

ADDRESS TO NEW STUDENTS 14 FEBRUARY 1983

AS PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR AND AS A FELLOW RHODIAN IT IS MY PRIVILEGE AND PLEASURE TO OFFER YOU A DOUBLE WELCOME, FIRSTLY TO THE ORIENTATION WEEK AND SECONDLY TO THE UNIVERSITY AS A WHOLE. AS NEW STUDENTS YOU HAVE BEEN REQUESTED TO ARRIVE ABOUT A WEEK EARLIER THAN THE RETURNING STUDENTS, SO THAT YOU MAY ACCLIMATIZE YOURSELVES TO YOUR NEW SURROUNDINGS, ASK ALL THE QUESTIONS AND GAIN ALL THE INFORMATION YOU NEED IN ORDER TO MAKE, OR CONFIRM, THE CHOICES YOU SHOULD SELECT, OUT OF THE MYRIAD OF OPTIONS BEFORE YOU, TO MAKE A SUCCESS OF YOUR FIRST YEAR AT RHODES. YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DO THIS BEFORE BEING DISTRACTED BY THE MORE SENIOR STUDENTS WHO KNOW, OR WHO IMAGINE THEY KNOW, ALL THAT THERE IS TO BE KNOWN ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY. THE

CONTRIBUTORS

ORGANISING COMMITTEE AND ~~PARTICIPANTS~~, BOTH STAFF AND STUDENTS [UNDER THE ABLE GUIDANCE AND LEADERSHIP OF MR PETER SURTEES, MISS JENNY BOWEN AND MISS JANE PARGITER] HAVE ^{COME} ~~DRAWN~~ ^{WITH} UP AN INTERESTING AND WIDE-RANGING PROGRAMME, THE DETAILS OF WHICH ARE AVAILABLE IN YOUR BROCHURE. WE ALL OWE THEM A DEBT OF GRATITUDE, [WHICH WOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO ACKNOWLEDGE IN THE USUAL WAY.]

SOME OF YOU WILL HAVE COME WITH VERY FIRM IDEAS AS TO WHICH SUBJECTS YOU WISH TO STUDY. OTHERS ARE NOT SO CERTAIN AND MAY FEEL THAT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN SUFFICIENTLY FULLY INFORMED, ESPECIALLY ABOUT SUBJECTS WHICH ARE NOT CONTINUATIONS OF THOSE OFFERED AT SECONDARY SCHOOL. ^(X) IN YOUR PROGRAMME YOU WILL FIND INTRODUCTORY TALKS OFFERED ABOUT MOST OF THE SUBJECTS TAUGHT HERE, FROM ACCOUNTING TO ZOOLOGY. WHY NOT ATTEND AS MANY OF THESE AS YOU CAN CONVENIENTLY FIT IN, EVEN IF YOU YOURSELF

^(X) Use some common sense as well: if you have a fixation on doing a Science degree, and the best you could muster in Matric for Maths and Science were E or D squares, think again. I know at least 20 students from last year who are back this year at H.E., in another study direction. Lucky to have been taken back. Many not so.

CONSEQUENTLY GOING TO REQUIRE OF YOU, AND RECEIVE, SOME ENHANCED STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

IT IS SOMETIMES A USEFUL EXERCISE IN GETTING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE TO TALK A LITTLE ABOUT MONEY. YOUR RESIDENCE AND ACADEMIC FEES, ^{Book 2} AND OTHER INCIDENTAL EXPENSES ARE TYPICALLY GOING TO COST YOUR PARENTS OR YOUR BURSARY SPONSORS IN EXCESS OF ⁴ R3000 PER ANNUM, BUT THAT IS ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG IN TERMS OF WHAT IT REALLY COSTS TO KEEP THE UNIVERSITY OPERATING. IN ROUND FIGURES THE GROSS COST IS ^{of the order} ~~IN EXCESS OF~~ ^{approaching} ~~R24 000 000~~ ⁵ PER ANNUM, OR RATHER MORE THAN R2 000 000 PER MONTH. ON A PER STUDENT BASIS THIS WORKS OUT AT ABOUT ¹⁰ R8 000. THE ⁶ R5 000 BALANCE COMES FROM THE TAXPAYER, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT FROM DONORS. THERE IS

^E SOMETIMES A TENDENCY TO ASSUME THAT TAXPAYER'S MONEY IS FREE, LIKE THE AIR WE BREATHE. I HAVE OFTEN WISHED THAT THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT

of course that is not true: we are all taxpayers, if not as income tax payers. Then certainly as GST payers every time we purchase something at a shop. As the Americans say "I no such thing as a free lunch"

SUBSIDISE THE UNIVERSITIES AT ALL, BUT RATHER LEFT THEM TO RECOVER THE FULL OPERATING COSTS IN FEES. THE SUBSIDY MONEY COULD THEN GO TO THE PARENTS AS A LOAN, TO BE FORGIVEN *in whole or in part, depending on the student's degree of success.* IF THE STUDENT EVENTUALLY OBTAINED HIS DEGREE. THIS WOULD BRING HOME TO ALL CONCERNED THE TRUE STATE OF AFFAIRS. IT WOULD WONDERFULLY CONCENTRATE YOUR PARENT'S MINDS AND CONSEQUENTLY YOURS. ^(X) NOBODY WOULD THEN BE IN ANY DOUBT, LEAST OF ALL THE STUDENT, THAT HIS MAIN BUSINESS IS SERIOUS STUDY. HIS SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND SPORTING ACTIVITIES, HIS MUSINGS AS TO THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF THINGS AND HIS LAUDABLY MOTIVATED, BUT SOMETIMES NOT ALWAYS MATURELY CONCEIVED, ENDEAVOURS INSTANTLY TO CONVERT SOUTH AFRICA IN PARTICULAR, AND THE WORLD IN GENERAL, INTO A JUSTER AND MORE HARMONIOUS PLACE, WOULD THEN HAVE TO BE MANAGED WITHOUT DETRIMENT TO STUDY.

^(X) If you think this is an extravagant idea I know of a South African university which is to replace all its bursaries with loans of this kind

AUTHORITY. IN THESE HEADY DAYS OF ~~CONSTITUTION-MAKING~~ IT IS PERHAPS
TEMPTING TO QUESTION ALL AUTHORITY, WHETHER IT BE OF THE UNIVERSITY,
THE EMPLOYER, PARENTS OR THE STATE. SUCH QUESTIONING HAS A LONG AND
HONOURABLE HISTORY. WAS IT NOT THE EMINENT CAMBRIDGE^{19th C} HISTORIAN, LORD
ACTON, WHO SAID "POWER TENDS TO CORRUPT AND ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTS
ABSOLUTELY"? BEFORE WE GET TOO CARRIED AWAY IN THE INSULATED AND
COCOONED ATMOSPHERE OF UNIVERSITY LIFE IT IS AS WELL TO CONTEMPLATE
FOR A MOMENT A WORLD WITHOUT AUTHORITY. WOULD IT WORK? FOR BREVITY'S
SAKE LET US LET ONE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S BETTER KNOWN CONTEMPORARY POETS,
DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE, ANSWER THAT:- *in these words*

"IF ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTS,

WHAT OF THE ABSOLUTE ABSENCE OF POWER?

SURELY, BEFORE SOMETHING ERUPTS

(c)

Because a university is such an open society it is ~~are~~ vulnerable to disruption, serious turmoil or even destruction. This is no idle thought: we have numerous ^{examples of} educational institutions, even some near at hand, where precisely this has happened. Before you are tempted to lend your support, actively or passively to such pursuits, consider the attitude of a university, both staff and students, in strife-torn Ulster. In that ~~state~~ devastated community, the univ, with a 60:40 explosive Prot-Cath mixture has had no destruction of property or disruption, not even any boycotts or demonstrations. why? Because of the ^{responsible - on part of student+staff} conviction, that whatever finally emerges from the present Troubles, as they are euphemistically called, Ulster will need universities whose traditions of scholarship, educational standards and research, have not been eroded. The parallels with our situation are so obvious that they do not need to be emphasised.

(D) You may not be given another chance. Shakespeare's words from Julius Caesar have been quoted so often that perhaps they have lost some of their force but none of their truth:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune:

Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

Nothing is more pathetic than the letters I receive every year from students begging to be allowed back "I never realised how much work one had to do, right from the beginning". We haven't let many of those back, because then we should not have had room for some of you. Get cracking from day 1 of lectures, and to save yourself the futility and embarrassment of having to write that kind of letter,