

surpassing any achieved anywhere in Africa, poverty continues to be the lot of every Black man. South Africa can achieve its full economic and social potential as a country only if every individual has the opportunity to contribute to the full extent of his capabilities and to participate in the workings of our society.

It should, therefore, be the policy of South Africa to allow everyone the opportunity of education and training; the opportunity to work and the opportunity to live in decency and in dignity.

The most feasible way in which to tackle the problem of poverty in South Africa is that of increasing the national income by making a more efficient use of factors of production such as economic resources at our disposal.

The population of a country or at least, that part of it which is of working age, constitutes its working force and if the maximum use is not made of this working force, then the national income is not as large as it should be. Here in our country, this goal cannot be achieved unless South Africa uses to the fullest all of her available labour force.

A feature probably exclusive to the so-called South African way of life, and one which reduces the effectiveness of its labour force, is the migratory labour system. Some of these labourers spend six months of the year in industry and another six months as farm labour hands, while others live and work in gold mines under contract.

From the national point of view, this is an expensive procedure to follow. The high labour turnover in industry sends up its operating costs for, although the worker concerned normally works only as unskilled, he has to learn new routines each time he returns to industry. The ever changing population of

these "homelands" where this labour reservoir is, prevents the maximum use being made of the limited resources a worker has.

There are also several conventional legislative or administrative restrictions which prevent a Black worker from obtaining employment as a skilled worker. Trade Unions registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act may not enrol Blacks as members neither can Blacks work as artisans even for a wage less than that prescribed for white skilled workers.

The regulations flowing from this Act prevent the best possible use being made of available skills because those with some skills of some sort are not able to graduate out of the ranks of unskilled workers and there is absolutely no incentive for those with latent skills to develop their aptitudes. This is the reason you find that the majority of Black workers live on subsistence allowances and are in poverty.

The new labour bill is the first government response to black economic power, power that has not yet won any tangible victory but which will certainly be used in the future. New black unions are being set up and if the government were wise it would recognise them as an inevitable development today rather than agonisingly tomorrow.

As I mentioned earlier, there has been another force for change acting in South Africa's industry in recent years, the growth of the economy. There are some four million whites in South Africa, compared with 19 million blacks. As the economy has expanded the number of skilled jobs has outstripped the number of whites.

It is this phenomenon that has been powerfully used by those who believe that economic progress will ensure that all will come right in South Africa in the end.□

POLITICS AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT

by David Maughan Brown

Every time a student voice is raised, or a placard appears outside the gates of a South African university, to protest against some government action or some piece of legislation which the students regard as manifestly unjust, an answering voice is heard down the road shouting "Stick to your studies", "Stop wasting the tax-payer's money" or "You are too young to know anything about it anyway."

These slogans can usually be dismissed in one of two ways. Either one can regard them as the evasions of comfortable men anxious not to have to think about the issues involved, or brittle men troubled by the stirrings of a conscience which, if not shouted down, could damage the skeletal narrowness of their views. Or one can regard them simply as the angry outbursts of prejudiced men who hate and fear those who don't.

share their prejudices, and jealous men resentful of the privileged position of students, and happy to seize on any opportunity to make that resentment vocal. This is the voice of a backward and often deeply bigotted white society desperately anxious to preserve its privilege at all cost, and the sound of its irrational anger can often be taken as a tribute to the incisiveness, accuracy and persistence of the student criticism.

But there are other voices raised from time to time in condemnation of student political involvement, the voices of men whose elevated position and knowledge of student affairs should entitle their comments to be considered with respect. I am not thinking here of the politicians whose knowledge of student affairs seems to depend entirely on the everlastingly unpublished reports of parliamentary commissions of enquiry, and whose reasons for levelling abuse at students are usually the same as those of the man in the street, only more fanatically insisted on in proportion to their greater privilege. I am thinking of learned men in the academic world, in the English language universities at that, who have been heard to say much the same things, sometimes in only marginally sager tones. As, for example, the senior member of the Senate of the University of Natal who told the Harcourt commission of enquiry into student affairs: "Students should get on with their studies and not waste their time and their parents' money dabbling in politics."¹

Any attitude which can be shared by English speaking University professors, Afrikaans speaking Cabinet Ministers and for the most part impressively silent security policemen must, apart from having its curiosity value, be an attitude worth spending a little time discussing. If only to show that its manifestations have been heard and given due consideration before being ignored. My main purpose though is to discuss the suggestion that student political activity should be confined to political societies on the campus which would reflect South Africa's existing White political parties. A proposal being put forward by some of those who recognize that students are entitled to take an interest in politics, but are unhappy with the form that this interest takes and would like, in particular, to see some sort of restriction imposed on the political activities of the Students' Representative Councils.

If we take 'politics' to have two basic meanings, the primary meaning, "the science and art of government", and a secondary meaning, "the principles, convictions, opinions or sympathies of particular political parties" there is for each of these one basic reason why students not only may, but sometimes must, ignore the call not to "dabble in politics". In the first place Political Science, dealing as it does with "the science and art of government" is taken as an academic course by many of the students at our universities and must, as such, be a subject of free discussion and debate. In the second place many students are registered as voters and therefore have a civic responsibility to exercise their right to enquire into "the principles, convictions, opinions or sympathies" of the various political parties and cast their votes accordingly.

But this is to argue from a defensive stance. It is in the very nature of a university that its students should seek

out the truth in every sphere of life and declare it when they have found it. A university, according to Newman, is: "the high protecting power of all knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation; it maps out the territory of the intellect, and sees that . . . there is neither encroachment nor surrender on any side."² A university should concern itself with both the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the training of the minds of its students. In training those minds one of its main aims should be at the development of an intellectual curiosity which, once inculcated, will then direct itself not only at the academic courses on the curriculum but at every facet of the life of the student and his society. Only when this happens can a society reap the full benefits of having made a university education available to its members.

The reiterated demand that students should stop concerning themselves with politics stems very often from a fundamental misconception of the nature of a university. If a university were no more than a professional training school whose function was to drill into its students a certain amount of basic knowledge and a few basic skills, and whose quality was assessed purely in terms of its drilling efficiency and the practical usefulness of the courses drilled, then one would be justified in saying that society is paying for the students to be trained as quickly and efficiently as possible, and that any outside activities which might distract the student from that training are wholly unjustified. This argument would hold good even if one were to say that a student goes to university solely to absorb a certain amount of knowledge and be rewarded at the end of a specified period with a degree graded according to his absorption efficiency. But as soon as one accepts that a university's function is to train rather than simply fill the minds of its students one must accept that trained minds are probably going to find a lot to disturb them when, in their quest for "fact and principle", they apply themselves to the state of their society.

Those who, as tax-payers, shout "Don't waste the taxpayer's money" at students who give evidence of a newly acquired capacity to think betray a woeful ignorance, in their language, of the production methods and finished products of the factory in which they are investing their money. To put it another way, they could be likened to those English tourists who go into restaurants in France, order 'Steak tartare' ("You know dear, with that nice sauce like we had with that lovely cod at the Savoy in Eastbourne."), become feverishly indignant when served with a mound of raw meat topped by a raw egg and a bit of parsley, and cherish a lasting grudge against French civilization from that moment on.

They are, however, right on one point at least. It is to a large extent the taxpayer's money which enables the student to spend three or four years in a privileged position, free of the need to earn his living. The position "free from necessary duties and cares" which Newman, following Cicero, sees as being essential to man before he can be in a condition for "desiring to see, to hear, to learn." If he is supported at the university by society the student owes society an obligation in return; an obligation which

will not be filled simply by applying himself, as he must, to his quest for knowledge, and cannot be deferred until the time when he will leave the university and contribute what he has gained there towards the welfare of society.

The student has, as I see it, two duties to society which he should make some effort to fulfil while at the university. Being possessed, presumably, of one of its best brains, the student should take the opportunity provided by his position of detachment to cast a critical but dispassionate eye at the society which is sponsoring him. If his analysis leads him to the conclusion that, for the sake of example, society has embarked on a course leading to self-destruction, it is no more than common gratitude to say so. In this way society can subject itself to a continual process of critical self-examination conducted by its best and most idealistic brains. Society is not, of course, obliged to take cognizance of such criticism, the student can afford to be idealistic from his position of detachment and some of his advice will inevitably be impracticable, but such self-examination can only prove beneficial. To suggest, as many do, that youthful idealism is, by its very nature, precluded from having anything valuable to say about society, is to deny the voice of the one group of critics whose comments have any real chance of being both intelligent and disinterested.

The second duty the student has is to employ some of his leisure time in doing something practical for society in return for its generosity. A glance at the notice board in any Students' Union will give an indication of the many ways of fulfilling this obligation that have been found, from teaching at evening classes to collecting money for charity, from running medical clinics to investigating wages. Even in this sphere there is much criticism of student involvement. While few would criticize Rag fund-raising as being an example of student "dabbling" in politics – though making the public aware of the dependence of so many welfare organizations on money raised by students is, of course, a "political" act – many would, and do, strongly criticize such bodies as the Wages Commissions as politically motivated leftist organizations trying to undermine the structure of South African society. Leaving aside the possibility that the student's dispassionate analysis may have led him to the, perhaps entirely valid, conclusion that the structure of this society needs changing, it should be pointed out that the Wages Commissions and the Rag committees are doing exactly the same thing. In trying to fulfil their obligation to do something practical for society they are trying to help its less privileged members to achieve a level of existence freed from the more pressing imperatives of ignorance and want, and to gain the sense of personal dignity which comes with this. This sort of involvement, too, can only prove beneficial to society.

These two duties owed by student to society cover all the forms of student political activity which would be condemned as "dabbling in politics". The student's responsibility to seek the truth about society and to declare it when he feels he has found it leads to the statements issued by the Students' Representative Councils, to the distribution of pamphlets in the cities, to placard demonstrations and to the holding of protest

meetings and church services. The responsibility to do something practical for society in return for its generosity leads to the Wages Commissions and the evening classes. Students are thus usually at their most responsible when being condemned most loudly for "irresponsibility" by the man in the street, and are entirely justified in continuing to ignore the call to stick to their studies and have nothing whatever to do with politics.

This brings me to the views of those who agree that students have the right to interest themselves in politics but are unhappy with the way in which that interest is currently manifested. Professor Francis Stock, Principal of the University of Natal, is among this number and his views, as principal of an English language university, deserve careful consideration – even if some of his recent, highly controversial, statements on academic freedom suggest that his real interest lies in weakening a student voice which he finds embarrassing. I quote from his opening address to the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University in February 1974:

"While you are in the University it is of course right that you should take an interest in the nation's affairs, in its political parties, and so on. I remember well when I was a student we had political societies on the campus. A Conservative society, a Socialist society, a Liberal, a Communist society and even a society of Moseleyites, the fascists . . . And these were all active societies, recognized by the S.R.C. of the time, but their activities were not controlled by the S.R.C. I wish very much that similar societies existed here. On the other hand bodies like the S.R.C.s themselves or N.U.S.A.S., regional or national, if they are to serve the needs of the students they represent, must, like the Universities themselves, be apolitical bodies . . .

I am wholly opposed to national bodies or to regional bodies of this kind becoming involved in national political affairs. And I believe the situation in South African universities would be far healthier if these activities were left to individual societies whose primary purpose was to take an interest in party politics, and whose name identified that intention. Don't sail under false colours."

Two obvious objections to this line of thought, quite separate from resentment of the insinuation contained in the last sentence, immediately spring to mind. In the first place it is somewhat unlikely, in a country where Special Branch policemen go, as a matter of course, to political election meetings to keep an eye on student hecklers that Socialist, Liberal or Communist societies would be allowed to flourish on the University campuses. For the students to be reduced, effectively, to a choice between Conservatives and fascists, would rather tend to defeat the object of the exercise. Unless, of course, that were the object of the exercise. In the second place there is a strong objection in principle to the idea proposed by Professor Stock. There are still, and one hopes always will be, some Black students registered at the English language universities. It is a rule laid down by the S.R.C.s,

certainly at Natal, that student societies must be open to all students. But the 'Political Interference Act' prevents Blacks from belonging to any of the White political parties, so presumably Blacks would not be eligible to belong to a Nationalist, United Party, or Progressive society on the campus. The idea of confining political activity on the campus to a few societies from which some students could be excluded on the grounds of colour is wholly unacceptable.

But, and perhaps even more important, Professor Stock's speech betrays an inability to perceive the fundamental difference between British and South African society. As a further justification for the present forms of student political involvement in this country it is worth spending some time pointing out that a system which may work very well in Britain may be totally inapplicable to this country.

The British political scene can perhaps be likened to a vast open-air forum where men of any persuasion can try to convince anyone who cares to listen about anything. The centre of the forum is taken up by the members of the larger political parties, while around the edges the fringe elements carry on their activities to the amusement of most, and the consternation of some of those near them. Provided these activities do not become violent they are magnanimously tolerated, and their authors have little worse to fear from those holding the centre of the floor than a somewhat chilly disdain. If Vanessa Redgrave wishes to lose her deposit campaigning in the East End of London on behalf of the Trotskyite Workers' Party that is her affair; we all, as they say, have our problems. The larger parties may become so absorbed in their struggle in the middle that they forget what is going on around them and ignore the interests of their supporters, in which case it always remains open to those supporters to form other parties which they think will serve the interests of society better.

It can readily be seen that in a democratic political climate such as the one sketched here there is no reason why political activity in the universities should be any more than a microcosmic reflection of the political activity of the society of which those universities form part. Where politics is a free and open debate we would expect to find political opinion in the universities divided along more or less the lines found outside the universities, though we would expect the proportion of supporters of left-wing parties to be higher in the universities than outside. And if students are divided along these party political lines it is unlikely that any body could be found which could speak on political issues with a corporate voice. It is, however, significant that at Oxford and Cambridge, where there were, until recently, no S.R.C.s, such bodies have now been constituted to accord recognition to corporate student opinion.

The South African political scene is patently different. It is not democratic. Where in Britain the debate could be said to be carried on, and the important decisions made, in the open air, here the important activity could be said to go on within the confines of a granite building of peculiarly squat and uncompromising design. The major parties again hold the centre of the floor but it is noticeable

that fringe activities are almost non-existent, there is no movement, merely the odd empty space, around the edges, and, more striking still, only a very small proportion of the community is allowed access to the building. The vast majority of the population throng round the outside waiting with a more or less silent and resigned patience for the decisions about their future to be communicated to them. The walls of the building insulate those who make the decisions from the majority of those who have to abide by them, and allow those within to concentrate all their aim in slinging mud at each other while ignoring the vital issues confronting the population as a whole.

Given this situation it becomes obvious that there is a vital need for a body of people who have access to the building but who will avoid becoming absorbed in the debate on the floor and preserve a critical detachment from their viewing platform in the gallery. The role of these people is to try to attract the attention of those down below to the plight of those standing outside; to give the latter what help they can and to interpret for them the decisions that come somewhat arbitrarily from within; to criticize those decisions from a position of detachment; and to examine and question the architecture and the very existence of the building as a whole. This role has traditionally been filled by the clergy, by small groups like the Black Sash, the Christian Institute and the Institute for Race Relations, and by the students, as represented by the S.R.C.s, at the English language universities.

It is axiomatic that if this role is to be adequately filled by anyone he must avoid party political involvement, for that would be to abandon his observation post in the gallery, to take his place with the rest on the floor of the building, and to lose his perspective in the process. And herein lies the basic objection to the idea of limiting student political activity to off-shoots of the existing political parties. If politically aware students were obliged to limit their activities in this way they would rapidly become enmeshed in the party political bickering which absorbs the attention of most of their elders and would lose their ability to proffer dispassionate criticism. Moreover it is one of the more regrettable aspects of South African politics that the policies of the existing parties are to a large extent dictated by the need to appeal to an exceedingly conservative electorate, and accordingly cover that relatively small area of the political spectrum between very conservative and fanatically so. So if student political activity and comment were limited to the confines of what would amount to campus branches of the Nationalist, United, Progressive and Democratic parties a great many of the students would not find a niche in any of the societies and so would be precluded from any form of political activity. And these would be precisely those students whose comment would be most valuable.

From the point of view of a university trying to lead its students along the path towards a dispassionate evaluation of the truth there is another, very much more important, reason for rejecting Professor Stock's suggestion of forming political societies on the university campuses. This is admirably expressed in the words of the Harcourt report: "the unquestioning loyalty to party

dogma demanded by most political parties is not easily compatible with the critical and dispassionate spirit of enquiry and challenge which should characterize the mental attitude and activity of a student."⁴ Much the same point is made by G. L. Brook in "The Modern University," where he says: "... a graduate whose education has been more than superficial should have acquired an ability to see an opponent's point of view, a willingness to concede the force of his valid arguments, and a refusal to misrepresent them which he can carry into the affairs of everyday life. Such a man is not as a rule a good party man, for a man whose chief aim is the pursuit and open declaration of the truth as he sees it must sometimes be disloyal to his party." The narrow sectionalism and emotive propaganda of party politics are contrary to the ideals of a university, and it would be in the best interests of our universities for political societies along the lines envisaged by Professor Stock to be kept

off the campuses. Which was, in fact, what the Harcourt commission recommended.

This would also be in the best interests of this country. South Africa cannot afford to have the political comment of its students emasculated; and emasculated it undoubtedly would be if it had to be channelled through the spokesmen of various campus political societies representing only the more conservative students. There could be no corporate voice and, worse, that would not matter, as there could be no detached vision to be expressed by one.

It seems clear to me, then, not only that students have the right and duty to "dabble in politics", as that University Senator put it, but also that it is in the best interests of the universities and of South African society as a whole that student political activity should retain its present form.□

¹ Report of the committee of enquiry into Student Affairs. University of Natal 1968. p. 228

² T. H. Newman. The idea of a University. Langmans, Green & Co., 1947 p. 335

³ Newman Op. Cit. p. 93

⁴ Op. Cit. p. 242

⁵ G. L. Brook. The Modern University. Andre Deutsch. London 1965 p. 12.

'IN THE ILLICHIAN FIELDS'

by Patrick Kearney



Ivan Illich

In June and July of 1973 I had the privilege of studying at CIDOC (Centre for Intercultural Documentation) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and of attending seminars led by Ivan Illich, author of *Celebration of Awareness, Deschooling Society* and *Tools for Conviviality*.

As the calendar of this unusual Mexican institution states: "CIDOC is not a University but a meeting place for persons whose common concern is the reconstruction of society and the understanding of the effect of social and ideological change on the minds and hearts of men. It is above all an environment for contemplation and learning and not a headquarters for partisan action."

CIDOC was originally founded, early in the 1960's, to prepare North American missionaries for work in Latin America, by encouraging them to analyse their motives for wanting to do such work, and also to make in-depth studies of the contrasts between their own culture and that of the countries to which they were going. At the same time they were to learn Spanish. Now CIDOC has severed its official connections with the Catholic Church, and though priests and nuns still attend courses there (a Vatican ban having been lifted) CIDOC now draws a very much wider range of people whose concern is social change, as well as quite a number who simply want to learn Spanish.

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