

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

Thanks

Our warm thanks to those of our members who have so promptly sent us their subscriptions during the last few weeks. Their receipts are enclosed herewith. To those who are still meaning to send them, we say "Do it now!".

Our thanks also to those who have sent us the names of possible members. These will be dealt with as soon as possible. But we could do with more - we need to grow and this is an easy way of doing it. What about your family and friends?

"Patrons of promise"

Under this heading the Cape Times in a leading article (7/3/75) commends for support the Educational Trust of the Institute of Race Relations. We warmly support this appeal. The Trust helps promising young Coloured and African men and women to continue their education - a most valuable step towards building better race relations. The Trust's address is c/o the Institute, 4 Leeuwen Street, Cape Town.

Authoritarianism and the Universities (Cape Times, 6/3/75)

The Council of the University of Cape Town has decisively rejected the second interim report of the Van Wyk de Vries Commission (tabled in Parliament on February 11) and has called on the Government not to implement its representations.

The statement says that the recommendations aimed at preventing university staff and students from taking part in activities which have so far been permissible "would strike at fundamental values and principles accepted as essential to universities in democratic societies".

The Council rejected as "unproved" the Commission's view that NUSAS has an "iron grip" on the campuses of English-medium universities, and declares that apart from "a few minor infringements of local by-laws, UCT students have "kept their protests within the law".

"Seeking to curb or eliminate student protest stemming from genuine concern among students for a better society and conducted by lawful and peaceful means", says the Council, "could only

have adverse effects".

Staff resignations

The Chairman of the Wits Academic Staff Association has said (Cape Times, 19/2/75) that he himself and, he was sure, other staff members would resign if the Commission's report was implemented in law.

"The effect", he said, "would be to make it untenable to work here, and we would not attract any staff from overseas."

"Preposterous"

Dr G. Bozzoli, Principal of Wits, who was a member of the Commission but refused to sign the report, said that "any reasonable man" would apply this adjective to the report because

- i) it is preposterous that a university should be fined for anything;
- ii) it is preposterous to introduce legislation to restrict the activities of citizens just because they happened to be students; (He might have added, especially in the light of the efforts to get youth generally to take an active interest in politics!)
- iii) it is preposterous to expect the university councils to need bolstering with this sort of special legislation".

the Commission recommends that the authority of university councils should be so strengthened that they would be able to "take immediate and effective action to bring any situation under control" - but apparently does not indicate in what way such extra strength is to be provided...

Another "iron hold" ... (Cape Times, 12/2/75)

The Commission quite bluntly recommends that NUSAS be forced by legislation to cease its political activities and dismantle its political machine. The first step, it says, to rid English-language universities of "the unhealthy state of affairs" in the student community should be to "break the the iron hold of NUSAS" on the students' representative councils, to "eliminate its action and active participation in politics through SRC's and students".

In case university councils should not conform to these principles, the Commission recommends the amendment of the Universities Act by adding a provision that if the Minister is satisfied that any inter-university organisation or student organisation is "engaging in politics" or "seeking to promote

any political aim in a non-academic manner " (as defined by the Commission in its first report), he could by notice in the Government Gazette declare such an organisation to be an undesirable organisation, and if the university allowed any student organisation to pay money to such an organisation, it would forfeit R10 000 of its State subsidy. So much for the strengthening of the authority of university councils!

The Commission adds that it is "convinced that this undesirable state of affairs has already gone so far that the university authorities concerned would not be able to put a stop to it without outside assistance"!

Space precludes our going into all the recommendations and obiter dicta (for which no evidence seems to be adduced) of the Commission. This is reported in considerable detail in the Cape Times of February 12. We quote, as summing up the views of those who oppose the Commission's report, from an editorial in the Sunday Times of February 16:

"A shocking report"

"The latest report of the Van Wyk de Vries commission of inquiry into universities is an astonishing document. It is not surprising that Professor Bozzoli, Principal of the University of the University of the Witwatersrand and a dissentient member of the commission, described some of its findings as 'preposterous'.

"The report makes some extraordinary assumptions. For instance, it refers to the "unhealthy state of affairs" in the student community of the English-language universities. What is this "state of affairs" and why is it unhealthy? In our opinion the student community in the English-language universities is alive and well, with students showing a commendable ability to think for themselves about current affairs. Most people welcome a similar tendency among students at Afrikaans universities.

"Another ludicrous assumption by the commission is that Nusas is in some way all-powerful in moulding the thinking of students. Of course it is nothing of the sort. Nusas represents the usual small section of the student body interested in active politics. Its members, being energetic and dedicated, naturally play a leading part in the business of student representative councils. But it is naive to imagine that Nusas speaks for the whole body of student opinion. To refer to its 'iron hold' and 'steel ring' is extravagant nonsense.

"The report draws up a list of Nusas aims which are presumably

intended to shock the public. These include opposition to all overseas sports tours by teams not selected on merit (so daring a demand for equal pay for equal work, and a call for the US to end its part in the Vietnam war. The commission even lists among Nusas offences an appeal for responsible elements to take steps to settle the constitutional issue in Rhodesia. Just how abhorrent that is may be gauged from the fact that this now happens to be the stated aim of the Prime Minister.

"But much more serious than these absurdities is the proposed weapon to be used against Nusas. This is a bludgeon. The courts will be excluded from any jurisdiction in the matter and the Minister of National Education will be empowered to give university councils the right to take immediate and effective action to bring the situation under control. And if they fail? The university concerned can in certain circumstances be fined sums running up to R10 000 or more.

"The effect of the report, in boxing parlance, can certainly be described as a punch below the belt.

"It is difficult to know where to start in criticising this report, which must be one of the worst ever produced by a commission of inquiry in this country. One thing is certain. If the Government seek to implement these recommendations, they will forfeit, on behalf of South Africa, any respect which this country may still retain in academic circles in the free world."

"An attack on integrity" (Cape Times, Feb. 14, 1975)

The Cape Times, after pointing out that "if students, lecturers or any other class of the community engage in political subversion, they should be dealt with in terms of the rule of law", comments: "...the mere publication of such a report is itself an attack on English-speaking South Africa's integrity and cultural autonomy. It is part of an insidious pattern of menace of the English section's cultural institutions, its newspapers, its churches and, now again, its universities... The report re-awakens old fears about the supposed affinity between Nationalist ideology and the totalitarian enthusiasms of the 1930's. The Commission, says the paper, has in mind "a species of thought control, to be imposed on the English universities by the bludgeon of financial blackmail".

We hope that Mr Vorster and his Minister of National Education will reject such ideas out of hand.

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