



WORKS

A group of students from Orlando West Junior High School – the first school to boycott classes – and some of their friends from other schools such as Morris Isaacson High School – as yet unaffected by the Afrikaans issue – arranged a general demonstration in protest of the state's design to use the language of the oppressor as a language of instruction.

Once again the tactics, the form of protest – a demonstration – was a symbolic one, albeit more dangerous, since demonstrations of any kind in South Africa are, by statute, punishable offences. The organisers of the demonstration – the embryo of a later-to-be self-proclaimed leadership – proceeded to visit all local schools to gather support.

The response of the Soweto students who attended that demonstration on June 16 far exceeded the expectations of the organisers. As opposed to the anticipated couple of thousand demonstrators expected by the organisers, about 30,000 students gathered at Orlando West High School.

The placards carried by those gathered already portended things to come. There were slogans not only denouncing Afrikaans and Bantu Education, but such slogans as: "Power", "Smash the system," "Away with Vorster", "We'll fight until total liberation."

In festive mood the students took their protest to the streets. Inevitably they were confronted by the brute force of the South African state, who, by ruse of history, understood the implications of the students' actions even more clearly than most of the students themselves were able to at that time. Without warning the police opened fire on the singing and marching students. The students at the front of the procession began to retreat, but their flight was halted by the act of one person. One young woman stood her ground, then defiantly walked towards the police shouting: "Shoot me!" Inspired by this incredible act – so incredible that the police did not shoot—the students' retreat turned into a regroupment and frenzied counterattack. Rocks were torn from the ground and hurled at the police. After a second volley of shots had left more students dead and wounded, the leadership suddenly reappeared, in the form of one Tsietsi Mashinini, who stood up on an overturned vehicle and exhorted his fellow students to disperse. He was promptly forced to scuttle when the students turned their rocks on him. While the leadership was thus "left in the bush part three," so was their newfound style of contestation—demonstration; for the students did disperse, not to seek refuge at home from "inevitable" suicide, as the self-proclaimed leadership had urged, but to rampage through the streets of Soweto in a potlatch of destruction.

