

CLOSING ADDRESS

Dr ESSOP JASSAT

Mr Chairman, delegates to the 58th Annual Conference of Nusas:-

I would like to thank you, Mr Borraine, and your Executive Committee for having invited me to talk to you on education within the framework of the theme "Exposing Total Strategy."

For me this invitation has fulfilled the pleasurable role of being at my alma mater once again and also of renewing the contacts which I once had with Nusas whilst serving on the Wits SRC in 1958.

The association with Wits and Nusas was terminated by one Balthazar Johannes Vorster, the then Minister of Justice of the Republic of South Africa who, being satisfied that I was engaged in activities which were furthering or were calculated to further the achievements of any of the objects of communism in terms of subsection (1) of section 9 of the Suppression of Communism Act 1950 (Act No 44 of 1950) prohibited me from attending any gathering within the Republic and the territory of South West Africa for a period of five years up to the end of January 1969. His successor, Petrus Cornelius Pelser, extended this order for a further five years until the end of January 1974.

It is interesting to note that one of the gatherings from which I was barred was "any gathering of pupils or students assembled for the purpose of being instructed, trained or addressed" by me.

Already in 1954 rumblings against the educational systems were noted in Johannesburg, when the Transvaal Indian Congress initiated the Central Indian School in Fordsburg, which was run by the community in response to an attempt by the authorities to bus pupils from Johannesburg to Lenasia some 30km away. A few notable personalities on the staff of this school were: Merna Thandry, the principal who was the Secretary of the Transvaal Indian Congress; Molly Fisher, the wife of that great South African Braam Fisher; Dennis Brutus who became a leading figure in the Anti-apartheid Movement in Britain; Duma Nokwe who became Secretary General of the ANC-in-exile; Mosy Moosajee; Alfred Hutchinson and many others.

This school, while it lasted, was an attempt by parents to see that their children would not be used as pawns in the game of apartheid.

Student discontent did not begin in June 1976, as some would like us to believe. It had been raging for many years. This year was merely the culmination of serious thinking, discontent and crisis in the minds of scholars and students over a number of years.

Though the '76 student uprising was sparked off by the Government's stubborn attitude to pushing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in a number of subjects, in fact the students asked for a universal human identity. They were after a universal culture because they were sick to their teeth of being reminded of their "cultural heritage" and forced into their own culture by a regime which threw the word around as some sort of justification for keeping blacks under subjection.

These events of June '76 rocked the country. For the first time in South African history these young children were giving their parents and elders a political lead. Close to a thousand children were killed. Many more thousands left the borders to swell the forces poised to strike back at white South Africa.

There was a lull for 3 years - but not completely, for last week we read that three of these young men - Mambithi Lobisi, Tsepo Mashigo and Naphthali Menana were sentenced to death. Six others were also found guilty of high treason and were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of between 10 and 20 years. An eminent Afrikaans sociologist, Professor F.A. Maritz, in his evidence in mitigation of sentence stated: "People have tried to overthrow governments and those who are in jail one day sit in governments the next."

Then came the explosion of 1980. The deliberate attempts to represent the events of this year as a Coloured struggle were a complete distortion and another brick in the wall the government calls ethnicity. Practically all secondary school pupils in all Coloured and Indian areas were involved and to a lesser extent African students in all four provinces.

These children rejected segregated education based upon the Verwoerdian dictum that it is of no avail for black people to receive a training which has as its aim absorption into the white community. They demanded a unitary form of non-racial education.

Their second demand was an equitable allocation of financial resources amongst the four school systems. The expenditure from the State Revenue Account on education during the 1977 - 1978 financial year for whites was R876-million, whereas for the other three groups put together it was R315-million. The per capita expenditure during the same period was R577 for white pupils, R236 for Indian pupils, R185 for Coloured pupils and R54 for African pupils.

Their third demand was for an improvement in the pupil:teacher ratio. The figures for 1979 were 20:1 for whites, 26:1 for Asians, 30:1 for Coloureds and 48:1 for Africans.

Their other demands (so called short-term) were the abolition of Ministerial consent for study at higher institutions, better sporting, library and laboratory facilities, repair to schools, ending shortages of desks and books and more democratisation of school representative councils. They did not forget their teachers for whom they demanded parity in salaries. The feeling of the pupils was succinctly expressed by a placard during the school boycott which read: "We demand a relevant educational system for all."

The boycott has been called off for the moment in most areas but in others the struggle continues. The total boycott of schools in Port Elizabeth enters its eighth month as more than 50 000 students stand firm against apartheid education. Countless young people are still detained. We must demand their release.

"Equality of opportunity is the central issue of the current debate on South African education. It is also high on the agenda in any debate about the political future of South Africa. Educational opportunity can only be developed within a political system where all people participate in a just sharing of power. The establishment of an educational system in which resources are shared on a progressively more equitable basis will not however result in the evolution of a just political system, nor is a radical redistribution of resources likely to occur under circumstances where a dominant group in society monopolises the power structure.

Therefore, the impetus to redistribute educational resources will of necessity occur concurrently with major changes in the South African political structure."
(M.A. Corke)

Mr George Bizos, when he opened the Nusas Congress made mention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which sadly South Africa does not subscribe to. A similar and moving declaration called the Freedom Charter was drawn up on June 25 and 26 1955 at the Congress of the People in Kliptown. I would like to end by quoting the section headed "The Doors of Learning and of Culture shall be Opened."

" The Government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life. All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands.

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace.

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children.

Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit.

Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan.

Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens.

The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished."