

has irresistibly come to a close. This applies to South Africa-too, albeit the majority of its black inhabitants have thus far rejected violence as a means to solve conflicts. Disenchantment with the principle of non-violence seems, however, to be on the increase. The late Z.R. Matthews, one of South Africa's foremost black education-alists, has warned many years ago (of. Matthews,1981:224) that violence would leave continuing bitterness, and that African communities would be destroyed in any attempt to meet the power of the white South , . African state with violence. What Matthews probably anticipated was that a beleaguered government in fear of being overthrown would'react vehemently with repression and violence. According to Mazrui (1973:115) there has thus far been no precedent of a beleaguered white community, isolated in power in a former colony, which has been willing to give up that power without violence. South Africa is not a colony where whites can withdraw to a metropole elsewhere in the world. This makes a violent conflict so mnch more probable if negotiated solutions - cannot be achieved in time.

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### RIGHTS OF PASSAGE

There can be few less edifying spectacles than that of a student mob, gathered outside a lecture theatre to shout, jeer, sing, ululate, chant and eventually, their efforts having met with no apparent success, burst through doors that were locked to keep them out, in order to disrupt a visiting academics lecture. The Conor Cruise O'Brien affair has become symbolic of a series of broadly similar incidents at the universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, in which visiting speakers were prevented from addressing meetings, and in some cases were hounded off campus. Apart from O'Brien, others such as Piet Koomhof, Denis Worrall and a township politician by the name of Tam Linda (the SABC have tried to turn him into a national figure) have all been refused a voice on these campuses by hostile student groups. Games have been disrupted on the anniversary of Sharpeville and on other emotive occasions. Jewish students who apply the standards of free speech rigorously in all other cases have tried to silence pro-Palestinian speakers. Muslim students have done their best to shout down speakers they perceived to be Zionists. Freedom of speech has become an issue on the very campuses which have always been regarded as the most liberal in the country. -

An interesting aspect of this situation is that there is no group at either of these universities, including those which have slipped so easily into mob behaviour in the past, that would not claim to subscribe to the principle of freedom of speech. But then anyone who has spent some time observing the way political movements function will be aware that there is no concept in human thinking

Wessel Ebersohn  
so riddled with hypocrisy as the concept of freedom. No one put it better than Franz Kafka: "As freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding deceptions are the most sublime." Government talks about separate freedoms when it means white dominance, black political movements talk about liberation when they mean power, as Marxists do when they mean class dictatorship.

Through all of this the administrations at both UCT and Wits have consistently sought to pick a path among the conflicting interests of their students that allows as much freedom of speech as possible without reducing their institutions to war zones. In the words of Prof Robert Charlton, vice-chancellor of Wits: "Complete freedom of speech is an abstract liberal ideal that probably doesn't exist anywhere. We subscribe to the principle and we seek to uphold it to the best of our ability. But we feel we cannot allow the advocacy of racism or violence . . . ." Recently a third criterion, that of sexism, has been added, but that is perhaps another story. Mobs of wild-haired viragos intent on dismembering male chauvinist speakers have

not yet appeared on any campus.

At the centre of the conflict on liberal campuses lie large and intractable problems over which the universities themselves have no control: the composition of the country, the government and the political position of black students among others. James Maseko, president of the Black Students' Society (BSS) at Wits, sounded angry and disgusted when he said to me: "I am denied freedom of speech. We cannot be expected to give that right to those who deny it to us. The campus cannot be divorced from society." Charlton extends essentially the same argument: "The general public believes that government is justified in trying to impose financial sanctions on us because of our failure to uphold freedom of speech. But for the government to adopt that stance is absurd when it drastically curtails freedom of speech itself. Under the emergency regulations I am not even allowed to call for the release of my detained students. The crucial issues of sanctions and the academic boycott cannot be debated because it is forbidden to speak in favour of them - small wonder if some students retaliate in kind." UCT's vice-chancellor Dr Stuart Saunders remarks: "It is tragic that peaceful protest is illegal in South Africa - an indication of the repressive nature of our society. Pressure cookers have a habit of depositing the food on the ceiling if they are not given proper attention." A strong case can be made for seeing government action as the root of the problem. Five leading members of the Wits BSS have been detained in recent years. One of them, Chris Ncgobo, has been in prison for two years. Meetings have been banned, in one case only 15 minutes before the advertised time, and audience reluctance to disperse had to be dissipated by a police baton charge. Peaceful demonstrations are regularly broken up, and students holding posters on Jan Smuts Avenue the legal distance apart from each other are photographed by police. At last three recent Wits SRC presidents have been either detained, interrogated or restricted. The emergency regulations themselves restrict freedom of expression and prohibit protesting and petitioning, while the Inter-6".)

Dr Stuart Saunderson, Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town. National Security Act bans open-air meetings and the Publications Act restricts what may be published.

At UCT Vusi Khanyile, a special assistant to the vice-chancellor, was detained in December 1986 and has been held ever since.

Many who attended the conference of the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee (the precursor of the National Education Crisis Committee) at Wits in late 1986 felt that it was Khanyile who persuaded delegates that there was no sense in school boycotts, and that liberation-before-education was fruitless. "Revolutionaries" are made of sterner stuff than this. Saunders describes him as a "man of peace", and his role on the UCT campus after the Oan'en affair, as that of a conciliator.

Official involvement may go beyond authoritarian action. At the meeting from which O'Brien was driven, one Daniel Pretorius, later to confess his role as a police spy on campus, was photographed in the vanguard of the mob, no doubt doing his damndest to incite the prevailing bloodlust. A leading member of the Students, Moderate Alliance, a government-supporting organisation which has recently adopted a more liberal pose, has been seen on the 10th floor of John Vorster Square by someone visiting security police headquarters under less cordial circumstances. During the last week of Ramadan last year 1 500 students packed the Jameson Hall at UCT to listen to a tense debate between the Muslim and Jewish student associations. The meeting was trouble-free until someone who cannot be positively identified but who was neither a student nor a member of the university staff shouted, "Heil Hitler".

While provocation cannot be proved, the Minister of National Education reproaches that the country's largest liberal universities do not maintain discipline begin to sound absurd, to use Charlton's word. The goals the minister says must be achieved, and so claims are not being honoured at present, are uninterrupted and unhindered tuition, sound application of taxpayers' money, good order and discipline and the maintenance of academic standards.

The picture created by the minister's demands is one of continuing anarchy, perpetrated by wild-eyed radicals on campuses funded for reasons of altruism by government. As one of the students protested to me: "Give me a break".

At Cape Town University the course success rate for first time entering students is 79% and the average success rate for all undergraduate students is 84%.

one of the highest in the country. In 1986 the university conferred 603 diplomas, over 2 000 bachelors, 370 honours, 260 masters and 56 doctoral degrees. The figures for Wits are equally impressive. They are impressive because they are achieved against high standards. Wits and UCT receive 65% of all research grants awarded to South African universities, on the basis of

excellence. The sheer volume of research apart from the quality criterion, is a good indicator of the degree of inquiry going on at those two institutions while others (1 and established universities produce a total level by comparison, of published research work. Further, if you visit either of them, on days out of 100 you will find students and staff going placidly about their business. And on that hundredth day when there is a disturbance you will have to be in the right place at the right time to be aware of it. The impression is also created by government that the universities do not discipline their students. Although they may not have acted with the punishment now, ponder later. A characteristic of government: the truth is that every incident of this nature has been painstakingly investigated by the university authorities and in many instances action has been taken, fines imposed and

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even rustication ordered. The report of the commission of inquiry into the OlBrien affair ran to more than 90 pages; not the work of an administration that took the matter lightly, whatever the difference of opinion on the report itself may have been.

None of this is intended to indicate that the liberal universities do not have a problem. The nature of their predicament is clearer to the heads of their administrations than to anyone else, but the fact that government policy and actions have not made their task easier is beyond doubt. Ultimately though, we all have to take responsibility for what happens in our own backyards. The universities and their students will have to deal with the problem of freedom of speech in their institutions within an ambience for which we all bear some responsibility. It is not surprising that Saunders tells a story about the university principal who died and went to 1'3 it took a week before he realised that he was not on campus.

Near the centre of the debate lies a closely related issue, that of the academic boycott. OIBrien, an internationally respected liberal who was once Dag Hammarskjold's deputy in the Congo, visited the country in defiance of the boycott; not only in defiance of it but, in true Irish fashion, loudly, determinedly and belligerently in defiance of it. He called it a Mickey Mouse affair and referred to his first grilling at the hands of UCT radicals as an academic necklacing. He also pronounced to all who were willing to listen that he was so liberal that he had brought along his black adopted son. Leftist sympathisers seized upon his behaviour as a way of explaining the disruption of his meetings. In an issue of Forum, a publication of the UCT Academic Association, Dr Neville Alexander described the events of that period as "student reaction to O'Brien's bull-in-a-China-shop behaviour".

In an interview, Cameron Dugmore, SRC president, complained that O'Brien undermined strategy, that he made disparaging remarks, had an arrogant manner, was seeking confrontation and openly opposed any form of academic boycott.

In other words, as I understand it, O'Brien's meetings were disrupted because his manners were bad and he held views with which the students disagreed. It is an interesting position. I think that Carla Sutherland, SRC president in 1986, came a lot closer to the facts of the matter in an interview with Die Burger published on October 18 1986. "After he arrived in South Africa," she is quoted as saying, "the Anti-apartheid Movement and the National Union of Students of England requested Nusas and the Azanian Students Organisation to take the matter further." No one can doubt that they complied.

Despite the boycott, there are between five and 25 visiting academics at both Wits and UCT at any one time. During the time that the O'Brien affair was in full swing, an army

officer from Sandhurst was in the middle of a six week visit as a guest lecturer. He and the others went about their business unhindered. I asked James Maseko the reason for this and he answered that no mechanisms exist to ensure that the boycott is implemented. It is not a reply to gladden the hearts of the members of the administration.

Without a doubt the boycott is starting to have an effect. One respected academic told me that, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and the South Africa Foundation, he receives many distinguished academics.

"In the past I would ask them to give a guest lecture. I wouldn't risk it now." An international nuclear science seminar was held recently at Wits and a number of invited guests thought it wiser not to attend. In 1986, Prof Philip Tobias, a world leader in the analysis of early hominid fossils, was refused an invitation to the World Archaeology Congress. The fact that he has always been an outspoken opponent of apartheid and was one of the prime movers behind the Medical Association's investigation of the Biko doctors, conduct seems to have carried no weight. And recently a World Health Organisation bursary awarded to Prof Michael Simpson, a psychiatrist who is a specialist on stress disorders suffered by detainees, was withdrawn because he is a white South African. Last October he was banned from lecturing to the Royal College of Psychiatry in London; he was told of the ban only after his arrival in Britain.

The academic boycott is part of a wider campaign to isolate South Africa in every possible way. But even its supporters appreciate some of its undesirable aspects. Dugmore told me that he supports a selective boycott. Alexander, in the article previously quoted, says that the boycott "deprives mainly the oppressed and exploited . . . we should, instead, support a carefully planned selective boycott". —

From the point of view of freedom of speech, a selective boycott seems to me to be the worst of all possible options. No doubt Messrs Dugmore and Alexander see people whose views coincide with their own doing the selecting.

Saunders, in a statement to the UCT Senate on April 10 last year, put his administrative position clearly. "All forms of academic boycott have been applied . . . to UCT. All are inimical to scholarship." Elsewhere he said: "No university can maintain the standards to which it should aspire unless there is open communication between it and scholars throughout the world. The academic boycott is destructive. It can only result in the erosion of all that makes up a university. "

Black students are destined to play an increasingly prominent role on the liberal campuses. At UCT, 22,470 of the student population is black and the proportion is increasing by more than 1% yearly while at Wits it is 20% and also rising. In private, all sorts of people are computing the date when black students will be in the majority and working out their own analyses of what sort

of effect that will have. And, of course, there are many whites who see the presence at the universities of any black students at all as being unpatriotic, suicidal, generally damned stupid and certain to lower academic standards.

But standards have not fallen, black students are passing and, according to a number of lecturers, doing better every year. Hugh Amooore, registrar at UCT, believes that it is the very fact of the high standards that brings black students to the university. They know that they will not get an inferior qualification. They do still see themselves as outsiders though. They do not participate in student affairs, except to run their own exclusive Black Students Society. An Indian student who was elected to the Law Students, Council at Wits endured an orchestrated campaign of vilification until other issues pushed hers to the background and she was forgotten. Black students seem to have little choice regarding the 388 and its activities. Maseko told me that they have automatic membership as soon as they enrol at the university. At both universities black students have been hauled out of lectures by BSS activists to participate in protests and to attend meetings. Amooore agrees that most black students, views of UCT contain some degree of ambiguity. "All things visible and invisible at the university, its very ethos, is white and Western. There must be areas of resentment." James Maseko spelt out the black position for me without any ambiguity. HSouth Africa is not like a normal country," he said. "A war is being waged against the people. We cannot except normality. If Botha was genuine about reforms he would have released our imprisoned and detained leaders. He would have allowed the exiles to come home. We've lost hope of change coming about through Parliament . . .

"You cannot expect us to allow representatives of a government that withholds our



Prof Robert C/zar/tan, Vice-C/zanrel/or, Uni'uen'ity aft/le Wiwaterxrand.  
rights to say what they like on our campus.

Or blacks who support the system either,  
homeland leaders, community council-  
lors . . ." uThey are involved in clashes with  
the people, vigilante killings," a second stu-  
dent added. "It would be treasonable to let  
them speak."

But who is a supporter of the system and  
who is not, I asked? Are the members of the  
ogrmssive Federal Party supporters of the  
dstem?

"Helen Suzman spoke on the campus re-  
cently and there was no trouble," was his  
reply.

But can you guarantee that you will not  
try to disrupt future PFP meetings? I asked.

"Its not our policy to deny them the right  
to speak." The answer had come quickly,  
but it was followed almost as quickly by a  
qualification. "It would depend on the PFP  
stand at the particular time. It would depend  
on the issue.n

And what of the future? "In a future non-  
racial South Africa these rights must be  
guaranteed, but they must be seen in con-  
text. Those who hamper our progress may  
be denied those rights."

To see the intolerant left on liberal univers-  
ity campuses as one movement is, I believe,  
faulty. The black students are products of  
circumstances that should be familiar to any  
South African who does not suffer from a  
self-imposed blindness of spirit. The result  
of the conditions under which these young  
people have grown to maturity is not one in  
which tolerance is easily nurtured. It is a  
point Saunders has patiently made in speech-  
es delivered in the wake of the O'Brien affair.

"We cannot assume that a young student  
coming to this university who has grown up  
in a school system which is authoritarian and  
in a society which denies basic human rights;  
a young person whose aunt sitting on a park  
bench doing her crocheting can as a conse-  
quence spend a night in jail and suffer the  
indignity of having to go to court; a student  
who realises only too well that if he or she  
swims in the sea in Port Elizabeth he or she  
might be prosecuted; a schoolboy who has  
been woken repeatedly at night by the rum-  
ble of the Casspir outside or has had a brother,  
sister, aunt, uncle, father or a mother in de-  
tention without trial for months - you can,t  
assume that a young person who has had  
these experiences will automatically put the  
premium on the freedom of speech and on  
academic freedom that you give itf, he said  
at a mid-year graduation ceremony last year.  
uYou therefore have to explain and discuss  
and convince them that in a university en-  
INGRID HUDSON

vironment and for the sake of their own edu-  
cation and for the education of those who  
follow them, these values are important!"

An intense group consciousness grows out  
of the kind of conditions he describes. You  
cannot compel people to live in a ghetto  
then expect them not to identify with each  
other. The cement that holds them together  
is one of group identity, nationalism, not

ideology. That they are in favour of some vaguely discerned Afri-can-socialist form of government follows unavoidably from their being poor. But the ideological left, I believe, is a separate matter entirely. Without a doubt the two overlap at times. And without a doubt it is to the ideological left's advantage to frame its strategies within the scope of the nationalist struggle. But the differences are marked. The points of divergence between those who identify with an ethnic group (because of the very colour of their skins and by their shared sufferings) and those of whatever colour who do it out of ideological conviction is shown all too clearly by the need to form a Black Students Society. The black student is interested primarily in ridding himself of white dominance, not in the wondrous world of Karl Marx.

Marx's appeal to many people lies in the total world view that his vision enfolds. Like

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the Freudians of 20 years ago, the Marxist interprets everything from art and sex to football and toothpaste commercials within the same framework and according to the same standards. It is less a scientific view than a secular religion and it appeals to young peoples need to tie up the loose ends and have everything fit. No other political view offers the complete picture that Marxism does. Those who don't fancy Marx often try Jimmy Swaggart or someone of that ilk as an alternative. The completeness of evangelical Christianity's view of life is markedly similar, as are the psychological benefits of adherence. In white radical circles, when Marx is quoted it is often with a finality that suggests that the last word has been spoken and nothing may be added - thus saith the Lord. When I interviewed David Welsh, professor of political studies at UCT, he described this phenomenon perfectly. "They are in the grip of a fundamentalist mind-set," he said.

David Spitz expressed the truth of a state of mind essentially the same in the Spanish inquisition and Stalin's Russia as it is today, in Khomeini's Iran and some South African departments of sociology, when he wrote, "Those who believe not merely that there is an objective truth but that, by some mystery of incarnation, it has been given to them to know it, have rarely been willing to respect the claim to such knowledge by others? It is this state of mind that leads leftist academics to write about "the myth of academic freedom". Once you have convinced yourself that academic freedom is a fiction, then you no longer have to concern yourself with allowing that luxury to others.

In an article in UCT New: in May this year, the president of the SRC (an organisation which, incidentally, is elected year after year by a fairly small minority of students') lists nine points that have been recognised by the university as necessary conditions for the emergence of democratic processes in South Africa. They include lifting the State of Emergency, releasing detainees and so forth. He goes on to say in the next paragraph: "All these are preconditions for freedom of speech." As the context of the article was that of the university, if I understand the term "precondition" correctly, in his view there can be no freedom of speech on campus until the government has been replaced. In my interview with him I asked if, in his personal view, cabinet ministers would be welcome on campus. He said, "No." I tied a few personalities. Suzman? "Ya." Hendrickse? "No." Schwarz? "Yes, I think so." Buthelezi? "Definitely not." The answers to my questions were no cause for surprise. There is probably not a political journalist in the country who could not have guessed how he would reply. What was interesting to me was that he was willing, and considered himself competent, to make such judgements at all.

University students, like other concerned

young people, are a little inclined to be blown along by the freshest and sharpest wind of political doctrine available. National socialism, another all-encompassing secular religion, captured the campus in Germany before it seized the nation. In Mozambique, pro-Frelimo students welcomed the advancing revolutionaries, only to be driven from the country during Frelimo's grotesquely racist early days. There is an innocence in all this, a determination to rebel against the sins of your parents and fix the world once and for all. It has been known to go awry. In the midst of all these currents the liberals occupy their usual position - in the middle, and their usual state of mind - insecurity. Social anthropologist Virginia van der Vliet of UCT put it this way: "In the Sixties allegiances were clear. Now you are faced with equal intolerance from either wing. In the Sixties, whatever you said you were looking over your right shoulder. Now you're still looking over your shoulder, but it's the left one."

Most frustrating of all is that the attacks from the left are almost always based on liberal values. Expressions such as "I have the right to be heard" emanate from quarters which seek, albeit equivocally, to deny that right to others.

So the administrations have sought to promote freedom of speech, using common-sense limitations like the advocacy of racism and violence (both are problematic as no prospective speaker sees himself as violent or racist) to keep the worst sort of loonies off the campus; principles like "equal platform" which attempt to give every side a hearing and the banning of electioneering to avoid obvious and unnecessary strains from this area. At Wits, objections to proposed speakers will be considered by a panel to which interested parties will be co-opted ad hoc. At UCT the Academic Freedom Committee is to make recommendations soon to Senate and Council on the management of meetings. There is talk of a committee with both student and staff representation which may decide whether potentially problematic speakers should be allowed in tricky circumstances.

"The right to speak on the UCT campus will be preserved wherever and whenever it is possible to do so," Saunders says. "Collegiality must determine our right to allow this essential interchange of ideas to take place. In contemporary South Africa it is not possible to resort to the police in this regard."

"It is our task to ensure that the whole university community understands why it is fundamentally important that all points of view should be heard and debated. It is only then that a university can employ new ideas and develop new concepts, a role essential to all universities, but a crucial one in contemporary South Africa. The university will not act as a censor. It will not encourage selective silence."

"Given repression, revolution, border war and pious arguments," Amoore said to me, "it does not behove anyone to argue that one

must limit freedom of speech at this university." His vice-chancellor took it further ' "The struggle for freedom and justice can succeed if in the process academic freedom is destroyed."

But there is only so much that a university administration can do. I asked James Maseko what can be done to ensure freedom of speech. "First the people must be free," he said. "First address the matter of power." But it must be remembered that even after the matter of power is addressed, Maseko can give no guarantees to ensure the survival of freedom of speech.

A black voice of great clarity came from Dr Mamphela Ramphele of UCT's social anthropology department. She was one of the few workers in the Black Community Programme to survive governments destruction of their organisation and remain a useful person: the effect she had on the local black population when banished to Tzaneen was of almost legendary proportions. 5.

allowing freedom of speech we must be careful not to allow speakers who trample on the dignity of others. In our own employing of this right, we must all be careful not to heighten the level of conflict. We must be able to disagree without insulting each other.

"In a university we should be involved in a continuing discourse, a search for the truth. We cannot have a university made up only of people with like minds. We can also not be non-democratic now and imagine that we will be democratic after liberation. Our lives are a continuum. Whenever we fall short of this ideal we must be ready again to discuss and debate, to keep the issue alive, to build trust for the future out of the mess of the past."

In Saunders's words: "Freedoms once lost are very difficult to restore."