

"Refreshed by the precious files of our traditional weekly Fort Hare Diary, memory evokes a year which began quietly but effectively, and closed sensationally." (Professor F. H. Rand, "The Year at Fort Hare," 1959)

Fort Hare Record WINSTON NAGAN

The recent dismissal of Mr. Curnick Ndamse from the staff of Fort Hare University College for "insubordination" spotlights once again the record of Fort Hare since its rape by the Verwoerd regime in 1960.

UNTIL UNIVERSITY APARTHEID was introduced in 1960, non-white students could attend the "open" universities of Cape Town and and the Witwatersand, could enrol at the University of Natal in segregated classes, and could become students at the non-white University College of Fort Hare.

In December 1953, the government appointed the Holloway Commission "to investigate and report on the practicability and financial implications of providing separate training facilities for non-Europeans at the Universities." The question of the desirability or otherwise of such separate facilities was not included in the terms of reference.

In its report published in February 1955, the Holloway Commission rejected the suggestions of new ethnic universities for non-Europeans mainly on financial grounds. It suggested that if segregation was desired, the most practical scheme would be to concentrate non-white students mainly at Durban and Fort Hare.

Towards the end of 1955, the government appointed an inter-departmental committee to obtain further information, particularly on the financial implications of providing separate facilities, and to advise on how the scheme could be applied. This committee worked on the hypothesis that separate ethnic colleges for non-white students were *de jure*, and *de facto*, going to be established, and that the University College of Fort Hare would admit only Xhosa-speaking African students. In point of fact, a separate University Education Bill was published before the findings of the Committee were made public.

In the *Government Gazette* of 15th November 1957, a notice headed "Hybrid Bill" declared the intention of the Minister of Native Affairs to introduce a Fort Hare University College Transfer Bill early the following year.

In the face of large and influential opposition from the universities and students in South Africa, and from students and academicians all over the world, "The Extension of University Education Bill" was passed in 1959. This Bill was the culmination of the efforts of the Nationalist Party, which had been in power since 1948. In that same year, Dr. D. F. Malan proclaimed that the enforcement of University Apartheid was "urgent" state policy. The motivation for this bill is illustrated by the following:

"I am confident that no European at Winburg or anywhere else will tolerate their son or daughter sitting in the same class room with non-Europeans. This is the reason why the Government is doing everything in its power to establish black universities." (C. R. Swart, State President, then, Minister of Justice, *Cape Times*, 25th March 1957.) "The real reason for this legislation is to ensure the maintenance in South Africa of that which is one of the greatest cultural treasures of the white man, viz: abhorrence of miscegenation." (Dr. C. de Wet, South African Ambassador in London, then. A member of the Commission on the Separate University Education Bill, in Parliament 29th May 1957.)

"We do not want (Non-Europeans) in the same university as the young European students of today, who are the leaders of

tomorrow. We do not want Europeans to become so accustomed to the native that they feel there is no difference between them and the natives." (Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, Prime Minister, then Minister of Native Affairs, *Cape Argus* 19th March 1958.)

THE TRANSFER OF FORT HARE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACT, which was coterminous with the former act is often regarded as the more tragic in terms of the proud tradition which was built at the College, of its associations with Rhodes University, and of events which have since taken place at the college. Why was the college taken over by the Government? Dr. Verwoerd supplies us with the answer. "If the Native... is being taught to expect... a policy of equality, he is making a big mistake" (Hansard 1954). He later spoke (in 1959) of the educationalists who "create the wrong expectations on the part of the Native himself." It was quite clear that the Government was tired of Fort Hare producing "Black Englishmen... to struggle against the Afrikaner."

Protest meetings were held all over South Africa against these Bills. At Fort Hare 20 members of staff and 380 students marched in protest through the streets of Alice.

Fort Hare was a multi-racial organisation: in 1959 the staff consisted of 28 whites, 10 Africans and one Coloured. The University Council was composed of 19 whites and 3 Africans and the Senate of 21 whites and 4 Africans. Of the 498 students, 37% were Xhosa-speaking Africans, 33% came from other African groups, 15% were Indian and 15% were Coloured. Such an arrangement was not acceptable to the Government.

During the parliamentary debate on Fort Hare the Minister of Bantu Education said that Fort Hare was nothing but an English University for non-whites. Because of the admission of different groups of non-whites, English had become the official language used by the students in neglect of their own languages and traditions. If they spoke Xhosa instead, this language would eventually reach the status of a university language, and the Xhosa culture would be developed. The Council of Fort Hare was denied permission to be heard at the bar of the house before the second reading of the bill.

It was announced early in July, 1959, that the principal (the late Professor Burrows), would not be re-appointed when the Bantu Education Department assumed control. He would be replaced by Professor J. J. Ross from the Afrikaans University of the Orange Free State.

The Vice-Principal Professor Z. K. Matthews, was informed that he would be re-appointed as a state employee, subject to the proviso that he resigned from the African National Congress. Professor Matthews, who was to have gone on pension shortly, refused to do this and announced he would not accept the appointment, thereby sacrificing his life pension. Two other staff members were not re-appointed. Professor Leslie Blackwell (a former judge of the supreme Court of South Africa), and Lady Agnew (Snr lecturer in Geography). Others to be dismissed were Professor Rand (English), Sir Fulque Agnew (Registrar), who described his dismissal notice as a "certificate of decency," Professor Williams (History), and Messrs. Beard, Israelstam and Hutton. The Minister of Bantu Education is reported to have said, "I disposed of their services because I will not permit a penny of any funds of which

WINSTON NAGAN, now at Brasenose College, Oxford University, was a student at Fort Hare and an active member of NUSAS.

1960

I have control to be paid to any persons who are known to be destroying the government's policy of apartheid." Other members of staff resigned, among them Dr. M. Webb, Mr. S. B. Ngcobo, Mr. C. L. S. Nyembezi, and Mr. A. M. Phahle (all professors or Senior Lecturers).

The reaction of the student body to this is best expressed in a resolution unanimously passed by all 498 of them.

"The Government in its dictatorial action in dismissing our staff members without stating any reasons, has added to the atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty, that has engulfed Fort Hare during the past few years. This atmosphere makes the normal pursuit of academic activities almost impossible. But, let it be noted once and for all, that our stand as students of Fort Hare, and as future leaders of our country upholding the principles of Education as universally accepted remains unchanged and uncompromising. Our outright condemnation of the University Apartheid Legislation remains steadfast. We wish to warn the architects of white domination, the whole country and the world at large, that we will not be held responsible for the disastrous repercussions of this apartheid policy, which in the foreseeable future will destroy the entire social, political and economic structure of our country."

During the spring of 1959, the newly appointed Rector, Professor Ross, and his Registrar, Mr. Du Preez, visited Fort Hare. The electrifying tension of the preceding months broke with the shower of tomatoes which greeted the new arrivals. Both beat a hurried retreat from Fort Hare and only returned on January 1960. The closing of the era is best described in the moving words of Professor Rand:

"Without particularising further, among many activities, we must mention the unforgettably restrained, but emotional 'completers' social' at which presentations were made to the members of staff dismissed. . . . And so the climax of remembrance came with the presentation of a silver tea service and a canteen of cutlery to the principal inscribed *Fortis cadere, cedere non potest.*"

1960

THE MAINTENANCE, MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL of Fort Hare was assigned to the Minister of Bantu Education by the Government as from 1st January 1960. The first significant act of the new regime was to victimise the whole of the 1959 Students Representative Council. The Minister said their readmission was not considered by him to be "in the best interests of the College because of their activities in 1959." The new SRC was not allowed to continue its affiliation with NUSAS (National Union of South African Students). During September 1960, NUSAS officials visited Fort Hare to discuss the question of its affiliation with NUSAS. The rector refused the officials permission to address the student body on the campus, but at a public meeting in the town (Alice), indignation was expressed at the ban on NUSAS and the ambiguous status of the new SRC. Feelings ran high on the campus as protest meetings and demonstrations were being staged. The students resolved to dissolve the SRC until a new constitution had been drawn up. (The new Constitution was never approved and a new SRC has never been constituted.)

The College authorities quelled the unrest by demanding on penalty of dismissal, that every student should sign a declaration reaffirming his/her acceptance of college regulations.

A few days later more stringent regulations were gazetted. They were, *inter alia*:

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(a) That Fort Hare Students were to apply each year for permission to report for registration.

(b) Together with the application form, must be attached a certificate of good conduct by a Magistrate, Bantu Affairs Commissioner or a Minister of Religion.

(c) The Minister has the power to refuse a student admission even though he complies with all the conditions of registration.

(d) No person may be on the college grounds as a visitor of a student without the prior approval of the rector. No Fort Hare student or student group may visit any other institution without permission of the Rector and the institution concerned.

(e) Any student contravening these regulations must be brought before the college disciplinary committee and legal representation will not be allowed at the enquiry.

1961

THE YEAR 1961 COMMENCED with the non-admittance of Mr. Mhlambiso, the former secretary of the dissolved SRC. Mr. Mhlambiso, one of Fort Hare's outstanding student-leaders, later became a Vice-President of NUSAS, and is at present serving a sentence on a political charge.

Early in the year, when Chief Kaizer Matanzima visited Fort Hare, students were invited to express their views on Bantu Education and the new regime. Mr. Mabisela, who expressed views which were critical of the system was expelled. The authorities alleged that he had been "insubordinate." The student body were infuriated and marched *en bloc* into the rector's office and demanded that Mr. Mabisela be reinstated. It was, however, only after an appeal by all the non-white staff members, that Mr. Mabisela was allowed to complete his course. He too is now languishing in a South African gaol.

Shortly after this event, the college was painted with slogans pledging solidarity with the Convention Movement, and the "All-in Conference" which had recently been held in Pietermaritzburg. Other slogans were particularly derisive of the new regime. After long and protracted investigations the Special Branch were unable to discover who the authors of this "indignity" were. As a result, the college installed floodlights, sirens and so it was rumoured, Alsatian police dogs. These mysteriously disappeared after inadvertently attacking the Registrar, Mr. Du Preez, one evening.

On 31st May 1961, without consulting the non-white majority, South Africa was declared a Republic, and subsequently severed all links with the Commonwealth of Nations. In sympathy with a general call to stay-at-home, the student body resolved not to attend lectures and other functions for two days, following on the Government's Republic Day celebrations. The call was 100% effective and Coloured, African and Indian students remained quietly in their rooms. The morning of the third day however, a notice appeared on the notice board cancelling all lectures until "further notice." Shortly thereafter, the whole student body was given 24 hours to leave the campus. To ensure that this was effectively carried out, the college was invaded by members of the S.A. Police, all well armed with sten-guns and revolvers. Students also alleged that Saracen armoured cars were in the vicinity of Alice.

TWO MONTHS LATER the college was re-opened and students were

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required to apply formally for re-admission. Many students throughout South Africa came out expressing solidarity with Fort Hare students during this crisis. Rhodes University staged a two-day sympathy strike. Lovedale, Healdtown, St. John's College, Antata and other educational institutions were temporarily closed as a result of the hasty action of the Fort Hare authorities.

1962

DURING THE FIRST SEMESTER, numbers of students were arrested, charged with political offences, convicted, and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Special Branch Police activity increased tremendously on the campus. Often road-blocks were set up and cars searched. One peaceful Sunday morning, two lecturers from Rhodes University came down to Fort Hare to give some additional lessons to a student who was completing his degree under Rhodes University. Detective Sergeant Hattingh of the Special Branch, accompanied by Mr. Du Preez, the registrar, in addition to being particularly abusive and rude to the bewildered lecturers, searched them in full view of the students. They were ordered to leave the campus immediately. The Fort Hare students were so disgusted, that they issued a public apology for the "platteland-like" behaviour of Mr. Du Preez and "his" special branch. NUSAS officials had established contact with Fort Hare students, who expressed the desire to form an unofficial branch of the National Union on the campus. This Committee was able to arrange a Seminar with Rhodes University students somewhere in the Eastern Cape. Towards the end of the year more students were arrested and charged with sabotage and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. Mr. Masondo, a lecturer in applied Mathematics, a man with a brilliant academic record, was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. His wife and their five children, who were residing in a college house, were ordered to vacate the premises at short notice and leave was refused the students to embark on a fund-raising scheme to tide her over. Mrs. Masondo was doing the second year of her B.Sc. degree when she left Fort Hare. During December 1962, Fort Hare Students attended a NUSAS executive meeting.

1963

EARLY IN 1963, a Fort Hare student was able to slip away and address the SRC of the University of Cape Town on the conditions at Fort Hare. Another was able to represent Fort Hare at the Day of Affirmation of Academic and Human Freedom held in Durban, and a number of students were able to participate in the National Seminars for Youth Leaders, now held annually in South Africa. The Security Police were soon on the move and a party given by one of the professors was stopped when Sergeant Hattingh arrived uninvited. He told the professor that it was occasions like those that created a feeling of equality in the students. The Professor replied that that was precisely his aim. Another incident that left a sour taste concerned the child of one of the new appointees, who called a student a "Kaffir Pig"; the student instantly gave the child a spanking, whereupon the father instead of approaching the college disciplinary committee, reported the student to the Police. The student was found guilty of assault and sentenced to pay a £5 fine. The student body raised the money to pay the fine.

1964/1965

1964

IN 1964, the unofficial NUSAS Committee issued a statement condemning the detention of Jonty Driver, the NUSAS president. Late in 1964, a number of students were detained under the 90-day Act. Amongst others, one of Fort Hare's most brilliant scholars, Mr. Seretse Choabi, who was a former President of the SRC, and had been recently married. After months of confinement, they were brought to trial in camera and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from one to four years. Mr. Choabi had declined a scholarship to Oxford in order to complete his M.A. thesis.

1965

RECENTLY MR. C. M. C. NDAMSE, the senior Lecturer in Public Administration was dismissed from the staff at Fort Hare. Apparently, whilst attending a seminar of the University of South Africa, he was reported to have said that "separate development" (the euphemism for apartheid) had not brought any economic benefits or professional opportunities to the African people. The charge against him — "insubordination."

A few months ago a publication called *Education for Success* (Booklet No. 28 in the series "Reports on South Africa") appeared in London. This publication is an attempt at justifying Bantu Education and separate ethnic Universities. However, the publication correctly states that the history of Fort Hare is an "eventful" and "proud" one. ●

Break in the Sun

David Thomson

This is the story of a man who, under the impact of Africa, loses his sanity and then regains it. It is 1961; Daniel, hero of the author's much praised earlier book **Daniel**, is sent from England to Tanganyika to make a film on the occasion of independence. No sooner does he arrive in Dar es Salaam than he begins to have hallucinations, some beautiful some terrifying. After a spell in the local hospital he starts home again by ship. In Mombasa, where it docks for a few days, he meets an Afro-Japanese girl; and their painfully intense relationship forms the climax of this extraordinary book.

price: 21s.

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