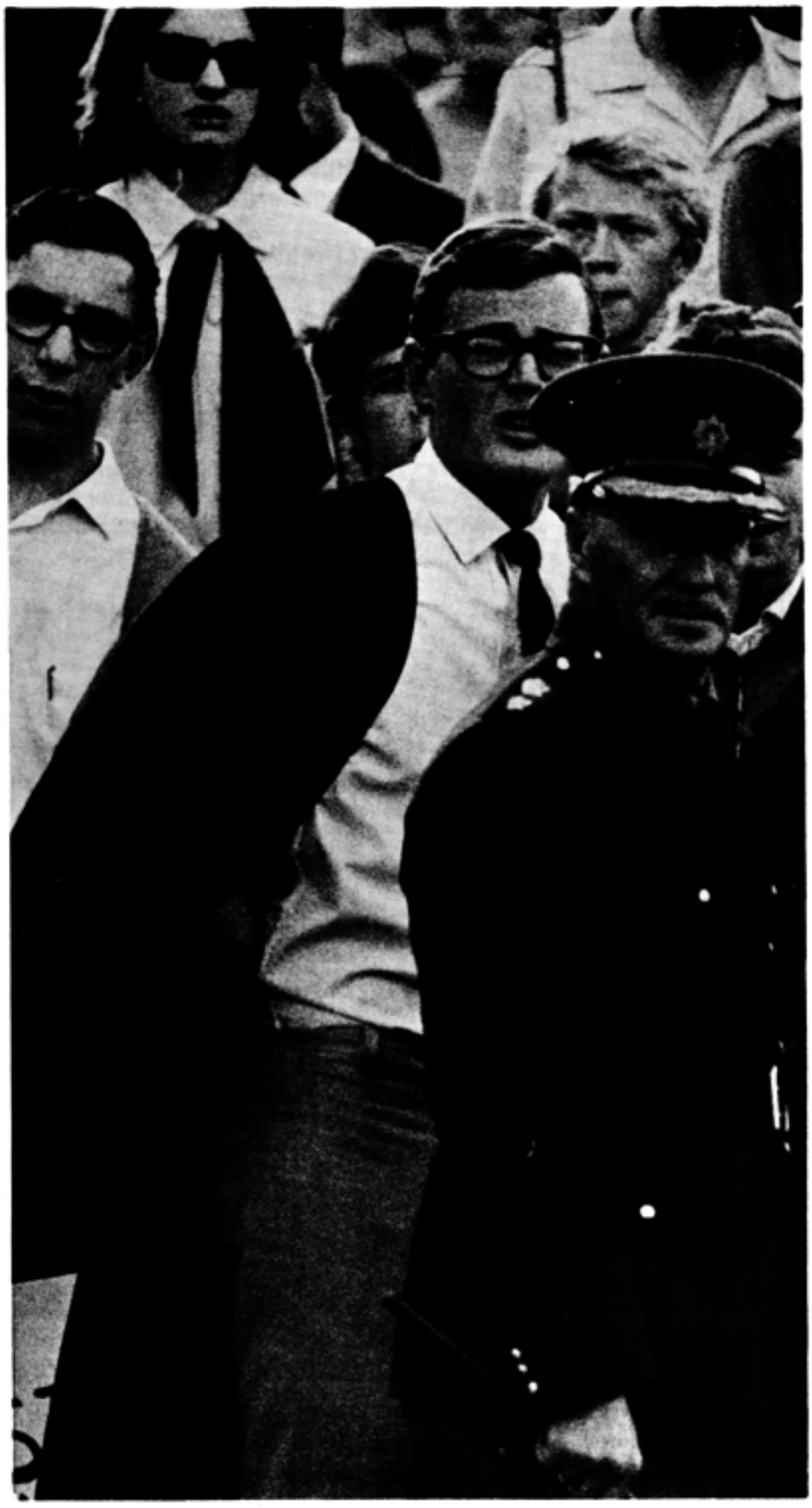
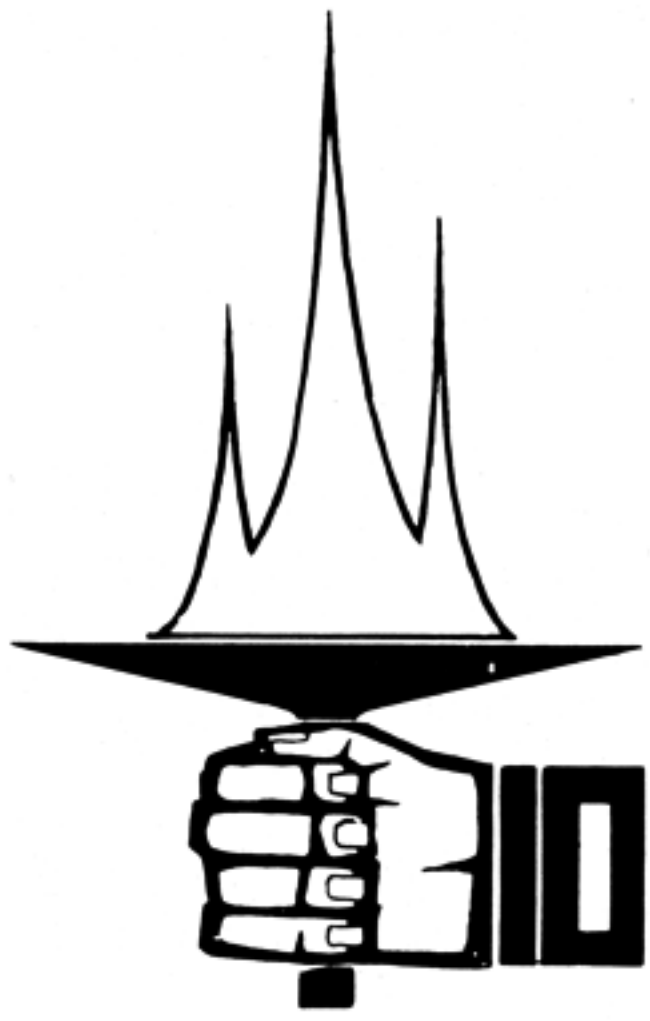
1969

THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE STATE 1959 – 1969





—FOREWORD—

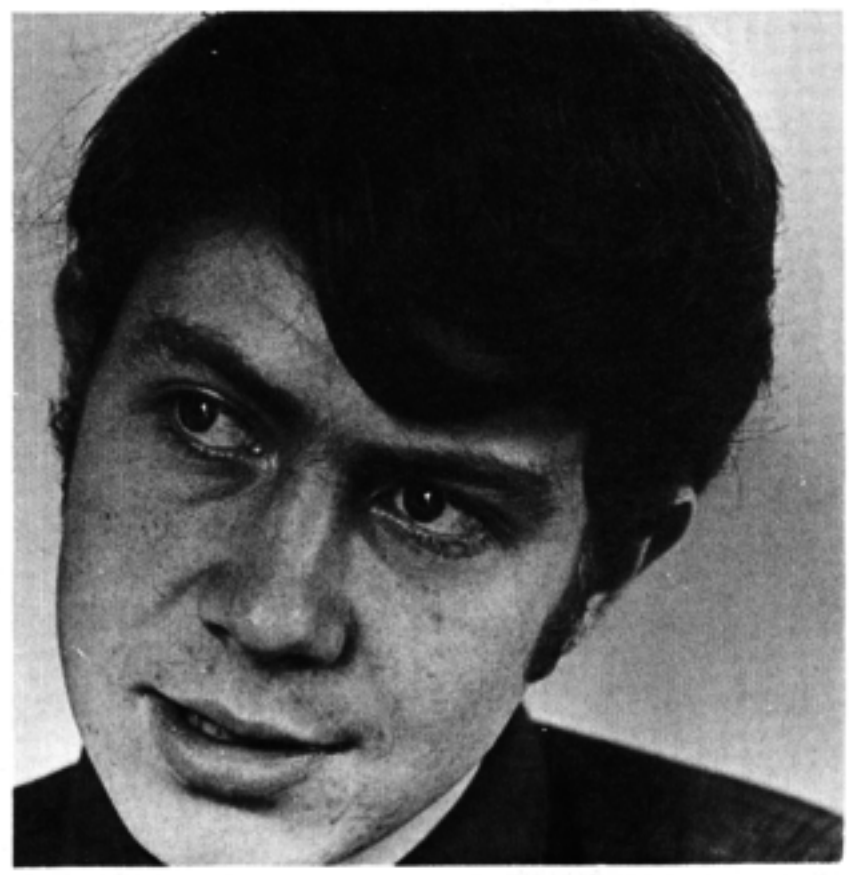
From Dr. G.R. Bozzoli

Vice Chancellor and Principal

Ten years ago at a very large gathering representing the Council Senate, Students and Convocation of our University we protested against the legislation introduced by our Government in terms of which we were deprived of the right to admit non-white students to our University Community. Our pledge on that day was to strive for the restoration of the rights we had lost and is inscribed in bronze at the entrance to the Great Hall of our University.

We believed then that academic non-segregation provided the conditions under which our University could serve South Africa best in the pursuit of truth and dissemination of knowledge to all South Africans and the training of intellectually gifted persons to perform the tasks that the community requires of them. And we believed that in expressing this belief we were patriotic and loyal South Africans aware of the needs of our country.

On this occasion, ten years afterwards, we affirm that since then we have never wavered from these beliefs and we again dedicate ourselves to the cause of the restoration of the open Universities in South Africa.



From Mr. Mark Orkin SRC President

In 1959 the Nationalist government imposed apartheid on Wits and U.C.T. despite determined and concerted opposition by South African academics, and in the face of a worldwide outcry. The universities lost the first encounter in a battle that continues today, to defend their fundamental freedoms – to determine for themselves who shall teach, who shall be taught and how, and who shall be admitted to study.

We have seen since then three professors arbitrarily banned, a lecturer not appointed because of the colour of his skin, students intimidated and their leaders – particularly NUSAS – deported, banned or refused passports. The vast contribution that our great university institutions have to offer to the development of ideas in South African society has been largely ignored. Our right to dissent, and to make our opinions generally known through lawful and orderly demonstrations has been deeply eroded. Tribal colleges have been founded, which are centres of indoctrination and parodies of universities, denied any of the liberties essential to a genuine search for truth.

Ten years' evidence of interference in free education is before us, as a decisive indictment of authoratarian government. Our conviction is strengthened by the sacrifices which fellow academics have made for the ideals we hold. Now is the time for commemoration of the past and reaffirmation for the future. The university, founded in learning and integrity, is the highest court of truth. Its findings are clear. It is our duty as students and citizens to convey to South Africa through every democratic channel available the import and implications of our beliefs.

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Edited by Richard Beynon.

The closed Universities

In 1959 the Extension of University Education Act was passed by parliament. It marked the end of the open Universities of Cape Town and Wits where, ever since their constitution the criteria for the admission of students had been academic merit alone. The Act introduced a new criterion - colour.

The passing of the Universities Act came eleven years after the Nationalist Government came to power in 1948. In election speeches in that year several candidates had expressed their desire to segregate the Universities of Cape Town and Wits. And in the same year a manifesto issued by the Institute for Christian National Education announced that

> "Native education should be based on the principles of trusteeship, non-equality and segregation; its aim should be to inculcate the white man's view of life, especially that of the Boer nation, which is the senior trustee".

In 1951 the then Prime Minister, Dr. Malan said that the

> "mingling of Europeans and non-Europeans at the two largest universities of South Africa would have to be eliminated as soon as possible. The mingling is directly opposed to the principle of *apartheid*".

The signposts all pointed in the same direction — towards the abolition of integration at Cape Town University and at the University of the Witwatersrand. But for eleven years the government hesitated. The Holloway Commission appointed in 1953 to investigate the possibilities of establishing non-white universities, did not view the idea favourably. But in 1957 the government at last indicated that it was ready to implement its apartheid policy in the universities. Consulting neither Cape Town University, nor Wits, it published the Separate University Education Bill. The Bill established academic segregation and subjected the proposed non-white universities to rigorous Ministerial control.

The two universities imperilled by the proposed legislation reacted strongly. Numerous placard demonstrations were held in Cape Town, and a 2,000 strong procession moved through the streets of Johannesburg. The Bill was withdrawn, and for a moment it appeared that the government was unwilling to occasion the wrath of the two top academic institutions of the country.

But Minister C.R. Swart, later State President, announced in Parliament, that far from having succumbed to university pressures, the State "should have authority over who is taught and what is taught". And in the following year two separate Bills were introduced; one to segregate the universities, and the other to transfer control of Fort Hare to the government. The proposed constitution of the University College omitted any mention of the 'Conscience Clause', which guarantees religious freedom to lecturers. The two bills flew in the face of established academic traditions.

But yet again the final passing of the Bill was forestalled. On the death of the Prime Minister, Strijdom, the Bill, a piece of contentious legislation, was withdrawn.

In February 1959 the Bill was again introduced into the House of Assembly. It was clear at this stage, that despite the protests of academics throughout South Africa, the government was intent on pushing the Bill through every stage of the legislative process. The National Union of South African Students received 220 protests from around the world against the apartheid Bill. National unions of students, representing 6,000,000 students from five continents, expressed their horror at the impending Act. In the United States a petition of 1,000,000 signatures was collected and sent to South Africa. But in a manner already characteristic of the Nationalist Government the Minister of Education, Mr. J.J. Serfonetein stated that "the government will not be diverted from its course by anyone in the world".

In June, in an enlarged Senate, the Bill was finally passed, and became law..

At Wits at a ceremony attended by the Senate, the Council, the SRC, the Students and Convocation, a solemn declaration was made affirming the stand that the University had taken, and dedicating the University to fight for academic freedom.

Ten years have passed since that dedication was framed. For ten years the government has been slowly destroying what vestiges of academic freedom remained after the passing of the Act. The then Minister of Justice, Mr. B.J. Vorster banned Professors H.J. Simons of Cape Town, Eddie Roux of Wits, and Bill Hoffenberg, also of Cape Town. The independence and freedom of students have also been challenged: Ian Robertson was banned, John Sprack deported, and Duncan Innes has had his passport withdrawn. In none of these cases — and they represent only a fraction of the total — were substantive reasons advanced for the government's actions.

For ten years the 'open' universities — or what remains of them — have been in a state of seige. And we are mistaken if we suppose that the government has satisfied itself that the twin universities of Cape Town and Wits are sufficiently purged. For, while there is a single student remaining whose interest and beliefs run counter to the official doctrine, the government, with the cold logic it has always employed, will feel itself constrained to silence that student. This is a far cry from the sentiments uttered by Lord James of Rusholme, who, when giving the Richard Feetham lecture two years ago in the Wits Great Hall said :

> "To question, to argue, to disagree in freedom are the truest signs of academic liberty, and of that intellectual integrity to be whose servants and champions must be the noblest aspiration of us all."

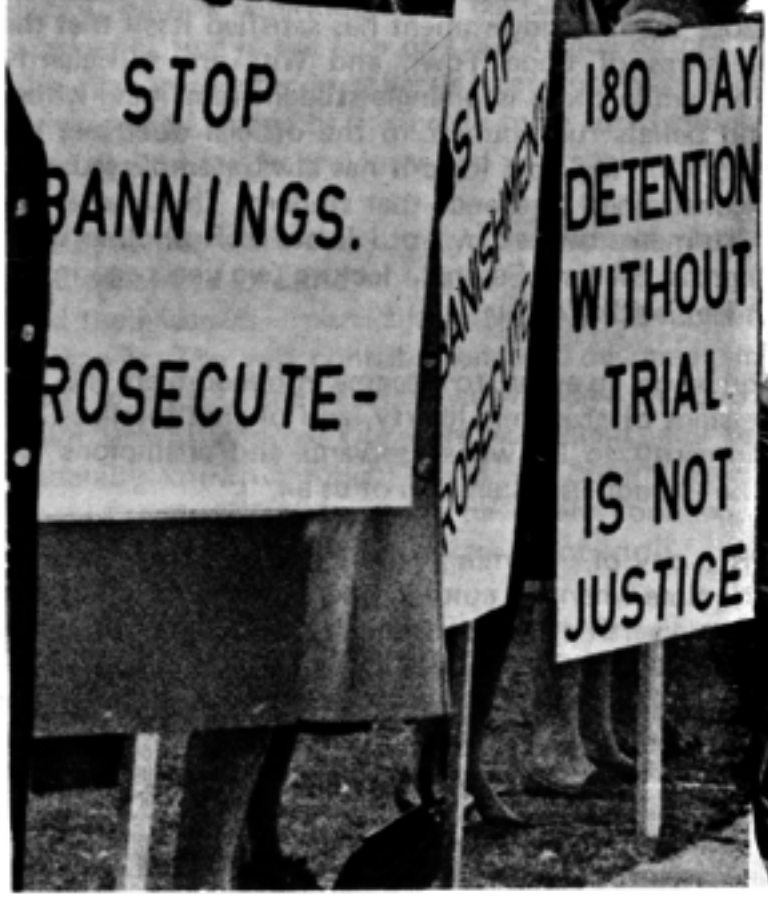
April 16 is a day of mourning. It is a day on which we shall recollect the time when the epithet 'open' attached to Wits and Cape Town universities, was not an empty slogan. But, more than a day of mourning, April 16 marks also a day of reaffirmation, and rededication to a cause which inspires "the noblest aspiration of .... all".

The Trib

There are five tribal colleges or 'University Colleges', as the Government prefers them to be known : Fort Hare, Bellville, Turfloop, Salisbury Island, Ngoye. With the exception of Fort Hare, which was affiliated to Rhodes University for degree and examination purposes, all these were set up under the Extension of University Education Act of 1959.

At present all the colleges are under the academic regulation of the University of South Africa; each of them is for one racial and ethnic group (Fort Hare - Xhosa's; Bellville - Coloured's; Turfloop - Shangaans; Ngoye - Zulu's, and Salisbury Island - Indians); the status of the staff too varies according to race: the white staff are employees of the University Council, while the non-European staff have the official status of civil servants.

All the colleges are substantial distances away from towns, except for Salisbury Island, which, as the name suggests, is nevertheless effectively separated from a town. Student life is regulated by the Rector, who has been backed in the past by Security Police and police dogs. In 1968 at Fort Hare, for example, students sat down in front of the main administration block to express their grievances: this resulted in 2/3 of the student body being suspended and only being re-admitted on condition that they indicated their willingness to obey the rules and regulations to the letter. Even then, not all the students were re-admitted. It would seem that the criteria for admittance to the tribal colleges are not strictly academic, for students have to sign the rules, indicating their willingness to obey them before they are admitted. Mixing with students of other universities is frowned upon, especially in the case of English-speaking students: the authorities have encouraged the students of Fort Hare and Turfloop to have contact with the Afrikaanse Studentebond.



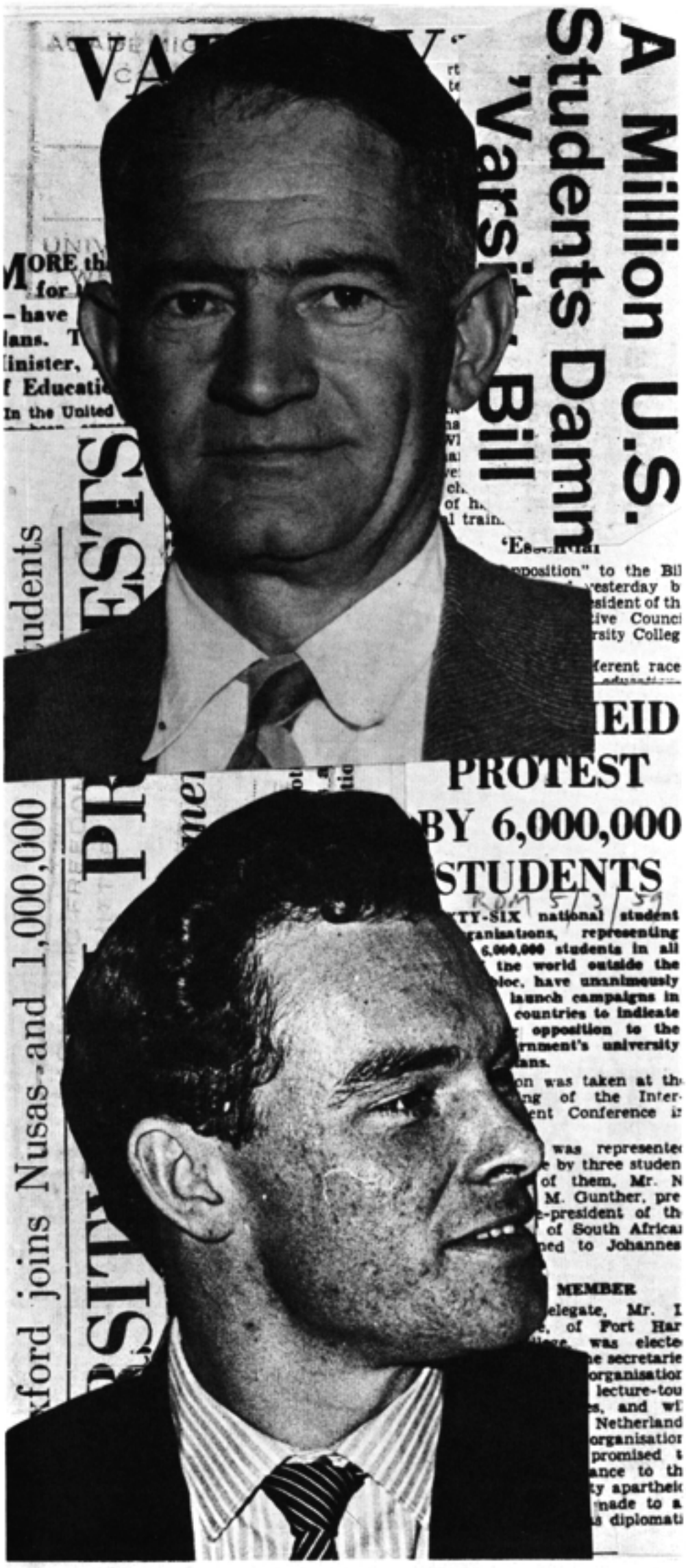
ibal Colleges

Staff members have been dismissed in the past for being known opponents of the government's policy of apartheid; in 1959, one of them, Sir Fulque Agnew declared that he regarded his dismissal as 'a certificate of decency'. At this stage, one might conveniently note Article 15 of the Christian National Education programme, which states, inter alia, that the aim of 'native education' ..... 'should be to inculcate the White man's view of life, especially that of the Boer nation, which is the senior trustee'.

The conclusion one is forced to reach about the tribal colleges is that while their facilities are often superior to those of the universities, the spirit of free enquiry which should characterise an establishment of higher learning is entirely absent.

In the light of this, it seems a desecration of the name of 'university' in South Africa that the tribal colleges are to be granted university status this year. The bills to grant this, however, makes it quite clear that university autonomy and thus academic freedom will be in the terms of the Minister of Bantu Education's thoughts on the matter, which do not accord with the concepts held by Western universities. One University Council for example will consist of nine people, eight appointed by the State President and the Rector, who is appointed by the Minister of Bantu Education. There is no provision for non-White professors to sit on the Senate.

There is no indication that the authoritarian heavy handed paternalism that is practised towards the students will change once the colleges are granted university status: in fact the whole object of granting university status to the tribal colleges seems to be to provide further ammunition for the Information Service and Current Affairs.



Professor Eddie Roux, of the University of the Witwatersrand, banned in 1964 from his post and from campus; and Ian Robertson, 1966/67 President of the National Union of South African students, banned in 1966.

Affirmation in 1969

Nine years after the national and international demonstrations which followed the closing of the open universities of Cape Town and Wits, and two years after the protests against the banning of Ian Robertson, South Africa once again witnessed demonstrations on a national scale. The issue revolved about the 'un-appointment' of Mr. Archie Mafeje. Engaged to lecture in the Department of Social Anthropology at Cape Town, his appointment was prevented by Sen. Jan de Klerk, Minister of Education, Arts and Science. The Minister's reason for the revocation had the tired ring of the platitude about it : Mafeje's appointment was contrary, the Minister said, to the traditional South African way of life.

Students at Cape Town University staged a sit-in — the first such demonstration in South Africa. Encouraged by the initial success of the Cape Town student's action, students at Wits came out in overwhelming support.

It is characteristic of student demonstrations both here and overseas that although the range of criticism and protest may be slight at the start, intervention in the demonstration by the authorities leads to a backlash of reaction, and a consequent broadening of the issues.

This was spotlighted last year when Prime Minister Vorster repressed the planned March of Wits students through the streets of Johannesburg. His action led to a week of picketing along Jan Smuts Avenue. Counter-protestors continually attacked students and the police, who were always present, made no attempt to protect the beseiged students.

Students thereupon asked : Is the right of peaceful protest in South Africa dead?

The nature of the protests had changed and broadened to include an examination of concepts other than academic freedom. Instead of pinpointing Mafeje and the encroachment of the state into the affairs of the University, the question posed now was of concern to all South Africa: May citizens protest against a government which still calls itself 'democratic'? And the answer was a depressing one. For not once had the police sought to protect the students against assault. And the Prime Minister himself warned students that if they did not cease their protest, he would instruct 'his boys', the police, to come onto the campus and forcibly to end the protest.

Meanwhile Fort Hare, the oldest university college for Africans was in ferment. In 1958 the control of the College had passed to the Department of Bantu Education. And rigid suppression of both intellectual and physical dissension has been the hallmark of the college.

Shortly after the protests at Wits had ended, fully three quarters of the students of Fort Hare protested the interrogation of 17 of their number by the administration.

It is difficult for a white student to appreciate the gravity of the Fort Hare stand. In a University College controlled by the government, no political activities are tolerated. All publications of the students are censored by the administration. Permission to hold meetings of the students has to be sought from the Rector. Academic freedom is hardly existent, and university autonomy is a luxury unheard of, since the university authorities are identified completely with the state.

In this context it seems impossible, to the white student of Cape Town or Wits, where sanctions imposed by the University authorities are negligible, that the students of Fort Hare ever

dared raise their voices against the authority of the Rector. Yet raise them they did. And in the confrontation that resulted between the students and Prof. de Wet, the Rector, there was never a sign that the students were willing to acceed to the Rector's demands.

Finally in answer to the students' silence, Prof. de Wet told all three hundred that they had been suspended from the College, and that they were thus trespassers on university property. It became evident that the students were not going to leave of their own accord, and some hours later police with police dogs and equipped with tear gas arrived and cleared the campus of the students.

In the face of intimidation on a scale like this, the courage of the African students is something that we can only wonder at. We have never been called upon to make sacrifices of this order. Were we called upon to withstand the combined opposition of administration and police, it is an open question whether we would display the resolution of the students of Fort Hare.

If the Fort Hare protests have no other importance, they do stand as an example which we as privileged members of our society can only keep in mind when we protest from within the protected isolation of our universities.

The 1968 Student demonstrations at Wits, Cape Town and Fort Hare raise questions which we must at least attempt to answer. For although thousands of students stood up for what few rights remain to them, it must be admitted that no tangible results have emerged from the protests. A deputation to the Prime Minister led to nothing less than a stern admonition. During the summer vacation over forty students were harrassed by the police and the Special Branch. Several students, residents of Rhodesia were deported, and repeated efforts to have their resident permits returned have met only with failure. Spies have been placed on every campus, and several prominent students have revealed that they were approached by the Special Branch attempting to recruit them. Seventeen students have been expelled from Fort Hare.

The picture thus revealed is not an optimistic one. Why then do we continue to protest?

It is plain that if the motives which inspire a person to protest are unconscious, or unrealised, that protest can be at best a vague statement of belief. April the sixteenth marks the tenth anniversary of the closing of the open universities. This means in essence that we are attempting to recommit ourselves to the cause of academic freedom. It is a test of our dedication; and without the stimulus of an immediate issue, it will be that much more difficult to maintain an integrity of motive. The protests of 1968 were largely a reaction to government action - the non-appointment of Archie Mafeje. The protests of 1969 will not be rooted in reaction, but will spring from our reaffirmation.

We cannot expect to reap a harvest of concessions. We cannot expect an authoritarian government to negate a single clause in any one of a hundred legislative acts.

We protest to keep alive that sense of commitment; we protest to rededicate ourselves to a cause which has for ten years been the focus of governmental attacks. We protest too for others who have not the freedom to protest – we protest for the three hundred Fort Hare students whose strength of spirit led to their suspension.

"How sharply our children will be ashamed
taking at last their vengeance for these horrors
remembering how in so strange a time
common integrity could look like courage."
Yevgeny Yevtushenko

1959 Dedication

WE ARE GATHERED HERE TODAY TO AFFIRM IN THE NAME OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND THAT IT IS OUR DUTY TO UPHOLD THE PRINCIPLE THAT A UNIVERSITY IS A PLACE WHERE MEN AND WOMEN WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE AND COLOUR ARE WELCOME TO JOIN IN THE ACQUISITION AND ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND TO CONTINUE FAITHFULLY TO DEFEND THIS IDEAL AGAINST ALL WHO HAVE SOUGHT BY LEGISLATIVE ENACTMENT TO CURTAIL THE AUTONOMY OF THE UNIVERSITY.

NOW THEREFORE WE DEDICATE OURSELVES TO THE MAINTENANCE OF THIS IDEAL AND TO THE RESTORATION OF THE AUTONOMY OF OUR UNIVERSITY.

1969?

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