

# NUSAS PRESIDENT- OPENING ADDRESS

On the morning of the 3rd of February, 1960, the then British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, addressed a joint sitting of the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town. To the dismay of most of the representatives assembled there, he talked of the "winds of change" sweeping through the African continent.

His speech came at the end of a decade of mass resistance in South Africa.

Eight years earlier, thousands of people had been mobilised nationwide through the Defiance Campaign. Many of them went to jail.

In 1954, a year long boycott of the newly created "Bantu education" institutions had seen the establishment of Congress schools and cultural clubs, until they were outlawed.

A year later, over 3 000 representatives came from all over South Africa to Kliptown to draw up and sign the Freedom Charter. This document remains to this day the only non-racial and democratic constitution this country has ever known.

Harold MacMillan was also referring to the rest of Africa as the first rumblings of anti-colonial resistance began. Yet in South Africa, within two months of his speech, 69 people had died at Sharpeville. A State of Emergency was declared, over 3 000 people detained and political movements, such as the African National Congress, were banned.

The vision of a new South Africa dimmed as the Terrorism Act of 1963 began its own reign of terror. George Bizos has detailed the costs - it is not necessary to repeat them. The winds of change had stopped blowing. Or so it seemed.....

On June 16, 1976, the fightback began. Fueled by the massive Durban strikes of 1973, and the independence of Mozambique and Angola two years later, thousands of students said no to an education, which in the words of Khoto Seatholo, then President of the Soweto Students Representative Council, "trained them to be hewers of wood and drawers of water."

This year we are witnessing similar resistance. By May, 1980, over 100 000 pupils and students were boycotting "gutter education." Tens of thousands of South Africans joined the campaign to release Mandela and other political prisoners. Workers fought for the right to democratic representation of their own choice. In many cases, they won. Community organisations challenged high rents, transport costs and lack of housing through boycotts and grassroots mobilisation.

What do the events of this year teach us? We are witnessing conflict between two opposing forces. One, a minority, is in power, and determined to hold on to that position. The other, through popular resistance, is fighting for democratic representation. This year in particular has shown the power of the majority, that the future lies in their hands.

But increased signs of popular resistance does not mean that change is around the corner. The state is able to adapt, to respond to challenges to its position. It has many forces at its disposal. It has access to many different methods of control. It is still extremely powerful.

It was with these changes in mind that NUSAS adopted the theme "Exposing Total Strategy" at Congress last year. Since then, a number of different aspects of Total Strategy have been examined. These included post-Wienahn and Riekert

labour strategy by both the government and big business; the proposed "Constellation of States"; the promises to do away with "hurtful forms of discrimination"; the various urban betterment schemes for black townships.

Two other areas which form significant components of Total Strategy are the various political and educational initiatives that have been announced this year. I would like to focus on them in a little more depth.

The majority of South Africans have laughed off the President's Council as a "ship of fools", or, as the UCT student newspaper put it, a "showcase for stooges."

But what of the implications? What will the reaction be when the President's Council is used to launder through changes such as a single parliament for so called coloureds, Indians and whites. Will this be greeted with caution but hailed "as a step in the right direction?" When other reforms, perhaps "recommended" by the President's Council and then "adopted" by the Cabinet are announced, will the attitude be to "give them a chance?"

In the field of education, which concerns us directly, how do we react to the institution of compulsory schooling, and the possibility that in two or three years time all universities will be desegregated?

There is a choice facing us today and we must make up our minds now. Do we accept that the new reforms, pronouncements and promises offer a platform for the building of a new South Africa, or are we witnessing one group, challenged by a vociferous majority, making changes in order to consolidate their position of power?

I believe our answer to Total Strategy must be an emphatic NO. This is based on three reasons:

Firstly, much attention has been paid to Koornhoff statements such as "I have declared war on the dompas." Was the same attention paid to the banning of Johnny Issel in Cape Town last week? To the fact that leaders such as Oscar Mpethu and Achmat Cassiem are still in detention, along with many others? To the fact that for some months this year, no political meetings could be held? Do we follow the vast number of trials being held at the moment? Do we remember the death of Bernard Fortuin of Elsie's River and many other school pupils this year?

Both the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde faces of Total Strategy must be seen. With promises of reform have come increased control and repression - integral parts of both old and new government policy.

Secondly, Total Strategy has to be rejected because it is undemocratic. Even in terms of parliamentary politics, we see a move away from legislation by parliament to rule by decree, ministerial proclamations and select committees. Taking this one step further, total strategy seeks out puppet leaders, puts them in the President's Council or in Community Councils, and then talks to them. At the same time, calls for true leaders such as Mandela and Sisulu to be released are rejected out of hand.

Finally, Total Strategy cannot be accepted because it does not meet even one of the minimum demands of the majority of South Africans.

This is not, as many people maintain, because Total Strategy "does not go far enough." On the contrary, Total Strategy was never designed in relation to people's needs. One simply looks at the conflicts of 1980 to see illustrations of this. One of the clauses of the Freedom Charter says that there shall be housing and security for all.

This year, through 99-year leasehold plans and Urban Foundation housing schemes, this demand has ostensibly been covered. Yet housing has and still is one of the key areas of resistance this year, with many communities refusing to pay increased rents. The issue here however is not so much the actual increases, but the fact that most South Africans are not regarded as citizens of this country. The state has thus never felt obliged to provide housing for all people. Until it is resolved that South Africa is a unitary state with 26 million citizens, no amount of Total Strategy tinkering will solve the escalating conflict.

Nineteen-eighty has seen bus boycotts in Cape Town, Pietersburg and Natal over increased bus fares. The issue again is not so much the actual increases, but the fact that millions of South Africans have been moved away from their original homes and workplaces into urban ghettos or rural resettlement camps. Thus transport, like everything else, is ultimately a political issue. Transport problems can never be solved by Total Strategy reforms, so long as the majority is excluded from direct political representation.

One could illustrate these points with other examples. That is not necessary. What is necessary is that we begin to make a choice. One of the roles of students lies in the realm of ideas. It is important that we continue to play this role, to analyse, discuss and debate. However, a great African leader, Amilcar Cabral said:

"Always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children..."

It is for these reasons that we make a choice, that we decide on what side of the fence we fall. For too long students have tended to operate in a vacuum, taking direction only from their own textbooks and favourite author. As young people seeking to contribute to the transformation of our society, we must choose a path which falls in line with the struggles of the townships and ghettos, the resettlement camps and the migrants. It is from the majority of South Africans that our lead must come.

Nineteen-eighty has been an optimistic year. The winds of change that began blowing in the 1950's are now blowing stronger than ever before. However, much still needs to be done. While a few battles were won this year, South Africa is still far from being the place where "The People Shall Govern."

We as students are not in the frontline of political struggle. We have never claimed to be. However, the building of a democratic society does not only take place in areas of direct political action, of trade union struggles or mass mobilisation. Democracy is built at many different levels: education, ideology, values, social interaction and more. We are all directly involved in these areas - let our voices be heard and our actions felt.