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IN DEFENCE OF THE 'OPEN UNIVERSITY':
WITS UNIVERSITY, STUDENT POLITICS, AND UNIVERSITY APARTHEID

Introduction

In 1959 the Nationalist Government, after a decade in power, finally passed through Parliament legislation to impose apartheid on South Africa's university system. In protesting against the Government's proposals for university apartheid and an end to black access to the 'open universities', Wits and the University of Cape Town (UCT) demonstrated a high degree of solidarity, both in developing a united front on their respective campuses and coordinating action as between themselves. Two corporate protests, the first in the University's history, were organised by Wits against university apartheid; a march from Braamfontein to the City Hall in May 1957, and a general assembly in April 1959 to record the University's 'solemn protest' against the new legislation.

Wits continued thereafter to mount 'solemn protests' against the application of university apartheid. In April 1969, to mark the tenth anniversary of the Extension of University Education Act, the University staged a week of demonstrations, culminating in another general assembly. 'The events of Academic Freedom Week at Wits', Convocation Commentary proudly declared, 'showed that protest need not disrupt university life. That is the essential difference between student protest here and at some of the bigger institutions in Britain and the United States.'

For more critical observers, the formal protests at Wits were never more than symbolic.¹ The University otherwise fully acquiesced in the application of the Government's restrictions on black admissions--there was no attempt to challenge, defy, evade, or systematically undermine them--and had itself sought to curb radical dissent on campus. In the early fifties, those responsible for running the University's affairs were, apart from the Registrar Glyn Thomas, hostile to the 'leftists' in control of student politics, and in the defensive-minded atmosphere of the time believed that radical activists were positively endangering the 'open university' by inviting Government retribution. In 1955, under a new Principal, W.G. Sutton, a new constitution was imposed on the SRC both to clip its wings and put an end to left-wing dominance in student affairs. The expedient worked, and leadership of the SRC shifted decisively from radicals to 'moderates' and liberals.

When the Government nonetheless announced that it was proceeding with legislation for separate universities, Wits found itself obliged to take a political stand, and all constituencies within it came together to do so. 'Wits', the Witwatersrand Student commented in March 1957, 'is today a completely united front against apartheid.' No less a person than Eddie Roux, once a leading member of the Communist Party, was deeply impressed by

the protest march undertaken by staff as well as students; he could never previously 'have visualised an academic procession of staff and students through the streets of Johannesburg'.² The transfer of leadership from radicals to liberals in the SRC greatly facilitated the new spirit of co-operation against the Government, as did what Roux perceived as 'the steady growth of liberalism in the staff'.

Even so, the University stood absolutely powerless before a Government determined to get its own way. Once the Nationalist Government had decided on its formula for apartheid university structures, it simply brushed aside the case put forward by the 'open universities', and proceeded to legislate for separate universities. Again, there was never any real prospect that Wits and UCT might seek to defy the legislation of 1959. Not only was there a powerful tradition in the Wits administration that the law of the land should be scrupulously observed, but also the University was heavily dependent on the state for its finances. The Government, furthermore, made individual students, rather than the universities themselves, liable for prosecution for infringement of the law.

If the University was basically helpless to resist the imposition of university apartheid, it was within its power to articulate a cohesive defence of the 'liberal' university in an apartheid society. It failed to do this. The University's own position remained so riddled with compromises and contradictions that it was incapable of framing a compelling assertion of liberal values. As Sir Robert Birley chided Wits in his Chancellor's lecture of 1965, reminding it of the mistakes made by German universities in the Nazi era, the 'liberal' university could not expect to preserve 'academic freedom' if it simply stood by when freedom and justice were under attack outside its walls: 'I should say that a University today should be deeply concerned about the denial of justice beyond its own walls'.³ The Wits administration, had steadfastly refused to take up wider issues, and complained that students who did so were embroiling the University in 'politics'. In the final analysis, an inward-looking, defensive-minded University, primarily concerned about its own conscience, rooted its stand against university apartheid in the narrow concept of university autonomy. It was a concept that enabled it both to protest against enforced university segregation, and simultaneously continue its own practices of racial discrimination. In the parliamentary debates over the separate university legislation, Nationalist spokesmen revelled in the contradiction.

In the wake of the 1957 march, the liberals in control of the SRC, fully aware of the limitations and contradictions in the University's official standpoint, moved to articulate a philosophy of student involvement in the wider society based on liberal ideals, and to rid the University of its own discriminatory practices, but the University Council and administration refused to budge. The end result was that the

Nationalists, misguided as they were, managed to convey more of a vision for university education in South Africa than did the 'open universities'.

University apartheid

In retrospect, Nationalist Government policy-making on the universities went through two distinct phases. During Malan's premiership (1948-54) the 'intermingling' of the races at the 'open universities' served as the main Nationalist target, and the 'open universities' were increasingly subjected to Government threats and attack, culminating in the appointment of the Holloway Commission at the end of 1953 to investigate 'the practicability and financial implications of providing separate training facilities for Non-Europeans at universities'. During this phase there was some hesitation within the Government as to whether it could legitimately proceed against the 'open universities', and the Government itself lacked a firm scheme for establishing black university institutions. Following the fiasco of the Holloway Commission report, which suggested that the creation of separate university institutions was not financially feasible, and after Strijdom's accession to the premiership at the end of 1954, Government policy entered its second, more assertive phase. As Mary Beale has detected in her study of the evolution of the policy of university apartheid, there was a shift from a 'relatively open-minded investigation' to 'a more driven ideological approach'.⁴ The positive sense of ideological direction was provided by Verwoerd's Native Affairs Department, and more particularly by the Secretary for Native Affairs, Dr W.W.M. Eiselen. Eiselen, the son of the superintendent of the Berlin Missionary Society at Botshabelo in the Eastern Transvaal and a social anthropologist, had initially contemplated the creation of a single, large 'Bantu' university, but from the the Holloway Commission hearings onwards he consistently urged the case for a series of ethnically based universities.⁵ It was this scheme that was enacted in 1959.

By the end of the first phase of Government policy-making on university apartheid, all the major constituencies within Wits had come out in defence of the policy of 'academic non-segregation', but fundamental divisions between them prevented the formation of a united front. In the midst of the Holloway Commission hearings, a bruising battle was waged between the Principal and the Council on the one side and the SRC on the other. It was only after that battle had been decided, with the imposition in 1955 of a new constitution on the SRC, and with Government policy defined, that Wits came together in a truly united front, with a remarkable degree of co-operation emerging between the SRC, the staff, and the University authorities.

Wits and the Holloway Commission

The creation of the Holloway Commission coincided with a major change-over in the leadership of Wits, where Raikes retired as Principal and was succeeded by the engineer, Professor W.G. Sutton. Politically, Sutton was exceptionally conservative, and from Council's standpoint could be relied upon not to provoke the Government in any way. Later, as Wits moved from a hesitant defence of 'academic non-segregation' to a more affirmative assertion of the advantages of the 'open university', Sutton became more of a liability than an asset, and was in effect sidelined. The whole concept of 'protest' was alien to him, and anyhow he could not understand what all the fuss was about over preserving 'open' admissions to Wits when so few blacks actually attended the University. To his credit, when Council and Senate decided to make a stand, Sutton did not resist. He refused to lead the University's formal protests, but he did not obstruct them.

On the surface, the University appeared to close ranks in response to the appointment of the Holloway Commission; all the major constituencies within Wits rallied to the defence of its policy of 'academic non-segregation'. The initial focal point was Senate, which in making representations to Council engaged in its first fundamental debate on policy towards the admission of black students since the 1927 deliberations on black admissions to the Medical School. After a memorable debate in March 1954, Senate gave a decisive endorsement to the maintenance of 'academic non-segregation' at Wits, though not without first facing a major challenge from the right. In Senate there had always been a substantial minority who either believed there was inadequate segregation on campus, particularly in the classrooms, or who were opposed to the very notion of blacks at Wits. Professor Pierre de Villiers Pienaar, from 1944 head of the new Department of Phonetics and Logopedics, and Abel Coetzee, from 1947 Professor of Afrikaans Taalkunde en Volkskunde, were the only two self-acknowledged Nationalists in the Senate, but there were several other 'gloomy reactionaries', as one contemporary described them, who were basically hostile to the presence of black students at Wits. The most powerful was Professor J.C. Middleton Shaw, the long-standing Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry, who had successfully resisted all attempts to open up the Dental School to blacks. With the appointment of the Holloway Commission, Pienaar and Shaw took the lead in mobilising opposition in Senate to the continued presence of blacks at Wits. As they wrote to Sutton in February 1954, they were convinced that 'the continued admission to the University of non-European students is not in the interests of either the white or the non-European members of the community'.⁶

For two days Senate debated its position on 'academic non-segregation'. At the Senate meeting of 5 March Professor Errol Harris, the energetic new head of the Department of Philosophy, and Professor J.S. Marais, the head of the Department of History, a product of the Cape liberal tradition and a man of great integrity, led the attack on university apartheid.

Together they sponsored a motion which condemned discrimination in academic matters on racial grounds, and requested the Principal to convey Senate's views to the Council. The counter motion put forward by Shaw and Pienaar asserted that Senate was not in the position to advise Council or anyone else until so asked; in introducing the motion Shaw proclaimed it was time for the Senate to come down to 'earth--good, South African earth'. For the next meeting of 12 March Harris and Marais amended their motion to read that Senate held 'that the policy so far followed by the Council has been in keeping with academic principles, has promoted racial harmony and understanding and has won international prestige for the University'. Over the two days, 24 members of Senate, almost half the total, spoke their minds, with the proponents of the two motions evenly balanced; no one knew how the Senate as a whole would vote. In the end, Senate showed itself to be more liberal than generally anticipated; it adopted the Harris/Marais motion and defeated that of Shaw and Pienaar by 24 votes to 10.⁷

The SRC, for its part, under Dan Goldstein, a medical student and a socialist, had resolved at a special meeting on 24 February not to submit 'technical evidence' to the Holloway Commission on the grounds that the commission was simply 'part of the machinery being assembled by the Government for the abolition of the open Universities'. It did, however, agree to submit a detailed statement of its attitude to the commission, and committed itself to co-operating with other universities and NUSAS 'in fighting for academic freedom'.⁸

The committee appointed by Council to prepare the University's submissions to the Holloway Commission treaded through a series of minefields to produce a full endorsement of the University's overall policy of 'academic non-segregation and social segregation'. The committee's memorandum, accepted by Council at its meeting of 23 April 1954, represented Wits not so much as an 'open university' but more as a 'European' university that admitted a limited number of black students. In all, the memorandum contended, Wits, while successfully maintaining its predominantly 'European' character, was able to offer its black students a range and standard of facilities that could not be paralleled in a system of separate facilities, whether within the University or in separate institutions.⁹

While Council, Senate, the SRC, and also the Lecturers' Association and Convocation, all moved to defend the policy of 'academic non-segregation' in response to the appointment of the Holloway Commission, there was no real closing of the ranks; Council made it quite clear that it alone was responsible for policy. The consensus that existed was for Wits to continue to admit black students; thereafter the questions of quotas for admission to the Medical School, social segregation on campus, and the overall strategy to be adopted towards the Government remained divisive issues between, on the one hand, Council and the Principal, and on the other, the SRC, with some support from the executive of Convocation.

Sutton and the SRC

Sutton's blunt, uncompromising approach in dealing with the SRC accentuated the divisions, and caused outright conflict. As Sutton perceived the problem, an important part of his responsibility was to crack down on the 'leftists' in control of student politics. In his own eyes, they had got quite out of hand in Raikes' last years, attacking the authority of the Principal, the Council, and the University as a whole, and dragging the University into the political arena.¹⁰ Left-wing students, for their part, quickly came to see Sutton as a reactionary intent on pushing the University into toeing the Government line.

With the official demise of the Communist Party of South Africa, the 'hard' left at Wits when Sutton took over belonged to the Congress Alliance. For whites, this meant membership of the South African Congress of Democrats (COD), a small but highly vocal organisation founded in 1953 as the white arm in the Congress Alliance, in partnership with the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress, and the South African Coloured People's Organisation. Bob Hepple, who became SRC President at the end of 1954, was simultaneously chairman of the youth section of COD and of the Students' Liberal Association (SLA), with the latter providing prominent figures in the Congress Alliance with a ready forum on campus. Ruth Baranov, a pivotal figure as correspondence secretary in Hepple's SRC, was likewise a COD member. Though the left and liberals continued to work with each other on the SRC, with the left in control of the executive, the SLA itself had effectively ceased to represent a broad left/liberal alliance and had become instead a narrow sectarian sect. For Sutton, the left's continued predominance in the SRC executive, and its sectarian activism on campus, were anathema. Furthermore, he had developed a strong personal antipathy to the 'leftists' on the SRC for the 'utter cheek' they displayed in dealing with University authority. On one occasion he rebuked Hepple: 'You are giving me lip'. Hepple retorted: 'I have been mandated to give you lip'.¹¹

Sutton's determined efforts to assert the authority of the Principal and Council over University affairs led to immediate clashes with the SRC over 'Non-European' admissions to the Medical School and seating in the Great Hall. In response to the SRC's own investigations into clinical facilities available to the Medical School, which indicated that many more 'Non-Europeans', Chinese as well as Africans, Indians, and 'Coloureds', could be admitted than the new quota system allowed, Sutton bluntly asserted that 'the University could not face a situation, under present conditions, where a considerable number of European applicants of desirable quality would have to be turned away, to allow of places being allotted to an increasing

number of Non-Europeans'.¹² For Goldstein's SRC, Sutton's standpoint represented a 'radical change in University policy', but this the Principal simply denied.¹³ More damaging to relations was Sutton's revocation of the compromise arrangement worked out by the SRC and Raikes over seating in the Great Hall for performances open to the public. When approached by the SRC to continue the arrangement, which permitted integrated seating in certain blocs, Sutton made it clear that while the SRC might have found the compromise 'eminently satisfactory', its permanent adoption by the University was not 'a mere formality'. It was for Council, not the SRC to decide, and at its meeting of 26 February 1954 Council decided otherwise.¹⁴

The situation now became polarised. At the annual general meeting of the student body at the end of March, the motion which called on Council to revert to the compromise scheme that Raikes had allowed, and furthermore instructed all student societies and clubs not to make use of the Great Hall for segregated functions, was passed by the relatively small margin of 368 votes to 288. Not all societies were willing to comply. The Choral Society, scheduled to put on a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Ruddigore' in the Great Hall, protested vigorously against 'this subordination of cultural activities to political ideology' and on the Principal's advice determined to proceed in defiance of the SRC's threat to withdraw recognition and financial support from the society. At its meeting of 23 April 1954 Council endorsed the Principal's position. For Council, the SRC's threatened action against the Choral Society brought to a head the whole issue of its powers and legal standing in the University; in challenging seating arrangements in the Great Hall the SRC was challenging 'the authority which the Council and Principal are empowered to exercise in the University'. Council consequently instructed its constitution committee to 'proceed forthwith' with the preparation of a new statutory constitution for the SRC; in the interim, the SRC was to function by Council's sufferance, and was subjected to the 'unimpeded authority' of the Principal, who, as the SRC was informed, was empowered to veto any of its decisions and suspend or cancel any provision of its constitution.¹⁵

With such threats hanging over the SRC, the Choral Society went ahead with the opening night of 'Ruddigore' (or 'Ruddibore' as it was satirised) on 29 May in a half-empty Great Hall, largely devoid of students in the audience. At interval a shower of pamphlets greeted the theatre-goers as they moved into the foyer, but Sutton deemed this only a 'slight evasion' rather than an outright defiance of his order prohibiting any demonstrations.¹⁶ The question of seating in the Great Hall was thereafter subsumed in the wider struggle over the constitutional position and rights of the SRC.

At an agitated meeting on 2 June Goldstein's SRC sanctioned a series of motions asserting 'the autonomous rights of the student body' and protesting the Principal's 'flagrant' encroachment on the freedom of students to express their views freely about

student affairs. Uproar resulted when these motions were put before a packed general meeting of the student body in the Great Hall in mid-June, and a riot of 'catastrophic dimensions' threatened when a member of the SRC executive, Sydney Shall, leapt off the stage to deal with a heckler.¹⁷ The meeting was ultimately adjourned until after the vacation.

When a special general meeting of the student body was again summoned on 10 August, Goldstein put before it a more considered SRC motion. By 186 votes to 89, the thinly attended meeting 'respectfully' requested that in drafting the new SRC statute, Council should allow the SRC to remain subject to instructions given by general meetings of the student body, to express its views freely on any matter relating to the student body, and to have full control over its finances. To assist the Council in its work the SRC submitted its own draft for a statutory constitution.¹⁸

In 1952 Parliament had amended the University's Private Act and the Wits SRC, at its own behest, had become the first in the country to be granted statutory recognition. The Act now provided for an SRC, elected by the students of the University; its composition, mode of election, powers, duties, and privileges were to be prescribed in the University's statutes and regulations. Following the fracas with the SRC over the Choral Society, Council proceeded on its own accord to prepare the relevant statute for the SRC, and it went into operation in 1955, ironically the golden jubilee year of the foundation of the SRC, in the face of concerted efforts by the SRC to have it blocked at both the ministerial and parliamentary levels. Under the headline 'SRC Strangled!', Witwatersrand Student declared that the new statute provided for a 'puppet' SRC 'subservient in every way to the University authorities'.¹⁹

In campaigning for statutory recognition the SRC had seen it as a device for enhancing its power and status within the University; in the hands of Council statutory recognition became an instrument for curbing and controlling the SRC. The new statute, which was prepared by Professor G.H.L. Le May, head of the Department of Local Government, on behalf of Council's constitution committee, prescribed the SRC's subservience to Council and the Principal; it laid down that the SRC was to discharge its functions in conformity not with resolutions of the student body but with the policy and decisions of Council, and that the Principal, acting on behalf of Council, was empowered to restrain the SRC from any course of action, and to restrain or direct the use of SRC funds. Council itself was empowered to terminate the period of office of the SRC, to appoint officers to administer its affairs, and to order new elections.²⁰ In the regulations, Le May's initial provision was for the entire SRC to be elected through a system of proportional representation in a single University-wide constituency; the intention of this was to undermine the position of the radicals in the SRC, particularly by putting an end to the left-wing bloc returned by the Medical School. Following protests by the SRC, Council's constitution

committee agreed to each faculty, irrespective of size, possessing one representative on the SRC, but the remaining members were all to be returned in a University-wide election based on the single transferable vote system of proportional representation.²¹

Under the presidency of Hepple, now a law student, the 1954/5 SRC, the last elected under the old system, waged a sustained campaign to block the adoption and application of the new statute and constitution for the SRC. Its campaign culminated in the organisation of an anti-statute petition, signed by over 2 000 students, for submission to Parliament; due to a mix-up the petition was not submitted before the legal time-limit for Parliament to disapprove the statute lapsed. The statute thereupon acquired the force of law, prompting a major protest rally at the swimming pool, at which a Manifesto of Student Rights prepared by the SRC and the faculty councils was adopted.²² In a final effort to block the statute, the SRC secured legal opinion challenging its validity, but Council's own legal opinion held that the statute was completely valid. At its meeting of 1 July 1955 Council duly resolved that 'the body hitherto known as the SRC' would be dissolved on 15 August, that its members would continue to administer the funds and affairs standing in its name until 30 September, and that Professor Le May would take responsibility for organising elections for the statutory SRC. As a final gesture of defiance, Hepple's SRC declined to assist at its own execution, and Council consequently appointed a committee of the Principal, Vice-Principal, and Professors MacCrone and Richards to administer the affairs of the old SRC.²³

Despite denouncing the new statutory SRC as a 'puppet' designed to administer student affairs on behalf of the authorities, an inter-faculty meeting of councils called by the SRC decided to participate in the elections for faculty representatives on the SRC on 15 August 'on the strict understanding that by doing so they were in no way condoning the new SRC'. At the same time it was decided that there should also be an organisation 'capable of fully representing students', and at a general meeting of students on 11 August it was consequently resolved to establish a Witwatersrand University Students' Association to uphold, defend, and advance the rights of students at Wits.²⁴ The upshot was three sets of elections; faculty elections for the SRC on 15 August, off-campus elections, as a consequence of a University ban, for the new association on 8 September, and single constituency elections for the SRC on 28 September.

The new SRC, which was returned in elections in which 40 per cent of the student body participated, differed in several fundamental respects from its predecessors. With the abolition of representatives from the residences, there was, for the first time since 1945, no African on the SRC, and Ada Bloomberg was the solitary female until later joined by Isadora Finn. While several radical stalwarts, including Hepple, Shall, and Ismail

Mohammed, a brilliant debater who dazzled at general meetings, were elected, control of the SRC now passed to the liberals and the 'moderates', and the centre of gravity in student politics shifted decisively from the Medical School to Milner Park. Chris Rachanis, a long-standing chairman of the All Sports Council, which over the years had built up a powerful resentment at the 'politicisation' of the SRC and its control over funding for sports clubs, became the first dental student since the war to serve as SRC President.

The first act of the new SRC was to instal a liberal editorial board for the Witwatersrand Student, with the appointment of Magnus Gunther and Johnathan Suzman as editors; in their first number for 1956 they proclaimed that the SRC had finally 'escaped from the Marxist morass'.²⁵ Not only had the a-political centre welcomed an end to the era of left-wing control of the SRC, but so too had an increasingly assertive liberal grouping, which was determined to change the student political culture at Wits. The University Students' Association, prohibited from using the designation Witwatersrand, was banned from the campus by Council, and soon evaporated for lack of resources.

For radicals on campus, the imposition of Council's constitution on the SRC represented yet another instalment in the University's capitulation to Government pressure. 'Submitting completely to Government pressure', the Witwatersrand Student, edited by Hepple, Stanley Trapido, and R.W. Harvey, commented on 8 September 1955, 'the authorities have made it their declared intention to suppress all attempts to retain inner-University democracy.' No doubt, growing Nationalist criticism of the 'open universities', and Wits in particular, as 'hotbeds' of political subversion, intensified the traditional concern of the University's Principal and Council about the 'politicisation' of the campus, but their aversion to 'the left' had also acquired its own dynamic. It was a dynamic also evident in liberal relations with 'the left' in the wider society and in the student body.

1953 had seen the formation of a series of new political groupings in South Africa, notably the South African Communist Party (SACP) as an underground organisation, the South African Congress of Democrats, and the Liberal Party. The fundamental principle of the latter was non-racialism, but from the outset it was powerfully anti-Communist as well as anti-apartheid. The Liberal Party's declared opposition to 'all forms of totalitarianism such as fascism and communism' ensured a hostile relationship between it and COD, which was widely perceived as a Communist 'front'.²⁶ Given that the differences between liberals and the left had now been organisationally defined at the national level, their relationship in student politics acquired a new edge. A new generation of student leaders, at UCT as well as Wits, belonged to the Liberal Party, and they were as intent on politicising students, and mobilising them against apartheid, as were the left. Increasingly well organised, they were also

intent on asserting their leadership in student politics. As before, liberals and the left would co-operate on a wide range of issues, but the reins of student power and the public platform on campus would now be controlled, in the main, by the liberals.²⁷

The 'Open Universities' Campaign in 1957

So far from leading, as Hepple's SRC had fore-warned, to a long-term embitterment of relations within the University, the imposition of the new SRC constitution resulted in their improvement; the changover in the leadership of the SRC from the radicals to the 'moderates' and the liberals considerably facilitated a closing of the ranks as Government policy-making on university apartheid moved into its second, more assertive phase. While strains continued to manifest themselves from time to time, the new SRC leadership showed itself both anxious and able to work with the University authorities and the academic staff in a way not before evident; a major premium was now placed on constructing a united front against the Government. A closing of the ranks was also facilitated by subtle changes in the University's own leadership. Following the death of P.M. Anderson at the end of 1954, the liberals on Council, headed by the Chancellor, Richard Feetham, played a more assertive role, with Sutton allowing himself to be sidelined in political matters, displaced by Professor I.D. MacCrone as the longest serving Senate member of Council. Temperamentally unsuited to the politics of protest, Sutton kept to himself, permitting Feetham and MacCrone to serve as the University's spokesmen as Wits entered into the untrodden territory of official protest against Government policy.

For relations within the student body, the important feature was that the left did not mount a sustained rearguard action against the new SRC regime. Although deprived of its position of leadership, the left effectively decided to work within rather than against the new SRC; in so doing it helped to ensure that the changeover in leadership was not accompanied by profound changes in the SRC's agenda.

How the first statutory SRC, under Chris Rachanis, would handle the question of university apartheid was soon put to the test with the Government's announcement in November 1955 that it had appointed an inter-departmental committee to inquire into the establishment of separate university facilities. Initially, Rachanis' SRC floundered over how to respond, but by the beginning of the 1956 academic year it had come down heavily in favour of a motion to 'reaffirm the traditional policy of academic non-segregation' and to protest against the Government's intention to implement university segregation. The motion was duly carried by 614 votes to 15 at the annual general meeting of students.²⁸

With the election of the next SRC in September 1956, the liberals were basically in the ascendant; the new President, Mike Kimberley, was a 'moderate' from the Law School who allowed his

liberal colleagues to make the running. Both in NUSAS and on the Wits campus, the liberals were by now well organised, and poised to sustain a wide-ranging national campaign in protest against the idea of university apartheid. Their leaders, Wentzel and Neville Rubin at UCT, and Magnus Gunther at Wits, were all members of the Liberal Party, with the charismatic Wentzel the central figure as President of NUSAS. Wentzel was the intellectual strategist, Rubin the master organiser and tactician, and Gunther the energetic mobiliser. At its annual meeting in July 1956, held in Pietermaritzburg, the NUSAS Assembly adopted the resolutions that signalled it was moving into top gear as an organisation to co-ordinate protest against Government plans to impose university apartheid; it resolved that NUSAS should give a new priority to its national academic freedom campaign, bringing together as many groups as possible, and the SRCs of Wits and UCT were both requested to set up standing committees on university autonomy.²⁹

At Wits, an academic freedom campaign was duly launched on 13 September, immediately after the SRC elections, with the outgoing SRC President, Chris Rachanis, chairing a mass meeting of 1 300 students at the swimming pool. By an overwhelming majority the meeting, on the motion of Gunther, 'instructed' the incoming SRC executive to make arrangements for a 'symbolic protest' against university apartheid by way of the cancellation of lectures for an hour, or alternatively non-attendance at lectures for an hour.³⁰ The 'instruction' from the student body immediately put the new SRC statute to the test. The Acting Principal, Professor I.D. MacCrone, promptly vetoed it, and warned the SRC that any protest action would be in breach of University discipline, leading to disciplinary measures. In defiance of MacCrone's ruling, the 'boycott' of classes nevertheless went ahead on Wednesday 19 September, with an ad hoc group of some 600 students taking responsibility for it. In all, about 1 000 students congregated for an hour on the Great Hall steps. This was followed by a mass meeting in the Great Hall, which rapidly degenerated into what the Rand Daily Mail described as 'a noisy farce', with a rowdy group of mainly engineering students at the back of the hall hurling abuse at the speakers, who included the Bishop of Johannesburg, the Right Reverend Ambrose Reeves. 'When I was called to mediate in the Liverpool dock strike', the Bishop expostulated, 'I never saw such disgraceful behaviour, even from dockers'.³¹

On the face of it, Wits student politics had returned to the 'morass' of cleavage and conflict, but in reality the trajectory was very different, moving towards the creation of a new united front at Wits against university apartheid. Gunther's motion of 13 September, designed to appeal to a range of constituencies, had also called for a co-ordinated programme to arouse 'national' opinion in defence of academic freedom and to ensure 'the fullest possible co-operation of the staff'. Some 70 staff members responded by signing a petition to MacCrone in support of the students' 'symbolic protest'. As MacCrone made evident in his

reply he was by no means unsympathetic to the students, but on academic grounds he was 'strongly averse' to any disruption of the regular University routine. More importantly, he confided, he considered that the actions of the students were likely to embarrass the University's Council in its dealings with the Government. He had himself been giving 'some thought' as to how the Council should act, and had concluded that Wits and UCT should work together to prepare for any likely 'show down' with the Government. They should first send a joint deputation to see the Minister to ascertain exactly what the Government had in mind and to make representations; should the Minister fail to heed them a 'show down' would follow. 'And only after such a "show down", he contended, 'would the appropriate time have arrived, in my opinion, for a strong public statement or protest on the part of the two Universities jointly--a statement which would then have all the greater effect in the light of our record.'³²

With the threat to the 'open universities' becoming more immediate--in mid-September Verwoerd's announced that legislation to enforce university apartheid would be introduced in the 'very next session of Parliament'--what MacCrone was signalling was his determination to ensure an inclusive stand by the two 'open universities'.³³ That was precisely the goal that the new SRC and its Academic Freedom Committee were aiming at. Headed by Gunther and Ada Bloomberg, a COD member, the Academic Freedom Committee was specifically set up to politicise students against university apartheid, and to mobilise their protest action, by way of placard demonstrations outside the City Hall, the Railway Station, and at Clarendon Circle, and other such newsworthy ventures. But the intention all along was that protest action should not be confined to students. The goal, which was ultimately realised, was to build up a University-wide consensus for a collective protest, which would be far more dramatic in its impact than any purely student protest. In this process MacCrone proved a pivotal figure. With Sutton on the sidelines, MacCrone emerged as the key link between Council and Senate on the one hand and students on the other, developing a powerful rapport with the students themselves. Where student leaders, liberals as well as those on the left, went beyond MacCrone was in their recognition that protest against university apartheid was not an end in itself but part of a wider campaign against the apartheid regime. 'The defence of learning in South Africa', the Witwatersrand Student, edited by Ada Bloomberg, declared, 'is simultaneously a campaign to arouse public opinion against the Nationalist Government and the evils it has wrought.'³⁴

Verwoerd's announcement in mid-September served to galvanise every constituency within the University, with the academic staff taking a particular lead. The whole experience of the 1950s, together with the increasing recruitment of Wits graduates to the staff, had given the academic staff an altogether more liberal leaning, and this was a process the campaign against university apartheid was to intensify. The Lecturers' Association set up an Open Universities Vigilance Committee, and under its auspices a

statement in support of the maintenance of the 'open universities' collected over 250 signatures from members of the academic staff, including almost two-thirds of the professors.³⁵ Professor G.H.L. Le May and Anne Welsh at Milner Park, and Dr Phillip Tobias at Medical School, were the key figures in organising the petition, a precedent for which had been set in 1955 when 68 Wits staff members supported 13 Pretoria University academics in declaring their outrage against the Government's packing of the Upper House of Parliament. On 16 October the Vigilance Committee sponsored a meeting of representatives from the Senate, Lecturers' Association, Convocation, the SRC, and the SMC to form the Open Universities Liaison Committee to co-ordinate protest action and to organise co-operation with UCT.³⁶ Accompanying these moves, a special meeting of Council was summoned, and it agreed to ask the Minister of Education, Arts and Science to receive a deputation 'to discuss the admission of Non-European students to this University'. Dr F.E. Kanthack, Anderson's successor as chairman of Council, Sutton, and MacCrone constituted the deputation.³⁷ When the Minister made it clear to the deputation that the Government intended to legislate for university apartheid in the forthcoming session of Parliament, Council agreed to the UCT Council proposal that the two universities should stage a joint conference in early 1957 'with the object of producing a reasoned statement of our belief in the value of open Universities in South Africa'.³⁸

Within Council, Sutton was evidently greatly perturbed about the prospect of the University itself being drawn into protest politics, but Feetham and MacCrone insisted on the need for the University to register a 'dignified' but 'emphatic' protest against legislation that would prohibit Wits from admitting black students. For them the essential autonomy and freedom of the University was at issue; in the oft-repeated phrase of Dr T.B. Davie, the former Principal of UCT, 'the four essential freedoms' of a university--'to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to to study'--were at stake. Having witnessed the Nationalist juggernaut in action in removing 'Coloured' voters from the common roll, those in Council and on the academic staff who urged a principled stand held few illusions about their ability to force the Government to retreat. Professor J.S. Marais, as chairman of the Open Universities Liaison Committee, conceded there was no prospect of victory, but the principle could not be allowed to go by default.³⁹

The opposition to the Government's legislative proposals to enforce academic apartheid proved wide-ranging. It encompassed all the English-medium universities; NUSAS, which drummed up massive international support and which was re-joined by Fort Hare SRC in the belief that it was 'the most urgent need of the day...for students of different races and political beliefs to unite to fight the University Apartheid Bill'; the ANC, which denounced the 'intellectual kraals' the Government was designing for blacks; the parliamentary Opposition, which engaged in a

'dogged' defence of the 'open universities' in the second reading debate of the Separate University Education Bill in late May 1957; and the Black Sash, which staged a vigil outside Parliament. The two 'open universities' themselves, co-operating with one another for the first time on an issue of significance, demonstrated a remarkable degree of solidarity.

The highlight of their co-operation was the organisation of a joint conference, consisting mainly of senior academics and representatives of the two Councils, in Cape Town in January 1957; its outcome was the book The Open Universities in South Africa. Compiled before the details of the Government's legislative proposals were known, the book was essentially a defence of the concept and role of the 'open universities' in South Africa, and a declaration that the 'legislative enforcement of academic segregation on racial lines' represented 'an unwarranted interference with university autonomy and academic freedom'. The analytical focus was on the losses that the 'closing' of the two 'open universities' would entail for the country as a whole as well as the universities themselves, but basically it amounted to little more than a plea that Wits and UCT should be allowed to continue as before. While the book recognised that 'the crux of the matter' was that apartheid was being forced on the universities by legislation as 'an integral part of an over-all policy', an extended critique of that policy, and the threats it posed to freedom more generally, was studiously avoided. Again, while the virtues of racially mixed universities and academic freedom were extolled, the book's guiding principle was university autonomy; there should be no more compulsion on 'closed universities' to become 'open' than on 'open universities' to become 'closed'. It was all a matter of 'free choice'. Published by the Witwatersrand University Press at the end of February, the book was given extensive coverage in the English-medium press.

Following the Cape Town conference, Council set up its own Open Universities Liaison Committee to maintain contact with UCT and to advise Council on future action; its members were Feetham, Sutton, and the University's representatives to the conference. With the publication in early March of the first draft of the Separate University Education Bill, the committee swung into action.⁴⁰ The resolution prepared by the committee, and approved by Council at its meeting on 25 March for submission to the Minister, not only protested against the Bill's interference with the University's autonomy, but also subjected the proposed new university colleges for blacks to scathing attack. They were dismissed as inadequate, and the Government's draconian measures for their control represented as an insult to the very notion of a university. Feetham, Sutton, Glyn Thomas, and MacCrone were deputised to see the Minister, and authorised at their discretion to publish Council's resolution after their interview. The preparation of a petition to the Speaker and House of Assembly was also approved, and authority given to release to the press the resolution passed by a special general meeting of academic

staff held on 22 March condemning the draft Bill as 'an attack, unparalleled in the history of South Africa, upon University autonomy and academic freedom'. At the annual general meeting of students on 15 March, a motion rejecting the Bill had likewise been passed, by 524 votes to 74, and during the Academic Freedom Week that followed MacCrone addressed some 2 000 students on the implications of the Bill.

To symbolise the unity of the University in opposing the Separate University Education Bill, a well-orchestrated corporate academic protest, the first of its kind in South Africa, was staged on Wednesday 22 May, on the eve of the second reading debate in the House of Assembly. With the formal blessing of Senate, which cancelled classes for the occasion, it took the form of a solemn procession of protest, with well over 2 000 Council members, academic staff, students, and members of Convocation marching six abreast, in their gowns and university blazers, from the University to the City Hall behind a single banner: 'Against Separate Universities Bill'. According to the Transvaler, some 100 of the students in the march were 'Natives, Coloureds, Indians and Chinese'. Sutton, who had an especial distaste for protest marches, did not participate, but he addressed the procession before it set out. At the City Hall it was addressed by MacCrone. 'Let no one have the temerity or be so foolish as to dismiss this public demonstration as a mere futile gesture', he declared. 'It has cost all of us real effort to engage in this kind of public demonstration.' He added: 'We shall obey the law when it becomes the law but we will never accept it. We will continue to maintain our claim to be an open university, whatever changes may be enforced upon us by law.'⁴¹ Similar protest marches by Fort Hare and UCT followed.

On campus, the remorseless nature of the protest campaign against university apartheid had at times threatened to prove counter-productive, with attendances at meetings flagging in April, but the two major set-pieces, the march and the petition to Parliament, received enormous support. In the view of the Academic Freedom Committee of the SRC, the campaign initiated in September of the previous year had, for the time being, reached a fitting climax with the march, and it was held to be at least indirectly responsible for the Government's decision to postpone enactment of the separate universities legislation, referring the 'administrative aspects' of the measure to a Select Commission.⁴²

1959

In August 1958, after the University's evidence to the Select Commission had been entirely ignored, the new Minister for Education, Arts and Science, Dr M.D.C. de Wet Nel, introduced the redrafted and renamed Extension of University Education Bill in Parliament. In all quarters, it was accepted that its passage was only a matter of time, with the Government even beginning building operations for the new university colleges before the Bill was passed. Council's response to the new Bill was to

decide to close the University for a morning during the second or third reading and stage a general assembly to re-affirm the University's adherence to the cause of the 'open university'.⁴³ In contrast to the march through the streets of Johannesburg in demonstration against the Separate University Education Bill, the University's corporate protest against its successor was to be an entirely internal affair: a general assembly staged in the Great Hall as a symbolic statement of principle.

For the student leadership, the continuing protest against university apartheid was inevitably far more wide-ranging and ambitious than that. Through NUSAS, the SRC was linked into both a national and an international campaign of protest; NUSAS again went to great lengths to drum up international support, in the effort to bring international pressure to bear on the Government and reassure the English-medium universities that they were by no means isolated in their protest. Domestically, the chief intent of the Academic Freedom Committee, chaired by Clive Rosendorff in 1958 and Saul Bastomsky in 1959, was to politicise students against apartheid and the whole principle of racial segregation. At Wits, some of the old fractures between student leaders and the University authorities consequently again showed up. As the apartheid screw tightened, and as they moved to give expression to their own principles of non-racialism, the liberals in control of the SRC adopted positions and a programme of action not unlike those advocated by the left at the beginning of the decade. While uniting with Council and Senate in the defence of university autonomy against invasion by the state, the student leadership parted company in seeking to mobilise political opposition to the apartheid regime itself and in challenging the practices of racial discrimination within the University, notably the quota system in the Medical School, the exclusion of blacks from the Dental School, and the overall policy of social segregation.

Following the University's protest march of May 1957, and with a view to catering for the return of Fort Hare to NUSAS, the SRC clarified and codified its position on student involvement in political matters by adopting a motion prepared by Gunther and Henry Eigalis, a politically important 'moderate' on the SRC. The omnibus motion was designed to cater for a range of constituencies, but at its heart was the declaration that the SRC opposed the Government's whole policy of apartheid. After declaring its attachment to the idea of a truly 'democratic' system of education and to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and affirming that the SRC should engage only in those aspects of life that had particular reference to the student, the motion asserted that education could not be separated from the society in which it took place; consequently the SRC declared its opposition to the policy of apartheid as it rendered impossible any democratic system of education in the country. Nevertheless, the motion continued, the SRC would continue to refrain from identifying with any political movement or party and would 'play its role in the total

life of the community by defending and seeking to implement all factors relating to the basic principle of academic freedom and academic equality'. While including a clear statement of opposition to apartheid, the motion contained several qualifications to mollify those who thought the SRC was venturing well beyond the legitimate arena of student involvement. For the left, it was precisely these qualifications that undermined the efficacy of the motion, and a more radical formulation was proposed by Ada Bloomberg and Ismail Mahomed affirming that 'Under conditions such as prevail in South Africa, student activities cannot be restricted solely to the University but must be directed also against all discriminatory racial measures in South Africa'. With the defeat of their amendment by 10 votes to 6, the left was sufficiently approving of the original motion to allow it to be carried 16-0, 3 members abstaining. In effect, the Gunther/Eigalis motion represented the ultimate liberal statement of the fifties on student participation in politics, and at the annual NUSAS Congress in Cape Town in July 1957 it was adopted, with some modification, as the official NUSAS standpoint. It was a formula that allowed NUSAS to reincorporate Fort Hare in its ranks and ward off suggestions emanating from nationalist-minded African students at Wits for the formation of a National Union of African Students, as well as to retain the more conservative elements in its support.⁴⁴

As Kimberley's protege, the strongly Catholic Gunther was installed as SRC President following the September 1957 elections, and under him the SRC moved to challenge the operation of the quota system at the Medical School, the exclusion of blacks from the Dental School, and social segregation on campus. While the University's Council centred its case against the enforcement of university apartheid on the principle of university autonomy, the SRC advanced more positive notions of academic freedom, the elimination of discrimination in the university sphere, and the development of a 'democratic' system of education.

The attack on Council's long-standing policy of social segregation was launched in September 1958, immediately after the Government had introduced its new Extension of University Education Bill in the House of Assembly. On 9 September, on the motion of Gunther and Richard Goldstone, the SRC voted 15-0 to set up a five-man commission, under Goldstone's chairmanship, to investigate all forms of segregation at the University. It was a move that infuriated Sutton and MacCrone. As they made clear in meetings with the SRC executive, they deemed it tactically wrong to provoke white opinion at a critical juncture in the University's fight to retain its 'open' status, and they totally disapproved of the commission's approach to individual members of Senate to comment on Council's policy. With regard to the operation of the quota system in the Medical School, the University administration bluntly refused to provide the detailed information requested by the Students' Medical Council, which had been deputed to look into the matter. The

Registrar, Mr A. de V. Herholdt, curtly advised the SMC that he was not prepared to discuss the University's admissions policy with any student organisation.⁴⁵

At a time when a premium was placed on maintaining a united front against the Government's plans for university apartheid, the SRC's challenge to the University's own policies of discrimination was clearly divisive. What the challenge reflected was the growing impatience of the SRC liberals at the compromises and contradictions inherent in the University's position, and also a growing irritation at what they considered was an unimaginative, reactionary administration in the hands of Sutton and Herholdt.

As already manifest in the Holloway Commission Report, and in the debates over the Separate Universities Bill, the University's own discriminatory practices opened it up to the charges of inconsistency and hypocrisy; when not accusing Wits of promoting social equality among the races, Nationalist spokesmen denounced the University for its hypocrisy in discriminating against blacks and denying them the full benefits of student life. In its treatment of the Wits protest march of May 1957, the Transvaler had skilfully played on both themes.⁴⁶ Fort Hare's intervention at the 1958 NUSAS Congress, furthermore, had brought it home to the SRC that defence of the principle of university autonomy was in itself problematic; complete autonomy meant that universities were then free to practice discrimination, as was indeed the case at all South African universities, Wits included. The standpoint adopted in the SRC position paper prepared by Gunther's successor, John Shingler, and Richard Goldstone, was that the Wits SRC's policy 'has been and is now' that universities had the right to decide, in terms of their autonomy, who should be taught, but that no such decision should be made on the basis of race, religion or sex.⁴⁷

While the SRC's challenge to discrimination and segregation at Wits proved highly divisive, the proposal from two of its members, Hendrik Smit and Neville Cook, to allow the Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB) to establish a branch on campus was exploited by the liberals on the SRC to unify student support behind them. At an emergency meeting on 6 June, the SRC agreed to put to a referendum the motion: 'This student body, in terms of traditional policy, is of the opinion that the Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB), because it is not open to all students irrespective of language, colour or creed, should not be permitted to have a branch on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand'. As in all their dealings with the ASB, the Wits liberals presented it as a thoroughly racist body, and at the subsequent referendum of 17 June the motion was overwhelmingly approved. From the standpoint of the liberals, the notion that Wits students stood solid in their opposition to racialism had been fully endorsed; in the view of the Transvaler, the ban on the ASB was another example of intolerance and hypocrisy at Wits.⁴⁸

By resorting to the device of a referendum, the SRC quite consciously avoided the prospect of a stormy mass meeting on the issue of ASB recognition. Because of the rowdiness that often accompanied mass meetings, the SRC had become wary of staging them. At the annual general meeting of students in the Great Hall on 11 March 1958, at which 'a gigantic clique of jeering engineers' demonstrated their 'notoriety at all such gatherings', the SRC was unable even to put its motion affirming full support for the pro-Western International Student Conference--an embarrassment that thoroughly amused the left. For the beginning of the 1959 academic year a special meeting of the student body was summoned, to be addressed by Professor Phillip Tobias. With the Great Hall crammed to overflowing, and a noisy crowd at the back heckling and hurling toilet rolls, two motions were carried by overwhelming margins. The one reiterated the student body's opposition to the 'proposed closing of Wits'; the other condemned 'the nefarious activities of a former student of this University, who informed the Security Branch of the South African Police of the bona fide activities and ideas of students, expressed both in public and private conversation'.⁴⁹

The effect of the notorious 'blonde spy' affair was to give an additional edge to the student campaign against the Extension of University Education Bill, but also to inject a new element of anxiety into student politics. Ever since the Nationalists had taken power in 1948 the police had monitored protest action by Wits students--at demonstrations, police cameramen were frequently more prominent than those from the press--and such intimidatory tactics were undoubtedly effective; they made students wary about participating in public protests, fearing in the main that police identification would lead to the loss of their passports. In September 1957 the confession of a Rhodes University student that he had supplied the Security Branch with information about the political activities of staff and students raised a new spectre; that a network of police spies was operating at the English-medium universities. The discovery of a 'blonde spy' at Wits seemed to confirm that this was so. The state's security apparatus, it was now sensed, was sufficiently well-developed in its structures and far-reaching in its activities to enable it to penetrate student and liberal groups as well as on the country's major left-wing and African nationalist organisations, notably COD and the ANC.

The spy drama at Wits broke during the summer vacation when, via pillow-talk, the new SRC President, John Shingler, learnt that Priscilla Lefson, who had recently completed her BA, had been receiving payments from the police in return for information about student political activity at Wits. Shingler went straight to Richard Goldstone, his Vice-President, and Ernie Wentzel, the former NUSAS President and now a practising attorney, with this news, and together the three interrogated Miss Lefson late one night in a Berea flat, extracting from her a confession that she had been spying for Sergeant Kruger at the Security Branch. Unbeknowns to her, the confession was recorded, and a copy of the

transcript was handed to the Sunday Times, which published the story as front-page news on 15 February. To protect the identity of Miss Lefson, in accordance with the undertaking given her, she was referred to as a 'pretty blonde'. As is evident from the transcript, Miss Lefson did not crack easily, but she finally conceded that for some two years she had been handing to Sergeant Kruger information on SRC activities, SLA meetings, and NUSAS conferences, and that she had a specific instruction to keep her eye open for 'trouble makers'. The very existence of a police spy on campus, and Miss Lefson's rather cavalier methods of reporting, were deeply disturbing, but otherwise much of the information she passed on was trivial, and her observations about certain individuals could have been disturbing only to themselves. One SRC member could never be persuaded to talk to her about anything beyond 'his bloody history essays', while with another 'the only conversations we used to have were about my legs'. At no stage did Miss Lefson admit to receiving payment from the police.

At an emergency meeting on Friday 13 February, prior to the Sunday Times expose, the SRC unanimously 'ratified' the action of the trio who interrogated Miss Lefson, and adopted a resolution deploring the intrusion of political police into the University and the spread of police state methods which 'seriously impair academic freedom', and which called upon the Minister of Justice to hold a public enquiry into the activities of the police at universities. At a special general meeting of students on 4 March, the action of the SRC was likewise 'ratified and endorsed'.

By then, however, some of the ground had shifted from under Shingler and his aides. The police had gone onto the offensive, with the Commissioner of Police, Major-General C.I. Rademeyer, attacking the trio for their use of 'Gestapo methods' in the interrogation of Miss Lefson, a charge which was repeated in Parliament by the Minister of Justice, C.R. Swart. Furthermore, when the trio frustrated a police search for the original tape-recording they found themselves facing charges of obstructing the law and contravening the section of the Official Secrets Act that dealt with passing information 'likely to be directly or indirectly useful to an enemy'. In anticipation of a police search, Goldstone had transported the tape to Cape Town, with the result that when detectives under Lieutenant-Colonel A. Spengler, head of the Witwatersrand division of the Special Branch, raided the SRC offices, Wentzel's flat, and Shingler's rooms at Pridwin Preparatory School, they found nothing. A visit by the police to the NUSAS offices in Cape Town likewise failed to produce the tape. Shingler and Wentzel were consequently subpoenaed to appear before the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court on Saturday 21 February for questioning about the tape-recording, and Goldstone was questioned by Spengler for half an hour at Jan Smuts Airport on his return from Cape Town. A week later, when the court proceedings were resumed, the missing tape-recording was found 'by accident' lying on the floor at the NUSAS offices

in Cape Town, much to the 'relief' of Messrs Shingler and Wentzel; news of the discovery was brought to the court by Mr Goldstone, who arrived 'hastily', only to discover that the proceedings had been adjourned because the court's own tape recorder had broken down. Messrs Shingler and Wentzel were then discharged. While the Security Branch's heavy-handed actions earned it the scorn of much of the English-language press, which gave extensive coverage to the 'spy' drama, the trio's own apparent resort to 'third-degree' methods and their melodramatic behaviour over the tapes also served to damage their public standing. Miss Lefson, for her part, underwent a remarkable metamorphosis in the press, from a campus Mata Hari, prepared to betray her fellow students for a fiver a month, to the comely girl next door, who was a brunette not a blonde and motivated only by a sense of patriotism.

After the dramatic midnight court order secured by the police and Miss Lefson's father to prohibit the Sunday Express of 22 February from publishing the photograph and name of 'the woman who did espionage work for the South African Police at the University of the Witwatersrand' was finally lifted on 11 March, and her identity was revealed, the press' interest in her was overwhelmingly personal. In the lyrics of Anthony Farmer's musical satire, 'I Spy', she was represented as 'the special duty cutie'. It was perhaps the misfortune of the Wits SRC to have discovered a female, rather than a male, informer.⁵⁰ To the absolute outrage of the SRC, the University provided the Special Branch with two tickets to accompany Miss Lefson to her graduation to ensure her 'protection'. 'There is nothing that can be done about it', Sutton explained to the SRC executive. 'She had been threatened by people of the very lowest class.'⁵¹

On Thursday 5 March, after the special general meeting that had denounced the 'spy', and despite the presence of a formidable contingent of Special Branch detectives and uniformed police, close on a thousand students staged what was then the biggest student only demonstration in the history of Wits. Several hundred students lined the traffic island in Jan Smuts Avenue holding a 300 yard long iron chain 'to symbolise the chaining of university freedom', and others carried banners and posters, one reading 'Keep Wits open--but not to spies'. The next day a banner-waving, slogan-shouting crowd of about a thousand students marched through the streets of central London to protest against university apartheid. 'It is a plain fact', the Rand Daily Mail commented, 'that few of the Union Government's apartheid measures have created a worse atmosphere for this country overseas than the University Apartheid Bill.'⁵²

The protest against the Government's plans to impose university apartheid reached its climax in April 1959 with the second reading debate of the Extension of University Education Bill in the House of Assembly. Inside the Assembly the Opposition mounted a 'spirited' resistance for the three days assigned to the debate, forcing a continuous 26 hour session on the last 'day' before the Government imposed a guillotine on all

further discussion. Outside the gates of Parliament students and the Black Sash maintained a constant vigil in the pouring rain. On Thursday, 16 April, Wits staged a solemn day of protest against the Bill. At 8 in the morning white and black students joined in erecting a huge banner on the columns of the Central Block that reaffirmed Wits' commitment to the idea of a university open to 'men and women without regard to race or colour' and dedicated its members 'to the maintenance of our idea of a University and to the restoration of the autonomy of our University'; photographs of the banner were published around the world. Inside the Great Hall was held, for the first time in the history of Wits, a general assembly of the University, presided over by the Chancellor, the Hon Richard Feetham. On the platform sat members of Council and Senate as well as lecturers and members of the Convocation executive, all in academic dress. The main body of the Hall was packed to capacity with students. The sole speaker, Professor I.D. MacCrone, gave a valedictory address on the struggle to prevent the enactment of university apartheid. The assembly then stood as the Principal, Professor W.G. Sutton, read the Re-affirmation and Dedication. After a minute's silence was observed, the assembly was dissolved, and the University closed for the remainder of the day.⁵³

End of an Era

When the separate university legislation was enacted, the total 'Non-European' enrolment at Wits was 297, up from 201 at the outset of the decade. In the same period, white enrolment advanced from 4 025 (including over 600 ex-volunteers) to 4 813. Within this context of limited growth, African numbers were in fact static--73 in 1950 and 74 in 1959--and there was a positive decline in the number of 'Non-Europeans' in the Medical School, from 109 to 73. Both features were a direct consequence of the opening of the Natal University Medical School for blacks in Durban and the imposition of racial quotas at the Wits Medical School. Indians remained the largest single 'Non-European' population group at Wits, with Indian enrolments increasing by about a third over the decade, while Chinese and 'Coloured' enrolments both doubled, from 30 to 60 and from 16 to 30 respectively. Apart from a tripling of the 'Non-European' enrolment in the Faculty of Arts, to almost a hundred, the new growth points in the 1950s were Engineering, with 8 Chinese, 6 Indian, 3 African, and 1 'Coloured' student by 1959; Architecture, with 8 Chinese students; Commerce, with 9 Chinese, 9 Indian, 3 'Coloured', and 2 African students; and BA Social Work, with 7 Africans, 4 'Coloureds', and 1 Indian. While the African students in the Medical School continued to be recruited from all around the country, and a substantial contingent of the Chinese students came from Kimberley, the overwhelming majority of 'Non-European' students by 1959 were drawn from the Pretoria-Witwatersrand- Vereeniging (PWV) complex, in marked contrast to the pattern a decade previously. As a result of the

clampdown on the issue of travel permits, and the opening of the Natal Medical School, Indian students from Natal were virtually a thing of the past; so, too, were blacks from outside the country's borders.⁵⁴

In terms of the number of 'Non-European' graduates produced, Wits in fact lagged behind the other institutions of higher learning through which 'Non-Europeans' obtained degrees. By the end of 1961 Wits had awarded the grand total of 377 degrees to 'Non-Europeans'; 207 to 'Asians', 153 to Africans, and 17 to 'Coloureds'. Neither the University of South Africa (UNISA), which provided for degree study by correspondence, nor UCT kept a full account of their 'Non-European' graduates, but comparative figures for all institutions are available for the years 1956 to 1961. In that period 670 Fort Hare students obtained degrees, UNISA awarded 650 to 'Non-European' students, Natal 350, UCT 298, and Wits 127. Wits' main contribution throughout was in training 'Non-European' doctors. Half the total of degrees awarded to 'Non-Europeans', and 84 of the 153 degrees awarded to Africans, were in Medicine.

The impact on the University of the separate university legislation of 1959 cannot be assessed in isolation. Recent scholars see the years 1959-1961 as a watershed in the making of apartheid; it was then that apartheid moved into its 'second phase' in response to the escalation of urban African resistance in the late 1950s, culminating in the Sharpeville shootings of March 1960.⁵⁵ The Government resorted to massive repression, beginning with the banning of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress, a general tightening of state controls, more rigid influx control, and the active promotion of the homelands policy of separate development in the effort to undercut African nationalism by asserting tribal identities--a policy already inherent in the plans for separate university institutions. It was in this new atmosphere of unrest, repression, restriction, and control, including the restrictions imposed by the Extension of University Education Act, that Wits entered the 1960s; it was an atmosphere fraught with consequence for Wits and the 'liberal' universities more generally.

That an era had ended at Wits with the passage of the separate university legislation was symbolised on 17 April 1961 when Feetham, as Chancellor, unveiled a plaque outside the Great Hall to record, in both English and Afrikaans, the Dedication affirmed by the University two years previously. The practical manifestations that the era of the 'open university' had ended were by then already evident. African enrolments at Wits plummeted. In terms of the legislation, 'non-white' students already at Wits were permitted to complete their degrees, but for new students the policy adopted by the University was that it would admit only those 'non-white' students who had obtained special ministerial permission. For Africans, that permission was mostly not forthcoming. In 1960 the Minister of Bantu Education, W.A. Maree, turned down 186 of the 190 applications he received from Africans to enrol at 'white' universities,

including 84 of the 85 who had applied to attend Wits. The large majority was turned down on the grounds that 'parallel facilities' already existed for them at the black university colleges, but the 8 who had applied to enter engineering at Wits were rejected as employment opportunities for them allegedly did not exist. A 'qualified Bantu engineer', the Department of Bantu Education advised, could only expect to be employed by a Bantu authority, and at present their need was not for engineers but for 'Natives with qualifications in agricultural surveying'.⁵⁶ In Proclamation 434 of December 1960 the Government listed a long series of courses that Africans would be precluded from taking at the 'white' universities, thereby removing any further discretion on the part of the Minister. As these included the preliminary courses required in any of the professional degrees, the Wits administration reached the extraordinary conclusion that Africans were now completely barred from attending the University and there was consequently 'no point' in applying for ministerial permission on behalf of Africans.⁵⁷ The number of African students at Wits consequently fell off sharply from 74 in 1959 to 21 by 1963, and 10 by 1965.⁵⁸ In 1961 the African Medical Scholarship Trust Fund (AMSTF) was dissolved, after having raised £70 000 in slightly over a decade; its surplus funds were handed over to the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED), founded in 1959 to assist black students not wanting to attend the 'tribal colleges' to obtain UNISA degrees. By the time of its dissolution, the AMSTF had enabled 16 African doctors to graduate from Wits, with 5 remaining to complete their degrees.⁵⁹ What firmly underlined that an era was indeed over was the closing down at the end 1963 of Douglas Smit House, the residence built specifically for African students at Wits.

The number of 'Coloured' students at Wits was likewise decimated, down from 30 in 1959 to 11 by 1965. By comparison the decline in the number of 'Asian' students, Indians and Chinese, was marginal, but the overall statistic masked the fact that the Chinese component was continuing to expand. Between 1959 and 1965 the total number of 'Asian' students dropped from 193 to 177, but by then there were almost as many Chinese in the University as Indians, 85 as against 92. Four 'Asian' students and a 'Coloured' broke new ground in 1962 when they were admitted to the Dental School. In 1961, following the establishment of a Maxillo-Facial and Oral Surgical Unit at Baragwanath Hospital, the Faculty of Dentistry had finally decided that it could take on a handful of 'non-white' dental students each year.⁶⁰

It is impossible to measure the impact on the University's staffing complement of the enactment of university apartheid, the heightened unrest in the country at large, and intensified state repression, but Wits was inevitably a victim of the consequent flight of despairing liberals, harrassed radicals, and frightened conservatives, some of them established academics but many more of them promising young scholars and researchers. The 'brain drain' from South Africa was by no means a new phenomenon, and its causes were never solely political, but at the beginning of

the sixties it gained considerable momentum. The loss to South Africa's 'liberal' universities was compounded by the fact that the country's oppressive reputation in the wider world made it well-nigh impossible for them to gain 'brains drained from elsewhere', as an article in Convocation Commentary in 1967 put it. 'Many of the best academics left the country', Margo Russell commented in retrospect, 'and many second-best academics gratefully stepped into their places, surprised and pleased at their sudden promotion, not yet cognisant of how the replenishing flow of visiting academics, so stimulating a feature of the fifties, had already dried up.'⁶¹

For the successive generations of student leaders who had sought to resist the coming of university apartheid, the early sixties constituted a profound moment of decision. A significant proportion joined the 'brain drain', others remained to pursue their careers in South Africa, and others, again, were among the first participants in the armed struggle. Of the Wits SRC presidents since 1948, Clayton and Brenner were early recruits to the 'brain drain', Getz, Goldstein, Gunther, and Shingler followed in the sixties, and Wolpe and Hepple were arrested in July 1963 after the police raid on Lilliesleaf Farm in Rivonia had resulted in the capture of the bulk of the high command of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the newly-founded military arm of the ANC. Hepple skipped the country after being let out on bail; Wolpe, and his former colleague on the Wits SRC, Arthur Goldreich, staged a dramatic escape from Pretoria Central Prison and likewise went into exile.⁶² Simultaneously with the Rivonia raid, the African Resistance Movement (ARM) embarked on a campaign of sabotage until broken by the police in mid-1964. A loose coalition of ideologically divergent groups, including the Trotskyist Socialist League and dissident members of the Liberal Party, ARM was powerfully rooted in the despair felt in NUSAS and university circles over the turn of events in South Africa. At his trial Alan Brooks, a former NUSAS activist, explained that in his case the failure of the campaign against separate universities had 'planted the seeds of the inadequacy of constitutional methods in opposing government policy'.⁶³

1. See Paul B. Rich, White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism (Johannesburg, 1984), 133-4.

2. Convocation executive minutes, 21 July 1959.

3. Robert Birley, Universities and Utopia (Johannesburg, 1965), 16.

4. Beale, 'Apartheid and University Education', 108.

5. For Eiselen, see Cynthia Kros, 'Origins of Bantu Education: The Prelude (unpublished MA thesis, University of the

Witwatersrand, 1994).

6. Shaw and Pienaar to Sutton, 17 February 1954, Registry P12/8.
7. Senate minutes, 5 & 12 March 1954; interview with Professor G.H.L. Le May, Oxford, June 1989.
8. SRC minutes, 24 February 1954.
9. Memorandum for the Commission on Separate Training Facilities for Non-Europeans, Misc C/57A/54.
10. Interview with Professor W.G. Sutton, Johannesburg, November 1982.
11. Interviews with Professors W.G. Sutton, Johannesburg, November 1982, and G.H.L. Le May, Oxford, September 1994.
12. Sutton to SRC President, 8 March 1954, Registry B19/3.
13. SRC minutes, 9 March 1954.
14. Council minutes, 26 February 1954.
15. Principal to SRC President, 14 April 1954, and Registrar to SRC President, 28 April 1954, Registry P12/8; Council minutes, 23 April 1954.
16. Star, 31 May 1954.
17. SRC minutes, 10, 14, 18 & 21 June 1954; interview with Professor Dan Goldstein, Sheffield, August 1994.
18. SRC minutes, 10 August 1954
19. Witwatersrand Student, 11 August 1955.
20. Draft for Chapter XIX of Statute I, 16 November 1954, Misc C/229A/54.
21. Executive Report to SRC meeting 23 November 1954, SRC minutes; interview with Professor G.H.L. Le May, Oxford, June 1989.
22. Minutes of statutory general meeting held in the Great Hall, 15 March 1955; Executive report to SRC meeting, 10 May 1955, SRC minutes; Witwatersrand Student, 20 May 1955.
23. Council minutes, 15 August 1955.
24. Witwatersrand Student, 11 August 1955.

25. Witwatersrand Student, April 1956.
26. Peter F. Alexander, Alan Paton: A Biography (Oxford, 1994), 289. For the Liberal Party see also Douglas Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in Jeffrey Butler, Richard Elphick and David Welsh (eds), Democratic Liberalism in South Africa (Cape Town, 1987), chap 6; Joshua N. Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid (Bellville, 1994), chap 8.
27. Interview with Magnus Gunther, London, September 1994.
28. SRC minutes, 23 November 1955, 6 March & 21 March 1956.
29. Minutes of the 36th annual NUSAS Assembly, Pietermaritzburg, 1-12 July 1956.
30. Minutes of the special meeting of students, 13 September 1956, SRC minutes.
31. Rand Daily Mail, 20 September 1956.
32. MacCrone to W.A.P. Phillips, 19 September 1956, Registry P12/8.
33. For the announcement by Verwoerd, as Minister of Native Affairs, see the Star, 18 September 1956.
34. Witwatersrand Student, March 1957.
35. Rand Daily Mail, 10 October 1956.
36. Minutes of special meeting of the executive committee of Convocation, 17 October 1956.
37. Council minutes, 5 October 1956.
38. Council minutes, 14 December 1956.
39. Interview with Professor G.H.L. Le May, Oxford, September 1994.
40. Report of the Council Open Universities Liaison Committee, March 1957, Misc C/48/57.
41. Star, 22 May 1957; Rush, 'Transvaler and Wits, 105.
42. Academic Freedom Report, 13 June 1957, SRC minutes.
43. Council minutes, 15 August 1958.
44. SRC minutes, 20 June 1957; report on NUSAS executive meeting of 3-5 December 1956, SRC minutes; Resolution 122, minutes of the

33rd annual NUSAS Assembly, Cape Town, 29 June-10 July 1958.

45. Report by the outgoing President of the executive committee between 9 September and 2 October 1958; minutes of executive meetings with the Principal, 29 October & 20 November 1958; Report of Commission of Enquiry into segregation within the University, SRC minutes.

46. Rush, 'Transvaler and Wits', 82-3 & 104.

47. 'University Autonomy', n.d., SRC minutes 1959.

48. Rush, 'Transvaler and Wits', 106.

49. Report on the activities of the Academic Freedom Committee for the period 25 July to 24 August 1958; minutes of a special general meeting of students, 4 March 1959, SRC minutes; Rand Daily Mail, 5 March 1959.

50. The transcript of the interrogation of Miss Lefson and a 'Supplement on Police Espionage at Wits University', summarising developments and press coverage surrounding the 'blonde-spy' affair, are lodged in UA 115. See also Felicia Tobias, 'The Women of Wits 1939-1959' (unpublished BA Hons dissertation, History Department, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992), 75-8.

51. Minutes of executive meeting with the Principal, 17 April 1959, SRC minutes.

52. Rand Daily Mail, 6 & 7 March 1959.

53. Star, 16 April 1959; Rand Daily Mail, 17 April 1959.

54. Statistics have been compiled from the statistics available in UA 211 and Registry Subfile 1 to L9/6. The latter includes a full list of the names, addresses, and registrations of the 278 'Non-European' students at Wits on 18 November 1959.

55. Deborah Posel, The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961 (Oxford, 1991), chap 9; Philip Bonner, Peter Delius, and Deborah Posel (eds), Apartheid's Genesis 1935-1962 (Johannesburg, 1993), introduction; Nigel Worden, The Making of South Africa (Oxford, 1994), 108-113.

56. Friend, 9 February 1960; Star, 16 February 1960; Secretary for Bantu Education to Registrar, 1 November 1960, Registry Subfile 1 to L9/6.

57. D.A. Duggan to Dean of Arts, 1 March 1963, and to Miss G. Nettell, 24 July 1963, Registry Subfile 1 to L9/6.

58. Statistics on university enrolments are to be found in the

annual Survey of Race Relations, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations. See also Registry Subfile 1 to L9/6.

59. Wits Student, 17 & 24 March 1961.

60. Dean of Dentistry to the Principal, 9 February 1961, Registry B19/3.

61. Margo Russell, 'Intellectuals and Academic Apartheid, 1950-1965' in Pierre L. van den Berghe (ed), The Liberal Dilemma in South Africa (London, 1979), 145. For a consideration of academic emigres from South Africa see Graeme C. Moodie, 'The state and liberal universities in South Africa: 1948-1990', Higher Education, vol 27 (1994), 1-40.

62. See AnnMarie Wolpe, The Long Way Home (Cape Town, 1994).

63. Martin Legassick, The National Union of South African Students: Ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities (Los Angeles, 1967), 38. For ARM see Hugh Lewin, Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison (London, 1974), chap 1; Lazerson, Against the Tide, 235-9; Baruch Hirson, Revolutions in my Life (Johannesburg, 1995), chap 16.