South Africa's education department maintains apartheid-era victimisation of blacks

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Last month, sheriffs of the High Court in Pretoria and King William's Town seized property belonging to the Department of Basic Education for failing to pay R28 million (US$2.47 million) in salaries to part-time teachers in the Eastern Cape province. The court attached the assets after the department ignored a March 20 verdict ordering the payment.

Action against the department was brought by the human rights organisation, the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), on behalf of 32 public schools. An LRC statement confirmed on September 30, "All but R1.5 million has since been paid… [The action was] on behalf of … schools … seeking payment of those teachers hired … to fill vacancies that the Department left open and [asks] that … educators be appointed permanently to the vacant posts…"

This is in stark contrast to the self-satisfied remarks of Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga. Addressing the national congress of the pro-government South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) on October 2, Motshekga claimed the apartheid system had been replaced with the focus now on "improving quality education."

The reality is far from such a rosy picture. Statistics from South Africa's 20-year youth employment review from 1994 onwards, showed that black youth lagged peers of other races in the acquisition of job-critical skills. Of the country's skilled labour force, black youth account for 18 percent, a rise of just 3 percentage points since the end of Apartheid. While forming almost 80 percent of overall population at the last census in 2011, blacks made up only 8.3 percent of those with a tertiary qualification.

"Possibly of most concern is the unemployment rate for black Africans with tertiary education," reads the StatsSA review. "[T]he education system, from basic education to universities, is far from optimal…"

Grade R, a once voluntary preschool reception grade prior to grade one, became compulsory across South Africa this year. The Department introduced it in an effort to "enhance educational outcomes through early intervention in childhood development."

A study conducted by the University of Stellenbosch on behalf of the department shows that the programme, which began in some schools in 2001, yielded negligible gains for poor children like those in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. "The most affluent benefited the most from the extra year… Thus, instead of reducing inequalities, grade R further extends the advantage of the most affluent schools," the University of Stellenbosch researchers conclude.

_Civil rights group Basic Education for All won a judgement in May in the North Gauteng High Court against the Basic Education Department, after accusing it of failing to deliver textbooks to 39 Limpopo schools. The Department blamed school principals for submitting requests too late.

Unfortunately, the saga of Limpopo's undelivered textbooks is just a footnote in a narrative of corruption. According to the *Daily Maverick*, its roots lie in Jacob Zuma's election as African National Congress (ANC) president in 2007. The arrangement was that in return for support from then ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, Zuma give him carte blanche in Limpopo, Malema's home province.

By the time then Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan's department took over direct control of the province's finances in 2012, unauthorised expenditure had swelled to R2.7 billion. Some suppliers were being paid, as Gordhan dolefully observed, at a rate equivalent to once every 2.5 working days.

Criminal cases were opened against 38 Limpopo

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government officials from four provincial departments. "The department of education in the province … was found to have breached supply chain management policies and had accumulated unauthorised expenditure of R2.2 billion," according to a July 2012 *City Press* report.

An April 2011 Eastern Cape audit showed that 1,300 of 5,700 of the province's public schools needed furniture, affecting 600,000 pupils. That is according to a February *Business Day* report of another judgement against the Basic Education Department, this time handed down by the Eastern Cape High Court. The court held that Minister Motshekga had failed pupils by not providing them with age-adequate and grade-appropriate school furniture.

Parliament's Basic Education portfolio committee—dominated by the ruling ANC—went through the motions earlier this year of urging the Eastern Cape "to fix issues which require urgent attention." This followed the committee's oversight visit to schools in Qumbu and Sterkspruit. These districts are the worst performing in terms of student results, with Eastern Cape having the nation's lowest pass rate (64.9 percent) for pupils sitting for matriculation or A-level exams.

According to the World Economic Forum, the quality of South Africa's maths and science education puts it last out of 148 countries. Absolutely and in relative terms, South Africa spends more on education than Haiti, Lesotho, Chad, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Kenya, countries all appearing higher on the WEF rankings. R254 billion, or 20 percent of the 2014-15 budget, is set aside for education. Of this, the sum dedicated to the basic education of nearly 9 million children amounts to R164 billion.

Why such outlays have so little effect is partly answered by the allegations against Pankie Sizani, wife of ANC parliamentary chief whip Stone Sizani. Pankie appeared twice in August in the Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape) Commercial Crimes Court on charges of defrauding the Department of Education of R1.2 million between 2009 and 2010. At the time, she worked as Port Elizabeth district education coordinator of the Early Childhood Development unit.

In the post, Sizani had to scrutinise the application forms of candidates for grade R teaching vacancies. Having applied for posts on candidates' behalf, she would then falsify the signature of the principal empowered to ratify an appointment. When the applicants, who were apparently not informed of their "appointment" to a vacant post, received money in their accounts, Sizani would call demanding that they pay the money to her, as it had been paid to them "in error".

Following a postponement due to ill heath after her arrest last year, the case against Sizani has now been postponed again until 2015. Her defence team need the time until then, they said, to study documents of which they were previously unaware. NGO Equal Education issued a statement denouncing the repeated deferments. "This type of corruption undermines opportunities to create sustainable employment … for black women," it added.

It is ridiculous of Equal Education or anyone else to expect that an ANC government could possibly create sustainable employment for black people—outside the party. The ANC has, for a connected few, reversed the financially debilitating effects of apartheid, but for most blacks it has simply entrenched the conditions under which they lived before 1994. Essentially, the party is a club dispensing patronage to bourgeois blacks who have now assumed the exploitative role previously open only to whites.

This exploitation is limitless. Its extent is not only determined by the hundreds and thousands of Pankie Sizanis multiplying right across the government, as SADTU President Magope Maphila made clear. Addressing the same congress at which Minister Motshekga spoke, Maphila pleaded with some 400 delegates to put a stop to the "scourge" of teachers sleeping with schoolgirls in exchange for awarding better grades. "These kids are entrusted to your care [for you] to look after them and not to sleep with them," he said. "You are like a shepherd to them and a shepherd doesn't turn against one of the lambs he leads."

Without irony, Maphila then accused opposition parties and the media of demonising SADTU. He was referring to the most recent allegations levelled against his union, which suggest that its officials peddle teaching posts for cash.

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