

THE CRISIS IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
IN
SOUTH AFRICA . [1959?]

University education in South Africa , like so many other things in this country is passing through a critical stage in its history . The Nationalist Government which has an unrivalled record as far as the creating of needless crises is concerned has thrown the apple of discord into the hitherto relatively calm field of university education .

University Education for Whites .

The Union of South Africa , for a country with a population of less than 14 million is well supplied with universities especially when it is remembered that , with one exception, its universities cater for the needs of 2½ Million Whites . There are eight independent universities - Cape Town , Stellenbosch , Witwatersrand , Natal, Pretoria, Rhodes , Potchefstroom , Orange Free State - which cater primarily for White students who can afford to attend university on a full-time basis .

The universities which cater in the main for White students may be divided into two groups on the basis of the medium of instruction employed in the university and the policy followed as far as the admission of students is concerned . As it happens the resultant grouping is broadly speaking the same whichever of the two criteria is applied. On the basis of the same criterion the universities are divided into the English - medium and Afrikaans - medium universities . In the first fall Cape Town , Witwatersrand , Natal and Rhodes and into the second Stellenbosch , Pretoria , Potchefstroom and Orange Free State .

On the basis of the second criterion the universities are divided into "Open" universities and "Closed" universities (i.e. 'Open' and 'Closed' to non-White students respectively) . The Afrikaans -medium universities are all "Closed" universities . They are all uniform in their exclusion of non-White students. The policy followed by the 'Open' universities as far as non-European students ~~xx~~ is concerned varies from university to university . It may be said that the universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand are the most open in that "while conforming to the South African practice of separation in social matter (residence , games , dances) these two universities

so far as possible , admit students on the basis of academic qualification only and in all academic matters treat non-White students on a footing of equality and without separation from White Students " .

The University of Natal admits non-White students but except for post graduate work requires them to attend separate classes , apart from White students . Rhodes University to which the University College of Fort Hare , 60 miles away is affiliated does not ordinarily admit non-White students , except in the case of post-graduate work where such facilities are not available at Fort Hare .

In addition to these independent universities for White students there is the University of South Africa which caters for those White Students who for financial or other reasons cannot afford to go to University and have to content themselves with studying for the degrees and diplomas of the University as external students .

It can be said therefore that South African society has gone a long way towards bringing university education within the reach of every White student who is qualified and financially able to take advantage of such facilities.

University Facilities For Non-Whites .

The picture is quite different as far as non-European students are concerned . For a number of years there was only one declared institution for higher education to which they were freely admitted and that was the University College of Fort Hare formerly known as the South African Native College, and opened in 1916 by General Louis Botha , Prime Minister of the Union .

Qualified students of the College were prepared for the degrees of the University of South Africa , then a federal university consisting of a number of constituent colleges incorporated by Private Acts , situated in different parts of the country . Fort Hare was not recognised as a constituent college of the University of South Africa , and Fort Hare students were registered as external students of the University of South Africa as if they were doing their degrees work by private study .

The University of South Africa did, however, eventually agree to accord the University College of Fort Hare de facto

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some of the privileges granted to the constituent colleges and to apply to its students some of the provisions applicable to the internal students of the University Colleges . Technically , however , not having been incorporated by Private Act Fort Hare was not strictly speaking a university college and its students were regarded as external students of the University of South Africa , along with thousands of students throughout the country who are receiving private tuition for their post matriculation studies.

As a result of their development it became clear that some of the constituent colleges of the University of South Africa would eventually hve off into seperate and independent universities . In view of this likelihood the Union Government appointed a Commission to enquire into and report upon the future structure of university education in South Africa . As a result of the Report of that Commission which was presided over by Senator Dr. E. H. Brookes it was decided that : -

- (a) All the existing constituent colleges with the exception of Huguenot University College should be accorded independent university status .
- (b) Huguenot University College which was primarily a Women's College should be closed down .
- (c) Fort Hare , which would otherwise have remained as the only University College attached to the University of South Africa , should be affiliated to one of the independent universities , preferably R hodes University , situated at Grahamstown , 60 miles from Fort Hare . It was felt that at that time Fort Hare had not yet satisfied the criteria laid down by the Brookes Commission for independent university status .
- (d) The University of South Africa should continue to be the examining body for external students .

THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF A UNIVERSITY .

The traditional concept of a university is that of an autonomous institution whose function is the pursuit of truth and the dissemination of such knowledge as has been garnered in the search for truth , beauty and goodness in the universe . As far as its ~~students~~ structure is concerned the normal university in South Africa has consisted of a governing Council whose function it is to represent the interests of the Community in the University . On the Governing Council

are usually represented various interests in the community including the Government , and it is the function of this body to determine the policy of the University on various matters such as the appointment of staff , the admission of s tudents , the financial and other administrative aspects of the life of the institution .

Another important part of the university is the teaching staff . This usually consists of professors , lecturers , demonstrators , research workers who are primarily entrusted with the academic side of the life of the institution . Research , the superintendence of instruction and discipline may properly be regarded as the first duty of what is commonly called the Senate of the University consisting of the senior members of the various academic departments of the University.

The Senate which is usually represented by its most senior members on the Gâverning Council may be said to represent the peculiar interests of the university in the community . It is to them that we mÿst look to guard the academic freedom of the University without which the University cannot perform its proper function - the pursuit of truth and the dÿssemination of established knowledge .

Another vital part of the university is to be found in the student body . The student body consist of men and women who by passing various tests have proved that they might profit by the advantages of a university education .

The Council , the Faculty consisting of Senate and non-Senate members and the Student -body (consisting of graduates and under-graduates together constitute a community within the larger society of which they form a part . Traditionally the community of university administrators , scholars and learners is accorded a large measure of self-government within its own sphere of work . Obviously this does not mean that the University is a law unto itself . After all,as already indicated the Governing Council is there to protect the wider interests of the Community in the University while the Senate is there to watch the peculiar interests of the university in the Community , while the student body vigorous and uncommitted to any particular view of life is there to remind both Council and Senate that a society lives by fixing its gaze upon the future as well as upon the past and the present .

The Achilles heel of the Universities as far as their autonomy is concerned lies in the fact that university education is an expensive business and is becoming more and more so with the passage of time . In order to meet their financial commitments universities in most countries, including South Africa , have tended more and more to look to the Government as the institution with the greatest financial resources in the society to subsidise their work . Were this is the case it is extremely difficult for the government concerned to resist the temptation of abusing its undoubted right to see that public funds put into a subsidised institution are properly used, thus undermining the autonomy of the university and endeavouring to convert it into a purveyor of its own particular ideology .

THE NATIONALISTS AND THE UNIVERSITIES .

Ever since it came into power in 1948 the Nationalist Government has made it clear that sooner or later they would invade the field of university education with their policy of Apartheid. At party Congresses and at Jeugbond meetings questions were asked as to when University apartheid would be realised and promises by various ministers were made that action would be taken in due course.

To prepare the ground certain preliminary steps were taken . First a Commission presided over by Dr. J.C. Holloway former Secretary for Finance was appointed to investigate and report upon the probable cost of university apartheid. It is common knowledge that this commission whose terms of reference did not permit of it going into the advisability or otherwise of introducing compulsory apartheid into South African universities indicated in no uncertain terms what the cost of establishing separate university facilities for non-whites would be .

That the Government did not accept the recommendations of this commission was shown by the fact that in 1955 an Inter-Departmental Committee presided over by Mr. H. S. van der Walt , Secretary for Education, Arts & Science was set up to advise the Government on the provision for non-Europeans of educational facilities of university standard . The report of this committee has not been released for general information .

At last , however, the legislation intended to implement this aspect of the policy of the Nationalists Government in the form of the Separate University Education Bill has been published .

Broadly stated the Bill empowers the Government :-

- (a) To establish or disestablish so-called university colleges for non-White students .
- (b) to transfer the University College of Fort Hare to the Department of Native Affairs .
- (c) To transfer the non-European Medical School in Durban to the Department of Education, Arts & Science .
- (d) to limit and eventually to prohibit the admission of non-White students to the so-called 'Open' universities .

The Separate University Education Bill consists of 45 clauses divided into five chapters , but from its preamble to its title it is difficult to find a single redeeming feature in this measure . Before the Bill was published it was suggested in some quarters that the ethnic universities contemplated by the Government need be nothing worse than an endeavour on the part of the Government to bring university education within the reach of more non-European students by the establishment of more university colleges to cater for the needs of the 10 Million non-Whites . Just as the situation of the universities for Whites in different parts of the country is an undoubted advantage to White students , it was supposed that four or five colleges situated where the different racial groups are concentrated would enable more students to go to university than is the case at present , and that in other respects the new institutions would conform to the traditional pattern of university colleges in this country .

The opponents of university apartheid no doubt also influenced by a fond hope that certain things simply could not happen here contented themselves with an averment of their faith in university autonomy as far as the admission of students is concerned . Just as they were prepared to accord Stellenbosch the right to refuse to admit non-White students , they claimed for themselves the right to admit such students. By adopting this attitude they hoped to maintain the unity of the university front against the government's proposals. That seems to be the line adopted in the admirable publication on "the Open Universities in South Africa" sponsored by the universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand . It seems clear , however, that the present government is not prepared to base its policy on the highest measure of agreement among the different sections of the population . On the contrary it seems determined to base its programme in every aspect of our national.../7.

national life upon a single view of life - the Nationalist conception - imposed upon all sections of the population .

Thus as has been pointed out by the ex-Chief Justice A. Van der Sandt Centlivres , the Chancellor of the University of Cape Town , the university apartheid Bill is far worse than was expected even by the opponents of academic segregation .

Take the title of the Bill . It is described as 'The Separate University Education Bill ' and not as the 'Separate Universities Bill . There is a world of difference between the two . In other words it is not intended to establish ~~separate~~ university colleges for non-Whites in the generally accepted sense of the term but rather to set up institutions in which something deemed by a Government Department to be equivalent to university education will be provided . The idea that a group of civil servants , however, well intentioned , should be empowered to determine the academic standards of a university will be wholly repugnant to the principles of higher education as commonly understood in the modern world.

The long title of the Bill shows that every aspect of the life of these institutions will be subject to direct and rigid government control . Establishment, maintenance, Management and Control - when one has deprived a university of its autonomy in these respects what has one got left but an empty shell into which anything can be poured without the shell being able to react in anyway for fear of being shattered to bits .

But the actual terms of the Bill relating to the structure of these so-called university colleges are, if anything, even more offensive . The Governing Council of the University College" which may consist of as few as three members will be appointed by the Governor-General , no doubt because of their espousal of policy rather than their competence in academic matters or university administration . The Senate , the body normally primarily charged with responsibility for academic matters within a university will be appointed by the Minister who may delegate his powers to the Secretary who may delegate his powers to an Officer of the Public Service. The Principal, Professors, lecturers and other staff members will also be appointed by the Minister and will be subject to a disciplinary code which will reduce them to automats hardly able to breathe or to pass on to their students the spirit of free enquiry which is the hallmark of a university .

But the venom of the Bill seems to be particularly concentrated in the chapters dealing with the University College of Fort Hare and the Non-European Medical School , Natal University .

The University College of Fort Hare formerly known as the South African Native College has been in existence for just over 40 years . The College has a record of achievement of which it is justly proud . The first graduate was turned out by the College in 1923. By 1955 , 5 students had obtained the degree of Master of Arts , 3 the degree of Master of Science , 4 the B.A. (Hons.) , 6 the B.Sc. (Hons.); 544 students had qualified for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, 311 for the degree of Bachelor of Science and 69 for the degree of B.Sc. (Hygiene) - a degree specially designed for those entering the Public Health services of the country ; 83 had gone on to qualify as medical doctors either in the Union itself or overseas . 582 qualified for professional teaching certificates and 91 had completed the requirements for Diplomas such as the Advanced Diploma in Agriculture or the Diploma in Theology . Some have gone on to take senior degrees in other universities both in South Africa and overseas and the list of successes of former students published in the College become more impressive year by year .

The staff of the College is mixed i.e. both White and Non-White . Although Whites are at present in the majority on the faculty , all posts without exception are open to qualified applicants without distinction as to race or colour. All members of the permanent staff are subject to the same conditions of service , including salary scales and other conditions of employment.

Former students are to be found in all parts of South , Central and East Africa holding positions of great responsibility and rendering significant service to their communities in various spheres of life - as teachers , ministers of religion , doctors , lawyers , civil servants , farmers , agricultural extension officers , social workers, health workers , laboratory assistants in scientific research stations , chiefs , councillors, political and other leaders of thought .

Throughout the past forty years the relations between the College and successive South African governments

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have been cordial . What is the reward which the Nationalist government proposes to hand out to the Council and Senate of the University College of Fort Hare ?

The College Council is to be deprived of the finctions and powers vested in it , including all property movable or immovable which are in future to be vested in the Minister of Native Affairs with effect from a date to be fixed . In all this there has been no question of consultation with the College Council in which the Government itself has always been well represented . As far as the staff is concerned from the Principal downwards they are to become civil servants . Any member of the staff who is persona non grata with the government is to be compulsorily retired; others~~y~~ will be given two months within which to decide whether they are going to sell their academic souls for a mess of pottage or leave . That is the cruel choice with which men and women who have spent years of preparing themselves for the work in which they are engaged will be confronted.

The same applies to the students admitted to these institutions who will have to be "approved by the Minister" . Having regard to the intense desire of Non-Europeans for education and the total absence of alternative facilities for them

in the country non-White students will probably be compelled to seek admission to these 'intellectual kraals' .

The opposition to this Bill has hitherto been confined to the Universities affected , but it is to be hoped that all people interested in the future welfare of the country will unite and form a broad front of opposition to this monstrous Bill .

But the more important thing about a university institution is that it should not be isolated from other seats of learning. Such an institution may be said to be isolated geographically, if it is situated in an inaccessible part of the country so that those connected with it seldom have the opportunity to know and feel what is going on in other parts of the country or of the world. With the rapid development of methods of travel and means of communication this is not such a serious handicap in the modern world, but even so the modern tendency is to avoid siting a university institution in places too remote from the main thoroughfare of the country.

A university wherever situated might also be isolated in the sense of being detached from the world around it, concerning itself with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake without bothering itself about the requirements of the society of which it forms a part. The conception that the world is too much with us and should consequently be largely ignored by those who are engaged on the serious business of study is not one that commends itself to the modern mind. While pure research is still part of the life-blood of genuine universities, much of the research which is pursued in modern universities is concerned with matters which are relevant and applicable to the problems of modern society. Especially in these days when universities are so dependent either upon the philanthropy of organised commerce or industry or upon sub from the state, it is necessary for them to demonstrate the relevance or the practical application of their work before the bar of public opinion.

Finally a university institution might also isolate itself from other seats of learning because its work is conducted through the medium of a language which is confined to a small area or is spoken by too small a number of people.

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Obviously all people naturally want the education of their children to be conducted in the language with which the children are most familiar. This is usually but is not necessarily what is commonly called the mother tongue. In the higher reaches of education, however, it is undoubtedly of great advantage to the future leaders of a country of this education is conducted through the medium of a language which will make it possible for these to enter into the heritage of world civilizations. This is even more important for people who belong to the so-called under-developed groups of the world. To a greater or lesser extent their lack of development is due to the fact that they have developed their civilizations, all of which are naturally entitled to respect, in comparative isolation from the more dynamic social and economic systems of the modern world. If they are going to be able to stand on their feet under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, at least their future leaders, both men and women, must be able to understand and appreciate the machinery of modern civilization. In them to be compelled to do so through the medium of languages which are relatively speaking still in their infancy as far as their literary development is concerned is a cruel imposition which can only be perpetuated upon a voiceless and defenceless people.

The Union Government has announced its intention to re-organise the higher education of Non-Europeans on an ethnic basis. The Africans, the Coloured and the Indians are to be separated from the Whites and from one another in their university education as they are largely in their primary and secondary education today. The Coloureds are to have a university college for them in the Western Cape where the greater proportion of their population is concerned. The Indians are to have their university college in Natal for the same reason.

When we come to the Africans who contribute the vast majority of the Non-White population, although everything hither-

to been done by legislation or otherwise to place them in the same category, for the purposes of their higher education, they are to be divided into three groups, namely (i) the Sotho and related tribes for whom a university college is to be established in a Reserve somewhere in the Northern Transvaal, (ii) the Zulu and related tribes for whom a university college is to be established in a Reserve in Zululand and (iii) the Xhosa and related tribes who are to be served by the existing university college of Fort Hare.

What participation can there be for this re-organisation on an ethnic basis or this sudden increase of the number of university colleges for Non-Whites from one to five. Is this because the one university college at present in existence - Fort Hare - cannot be expanded to take in more students. That certainly is not the case. The present enrolment at Fort Hare is 400 and that number could be raised to one or two thousand at far less cost than it would take to set up a new university college, even with the Native Affairs Department Building squads.

The question may be asked as to whether the present demand for university education among Non-Whites university students is approximately as follows: 400 at Fort Hare, 500 at the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand combined 400 at the University of Natal and about 1,400 external students at the University of South Africa doing their degree work by private study, a total of slightly more than 2,500. Of course it might be argued that as there are nine universities serving the needs of 20,000 White students, there ought to be more than one university to cater for the needs of the 2,500 non-white students. Admittedly just as the opening of more secondary schools for non-whites in the last 30 years has stimulated the development of secondary education, so the opening of more university colleges for non-whites situated in such a way as to make it possible for more qualified students to take

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advantage of the facilities offered might give a great fillip to higher education among non-whites.

But the fundamental defect in the government's scheme is it is based upon ethnic rather than regional considerations. If a non-white university college is established in the Northern Transvaal, say at Pietersburg, why should a Zulu student resident within reach of that university college be refused admission to it? Or why should a Xhosa student resident on the Reef be compelled, even 'with the aid of a bursary, to go to the so-called Xhosa university college rather than to the one which is nearer to him.

Moreover it must be remembered that the normal student goes to a university not to prove the ethnic group to which he belongs which may or may not be a matter of any importance to him, but to take a degree in Arts or Science or Law or Medicine or Commerce for success in which his particular ethnic grouping is irrelevant.

But the advocates of ethnic university colleges might suggest that it would be more feasible in such an institution to introduce a Bantu Language as a medium of instruction if all the students are drawn from one ethnic group, Sotho in the Sotho college, Zulu in the Zulu college and Xhosa in the Xhosa college. Apart from the immense practical difficulties which the use of a Bantu Language as a medium of instruction will present in most fields of study, which brand of Sotho will be used in the Sotho college - Northern Sotho (Pedi), Southern Sotho or Western Sotho (Tswana). If ethnic attachments mean what the advocates of these schemes suggest they do, Tswana students will resent having to be compelled to study through the medium of Pedi and vice versa. And what does one do with Venda or Shangaan or Swazi students for whom no special ethnic colleges are proposed. Are they to be allowed a choice of which university to attend. Why should they be

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favoured or discriminated against in this regard?

Of course the Government might suggest that the Afrikaners have their Afrikaans medium universities and the English their English medium universities and therefore the Bantu should have their Bantu medium universities. The difference is of course that in the case of these groups the medium of instruction was a matter of their own choice and not something enforced upon them from above. No doubt the day when the Africans take over the government of the country as the Afrikaners have done at present they will probably decide which one or more of the principal Bantu Languages used in the country will become the official languages and the medium of instruction in education.

But the most tragic aspect of the Government's scheme is that these tribal universities are apparently to be organised in an extremely different manner from the accepted practice in the other universities in the country. The pattern of the structure of South African universities is laid down in the Universities Act of 1955, an Act within whose compass Fort Hare was also included. The principle underlying the Act is to allow the universities the maximum measure of autonomy subject to the general supervision of their development and their financial administration by the Union Government through the Department of Education, Arts & Science. The Minister of Education, Arts & Science is assisted in this task of oversight in respect of the universities by an Advisory Committee which scrutinises carefully all proposals for expansion, increased subsidy, etc. But apart from this general oversight the universities are left to direct their internal affairs in the way through the University Council and the University Senate.

This system which has been build up in the past and is the fruit of the mature experience of persons who have been directly connected with the development of our universities is,

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like so many other things, to be sacrificed on the altar of apartheid. Instead of the large measure of autonomy which is associated with other universities, the tribal universities are to be subjected to a rigid form of control by the Government. The Council, the Principal, the Senate, the professors and lecturers are all to be cribbed and confined in such a way as to convert the tribal universities into intellectual kraals rather than places in which the spirit of free enquiry will prevail. Surely if apartheid or separate development is all that it is cracked up to be it ought to mean that within their separate university institutions the non-whites will have all the freedoms normally associated with university life instead of being expected to work in an atmosphere of threats and expulsion. Why should the non-white universities not be placed under the direction of the Minister of Education, Arts & Science? Does this mean that the Minister of Education, Arts & Science is a less ardent supporter of the Government's policy of apartheid? On matters of policy it must be supposed that they are equally au fait with the requirements of the government in this regard, but there can be no doubt that the Department of Education, Arts & Science is more conversant with the problems of higher education with which it has dealt since the consummation of Union.

As far as the Council is concerned, what advantage can be claimed for the system of having the Council appointed by the Minister? What are the disadvantages of having a University Council in which various interests, including the Government, are represented rather than one which consists of hand-picked supporters of a particular point of view, as Government appointees are almost bound to be.

The Senate of the university usually consists of professors or the heads of departments who owe their place in this body to their status on the university faculty rather than to Ministerial approval. Admittedly even today members

of the permanent staff of a university are appointed by the University council subject to the approval of the Minister of Education, Arts & Science. But once a Professor has been appointed by a University Council, it does not rest with the Minister to say whether such a Professor will be a member of the Senate or not. In the tribal universities, however, it would appear as if the situation might arise in which some Professors are honoured with membership of the Senate while others are not.

The position of the Principal of the tribal university will be somewhat anomalous. He will be appointed by the Minister and his powers, functions and duties will be prescribed by the Minister. At present the Principal is answerable to the University Council. The situation in which the Principal will have to divide his loyalty between his University Council and the Minister is not exactly an enviable one.

The discipline code which is contemplated in the tribal universities is altogether too totalitarian and appears to be intended to reduce these institutions into mere purveyors of Government propaganda. There is nothing which is calculated to undermine the development of any people and more especially the underdeveloped non-white people of this country than to have universities intended for them staffed with persons whose attitude to their work will be one of "Keep your mouth shut and your salary intact." Adverse public comment on any aspect of administration on the national or the provincial level will institute misconduct and the machinery to be set up for dealing with cases of misconduct leaves much to be desired.

The University of South Africa is to be the examining body of the new universities. It must be borne in mind that the University of South Africa is the statutory university for external students i.e. students doing their degrees work ^{by} private study. The students of the new universities will be internal students, whose professors and lecturers will no doubt wish to have a say in the examination of these students. The Universities Bill does not say whether the new universities will be accorded

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representation on the Senate of the University of South Africa as used to be the case before the formerly existing university colleges for white students became independent universities.

That will of course immediately raise the question of whether non-white members of staff will be permitted to participate in the work of the Senate of the University of South Africa. Perhaps that is why the Bill is silent on this point. It looks, however, as if it is intended that the University of South Africa should once more become a federal university with a number of non-white constituent colleges. Those who are acquainted with the days when the University of South Africa was a federal university with white constituent colleges know something of the weaknesses of that system and will sympathise with those who are about to be launched into a system which they were glad to abandon.

Finally the serious question remains to be asked as to what the connection will be between the white and the non-white university system. After all the products of these systems will inevitable come into increasing contact with one another in the public life of the country, not as white or non-white, but as experts in various fields of learning. To what extent will the comparative isolation from one another in which they have done their work affect their academic or professional standards.

All these matters point to the fact that with the best intentions in the world the Government may here be embarking upon something which requires much more careful consideration than appears to be given to the fact. The obsession with the idea of removing the few non-white students from the so-called "open universities" and that of setting up non-white colleges on an ethnic basis may lead to hasty action which may satisfy the political fancies of a section of the population, but will not advance the cause of

university education in South Africa.

It is significant that in connection with the Government plans for the re-organisation of university education in South Africa there has hardly been any consultation with the universities as such. University education is an important aspect of national policy and one would have thought that before such thorough going changes as are in this legislation were brought about the whole question would be submitted for investigation and report to a Commission on which all affected interests, especially the universities, were adequately represented. It is true that various committees have been appointed to inquire into and report upon a specific aspects of university development, but there has as yet been no comprehensive review of the present and future needs of the country in this field. As the most important state on the continent of Africa it is tragic that South Africa should permit that the development of a sound system of university education for all sections of the population to be bedevilled by the demands of vote-catching rather than those of the advancement of knowledge and truth.