

"AN OPEN LETTER TO STUDENTS"

Dear Student,

The past few months have been marked by the largest vendetta against students and student organisations for many years. A Select Committee is investigating NUSAS and UCM; the University of the North has been closed down; student councils at the University of Durban-Westville and the University of the Western Cape are coming under increasing fire from their own authorities. A student editor at Wits has been deported by the Government. At U.P.E. an editor has been silenced by the University authorities. Students and student organisers have been banned and a dozen students have lost their passports: Ministers threaten hysterically at legitimate attempts to hold non-racial intervarsities and other similar sports functions.

But what has been the response from our own campuses? SRC's at Wits, Maritzburg and Rhodes have either resigned or been forced to resign en bloc, or been effectively crippled through mass resignations. Students bicker continuously and have become mesmerized by infighting and power struggles. We do not want to enter into a debate about the merits and demerits of the arguments involved - in our own way here at NUSAS Head Office we are just as much to blame. A few things however must be made clear

Is it through blindness, naivete or just plain 'couldn't care less' attitude that we cannot see that the National party is seriously preparing to silence all students and student organisations - once and for all?

However important it might seem to us, we are achieving absolutely nothing through our present internal quarrelling, and until we decide to stand together and defend those things that are ours by right - our organisations, our legitimate activities, our newspapers, etc. - we will be selling out on noone but ourselves. No student on our campuses disputes his fellows' right to speak and act on a local or national level, and it is this fundamental right that is now in danger... a right common to all students, black, white, English, Afrikaans, conservative and radical.

We would like to repeat the call made earlier this year on all NUSAS campuses:-

For once, when those few rights we are left with are threatened with extermination let us transcend our minor differences and stand together. If we are not interested in defending our rights, then we don't deserve to have them.

'Fine words', you might say - 'but what does that mean in practice?'

Nusas is organising a "Free Education" campaign to take place from the 22nd to 30th May. This campaign is aimed at breaking students from their self-imposed campus isolation and taking the issues of the past few weeks to the public. Our aim is to create a public awareness of exactly what is going on in our country - with special reference to education and educational institutions. We will need every bit of support when the time comes to make a final stand. That time is not far off.

We appeal to you to lend your active support to this campaign. If you believe in what you say, don't tell us - tell it to John Citizen in the street".

having lent their support to the student cause, and if all goes according to plan, the Nationalist Party should emerge as the only reliable custodian of South Africa's future.

The latest conspiracy theory seems to be transparently obvious. Vorster has already indicated that he will take action against foreign students within the next two weeks. He realises that he cannot stop there and will probably seek to link the so-called international plot to organisations within the country. NUSAS therefore appears to be a likely target. What he will do is list the overseas trips of various NUSAS executive members, quote from various letters and diaries and attempt to link these to a master plan to import foreign students to further the communist cause. He will try to prove that student leaders are inculcated with foreign ideologies whilst overseas and that they return to South Africa with the sole intention of putting these ideals into practise.

Can Mr. Vorster really hope to achieve this in the light of the dismal failures of his previous conspiracy theories?

The results of so many recent political trials especially those of the Dean and Jacobsen, have been of little use to him. The public is becoming increasingly wary of arbitrary bannings and detentions, and a great deal of antagonism has been aroused by the legalisation of telephone tapping and the interception of mail. The public is also suspicious about the intentions of the select committee. But, in spite of the present indications Vorster might decide to keep the existing student organisations intact, so that the whole process can be repeated at another opportune moment. In other words, scape goats are necessary to divert public attention from the genuine problems which are becoming more and more serious.

But no amount of "conspiracies" are going to change the real problems. The problem started on the black campuses and from there it will spread. The problem is apartheid and its institutions which have been imposed upon people who never wanted it and will never accept it. The problem cannot be foreign agitators because there are no foreign students at the black universities. Vorster's self created problem is a myth. His apartheid policies are also myths. If the myth of apartheid is to be maintained, it can only be maintained by force and violence, and the whites are only now beginning to see the more blatant signs of an inherently violent system which the blacks have long since grown accustomed to.

SPECIAL BRANCH

By Paul Pretorius 29/6/72

"If the confession by Eckardt last week is true, it has special significance for us.

It is further confirmation that the Special Branch operates in terms of preconceived conspiracy theories regarding communism and anarchism. These theories are imported directly from overseas by the Special Branch policy makers.

We have stated on countless occasions that they are wasting their time; that NUSAS is not illegal and has nothing to hide. Yet when one of their own senior informers, a warrant officer at that, tells them this, they ignore him.

In the good tradition of Alice in Wonderland they have found us guilty before even investigating the matter.

The Eckardt case and others over the past month have shown clearly that all too often it is the police, both uniformed and plain-clothed, that are the agitators, and that it is they that have been fed with conspiracy theories and the like.

The most damaging effect of informers on campus is to break down the level of trust between students and to divide them against one another. I appeal to students to avoid the temptation of paranoia and to ignore as far as is practically possible the fact that our activities are subject to surveillance.

Above all we must not allow ourselves to be provoked into careless action by professional police agitators"

SELECT COMMITTEE

By Paul Pretorius 15th February, 1972 after a National Council Meeting, and as part of his Fresher Reception Speech delivered at Wits

"When the proposal of a select committee was first made, we rejected it. Now that it has become a fact we reject it again.

"We will have no truck with that committee. We will not give evidence unless forced to do so by law"

"The existence of NUSAS was at stake, when this is the case, we cannot compromise and compromise we will not"

"Prominent spokesmen in both parties have already made quite clear their opposition to NUSAS and the principles for which it stands.

"It was Mr. Vorster himself who once said NUSAS was a cancer that had to be eradicated. There is no evidence to show he has in any way changed his mind".

By Renfrew Christie 6/2/72

"If Mr. Vorster really wants to find the cause of the tense situation in our country, let him look far more carefully at some of the facts of life in South Africa.

Let him look at:

- migrant labour system
- the fact that sixty per cent of the Africans in Durban townships are estimated to live below the breadline
- the 643,897 people arrested for pass law offences in 1969/70
- the 111,580 white, coloured and Indian families whose homes have been disqualified by group areas proclamations
- the countless thousands of African homes disrupted by removals
- the 108 cases of alleged assault by members of

the South African Police which are pending
in the courts
the death of Ahmed Timol
the Ovambo crisis
the 1108 people whose lives were disrupted under
the Immorality Act in the year ended June 1971.

It is not NUSAS, or the other bodies, who are in need of investigation. It is time South Africa started looking at the real issues.

NUSAS has been the conscience of its country since before most of its present leaders were born. Mr. Vorster knows everything NUSAS does, through his security police and other henchmen. If we had broken the law, van loads of policemen and dogs would have made sure that we were arrested and charged.

But Mr. Vorster knows he cannot get us that way, so he must try other means. The whole thing looks like an elaborate smoke-screen to blind the public from the real issues. However, if he wishes to investigate us, he may.

The public should, however, take heed of Sir De Villiers Graaff's timely warning in Parliament yesterday:

"The only way to combat communism ultimately is to remove the conditions which communism can exploit in this country".

By Paul Pretorius 5/2/72

"We have repeatedly stated in the past that we are an open organization with nothing to hide.

We feel in the circumstances that the appropriate action, if any action were in fact needed, would be to appoint a judicial commission of enquiry open to all, in clear preference to a select parliamentary committee.

We are concerned, however, that the activities of NUSAS take priority over such serious issues such as the deaths and allegations of torture in detention and the Ovamboland crisis which have been continually played down by the Nationalist Party during the no-confidence debate."

By Neville Curtis 28th October, 1971

"Sixteen people have died in detention in recent years. There have been 47 sworn statements of torture or assault by prisoners while in detention. Last week 105 people are known to have been raided and 10 detained.

Already one of these detainees has died and another is hospitalised - severely ill.

The Security Police and the responsible Ministers including the Prime Minister have refused to establish a commission of inquiry into these events.

NUSAS again calls on the Prime Minister to establish a full and open judicial inquiry as a matter of extreme urgency. If he does not, he must clearly bear blame for these deaths - and until it can be established otherwise, he must carry the stigma of being implicated".

BANNINGS AND ACTION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS

By Paul Pretorius 27th September, 1971

"For the second time in a week the government has found fit to ban political opposition to party policy.

"The restriction and house-arrest of Sabelo Ntwasa, a theology student who has in the past been closely associated with the University Christian Movement will further increase the hatred of the black man for the government's gestapo methods and the policies of domination that inevitably give rise to these.

NUSAS leadership has known Sabelo for many years and we express our fullest support for him and his actions in the past in working for the freedom of his people.

It is tragic to note however that as far as the whites are concerned there was hardly a ripple of opposition except in student circles - a sure indication that the majority of whites have accepted without reservations, white domination and its consequences. The sole reason for the present white discontent with the nationalist government is economic and social discomfort. The oppression of the black man seems an irrelevant factor.

It is an indication of the sick condition of our society that the threat of little doggies being cut up for furs and meat causes a national outcry among whites while the inexcusable and savage repression of a man's liberty hardly causes a stir.

Of course the action must also be seen in the light of the government's attempts to investigate, UCM, NUSAS and the two others. These actions make the investigation look more and more farcical as time goes on and one wonders now what its real purpose is".

RHODES COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

By Neville Curtis and Barry Sireek

~~"The brief examination which we have~~ given the report reveals factual inaccuracies in 27 places - all of these substantial, and many of these providing the basis for some of the wilder allegations of the commission.

The report as a whole seriously contradicts itself at several - often crucial - points, and displays no understanding of students and the students' situation. One gets the feeling that the first time the members of the commission really met students was when they were formally hearing evidence.

Nevertheless the Commission acknowledges serious failings in the role of the university authorities over a number of years - but instead of honestly examining these it proposes an absurd conspiracy theory which damns students and attempts to whitewash the authorities. The conspiracy theory lays the blame at the door of NUSAS and is totally unsubstantiated but nevertheless gives cause for serious alarm as in many cases it assumes or states an almost pathological suspicion of and dislike for students.

The recommendations of the commission confirm the existence of many of the student grievances - but seek to solve these by disguising them and pretending that they do not exist rather than by trying to solve them.

- To be specific:
- 1) The commission is unaware that individual students are not members of NUSAS and have not been for six years after constitutional changes were made - ironically - at the request of Rhodes students.
 - 2) The commission thinks that SRC presidents are members of the Nusas executive, they are not.
 - 3) The commission has no understanding of how student government works - credits the wrong jobs to people; makes errors of time, place and procedure which are laughable - and totally fails to understand the restrictions, and responsibilities of students holding elected office.
 - 4) The commission quotes documents out of context, specifically a paper by the NUSAS president, and a Nused

Justice Mollotho is a fellow student who has been prevented by Government decree from continuing his student Christian work in South Africa.

It is significant that both bannings last week took place during the University vacation. I call upon all affiliated NUSAS centres to protest against the inhuman, blindly authoritarian swipe of the minority government against this black student.

I would like to warn the Minister concerned that he is pushing students too far. He must not express surprise when students begin to react openly against the injustices he perpetrates on behalf of the South African white population.

The bannings of Fr. Cosmos Desmond, Mewa Ramgobin and Justice Mollotho, as well as the continued activity of the police force in intimidating peaceful opposition to apartheid have necessitated a re-examination by NUSAS of protest activities. We have already begun formulating new, more effective methods of protest and this protest programme will continue throughout 1972"

By Paul Pretorius 21/9/71

"The banning of Mewa Ramgobin is another oppressive step in a fresh wave of government attempts to silence all extra-parliamentary opposition. The harsh intimidation of people striving for justice and equality will never be forgotten and South Africa must eventually suffer the consequences of the actions of the Nationalist Government.

It should be noted that Mewa Ramgobin followed a rigid policy of non-violence in all his actions and aspirations. If this is the treatment meted out to those openly striving for peaceful change, what alternative does this leave for the oppressed people of South Africa. The policies and actions of this government are fast leading to a situation which will and can only be reversed by violent means."

By Paul Pretorius 23/7/71

"As a reward for his work in exposing the inhumanity of the government's homelands removal policy and the suffering of those people subject to its harsh implementation, Father Cosmos Desmond was banned and house arrested by the Nationalist Government. The banning order was served on Cosmos Desmond while the universities were on vacation. The churches and especially the Catholic Church (Fr. Desmond is a Catholic priest) have done little to voice any disapproval of the government's non-Christian and intimidatory action.

NUSAS has called upon the churches to voice their protest against this action and a massive, nationwide student campaign will take place.

The fact that the banning order is already nearly a month old, will not deter students from protesting loudly and clearly.

Over the week from the 2nd, to the 9th August, students will pamphleteer among the public in general and church-goers in particular. Mass meetings and public meetings will also be held at most of the NUSAS affiliated centres.

Other plans are being investigated!"

By Paul Pretorius 29/6/72

"Like Father Cosmos Desmond, banned last year, Dave de Beer was closely associated with NUSAS during his short period of freedom in South Africa. We are proud of that association and can only condemn in the strongest terms a government that resorts to such cruel and unjust methods to deal with its opponents. Dave's banning has only strengthened our resolve to continue to struggle towards peace and justice in South Africa. We call upon students to give full support to the church in their protests over the next few weeks".

report - and fails to acknowledge that all these documents are open knowledge and were freely supplied and available to Dr. Hyslop himself who was an honorary vice president of NUSAS at the time. (The honour was withdrawn by NUSAS congress in July after Dr. Hyslop's actions in April this year).

The only comment which we can make is this: Had we been University examiners marking examination papers, and had this report been submitted to us for marking, we would have failed it. The report contains factual errors, contradictions within itself, logical inconsistencies, and displays no understanding of the matter under discussion.

It is a sad reflection on Rhodes University that this commission report represents the best response that the authorities can make to the very real problems which exist, and it is no surprise at all that the authorities thought it best to keep it confidential and prevent students and the public from access to it. We thank the Sunday Times for the opportunity to comment on it.

Finally we must express real alarm that there is so little actual understanding of students, so much misrepresentation of their problems, and so much obvious hostility to them. If nothing else the report is a very good argument for student participation and representation on University councils and decision-making bodies. Such a farcical report, and the whole chain of events which led up to it would never have occurred if this had been the case. This is 1971 - but the commission brings back echoes of the 1930s - things have changed since the authors of the commission were at university themselves. If only they would realise this"

By Neville Curtis 7/10/71

"The Munnik Commission has made a number of erroneous and inaccurate allegations against NUSAS. As president of Nusas I reject this report. At no stage did the commission seek to hear from me - although I had offered to give evidence if this was required.

Now the commission refuses to release the full text of their findings which makes it impossible for us to reply to them or deal in full with the inaccuracies which have been perpetuated against NUSAS.

Until such a time as the commission responds in a more rational manner it can not be surprised that what it says is entirely rejected by the people whom it most concerns - students"

UPEN

By Paul Pretorius 19/8/71

"In the Port Elizabeth University student newspaper (UPEN) of the 3rd August, Prof. Marais issued a long statement explaining his action in preventing the SRC of his university from attending the inter-varsity conference organized by the SRC of the University of the Witwatersrand. The statement constituted a lengthy and often factually incorrect attack on NUSAS. This statement was answered by the President Neville Curtis in a statement to UPEN as well as in a letter to Prof. Marais, who pointed out to the professor many of these factual errors.

In the letter he stated:

'I must express my extreme disappointment that you have attacked NUSAS in the manner in which you have, when a great number of the points you raise could have been resolved by discussion, and I would like to repeat that either I or my successor, Paul Pretorius or any local office bearers of NUSAS will be pleased to discuss with you at any time matters relating to NUSAS'

Through the NUSAS Regional Director of the Eastern Cape, Professor Marais was contacted and told that I would be available to meet him at his convenience while I was in the Eastern Cape on an executive tour.

His reply, given by his secretary, was that 'he was not prepared to communicate with NUSAS'.

With all the present ecstatic talk about 'dialogue' going on at present, it is more than a little strange that Prof. Marais, presumably an enlightened man, is not even prepared to discuss the issues involved with a senior office bearer of the organization about which he holds such strong views. The fact that he has been told that his views are based on incorrect assumptions does not seem to make any difference.

Even more perturbing is his school master attitude towards his students. They were prevented from taking any part in contact with other SRC's and this for no other reason than that he dislikes NUSAS. I do not question his right to dislike NUSAS but I do question his right to dictate decisions to his students on the basis of incorrect assumptions. Surely they are capable of taking responsible decisions for themselves?

It is a sad reflection on the attitude of a leading educational authority when he is not prepared to enter into 'dialogue' with members of the South African student community whose views differ from his own".