



Black Wednesday Commemoration

Students commemorate the bloody night when the Mswati autocracy unleashed the army on university students on 14 November 1990. The army went on a rampage of assault, torture and murder. Those students and their families have never received justice!



By Pretty Mkhonta

On Wednesday 16 November 2022, students from the University of Swaziland held their annual Black Wednesday Commemoration at the

Kwaluseni campus in Matsapha.

In November 1990, students at the University of Swaziland fought for their rights where they boycotted classes from 12 November that year in protest of the lack of faculty lecturers, poor food and nutrition, as well as poor infrastructure. As they continued to boycott classes, on 14 November the university administration invited Mswati's soldiers to brutalise and kick them out of the university.

In 1990, one of the Swazi Government's most draconian measures, a 60-Day Detention Law, was still in force, permitting authorities to lock up anyone they saw as a threat to public order. All political protestors were designated as such threats.

Early on 12 November, all 1,600 university students held a protest meeting and boycotted all classes. At noon, they dumped their plastic wrapped lunches at the administration office door. The Swazi radio and TV stations, as well as newspapers gave extensive coverage to the dumping of the lunches. Many Swazis were subsistence farmers who often went to bed hungry; thus, this student decision reflected very badly on them. All students received a University notice demanding the end of their class boycott on 13 November. They decided to continue it. The University Council demanded their return to classes on 14 November or be considered in defiance of the twenty-three-year-old King Mswati III.

Another student meeting on November 14 continued the boycott. About 500 students peacefully barricaded



Artwork describing Black Wednesday: A book, police hat, and a police/military baton.

themselves in the two-storey university library. Several hundred students left campus or stayed in their student hostel area. At about 17:00hrs, armed Swazi soldiers entered the high fenced campus.

The violence that ensued after soldiers swept through campus has been a sensitive subject with the government since then. A commission of enquiry had its report secreted away for years, with a bowdlerized version finally released to the public in 1997.

About 400 students were heavily assaulted by the soldiers, and four of them were reported to have lost their lives.

This incident led to the students at the university commemorating the 1990 Black Wednesday every year to celebrate the lives of their fallen heroes, those who were victimised by the regime, all of whom fought for their rights.

This year, the students held their annual commemoration of the 1990 bloody Wednesday night as they always

do, but they faced some obstacles when trying to transport students from Mbabane and Luyengo campuses to Kwaluseni campus due to the current political crisis in the country. But, with the deepening of unity between the student movement and the transport workers organised under the Swaziland Transport, Communication and Allied Workers Union (SWATCAWU), they were able to safely make the trip.

On the arrival of the other students, the event started. They received remarks from the Vice President of the Student Representative Council.

The commemoration received messages of solidarity from various organisations. They demonstrated how the political system oppresses students by making the learning environment in institutions of higher learning unfavourable for the students. They thus called for students to fight for the total overthrow of this regime.

Swaziland has been under absolute monarchy rule for over 49 years, since 12 April 1973 when Sobhuza, with the direct political and economic support of the South African apartheid regime, banned political parties and organisations and bestowed all executive, legislative and judicial powers upon himself as a monarch. Consequent to that system, the people of Swaziland have fallen deeper and deeper into poverty while the royal family lives in extravagance.

National Organising Secretary of the Communist Party of Swaziland, Simphiwe Dlamini, also made his address as the keynote speaker in the commemoration. He was called upon to help students to find ways to strategise on ways to fight the tinkhundla system.

The National Organiser said that what the 1990 students were faced with is still similar to the kind of oppression students are still facing in their institutions and when students try to voice out their issues the very same university administration still invites Mswati's security forces to brutalise the students when they fight for their rights.

He continued, "Students form part of the pillars of the mass democratic movement, and that is why the system will oppress them in these institutions. The ma-



Picture courtesy of [UNESWA students group](#)

terial conditions that students face groom them to be political leaders, and that is why they will always be faced with this kind of brutality when they try to fight the system of governance in the country."

He also said that they have seen the members of the Swaziland National Union of Students (SNUS) on the streets on the **Scholarships and Jobs for All** campaign and how Mswati's security forces brutalised them for fighting for their rights and calling for democracy in the country.

He further said that the students must link up with the broader working-class youth across the country to create a revolutionary youth front. All students should affiliate in this youth front, notwithstanding their differences, emphasised the National Organiser.

The CPS Organising Secretary also reminded students that they are members of the community before they are students, as the SNUS slogan correctly states. As such, it is every student's role to mobilise in their communities more people to be part of the mass democratic movement. He also called for students to organise themselves. Students should ensure that they render the government ungovernable by all means necessary.

As he concluded, the CPS Organiser made an illustration of the youth of South Africa who proclaimed, "liberation first and education later." Their proclamation was to their understanding of their role as students and youth of their country: that they had a direct role to play in the freedom of their country.

After the messages at the hall, students marched from the hall to the university library where they held a moment of silence and further educated the masses about the strategies to fight the system, including ways to avoid brutality from Mswati's security forces. The university administration, however, in typical fashion, denied the students access to the library.

The struggle continues!

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Additional reporting on the [history of Black Wednesday](#) by Swazi Media Commentary



QUICK THOUGHT

By Elihle Magagula

STATE IMPACT ON YOUTH AND STUDENTS

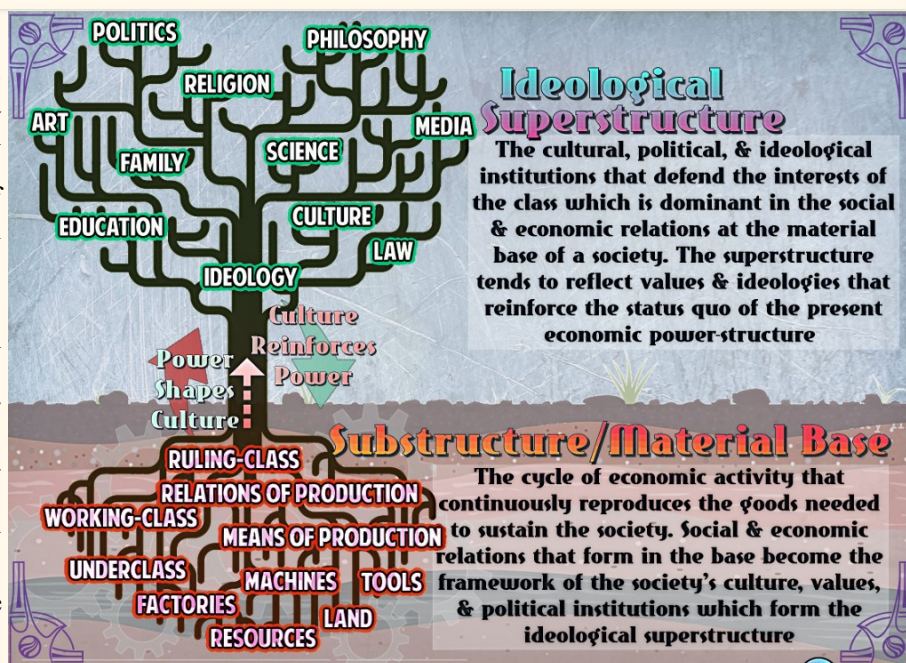
In his book “The State and Revolution”, Lenin quotes Engels where he defines a state as “a power forced on society from without” which we could translate to saying a State is defined by a faction of society that perceives itself better than the rest and imposes itself as higher authority over the rest of society.

Marx’s description of the state as “an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another” coincides with Engel’s definition so to emphasize that a state is nothing but a product of the irreconcilability of class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – in the capitalist era.

As part of its role to divide, subdue and control, the state pushes to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Its sole purpose is to serve the ruling elites by exerting power over the rest of the society – it does not have the people’s best interest at heart; that is if it at all has a heart.

In the case of the youth and students in Swaziland, the government has fulfilled its function as a state by creating “classism” among students and, as we already know, where there exist classes, conflict is always inevitable.

There are, in the main, three groups of youth and students in the country, 1) Non tertiary qualified youth, 2) Tertiary qualified youth, and 3) Tertiary and sponsorship qualifying youth. It is through these groups that the regime has managed to create conflict among the youth and students. The third group thinks of itself better than the second and first, the second group rests in thinking they are better than the first group when none of it is the case.



Base and Superstructure of society

The truth is all groups are just a manifest of how the state teaches and enforces oppression on its people. If anything, all these three groups are subject to the same exploitation with neither of them exempted.

Tertiary students are struggling for survival while at the same time thriving for education and the government isn’t doing anything about it. Instead, as observed this year, students had to go on and complete an entire semester with zero financial assistance from the state. This has of course led to the recent incline of suicide cases among students since the year began alongside dropouts.

The rest of the youth, graduates or not, are unemployed. If by any chance one gets employed, still the cost of living is just too high for most of the Swazi people to afford – we cannot even buy bread!

Back to tertiary institutions, the state has extended itself by the establishment of a public power which no

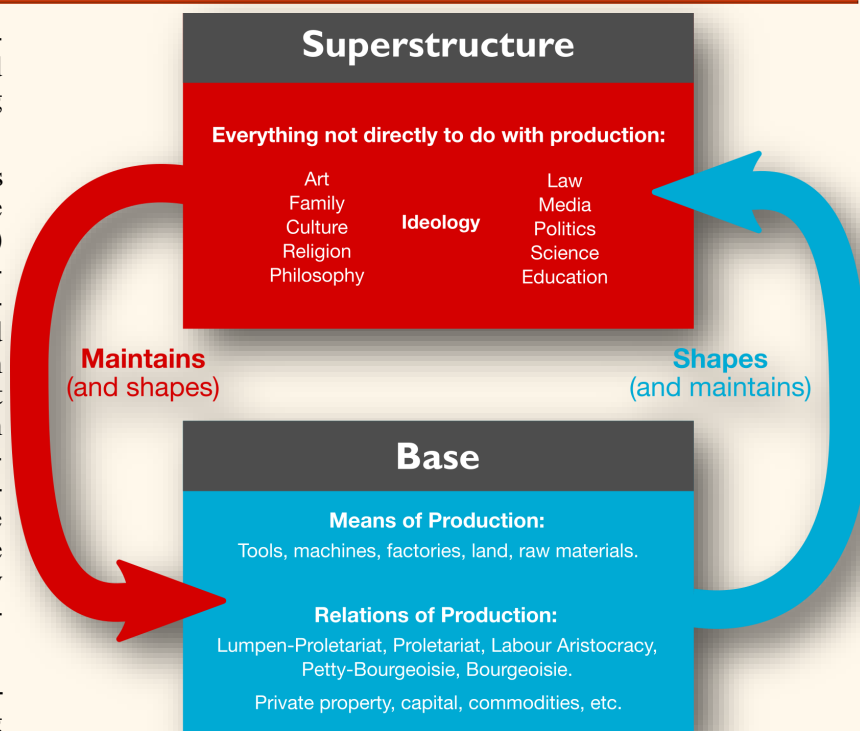
longer directly coincides with the population organising itself as armed forces and also consist of material adjustments having “correctional” facilities in their command.

We have seen in the various institutions of higher education in the country where the administration (an extension of the state) would suspend students for demanding allowance extension and better canteen services on campus. We have also observed how they would run to the extent of even inviting Mswati’s security personnel to shut down students who advocate for activism against this treacherous regime, where violence and arms were fired on unarmed protesting students. Some student activists have even been put under surveillance by the state to monitor their movements as they have been classified as a “threat” to the tinkhundla state.

This exploitative system is perfectly orchestrated so much that the cost of living has escalated along with the number of unemployed youths, with vacancies being availed more in the security forces. So, in fighting fire with fire against the protesting youth, the government uses the youth in the security forces to fight back unarmed citizens. Turning brother against brother, and sister against sister, just to maintain power and protect the interests of the monarch and the bourgeoisie.

We now understand, of course, that nothing is permanent, and that at some point in the future the state will wither away. This of course, will be preceded by long struggles; class struggles. Engels says of this, “But thereby it (society) abolishes itself as the proletariat, abolishes distinctions and class antagonisms, and abolishes also the state as state.” This may have not materialised yet but take a look at the situation currently: the struggle is maturing with time, as we see even junior police officers petitioning their employer for the first time in history of Swaziland. This will in time birth the abolishment of class antagonism and the state itself, but first the working class (proletariat) must take power and direct the movement of the state for the interests of all members of society!

The proletariat is forced to revolt against the state and overthrow the tinkhundla system for once and for



**This moves in a spiral pattern.
The base is generally dominant.**

all times. On this, Engels shows the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of an economy based on capitalist exploitation.

And so, the youth and students have been forced by these rude conditions to wage this revolution against the Mswati autocracy as there will never be conducive living conditions under this rotten system.

The people shall seize the power from the state and the people shall govern. Freedom, Democracy and Socialism remains our sole route!

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