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South Africa

South African campus updates

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#FeesMustFall has been likened to the student uprisings of 1976. In the year of the 40th Anniversary of 1976, it was hoped that the energy would carry over into 2016. But what we have seen is mass demobilisation and demoralisation.

It is clear that there has been collusion between the state and university management to repress and undermine student activism and protest by criminalising it. We have seen this in the nation-wide use of interdicts, mass disciplinary action and arrests of activists.

Western Cape

Since the beginning of the year there have been many protests. The result has been repression of activism and, disciplinary action against many students.

In February, UCT students protested against the housing crisis at the university by erecting a shack. #Shackville got a lot of attention nationally. Management insisted that the Shack be moved. Students refused. The result was an escalation in which paintings and other property were burned and the shack was demolished.

In the aftermath students were interdicted from the university and have been charged in disciplinary processes. This has resulted in a number of students being expelled. This is happening across the Western Cape. Students at UWC and CPUT started this year fighting for the insourcing of workers and an end to private security on their campuses. At Stellenbosch, as a result of protests against outsourcing, 150 workers were dismissed. They also erected a shack demanding that these workers be reinstated. This protest action was dealt with by private security, and the shack was demolished within hours.

Eastern Cape

The biggest student protest against rape and rape culture took place at the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR). Hundreds of students took to the streets of Grahamstown demanding that the university take action against rapists and sexual offenders. The university was shut down by protestors and many of the entrances to the campus were blockaded. Instead of dealing with the serious issues, the university allowed police to arrest students during the #NakedProtest and interdicted many of the students from continuing with the protests.

At the University of Fort Hare, during the centenary celebrations of the founding of the university, there was mass student protest. While they were spending money on celebrations, many students were not able to afford their tuition or food. The university had not paid them their money because they were having "financial difficulties".

At Walter Sisulu University of Technology, student leader Vusi Mahlangu was kidnapped. This ignited mass protest against outsourcing. The private security dealt with students in a very brutal manner, shooting at them with live ammunition.

KwaZulu Natal

Students and workers went on mass protest action to end outsourcing. After many weeks of protesting and many arrests, students and workers won a victory: insourcing and a pay increase. These protests have continued to spread to other universities and colleges across the province.

Gauteng

Workers and students of all universities in Tshwane protested, demanding the ending of outsourcing. Many of the workers were brutalised and threatened with losing their jobs, but they won an important victory. There were also protests against racism and the use of Afrikaans at their universities. Students were brutalised by racist students as well as the police.

Free State

At the beginning of the year black students interrupted a rugby match at the University of Free State (UFS) to challenge the language policy and racism. This led to the movement "Unsilence UFS". Jonathan Jansen has subsequently stepped down as the Vice Chancellor.

North West

Students protested against university management corruption and interference with student governance. They dissolved an elected SRC and appointed their own SRC, without the student body. Student protestors were shot with live ammunition and rubber bullets and dispersed by tear gas and stun grenades. These clashes led to the burning of the administrative building and the indefinite shutdown of the campus. This sent home many students who had paid for their fees and residences.

At the Potchefstroom campus students united with students at Afrikaans universities across the country, protesting against the language policy. They said it was racist and exclusionary. Like at UFS, black students were victims of terrible racial abuse. The university failed to take any action against the abusers. Workers supported the students, also demanding the end of outsourcing. These protests resulted in a mass firing of workers. They are continuing to fight for their reinstatement. Black students have been victimised by university management