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ALAN PATON AT 80

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A JOURNAL OF LIBERAL AND RADICAL OPINION

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EDITORIALS

1. ALAN PATON

Alan Paton turned eighty this January, thirty five years after *Cry the Beloved Country* was published, and the Nationalist Party came to power; thirty-two years after he drove down out of the mists of Bulwer one night, to a small meeting in Pietermaritzburg, and so became involved in the beginnings of what was to become the Liberal Party of South Africa.

This year it will be thirty years since the Liberal Party was formally established to present a non-racial alternative to the Nationalist government's racial policies, and it will be fifteen since it was formally disbanded in the face of that same government's Improper Interference Act, which outlawed non-racial political association. What the Liberal Party stood for was in almost every respect the exact opposite of what the Nationalist Party stood for. Nationalist Party policy has been built on the unlikely proposition that it is only by keeping people apart that they will ever learn to live together. The basic assumption of Liberal Party policy was that, if a lasting and stable future was to be built here, it could only be done with the consent and participation of all our people. That small exploratory meeting to which Alan Paton came in 1951 was a non-racial meeting, the Liberal Party was a non-racial party from its inception, and it was committed, from the beginning, to the ideal of a single, integrated, democratic South Africa in which full rights and responsibilities were shared by all. Alan Paton was the Chairman of the Liberal Party for three years of its brief life and its President for ten. He, as much as anyone, was responsible for formulating its philosophy and its policy, and for fifteen years he gave to it unstintingly of his energy and time and talents.

There are people who think that all this was a terrible waste. That Alan should have observed and commented on our messy politics from a safely antiseptic distance, and got on with his writing. That would have been like asking him to cut off his right hand so that he could go on writing with his left, for he could no more have kept at a carefully measured distance from South Africa's political life than he could have given up writing. Of course the continual political crises which have racked South Africa since 1948 often called for action which meant putting writing aside. And often the threat of crisis in the air made it impossible to concentrate on writing, even if there was nothing much that could be done about the particular crisis of the moment. But, in the final analysis, is it not this perpetual tension in our society, and the feeling for it which only active involvement with it can give, which has been the stimulus and inspiration for most of Alan Paton's work?

It is simply not possible to separate Alan Paton the writer from Alan Paton the man fighting for what he believes to be right. As a writer his place in our future is assured. What chance is there that South Africa will one day also honour his political vision by creating a non-racial, democratic society here in which all can freely share? After thirty-five years of racial politics, and with signs of racial polarisation growing round us by the day, it is difficult to be hopeful — but, as he has always been, we are.

In the meantime, while we wait, and work, and hope for that day, *Reality* wishes one of its founders and the most distinguished member of its Editorial Board, many more productive years of life.

2. THE NEW CONSTITUTION

Whatever else may be said about the Government's new constitutional proposals they have certainly let loose a flood of debate and a good deal of invective amongst non-Nationalists on the perennial question of whether one is more likely to change apartheid by white-anting it from within or by fighting it from outside.

The decision of the Labour Party, which formerly controlled the Coloured Representative Council, to participate in Mr Botha's tricameral Parliament has really set the controversy boiling and has already produced some results nobody was expecting. It has led to the formation of a united front to fight the proposals which, it seems possible, could bring together people who have been as far apart as Inkatha and the Natal Indian Congress. It has given impetus to an idea conceived by Dr Cedric Phatudi to form an extra-parliamentary black federation, which now appears to enjoy the support of both Chiefs Buthelezi and Matanzima, who have scarcely been on speaking terms

these past few years. And, perhaps most interesting of all to readers of REALITY, it has led to the founding within the Coloured community of a new political body, COPE, which eschews all ethnically-based political organisation and is campaigning for the repeal of the Improper Interference Act and the establishment of a new non-racial political party.

We do not know how representative of Coloured opinion the Labour Party is these days, nor what prompted it to take the decision it did. We do not think that decision puts the Party beyond the pale for ever but we do think it was the wrong decision to take. Our view continues to be that no decision of great consequence about our future can be taken without black participation, and that the more non-blacks who make their commitment to that principle quite clear now, the better prospect there will be one day that those decisions, when they are taken with black participation, will commit us to a genuinely non-racial future for our country.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO DR NEIL AGGETT?

by Julian Riekert

When will South Africa start to help itself? If, as it has been said, no man is an island, it is equally true, whatever geography may otherwise try to teach us, that no nation is one either. It must still carry the support and good opinion of the rest of the world. We will never know whether Steve Biko might have been, as some have suggested, a great statesman who could have solved South Africa's seemingly intractable problems or a terrorist hothead who might have exacerbated them. What was manifest to me, however, was that whatever his political views, his death and the circumstances which occasioned it were indescribably wicked and unjustified, and can be laid equally at the door of the security police who occasioned it and the doctors who might have prevented it.

— Sir David Napley, *Not Without Prejudice* Harrap 1982 391.

THE BACKGROUND:

On February 5 1982 the people of South Africa and the world learned that Dr Neil Aggett, a medical practitioner little known outside of trade union circles, had died while in the custody of the Johannesburg security police. One of a large group of people detained, in what was later claimed to have been a major breakthrough by the security police in their campaign against the 'total onslaught' against

South Africa, Dr Aggett was, according to a police statement, found hanged in his cell by a security policeman. There were widespread protests from trade unions throughout the world, as well as from lawyers, opposition politicians, academics and the opposition press in South Africa. Many of these critics called for a judicial inquiry into the forty-sixth death in security law detention in South Africa.

Fears for the well-being of other detainees were increased by the announcement that Dr Aggett's lover, fellow doctor Liz Floyd, had been admitted to the psychiatric unit of a Johannesburg hospital. With international protests mounting rapidly, and thousands of South Africans attending memorial services throughout the country, it was announced that an inquest into Dr Aggett's death would be held. Thousands of people of all racial groups attended the funeral in Johannesburg on February 13.

Mrs Helen Suzman MP attempted to raise the question of Dr Aggett's death in Parliament on February 17 and disclosed that a note smuggled out of John Vorster Square, the Witwatersrand police and security police headquarters, by a fellow detainee alleged that Dr Aggett had been physically abused by the security police before his death. The Minister of Police denied these allegations and accused Mrs Suzman of fabricating documents in order to denigrate the police. The Speaker then ruled that the death of Dr Aggett was **sub judice** because of the pending inquest and could not therefore be discussed in the Assembly.

The inquest, before magistrate, Mr P A J Kotze, opened in Johannesburg on March 2. It was adjourned to April 13

at the request of Mr George Bizos SC, counsel for the Aggett family, in order to enable him to lead evidence from other detainees.

THE INQUEST:

In terms of the Inquest Act 58 of 1959, a magistrate must hold an inquest into any death, prima facie caused by other than natural causes, if a public prosecutor does not recommend the institution of criminal proceedings against any person as a result of that death. The purpose of the inquest is fourfold. The magistrate must conduct such inquiries as will enable him to determine:

- (a) the identity of the deceased;
- (b) the cause, or likely cause, of death;
- (c) the date of death;
- (d) whether the death was brought about by any act or omission involving or amounting to an offence on the part of any person.

If he is unable to make any such finding, he must record that fact too.

In the case of Dr Aggett, the first three legs of the inquiry were not too problematical. The police knew only too well who Dr Aggett was, and when he had died, The district surgeon of Johannesburg, Dr Vernon Kemp, gave evidence that Dr Aggett's death was the result of suffocation caused by the application of a cloth ligature to his neck. The greater part of the inquest was to turn around the fourth part of the inquiry, the allocation of juridical blame for Dr Aggett's death.

THE TUG OF WAR BEGINS:

On April 13 Mr Bizos began to read to Dr Kemp a statement made by Dr Aggett 14 hours before his death. Counsel for the Ministers of Police and Law and Order, Mr P J Schabort, objected to this, arguing that the contents of the statement related to the security polices' continuing investigations and that their disclosure would be contrary to the interests of national security. The next day magistrate Kotze ruled that the statement was admissible. His ruling was challenged by Mr Schabort and the inquest was adjourned in order to allow him to obtain a Supreme Court ruling on this point. Mr Justice Eloff, of the Transvaal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court, remarked during the hearing of Mr Schabort's application, that South Africa's international reputation and the reputation of the South African police would be adversely affected if there was not a full inquiry into Dr Aggett's death. He ruled the statement to be admissible.

Since the purpose of an inquest is to make known all the circumstances surrounding the unnatural death of its subject, this tactic on the part of the Ministers concerned is open to question. The Supreme Court's ruling did not, in any event, put an end to the executive's attempts to withhold vital evidence from the inquest court.

DR AGGETT'S STATEMENT

The statement was read to Dr Kemp. It alleged that Dr Aggett had been hit, punched, kicked, subjected to electrical shocks and that his genitals had been physically abused. It also disclosed that the interrogation during which this had taken place had lasted for 62 hours. Dr Kemp agreed that the scabs, scratches and other marks described in the statement

corresponded with those that he had found on Dr Aggett's body during the autopsy. He said that there was no evidence that Dr Aggett had been visited by any district surgeon since he had been detained the preceding November, and that there was a possibility that timely medical attention might have saved Dr Aggett's life.

SOME POLICE WITNESSES:

The police sergeant who found Dr Aggett's body hanging in his cell admitted, under cross-examination, that he had never heard of the inspectors of detainees, appointed in the wake of the Biko inquest to protect detainees from unlawful treatment. He also admitted that he had standing orders to check on all detainees every hour, but that on the night of Dr Aggett's death he had been 'too busy' to do so. Another policeman, a constable, said that he had been stationed at John Vorster Square for seven months. During that period he had never seen a magistrate visit any of the detainees. He confirmed that there were standing orders for hourly checks on detainees but that on the night of February 4/5, he had been too busy to carry out this order. He admitted that an entry he had made in the regulation occurrence book, claiming that he had visited the detainees just before 1 a.m. and that none of them had had any complaints, was false.

Another policeman said that an inspector of detainees had called to see Dr Aggett on January 4, but that he had been told that Dr Aggett was not available. This was not an uncommon practice.

Security police officers told the inquest magistrate that Dr Aggett had been arrested on 27 November 1982 'for furthering the aims of the ANC'. At the time of his arrest, Dr Aggett had had in his possession some books by Trotsky and Lenin. Three ANC documents said to have been found in his briefcase did not appear on an inventory made by the policemen after his arrest and countersigned by Dr Aggett.

MAGISTRATES AND INSPECTORS:

A magistrate gave evidence that he had called to see Dr Aggett on three occasions. Each time he had been told that Dr Aggett was not available for a visit. When he eventually saw him on January 18, Dr Aggett had complained of ill treatment, including the administration of electrical shocks. A woman police sergeant confirmed that she had taken a statement from Dr Aggett regarding these complaints on the day before his death, some three weeks after the complaint had been made.

The inspector of detainees who had called to see Dr Aggett, Mr Abraham Mouton, said that Dr Aggett had not made any complaint during his visit on January 22, just four days after he had complained to the magistrate. He admitted that detainees were often reluctant to make complaints to him because they feared that these would be shown to their police captors.

He admitted that some of the other detainees had complained about their treatment. One alleged that he had been assaulted, another said that he had been threatened with death if he did not tell the truth and a third complained that a warrant officer had kicked the door of his cell and shouted 'staan op, kaffer'. He had transmitted these complaints to the Minister of Police.

THE OTHER DETAINEES:

On June 21 Mr Bizos announced his intention to use statements made by a number of Dr Aggett's fellow detainees in order to cast some light on the circumstances in which Dr Aggett had been detained and interrogated. Mr Schabert objected to this, arguing that the similar fact evidence which might be derived from such statements was irrelevant to the medical finding that Dr Aggett had died by hanging. After an adjournment, the statements were ruled to be admissible and Mr Bizos was given leave to call other detainees to give oral evidence.

One detainee, Mr Maurice Smithers, who was served with a banning order during the inquest proceedings, revealed that he was the author of the note mentioned in Parliament by Mrs Suzman. He had written it in custody and his sister had smuggled it out after a visit. In it he revealed that he had seen Dr Aggett being forced to run on the spot with his arms outstretched. Whenever his arms began to droop or he stopped running he was hit on the back or the arms with what appeared to be a rolled-up newspaper. Smithers formed the impression that the intention was to humiliate Aggett, rather than to do him any serious injury. Aggett had also been forced to do 'a substantial number' of push-ups. At one stage a police officer bent over him and Smithers heard the distinct sound of flesh being hit. Mr Auret van Heerden, another detainee whose cell was opposite Aggett's, said that Aggett could not be awakened to eat his meal after the marathon 62 hour interrogation. Aggett had later told him that he had been 'broken' and van Heerden was so struck by the obvious deterioration in Aggett's physical and mental condition that he resolved to tell the security police about it. Before he could do so, he heard a commotion outside Aggett's cell and knew at once that 'the worst had happened'. He had subsequently been told by a Major Cronwright that his (van Heerden's) statement would not go before the inquest court as it was his duty to protect his men, who were 'doing a good job in preventing terrorism in the country'. He had also been threatened with being gaoled, banned and house-arrested if he revealed what he knew about Aggett's death.

Another detainee, Mr Pramanathan Naidoo, who was later sentenced to one year's imprisonment for harbouring an escaped prisoner, gave evidence of his own treatment while in detention. The account which follows is that published in *The Natal Mercury* on 24 September 1982:

"In an affidavit Naidoo said he had been taken to the office of Maj Arthur Cronwright soon after being detained on November 27, 1981. There he had met a Maj Arbee.

'Maj Arbee asked me when I joined the African National Congress. When I replied that I was not a member of the ANC, he grabbed me and smacked me a couple of times across my face. He then grabbed me by my hair and banged my head on the desk. He made me squat in a corner with my face to the wall.

'He then took me into a nearby office where a couple of people were sitting having tea. I was made to squat behind the door facing the wall. While I was squatting there, someone came up behind me and punched my head with his fist.'

Naidoo said he was then taken to his cell, where he remained until November 30.

'I was fetched by a man whom I later discovered was W/O

Smith. He told me he knew all about my activities, that if I co-operated and made a statement, all would be well. If I did not co-operate, they had ways and means of getting the information out of me and they would do so.

'W/O Smith asked me when I had joined the ANC and the S A Communist Party. When I said that I was not a member of either organisation, a ginger-haired man suggested I be handcuffed.

KICKED

'W/O Smith then handcuffed my right wrist to my right ankle and I was made to remain standing. Then I was asked the same questions again and gave the same reply. W/O Smith then went to a cupboard in the office and took out a canvas bag.

'He placed this over my head. From time to time they asked me the same questions again and when I gave the same reply, I was kicked and punched. At one stage during the morning, someone else came into the office and removed the bag and said: "Hy's nog vars" (He is still fresh). He then kicked me on my backside and replaced the bag.'

The handcuffs were removed to allow Naidoo to eat lunch.

'After lunch, the cuffs were put back, wrist to ankle, and the questioning started again intermittently. After about two hours, the cuffs were removed and W/O Smith made me do some exercises. He made me do squats and press-ups on the floor.'

STRIP

Naidoo was then taken back to his cell until the next morning (Tuesday) when he was taken to W/O Smith's office.

'W/O Smith came in after a while and ordered me to strip. I was then handcuffed right wrist to right ankle. The ginger-haired man came in again and I was asked the same questions as the day before. Again, when I gave the same answer, I would be kicked, punched or pushed. This went on to about lunchtime.

'After lunch, during the afternoon, I was handcuffed again, wrist to ankle. During this period, Lt Prince came in. Without any provocation, he pushed me on to the floor and while I was on the floor, he put his foot on the handcuffs so that they dug into my wrist and ankle. He then struck me under my feet with a piece of wood which had a key tied to it'.

Naidoo told the Court he was screaming from the pain and the skin on his feet later peeled off.

'Then I was made to get up. After a while the cuffs were removed and I was made to kneel and to hold a chair above my head . . . They kept asking me when I joined the ANC and SACP.

'While I was holding the chair, a tall man with a long nose came in. I understood that he was a Capt Venter or Verster. My arms were tiring and the chair was beginning to sag. He grabbed the chair and banged it on my head a couple of times. He did not ask me any questions. I was naked all this time.

'After a while, they put the chair down and made me kneel with my arms above my head. The captain then came and hit me two or three times very hard on my head with his fist.

'During the afternoon, W/O Smith made me do squats, press-ups and running on the spot. When I started to perspire, W/O Smith told me they wanted to get my body warmed up so that if I died, the marks would not show up in the post mortem. The exercises went on for approximately 15 to 20 minutes . . . If I flagged, and I was made to do the exercises at a fast pace, they would jab me, prod me and force me to keep going.'

Naidoo was taken back to the office on Wednesday morning, and said he had stayed there until Friday afternoon, naked all the time and not allowed to sleep.

During this time he was given tablets and was told they were to keep him alert.

'During this period . . . I was made to march on the spot, to kneel and to hold the chair above my head and to do exercises such as squats, push-ups and marching on the spot. They had an ANC flag which they would make me wave and hold up while I was marching on the spot . . .

'At one stage they made me sit down on a chair and while holding my arms put a plastic bag over my head. I resisted and managed to rip it off . . .

'Lt Venter told me that they referred to that floor as "Timol Heights" and that after they had finished with me, they would change it to "Prema Heights" . . . The ginger-haired man asked me if I had seen the sign downstairs saying "Beware of flying Indians" . . .

'During this period I knelt such a lot that the skin on my right knee broke on Friday morning.'

On Friday afternoon, Naidoo said he was taken to Vereeniging police station. Naidoo told the Court that he had shown an officer his knee when asked if he had any injuries. 'You don't call that an injury,' the officer told him.

'I was placed in a cell. I laid down on the mat and fell asleep immediately. Later, I do not know how much later, but it was dark, I was fetched and taken to an office.

'They immediately made me strip . . . They questioned me intensely. I fell asleep on my feet and, when I next became aware of what I was doing, I found myself talking but unable to stop myself . . . They also tried to force me to agree to make a confession to a magistrate. They pulled my hair and punched me.'

Naidoo said that at 6 a.m. on Saturday, the new shift of interrogators allowed him to put his clothes on and went through everything he had said. He was then taken to his cell, but was not able to sleep.

He was fetched again later the same day and had been taken to an office and given pen and paper to write a statement. He was kept there until 'about Wednesday'.

For the first two days he said he was not allowed any sleep. On Tuesday and Wednesday he was allowed 'to lie down on the floor for an hour or so on newspaper. On another occasion, I was allowed to lie down on a couple of chairs which had been brought together.

'When W/O Smith and Booyens came on shift . . . they made me do exercises, such as standing against a wall with my knees bent, sit-ups, squats, press-ups and running on the spot and this went on for about two hours.

'On Tuesday, or Wednesday, Lt Botha asked me if I would make a confession to a police officer . . . I said I would and someone was sent for. I then changed my mind and

Lt Botha was very angry and punched me on the chest. He said he was going to kill me.

'He then made me stand up against a wall with my heels hooked on a brick and my knees bent slightly. Whenever I flagged, the ginger-haired man came and jabbed me to get standing to their satisfaction. This lasted for several hours.'

On 'about Wednesday' he said he was taken back to his cell and allowed to sleep. The following morning he made a statement to a Vereeniging security policeman.

Asked why he had not reported these incidents, Naidoo told the Court he feared he would have to go through it all again.

Naidoo said he had complained to Lt Steyn of a sore ear. 'I told him that W/O Booyens had hit me across the ear during the time I had been at John Vorster Square.

'The next day, W/O Booyens was very angry and demanded to know why I had made false allegations about him when he had been so good to me. He forced me to apologise in front of Lt Steyn.'

He told the Court that when an inspector of detainees had asked him if he had been assaulted, he had said he would rather not answer as he was frightened."

THE OTHER POLICE WITNESSES:

A number of police witnesses, principally drawn from the security police, gave evidence to the inquest court. Brigadier Muller, the head of the Johannesburg security police, said that it was within his power to authorise or forbid a lengthy interrogation session. Sometimes such interrogations were prolonged at the request of the detainee, who wanted to finalise the interrogation. He agreed that if Dr Aggett's complaint, that he had only been allowed ten hours of sleep during the 62 hour interrogation session, were true then it was 'a gross deprivation'. He agreed that there had been an undue delay in the investigation of Dr Aggett's complaint to the magistrate. He had been told by Major Cronwright (on whom see below) that Aggett had given the police a new list of names during the interrogation. Cronwright wished to arrest these persons and had told him so in front of Aggett. This might explain why Aggett had then hanged himself in his cell. The Brigadier later threatened to obtain an interdict against **The Rand Daily Mail** if it took any photographs of his men.

Major Cronwright is the head of the interrogation division of the security police at John Vorster Square. He had given a Lieutenant Whitehead permission to interrogate Aggett for 62 hours, but denied Whitehead's claim that Aggett had required 'more intensive' interrogation. He also denied that the police had been in any hurry or that they had believed that they were on the brink of a breakthrough in the investigation of a 'tremendous conspiracy'. He admitted that he was withholding from the inquest court dozens of pages of statements written by Aggett because they 'contained secret information'. Mr Schabert requested that these documents should not be admitted as to do so would 'implicate a very respected person in this court today with the Communist Party'. A ministerial certificate was later produced, in terms of which these statements were to be withheld from the inquest, on the ground that their disclosure would be prejudicial to the interests of national security. Amongst them were four pages of notes made by Aggett and alleged by the police to be 'crucial to their investigations'.

A Lieutenant Carr told the inquest that it had been necessary to make Dr Liz Floyd stand while she was being interrogated in order to discipline her. She had been insulting and sarcastic and had called the police 'bastards'.

Other police witnesses gave evidence that, insofar as the police were concerned, being an ANC sympathiser was the same thing as being a member of the ANC and that admitting to being a socialist was similar to admitting to being a communist.

A number of police witnesses denied the allegations regarding the treatment of Pramanathan Naidoo. One security policeman suggested that such allegations were made in order to denigrate the security police. The atmosphere at a number of interrogation sessions was described as 'friendly'.

THE EXPERTS

Professor Charl Vorster, a psychologist from the Rand Afrikaans University, gave evidence to the effect that Dr Aggett was not likely to have committed suicide in view of his personality and background. Professor Jan Plomp, a psychiatrist from the University of Pretoria, said that it was not unlikely, if Dr Aggett's complaints about his treatment were true, that this could have led to his suicide. A political scientist from the University of the Witwatersrand expressed the opinion that the alleged confession by Aggett to being a communist was wholly inconsistent with other parts of the same statement. He was of the view that Aggett could have allowed the admission to be included because it was expressed in terminology which he would not normally have used.

THE MINISTER OF POLICE:

Mindful perhaps of the outrage that followed former Justice Minister, James Kruger's, 'dit laat my koud' statement, Mr Louis le Grange announced on August 18 that 'he wished to make it abundantly clear that he was not insensitive to deaths in detention'.

THE INQUEST FINDING:

After the summing up and legal argument by counsel on both sides, Mr Kotze adjourned the inquest to consider the evidence. On 20 December 1982 he gave his decision, which has closed the door on any hope that a judicial inquiry in South Africa will pierce the veil of secrecy which surrounds the offices and deeds of the security police. Neil Aggett's death was the result of suicide, he found. No person was to blame for his death and no prosecution of any person was indicated. He did not stop there, however. He suggested that Mr Auret van Heerden, Dr Aggett's fellow detainee, should bear part of the blame for his death because he had not brought Dr Aggett's depressed psychological state to the attention of the security police.

HOW CAN DR NEIL AGGETT'S DEATH BE EXPLAINED?

There is abundant evidence on the effects of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation on the human mind. Expert evidence to the effect that solitary confinement for extended periods could impair a subject's mental faculties, and particularly rational thought processes and memory functioning, was accepted by a judge of the Natal Supreme Court in *S v Gwala & Others*, a Terrorism Act case decided in 1977. This finding was confirmed by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on appeal.

A few days after Dr Aggett's death, Professor Charl Vorster, who also gave evidence at the inquest, said, in an interview,

that prolonged solitary confinement amounted to severe torture. This interview was published in *The Natal Mercury* on 12 February 1982:

"Eskimos never walk alone, because the sheer monotony of their snowy landscapes could unbalance their minds.

That is why human beings should not be kept in solitary confinement, because the monotony, the lack of stimulus, will unbalance them.

And that is why any confession or acknowledgement of guilt made after a period of solitary confinement should be rejected by the courts.

That is the view of Professor Charl Vorster, of the department of psychology at Rand Afrikaans University.

'This is not my idiosyncratic viewpoint — it is the finding of numerous well-controlled laboratory experiments around the world,' he said in an interview. 'You only have to look at the literature.'

MENTAL TORTURE

That, for purely academic reasons, is what this young professor did. And now he is calling for the outlawing of solitary confinement, and the rejection by the courts of any confession or admission of guilt made after solitary confinement.

'Solitary confinement is a most severe mental torture. It is at the same level as the giving of electric shocks or other physical torture — it is just that it appears more innocent,' he said.

Only at the point at which a country was prepared to accept the need for electrical-shock treatment or other physical torture for detainees should it consider whether solitary confinement should be permitted.

And then solitary confinement should be under the supervision of a psychiatrist or psychologist to prevent permanent damage being done to the detainee, and no statement should be accepted unless it has been made after a 'cooling off' period, again supervised by a psychiatrist or psychologist. Why? What does solitary confinement really mean? And why should it be so devastating?

The technical term for solitary confinement is sensory or perceptual deprivation. It means a person is placed in a monotonous environment where nothing changes, where there are no incoming stimuli to break the monotony. That environment might be the high seas — and your lone yachtsman will begin to hallucinate. Or the skies, or in outer space.

Or it may just be an empty room — it does not have to be a pitch dark, soundproof chamber to disturb the balance of the human mind.

'To maintain a healthy mental balance you have to be in constant interaction with your environment and consciously or unconsciously test your perceptions.

'If you are cut off from the ability or opportunity to test yourself and measure yourself, you become more and more distanced from reality because you have no yardstick,' said Prof Vorster.

'Any group of people placed in a dark room with a single light against one wall will testify to the movement of the light, even when the light has been quite still.

'You are totally dependent on your environment for your perception and your testing of reality.'

More than 2 000 investigations, he said, had been undertaken around the world into the concept of 'brain-washing', which first surfaced when United States servicemen kept prisoner by the communists in the Korean war made amazing confessions and denounced their country. These investigations showed the technique of brain-washing centred on solitary confinement.

DISORIENTATED

Laboratory tests involving personality tests, clinical observation and measurement of the brain waves by electroencephalograph provided proof that victims of stimulation deprivation underwent changes. And the researchers used such terms as 'startling' to describe reactions to solitary confinement. 'In just about all these studies it was found that people, sometimes in a matter of hours, started hallucinating,' Prof Vorster said.

'If confinement is kept up the person loses contact with reality, he becomes totally disorientated and he exhibits symptoms you find in a person with psychosis — imbalance of the mind — such as high levels of anxiety, panic, delusions. He hallucinates, hears voices. Everything is distorted in terms of distance and height. Walls bulge, the figure of a policeman looms huge . . .

'He might not even be able to write or speak properly. Then — and this is most important — a state of depression could follow, making him more susceptible to persuasion and propaganda.

With severe depression could come thoughts of suicide or actual attempts at suicide.

'I hesitate to say this could explain the high figure of suicides among political detainees, but it certainly can't be ruled out that this is a contributing factor,' said Prof Vorster.

Even a person who was not considered to be the 'suicidal type' could be brought to that state.

'This is a state of severe torture. If you can't escape you get quite desperate,' he said.

MAJORITY WOULD

Solitary confinement could push a person with latent psychosis 'over the brink'. The sheer isolation of a U S base at the South Pole drove one man to full-scale psychosis.

Physical ailments might be aggravated because depressed people suffered physically — they would not eat and they lost weight and became more susceptible to pain.

So there was no need to inflict pain — 'solitary' was torture in itself

Solitary confinement definitely led to temporary, but not necessarily permanent imbalance of mind, Prof Vorster said.

The vast majority of people would become unbalanced to some extent by stimulation deprivation, but not every single individual. It would depend on their personality structure and how they handled the situation. People could even be trained to resist the effects to some extent. Interviews with those American PoWs indicated that people who exercised, or who played mental games, could keep selves together.

It would be interesting to know if people detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, and most of whom appeared to undergo solitary confinement, were permitted exercise, Prof Vorster said. The American PoWs had been expressly forbidden exercise.

Of course the moment any detainee came into contact with someone else, even his interrogator, there was no longer sensory deprivation. But the detainee was in contact with others within a certain frame of reference only — there were the same kind of questions, over and over again, and perhaps the same questioner.

'And because those stimuli are the only ones to which

he is exposed, their impact is so much stronger,' Professor Vorster said.

Detainees would not be helped by a newspaper suggestion that relatives observe the detainees through a glass panel — the detainees needed to interact with their relatives.

'Why can't they talk with their relatives? There can't be any security risk. I suspect it is purely for the purpose of stimulus deprivation.'

From a psychological point of view admissions made by people who had undergone solitary confinement were worthless, and should be rejected because the people who made them were not in a sound frame of mind.

No court would accept a statement made under the influence of alcohol. 'Solitary' was so much worse."

Professor Vorster's views were confirmed in papers given by Dr Louis J West, a Californian psychiatrist who had given expert evidence in the Gwala trial, and Dr G A Tyson, of the University of the Witwatersrand, at the Conference on Detention and Security Legislation held at the University of Natal in Durban in September 1982.

In another paper given at that Conference, Professor Frances Ames outlined the physiological consequences of some of the strategies alleged to have been employed by the security police in the Aggett inquest. She said that the anxiety resulting from the initial detention by the police was likely to cause limbic cortex arousal, an ancient response to crisis situations, which prepares the body for fight or flight. Denied any physical outlet, this state could result in a variety of somatic symptoms and pervasive apprehension. If this was followed by a period of relative sensory deprivation (for example being left alone in a darkened cell) the result could be disruption of orderly thought, loosening of emotional control, fantasy formation, distorted perception and hallucinations.

If the detainee was then subjected to a period of intensive interrogation, the sudden sensory overload could disrupt his sense of time, weaken his self-identity and blur the lines of demarcation between his own thoughts and those of the interrogators. Prolonged standing during interrogation also produces physiological responses. As blood pools in the lower extremities, plasma fluid leaks into the tissues, cardiac output and arterial pressure may fall and an increase in heart rate, and vaso-constriction in some areas, are likely to result. The consequences of these physiological changes are restlessness, nausea, slowing of the pulse and a reduction of the blood supply to the brain, which may cause loss of consciousness, falling and ultimately epileptic seizures.

Cerebral dysfunction can be further increased by interference with the normal sleep patterns by sleep deprivation. Minor assaults can further disrupt rational thought by causing fear and anger in response to physical pain. Severe assaults can result in permanent damage, especially to the brain, and death. The administration of neurotoxins can also cause temporary or permanent neurological damage.

It seems perfectly reasonable to suggest that Dr Aggett's suicide could have been induced by depression and despair caused by the application of a combination of the techniques and effects described by Professor Ames and the other psychological experts. The first part of the finding of the inquest magistrate might therefore be technically correct, namely that Dr Aggett committed suicide.

But how, in good conscience, can we agree that no one was to blame for his death? The blame for Dr Aggett's death must, in my view, be allocated to, and apportioned between, a number of persons and agencies. First and foremost, it must be laid at the door of the legislation which permits detention without trial in solitary confinement. Despite the findings of the Rabie Commission, there is more than enough evidence, both in South Africa and elsewhere, to show that abuse of the detention without trial power is virtually inevitable. But legislation has no independent existence of its own. It is an expression of the values which prevail in the society which brings it into existence. So the blame must go also to the persons who enacted the Terrorism Act and its successor, the Internal

Security Act of 1982, and who permit such 'indescribably wicked' legislation to continue in existence. It must fall heavily too upon the members of the security police and upon the members of the South African executive, both past and present, who hold or held in their hands the rudder of the South African ship of state. Lastly, and most of all, it must fall upon the ordinary fun-loving, sun-loving, honest-to-God white South African, who, surrounded by poverty and suffering, enjoys one of the highest living standards in the world and by an extraordinary feat of wilful blindness, does not, will not, see what indescribable abominations are being executed in his name and for his alleged benefit. □

SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

The Steyn Commission's interpretation of social and political reality.

by Ralph Lawrence

Mr P.W. Botha throughout his period of office as Prime Minister of South Africa's Nationalist Government has sought to project the image of the reformist, a politician well aware of the dynamics of social and political processes, yet at the same time a pragmatist, sensitive to the constraints on public-policy making at any juncture. To this end advice on many significant areas of public policy has been requested. The President's Council was initiated to provide advice on constitutional proposals; the Human Sciences Research Council has, at the Government's behest, carried out studies of sport and education; and commissions of inquiry have reported on labour, employment, security and the mass media. In this article I examine the work of two Commissions of Inquiry, both headed by Justice Steyn and both dealing with the press, to ascertain not the specific policies they recommend but the intellectual foundations of their analyses, their ideological outlook. We can then determine whether those who actually make public policy are receiving at least some source of advice which encourages them to think differently and promotes a climate of change in society which is reflected in the public policies eventually adopted.

The first so-called Steyn Commission was set up to investigate the relation between the mass media and the state on matters of security.¹ This Report appeared in early 1980. The second Commission carried this task a stage further by being given very generous terms of reference, to judge '... whether the conduct of, and the handling of matters by, the mass media meet the needs and interests of the South African community and the demands of the times, and, if not, how they can be improved.'² These findings were made public in early 1982.³

First of all, a preliminary note on my selection of the Steyn Commissioners's efforts for the type of analysis I propose. Both Commissions concluded that their respective terms of reference necessitated a full factual and 'scientific' examination of the context in which the mass media operated; namely, South African society. A large part of these Reports deal with this aspect, clearly revealing an ideological pers-

pective and attendant general public policy prescriptions. Unless indicated to the contrary, I present a composite analysis of the two Reports, for although the second Commission was entirely independent of the first, and not bound by its findings, in practice the work of the bodies proved to be complementary. The later Steyn Commission was substantially in agreement with the views of its predecessor, going so far as attempting to rebut its critics.

I have chosen to restrict myself here to three areas of the Steyn Reports: the social fabric and the political order; democracy; the state, and the relation between the individual and the state. These are two other topics, which for reasons of space I have omitted - the theory of the 'total onslaught' and the appropriate response, a 'national strategy'. The total onslaught comprises the ideological and material forces, within and without South Africa, directed against the present system of rule. The national strategy is the ideological and material riposte, dictating the substance, pace and timing of changes in public policy. The total onslaught, in particular, pervades the Reports, providing the background to and complementing the interpretation of social and political reality I now begin to discuss.

The Social Failure and the Political Order

Does South African society constitute a community, in the sense of a population residing in a given territory, sharing common interests and unified by as well as owing allegiance to the same political authority? The latter Steyn Commission put forward the following argument. To begin with the status of whites in South Africa has to be considered. Can they be regarded justifiably as indigeneous people of South Africa? 'The Afrikaner is unquestionably a true child of Africa' whose only home is South Africa.⁴ Afrikaners were once a settler community but they became a nation with its own language, identity and culture - the Cape-Dutch and Boer-Republican cultures.⁵ English-speaking South Africans, however, are only in the process of becoming an African people as they interact with Afrikaners and 'other Peoples', thus differentiating them from English-speakers elsewhere.

South Africa is ethnically diverse; it is composed of a number of peoples, each of whom is determined to retain its own ethnic and cultural diversity. This is a well-established fact.⁶

As such each people in this plural community of nations has a different fundamental outlook or perception of reality from that of other peoples. This is manifest in how a people views its past, its present circumstances and its future. On this basis different approaches to social, economic and political demands are inevitable. ⁷ Apart from cultural cleavages South Africa's population also experiences different levels of economic development: 'This is indeed a land of extremes, where the First World and the Third World co-exist, but do not easily co-operate or harmonise - not even the components of the First World amongst themselves or those of the Third World.'⁸

Given all these various types of diversity it would seem unlikely that South Africans have the common needs and interests which are necessary conditions for any community. The second Steyn Commission, however, found a number of grounds for deciding that South Africa is actually a community, characterised by 'unity in diversity' - as symbolised by the design of the national flag.⁹

For a start, human beings in general share certain fundamental but essential needs and interests; namely, food, clothing and shelter, as well as order and stability, the minimum prerequisites for harmonious social relations.¹⁰ A population sharing these material interests develops a degree of coherence and acquires a sense of identity; it becomes a community. White and Black South Africans have shown very clearly by their attitudes and behaviour that they do have some common needs and interests - order, peace, economic prosperity and political freedom.¹¹ Thus a South African community exists. Readily identifiable ethnic groups can be part of a community: the Commission supports this by drawing attention to three examples - the European Economic Community, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

A sense of community is evident when its members are willing to co-operate with one another. They collaborate in the pursuance of common objectives and each is aware of the other's worth in so doing. This, too, the Commission held is an acknowledged fact in South Africa. The case of the Boer War is cited. Some English-speakers assisted the Boers in their struggle, as did Blacks who were described in the Report as 'battle-attendants. - Agterryers'.¹² More recently Black and White Africans together with Namibians have been '... facing the common foe in South West Africa and other operational theatres and rear areas in defence of Common ideals and of a common sub-continental homeland ...'¹³

But this general point can be put even more strongly. The peoples of South Africa - as the Commission refers to them - do not merely co-operate in the furtherance of common needs and interests; they share a common destiny of which they are increasingly conscious. This is the true import, it would appear, of the Commission's phrase 'unity in diversity'. People who are concerned to maintain their identity nevertheless act in concert with people of different ethnic groups because their destiny is a common one. Put another way, this is the explanation for 'aggressive South African heterogeneity'; the inherent urge of a community to determine its own destiny according to its own designs.¹⁴ What are the political implications of this view?

South Africa is recognised by the international community to be that territory and population which fall under the jurisdiction of the political rulers in the central government in Pretoria. This is the South African state, which does not

accord with the Steyn Commissioners' view of political reality. Instead, the second Steyn Report regards the same territory as the 'Inner Core' or South African community, composing the Republic of South Africa and the 'independent states' of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and



Ciskei, as well as, it would appear, 'South West Africa'.¹⁵ It is acknowledged that all ethnic groups have equal rights to self-determination. There is no demand to eradicate ethnicity; in fact, quite the reverse. 'In political terms, at least in respect of customary and habitual life-style, there appears to be no demand for integration. The response to the question whether each population group should or should not live according to its own customs and habits was strongly in favour of the maintenance of own life-style ...'¹⁶

There are three main shades of opinion in South African politics, the Report says. One is that Marxist rule should be established by revolutionary means. Secondly, what one might term the liberal view, namely, that majority rule should replace minority rule, with the transition coming about peacefully. Thirdly, the conservative or pragmatic approach; in this category there is the Nationalist government, the White opposition political parties and leaders of other population groups who participate in the operation of the current political institutions.¹⁷ The Steyn Commissions favour the pragmatic school.

Political reality determines the appropriate style of rule. In the South African community, this means co-operation between Whites and Blacks: '... there are too many Whites (who are also too determined) in South Africa for the Blacks to be able to "chase them into the sea", and too many Blacks (who are likewise too determined) in South Africa for the Whites to subjugate and keep subject by force.'¹⁸ If either Whites or Blacks exclude each other from public policy decision-making, political and economic disaster will follow, creating a vacuum which a foreign power may fill.¹⁹

On grounds of pragmatism, then, White and Black political leaders should collaborate. This was put into practice at the end of the 1960s when the democratic rulers of the day concluded that the South African community's future should not be settled by armed conflict. Negotiations commenced then and have accelerated over the past decade, with the mode of deliberation constantly being adapted to changing circumstances. The benefit of '... this interaction is having a yeast-like effect on the Inner Core's body politic,

causing a beneficent and dynamic fermentation of thought and the generation of new, realistic and positive perceptions, attitudes and relationships at all levels . . .²⁰ Despite sharp differences of opinion between South Africa's political élite the process of consultation has made them acutely aware of their interdependence and their common needs and interests: co-operation helps to foster a sense of community.

All in all South Africa's situation is somewhat paradoxical. Stability is provided by effective political rule and a 'basically sound' economy. Yet the community is simultaneously in a state of flux because of its undergoing legal, social and political change.²¹

What range of acceptable public policy alternatives is implied by this perception of society and politics? Two features stand out. First, any public policy-makers must take as axiomatic that the main cleavage in South African society is ethnic - this must be maintained. Second, the South African community has certain common needs and interests, the most important of which is to accommodate by negotiation Black and White political aspirations in 'a constellation of states'.²² This evolutionary process is well-established allowing South Africans to seek solutions to problems in their own 'idiom', without interference from imported ideologies like liberalism or Marxism. The 'Inner Core' is thus dynamic; moreover it is a dynamism with particular qualities — a 'developing democracy'.

Both Steyn Commissions conclude that South Africa is a 'developing and plural democracy' in which the various nations or ethnic groups are subject to a republican form of government: 'Within South Africa and South-West Africa there are at present dynamic forces at work within our midst aimed at the development of the internal order into a multiracial symbiosis modelled on the fundamental values, conduct and world-view of the true religiously-orientated and democratically inclined civilization.'²³ What are the characteristics of democracy in South Africa? There is, the Reports conclude, basic freedom of speech and Press with criticism of the state tolerated within the confines of the law. The judiciary is free from political control; all individuals are equal before the law. Despite state influence the capitalist economy is mainly unfettered. Church and state operate independently, with freedom of religion guaranteed. The 'peoples defence force', security and police forces are apolitical, symbols of national verity and integrity, ' . . . the protectors of the life and limb, hearth and home and general security interests of the citizens'.²⁴

Although South Africa is a developing democracy it is not an orthodox liberal democracy with equal political rights for all and a popularly elected legislature and executive. This is an ideal which is not necessarily appropriate for every society in all phases of its development.²⁵ Liberal democracy only flourishes in homogeneous, rather small societies, without substantial urbanisation, industrialisation and a high rate of population growth. In any case, even the supposed democracies are subject to stress and instability. Britain is suffering militant trade unions, civil disorder and Irish Republican Army terrorism; the United States has wilted under Black Power and persistent racial inequality; democracy is unsuccessful in the European Economic Community. The ideal democracies are not so ideal after all.²⁶

In any event the Westminster system of government cannot be expected to function troublefree in Africa since it is a cultural transplant bound to be rejected by its recipient society.

It would certainly fail in South Africa, given its ethnic diversity, a fast-growing population, a large landmass, industrialisation and urbanisation, which are the very circumstances preventing liberal democracy from taking root. Its initiation would divide society not unite it, for although South Africa is a community, a corporate sense of identity among the people is still lacking; there is a differentiation rather than uniformity.²⁷ At least a decade must pass before a sense of common destiny can be fully established.²⁸

In a liberal democracy the opinion of the majority expressed at the polls decides who will form the government. The second Steyn Commission believed that it is not quite so easy to determine what constitutes a majority in a heterogeneous society like South Africa:

Within the totality of that Community of Peoples each such distinct National or Ethnic Component is a minority as against the rest; but within a particular Nation or group the members thereof usually perceive "the will of the majority" to be that of the majority within their own group, and they cannot usually be expected to defer or bow to the will of some majority on the "outside".²⁹

For a variety of reasons, then, liberal democracy is undesirable and dangerous to implement in South Africa. But this is not to say that the present South African political dispensation is undemocratic. What makes it a democracy is the fact that leaders of all population groups are able to have some influence on government decision-making. Blacks thus exercise considerable indirect political power even though they are unrepresented in the central legislature. The greater the degree of consultation between Whites and Blacks, the more expansive the democracy - and South Africa's democracy is undoubtedly expanding. Therefore, to regard the country ' . . . as an oppressive, racist-inspired White regime suppressing the Black majority and depriving them of their human dignity . . . is fallacious thinking, which in addition ignores the present internal South African dynamism.'³⁰

Democracy

Democracy is a mode of political rule. We must now consider the Steyn Commissions' understanding of political rule itself, particularly their conception of the state and the relation between the individual and the state.

Individuals are fallible by nature, requiring aid to prevent them from succumbing to their foibles and all manner of dangers.³¹ Without society man deteriorates, his mental powers recede. The survival of the individual, his welfare and happiness is only possible in a social context. Society makes self-fulfilment possible. Man is inescapably a social being.³² However, the social fabric alone cannot sustain order and stability. Man's unrelenting efforts to dominate man must be tempered.

Put in its most basic form, the quest for power, the struggle to achieve, command, maintain, consolidate and exercise power, whether with just or unjust intentions, is one of the fundamental driving forces in man. This power struggle is as old as man. It appears in the individual, the institutional or corporate level, within the community, between political parties, in industry and commerce, between states, in brief, everywhere.³³

The role of the South African state is instrumental. In other words it has no intrinsic qualities beyond the functions it

serves which is to provide for the needs of society. Society cannot do without the state, yet without society there would be no rationale for the state at all.³⁴ The state is an artifice devised by society to attempt to remedy its shortcomings, to bring about orderly social relations. In the 1980 Steyn Report the state is defined as '... a political system, constituted into an organisational unity by its citizens, a particular territory and a system of law which renders legal a particular way in which power is discharged. Within its territory the state enjoys the highest measure of sovereignty.'³⁵ A state possesses 'inalienable rights' established and guaranteed by law. Against this orderly background individuals and institutions can pursue their goals. Because of the indispensability of the state to society any attempts to replace it with a stateless or anarchic society must be resisted and no such tendencies should be given any encouragement.³⁶ The internal object of the state is to maintain law and order; externally, its role is to protect its citizens.³⁷ These ends are attained by government which acts in the national interest. Government is the set of institutions through which state power is exercised. In a democratic system political rulers owe their office to the members of society.³⁸



The State and the Individual.

This brings us to the relationship between the state and the individual. In Western liberal democracy political activity is evaluated in the final resort by the advantages or disadvantages conferred on individuals. However, the situation is different in South Africa since the community takes precedence over the individual. This is basic to both Afrikaner and African political thought: '... Afrikaner political thinking... takes as its fundamental tenets the political freedom and differential development, of Peoples, or ethno-cultural Communities, rather than that of the individual as a deculturalised and non-ethnic base component of a politically and racially undifferentiated Body Politic.'³⁹ Once again, the Steyn Commission asserts, this demonstrates how foreign ideologies are inappropriate and impractical in the South African context.⁴⁰

A similar fallacy, so the Reports say, distorts the notion of an individual's rights. Rights and duties are correlative; every right entails a duty.⁴³ What this implies emerges clearly in a passage in the first Report dealing with military conscription. The argument runs as follows. Because Whites enjoy political rights they have '... corresponding civic duties in defence of the system that accords them such rights.'⁴⁴ The electorate determines at the polls whether a cause should be defended or not. That is what decide the existence of a 'just war'. Thereafter the individual is obliged to accept the majority opinion and it is illegal to refuse to abide by it. 'Should an individual, because of personal moral conviction, not be able to accept as just the cause that the people have accepted as just,

he may exercise his right of withdrawing from the community.'⁴⁵ (This is a highly circumscribed 'right' for reasons which will soon become obvious.)

There are not inalienable or absolute individual rights, that is, general and universal rights which are not conferred on individuals by the state, but possessed independently of the state. The Steyn Commissions adopted a positivist approach. All rights are to be found in common and statute law.⁴⁶ Rights and obligations are regulated by the legal system. Three comments at this stage. First, if all rights are created by the state, then it is the opinion of the judiciary or decision of the executive which will decide whether an individual does have the right of withdrawal from the community. Secondly, if rights are solely legal artefacts does an individual have only legal obligations — that is, no moral obligations if they have no legal standing? Thirdly, rights may be curtailed or withheld by executive action. Hence there is no natural justice; justice is what the law says it is and that is variable. Or as the Commissioners put it: 'law must always be just, but justice must be determined according to the requirement concerned.'⁴⁷

The relationship between the rights and duties of individuals is emphasised, particularly in the earlier Report, because it was felt that rights are continually stressed, but little is ever said about duties, especially an individual's obligation to his country and community.⁴⁸ Since 1945, says the Report, the trend has been for the individual to take precedence over society which has led to constant attacks on social, political and legal authority. The 'Western public has... been continuously fed on a "rights-rich, duties-poor diet" of legal and socio-political philosophies which markedly weaken the social fabric, especially in the ranks of the young.'⁴⁹

Human Rights

Human rights present a problem, as the second Steyn Commission, on the basis of their sources, was unable to find widely shared agreement on what these rights actually are. But whatever they are, they exist in a social context and are part of social relationships, including those that bind members to groups, and groups to groups.⁵⁰ The importance of human rights, then, must be assessed against the background of the circumstances of a society.⁵¹

When a society is in the throes of crisis, as South Africa is, bearing the brunt of a total onslaught, the security of the state overrides the rights of individuals. In the Commission's words, 'the current and anticipated threat is so serious that the "Supreme Right" of the State must prevail and its defensibility and survival interest must take precedence over the lesser interest of the individual and the group.'⁵² The argument for this is identical to that for the justification of political rule. The state serves the individual; measures which protect the state are beneficial to him. Consequently, curtailing an individual's rights is done in his interest. Thus security legislation which restricts rights to legal redress is introduced for the sake of the community, to counter the dangers it faces. The 'abnormal demands of the times' are the cause of these measures. But who decides when the state is imperilled? The state itself.⁵³ And is it the state which is at risk — or the government which, of course, is an entirely different matter? At one point the 1980 Steyn Commission suggests that the press' right to public information may be limited if the government is in trouble. The passage reads, '... where government anticipates risk to its survival, (the press) may be precluded from the disclosing of less sensitive information relating to security and defence matters.'⁵⁴

Two noteworthy features emerged in this section on the state and the individual. One is the stress yet again on the community and the corresponding irrelevance of Western doctrine on individual rights and the state. This in a way is surprising, or at least inconsistent, since the justification for political rule, described earlier, is the classical liberal view whereby formal political institutions and practices are only legitimate in so far as they satisfy the basic requirements of individuals.

And, one might add, although the Steyn Commissioners constantly inveigh against the perniciousness of alien political ideas, their own stance is hardly free of such influence.

Summary

Finally, the intellectual foundations of the Steyn Reports represented in the preceding analysis can be summarised and organised into the following set of propositions:

1. Man is not innately good.
 - i. One of man's fallibilities is the desire for power
 - ii. Individuals have in common certain basic needs — food, clothing, shelter, order and peace.
2. South African society is heterogeneous.
 - i. The main cleavage is ethno-cultural due to a desire for national identity.
 - ii. South Africa is a community with common needs and interests — order, security, prosperity, freedom.
 - iii. The community is the fundamental social unit.
 - iv. A common destiny is developing based on a sense of community and a growing awareness of a shared threat to and hopes for the present social and political order.
3. Unique situations demand unique solutions.
 - i. South African society is unique; it is being subjected to unique pressures.
 - ii. South African solutions must be sought for South African problems.
 - iii. Foreign ideologies are inherently unworkable in South Africa.
4. The state makes possible stable and fulfilling social relations.
 - i. Instrumental; the state serves the individual.
 - ii. Rights and duties are correlative.
 - iii. Positivism; rights are established by the state.
 - iv. Natural rights are a standard, not a requirement.
 - v. The security of the state takes precedence over the rights of individuals for their benefit.
 - vi. The state itself decides what is in the public interest.

For there to be consistency between such an ideological stance and public policies pursued by the state an acceptable political dispensation in South Africa must conform to these prescriptions:

1. Unity in diversity.
 - i. Ethno-cultural groups have a right to self-determination.
 - ii. Ethno-cultural groups have equal rights.
2. Political dispensation.
 - i. Ethno-cultural groups seek a political order in which group identity will be maintained.
 - ii. The South African community is a constellation of states.
3. Political development.
 - i. Co-operation is the widely shared style among South Africa's political leaders.
 - ii. Black leaders participate to an ever-increasing degree in the policy decision-making of central government.
4. Democracy.
 - i. South Africa is a developing and plural democracy.
 - ii. Democratisation is the degree of influence on policy decision-making.
 - iii. Liberal democracy is an ideal which is practically unrealisable in South Africa.

There is not a single aspect of the ideological basis of the Steyn Commissions' work which suggests any major deviation from the views and policies enunciated by South Africa's current political establishment. Far from being a creative and imaginative source of advice the Steyn Reports attempt to legiti-

mise and foster the spirit of cautious reforms and tentative, inherently conservative, political change practised by the Nationalist Government. It is ironic that these independent Commissions of Inquiry, free from political party and governmental representation, should offer in their Reports such a splendid illustration of the contemporary apartheid mind at work.

References

*My thanks to the Editor and library staff of the *Natal Witness* for allowing me to use their copy of the later Steyn Commission report.

(1) The terms of reference were published in Republic of South Africa *Government Gazette*, No. 6776, 14 December 1979; No. 6821, January 1980. The report itself appeared as Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force and South African Police*, RP52/1980, Pretoria, Government Printer. (Henceforth referred to as S1.) — (2) *Government Gazette*, No. 7106, 27 June 1980. (3) Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media*, RP89/1981, Pretoria, Government Printer. (Subsequently referred to as S2.) For an excellent review of this work, see André du Toit, 'The Steyn Commission and the Theory of the Total Onslaught', *South African Outlook*, April 1982, pp 51-54. — (4) S1, p4; S2, p965. — (5) S2, p181. — (6) S2, p180. — (7) S2, p177. — (8) S1, p74; S2, pp175, 800, 887, 1131. — (9) S2, pp1130-1131. — (10) S2, p177. — (11) S2, p175. — (12) S2, pp180, 1138. — (13) S2, p178. And: 'An even more striking demonstration of that capacity to join hands and to bridge a seemingly unbridgeable psychological, cultural and political gulf and to co-operate in the realisation of a joint Ideal is to be found at the foot of the Women's Memorial at Bloemfontein, a Monument representing the sacred essence of Afrikanerdom. Of the five persons there buried three came from English-speaking homes, and one, Emily Hobhouse, never mastered the Afrikaans language.' S2, p177. — (14) S2, p178. — (15) S1, p45; S2, p177. — (16) S2, p184. — (17) S2, p923. — (18) S1, p55. White right-wing terrorism is a response to the Government's '... policy of adaptation to changing circumstances and of dynamic and realistic development of the South African Community.' S2, p170. — (19) S2, p720. — (20) S2, p721. (21) S2, p185. Cf. also pp178-179. — (22) S2, pp184-185. — (23) S2, p185. — (24) S1, p25. — (25) S1, p7. — (26) S2, p182. — (27) S2, pp197-198. — (28) S2, p201. — (29) S1, p25. — (30) S2, pp198-199. — (31) S1, p36. — (32) S1, p17; S2, p721. — (33) S1, p17; S2, pp 262-263. — (34) S2, p880. — (35) S2, p282. — (36) S1, p90. — (37) S1, pp91-92. — (38) S1, p90. — (39) S1, p92. 'Government and its institution are primarily responsible for the monitoring, planning and stability-ensuing process... To create and maintain a stable climate a government must not only be fair and just, but must be perceived to be fair, just and responsible, to have the will to act effectively and to be credible in the eyes of the community it serves.' S2, pp897-898. — (40) S2, pp655-656. — (41) *Ibid.* Note, too, this general admonition: 'As in all human affairs, matters pertaining to South Africa are more often than not markedly different from what they seem to be at first glance or through doctrinal spectacles designed elsewhere for use in other surroundings; and caution is, therefore, necessary when attempting to scout the South African landscape through such glasses lest one stumbles and falls over some undetected obstacle.' S1, p279. — (42) '... an orderly compliance with civic duties is a necessary corollary to the enjoyment of civic rights.' S1, p64. Presumably, then, the reverse is equally true — a duty is only owed when a right is conferred? Thus on this view if one has no political rights one incurs no political obligations. — (43) S1, p63. — (44) *ibid.* — (45) S1, pp9, 17-18, 41. — (46) S1, p18. Natural justice can only be a standard: '... in our opinion, "the Natural Law Tradition" of our law is a precious heritage which must at all costs be preserved and constantly used as a "golden metawand" or instrument wherewith to... measure the quality of existing or contemplated laws and procedures, and also as a guiding star in our journey towards a more fully developed socio-legal dispensation.' S2, pp202-203. — (47) S1, p23. — (48) S2, p262. — (49) 'The reciprocal gravitational pulls of the solar system of the individual and his cluster of rights and the Galaxy of Society, constitute the right-duty relationship between the single person and the group that constitutes the web of relationship which is of the essence of human existence.' S2, p263. — (50) S2, p288. — (51) S1, p144. Elsewhere, 'Salus reipublicae suprema lex' is quoted — the security of the state is the supreme law. See S1, pp16-19. — (52) 'The commission emphasizes that only the State is able to determine what is dangerous to the State and what is in the interests of State security...' Mr F. le Roux (N.P. Brakpan) speaking in the House of Assembly on 28 April 1980. Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, Vol 86, Col. 4963. — (53) S1, p153. □

ARE THIRD WORLD UNIVERSITIES REALLY NECESSARY?

by Robin Hallett

Do Third World countries really need universities? Or, to rephrase that question rather less starkly, rather more precisely (the term 'Third World', stretched to embrace countries as different from one another as Mexico and Mozambique, is becoming too cumbersome for rational discussion) can the poorest countries in the world really afford the most expensive type of educational institution? Even in this modified form the question has a shocking, heretical ring about it. Only an arrogant Northerner, someone from the South of the world might argue, would have the effrontery to pose such a question, revealing in so doing his racial and cultural prejudices.

Certainly the question is not one that many people would have thought of posing in the Sixties and early Seventies, that euphoric age of educational expansion, when Education seemed the easy answer to all problems, the panacea for all ills, while higher education was clearly a vital component of the process of Development and Growth. Nor, speaking personally, would I myself have presumed to think heretically in the days when I too had my niche in the academic establishment with a research post at Oxford in the Sixties, a lectureship in Cape Town in the Seventies. But the Eighties have forced me, as they have forced so many others, to find rather less conventional ways of earning a living: supported by a modest inheritance, I work as a free-lance writer, trying to keep my links with the academic world through lecturing engagements in South Africa.

About a year ago I was invited to lecture for a month at the university of an independent African state. My motives for accepting the invitation were, I think, pretty typical of the reasons that lead many expatriates to work in African or Third World universities and so it is worth subjecting them to a certain amount of critical analysis. (The position of an English person working at a white South African university is very different: it is easy to shed the expatriate label and feel oneself assimilated to the local community.) My prime reason for accepting this particular invitation was a purely economic one: I grasped eagerly the opportunity of earning a month's salary topped up as it was by allowances — unnecessarily generous allowances, I could not help thinking, from the British Council.

Curiosity was another motive. Though I had worked in Nigeria and Tanganyika as it then was in the Fifties, I had known Black Africa only in its colonial era and had never had the experience of working in an independent African state. At white South African universities it is all too easy to feel oneself distanced from Africa's fundamental problem, the problem of increasing poverty. I hoped I would find myself among people who had got their priorities right and were deeply involved with essentials. I hoped too that I would have an opportunity of fleshing out the recent history of the country I was to visit, of making it more personal, more vibrant in my mind.

Vanity was unquestionably another motive. I was flattered to have received an invitation out of the blue. It was good to feel that one was actually needed in one's old profession, that in a time of academic unemployment, with English universities turning into closed shops, one could do something useful again. There is, in this desire to be useful, a certain missionary urge. I have learnt to be sceptical of those who set out from Europe to 'help' the Third World. But it is difficult to purge one's mind completely of a certain residual idealism. In any case I enjoy university teaching — at its best the most rewarding, because the most sociable and stimulating, of occupations.

This personal confession is not irrelevant to the theme of this article. British people of my background and generation have played a large part in shaping the pattern of higher education in many parts of Africa. Our experience has a certain historical interest. Besides, education is not a subject that should be written about in the abstract. Potentially the subject is an exciting one. Unfortunately academic writing on education — like academic writing on most subjects — is couched in such drearily abstract terms that the subject itself comes to seem tedious. This is a great pity: in its essence education is concerned with a highly intriguing type of human relationship — the relationship between the teacher and the taught — a relationship that can prove quite as fascinating to consider as that between husbands and wives, parents and children or masters and servants.

From now on I shall be treading on sensitive ground: I shall cause offence no doubt to those who have vested interests in maintaining certain types of educational institution. But I shall not be indulging in sonorous moral judgements: who indeed will presume to be the judge in these matters when we are all guilty of short-sightedness, incompetence and self-interest? I am in pursuit of that elusive substance 'reality'. I want to squeeze as many useful lessons as I can out of a particular experience. I hope that what I say may help to promote and stimulate discussion — and discussion that will not be an end in itself but a movement towards more effective action.

Any expatriate with recent experience of working in an African university can bring out a crop of stories about personal hardships and professional frustrations: universities closed for political reasons for weeks or months at a time, acute fears about personal safety on account of the incidence of armed robbery, anxieties caused by the lack of proper medical facilities, austerities imposed by the lack of basic necessities. I got off pretty lightly in the university I visited. I was adequately accommodated, food was easily procurable, and there was a good library. But my visit was certainly surrounded by a good deal of muddle and confusion that seemed intensely irritating at the time — letters left unanswered for months, money wasted on extravagant telex messages, days spent hanging around with no demands being made on my services,

an absence of those small attentions and courtesies which can cast a glow of pleasure, of remembered human warmth over the drabest of experiences.

These points are not trivial: they have great practical importance. In the 1950's and '60's it was not difficult for African universities to recruit first-rate expatriate teachers. Bad working conditions are going to make the task of recruitment infinitely more difficult. The good expatriate teacher in the Africa of the 1980's is going to have to develop some of the qualities shown by the old missionaries — self-reliance, an ability to adapt to the modes of the country, a good deal of faith and dedication. These qualities are hardly likely to be shown by those who see themselves climbing an academic ladder or who have come out to Africa simply to earn a salary.

In the colonial period teaching appointments at African universities were filled almost entirely by expatriates from the metropolis. The staffs of African universities have become much more diverse in recent years. As many posts as possible are filled by locals, but there are still large expatriate contingents. The expatriate communities have become more cosmopolitan: they include many academics from other African or Third World countries. At first there may seem something exciting about having so cosmopolitan an academic community. But cosmopolitanism is only enriching if it is accompanied by open intercourse between people of different backgrounds. If such openness is lacking, then lines of division easily emerge between locals and expatriates, Africans, Asians and Europeans.

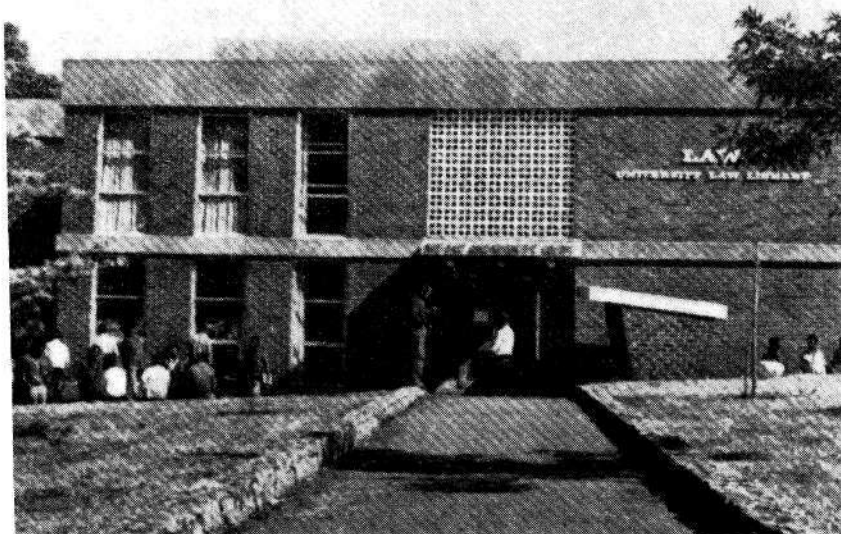
Those who are appointed to posts in African universities have to live with a degree of insecurity that those who have spent their working lives in the stable environment of an English, American, or white South African university would find it hard to imagine. This is most obviously the case with the expatriates. A few of the expatriates may be old-timers who have dug themselves in so deeply that they are not likely to be moved. All other expatriates are appointed on contracts for two or three years. A lecturer out from England whose contract is not renewed faces the alternative either of returning home to join the dole queue (unless he or she is exceptionally lucky) or of taking another contract appointment in another African or Third World country, knowing that in another two or three years the problem of moving will come up

yet again. The plight of African or Asian expatriates is likely to be even more painful. Often political reasons make it impossible for them to return to their own country, while immigration restrictions shut the gates of those traditional refuges for dissident intellectuals in London, Paris or New York.

But the position of local members of staff may be hardly less enviable. Superficially they can see themselves as members of the dominant elite, men and women whose careers have been highly successful. But they occupy posts of some political sensitivity. If they are ambitious, they will use the university as a jumping off point from which to move to more lucrative posts in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy. If they fall foul of the local political establishment, they may well find themselves having to flee the country for their lives. The political activities of academics in white South African universities look a good deal less hazardous in comparison.

A measure of insecurity can be stimulating: lively minds and security of tenure do not go easily together. But too much insecurity is bad for any institution, and especially bad for a university. Teaching and research both require a measure of continuity; short-term appointments make for scrappy teaching and mediocre research. Worse than that, insecurity also serves to create an atmosphere profoundly inimical to free discussion. "Keep your head down, be careful what you say, don't get in any way involved in local politics" may be practical advice to give university lecturers working in countries with prickly authoritarian regimes (and most countries in Africa come into that category in the 1980's) but it is advice which negates that ideal of intellectual freedom to which every proper university should surely aspire.

I was innocent enough to hope that the university I visited would be humming with intellectual activity. (When I visit white South African universities, I always find them lively places — but I know I am lucky to have friends whose conversation is stimulating and exciting.) I realized that there would be political constraints but I thought that I would meet a good many people who were giving their minds to the country's basic problems and the need to tackle in a practical manner all the manifestations of underdevelopment. I foresaw myself being given some opportunity to visit development projects. I wanted desperately to correct the gloom induced by a contemplation of the present state of Africa, to meet people whose work would give me real cause for optimism.



University of Zimbabwe Law Library

Perhaps I was just unlucky and did not meet the right people. "So-and-so", somebody said to me, "is the chap you really ought to talk to — but he's gone off to New York." (Incidentally if I were vice-chancellor of a university in an undeveloped country, I would put a complete embargo on conference-gadding by members of staff during term time.) By the time my month was up, I had seen no more of the country than the campus of the university. Like most campuses, it was a very cosy enclave. Within its confines it was as easy to forget the country's basic problems as it is for most white South Africans to be unaware of the realities of life in the urban ghettos and the rural slums.

But I learnt also that there was really no need to leave the campus to learn something of what was happening in the country. Expatriate members of staff might be too new to the country or too taken up with their own difficulties to provide illuminating insights, locals members of staff too cautious and reserved — but then why should they open their minds to a complete stranger? But with students — once the necessary mood of confidence had been established — conversation was much easier. Many of the students were men and women in their thirties and forties, often with a rich and varied experience of life behind them. At their best they were philosophical, perceptive and articulate. As they talked, my mind began to fill with a series of vignettes of local life — family relationships, clan divisions, journeys, cattle, political meetings. There was satire and drama, violence and laughter, human warmth and human variety, in their conversation. This was really what I had come to find, a compensation for all frustration, and on reflection — I shall come back to this point later — an antidote for pessimism. I trust that there was nothing condescending in my interest, my avid curiosity — I did not want to play the part of the anthropologist or the historian, I just wanted to know what it was like to live in that society, that country. I hope I would feel the same about any society. A proper curiosity is the obverse to a proper respect — and respect is the foundation stone for proper human relationships.

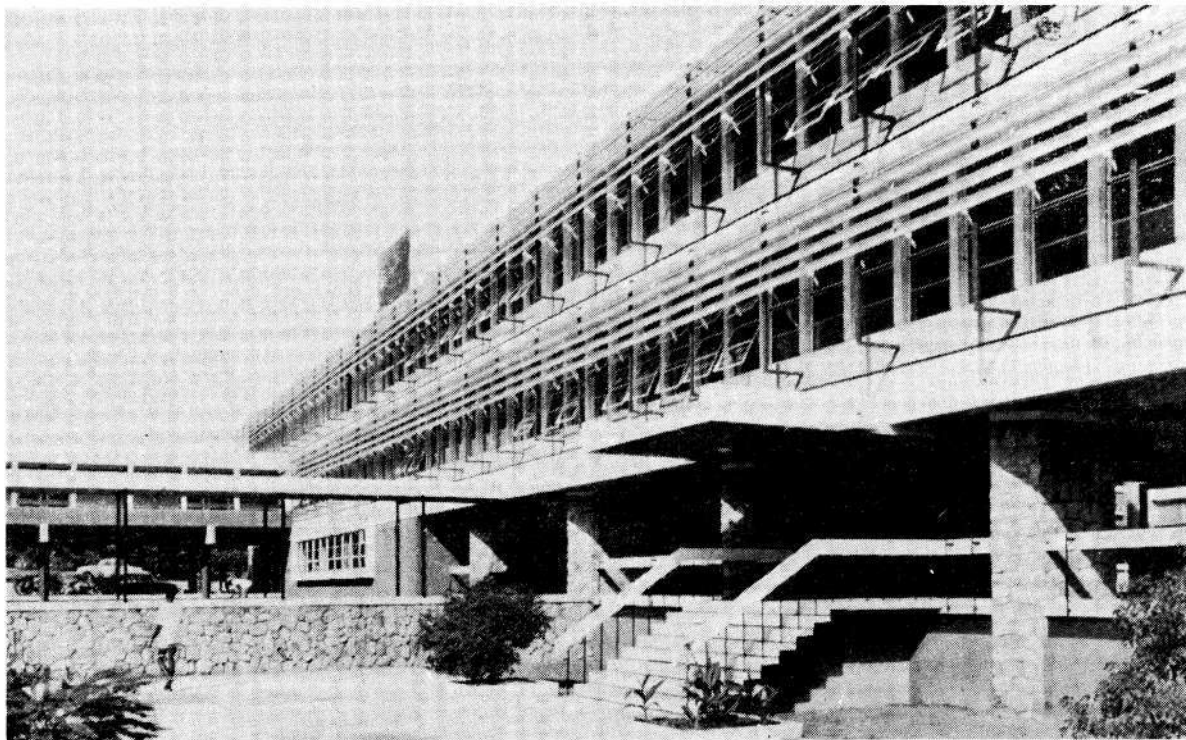
Yet thinking in less personal terms about the position of my students, I could not help feeling worried. I admired them for the sacrifices they had made to reach their present position — but where was their university course leading them? There was really only one answer — to jobs in the bureaucracy. Those who had already acquired a niche in the bureaucracy could count on using a university degree to upgrade their salaries. Those who had come to university straight from school would at least have a substantial advantage over 99% of their contemporaries in seeking well-remunerated employment. Year after year the university would be turning out more people to go on the government's pay roll, to do jobs that would be in the most literal sense unproductive. The country was poor, even desperately poor. Yet every year more and more of its resources were being siphoned off to meet the needs of its expanding urban elite. The problem is to be found in every Third World country. Between those governments which consider themselves Marxist or socialists and other more conservative regimes there certainly is a difference in rhetoric, but not a basic structural difference. In these circumstances surely it is time that we began asking difficult questions. Is it really worth maintaining at great expense educational institutions whose main function is to contribute to a process that is socially divisive and economically retrograde? Would it not be better to scrap universities completely and rethink the whole problem of higher education in underdeveloped countries?

Iconoclasm with a vengeance — iconoclasm to provoke looks

of horror on the faces of the international bourgeoisie, all those who have a vested interest in retaining Third World universities — institutions you can give aid to, institutions you can get jobs in, institutions where you can 'really begin to find out what is happening in the country'. The radicals are particularly shocked: they point out that universities are among the few effective centres of opposition in authoritarian states. Certainly it is possible to enumerate incidents from almost every country in Africa where university students have come out against the government. But universities can far too easily be broken to be really effective centres of opposition. Send the students packing for six-months — they will come back peaceful as lambs, anxious to make up lost time and not jeopardize their career prospects. And if any of them go on being recalcitrant, well, they can be broken or bribed — a knock over the head or the offer of a safe job. An autocrat does not really have to be very astute when he is faced with a dissident university. But surely — how often have I heard this phrase on the lips of vice-chancellors — 'universities are centres of excellence, places that set standards for the rest of the community.' A splendid aspiration: universities should indeed be centres of excellence, institutions from which new and liberating ideas radiate out, institutions which are closely in touch with other institutions, schools, hospitals, government ministries, newspapers, broadcasting corporations. Universities should play a major part in helping to create within a country or community as a whole a climate of discussion, enquiry, experimentation. No doubt in the more highly developed countries a few universities have some such impact, but in the Africa of the 1980's the constraints are too great; what interests can the ruling class, the local elite, have in encouraging discussion, when such discussion is inevitably going to lead to a criticism of its own shortcomings?

When the first universities were established in British colonial Africa in the years after the Second World War, their founding fathers, British and African alike, were profoundly influenced by one of the slogans of the day — Only the Best is Good Enough for Africa. And the Best meant of course Oxbridge, just as in political terms the Best could be identified only as the Westminster Model of Parliamentary Democracy. We are wiser or at least less sanguine now. We know that political institutions cannot be easily transferred from one country to another. (No, we don't all know that — many Marxists have still to learn the lesson.) Surely it is about time we came to realize that the same truth also applies to educational institutions.

During the colonial period an educational system was established in most parts of Africa that proved pretty efficient in one of its functions — the training of clerks, of those who needed certain basic skills in literacy required for carrying out certain routine duties. The process of professional training was carried further after the Second World War. The new universities now began to produce higher civil servants and secondary school teachers, doctors and engineers. The achievement was a substantial one, but the teaching was inevitably based on alien models. The subjects taught were new to Africa, as were the teachers who came out from the metropolis bringing with them their libraries, their laboratory equipment, their workshops. In the age of wishful thinking, most of us were only too happy to accept simplistic ideas about 'development' seeing it as a process in which all countries were involved, in which they would all, if only they followed the rules, trundle along the imaginary runway to reach the magic stage of 'take-off' after which they would zoom off into a future of mass consumerism, their economies powered by the process of 'self-sustaining growth.' In those halcyon days of the 1950's and



A portion of the Education Faculty Complex at the University of Ibadan.

60's the growth of higher education was one of the great success stories of African development.

We live now in a cruelly different age. Most African states are on the verge of bankruptcy, the basic infrastructure of their economy close to collapse. Shortage of foreign exchange means that libraries cannot keep up to date with their purchases, laboratories run out of basic supplies, workshop machinery breaks down for lack of spares. (In the mid-1970's I recall meeting a lecturer from a university in Zaire who told me that his library had received no new books for the last ten years: while I was writing this article, an acquaintance told me of a francophone country in West Africa where it was impossible to get an X-ray because of the lack of the proper photographic material.) The idea of equipping desperately poor countries with modern universities begins to look increasingly absurd.

But institutions once established develop a life of their own, spawning their own protectors. All universities are centres of privilege, and their teaching and administrative staffs, the academic bourgeoisie (occasional displays of rhetorical radicalism notwithstanding), as much a part of the local Establishment as those who occupy the higher echelons of the bureaucracy or the armed services. Being part of the Establishment, the academic bourgeoisie is able to lay a claim on scarce resources and so ensure its own survival. However critical outsiders may be of their nature and function, it is unrealistic to imagine that many Third World universities will collapse and disappear. The dynamism and aspirations of their youth long forgotten, they will turn into the institutions of an *ancien regime* with much stress on ritual — the pantomime of formal academic occasions — and much money spent every year on the maintenance of the grandiose buildings with which they were endowed. (The University of the Transkei, to quote but one example, is reported to use as much electricity as the whole town of Umtata: having seen something of that archi-

tectural monstrosity, I can well imagine this to be the case.) No matter — Third World universities will go on getting support from richer countries anxious to appease sensitive consciences or to 'win friends and influence people' among 'the next generation of leaders'.

Iconoclasm is an essentially negative operation. "And what would you do?" — those who resent these strictures can quite properly ask. I find myself reluctant to answer — not because I have no ideas of my own — I shall bring them out shortly — but because I am increasingly of the opinion that Africa has suffered all too much from the advice, however well intentioned, of those who are outsiders, who have no stake, physical and ancestral, in the continent. Contemporary Africa is littered with the ruins of failed institutions. Would that African countries could be left entirely alone, unpressured by outsiders, to work out their own solutions. But given the nature of the world economy, the emergence of an international culture, such a wish is an absurdity.

So if I am pressed to say what I would like to see happening in universities in Africa and other poor parts of the Third World, I would say this. Keep your eyes firmly fixed on absolute essentials. Remember how fast your population is increasing. People's most basic need is food — and after food, shelter and health. Strip your educational institutions down to essentials. Cut out all those subjects that must be regarded as luxuries. Close down your faculty of Arts, stop teaching Literature and Political Science and Religious Studies and even History. If you will seek an example from the West, forget all about Oxbridge or the Sorbonne or UCLA, find out something about the way in which working men and women in nineteenth century Britain, caught up as they were in the brutal early processes of the Industrial Revolution under a *laissezfaire* economy, set about educating themselves. The universities were completely closed to them, so they set up their own Institutes, established their own libraries, ran their own courses. Get out of the

habit of thinking that the State or Foreign Aid will provide everything. Break your university down into a number of smaller institutions, each devoted to purely practical subjects – Farming, Building, Health Care, Bookkeeping. (Don't get caught up by the way in providing courses to equip a few of your citizens for jobs with multinationals.) Smaller institutes will be much easier to manage. Cut down salaries. Do not pay your teachers in your institutes more than you pay school-teachers. And keep down the number of expatriates to the minimum.

If you are going to look abroad for stimulating examples, don't look at countries much richer than yourself. You simply cannot afford to do what they are doing. See what China has got to teach you – don't be afraid of its Communism – you ought to know by now how profoundly conservative gerontocratic Communist states really are – but China may have some good ideas. So too may Mozambique and Zimbabwe or even Bophuthatswana – look to the places where people started recently to build from scratch. And perhaps even from England you may get some ideas. Over here universities, subject to increasing cuts and restrictions, look like becoming pretty fossilized institutions. Where will they go – all those bright young men and women who would have enjoyed had they been born twenty years earlier, comfortable academic careers? They will have to work out new career patterns for themselves. You may get some ideas from their experience.

But perhaps the most reassuring advice that can be given comes from putting the whole process of university education in some sort of historical perspective. We can see very clearly now that all over the world the 1960's and 70's formed a period of edu-

cational expansion quite unprecedented in human history. If one takes a much longer historical view, one can see no less clearly that the part played in the intellectual development of mankind by formal institutions of education has been at best a limited one. The world's greatest teachers, Socrates, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, devised their own essentially informal structures. The world's great writers were self-taught. The world's great artists learnt their skills in small workshops. Formal institutions can indeed have a stultifying effect on vigorous and original minds. In the end the institutions fall into the background: what matters is the vigour and originality of thought of individual men and women.

I think back to those students I got to know all too briefly at a certain African university. The stimulus I gained from their company was a constant antidote to the depression that afflicted me when I thought of the structures in which they were caught up. In the end the structures fall away – what matters is the warmth of personal relationships and a lively and self-reliant mind. At its best a university can provide an ideal environment for developing such qualities. Alas! In the harsh, impoverished and dangerous age into which we are all moving, ideal environments will disappear. But though institutions may crumble, human vitality remains a constant.

To think without sentimentality of the vitality of so-called ordinary people is perhaps the best way to develop a certain philosophical perspective. It also leads one to reflect that universities, which can (after all) influence only a very small proportion of the population, are not perhaps quite such important institutions as those of us who have spent half our working lives in them are inclined to imagine. □



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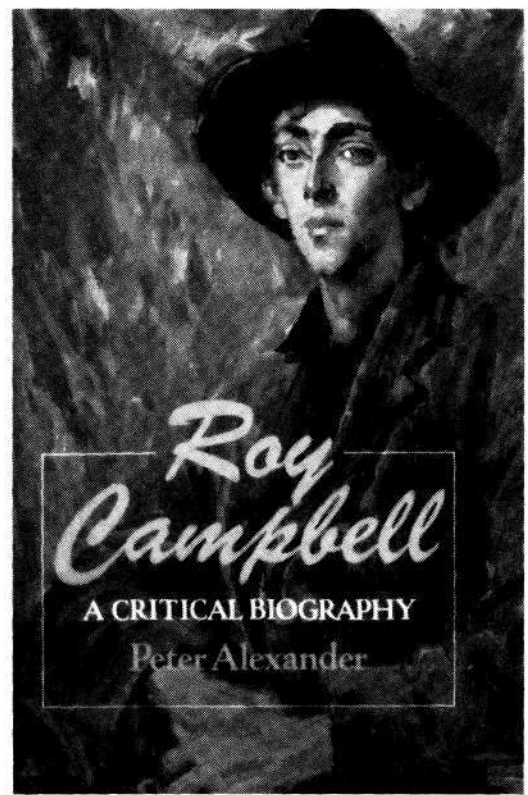
WHITE ZULU

A review of *Roy Campbell: a Critical Biography* by Peter Alexander, published by David Philip, Cape Town, 1982; R18,75 (excl.)

by A.E. Voss

Roy Campbell died in a road accident in Portugal in 1957. At that time I was a student at Rhodes University and Professor Guy Butler was in the midst of a course of lectures on, as I remember it, *Nostromo*. On the news of Campbell's death, the Conrad classes were suspended, to be replaced by a series of three lectures on the work of the South African poet. My memory retains two aspects of my then impression of Campbell: the expressionist vividness of his best work, an intensification of the colours of late nineteenth century and Edwardian verse; and the code of the horseman, one with nature, but above the herd, self-reliant, dextrous, graceful. Professor Butler is quoted in Peter Alexander's new biography of Campbell; when they met in London in January, 1955, the elder poet struck him 'as a sick, defeated and frightened man, frightened by his own drinking habit and by the horror of life.' (p. 235)

Campbell's personality, in Dr Alexander's careful portrait, was built on such oppositions as these; a colonial upbringing versus a largely metropolitan career; the revolt against parental tradition versus an uneasy commitment to its values, at least in the abstract; Bohemian youth versus Catholic maturity. The paradox hovers in the tension between the swiping satire of *The Georgiad* (1931) and the fine translations of *The Poem of St. John of the Cross* (1951). It informs Campbell's social and sexual personality. On the one hand the macho bullfighting image and on the other the submissive spouse. The contradiction is perfectly expressed in two of the pictures that illustrate this book. The dust-jacket carries Augustus John's portrait in oils of Campbell (c. 1920). This is the image of the darling of Bohemia; beneath the black hat the face expresses both defiance and seduction, the eyes half-closing, the lips about to pout. Inside there is the famous photograph of the *Voorslag* trio on the beach at Sezela. Between William Plomer, who looks as though he's knitting, and Laurens van der Post, who looks as though he's holding his trousers up, stands Campbell, bearded, and with his hat in his hand, looking like 'n arm-blanke wat werk soek'. Dr Alexander's publishers in fact use these two pictures on p. 2 of their latest catalogue.



Dr Alexander's is a sympathetic account of a fascinating life. Although offered as 'a critical biography' there is more biography than criticism in it; the portrait and the life are built up on a mass of carefully ordered and vividly rendered details. Dr Alexander is particularly good on Campbell's early years in Oxford and London; on the life in Southern France after his marriage; and on Campbell's experience in World War II and afterwards. Those last years were comfortable but sad; when Campbell had at last earned a substantial reputation as a poet, he was in a sense in no condition to enjoy it. Dr Alexander's account of Campbell's two trips to America makes harrowing reading, as does that of the poet's return to Natal to receive an honorary doctorate: 'The doctoring' Campbell wrote to Mary 'was like a bullfight with the gold scarlet gowns.' (p. 232)

The edition of Campbell's *Collected Poems* to which Dr Alexander's book has sent me back (Bodley Head, 3 vols., 1959) claims, among other things, on the dust-jackets that Campbell was 'a soldier in both world wars'. This kind of legend, largely put about by Campbell himself, should now no longer be tenable. Dr Alexander's sifting of the evidence has isolated the thread and the themes of Campbell's life.

One important aspect of Campbell's life and personality which his own bluster seems to have done much to conceal was his gift for friendship and his loyalty to the friends he made, from T.S. Eliot and Richard Aldington to Aimé Tschiffely and a taxi-driver in Lexington, Kentucky. He was generous with his own time and effort to younger poets and deserved, in a sense, a happier life. Despite Mary's affairs with Vita Sackville-West (who comes out of it all pretty badly in this account) and others, and Campbell's gestures of defiance, he was blessed in his marriage and in his wife, although his children's lives have been marked by unhappiness.

Not that Campbell was without fortune. He was born privileged and continued to enjoy either a parental allowance or an inheritance all his life. Much of the domestic drama of Campbell's life was bound up with whether or not the 'money from South Africa' would arrive each month.

Campbell's relationship with South Africa is one of the fascinating, but, I believe, unanswered questions raised by this book. Dr Alexander's account of the *Voorslag* years, for example, suggests that Campbell made a genuine attempt to engage himself with his native land. The point of some of his best-known poems ('The Serf', 'The Zulu Girl') is not the extent, but the limits of the poet's engagement. They are poems of observation rather than commitment. Perhaps Campbell's whole life is a story of a quest for identity within community. The poetry which isolates him from some others is his only means to genuine identity. For this and other reasons, it is perhaps not surprising that Campbell took to drink. Not often did his own life give him such moments of balance between prospect and retrospect as he expressed in 'Autumn' (1929), where he writes of the olive trees:

Soon on our hearth's reviving pyre
 Their rotted stems will crumble up;
 And like a ruby, panting fire,
 The grape will redden on your fingers
 Through the lit crystal of the cup.

Campbell called Toledo 'this heavenly place which means more than all the world to me' (p. 240) and, all in all, South Africa meant little, consciously or explicitly, to the poet, although historically he was bound to it. Nonetheless it is a pity that Dr Alexander's image of South Africa is stereotypical rather than critical. He can be vivid: of Durban, in 1906, he writes

The town asserted itself against the bush by a law requiring the Zulus to wear trousers once they passed the city limits, and against the sea by William Campbell's breakwater. (p. 5)

The weakness of the formulation conceals the equation,

bush = Zulus. It seems that Dr Alexander accepts the stereotypes about which he should be critical. Thus he writes of 1906:

the Zulus had risen in rebellion all over Natal, and were slaughtering whites. (p. 5)

This is simply not true and is even half-contradicted later in the book:

Campbell, of course, vividly recalled the days of the Zulu Rebellion when the threat of large-scale black violence was very real. (p. 65)

This rather simple history is reflected in some of Dr Alexander's criticism. For example, his comment on 'The Serf' misses the force of 'ploughs' in the last line of the poem and uses the term 'nature' very loosely:

... the ploughman, because of his closeness to nature, will endure, while the very artificiality of the 'palaces, and thrones, and towers' will bring them down. (p. 65)

Dr Alexander's comment on 'A Song for the People' (p. 57) suggests that neither he nor Campbell can clearly identify or identify with 'the people'.

In terms of literary history, Campbell was a late Romantic. The paradoxical rejection of the community which sustained him materially in effect sustained him as a poet.

Campbell is enjoying something of a vogue at the moment. Marcia Levenson has recently edited a selection of poems (Donker, 1981). Dr Alexander himself has done the same (OUP, 1982). A *Collected Works* is promised (Donker). As may have been the case for a long time, certainly as Campbell himself realised, what South African literature needs most is South African criticism.

Dr Alexander's book is handsomely produced, which we have come to expect from David Philip.



From the left: William Plomer, Roy Campbell, and Laurens van der Post on the beach at Sezela, August 1926