2. The Liberal Democratic Association of S.A.

During March the Liberal Democratic Association of South Africa was launched, the culmination of nearly two years of discussion in several non-racial groups around the country. Its founders comprised independent Liberals as well as others involved in a variety of anti-apartheid and anti-tricameral Parliament opposition organisations.

The Association is committed to the defence and propagation of Liberal principles and to working out suggestions for policies for a post-apartheid society based on non-racial majority rule, regular free elections, protection of individual rights, the rule of law, a mixed economy, and a comprehensive system of social security.

The Association has said that it will try to devise mechanisms which will mean that minority views are heard and others to encourage cooperation and collaboration between the many different social and cultural interests in our new society. It will try to persuade South Africans in general that Liberal ideas provide a better basis for a conflict-free future than do the rigid ideological plans of the Left or the Right.

REALITY welcomes this development. It is high time that the Liberal option was cleared of the misrepresentations which have been attached to it by its opponents and brought back into the main current of political debate in our country.□

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by V.P. Khanyile

SPEECH TO ASP CONFERENCE IN PIETERMARITZBURG

December, 1986

It is a great pleasure for me to deliver this keynote address to this conference today, because the people gathered here, representing the Academic Support Programmes at different universities, could play a crucially important role, not only in the future of their institutions but also in shaping the future of tertiary education in South Africa.

It is also extremely important – and entirely appropriate – that Academic Support Programmes should be showing such an interest in People's Education and attempting to define a relevant responsive role for universities in helping to give content to this concept.

I am told that Academic Support Programmes had humble beginnings, starting life as minor appendages to the university's major academic programmes. Their job definition was to prepare so-called disadvantaged students to adapt to the university's course structures and 'cope' with their academic demands.

This brought the ASP staff into direct contact with many students who had been shaped by the struggles at schools and in their communities. This exposure was the vital factor in moving many ASP staff from a mere intellectual appraisal of the problems facing black students to an experiential understanding of their struggles, not only at an academic level, but on the political terrain as well.

Many of you have developed an insight into the way the struggle against academically inferior 'Bantu Education' has evolved away from the original demands for 'equal' education in a single system to demands for the development of an entirely new education system, with appropriate content to prepare students for participation in a transformed democratic society, informed by different values and social objectives.

And you have been among the first at universities to understand that the time has come for educational institutions to be responsive to the needs and demands of a far wider community than those they have traditionally served, and that these responses will only be relevant and acceptable if they are based on transformed structures of accountability.

These insights form the essential base for the ASPs to expand and transform their role at universities. The path will not be an easy one because it will require becoming part of a pioneering process that challenges many of the traditional concepts and structures of tertiary education in South Africa. And these will be very jealously guarded by powerful forces and vested interests inside and outside the universities.

But, unless that task is undertaken, the universities will miss the historic moment that has arrived for them to play a creative and constructive role in the process of radical transformation that South Africa has irrevocably entered.

Before considering specific actions and strategies, it seems essential to recognise the historic moment we are facing, to understand the forces that are shaping it and the opportunities it offers.

An appropriate starting point would be a brief analysis of the situation in the schools, which at present are at the forefront of the education struggle. In the last two years, we have seen our townships being transformed into zones of struggle; being the focus of struggle between the forces that protect white privilege and domination on the one hand and the black youth that is committed to raise this country from the bleak and desolate realities of what racial South Africa is. It is this youth who in the last decade have laid down their lives to fight the evil that comes with education under apartheid. The reports of the last few weeks have shown that the current State of Emergency has made a frontal and concentrated attack on the student sector, especially high school students. Commentators talk of up to 8 000 students who have been detained. Children as young as fourteen years are known to have been detained and brutalized by subjecting them to solitary confinement, infrequent and unbalanced diets, lack of access to the outside world, to lawyers and so on. Few of them who survive the experience filter through to universities; this is the youth that has been schooled in struggle.

This struggle will have an ever increasing impact on the universities, not only because it is shaping the political consciousness of many prospective students, but because tertiary education will have to pay increasing attention to compensating these students for the educational sacrifices they have made in the course of their struggle and to providing the skills that the DET system (and most other forms of primary and secondary education in South Africa) have failed to provide.

In a recently published analysis of the crisis in the schools, Dr Ken Hartshorne predicts that the Department of Education and Training will collapse within three to five years. Dr Hartshorne is not an activist and has no political motivations for making such a statement. Indeed, he is a retired State Education Planner. If one accepts the validity of this prediction, the implications are enormous.

Firstly it is important to understand what he means when he talks about the department's collapse. He is talking about the expansion and entrenchment of a process that has already begun in many schools, increasingly rendering the DET powerless to enforce its syllabus, rules, or evaluation standards. In essence the DET will die in the schools from a lack of legitimacy. Unlike many other terrains of minority control, education is unenforcable by coercion alone. Soldiers in the schools will not save the DET's education system. On the contrary, they will merely hasten its passing. Perhaps more than any other social institution, education depends upon the consent, co-operation and participation of those for whom it is intended.

Secondly, this prediction carries important strategic implications because it is based on a particular perception of the way in which the struggle against minority control is likely to proceed. Unlike many historic precedents of social transformation, the starting point of the process in South Africa has not been the transfer of political power to the majority, leading to a subsequent restructuring of the social institutions. Instead, inside South Africa the struggle for democratic control has started by challenging and transforming existing social institutions and localised authority structures, creating a cumulative process towards People's Power. And it seems that education could be among the very first arenas in which minority domination and control could be successfully challenged.

Of course, this will not mean an end to the struggle, but merely the culmination of the first phase. The real struggle is to replace an undemocratic, coercive, ineffective and irrelevant education system with a democratic, participatory and relevant alternative.

This poses perhaps the greatest challenge that students, educationists, educational institutions and the wider community have yet faced in the history of education in this country. For it will be their collective responsibility to ensure that, as the decline of the DET and other undemocratic education structures proceeds, the core of a legitimate and educationally-sound education system rises in its place. It was on the basis of this realisation that the NECC was formed, to co-ordinate the People's response, and to provide a link with other progressive forces in resolving the education crisis.

I am not suggesting that the universities are in a position to take over from the DET and administer a school education system for ± 6,0-million students. This is not their role, nor do they have the resources to do so. The NECC believes that the State must continue financing education, providing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure such as buildings and equipment, and distributing textbooks. What we reject is the authoritarian structures of the DET, the content of its curriculum and the teaching methods employed in the schools under its jurisdiction. We must be sure that we can formulate an alternative in all these areas, despite the DETs opposition. At this point the DET is determined not to allow People's Education in the schools. But, as it has been pointed out, they will eventually not have much choice. It is clear that the DET is no longer able to enforce its system. The Eastern Cape areas (where there has been no effective schooling in the last three years), Duncan Village, Soweto and Lamontville, to mention a few, bear testimony to this fact. It is in the light of this development that we call upon the government to hand over the control and management of the schools to the

community. The task facing the community and universities is to ensure that we are prepared for that moment and have carefully researched and formulated alternatives that we can begin to introduce in schools where the DET's authority has collapsed.

This is a massive task, the importance of which cannot be over-emphasised. And its success depends not only on the content of the alternative, but on the PROCESS through which it is evolved indeed the PROCESS will perhaps be the major factor in determining the acceptability and relevance of the new education system that emerges.

The most important question facing the universities today is what role they can play in this transition. It seems to me that their response should cover three main areas:

These are:

* Examining their potential role in helping to do research that will support the work that is being done to develop alternative ccurse content and teaching methods for People's Education in the schools.

* Examining and transforming their own structures of accountability, as well as creating new ones to enable direct communication and consultation with the broader community and the People's organisations.

* Evaluating their own courses, entrance requirements and Academic Support Programmes in order to turn their institutions into centres of relevant and accessible 'People's Education', which certainly does NOT mean academically inferior education, but rather the sort of education that will serve South Africa's most pressing needs and become part of creating a new society.

Let us begin with the situation in the schools: As I have already stated, the erosion of the DET has placed an enormous responsibility on the universities, (amongst others), to become creatively involved in the development of a new education system at school level. This huge undertaking requires academic and technical expertise, much of which is located in the universities. But, it also requires an advanced degree of political sensitivity and an understanding of the concept of 'People's Power', which lies at the heart of the People's struggle for control over the forces, structures and institutions that govern their lives. This understanding must determine the way in which academics go about the task of making their expertise available to the broader community.

Progressive individuals at universities, who have both the necessary expertise and political commitment, are keen to become part of the process of compiling new courses and study materials for 'People's Education.' Some are already actively involved particularly in the subjects of History and English, which have been the first to face the demands and challenges of transformation. And some are pioneering ways in which to involve students and People's organisations with an interest in education in the task of planning the new curriculum.

Further initiatives have begun within education faculties, where some progressive educationists at one major university are attempting to set up structures, under the joint direction of the university and the NECC, to pioneer research into appropriate education policy and teaching methods.

These attempts are all in their infancy, and have not been without their teething problems. However, the important thing is that they have started and that they represent important departures from the traditional concerns and procedures of university-based academics. But the process has still a long way to go, and the onus is on the universities to ensure that these initiatives develop further, and that the concept of partnership and joint management of projects and structures will extend to all areas of university life.

It is insufficient for the universities to rely on the commitment of individual academics, acting in their private capacities, to give much of their already over-committed time to additional work in the sphere of 'People's Education'. It is unacceptable to expect them to undertake this massive task in isolation alongside their mainline academic work. What is required is a concerted INSTITUTIONAL response from the universities. This will necessitate a reassessment of priorities and a reallocation of resources, based on an understanding that the actions of the universities in this critical transition phase could very well play a determining role in the future of education in South Africa.

This effort should be engaged in every faculty at the University, not merely the Arts and Education faculties. Mathematicians, Scientists, Engineers, Economists and Architects (amongst others) have a particular responsibility to show how their disciplines can become part of the process of democratic transformation and relevant to the needs of the majority of South Africans. Already some of these disciplines are perceived by many student activists as elitist and divisive, exclusively serving entrenched establishment interests, and resisting the forces of change.

The central question, of course, is how the necessary switch in priorities can take place? It is unlikely to happen easily through the present structures because the constituencies they represent tend to regard the universities' main function as the pursuit of 'academic excellence' (without taking context into account), particularly in the spheres of post-graduate research and the production of specialist publications. Moreover, the dominant forces within these structures are intent on preserving what they call the 'autonomy' and 'neutrality' of the universities, apparently unaware that the present structures themselves ensure the universities' accountability to establishment economic and political interests, and therefore place them in a far-from-neutral position in the current South African conflict.

All this makes it unlikely that the universities' response will be sufficient to meet the demands of the times unless the structures of accountability are drastically transformed. How is this to happen?

There will, no doubt, be attempts in this direction by the universities themselves. After long and intensive debate and soul-searching, they will probably appoint one or two prominent black educationists, community or church leaders to Council. The chances are that these appointments will be declined, leading to anger, confusion and disillusionment within the university hierarchies that their initiatives are being spurned.

They will have to look deeply and honestly at the reasons for this sort of response. They will have to accept that the time has long past when this type of token gesture could have any impact at all in satisfying the demands they face. No matter how sincere the universities' attempts at reform

may be, they will not be accepted if they leave the essential composition and orientation of university structures unchanged. No doubt, many within the universities will argue that, given time, the composition of decision-making structures will gradually change, altering their outlook and policy decisions. But this argument carries little credibility, particularly as the universities have not used past decades even to begin this process. The convocations of our major universities, for example, have never (to the best of my knowledge), elected a single black representative to Council. And even if they were to start now, one does not have to be a prophet to see that the universities do not have the time they will need to effect meaningful change this way. If they cling to gradual, piece-meal reformism, there is little doubt that they will be overtaken by events, generated by the People's demands and struggles for radical and rapid transformation, and the People's desire to govern, both on the campuses and in the broader community.

What alternatives do the universities have? Of course, the process of altering the composition of Council is important and must proceed, along radically creative lines that will give a significant say to traditionally excluded constituencies. The time is long overdue for the universities to apply collective political pressure for fundamental changes in the various University Acts that determine, among other things, the composition of their Councils.

But it would be unacceptable for the universities to use the provisions of these Acts to resist further innovative changes. They cannot afford to be held captive by their existing structures. Which Act stipulates that Senate will only nominate white people to Council?; which Act stipulates that convocation should exclude black people from Council? Is it a question of statutory barriers or internal barriers, indicative of the white consciousness of these universities? There is nothing to stop them from pioneering new channels of communication, consultation and negotiation with the important, but excluded constituencies and organisations.

Of course there will be strong resistance to such moves, mainly on the grounds that they allegedly abrogate the traditional liberal tenets of 'university autonomy' and 'academic freedom'. I have already argued that, whether they believe it or not, the universities are not autonomous. A brief look at the interests represented on council (of which approximately 20 percent are appointees of the State President) is sufficient to make this point.

Almost all the members of council represent constituencies that have evolved historically and entrenched themselves within an undemocratic, discriminatory and exploitative political and economic system. Moreover, they include appointees of a government that has led the assault on academic freedom in South Africa, and that has, over the years, severely circumscribed what the universities may teach, who may teach and who may be taught. The purpose was to exclude those very constituencies who are now demanding to be heard.

But the liberal arguments against radical changes in the universities' structures of accountability can be met on their own ground. As Anthony Kenny, Master of Balliol College Oxford, has pointed out, 'Academic Freedom is genuine value, and a precious one; but it does not come very high in the hierarchy of human values.' Within the Liberal hierarchy of values, academic freedom must surely have a significantly lower priority than the right to equal political participation for all individuals in their society's governing institutions, and the right to equal education. The constituencies represented in the universities' existing structures derive their exclusive power and influence precisely as a result of the historical denial of these rights to the majority. It seems to me that if liberals at the universities wish to apply their principles consistently, they must move beyond verbal protest, and concentrate on redressing the historical abrogation of these principles in our society by introducing fundamental structural changes that will provide meaningful representation to the excluded majority.

Nor need this happen at the cost of academic freedom. Indeed, we regard it as a move that will take the universities closer towards real academic freedom, for which a society based on equal political access is a necessary condition.

There have already been some encouraging moves in this direction, pioneered by the 'Perceptions on Wits' report, researched and produced by a group of progressive academics at the University of the Witwatersrand. This represents the first formal attempt to elicit the views of what they call 'the community'. At present, I understand that this report is being followed up at faculty level within the university. This is an important development which could and should lead to structural changes.

All universities should be searching for meaningful ways to institutionalise this 'community participation'. It is not for me to spell out how this should occur because this will be worked out through a process of negotiation. But if the universities fail to do so, they will find themselves increasingly unable to resolve the conflicts that erupt on their campuses. They cannot and will not be excluded from the People's struggles.

The NECC has paid particular attention to the issues raised by debates on the academic boycott and academic freedom. We need to think along the lines of setting up a joint consultative body representing both the universities and the 'community' (People's Organisations) in negotiation and discussion on the issues raised by the academic boycott. Such a body could discuss and consider for example, the desirability of inviting academics to South Africa who can make a relevant and meaningful input, not only within the universities, but to the work of the People's organisations.

People defending the status quo will no doubt say that it is unacceptable to allow outside interference with these university matters. But such 'interference' from establishment interests is acknowledged and accepted, and there are formal channels through which it occurs. All South Africa's major universities have offices abroad, or in other major local centres, which serve, among other things, as private sector sensory devices, to inform the universities of the response of the private sector to events and developments affecting the universities. This was particularly apparent during the O'Brien affair at UCT, and other incidents at Wits, when considerable 'negative feedback' on the student protests was apparently transmitted to the universities through these offices.

Some may argue that these channels exist primarily for fund-raising and that 'he who pays the piper' is entitled to call the tune. If we make the rich have the decisive say in the university, we will be doing nothing to transform our

society, but merely entrenching the status quo while paying lip-service to change.

There will also be strong resistance to the community's initiative from those determined to defend the prerogative of heads of department to take decisions on visiting lecturers alone, without being accountable to anyone. It is difficult to understand why this tradition is sacrosanct, and why heads of the department should not even be accountable to the rest of the university community (let alone the broader community) for decisions that can have a profound influence on their institutions.

Which brings me to the third issue that I want to discuss today: that is the universities' internal hierarchy of decision-making and accountability. The logical place to begin this examination is with the Senate, whose views and recommendations carry enormous influence and weight. The time has come for us to question whether the Senate is an adequate representative body based as it is on the elitist British system of one-Professor-one-vote, and excluding the vast weight of the university staff, students and workers. This is an outdated model, incapable of dealing with the demands of our times in a different social context. A similar criticism can be levelled at the Senate subcommittees, which have a great deal of power within the universities. These also need to be reconstituted so that they are more representative of the university community. Unless this task is undertaken, it will be extremely difficult to shift the universities' priorities and resource allocation or transform its course contents and entrance requirements.

Finally, let us look at the role of the ASPs in this process. It is easy to predict that the ASPs will become more and more important in the years ahead. That is why there is such intense discussion on the different models they could follow. The alternatives that have been suggested, with varying degrees of support, include off-campus 'junior colleges' to prepare 'disadvantaged' students for tertiary education; a foundation year, based at the universities themselves to fulfill the same purpose; 'parallel support programmes' to run alongside major courses; or a 'slow stream' that enables students to spread their first year over two years. It is certainly not for me to suggest which one would be best. That must be worked out by the interested parties, including the students for whom they are intended. ASPs should realise that their programmes can only be successful if they carry broad acceptability and legitimacy, which again underlines the importance of channels for community consultation. ASPs cannot defer this consultation until students arrive at their institutions and have no option but to slot into programmes designed for them.

Therefore, it is in the very best interests of the ASP's to support in every way they can, the setting up of formal negotiating structures with the community. It is equally in their interests to push for a change in the channels of influence and decision-making within the universities themselves. I have no doubt that the ASPs will play a pioneering role in this process as the effectiveness and relevance of their work depends to a large extent on it.

Be assured, you will have the NECC's support. We wish you well.□

Foreign news

The weak light washes down
yellow, mauve and strawberry,
engorging the dying town.

Implacably, frost spreads its hold
this longest night of the year,
and now, piercing the dark,
the radio speaks fear:
solemn diagnosticians,
clinically alert,
foretell our end is near.

Fear has an iron grip
fire cannot unseal.
The stars, their spears
thrown down, are shocked
we do not feel
as they about our doom.
In righteous anger
they retreat,
and leave us to the stink
and terror of this darkening room.

Poem by: Don Maclennan