

Naught for the new Fort Hare's comfort in three fresh shocks

To the Editor, *The Argus*

SIR,—The debating, protests and clamour past, we are now being assailed from Alice with the death rattle of what was once the pride of Christian missionary endeavour in this country, the leading institution for non-White higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, and a university renowned throughout the free world.

The torture is being applied by an instrument known euphemistically as 'The University College of Fort Hare Transfer Act.'

It was introduced — late, in a guillotined session — with characteristic Nationalist detours of the evidence, contempt for church interests, cultural moonshine, protestations of the loftiest motives, that peculiarly offensive brand of unctuousness and assumption of hurt at any doubt or disbelief in those motives, and accusations of pre-sabotage.

But it is too late to re-cavass the merits of what was perhaps the most naked, tragic and dangerous application of political power to the deprivation of individual and corporate rights in all the madness of the last decade.

Dangerous

It was dangerous because with luck you can continue unjust pass laws, quasi-voluntary farm labour, and bannings, but you cannot, with all Africa athirst for knowledge, lead intelligent men away from the Pierian springs of free universities and make him drink the brack water of Government-sublimated *lavas* — at least, not without building up a vast pressure of kinetic resentment among the most influential element of the non-White community.

But if the policy is irreversible, we can still protest at the methods used. Three news items have come in from Alice since the Act was passed. Each exposes Nationalist thought in all its glittering immorality.

Firstly, the membership (entirely Government-appointed) of the new council has been announced.

Now one of the main grounds advanced by the Minister of Bantu Education for the 'transfer' was the 'unsatisfactory' nature of the old Council. It had representatives of *certain* churches and *certain* universities, this apparently being unfair to those not represented. (See 1959 House of Assembly Hansard, 4450).

It is with shock, therefore, we hear that the new Council has undergone changes of substance, but not of form. There are now representatives of *certain* (other) universities and of one church!

New impetus

Secondly, the new governing regulations have been promulgated. Now the Government expostulated throughout that the 'transferred' Fort Hare would be no less a university than before, and that it would continue with a new impetus to its destiny as a fully-fledged member of the academic comity.

In the Select Committee proceedings, the Government witness, Dr. P. A. W. Cook (Under-Secretary for Bantu Education and now Rector-designate of the Zulu tribal college) was not deterred at the prospect of a university under the direct administration of a Government department; indeed, he found the idea, if anything, inspiring.

I think the advantage is in fact probably with the Minister. The Minister has greater resources at his disposal, and if he organizes this department properly, I think he can produce results which are as good as those produced by an ordinary council, if they are not better.

We now read that the new Fort Hare is to be administered with all the departmental suspicion, pettiness and mumbo-jumbo lavished on a branch post office or police out-station.

(first principal of Fort Hare when, in 1916, it was two teachers, 22 matriculation students, and three bungalows on an Amatola hillside) who had come stoically to protest at the destruction of his life's work:

'You also said that efficiency depended upon the people running such an institution? — Yes.

'You then specifically referred to the staff who are running it today. Supposing that this staff were to continue to do so, what would your objection then be? — I should not then have so much objection.

'Now if it were the intention—in fact, that is, provided for in the Bill—for the staff to be taken over, then most of your objections on this ground would disappear? — Yes, but then the Bill states that the Minister will take over whom he pleases.

'If you were given the assurance that the present staff, or the majority of the staff, would remain at Fort Hare, would most of your objections on this ground disappear? — What will the majority be? Let us say 90 per cent, or even 95 per cent.

The percentage has in fact worked out at 75 per cent. But the Minister was himself even more comforting and unequivocal on this point:

'... we also believed that the lecturers of Fort Hare who to-day, as a result of the political agitation being waged in the country against this legislation, are opposed to this legislation, and are opposed to the transfer of Fort Hare, but who behave themselves properly, have nothing to fear.

'We shall take no steps aimed at removing them from their posts, because we believe that, just as in the case of the Bantu Education Act, we succeeded in gaining the goodwill and the co-operation even to those teachers who originally opposed the legislation, so we shall also, in the course of time, succeed in gaining the co-operation and the loyal co-operation of these lecturers.' (See 1959 H. of A. Hansard, 8973, and again at 9246).

The feathers of the so-called Government educationists' wing were preened on the same hot air. Mr. H. A. Rust, of Piketberg, said:

'Let honorary members opposite tell me what difference there will be. The courses will remain the same. The diplomas and the degrees will remain the same; the staff who are there and who wish to remain can remain. Those who want to leave will leave of their own accord, incited by honorary members opposite and by their own propaganda, but those who wish to remain can do so. It will still be the same institution as existed previously.' (See 1959 H. of A. Hansard, 9218).

The Minister's recent attempt at Glencoe to justify the sackings was a complete departure from his assurances in the House.

Protests are reviled

The difficulty is that protests are reviled as coming from 'liberals' and 'political agitators' (whatever they may be — apart from articulate members of the body politic).

It is possible to understand, and imperative to tolerate, those who believe in apartheid, and one realizes that they may be sincerely dedicated to a policy which it grieves them to administer with inevitable hardship.

But, surely, no self-respecting Nationalist can countenance dishonest reasons and immoral methods. Surely there must be Nationalists, men of conscience, who will openly avow that such things as are mentioned above are wrong, and that the end can never justify the means?

Meanwhile, as for Fort Hare, with these three shocks so freshly administered, there appears — in the immediate future — to be naught for its comfort.

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Wastage

Forms are to be filled in, equipment checked — all the sorry wastage of grinding bureaucracy. The imagination reels at the Bantu Education Department solemnly painting (in collaboration, of course, with the Public Works Department) all the chairs in the lecture halls with grotesque inappositeness: BED 1; BED 2; BED 3;—in white.

Thirdly, we have heard that altogether, out of a remaining staff of some 40 (there having been, even before the Act, a voluntary exodus), three will not be re-engaged on the expiry of their contracts and six permanent members will be dismissed (at great expense to the taxpayer, since they receive prodigious pensions).

Again, the Government had given bland assurances. The following is an extract from the evidence of Dr. Alexander Kerr