

THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF RACE

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PRIOR to 1959 university education in South Africa was mainly, although not entirely, the privilege of the whites. The white fifth of the population, 3 million, enjoyed eight universities, some fairly small, but others reaching an enrolment of six or so thousand students. Half of these universities were Afrikaans medium, while half were English. There were barely enough students coming from the 12 million non-whites to fill one good-sized university college. Some hundreds went to the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and to the University of Cape Town, where they were welcomed in the classrooms but were permitted only a limited place in extra-mural activities. In the University of Natal some non-whites, mainly Indians, were received, but only in separate classrooms, and there was the small medical school—with less than 100 non-white students—as part of Natal University at Wentworth, near Durban. Finally, there was Fort Hare University College, totally non-white, with nearly 500 students, to which I was appointed as Professor of Law at the beginning of 1958. No non-whites were admitted to any of the four Afrikaans universities.

To the Nationalist Government, ever widening instead of closing the ambit of apartheid, it was thought dangerous that any of the 'white' universities, drawing their revenues mainly from public funds, should allow non-whites to mix with whites in the classrooms, the laboratories, and, possibly, some few other forms of university life. A new policy, therefore, was embodied in legislation. In the future no further non-whites were to be allowed admission to any white university, though dispensation might conceivably be granted in rare and special cases. Non-white higher education was to be spread over five university colleges, of which only Fort Hare was then in existence. All of these were to be ethnic, and were to serve a separate section of the non-white population. There were to be three tribal colleges, one in the Northern Transvaal for the Sotho, one in Zululand for the Zulu, and Fort Hare itself, in the Eastern Province, for the Xhosa. In addition, there was to be a

college for the Coloured in the Western Cape, and one for Indians in Durban.

Fort Hare had been in existence for fifty years. It received non-whites from all over the Union and beyond, including Indians from Natal, and Coloured students from the Cape. At the time ethnic education was introduced, it had reached an enrolment of nearly 500 students, and was growing at the rate of 100 a year. The other two tribal colleges were opened at the beginning of 1960, as was the Coloured college at the Cape. The Indian college in Durban was opened this year. It was not enough for the Government to introduce Bantu Education. It had also to introduce three sorts of Bantu Education, and then add Indian Education and Coloured Education as well.

It is now over two years since the necessary legislation was passed, and some 18 months since three of the new colleges began to operate. What so far are the results? Fort Hare itself is undergoing a process of dismemberment. It has already lost a number of its potential students, and in a year or two will have lost all its Coloured and Indian ones, as well as all African students who do not happen to be Xhosa. Its numbers have already shrunk from 500 to 390, and it is inevitable that they will, in a year or two, fall to 200 or even lower. The other two tribal colleges are, of course, in their infancy; one has 86 students, the other 48. I entertain the gravest doubts as to whether, within the foreseeable future, the numbers at either of them will grow to even the 200 level. The Government may spend money, as it has been doing, with extravagance. It may make adequate, even generous, provision for new buildings. It may provide attractive conditions for the staff. It may even search the side-paths for new African students. But it will be many years—if ever—before any of these new colleges reach anything like the figure of enrolment which could be expected from a healthy and growing university. You cannot build up an institution for higher learning except on the basis of properly matriculated students, and under Nationalist rule, the present potential is barely enough for one university college, let alone five. And what possible justification can there be for splitting the non-white university population among five institutions? Why did not the Government foster Fort Hare instead, leading it to full university status, instead of dismembering it altogether? Now a young Zulu, who three years ago would have been received and encouraged at Cape Town, Johannesburg or Fort Hare is

being forced to conduct studies in a college of 48 students in a remote part of Northern Natal.

The Government, naturally, is committed to doing all in its power to make the new colleges succeed. Money has accordingly been spent, in an unusually lavish way, on buildings and staff. In capital and current expenditure, each non-white university student is costing the taxpayer five, in some instances even ten times as much as the ordinary white student. Yet little or nothing has been done to invite public competition for posts in the new colleges, and these have all been filled departmentally. The result has been that virtually all of the new appointments have been made from only one section of the community; if they do not all bear Afrikaans names, they are all Afrikaans-speaking. Of the five Principals, four are Afrikaans, while the fifth—who bears an English name and is, presumably, English-speaking—was the main exponent of the Government's policy of academic apartheid two years ago, when the Select Parliamentary Committee sat to take evidence on the University College of Fort Hare Bill.

Fort Hare was an English-speaking institution; it had been so from the beginning. All the students, and most of the staff, were English-speaking. Eight of the staff were dismissed when the Government took over, and eight others, mostly African professors and lecturers, have resigned. Their places have been filled, to a man, by Afrikaners. Fort Hare is not only being dismembered; it is in the process of being turned, so far as the language of its students will permit, into an Afrikaans institution. This has, of course, occasioned the most profound resentment and bitterness among Africans and Indians especially. Professor Z. K. Matthews, one-time Acting Principal of Fort Hare and the doyen of African university professors, was urged by the Government to remain. He was within two years of retiring age, and would have qualified for a reasonably generous pension. But he felt that he could not serve the new régime, and the course of events over the last 18 months has shown how wise and inevitable his decision was. For some years now the Government has maintained a force of special police in the tiny village of Alice, next door to Fort Hare, solely in order to watch the activities of the students. As a result of the reports from these police, a number of final year students, including the whole of the Students' Representative Council, were refused re-admission to Fort Hare at the beginning of the academic year.

The students have been simmering with unrest; but the activities of the police, combined with the threat of expulsion, have so far been sufficient to maintain a façade of peace. How the new college for Indians in Durban will fare remains to be seen. Leaders of Indian opinion have called for a boycott of the institution, and the new Principal, Professor Olivier of the University of Cape Town, will doubtless have a very difficult task ahead of him. The most peaceful of the five colleges would seem likely to be that of the Western Cape, but its intake of students will be limited by the small numbers of Coloured students equipped to pass the university entrance examination, and growing political opposition to Government policies among the Coloured has already made an issue of the special Coloured college.

The well-established universities of South Africa draw their revenues almost entirely from the taxpayer; their endowments, judged by English or American standards, are negligible. Why, then, has the South African Government taken upon itself to deny to students, solely because of their colour, the right to the best education which their abilities merit, more particularly when one half of our universities are not only eager to receive them, but bitterly resent their exclusion?

Whether ethnic education will provide the non-white peoples of South Africa with the higher training they so passionately want is profoundly to be doubted. That it will swell the torrent of racial rancour in South Africa seems certain.

