results that the whites were producing. Indian education...suited...state to promote Indian education because it proved to the world that state affairs works. So they gave...they gave money to Indians, they gave good money to coloureds and they gave best money to whites and they gave practically nothing to the blacks. So the money that we got was made very good used that is what helped to raise the Indian community.

It is then clear from this testimony that unequal funding aimed to isolate Africans and eventually Coloureds and Indians from one another. In addition to funding, one of the most critical challenges in African communities was the shortage of schools. Many schools were overcrowded. Highlighting the issue of overcrowding, Stanley McKenzie remarked 'the issue of overcrowding was terrible! We had to teach large classes. I recall that I had a class of 65 pupils and I tried my best though it was not easy. This raised a question on the state funding policy which was deemed to be iniquitous. The conditions were horrendous in rural areas. Schools were few, and those that were available, were far from other localities and overcrowded. Nolihla Mboniswa who completed her primary education in Transkei recollects 'we used to travel an hour on foot, but we have never missed a day at school whether there is rain, warm, cold or what, there is snow, we would always be at school.' In the rural 'self-governing states,' school buildings were rudimentary and inadequate. Zeph Mthombeni, a teacher who also completed his primary education in the former Bantustan of KwaNgwane, indicates that from the then Sub A to Sub B, they were taught under a tree and during the rainy season, they would miss school as a result. All these conditions made it difficult for African, Indian and Coloured children to obtain an education which was as adequate as that of their white counterparts.
The plight of educators

African secondary schooling expanded dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. This sudden expansion worsened the resource shortages, overcrowding and declining teaching standards. Such that by 1982, there were 72,500 African learners (of whom 53% passed, compared to 94% of whites.) Teacher training colleges could not keep pace with this expansion, leading to even greater employment of under-qualified teachers. African teachers experienced difficulties ranging from teacher-development programmes to teacher poverty. Moreover, the number of qualified teachers in schools was low. This is better illustrated by Basil Mothibi, a former teacher in Posmansburg and Kimberly in the Northern Cape shed the light on the issue of shortage of teachers that directly affected him while he was a student in Kimberly. In his own words:

when I was attending high school we didn’t have teachers; our schools the ex DET schools were struggling to get teachers. When I did my standards 9 in 1984 we did not have educators for maths and science I was doing mathematics’ physical science and biology… we struggle to get the three content educators. I attended in Thabane, 1984, doing my standard 9. We had to go to neighbouring schools like St Boniface and coloured school, the ex HOR schools- House of Representatives, to get education after school hours. Although this inspired me, that if I complete, I want to become a teacher to assist my fellow comrades.

It was the same in other provinces. Mathematics and Sciences were inadequately taught due to a few well trained teachers in these subjects. Resolving this problem was left in the hands of Communities. Some high school graduates, such as Boitumelo Ramapulane were approached by the community to teach as ‘private teachers.’ Records show that in September 1978, KwaZulu schools were short of about 3000 teachers.

African educators were working under frustrating conditions. Teacher management and support was conceived as two separate processes. Teacher supervision in reality, referred to administration and control. The system of teacher appraisal had been largely inspectorate and bureaucratic. It was not developmental, rather more summative, in that it rewarded compliance and punished incompetent performance. Supervision was done with the view of assessing teachers’ obedience rather than engaging and improving teachers in their work. It was oriented towards the narrow objective of improving examination results, rather than improving educational processes in general. Inspectors and principals did not have any professional respect for teachers and this frustrated many of them. There were asymmetrical power relations. Loyalty to officials and their department outweighed the interests and needs of teachers. In his narrative, Twist Ndlovu a principal in Klaarwater outlined that:

School inspectors will come and say there is inspection. They will come for five days and everybody will be like cold, you didn’t know what to expect. That is why when the SADTU got in, in the 1990s we said we were doing away with the inspections. And we said, no inspectors should be allowed in schools. And even when the inspectors came, we will try even to make the learners threaten them because we did not see them developing us. They were more about fault finding than developing teachers.

"By 1982, there were 72,500 African learners of whom 53% passed, compared to 94% of whites."
This testimony provides an insight into the teachers' experiences of, and perspectives on, the type of administrative system they were subjected to under the department of education. A number of interviews reveal both conflicting and complimentary discourses on administration. Some older generation teachers believed that some of the inspectors were good. This cohort of teachers would say that; ‘Teaching was teaching. And there is no way that you can deviate from that. Fortunately at the time, you had inspectors... they were good in what they were doing.’ Seeking to address the negativity of the old administrative measures, Zakhele Nxumalo states that ‘Inspectors treated us like children. They would demand the green file [a daily workbook for teachers]. The green file was according to the current General Secretary of SADTU, Moswena Maluleka a monitoring file that conditioned teachers to follow a specific method of teaching, which in turn deprived them from thinking and functioning independently. Elaborating on Maluleka’s testimony, many teachers revealed that they were informed by their principals what was expected out of them. Questioning was not allowed. There was no space for teachers to think creatively. They had to be very cautious of straying from the syllabus, let alone getting involved in political activities.

Twist Ndlovu recalled ‘the principal who was the chairperson of NATU, was very strict and the school was up to date, but after his departure things started falling apart... when you think of Vukuzakhe [high school] you would think of Kubheka, when you talk about Zwelihle you would think of Mdlebe.’ The idea that the performance of the schools dropped when principal left, implies that administrative control was in their hands and that their expertise was not used to develop teachers. This has been revealed by countless teachers during interviews who confirmed that, in most cases, inspectors will show up in schools without notifying teachers in advance. According to Ndlovu, ‘they would demand this and that and the poor principal and teachers would be running around like nobody’s business. This has been emphasized by Ephraim Liao, a former teacher who remembers;

You know... they demanded a lot of work from us and unreasonable work ... uh and a lot of writing. We became clerks instead of being teachers in the class. You know... we were intimidated in a way that... uh, an Inspector can come in any time without notice, you know? And those are some of the things that we said ‘you can’t just visit us. We cannot get a visitor just abruptly without notification’, this is wrong! And it was very judgmental by them...it was a mission of finding mistakes! Just to find mistakes, and charge teachers.

Teachers were organised under this top-down system. Education was governed by a statute and common law which stipulated the conditions of service, salary and grievances, along with disciplinary procedures. The principles or norms of institutional governance were established by the Ministry of Education and Training on the advice of relevant Boards and Councils. There was virtually no effective participatory governance in African schools. African teachers were deliberately excluded from participating in educational policy development. As Govender states, teachers worked under bureaucratic authoritarianism in which decision were formulated by white government officials. This system of governance did not provide the framework for a workable dispute resolution or collective bargaining. It empowered principals and circuit inspectors to become tyrannies. Principals were ‘watchdogs’- they had to ensure that teachers adhere to the policies of the Department. They had absolute power; they regularly conducted classroom visits from which they would decide who should be promoted. They were also responsible for decisions related to transfers; medical aid and annuity. ‘If the principal did not like you, you would be not promoted,’ said Ndlovu who was by then a young teacher.

However, the young militant teachers of the 1980s saw themselves as revolutionaries who were mandated to advance transformation within the education system. At the classroom level, there were certain spaces which they could creatively appropriate as activists. This was expressed by Irshad Motala, the son of the late Pietermaritzburg ANC activist, Dr. Chota Motala

when I’m teaching Shakespeare from a progressive perspective and when I’m teaching poetry, even within the constraints of a syllabus that was saturated with a dogma of racism and sexism, there was still spaces for us to maneuver. These were spaces that we wanted to creatively exploit during your subject committees of TASA.

Teachers were not given a chance in other forms of school management. Their management was confined to their classroom. ‘The old principals and their head of departments believed that teachers were not qualified to handle administration outside of their classrooms.’ The recruitment and the promotion of teachers was not transparent, neither were interviews. This is illustrated by the account of Steve Jules who recounts that, ‘just because my father was trading with a farmer who was a member of the school committee, I never applied or undergone any interview. I just got the job. I never submitted any CV.’ Principals recruited teacher of their choice. This has been confirmed by Stanley McKenzie a former principal in Roodepan Primary who revealed that:

Getting a post was difficult that time because of who you know. In Kimberly there was apartheid within the coloured community. Take the history of Kimberly you don’t speak English you are out if you were African coloured, you are put on a waiting list. So that time principals had too much power, because they select who they want to appoint at their schools. There was favouritism at that time. I want the child of that person because I know him...like me not being from Kimberly it was difficult. You must know someone who can recommend you; just because the principal do know me it was difficult. My late father was a friend to the head of Afrikaans and then he recommended me to him- that is how I got the post.

This recruitment style was a common phenomenon nationally. Vivian Carelase one of the founding members of SADTU, shed the light on how the school in which she was teaching recruited teachers, recounting that, ‘the school often encouraged some of the learners to come back and offer their services.’ This practise, coupled with nepotism and regionalism deprived other potential incumbents. Principals were beneficiaries of this recruitment system. In most cases, inspectors would transfer principals to other schools without being interviewed. This form of staffing and promotion severely affected women. Female teachers were marginalised, not promoted to the position of principal. Their promotion was limited to lower primary schools. According to Boitumelo Ramapulana,

‘In most cases, women were objects; principals could say I don’t want...’ In order to gain promotion, some women had to perform sexual favours for principals and circuit inspectors. So for young women like us, it was very difficult unless you were able to stand firm.
Teachers had to dress formally and modestly. Women were forced to wear their attire with pantyhoses. Men were expected to wear a tie and jacket. Carol Newman, a former teacher currently serving as a Director in the Upington Local Municipality recalls that, ‘I was the physical education teacher, but I was forced to dress in formal even though I was supposed to look sporty because of the nature of the subject that I was teaching.’ In the same vein, Mary van Wyk, one of the founders of SADTU in the Kalahari region of the Northern Cape, laments, ‘women were discriminated against. You could not fall pregnant while you were not married. If pregnant, you were forced to resign. I fell pregnant and thus, I had to resign. I was called by the principal and the school board and I had to. This affected me personally.’ For convenience sake, many female teachers who got pregnant out of wedlock swiftly got married under pressure. Some had to arrange marriages with relatives to safeguard their jobs. The violation of female teachers’ rights persisted after 1994. This is illustrated in Carol Newman’s testimony in which she states that, ‘what frustrated me in 1996, is that I got pregnant and the principal asked me to resign. I fought against that discrimination and I won.’ Prior to the pre-1994 period, it would have been difficult to challenge this, however, the presence of SADTU in 1996, made it possible for Newman to successfully challenge this.

To recapitulate, all the complex character of the system of education was characterised by three key figures. First, the fragmented system that operated along the racial lines under the doctrine of apartheid. Second, by the vast disparities that existed between Africans and whites. Third, the lack of democratic control within the education and training system. The African teachers, parents and student reaction changed slowly. As demonstrated, in the early years, radicalism that was ignited by the implementation of Bantu Education was led by teachers associations. These associations were backed up by African nationalist organisations, African academics and missionary educationists. With the defeat of the Mphahlele and Motshopeng leadership in TATA, some of the militants in TATA began arguing for the unification of TATA and the Transvaal African Teachers Association (TATU). This union was more conservative; dominated by rural teachers that broke away from TATA in the 1950s. With attempt to maintain African unity, TATA and TATU united to form the Transvaal United Teachers Association (TUATA). However, this stifled teacher’s politics because a conservative leadership that rejected nationalist political action took over TUATA. As a result, there was a political hull in the 1960s. The ANC was banned, innocent demonstrators were killed in Sharpeville and many political activists, such as Nelson Mandela and his comrades were arrested. The aspirations of teachers toward a petty-bourgeois status began to resurface. African teachers associations and unions were discriminated against. You could not fall pregnant while you were not married. If pregnant, you were forced to resign. I fell pregnant and thus, I had to resign. I was called by the principal and the school board and I had to. This affected me personally.’ For convenience sake, many female teachers who got pregnant out of wedlock swiftly got married under pressure. Some had to arrange marriages with relatives to safeguard their jobs. The violation of female teachers’ rights persisted after 1994. This is illustrated in Carol Newman’s testimony in which she states that, ‘what frustrated me in 1996, is that I got pregnant and the principal asked me to resign. I fought against that discrimination and I won.’ Prior to the pre-1994 period, it would have been difficult to challenge this, however, the presence of SADTU in 1996, made it possible for Newman to successfully challenge this.

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The set of educational administrative measures created a state of crisis in townships and rural schools in South Africa. This was apparent when learners opposed the implementation of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in South African schools. In response, the state increased repression. In all government-administered schools, no interracial mixing was allowed. Pupils had to attend the school that caters for their racial classification. The absurdity of educational segregation was heightened when the demography of the white population changed. While black schools were massively overcrowded, there were insufficient pupils to fill the white schools.

After 1976, there were cosmetic reforms, such as the name changing of the department of Bantu Education to the Department of Education and Training (DET). These reforms were problematic as they were refashioned in a way that maintained racial domination. This mounted the crisis, resulting to the radicalisation of students, parents and teachers. Subsequently, students morphed into a hitherto unheard of militancy for change and liberty. A further important feature of the crisis that indirectly linked to education in townships, was the shortage of houses and improved municipal services. In the 1980s, education became entangled with the bad infrastructural conditions in schools. In some schools, children huddled in cold and wet classrooms. In a letter to the Department of Education and Culture, Mrs Dulcie Erasmus, project manager of the South African Tuberculosis Association (SANTA), expressed her concern at the conditions in schools revealing that, ‘several classrooms have been without windows...ceiling and electricity.’ It is clear that the nature of the education crisis was multidimensional during the apartheid period. It incorporated social and political aspects. The problem was far more than education; it required a wider process of social change. As a result, teachers were confronted with civil problems that were directly linked to the apartheid administration in their communities.

In addition, the socio-economic conditions under which most African families lived had far-reaching implications for many teachers. This is better illustrated by Mxolisi Dimaza who recalls

You will remember that during that particular period, it was the time that we were having councillors, but not democratically elected ones. And there [were]... serious problems confronting the communities... What are the problems? How can we improve the conditions of the people here in..., in Burgerstone? What is it that must be demanded from those particular people who were councillors then? And because we never said, “Let’s remove them”. We said, no, realistically we want them to demand, the question of electricity, the question of the toilets..... the question of building the bridge because there were problems of when people were crossing to the township. Then it was very difficult on the serious rainy day. You cannot go to town and so on because of that we have to ask for those things, you know.

The conditions in townships compelled teachers to partake in local political structures. As Dimaza puts it, ‘one will be a chairperson of the local civic structure, on the other hand, a chairperson of the street committee...we were overwhelmed.’ It is therefore evident that the education crisis did not exist in isolation. It was coupled with dire civic circumstances which coerced teachers to political activism. These circumstances indirectly impacted on the performance of teachers and learners in their respective schools.
Towards SADTU

The main question that confronted teachers was the form of strategy that could be adopted in order to improve and transform the education system. Another key question was whether the teacher struggle and politics should be linked up with national movements outside education. Initially, there were no ‘progressive’ teachers unions or structures that voiced their grievances. The existing official association under ATASA, did not mobilise the membership around issues of common concern. Rather, the leadership concentrated their efforts on diverting teachers from the then, political realities into social activities, most notably choir competitions and sports. A teacher from Inanda remembers that, ‘the union for teachers then, was to wear stockings then sing songs that has Shembe in them. I never saw them attend to matters that are work related.’

In a similar vein, a former Transkei teacher described the Transkei Teachers Association (TTA) as follows: ‘they had choirs. They had funerals. They were involved in sports. I mean like SADTU is doing today, they are just emulating what they had done, but TTA was confined in Transkei.’

As the former member of TTA, Boysie appreciated the level of professionalism and the standard of education that TTA facilitated in Transkei when he mentioned that:

They were good in professional development. They formed what is called Teachers’ Association, Maths Association, all those things- Marking Associations, and they will go deep into research. At some stage, teachers were taken to London for Maths and Science, then they will come back...

This testimony illustrates that these associations emphasised on professionalism, discipline and educational achievement. From the interviews, the ‘professionalism’ discourse among the radical younger generation of teachers, did not, to some extent, subscribe to their educational forebears. Resistance and transformation was one of the values that underpin it. Their accounts reflected on the need for young teachers to take over the system and acquire a democratic administrative mastery over it.

At the height of the apartheid system, the anti-apartheid political activism intensified. This compelled the state to integrate any social grouping that threatened its hegemony. In the field of education, one of the major strategies of the regime was to encourage the development of conservative teachers’ organisations. These unions appeared to have enjoyed financial support from authorities, and recognition as the negotiating bodies of the teaching profession. Among Indian teachers, there was the South African Indian Teacher’s Association (SAITA), formerly known as the Natal Indian Teacher’s Society (NITS), which was established in 1925. With progressive political influence the association later desegregated itself and changed its name to Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA) According to Harold Samuel,

A collective organisation of Indian teachers was an ideal platform for me. So I came through from the ranks. I became chairman of the local branch and later, chairman of the region of the North Coast and gradually I walked myself and became chairman of the body. The Indian body and all started now challenging the authorities by saying to them; we want better condition of service. But we were largely, I don’t want to mislead you- we were largely focusing on our own, improving our own conditions. With SAFTA, when we started mixing and mingling with everyone, we realised the way the others were been deprived, that’s when the new movement started moving in that direction.

Among the Cape Coloureds school teachers, there was Cape Teachers Professional Association (CTPA). Randal van der Heever a former executive member of CTPA remarks ‘CTPA was based on a pragmatic concept…we were fundamentally opposed to apartheid… We tried to improve teacher’s conditions like salaries. All these organisations including ATASA, were seen by young progressive teachers who later formed their localised fragmented teachers unions, as ‘useless’ and ‘conservative’. Some older NEUSA comrades, such as Zamayedwa Tom, popularly known among his Eastern Cape comrades as ‘Bra Z’, gave a totally different perspective on how these associations were perceived by the ANC in exile. In his own words, he outlined that, ‘the ANC taught me that every existing teacher organization must not be looked as sell outs. Get in there and bring them over- that was the instruction.’ This was evident when ‘Bra Z’ mobilised ATASA members to form a localised teacher’s organisation called Alice Democratic Teachers Union ADETU, –in the early 1980s, ‘I said lets form ADETU, let us be united…’Then the old man looked at me and said, ‘I like your approach’. I said, ‘please go and talk to your ATASA structure and then I will brief my NEUSA structure.’ When ADETU was formed, ‘Bra Z’ became the president. ADETU had access to UDF’s information and to the banned literature. ‘I would look at the pages and just make a photocopy and give each member to go and read and they begin to say, man we are beginning to understand things here. This is what ATASA has been standing for’ ‘Bra Z’s testimony reveals that in some areas, ATASA members were conscientised. Under ADETU professionalism and resistance against oppression was central. Teachers from different establishments forwarded their ideas on how to deal with the rest of the issues.

Defiance against the established teachers association cut across the racial lines. For instance, Duncan Hindle, a progressive white young activist rejected the world in which he was raised. He became a trade unionist, an organiser of NEUSA and the only white in the first leadership of SADTU. When questioned why he joined teachers’ politics, Duncan expressed his frustration when he said:

I was coupled with a deep sense of frustration when I joined the educational provincial department. In my first pay cheaque, I saw the deduction of the Natal Teachers Society and I said no, no, I am not a member of Natal Teachers Society. In reply they said, you have to be, it’s a statutory requirement that you have to belong to the teachers organisation. And I said its fine, but I want one of my choice. They said the teachers in Natal must join the Federal Teachers Association for Whites...when you were admitted you need to join that. These organisations were very well protected and supported by the state patronage. At the same time, there was this small organisation NEUSA, I was then committed to build NEUSA.

In 1980, the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) was founded, as a non-racial, educational organisation. This union subsequently became a close ally of the UDF in 1983. Being a very loose formation with no solid policy, NEUSA struggled to attract a mass membership. Duncan Hindle reveals that, at the time NEUSA, ‘never convened congresses, neither did they have a constitution, nothing. There were no major
policy debates within organisation.’ In other regions, such as the former KwaZulu, across Thukela River, NEUSA was suppressed. It only operated in some parts of urban Natal, such as Pietermaritzburg and some parts of Durban. The formation of NEUSA in this region, responded to the departmental action of forcing African teachers to join NATU, the affiliate of what was then Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe. Some Natal teachers, such as KK Nkosi, one of the founders of SADTU in KwaZulu Natal, were convinced by Ben Ngcobo not to join NEUSA because of its non-racial leadership. In his own words, KK remarked,

Ben Ngcobo was an Africanist. He came to visit me at my school and he wanted me to consider, mobilizing teachers. We then said that, we will mobilize teachers but under what? I told him that there was an affiliate of the UDF which was NEUSA that we could consider joining. He indicated that NEUSA was led by whites and those people were racist...And then he suggested that we joined NEHAWU because it is a COSATU affiliate.... And then where we were schooled. We were schooled very well on trade unionism by a guy whose name was Themba Nxumalo of Chesterville Township and a guy by the name of Kiza Dlamini of Ntuzuma. These were two guys who were responsible for political education in NEHAWU. We used to sleep in classes every Friday, in schools and whatever....And then we mobilized throughout and then we became the competitor of NEUSA.

KK Nkosi’s statement gives an insight into the feeling of bitterness among some ‘Black Conscious’ teachers, who felt that if they joined NEUSA they will betray their fellow Africans. KK and his comrades undermined and distrusted NEUSA. Giving his explanation to this, he reasons, ‘we thought they were too soft. Unlike, in KwaZulu, NEUSA became strong in the Eastern Transvaal, Pretoria, Witwatersrand, the Vereeniging region, as well as in urban Durban. In these regions, the establishment of the movement symbolized a deep sense of frustration for teachers that were dissatisfied with the existing teachers association. According to Hindle:

It [NUESA] had the participation of students, and it had the participation of teachers. It was a broader formation...ideologically it was a charter movement. It was largely driven by Gauteng based groups. Curtis Nkondo was there...of course Thulas Nxesi was there. So what we were getting going was the Natal branch of NEUSA that involved people like Archie Gumede from Claremont. We would have been termed the progressive education movement... the part of teachers focused on the educational curriculum development and alternative syllabuses. The parent side pushed more on the formation of school committees as opposed to state sponsored school committees. The student side was more on the line of each one teach one. It certainly was not a formal organisation. There were no subscriptions and it was broadly organisation that opposed working within communities.

As Hindle explains, NEUSA was an educational movement that responded to the education crisis. According to NEUSA’s formation document;

The National Union gives priority among its aims to the focussing of professional attention on the education crisis in South Africa. It works for the achievement of a non-racial South African Teachers’ Council and a single and equal education system in South Africa., Providing this does not imply centralized control. The National Union seek
maximum co-operation with all existing teachers’ associations.

NEUSA called for the participation of the existing teacher organisations, which were fragmented and co-ordinated by the apartheid system. It did not call for the disbandment of these organisations, but for the formation of a single body through which the educational needs of the country as a whole could be represented. Given the recurrent educational crisis in the country, NEUSA extended its mobilisation to medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, as well as other professionals. The organisation was of the view that all parties should contribute in the design of a more equitable education system. The formation of NEUSA was followed by the gradual growth of teachers’ organisation, such as the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU). Subsequently, there were number of smaller initiatives, on local levels by teachers seeking to form unions.

The formation of NEUSA, along with its political fermentation, injected a wave of young radicals into the teaching profession. Oral accounts reveal that the lack of other professional opportunities for Africans propelled a large proportion of this younger generation to join the teaching profession. For instance, ‘comrade Varas’ (as known among his comrades) recalls ‘I wanted to be a lawyer, but it was really difficult because we did not have money to pay for university. I ended up in Phuthimang College of Education.’ As a result, teacher education institutions were being subverted by many students who had no desire to teach but merely wanted an affordable route to a high education qualification. Among this generation of teachers, there were tendencies of becoming politically active within townships, colleges and universities. For instance, many teachers who later participated in the formation of SADTU, such as Mxolisi Dimaza were politised. Mxolisi recalls how as a student, he was politised:

(In) my third year, I was going to Mdantsane and they were having their conference and games and we saw at the college a yellow Kombi… only to find out that the person was Buti Matthews. Matthew Goniwe came in a Kombi and started to say, I know you, you are Mxolisi….and quite a number of things that he raised. Already, I was quite aware of him and…. and then they asked us to accompany them because they were going to a certain place in the ATASA games. There he gave us some pamphlets. Those pamphlets were written, “Teachers in South Africa unite for a democratic future”. You see, and we were spreading these pamphlets amongst the teachers who were busy playing these games. When you read the pamphlets, there was a lot that was written on how wrong ATASA was. It was a sweetheart khekheleza organisation.

This clearly demonstrates that teachers colleges and universities were political mobilisation centres. It is where anti-apartheid activists, SADTU leaders, as well as students, got introduced to politics. In turn, many young teachers who entered the system began to defy the statutory requirement that compelled them to automatically join ATASA establishments when employed by their respective departments of education. A Durban based principal and a member of SADTU, Twist Ndluva recalls,

So when I started teaching at Mtubatuba in 1987, it was a norm for teachers to become NATU members because even the sports were organised by NATU. But I refused to join NATU in my first year of teaching. I made my principal aware of my convictions. Why? I could not join something that was related to Inkatha at that time. And our school suffered because we couldn’t play sports as activities that were organised NATU.

It was the same with the Western Cape ‘young lions’ that joined the teaching fraternity in the 1980s. A teacher in Atlantis, Udenvan Vandervenn remembers;

So when I started teaching there was a union already, a teachers’ union CPTA, but me as a young lion, felt that this union was too tame. I remember when we started there; we were like five or six teachers. So when we came there, we were seen as rebels, you know, because we spoke…. we spoke, we were not scared of the principal. When we came there, we were actually warned about this principal, his way or no way… We weren’t scared of authority.

It was not the same with the elderly generation of teachers who could not defy the membership of ATASA. Abraham Leu who started teaching in late 1970s recalls

‘Teaching was very tough by then. Very tough….you know. You had no say by then. And you know we are the generation e tingi [that came] after the 1976 uprisings…. It was tough! We could not establish anyway you know, student movement whatsoever because of Manggope’s regime. Ja it was tough! Because you would be expelled as soon as you started that….there were a lot of spies! Checking on our movements and all that, you know. But uh, I was fortunate that when I came back I met Majova’s brother, they were here now. And then they came up politically conscious.

Working with elderly teachers that believed in the conformist ideas of the old teachers unions and association was not easy. Ndluva who was the youngest teacher in one of the Eastern Cape schools said;

the members of the Ciskei Teachers’ Union, were so conservative, they were older than us. We were just young, and also young activities. And also they have seen us as young energetic teachers who wanted to involve them into politics that might affect their working conditions, maybe to be dismissed, dismissal, or to lose benefits from the Department of Ciskei.

In 1980s, a mass mobilisation against apartheid took a new turn with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The UDF brought together diverse communities, cultural, sports and political organisations - committed to acting together in order to challenge apartheid. This was followed by the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which aligned the majority of the trade unions into an anti-apartheid front. These developments were given a further boost by dynamics within churches. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Institute of Contextual Theology began to be active. It is always important to see the emergence of these organisations as part of the general revival of political activity in the country. The teacher and student resistance that gave birth to the Congress of South African Student (COSAS), the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM) and NEUSA, formed the pieces of the same activity. The order from the Commander in Chief of the Umkhonto WeSizwe, Oliver Tambo who called for an ungovernable South Africa, had to be carried by these political formations.

Within the education sector, the new radical progressive regional trade unions, such as WECTU, were formed by young teachers all over the country. When these unions were created, an unprecedented wave of militant student action persisted in African schools.
Once again, this caused a crisis in African education. The sequence of the events was nearly always the same as the 1976 protest measures that included intimidation, clashes with the police, marches, stone-throwing, burning school buildings and other properties. The school learners became entangled in these upheavals and their scholastic achievements have shown an alarming decline. In the same vein, the teaching fraternity also lost direction. Teachers took part in politics beyond educational issues. The young radical teachers pledged solidarity with students and education collapsed in urban centres. Some teachers were recruited into the underground ANC military wing. Mfana Lushaba remembers that, ‘being a teacher, I got involved with the ANC military wing. I got exposed to cadres in the 1970s because of the guys who were crossing the border to Maputo via Mangweni village.’ It was the same instance with ‘Bra Z’, though older than ‘young lions.’ With his extensive political exposure that ranges from the time of the Black Consciousness Movement, ‘Bra Z’ was able to link up with quite a number of activists across the border. From Lesotho, The ANC instructed him to mobilise the women, as well as teachers. ‘Bra Z. recounts that;

[The ANC said] man you are well placed. We want you to concentrate on women development. Mobilize women, mobilize students and mobilize teachers’. So I had those 3 responsibilities. When the COSAS movement started, Lulu Johnson was one of the firing presidents of COSAS. He was in Port Elizabeth and my car will be used to transport students from Queenstown. From Alice, from Beaufort and from King Williams town, to Port Elizabeth to have COSAS meetings there. So I worked for COSAS and I worked for women and I worked for the teacher organization.

These testimonies signalled the militant mood and attitude among those who formed the backbone of the fragmented education system. In contrast, however, the formation of these teachers’ organisations was suppressed by tribal authorities in Bantustans. During the interview with Melikhaya Hubushe, a former teacher and a SADTU member, Hubushe expressed his frustration with the Ciskei government, revealing that;

The Ciskei government was very repressive andpeople feared it. They had the capacity to kill people. Majority of our activists were killed here and guys from Soweto feared this area, like Thulani Nxesi. When we called them, we had to make sure that they would be safe and their lives will depend upon us. It was an extremely dangerous environment. So our existence came to the attention of the Ciskei government. They had an arm called the CCS – Ciskei Central Intelligence Services under Lennox Sebe’s. The younger brother to Charles Sebe. If you go there you might come back in a coffin. It was a very repressive military arm of the Ciskei government.

Out of these entire homelands, KwaNgwane homeland had its own peculiarities. The Chief Minister Enos Mabuza was relatively progressive. To some extent, his administrative style appeared to portray political understanding. Perhaps his political leniency transpired from that he led a delegation of 21 persons, including his entire cabinet, of the Inyandza National Movement to meet the ANC in Lusaka in 1986. Unlike in other homelands, the formation of localised teacher unions was not suppressed in KwaNgwane. In Hazyview, for instance, and other parts of KwaNgwane, local teachers’ unions were formed. One of the prominent organisations was NEUSA, launched by Sandile Sukati working with DD Mabuza, and Mgababa Mathonsi. During this period, education was in deep crisis. There was virtually no learning that took place in many parts of the country, particularly in urban centres. It was therefore essential that the teaching-learning culture be restored, if acceptable, standards were to be regained, improved and maintained. As a result, many parties from different sectors embarked on intensive and maximum consultation. Teachers, students, professional and other stake holders were mobilised. This resulted in the formation of a progressive non-racial body, the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) that was formed in Durban, 1986. This committee was supported by the UDF and COSATU. As an affiliate of congress movement, the NECC brought together all sections of oppressed communities and all those who detested apartheid. The aim of the NECC, was to collect demands of the people regarding education through the process of consultation. The committee also aimed at drawing up guidelines for a future education system in a democratic South Africa that would satisfy the needs of all South Africans. In the keynote of the conference that was held in 1986, it is clearly stated that,

It is an important lesson to the apartheid forces: The people stand united. Ten years after the 1976 rising, we remain united in our demand for the ending of apartheid education and the establishment of a democratic people’s education. We also remain convinced that this can only be achieved with the eradication of the apartheid system and the establishment or a democratic people’s South Africa. Ever since 1976, the people have recognised that apartheid education cannot be separated from the apartheid system in general. This conference once again asserts that the entire oppressed and the democratic community is concerned with education.

By this time, the Congress of South African Students was banned. A large number of students were detained. Many politically active teachers were dismissed and forcibly transferred to remote areas. The government was still instrumental in stopping the democratic SRCs from functioning. School buildings were vandalised and unrepaired. The South African Defence Force (SADF) troops were still in the townships. Boycotts were taking place throughout the country because of the intransigence of the authorities, their refusal to meet people’s demands. In what ways then, could this crisis be considered to have given birth to the united teachers’ union, SADTU? In terms of educational crisis, the aforementioned circumstances provided a fertile substrate for teachers’ unity. For the first time, localised fragmented progressive unions were able to draw the majority of teachers into teachers’ politics that maintained progressive ideas for a longer period of time. This was the turning point in teachers’ politics which marked the establishment of a mass democratic teacher union. The reorganisation of teachers union increased its capacity to ‘hold’ its membership and to recruit. The 1980s, saw this organisational restructuring focused on the urban areas. For example, these localised unions in the urban Cape and Transvaal, grew faster than those in rural areas. Thus, the late 1980s marked a dramatic adaptation in trade unionism to the task of mobilising teachers.