

ETHNIC UNIVERSITIES

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Now undergoing Preparatory Examination on a charge of High Treason.

EVER since it came into power in 1948 the Nationalist Government has made it clear that sooner or later it would invade the field of university education with its policy of Apartheid. At last the legislation intended to implement this policy, the Separate University Education Bill, has been published.

Broadly stated the Bill empowers the Government:

- (a) To establish or disestablish so-called university colleges for non-White students.
- (b) to transfer the University College of Fort Hare to the Department of Native Affairs.
- (c) To transfer the non-European Medical School in Durban to the Department of Education, Arts & Science.
- (d) To limit and eventually to prohibit the admission of non-White students to the so-called "Open" universities.

Before the Separate University Education Bill was published, it was suggested in some quarters that the ethnic universities contemplated by the Government need be nothing worse than an endeavour on the part of the Government to bring university education within the reach of more non-European students, by the establishment of more university colleges to cater for the needs of the 10 million non-Whites. Just as the situation of the universities for Whites in different parts of the country is an undoubted advantage to White students, it was supposed that four or five colleges situated where the different racial groups are concentrated would enable more students to go to university than is the case at present, and that in other respects the new institutions would conform to the traditional pattern of university colleges in this country.

The opponents of university apartheid, no doubt also influenced by a fond hope that certain things simply could not happen here, contented themselves with an averment of their faith in university autonomy as far as the admission of students was concerned. Just as they were prepared to accord Stellenbosch the right to refuse to admit non-White students, they claimed for themselves the right to admit such students. By adopting this attitude they hoped to maintain the unity of the university front against the

Government's proposals. It seems clear, however, that the present Government is not prepared to base its policy on the highest measure of agreement among the different sections of the population. On the contrary, it seems determined to base its programme in every aspect of our national life upon a single view of life—the Nationalist conception—imposed willy-nilly upon all sections of the population.

Thus, as has been pointed out by ex-Chief Justice A. van der Sandt Centlivres, the Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, the University Apartheid Bill is far worse than was expected even by the opponents of academic segregation.

Take the title of the Bill. It is described as "The Separate University Education Bill" and not as the "Separate Universities Bill." There is a world of difference between the two. In other words, it is not intended to establish university colleges for non-Whites in the generally accepted sense of the term, but rather to set up institutions in which something deemed by a Government Department to be equivalent to university education will be provided. The idea that a group of civil servants, however well intentioned, should be empowered to determine the academic standards of a university will be wholly repugnant to the principles of higher education as commonly understood in the modern world.

The long title of the Bill shows that every aspect of the life of these institutions will be subject to direct and rigid Government control. Establishment, Maintenance, Management and Control—when one has deprived a university of its autonomy in these respects, what has one got left but an empty shell into which anything a Government wishes can be poured?

But the actual terms of the Bill relating to the structure of these so-called university colleges are, if anything, even more offensive. The Governing Council of the "University College" which may consist of as few as three members, will be appointed by the Governor-General, no doubt because of their espousal of policy rather than their competence in academic matters or university administration. The Senate, the body normally primarily charged with responsibility for academic matters within a university, will be appointed by the Minister, who may delegate his powers to the Secretary who may delegate his powers to an Officer of the Public Service. The Principal, Professors, Lecturers and other staff members will also be appointed by the Minister and will be subject to a disciplinary

code which will reduce them to mere automata.

But the venom of the Bill seems to be particularly concentrated in the chapters dealing with the University College of Fort Hare and the non-European Medical School of Natal University.

The University College of Fort Hare, formerly known as the South African Native College, has been in existence for just over 40 years. The College has a record of achievement of which it is justly proud. The first graduate was turned out by the College in 1923. By 1955, five students had obtained the degree of Master of Arts, three the degree of Master of Science, four the B.A. (Hons.), six the B.Sc. (Hons.); 544 students had qualified for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, 311 for the degree of Bachelor of Science and 69 for the degree of B.Sc. (Hygiene)—a degree specially designed for those entering the Public Health services of the country; 83 had gone on to qualify as medical doctors either in the Union itself or overseas; 582 qualified for professional teaching certificates, and 91 had completed the requirements for Diplomas such as the Advanced Diploma in Agriculture or the Diploma in Theology.

Former students are to be found in all parts of South, Central and East Africa, holding positions of great responsibility and rendering significant service to their communities in various spheres of life—as teachers, ministers of religion, doctors, lawyers, civil servants, farmers, agricultural extension officers, social workers, health workers, laboratory assistants in scientific research stations, chiefs, councillors, political and other leaders of thought.

The staff of the College is mixed, i.e., both White and non-White. Although Whites are at present in the majority on the faculty, all posts without exception are open to qualified applicants without distinction as to race or colour. All members of the permanent staff are subject to the same conditions of service, including salary scales and other conditions of employment.

Now the College Council is to be deprived of the functions and powers vested in it, including all property, movable or immovable, which is in future to be vested in the Minister of Native Affairs. In all this there has been no question of consultation with the College Council, on which the Government itself has always been well represented. Members of the staff from the Principal downwards are to become civil servants. Any member of the staff who is *persona non grata* with the Government is to be compulsorily retired; others will be given

two months within which to decide whether they are going to sell their academic souls for a mess of pottage or leave. That is the cruel choice with which men and women who have spent years of preparing themselves for the work in which they are engaged will be confronted.

The same applies to the students admitted to these institutions who will have to be "approved by the Minister." Having regard to the intense desire of non-Europeans for education and the total absence of alternative facilities for them in the country, non-White students will probably be compelled to seek admission to these "intellectual kraals."

The most important thing about a university institution is that it should not be isolated from other seats of learning. Such an institution may be said to be isolated geographically, if it is situated in an inaccessible part of the country, so that those connected with it seldom have the opportunity to know and feel what is going on in other parts of the country or of the world.

A university wherever situated might also be isolated in the sense of being detached from the world around it, concerning itself with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake without bothering itself about the requirements of the society of which it forms a part. The conception that the world is too much with us and should consequently be largely ignored by those who are engaged in the serious business of study is not one that commends itself to the modern mind. While pure research is still part of the life-blood of genuine universities, much of the research which is pursued in modern universities is concerned with matters which are relevant and applicable to the problems of modern society.

Finally, a university institution might also isolate itself from other seats of learning because its work is conducted through the medium of a language which is confined to a small area or is spoken by too small a number of people. Obviously all people normally want the education of their children to be conducted in the language with which the children are most familiar. In the higher reaches of education, however, it is undoubtedly of great advantage to the future leaders of a country if their education is conducted through the medium of a language which will make it possible for them to enter into the heritage of world civilizations. This is even more important for people who belong to the so-called under-developed groups of the world.

To a greater or lesser extent their lack of development is due to the fact that they have developed their civilizations, all of which are naturally entitled to respect, in comparative isolation from the more dynamic social and economic systems of the modern world. If they are going to be able to stand on their feet under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, at least their future leaders, both men and women, must be able to understand and appreciate the machinery of modern civilization. For them to be compelled to do so through the medium of languages which are relatively speaking still in their infancy in literary development, is a cruel imposition which can only be perpetrated upon a voiceless and defenceless people.

The Union Government has announced its intention of reorganizing the higher education of non-Europeans on an ethnic basis. The Africans, the Coloured and the Indians are to be separated from the Whites and from one another in their university education as they are largely in their primary and secondary education today. The Coloureds are to have a university college established for them in the Western Cape where the greater proportion of their population lives. The Indians are to have their university college in Natal for the same reason.

When we come to the Africans who constitute the vast majority of the non-White population, although everything hitherto has been done to place them in the same category, for the purposes of their higher education they are to be divided into three groups, namely, (i) the Sotho and related tribes, for whom a university college is to be established in a Reserve somewhere in the Northern Transvaal; (ii) the Zulu and related tribes, for whom a university college is to be established in a Reserve in Zululand, and (iii) the Xhosa and related tribes who are to be served by the existing university college of Fort Hare.

What justification can there be for this re-organization on an ethnic basis or this sudden increase in the number of university colleges for non-Whites from one to five? Is this because the one university college at present in existence—Fort Hare—cannot be expanded to take in more students? The present enrolment at Fort Hare is 400, and that number could easily be raised to one or two thousand at far less cost than it would take to set up a new university college, even with the Native Affairs Department squads responsible for the erection of new

buildings.

The question may be asked whether the present demand for university education among non-Whites justifies this increase in the number of university institutions catering for them. At present the number of non-White university students is approximately as follows: 400 at Fort Hare, 500 at the "Open" Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand combined; 400 at the University of Natal, and about 1,400 external students at the University of South Africa doing their degree work by private study; a total of slightly more than 2,500. Admittedly, just as the opening of more secondary schools for non-Whites in the last 30 years has stimulated the development of secondary education, the opening of more university colleges for non-Whites situated in such a way as to make it possible for more qualified students to take advantage of the facilities offered might give a great fillip to higher education among non-Whites.

But the fundamental defect in the Government's scheme is that it is based upon ethnic rather than regional or academic considerations. If a non-White university college is established in the Northern Transvaal, why should a Zulu student resident within reach of that university college be refused admission to it? Or why should a Xhosa student resident on the Reef be compelled, even "with the aid of a bursary," to go to the so-called Xhosa university college rather than to the one which is nearer to him? The normal student goes to a university to take a degree in Arts or Science or Law or Medicine or Commerce, for success in which his particular ethnic grouping is irrelevant.

But the advocates of ethnic university colleges might suggest that it would be more feasible in such an institution to introduce a Bantu language as a medium of instruction if all the students are drawn from one ethnic group, Sotho in the Sotho college, Zulu in the Zulu college and Xhosa in the Xhosa college. Apart from the immense practical difficulties which the use of a Bantu language as a medium of instruction will present in most fields of study, which brand of Sotho will be used in the Sotho college—Northern Sotho (Pedi), Southern Sotho or Western Sotho (Tswana)? If ethnic attachments mean what the advocates of these schemes suggest they do, Tswana students will resent having to be compelled to study through the medium of Pedi and *vice versa*. And what does one do with Venda or Shangaan or Swazi students, for whom no special ethnic

colleges are proposed?

But the most tragic aspect of the Government's scheme is that these tribal universities are apparently to be organized in an entirely different manner from the accepted practice in the other universities in the country. The pattern of the structure of South African universities is laid down in the Universities Act of 1955, an Act within whose compass Fort Hare was also included. The principle underlying the Act is to allow the universities the maximum measure of autonomy subject to the general supervision of their development and their financial administration by the Union Government through the Department of Education, Arts & Science. The Minister of Education, Arts & Science is assisted in this task of oversight in respect of the universities by an Advisory Committee, which scrutinizes carefully all proposals for expansion, increased subsidy, etc. But apart from this general oversight, the universities are left to direct their internal affairs in their own way through the University Council and the University Senate.

This system which has been built up in the past and is the fruit of the mature experience of persons who have been directly connected with the development of our universities, is, like so many other things, to be sacrificed on the altar of apartheid. Instead of the large measure of autonomy which is associated with other universities, the tribal universities are to be subjected to a rigid form of control by the Government. The Council, the Principal, the Senate, the professors and lecturers are all to be cribbed and confined in such a way as to convert the tribal universities into intellectual kraals, rather than places in which the spirit of free enquiry will prevail. Surely if the policy of apartheid or separate development is all that it is claimed to be, it ought to mean that within their separate university institutions the non-Whites will have all the freedoms normally associated with university life in other societies, instead of being expected to work in an atmosphere of threats and compulsion. Why should the non-White universities not be placed under the direction of the Minister of Education, Arts & Science? There can be no doubt that the Department of Education, Arts & Science is more conversant with the problems of higher education, including higher education for Africans with which it has dealt since the consummation of Union, than the Department of Native Affairs.

And what advantage can be claimed for the system of having

the Council appointed by the Minister? What are the disadvantages of having a University Council in which various interests, including the Government, are represented, rather than one which consists of hand-picked supporters of a particular point of view, as Government appointees are almost bound to be?

The Senate of the university usually consists of professors or the heads of departments who owe their place in this body to their status on the university faculty rather than to Ministerial approval. Admittedly, even to-day, members of the permanent staff of a university are appointed by the University Council subject to the approval of the Minister of Education, Arts & Science. But once a Professor has been appointed by a University Council, it does not rest with the Minister to say whether such a Professor will be a member of the Senate or not. In the tribal universities, however, it would appear as if the situation might arise in which some Professors are honoured with membership of the Senate while others are not.

The discipline code which is contemplated in the tribal universities is altogether too totalitarian and appears to be intended to reduce these institutions into mere purveyors of Government propaganda. There is nothing which is calculated to undermine the development of any people, and more especially the under-developed non-White people of this country, than to have universities intended for them staffed with persons whose attitude to their work will be one of "Keep your mouth shut and your salary intact." Adverse public comment on any aspect of administration on the national or the provincial level will constitute misconduct, and the machinery to be set up for dealing with cases of misconduct leaves much to be desired.

The University of South Africa is to be the examining body of the new universities. It must be borne in mind that the University of South Africa is the statutory university for external students, i.e., students doing their degree work by private study. The students of the new universities will be internal students, whose professors and lecturers will no doubt wish to have a say in framing the syllabuses and conducting the examination of these students. The Universities Bill does not say whether the new universities will be accorded representation on the Senate of the University of South Africa.

That will, of course, immediately raise the question of

whether non-White members of staff will be permitted to participate in the work of the Senate of the University of South Africa. Perhaps that is why the Bill is silent on this point. It looks, however, as if it is intended that the University of South Africa should once more become a federal university with a number of non-White constituent colleges. Those who are acquainted with the days when the University of South Africa was a federal university with white constituent colleges know something of the weaknesses inherent in that system.

Finally, the serious question remains to be asked as to what the connection will be between the White and the non-White university systems. After all, the products of these systems will inevitably come into increasing contact with one another in the public life of the country, not as Whites or non-Whites, but as experts in various fields of learning. To what extent will the comparative isolation from one another in which they have done their work affect their academic or professional standards?

It is significant that in connection with the Government plans for the re-organization of university education in South Africa there has hardly been any consultation with the universities as such. University education is an important aspect of national policy, and one would have thought that before such thorough-going changes as are adumbrated in this legislation were brought about, the whole question would be submitted for investigation and report to a Commission on which all affected interests, especially the universities, were adequately represented. It is true that various committees have been appointed to inquire into and report upon specific aspects of university development, but there has as yet been no comprehensive review of the present and future needs of the country in this field. As the most important State on the continent of Africa, it is tragic that South Africa should permit the development of a sound system of university education for all sections of the population to be bedevilled by the demands of vote-catching, rather than those of the advancement of knowledge and truth.

The opposition to this Bill has hitherto been confined to the universities affected, but it is to be hoped that all people interested in the future welfare of the country will unite and form a broad front of opposition to this monstrous Bill, from the baneful effects of which all universities, White as well as non-White, require to be saved.