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Apartheid in
Higher Education

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Kew,
P. O. Lyndhurst
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

"I want to remind honorable members that if the Native in South Africa today, in any kind of school in existence, is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. Honorable members always profess not to be in favor of equal rights, and therefore they should now support me in principle in what I am saying. If they, like me on this side, are not in favor of equal rights, and if they are, like we are, in favor of the Native's development within his own sphere and in the service of his people, then such a person should be reared in that idea right from the start."¹

If you can read your way through the maze of parenthetical expressions in this argument, made by the South African Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, during debate on the Bantu Education Bill last year, you will find it is the basis of the Nationalist Party policy of apartheid as it applies to education.

I first came into contact with the policy when, a few days after Julie and I had moved into our present Johannesburg home, I went to the University of the Witwatersrand to see if I could use the University library as a place to study and do research. It is not as simple a matter as one would think. The applicant finds himself being shunted from one office to another, filling out forms, racking his brain for references, and waiting for various library officials to come back from tea.

During one of these waits I found myself in a busy room with a young, grey-haired woman who seemed to be a lady of no inconsiderable power in the department of public relations. She was seated behind a table and was just barely able to peer over the top of a tremendous pile of papers. She struck up a conversation as she efficiently folded the papers and put them into envelopes. After small-talk of the why-are-you-here variety, I asked her what she was doing.

"Collecting a million pounds," came the answer. "It's hard work."

"I should imagine so," I said. "What are you going to do with it when you get it?"

"Well, it's for the University, really," she laughed. "We don't have any endowment to speak of and there are none of those lovely alumni funds all American universities seem to be blessed with, so we have to collect money as best we can. I'm sending out letters to all graduates from the University since 1916 asking them to help us in our hour of need."

I looked around me. The building in which she was working was very new--

¹. House of Assembly Debates (Hansard), Union of South Africa; First Sitting, Eleventh Parliament; 14 September to 18 September 1953; Cape Times Ltd., Capetown.

made of raw wood and beaverboard and obviously prefabricated. "Apparently this a new thing," I said. "Why all this sudden haste to collect money?"

"Well, you see," she said in a low, conspiratorial voice, "we owe sixty thousand pounds to the government already. If we ever find ourselves in the position where more than half of our annual income comes from the government, the government then takes direct control of the University and we've lost our battle."

"Battle?" I said. "What battle do you mean?"

"Why, the battle to keep Wits (Witswatersrand) non-segregated," she answered. "Haven't you heard about it?" I shook my head. "Well, you're here to find out about things, why don't you look into it?" she asked. And I did.

The first thing I had to look into was the educational policy of the Nationalist Party, a bit of which I included in the first paragraph. Briefly, it is to educate the African to be an African and to educate the European to be a European. In other words, to teach the African to be a laborer and to teach the European to be his boss. It is a part of apartheid, or strict segregation begun in 1948 by the "Nats" and which affects every phase of life in South Africa.

The first legislative step in implementing this policy in education was taken last August when the Bantu Education Bill was passed. The bill itself does not do much. It merely effects the transfer of primary and secondary Native education from the provincial governments to the national government. But in doing so, it gives the Minister of Native Affairs (not, oddly enough, the Minister of Education) the powers of a dictator in matters educational. I have listed some of these powers below:

"The control of Native education shall be vested in the government of the Union subject to the provisions of this act.

"The Department of Native Affairs may subsidize any Bantu (Native) school established by any Bantu authority or any Native council, tribe, or community.

"The Minister (of Native Affairs) may, in his discretion, at any time suspend, reduce, or withdraw any subsidy or assistance granted to any such school under this section.

"The Minister of Native Affairs may establish Bantu schools which shall be known as Government Bantu Schools.

"The Minister may, at any time, whenever he considers it expedient to do so, close or disestablish any such Government Bantu School, hostel, teachers' quarters, school clinic, or any accessory to a Government Bantu School.

"Subject to the provisions of this act, the Minister may, on such special conditions as he may stipulate and in accordance with such general principles as he may determine in consultation with the Minister of Finance . . . make grants-in-aid to any Native School approved by him for the purposes of this section: Provided that before approving any such school the Minister may consider . . . whether the establishment or existence of any such Native School precludes, retards, or renders impracticable the establishment of a Bantu Community School or a Government Bantu School for the area concerned.

"The Minister may, in his discretion, at any time suspend, reduce, or withdraw any grant made under this section or revoke his approval of any Native school for the purposes of this section: Provided that before so

exercising his discretion the Minister may cause an inquiry to be held at which the person or committee or other body in charge of the said school shall be entitled to be heard.

"As from the date to be fixed by notice in the Gazette, no person shall establish, induct, or maintain any Bantu or Native school, other than a Government Bantu School, unless it is registered as prescribed.

"The registration of any such school shall be refused or cancelled if the Minister, acting on the advice and recommendation of the Native Affairs Commission constituted under the Native Affairs Act given after due inquiry by the said commission is of opinion that its establishment or continued existence is not in the interests of the Bantu people or any section of such people or is likely to be detrimental to the physical, mental or moral welfare of the pupils or students attending or likely to attend such school.

"The power of appointment, promotion, transfer, or discharge of teachers in Government Bantu Schools shall, subject to the provisions of this act, vest in the Minister who may delegate any or all of the said powers to the Secretary.

"In respect of any post designated by the Minister, he may delegate the power of appointment or discharge of any teacher to any officer of the department.

"The conditions of service, including the scales of salary, leave privileges, and retirement or pension benefits, of teachers in Government Bantu Schools shall be prescribed by the Minister in consultation with the Minister of Finance and on the recommendation of the Public Service Commission.

"The Minister may from time to time make regulations: (a) prescribing the conditions of appointment and service, including the rights, duties, and privileges, of teachers in Government Bantu Schools; (b) prescribing a code of discipline for teachers in Government Bantu Schools; (c) prescribing courses of training or instruction in Government Bantu Schools and the fees, if any, payable in respect of such courses or any examination held by or under the supervision or control of the department; (d) prescribing the medium of instruction in Bantu schools; (e) relating to the admission of pupils or students to, the control and treatment of pupils or students at, and the discharge of pupils or students from, any Government Bantu School; (f) providing for religious instruction in Government Bantu Schools; (g) prescribing the circumstances in which the suspension or expulsion of any pupil or student from any Government Bantu School may take place or any other punishment may be administered or imposed.

"Different regulations may be made in respect of different teachers, groups, classes, or races of teachers, or different schools or areas."¹

The position of the Nationalist government was made very clear during debate on this bill. The following are a few statements made by the Minister of Native Affairs concerning Bantu Education:

"Racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to Natives. They cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of frustrated people who, as a result of the education they receive, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled immediately; when it creates people for professions not open to them, when there are people who have received a form of cultural training which strengthens their desire for the white collar occupations to such an extent

1. Taken from the Bantu Education Bill, 1953.

that there are more such people than openings available. Therefore, good racial relations are spoilt when the correct education is not given. Above all, good racial relations cannot exist when the education is given under the control of people who create wrong expectations on the part of the Native himself; if such people believe in a policy of equality, if, let one say for example, a Communist gives this training to the Natives.

"In his education the (Native) child was not intentionally divorced from the parental authority or the tribal authority, but that result was brought about because the education he received made him feel different, made him feel that he was not a member of the Bantu community but a member of a wider community. He began to think that he was elevated above his own people, and that should not be the spirit which results from education.

"The basic principle ought to be that if the State pays for Bantu Education it should also control Bantu education. (Even) with a common policy we can see to it that education will be suitable for those who will become the industrial workers in the country and also that education can be suitable for those who have to stand on their own feet in the reserves and who will have to conserve their soil and develop their agricultural activities; that education can also take into account the requirements of those who will become the rural and agricultural workers, and it can also keep in mind those who would develop to the higher professions by means of which they will be able to serve their own community."¹

From this kind of talk it is easy to see that the government did not plan to stop at primary and secondary education. It was evident that, in order to fully implement this policy, higher education for Natives also had to be brought under government control.

Before we can consider this, we must know something about the universities concerned. There are nine universities in South Africa. If you or I were to attend a South African university, our choice would immediately be narrowed down to five. At these five universities (Natal, Rhodes, Fort Hare, Cape Town, and Witwatersrand) the language used in classes, lectures, and text books is English. At the other four universities (Potchefstroom, Orange Free State, Pretoria, and Stellenbosch) the medium of instruction is Afrikaans.

The government need have no fear of Natives in the Afrikaans medium universities. Those institutions are already completely segregated and are attended by approximately 8500 Afrikaans-speaking students. In the English medium universities there are nearly 11,500 students and at three of them there is some sort of racial segregation.

For instance, Rhodes University is generally for Europeans, and non-Europeans are only admitted for advanced courses of study when there is no room for them at Fort Hare University College, which is almost entirely reserved for non-Europeans (Indians, Africans, and Coloreds). At the University of Natal there are three sections: a section in Pietermaritzburg for Europeans only, a section in Durban for Europeans only, and another section in Durban for non-Europeans only. In theory the non-European section provides facilities equal to those at the European section, but I have been told authoritatively that this is not so. In addition, there is now under construction at Durban a medical school for non-Europeans.

¹ op. cit.

Students are admitted to the other two English medium universities (Witswatersrand and Cape Town) without regard to skin color. These are the two universities about which the government is so worried.

The number of non-Europeans attending universities is not overwhelming. At Fort Hare, 98 per cent of the 380 (approximately) students are non-Europeans. At Natal, there are 2100 students of whom almost 300 (14 per cent) are non-Europeans. Most of this non-European group are Indians. At Cape Town, 5 per cent (194) of the total enrolment of 3780 are non-Europeans. And, at Wits, 220 (5 per cent) of the 4273 students are non-Europeans.

Out of an approximate total of 20,000 university students in South Africa, about 1000 are non-Europeans. More statistics: For a total European population of 2,500,000 there are about 19,000 university students; for a non-European population of between 9,500,000 and 10,000,000 there are 1000 students in universities.

The difference between these figures are easily understood. Most non-Europeans are in no financial position to attend universities and the inferior preparation given them in some non-European primary and secondary schools does not give them sufficient book-learning to pass the entrance examinations.

All universities, with the exception of Fort Hare which is partly under the jurisdiction of Rhodes University, partly under jurisdiction of the government, are independent except that part of the annual running expense of each university must be met by a grant from the government. Therefore some appointments to the governing bodies of the universities are made by the government to keep an eye on the money. These appointments, in the past, have been made wisely, and politics for the most part has remained secondary.

Under terms of the charter of Potchefstroom University attendance there is restricted to "Christian Europeans." Other than that, admission of students is entirely up to the university concerned. There is not, at present, any law dealing with admission of students to universities according to race.

The Nationalist government has made it clear that this state of affairs is not tolerable. When the "Nats" first came into power in 1948, they talked very heatedly about mixed dances and inter-racial love affairs at Witswatersrand and Cape Town Universities.

"This caused so much of a stir and outcry from the university students concerned that the charge was temporarily dropped," Michael O'Dowd, president of the National Union of South African Students, told me the other night. "But the Nats knew that it had come to power because of one thing--race prejudice--and it wasn't going to let the matter drop."

O'Dowd, a tall, lanky fellow with a mop of unruly blond hair and a halting manner of speaking, graduated from Wits last year. Presidents of NUSAS cannot succeed themselves and may only serve during the year immediately following their graduation from the University. The Union is a federation of Student Representative Councils at the English medium universities and is dead set against the current university segregation campaign.

As a first-year employee of the Anglo-American Corporation (gold mines), he is not exactly overpaid and his living room, in which we had our first talk, was furnished with a couch, two chairs, a rug, curtains, a cuckoo clock, a Siamese cat, and his wife who curled up very attractively in a corner of the room and made comments aimed at keeping Michael from becoming too serious.

"The fact of the matter is that since the first non-European student was admitted to Wits in 1910, there has never been any social mingling at the University. We went to classes with Africans and studied side-by-side in the library, but anything that might have caused trouble was steered shy of.

"It's significant, I think, that during all the years between the founding of the Universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand no one had objected to the 'open' policy until the Nats came into power in 1948 and announced their intention of ending the 'temporary' and 'intolerable' situation at these universities. About once a year after that opening gun was fired in 1948 some reference was made to the 'dangerous' situation at Wits and Cape Town.

"Every time it happened the staff and students of the two universities would refute the charges, but it did no good and the government began to nibble away at the numbers of non-European students.

"The measures, although apparently small in themselves, were obviously the beginnings of a major campaign. For instance, they (the government) refused to issue the inter-provincial permits necessary for Indian students wishing to enter the Transvaal to study at Wits; they banned non-Europeans from outside the Union of South Africa from entering any educational institution in South Africa; and they discontinued the government scholarships for Africans who wished to study medicine at Wits."

To fight this (and here I combine information given me by O'Dowd and Godfrey S. Getz, former president of the Witwatersrand University Student Representative Council) the students at Wits and Cape Town kicked up such a fuss that the ban on non-European students from outside the Union was lifted until January, 1954,¹ and Indian students were allowed to enter the Transvaal. Also, the students at Wits established the African Medical Scholarships Trust Fund to replace the government scholarships that had been revoked. To provide money for the trust fund, each student was asked to donate 10 shillings a year and, at last count, more than half of the students were active contributors. This fund was supported handsomely by students in the other English medium universities and by overseas contributors.

"It looked as if we had won in 1950-51," O'Dowd told me. "The government stopped advocating legislation to force segregation down our throats. They still talked about European students escorting Africans to dances and kept hinting that 'where there's dancing there's usually kissing' but they were content to let the 'pressure of public opinion' bring non-segregation to an end."

"All that time," says Getz, a forceful opponent of segregation and a last-year medical student, "we were very careful not to have any incidents of racial strife

1. Although there has been no notice taken of it in the newspapers, this ban is again in effect.

at the University. The non-Europeans took part in all student activities except dances and sports. This wasn't because of any regulations of the University but because it has always been the practice at Wits and Cape Town. The students took it upon themselves to see that there was no trouble and there wasn't."

"The lull in the government's attack by legislation went on through 1952," O'Dowd told me. "Then, during the election campaign at the beginning of 1953 government spokesmen again brought up the 'acute' situation and promised legislation. In August, 1953, the matter was raised in Parliament during the debate on the Bantu Education Bill and the Minister of Education promised that the segregation in the universities would be considered after the Parliamentary session. He also said, and this is very important, that the government would respect the traditional academic freedom of the universities, but that he did not regard the right to decide what students they would admit as part of that freedom."

"Then, early in December, it was announced that a commission of inquiry would look into the 'practicability' of introducing apartheid into the universities. And we knew that the government really meant business when Dr. Malan, speaking at Stellenbosch University (Afrikaans medium) said that it was the intention of the government to put an end to non-segregation in the universities with 'all speed.'

"The commission has not yet begun to inquire into the question, but it is almost a foregone conclusion that segregation will be forced down the throats of the two universities which in the past have run so smoothly without it."

"The government has two ways of imposing segregation: One is to threaten removal of the subsidies which are the only means by which the universities can keep their financial heads above water, and the other is to legislate directly. If they try the first method, they might be thwarted by the million pounds being raised by Wits. I feel sure that they will legislate directly. And there's almost nothing we can do to stop them."

"The only way to fight this thing is through the pressure of public opinion. We cannot deal in strikes or demonstrations--in the first place we might find ourselves in jail, and in the second place it would surely turn the public against us. We will try to line up every segment of the liberal-minded population behind us and we will start a campaign overseas to bring the matter to the attention of persons interested in academic freedom. We don't have a hope of stopping the segregation law. But if we make it tough for the government to pass this bit of apartheid, they may think twice about introducing the next one. And if they think twice about the next one they may think three or four times about the one after."

What arguments do the government use in support of legislation in universities? (1) The government says that South Africa's racial problems are so unique that solutions that work in other countries will not work here. (2) The government says that non-Europeans will be much happier in segregated institutions because they will be studying among their own people in an effort to help their own people. (3) The government says that completely equal facilities

will be provided for the segregated non-European student.

O'Dowd (and NUSAS) answer these arguments as follows: (1) The teaching and administrative staffs and the students of the universities concerned can testify that "not merely does their system cause no friction but it promotes the understanding and harmony that can only come through inter-racial contact. No one except the present government has ever complained of the system and there is no proof of the Nationalists' allegations that there is abuse of social contacts at the universities."¹

(2) Non-Europeans at totally segregated institutions are opposed to apartheid and non-Europeans have continued to go to Wits and Cape Town whenever the opportunity presented itself. NUSAS takes a sly dig at the Nats by saying that "it is not normal practice in civilized countries to compel people to be happy and adjusted."²

(3) "Given the position of non-Europeans in the country and their prospects under the present government, the number who reach university level will always be small and no small university can reach a consistently high standard in South Africa where there are already too many small universities, fairly severe shortage of adequately qualified teaching staff, restricted government subsidization of education and severely limited public financial support for higher education. In any case an institution with about 1000 students cannot reach the standard of a big institution if it has to offer courses in all faculties as a segregated non-European institution would have to do. The impossibility of segregated and equal facilities is eloquently proved by conditions at Fort Hare which in the 37 years of its existence has not succeeded in obtaining laboratories or libraries of university standard and has not managed to establish faculties of Law, Commerce, Engineering, Architecture, or Medicine. Moreover, both South African and American experience of segregated institutions for non-Europeans proves that they become stamped as inferior because of their racial composition, and in consequence receive limited financial support which leads to inadequate salaries, inadequate staffing and low standards, all of which are self-perpetuating. It is highly unlikely that the South African government will make any serious attempt to overcome these serious difficulties because of their general attitude and that of their supporters to non-Europeans, because of their policy of barely adequate subsidization of existing universities, even Afrikaans-medium ones."³

How do the university administrations feel about the situation? I have talked to officers of the Witswatersrand University who seem to sit on either side of the fence. Mr. W. Richards, for example, is a member of the board of directors of the Union Corporation (gold mines) and is also a member of the Council which administers Wits.

I met him for lunch at the Rand Club a few days ago. He is a little man who is either in such a financial position that he no longer has to worry about how his clothes look--or his wife is out of town. In any case, his collar points curl and his trouser knees bag and his hat is well broken-in. On the way from the bar (downstairs) to the dining room (upstairs) he broached to me the outline of a high school he has dreamed up where there will be "parallel

1. From a pamphlet on segregation in universities released by NUSAS.

2. *ibid.* 3. *ibid.*

classes in the English and Afrikaans media but with complete admixture of boys in houses or hostels and on playing field." He said that much of the hard feeling that exists between Boer and Briton in South Africa today arises from the fact that their secondary school education is separate and that his school is the answer to all the trouble.

When the conversation meandered away from this idea of his, he did not speak with quite so much conviction. "Well, I'm not so sure that this segregation wouldn't be a good thing. I know as well as anyone that once you start having social contacts with the Bantu it can only lead to one thing--inter-racial marriage and all that, and it might just be that the time is ripe to put a stop to the mix-up at the University."

I protested that there are inter-racial mixtures at universities in the United States and that marriage between Negroes and white students is still a rarity, but he only shook his head. "You can't tell me that children between the ages of, say, 18 and 20 have the maturity to tell the difference between a liberal attitude and just plain foolishness. I must say that there hasn't been any real trouble at the University yet, but that can't last forever.

"And, another thing, I see where some people are going about saying that the facilities provided for the Bantu can't possibly be equal to those at Wits. The way I look at that is this--suppose Dr. Verwoerd is traveling through a Native reserve and he has an automobile accident. If the only doctor who can take care of him is a Bantu doctor, you can bet that Verwoerd is going to want that Bantu to be just as well-trained as is possible."

The conversation continued along this line for quite some time and it became apparent that, although Richards disagreed with the Nationalist Party on principle, he was not sure that their educational policy was not a good thing. "Are there many men on the Council who feel as you do?" I asked.

"No," was the answer. "I am in the minority there." I got the same estimate of Council opinion from Mr. A. dev. Herholdt, the assistant registrar of the University. A small, neat, tweedy man, he seemed to be able to consider the question of segregation in universities without excess emotion as we talked in his small office in the University's administration building.

"Of course, it's not supposed to be known to people outside the Council, but I understand that the Council passed a resolution when this committee of inquiry was set up. They voted in favor of preserving the status quo and I take it that that means they are opposed to segregation.

"They can't take very strong action, you understand. If someone is giving you money to keep going, you don't go about telling other people that you don't like your benefactor's principles. I think the action they took is just about as strong as any action they are free to take could be. And to say, as some people do, that this million pounds we're collecting will take us out of the clutches of the government is just foolish. Even if we spent the whole million we'd only be able to keep going for five or six years. And if the money is invested, as it

should be, the interest will just provide enough to keep us from going deeper into debt--keep us from going over the fifty per cent mark.

"I think the students had a lot to do with bringing the government down on our necks. If they hadn't kicked up such a fuss about it, the whole thing might have come off the boil. But they kept going about saying that the only reason the government was advocating segregation at Wits was because Wits was living proof that Europeans could live peacefully in South African without Apartheid. Perhaps they were right, but it only served to antagonize the government and make them more determined than ever to crack down on us. I'm afraid there's nothing we can do to stop it now.

"You might say that the policy of the University will be to disapprove of the imposition of segregation and the limitation of academic freedom--but that we won't make a fight of it because we might have to close down because of lack of funds. By the way, this is definitely not for publication."

Before the interview was finished I made it a point to ask Herholdt a few biographical questions. An interesting point is that his father is an Afrikaner, his mother is an Afrikaner and his grandparents were Afrikaners. "I guess that makes me an Afrikaner too," he said with a broad smile. "But I'm afraid I daren't talk politics with my father any more--I'm too much of a liberal Afrikaner. That's what comes of working in an English medium, non-segregated university."

It will take several months before the commission of inquiry finishes collecting testimony and reports to Parliament. Nothing will be done about segregation in the universities during the session that is just about to begin. But in the session to come this summer (winter, in South Africa) it is almost a foregone conclusion that legislation will be passed prohibiting non-segregation in all institutions of higher learning. One more line of communication between European and African in South Africa will have been cut off by the Nationalist Party.

This one example of apartheid gives a good picture of what is going on in South Africa. At a luncheon party yesterday I met a woman who has done much work in Native hospitals in the Northern Transvaal. I told her of my interest in the Nats' campaign to segregate university students.

"You know," she said, "it seems to me that that's one of the most important things the Nationalists have tried to do so far. I remember one old Native woman who came to the hospital for an operation. I had a talk with her before she went to the operating room and she said, 'Madam, I don't mind having to live in a location and I don't mind all the other things that happen to us, but it does make my heart sad to think that my children cannot get good education.' I hadn't thought of it before, but I decided right then that our only hope of helping the African was to teach him."

Sincerely,



Peter Bird Martin

Rec'd New York 1/25/54.