

# THE QUOTA BILL

by A.W. Stadler.

The Department of National Education has drafted legislation which changes the form of the government's racially-based university admissions policy. The system of ministerial exemptions which has operated since 1971 will be replaced by a racial quota system. The operative clause in the new bill (clause 9) is simply an enabling one which does not even mention quotas, and in theory it could enable the Minister to remove race from the criteria for admission to South African universities.

No one believes this is the intention of the bill. Indeed, while some university administrators believe there are administrative conveniences in the proposed system, others are deeply uneasy about it, not only because it continues to affront the principle of university autonomy and the right claimed by the "open universities" (Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes, and Witwatersrand) to admit students solely on the basis of academic criteria, but because of some of its other implications. Among these implications is the threat of financial sanctions over universities which exceed the quota set by the Minister. At present, a black student who succeeded in registering at a university without getting ministerial permission would be penalised, not the university. The new bill meets the difficulty of ensuring that universities will observe the quota by combining the enabling clause referred to earlier with the clause in the present act which states the conditions for the determination of the state's subsidy to universities. This sanction is not explicitly stated in the bill, nor has the issue been raised in public, but it seems the logical way of applying sanctions in a situation in which it would clearly be absurd to try and select culprits from among students of a particular race in a group which is larger than the approved quota.

Another worry is the possibility that the quota might be varied from year to year either to reward or punish particular universities. The quota could also be used to allocate students to different universities in a way that would favour the government-sponsored Vista University for blacks, which has just opened its doors.

The notion of a racial quota is repugnant to many university people because of its associations with the universities of Tsarist Russia and countries in eastern Europe in times long past. (Perhaps the one thing that might facetiously be claimed on behalf of racial quotas is that the Nazis did not use them: they simply excluded Jews from the Universities.) Above all the "open" universities are worried by the likelihood that they will be involved in the detailed administration of a racially based quota. They can at present claim quite legitimately to have clean hands, though a purist could argue that they know the race of their students and are thereby compromised.

The universities have responded to the proposal rather slowly. So far there has been none of the drama which attended the passing of the Extension of University Education Act in 1959. The reasons for this are complex — among them, simply that for more than 20 years the universities have become inured to a whole series of intrusions by the state. In any case, the four English-speaking universities have issued a joint statement rejecting the proposal outright as a matter of principle. The statement does not debate the relative demerits of two objectionable systems.

## THREE STAGES

We can identify three stages in the development of state intervention and control over South African universities during the past quarter century. Each stage corresponds to a major thrust in government policy. During the first stage, lasting roughly from the mid-1950's to the end of the 1960's, state intervention took the form of excluding blacks from the so-called white universities and establishing separate ethnic universities, mainly in the homelands. That stage corresponded to the development of total separation, **apartheid** in its Verwoerdian formulation. The ethnic universities meshed perfectly into the political strategy underlying the development of the homelands states. As the policy of apartheid established a privileged elite in positions of power in the homelands, so too did the universities provide a milieu for the training of a subaltern class of administrators and teachers.

The second stage was marked by the system of ministerial exemption formalised in 1971. It matched the attempts made in other areas to make the administration of apartheid more flexible; it did not mark a shift in the purpose of the state. The main framework of apartheid had been achieved; within that framework flexibility was needed to deal, for instance, with the problems of minority, like the Indian community of Johannesburg, who became the main beneficiaries of the policy of ministerial exemptions during the 1970's.

The third stage, marked partly, but only partly, by the proposal to introduce a quota system at the universities, reflects the extremely complex set of developments in state reconstruction which has loosely been termed "total strategy." Before looking at the logic of this strategy and its implications for universities, it is worth emphasising that each stage has involved an effort by the government to generate a policy for the universities which corresponds to its overall policy for the state as a whole. The second point to be stressed is that each stage in the development of government policy is cumulative and

continuous with the previous stage, though it also should be recognised that each stage is marked by a certain degree of provisionality. In these terms, total strategy is not fundamentally a departure from earlier developments. Total strategy is a total strategy for the defence of the existing political order. Nevertheless, the changes it contains are likely to be revolutionary; we could sum up its contradictions in the phrase from Lampedusa's novel, **The Leopard**, in which a character says: "If things are going to stay the same around here, things are going to have to change."

Unlike earlier phases in the development of state policy, which were, as far as universities are concerned, essentially regulative and coercive, the phase we are entering is not in essence simply concerned with imposing a form of external controls over the universities, though these are part of it. In general, we will miss much of the meaning of total strategy if we see it simply as a set of repressive controls. Total strategy reflects, in part, an effort to elicit the cooperation and cooption of social and political institutions. It should be remembered that the strategy evolved out of the recognition that repression alone could not guarantee the survival of the South African state. It is only apparently a paradox that this insight was achieved by the military, whose main business is repression, and which therefore has an extremely acute understanding of the limits of repression. Total strategy is aimed at the legitimisation of controls as much as controls themselves. The system of total strategy is extremely complicated, and it is by no means possible to isolate a single determinate principle which explains its implications for universities.

## NO GUIDELINES

One might think that one would find some guidelines in the pronouncements of the President's Council, but as far as I can see that ruminative corporation has said nothing about universities beyond stating its approval for the De Lange Commission. It could be argued that the proposed quota system represents a tactic for reconciling the De Lange Commission's objective of providing "equal opportunities for education . . . for every inhabitant, irrespective of race, colour or creed . . ." with the existing structure of apartheid in every level of the educational system. To pursue such a policy would require a more flexible and collaborative relationship between the state and the universities. The De Lange report itself provides an interesting set of ideas about the implications of total strategy for the universities, for it is quite explicitly committed to creating an educational system concerned with developing manpower and integrating and coordinating the educational system as a coherent instrument of state strategies.

Some other elements of a strategy can be found in the earlier reports of the HSRC; for instance the plan for research in the human sciences, produced in 1980, attempted to identify and explore what it called "national problem areas." Such areas were defined broadly as ones which threatened the welfare, happiness and prosperity of all inhabitants, i.e. "causing group conflict, impeding the realisation of human potential, impoverishing the quality of life, hampering the optimal exploitation of the country's natural and human resources, and endangering the security of the state." It also made clear that research would be combined into a national research effort, an effort which would be directed "towards the needs of

the decision-maker among others . . ." These provide some hints about the implications of total strategy for university research. One might sum up the broadest features of total strategy in the following terms: (i) to centralise and rationalise state power and decision-making within a powerful central institution (the executive presidency) and to develop a close collaboration and liaison between state policy makers and the security forces;

(ii) to coopt particular groups and institutions into new political structures; (iii) to depoliticise policy and decision-making arenas by making them inaccessible to popular control and pressure through a variety of devices; for example, through the institution of ethnic parliaments with partial and limited powers, the development of class-biased franchise and delimitation systems in local and regional levels. Such devices would enervate and fragment opposition to a powerful and technically competent set of institutions in the central government.

## LEGITIMATION

It was mentioned earlier that the premise of total strategy is that repression and coercion were insufficient to achieve the goal of social peace, or as I would prefer to call it, legitimisation. The universities are, or could become, important instruments of legitimisation for a number of reasons.

Firstly, universities have always been agents of legitimisation by providing opportunities for the upward social mobility of limited numbers of gifted, ambitious or aggressive members of subordinate classes. A degree provides a route out of the working class. The opportunities so provided have always been limited, but the fact that they exist provides a safety valve which can help in generating legitimacy. Universities have also been involved in educating the professions which are involved in producing welfare — medicine, education, planning and so on. Welfare functions themselves are crucial in achieving legitimacy, and indeed in generating some of the conditions for economic growth at certain stages of economic development. It has been argued that the growth rates achieved in the United States and Europe during the 1950's and the 1960's were largely explicable as a consequence of the expansion of the "welfare/warfare" state.

In the current stage of this country's history, welfare problems are escalating at an alarming rate. We see the consequences in areas like Transkei and Kwa-Zulu of generations of under-development in the rural areas. The welfare crisis coincides, not fortuitously, with the intensification of crises in other areas; with mounting and more open confrontations with the state; with pressures on wages (which stimulate the search for labour-saving measures); with growing social conflict and disintegration, and, consequently, an escalation of the security forces' demands on state revenues.

The current pressures on the universities could be seen as an effect of some of these issues, for they potentially can be harnessed into efforts to generate physical and human capital, research and development which facilitates and reduces the costs of producing this capital; and the development of technical and managerial skills.

Personally, I believe the universities do have social obligations, but that they cannot be properly or adequately discharged within the framework of an authoritarian strategy designed to perpetuate apartheid. □