

# THE U.C.T. SIT-IN

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**PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASKING** why there have been so many student protests in 1968. They want to know what students are advocating. Faced with such questions and insufficient information and expertise to make organised sense of all that is happening, I will make no attempt to supply these questions with general answers. Fortunately, better brains than mine are equally baffled and are producing far from final answers to such questions. As one of Oxford's outstanding historians said when he was asked what students are after:

"Who the hell knows? I can't answer it, for whatever I write tonight would probably be outdated tomorrow."

On the other hand, Prof. D. V. Cowen, who gave the 1968 Dr. E. G. Malherbe Academic Freedom Lecture — on "The rights and responsibilities of students in a modern University" — was somewhat more adventurous. He claimed that three significant elements stand out as the root causes of student unrest.

**FIRSTLY**, a widespread dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the state of society itself in all its dimensions.

Secondly, righteous indignation against dishonesty and inner contradiction.

Thirdly, an almost desperate search for values to live by, a yearning for a sense of direction and for belief in the worthwhileness of life.

If Prof. Cowen was analysing student protest on the international scene, then all three of his points probably stand. If he only had so-called 'white' South African students in mind, then I'm not so sure that he could substantiate his first point — the one about *widespread* dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the state of society in all its dimensions. I may be open to correction, but I sense very little by way of such dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the state of our society on, for example, the Rhodes campus. In fact, I am somewhat disenchanted and more than dissatisfied that Rhodes students seem to be more enthusiastic about putting out the security officer's torch than fanning the flame of academic freedom which UCT students are trying to keep alive. And while I appreciate the legitimate and widespread indignation against a disciplinary code which has as one of its basic principles that a Rhodes man and woman must at all times have both their feet on the ground, I wish

that the same people would become as indignant about the similarly archaic and paternalistic restrictions on contact between, say, Rhodes students and those of Fort Hare.

But be that as it may. Having put my cards on the table to the question of what I regard as some of the really important issues confronting both the Rhodes students and the Rhodes staff at the moment, let me return to Professor Cowen's second point — *the one about righteous indignation against dishonesty and inner contradiction*. This is the point in which I am interested and which I want to pursue for the rest of the time at my disposal. Furthermore I want to confine my attention to what has become known as 'the Mafeje case'; and I want to attempt the question.

"Why are some UCT students and staff members protesting?"

and answer some criticisms which have been directed against their sit-in.

**Why are some UCT students and staff members protesting?**

I am convinced that it is their righteous indignation against the inner contradiction in their Council's decision not to appoint Mr. Archie Mafeje to a Senior Lectureship in Social Anthropology which is the root cause of the UCT sit-in. They were tired of reaffirming academic freedom on holy days

and contributing to its demise on working days. They were tired of having their deeds contradict their words. They were tired of being reminded that the purpose of the annual T.B. Davie Memorial Lecture is:

"to keep before the University a reminder of the seriousness of its loss (of academic freedom), to keep alive its faith that the lost freedom will one day be restored, and to keep its members vigilant lest further inroads into its remaining freedoms should be made."

And as they were tired, they sat down!

I will return to this point later. At this stage I simply want to underline Prof. Cowen's point about 'righteous indignation against dishonesty and inner contradiction'. I am convinced that one of the most serious problems confronting some South African universities, and student organizations like NUSAS and the UCM, is the Government's determination to prevent people from attempting to translate their verbal expressions of their convictions about university education and about human relations into deeds.

It ought to be obvious why people become angry when they cannot do what they want to do. It ought to be even more obvious why people become angry when they are prevented from acting on what, in the Western world at any rate, are regarded as the normal, civilized principles on which a university ought to be based and the normal, moral and Christian principles which ought to regulate one's relationships with and treatment of other people. But in case it is not obvious why people become angry in such circumstances; in case it is not obvious why they ought to become angry in such circumstances, let me try to explain.

*Freedom of thought — that is, the freedom:*

"to think candidly and intrepidly about the fundamental issues in the life of the individual and the community on the Greek principle that an unexamined life is no life for a man —".\*

is meaningless unless it is accompanied by the freedom to act upon the convictions and conclusions at which one has arrived. Being free to think is no freedom at all unless there is also freedom to take appropriate action. Not only to be free to think, but to follow

(\* Sir Walter Moberley  
"Crisis in the University")

whither the thoughts lead is the essence of freedom of thought.

It is this connection which ought to hold between freedom of thought and freedom of action which the Governments of the past 20 years have been systematically eroding. It is because this connection between freedom of thought and freedom of action has been eroded that members of the University of Cape Town have put both their feet and their bottoms down and decided that they have had enough of this dishonesty and inner contradiction between their words and their deeds. In other words: the students and staff at UCT have demonstrated that they are no longer prepared to accept the dictum that they may think as they please so long as they remain cowering on their knees. And they are right in so doing because not to match one's verbal expressions of one's convictions with the behaviour which is consistent with those convictions, undermines one's integrity and lays one open to the charge of hypocrisy.

This demand for consistency was well put by Prof. M. W. M. Pope, Professor of Classics at the University of Cape Town for the past 11 years, who resigned 6 weeks ago when he heard of the decision not to appoint Mr. Archie Mafeje to the staff because of Government pressure.

"The present situation at UCT is faintly absurd. On the one side you have a unilateral declaration of autonomy and academic freedom. On the other you have a Minister of Education manufacturing a 'tradition' for us of which we have no knowledge at all. It is laughable and totally unreal."

Indeed, it is. But it is also dishonest and inconsistent. Thus part of the answer to the question why UCT students and staff members are protesting is simply this; they want to match their pronouncements on academic freedom with deeds. They want UCT to be what they believe a university ought to be — free to determine on academic grounds alone *who* shall teach and *who* may be taught.

But the students and staff members of UCT are protesting for at least one other reason. They are protesting because they have recognised that segregated universities are inferior universities.

Segregated universities are inferior universities. This was the conclusion the Appeal

Court of the United States came to in a 1954 judgement on the issue of segregation in education. The unanimous decision of the Court was that:

"In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

Segregated universities are inferior for at least three reasons:\*

Firstly, it is difficult — in fact, it is impossible to provide 'separate but equal' library and laboratory facilities. It is also impossible to duplicate equally the interchange of overseas staff and lecturers. This particular lack is, of course, no great skin off the nose of a so-called 'white' university like Rhodes. But students at Fort Hare and elsewhere are deprived in this way. And our own facilities could be improved if money was not being wasted to give visible expression to the scatterbrained opinion that there is a divine correlation between people's pigmentation and their grey-matter!

Secondly, segregated students are denied the freedom to seek learning from the teachers of their choice with the special qualifications they need and desire. Once again this is a liability which so-called 'non-white' students suffer under more obviously than so-called 'white' ones. But as the Mafeje case so clearly demonstrates, the shoe can — and in the future will probably increasingly — be on the other foot. To put it more bluntly: if Mr. Mafeje is not appointed to the Senior Lectureship in Social Anthropology at UCT then students who read that subject will be taught by some 'white' lecturer who is less qualified and capable than he is. And if that is not a good reason for protesting against Mr. Mafeje's non-appointment then I don't know what is!

Thirdly, receiving an education is more than simply acquiring enough information to scrape through an examination. The amount of text-book information one manages to acquire while at a university is probably the least important reason for being there. Much more important is what one learns about life and about other people; not in formal contexts, but only half-consciously and via a process of osmosis. Segregated students however suffer this kind of impoverishment through separation from people of other eth-

\*Compare J. Hamilton Russell "The University and Politics."

nic and cultural groups with whom they must learn to live together for the rest of their lives.

These three reasons together amount to the second reason why UCT students and staff members are protesting at the moment. They do not want UCT to become more segregated and therefore more inferior than it already is. What's more, it is not only UCT's status as a university which has been impoverished in this way. Both students and staff at Rhodes, and at every other segregated university in the world, are suffering a similar impoverishment of education.

This brings me to an end of my attempt to answer the question about the reasons UCT students and staff members are protesting. They have recognised that freedom of thought is meaningless unless it is accompanied by the freedom to act upon the convictions and conclusions at which one has arrived. They have recognised that segregated education is inferior education.

#### Replies to some critics

I now want to deal briefly with criticisms which have been levelled at the UCT sit-in.

Senator de Klerk has complained that they have opposed Government policy. For once Senator de Klerk is correct. But I fail to see what point, if any, he is trying to make. Before 1948, Senator de Klerk opposed Government policy. If the Nationalist Government were defeated at the next election, Senator de Klerk would no doubt once again oppose Government policy. So what's all the fuss about?

The Prime Minister has complained that students should not meddle in politics but get on with their studies. I have two comments on his complaint:

Firstly, I want to remind him that it was a Nationalist Government which decided that 18 year olds are intelligent and responsible enough to have the vote. It was a Nationalist Government therefore that decided that student and other 18 year olds ought to meddle in politics. Once again I fail to see what all the fuss is about. As the Prime Minister knows from his own experience in the 1930's and early 1940's; one of the most respectable ways of participating in politics is to join a political party which is opposed to the government of the day. And as he also knows from personal experience, one of the other recognised ways of expressing one's political convictions is to protest against what you re-

gard to be inconsistencies and injustice's in Government policy. Surely the Prime Minister is not so naive as to imagine that every student in the country is one of his supporters?

Secondly, I fail to see how it is possible *not* to meddle in politics. This point has recently been well made by Mr. J. Hamilton Russel in his highly to be recommended lecture — *The University and Politics*. I quote.

“How can anyone keep out of politics? Everything is politics. Everything that happens to man is the subject of political action. No-one should try to limit the scope of learning and enquiry. Politics, religion, science, apartheid, the Rule of Law, all must be examined and disputed, queried and questioned until the truth is found.

To be true to themselves members of universities should apply the same concept of reason and objectivity to their examination of all national issues. While maintaining an ardent spirit of protest against all that is unjust or politically immoral *they should avoid emotional thinking or action*. They should know, from the example of government action, that it is dangerous to think with blood.”

Implicit in both Senator de Klerk and the Prime Minister's complaints, is a criticism which a great many editors of English newspapers have raised against the UCT sit-in; namely, a questioning of the method used by the UCT students and staff in expressing their dissatisfaction. The implied argument in such complaints and questions is the claim that the only valid means of expressing one's political convictions is via the ballot-box. And the reason this argument is advanced is that those who advocate it are, quite rightly, afraid of hooliganism and violence. I share their fears. But let's get the record straight and keep it that way: the UCT students have neither behaved violently nor with vulgarity. As I said near the beginning of this argument: having become tired of not being able to act upon the convictions they hold, they simply sat down.

The only violent and provocative utterance so far made, came from the Prime Minister at Heilbron last Friday. And the only acts of hooliganism and violence have come from students who are opposed to the convictions which are held by those UCT students and staff members who are engaged in the sit-in. In other words; the violence and

vulgarity which is feared, is coming — not from the UCT students and staff — but from those opposed to their action.

What's more, the 20th century source of this dignified and non-violent way of protesting against injustice has a South African source. I am referring, of course, to the life and teaching of Mahatma Gandhi. All the detailed methods of civil disobedience which have since swept the world — from card-burning to oath-taking to marching — were first improvised in such localities as the Mosque in Durban or (as it was popularly called) the Jewish Theatre in Johannesburg, or in such rural stations as Volksrust.

This is not the time or the place to discuss Gandhi's method of non-violence. I simply want to point out that it is the same method of protest which the UCT students and staff are employing. And I want to quote one sentence from Erik H. Erikson's outstanding 1968 T. B. Davie Memorial Lecture on Insight and Freedom. He says:

“South Africa may have every reason to be as proud of this export, the Gandhian method, as it is proud of its gold and its diamonds; for whatever the long range political fate of militant non-violence may be the spirit of its origin has, I believe, added lasting insights to our search for truth.”

I must close. I do so with two quotations.

The first comes from Professor Julius Ebbinghaus, the Rector of Marburg University. This is what he said when that famous German University, closed down by Hitler, was eventually reopened in 1945:

“One fact remains unfortunately too true. The German universities failed, while there was still time, to oppose publicly with all their power the destruction of learning and of the democratic state. They failed to keep the beacon of freedom and justice burning through the night of tyranny so that it could be seen by the entire world.”

My second quotation comes from General Smuts. In 1934, while addressing the members of St. Andrews University, he mourned the fact that other countries, *unlike South Africa* had:

“Lost the sturdy independent-minded freedom-loving individual and replaced him by a servile, standardised, mass mentality.”

which he called:

“the greatest menace of our time.”

Still contrasting South Africa and Europe to the latter's disadvantage, he went on to say:

"Minorities are trampled down. Dissident views are not tolerated and are forcefully suppressed . . . intellectual freedom is disappearing with political freedom, freedom of conscience, of speech and of the Press, and that of teaching, is in extreme danger . . ."

He closed his address with an observation and two questions:

"The fight for human freedom is the supreme issue of the future . . . Are we going to leave the field free to those who threaten our fundamental human ideals and our heritage of the past? Or are we going to join in battle for the breaking of our bonds and the enlargement of our range of free choice and free action?"

Mr. Chairman. Ladies and Gentleman: some students and staff members at UCT have answered these two questions. So must we.

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# STINKWATER

## A JOURNALIST

### THE CASE OF STINKWATER AND KLIP-

GAT, those appropriately named shanty towns north of Pretoria, where more than 400 African families were dumped in the heart of the coldest winter, shows once again the cold, inhuman attitude of the Government towards the African people.

For whatever reason they were uprooted, whether valid or not, the fact that they were forced to shiver in tents and lean-to shacks during the weeks of sub-zero temperatures was deplorable.

The *Bantu Administration Department* claims that the families are happier in the "closer settlement areas". Closer to what? One may well ask. Certainly not closer to the homes they loved and lived in for up to forty years, and in some cases longer.

Stinkwater was quite rightly branded as the "Linchill of the Transvaal", as living conditions in the dense bushveld are shocking. The B.A.D. made no effort to improve them — until press publicity on the affair had caused such acute embarrassment that they were forced to sink several boreholes. Otherwise they maintained contemptuous departmental silence.

Again the department had thought they could get away with uprooting the families without a word being said to the Press. Again they were wrong. When first mention was made of the removals, officials flew into a flurry. Pressmen were refused entry and no special permits were allowed. Then, when this was shown up, to their great embarrassment, the authorities laid on a visit to the "show-piece areas".

I spoke to families in the Stinkwater area, and almost without exception they said they would have preferred to have stayed where they were, near Eersterus. It was close to their work, close to the railway station, close to their friends, and most of all close to their hearts.

Officials of the B.A.D. claimed that the families were, without exception willing to move from the "absolute squalor". Proof of this was an African man who was handed a form giving him six days to leave home.

He was told that if he was not off the land within that time, his house would be bulldozed down with all his possessions inside.

What could the families do? Who could they turn to for protection? As one man said: "If I complained too much, they would have told me I was an illegal squatter. They would have forced me to go to a 'homeland' far from Pretoria, where I have never been."

The families were taken to Klipgat and Stinkwater in lorries. They were left in the veld with one tent per family, and told to build their own houses. They were told that the tents would be removed in three months.

Many said they could not afford to build their houses. They were forced to put together lean-to shacks from rusty corrugated iron sheets, cardboard and scraps of wood. Anything to keep the cold out.

### Bus fares

One man said he spent nearly R12 a month on bus fares to and from work, nearly a third of his monthly wage. Most of the men were employed at Silverton, which is close to Eersterus. They now have to travel 35 to 40