

National union of south african students
nasionale unie van suid-afrikaanse studente

NUSAS

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To: SRC Presidents
National Executive

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Sir/Madam

Meeting with Muller

The NUSAS delegation spent an hour and a half with the Minister of Police and the Interior, Mr S.L. Muller. The meeting was requested by the SRC Presidents so that students could put certain points for discussion with the Minister. Discussion centred around student protests in general, the matter of Special Branch intimidation of students, passport refusals and deportations. Below is a factual account of the conversation as it occurred.

On entering the Minister made it clear that he did not want us to present demands to him, but he would appreciate an open discussion. We agreed on this point stating that we had certain requests to put before him and we too would value the discussion.

We outlined why we had sought the interview explaining that recent Government action against us had made it seem to the public that our activities were subversive. He replied that he did not feel our activities were subversive, but felt that we were being used by Communist organisations. He also felt that our activities were likely to cause disorder in the country and stated that these were his worries. He mentioned ways in which communists tried to exploit our activities. We pointed out to him that this was not our concern and explained that we had no contact with communists or revolutionaries' organisations either in South Africa or abroad. The Minister acknowledged this, but said that we had some strange "bedfellows".

The matter of Special Branch intimidation of students was then discussed. We acknowledged the need for protection of the security of the state, but pointed out that we were not happy with the methods which the Special Branch were using and cited specific examples of what we regarded as intimidation. The Minister did not argue against us and agreed that such intimidatory measures as we had described were unnecessary and unwanted. He told us that he would investigate our complaints and requested us to bring any further complaints either to him directly or if such complaints occurred in centres other than Cape Town to take these to the District Commander of Police or the Divisional Commandant in the area. He explained to us however that it was difficult for the police to avoid making mistakes as they were so very busy and had such a difficult task to do. We replied that we understood this and in fact Mr Innes stated that "some of his best friends were policemen". The Minister defended the principle of police interrogation of students claiming that he had to have spies on all the campuses and confirmed that there were spies on all campuses. We pointed out that this was undesirable but accepted his right to have spies.



The Minister then outlined his problems regarding passport refusals. He informed us that passports in South Africa were a privilege and not a right and that he had to refuse somebody a passport if he thought on the evidence which he had before him that that person was likely to abuse that privilege. He also claimed that he considered not only what a person had done but what he was likely to do when he took his decision. He also had to take into account what the person was likely to say about South Africa when he was overseas. He referred specifically to Mr Innes' case and told us how upset he had been at having to remove Mr Innes' passport, and that in fact it had been such a difficult thing to do, that he had had to refer the matter to the Cabinet for their decision. He stated quite clearly that Mr Innes' passport had been refused because of his position as President of NUSAS. When Mr Innes asked him for the reasons why he had lost his passport, he said he was unable to give these, but when Mr Innes asked if his guess was correct that it was because the Minister felt that he would contact overseas organisations which were hostile to South Africa and meet with these people and other revolutionaries, he replied that "that was a very good guess". He indicated that further discussion on the matter of Mr Innes' passport should be a matter for him and Mr Innes alone and he would be happy to discuss this at a later date. We raised the point that NUSAS had become tainted as a result of constant passport refusals and the Minister said that he was aware of this and sympathised. He stated that passport refusals were not permanent and wished to clarify that these refusals were not done simply because we opposed apartheid. Opposition to NUSAS was not on that score.

He was prepared to review the cases of deportation, making the point that he had not even considered what the students concerned had wanted to do in the coming year and should these students have good ground for returning to South Africa, he would be willing to reconsider his decision. Similarly he indicated that he was willing to reconsider the cases of passport refusals. He pointed out that foreign students were guests of the country and must not abuse their hospitality. We pointed out that they fulfilled a useful function bringing ideas from outside into the country, but the Minister did not seem to fully grasp this point.

Protests, the Minister said, could not be tolerated if they disturbed order. He referred specifically to the UCT sit-in. He said that law was not the only consideration and the question of whether or not protest was likely to cause disorder was an important factor for consideration. He said that he personally did not have any objections to picket demonstrations or marches but explained that both these forms of protest were likely to cause counter-reactions which might in turn lead to disorder, thereby implying that they would probably not be tolerated. He said that if the normal running of the Universities was to be disturbed, he would not hesitate to send his police onto the campus.

The Minister then remarked upon a circular which had been sent out from NUSAS Head Office and signed by the NUSAS President which outlined details of the events occurring last year from August to December. The circular was sent to all national unions and requested them to lend support to NUSAS should trouble occur in the coming year. The circular was in the Minister's possession and had been sent to him from the Prime Minister who had in turn received it from Lesotho. The Minister was clearly displeased at this. We pointed out to him that it was common practice for national unions to keep each other informed on what occurred in their own countries and that such support as they lent was always of a moral nature. The Minister expressed the view that perhaps we should leave world affairs alone until we are older, as it seemed as though we were inviting other countries to interfere in South Africa's domestic affairs. We explained that we thought it was necessary that overseas national unions were aware of our affairs in this country and explained further the tremendous difficulties which

MUSAS operated under, existing as it does under constant threats of bannings, etc both to its members and the organisation as a whole. Such a situation obviously tended to influence our judgement and the manner in which we conducted our affairs. The Minister acknowledged our point.

Regarding the press, the Minister said that he felt it was unfortunate that this private discussion should have received such wide publicity. He mentioned in conclusion that legislation regarding segregated societies was unlikely to be introduced and thought we were getting too upset about it. He indicated that if we avoided further fuss the legislation might not come off. He also said that he knew nothing at all about the rumour that 30 foreign students from UCT would be prevented from returning to South Africa.

COMMENT

The meeting was characterised by open and friendly discussion with a willingness by the Minister to cooperate with us and meet on certain points. He revealed far more to us than was expected and has been formally done even going so far as to show us documents etc to substantiate many of his claims. It is difficult for us to decide on his motives in his actions as they may well fit either of the 2 categories. Either he is attempting sincerely to be honest and seek a negotiation with us and thus is prepared to bend over backwards to accommodate us (this was the impression he gave). Or he is aware that we are trying to force him into a corner and is countering this by playing up to us and not seeking to antagonise us unnecessarily. Thus should a breakdown occur he can blame it on our unreasonableness. I would say that both factors are influencing his actions as he is obviously aware of our intentions, but must also know that if he can secure a settlement it will boost his position in the public's eye immensely (also his status vis a vis his party).

As a result of these factors, the delegation decided to issue the enclosed statement. Our point here is to let the public think that we are putting our trust in the Minister and sincerely hoping that he will grant us our request while at the same time I shall re-apply for my passport as will Mr Kaplinsky, while Harris and Murray will both apply to return to South Africa. Thus we will reserve our decision on whether to protest or not until the Minister has met the test cases. Suitable pressure will be brought to bear so that he cannot stall for too long.

You are asked to keep those students who are concerned of with our actions informed of all latest developments. You will be kept informed of developments as they occur.

Yours sincerely

DUNCAN INNES
PRESIDENT

PERS BULLETIN

PRESS BULLETIN

NUSAS

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PRESS RELEASE 1/64

We feel that our talks with the Minister were both constructive and beneficial. While there were differences of opinion, there was never any breakdown of communication and frank and open discussion ensued.

On the matter of student activities in general, a greater degree of understanding seemed to be reached. Our fears that the Government regarded our activities as subversive were largely allayed by the Minister. We in our turn, informed the Minister that our activities in South Africa had never been aimed at destroying law and order.

On the 3 specific matters of special branch interrogation of students, passport refusals, and deportations, the Minister offered us certain assurances that we believe could lead to a meaningful alleviation of the present situation.

In our opinion, the meeting was of such a nature that protest now on these 3 matters would not assist us in securing any of the alleviations which we seek.

DUNCAN INNES
PRESIDENT

CLIVE NETTLETON
VICE PRESIDENT

NEVILLE CURTIS
ACTING DEPUTY VICE PRESIDENT

Commenting afterwards, Mr Innes said:

"I feel it would be unwise to disclose any further information regarding our talks with the Minister as the SRC Presidents have not yet all been informed of what occurred. Regarding the possible alleviations, I would rather not comment on this as the Minister will be handling these matters."

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