

Down at Bush

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*Concluding the views
of a student at the
University College of
the Western Cape*

THERE IS NO MEASURE that can successfully be applied to prove that the academic standard at "Bush College" is low, but what can rightly be said is that the pattern of lecturing tends to be something in the nature of high-school teaching. The reason for this can only be attributed to the every so often expressed idea that the intelligence of a nonwhite student is lower than that of a white student. One can only imagine that this is the only reason that has motivated this often boring system of lecturing.

We can also mention here that most of the lectures are conducted in Afrikaans; and one crank with an air of triumph once argued rightly that for once in the history of South Africa we have found a home where the Afrikaans-speaking Coloured student can rise to new heights in learning and erudition.

"You see, the Nats are doing good by us," quoth the crank. To counter this type of thinking we need only think of the words of the late Pandit Nehru, who once said, "English is a window through which we can look into the world."

WHEN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE of the Western Cape was established, it was one of the assertions of the founders that it would provide opportunities for Coloureds by offering them lectureships and many other responsible positions. Today, after four and half years, the position is far from what the founders asserted, and the status quo is likely to remain.

All the lectureships and senior positions, bar the Philosophy lectureship, are held by whites. The Philosophy lectureship is held by Mr. Adam Small (he is Coloured), who happens to be studying at Oxford at the moment. In his absence one Springbok (South African sporting hero) has been invited to deputise for him, and there is every likelihood that the Springbok might stop deputising and assume full-time lectureship.

The staff is conveniently drawn from the Pretoria University, University of the Orange Free State, and Stellenbosch University complex, except one or two stray Nats from Rhodes or U.C.T.,

or some overseas university. The highest position held by a nonwhite, besides that of Mr. Small, is that of technical assistant and that of supervisor in the library. Other positions held by nonwhites are those of switchboard operator and junior typist. Perhaps the most responsible jobs are those of caretaker, cafeteria hands, and the many garden hands one sees around the campus. Who expects whites to do these jobs? Serve nonwhites in a cafeteria? Preposterous!

THE REASON WHY NONWHITES cannot be allowed to run this college on their own is not far to seek. You see, nonwhites are irresponsible and cannot be left to their own devices. They must be taken care of by the whites. This can clearly be illustrated by the story of a Coloured child that had gone to visit his mother at the *oubaas's* farmstead. When the *oubaas* saw the little boy he asked him whether he was still at school, and the little boy replied in the affirmative. The *oubaas* then asked him whether he was clever at school. The little boy affirmed by nodding his head, and went on to say, "Cleverer than the *oubaas*." What a moral revolution, thought the *oubaas*. The next moment the little boy with his crestfallen mother were making a fast getaway off the premises, and were told never to put their feet on the farmstead for as long as they lived. The stereotyped *oubaas* could only attribute the little boy's honest remark to the fact that he had been poisoned by his Coloured schoolmaster. The *oubaas* could not brook this, and likewise our rulers won't brook it at the University College of the Western Cape. This rule holds good for the other tribal colleges as well.

IT HAS ALSO BEEN ASSERTED that the University College of the Western Cape has been instituted so as to train leaders for the Coloured community of South Africa. When we speak of leaders we do not think only of political leaders, but we think also of leaders in all spheres of our social matrix. The academic side of this issue is perhaps being met to an extent at the University College of the Western Cape, but the practical side, that is a means whereby a man equipped academically for a certain skill or profession, is sadly wanting. The reason for this also accounts for the dullness of student life at the University of the Western Cape outside the lecture room. There is nothing that interests or stimulates creative thinking among the students outside the lecture rooms, except the Friday extension lectures where the students are shown pictures selected by the authorities to suit the authoritarian taste.

THE QUESTION NOW ARISES: why is life down at Bush outside the lecture room dull? The reason for this dullness can be attributed to the non-existence of a Students' Representative Council on the campus. Besides the University College of the Western Cape one or two other tribal colleges, which are likewise the symbols of apartheid, are also without Students' Representative Councils. In any university worth the name the S.R.C. is an indispensable necessity.

It is through an S.R.C. that all forms of student activity can be canalised and given direction. It is a supreme organ by means of which all student tastes can be given expression. It indeed takes care of all the interests of the students. Down at Bush there is a rugby club, Soccer club, a tennis club and Students' Christian Association. These function in loose threads in the absence of a uniting force in the nature of an S.R.C.; hence their function and organisation is often chaotic.

The absence of an S.R.C. is also responsible for the absence of a students' magazine. A students' magazine cannot be divorced from any institution of learning, let alone a university. There are poets and writers by the dozen at U.C.W.C. who may not realise their potentialities. These can only find expression in a students' magazine; and this would allow the entire public to share and enjoy the ideas of these budding poets and writers.

IT HAS BEEN SAID that when this college opened in 1960 there was an S.R.C., the life span of which was cut short by the Rector. The reason for the murder of this S.R.C. was that the S.R.C. once organised a function which received unanimous support from the authorities, the students and the public: but when preliminary seating arrangements for the function were to be effected the Rector insisted that the front seats be reserved for the white lecturers and white visitors. The S.R.C. and the entire student body was opposed to this; and the S.R.C. members felt that as the organisers of this function it was their duty, and their duty alone, to arrange seating as they wished. When the Rector refused to relent to the S.R.C.'s demands, slogans lampooning the Rector's stand were seen on the campus on the days preceding the function. There was even a threat of boycotting the function by the students. Whether the function was a success, if it did take place at all, is not clear; but what is clear is that the Rector and his staff were shocked by the unity of the students, and immediately a regulation came from the Rector's office stating that no S.R.C. shall function without being headed or supervised by the Rector or one of the staff members. The S.R.C. viewed this attitude with contempt and decided to resign *en bloc*. The Rector, mindful of the earlier unity of the students, and apprehensive of what might follow should he decide to punish the recalcitrant S.R.C. members, decided by shrewd and subtle methods to eliminate them (the S.R.C. members) from the campus. Those among the students who were known either to be friendly or to sympathise with the stand of the recalcitrants were victimised in the same manner.

In any authoritarian government, it is not uncommon to see petty officials overstep the stipulation of the state law by manufacturing their own laws to victimise and jeopardise the position of those they regard as a threat to their interests, regardless of what the issue at stake is. The Rector's actions should be seen in this light: he is a government man and a Broederbond. His attitude to the S.R.C. issue was a fatal blow to the earlier unity of the naïve students. The different categories of students on the campus were born of this harsh treatment of the members of the defunct S.R.C. The progressive students were disillusioned and became the more opposed to everything that smacked of government manipulation. They recoiled, and could only speak their minds over the set-up in

the country to those they regarded as friends. A solemn hush reigned over the campus. Many students adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards everything on the campus.

THIS PERIOD MARKED THE EMERGENCE of the spies on the campus. Many students with latent pro-government proclivities made hasty moves to fraternise with the staunchest of Nats among the staff members, lest they should be overtaken by the victimisation machinery. This, seen in its proper perspective, is the same thing that one sees among some lily-livered politicians who start off as ardent government opponents only to stab their fellows in the back from fear of the government dragnet, by becoming government informers. The students who were out on a fraternisation campaign with some staff members soon found their way into the Rector's office; and by virtue of being students they managed to penetrate all the meetings which were held by students and some interested outsiders outside the campus. After every such meeting a few students would be called to the Rector's office and given strong warnings about their attendance at such meetings, and some would even be surreptitiously victimised. It did not take long for the students and the public to know who the sell-outs were. One of them was even given a hiding by some outsiders in Bellville. It is only small-mindedness and blindness to reality that makes some people spy on those who try in their own small world to better the position of the group. History has taught us what usually becomes of spies once a government falls, and the spies and informers in our land will in time reap the fruits of treachery.

The victimisation of the S.R.C. members had created an interregnum on the campus; and for a while resuscitation of the S.R.C. became a feared topic on the campus. The students felt that since the Rector has assumed such vast powers in controlling of any student activity which he thinks may disturb his neck, the position of an S.R.C. member would be unpleasant and far from auspicious; and the Bush College has thus been without an S.R.C. for the past three and a half years in its four years of existence. Late last year some senior students had an informal meeting to discuss the possibility of forming an S.R.C. This meeting was an eye-opener to the S.R.C.-formation-idea group, because there was a small group of hard-core progressives who asserted that "we are at Bush under protest", and dismissed the S.R.C. formation idea categorically. There was also a moderately progressive group which explained that, when the formal meeting has to be called to discuss the S.R.C. question, the college administration will have to grant permission for the convening of such a meeting, and the Rector with some staff members would insist on being present at the meeting regardless of student opinion with regard to the presence of authorities at this meeting. The moderate progressives were, however, opposed to this, since they felt that the S.R.C. question was expressly a student affair; and as such the presence of any authority at this meeting would mean violation of the inalienable right of the students (discussion of student matters without interference from the authorities). The fathers of the S.R.C. formation idea, who had been coerced into accepting the Rector's presence in all student meetings by their nescience in

their basic rights as students, were gagged by the progressive stand on the S.R.C. issue till the end of the year. The fact that after this meeting those who advocated the formation of an S.R.C. never spoke of it any more makes clear their opportunistic designs. They felt that since they were seniors they had to make names for themselves as the founders of an S.R.C. down at Bush. Lack of a penetrating vision on their part made them unaware of the difficulties they would have to face in a dummy S.R.C. They thought they would become heroes in the eyes of the authorities and some naive students by being founders of an S.R.C. headed by the Rector or some staff member.

Small groups of students walking around the campus or sitting in the cafeteria have been heard to discuss the pros and cons of the necessity of an S.R.C. down at Bush. The same discussion groups have been characterised by the seriousness with which they view the whole question of student activity which is being hampered by the absence of an S.R.C. on the campus. The hard-core progressives are still sold on the idea of opposing anything along the lines of an S.R.C. formation. They argue that it is a question of principle involved in this S.R.C. question. The authorities will never go back on their

principles. Even if there should be a change of heart on the part of the authorities, this should only be seen as duplicity, if not hypocrisy. They feel that any student that serves under an S.R.C. formed on account of the pressure applied by the student body, to force the authorities to abandon their stand, would only be creating a noose to hang himself. They have no confidence in the authorities, and they feel that the only S.R.C. that can function down at Bush is the one sponsored by the Rector or a man of his choice.

The moderate progressives have been the most active with regard to the whole S.R.C. question. They argue that the students must take united action to force the authorities not to meddle in student affairs. They tried to put this into action by stating that they should constitute themselves into a small committee of nine or so, which committee would be called the Preparatory Committee for the discussion of the possibility of forming an S.R.C. Notices calling a meeting would be circulated around the campus, and about a 100 or so signatures of students would be attached to these notices. On the day of the meeting one of the committee members would ask the house to elect its chairman. The chairman would then convene with one or two members of the committee to draw up an agenda and to be told what to say in his opening remarks. After his opening remarks the chairman would read the agenda to the house and declare the meeting open. If the meetings should go on for too long the chairman would ask the house to vote for the date of the next meeting, for the election of the S.R.C. members. On this day a constitution would be drawn up for the S.R.C., and the students would declare that all their interests and activities on the campus should be guarded and guided by the S.R.C.; they would also go on to state their stand for academic freedom and the other freedoms of student life. They would further declare that the victimisation of the S.R.C. members would mean automatic, simultaneous and immediate stay-away from lectures by all students.

This trend of thinking seemed to be too rash, belligerent and severe to some lily-livered students and many became cautious in supporting it. They wanted to see who and who were supporting it. Some hard-core progressives supported this idea vigorously, but others regarded it as outright pipe-dreaming. There was even talk of brooking no neutrality on this issue. It was either that one supported it or opposed it.

Things seem to happen very fast these days. Before the scheme could be launched some students invited two or three students from U.C.T. to come and address the students on the necessity of an S.R.C. Nothing tangible came of this meeting, because the S.R.C. question down at Bush is purely a problem for the student there, and he alone with courage and determination can solve it. This does not mean that outside help is not needed. The Bush students very much need the guidance and advice of students from other universities; but no amount of talking from outside can bring about a change unless the Bush students are prepared to help themselves. However, the presence of the U.C.T. students was heartening.

Just about this time there was talk of forming an N.U.S.A.S. branch at the University College of the Western Cape. The

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president of N.U.S.A.S. visited the Bush campus in this regard, only to be led out by police before meeting any students there. The bid for the establishment of an N.U.S.A.S. branch at Bush is as old as the college itself, and all attempts were of no avail. A few students at Bush fraternised with some N.U.S.A.S. members from U.C.T.; and one or two were subsequently asked to try to establish an N.U.S.A.S. branch at Bush, but did nothing effective in this regard. It became apparent that their fraternisation campaign was merely for the satisfaction of a social need on their part. This proved to be a quest for popularity among white students. There was no determination or singleness of purpose in them as regards establishment of an N.U.S.A.S. branch at Bush. It is funny how some nonwhites think a heaven of themselves by being known by whites, and in the same breath it is sad to see how certain whites think humanists of themselves by chatting or shaking hands with a few nonwhites. Perhaps it is a malady of our time; to be unable to live with oneself.

Time was fast running out and the winter vacation was in sight and the Preparatory Committee was not prepared to shelve its scheme for later. A shattering blow, which caused the Preparatory Committee to halt the launching of its scheme,

came when some senior students asked the Rector to allow them to stage a post-graduation function in the cafeteria. The Rector told these students to form themselves into a committee, under his auspices, to run the function, and after the function to become the automatic S.R.C. of the college. This most unfriendly suggestion forced the students concerned to abandon the idea of the function. What was most disconcerting and harrowing was to see how little the Rector cared for student opinion on the campus. No S.R.C. can be formed without a mandate from the students. It is a purely student affair; and the students have to elect those they feel can lead them ably to form an S.R.C.

It was now time for the half-yearly examinations, and the students were settling down to hard swotting and the S.R.C. question passed off the scene. What measures are to be taken in this regard still remains to be seen. This report has been written to summon public opinion and interest on the plight of the student down at Bush. No student can be divorced or can divorce himself from the entire public. Therefore, the lot of the student at U.C.W.C. is, in a word, the lot of the entire South African public. We call on the public to watch, enquire into and do something effective about the goings-on down at Bush.

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COMMENT

Separate and unequal libraries

FOR AN AFRICAN KEEN ON STUDIES lack of an adequate library service is one of the major stumbling blocks. In all municipal areas, let alone in country places, there is a shortage of libraries for Africans. Yet whites are provided with large libraries through which they can order any book they need. It is only by borrowing from and exploiting a white friend that the African manages to get the book he needs. Of course, it is from a small number of rational whites that one gets the right book.

In a Pretoria location where I stayed some time back the only thing that could pass for a library was a local mission library. Besides this, the only other thing approaching a library that I have known during my stay there was a shifting, poor affair that hardly could house in one street for a season—a struggling adventure

by some far-sighted and diligent residents. And then in any case one finds that any such library is hardly known except to a few exceptional devotees to studies. This was in a freehold location, and perhaps the municipality would not trouble to aid a society not directly under it?

A look at any of the new municipal locations while growing will show that library service is not considered of much importance. The municipality concerned will furnish first those institutions that have little to do with developing mental skills. Among the earliest plans will be accommodation for sporting grounds, beer halls, all of which make for physical development and leisure. These amenities, though desired, should not be primary in a State faced with the need for social reform. Though schools and churches are provided, these schools teach their creeds to their particular class of people and end there. A public library will be slow in coming, and then it will be too small for the community it serves.

BUT THEN WE ARE ALWAYS TOO ready to put forward figures—often inaccurate—when we search for truths. In this case statistics will probably show that the