

A BETRAYAL OF IDEALS

S.A. Bill has no parallel in modern times

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THE Separate University Education Bill will stand for all time as the betrayal of university ideals in South Africa.

No parallel piece of legislation can be found on the statute book of any country in the twentieth century: in many ways the approach is worse than that made either in Fascist or in Communist countries. There the decline in intellectual integrity and the attack on university autonomy followed revolutions which destroyed democratic machinery.

In South Africa, democratic machinery is being used to prepare those who believe in university autonomy to commit hara-kiri.

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THE title of the Bill is a paradox which reveals confused thinking. The term university derives from "Universitas," a group or community of teachers and taught. A university is a corporate body formed with one end in view, namely, the pursuit of truth: it is a partnership in learning. Ability to share in, to contribute to the discovery of truth is traditionally the sole qualification necessary for learning and teaching which becomes thereby a vocation and a duty.

A university serves and is served by the different communities whence it draws its students. Without freedom to experiment, without the contact of mind with mind, without a legitimate risk of error, without contact with the growing and changing world around, a university ceases to be a university.

It becomes a factory wherein a foreman (whether or not he be tricked out in academic cap and gown) dictates the rules for doing this or making that in compliance with a schedule of requirements. There is no such thing as a separate university, and if there were, what was purveyed therein would not be education but mechanical skill. The will to learn and to create cannot be the product of legislation; neither, fortunately, can it be totally destroyed by legislation.

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IT is proposed then in the Bill miscalled 'the Separate Education Bill' to set up separate institutions. These institutions will be under the control of the Minister of Native Affairs, who may delegate to his Secretary, who may delegate to a senior officer. The council of the university is to be nominated by the Minister who may not only determine who shall teach but what faculties shall be set up: in brief, what shall be taught.

Having established such institutions he may disestablish them by proclamation in the Gazette. Or if he retains an institution he may dismiss or degrade staff for no less than 17 misdemeanours.

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THE procedure in each of these misdemeanours is that the accused will be suspended, and his case considered by the Secretary or other senior official with appeal to the Minister. In estimating the gravity of the offence, the

Secretary "shall give due regard to the probable effect of the misconduct on the tone and efficiency of the college." Regulations like these mean in effect that there will be no teachers worthy of the name, but only instructors passing on information determined by the Minister. For every sentence uttered in a lecture theatre is "a public statement."

An instructor might, for instance, be quoting Stebbing's illustration of the categorical syllogism . . .

cf: No one who is invariably truthful is a successful politician.

and: All cabinet ministers are successful politicians.

then: No cabinet ministers are invariably truthful.

It requires little imagination or experience to see how the avid note-taker could bungle this so as to imply 'adverse comment' which might be equally construed as 'an incorrect statement.' It will not be possible to discuss the pros and cons of a subject, nor will it be possible to urge the student to read the evidence and think for himself.

Though it is true that there is to be no religious test imposed on candidates for employment in the new institutions, the religious and truthful man so appointed may very well be put into a position where conscience forces him to resign. For the religious man, like the scientist, is humble before truth, which he cannot foreswear.

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A CONSCIENCE clause in a bill like this, ceases to have significance. Clause 14 of the Bill is not a mark of broad-mindedness, nor is it homage to the spirit of toleration: taken together with sections 33, 34, 39, it implies that conscience is of no account in academic affairs.

It may, of course, be argued, that 'the lecture theatre will not be construed as a public place.' All the evidence of the text of the bill as it stands implies that it will be so. There is liable to be either a fifth-column in the lecture-theatre, or inspection, or the cyclo-styling of lecture notes.

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IN ANY event, a Parliament which considers a Bill like that now before the House, and a public opinion which quietly accepts it, will not boggle at extending the administrative basis of one kind of university institutions to all academic institutions within the country.

Once the point is conceded that the State can with social and moral impunity determine who may teach, what may be taught and who may be taught, and the whole tradition of the modulated freedom of the university as such, is potentially destroyed. This Bill seeks systematically to undermine that without which no country can thrive, the moral and intellectual integrity of those who teach and those who learn. It is catastrophic.