

Outsourcing at Wits University

Apartheid is back!

Wits University has an anti-apartheid reputation. But seven years after its burial, apartheid returned to Wits. In 2001 workers were sold into the slavery of outsourcing. It opened a shameful period in its history.

Outsourcing meant being disowned by the Wits "family." Workers lucky enough not be retrenched were re-hired on lower wages and worse conditions. Companies abolished year-end bonuses, stopped Unemployment Insurance Fund payments, provident fund deductions and medical aid. As outsiders, we were denied access to university library and computer facilities and free study for our children. You can find three generations per family as children follow parents to work, condemned to be cleaners for life.

Deliwe Mzobe
Wits Cleaner

With outsourcing we were humiliated, like second class citizens under apartheid. Restricted to only one entrance no matter where exactly we worked. Locked out of staff toilets - good enough to clean but not use. Banned from all eating areas, from resting on lawns or seeking shade under trees. Allocated a small unventilated changing room adjoining a refuse dump. Provided with a kitchen without basic utensils, a faulty boiler and unbearably smelly overhead sewerage pipes. Prohibited from bringing

any belongings with violations punished with dismissal.

Workers fight back Students, lecturers and workers then formed the Wits Workers Solidarity Committee (WSC). By May 2013, WSC's pressure forced new Vice Chancellor, Adam Habib to trim ten years+ of the worst apartheid-like practices. But class apartheid remained.

Management rejected outright the re-employment of workers and the restoration of former benefits. Outsourcing was here to stay. Unhappy with the recommendations of the first Tokiso investigation he had

ordered, Habib dishonestly ordered a second with new terms of reference.

The Letsema Report found re-employment would cost an "unaffordable" R150m. Management manipulated the investigation using R7 000 to calculate salary costs instead of the minimum living wage of R3 500 we demanded.

Aluta Continua

But the struggle never stopped. When management argued that the WSC was not a formal, registered structure, we protested at the monthly meeting of the Senate (academics, management and students). In an important victory, the Senate conceded. New companies would

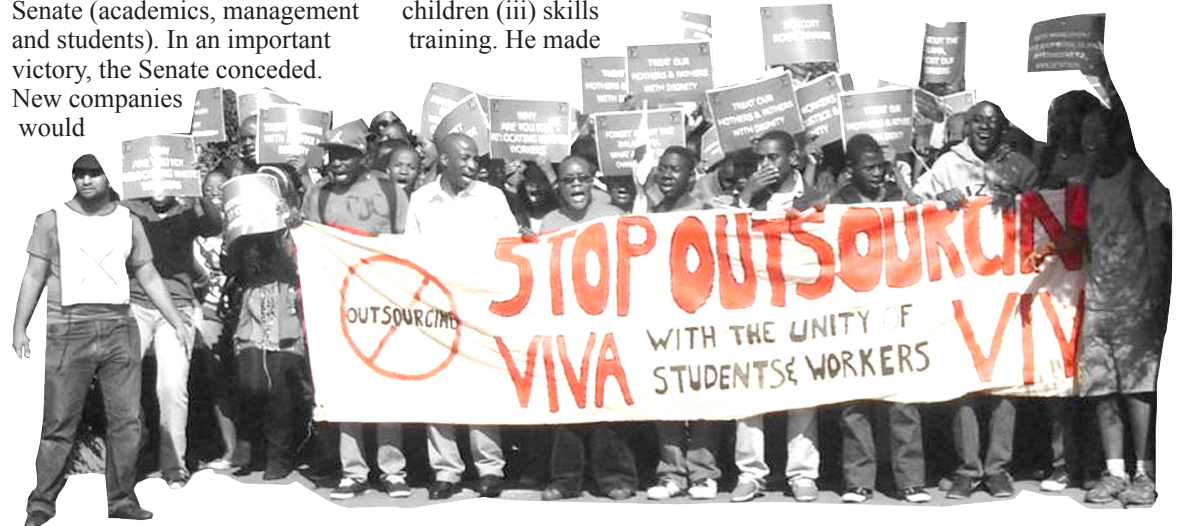
absorb all workers. We managed to save almost 300 jobs.

Our mobilization culminated in the occupation of Senate House with students supporting workers. However management has refused any further concessions. Habib defended the R500 000 management salary increases as necessary to avoid losing Wits staff. The VC was telling us that we workers, who pay for bread the same as these educated people, do not matter.

Our main demands were: (i) top up our salaries from R2 700 to R3 500 (ii) free education for our children (iii) skills training. He made

the insulting offer of bursaries for two children. Companies would be advised to arrange skills training through Sector Training Authorities. Our salary demands would cost an "unaffordable" R20m. This was a joke! It's like working for a bakery and offered crumbs when all we asked for was one loaf.

The WSC has joined forces with the University of Johannesburg Solidarity Forum. Both are part of the new October 6th Movement which will march to demand an end to outsourcing, recognising that our struggle is part of a broader struggle.



From #Rhodesmustfall to...

#Capitalismmustfall

October 6th Movement shows way forward

The toppling of Cecil John Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town and the re-name Rhodes University campaign have sparked similar protest movements at other universities. It is a rebellion against what the 'Luister' video exposed about Stellenbosch University – discrimination against black students.

Protests at Historically White Universities (HWUs) are new. They are catching up with many years of 'second-tier' tertiary institution battles by working class students against financial and academic exclusion, the withholding of results for payments, unaffordable tuition and accommodation fees and debt.

Itumeleng Lecheko
Free State SYM

Rhodes' statue and the naming of a university after him are an insult – a celebration of a racist imperialist who was the prime architect of colonial subjugation, capitalism and apartheid. Protests against this are long overdue.

Having begun by demanding the eradication of racial discrimination, white domination and colonialism, these protest movements have been compelled to address the question why, more than two decades since apartheid ended, these institutions, despite significant increases in black student and management numbers, continue apartheid era practices.

The search for an answer to this question has led to the revival of the ideas of black consciousness, and the formation of eg the Black Student Movement, separately from #Rhodesmustfall. The Black Consciousness (BC) movement and Steve Biko's ideas played an important role in the political awakening and mobilisation of the 1970s generation. The 1976 Youth Uprising was its crowning achievement. It shattered the apartheid regime's aura of invincibility and was, after the 1973 Durban workers strikes, the most important blow against white minority rule, preparing the way for apartheid's defeat less than two decades later.

Correct analysis needed But is BC the answer? BC's authority lay in the objective political conditions of the time. Its call to rise up against the white minority regime naturally found widespread support. It's attraction to today's generation lies also in the quality of that generation of leaders – they were an example of dedication and self-sacrifice in sharp contrast to the unprincipled corrupt leadership of the former liberation movements today.

To the extent that white domination endures today, it does so with the full blessing and active connivance of a black government in power for two decades. The unintended consequence of side-stepping this reality, would be for BC to exonerate the ANC government of responsibility for the status quo, reducing it to political attorneys both of the ANC as well as an unwitting shield for the same (predominantly) white capitalist class before whom the ANC has prostrated itself.

In fact a common thread runs through colonisation, the brutal crushing of the 1922 white miners strike, apartheid's birth in 1948, 1994's historic elections and the 2012 Marikana massacre -- the economic subjugation of the black working class.

Continued white domination at HWUs is rooted in capitalism whose survival was Codesa's primary strategic objective. With white domination built into the foundations of colonial conquest and subjugation, the history of racism and capitalism in SA are inextricably intertwined. This explains the survival of racism in the economy, at universities and elsewhere.

The BSM is correct in rebelling against the assimilation of black students into this post-apartheid social order -- the mirror image of what the capitalist class is attempting in the economy, the creation of a black capitalist class.

The sharp intensification of the global capitalist crisis in SA is the material basis for black student rebellion at HWUs. Personal and household debt is piling up and fees are escalating just as NSFAS (see page 5) has run dry for thousands. Some Wits students for example, unable to afford accommodation, are known to sleep wherever they can lay their heads – lecture halls, laboratories and toilets. Many go without regular meals. Middle class parents are increasingly forced to lower their living standards, downgrade their cars and even their houses.

For this struggle to realise its potential, HWU students must join forces with their counterparts in 'second-tier' tertiary institutions. Under an overwhelmingly black management, students in these institutions experience their oppression not on a racial but a class basis. The Rhodes BSM march in solidarity with Rhodes university workers must therefore be applauded as must their support for the 6th October Movement established by Wits and Johannesburg University activists.

The 6th October Movement shows the way forward. It has identified neo-liberal capitalism as the common enemy of students, workers and academics alike. Its first campaign is to demand the end of outsourcing, restoration of pre-privatisation benefits and a 12 500 minimum wage. It is also developing a decolonisation and transformation curriculum to turn universities into public institutions serving the interests of society as a whole, not an elite. As the Socialist Youth Movement points out, this can only be achieved through the overthrow of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society.