

# University Report

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UNIVERSITY REPORT

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COSMO PIETERSE: This week our report deals with some aspects of academic freedom and censorship in the Republic of South Africa. It also includes discussion of the rights and wrongs of a boycott by academics from other countries of the Universities in South Africa. Our discussion stems from the recently published Volume II of the Oxford History of South Africa - the volume covers the years 1870-1966. The book is a serious academic volume, in exactly the same tradition of all the 'Oxford' history series. But in order for the book to be allowed to circulate in South Africa the editors felt they must omit one chapter - a chapter that might contravene certain South African laws. Thus two editions exist of the book because of passages like this on the Unkonto we Sizwe organization:-

QUOTE RE.D

"The movement was inter-racial in membership, and an offshoot from the African National Congress, but apparently not a part of that organization. According to the Congress Leader, Nelson Mandela, the decision to use sabotage was determined by the desire to spare life, and to find a form of violent action which would not needlessly embitter race relations, though the intention was to move to guerilla warfare if sabotage failed to bring about political change."

COSMO PIETERSE: Well in a minute Professor Monica Wilson - co-editor of the Oxford History - will be talking about why this sort of information is unpublishable in the Republic - and other related issues, but first let me state my personal interest in this matter.

Having grown up in South Africa, I myself spent five years, up to December 1952, at a South African University - the University of Cape Town, then a so-called "Mixed" University. In 1958, by law, all Universities in South Africa became virtually "one-race" or ethnic insitutes. Round about the same time, under the Riotous Assemblies Act, I was banned from meetings. Subsequently I have become - like many other South Africans, some in South Africa, some not - someone who may not be quoted or published in any form, in the Republic. Whatever we write or

or say, or have written or said, is barred from South Africa: public speech, biography, novel, letter, poem, play ... Such unquotable people "necessarily" include those who were prominent in the organizations opposed to segregation or apartheid in South Africa: e.g. Nelson Mandela or Robert Sobukwe of the Pan-African Congress. And the chapter omitted from the South African edition of the 'Oxford History of South Africa - Volume II' - edited by Professors Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, was one entitled 'African Nationalism in South Africa, 1910-1964'. It is a 52 page academic study by Professor Leo Kuper a study which has incidentally been sharply criticized by some reviewers, e.g. in Sechaba, the official organ of the A.N.C.

When Professor Wilson was in London recently, Gwyneth Henderson asked her why she and her co-editor had left out the chapter on African Nationalism in the South African edition.

PROFESSOR WILSON: Because it would have been totally illegal in South Africa to recommend a book to students which had this chapter. The reason why it is illegal is that it quotes persons who are banned.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What sort of thing in fact was left out? What sort of specific pieces made you think that it was going to be unacceptable

PROFESSOR WILSON: Well, any quotation from a leader of the African National Congress is illegal, because all the leaders of the Congress are banned and the same with the leaders of the Pan-African Congress. So that, necessarily, any discussion of African Nationalism quotes persons who are banned persons, and it is an offence under the Criminal Code to quote any of those persons.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Can I ask you something which is really getting on to academic freedom? Aren't you really giving in to this sort of thing? By allowing the book to be published without the chapter, aren't you giving in before you begin?

PROFESSOR WILSON: Yes. I take a different view. I feel that the important thing is that this book should circulate among South African students, and I come back to my original point that the South African contributors are anxious that the book should circulate in South Africa. I, as a teacher, and the other teachers included want to recommend the book: put it on our reading lists for our students.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: But the chapter is missing. What effect is this going to have on the students?

PROFESSOR WILSON: Students are curious. The fact that there is a chapter missing makes them ask questions, and they

begin to ask themselves whether indeed they are being given the full picture in the books that are circulating freely.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Well this really brings us onto the point of the distortion of history if you like. The South African Government by virtue of their laws, in not letting these sort of facts be published are distorting history. Is this in fact a whole-sale policy of the government to write their own history?

PROFESSOR WILSON: Don't you think that any government, any political party, any community, any group in power, tends to write history defending its position? I don't think this is confined to South Africa, I think you could find it in many countries. It may be more or less exaggerated and it is certainly true that the history books used in government schools in South Africa express the very clear dominance of the white group in South Africa. I couldn't possibly teach a history syllabus as set.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: But in leaving out this chapter, and leaving out people like Nelson Mandela, they are in fact pretending they don't exist, and the people do exist.

PROFESSOR WILSON: The people certainly do exist and the growth of African Nationalism is a very important part of our history.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Can I go to something which is in fact your part of the book if you like. One of the things that the South African government says, to partly justify itself or, if you like, make of its own history, is the fact that the whites were in South Africa before the Africans. Is this true?

PROFESSOR WILSON: No it's not true, and indeed there is a very long history of settlement in Southern Africa: history which is beginning to be disentangled by the archaeologists as well as the anthropologists and historians. And the notion that whites occupied an empty land is not tenable by any serious scholar.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: If we go back to the school books is this the sort of fact perhaps that is in the school books, that the white settlers were there before the Africans?

PROFESSOR WILSON: Yes you do find the statement that the Bantu were crossing Limpopo at the same time as Van Ruybeek was arriving at Cape Town, was settling in Cape Town. This is not true.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: If we can go back to the Universities and the book itself now, how do you think the Universities, the students in particular, are going to react to this? Are they going to take it, or have they taken it, indeed as being another blow to academic freedom in South Africa?

PROFESSOR WILSON: No. The reactions we've had to the book are very favourable. They are delighted to have the second volume of the South African History, they like the chapters they've got, and of course if they travel abroad they read the additional chapter.

COSMO PIETERSE: Professor Monica Wilson, Professor of anthropology at the University of Cape Town and co-editor of the 'Oxford History of South Africa'. Before touching on another aspect of academic freedom, let me add a brief footnote. Some of the material referred to - but hardly quoted - in the missing, or additional chapter, is information about the growth and aims of the A.A.C. and the Pan African Congress. There are actual quotations from both these organizations, and from banned people, in two books published in Southern Africa this year - namely 'The Silent War' by Reg Shay and Chris Vermaak (published in Rhodesia) and 'Terrorism' by Michael Morris, published in Cape Town. And yet in Leo Kuper's chapter from the Oxford History, the closest he comes to quoting is in talking about the Congress of the People back in 1955, and the Freedom Charter they adopted:-

QUOTE READ: "The Freedom Charter was the charter of a democratic South African nationalism. It proclaimed 'that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White' thus implicitly denying the conception of 'Africa for the Africans'. It sought not the rule of the African majority, but 'a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, in which the people would govern'".

COSMO PIETERSE: But now, from such content, that is an educationist's right to teach an established factual truth, to the right of the university to appoint the best qualified teachers. It is this area of events and activity that Gwyneth and Professor Wilson next turn to:

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Whilst on academic freedom as a whole in South Africa, can we go back to 1968 when, as I remember, you appointed a black South African, Archie Mafeje to your Department and the appointment was not allowed to go through. There was in fact a sit-in by the students. Is there any point at all these days in the students, or whoever it may be, taking this sort of action?

PROFESSOR WILSON: I am rather dubious of the value of sit-ins, but I am quite sure that there is everything to be said by pressure from students pointing out where a compromise in academic freedom is made by their seniors. In point of fact the appointment of Dr. Mafeje, I made the recommendation and I had every support from the university in recommending someone whom we agreed was the best candidate for the post.

So that the conflict was not within the university it was between the university as a whole and the government.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What was your attitude to the sit-in at the time?

PROFESSOR WILSON: I was not in support of the sit-in because I thought it was splitting the university.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: In what sense?

PROFESSOR WILSON: That I thought it was expressing a conflict between students and staff members of the university which didn't really exist.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Well, in fact, what pressure did the staff or the university itself put on the government?

PROFESSOR WILSON: This is where we were weak. That was why the students were angry.

COSMO PILTERSE: Professor Monica Wilson on student activism against incursions on academic freedom at the University of Cape Town in 1968.

Now the erstwhile "mixed" Universities of South Africa like those of Cape Town, Johannesburg or Natal, had always had very few black or coloured teaching staff. They had also, when they were "open" Universities, had proportionately few black or coloured students. The 1958 Extension of University Education Act brought any growth of African, Coloured or Indian students to an end, and instituted racially, and even tribally, separate Universities. This happened despite University protests at all levels, including the resignation of many academics from secure posts. At the same time, basic financing of the Universities by the government, and representation of the government on University Councils meant that all the Universities would by and large be bound to accept and carry out the governmental policy of segregation or apartheid. This was the view of many academics and students in South Africa and outside. Shouldn't South African Universities, which by law are racially exclusive, therefore be ostracized by those who believe that knowledge and education should know no colour, race, creed or sex bar?

As Gwyneth put it to Professor Wilson:

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Can I go on a bit further now to the whole problem of academics from this country, or America or Canada, it's a problem that is much discussed about whether or not there should be an academic boycott of people from outside going to South Africa as a member of the academic staff of a university. What is your feeling about this?

PROFESSOR WILSON: My feeling is very strongly against a boycott of South African Universities by academics, because I feel that you can do more from within by educating the white population than you can do from without. And the enormous value we get from academics joining us from outside is like a breath of fresh air coming through the university.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: You really don't feel that just by virtue of going there, by paying their taxes and all the rest, that they are not in fact, in some sense, supporting the status quo?

PROFESSOR WILSON: They might support the status quo if they remain totally silent, or withdraw altogether into their own specialism, but very few people from outside do quite that.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Well if I can go back then to you saying that the University over the question of Dr. Kefauver, in the end was weak. What can be done?

PROFESSOR WILSON: It's very difficult to take effective action, but after all, any country depends on its universities and if there is a strong feeling in the universities against limitation on their intellectual activities this does have an effect on opinion generally in the country. It may not be immediate. You see I really really believe in persuasion. I don't believe in fighting, and I feel that we've got to keep on persuading, arguing, convincing people.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Well, still going back to 1968 you say that the university was weak. In what sense was it weak, what could it have done, what should it have done?

PROFESSOR WILSON: I wish we had had support from the other universities right through the country, and it is possible we should have done more in seeking such support. I don't know if we would have got it.

COSMO MILLER: Professor Monica Wilson, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town in the Republic of South Africa and co-editor of the 'Oxford History of South Africa', talking to Gwyneth Henderson about aspects of university freedom and action in South Africa.

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