THE MODERN UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO MANPOWER NEEDS OF A DEVELOPING COMMUNITY

11 July 1980

In the intellectual tradition which we have inherited in South Africa the University as an institution is predated perhaps only by the Catholic Church. From their very beginnings universities have regarded knowledge, advanced knowledge, its preservation, extension and transmission as their very reason for existence. Modernity, if it implies a serious departure from that tradition, cannot be held as a virtue in a university. A modern university is therefore one that exists in modern times, is in tune with the intellectual needs of those times, and which

2

ADAPTS, WITHOUT IMPERILLING, ITS CENTURIES-OLD OUTLOOK
TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE. A MODERN UNIVERSITY, MOST EMPHATICALLY,
IS NOT ONE WHICH CUTS ITSELF OFF FROM ITS AGE-OLD
INTELLECTUAL ROOTS. AN INSTITUTION WHICH DOES SO IS NOT A
MODERN UNIVERSITY: IT IN FACT CEASES TO BE A UNIVERSITY
AT ALL.

A UNIVERSITY SERVING THE NEEDS OF A DEVELOPING COMMUNITY
HAS TO JUDGE THOSE NEEDS ACCORDING TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES
IN WHICH IT FINDS ITSELF. IT IS FREQUENTLY THE CASE THAT
SUCH A UNIVERSITY IS THE ONLY UNIVERSITY IN A RELATIVELY

HOMOGENOUS COMMUNITY IN A VERY EARLY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN WHICH THE RESOURCES FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION OF ANY KIND ARE EXTREMELY LIMITED. THESE ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAILING IN BOPHUTATSWANA, LESOTHO, MALAWI, SWAZILAND, TRANSKEI AND ZAMBIA. IN SUCH A SITUATION THE STRATEGY WHICH I UNDERSTAND IS TO BE ADOPTED IN BOPHUTATSWANA WOULD APPEAR TO BE A VERY RATIONAL ONE. THE SINGLE UNIVERSITY IS SEEN AS THE APEX OF THE WHOLE APPARATUS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION, AND AS SUCH WILL HAVE AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES, TECHNICAL INSTITUTES AND OTHER SPECIAL PURPOSE TERTIARY AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FACILITIES FOR WHICH THE COMMUNITY HAS THE RESOURCES AND PERCEIVES THE NECESSITY.

4

INEVITABLY SUCH A UNIVERSITY WILL DEVOTE A GREAT SHARE OF ITS RESOURCES TO FOSTERING AND SUPPORTING SUCH FACILITIES, PROBABLY AT THE EXPENSE OF ITS POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES. INEVITABLY IT WILL FIND THAT ITS STUDENT INTAKE WILL SUFFER FROM A VARIETY OF DEFICIENCIES IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND THERE WILL BE A FURTHER HEAVY DRAIN ON ITS MEAGRE RESOURCES IN ATTEMPTS TO REMEDY THE GROSSER OF THESE DEFICIENCIES.

In the Republic of South Africa the circumstances are different, and a great deal more complex. We have a far

FROM HOMOGENOUS SOCIETY AND ESSENTIALLY TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESIDENTIAL UNIVERSITIES. THE TEN UNIVERSITIES UNTIL RECENTLY ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FOR WHITES DIFFER ONLY IN DETAIL FROM UNIVERSITIES IN FULLY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, AND IN FACT SERVE A FIRST WORLD COMMUNITY EMBEDDED IN A THIRD WORLD SURROUND. THE SIX STATE UNIVERSITIES SERVE COMMUNITIES MORE ADVANCED THAN THOSE IN MOST OF THE TERRITORIES NEIGHBOURING SOUTH AFRICA, BUT NONETHELESS A LONG WAY LESS DEVELOPED THAN THE WHITE MINORITY.

In such a multiple university system each university develops its own characteristics and particular skills. No single university or even group of universities holds

6

SWAY OVER OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN THE TERTIARY EDUCATION

SYSTEM, ALTHOUGH SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS CAN DO AND SHOULD

EXIST BETWEEN PARTICULAR UNIVERSITIES AND TEACHER TRAINING

COLLEGES, THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES, TECHNIKONS AND THE LIKE.

IN ORDER TO FOCUS DISCUSSION I WISH TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION

AS TO HOW ANY PARTICULAR UNIVERSITY TRADITIONALLY SERVING A

SECTION OF THE WHITE COMMUNITY CAN MAKE A GREATER

CONTRIBUTION TO THE MANPOWER NEEDS OF LESS DEVELOPED, BUT

RAPIDLY DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES IN OUR MIDST.

THAT THERE IS SUCH A NEED AND SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY CAN VIRTUALLY BE TAKEN AS AXIOMATIC. THE WHITE GROUP IN SOUTH AFRICA HAS PRACTICALLY REACHED A STATE OF ZERO POPULATION GROWTH, WHILE THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE CONTINUES TO GROW RAPIDLY. CRITICAL SHORTAGES OF SKILLED MANPOWER MANIFEST THEMSELVES IN PRACTICALLY EVERY FIELD OF ENDEAVOUR, AND THESE SHORTAGES CAN ONLY BE RELIEVED BY SUBSTANTIAL RECRUITMENT FROM THE BLACK POPULATION GROUPS. WITH CONSIDERABLE UNDER UTILIZATION OF RESOURCES IN THE WHITE UNIVERSITIES AND AN EXPECTED EXPONENTIAL GROWTH IN MATRICULATED BLACK SCHOOL LEAVERS WHICH WILL RAPIDLY OVERWHELM THE RESOURCES PROVIDED FOR THEM WE ARE RAPIDLY MOVING TOWARDS A CRISIS SITUATION. THE EXACT STATISTICS

8

DEPEND ON WHAT ASSUMPTIONS ARE MADE, BUT WHATEVER REALISTIC ASSUMPTIONS ARE ACCEPTED THE CONCLUSIONS ARE INESCAPABLE: THE CASE FOR INCREASED MANPOWER TRAINING, PARTICULARLY FOR THE HIGH END OF THE SPECTRUM, HARDLY MERITS DEBATE, AND ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES MUST BE PRESSED INTO SERVICE, NO MATTER WHAT SACRED COWS ARE TRAMPLED IN THE PROCESS.

THE MOST OBVIOUS WAYS IN WHICH THE WHITE UNIVERSITIES CAN RESPOND IS IN THEIR TRADITIONAL AREAS OF COMPETENCE. THIS CAN ONLY BE EFFECTED RATIONALLY IF THEIR FULL AUTONOMY IS RESPECTED AND THE DECISIONS AS TO WHAT STUDENTS SHALL BE

ADMITTED RETURNED TO THE HANDS OF THE UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES THEMSELVES. THE SYSTEM OF PERMITS BY MINISTERIAL CONSENT, BOTH AT THE UNIVERSITIES AND EVEN MORE ACUTELY AT THE TECHNIKONS, HAS BECOME ONE OF THE GREATEST SINGLE STUMBLING BLOCKS TO THE RATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TOP LEVEL MANPOWER. APART FROM ITS ARBITRARINESS AND HUGE EXPENSE ITS ASSAULT ON HUMAN DIGNITY AND THE CONSEQUENT BITTERNESS AND FRUSTRATION WHICH IT ENGENDERS MAKE IT ONE OF THE MOST EXPENDABLE AND OBSOLETE RELICS OF A BYGONE AND UNLAMENTED ERA.

WITH ALL ARTIFICIAL OBSTACLES REMOVED SUCH UNIVERSITIES
WILL BE FREE TO MAKE A MUCH LARGER CONTRIBUTION TO TRAINED

10

MANPOWER NEEDS IN THE PROFESSIONS, IN BUSINESS AND EDUCATION AND ABOVE ALL IN PROVIDING BETTER QUALIFIED TEACHERS. MANY DIFFICULTIES WILL OF COURSE REMAIN, THE LEAST OF WHICH, I BELIEVE, WILL BE FINANCE. SO PRESSING HAVE THE NEEDS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY BECOME THAT I FORESEE A GREATLY INCREASED LEVEL OF BURSARY AND LOAN SUPPORT TO SELECTED STUDENTS LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO ALLEVIATE THOSE NEEDS. A MUCH GREATER DIFFICULTY ARISES AS THE RESULT OF THE GROSS INADEQUACIES OF THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM FOR BLACKS, A FACTOR OF WHICH WE HARDLY NEED REMINDING IN THESE TIMES OF VIRTUALLY DAILY BOYCOTTS AND UNREST ARISING FROM PRECISELY THIS CAUSE.

In spite of the enormously increased scale of funding of Black schooling its limitations remain one of the more serious inhibitors of the effective use of manpower. Provided all legal obstacles were swept away White universities could make a significant contribution to reducing the effects of this basic problem. By participating in the training of Black teachers and volunteer White teachers willing to serve in Black schools the White universities would be supplying teachers who were really competent in their teaching subjects as well as in one or other of the official languages, and would be introducing into the Black schools models to be emulated both by other teachers as well as the pupils. This would provide a leavening of really well

12

TRAINED TEACHERS WHICH WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE UPGRADING OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BLACKS.

Another obvious contributory area is the role that the research conducted at universities could play in improving and enriching the educational process in Black schools. The peculiar problems of instruction in English by people whose mother tongue is not English to pupils to whom it is also a second language is a very pressing and legitimate

RESEARCH AREA. THE SAME IS TRUE OF RESEARCH INTO PROGRAMMED LEARNING OR INTO ANY OTHER ASPECT OF IMPROVING THE LEARNING PROCESS.

As we move away from the normal teaching and research areas we have to give consideration to difficulties that undoubtedly merit attention, but which are problematic as far as a university is concerned. The first of these is remedial education, to make good some of the deficiencies occasioned by shortcomings in the secondary educational systems. In my view this is not properly the province of the university, but in order to obviate serious failure rates it seems inevitable that universities will become

14

INVOLVED. ONE OBVIOUSLY HAS TO CONSIDER BRIDGING COURSES, SPECIAL REFRESHER COURSES, COURSES IN COMMUNICATION, AND THE LIKE. LAUDABLE AND NECESSARY THOUGH THESE ACTIVITIES MAY BE, UNIVERSITIES MUST BE WARY OF FINDING THEMSELVES CONDUCTING WHAT EVENTUALLY EVOLVES INTO A RATHER SPECIALISED SECONDARY OR PRE-UNIVERSITY SCHOOL ATTACHED TO THE UNIVERSITY. I PERSONALLY CONSIDER THIS A RATHER QUESTIONABLE USE OF THE UNIVERSITY'S LIMITED FINANCIAL, MANPOWER AND SPACE RESOURCES. IT WOULD BE FAR PREFERABLE TO HAVE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS MORE STRINGENT THAN A FORMAL MATRICULATION EXEMPTION, AND TO LEAVE IT TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS TO FILL THIS

PARTICULAR EDUCATIONAL NICHE. PRIVATE BUSINESS AND CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGES SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO OPEN THEIR DOORS TO ALL COMERS, AND QUALITY HIGH SCHOOLS SUCH AS ST BARNABAS COLLEGE AND THE NEW SCHOOL TO BE LAUNCHED BY THE AMERICAN BUSINESS COMMUNITY SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO PROLIFERATE, AND TO SUPPLY IN INCREASING NUMBERS STUDENTS ADEQUATELY PREPARED TO MAKE A SUCCESS OF ORDINARY UNDILUTED UNIVERSITY CURRICULA. FURTHERMORE, ALL IMPEDIMENTS TO BLACKS ENTERING PREVIOUSLY ALL WHITE SCHOOLS WILLING TO ACCEPT THEM, SHOULD BE REMOVED. IN THE SHORT TERM I RECOGNISE THE PROBABLE UNAVOIDABILITY OF UNIVERSITY ACTIVITIES IN THIS ARENA, BUT I DO NOT RELISH THE PROSPECT OF ITS BEING A PERMANENT PART OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS.

16

The Question of adult or continuing education is also fraught with ambiguities for universities. At present the government makes no subsidy provision nor allows any tax concessions or donations for this purpose, the theory being that it should be entirely funded from fees. Where such continuing education takes the form of refresher courses in the latest developments and techniques for graduate professionals already in the field, it is making an invaluable contribution to manpower development. It is akin to a full postgraduate course in a truncated form and as such is a legitimate university pursuit. Such activities should become

PART AND PARCEL OF THE UNIVERSITY'S NORMAL PROGRAMME, AND RECEIVE OFFICIAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND RECOGNITION.

Where continuing education is concerned with professional training at a much lower level or with general cultural pursuits, it should at most be a very peripheral university activity. Lower level professional and vocational training is the legitimate province of the technical colleges and technikons and private institutions catering to specialised needs. In many cases it merges into on-the-job training which is very definitely the responsibility of the employer. The numerous and successful secretarial colleges provide a pointer, as do the more recent computer training

18

ORGANISATIONS. Some of the latter have evolved an intriguing modus operandi which deserves more careful study and wider emulation. The success of the more reliable of these organisations rests on the confidence reposed in them by prospective employers, who fund the whole cost of the operation in return for a reliable supply of trained people of a guaranteed and acceptable minimum standard. The individual obtains his training at no cost to himself, provided he survives rigorous aptitude and entrance tests and passes equally demanding progress thresholds during the duration of the course. The acceptance rate can be as

LOW AS THREE OR FOUR PER CENT, BUT THE SUCCESSFUL INDIVIDUAL IS GUARANTEED REWARDING AND SATISFYING EMPLOYMENT. THE SYSTEM IS WORKING WELL AND IS MAKING A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRIPPLING COMPUTER PROGRAMMER SHORTAGE, A CONTRIBUTION IN AGGREGATE GREATER THAN ALL THE UNIVERSITIES COMBINED. NEEDLESS TO SAY NO DISTINCTION IS MADE AS TO RACE OR SEX. THERE IS A LESSON HERE WORTHY OF CAREFUL STUDY, PERHAPS EVEN BY THE UNIVERSITIES THEMSELVES. THOSE WHO PASS SUCCESSFULLY THROUGH THIS PROCESS CAN CERTAINLY MAKE NO CLAIM TO BE AS FULLY EDUCATED OR INTELLECTUALLY FLEXIBLE AS THE UNIVERSITY PRODUCT, BUT THEY ARE UNDOUBTEDLY MAKING A MUCH MORE IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON THE MANPOWER SHORTAGE, IN FAR LESS TIME AND AT FAR LESS COST THAN IT WOULD TAKE TO COMPLETE A UNIVERSITY DEGREE.

20

ONE EASILY OVERLOOKED ASPECT OF A UNIVERSITY IS THAT THE INSTITUTION ITSELF IS A RELATIVELY LARGE EMPLOYER OF SPECIALISED ACADEMIC, AS WELL AS SKILLED AND UNSKILLED LABOUR IN A WIDE VARIETY OF CATEGORIES. UNIVERSITIES, BECAUSE THEY ARE SO MUCH IN THE PUBLIC EYE, HAVE A PARTICULAR OBLIGATION TO OPERATE EFFICIENTLY AND TO UTILISE MANPOWER IN THE MOST NEARLY OPTIMUM FASHION OF WHICH THEY ARE CAPABLE. THEIR IN-HOUSE O AND M PROCEDURES, AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE AS ENLIGHTENED AND EXEMPLARY AS POSSIBLE. BY BEING SO THEY WILL BE MAKING AN IMMEDIATE CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR OWN

MANPOWER NEEDS WHICH, BECAUSE OF THEIR POSITION, HAS AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF BEING IMITATED. UNIVERSITIES ARE MISSING A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY OF MAKING A REALLY SIGNIFICANT, ALBEIT INDIRECT, CONTRIBUTION TO OVERALL MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT IF THEIR MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THESE AREAS ARE NOT OF THE VERY BEST.

In summary, a university most readily serves the needs of the community which supports it, and from which it draws its strength, by being the best possible university of which it is capable, and not by turning itself, even in part, into some other kind of institution. A university is concerned with transmitting academic and professional

22

KNOWLEDGE, AND WITH FURTHERING THAT KNOWLEDGE. IT IS NOT ITS CONCERN TO ENTER THE ARENA OF SECONDARY OR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND EVEN LESS SO OF ON-THE-JOB TRAINING. WHEN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY PUT PRESSURE ON UNIVERSITIES TO PRODUCE PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMEDIATELY USEFUL UPON ENTRY THEY ARE BEING VERY SHORTSIGHTED. THIS TEMPTATION IS LIKELY TO BE FELT IN ITS MORE ACUTE FORM IN DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES. IF UNIVERSITIES SUCCUMB TO THIS TYPE OF PRESSURE THEY CANNOT FULFIL THEIR TASK OF PROVIDING TRAINED AND FLEXIBLE INTELLECTS WHO CAN SEE PROBLEMS IN BROADER PERSPECTIVE AND THUS PROVIDE INTELLIGENT AND FARSIGHTED LEADERSHIP. IF IT

IS FELT THAT IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES THE NEED FOR MORE IMMEDIATE AND SHORT-TERM MANPOWER TRAINING HAS A GREATER PRIORITY OVER THE MORE ABSTRACT AND LONG-TERM UNIVERSITY APPROACH, THEN THE PROPER PROCEDURE IS TO DIVERT MORE RESOURCES INTO INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING THAT TYPE OF TRAINING, EVEN AT THE EXPENSE OF THE UNIVERSITIES. IN THE LAST RESORT, IF IT IS FELT THAT THERE ARE MORE UNIVERSITIES THAN A COUNTRY CAN AFFORD, THEN BY ALL MEANS CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO CONVERTING CERTAIN UNIVERSITIES INTO THE APPROPRIATE TYPE OF INSTITUTION. THIS WOULD BE A FAR MORE PREFERABLE SOLUTION TO SUBORNING THE VERY IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY.

24

Unfortunately, Questions of prestige arise. Because universities enjoy more prestige than other types of tertiary education people who attend these other institutions feel that they are being offered something inferior. They are not: they are being offered something different. An analogous situation arose with science. Because of the phenomenal success of science over the last hundred years just about every field of intellectual endeavour started calling itself a science. With the current reduction in scientific prestige perhaps this unhealthy situation will correct itself. Similarly, as soon as the

PUBLIC BEGINS TO REALISE THAT UNIVERSITIES ARE ONLY
UNIVERSITIES, AND NOT SOME CHARISMATIC INSTITUTION CAPABLE
OF SOLVING ALL THE ILLS THAT MANKIND IS HEIR TO, THE
PRESTIGE OF OTHER ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS WILL RISE VIS-AVIS THAT OF UNIVERSITIES, AND THEY WILL THEN BE ABLE TO
MAKE A GREATER CONTRIBUTION TO OUR VERY REAL AND PRESSING
MANPOWER NEEDS.

D S Henderson 11 July 1980