

S/270 - 1/7/59

FORT HARE - FACTS AND FICTION

Universities suffer from the disadvantage of being institutions which seek and teach the truth. They are handicapped therefore in defending themselves against certain legislative proposals.

The following extraordinary samples are taken from Hansard reports of the House of Assembly Debates on the Fort Hare Transfer Bill. They constitute a medley of unfair and incorrect statements which endanger the already low confidence of university staff.

4450
The Minister: " In the nature of things the interest taken by this council in the needs of the Xhosa community will be vague, superficial and general in nature, and its interest will be concentrated merely on the academic training of individuals irrespective of what their future will be and irrespective of what contribution they could make to the specific development of the Xhosa."

The academic training is exactly what Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Pretoria and other Universities are doing. What is a University institution supposed to do? This is one reason why staff are very worried about losing the link with the Union Dept. of Education, Arts and Science, with whom it has worked harmoniously and successfully for many years, and coming under the control of a department which, as the above quotation only too clearly shows, has had no experience of University Education.

4453
The Minister: " Fort Hare is not a truly autonomous institution because in the academic field particularly, it is subject to and under the control of the senate of Rhodes University. An exactly similar position will prevail under the new set-up under which the academic activities of the College, when it is taken over, will fall under the control of the University of South Africa which will be the examining university."

Fort Hare is represented on Rhodes Senate whenever any matter affecting Fort Hare is under discussion.

All Fort Hare's Heads of Departments are on Rhodes' Boards of Studies where courses, syllabuses, examinations and appointment of examiners are discussed. On a number of occasions Rhodes has met the wishes of Fort Hare.

4484
Mr. J.A.F. Nel: " All the years during which it contributed such a great deal to South Africa, as alleged, and when it was not a tribal college the Minister could abolish it."

Government Notice 671 of 27/3/1953 Part 9

4456
The Minister: " In other words, the Minister has full control over the instruction of the university"
" Can hon. members now argue that this was an autonomous institution? Even the hon. gentleman who is the principal of the institution is apparently unaware of the provision because he has made statements to the

newspapers to the effect that this is an autonomous institution and that he knows nothing about any State control. But Mr. Speaker, the reason why he is unaware of this provision and why the State's powers have not been used is because this type of control is impossible to exercise as far as university institutions are concerned. It would mean that inspections would have to be continually threatening such universities with a reduction or the holding of the grant-in-aid. This is an unsatisfactory type of control."

The responsible Department however has never had any occasion to doubt the value of the work done at Fort Hare, still less inspect it, and certainly not abolish it!

4485 Mr. J.A.F. Nel: "I merely want to say that it is clear from what the hon. the Minister has told us, that if conditions are allowed to continue, as hon. members opposite wish them to (the hon. member for Hillbrow pleaded that the status quo should be maintained for ten years), there will be more Indians at Fort Hare than Natives and the whole character of Fort Hare as a Bantu college will disappear."

This shows a complete ignorance of Fort Hare. The College has been prevented from seeking either Government or private loans for new buildings. Consequently, as Fort Hare is a residential University, the present enrolment of 500 students cannot be exceeded. It then follows that as Bantu students always get preference any continued increase in their number must inevitably result in a fall in Coloured and Indian students. Further, if the hostels are taken away from the Churches, a Bible School, at present temporarily rented by the College to house 60 students, will no longer be available. The maximum enrolment will then fall to 440, with a further inevitable reduction in the enrolment of Coloureds and Indians.

4447 The Minister: "A second reason why control must be taken over is the fact that the Council of the University College of Fort Hare, as constituted at the moment, and as it is functioning at the moment, is guiding this institution in a direction which varies completely from the objects for which this institution was founded and established, a direction in addition which deviates completely from the character which we should like to see this college maintaining, a direction which conflicts not only with the objects for which this institution was established, but indirectly with the accepted policy of this country as well."

This shows a complete ignorance of the aims of the college as laid down in Government Acts and Regulations. In any case, had there ever been such a departure the Government members on Council (of whom there are at present six) would have been quick to draw attention to it. No such objections have ever been raised.

4457 The Minister: "Fort Hare's disciplinary regulations are stricter than those of the Public Service."

New conditions of service which followed the general lines of those of other Universities were approved last year by Senate and Council. They were temporarily held up by the Department pending the approval of the Minister. After I had pointed out to the Department that there was nothing in the 1955 Act which required such approval the matter was again examined. In due course the Law Advisers confirmed that ministerial approval of such conditions of service was not necessary.

4484
Mr. J.A.F. Nel: "the student of Fort Hare gets nothing whatsoever from Rhodes University. He receives nothing more through affiliation than he receives when he writes his examinations under the Auspices of the University of South Africa. As I have already said, students from Fort Hare are only allowed to take post-graduate courses at Rhodes in exceptional circumstances. Rhodes does not offer him anything more than the University of South Africa does"

On the contrary, Fort Hare has very close ties with Rhodes. There is a strong academic bond with a live university instead of with a cold impersonal examining institution. Moreover, the staff of both institutions meet frequently and the students occasionally to discuss problems of academic interest.

4502
Dr. de Wet: " Mr. Speaker, Fort Hare has no character. Just walk into the dining room and what do you find? the walls are festooned with pictures such as we unfortunately have in this House. Such is the Character of Fort Hare"

In the first place there are better tests of character than pictures in the dining room. Secondly, what are these questionable pictures? Here is a list of those which were "festooning the walls" on that fateful day.

Rev. Curnick D.D.
Patrick Duncan
Alice Duncan
George V.
David Livingstone
Rev. Lennox
Dr. Stuart
Hon. W.P. Schreiner

and a large 1907 photograph of the committee which planned the new College. This included Mr. J.W. Sauer, father of the present Minister.

4522
Mr. G.P. van den Berg: " I submit that at least 80 per cent of the White electorate in South Africa is in favour of putting a stop to the continued existence of Fort Hare in its present form - a colourless (it is really a contrast to use that word, because it is almost technicolour) lot of people, a university without a character of its own, a university which can never build up a character of its own"

4455
The Minister: " The sooner this particular experiment at Fort Hare is brought to an end, the better it will be for race relations in South Africa. I think I have said sufficient to indicate how entirely impossible it would be to consult a council such as that of Fort Hare on the fundamental principles at stake in this Bill"

The above statements are incorrect, cruel and unChristian.

4483
Mr. J.A.F. Nel: " In one or other respect there is inferiority at Fort Hare at the present moment. Either the students are inferior, or the lecturers are inferior. According to the 1959 Year Book of Fort Hare, we find this in connection with the students who graduated in 1957"

The author of the above statement did not complete the paragraph of the Calendar from which he was quoting and which pointed out that the examination

- 4 -

results for November 1957 were only provisional. After the same students had completed certain minor subjects and had passed a few supplementary examinations, the percentage of passes changed from 62% to 80.4% in B.A., and from 61% to 87.5% in B.Sc. The percentages of passes in M.Sc. and B.Ed. were 100%.

Moreover, the degree results in all S.A. Universities for 1958 were recently obtained. In these Fort Hare scored the second highest percentage of passes in Arts and Science Degree examinations.

Surely an apology for such a statement is called for, especially in view of the handicaps which the students of Fort Hare have to overcome.

The Minister: "Fort Hare is in the heart of a White area."

It is true that Fort Hare at present is in an European area, but under the proposed group areas Act it will fall under a Native area.

Moreover, the college adjoins a large Secondary School for Bantu and a large hospital for Bantu patients and for the training of Bantu nurses. It is also understood that the purchase of one or more European farms for Native occupation is being contemplated. Lastly, Fort Hare already adjoins a Native Reserve. It is difficult therefore to see how the college can be in the heart of a European area even at the present time.