

ing of the process of fundamental change. The combination of these two elements is marvellously illustrated by the work of Prof. H.W. van der Merwe and his Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town. His teaching, inter alia, about the need to accept incremental change — step by step — is as relevant to the situation in South Africa as it is to the Commonwealth.

While suspension of delinquent members of the Commonwealth might take time, there are other ways of encouraging governments to *move towards* recognised democratic standards and respect for human rights as, for example, by the Commonwealth establishing its own Court of Human Rights (as is already the case in Europe) where individuals can lodge complaints against their governments. (The Organisation of African Unity has already set up such a Court, but it has not yet delivered any judgments.

A second method could be a decision by the Commonwealth Secretariat to withhold its services from delinquent governments, but this might be difficult to apply since such a decision could damage the interests of innocent people.

The third method — and one that is currently gaining favour in the Western community as well as among many African opponents of existing unrepresentative regimes — is for economic aid to be made conditional on what has come to be described as 'good governance'.

This kind of pressure could be salutary, but if it is to win general support it will need to fulfill two conditions; that it should be selectively applied so that projects important to the weaker elements of society can continue; and that they should be non-selective in their application to governments. In other words, countries like Kenya and Malawi, should not be excluded from the withdrawal of British aid just because presidents Moi and Banda are good friends of the British, or because of overriding economic interests.

We are at the beginning of an important and interesting new turn in the history of the Commonwealth. Instead of deriding its halting first step towards encouraging the growth of multi-party parliamentary democracy and respect for human rights, we should be uttering hallelujahs for this new move, and praying for steady improvements in redressing the wrongs, not only of the Commonwealth, but worldwide. ●

DAVID WELSH, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN, FINDS THAT FEW STUDENTS TOOK PART IN THE RECENT VIOLENCE ON THE UNIVERSITY'S CAMPUS

Intimidation and mindless thuggery

IT HAS not been a pleasant time at UCT. One has felt both anger and sadness at the sight of a great old institution being wracked by violence, intimidation and mindless thuggery. The mood of the mobs that rampaged across the campus, disrupting lectures, erecting barricades and damaging cars and other property was frightening to behold.

Why, one asks oneself, did it have to happen? Was it chickens from the Conor Cruise O'Brien episode of 1986 coming home to roost? Was it the TGWU trying to demonstrate its toughness, thereby keeping out a rival union that is said to be gaining ground in other educational institutions in the Western Cape? Why, in fact, after about six years of relatively smooth wage-bargaining with the workers did this round go so horribly sour?

As is usual of these occasions UCT is getting a thoroughly bad press. Cape Town's English-language newspapers have been full of irate letters from students, former students and ordinary citizens accusing the University authorities of spinelessness.

The Argus of 1 October, for example, contains a letter from 'Cleansing Broom', expressing shame at his old University and announcing that he has cut UCT out of his will. Another letter from 'Livid' thanks the University for the excellent education he received but says that he declines to respond to its appeal for donations.

According to Mr Harold Harvey of the TGWU UCT treats its workers 'like animals and children'. Even a casual visitor to the campus would recognise this statement as absurd. The Vice Chancellor, Dr Stuart Saunders, has claimed that the University's offer compares very favourably with wagescales in other universities, many of which pay less than half of what UCT has been offering. Even the Union was forced to acknowledge that this was true.

UCT's workers are in fact, very well-treated indeed. The only category of

employee in the University which is genuinely exploited are temporary lecturing staff, especially if they are female.

UCT's workers, on the other hand, are truly part of the 'labour aristocracy', an old Marxist term used to describe an especially advantaged category of workers. UCT's situation, at least in this respect is a microcosm of a far wider, national situation: in the short-run the labour aristocracy appears to get its way; regular wage increases are granted with no consideration for incidental matters such as increased productivity. Wage-rounds ripple through the entire economy with profound inflationary effects.

But it is not simply the inflationary effects, it is also the effect on employment that is at issue. The better paid the labour aristocracy the fewer workers will be employed — and the more firms will be inclined to mechanise because machines don't go on strike. With a national unemployment figure of perhaps 35 per cent this is tragic. Efforts to impose a national minimum wage (as some in the ANC would like to do) could actually bankrupt the country.

Efforts have been made to portray the UCT strike as merely an industrial relations dispute. That is undoubtedly so, but there are complications in the UCT situation.

Unlike industrial or commercial firms, the campus contains another highly volatile component in the form of the students. The radical students, a small but highly active and vociferous minority, will almost naturally side with the workers.

On this occasion, however, the overwhelming majority of students opposed the disruptions: probably no more than 50 to 60 participated in the forcible break-up of lectures or the erection of barricades. The newly-elected SRC, with its first black president, was paralysed by ambivalence, although it unequivocally



condemned the intimidation of students wishing to attend lectures, the disruption of lectures and the barricading of entrances to the University.

Part of the reason for the ambivalence (and not just the SRC's) was that no-one seemed to know exactly from which political faction the activist students or the workers came. The students, indeed, seemed to be a particularly leaderless and amorphous grouping.

The test that UCT now faces is whether it will take firm disciplinary steps against the disrupters. In 1986, at the time of the Conor Cruise O'Brien affair, the student disrupters were given only nominal punishment. Perhaps many believe that similar behaviour will ultimately receive similar treatment. But I am not so sure.

The anger among the lecturing staff who had to contend with gangs of invading thugs is considerable. Some were shocked and frightened by the experience, like a young woman colleague who bravely persevered with her lecture despite threats to 'get her'. (Later in the day she found that her car tyres had been slashed).

A widespread view among the staff is that they were directed to go ahead with classes, with no effective physical protection. 'I felt like a Kamikazi pilot,' said one.

There cannot be a serious problem

with the identification of disrupters. Press photographs clearly identify many; lecturers and other university officials can identify a number of others. If, after the process of law, disruption is proved against individuals they should be expelled. Nominal punishment in the name of 'reconciliation' not only will not be reconciliation, it will also compound the problems UCT will have to face in the future.

Should the University have taken a far tougher line right from the start? In some respects, yes. But this is easy to say in the white heat of anger at the disruption or with the wisdom of hindsight. It is no easy task running a volatile, multiracial institution with a population of 14000, nearly one-third of whom are other than white.

The authorities declined to call in the police because to do so would have alienated a large segment of student opinion which, while not necessarily unsympathetic to the strike, certainly opposed the disruptions. Moreover, the sight of police removing barricades or arresting disrupters would have inevitably polarised racial attitudes on the campus. One regrets to have to say this, but it is true.

The strategy appears to have been one of avoiding any actions that would have increased student support for the strikers, thereby allowing the foolish

actions of the strikers and their (tiny) student following to increase their own isolation.

If you live in a university for a long time, as I have done, you come to recognise just how fragile an institution it is, and how necessary peace and tolerance are to the scholarly life.

For many the events at UCT have been a gloomy foreboding of 'the new South Africa'. Is their gloom warranted?

Personally I doubt it. As I have suggested, university communities are not necessarily typical microcosms of the wider society: they have a more volatile mix of inhabitants than virtually any other institution.

Secondly, the TGWU behaved with an intractability and truculence that is hopefully becoming rarer among unions.

More importantly, the strike and the accompanying disruption showed, however dimly, that there exists a large middle-ground of students of all races who deplored the disturbances and wanted to get on with their work.

A number of black students were intimidated into boycotting lectures, but rather more were not.

Obviously you can't read too much into this but it did something to strengthen my view that the overwhelming majority of South Africans devoutly want peace. ●

Any colour, as long as it's white

- JO STIELAU

THE TIDE which toppled the Berlin Wall, the Soviet Communist Party and the gates of Victor Verster Prison dribbled ignominiously into our staff room last term in the shape of Model B.

Originally, Model B was touted as "letting blacks in" but the secret at the parental polls was that a 'Yes' vote was the only way of keeping Them out. The reasoning behind this was that when They "took over", our schools would be safely "open" to all races and "closed" in terms of our admission policy. To tarry in admitting blacks would be to have Them force it upon us. Our schools would be nationalised along with our homes and cars if we weren't covered by flexi-plan B. So Model B's admission policy was debated between scones ("thanks to the Home Economics ladies") upon the wicker chairs which snag our tights. The lunatic left, easily identified by ethnic bracelets, herb teas and home-

spun knitting in progress, led the floor with the usual niceties: Pupil Potential, Affirmative Action and Avoiding Discrimination. The Principal thanked them for their observations. The raving right were more interesting, if no less predictable, with a call for hair tests (not the pencil this time) for lice, blood tests for AIDS, financial checks and an affidavit to the effect that the pupil would not cause political unrest, boycott classes, denounce the prefect system, insist on using difficult-to-pronounce names or smell offensive in class. The Principal thanked them for their observations. The Principal herself observed that Standards and Traditions should be upheld at all costs — including the cost of blazers, ties, seasonal sports equipment and decent swimming attire. Discussion was opened to the floor and among the fears voiced were the problems of black taxis misbehaving in the school parking

lot, militant Muslims demanding separate toilets under our Christian roof and black boys loitering after black girls at the front gate. Somebody suggested that these boys might loiter after, God forbid, white girls — there followed an appalled silence . . . You can have Model B, like Ford's Model T, in any colour as long as you're white. However, the doors of learning are also open if you are pretty rich, speak good English, play reasonable hockey and tennis, have own transport, are free from AIDS and lice, are prepared under oath to retain your Hymen Intacta.

And . . . oh, by the way, WELCOME to our school!

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