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## Wither Higher Education in the Context of the Fees mustfall Campaign in South Africa

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**Abstract:** The paper attempts to look at the current higher education crisis in South Africa in terms of the recent #FeesMustFall Campaign, embarked upon by higher education university students over the last several months and still continues unabated, in a country that seems to have lost its way. Civil unrest, strikes and protests in almost all sectors of the economy now permeates the political landscape of South Africa. This is an indictment to the democratic order, post 1994. As such, the paper will concentrate on the problems and challenges that confront South African higher education. It argues that education is a public good and therefore, a direct responsibility of government, given the heroic struggles of the masses from apartheid oppression and Bantustan education. Naturally, the paper argues further that, heirs of the revolutionary struggle are entitled to their rage. Tertiary education cannot remain limited to the few privileged in South Africa and, only radical action brings solutions. In other words student movements like it did, to challenge apartheid education, must be used to achieve the Freedom Charter's vision. The Freedom Charter of the South African liberation struggle says that "the doors of learning must be open to all." ([The Freedom Charter, 1956](#)). On the other hand there is just no money to fund higher education because of the rampant corruption, faltering action plans and as such, it appears that the higher education dream has been deferred. The most recent #FeesMustFall campaign brings to reality that after 21 years of democracy South African politicians of the ruling party can no longer rely on their revolutionary credentials because, the time has come to deliver real change. The mass student revolt of recent times has been unprecedented in the history of democratic South Africa. Amongst a host of other issues, this narrative will show that the students have sent a powerful message to the ruling party that has taken South African people for granted. Protesting students therefore, require the nation's unreserved support. The paper will therefore attempt to talk to a host of issues as concerns higher education in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Education; Students; #FeesMustFall; Protests; Economy; Politics; Democracy; Challenges; Public Good.

### 1. Introduction

Soweto students in 1976 rejected Afrikaans as a language of instruction under apartheid and, by implication it was a rejection of Bantu Education in South Africa under apartheid. "Schools became staging grounds for the struggle against apartheid. Activists, researchers, and communities collaborated to develop new policies and reforms were grounded in community discussions" ([Weber, 2008](#)). Over several decades education in South Africa was at the centre of the struggle to end apartheid and transform society. The struggle at that time was led by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and not the African National Congress (ANC), in respect of education. The 1976 Soweto riots brought the apartheid government to its knees. This jolted the apartheid Nationalist Party and laid the ground for negotiations with the revolutionary forces of South Africa and nearly 40 years after this protest of mammoth and gigantic proportions, saw the demise of apartheid in 1994. If we fast forward to October 2015, Higher Education in South Africa faces a major dilemma of insurrectionary proportions as students have once again brought the country to almost a standstill via their movement called the #FeesMustFall campaign which began in October, 2015. This campaign began at the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg and, spread to all university campuses in South Africa and across all universities. This has resulted in the torching of some university buildings, violence and chaos throughout the country. The President of the country had to announce a freeze of university fees for the academic year, 2016. This stemmed the tide somewhat, but violence in some campuses continues unabated. Amidst the #FeesMustFall campaign, students are demanding a host of other urgent concessions on the part of government

and the National Minister of Higher Education. The demands straddle a wide range of issues, chief amongst these are transformation of the higher education landscape because of slow transformation over 21 years of democracy, the scrapping of Afrikaans as a language of instruction at certain universities, insourcing of worker demands and the scrapping of outsourcing services, the scrapping of historic student debt that runs into millions or in fact billions of Rands and the resignation of the Minister of Higher Education. If one considers usual measures, post - apartheid, much of the education system at both the higher and basic levels does not do well in South Africa. In this regard [Samoff \(2008\)](#) states that “privilege, often in post – apartheid education in South Africa is still based on race and increasingly on class and this asserts itself at every turn and the gains that exist post 1994 are regularly swamped by education’s debilitating disabilities. The struggles are more about survival than social transformation.”

Post 1994 education has become an increasingly contested terrain and reflects the challenges and tensions of leadership transition. However, after two decades of freedom this cannot any longer be used as an excuse. Wither education in South Africa. It is also post 1994, contributable to an expanding middle class and increasing inequality. This is further exacerbated by government policy guaranteeing entry into universities, for the masses of students, irrespective of the quality of matriculation results and the failure of government revamping the further education and Training (FET) higher education institutions, into which billions of Rands have been pumped into, post 1994. Government has therefore created a legitimate expectation and therefore, cannot renege on its promises given the brutality with which education was promulgated by the apartheid regime. These FET institutions are unable to attract quality students coupled with the facilities and campuses that do not resemble the facilities offered at universities. All of this contributes very seriously upon the social currents of resistance that has now permeated the higher education landscape post 1994 and that education according to [Samoff \(2008\)](#) “has not been the dynamo at the centre of social transformation.” Higher Education therefore, needs to become the engine for change. The issue that lies at the heart of this contradiction and reality is - what is education’s role in maintaining and transforming society after 300 years of colonialism, more than 50 years of apartheid and over 21 years of democracy? As Amilcar Cabral reminded Africa “Tell no lies. Claim no easy victories.” The higher education sector in the recent past has been layered by lies and an incompetent minister that does not have his pulse on the transformation agenda and the requirements of higher education students in the country.

Therefore, productive stock – taking and the ear to listen to societies’ demands requires frank discussion, sustained debate and a relevant conversation, demanding rapid answers. Failure to do this and allowing the minister of higher education to set the agenda is a recipe for disaster. The system, the students and the government needs to call the ministers bluff in terms of his so – called socialist agenda for transformation. Basically he remains clueless as how to intervene. He preaches socialism but in reality is a capitalist donning a socialist cap. He is thus a ‘reactionary’ and a ‘Gucci socialist’. Electing new leaders is now essential and most opportune for South Africa. As [Weber \(2008\)](#) points out that “critical reasoning , self – reliance, cooperative approaches, community responsiveness and participation, environmental awareness, self – confident assumption of responsibility, political consciousness, engaged citizenship and many more, have been marginalized” by the current minister of higher education, his advisors and the government of South Africa. In short a narrow conception of higher education has produced narrow results and negated and, lowered this sector to the lowest common denominator, in terms of the people’s high aspirations and grand objectives, post 1994. Under the present Minister of Higher Education the sector has deteriorated, the transformation agenda has been put on the back burner, to please neoliberal policies coupled with appeasing capital and has become authoritarian under his watch. This is clearly exemplified by the The Times newspaper reporting on the 23 November, 2015 that “The South African Communist Party (SACP) whose Chairperson is the Minister of Higher Education proposed an increase in personal income tax to fund tertiary education. They said that banks need to contribute towards shortfalls in tertiary education. They further added that monopoly capital is the principal beneficiary of public funding. It rejected free education for all.” The SACP and the minister are out of kilter demanding that, the private sector fund tertiary education. There is no doubt that the private sector has a role to play. They already provide numerous bursaries to South African students that run into millions of Rands. Indeed the private sector and, particularly big business in South Africa has to be engaged in an orderly manner, without double speak and threats by the minister. Business has a fundamental and pivotal role to play with regards higher education, contribute to the skills deficit that has plagued the country, grow the economy and contribute to the stability of the nation by addressing the very high unemployment rates, address poverty and inequality that permeates South African society. The government should acknowledge that all education in South Africa is a public good and therefore, the direct responsibility of the state to provide free education to all South African students ([Vally and Motala, 2014](#)). There can be no debate in this regard.

Wither education and therefore, cry the beloved country. It must be remembered that education activism of the 1970s and 1990s nurtured intensive debates about policy, transformation and practice. This saw the mobilization of students and staff in the education sector. Its leader’s credentials were mostly unquestionable, whose ideas, public roles, and legitimacy were forged in the struggle to liberate South Africa and to deal with all education decisively coupled with an unwavering resilience to rectify and remedy apartheid education.

This enthusiasm, selflessness and charismatic leadership had no agenda’s and spoke truth to power, but the post 1994 political and education leadership “came from a different direction – the politics of interests and stymied the emergence of higher education” ([Samoff, 2008](#)) and the basic education sectors and, failed to realize that sound policies were developed by tried and tested South African researchers, prior and post 1994, by policy experts and academics that have been swept under the carpet and, many banished into oblivion because of these narrow interests, much to the peril of the country. Politics is an essential element and necessary mechanism for assuring democratic

representation, participation, implementation and action. These are currently paid scant reference to by government which favours, irrelevant management and only incremental change over sound and intellectual leadership thus, putting paid to bold initiatives that are now required. As Samoff (2008) points out that “systemic integration is undermined when decentralized responsibility serves as a strategy for preserving privilege and withdrawing from the education system rather than contributing to it.” This is what the minister has achieved under his tenure and continues to do so, blaming all and sundry but, takes no responsibility for the morass and decay that, has overtaken higher education, within the university landscape of South Africa, post 1994.

In terms of higher education at the traditional White universities, the policy of elite institutions was an imperative followed by the democratic government, on the basis that these universities must not be jeopardized. This was short sighted and the outcomes were not in keeping with democratic transformation or, rather the chickens have of come home to roost, because these universities have maintained the status quo. The government did not factor into the equation that the majority of students are Black and crying out for higher education, yearning for education opportunity and South Africa’s universities cannot absorb them all, given the apartheid legacy of exclusion. Under the democratic revolutionary government once again Black students remain excluded and poverty stricken to access higher education. On the other hand, it is obvious that the leading White institutions have been shielded by short – sighted government policy and were sheltered from institutional rearrangements, while Black institutions have been reorganized and merged. Intended to support quality, the higher education national funding strategy significantly entrenches the existing differentiation. Thus we rightfully observe in 2015, the emergence of the #FeesMustFall campaign after 21 years of so – called South African democracy. Accountability together with a somewhat apolitical approach within the ambit of the rule of law coupled with the call of the Freedom Charter and the Constitution of the Republic must be invoked and relentlessly pursued, rather than government intervening in all education issues together with its alliance partners the labour unions and the SACP unnecessarily, in terms of public policy making, must be done away with, but must be monitored by an independent body instilling the appropriate check and balances and to see that government policy is implemented.

Samoff (2008) and Karodia (2014) point out that “the elimination of two major education sub – systems, the colleges and the Technikons, has not as yet produced an integrated higher education system and thus the roles of the eliminated institutions remain ill – defined under the new democratic order.” The higher education system is presently geared to safeguard education for the elites. Transformation therefore, remains incomplete after two decades of democracy. Observation reveals that even though higher education and basic education in South Africa has expanded access, education has maintained and reinforced their elitist character. In other words, the efforts to preserve elite education, reinforces an understanding of education that undermines the development of quality mass education. It naturally negates the public good, adds to the massive unemployment burden curtails the growth of the economy drastically, lowers morale of citizens and the youth and contributes to an already faltering economy. This thus does not allow universities in South Africa, to play a leading role in education transformation and justifies the outmoded notion of differentiated education, in a democratic order, in terms of quality and success. However, it must be remembered that quality and equity can never be alternatives under a democratic order that, was ushered in to deal with disparities created by apartheid.

What then are the questions that must guide change? (Weber, 2008) puts them as follows:

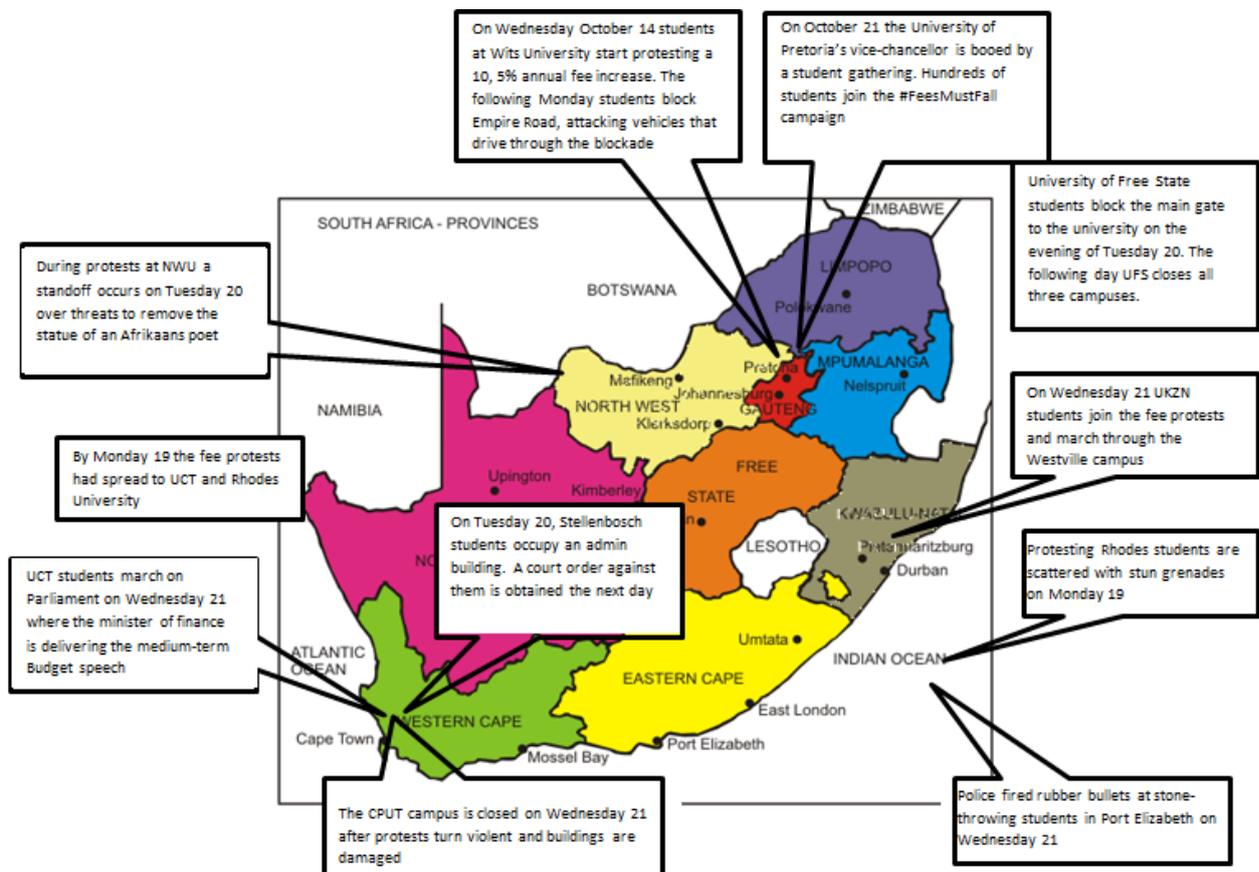
- “How does educational change happen within transition societies?”
- How is educational change in transitional societies different from educational change in stable or established societies?
- Why is change difficult?
- What are the factors that restrain change?
- What can we learn about educational change from a study of continuity?
- What are the qualities of change?
- When does change become transformation?
- Can different kinds of change be discerned – and if so, how is such change characterized in the literature?
- How do we know that change has happened?
- What are the historical antecedents to change that helps to explain the pace and direction of change?
- Do people change their behaviours first and their beliefs later – or do they first change their beliefs and behaviours.
- Is spontaneous change from planned or deliberate change necessary?
- Who should lead the process of educational change and how?
- What is the role of leadership in educational change?
- Who loses and who gains from the process of change – and can this kind of interest help us and the system to predict the kind of changes required?
- How is superficial change different from deep change?
- What is required for sustainable change as opposed to one – off change events?
- What are the unintended consequences of change, and are such consequences always negative?
- What role does culture play in the possibility of change?
- Are certain cultures such as institutional cultures more favourable than other cultures?
- What explains high levels of educational performance in limited – resource contexts?
- Can cultures be changed, and if so, how?

- What kind of change is more desirable in educational systems – incremental change or large – scale changes?
- To what extent is educational change possible without corresponding social changes?
- What is the relationship between social and educational change?
- Is top – down change more effective than bottom – up change?
- Is a stakeholder model of change more effective and efficient than a management model of change?”

Pre and post 1994 the above questions were researched and there is a plethora of literature that was assembled by an array of local, regional and international researchers and academics. In this regard there is no need to reinvent the wheel and commission further research in this regard. The downward trajectory that the higher education landscape has taken in the most recent past has to do with the government’s inability to action the answers documented by these questions. All of this was undertaken given the morass and decay that entrenched it through apartheid ideology and, the backdrop of globalization and the problems that confront higher education over the last two decades under a democratic government, in terms of higher education transformation. Much of the work in terms of financing education at the higher level has long been completed, including the call for bureaucratic change and the changes in ideology to meet the imperatives of a democratic South Africa; the issue of educational governance was also researched. However, the country, its bureaucracy and the ministry of higher education has lost focus in terms of implementation strategies already defined and therefore, the country is in a quagmire and on to a road of destruction. This is exemplified by an inept higher education ministry that is out of tune with the South African reality.

Zwane (2015) clearly shows the days of student rage in respect of the days of rage in October of 2015 which brought the higher education sector of South Africa to a standstill and, almost after three months this rage has continued unabated and will continue in 2016, when universities reopen in February. Many universities had to cancel examinations that were to be written in November / December 2015. These examinations are now scheduled for January 2016. During these dark days students torched buildings and destroyed university infrastructure. The days of student rage is shown hereunder, in the following graph:

## Days of student rage How the fee protests spread



Source: Zwane (2015). Mail and Guardian, October 23. Johannesburg.

## 2. Literature Review

According to [Bender \(2008\)](#) “expectations for higher education transformation include more institutional engagement and greater responsiveness to community and societal needs.” “The notion of free trade for the purposes of access and from the perspective of promoting the public good must be scrapped from a trade perspective within public universities. Public universities must not be allowed to compete with statutory private education institutions, which are very few in number and do not have a substantial student base, because, the only option for South Africa is to pursue a higher public education system, rooted in promoting the public good” ([Vally and Motala, 2014](#)). There can be no excuses that can be proffered by government in this regard. The minister of higher education has called on the private sector to fund the immediate shortfall of some R2.6 billion for the 2016 academic year and, a further R30 billion per year to fund higher education. The minister has also made a clarion call to increase the taxes of the rich and, to use a means test to fund poor students. This is the most ludicrous suggestion because South Africans are overtaxed and possess a narrow tax base of some 5 to 8 million people; the issue of using a means test will not work in South Africa because, it cannot be monitored, it will open up fraud and corruption, as was and is seen in the social grants system, in an already corrupt country. On the other hand government must take cognizance of the reality that the majority of students are poor and black (about 84 percent attending universities, including disadvantaged Indian and Coloured students). This would mean that only about 15 percent of so – called advantaged students will have to pay fees. Who determines who is rich and who can pay fees, in a country that is essentially poor with very few middle class income earners and the majority of the population, irrespective of race is, in the lower income bracket? Why should free education not be provided to all, if it is a public good? What is the cut off for being put in the rich bracket of income earners? If a study is conducted in this regard, it will definitely reveal that only 5 to 8 percent of the 15 percent stated above will be able to afford the vulgar escalation of fees. Education being a public good and a responsibility of government must be made free for all. [Karodia \(2014\)](#) points out that “a similar situation existed in Mexico and student demands for free education was finally acceded to by the Mexican government.” The government of South Africa as led by the African National Congress must therefore, implement free higher education for all and live – up to its revolutionary credentials and the Freedom Charter which calls for the scenario that all living in South Africa must be afforded education and access must be open to all.

On the other hand [Boyer \(1996\)](#) states that “the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our pressing, social, civic, and the ethical problems. The scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which academia communicates with civic cultures more continually.” This has not been achieved post 1994. “The new scholarship requires a new epistemology” ([Schon, 1995](#)). It is a question of critical thought and legitimate knowledge and must be built into institutional structures, policies, and practices of South African universities. This is sorely lacking at our universities and plays out negatively in many ways.

[Motala \(2008\)](#) and her other work on education states that a key concept framing the transformation of post – apartheid education system is equity. The concept is important in its own right. It is a unifying social concept for the future.” The thrust of financing education in South Africa was geared towards the equalization of funding and towards socio – economic groups. “After the second national democratic elections in 1999, [Motala \(2008\)](#); ([Fiske and Ladd, 2006](#)) state that “it became apparent that policy makers were struggling to address the equalization of access to resources at both the basic and higher education levels. They further point out that issues of equity and equality have become even more important in the context of the gap between the rich and the poor and, whether this gap is widening. Distributional equity according to these authors is of vital importance.” Disagreements abound in terms of which inputs are the most significant, whether equity includes the notion of adequacy, and whether the function of funding equity is to equalize access to resources or to improve outcomes. In reality, it is both and therefore, a government duty to ensure adequacy and equalize access to resources to improve outcomes. In this regard the government has reneged from these fundamental tenets to secure access to all education in the country. However, while South Africa has developed a particular model of resource allocation, there is little understanding of the impact of this input – driven approach ([Levin and McEwan, 2001](#); [Mingat and P., 1988](#); [Monk, 1990](#); [Ross and Levacic, 1999](#)). Technically speaking and in terms of observation by the authors post 1994 there are serious tensions in achieving social development targets.

Faced with global shifts and local needs, the refigured post – apartheid state confronts complementary and competing demands regarding resource allocation. The state has to understand that two decades after democracy, it must modernize and deliver progress. It has failed to do so and is now facing the brunt. The education terrain remains polarized by government interference and the lack of political will to make sustained and implementable policies at the higher education level. In terms of the political economy, it’s a question of choices and government in many instances has made the wrong choices in terms of policy imperatives. In this regard [Karodia \(2013\)](#) states that “Politics is the art of the possible and economics is focused on the effective utilization of scarce resources and therefore the government of South Africa, in terms of education and, its management in respect to public issues has failed the nation in many directions. The second ground of caution is that most innovations and policy implementation require investments that can be made only to the extent that government is able to extract from the tax – paying public some part of their income or capital. This opportunity has been lost by wrong investments, poor choices, and the recessionary climate since 2008, exacerbated by overt corruption and wasteful expenditure on the part of the state; an inefficient and unproductive public service bureaucracy coupled with a very narrow tax base, civil unrest and the lack of service delivery, particularly to the poor in almost all directions, given the widening inequality, increasing unemployment and rising unstoppable poverty in South Africa.”

It is therefore imperative and vitally important that government after two decades of democracy has to now give substance to the constitutional provision that “everyone has a right to quality education” then government has to take adequate measures to safeguard this right (RSA Constitution, 1996a, Section 29). In other words education is a public good and as such it must be implemented. In this regard [Ball \(2003\)](#) states that “the interlocking inequalities, the mobilization of social resources is critical to the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage.” From a policy perspective after two decades of democracy, according to [Weber \(2008\)](#), [Motala \(2008\)](#) “education expenditure now requires a review to address socio – economic differentials and historical backlogs in all of education. All of this requires more vigorous attention and fees are another area that requires review.” There has to be sustained equity, redress and quality, irrespective of the challenges faced by the fiscus. In other words equity, and a system of education provision at both the basic and higher education levels in terms of social justice seems to be far away and we see that by 2016, it has yet not been achieved.

On the other hand the skills funds have to be unlocked for higher education. In this regard [Gerber \(2015\)](#) states that “the higher benchmark for training and skills development set by the new black economic empowerment (BEE) codes may provide an ideal solution to help fund higher education. This will allow companies to accumulate BEE points and, thus to claim tax allowances. No additional wealth taxes will be needed.” With legislation in place in the form of BEE codes and businesses having the money available and under pressure to spend outside the workplace, leadership and government intervention is now required to address the challenges that have been outlined by the #FeesMustFall campaign. This could and must be linked to affordable education or no fees for higher education. The rather short literature review calls for a new reform policy post 2015 and 2016 by the state, because the state according to [Crain Soudien and Gilmour, 2008: 333](#) “is directly implicated in the production and reproduction of the inequities that continue to operate within the education system.” Technically the poor and the black have not been catered for by the state, the ruling African National Congress government and the ministries of both the basic and higher education departments. On the other hand and in the main, the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAS) has been a massive failure and not a well thought out strategy that was implemented in South Africa. Over the years billions of Rands have been poured into these SETAS, but they have not served the purpose that government had envisaged in terms of skills training and retraining. The irony is that the current minister was a protagonist of these SETAS, but now faced with a financial crunch, he is desirous of streamlining them and scrapping most. They have large amounts of money in reserves and by scrapping them he (the minister) will be in a position to raise the shortfalls required for higher education. This might be wish full thinking on his part because these SETAS employ large numbers of people and its bureaucracy has become entrenched. Any interference by the minister will not be welcomed by employees and could cause great turmoil.

## 2.1. Lack of Transformation

We use just one university in South Africa, as an example to underscore the point that, the University of Pretoria, which was the bastion of apartheid privilege and its legacy. To underscore and show that, there has been no real change at the university post 1994 in terms of transformation. Increasing black student intake is not real transformation but a smoke screen that masks the real transformation issues that are masked by the university, in order to maintain the apartheid status quo and thus negate the transformation agenda of a democratic South Africa. The University of Pretoria is not the only culprit but historic white privileged universities such as the Witwatersrand University, Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town, Free State University and, many more must also be held culpable for styming the post 1994 transformation agenda of higher education in South Africa.

According to the Higher Education Transformation Network [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#) “the University of Pretoria was established in 1908 by the old Transvaal government initially named as the Transvaal University Council. The institution was reestablished through the University of Pretoria Statute of 2003 and the Higher Education Act No 101 of 1997 by the Republic of South Africa. In terms of its strategic plan 2007 – 2011, the University of Pretoria states academic excellence; local impact; transformation and sustainability amongst its key objectives, the university represents an embodiment of acute lack of transformation and an institution that does not fully support government policy.” This is a clear indication that the government and the current minister of higher education have failed to implement and secure the transformation agenda of the state. The state has allowed such white privileged apartheid universities to do as they please, without holding them accountable to the tenets of South African democracy, post 1994. This is an indictment to the democratic order under the present government and an inept minister with a rather big ‘ego’ and who is imbued in his self – importance, rather than turning around higher education in South Africa and securing the transformation agenda of the state. The [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#) further points out that “Notwithstanding policy guidance by the Higher Education Ministry, some universities are today still unfetteredly continuing with their undesirable practices of withholding qualification certificates to graduates in exchange for the offsetting of study fees.” These are only symptoms of a larger underlying problem within higher education. It does not allow for the actualization of the expectations and aspirations of South Africa’s people.

On the other hand it states that “Whilst transformation of higher education has been actualized at policy level by government, it is concerned that practical implementation of transformation policies has been left to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and University Councils to implement without any detailed monitoring for full compliance as well as the implementation of regulatory measures in the case of identified non – compliance” [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#). This proves the assertions made by the researchers that the minister of

higher education is not in tune with the transformation agenda and has allowed the privileged apartheid institutions to maintain the status quo to the immense disadvantage to the country and particularly the majority black student base.

It is therefore clear according to the [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#) that “there are problems in higher education relating to racism, sexism and compliance with Constitutional imperatives by higher education institutions. There is a lack of institutional will by higher education institutions in respect of the implementation of transformation issues. This is clearly shown at the University of Pretoria in that since 1994, out of the 9 strategic level posts on the university organogram, only three black executive appointments were made in 2009. To date there is only one current black Executive on the university’s executive management team. Of the institutions total staff complement, only 26.5 percent comprises African staff and less than 3 percent Coloureds and Indians with blacks overwhelmingly occupying the lower occupational category levels. It is clear that there is an adverse organizational culture prevailing at the institution. The issues go far beyond these variables and there is an adverse organizational culture which has led to a hostile working environment. This is evidenced by the high attrition rate of black university lecturers and employees” [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#).

Contrary to the spirit of the Education White Paper 3 (1997), the University of Pretoria according to [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#) support business units along economic imperatives into unlisted subsidiaries and has made investments into these subsidiaries totaling over R45 billion (according to the 2009 audited financial statements) and holds reserves of up to R6 billion. There are 12 such entities. This means that the University is diverting public funds to private subsidiaries and there is no public oversight conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education and, this therefore, flouts the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) and creates rampant opportunities for corruption.” All of this has happened and is happening under the watch of the government and the minister of higher education. There is no accountability and yet this university is funded by the state which uses state resources and infrastructure to promote its nefarious agenda. This privatization undermines the ethos of the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 and also undermines the authority of the South African government. On the flip side we find that the minister of education is averse to private higher education in the true sense within the private sector which remains unsubsidized by the ministry of higher education. They fill an important gap given that South African universities are bursting at the seams and thousands of black students have to be turned away from the doors of higher university learning because of a lack of spaces. The minister is shortsighted in this regard because, he needs to enter into a compact with these private higher education institutions, like other African countries have done, in order to release the pressure on universities that cannot accommodate the large volumes of higher education students each year and what has become a perennial problem in the South African context.

“The privatization of higher education at public level in the pursuance of profit making is in contrast to the need to fight unemployment and poverty through increasing access. In the pursuit of profits at public universities, it is natural that a minimal investment will be made in free quality education. In addition to a host of other debilitating factors that go beyond the brief of this paper, it must be pointed out that the Pretoria University Alumni Board consists of all 7 members drawn from the reactionary Afriforum, a white Afrikaner grouping, working with overt and covert support from the white labour union Solidarity and they have high jacked the Pretoria Alumni Board, which controls R4.3 million worth of bursaries to oppose transformation, advance the sectarian political interests of Afrikaans groups, prevent progressive alumni from election and keep black students from accessing university funding resources [Higher Education Transformation Network Report \(2011\)](#). The appeal by the HETN for intervention by the Minister of Higher Education has gone unanswered. If a study is conducted at all former traditional white apartheid universities of South Africa, it will reveal a similar pattern of maintaining the status quo and the marginalization of black students and, the privatization of public resources to the detriment of the majority black population. Wither education under the democratic government and the current minister of higher education. Something has to be done and, it has to be done quickly to save the day. It is therefore, self – explanatory that the #FeesMustFall campaign is fully justified because it is the creation, borne out of a just and legitimate demand for free education in South Africa, given the ineptitude of the ministry of education, who rather than intervening decisively prefer to stand on the side lines and maintain the status quo of apartheid legacy.

## **2.2. Higher Education Dream Deferred**

South African higher university students have proved to the nation that, leaders can no longer rely on ‘struggle heroism’ to enjoy support – they must deliver real change. The current student revolt and activism for free and quality education is testimony to this. Given the broader social consciousness, it has been able to marry its plight with that of the working class. Therefore, there are strong possibilities that, this rights consciousness and activism, may filter into other sections of society. In this regard, [Hlophe \(2015\)](#) states that “One common factor in the protests is that they call for the political leadership to account and to be responsive to the manifestation of their rights. The masses are now linking political leadership, institutional performance and service delivery with promises and accountability on the part of government. They are not paying much attention to the bureaucratic personnel. This marks the decline of the political leadership era of the ‘big man’ syndrome. In other words the chasm between political leadership and the #FeesMustFall student movement is partly an ideological issue.” It must be recalled that the ANC ran a leftist – orientated liberation struggle, but post 1994 landed in a liberal capitalist dispensation. Hence, there is a wide gap between the political rhetoric of the liberation leadership and the economic policies it implements. This is shown by the reality that the students are dealing with inequality based on race in South Africa.

This is exemplified and shown by the inability of the liberation political leadership to afford black youth free education legitimizes apartheid patterns.

It condemns generations of black people to marginalization from the mainstream economy. It is a legitimization of black generations as cheap labour in a democratic South Africa. Free and quality education is a basic priority and therefore, a public good that must be guaranteed by the government. It is therefore, a political imperative and necessary to achieve socio – economic equalization in a race based society. The government must realize that the vision of the National Development Plan (NDP) is and will be unrealizable without an educated black contingent. Hence the NDP is bound to fail with the high costs of education which leads to low levels of educated black people. The civil unrest, service delivery breakdown, student marches is a reflection of the breakdown of trust between the political leadership and the masses of students. In this regard Hlophe (2015) points out that “in recent history, political leadership, through elections, changed hands in countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece. This was the result of political leadership’s inability to deliver to its citizens and, therefore, South Africa sits in a quagmire and within the range of a time bomb waiting to be exploded to the peril of the nation.”

Observation reveals throughout the world that, there is an increasing link between political leadership and delivery execution and sustained implementation. Thus we see in the #FeesMustFall campaign in South Africa, the quest for free education as a legitimate expectation in a country that was bogged with Bantu, colonial and apartheid education for centuries. This now requires a concerted effort by government to overcome and afford redress, but requires not only political will on the one hand but very clearly the willingness on the part of government to implement free higher education. Hlophe (2015) in this regard says that “the youth is reclaiming its power. Liberation heroism alone may not save the political leadership of South Africa from a scorned youth.”

### 2.3. Student Revolt is telling

There is no doubt that the shutting down of at least fourteen higher education institutions is unprecedented and is taking its toll on the country and government that, is reeling with a fiscal and economic crisis. As Siphoo Seepe points out that “it is due to a grossly inadequate systemic change under democracy, post 1994 and that, the current student uprisings is a narrative of transformation that has been force – fed the country and which has failed the nation. Put bluntly, students are saying that this narrative has not brought about any material change in their lives. They have argued forcefully that the current dispensation is anti – black, anti – poor and anti – working class.” This is very clearly shown for instance at the Witwatersrand University in terms of fee rises; at Rhodes it is about a ridiculously high minimum initial payment; at the university of Stellenbosch, it is about institutional racism. At the University of Cape Town, students are seriously concerned with what they term an anti – poor, anti – black and anti – working class issue and slant. This is an indication that higher education transformation post 1994 and, under the current minister and government has not materialized, in terms of the desired change in an unequal society. In reality both the government and the management echelons of South African universities have become completely disconnected from the plight of students, especially in hard economic times. “Far from dismantling the apartheid edifice of inequalities, these have become entrenched. The historical legacy of apartheid has accordingly been legitimized. The question is whether the nation can continue to entrust the future of higher education in the hands of the very people who have steered it to the brink. In other words, the time is now opportune for the decolonization of South African higher education. A new narrative must now take form and shape in respect of the South African higher education system and landscape” (Karodia, 2014).

There is thus no doubt that South Africans after 21 years of democracy, face the consequences of incomplete economic transformation leaving many excluded from enjoying the benefits of democracy. This is due to “glaring ramifications of the fiscal conservatism policies of the mid – 1990s which encouraged privatization and outsourcing and have now come back to haunt the country (Ndima, 2015). We find that this generation now demands its share of the economy in terms of realizing a social contract for total emancipation from the shackles of poverty, destitution and dispossession.

### 2.4. Government Cutting Education Spending

Nkosi (2015a) Shows that “state spending on higher education has dropped at an ‘alarming rate over the years and, government has been critically underfunding institutions and students for years. It’s been ticking and who’s been sleeping on it? Both the government and university vice – chancellors have been sitting on it.” The vice – chancellors have been sleeping on it because they do not want to antagonize government and remain divided. There are mammoth divisions in South African higher education between the advantaged and the disadvantaged universities, and between the universities of technology and the traditional universities. Nkosi (2015a) points out that “Although the government’s subsidies to the 26 public universities have increased in monetary terms to the current R26.2 billion, the allocation is not enough for the institutions to cover their operational costs. State funding counts for just 40 percent of universities’ budgets down from 49 percent in 2000. South Africa spends 0.7 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on higher education. This is low, even when compared with the likes of Ghana and Senegal.” But we see in South Africa that each year fees are increased by double – digit percentages, outstripping general inflation. Wither Education. In a most recent study (2015) by Statistics South Africa, “the consumer price index revealed that the cost of tertiary education rose by 9.3 percent in March 2015, compared with March, 2014. This was 5.3 percentage points more than headline inflation of 4 percent.”

The Mail and Guardian (2015) states that “Between 2000 and 2012, student fees across the country’s universities doubled from R7.8 billion to R15.5 billion, meaning that over 12 years, students had to find R7.7 billion more for the loss of government contribution. According to Cloete The Mail and Guardian (2015) ‘The universities are not without blame; they should have been putting pressure on government to assist in sorting out the student debt and to give them more money, as costs in universities increased. There is no doubt that higher education expenditure has been declining at an alarming rate in both real and student per capita terms, a trend that has left South African higher learning institutions in increasingly worsening financial positions. This situation holds good for 2015 also. Nkosi (2015a) reports that “the higher education department admits that it is underfunding universities, but blames this on unfavourable economic conditions.” This is further exacerbated by the reality that universities for the 2016 academic year have to find between R20 to R50 million on their own to fund shortfalls, as announced by the Minister of Higher Education. It must also be remembered that most white apartheid universities have large reserves, which can be used to fund higher education. Universities are therefore, in an extreme quagmire because of mismanagement of the fiscus by the government. This will not assist the system and education will wither further in the years that lie ahead. Students are in such dire straits reports Zwane (2015) that “the money for individual students which ought to be used for food goes to their fees, anything from R1300 to R1600 per month. Table 1 below shows that university education in South Africa comes at a price. It shows the comparison of the annual cost of studying for a BCom degree at five universities.

**Table-1.** Comparison of the Annual Cost of Studying for a BCom Degree at Five Universities Comparison of the annual cost of studying for a BCom degree at 5 universities

University of Cape Town fees	University of the Witwatersrand fees	University of Pretoria fees	Stellenbosch University fees	University of KwaZulu-Natal fees
R 50 000 to R 62 500	R 42 010 to R 43 320	R 36 250	R 33 164	R 39 170
<b>Plus accommodation:</b>	<b>Plus accommodation:</b>	<b>Plus accommodation:</b>	<b>Plus accommodation:</b>	<b>Plus accommodation:</b>
<b>Baxter Hall single room R 43 800</b>	Per student in a single room <b>R 33 660</b>	<b>R 28 800</b>	<i>In Dagbreek men’s residence</i>  Single room <b>R 36 360</b>  Double room, per student <b>R 29 880</b>	Dependent on room, campus allocation <b>R 25 892</b>
<b>Double room, per student R 38 500</b>				
<b>Small single room R 42 200</b>				
<b>Plus meals</b>	<b>Plus meals</b>	<b>Plus meals</b>	<b>Plus meals</b>	<b>Plus meals</b>
<b>Three meals a day for seven days a week First tier R 17 300 for the year</b>	15 meals a week <b>R 20 976</b>	<b>R 14 400</b> for the year	<b>R 188</b> a day	<i>Meals are not provided by the university</i> <b>R 23 980</b> for the year

Source: (Nkosi, 2015b) October 23. Mail and Guardian

## 2.5. Minister Complicit for Not Releasing ‘Free University’ Report

A study showing the viability of no – fee tertiary education was held undisclosed by the Minister of Higher Education for three years, reports Nkosi (2015a). The study was conducted by the Department of Higher Education, which found that the introduction of free university education for the poor in South Africa was feasible. Given the violence that ensued during the #FeesMustFall campaign, the Minister of Higher Education must be held culpable for he alone is complicit for his actions. The report was received by him in December 2012 from a working group he appointed in 2010. What is shocking is that the government now says that the unfavourable economic conditions have tied its hands when it comes to introducing free university education for the poor.” A working group member, Salim Vally said “he does not understand why the report has not been released to the public. He added that this would have allowed for choices and possibilities. We took a long time to find concrete solutions and, to number crunch and came up with a model that is realistic and feasible. It was a feasible decision based on consensus” (Salim Vally, In Nkosi, 2015).

The key recommendations of the report were as follows:

- Those eligible should come from the lowest tax bracket, which was R54 200 in 2010. They would not have to make any household contribution. But those in the bracket from R54 200 to R271 000 in 2010 terms should be eligible for free university education in a similar manner, but should be required to make some household contribution.

- When funds will be made available by government, other needy students would be considered and progressively included. The Committee said that this would be a starting point.

Amongst a host of other feasible and practical recommendations, it is obvious that the Minister of Higher Education has failed the students, the nation and the government by withholding the report that was commissioned by him to implement free quality higher education in South Africa. [Nkosi \(2015a\)](#) amongst a host of educationists, state that “We cannot, years later, still be arguing about free quality education. There’s no better time than now.

## 2.6. Students Reject Six Percent Limit on Increase in University Fees

After the protests entered a second day of protests at universities around the country turned violent, the Higher Education Minister said that an agreement had been reached between universities and stakeholders to cap fee increases for 2016 at 6 percent, according to [Bernardo \(2015\)](#). Students across the country rejected this and insisted that they would not accept any increase for the coming year. According to students this was a short term solution announced by the minister. It was also rejected because in his autocratic style of leadership. The minister only consulted with the vice – chancellors of universities and did not consult with students. This goes against the grain of democracy and participative democracy. In this regard the Minister of Higher Education “urged the protesting students to seriously take this offer in the interests of the system.” The minister further said according to [Bernardo](#) that “a task team would be set up to propose a sustainable solution for 2017.” However, the Minister was a forlorn figure and in the doldrums when suddenly the President of the country announced that there would be no increase in fees for 2016. The 2016 academic year, in spite of this announcement will most certainly see serious problems when universities reopen for the 2016 academic year in February (This is a reality because as we enter the month of May, 2016 resistance and violent protests continue at many universities).

## 2.7. Scramble to Fund Higher Education

The Minister of Higher Education as usual does not concede his inadequacies and ineptness and arrogantly defended his record after the wave of protests that now sees government scrambling for cash to fund higher education. [Govender et al. \(2015\)](#) state that “the embattled Higher Education Minister admitted that he had no idea how the government would fund a projected R3 billion shortfall in university fees after it announced a 0 percent increase for 2016. He insisted that he had given his job “his best shot” and notched up notable achievements. Many criticized him for his high - handed behaviour in many directions and, he only left the National Assembly after a protracted delay to address students. There is no money and, I have not consulted the Finance Minister to find the money.” At the same time the Minister of Finance was unaware as to where to find the money. Universities will have to reprioritize to fund higher education fees. The funding crisis by the Higher Education’s own admission that, at least eight of the 26 universities will have to be completely bailed out by the government. They are all historically black institutions. Institutional autonomy has been abused in South Africa by some of the historically traditional apartheid structured white universities, because it has been used to prevent transformation in a democratic society. Many of them remain as apartheid enclaves. However, institutional autonomy is necessary, but it is not a sufficient condition for transformation because it can and has been abused. It is not the same as academic freedom. There are indeed opposing views which must be taken into consideration. There has to be a right balance between institutional autonomy and social accountability.

The National Development Plan (NDP) is to increase enrolment in higher education institutions by 70 percent, to more than 1.6 million, within 15 years. According to [Mtongana et al. \(2015\)](#) “in order to fill this noble aspiration, the cost of education, which has sparked student protests across South Africa, could threaten the government’s plans if funding challenges are not addressed. It is therefore obvious that a decline in government subsidies which is a reality in South African higher education has and, had led to most universities needing to increase fees in a bid to not compromise the quality of education. Diane Parker, the Deputy Director General of Higher Education said that “public financing of higher education had dropped by 30 percent in the last decade” ([The Mail and Guardian, 2015](#)). Indeed this is a very serious problem. This cannot be the only reasoning on part of universities because, they have large reserves that run into billions of Rands, have not really addressed the transformation agenda for over two decades, many of them have no clear direction in removing the vestiges of apartheid education and have maintained the status quo. On the other hand the government and the Minister of Higher Education have also failed the South African transformation agenda by not promoting higher education as a public good and, have been caught up with neoliberal education policies that have done a great disservice to an emerging democratic society and a truly emerging economy, that still has to live with entrenched apartheid policies. This is the reality that government and the minister do not want to acknowledge, nor do they want to intervene meaningfully and decisively, as higher education withers away in so – called democratic South Africa and, is on the path of ruin and, a path of no return, under the current Minister of Higher Education. South African higher education is moving towards destruction and therefore, South Africa has to think this through. There, thus has to be a dramatic injection of capital into higher education by government.

## 2.8. Higher Education Minister Tries to Intervene but the Horse Has Already Bolted: Minister Now Wants a State Audit of South African Universities to Tighten his Grip Given his Failures

It took the October, 2015 student protests to rock the democratic government and bring it to its senses that, not all is well within higher education in South Africa, after 21 years of freedom and democracy. The Minister of Higher Education is now playing to the gallery and insists that universities should be audited by the state, through the offices of the Auditor General, in order to tighten his grip on South African Higher Education. In 2011 the HETN through its report handed to the minister, requested an investigation into university finances and, indicated that not much was achieved through the transformation process and that, the former white apartheid institutions had privatized entities within some universities, using government funds and infrastructure, in order to maintain the historic status quo which excludes meaningful and necessary black participation in the transformation process and within management. The ([Higher Education Transformation Network Report, 2011](#)), report was ignored by the minister and his department. Given what the Minister of Higher Education wants to now do, in terms of auditing universities by mechanisms used by the state, it sets the pace for government to lock horns with universities over institutional autonomy. The minister now wants to undertake a process that will be resisted vehemently by most universities. In reality, his desire to do this is basically a move not based on sound analysis and, would not achieve much because the horse has already bolted from the stable and, higher education is in tatters under his watch. Such an audit should have been undertaken by his department a long time ago, thus not allowing some universities to privatize university entities that belong to the state. This would have allowed for a sustained intervention process and calling some of the universities to order, in terms of the transformation agenda.

[Nkosi \(2015a\)](#) states that “the Minister of Higher Education plans to have the institutions audited like state entities. As one component of their institutional autonomy, universities’ financial books and performance data are audited independently of the state’s auditor general. Universities appoint independent firms to audit their books and, reports are submitted to the higher education ministry, every year.” [Nkosi \(2015a\)](#) points out that “the Department of Higher Education did not respond to the Mail and Guardian’s requests for comment on the proposal. The Auditor General’s office confirmed that it was approached by the Minister of Higher Education to conduct such audits and to look at the legislation, for purposes of such a review.”

It must be remembered that:

- All universities are audited and normal governance procedures are applied. The issue is what is the purpose of this proposal? If it enhances university accountability but still allows for autonomy, it could go in the right direction. If it is a question of tightening the grip over South African universities, in terms of pushing a totally government agenda for transformation, then it will be a move in wrong direction. There has to be a cautious approach.
- Is the purpose not being fulfilled by existing arrangements?
- Is it an emotional decision by the Minister of Higher Education, and the ANC led government, given that his back is against the wall and that, the minister has not achieved much in respect of the transformation of higher education, has failed higher education students and the country, over two decades of freedom and democracy? The writing is on the wall for the Minister of Higher Education and, before he is pushed, it might be wise for him to resign before he bears the wrath of the government, the President and the massive student movement.
- Universities are public institutions and not necessarily state institutions and by implication given the history of past apartheid education policy, which stills denies access, there is compelling arguments and grounds for free higher education, on the basis that it is a public good that must be catered for by government.
- Universities do not receive 100 percent of their funds from the government although state funding is one stream of income; universities generate funds from other sources such as endowments, private donations, investments and student fees. They are therefore also accountable to such constituencies.
- Is it an attack on institutional autonomy?
- Are there cogent reasons to action this plan by the minister of higher education?
- Must independent entities be audited by the state?
- The state can intervene provided universities are well managed and work in the interest of the public good, secure quality free education for all, fulfill the transformation agenda and, allow for student access and display orderly selection of academic staff.

The HETN that provided the minister of Higher Education a damning report on the slow pace of transformation in 2011 supports the proposed audit plan. It argues that you cannot have a situation where state funds are used without reporting to the Treasury and, therefore, state auditing must become compulsory. Irrespective of what happens, this proposal of the minister will be a fait accompli. If it is to be actioned there will be resistance because many feel that university autonomy will be compromised. However, there has to be sustained debate in this regard, without emotion and must not be pushed down the throats of university managements.

## 2.9. Blame the Universities not the ANC

The ANC secretary general has lambasted vice – chancellors of universities for ineffectively dealing with the widespread #FeesMustFall protests. [Hunter and Nkosi \(2015\)](#) state that “the secretary general said, blame should not be shifted from universities to government and the ruling party, because universities take unilateral decisions when it

comes to fee increments. Autonomy is abused by universities, in order to commercialize education and exclude students on the basis of price and race and therefore, the blame should not be shifted to the ANC, government.” This is the tactic used by the secretary general and government in almost all issues including serious social issues that confront the state and the country. A tactic never to take blame for anything but accusing others for their ineptness and not taking responsibility has become the order of the day under the ANC led government.

## **2.10. Knives out for the Minister of Higher Education**

In the confusing that arose from the Fees Must Fall protests, the South African Communist Party (SACP) of which the Minister of Higher Education is the Chairperson has accused South African Cabinet Ministers of conniving to get rid of the Minister of Higher Education over the fees crisis. Rampedi (2015) said that “the SACP second deputy Secretary General has accused senior ANC leaders were using the ANC Youth League to attack the minister in order to weaken him politically. He accused unnamed ANC politicians of bankrolling protesting students.” The Youth League has called for the minister to resign or that the President fire him because he failed to fund higher education adequately because, the minister had failed to fully implement the recommendations of a 2012 higher education report that called for free education of the poor. This division within the ANC and its alliance partners points to disarray within the Cabinet which is exemplified by a call by the SACP which states that “the Minister of Finance must be ignored and that funding proposals should be made by the minister, directly to the Cabinet, in order to expose ministers who were trying to hold the Minister of Higher Education personally liable for a problem of the revolution. If the Cabinet dares reject the proposal, it must be made public” (Rampedi, 2015). The alliance is in tatters and there is disarray within the ANC, the SACP and the largest trade union, in the form of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). The influence of the SACP in terms of policy imperatives and combined with its influence on the President by its Chairperson, the Minister of Education is waning drastically and the ministers position within Cabinet is now shaky and untenable. It is obvious says Hunter and Mataboge (2015) that “for party youth, at least, the SACP leader is far from the ally they want him to be.” The ANC Youth League is the kingmaker in South African politics historically and therefore, the writing is perhaps on the wall for the SACP and its Chairperson the Minister of Higher Education. The SACP and its Chairperson, the Minister of Higher Education have riled and paid scant reference to the ANC Youth League, in the past and, this has come back to burn them very seriously.

## **2.11. A Powerful Message to the Ruling Party – Some Conclusions**

The narrative in this paper has shown the crisis in South African Higher Education and has captured the ineptitude of both the government and the Minister of Higher Education, not only in dealing with the crisis, but shows that higher education is on the path of destruction post 1994. That the government and Minister of Education have failed the poor in general and, the body mass of students yearning for an education after the destructive policies of apartheid. In so doing, the government has pursued neoliberal policies and has failed to realize the goals and aim of free education for all. Some conclusions are therefore, drawn by the authors of this paper, leaning on the Independent newspapers narratives over a period of time (2015: October, November and December) and, their own observations. These are as follows:

- The wave of university student protests, which forced President Jacob Zuma’s hand to cap the university fee increase for 2016, to zero percent, is a move in the correct direction. However, it is not enough because, it does not solve the issue of free education for all. South Africa now sits on a time bomb of increasing protests in the New Year. The face of politics will have changed in democratic South Africa and, it would not be the same anymore. It will be an arena of contestation led by students like the youth movement did in 1976.
- It was not as though the ANC was not aware of this. Various party discussion documents presented at its recent national general council alluded to this ticking time bomb.
- It is also a matter of public record that the party’s (ANC) secretary general, has warned in some of the discussion documents that people’s patience over the slow pace of delivery was wearing thin.
- The party has noted that, except for social grants, little progress has been made in fighting unemployment, poverty and inequality.
- There has been a lack of delivery on various fronts including basic and higher education promises.
- The party the ANC has become preoccupied with the leadership succession battle at the expense of service delivery, sound governance, and a better life for all.
- Party leadership contests have become nothing short of cloak – and – dagger affairs.
- The party has become entrenched with corruption and political patronage at the expense of the youth and the nation.
- Irrational decisions embroiled in wrecking the economy and thus unable to fund essential priorities like education and health. Economic deals at a very high cost such as the arms deal, the proposed nuclear deal, e - tolling and so on.
- Arrogance and power is now holding sway, with overt greed
- Students can never be happy when they are looking for political leadership from a party that has led them down and, which does not inspire confidence.

- The ability and the required political will is drastically absent within the ruling ANC led government and, therefore, the legacy of Nelson Mandela has been tarnished and his dream has become suspect over the years.
- Invoking struggle credentials for political legitimacy. No longer holds away, especially in the face of agitation for change.
- The statement by Higher Education Minister that the protests did not constitute a crisis turned out to be a minister out of kilter, a minister that does not have his ears to the ground, in reality a minister out of tune with the realities confronting higher education transformation; it was ill – advised and totally uncharacteristic of a minister that leads the South African Communist party (SACP). He was just not on the top the situation that unfolded in South African higher education.
- It is no longer a crisis but in fact an emergency which now calls for a higher level intervention because, the protests are no longer a mere act of defiance or political immaturity, it is real and alive and, has changed the political landscape of democratic South Africa, after 21 years of freedom and democracy.
- The students are saying that now is the time to deliver and is therefore, a powerful statement directed to the ruling party that it will and must from now on be accountable to its promises.
- These protests will look like a Sunday picnic, if the ruling party, the ANC does not act swiftly.

### 3. Conclusion

History will remember the students of 2015 as the generation who would no longer be quiet. History will remind the ANC of the 1976 student protests that brought the apartheid regime to its knees. The generation of democracy will no longer be fooled and taken for granted by politicians who live on erroneous struggle credentials. The generation who said, “so far, and no further, and who led when there was no leadership to be found. They occupied Nelson Mandela Bridge. They shut down universities. They marched on the headquarters of the ANC - Luthuli House in Johannesburg and stormed Parliament in Cape Town and, to the doors of the institutions that had failed them. From the inside of prison cells they took this country by the shoulders and they shook it. They marched for education. For change, and for each other” #FeesMustFall Campaign (2015).

What is clear is that mismanagement of the South African economy by government has caught up with it and, it is now captive of South Africa’s current low – growth environment, with little room for maneuver. Since 1994, South Africa’s total education budget has grown at an equally impressive compound annual rate of 11 percent from R31 billion to R246 billion and tertiary expenditure grew faster at 13.7 percent from R4.3 billion to R56.6 billion today. Total education’s percentage of the national budget (19.8 percent), and tertiary education’s percentage of the overall education spend is now 23 percent at the upper end of the emerging market spectrum. South Africa’s students are saying it loud and clear that there is still a big problem, because government debt – to GDP ratio is set to rise within three years to just fewer than 50 percent.

Given the above picture South African’s require a coordinated approach to find solutions together – the state, business, labour, academia and civil society. The alternative of a spiral into the 1980’s style conflict will only lead the country to the edge of a cliff. We require sustainable funding plans. Let’s use South Africa’s strengths and this will allow for a higher sustainable growth path that can lead the way to prosperity for all, because it has been said that – Education is a better safeguard to liberty, than a standing army and that Education does not mean teaching people what they do not know, it means teaching how they ought to behave. The behaviour of the ANC led government and particularly the Minister of Higher Education has been in poor taste as concerns higher education and towards the students that led the #FeesMustFall protests. The time has come that higher education be made free for all South African students. The time has come to action higher education as a public good. The time has come to hold the government and its Minister of Higher Education accountable and to force him to work within the ambit of the rule of law and within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic, in order to secure true freedom and democracy.

### 4. Recommendations

There are no finite and specific recommendations that the paper makes. Conclusions and recommendations are dispersed throughout the paper and it is hoped that readers will read the narrative in terms of the problems and challenges that confront higher education in South Africa. The paper does not offer a comprehensive solution to the myriad of problems that confront higher education in South Africa. However, some solutions are captured within the broad narrative of this paper. The paper therefore, talks to some of the vexing and pressing issues that confront higher Education in South Africa. However, some conclusions are made by the authors at the end of the paper.

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