

REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF A VISIT OVERSEAS DURING DECEMBER 1979 AND JANUARY 1980

Introduction

After four years of service as Vice-Chancellor the Council granted me leave to proceed overseas during December 1979 and January 1980. With the assistance of the Board of Governors of the Rhodes University Foundation, for which I duly express my appreciation, I was able to visit numerous institutions and influential people in Britain, France and the United States of America. During these visits I was able to gather useful information and general impressions and also to exchange views and make comparisons concerning higher education in South Africa and the various countries I visited.

Preliminary Activities in the Transvaal

My itinerary began with a few days of business in the Transvaal. This included being part of a Committee of University Principals' delegation to meet The Universities' Advisory Council to seek further clarification concerning the offering of Bachelor of Pharmacy degree programmes by certain universities in conjunction with Technikons, a subject of vital importance to Rhodes. I was also able to meet representatives of a large electronics company who may be interested in exploiting an electric power Demand Control Unit, currently being developed and tested at Rhodes.

Activities in Britain

Almost immediately after arriving in London with my wife and younger daughter I addressed a gathering of the South African Universities' Club. An audience of between forty and fifty expatriates from many of our universities heard me speak on some of the current factors affecting University education in South Africa.

Shortly thereafter we were able to visit Dr T Alty, first Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes, in his home in Birmingham. We found him in excellent spirits and in good health, except for his eyesight which continues to be of concern after a recent cataract operation. He continues to maintain a strong interest in our affairs, and was a mine of information on British university affairs through his association with Birmingham University.

Our next University visit was Oxford where we dined with Lord Trend, Rector of my former College, Lincoln, and his wife. New additions to the College included the conversion of the former All Saints' Church into a truly magnificent library, and ingeniously designed quarters for graduate students on a small but well-situated plot of ground which had been in the possession of the College for 500 years and never properly exploited until now. Practically every College at Oxford now accepts students of both sexes, with men and women in adjacent rooms. Lincoln had only just welcomed its first women members without so far, it was claimed, encountering any problems. Nonetheless it was with a certain sense of shock that I noted the names of three female residents on my old staircase!

On the return journey to London we paid a brief call at Reading University, the only British University to have been established between the World Wars, and now housing 6000 students on its new Whiteknights campus. We had a reunion lunch with Professor E S Page, also a former Computer Science professor, who informed us that the university specialises in activities connected with land use.

Back in London I was able to pay brief visits to Imperial College of Science and Technology (about 3000 students), the London School of Economics and Political Science (3300 students) and Bedford College (1600 students). All of these institutions are constituents of the federally organised London University, and enjoy a great measure of internal autonomy. Bedford College, situated in North London in a corner of the spacious Regents Park, has all the advantages of a small, uncluttered institution, coupled with the cultural and communicational benefits of being sited in a large metropolis. The other two, particularly LSE, are squeezed into a cluttered and cramped city environment.

Overall Impressions Gained

My discussions at individual universities were complemented by an interview with the Secretary of the Committee of University Vice-Chancellors and Principals, Mr B H Taylor. My impressions of current university problems and circumstances in the United Kingdom may conveniently be summarized as follows:

- (a) University life is plagued by an even greater degree of financial uncertainty than is the case in South Africa. They have no fixed subsidy formula as we have, but the central government decides on a global sum for universities, which is divided up in an

arcane and impenetrable process by that august body, the University Grants Committee, which has no direct university representation.

- (b) The present government is determined to reduce public spending, including that directed to universities. To that end, it has determined that in future foreign students will enjoy no further benefit from the British taxpayer, but must pay in fees the full cost of their education. Academic fees as high as £3000 p.a. for science and £5000 p.a. for medical students are certain to result.
- (c) Sometime in the mid-eighties the total enrolment of students is expected for demographic reasons to drop off very sharply. This, coupled with a potential reduction in foreign students, is likely to affect certain institutions very gravely, particularly those, like LSE, with a high percentage enrolment of foreign students. There was open speculation that certain institutions may not survive, especially those with very specialised interests. London's School of African and Oriental Studies was one mentioned on more than one occasion. Job prospects for young would-be academics were regarded as dismal.
- (d) All commentators were unanimous that today's British students were much more serious minded, job oriented and apolitical than their immediate predecessors. Insofar as they do express political preferences they are much more conservative than their lecturers, especially the younger ones. Even the notorious LSE no longer merits its pink reputation.

During our stay in England, together with a brief visit to Paris, I was able to meet quite a number of influential people from whom I was able to gain valuable insights into the present political and scientific climate in Britain. Among them were Sir Robert Birley, former headmaster of Eton, the South African Foundation representatives in London and in Paris, and Sir Michael Edwardes, Managing Director of British Leyland, on whom we shall shortly be conferring an honorary degree. A complete list of people and institutions visited is provided in an appendix.

Activities in the USA

After about three weeks in England we were able to spend a similar period in the USA, in upstate New York and in Massachusetts. The first institution we visited there was Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., formerly a famous women's college that went co-ed in 1971. With 2250 students

on a beautiful 1000 acre campus Vassar has many features in common with Rhodes. In spite of residence and academic fees totalling \$6600 per annum and no direct public subsidy, Vassar has five applicants for every student admitted. Firm believers in "Small is beautiful" Vassar has no intention of increasing its enrolment. Dr H P Sullivan, Dean of the Faculty, had three firm pieces of advice, gleaned from painful hindsight:-

- (i) Under no circumstances have men and women living under the same roof. The resulting atmosphere is not one conducive of serious study.
- (ii) The closing of individual halls and replacing them by one vast central cafeteria system is highly destructive of social cohesion. The centralised preparation of food and self-service arrangements per se do not have this effect, but the preservation of smaller groups of the order of 200 taking their meals in what they regard as their own territory is definitely worthwhile.
- (iii) The construction of Oppidan style "town houses" right on the campus had had the counterproductive effect of making the conventional residences very junior in composition and consequently rather noisy.

Other institutions visited were Hampshire College, one of a group of five or six cooperating colleges and universities in the Connecticut Valley and, of course, Harvard. Hampshire, with about 1500 students, is a fairly recently established college with an innovative and experimental curriculum which enables students to study unusual combinations of subjects, not all necessarily taken on the home campus. In some quarters its programme is regarded as too loose and unstructured but it is too soon yet to prognosticate how successful its approach will be.

Harvard is completely sui generis and still easily maintains its position as the premier university in North America. With its 1978-79 budget of \$343 000 000, more than enough to run all of South Africa's universities, and an investment portfolio of \$1 300 000 000 its scale of operation is hard to comprehend. The telephone statistics alone are mind-boggling. It has two complete telephone exchanges serving 13 000 extensions, and the annual telephone account is \$6 000 000! For all that, as far as student numbers are concerned, the scale remains human. Harvard College has only 4 000 undergraduates, while approximately 11 000 postgraduates are clustered in groups of no more than 1 500 in world-famous schools of Arts and Sciences, Law, Economics, Business, Government, Medicine, Dentistry, Design and Divinity, to name the better known ones. Undergraduate composite residence/academic fees are now approaching

\$10 000, high even by North American standards. The financial circumstances of each individual student are carefully examined, and a combined contribution from parents, the student himself by means of paid part-time work, government grant direct to the student, loans and scholarships, is carefully compiled. In order to improve faculty salaries an appeal for a further \$250 000 000 of endowment funds is currently under way.

General Observations Concerning the USA

With its 1 500 private and 1 600 publically supported universities and colleges, any generalisation about American tertiary education is hard to substantiate. One can, however, state with a reasonable degree of confidence that the private institutions particularly are under varying degrees of more or less severe financial pressure. Student enrolments have peaked, and academic jobs, except in certain technical fields, are definitely in short supply. A trend towards unionisation is clearly discernable, although a Court has recently ruled that academic faculty at private colleges may not join unions because they are part of "management" in that they determine curricula and set academic policy. Undoubtedly a considerable number of the literally hundreds of institutions will close their doors during the next decade.

A subject on the agenda of virtually every interview was the question of disinvestment from companies doing business in South Africa. Some universities with small portfolios have done so, but the brokerage costs alone would run into millions of dollars in the case of the larger institutions. The Attorney-General of one State has issued an opinion that Trustees of endowment funds would be personally liable for losses sustained if a disinvestment policy could be shown to have reduced the income of the institution they serve! Harvard, as usual, had produced a most intelligent document on the subject, in the form of an open letter from its President, in which all the factors had been most carefully weighed and assessed. Their final decision has been to consider each such company individually on merit, a typical criterion being adherence to the well publicised Sullivan code.

Wherever I went I was received with the utmost courtesy and friendliness. The difficulties under which English-speaking universities operate in South Africa were for the most part well understood and appreciated. The tour was worthwhile in every respect. I met interesting and sympathetic people and was exposed to new and stimulating ideas which will influence the way I operate, both directly and indirectly, for some time to come.

Although the tour could fairly be described as a working holiday, I can assure members of Council and the Board of Governors that there were ample opportunities for cultural and sightseeing pursuits of a more relaxing nature. I am confident that my work as your Vice-Chancellor will benefit from these opportunities as well.

Derek S. Henderson

D S Henderson

5 March 1980

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APPENDIX

ITINERARY OF INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS VISITED DURING
THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S TOUR DECEMBER 1979 - JANUARY 1980

November

Thursday 29 CUP delegate to joint CUP/UAC meeting on
Pharmacy Education in Pretoria

December

Monday 3 Lunch with representatives of large
Johannesburg electronics firm to discuss
possible exploitation of electrical Demand
Control Unit

Wednesday 5 Lunch with Mr Roy Macnab, London
representative of S.A. Foundation

Dinner and talk to approximately 40 London
members of S.A. Universities' Club

Friday 7 Visit Dr T Alty, former Vice-Chancellor of
Rhodes, in Birmingham

Sunday 9 Dinner with Lord and Lady Trend, Lincoln
College, Oxford

Monday 10 Inspect new facilities at Lincoln College

Tuesday 11 Visit Reading University. Lunch with
Vice-Chancellor, Professor E S Page

Wednesday 12 Visit Mr B Lloyd Davies, Deputy College
Secretary, Imperial College of Science and
Technology

Thursday 13 Morning visit with Sir Michael Edwardes,
Managing Director of British Leyland.
Afternoon visit to London School of
Economics and Political Science.
Interviews with Professor A C L Day, Pro-
Director and Professor A S Douglas,
Professor of Computer Science

Monday 17 Lunch with Mrs H Nixon, formerly Senior
Lecturer in French at Rhodes.
Brief discussion and walking tour of part
of Paris with Mr Desmond Colborne, Old
Rhodian and Paris representative, S.A.
Foundation