

Social classes have up to now proved inevitable in modern industrial societies, some sort of class hierarchy obtaining even in socialist countries. Whether intended or not, to conceive South Africa in terms of a class hierarchy is to give it respectability and to bring it in accord with Western democratic Christian traditions. But this is not possible, for racial discrimination in South Africa is in conflict with the fundamental principle of modern Western class society, which tolerates class on the underlying assumption that a person's position is not fixed by birth, that he is free to utilise his talents to move out of it. Western democracies explain that their vitality and dynamism are due to the motivation to compete and achieve which such social scales stimulate. It is precisely because this freedom is obstructed, this drive, this motivation to aspire to the top is blocked, that the Western world condemns the South African system and implies or contemplates sanctions against it. South Africa with its rigid, permanent, and unchangeable grouping of persons by race violates the fundamental democratic principle of individual freedom to pursue social and economic goals.

IMPRISONED AND POWERLESS

In modern class society the distance between classes constrict, and there are real expectations that lower classes move towards increasing freedom and greater power; this is so because the classes are integrated into a democracy. The Black race is not the equivalent of such a class. It does not manipulate political power to curb capitalist exploitation, and extend the areas of State control in its interest. Imprisoned and made powerless by its race, it cannot move out of its race. Though the wages and living conditions of Blacks may improve, their exploitation will continue unabated and the discrepancies between their objective condition and that of the White will remain as sharp. Exploitation on the basis of race has continued in South Africa for three hundred years and it can continue for as many more, no matter how enlightened the oppressed Blacks. This is the intrinsic difference between a class society and a race society as it exists in South Africa to-day.



Robert Sobukwe

It does not seem possible that the social scientists who are signatories to the Report, can be so ignorant of Black history or so out of touch with Black dynamics to interpret their present quiescence as absence of political awareness, or to believe that Blacks are not ready to participate in a common democracy or that they would support an even less Christian society than the one presently existing in South Africa. **It seems quite apparent that the "new liberals" are so overawed by the power of the present Government, and so fearful of losing White sympathy that they dare not propose change, and thus this tragic report.**□

FROM PROTEST TO ACTION

by David Hemson

It is commonly held that students are privileged members of society. This is true. For a comparatively short span of three years students can, if they make the effort, begin to acquire an understanding of South African society and themselves. The student who moves in the environment of the university and the farm worker who labours from sunrise to sunset occupy different worlds. There is a connection, however; a link between the exploitation of the worker and the production of knowledge at the university.

Only a small fraction of the amount of money required for study is provided by the student himself; the state provides the bulk and the proportion is increasing. These amounts are fed to the grateful universities which can then continue their 'useful' role in the production and distribution of certain forms of knowledge. The state gathers its funds from taxation :- income tax, company tax, and other forms of taxation which add to the burden of black workers. In this way the state scoops off a percentage of the profit which results from production in major sectors of the South African economy and gains revenue from workers who earn below the poverty datum line.

The amount of surplus which can be gained is related to the rate of exploitation of the workers within that sector. The clearest example of state revenue from the high rate of exploitation of workers is that of the gold mining industry

which has always been a major source of revenue and it has paid for the extension of the state and general revenues which have been absorbed by universities. The industry has had a decisive role in the establishment and development of the University of Witwatersrand. So as we see, the accumulation of knowledge is concomitant with the accumulation of capital; the means to knowledge have not dropped from heaven.

LOYALTY TO WORKERS

The universities are now in a subservient relationship to the state which has acted as a mechanism for transferring surplus value from the workers to the students. In this context the universities and students owe a loyalty to the workers of South Africa. This is not a sentence which has been written casually. The university should be involved in the production of information directly relevant to

production, to improving industrial techniques, and the level of technical knowledge. But the university owes a direct responsibility to the workers. Let us explore the meaning of this new responsibility.

The new responsibility is not likely to be undertaken willingly by the universities which are presently in a 'locked-in' relationship with managers and professional groupings. This is not to repudiate relationships between industry and universities, but the present relationships are made not toward an objective industrialisation, but toward private profit. The new orientation would require study groups in each faculty to develop critiques of the present maldevelopment of disciplines in South Africa. Wider groupings could evaluate the production of knowledge at specialised institutions such as the Institute of Race Relations and the National Institute for Personnel Research.

The Institute of Race Relations should be encouraged to take a more direct interest in the wages of black workers, to present evidence to industrial councils and wage boards during investigations, to provide constant publicity on the growing gap between black and white wages, to study the extent of foreign investment in South Africa, and to bring together the people working for change. Basically the research policy should be encouraged to move from the collation of facts (essential though this is) to the exploration of the economic functions of racism, and the means of change in apartheid society.

The National Institute for Personnel Research has been doing research into industrial problems for the benefit of management and the results of the studies are denied to the workers. It has taken a particularly supportive rôle towards the gold mining management, and its research on the motivation of African miners and production in the mines has sharpened management techniques of labour exploitation.

WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES

A start would have to be made within the universities themselves. Students should begin by improving the working conditions and wages of those who clean the rooms, set up the laboratory experiments, and clean the lavatories. Nothing is more indicative of the racial structure and petty obsessions of the white universities than the way in which black workers are treated on campus. Apart from surveys of workers' material needs, students and academics should consult manual and technical workers on their representation within the university structure, and try to bring the arbitrary decisions on hiring, firing, and promotion, under some form of control by the workers themselves. Recent investigations at various universities have indicated considerable malpractices such as demotion over minor disciplinary matters, boss systems of favouritism, deliberate withholding of wage increases, incidents of assault, workers being denied the right of permanent employment even after 20 years service, and general indifference by university administrations. A new atmosphere can only be created when these injustices are brought into the open, discussed, and decided with workers' participation. At present the university is a duplication of the model apartheid institution with positions allocated according to the relevant slots of overall race-class structure of the society. The gap between lecturers and workers has widened dramatically in the last few years.

The movement for change within the university structure has to start within the social sciences which try to come to an understanding of social change. Within our universities we have history departments which present as history the facts

as they have been stacked by the colonial and civic authorities, political science where major attention is given to social groupings in America and Britain, an anthropology blind to the realities of colonialism, and sociology which is refusing to confront the problem of appropriate social action. Even in the applied disciplines such as the education departments basic educational problems of our country are evaded or dealt with in only the most theoretical way, while children faint from starvation in schools nearby.

ENGINEERS AND CHANGE

But what of the technological sciences; of what relevance are engineers to social change? Thorstein Veblen, an American sociologist, argues that the factory worker and the engineer are more in line with the positive direction of social change than the financier whom he regards as relatively static and pursuing ends which are inimical to those of the workers and engineers. The engineer, although limited by administrative or economic decisions, still is a crucial factor in social change. But the student engineer in our universities accepts the goal of private profit uncritically, and scorns any identification between himself and production workers. He is blind to the tension between dynamic technology and property relations.

Yet the possibility remains, as science develops and is applied in industry, of its becoming a directly productive force. At present the application of scientific research is an important component of the profit of major companies, a surplus which is distributed to wealthy share-holders here and abroad. Research workers who are engaged in producing new forms of knowledge must ensure that their work is not used for private gain and to reinforce existing property relations.

A scientific program should be drawn up independent of the need of companies to secure a high rate of profit. The program should include :-

- The *electrification* of the country
- The overall mechanisation of production
- The thorough development of new industries, new forms of power and materials
- The thorough and rational utilization of natural resources
- The closer relations of science to production.

The determined application of these measures would provide sufficient employment to absorb the 1 288 269 Africans estimated to be unemployed.

So we have demonstrated that students from all disciplines have a relevance to the full development of our country. But what directly can be expected of the students? Students cannot be expected to strike up immediate bonds of empathy with workers. There are barriers of class, language, and race; but they can communicate with workers about the essential aspects of their work life: wages, hours, and working conditions.

The struggle of workers in our society to regain an increased proportion of what they have produced is a struggle which continues whether students wish to relate to this movement or not. The question is not whether or not students are to create the conditions for this movement, but what attitude they are to take towards a movement which has existed since labour for wages has become the dominant feature of our political economy. **Students may persist in their indifference or become committed to a policy of redirecting the flow of information relevant to daily industrial activity from the exclusive property of management to the workers as a whole.**