Almost no scholarly attention has been paid to the community of intellectuals who worked in political, social, and educational circles in Cape Town, South Africa, outside of the academy, in the last hundred years. From about the middle of the 1930s, a steady stream of intellectuals emerged in Cape Town, working in left-wing political and cultural structures. They brought to the assemblies in which they moved a fierce commitment to social analysis buttressed by a concentrated interest in political theory. This commitment was expressed in activist work, in polemics in debating circles, and also in writing sometimes reproduced in formal journals, newspapers, and books, but, much more often, in polemical tracts. These tracts and pamphlets constituted the grist of the intellectual work holding up the particular outlooks and perspectives emerging in those parts of the Western Cape that were not White. They contained what came to be the characteristic postures of the Unity Movement, the Fourth International of South Africa, the Teachers’ League of South Africa (TLSA), and a whole range of Trotskyist and Leninist movements (Jaffee, 1988; Kies, 1953; Saunders, 1988; Wieder, 2008).

The political work, thought, social analysis, and teaching of Richard Dudley, the subject of this chapter, constitute an informative and perhaps even exemplary idea of the character and orientation of the Cape Town “community of intellectuals.” He lives his life as the public intellectual portrayed in Edward Said’s Reith Lectures (Said, 1994). In “Speaking Truth to Power,” Said writes of intellectuals’ public involvement and challenges to government. Dudley does such as both a teacher and political activist, and he paid a price. We examine Dudley’s work for multiple reasons. First, we are interested in understanding the specific intellectual dynamics animating the political community on the left and showing how leading individuals such as Dudley helped frame the perspective of that community. We are also interested as educational historians to show how limited, indeed stereotyped, general representations of South African teachers are in their portrayal of teachers as small-minded and narrow. Several South African works, fiction and non-fiction, come to mind here, and Metrowich’s (1964) A Blackboard Round My Neck is almost emblematic. Particularly in the late 1960s and 1970s, teachers in South Africa were limited by an educational and social system that produced intensely prescriptive social pressures and often succeeded in co-opting them under the auspices of an arid, detached, and depoliticized professionalism. But we argue that while many teachers succumbed to the pressures of the apartheid system, there were equally many, if not more, who invested their work
with a profound commitment to social justice and learning. Like their colleagues in other professions, South African teachers are opinion-makers, trend-setters and, without doubt, major social intellectuals. In this work we seek to show how much a teacher can be a pedagogue but also a political analyst and a social leader. We use Dudley's life and writing to demonstrate the complexity of his identity as a teacher, an intellectual, political leader, and a public pedagogue.

Cape Town teachers speak with awe and reverence when mention is made of Richard Dudley. Beth McLagan, Pam Hicks, and Rose Jackson taught at Livingstone High School, an institution that was founded in 1924 for colored students and quickly became known throughout South Africa for academics and leftist politics. McLagan recalled the non-racial spirit of the school and attributed it to Dudley while Jackson refers to the “benign Dudley spirit.” Pam Hicks reflected on her job interview with Dudley at Livingstone High School:

He said, “You’ve been teaching in so-called colored schools. Is there anything different that you noticed about the children?” I sort of came up with some sort of neh neh neh story about, “No, well children are children, you know. No, there’s no difference.” And he said, “Well actually these children are subjected to pressures, you know, there are normal pressures in growing up, but I think there’re specific pressures that they’re subjected to.” And it was like, you know, having come out of a madhouse into sanity. Somebody who just had a grip and was prepared to talk about the grip that he had. And he was expecting me to respond. I wasn’t to come out with platitudes. I was actually to speak about what my experience was and I had to start using my brain. And it was just amazing. (Wieder/Hicks Interview, 1999)

Dudley began his teaching career in the 1940s and retired in 1984, one year before the second major wave of countrywide school boycotts of the 1980s. His political involvement began at the age of 16. He became a member of an activist-intellectual grouping called the New Era Fellowship (NEF) in 1941, where he learned the politics of struggle. Besides a long and honored career as an educator, Dudley has been actively involved in non-collaborative, democratic politics for over 60 years. He has been a member and officer of the Teachers’ League of South Africa, the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD), the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), and more recently the New Unity Movement (NUM). There was a marriage between Richard Dudley’s teaching and his political involvement. His work with students at Livingstone High School, an academically revered Cape Town school, was political as well as pedagogical. Dudley taught young people that nothing less than full and intelligent participation in a democratic society was acceptable.

We conducted extensive interviews with Dudley between 1999 and 2005, and also collected much of his written work, a great deal of which, prior to the 1980s, was published anonymously. Articles appeared in *The Educational Journal*, which was the mouthpiece of the TLSA. Authorship of articles was never acknowledged in the journal primarily because it made individuals vulnerable to the dangers of arrests and bannings, but also because the TLSA was critical of forms of individualism that set some of their members apart from others. The Teachers’ League viewed work in the journal as expressing its collective perspective making issues of intellectual provenance and authorship somewhat superfluous.

In this chapter we analyze Dudley’s teaching, politics, and writing in the context of the larger question of the relationship between the society in which he found himself and the kind of teacher he consciously set out to be. We are interested in the specific question of what it means to be a “radical” teacher in an environment where to be anything but a compliant and submissive propagandist for the apartheid government was tantamount to sedition. While we recognize that
Dudley is by no means representative of the radical teacher, his life is representative of the postures, the analyses, the world-views, and the actions that many of his colleagues and peers aspired to and sought to emulate. Said’s public intellectual again comes to mind as Dudley stood up to the Coloured Affairs Department on issues of racial segregation, language of instruction, and so much more. It is not surprising that he paid a price. He was banned, arrested, and passed over for deserved promotions on numerous occasions. At one point the Livingstone High School Committee demanded that the Superintendent General of Education appoint Dudley as principal of the school. The response was curt and clear. “Look, we know Mr. Dudley. We know that he’s qualified for the position, but we also know that he has been fighting our policies all the time, and we are not going to pay him now for opposing our school policies” (Wieder/Dudley Interview, 1999).

Context

The context in which Dudley worked was specifically shaped by the history of apartheid and the experience of colonial segregation that preceded it. This history, and its historiography, is mired in controversy (Nasson, 1990; Saunders, 1988). Central to these controversies are the abiding questions of race, class, and gender. As any number of texts on the history of South Africa will show, the questions of race, class, and gender profoundly shape the nature of modern South Africa (De Kiewiet, 1941; Jaffe, 1994; Simons & Simons, 1969; Wilson & Thompson, 1971). In 1948, the National Party won the White election and systematically set about removing all vestiges of participation of people of color in government. The coming to power of the National Party signaled the development of a special phase of White supremacy in South Africa’s history. Where segregation was the order of the day in the period up to the end of World War II, the National Party deliberately and painstakingly set about the construction of a social order defined exclusively by ethnic definitions and institutional racism, by passing in 1950 the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act; the Bantu Education Act of 1953; and a whole slew of other laws. The impact was to separate the people of South Africa into White, colored, Indian, and 11 African groups. As a result of the Group Areas Act, urban communities were dismembered and families were broken up and relocated to badly-serviced townships invariably many miles distant from their places of work. Rural homelands were established and given forms of “independence,” which left them outside of mainstream South African society. Their inhabitants were stripped of whatever legal rights they enjoyed as South Africans and were turned into permanent sojourners in the towns and the cities. Without access to the law and the protection of the state, they came to constitute the vast pool of cheap labor which made possible the crucial first phase of unbridled capital accumulation in the South African economy.

In the Cape, where Dudley was born, a socialist tradition took root that challenged the liberal tendencies of the nationalist groups. This tradition emerged out of the relatively young socialist movement in South Africa which was found in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), the trade union movement, and in various intellectual groupings throughout the country. In 1933 the Lenin Club was formed to bring together socialist groups with the intention of building a programmatic basis for challenging oppression and exploitation in South Africa (Drew, 1996). Influenced by the events of the Russian Revolution, and in particular by Lenin and Trotsky, but dismissive of the growing Stalinist inclinations of the pro-Moscow CPSA, the Lenin Club and other organizations that followed it developed strong intellectual and cultural followings in the Western Cape. A particularly important structure was the New Era Fellowship (NEF), established in 1937, which was an open forum where “all things under the sun” were discussed (Jaffe, 1994, p. 162). The NEF was emblematic of the intellectual vivacity that swept through disenfranchised Cape Town in the 1930s and 1940s. Meetings were held in community centers
such as the Stakesby-Lewis Hostel in District Six, Cape Town. Over a weekend, and, particularly on a Friday night, young men and women, many of them still in their final years at high school, would gather to hear debates and exchanges about world imperialism, South African racism, the role of the intellectual, the state of the Russian Revolution, and so on. There they were mentored by astute theoreticians and analysts from the University of Cape Town and from the organic intellectuals within the community, and were trained in the art of speaking, reading, and writing. At one such occasion Dudley, who was around 20 years old at the time, was provided with an opportunity to make his first presentation. His respondent was none other than the already redoubtable Ben Kies, the foremost theoretician of the Non-European Unity Movement.

My second year in the study group, I was given the chance to speak to the study group. My task was to examine the position of Native Labor in South Africa. Now we used to sit in a horseshoe shape, you see. And the person who was due to speak would be in the center so that you faced everybody there. And so you go along there full of yourself and full of this information and so on. You feel that you’ve done a good job. And then the tutors start taking you apart. You go in there and you think that you’re Gulliver in Lilliput. You shrink in size but you learn an important lesson and that is analysis. (Wieder/Dudley Interview, 1999)

Young members would often begin their mentorship as “foot-soldiers” responsible for distributing pamphlets and social tracts. As they became more experienced, they were given responsibility for writing themselves. Important newspapers where their writing skills were cultivated included *The Torch*, which began in the 1940s, a journal called *Discussion* and, importantly, *The Educational Journal* (Saunders, 1988). The discussions and debates generated by these developments laid the foundation of the Anti-CAD movement and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) in 1943. The Anti-CAD was a united front of civic, cultural, and political organizations that came together to resist the attempts by the government to introduce a special Coloured Affairs Department to deal with the so-called colored community. The Anti-CAD and the NEUM introduced a number of formative principles of political engagement in South Africa, namely, non-collaboration and non-racialism. In addition, the NEUM propagated, often in opposition to organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the idea of the strategic necessity for boycotting all those political instruments and measures which gave the disenfranchised less than what was theirs by right. These were, in time, adopted by the liberation movement in many of its strategies and tactics right up to the 1990s. At its founding conference in December 1943, the NEUM adopted what it called the Ten Point Programme in which the general principles of non-racial equality, anti-sectarianism, and non-collaboration were spelled out. The programme “detailed the demand for ‘nothing less than full democratic rights.’ Beginning with the demand for the full franchise, the demands included…” (NEUM Ten Point Programme, 1943) inter alia, demands for land rights for the rural, free and equal education, and the right to work.

A central organization within the Anti-CAD and NEUM was the TLSA. Up to the early 1940s, the TLSA was a conservative organization seeking to defend the narrow interests of the so-called colored elite and to promote, in the context of White anxiety about reckless Black radicalism, the image of the “respectable colored teacher.” Under the tutelage of Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman, one of the foremost figures in Cape politics, the TLSA was careful not to offend the White establishment. For many young intellectuals within the teaching community, many of whom had first-hand experience of discrimination such as being denied entry into institutions and professions because of their color, this posture was decidedly unacceptable. Spurred on
by debates around equality in the aftermath of the Second World War and the anti-colonial movement in many parts of the world, they pushed the TLSA towards a much more progressive political position. Underlying much of the rhetoric was a deep commitment to socialism and the building of a non-racial and non-exploitative South Africa.

The organization provided an important source of leadership in the disenfranchised community of the Cape, and, indeed, elsewhere in the country. In the mid-1940s the organization was undoubtedly the most important medium and vehicle for addressing social, political and educational causes and struggles. In the absence of a more differentiated middle class, teachers took the lead in synthesizing and articulating the grievances of the dispossessed. In providing this leadership, teachers within the TLSA came to play the classic role of Said’s public intellectuals. They earned their living by working within the institutions of the state, but defined their political identities through the oppositional work they engaged in as critical teachers, community workers, and meaning-makers. They offered their students access to counter-narratives and alternative epistemologies but also took their work into the larger society. They were teachers in schools but also saw themselves as teachers in a broad sense. Teaching was for them a life’s commitment which required intellectual and social vigilance within the classroom and the broader society. This vigilance thrived on their access to communities and their ability to sustain solidarity networks where they could continue to talk and communicate.

The heritage that this socialist tradition of the NEUM and the TLSA bequeathed to intellectual and political struggle in South Africa is profoundly significant as it came to influence not only the vocabulary of political discourse and analysis, but also the practice of those who sought to challenge the structures of racial and class hegemony. In all of this Dudley himself was pivotal. Precocious as a scholar, he quickly advanced into the front ranks of the TLSA and the NEUM. When the liberation movement was driven underground during the repressive years of the 1960s to the early 1990s, it fell to leaders such as Dudley to take on the role of mentor and leader. He remained heavily involved with the TLSA, with civic organizations in the areas where he lived and with the influential cultural forums (such as the Cape Flats Educational Fellowship and the South Peninsula Education Fellowship) that continued the mantle of the NEF. In these forums he spoke often to attentive audiences grappling, like him, with the difficult questions of struggle tactics and strategies. As a mark of his stature, when the NEUM re-emerged as the New Unity Movement (NUM) in the mid-1980s, after having been driven underground during the repression of the 1960s and 1970s, the organization turned to Dudley for leadership. It was he who had the responsibility of rearticulating the politics of the NUM and the TLSA. During the late 1970s and 1980s, when new expressions of political analysis emerged in the Black consciousness movement, and new mass movements emerged in the vast wave of trade union organizations and various ANC fronts, he was called upon to argue for the continued relevance of non-racialism and non-collaboration. These times, as much of Dudley’s work we refer to below suggests, were extraordinarily challenging. The political mood in the country had shifted, and what began emerging was an impatience and a stridency that was suspicious of the careful analysis and reflection which people such as Dudley urged.

**Richard Dudley**

Richard Owen Dudley was born in 1924 and was schooled at Livingstone High School and the University of Cape Town. He returned to Livingstone as a teacher in 1945 and taught there until 1985. His teachers and later his colleagues and comrades had a great effect on his pedagogy, politics, and social analysis. He was taught at Livingstone by “left wingers”—members of the Fourth International and White women who escaped Nazi Germany—who greatly influenced his ideas
and views. He was also influenced by people he met when he joined the NEF as a 16-year-old college student at the University of Cape Town.

By the time I left the University, I had been pretty well immersed in the politics of that period. Because when I was at the University in my second year I joined the radical groups here in Cape Town, which were associated with the New Era Fellowship. And as a youngster of 16, having been at the University of Cape Town, I was full of pretensions about what the extent of my knowledge was. My humbling and re-educative experience took place in the study groups that were established in the New Era Fellowship. We were given the opportunity of learning the history and politics of South Africa. And in addition to that we had tutors. They were people who were well versed in the literature of virtually all of the continents on which there were struggles occurring. So we were introduced to what one might call the struggle literature of India, the struggle literature of the West Indies, of America, of Europe. (Wieder/Dudley Interview, 1999)

Dudley became an active participant in both the Non-European Unity Movement and the Teachers’ League in the early 1940s. There he was schooled in the workings of world imperialism. As a result, the laws and actions of the National Party after 1948 were not a surprise to Dudley and his comrades. Other teachers at Livingstone High School, specifically Ali Fataar and Victor Wessels, were also active in the NEUM and the TLSA. They fought against government racism, school segregation, Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, and more. The TLSA made alliances with other teacher organizations in the fight against imperialism and racism. Dudley had strong relationships with his elder comrades like Ben Kies and Willem van Schoor, who were banned in the 1950s. He and fellow teachers Fataar and Wessels were banned soon after but were allowed to continue teaching. “They used to denigrate the school as being a sort of communist school. And they did whatever was possible to try and sabotage the work of the school,” said Dudley (Wieder, Soudien/Dudley Interview, 2001):

They banned nineteen of the leading professional teachers from the schools including myself, but we won the right, actually, to teach—in the Appeal Court. That was in 1961. It made our position very difficult because we couldn’t attend the meetings where the opposition was being organized. But we had alternative ways of doing it, we used to provide the arsenal of ideas and then other people used to fire the shots outside. (Wieder, Soudien/Dudley Interview, 2001)

Dudley worked with students to question and fight the apartheid government. He also, however, became heavily involved in the Teachers’ League and the Unity Movement and worked on both organizations’ constant stream of publications. He consistently moved political discussions from local to national to global as he spoke of issues like Black consciousness, the Group Areas Acts, and the importance of providing students with a broad perspective of apartheid within the context of world politics. These are the issues that were ever pressing for Dudley and his comrades. They were also troubled by what they viewed as the thoughtless activism of students and other teachers during the struggle years. Dudley wrote and spoke about these issues in the 1980s and 1990s, and he continues his critical work today.

Writings

A bibliography of Dudley’s writing would be difficult to compile, largely because so much of it was done anonymously. Unity Movement people and Teachers’ Leaguers seldom put their names
on articles published within the organization because, it was assumed, authors were not writing as individuals but as spokespersons for the collective. Dudley began writing in his early twenties, and it is widely accepted that his writing and thinking has retained fidelity to the themes of non-collaboration, anti-imperialism, and non-racialism. In 1993 the New Unity Movement published a special issue of the *Unity Movement Bulletin* titled “50th Year of Struggle: And the Struggle Continues.” Richard Dudley did most of the writing in the journal, although his name only appears as writing the introduction. He explains the political principles of the Non-European Unity Movement and clearly connects imperialism to South Africa during the apartheid era. The divide-and-rule politics of the government, racism, oppression, and exploitation; and of course unity and democratic rights are emphasized by Dudley. He offers a counterpoint to capitalism and world imperialism—both past and present. “In light of these founding principles and policies it is clear that a ‘government of National Unity’ set up by the de Klerk Government and World Imperialism (that is, the United States, Canada, Britain, Japan, and the European Community) cannot bring liberation peace and justice to us” (Dudley, 1993, p. 2). Dudley’s written work focuses on imperialism and apartheid.

**Imperialism**

Imperialism is a central motif in NEUM and TLSA analyses. The positions the organizations took were uncompromisingly critical. Framed in the language of polemic and analysis, the authors of much of the work of the TLSA found it hard to give up their didactic responsibilities. They lost no opportunity to drum home the message of imperialist venality and of how others within the liberation movement were characterizing the national situation incorrectly.

Dudley himself wrote prolifically about imperialism. He wrote, for example, about the Dutch coming to Cape Town in 1652. In these texts, colonialism is analyzed within the context of what he refers to as “Capitalism-Imperialism.” Poverty and racism in these discussions are presented as the products and manifestations of world imperialism. He explains, for instance, in his address to the 50th Anniversary of the NEUM, that

\[(i)\text{t has been part of the struggle of the masses of this country to understand the real causes of our loss of liberty, the poverty we suffer and the terrible conditions under which the majority live. It has taken a long time for the freedom movement in this country to get to know that our struggle is not just against segregation or apartheid; our struggle is very definitely against this entire system of colonialism-imperialism. (Dudley, 1993, p. 4)}\]

The assault on the evils of imperialism in these texts is unremitting. In an essay titled “Imperialism: The Villain in Exploitation,” Dudley introduces 19th-century British and European colonialism and concludes that colonialism provided European countries with “raw materials, cheap labour, and markets essential for the growth of monopoly capitalism” (Dudley, 1987, p. 9). Much of Dudley’s work echoed analyses found in Jaffe’s (1988) *300 Years* and Majeke’s (1952) *The Role of the Missionaries.*

In several of Dudley’s essays, the teleological effects of this rapacious assault on the world landscape are traced into the present period. Twentieth-century imperialism is described as the marriage of national and later multinational corporations with the banks to control world resources as well as politics, education, the media, and much more, all in the name of “monopoly capitalism.” Exploitation in South America, Africa, and Asia often demanded military force and the people were left powerless underneath the yoke of colonialism. Like Marx, Dudley’s work, and indeed that of most Teachers’ Leaguers, continued to hold fast to the idea that capitalism
was, relative to feudalism, a progressive force. Dudley reviews the advances of science from feudalism to capitalism and argues that,

if capitalism has had any virtue at all, it is that it has developed through industry and applied science in many fields the possibility of providing all the basic needs of mankind or [of enabling] us to wipe out poverty, hunger, illiteracy, innumeracy, and most illnesses. (Dudley, 1992, p. 1)

We are quickly reminded, though, that the socialist utopia never came to be and that his criticism of capitalist greed holds today as much as it did 150 years ago when Marx wrote Das Kapital. Dudley defines imperialism in the following way:

This domination of foreign countries by finance capital is called imperialism. It is a system in which the owners of the giant multinational monopolies, the international bankers, and a small number of financially powerful states like the USA, Japan, West Germany, France, and Britain manipulate world markets, dominate all major industry and commerce, and prey upon the poorer countries, stealing their valuable minerals and other raw materials. Imperialism sets up those economic and political structures which serve its interests, and it destroys those which are a threat to it. In the final analysis, imperialism is a parasitic system, deriving its wealth and power from the exploitation of the resources and the people of the poorer nations. It is a system designed to benefit the rich and to make the poor even poorer. (Dudley, 1987, p. 9)

Dudley and his comrades connected world imperialism to imperialism and racism in South Africa. Certain struggles were seen, in the organization’s study-circles, as progressive while others were viewed as betrayals of the interests of the working people. Progressive struggles included the Spanish Civil War, the Bolshevik Revolution, the “quit India” movement against the British, Mao’s revolution, the Indonesian uprisings against the Dutch, and the Vietnamese war of independence. Dudley cites Jane Gool and Ben Kies, both leading comrades in the broader left-wing movement, in his work reflecting on world revolutions and their relevance to South Africa. He also speaks of the selling out of Asian and African nations:

(t)he violation of this anti-imperialist principle by Nehru in accepting Partition in 1947, by Nkrumah in Ghana in 1951, and later by Kenyatta and other African nationalist leaders, was to become a precedent for the conversion of the ANC from a nominally liberation movement into a sub-manager of an imperialist-owned state in South Africa itself. (Dudley, 1993, p. 20)

Dudley’s views are representative of the perspective in the Unity Movement from the 1940s to the present. Collaboration with the enemy—both the apartheid state and what he would have described as ‘the forces of imperialism’—was not and is not a negotiable issue for Dudley and his comrades. A discussion of this issue provides a good link to Dudley’s portrayal of the fight against imperialism in South Africa. He argues “that no ruling class can rule without the help of collaborators against the oppressed” (Dudley, 1993, p. 5). Dudley speaks of “quislings” amongst the membership of the Teachers’ League and accuses the Communist Party, African National Congress, and the South African Indian Congress of collaboration. But Dudley and his comrades were criticized for being myopic and turning people and groups they disagreed with into allies and agents of the enemy. This posture was often seen as being self-righteous and abstentionist. Nasson (1990) addressed the issue:
These men and women could spit venom at any non-NEUM political initiative on the part of the people but themselves seldom became involved in “mass organisation” and “mass mobilisation.” The policy of non-collaboration was often transformed from being one of the most creative ideas of the South African struggle into a pharisaical cliché which was used to assassinate the political characters of any who did not agree with the leaders of the NEUM. (pp. 189–190)

Dudley and his comrades, however, believed non-collaboration strengthened the oppressed and provided independence. It provided a hermetic seal against the poisonous ideas of the rulers and lessened the possibility of corruption from within. NEUM’s Ten Point Programme and boycotts, discussed above, were also viewed as key elements in the fight against imperialism in South Africa. Dudley writes extensively of the fight against imperialism through the work of NEUM. The organization was formed in 1943 and included the Anti-CAD, All African Convention (ACC), African People’s Organisation (APO), Teachers’ League of South Africa, and the Cape African Teacher’s Association (CATA). Dudley writes about this history in both the “New Unity Movement Bulletin” and “50th Year of Struggle: And the Struggle Continues.” We learn about the founding of the All African Convention (1937) and the Anti-CAD (1943) after the passing of the Hertzog Act in 1935. Of course, mention is also made of the New Era Fellowship in the 1930s as a foundation for the Anti-CAD. Emphasis is placed on the political oppression that led to the election of the apartheid government in 1948 as well as the tenets of NEUM in its struggle for democracy and freedom. The issue of unity is poignant in the simple sentence: “As long as a section of the people is enslaved there could be no democracy, and without democracy there could be no justice” (Dudley, 1987, p. 6).

Apartheid

Apartheid was ever present in Richard Dudley’s life. It determined where he taught, where his children went to school, and where he lived. He was banned and detained by the apartheid government. Yet, Dudley and his comrades believed very strongly in non-racialism—race was a creation of colonialism and lived on in the apartheid system. Non-racialism was part of the interview process for prospective Livingstone teachers:

Fortunately, I used to be invited by the principal to interview people who made application to the school….And we used to point out to people that, although the school now fell under the Coloured Affairs Department, the school had a set of aims, objectives, and directions which were very explicit….And we used to point out to them that we don’t have Colored children at this school; we don’t have African children at this school; we don’t have Indian children at this school; we have boys and girls. And if you can fit in with the program that we have, and if you feel that you have any prejudices and you can leave them outside at the gate of the school and so on, you’d be welcome. (Wieder/Dudley Interview, 1999)

Dudley viewed apartheid within the context of imperialism, class, and power. In “The 1992 Jonas Fred Bosch Memorial Lecture,” he argues that race and class are part of the same struggle. He acknowledges that some South Africans believed that the end of apartheid would bring democracy. Dudley (1992) emphasizes the importance of class:

The class struggle and the struggle against racism are parts of one struggle. But the very dynamics of struggle, if it is nourished by the growth of class awareness, awareness of
the historic duty that the workers and peasants in this country have to carry out, will promote the class struggle to its prime position in the scale of priorities of the liberation movement. (p. 11)

The Non-European Unity Movement constantly addressed apartheid, but it wasn’t viewed as the entire issue. In a 1983 speech, “The Nature of South African Society and The Nature of the Struggle,” Dudley addresses apartheid and racism as part of capitalism’s ideology of divide-and-rule. He argues that racial segregation began in 1910 when South Africa became a Union and White workers were bought off and became the enemy of non-White workers. This, of course, was magnified after 1948 with the passing of numerous laws that discriminated racially. Dudley’s writings address various aspects of apartheid in South Africa with emphasis on education and forced removals. He writes about the penalties paid by activists like Ben Kies, Eskia Mphahlele, and many others. Dudley memorialized Jonas Fred Bosch in 1992 and Zantsi Mzimba in 1999. Both Bosch and Mzimba were dismissed from teaching because they fought against apartheid. Dudley (2001) praises Mzimba and then records his treatment by the apartheid state:

As a teacher and member of the Cape African Teacher’s Association (CATA) and the Teachers’ League of South Africa (TLSA) he devoted all his professional skills and energies to combating “race-based” schools...He had to face harassment by the security police, was jailed for three months for possessing “banned literature” and was prevented from taking up employment.

Dudley spoke and wrote and lived the battle against apartheid through teaching and education. Even before the apartheid government came to power, the South African government used education to divide-and-rule. Teachers were viewed as a conservative force and were often used by the government to subjugate Blacks, coloreds, and Indians. This was exacerbated after 1948 through laws passed by the apartheid state such as the Bantu Education Act in 1953, the Coloured Education Act in 1963, and the Indian Education Act in 1965. Children went to schools that were racially divided and were taught that White people were superior and that Black children, colored children, and Indian children were being educated for their proper place in society. In 1954, the Minister of Native Affairs and future president of the country, Hendrik Verwoerd, spoke of non-Whites before the Senate:

There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within his own community, however, all doors are open. For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze. (cited in Soudien, 1998, p. 9)

Dudley and his comrades fought this every day of their lives; Dudley spoke about the evils of apartheid education in his 1983 New Unity Movement presidential address:

This brings us to the vexed question of education as part of a sick society which seeks directly to poison the minds of all the youth. It is no accident that the assumption of responsibility for all schooling by the state coincided with the coming to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948. In its Christelik-Nasionaal social and political creed, it felt it had the final answer to the question of complete separation of the oppressed along lines
of race, language, colour and whatever device could be raised in the name of its fascist creed. Thirty years of this intensified operation in the schools and universities have created havoc. (Dudley, 1983, p. 19)

Dudley presents a long chronological review of the fight against apartheid education in an essay titled “The Unity Movement and the Struggle for Non-Racial Education.” He begins by emphasizing that education was always a key part of the struggle for the Unity Movement. “The movement strove to get teachers, parents (mainly workers) and their children to conduct the struggle for a non-racial, unsegregated and democratic school system as part of the struggle for political and economic democracy” (Dudley, 1993, p. 33). He reviews the coming to power of Unity Movement people in the TLSA and also praises CATA and the Transvaal African Teacher’s Association (TATA) for their educational struggles against the Eiselen-Malan education which was responsible for apartheid education.

Through all of this, teachers from the TLSA, CATA, etc….continued to fight the system. They led the fight against segregated celebration at the 1952 Van Riebeeck Festival and they refused to support school flag raisings to celebrate Republic Day after 1960. Additionally, they taught their students subject substance as well as historical and political truth. Teachers in their classrooms taught pupils not to call themselves “Coloureds” and to regard all people as equal members of the one race, the human race. The concepts of non-racialism and an equal humanity were propagated in the schools and inspectors of education who attempted to sow seeds of racialism were opposed by teachers. Class readers and textbooks—in all subjects, even Mathematics and Science—in which racist concepts were propounded or hinted at were rejected. Where schools were forced to use such books teachers told their pupils that they should reject such concepts. (Dudley, 1993, p. 39)

Non-racialism is one of the main tenets of NEUM and the TLSA. In projecting itself as a non-racial organization, the TLSA (and the NEUM) deliberately counterpoised themselves to the clutch of organizations within the African National Congress stable. A target of much of Dudley and the TLSA’s invective was the continued parody of race presented and defended within the Freedom Charter of the ANC (Suttner & Cronin, 1986). The ANC, in projecting its vision for the future South Africa, presented South Africa as a country of four nations. The upshot of this analysis, according to the TLSA, was to see South Africa in precisely the same racial terms that the liberation movement was struggling against. Embedded in the language and the vocabulary of the ANC and its allies, thought the TLSA, was a pervasive race-mindedness which undermined the ability of South Africans to see themselves as part of the human race. This approach is evident in Dudley’s continuing rejection of racial labeling. He has great difficulty, for example, in using racial terms and when he is required to talk of color sometimes talks of “tan” or “not so tan” people. He and his comrades often stress that there is one race, the human race as is evident in the story of the interview process that we have previously noted. It is also important to note that practice and theory did meet. Dudley and his colleagues at Livingstone subverted the government by hiding the enrollment of Black students at the school. As we move below to a discussion of the struggle years beginning with Soweto, we will address further criticism of NEUM and TLSA positions.

Dudley discusses the 1976 Soweto student revolts where students reacted to the government’s attempts to make Afrikaans the language of instruction (this was also an issue that Dudley and his colleagues fought at Livingstone), the De Lange Commission’s (a Commission of Enquiry for the improvement of South African education set up by the apartheid government in the middle
of the 1980s) proposals for equalization in education, as well as the Botha government’s rejection of the commission. Finally, an article titled “The Role of Students in the Struggle” addresses the Unity Movement and education from Soweto through the eighties. Dudley’s caveat is that although students have an important role in the struggle, it is supportive and educational. The main players are workers, teachers, and parents. He lists student limitations—rashness, inexperience, sloganeering, impatience, and lack of theory and history. “Education for Liberation,” one of the main tenets of the TLSA is presented and contrasted with one of the slogans of the 1985 school boycotts, “Liberation now, Education later.” Dudley does pay homage to the brave, courageous stand of students. But, he criticizes the thoughtlessness of sloganeering and demonstrations. The TLSA did not want students out in the streets and they believed that they were being used by ideologues who didn’t understand the politics of apartheid:

The students used to march around the school. What was also interesting about that is that there were some people who were opposed to the idea of having these banner marches around the school. They wanted the pupils to go out onto the street. And when the pupils themselves ventured to go out onto the street, the police really fired into them and that happened again in 1980 and again in 1985. And so we indicated to them that there was no way in which they could, in a few days of struggle, achieve what they were demanding. That they would have a long career in front of them in which they would have to be involved in this sort of thing. I said, “You can’t be doing this sort of thing purely as a kind of reaction to a situation when before you might have been very placid and so on and you were taking things for granted.” Now that kind of education, I think, is very necessary for these pupils. (Wieder/Dudley Interview, 1999)

Dudley and his comrades had been accused by the ANC and its allies for over 30 years of acquiescence, of waiting for the perfect “revolutionary” moment, a moment they claimed would never come. Now, the critique went, it was their students, many who had actually learned politics from TLSA teachers very well, who were questioning their relevance. They were viewed as “armchair politicians.” Not all their products were to take the same position, however. On reflection, many of their students, who as young teachers were leaders in the struggle, continued to honor the lessons they learned from teachers such as Dudley. Mandy Sanger was a radical student leader and then a teacher activist during the struggle years of the 1980s. She is critical of the Unity Movement, but she credits her teachers:

They were role models in the sense that they were political. Yes, the fortunate thing about our school was that they would never be seen to be expelling or suspending students for being involved in politics; it was seen as a good thing. A lot of teachers were members of the Unity Movement, so they’d invite us to the discussion groups on Saturdays and Sundays, and we’d go. They had an education foundation, but they essentially saw political action as being outside of school time. Despite my dislike and criticism of the Unity Movement, many of my teachers were inspiring classroom practitioners. They made school enjoyable and were committed teachers. (Wieder/Sanger Interview, 1999)

Conclusion

Recently, Richard Dudley and some of his NUM comrades argued before a government committee for reparations for people who were removed from their homes during apartheid forced removals. The South African economy is not strong, and the government is not particularly generous or forthcoming in paying the people who were wronged. But Dudley and his comrades
continue to provide counterpoints to South African commonplaces. Some of Dudley’s ex-students from Livingstone High School, while praising their former mentor, are saddened by the refusal of Dudley and his comrades to participate in the “new” South African democratic government. But Dudley and his comrades’ political and social analyses have criticized the government for over 50 years. Again, we think of Said’s definition of the public intellectual. Richard Dudley was approached in 1993 about the possibility of serving as the Minister of Education in Nelson Mandela’s first post-apartheid government:

"The one thing that they did in my case I got a call to say that they wanted to speak to me because they were eager to forward my name as Minister of Education. And I would get the support of the people from the Unity Movement who were now sort of before court. That would have been round about 1993. Well I laughed. I said to this chap well I’ve been working in politics for a long time and I probably know all the problems in education. I also know that what they are doing now is not going to help solve the problems in education. So I’m not going to enter any job that I know that I must fail from day one. I said besides that you’re asking me to collaborate with the collaborators." (Wieder, Soudien/ Dudley Interview, 2002)

There have been other occasions since 1994 that Richard Dudley has seen the need to “speak truth to power.” In a 2003 interview with Dudley and his wife Iris, they spoke of a private luncheon meeting with President Mandela. The meeting took place in November 1998, and, although it was pleasant, the agenda included Mandela asking Dudley to help bring the colored vote in the Western Cape to the ANC. It is not surprising that Dudley explained his foundational belief in non-racialism to President Mandela.

The scholarship cited in our introduction, as well as Dudley’s work, analyzed imperialism and apartheid with grounding in Trotsky’s teachings and NEUM’s non-negotiable tenets of non-collaboration and non-racialism. Dudley and his comrades were criticized in the fifties and sixties for being elitist because of their theoretical rigidity—critics believed that their non-compromising positions were an excuse for inaction. During the struggle years of the eighties activist teachers and students were angered by the TLSA’s resistance to school boycotts and placard demonstrations. Teachers’ Leaguers were called “armchair politicians.” Ironically, they were not criticized as teachers, rather, they were lauded for pushing students pedagogically as well as politically. The mostly young teachers in the eighties who founded the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU), one of the forerunners of the modern national South African Democratic Teachers’ Union, organized with parents and students, and participated in overt demonstrations against the apartheid regime, remain critical of the inaction of Dudley and his comrades. But many of the activists’ parents, other relatives, and teachers were members of the TLSA. They watched as TLSA members were threatened by the government and they also formed their critical politics through the teachings of their elders—the “armchair politicians.” Pedagogy and politics were one for Dudley and his comrades and they demanded analysis and a critical perspective from themselves and their students. Ciraj Rassool has described their work as “a long range project in public education”—an education that was promoted both in and out of school:

Through an analysis of power in society and the conditions of resistance and collaboration, a system of representation was created, complete with its own vocabulary, framing categories, nouns, verbs, activities and procedures through which the nation was defined, the “enemy” named and conceptualised, and through which a moral code of behaviour was counterposed to that of the enemy. (Rassool, 1999)
The power of Dudley’s work and the movement he represents is foundational in its critique of class, race, and power in South Africa and the world. The criticisms of NEUM, and therefore Dudley, are, however, probably right in their questioning of the inactivism of NEUM as the organization waits for the perfect activist moment that never arrives. Drawing all these critiques together, it is probably correct to say that the Teachers’ League over-intellectualized its position and its responsibility in the gathering wake of the struggle against the faltering apartheid government. With an analytic frame that changed but little over a 30-year period, the TLSA arguably not only lost touch with those people it addressed in the 1940s and 1950s, but it also lost touch with developments in social analysis and social theory. Post-structuralist debates cut deep into the tendentiousness of deterministic Marxism. Understanding of society calls on much more nuanced understandings of the relationship between the economy and social agency, through the medium of culture, for example, the theory of the TLSA revealed itself as rather inflexible and out of touch (Alexander, 1989, pp. 180–191). In this respect, there is need for a great deal more rigorous analysis of the complexity of TLSA and NEUM theory. But it is not right to conclude that Dudley and his comrades are impotent. They have been leaders and mentors and their teaching and writing have come to provide much of the social, political, and economic foundation for the younger activists who helped to bring an end to the apartheid regime.

Notes

1. Both authors have done extensive interviewing with South African teachers. In addition, Soudien is part of the South African teaching community.
2. While the TLSA was a non-racial organization, the membership was predominantly colored as defined by the South African government. The organization partnered with CATA, a predominantly Black organization by government definition.
3. Both authors were part of the non-academic tradition of the South African left that wrote histories of both world imperialism and South African racism. See Saunders (1988).
4. There is irony here as Dudley was detained in 1985 during an intense period of the struggle. It was another “Speaking Truth to Power” moment as he lectured his interrogators on the evils of apartheid.
5. This is also true in the case of reparations mandated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

References

Interviews

Wieder/Dudley, 1999, Cape Town, South Africa.
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