

On the two days of the stayaway there was a very limited bus service operating in the townships. None of the KwaZulu Transport Services were operating as none of the drivers turned up to work.

There was no kombi service in the African townships either. However a monitor observed private trucks transporting workers into the city.

Most of the shops in the African areas were closed. In the Indian areas of the city about 60% of the shops were closed on May 5th and about 90% on May 6th.

Almost all the schools in the African areas were shut on both days apart from two schools. Indian and Coloured schools functioned normally.

At the University of Natal some students, mainly black, boycotted lectures on the 5th and especially the 6th of May. On the 6th about 400 students organised an open-air

meeting on the campus but the intervention of police forced them to continue the meeting inside.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In view of the State of Emergency and the almost complete lack of pamphlet distribution, the extent of the stayaway was clearly remarkable (supported by the workers and scholars). The high percentage (81) of Cosatu workers who stayed away would suggest that the Union Federation plays a significant role in ensuring the extent of the stayaway. But the fact that one half of the non-unionised workers stayed away is also significant.

The overall conclusion that might be drawn from this survey is that notwithstanding the legal restrictions, the stayaway can and will be used for political purposes, and the state, management and the workers will have to come to terms with this.□

by Richard Steyn, Editor, The Natal Witness.

## **AN ADDRESS AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY, UNIVERSITY OF NATAL PIETERMARITZBURG, 1987**

Mr Chancellor, Mr Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to have been invited to address you this evening. The Natal Witness and the University of Natal have had a long and fruitful association and I regard this invitation as an affirmation of our association, and I thank you for it.

Less than a year ago I was present, as a visitor, at Harvard University's graduation (commencement) ceremony. It was a spectacular occasion – a blend of high ceremonial and circus – held in the open air in the picturesque quadrangle adjoining Harvard Yard. Its climax came when the president of Harvard, in ringing tones, formally welcomed the graduands assembled before him "to the fellowship of educated men and women."

The president had a twinkle in his eye, for he knew, as did everyone present, that it was decidedly presumptuous to suppose that three or four years at a university – even one like Harvard – entitled one to enter the fellowship of educated men and women. He was also probably aware of the truth of the old saw that every man has two educations – that which is given to him and that which he gives himself. Of the two kinds the latter is the more valuable; what we are merely taught seldom nourishes the mind as does that which we teach ourselves.

Tonight we are gathered to honour not only those who have distinguished themselves in post-graduate studies, but also those who have spent three or four years at University and have come to the end of their formal education. In

congratulating all on their achievements, I want to suggest to the new graduates that the most important part of their education lies ahead.

Walter Wriston, one of America's leading bankers, made a remark which is relevant to the situation in which we in this country find ourselves today: "Since we are prisoners of what we know, often we are unable to imagine what we don't know. Man, given the proper initiative and freedom to act, has repeatedly found alternatives to ambiguity and doom."

Prisoners of what we know. It is one of the paradoxes of modern society that despite the astonishing advances in information technology – in print, in the electronic media, in home computers and word processors – and despite being virtually drowned in information, we are as lacking in knowledge as ever. We confuse information with knowledge and are so over-burdened with facts that often we fail to reflect upon their meaning. In many Western countries, literacy levels have declined alarmingly as a result of the huge increase in computer-scored, multiple-choice test-papers. These tests require no skills of composition and only moderate reading ability. The British are lamenting a general drop in education standards brought about by experimentation and Treasury cuts. In America, according to social forecaster Jim Naisbitt, high school graduates today are less skilled than their parents were. Despite America's current restructuring from an industrial to an information and services-based society and the excel-

lence of its communication systems – with cable television churning out news and information round the clock – the country continues to produce students at secondary and tertiary levels with an astounding ignorance of the world beyond America, imprisoned by how little they know of how others live.

In this country, despite technological progress and the belated advent of television, we certainly are not turning out young people with a better understanding of how the world thinks and works. Indeed, how could we?

Ask any serious minded visitor to South Africa about his or her impressions and the chances are that after making complimentary remarks about the weather and the cheapness of the rand, he or she will comment on how isolated we have become from the rest of humanity. Returning home recently after a year abroad, I was acutely aware of the narrowness of our collective focus. Our news broadcasts contain an endless diet of what cabinet ministers have to say at police passing our parades, of organ transplants into sick infants, of the level of the country's dams and how some obscure South African fared in the first round of an international tennis tournament. Regular news and informed comment about the state of the planet is virtually non-existent. Our world view continues to be based upon outdated ideological or emotional factors, upon a crude Cold War mentality typical of the 'fifties', which divides the world into the good (i.e. the West) versus the bad (i.e. the East, and particularly the evil, aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union). It passes barely unnoticed that two of the world's great powers – the Soviet Union and China – are undertaking two of the twentieth century's greatest experiments in government, as they try to inject a measure of freedom into their societies in order to compete economically and technologically with the US and Japan. We have little awareness of the rising strength and economic importance of Japan, or of the challenge that Africa faces from the technologically more advanced and now better-educated countries of the East.

We speculate darkly about the Soviet menace, yet there is virtually no awareness, or discussion in the media, of the fact that a significant shift in Soviet-thinking on Southern Africa may be taking place. A new generation of Soviet Africanists is taking a hard look at the costs and risks of getting heavily involved in this part of the world, and beginning to doubt whether even a black ruled South Africa could ever be inveigled into the Soviet camp. These are factors vital to our calculations as to how to deal with our neighbours in the front line states, not to mention the Soviet-influenced ANC. But, as psychological and economic pressures upon us have increased, we seem to have resolved collectively not only to resist that pressure – but also to close our eyes and ears to all but the most major events taking place elsewhere. Imprisoned by how little we know of the world, we continue to conduct our internal political debate in rhetoric studded with strange-sounding phrases like "healthy power-sharing", "group identity", "own affairs", "total onslaught" – terms which make no sense anywhere else.

At a more profound level, our lack of knowledge of our own history locks us into thinking in stereotypes, into a cast of mind which puts people into racial categories before considering them as individuals, which imprisons all of us in the politics of polarisation, of "us" versus "them". All

nations have their myths, but in few countries are myths so assiduously fostered as in ours. Consider a random few of them:

The myth that the Bantu-speaking people arrived as immigrants on the Transvaal Highveld at the same time that Europeans first settled in Table Bay. Our forebears were **not** here first, despite what some history books may tell us.

The myth that black people cannot farm the land. Historians now report that when given the opportunity in the Eastern Cape and Natal from 1850 onwards, black peasants did extremely well as cultivators of the soil and as pastoralists. Acre for acre and man for man, Africans often produced much more than the Settlers.

The myth that the Voortrekkers saw themselves as a "chosen people" designed to bring civilisation to the hewers of wood and drawers of water in Africa. This myth, which found expression in apartheid ideology, has arrested our progress for half a century. Now, at last, some Afrikaner historians are beginning to debunk it.

The modern myth of a planned, co-ordinated international onslaught on South Africa, when it is really apartheid which is under attack from many sides.

The counter-myth of African socialism, which contends that Africans are naturally socialist, democratic and assimilative. The fact is that conflict and war are as endemic to the African continent as they have been elsewhere.

The current myth that democracy can somehow be preserved by abrogating the Rule of Law and suspending normal democratic processes.

The power of myth, according to the sociologist Peter Berger, is most likely to erupt in situations of rapid change – especially when that change puts in question or threatens what has previously been taken for granted. The rise of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging is an obvious case in point. I studied history at university twenty years ago and the history taught now is not the history upon which my generation built its prejudices. Looking back, I realise now how much we were imprisoned by what we knew then of our past. The point is that one's education is never done, no matter what one's age. It was Bertrand Russell who said that "knowledge is fixed and certain; it is truth free from error". Without knowledge, our political struggle becomes a case of which side has the better myths.

A special threat to the free flow of information and knowledge is posed by the current state of emergency. There may be nothing wrong, in principle, with the temporary suspension of democratic values in order to deal with the threat to law and order. But this can lead to tyranny when it becomes part of the permanent order of things.

It is thoroughly disingenuous to claim, as our rulers do, that in order to preserve freedom, it is necessary to circumscribe free speech, censor and distort information and circumvent Parliament and the Courts. I find it depressing that at a time when the ANC, for whom I hold no brief, should be showing faint signs of conciliation and compromise, the Government has forbidden us to hear what its leaders are saying. Oliver Tambo can go to Washington and talk to Americans and arouse some of them to anger. Pik Botha marvels at the fact that he could not buy the

adverse publicity generated by Tambo in explaining his case in the free American press. Yet Botha denies that freedom to his own press: for news of Mr Tambo we are reliant upon the wisdom of Mr Adriaan Vlok. It has never been more necessary for all of us to know what is happening than in these difficult times. We should be allowed to work out who our friends are, and who our enemies are, and to make sensible judgements based on information and fact, not myth and rumour and propaganda from whatever source.

We live in a peculiar society in which things are seldom as they are perceived by the world outside. This is one of the darkest periods in our country's history, when between 13 000 and 30 000 people are in detention, yet it is also a time of hope. Just when liberal values, for which our antecedents fought and which we have taken for granted, seem on the point of extinction, there are signs of a revival. Inspired by a brilliant series of lectures from UCT economist Charles Simkins, the liberal community is emerging from a long period of hibernation to examine what contribution it can make to the search for a new system, rooted in values common to black and white and using the classical liberal mechanisms of a bill of rights and the rule of law. Your own Professor Tony Mathews makes a major contribution to the argument that liberal values are the surest foundation for a genuinely democratic South Africa in his new book "Freedom, State Security and Rule of Law".

The Kwa Natal Indaba – in whose deliberations many from this university have played an important part – has pointed a way out of the confines of "group think" towards a system which places individual rights ahead of group rights, yet still takes cognisance of the latter. These are encouraging developments.

Perhaps most encouraging of all is the emergence, at the Afrikaans universities, of a group of historians and philosophers who are determined to liberate Afrikaner-Nationalism from its pre-occupation with race and colour as a basis of negotiating a fairer constitutional dispensation for this country.

In his lectures Simkins makes the fascinating observation that all South Africans – black, white, Afrikaans, English, Zulu or Xhosa – have inherited a liberal tradition which expresses itself in a belief in constitutionality, in negotiation, in the Rule of Law, in democratic mechanisms and in free enterprise. Our instincts are to speak our minds, to meet to discuss grievances and to take these grievances to Court or to Parliament. The fact that the last 40 years have seen a gradual and lamentable retreat from these institutions – and an increasing willingness to resort to violence – does not mean that liberal values have been extinguished. On the contrary, the very failure of collectivist strategies elsewhere and of "group think" here lends weight to Simkins' view that more so than at any time in the past, liberals have the potential to reach a mass audience. Liberalism is a philosophy, not a political policy. It will not conjure away the hard, brutal facts of our situation, but it can provide us with a lamp to light our way.

As English-speakers, we are heirs to a tradition based on a belief in parliamentary democracy, that might is not right, that everyone has a right to be educated and that the

strong have a responsibility to the weak, and it is surely our duty to reassert those values and not to take refuge in defeatism and apathy. If we believe in the right of free speech and in academic freedom, let us stand up and say so, and not leave the field to the demagogues on the right and left who rationalise their intolerance and deny those whose views they dislike the opportunity to air them.

As an outsider, I have been following the debate about academic freedom on university campuses with considerable interest. While I understand the argument that a university is not an island unto itself and must reflect the realities of the society it serves, I do not see that it follows that academic freedom is divisible, that because the state denies freedom of expression to certain of its citizens, a university is justified in using similar methods to silence those whose views it does not like. When a university denies a platform to a visiting speaker because the latter is out of sympathy with a body of opinion on the campus, it seems to me to be undermining both its principles and the reason for its existence – which is to assert and debate and dissent, and to follow the truth, wherever that may lead.

Most of you have already left university to start your new careers. Many may have significant rôles to play in the future of this country. All of you will influence our future by the way you respond to the political demands that these times impose upon you. Some will decide to leave for less troubled pastures. Others, I hope most, will decide to stay. No-one has the right to tell you what to do; that is your choice and I would not presume to advise you. But of one thing I am certain; it is easier to get things done, to be a force for good, in a young developing country with such potential as ours, than it is in the older, more populous countries of the English-speaking world. Sir Laurens van der Post, when he was here recently, spoke of problems being a country's greatest blessing because they are the raw materials out of which mankind and civilisations have renewed themselves. Not many of us are blessed with his cosmic view of things, and I often wish that our problems were not so seemingly intractable. But I remain hopeful that, with the human resources at our disposal, we shall overcome them and find what Walter Wriston calls "an alternative to ambiguity and doom."

The other day, I came upon this pessimistic commentary:

"It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country. Not in the lifetime of most men has there been so much grave and deep apprehension. Never has the future seemed so incalculable as this time. The domestic economic situation is in chaos. Our currency is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible. The political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. Russia hangs, as usual, like a cloud dark and silent upon the horizon. It is a solemn moment. Of our trouble no man can see the end."

Those words appeared in Harper's magazine in the US in **1847** – fourteen years before the Civil War.

May they serve as an antidote to despair about our future. America endured – and so shall we. But if we want this country to survive with democratic values intact, and to become one in which we can all live with a clear conscience, there is work to be done. This is no time to be sitting on the sidelines. □