

THE INSTITUTE VINDICATED?

by Raymond Tucker

Much has been written and said about the Schlebusch/le Grange Commission's fourth interim report into Nusas. Little is known about its fifth, also recently tabled and dealing with the South African Institute of Race Relations.

The Institute, to nobody's great surprise was "vindicated", but in the course of its report, the Commission managed to make its fair share of insinuations about the organisation's objectivity, its foreign associations and, inevitably, about the role played in its affairs by members of the student organisation, Nusas.

Control of the Institute's youth programme was, perhaps, the major area for outright criticism of the organisation's personnel.

The strictures have been rejected by the Institute as "unfounded" and made "to present a semblance of justification for the investigation".

Just what were some of these criticisms?

In giving "attention" to the objectivity of the Institute's research and publications, the Commission's report carries two statements seemingly mutually exclusive.

In one, the commission states that it "by no means wishes to suggest that all the Institute's research and publications are of a negative and one-sided nature" and, as proof, praises the work of Miss Muriel Horrell, especially the Annual Survey of Race Relations.

A little later in the report, though, we are to find that "as has already been indicated, the Commission holds the view that not all the publications distributed by the Institute will pass the test of objectivity and correctness".

Which is the Commission's view? That most of the publications are objective or that most of them are one-sided?

And what does the Commission rely on for either of these judgments? There is the opinion of one of the multitude of anonymous "expert witnesses" whose views are peppered through these reports (there are at least four referred to in this one alone).

His credentials or qualifications are not referred to so we are left only with his remarks from which to judge his expertise and the merits of his "evidence" as accepted by the Commission.

When asked about the objectivity of the publications distributed by the Institute, he praised the Annual Survey of Race Relations and then proceeded to say the following in regard to a publication prepared by Mr John Kane-Berman:

"But the other publications are quite a different matter. I am thinking of South-West Africa now. I have not seen it again recently—about the Ovambo Strike—but this does give one the impression that it was written in a fairly prejudiced attitude"—"I have not looked at it again. I just ordered it when it came out and then had a bit of a look at it, but there were quite a number of factual data in it, some of which I would be in a position to confirm as being correct and others I would not be able to judge on my own. But the tone of the whole thing was not that it gave the impression that it was a purposefully objective study. It was written, one might say, with strong emotional involvement".

So much for the judgment of that expert on this publication. He was called upon to express his views on the publication "United States Corporate Investment and Social Change in S.A." by Mr Dudley Horner. He says ". . . it really struck me that it, well, really fell short as far as objectivity was concerned. That I must really say. I have given instances—there is something else here—yes. It was the subject of Labour Policy as such, which purported to give a brief survey of South Africa's labour policy. It is on page 5. The impression that a foreign reader must get is that we are still standing exactly where we stood in the days of the poor White and that whole problem, and that nothing has changed since then, and that practically nothing has been done. That is what I think is being said there in so many words. Well, that is not an acceptable presentation". A reference to Page 5 of that publication shows that it deals with the Industrial Conciliation Act passed in 1924, quotes the motivation for the measure by the then Minister of Labour and then proceeds as follows:

"The act was an unashamedly racist measure designed to protect the White worker from the threat of Black competition and in effect created the situation where there is one law for the White worker and an entirely different sort of law for the Black worker. This deliberate policy has been carefully fostered and nurtured over the years by successive White governments. In 1948 it was specifically re-affirmed by the then new National Government. It has given rise to the 57 laws listed in Annexure A to this memorandum".

One wonders which is the more objective view?

An aggrieved attack on Mr Horner's publication reads more like an information department handout than a serious attempt to examine the merits or demerits of his research and conclusions.

The Commission stated that over the years 337 research and investigation projects were carried out by the Institute, yet it

is apparently on the basis of these two publications alone that it reaches its conclusions about the objectivity of the Institute's research.

How seriously can one treat this finding?

As in previous reports, the Commission has appeared to rely on letters and documents obtained under the most questionable of circumstances.

Again, as part of its attempt to prove a "takeover bid" of the Institute by younger people, chiefly senior Nusas personnel, the Commission refers to letters written to and by Margaret Marshall, a former president of the National Union.

The letters as quoted in the report are chiefly remarkable for the sections omitted.

For instance, a letter from Miss Marshall to Mr Peter Randall, then assistant director of the Institute in which she criticises the Institute.

The following was cut out of the middle of the letter:

"Perhaps I am being somewhat underhand in writing to you about this instead of making the criticism at the meeting, but this was the first meeting that I had attended and I spoke up on a number of occasions and was met with nothing less than stony glances."

Why should this have been omitted? Was it because it minimised the suggestions of underhand action by students?

In a letter to Miss Marshall from the then Director, Mr Quinton Whyte on the 9th May, 1967 the following appears:

"I am in substantial agreement with what you say, and have made many efforts to inject a little life into the 'old boy's club'. Increasingly over the years the Institute has become more staff run but I have always tried to place responsibilities on Executive members, and have tried to avoid a staff run Council or Executive. Many of the latter have been in opposition for 19 years, and it is difficult to maintain morale when working continuously over these years in a negative context. Many are tired and frustrated and many feel that their abilities and knowledge and experience have been passed over by the wider community of South Africa. No public rewards, seats on commissions, no diplomatic posts, etc. etc. Creative abilities have been restricted".

This is dealt with by the Commission in the following way:

"I . . . have made many efforts to inject a little life into the old boys club. Increasingly over the years the Institute has become more staff run, but I have always tried to place responsibilities on executive members . . . Many are tired and frustrated and many feel that their abilities, knowledge and experience have been passed over by the wider community of South Africa". The comment on this is: "Although the Commission does not conclude that Mr Whyte was also in favour of more radical action on the part of the Institute, it nevertheless seems that he adopted an apologetic attitude towards Miss Margaret Marshall and that in his opinion there was room for "improvement" in the "fossilised" Institute. This statement could not have been made had the letter been quoted in full.

What clearly emerges from this portion of the report dealing with Nusas and young people is the deep-rooted fear of the Commission of any attempt to inject younger people and new ideas into old organisations.

This fear is only matched by its horror and distaste at the Institute's connection with overseas bodies.

The Commission examined the association of the Institute with certain overseas bodies, among them the Ford Foundation.

And it is here that the members of the Commission presume to express opinions on the taxation laws of the United States.

Nothing in the report suggests that the Commission here used an expert to advise them on these laws yet they are "convinced" that the conduct of the Institute falls within the ambit of certain sections of the U.S. Tax Reform law despite the opinion given to the Institute by the law advisers for the Ford Foundation that there was no transgression.

Was the purpose of this exercise to suggest to the U.S. authorities that the country's law was being transgressed or was it that the Commission imagined itself to be a committee of the U.S. Congress?

What skills and training did this Commission have to enable it to interpret the tax statutes of a foreign country? What tax experts did it call upon to support its view?

Is it any wonder that the Institute, in rejecting the findings of the Commission accused it of being from the outset "totally unsuited, both in composition and procedure, to perform what was essentially a judicial function".□