

---

# In a Zambian Secondary School

*Syllabus and  
Staff backgrounds*

---

## STUART GRAHAM

EVEN A CURSORY GLANCE at the class timetables will reveal that the boys at our school are receiving as good an academic education as they would at any first-rate White government school in South Africa: such a comparison is not quite just, since teachers here are able to enjoy a greater degree of academic freedom than is possible in any state institution in the Republic. Ours is a senior secondary school, preparing boys for the General Certificate of Education 'Ordinary' Level examinations, a course, judging from my own experience, far more demanding than the South African Matriculation especially in science subjects and in history and geography. A further examination has to be taken, though not at this school, to gain university entrance qualifications.

The subjects taught in the senior school are: English, Mathematics, Cinyanja, French, Latin, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, History, Geography, Art, Woodwork, Religion (Christianity). Of these English, Maths, History, Geography and one Science are compulsory, and pupils can choose two from the remainder. In the junior school, Forms I and II, Latin and Art are not offered, because there are not teachers for them. In addition to these subjects, each class has a weekly period for general discussion, during which the teacher will either answer questions on current affairs, or give talks on whatever takes his fancy.

Perhaps the most surprising thing after being in South African schools, and having some knowledge of Bantu Education, was the complete absence of any restraint on a teacher's beliefs, or on the way he taught his subject. This is not very important in the sciences, or in maths, but for history, geography and language teachers to be able to do their work without having to worry about a summons to the Principal's office for putting too much emphasis on this or that, gives the school an atmosphere of openness in which the less tangible aspects of education can be handled without a yawning gulf of suspicion between pupils and staff. A few examples will show what I mean: in History, trade unionism, the Russian revolution, and decline of the European empires are studied, as is the pre-colonial history of Africa; boys in the senior

---

STUART GRAHAM'S *article on the school and the boys appeared in The New African, 17 August 1963.*

French classes have been collecting material on the French-speaking states of Africa, by writing to the governments for information (one reason for learning French is the proximity of the Congo, and to be able to study at Louvanium University, Leopoldville); senior and junior English classes read West African novels (Ekwensi and Achebe mostly), and (seniors) write essays on "Is a United States of Africa desirable?" or "Elvis Presley is killing African music."

It is during the 'general' periods that the most startling questions are asked, and usually answered. A few examples: What is a flea circus? What was the connection between Profumo and Christine? How are European girls prepared for marriage? Why do the Boers oppress the Africans in South Africa? Why have Africans got flat noses and crinkly hair? Is it *really* true that Africans are not represented in the South African parliament? Is it true that an atomic bomb can kill millions of people at once? What is Malaysia? Is there a God?

It is sometimes difficult to interpret for these enquiring minds the bewildering world beyond this corner of the country, which most of the boys have never left, and if they have, only for Lusaka or one of the Copperbelt towns (the South African equivalents of which would be, say, Pietermaritzburg and Benoni). The central position of the country in relation to the rest of the subcontinent made foreign penetration later than in other parts, and although this has prevented the consolidation of foreign power, as in Mozambique or South Africa, it has also had the effect of limiting the inhabitants' range of reference, so that teachers are sometimes like builders who have to erect the walls and lay the foundations at the same time. After a long explanation of the making of margarine, a geography teacher was recently asked whether it was not produced by storks—so the teacher has to explain the commercial system of brand names.

THE PROCESS OF ADJUSTMENT is not helped by the schooling many of the boys receive before coming to us, as many of the primary schools are run and staffed by obscurantists like the Seventh Day Adventists and the D.R.C., and also because the standard of teaching in the primary schools cannot be as high as is needed because of the poor facilities and a wide measure of dissatisfaction among the teachers over pay and general conditions. As a result of considerable pressure from the Union of Teachers, the Government now seems to be ready to reform the whole system. On the average, a boy's home does not prepare him for school at all, primary school only just manages to prepare him for a secondary education, and secondary education has to prepare him for his job on a copper mine or for further studies. The task is made considerably easier than it might be by the boys' desire to learn, but unfortunately the impression left by eight years of Gradgrind primary schooling is that education, on their part, is a passive action, the teachers ladling out facts and pouring them into opened heads. The first task then, with Form I, is to make the boys realise that they have to do as much as, if not more than, the teacher. It is in this that our freedom from ideological restraint is of most ad-

vantage, because it makes it possible to use pupils' inherent curiosity about the world as a method of teaching: the example I have given of boys writing to Guinea for information, not only gets them the information but also teaches them to write and read French better. Once school work is seen by pupils as part of the process of getting to know their country, their continent and the world, the ghost of Gradgrind and M'Choakumchild are beaten into retreat.

An obstacle with which teachers of English have to struggle are the peculiarities of language that arise in the primary schools as a result of being taught English by French Canadians, Afrikaners, Frenchmen or Hollanders (and by teachers who have been taught by them!) A typical sentence in this strange Zambian English might read: "I had to try by all means yesterday to foot to town if at all I wanted to go for shopping." Another, almost insurmountable, difficulty are the confusions which arise in pronunciation owing to the multitude of vowels and diphthongs in English as compared to the five in most Bantu languages: a few examples will explain—There are many beds in the game park; he buttered a sack of maize for a ship; people shouldn't eat too many potatoes because they will make them f\*\*t. To make things worse, there is no differentiation in Nyanja (the local vernacular) between L and R, so one gets sentences like this: A leach man does not rike to eat lice. The permutations are innumerable.

By the time the pupils are preparing for their G.C.E. exams, though, they are usually able to write creditable English, and to write interestingly on many subjects. The former ability is the result of the English teacher's work as a language teacher, the latter, of the spirit of free enquiry (and its corollary, free expression) which is the guiding motive in the education system. Boys are encouraged to use the library, to read newspapers: old Observers go to the house common rooms, the library subscribes to the *Listener* and the *Central African Examiner* (among others); the French teacher gives the class *Jeune Afrique*. They debate or discuss controversial issues: birth control, should beer be part of school rations? (carried by one vote), school integration. They

attend lectures (the One Party System, the Crimean War), and listen to the radio. There are also regular film shows, usually of general interest films from the British Council, the (Federal) film library, the USIS, the French Embassy, the Indian High Commission, and an occasional treat, like Richard III or Great Expectations.

All this is not to say that the boys do not have to work hard—Applied Mathematics and Latin have to be learned—or that there are not a good number whose only interest is the Certificate, and the good job it brings as its reward (£800 a year after 6 months training as an Assistant Inspector of Police, or a rosy future as a copper mine technician). Teachers hope that some of the attempt to foster a critical and thoughtful approach to affairs will eventually bear fruit.

BRITAIN IS SHORT of 90,000 teachers, the newspapers tell us, and Zambia is proportionately just as badly off, so teachers are overworked and schools understaffed. A critical stage will be reached soon when the expansion of secondary education will depend entirely upon the availability of staff. Our school was short of two last year, but other schools have had to run double sessions to make up for their shortages, while the ministry seems to have been obsessed with the problems of taking over the former Federal schools, many of whose staff were not willing to teach or care for African children. It seems now to have become accepted that all the secondary schools will have to be staffed from abroad for many years to come: the 'localisation' of the civil service, the police, the army, and Anglo-American has absorbed most school-leavers this year, and will next year, and will probably for a generation. Those Zambians who should have been teachers and are now working in other jobs, are being replaced by South Africans (mostly Black), young British volunteers (who will stay for three or six years on contract), and no doubt by the Peace Corps, which is doing well in Malawi but is not officially welcome here yet. The backbone of the teaching service is the permanent establishment, who provide most senior teachers and most able administrators: these people are British, were part of the colonial regime, and seem now prepared to stay on doing their invaluable work (to my knowledge not one NRG secondary school teacher has resigned with approaching Uhuru).

Of our staff, five are on the permanent expatriate establishment, the rest on local conditions of service. Most have British university degrees, though one was at Fort Hare and another is studying by correspondence with the University of South Africa. The woodwork teacher received his training at the Polela Institute, near Bulwer in Natal: a new member of the staff is a South African, and perhaps Zambia's greatest gain in the teaching world had been the Leshoais' move from Lady Selborne to Ndola. The ministry has announced that it has a 'pool' of South African teachers from which it can draw, men who presumably want to escape from Bantu Education. Did Dr. Verwoerd realise in 1953 that many teachers who could not stomach his education policy would be staffing the schools of South Africa's first independent non-racial neighbour? ●

## NEW AFRICA

The Progressive International Monthly Magazine on  
African Political and Economic Affairs

Subscription: R2 (U.K. £1, US \$3) per annum (post free)

Published at:

58 PADDINGTON STREET, LONDON, W.1 (ENGLAND)