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BECOMING LIBERAL:
A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS: 1945-1955.

Clare Larkin

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University of Cape Town, for the degree of Master of Arts.

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This work has not been submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature

Signed by candidate

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ABSTRACT

The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) was established in 1924 as a forum for white South African students. The rise of Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s and the establishment of the ultra-nationalist Afrikaanse Studentebond (ANS) led to the disaffiliation from NUSAS of the student bodies of the Afrikaans-medium universities.

Until the end of the Second World War, two groups of students jostled for control of NUSAS. The first championed the ideal of a broad white South African national feeling and worked for the return of the Afrikaans-speaking centres, while the second group, predominantly left-wing radicals based at Wits, called for NUSAS to become a racially more inclusive organisation and admit Fort Hare to membership.

This conflict was decisively resolved in favour of the inclusivists in 1945 when returning ex-servicepeople, imbued with democratic ideals, were instrumental in NUSAS opening its doors to all students. The radical left, augmented by the newly affiliated black colleges, embarked on a course of lobbying NUSAS to oppose segregation *in toto*, which resulted in the abolition of the colour bar in NUSAS. This proved too much for the South Africanists, based mainly at UCT, Durban and Rhodes, who disaffiliated from NUSAS shortly after the National Party (NP) election victory in 1948.

Subsequently, the broad South Africanists proceeded to effect a rapprochement with Afrikaans-speaking students, but came to the realisation that the majority had jettisoned broad South Africanism and had embraced an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism. The South Africanists reluctantly returned to a NUSAS which attempted to unite its diverse student population by concentrating on common student concerns.

The election victory of the NP both united and divided NUSAS. The threat of the imposition of university apartheid resulted in the emergence of a broad liberal opposition. On the other hand, apartheid also deepened the cleavages between liberals and radicals as they disagreed over the tactics to be employed in opposing the government, and the degree to which NUSAS should involve itself in political issues.

The rise of militant African nationalism, the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and the mobilisation of the Torch Commando against the disenfranchisement of coloured voters had an important impact on

NUSAS. Fort Hare disaffiliated from NUSAS in 1952 after its motion that NUSAS recognise political and social equality for all was rejected on the grounds that it would have transformed NUSAS into a political organisation. Fort Hare's disaffiliation and the emotions aroused by the Torch Commando's activities temporarily made more students amenable to a political student union. But, as this would entail championing black political and social rights, NUSAS chose to maintain its non-political identity.

The divisions between liberals and radicals became more defined after 1953 and were exacerbated by the formation of the Liberal Party and the South African Congress of Democrats and the onset of the Cold War. Liberals wanted to substitute NUSAS' membership of the eastern-bloc-aligned International Union of Students (IUS) with that of the western-bloc Co-ordinating Secretariat as they felt that a non-political body like NUSAS could not remain in an organisation with a specific ideological orientation. In 1955, NUSAS disaffiliated from the IUS, the radical left was defeated and the liberals took full control of the national union, defining it as a liberal humanist organisation.

INTRODUCTION

The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) was founded in 1924 as a forum for South African students, who, despite their disparate backgrounds, were believed to have, as students, common interests, needs and concerns. To NUSAS were affiliated the governing bodies of all nine white universities and university colleges in the Union. The inspiration for the creation of such a body came from Leo Marquard, an alumnus of Grey University College, Bloemfontein, who, while a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, had participated in the formation of the British National Union of Students (NUS).

NUSAS was modeled on the British NUS and so absorbed its inherent contradictions, which, as time passed, became more difficult, if not impossible to resolve without a fundamental redefinition of the nature and function of a national union of students. The most important contradiction within NUSAS was its description of itself as a “non-political” organisation. This meant that it eschewed “party politics”, and in the South African context, specifically refrained from aggravating the “racial issue”, the fragile relationship between English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites shattered by the Anglo-Boer South African War and again ruptured during the First World War. The “Native Question”, as the unequal segregatory relationship between black and white was known at the time, was in theory considered to be “above party politics”, and thus at the very beginning was not a divisive factor within the national union. The “non-political” basis of NUSAS accorded well with the political concerns of a significant section of the white electorate which sought to foster a broad white South African national feeling as a bulwark against the black majority. As such then, NUSAS enjoyed a high political profile and the respect and support of the government and key figures in the establishment.

NUSAS was not to remain aloof from either “party politics” or the “Native Question” for long. The policy of a broad white South Africanism was challenged by the rise of an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism during the 1930s. Thus, Chapter one will briefly examine the response of NUSAS to this Afrikaner nationalism, as well as to the events which flowed from this phenomenon, namely, the disaffiliation from the national union of the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking universities and university colleges and the formation of the ultra-nationalist “Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentebond” (ANS) in 1934.

While one section of NUSAS desperately clung to the notion of a broad white South Africanism, and advocated compromise and rapprochement with the ANS-aligned campuses, a smaller grouping

within NUSAS, particularly the radical left (a loose assortment of Marxists, Trotskyites and adherents of the Communist Party of South Africa) called for the broadening of NUSAS into a more “racially” inclusive organisation through the inclusion of Fort Hare in its ranks. The meaning of “race” had begun to change as relations between black and white assumed an ever greater importance.

The conflict between the broad South Africanists and the inclusivists within NUSAS was only resolved at the end of the Second World War when NUSAS partially jettisoned the broad South Africanist position, opened its doors to Fort Hare and set-out on a path of liberalism and even radicalism.

The Second World War was an important period in the development of South African liberalism and for under-researched liberal organisations. The rapidly expanding South African economy led to an increase in the size of the black urban population. The government’s response to this challenge was couched in increasingly liberal terms as its Commissions recommended the acceptance of a permanent African population in the urban areas, as well as a very limited national health and welfare programme. The prime minister himself announced that “segregation had fallen on evil days” in 1942 during an address to the leading, liberal research body, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). In his study of South African liberalism and segregation, in which he devotes attention to the SAIRR, Rich¹ states that the SAIRR was also undergoing change as it sought to reposition itself within a different political, social, economic and ideological environment. During the 1940s it adopted a policy of economic liberalism to raise African living standards, and like other organisations (and NUSAS after the war), it sought ways to implement the aims of the Atlantic Charter, the inspirational document of post-war liberalism and social democracy. In response to rising African nationalism and assertiveness, radical liberals attempted unsuccessfully to move the SAIRR away from its “conservative liberalism” and commitment to “apolitical” and “dispassionate research” and to become a more political body.² This same challenge was faced with ever increasing intensity by NUSAS after the war.

However, returning ex-servicemen, who dominated the universities in the immediate post-war years were instrumental in NUSAS adopting a more overtly political policy in accordance with post-war democratic and anti-fascist ideals, ideals which were espoused by the Army Education Service and

¹ P. Rich: *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism 1921-1960*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1984).

² *ibid.*, pp.72-75.

the Springbok Legion, a progressive ex-servicepeople's organisation researched in detail by Roos³ and to a lesser extent, by Everatt⁴ and Lazerson.⁵ NUSAS' first step into the political arena occurred in 1945 when it denounced the attempts by the opposition National Party to impose segregation on the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand. This was the pretext used by the radical left, based principally at Wits and at the newly admitted black colleges of Fort Hare and Hewart, to push NUSAS further along the political road and to reject segregation *in toto*. In calling for the abandonment of social segregation and the colour bar, a measure accepted right across the white political spectrum, the radical left lost the support of the liberal left (the majority of whom would associate themselves with the left-wing of the ruling United Party), and alienated the centre-right South Africanist majorities at UCT, Durban and Rhodes. The South Africanist grouping (which roughly corresponded to the centre of the United Party) were not entirely convinced of the necessity or advisability of including black students in NUSAS and regarded their presence, and that of the radical left, as being obstacles to the return of Afrikaans-speaking students to the national union, which was their primary consideration.

Three months after the segregationist, South Africanist United Party (UP) was voted out of power and replaced by the National Party (NP) and its apartheid policy, UCT and Durban disaffiliated from NUSAS as the national union had effectively abolished the social colour bar. This left NUSAS in a position of imminent collapse as Rhodes had left the previous year. A strong movement to create an alternative national union which would include the Afrikaans-medium universities was led by UCT. However, by the beginning of 1949, it was clear to even the most idealistic South Africanist, that even with compromises from both sides, unity between the two white groups was impossible. It became clear that the majority of Afrikaans-speaking students had moved away from the idea of a broad South Africanism and had instead embraced an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism. On the other hand, the majority of English-speaking students were not prepared to participate in an organisation which officially excluded black members, the price demanded by Afrikaans students for their participation in a new national student union. Subsequently, UCT and Durban, somewhat reluctantly, returned to NUSAS during 1949 and 1950. NUSAS, under its long serving president, Phillip Tobias, then concentrated on moulding a national union united by common student concerns from its diverse white English-speaking and black population. The practical measures employed to do this are discussed in chapter three. Legassick, in his study of NUSAS,⁶ has argued that this

³ N. D. Roos: "A History of the Springbok Legion, 1941-1953", MA, University of Natal (1990).

⁴ D. Everatt: "The Politics of Nonracialism: White opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960", D.Phil. Oxford (1990)

⁵ J. Lazerson: *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle against Apartheid*, Mayibuye, Bellville (1994).

⁶ M. Legassick: "The NUSAS: Ethnic Cleavage and Ethnic Integration in the Universities", *University of California, Los Angeles, African Studies Center, Occasional Paper*, Los Angeles (1967).

structural reform of Tobias' was incomplete as it failed to provide an ideological foundation for political action against apartheid which was acceptable to all.⁷

The election victory of the National Party (NP) served both to unite and divide the student population in NUSAS. The steps taken by the NP to impose apartheid on the universities resulted in the emergence of a broad liberal opposition. On the other hand, apartheid deepened the cleavages between liberals and radicals. In particular, they disagreed over the tactics to be employed in opposing the government, and the degree to which NUSAS should involve itself in political issues. Liberals believed that a national students' union could best function as a non-political body and thus liberals were only prepared to oppose apartheid when it intruded on education. Radicals felt that NUSAS should become a vehicle for eliminating the NP and believed that the distinction between a political and a non-political organisation was spurious, as by opposing, for example, the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, NUSAS had already moved outside specifically educational issues.

The period 1949-1952 – examined in chapter four – coincided with the emergence of a militant African nationalism and the onset of the Defiance Campaign of 1952. The years of 1951 and 1952 witnessed the mobilisation of the under-researched,⁸ predominantly white English-speaking war veterans' Torch Commando against the disenfranchisement of coloured voters and the constitutional crisis which flowed from this. All of these events had an important impact on NUSAS. African nationalists, organised in the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), in alliance with the Trotskyite non-collaborationist Sons of Africa (SOYA), were instrumental in removing Fort Hare from NUSAS in 1952 after the national union rejected, on the grounds that it would transform NUSAS into a political organisation, a motion recognising the political and social equality of all people. Hewat College and the black section of the segregated University of Natal followed Fort Hare out in 1952 and 1954 respectively for similar reasons.

The shock of the disaffiliation of Fort Hare, as well as the emotions stirred by the constitutional crisis, had the effect of temporarily making more students amenable to the idea of a political student union. But, as this would entail the championing of black political and social rights, the identification with black political movements and the employment of non-constitutional methods of opposition, the liberal and centre majority within NUSAS chose to maintain the national union's

⁷ M. Legassick: pp.18,21.

⁸ The most substantial study on the Torch Commando is M. Fridjhon: "The Torch Commando: A Study in Opposition Politics in White South Africa, 1951-1953", BA (Honours) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1975). Less

“non-political” identity. As was the case in wider society, the divisions between the radicals and the liberals became even more sharply defined in NUSAS between 1953 and 1955 (the period covered in chapter five). These divisions were exacerbated by developments at national level which resulted in the formation of the Liberal Party and the radical white South African Congress of Democrats.

The onset of the Cold War and the division of the world into two hostile camps also served to separate the liberals from the radicals. In the aftermath of the Second World War, and because of its desire for peace and international student co-operation, NUSAS joined the International Union of Students (IUS) based in Prague. Chapter six will discuss how the Cold War and the identification of the IUS with the Eastern bloc led to the progressive abandonment by liberals of the ideal of international student co-operation. This led to a protracted battle between the liberals and the radical left over whether NUSAS, as a non-political organisation, could remain part of an organisation with a specifically political policy and ideological orientation. The increasing anti-communism of the liberal majority, as well as the disaffiliation from NUSAS of the IUS-supporting centres of Fort Hare and UNNE, enabled the liberals to effect NUSAS’ disaffiliation from the IUS in 1955 and to substitute it with membership of the western-bloc Co-ordinating Secretariat (COSEC) based in Leiden. In uncompromisingly liberal terms, the NUSAS president declared that it was impossible for NUSAS, as a liberal, humanist organisation which attached great importance to the separation of education and the state and to values such as academic liberty, to ever effect “unity” with an organisation like the IUS which did not share these basic assumptions. This marked the defeat of the radical left in NUSAS and the take-over by the liberals of the national union.

This did not mean however, that the goals of the radical left, to turn NUSAS into an overtly political organisation to challenge apartheid, were defeated. In 1957, NUSAS adopted as its vision, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and the principle that the pursuit of a democratic education could not be divorced from the pursuit of a democratic society. Because of the threat of university apartheid, Fort Hare returned to NUSAS in 1957 and UNNE some years later. According to Legassick, this adoption of the Universal Rights of Man “gave ideological expression” to the structural reform undertaken by Tobias, of bringing together, under a moderate leadership, both conservative whites and African nationalists and giving them the space to embark on political activity. Until the mid-1960s, NUSAS was perceived as a radical fighting body, but its radical

liberal leadership remained deeply hostile to the radical white left in, or associated with the Congresses.

In many respects, the history of the predominantly middle-class, white, English-speaking Liberal Party (LP), to which all NUSAS presidents from 1954 belonged, is similar to that of NUSAS which shared the same social base. Although the radical left was outside the Liberal Party, its policies of a universal franchise and close co-operation with African nationalism were supported by many Liberals at a time when the official policy was a qualified franchise and a reluctance to move away from constitutional, parliamentary forms of political activity. Not without conflict, by 1960 the LP had adopted a universal franchise and its policies were remarkably similar to those found in the Freedom Charter with which it had earlier, like NUSAS, been unwilling to identify.⁹

How did NUSAS compare with other student organisations? As yet, very little research has been undertaken on South African student movements. There is Legassick's pioneering history of NUSAS, to which this study, of a much shorter time period, is heavily indebted. This study is also indebted to Phillips¹⁰ and Murray's¹¹ studies of the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, respectively, which devote a significant amount of attention to NUSAS and student politics. Egan's history of the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS) sheds important light on the close link between NUSAS and the NCFS and the influential role liberal Catholics played in destroying the radical left at Wits and in the disaffiliation of NUSAS from the IUS.¹²

Other than a collection of essays on Fort Hare and Black Consciousness in *Student Perspectives on South Africa*,¹³ Nkomo's study of student activism in the 1960s and 1970s and a few articles elsewhere, little has been written on black student movements to date. The same can be said of Afrikaans student organisations. An article by Fick in *Student Perspectives* traces a skeleton history of the ASB and earlier bodies, but their histories still have to be written. From a brief perusal of student newspapers, the ASB was a far less successful organisation than NUSAS. It was overtly political, allied to the National Party and riven with that party's regional and ideological conflicts,

⁹ R. Vigne: *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-1968*, Macmillan, London (1997).

¹⁰ H. Phillips: *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948*, UCT Press, Cape Town (1993).

¹¹ B. Murray: *Wits the Early Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand and its Precursors (1896-1936)*, University of the Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg (1982); *Wits: the 'Open' Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1939-1959*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1997).

¹² A. Egan: *The Politics of a South African Catholic Student Movement, 1960-1987*, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town (1991).

¹³ H. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972).

all characteristics which Altbach argues suggest a short life-span.¹⁴ However, like NUSAS, the ASB attempted, much less successfully, to build a strong student trade-union/benefits base as a foundation for its political activities. The Federation of Progressive Students (FOPS) failed to become a national student body, but operated at Wits for six years,¹⁵ a long time in the life of an activist movement where student generations are short and organisations die because the political issue which brought them into existence assumes less importance.¹⁶ The South African Union of Democratic Students (SAUDS), a later left-wing political rival to NUSAS, also became localised on the Wits campus and did not last longer than a year.

Like the ASB, no major study of the British National Union of Students has been undertaken.¹⁷ From what exists,¹⁸ it can be deduced that NUSAS, a copy of BNUS in structure, confronted similar issues to BNUS, particularly as far as international affairs were concerned where both organisations were torn in two by the Cold War. The division of the world's youth into two hostile camps after the Soviet Union captured control of international youth and student organisations after the Second World War, is the topic of Kotek's *Students and the Cold War*. Kotek traces the establishment of western bloc, anti-communist student and youth organisations to the British Foreign Office, Sweden and the United States and at the same time examines these effects on various student unions.

Not only did NUSAS confront similar issues to those of BNUS, but NUSAS activists shared similar characteristics to those in student organisations in the industrialised parts of the world. Most come from middle-class, urban, affluent families, tend to have more educated parents and are often intellectually more able than the average. Many are drawn from ethnic minorities and are enrolled in the Social Sciences and Humanities.¹⁹

The sources for this study have been drawn primarily from the extensive NUSAS Archive housed in the Archives of the Jagger Library at the University of Cape Town. The University of the Witwatersrand also possesses a copy of these papers. Campus newspapers have also provided invaluable material as have interviews with some of the past members of NUSAS.

¹⁴ P. Altbach: "Perspectives on Student Activism" in P. Altbach (ed): *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (1989), p.3.

¹⁵ B. Murray: "The 'Democratic' Left at Wits 1943-1948: The Federation of Progressive Students and Student Politics", *Democracy, Popular Precedents, Practice and Culture*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (1994).

¹⁶ P. Altbach: p.4.

¹⁷ J. Kotek: *Students and the Cold War*, Macmillan, London (1996), p.243.

¹⁸ E. Ashby and M. Anderson: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970); D. Jacks: *Student Politics and Higher Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1975); J. Kotek: *Students and the Cold War*.

¹⁹ P. Altbach: pp.8-9.

Chapter one

THE ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY OF NUSAS: 1924-1945

The cessation of hostilities in Europe and the Far East in 1945 ushered in a new era in the history of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). However, in order to discuss this, it is necessary to have some understanding of the pre-1945 nature of the organisation. Thus, this chapter will firstly outline the foundation and structure of NUSAS as well as the socio-economic and political orientation of the various student bodies of which it was composed. Secondly, it will examine the dilemma faced by the national union in its pursuit of a broad South African national feeling in the wake of, on the one hand, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the secession of the Afrikaans universities and colleges, and on the other, an increasing movement towards a racially more inclusive organisation by including black student bodies. The concluding section of the chapter will examine the impact of the war on NUSAS and the conflict which it generated on the various campuses.

NUSAS was founded in 1924 as a forum for white South African students, who, despite their disparate backgrounds, were believed to have, as students, common interests, needs and concerns.¹ To NUSAS were affiliated the student governing bodies of all nine white universities and university colleges in the Union.² The inspiration for the creation of a national union came from Leo Marquard, an alumnus of Grey University College, Bloemfontein, who, while a Rhodes scholar at Oxford had witnessed and participated in the formation of both the international student body, the *Confederation Internationale des Etudiants* (CIE) and the British National Union of Students (NUS). In the aftermath of the First World War, it was earnestly and hopefully believed by a generation of ex-servicepeople that an international student forum fostering tolerance and understanding between students of different nationalities would avoid conflict and another war. So, the CIE came into existence as a type of student League of Nations. However, unlike the League, the CIE was "non-

1 Objects of NUSAS

"To represent the students of this country nationally and internationally and to maintain their co-operation with students of other countries. To promote the education and social interests of the students in entire independence of all religious and political propaganda. To co-operate with any organisation having kindred aims." *NUSAS Handbook 1932*. An earlier source is unavailable; Cited in L. Chisholm: "The Early History of NUSAS: Leo Marquard's Presidency, 1924-1930", BA (Honours) Dissertation, University of Cape Town (1976), p.95.

2 Membership

Constituent Organisation: Membership is open to the representative student organisations of universities and university colleges, and in special cases, subject to the decisions of the executive and confirmation by the Council, to student organisations within the universities and university colleges not affiliated as a whole. All members of constituent organisations are *ipso facto* members of the Union." *NUSAS Constitution, NUSAS Handbook, 1932* cited in L. Chisholm: p.95.

political", as were those national unions like NUS (1921) and NUSAS, which was modelled on NUS, which were established to participate in the CIE.

To NUS, "non-political" meant maintaining a clear distance from party politics and also non-involvement in political issues.³ Non-political student movements were not necessarily the norm, as student participation in and leadership of the nineteenth century European nationalist uprisings and the *Reforma* movement in South America in the early decades of the twentieth century demonstrate.⁴ In South Africa, the meaning of the term "non-political" shifted and was re-interpreted over time. This generated much conflict within NUSAS and is a major theme of this study. When NUSAS was formed in 1924, a "non-political" organisation meant one which disavowed and dissociated itself from "party politics" and specifically refrained from aggravating the "racial issue", the fragile relationship between English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites shattered by the South African War and again ruptured during the First World War. Marquard, a man impatient with narrow patriotism and nationalism,⁵ wanted a student organisation which championed student internationalism, and within South Africa looked beyond the differences of ethnicity to the common interests of all white students. This objective accorded well with the political views of a significant section of the white electorate - the need to foster a broad white South African national feeling. From its inception, NUSAS therefore had the support of most political leaders and public figures and, as such, considered itself a "respectable" body which expected to be taken seriously by the establishment.

Before describing the functioning of NUSAS and how it pursued its more specific objectives within the social context of cultivating a broad South Africanism, it is necessary to examine the institutions, namely, the universities and university colleges from which the members of NUSAS were drawn.

In 1918 the South African College (founded in 1829) and Victoria College (founded in 1866) were transformed by Act of Parliament into fully autonomous institutions of higher education and became the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch respectively. At the same time, the Transvaal University College (TUC), Pretoria (founded in 1908), Grey University College (GUC), Bloemfontein (founded in 1904), the South African School of Mines and Technology, Johannesburg (founded in 1904), the Natal University College (NUC), in Pietermaritzburg (founded in 1909), Rhodes University College, Grahamstown (founded in 1904) and Huguenot University College, Wellington (founded in 1874) became constituent university colleges of the federal examining body,

3 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970), p.61; M. Shaw: "Great Britain" in P. Altbach (ed.): *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut (1989), p.238.

4 M. Mollis: "Argentina" in P. Altbach (ed.): p.339-340.

5 L. Chisholm: p.viii.

the University of South Africa, formerly the University of the Cape of Good Hope. To these were added at a later stage, Potchefstroom University College for Christian Higher Education (PUC for CHE), established in 1919 and the Durban branch of Natal University in 1923 which had evolved from the Durban Technical College. In 1922 the South African School of Mines and Technology became the independent University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and in 1930, TUC became the University of Pretoria (UP). Each institution developed a distinctive character and ethos of its own over time.

The Universities of Cape Town, the Witwatersrand, Natal and Rhodes were regarded as English-speaking universities. The University of Cape Town, like its predecessor, the South African College, adopted a "universalist" approach to education and within the local context embraced a policy of broad South Africanism. However, in spite of the presence of a large minority of Afrikaans-speaking students, South Africanism was not fully put into practice as the university failed to adopt bilingualism and maintained its British character and orientation.⁶ Wits owed its existence to the needs of the rapidly industrialising and expanding Rand, and like UCT, exuded an air of "minor British provincialism", in spite of, again like UCT, the presence of a substantial number of Afrikaans-speaking students.⁷ NUC, situated in the province, where, among the white population, English-speakers predominated, attracted, like Rhodes with its specific imperial connections, students almost solely of English-speaking background.

The University of Stellenbosch, TUC, GUC and PUCHE were all regarded as Afrikaans-speaking institutions. Both Stellenbosch and PUCHE were almost exclusively Afrikaans-speaking. Stellenbosch came to be known as a "Volks Universiteit", an institution providing for the cultural, spiritual and intellectual needs of the Afrikaner nation. PUCHE grew out of the *Gereformeerde* Church seminary at Burgersdorp and, as a result, elements of this strain of Calvinist theology underpinned the university, giving PUCHE a religious character distinct from the other Afrikaans universities.

TUC and GUC began as essentially English-style institutions, but serving the needs primarily of Afrikaans-speaking students. Yet, beginning in the 1920's both university colleges underwent Afrikanerisation as proponents of the Afrikaans language movement fought protracted battles at both institutions for Afrikaans to be used as a medium of instruction. Bilingualism was formally adopted at Pretoria in 1930 and at GUC in 1938. Eventually, Afrikaans became the sole medium of instruction

6 H. Phillips: *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948*, UCT Press, Cape Town (1993), pp.114, 116-117.

7 B.K. Murray: *Wits - The Early Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and its Precursors (1896-1939)*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1982), p.327.

at Pretoria in 1932 and at the University College of the Orange Free State (the former GUC) in 1943.⁸

HUC in Wellington was founded in 1874 by Andrew Murray of the Dutch Reformed Church and educationists from the progressive Holyoke College in the United States to provide a Christian education for women in the Cape Colony. HUC also became Afrikanerised but, because of its different background,⁹ it often followed a different path to that of the other predominantly Afrikaans universities.

The South African Native College (SANC) was established at Alice in the Eastern Cape in 1916 by Scottish Presbyterian missionaries. The College prepared African, as well as a number of coloured and Indian students for matriculation and, from 1923, undertook university tuition too.¹⁰ Although constitutionally eligible for participation in NUSAS, Fort Hare, as the SANC became known, was not invited to join. As Marquard put it later, "at that time most [white] people ... would have thought such a step 'premature' and I do not believe the inaugural conference would ever have been held if I had invited Fort Hare".¹¹ Thus, NUSAS' first priority was to weld together white students in one organisation, already a difficult task, before introducing the contentious and divisive issue of black membership.

How was the construction of a united national student body and the pursuit of South Africanism undertaken? NUSAS had a federal structure. After payment of an affiliation and annual membership fee, calculated according to the number of students enrolled at a particular institution, all student representative councils (SRCs) of the white universities and university colleges were eligible to attend the annual NUSAS Council meeting. The Council was responsible for the formulation of NUSAS policy, drawing up practical projects and electing an executive which was responsible for the day to day running of the organisation and the implementation of policy and projects.

The executive comprised the president, who, like all other members worked voluntarily for NUSAS in his/her spare time, and four others responsible for various aspects of NUSAS activity. Due to an increase in the volume of work, it became necessary to increase the size of the executive.¹² In 1934 a head office was established in Cape Town administered by a full-time General Secretary, who in

8 H. Thom (ed.): *Stellenbosch 1866-1966 Honderd Jaar Hoër Onderwys*, Nasionale Boekhandel, Cape Town (1966), p.38; G. Viljoen: "The Afrikaans Universities and Particularism" in H. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds.): *The Future of the University in Southern Africa*, St Martin's Press, New York (1978), pp.172, 176-181.

9 HUC was disbanded in 1947, but subsequently the Dutch Reformed Church opened a training college for its social workers there. *Hugenote-Kollege van die NG Kerk, Wellington*, (Brochure) (nd.?1977), pp.3-4.

10 M. O'Dowd: *The African in the Universities*, NUSAS, Cape Town (1954), p.9.

11 L. Marquard: "A National Union of Students", *South African Outlook*, January 1974, p.2.

many ways ran the organisation with regard to day-to-day matters.¹³

From early on, the national union produced a bilingual magazine, *The NUSAS*. It was intended to strengthen national student unity through the publication of articles on national and international affairs of interest to students as well as news items from the various campuses.¹⁴ The magazine was still in existence as the *SA Student* in 1945, after weathering a number of financial crises.

The Travel Department was responsible for initiating and maintaining contact and co-operation with overseas student unions by arranging student tours to and from South Africa. Tours were a very important and popular function of NUSAS activities and also generated revenue for the NUSAS coffers. That NUSAS survived the Second World War financially intact was largely due to the capital reserves accrued from the profits of pre-war tours.

Another popular NUSAS activity, the Student Congress, drew 600 students from different backgrounds to Durban in 1929 for a week of entertainment, sport and debating.¹⁵ Attracting far fewer adherents was the campus-based Bantu Studies Department. Like at the liberal, "non-political" South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), to which NUSAS had strong ties, "non-political" issues such as the "Native Question" - considered to be "above party politics" at that time - were discussed within the segregatory framework accepted to differing degrees by most whites, including liberals.¹⁶ The inauguration of the Bantu Studies Department suggests that NUSAS was abreast with a trend in current liberal thinking, namely the conservative, segregatory, anthropological liberalism associated with university departments of Bantu Studies.¹⁷

A NUSAS institution which had wide appeal, but was inconsistent with the national union being "non-political", was the Student Parliament inaugurated in 1927. "Political parties" contested "seats" at the individual campuses for the 'national assembly' but for the sake of student unity, controversial issues such as the "racial question" - relations between English and Afrikaans-speaking whites - were avoided.¹⁸

Although NUSAS attempted to remain detached from national politics, there could be no avoidance of national affairs spilling over into the student arena. Firstly, the "Black Peril" election of 1929

12 L. Chisholm: pp.10-11.

13 BC 586 B1 Presidensiële Verslag 1934, p.1; Presidential Report 1938, p.5.

14 L. Chisholm: pp.15-17,32-36.

15 *ibid.*, p.51.

16 L. Chisholm: pp.58,59,66.

17 R. Elphick: "Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism" in J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh (eds.): *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect*, David Philip, Cape Town (1987), p.77.

18 B.K. Murray: *Wits - The First Years*, p.342; L. Chisholm: pp.52-53.

placed the relationship between black and white sharply in focus. Secondly, Fusion in 1934, while reinforcing the ideal of a "broad South Africanism", also led to the formation of the Purified National Party. This coincided with the emergence of a more exclusive and narrowly focussed Afrikaner nationalism which threatened the inclusivist foundations on which NUSAS was based.

Influenced by the Neo-Fichtean Volkisch philosophy and Kuyperian theology current in Central Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, as well as by the dire socio-economic position in which many Afrikaners found themselves at that time, Afrikaner intellectuals formulated Christian Nationalism, the notion that a nation (*volk*) could only fulfil its God-given calling in complete independence from other nations, and that the individual could only achieve his/her full potential by service to the volk and not apart from it.¹⁹ This Christian Nationalism was the driving force behind the emergence of the Afrikaans Economic Movement and the creation of separate Afrikaans cultural and community organisations and trade unions.²⁰

NUSAS was not immune to the mobilisation of Afrikaner nationalism as, in spite of its attempted inclusiveness, all the Afrikaans universities had resigned from the organisation by 1936. This was the consequence not only of nationalism, but also of a perceived fear that student organisations were becoming more genuinely inclusive and would eventually include black students in their ranks. In June 1930, prominent NUSAS members unofficially attended an inter-racial Student Christian Association²¹ conference at Fort Hare which certain sections of the NUSAS constituency found disquieting.²² This was exacerbated in July 1933 when it was tentatively proposed that Fort Hare be invited to join the national union.²³ To appease the dissatisfied Afrikaans centres, a Commission of Inquiry found that Fort Hare was constitutionally ineligible for membership as it was affiliated to Rhodes and that general student opinion made it impracticable to admit the college.²⁴

In August 1933 a mass meeting at Grey University College (GUC) called on the SRC to secede from NUSAS on the grounds that it was too "negrophilistic" in that it followed "a negative native policy"

19 D. O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme: Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1983), pp.67-72.

20 D. O'Meara: pp.75-76, 96-106.

21 The Student Christian Association was brought from the United States by the founder of Huguenot College during the nineteenth century. Separate branches existed for different racial groups, but whites remained in one organisation in spite of attempts by Afrikaans-speaking students to secede and form their own organisation between 1915 and 1917. The SCA had 23 000 members at schools and institutions of higher education in 1940. J. de V. Heese: *Die Voortrekkers en ander Suid-Afrikaanse Jeugverenigings*, Nasionale Pers, Cape Town (1940), pp.123-132.

22 L. Chisholm: pp.63-66; H. Thom: p.356.

23 N. Rubin: *History of the Relations between NUSAS, the Afrikaanse Studentebond and the Afrikaans University Centres*, NUSAS, Cape Town (1960), p.4; BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1933, pp.8-9.

with regard to admitting Fort Hare. It was also argued that NUSAS was "unafrikaans", in that English members wanted to couple South Africa with Britain as their home, and that it had a "liberalistic tendency" which was the "result of the strong influence of socialistic, international-minded Jews ... who wish to effect a general world citizenship, without founding it on genuine nationalism".²⁵

The reasons given by Potchefstroom for its secession later that year were similar to those of GUC but were more explicitly anti-Semitic and overtly nationalistic.²⁶

Pretoria left shortly after the others. Stellenbosch called on the disaffiliated centres to return to NUSAS to negotiate their grievances - grievances with which Stellenbosch also identified. In late 1933 Stellenbosch negotiated on behalf of the northern universities that the national union would become fully bilingual, NUSAS tours would be arranged to areas of cultural interest to certain students and that the "Afrikaans Nasionale Studentebond" (discussed in the next paragraph) would be recognised as a cultural and religious organisation complementing the work done by NUSAS. However, no unanimity could be reached on the requirement that no black students would be admitted to membership.²⁷

In September 1933, a month after GUC had left NUSAS, the inaugural conference of the *Afrikaner Nasionale Studentebond* (ANS) was held in Bloemfontein.²⁸ The ANS was not the first exclusively Afrikaans student organisation to be established. In 1911 a *Studenten Werden Komitee* was founded to fight for Dutch/Afrikaans language rights and in 1918, the *Afrikaanse Studentebond* (ASB), representing students north of the Orange River, came into existence to champion the "scientific development ... of the Afrikaner people and ... Afrikaans culture".²⁹ Both organisations were superseded by NUSAS, but the ASB and its mouthpiece, *Die Banier*, were resurrected in the early 1930s.³⁰

The ANS was founded by a former member of the NUSAS executive and current president of the

24 N. Rubin: p.4; BC 586 S23 P. Tobias: "A History of the Relations between NUSAS and the Afrikaans Universities 1924-1948".

25 *Die Volksblad*, 22.8.1933 cited in N. Rubin: p.3.

26 N. Rubin: pp.5-7.

27 BC 586 B1 Minutes of Council Meeting held at Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 15 December 1933, pp.4-6; N. Rubin: p.8; H. Thom: p.357.

28 P. Furlong: *The Crown and the Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1991), p.79.

29 J. Fick: "Afrikaner Student Politics - Past and Present: in H. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds.): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), pp.59-67.

30 *Die Banier* Vol.1 No.2, April 1933.

ASB, Nico Diederichs,³¹ as well as by Piet Meyer, the chief protagonist of GUC's disaffiliation from NUSAS.³² Both had studied in Central Europe and had assimilated the Volkisch philosophy³³ mentioned above. Diederichs had also cultivated strong ties with the ultra-nationalist European student organisation, the *Dietsche Orde*³⁴ which was the inspiration behind the foundation of the ANS.³⁵ The ANS was thus an extreme nationalist organisation³⁶ which became increasingly pro-Nazi, later joining the Ossewabrandwag (OB).³⁷ The ANS newspaper, *Die Wapenskou*, was at the forefront of developing and disseminating Christian Nationalism.³⁸ The student bodies of all four Afrikaans universities as well as those from the Afrikaans teacher training colleges (Normal Colleges) joined this student union.³⁹

The ANS opened branches at both Wits and UCT but because of its closed membership and the fear that it would increase "racialism", it was denied official recognition on both campuses.⁴⁰ By 1939 NUSAS had also been proscribed at Pretoria and Stellenbosch.⁴¹

By 1936 then, two distinct student organisations had emerged, one stridently Afrikaner nationalist, the other, still clinging to its inclusiveness and goal of cultivating a broad South Africanism, but consisting by default only of students enrolled at English-speaking universities. Within NUSAS tensions existed between those advocating rapprochement with the Afrikaans centres, and those who felt that NUSAS should move in a more recognisably liberal direction, become truly inclusive and admit Fort Hare to membership. The conciliatory South Africanist grouping was initially dominant and in 1935 the NUSAS executive was instructed to do everything in its power to contact the ANS executive for the introduction of dual membership, but this came to nothing.⁴² Students at Wits were

31 L. Chisholm: p.30; *Die Banier* (First Edition), September 1932.

32 J. Fick: pp.65-66.

33 P. Furlong: p.80.

34 *Die Banier* Vol.1 No.2, April 1933.

35 *Die Wapenskou* Vol.1 No.9, November 1934.

36 The constitution of the ANS said that the organisation was based on Protestant Christian and national cultural principles and recognised the leadership of God in the area of culture and all aspects of life. It aimed to develop an Afrikaans student spirit and character for the service of the nation. It also aimed to cultivate ties between South African students and their overseas counterparts who had the same national and cultural aims and interests. Constitution of the ANS in *Die Wapenskou* Vol.1 No.1, 28.3.1934.

37 A para-military organisation with ties to the Third Reich, intent on setting-up a republican, national-socialist, Afrikaans state. Its leader was A.J.P. van Rensburg, who later became head of the ANS. It had a membership in 1940 of 170 000. B.J. Vorster (later prime minister), Nico Diederichs (later state president), Hendrik van den Bergh (later head of the Bureau of State Security), Piet Meyer (later chairman of the Broederbond and the SABC) and Koot Vorster (later Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church) were all prominent members of the OB. P. Furlong: pp.169, 247-248).

38 D. O'Meara: p.70.

39 P. Furlong: p.170.

40 *Die Wapenskou* Vol.1 No.4, June 1934; Vol.2 No.4, June 1935.

41 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1936, p.2; 1939, pp.3,7.

42 *Die Wapenskou* Vol.2 No.8, October 1935; BC 586 B1 President se Verslag aan die Elfde Jaarlikse Raadsveradering 1935, pp.1-2; Council Minutes 1935, p.6; B. Meyer: *Wits – The Early Years*, p.342.

much less conciliatory and were also at the forefront of the campaign to allow Fort Hare and black students into the national union.⁴³ The latter was certainly achieved by 1940 as in that year an Indian student represented Wits at the annual NUSAS Council meeting.⁴⁴

In order to understand how NUSAS responded to its dilemma of bringing the Afrikaans universities back into the fold and also to becoming a racially more inclusive body, it is necessary to examine the composition and organisation of the student bodies at the various universities, university colleges and from 1936, the teacher training colleges which NUSAS represented.

Like their counterparts in Europe, most white South African university students in the 1920s, 30s and 40s tended to come from middle-class backgrounds.⁴⁵ Children from working class families were less likely to matriculate as secondary schooling was not entirely free⁴⁶ and tuition fees were high as universities were only partially subsidised by the state.⁴⁷ There was class differentiation amongst the different universities themselves. The residential universities of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and Rhodes tended to attract students from more affluent backgrounds, whereas Wits and UCT, situated in major urban areas with large oppidan populations,⁴⁸ although charging the highest tuition fees in the country,⁴⁹ had a greater proportion of students from lower-income families who saw education as a means of social mobility.⁵⁰ Both UCT and Wits offered scholarships, bursaries and loans to needy students and many took advantage of these opportunities.⁵¹ During the war, the student profile at Wits changed somewhat, as students from very affluent families, who in the past would have

43 B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, p.342. See for example BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1936, p.1; Council Minutes 1936, pp.4-5; 1939, pp.12-13; 1940, pp.38-39 for attempts made by Wits to include Fort Hare, coloured students and even to create a separate black union.

44 *Star*, 14.6.1940; 17.6.1940; *Die Vaderland*, 20.6.1940.

45 H. Phillips: p.115; B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, p.337.

46 H. Phillips: p.115.

47 Students contributed 53% to total university revenue at Wits in 1939. BC 586 O.6.1 "Committee of Inquiry – SRC – Memorandum of Evidence", p.1.

48 Wits in fact came into existence as a result of a populist campaign to provide a "utilitarian type of university" for those who could not afford to send their children away from home. B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, p.64.

49 BC 586 O6.1 The average tuition fees at all South African universities in 1939 were 43.67 pounds while those at Wits were 57.07 pounds and UCT, 48.57 pounds. BC 586 O6.1 "Committee of Inquiry – SRC – Memorandum of Evidence: 1943(?)", pp.1.2. Afrikaans universities charged lower fees than their English counterparts. In 1935, of all the white universities, the University College of Potchefstroom was the cheapest. *Wapenskou* Vol.2 No.3, May 1935. This was, however, still more than the fees charged at Fort Hare in 1944 which were on average a third of those paid at white universities. Fort Hare students were also expected to earn their keep by helping to maintain the college grounds. *South African Native College Calendar for 1944, Twenty-Ninth Year*, Lovedale Press, Alice, p.17.

50 B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, p.337; H. Phillips: p.113.

51 By 1935 20% of all UCT students had availed themselves of some kind of financial assistance, while in 1943 the Wits bursary and scholarship fund paid out over thirteen thousand pounds, enough to pay the full fees of 233 Wits students at 1939 rates. H. Phillips: p.113; BC 586 O6.1. "Committee of Inquiry – SRC- Memorandum of Evidence" ?1943, p.6.

proceeded overseas for their studies, registered at Wits.⁵² For the small number of black students enrolled at South African universities, the problems of access to limited secondary schooling and financial resources were exponentially compounded.⁵³ Black students were usually older than their white counterparts as they had probably worked beforehand to earn the requisite funds.⁵⁴ Most students at Fort Hare studied with the assistance of bursaries and scholarships⁵⁵ although a small middle-class elite did exist at some mission high schools in the Eastern Cape,⁵⁶ some of whom would presumably have gone on to university.

Although the majority of students were middle-class, there were differences in the composition of the student bodies at the various universities. Students at residential universities often came from the rural parts of South Africa noted for their conservative values. Further, the isolated, rather inward-looking and more strictly supervised environment of these campuses tended to produce student bodies with either an apolitical or rather narrower social outlook.⁵⁷ The exception was Fort Hare, where the isolation tended to have a pressure cooker effect, resulting in the politicisation of all aspects of life.⁵⁸

Wits and UCT were located in the cosmopolitan urban areas and both universities reflected this heterogeneity. Afrikaans-speaking students comprised 30% of the student body at UCT in 1937⁵⁹ and averaged 25% at Wits during the 1930s.⁶⁰ Many aspired to enter the professional middle-class and were thus enrolled in the faculties of Medicine and Engineering, neither faculties existing at Stellenbosch or Pretoria until the 1940s and 1950s.⁶¹

The majority of students at Wits, UCT and the Durban branch of the University College of Natal came from the surrounding areas⁶² which were strongholds of the segregationist United Party,⁶³ although the more affluent suburbs steadily returned candidates of its more liberal wing to

52 B. Murray: "Wits at War", *African Studies Seminar Paper No.275*, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand (1990), p.5.

53 *South African Native College Calendar for 1949, Thirty-Forth Year*, Lovedale, Alice, 1949, p.81.

54 M. Legassick and J. Shingler: "South Africa" in D. Emmerson (ed.): *Students and Politics in Developing Nations*, Praeger, New York (1968), pp.112-113.

55 In 1942, 147 bursaries were awarded to Fort Hare students and there were also scholarships available. *South African Native College Calendar for 1944, Twenty-Ninth Year*, Lovedale, Alice, 1944, pp.20-23, 65.

56 A. Mager: "Girls, War, Mission Institutions and Reproduction of the Educated Elite in the Eastern Cape, 1945-1959", *Africa Seminar*, Centre of African Studies, University of Cape Town (1992), p.7.

57 M. Legassick and J. Shingler: pp.112-113.

58 L. Kuper: *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa*, Yale University Press, New Haven (1965), p.162; B. Pogrand: *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg (1990), p.20.

59 H. Phillips: pp.113,187.

60 B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, pp.317,322.

61 B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, pp.317-318,337; H. Phillips: p.113. Medical Faculties were established at Pretoria in 1943 and Stellenbosch in 1956.

62 B. Murray: *Wits – The Early Years*, pp.337; H. Phillips: p.113.

parliament. Lower-middle and working-class parts of the Rand were the domain of the National Party (NP) and the English-orientated Labour Party (LP).⁶⁴ Thus it can be deduced that the majority of Wits, UCT and Durban students supported the United Party, while at UCT and Wits, a minority were Nationalists. At Natal University College, and particularly at its Durban branch, students were markedly more conservative than those at other campuses. Elements within the Natal UP championed a more colonial, paternalistic type of segregation while some Natal residents also felt strong ties to the British Empire. Moreover, Durban had a large part-time enrolment which meant that its student body had greater work experience, was more career-minded and had financial responsibilities not generally shared by younger full-time students. In addition, many enrolled for Commerce and Engineering, subject areas recognised for the more conservative bent of their students.⁶⁵

At the other end of the political spectrum and numerically tiny, was the "radical left". Although bitterly divided amongst themselves, this amorphous grouping of Socialists, independent Marxists and Radicals, Trotskyites, Leninists and adherents of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) were united by their belief in a universal franchise and a non-racial society. The intellectual influences of the university left came from groups in wider society such as the CPSA, the All African Convention (AAC) and later, the Trotskyite Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), other independent Marxists and Socialists, Left and Zionist-Socialist book clubs and youth clubs.⁶⁶ The NEUM, home to the coloured intelligentsia of the Western Cape⁶⁷ found adherents amongst the minuscule number of coloured students at UCT.⁶⁸

Few black students enrolled at either UCT or Wits before the war even though both followed "open" admissions policies. Moreover, the Fine Arts Faculty at UCT was closed to black students as white models were used in life classes and, for a similar racist reason (the Hospital Boards would not allow black students to examine white patients), black medical students at Wits and UCT were forced to proceed overseas for their clinical years of study. The outbreak of the Second World War curtailed this arrangement. Wits opened its medical faculty to all students in 1940 and UCT to all except

63 D. O'Meara: p.133.

64 *ibid.*

65 P. Altbach: "Perspectives on Student Political Activism" in P. Altbach (ed.): *Student Political Activism – An International Reference Handbook*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (1989), p.9.

66 S. Forman and A. Odendaal (eds.): *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*, David Philip, Cape Town (1992), p.xvi.

67 G. Lewis: *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics*, David Philip, Cape Town (1987), p.243.

68 S. Forman and A. Odendaal: pp.125-126.

African students.⁶⁹ Thus, by the end of the war there were some 150 black students at Wits (more than half in the Medical Faculty),⁷⁰ while at UCT there were 107 (a quarter in Arts and Medicine and a third in Science).⁷¹

The only other university in South Africa which at this time accepted black students was the University of Natal, albeit on a segregated basis. Part-time classes, offering a limited selection of courses to upgrade the qualification of teachers were instituted in 1936 at Sastri Indian Boys High School in Durban. Sastri College, as it became known, rapidly expanded its degree offerings⁷² and was partially relocated to the Durban campus where black and white students attended separate classes. Sastri students were denied membership of student sports and cultural clubs and instead attended the annual "Vacation Schools" at Adams College which offered social functions, sporting competitions and addresses by well-known public figures. These proved to be popular and numbers grew.⁷³

Although classes were mixed at Wits and UCT, traditional social mores were upheld and thus, very little inter-racial social mixing occurred. All sports clubs were segregated, black students were discouraged from utilising the tennis courts and swimming pools and were unable to attend dances or participate in Rag and Intervarsity.⁷⁴ A separate student residence, Douglas Smit, was opened at Wits in 1946 to cater for black students.⁷⁵

Fort Hare also followed an "open" admissions policy as a handful of coloured and Indian students enrolled annually.⁷⁶ The College was an important institution in furthering the African cause and counted among its alumni Southern African leaders in a variety of fields. Despite its importance, Fort Hare was financially strapped⁷⁷ and consequently Fort Hare students lived in much greater hardship than students elsewhere. Subsistence issues were frequently causes for student dissatisfaction.⁷⁸ Due

69 B. Murray: "Wits at War", *African Studies Seminar Paper No.275*, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand (1990), p.2; H. Phillips: p.226.

70 B. Murray: "Wits as an 'Open' University 1939-1959: Black Admissions to the University of the Witwatersrand", *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol.16 No.4, December 1990, p.651; "Wits as an 'Open' University, 1922-1959", *The Making of Class*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (1987), pp.4-7.

71 H. Phillips: p.226.

72 E. Brookes: pp.45-46; M. O'Dowd: *The African in the Universities*, NUSAS, Cape Town (1954), p.11.

73 E. Brookes: p.45.

74 B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1939-1959*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1997), p.54; H. Phillips: pp.192-193, 233-234; M. Shear: *Wits: A University in the Apartheid Era*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1996), pp.8-9; Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

75 B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, p.54.

76 In 1939 the student body comprised 131 Africans, 16 coloureds, and 10 Indians. N. Mandela: *Long Walk to Freedom*, Macdonald Purnell, Randburg (1995), p.84.

77 T. White: "Student Disturbances at Fort Hare in 1955", *Kleio* No.XXIX, 1997, pp.131, 135.

78 B. Pogrand: p.15; BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings, 21.5.1952; 23.3.1955.

to its missionary background, a dual system of authority existed, which also led to conflict. The university was responsible for academic discipline while the Protestant missionaries administered the hostels in a particularly rigid fashion. Attendance at church services was compulsory and, as at other institutions, Sunday sport was banned and visiting hours were strict.⁷⁹ To some extent, Fort Hare inculcated a particular worldview into their students which could be classified as well-meaning paternalism, ie. students should gratefully leave their traditional past behind them in order to enter the "civilised" white world, albeit on an unequal basis. To achieve this, they were to strive to become "Christian", "English", African "gentlemen" and "ladies".

Women constituted only 10% of the student population at Fort Hare in 1946.⁸⁰ Women were also a minority at Wits and UCT, averaging 28%⁸¹ and 40% respectively during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Of those at UCT, many were non-matriculants taking art or music lessons.⁸² Female students were likely to come from middle class and particularly at Fort Hare, even prosperous backgrounds as generally, less affluent parents gave priority to the education of their sons.⁸³

Women were expected to play the same role on campus as in wider society, namely, preparing for an early marriage and motherhood. Thus, women were concentrated in the Faculties of Arts and the Life Sciences as these led to teaching, a career considered suitable for women. Moreover, many came to university to find a husband and did indeed specialise in their looks, dances and domestic skills.⁸⁴ The mission school socialisation of black women⁸⁵ ensured that they played the same role at university – at Fort Hare women remained responsible for organising the fortnightly college dances until the 1950s.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, a significant minority of women students were genuinely interested in their studies and in issues connected with wider society, participating in the Women's Discussion Club at Wits⁸⁷ and at UCT, in the short-lived University Women's Political Association founded to educate women about the newly acquired (female white) franchise.⁸⁸

79 T. Beard: "Background to Student Activities at the University College of Fort Hare" in H. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds.): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), p.165; Fort Hare: *Report of the Fort Hare Commission July 1955*, Lovedale Press, n.p. (n.d.?1955), p.3; T. White: "Student Disturbances at Fort Hare in 1955", p.131.

80 B. Pogrand: p.15.

81 F. Tobias: "The Women of Wits 1939-1959", BA (Honours) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1992), p.3.

82 H. Phillips: pp.112-113.

83 F. Tobias: pp.5-6; A.S. Knowles (ed.): *The International Encyclopaedia of Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco and London (1978) Vol.9, p.4383.

84 E. Brookes: p.34; H. Phillips: p.189; F. Tobias: pp.13-15.

85 A. Mager: pp.7-8.

86 BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 23.5.1951.

87 F. Tobias: p.15.

88 H. Phillips: p.189.

Women played a more prominent and important role on the campus during the war, at Wits, producing clothes for the war effort, to great acclaim.⁸⁹ The hitherto tightly controlled and monitored lives of women students⁹⁰ underwent a change at Wits when women successfully demanded a relaxation of residence rules and dress reform.⁹¹ Partly to fill the gap left by the departure of male students to the front, some women were voted onto student governing structures at Wits and at UN. Pietermaritzburg, or became actively involved in politics, the student newspaper, societies and the somewhat changed NUSAS.⁹²

NUSAS reorganised itself after the departure of the Afrikaans universities. Students at teacher training colleges were offered membership in 1936 partly to neutralise the effects of the ANS campaigns to recruit the Afrikaans Normal Colleges and indoctrinate teachers and school children with Christian National Education (CNE).⁹³ This also heralded the anti-CNE campaigns embarked on by NUSAS during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

More student benefits were offered to entice more adherents to NUSAS. An Employment Bureau, a Supply Association which sold textbooks at discounted rates, as well as a facility for the printing of lecture notes and examination papers were established.⁹⁴ A national Department of Social Research, which replaced the potentially divisive student parliament in 1935, co-ordinated research into national issues such as "Poor-Whiteism" and "Bantu Affairs" undertaken by the newly created campus Local Committees.⁹⁵ Although aimed at making NUSAS more inviting to students, the Local Committees were frequently out of touch with current student opinion, became the home of a particular political grouping (as the left did at Wits) or eclipsed the more representative SRC in NUSAS forums.⁹⁶

Political allegiances at Fort Hare are difficult to ascertain as African politics were in disarray in the early 1930s,⁹⁷ political discussion was officially banned at the college⁹⁸ and as yet, research is lacking

89 F. Tobias: pp.24-25.

90 H. Phillips: pp.188-189, 228-229.

91 F. Tobias: p.28.

92 F. Tobias: pp.25-30; At Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 3 out of 11 members of the 1941 SRC were women, one of whom was a vice-president. The chairperson of NUSAS for much of the war was a woman. Women even spoke at meetings, which was evidently not customary. *Nux* Vol.V No.15, 27.3.1941; No.3, 18.8.1944; n.v., 18.8.1948.

93 *Die Wapenskou* Vol.3 No.3, May 1936; BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1936, p.5. In 1937 NUS (Britain) invited training colleges into its student union. D. Jacks: *Student Politics and Higher Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1975), p.80.

94 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1938, p.1; Council Minutes 1939, p.3.

95 *Die Wapenskou* Vol.2 No.7, September 1935; B.K. Murray: *Wits - The Early Years*, p.343.

96 B.K. Murray: *Wits - The Early Years*, p.343.

97 T. Davenport: *South Africa: A Modern History*, Macmillan, London (1991), p.283.

98 Eddie Roux, a CPSA member, held secret meetings in the bush outside Fort Hare in 1933 as the College authorities had locked the gates to prevent students attending a CPSA meeting in town. This led to the ban on

on the subject. A Communist Party magazine for teachers and students, *Indlela Yenkululeko* was fairly popular among students,⁹⁹ but the All African Convention (AAC), a liberal united front set-up in 1935 to oppose the removal of Africans from the common voters' roll, dominated political life at Fort Hare until the opening of a campus branch of the ANC Youth League in 1948.¹⁰⁰

The ANC Youth League (ANCYL) was founded in 1943. It was a militant, nationalist organisation with strong Africanist and anti-communist overtones. Many of its founders and leaders had been students at Fort Hare during the 1930s and 1940s,¹⁰¹ but in spite of its origins, most Fort Hare students rejected narrow ethnic nationalism¹⁰² and a campus-based nationalist student organisation about which little is known, was considered ineffective. The Transvaal African Students' Association, as well as other provincially-based organisations had branches at Fort Hare, but were not regarded as nationalist. Apart from student matters, they addressed issues such as teachers' salaries and conditions in hostels but refrained from overt political activity. On occasion, they had the ear of the government, but they had no contact with any white student organisations like NUSAS.¹⁰³

Fort Hare students did not confine their interests only to South Africa. Like students in other parts of Africa,¹⁰⁴ they were "incensed" by Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia.¹⁰⁵ With the outbreak of the Second World War, students ardently supported Smuts' and Great Britain's stand against Nazi Germany, but a few outspoken students linked to the African National Congress (which had conditionally decided to support the war effort) criticised Smuts' racial policies and British

political discussion. E. Roux: *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (1964), p.276; R. First: "Preface" in G. Mbeki: *South Africa: The Peasant's Revolt*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (1964), p.12.

99 E. Roux: p.276.

100 G. Gerhart: *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, University of California Press, Berkeley (1978), pp.127-128; T. White: "ZK Matthews and the Formation of the ANC Youth League at the University College of Fort Hare", *Kleio* No.XXVII (1995), p.129.

101 Nelson Mandela, a founder member of the ANCYL was expelled from Fort Hare in 1940 for helping to organise an SRC election boycott. Govan Mbeki was the leader of militant student opinion in 1936. Robert Sobukwe was SRC president in 1949. Others at Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s were Walter Sisulu, Congress Mbata, Peter Raboroka, Joe Matthews, Ntsu Mokhele and Duma Nokwe. G. Gerhart: p.110; N. Mandela: pp.49,138; R. First: p.12; T. Beard: p.172, T. Davenport: p.315; T. Karis and G. Carter: *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*, Hoover, Stanford (1972-1977), Microfilm Collection 2:XM71:94, Interview with C. Mbata, pp.3,9,11,47.

102 Kaiser Matanzima, a Xhosa nationalist on the Fort Hare SRC in 1937, and later leader of the Transkei Bantustan, could win no support from the student body for his idea that Fort Hare become an African-only institution, closed to coloureds and Indians. T. Karis and G. Carter: Interview with C. Mbata, p.3.

103 *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

104 A. Adu Boahen: "The History of the West African Students Union" in A. Adu Boahen (ed): *The Role of African Student Movements in the Political and Social Evolution of Africa from 1900 to 1975*, UNESCO, Paris (1994), p.45.

105 R. First: p.13.

imperialism.¹⁰⁶

The United Party's decision to enter the Second World War on the side of Great Britain and the Allies and the subsequent departure of Hertzog from the party, dealt a blow to the ideal of a "broad South Africanism" symbolised by Fusion. This was felt in the student arena too. At the English-medium universities, the administrations and the majority of the student body generally threw themselves behind the war effort,¹⁰⁷ even though at the more socially diverse universities of Cape Town and Wits, many Afrikaans-speaking students favoured neutrality or, if connected to ANS, a German victory.¹⁰⁸ After the invasion of the Soviet Union, the radical left aligned to the CPSA actively worked for the Allied cause, winning for itself a following and a respectability not seen before or since.¹⁰⁹

The war placed NUSAS in a dilemma. By supporting the Allied struggle for democracy and freedom, ideals which were also enshrined in the NUSAS constitution, NUSAS would both jeopardise its non-political position as well as destroy all hopes of a re-united white national student union. Finally, after much conflict¹¹⁰ the 1940 NUSAS Council, far from unanimously, adopted a radical anti-fascist "war motion" which endorsed all UP war policy, including black mobilisation and the neutralisation of pro-Nazi groupings within South Africa. The "war motion" also called for a "just peace" at the end of the war, which upheld the "democratic rights" of all in the "victorious" and the "defeated countries", as well as in the "colonies" too.¹¹¹ However, somewhat illogically, NUSAS issued a disclaimer that its support of the war did not indicate support of the United Party.¹¹² NUSAS' practical contributions to the war effort included a scheme to assist child refugees,¹¹³ as well as the

106 N. Mandela: pp.46-47.

107 B. Murray: *Wits: The 'Open' Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1939-1959*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1997), pp.18-19, 86; H. Phillips: pp.246-249.

108 B. Murray: *Wits: The 'Open' Years*, p.86.

109 T. Lodge: p.28; B. Murray: "The 'Democratic' Left at Wits 1934-1948: The Federation of Progressive Students and Student Politics", *Democracy, Popular Precedents, Practice and Culture*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (1994), pp.1, 3.

110 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1940, p.1; B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, pp.18-19,86.

111 "The National Union of South African Students believes that South Africa should continue in its war effort against Fascism, despite pro-Fascist Governments coming into power that may hand South Africa or its Allies over to the enemy; that every effort should be made to make full use of the abilities of all elements in South Africa which are genuinely anti-Fascist, including our non-European population; that all subversive elements calculated to betray South Africa to the enemy be rendered ineffective; that the war be waged against fascism as such and not against the people of Germany and Italy; that at the end of the war a just peace be concluded which upholds the democratic rights of peoples in the victorious nations and defeated countries as well as in their various Colonies; and, finally, that only by waging the war in this spirit can Fascism be overthrown and ultimately destroyed and progress towards freedom and liberty be ensured. In accordance with these views, NUSAS offers its full support to the Union government in its war effort." *Star*, 4.7.1940.

112 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1940, pp.1-2; Council Minutes 1940, pp.1-2.

113 *Star*, 4.7.1940.

distribution of enlistment forms.¹¹⁴

Far fewer students than were able volunteered to fight.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, the departure of a sizeable number of United Party adherents to the front¹¹⁶ contributed to the political polarisation of student affairs at Wits, and even more so at UCT. The substantially augmented NP and ANS contingent on the UCT SRC – alleging that NUSAS was 'unafrikaans' and 'political' in supporting the war¹¹⁷ – succeeded in abolishing UCT's automatic membership of NUSAS which led to doubts about whether UCT was still a member of the national union.¹¹⁸ Both UCT campus newspapers, the anti-war, Nationalist and increasingly pro-fascist Afrikaans-medium newspaper, *Die Spantou* and the pro-war, English, *UC Tattle* were banned by the SRC and the university authorities in 1941 because they generated "racial hatred" and compromised the Allied war effort.¹¹⁹

At Wits the 120 strong Nationalist-orientated ANS set out on a collision course with other sections of the student body.¹²⁰ A statement allegedly made at a mass meeting in June 1941 in support of Fort Hare being invited to join NUSAS, that Wits would "liewer met honderd naturel sal saamwerk as met duisend Afrikaners", was the pretext for the ANS to embark on an anti-Semitic and racist campaign to persuade Afrikaans universities to sever all ties with Wits.¹²¹ Consequently all sport between Wits and the Afrikaans-speaking universities came to a standstill for the duration of the war. From then on, as at UCT, the ANS campaigned for the segregation of the increasing number of black students at the university¹²² and began publication of its own magazine, *Spore* which the radical Wits SRC attempted to ban because of its anti-Semitism and racism.¹²³

To reduce the possibility for conflict between the diverse groups on the Wits campus, the university authorities simply prohibited all meetings of a controversial nature. However, this led to tension between the students and the authorities. In 1943 a boycott against a twenty percent increase of the already high tuition fees was only lifted after the authorities threatened harsh action. A group of left-

114 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1940, p.1.

115 Students at both UCT and Wits were accused of cowardice and shirking their duty as at both only 25% of their respective student bodies enlisted. This was partly because the government did not want medical and engineering students to enlist. B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, pp.15-18; H. Phillips: pp.226, 247.

116 The majority of those who enlisted from UCT were English-speaking (H. Phillips: p.225) and thus more than likely to have been UP-inclined.

117 *UC Tattle* Vol.7 No.1, 4.10.1940; *Die Spantou*, 28.8.1940.

118 H. Phillips: p.237.

119 *UC Tattle*, 8.10.1941; H. Phillips: pp.231-232.

120 There were about 750 Afrikaans-speaking students at Wits at the time. B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, p.102; *Wits Views* Vol.VII No.5, 13.8.1943.

121 BC 586 O6.1 (Wits SRC 1941-1943): R. Welsh(?): "Copy of Address to General Meeting 20.6.1941", pp.1-2; "SRC Wits, Motion" n.d. 1941(?); "The SRC President's Report to the General Meeting of the Students 20.8.1941 held in the Great Hall at 5pm".

122 G. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, pp.89-90.

wing students began an investigation into the high cost of university education and recommended that it be state funded, in the same way as secondary education.¹²⁴ This cause, as well as the campaign by the Wits SRC to win for itself statutory recognition, was subsequently adopted by NUSAS after the war.

NUSAS did not fare very well during the war. For the sake of student unity, as well as to bring in as many Afrikaans students opposed to the ANS as possible, the divisive question of Fort Hare membership was shelved in 1941 until the end of the war.¹²⁵ For this reason, and because of the efforts of Dawie Marquard, a past president of NUSAS,¹²⁶ and the official recognition it enjoyed there,¹²⁷ at UCOFS a thriving 350-strong NUSAS branch existed there all through the war. Indeed, it was suggested that there was the possibility of the further growth of the branch were NUSAS to maintain the racial status quo, namely segregation. This was a distinct possibility as in 1942, it was proposed that NUSAS adopt segregation¹²⁸ but this was rejected in 1943.¹²⁹ A representative of UCOFS even served on the 1944-1945 NUSAS executive.¹³⁰

On the other hand, with the decision to exclude Fort Hare, NUSAS virtually died at Wits. In 1943 a rival to NUSAS, the Federation of Progressive Students (FOPS), an amalgam of communists, socialists and also liberals disenchanted with NUSAS' stance on Fort Hare, was established at Wits to champion the creation of a democratic society.¹³¹ However, FOPS' ambitions to become a national student organisation were thwarted when it was refused recognition at UCT¹³² and its overtures to Fort Hare met with little success.¹³³ Nonetheless, in 1944 it won control of the Wits SRC, a position it retained for a number of years.¹³⁴ It was this left-wing grouping which would be the locomotive for moving NUSAS in a far more liberal direction after the war.

123 *Guardian*, 13.9.1945; *Spore* Special Edition Vol.1 No.5, October 1945.

124 BC 586 O6.1: "Committee of Inquiry – SRC – Memorandum of Evidence" 1943?, pp.1, 6, 62.

125 B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, p.89.

126 *SA Student*, 15.3.1945.

127 The authorities at UCOFS gave the ANS and NUSAS equal recognition, thus forcing a reluctant SRC to allow NUSAS to organise. BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1940, p.8; Council Minutes 1945, p.4.

128 *Wus Views* Vol.VII No.5, 13.8.1943.

129 *Wus Views* Vol.VII No.6, 10.9.1943.

130 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, pp.1,4; *Irawa*, May 1945; Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997; *SA Student*, 15.3.1945.

131 B. Murray: "The 'Democratic' Left at Wits 1943-1948: The Federation of Progressive Students and Student Politics", *Democracy, Popular Precedents, Practice and Culture*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (1994), pp.1, 3.

132 *Varsity*, 14.10.1944.

133 D.E. Burchell: "The Emergence and Growth of Student Militancy at the University College of Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s", *Journal of the University of Durban- Westville*, New Series 3, 1986, p.156.

134 *Wus View*, 15.2.1945; B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, pp.100-102.

AT UCT the NUSAS Local Committee continued to carry out its research and welfare projects,¹³⁵ but within a less than congenial environment. As already mentioned, the SRC was actively opposed to NUSAS at various stages of the war, student opinion was divided over the Fort Hare question¹³⁶ and within the Local Committee itself, conflict occurred between the segregationist-South Africanist grouping on the one hand and the liberal-radical grouping on the other, the former managing, unconstitutionally, to expel from NUSAS, those of the latter who became members of FOPS.¹³⁷ Because of its more homogeneous student body and its close working relationship with the SRC, the Local Committee at Pietermaritzburg was one of the most active during the war. Together with the SRC, it co-ordinated research, welfare and relief projects and represented Natal University on the Natal Indo-European and Youth Councils.¹³⁸ Because the Durban branch of Natal University was largely a part-time institution, less NUSAS work could be undertaken there than elsewhere. Added to this, the white campus shared an uneasy relationship with Sastri students. The latter were officially represented in NUSAS forums by the white branch, but this was not always the case.¹³⁹ At the very end of the war, the NUSAS branch ceased functioning after the resignation of the Councillor because of differences of opinion regarding segregation at Natal University.¹⁴⁰ At Rhodes NUSAS had a mixed career but, by the end of the war, its fortunes had begun to change when the Local Committee, in addition to its traditional visits to Fort Hare, embarked on welfare and relief projects.¹⁴¹

Throughout its history, training colleges played a very minor role in NUSAS. A rapid turnover of students following short, rigidly structured courses at government- or church-controlled institutions which were frequently hostile to the supposedly political NUSAS, made thorough, sustained NUSAS activity difficult.¹⁴² The Johannesburg Training College (JTC), with its close ties to Wits¹⁴³ was the

135 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.5.

136 In 1941, the UCT SRC opposed Fort Hare's membership, while the results of a referendum on the issue revealed that 467 favoured immediate affiliation, 225 at a later stage and 283 never. H. Phillips: p.237; *UC Tattle* 8.10.1941.

137 *Varsity*, 23.6.1944; 25.8.1944.

138 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.6. The Natal Indo-European Council was part of the Joint Council Movement which was launched in 1921 to foster "inter-racial co-operation" by exponents of the ideas of the American, Booker T. Washington. The Joint Councils were rejected by all but a small section of the black middle-class as they could be used to co-opt and depoliticise African nationalism. NUSAS was associated with "non-political" bodies like the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Joint Council Movement during the 1920's and attended their conferences. J. Frederikse: *The Unbreakable Thread - Non-racialism in South Africa*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1990), pp.21-22; L. Chisholm: pp.62-63.

139 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1940, p.12. The question of Sastri representation in Durban forums was an ongoing crisis. In 1942 black students received one representative on the white Durban SRC and were allowed to vote at general meetings. *Wus Views* Vol. VI No.3, 28.5.1942.

140 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, pp.3-4.

141 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.5; N. Mandela: p.83.

142 The Natal Training College (NTC), a co-educational boarding institution established in 1909 in Pietermaritzburg, was strictly regimented and regulated along Christian lines. It had both academic and

most active member of this constituency but, by the end of the war, NUSAS had ceased functioning there too.¹⁴⁴

In conclusion then, by 1945 NUSAS was in a crisis. It was only partially operative, was in many cases divorced from the SRCs and student bodies which it purported to represent,¹⁴⁵ and survived financially only by drawing on its capital reserves.¹⁴⁶ As far as policy was concerned, the national union was suspended in a political limbo, pursuing ineffectually a policy of a broad white South Africanism in the face of strident Afrikaner nationalism on the one hand and growing demands for a more racially inclusive policy on the other. As with other organisations, ex-servicepeople, filled with the horrors of fascism and its attendant racism and imbued with the post-war ideals of democracy and equality, returned to the universities and were instrumental in NUSAS adopting a recognisably liberal policy and partially jettisoning the policy of a broad white South Africanism.

organisational links with NUC, (NTC students were represented on the NUC Pietermaritzburg SRC), but the training college was "insulated from the tensions, conflicts and racial bitterness outside" and students had "stereotypical political beliefs". *Natal Training College, Pietermaritzburg 1909-1959*, n.d., n.p., pp.18, 20, 23, 25, 48, 51; *Nux* No.1, 26.5.1944.

143 There was no Education Faculty at Wits and thus students proceeded from there to JTC. JTC had representatives on the Wits SRC. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II, No.5, 10.5.1950.

144 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.4.

145 The NUSAS Council of 1942 was attended by 50 students, none of whom was representative of their student government. *Wus Views* Vol.VI No.5, 28.8.1942; Vol.VII No.1, 12.3.1943.

146 *Nux* No.1, 26.5.1944.

Chapter two

THE ENTRY OF FORT HARE AND POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION: 1945-1948

The longstanding dilemma faced by NUSAS from 1933 onwards, whether to seek a rapprochement with the disaffiliated Afrikaans universities and university colleges or to become a racially inclusive body by incorporating Fort Hare into the national union, was promptly resolved in favour of the latter at the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945. The influx into the universities of large numbers of ex-servicepeople, imbued with democratic, anti-fascist ideals led to the temporary defeat of the hitherto South-Africanist (United Party-orientated) majority in NUSAS and paved the way for the entry of Fort Hare to NUSAS and the adoption by the national union of a recognisably liberal policy based on the pursuit of democratic principles in student affairs. This pursuit of liberalism and democracy, as well as the endeavours of the left, particularly at Wits and the black colleges, to transform NUSAS into a progressive organisation led to a protracted struggle between the radical and liberal left, on the one hand, and the centre (centre United Party) and right (segregationist right-wing of the UP), on the other, as to the role of a national union of students and the degree to which, if at all, it should concern itself with political issues. This conflict came to a head in 1948 when the assembly, in view of the change of government and the possibility of the NP's earlier threats to segregate the universities, voted that the principle of academic non-segregation should be enshrined in the NUSAS constitution. This, as well as the evident reluctance of many in the national union to uphold a social colour bar, a step unthinkable to most whites, resulted in the withdrawal of UCT and Durban from NUSAS, leaving the national union in a state of potential collapse and as small and unrepresentative as it had been at the end of the war. The withdrawal of UCT and Durban and the election victory of the NP led to re-alignments in student politics, with both the emergence of pro-NUSAS liberal groups on the campuses as well as an intensification of the efforts of the South-Africanist grouping to effect a reconciliation with the Afrikaans university students, the majority of whom they mistakenly believed were not favourably disposed towards the newly established Nationalist-supporting Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB). Within NUSAS itself, however, it will be seen that the South-Africanist group was entirely marginalized by the end of 1948 as the liberal and by the standards of the time, even radical national union had moved so far beyond the segregationist position that would be demanded of it were the Afrikaans-speaking students to return.

The influx of a substantial number of ex-servicepeople¹ to the English-medium universities in 1945 injected new life and ideas into the various campuses which they came to dominate until the end of the decade. These students were older than their contemporaries fresh out of school and this factor, in addition to their experience of war, made them more worldly and mature.² Student culture, on the one hand, became more hedonistic and rowdier than usual as ex-soldiers re-established themselves in civilian life;³ but, on the other, it also became more adult and responsible as these students,⁴ primarily enrolled in the professional faculties,⁵ applied themselves more diligently to their studies than their peers.⁶ Women were particularly affected by the return of the ex-servicepeople, the overwhelming majority of whom were male. They were forced to grow up more quickly and to relinquish any social advances they had made in university life during the war.⁷ They became a marked minority on the campuses, swallowed up in an overwhelmingly male-dominated culture anxious for a return to pre-war gender roles.⁸

The influx of ex-servicepeople also resulted in the post-war universities becoming socially more diverse as government ex-service grants⁹ and the waiving of some academic admission requirements allowed working-class people to enrol. The return of ex-servicepeople also altered the balance between English and Afrikaans-speaking students at Wits and UCT. Afrikaans-speakers became a much smaller minority than they had been during the war and their importance in student life,

1 At UCT there were 1488 ex-servicepeople in 1945-1946, making up one-third of the student body. H. Phillips: *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948*, University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town (1993), p.225; *Varsity*, 2.8.1946. Wits registered 2 400 ex-soldiers in 1946, 54% of the total number of ex-servicepeople at all universities. *Rand Daily Mail*, 2.7.1947. At Natal University 300 full-time and 1 200 part-time students were expected to enrol in 1946. *Nux*: Exhibition Number, 15.9.1945. A substantial number of ex-servicepeople registered at Rhodes, 464 out of a total student population of 725 in 1946. *Rhodeo* Vol.8 No.3, 24.3.1945; R.F. Currey: *Rhodes University 1904-1970 - A Chronicle*, Rhodes University Library, Grahamstown (1970), p.111. Although only five ex-volunteers enrolled at Fort Hare, their presence elicited special mention. "Report of the Governing Council for year ending 1946" in *South African Native College Calendar for 1948, Thirty Third Year*, Lovedale Press, Alice, 1947, p.80.

2 *Varsity*, Vol.5 No.1, 8.3.1946; F. Tobias: "The Women of Wits 1939-1959" BA(Hons) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1992), pp.43-44.

3 H. Phillips: p.227; *Nux* No.2 of 1954, 3.6.1954.

4 H. Phillips: p.230.

5 H. Phillips: p.230. At Wits 706 registered for Engineering, 361 for Medicine, 277 for Commerce, 221 for Science and 212 for Architecture in 1946. *Spore Jaarblad* Vol.2 No.6, 1946.

6 *SA Student*, March 1949; *Varsity* Vol.5 No.3, 3.5.1946.

7 F. Tobias: pp.38,44. The 1946-1947 SRC, the largest in Wits' history had a majority of ex-servicemen and only three women out of 26 councillors. Of the 24 members of the 1943 SRC, 7 were women and the 1945 SRC had 5 women. There was a female vice-president in 1942 and several women had edited *Wits Student* during the war. B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1939-1959*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1997), pp.90,101,104,109. In 1948, the student newspaper at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg harked back to the war years when women had played a major role in student life, chairing the Local NUSAS Committee, being members and Vice-Presidents of the SRC, speaking at meetings, whereas in 1948, they did nothing. *Nux* (n.v.), 18.8.1948.

8 At Wits in 1946 there were over 4 000 male students and only 818 female students. F. Tobias: pp.34,42,48.

9 *Rand Daily Mail*, 9.7.1945; *Rhodeo* Vol.8 No.3, 24.3.1945; "Report of the Governing Council for the year ending 1946", *South African Native College Calendar for 1948*.

particularly in student government, declined. At UCT this change also served to dilute the power of the pro-Nationalist right, as well as the South Africanist inclusivist grouping as ex-soldiers with their more progressive ideas took over the SRC in 1946.¹⁰

What was the political-ideological orientation of ex-servicepeople? Most were left of the white South African centre and had, to some extent, transferred their wartime beliefs in democracy and anti-fascism to the South African situation. The "Army Education Service", established by left-wing academics at Wits,¹¹ presented the war as "a struggle for a better world, for democracy, for human rights" and attempted to inculcate in the army volunteers "a liberal tolerant frame of mind". Lectures examined issues such as the colour bar, socialism, communism and trade unionism.¹²

The Springbok Legion was essentially a working-class organisation, but also included in its ranks ex-soldiers from more affluent backgrounds.¹³ It was a non-racial "soldiers' trade union" organised along "popular front" lines and led by some prominent communists and liberals. It believed that a "square deal for soldiers could be achieved within a social justice framework in civilian life".¹⁴ This being so, it called for unity and co-operation among all races, supported democracy and also all organisations working for a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity.¹⁵ A large branch of the Springbok Legion existed at Wits,¹⁶ and while there is no evidence of branches at other campuses, there was certainly sympathy for the organisation. In 1945, the SRC at the Pietermaritzburg branch of Natal University (NUC(P)) joined the Legion in deploring the plight of fifty ex-volunteers,¹⁷ while older UCT students participated as a university group in the Legion's anti-National Party "Sticker Campaign" during the 1948 General Election.¹⁸

Most students were, however, likely to belong, not to the Springbok Legion, but to the Ex-

10 H. Phillips: pp.225,232,234,236.

11 B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years*, pp.4,18,21-22.

12 J. Lazerson: *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle against Apartheid*, Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, Bellville (1994), pp.54-55.

13 N. Roos, T. Clynick: "Servicemen, Social Justice and the Honour Code: The Springbok Legion 1941-1947", *The Written Past in a Transforming Society: Trends and Directions in South African History, Fifteenth Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society* Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 2-5 July 1995, p.17; J. Lazerson: p.59.

14 D. Everatt: "The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960", D.Phil., Oxford (1990), p.17; J. Lazerson: p.55; N. Roos and T. Clynick: p.5.

15 *ibid.*

16 *Wus Views*, Vol.IX No.2, 11.4.1945; *Wus Views* Special Rag Edition, 10.5.1946; Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

17 *Nux* No.7, 10.9.1945.

18 The Legion played an active role in the 1948 election campaign, calling on ex-soldiers to oppose fascist parties like the National Party. D. Fridjhon: "The Torch Commando: A Study in Opposition Politics in White South Africa, 1951-1953", BA (Hons) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1975), pp.4,15. Anti-fascist posters and stickers were put up. S. Forman and A. Odendaal (eds.): *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*, David Philip, Cape Town (1992), pp.127-128.

Servicemen's Associations operating on each campus,¹⁹ which were more closely associated with the more conservative, non-political British Empire Ex-Service League or the MOTHS. Although the UCT Ex-Servicemen's Association scorned party politics, it was committed to its own brand of "freedom, tolerance and measured liberalism",²⁰ and so too presumably were those on the other campuses. Well-organised ex-soldiers²¹ were able to win control of student government,²² and in so doing, enable NUSAS, which came to represent the SRCs, to move in a more recognisably liberal direction.

However, before this change in the political-ideological orientation of SRCs occurred, a strong right-wing grouping on the UCT SRC was instrumental in the official adoption by that SRC of segregation on the campus. This led to an attempt by the opposition National Party to remove black students from the universities through parliamentary means. The left-of-centre members of the NUSAS executive embarked on a campaign to oppose this, thus taking another step into "party politics" and, in so doing, jeopardising NUSAS' non-political image.

Towards the end of 1944, R.A. Lawrence, an Indian medical student and a member of the Students' Socialist Party, was elected to an SRC which held a conservative right-wing majority.²³ Using a number of technicalities and legalisms, the Nationalist and ANS members of the SRC attempted to remove Lawrence and then also tried to create a powerless, subsidiary, black advisory council on which he could serve. They were unsuccessful in this as they were unable to obtain a two-thirds majority from either the SRC or the student body.²⁴ The politically divided NUSAS Local Committee became involved in the struggle, the radical and liberal left members siding with Lawrence and the left, and the South Africanist grouping with the segregationist UP faction and the Nationalists. This served to further antagonise the right as regards NUSAS²⁵ and to weaken and divide further NUSAS at the end of the war. Only 25% of the UCT student body were members of NUSAS in 1945²⁶ while the SRC only reaffiliated itself to the national union at the end of that year.²⁷

The upshot of the "Lawrence incident" was the adoption of the so-called "Status Quo Agreement",

19 At UCT the organisation was known as the Ex-Servicemen's Association and at Wits as the University Ex-Service League (UXL). *Varsity* Vol.5 No.3, 3.5.1946; *Wus Views* Vol.IX No.2, 11.4.1945.

20 H. Phillips: p.236.

21 *Varsity*, Vol.5 No.1, 8.3.1946; Vol.5 No.3, 3.5.1946.

22 *Wus Views* Vol.1 No.3, April 1947; B. Murray: *Wits: the 'Open' Years*", p.104; H. Phillips: p.236.

23 *Varsity*, 16.10.1944; S. Forman and A. Odendaal: pp.124-125.

24 *Varsity*, 16.10.1944; Special Edition, 5.4.1945; *Wus Views* Vol.IX No.2, 11.4.1945; *Trek*, 9.2.1945.

25 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, pp.5-6; *Varsity*, Special Edition, 5.4.1945; Vol.4 No.3, 8.5.1945; *SA Student*, March 1945.

26 *Varsity* Vol.4 No.3, 8.5.1945.

27 *Varsity* Vol.4 No.9, 23.10.1945.

which formally acknowledged the existence of segregation and a social colour bar at UCT.²⁸ This agreement was supported by the majority of students.²⁹

The "Lawrence incident" continued at a national level. In early 1945, the National Party (HNP) MP for Gordonia, J. Conradie, gave notice of his intention to introduce a private member's bill which would result in the imposition of segregation in all institutions of higher learning.³⁰ The radical and liberal left elements of the NUSAS executive requested all SRCs to endorse their protest against the bill, which they linked to the "Lawrence incident". In their opinion, the ANS, thwarted in its attempt to impose segregation and to create a black subsidiary advisory council at UCT by democratic means, had decided to by-pass university structures and instead use parliament to attack student rights directly.³¹

This bill had the effect of dispelling apathy and indifference towards NUSAS at a stroke but also plunged it into controversy - many students felt that, by taking such a step, NUSAS was involving itself in party politics and thus straining relations between English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites. With the active support of the members of the radical Federation of Progressive Students (FOPS), the Wits student body, during a rowdy mass meeting at the beginning of 1945, voted to support NUSAS in its endeavour to halt the passage of the segregation bill.³² The majority (583 to 344) was surprisingly small, given the political complexion of some of the student body, and can only be explained by the opposition of a sizeable number of students to what they perceived as NUSAS' dabbling in party politics.³³

Students at NUC(P), although attending a segregated institution themselves, also rejected academic segregation because it violated university traditions and ideals³⁴ but some students were perturbed that the issue was raised at all because of the potential harm that it could do to inter-white

28 "a) Non-European students refrain from attending social functions and taking part in sporting activities together with European students b) This SRC further agrees not in any way to interfere with the existing rights of Non-European students in student affairs, provided they abide by the status quo c) This SRC however agrees that ordinary meetings of University societies are not social functions but a necessary supplement to formal academic instruction and therefore Non-European students should not be prevented from attending such meetings". *Varsity* Vol.4 No.3, 8.5.1945.

29 The "Status Quo Agreement" was supported by 61% of the student body and rejected by 19%. 79% disagreed with integrated social functions while 19% agreed. *Varsity* Vol.4 No.4, 6.6.1945.

30 Union of South Africa: *Debates of the House of Assembly, Second Session, Ninth Parliament 20 January to 12 June 1945*, 5478.

31 NUSAS Executive letter to SRCs quoted in *Wus Views* Vol.IX No.2, 11.4.1945; Open Letter "To Mr J.H. Hofmeyr" from J. Stewart and O. Caldecott, *Trek*, 9.2.1945.

32 *Wus Views* Vol.IX No.1, 13.3.1945.

33 B. Murray: "The Democratic Left at Wits 1943-1948: The Federation of Progressive Students and Student Politics", *Democracy, Popular Precedents, Practice and Culture*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (1994), p.10.

34 *Nux* No.3, 18.5.1945.

relations.³⁵ Likewise, Johannesburg Training College (JTC) realised that by opposing segregation they could jeopardise their relationship with the Afrikaans normal colleges but they decided to risk this anyway.³⁶ The NUSAS branch at the University College of the Orange Free State (UCOFS) supported segregation³⁷ while students at Rhodes did not, but nonetheless Rhodes students rejected the NUSAS motion by 80 to 51 votes, again, like at other institutions, because of the introduction of party politics into the national union.³⁸ Not without controversy, the SRC at the Durban branch of NUC upheld the decision of a mass meeting heavily attended by black students from Sastri College that Durban would reject university segregation and support the executive motion.³⁹

Finally, the NUSAS executive again entered the political domain, although within its constitutional framework of promoting equality of educational opportunity, and publicly denounced university segregation. It argued that university segregation would lead to unequal educational facilities and entrench the inferior economic position of the black population and that South Africa could not be "at peace" were the only contact between black and white confined to the unequal environment of the workplace. Further, because they were "places of tolerance" and concerned with the "pursuit of truth", universities were considered by NUSAS to be the most appropriate setting for the inculcation of "racial harmony". The concept of separate black universities was repudiated as unjust because the "inherited" South African university culture was not the "prerogative of Europeans but the inheritance of all".⁴⁰ These sentiments accorded well with the current liberal preoccupation of creating a black middle-class steeped in western culture, which could be incorporated into state structures. This would be achieved through increasing contact between races, the amelioration of black wages and the initiation or extension and improvement of welfare services to the black population, particularly in the field of education.

The increasingly liberal trend within NUSAS was confirmed in July 1945 when the NUSAS Council ratified the executive statement and empowered its members actively to oppose any attempt to segregate any NUSAS institution.⁴¹ To appease the segregationists - who had already argued in favour of culturally compatible African structures instead of the alleged imposition of white methods of organisation on black students and who had become alarmed that NUSAS might vote for the abolition of the social colour bar as well - the assembly accepted a motion put forward by a Durban

35 *Nux* No.3, 18.5.1945.

36 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, pp.4-5.

37 *Irawa*, May 1945; BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.4.

38 *Rhodes*, Vol.8 No.3, 24.3.1945.

39 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, pp.3-4.

40 *Cape Times*, 26.4.1945.

41 *SA Student*, August 1945.

delegate, that NUSAS would oppose segregation in the academic sphere only.⁴²

Although opposition to segregation was to assume the greatest importance in future NUSAS forums, the main item on the agenda of the annual NUSAS Council meeting, hosted by the UCOFS branch in Bloemfontein in July 1945, was the reorganisation of the national union which was felt to have become sectional and thus could no longer legitimately claim to represent all South African students.⁴³ For this purpose, representatives of all SRCs were invited to attend, but of the Afrikaans universities, only UCOFS sent delegates, the others only observers. At the meeting the executive was given a unanimous mandate to transform NUSAS into a more representative body.⁴⁴ The Council was to be transformed into a student assembly which would be a federation of SRCs of the English universities and of the Local Committees of the non-NUSAS centres,⁴⁵ in essence a "super SRC". Each university was to be represented by its SRC president and vice-president instead of, as in the past, by the local NUSAS committee "councillor" and "correspondent".⁴⁶ The Local Committees became Research Committees whose representatives would meet at a separate annual Research Council.⁴⁷ Thus, the domination of the Local Committees for over a decade would come to an end. This process was set in motion in May 1946 when the new constitution was implemented.⁴⁸

The entry of Fort Hare to NUSAS, one of the issues which had torn the national union apart during the 1930s and which had led to continuous conflict for more than a decade, was the other important item on the agenda of the 1945 annual Council meeting.

In 1945 Le Roux Rantshabo, on behalf of Fort Hare students, formally applied for NUSAS membership for the college.⁴⁹ By actually applying for membership (a tactic organised by the Wits left⁵⁰), an objection raised in the past by those opposed to Fort Hare's membership that the college had never applied for membership, was removed. Rantshabo argued that Fort Hare students pursued a policy of inter-racial co-operation and that NUSAS' claim to be a national union would remain

42 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, pp.8-9.

43 *Rand Daily Mail*, 7.7.1945; *Die Volksblad*, 7.7.1945; *Die Burger*, 7.7.1945.

44 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1946, p.5; *Rand Daily Mail*, 7.7.1945.

45 *Varsity* Vol.4 No.6, 31.7.1945; *SA Student*, August 1945, p.2.

46 *SA Student*, August 1945; *Nux* No.6, 22.8.1945.

47 *SA Student*, August 1945, p.2.

48 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1946, p.5.

49 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.16.

50 Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

empty until Fort Hare was included in its structures.⁵¹

Those who wanted to accede to Fort Hare's application argued that that line of action was consistent with the clauses of the NUSAS constitution which defended democracy and advanced educational and economic opportunities.⁵² The war, which had ended two months earlier, as well as the hoped for new democratic world order signified by the signing of the United Nations Charter in June 1945, weighed heavily on the Council's deliberations regarding Fort Hare. Thus it was argued that the war and the "present state of the modern world indicated that democracy was constantly in danger" and thus it was "essential ... to take a stand where a matter of principle was involved".⁵³ As such, the past policy of appeasement to the Afrikaans universities was denounced as "shameful" and "futile"⁵⁴ and detrimental to NUSAS. The Wits delegates, who were also members of the Federation of Progressive Students (FOPS), the radical student organisation which aimed to transform NUSAS from within, announced that they were only able to support an organisation which followed a "fighting policy".⁵⁵ They threatened the secession of Wits were NUSAS again to abrogate its democratic principles and leave Fort Hare out in the cold.⁵⁶ They believed that NUSAS should champion the cause of the weak and the rightless and accordingly, Fort Hare should participate in NUSAS forums.⁵⁷

Some segregation-minded students called for the decision to be delayed, arguing that the admission of Fort Hare could sabotage the re-organisation scheme by deterring the Afrikaans-speaking students from returning to NUSAS, because, on the one hand NUSAS would offer them membership and on the other, "hurl them in the face with Fort Hare" [sic].⁵⁸ However, this proposal was defeated.⁵⁹ The representative from the UCOFS felt that by altering its membership clause, NUSAS would plunge itself into party politics, thereby discrediting itself in the eyes of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans,⁶⁰ and in so doing compromise its claim to be a national organisation. The UCOFS spokesperson added further, in an apology for apartheid, that the decision would in fact be a

51 *SA Student*, August 1945; Letter from Le Roux Rantshabo; D. Burchell: "The Emergence and Growth of Student Militancy at the University College of Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s", *Journal of the University of Durban-Westville*, New Series 3, 1986, p.156.

52 *Star*, 5.7.1945.

53 *ibid.*

54 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.7; *Star*, 5.7.1945.

55 *Star*, 5.7.1945; *Die Vaderland*, 5.7.1945.

56 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.9; *Varsity* Vol.4 No.6, 31.7.1945.

57 *SA Student*, August 1945; *Star*, 5.7.1945; *Die Burger*, 5.7.1945.

58 In 1941, Afrikaans-speaking students at Wits alleged that a speaker at a mass meeting had said that NUSAS would rather work with Africans than Afrikaners. This was regarded as an insult to Afrikaners and all ties between Wits and Afrikaans universities were as a consequence broken off. See Chapter 1, p.17. *Die Vaderland*, 5.7.1945; *Die Burger*, 5.7.1945.

59 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.9.

disservice to the black population as the demand for black universities would cease.⁶¹

After much discussion, Resolution 8 of 1945, proposed that "Fort Hare be admitted to NUSAS Council" was adopted with the required two-thirds majority, by 11 votes to 3 – Gracie of UCT and the UCOFS against.⁶²

NUSAS' inclusion of Fort Hare and the rejection of academic segregation elicited a response from the public press. Nationalist editors utilised the decisions for the purposes of party political propaganda. *Die Volksblad* stated that NUSAS' policy placed black students above whites, particularly Afrikaners. It believed that NUSAS, which was in the hands of "extremists" and was particularly influenced by the "negrophiles" at Wits, had written its own "death sentence" by rejecting "proven segregation" which it believed Afrikaans- and most English-speaking students upheld.⁶³ *Die Burger*, in a roundabout and evasive fashion, argued that black people (with their "pre-middle ages world view") became "imitation white people"⁶⁴ at the universities where they mixed with white students, a situation which led to "saamboerdery" and the end of "White Civilisation".⁶⁵ Both *Die Burger* and *Die Volksblad* advocated the establishment of racially segregated institutions to eliminate *saamboerdery*.⁶⁶ The United Party government was held ultimately responsible for *saamboerdery* as it had allowed black students into the universities in the first place.⁶⁷

The liberal, UP-orientated *Cape Times* congratulated NUSAS on its "courageous decision" based on non-discriminatory principles which had emanated from the "noblest declarations of the war", to lift "colour prejudice" above the level of "practical party politics".⁶⁸ In other words, like NUSAS, it recognised that the war had changed the situation, but disguised the degree of change by portraying the NUSAS decision as no break with the past but rather consistent with traditional United Party

60 *Star*, 5.7.1945; *Die Vaderland*, 5.7.1945.

61 BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.7.

62 The final vote was 12-3 as Huguenot registered a postal vote in favour of Fort Hare. BC 586 B1 Council Minutes 1945, p.8; *SA Student*, August 1945; *Varsity* Vol.4 No.6, 31.7.1945.

63 *Die Volksblad*, 7.7.1945.

64 Segregationists argued that African culture or civilisation was backward, different, separate and alien from superior white culture or civilisation. It was believed that educated Africans who had assimilated white culture were frauds. This school of thought believed that Africans should remain and develop within their own culture. NUSAS countered the "imitation white man" argument by saying that university culture was inherited and thus was not the preserve of whites, but was universal. S. Dubow: "Race, civilisation and culture: the elaboration of segregationist discourse in the inter-war years" in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds.): *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, Longman, London (1987), p.84; *SA Student*, August 1945.

65 *Die Burger*, 3.8.1945.

66 *Die Burger*, 3.8.1945; *Die Volksblad*, 7.7.1945. The obsession with miscegenation or "saamboerdery" was influenced by the biological determinism of Social Darwinism and eugenics. S. Dubow: pp.75-77.

67 *Die Volksblad*, 7.7.1945.

68 *Cape Times*, 1.8.1945.

segregatory policy of keeping the "native question out of party politics". *The Star* also downplayed the decision by stating that the inclusion of Fort Hare was an "evolutionary" rather than a "revolutionary" step which it felt was "overdue". It believed that conditions had changed since 1934 when NUSAS had excluded Fort Hare on practical and, in its opinion, indefensible constitutional grounds.⁶⁹ *The Rand Daily Mail*, the most progressive of white South African newspapers hailed NUSAS' inclusion of Fort Hare and its opposition to university segregation in explicitly liberal terms in that the national union "recognis[ed] the academic equality of the educated native and admit[ted] his [sic] right to be a member of the student body".⁷⁰

Thus, the policy adopted at the 1945 Council meeting had decisively rejected segregation and pushed NUSAS firmly along the path of liberalism. NUSAS, however, denied that its policy was in any way political except in that it followed fundamental democratic principles. This situation was untenable for the segregationist, South Africanist-orientated students, who believed that unity between all white students was of greater importance than the inclusion of black students in the national union. That this grouping were losing their influence in NUSAS from 1945 is apparent in the composition of the 1945/6 executive. Whereas the 1944-1945 executive had three pro-segregation members, the 1945-1946 executive was left wing – four members out of six aligning themselves with socialism, although they did not pursue their personal political agendas in NUSAS.⁷¹

The conclusion of the 1945 Council meeting was marred by the resignations from NUSAS of Gracie, the former president and the a former executive member from UCOFS, as they felt that the national union was no longer representative of its support base and could not bring students together because of the contentious nature of the resolutions it had adopted.⁷² Accordingly, in August 1945, Gracie and two conservative members of the UCT SRC, in conjunction with students at Stellenbosch,

69 *Star*, 6.7.1945.

70 *Rand Daily Mail*, 6.7.1945.

71 The president of NUSAS was Arnold Kloppe, an Afrikaans-speaking alumnus of UCOFS who was studying Medicine at Wits. He was vice-president of the Wits SRC, (*SA Student*, August 1945), member of FOPS and, as a member of the Students Labour League, stood as a socialist candidate in the 1944 Johannesburg municipal elections. B. Murray: *Wits: the 'Open' Years*, p.98. In spite of his radicalism, he was popular with more conservative students. *Nux* No.6, 22.8.1945. Jimmy Stewart (vice-president) had been a member of the previous executive and was a socialist, pacifist and later, the founder of the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS). He was at the forefront of the campaign to include Fort Hare in NUSAS and also led the fight against the right at UCT during the war. A. Egan: *The Politics of a South African Catholic Student Movement, 1960-1987*, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town (1991), p.7; *Varsity* Vol.5 No.6, 2.8.1946; Oliver Caldecott, also a member of the previous executive, was left-wing and a member of the aborted UCT FOPS branch during the war. *Varsity* Vol.3 No.4, 23.6.1944. Bernard Kemp from NUC(P) and also later of the NCFS, was a long-standing supporter of NUSAS. He seemed to be more of a student "trade unionist" than a political candidate. *Nux* (n.v.), 19.10.1949. Jan De Villiers Graaf was a UCT science student and left-wing liberal, unlike his brother, the future leader of the United Party. Benny Sischy was a medical student, a member of the Wits SRC, FOPS and the CPSA.

72 *Rand Daily Mail*, 7.7.1945.

established a new national, democratic, "non-political", all white federation of SRCs, the Union Federation of Students (UFS), which in their opinion, harked back to the earlier non-contentious NUSAS.⁷³ The UFS was prepared to liaise only with separately constituted black student organisations. However, NUSAS denied that the UFS was either a national or a non-political body, as it would only represent those students who rejected Fort Hare's membership of NUSAS. It furthermore argued (somewhat inconsistently in the light of its own recent decisions) that by excluding black students, politics would be dragged into the UFS.⁷⁴

While the deliberations for the new organisation were in progress, the conservative United Party and Nationalist majority on the UCT SRC voted not to pay its membership and affiliation fees to NUSAS, in other words, refusing to re-affiliate to NUSAS and instead decided to affiliate to the UFS.⁷⁵ At a "rowdy" mass meeting on 13 August 1945, called to affirm UCT's support for NUSAS and to ratify its decision regarding Fort Hare, it was argued by NUSAS supporters that the UFS harboured within its ranks undemocratic, semi-fascist elements who were associated with the ANS and the Republikeinse Studentebond,⁷⁶ organisations with which the UCT SRC earlier had declined to co-operate.⁷⁷ A decision on UCT's relationship with NUSAS was postponed to a referendum, but an amendment that UCT support the UFS was lost by 476 votes to 327.⁷⁸

In the meantime, UFS members used an inter-university conference convened in Johannesburg to re-establish sporting links⁷⁹ severed by the Afrikaans universities in 1941⁸⁰ as a platform to promote the new federation.⁸¹ Hope for English-Afrikaans student unity was falsely raised when all universities excepting Wits agreed to segregated sports events.⁸²

In the end, the UFS died a speedy death. The expected support from Natal students and the former NUSAS branch at UCOFS,⁸³ which dissolved itself in August 1945,⁸⁴ was not forthcoming while

73 *Cape Times*, 9.8.1945; *Varsity*, Vol.4 No.7, 27.8.1945.

74 *Die Burger*, 10.9.1945.

75 *Cape Times*, 9.8.1945; *Varsity* Vol.4 No.7, 27.8.1945; *New Era* Vol.1 No.34, 27.9.1945; *Nux* No.6, 22.8.1945.

76 *Die Burger*, 14.8.1945. The Republikeinse Studentebond, a National Party-aligned group based in Pretoria, was working towards the creation of an alternative student organisation to the pro-Ossewabrandwag ANS. There was also a "Christian" Republikeinse Studentebond based at Potchefstroom which had the same intention as its near namesake at Pretoria, but supported the establishment of a theocratic, authoritarian Kruger-like republican state. P. Furlong: *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1991), pp.230-231.

77 *Die Burger*, 10.8.1945.

78 *Die Burger*, 14.8.1945.

79 *Rand Daily Mail*, 14.8.1945.

80 See Chapter 1, p.17. *Die Vaderland*, 15.8.1941; 19.8.1941; 23.10.1941.

81 *Wits Views* Vol.IX No.5, 13.8.1945.

82 *Rand Daily Mail*, 14.8.1945.

83 *Die Burger*, 14.8.1945.

84 *Irawa*, August 1945.

UCT students narrowly supported NUSAS and rejected the UFS in a referendum.⁸⁵

However, not all right-wing elements were marginalised at NUSAS centres around the country. Aided and abetted by the 1945 NUSAS representative who had supported segregation, as well as by anti-NUSAS members of staff, the Natal Training College decided to secede from NUSAS in 1946 as it could not support the NUSAS policy of academic non-segregation. This occurred in spite of the intervention of the NUC(P) NUSAS members who argued that it was not necessary to support all aspects of NUSAS policy to remain a member of the organisation.⁸⁶ Although NTC seceded, two new branches came into existence during 1945-1946. As a result of a 1945 Council resolution, the SRC of Hewat Teachers' Training College for coloured students in Athlone, Cape Town affiliated to NUSAS.⁸⁷ Hewat aligned itself with the radical left⁸⁸ in the student assembly. At Stellenbosch in October 1945 a NUSAS branch consisting of 26, mainly English-speaking students, was formed with the assistance of the UCT executive members.⁸⁹ The broad mass of Stellenbosch students was opposed to the existence of the branch and the SRC banned it from using any university facilities. The founders hoped that the NUSAS policy of bilingualism would change this attitude as the Stellenbosch SRC had shown itself willing to participate in the NUSAS Netherlands Relief project, but in vain.⁹⁰

The Netherlands Relief Project was organised by NUSAS in conjunction with the Geneva-based World Student Relief to help rebuild Dutch universities smashed by the Nazis.⁹¹ NUSAS hoped to include as many students as possible in this campaign, as is evident in the choice of the Netherlands as the beneficiary, a country to which many white students felt bonds of loyalty,⁹² and also in the choice of trustees of the fund, which included not only religious and political leaders, but also rectors of Afrikaans universities as well.⁹³ Money was to be collected at social functions such as braais and concerts at the individual campuses,⁹⁴ thus introducing a range of students to NUSAS.

Through contact and involvement with other campus organisations, such as the non-political, non-

85 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1946, p.2; *New Era* Vol.1 No.34, 27.9.1945.

86 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.27.

87 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.27.

88 There was strong support for the Trotskyist-orientated Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) at Hewat. In 1946, Hewat tried to persuade NUSAS to affiliate to the NEUM but this was rejected as NEUM was considered to be a political organisation. BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.20.

89 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1946, p.1; Assembly Minutes 1946, p.10.

90 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, pp.10-11; *Varsity* Vol.5 No.2, 5.4.1946; Vol.5 No.5, 7.7.1946.

91 *Varsity* Vol.5 No.1, 8.3.1946; Vol.5 No.2, 5.4.1946.

92 *Nux* No.10, 15.11.1945.

93 *Varsity* Vol.5 No.1, 13.5.1946; *Nux* No.3, 15.5.1946.

94 *Varsity* Vol.5 No.1, 8.3.1946; Vol.5 No.2, 5.4.1946.

religious, volunteer Cape African Night School Movement⁹⁵ and the Wits Night Schools,⁹⁶ NUSAS was able to reach a much wider constituency. The Western Cape Night Schools were organised by the UCT Local NUSAS Committee,⁹⁷ help was offered to the Wits Night Schools and all money collected by the Relief Department of NUSAS in 1946-1947 went to the African Night School Movement.⁹⁸

Other student benefits and schemes likely to attract students to the national union, such as the overseas tours, had to wait until NUSAS had reorganised itself and recovered fully from wartime restrictions.

The re-organisation scheme of NUSAS decided on in 1945 began in earnest the following year. In May the new draft constitution came into effect and the Council was transformed into a "Student Assembly" and the Executive became an interim body until the 1946 assembly elected a new one. The constitution was put before the student assembly in July 1946 for ratification. Essentially, it amplified and elaborated on the functions, powers and operation of the student assembly and the executive, and included a constitution for the Research Council. The 'Objects' clauses, which were the same as those in the 1945 constitution,⁹⁹ were heavily contested on ideological and political grounds. Wits and Hewat argued for the adoption of amendments which would have turned NUSAS into an explicitly radical, fighting body, in accordance with the aims of FOPS. This was opposed every step of the way by UCT because, (according to the *SA Student*) they were "too political", although they conceded the amendments were "principled and not revolutionary".¹⁰⁰

For example, the Wits delegates argued that NUSAS ought to be striving towards "build[ing] democracy" and the eradication of all undemocratic practice, rather than "defend[ing] democracy"¹⁰¹ which in their opinion was a misleading and meaningless objective as South Africa could not be described as a democracy. This was defeated.¹⁰² Both Wits and Hewat argued that Clause B (bii) of the 'Objects' of the constitution that NUSAS would "encourage the promotion of equality and economic opportunity" was incomplete and that the national union should also promote equal

95 D. Wilson: "The African Adult Education Movement in the Western Cape from 1945 to 1967 in the context of its socio-economic and political background" M. Phil, University of Cape Town (1988), p.83.

96 *Wus Views* Vol.VI No.4, 15.6.1942; Vol.VI No.6, 13.10.1942.

97 *Varsity*, Vol.4 No.3, 8.5.1945; D. Wilson: pp.83,85.

98 *Wus Views* Vol.1 No.1, March 1947.

99 BC 586 B1 1945 Constitution; 1946 Draft Constitution.

100 *SA Student*, 1.10.1946, p.5.

101 b) "To defend Democracy, as the fundamental basis of every sphere of our national existence, to the utmost against hostile ideologies ..." (My emphasis) BC 586 B1 Draft Constitution 1946.

102 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.2.

political opportunity.¹⁰³ This was rejected too, as, in so doing, NUSAS would be perceived to be a party political organisation by its enemies, and could, in addition, face the possibility of being banned from strongholds like UCT where political parties were proscribed.¹⁰⁴ Had these amendments been adopted, the very careful work of the 1945 leadership to give NUSAS the space to indulge in politics by justifying it as "democracy" (which was supposedly not political) would have been undone.

Of particular significance in determining the direction in which NUSAS was moving after the war was the decision to jettison the bilingualism requirement for membership of the student assembly. It was argued that bilingualism was too difficult to quantify and that few Fort Hare students were able to speak both official languages. However, the Stellenbosch branch, which stressed the South Africanist and bilingual character of NUSAS in its recruitment drive, was instrumental, along with Hewat, in prevailing upon the assembly the necessity of maintaining the national union's bilingual tradition.¹⁰⁵

There was a move to record NUSAS' opposition to university academic segregation in the constitution, but as this opposition was not unanimous, it was felt that it was wrong to bind a minority centre constitutionally and thus, this amendment was rejected too.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the issue of segregation and separate black institutions remained on the NUSAS agenda during 1946. It was unanimously agreed that NUSAS would investigate a separate African college near Pretoria, founded by the Dutch Reformed Church, allegedly to counter the influence of Fort Hare and to provide an inferior education suitable for Africans.¹⁰⁷

Of more immediate concern to NUSAS was the creeping segregation at Natal University which resulted subsequently in clashes between the NUC university authorities and student leaders, SRC election boycotts at Pietermaritzburg and Sastri,¹⁰⁸ a disaffiliation attempt from NUSAS at Durban¹⁰⁹ and the whole issue of university segregation being put on the agenda of the Natal Indian Congress¹¹⁰ which was conducting its Passive Resistance Campaign at the time. In May 1945, a joint meeting of the NUC SRCs deleted all references to colour in a new draft constitution issued by the NUC

103 "To encourage the promotion of equality of educational and economic (and political) opportunity for all in South Africa with special attention to the underprivileged." (My emphasis) BC 586 B1 Draft Constitution 1946; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, pp.2-3.

104 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.2-3.

105 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.7.

106 *ibid.*, p.3.

107 *ibid.*, p.18; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4.7.1946; *Die Vaderland*, 10.7.1945; *Varsity*, Vol.5 No.6, 2.8.1946.

108 *Nux*, 1.4.1947; 10.9.1947; 17.10.1947; 22.3.1948; *Natal Mercury*, 5.9.1947; 3.10.1947.

109 *SA Student*, November 1947.

110 *Rand Daily Mail*, 22.8.1947.

Senate.¹¹¹ A new Senate charter subsequently created three separate SRCs - one each for Durban and Pietermaritzburg and a separate black one for Sastri students. This was rejected by both Durban and NUC(P), but Durban was, at a later stage, to accept the segregationist, patronising justification for this by the principal, Dr. E.G. Malherbe.¹¹²

Sastri students rejected the Senate charter and Malherbe's rationale for it as racist and "a slur on Non-Europeans" and brought the matter to the attention of the NUSAS assembly.¹¹³ NUSAS resolved to oppose segregation and the creation of a separate black SRC and called on the NUC SRCs to oppose the Senate recommendations, against the wishes of Durban.¹¹⁴

Delegates from Wits, Hewat, Fort Hare and the two progressive executive members believed that NUSAS should oppose the NUC Senate proposals in accordance with its principles established in 1945 with the admission of Fort Hare. Black delegates feared that the officially sanctioned segregation at Natal could set a dangerous precedent for other institutions. Durban, however, believed that black students would be granted more representation under the new system¹¹⁵ while NUC(P), although opposed to academic segregation, agreed to support Durban in whatever it decided and felt that NUSAS was interfering in the internal affairs of NUC.¹¹⁶

Thus, with a mandate from the assembly, the executive met Malherbe and the Durban SRC on behalf of Sastri and presented them with a compromise solution worked out by Sastri. A common Durban-Sastri SRC would meet once a term while local affairs would be in the hands of individual Amenities Committees. The meeting was unsuccessful¹¹⁷ and at the 1947 student assembly meeting, NUSAS conceded defeat and recognised Sastri and Durban as two separate NUSAS branches.¹¹⁸

Another new NUSAS branch was officially recognised by the 1947 Assembly. Encouraged by the existence of a branch at Stellenbosch, NUSAS established a small branch at Pretoria in 1946. From initial reports, it seemed that the university authorities were quite amenable to its existence, but the

111 *Nux* No.4, 6.6.1945.

112 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.12.

113 *ibid.*, p.14; *SA Student*, 1.10.1946.

114 *ibid.*, p.16; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4.7.1946; *Varsity* Vol.5 No.6, 2.8.1946; *Nux* No.6, 20.8.1946.

115 In 1942 Sastri students were allowed one representative on the Durban SRC and were permitted to vote at General Meetings. *Wus Views* Vol.1 No.3, 28.5.1942. The proposed new separate SRC would give Sastri students one-third of the votes on the Joint executive of NUC and direct access to the Senate. *Nux* No.5, 24.6.1946.

116 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, pp.12-13; *SA Student* Vol.10 No.2, 1.10.1946; *Varsity* Vol.5 No.6, 2.8.1946.

117 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1947, p.2; *SA Student*, 7.3.1947.

118 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.2.

SRC refused NUSAS recognition and banned its operation on the campus.¹¹⁹ From the middle of 1947, ANS at Pretoria began conducting a campaign against NUSAS on the grounds that it was a "communist" organisation.¹²⁰

As with the establishment of the Pretoria branch, many students, particularly at UCT, optimistically, but erroneously believed that with Afrikaans student organisations in disarray¹²¹ and elements trying to distance themselves from the war-time activities of the Nazi ANS, Afrikaans-speaking students would be amenable to work with their English counterparts. In this spirit then, the 1946 NUSAS assembly, at the suggestion of the UCT delegates, passed a resolution calling for the convening of an inter-SRC Conference to discuss common student interests such as the drawing up of a "Charter of Student Rights" which would include the statutory recognition of SRCs.¹²² Not all delegates were so optimistic, however, and Wits, on the grounds that the meeting was futile and went against its SRC's principles, voted against the motion.¹²³ Subsequently, all the Afrikaans universities declined to attend the conference because NUSAS was hosting it and no colour bar would be observed.¹²⁴

As over the issue of the Inter-SRC Conference, no consensus could be reached on the adoption of a Charter of Student Rights. The ideals embodied in the 1941 Atlantic Charter had inspired many organisations supporting the Allied cause to either respond to the Atlantic Charter or adopt their own ones.¹²⁵ In the student world, the radical British Student Congress had formulated a "Charter of Student Rights and Responsibilities" in 1940¹²⁶ and FOPS had adopted an "Education Charter" in 1944.¹²⁷ Accordingly, the 1946 NUSAS Research Conference drew up a Charter which called for the closer linkage of the sciences and humanities, student representation on university senates and council, the strengthening of powers and independence of student governing bodies, the reduction in the cost of university fees and, most controversially, the repudiation of the colour bar, which would actively be pursued in all spheres by NUSAS.¹²⁸ The student assembly did not ratify the charter and it

119 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.5; *SA Student*, 1.10.1946; 7.3.1947.

120 *SA Student*, November 1947.

121 See footnote no.76.

122 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.19; *Varsity* Vol.5 No.6, 2.8.1946.

123 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.19.

124 *SA Student* Vol.II No.2, 20.6.1947; *Nux* (n.v.) 25.6.1947; *Star*, 11.6.1947.

125 In South Africa the South African Institute of Race Relations appointed a committee to work out ways in which to implement the Atlantic Charter. P. Rich: *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism 1921-60*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1984), p.72. In 1943 the African National Congress produced its interpretation of the Atlantic Charter in "African Claims in South Africa". T. Lodge: *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1983), pp.23-24.

126 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970), pp.81-82; D. Jacks: *Student Politics and Higher Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1975), pp.161-162.

127 *Wus Views* Vol.VIII No.4, 23.8.1944.

128 *SA Student* Vol.10 No.2, 1.10.1946, pp.1, 4. This charter was quite similar to the British one. D. Jacks: pp.161-162.

was left to the executive to draft a new version.¹²⁹ This new version was rejected by the SRCs of Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Rhodes for being too radical, was not voted on by UCT¹³⁰ and was also found to be unacceptable to the Wits SRC as it was too vague in expressing students' attitude towards practical problems.¹³¹ Subsequently, the FOPS members of the Wits SRC drew up their own more radical charter¹³² but after it was sent back to be redrafted as a set of principles only at the hugely controversial 1947 NUSAS conference,¹³³ it seems that the idea was buried for ever.

The 1947 conference, entitled "The Student and the Community", was held at UCT where a social colour bar was in place, which meant that the only social mixing allowed was at tea-time. Even this was unacceptable to the opposition National Party which at that time was so vigorously canvassing against social mixing at UCT and Wits¹³⁴ that the liberal Minister of Education, Jan Hofmeyr, was prompted to warn university authorities that, where inter-racial contact not restricted, their open admissions policies would be jeopardised.¹³⁵ It was in this political climate then that the NUSAS Executive approached the Mayor of Cape Town to host a ball to welcome the up-country delegates to the 1947 NUSAS Conference. Because of the social mores in operation at the time and because NUSAS upheld only academic non-segregation, the Executive invited only white delegates to the mayoral reception. At the opening session of the Conference, Lionel Forman¹³⁶ berated the NUSAS Executive for organising a "colour bar ball".¹³⁷ This led to the re-examination of segregation and the colour bar in NUSAS.

Harold Wolpe,¹³⁸ representing the Wits SRC, argued that as NUSAS was not a social organisation and because the distinctions between academic and social segregation were blurred, NUSAS should not organise any more social functions, particularly dances, from which any NUSAS member was excluded.¹³⁹ He was not in fact challenging social segregation as he maintained that the public would never accept mixed dances, but was concerned rather that some would be excluded and snubbed

129 *Varsity* Vol.5 No.6, 2.8.1946.

130 *SA Student* Vol.II No.2, 20.6.1947.

131 *Wits Views* Vol.1 No.5, May 1947.

132 *SA Student* Vol.II No.2, 20.6.1947; B. Murray: *Wits: the 'Open' Years*, pp.106-107.

133 *Varsity* Vol.6 No.11, 20.8.1947.

134 Interview with Philip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

135 B.K. Murray: "Wits, Student Politics and Apartheid, 1948-1959", *Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (1990), p.4.

136 He was the Secretary of the Students' Socialist Party at UCT, a member of the CPSA and was later the editor of the *Wits Student* and a NUSAS executive member in 1950. He was also appointed to the Executive of the International Union of Students (IUS) and worked on the production of its magazine in Prague. He was a 1956 Treason Trial defendant. S. Forman and A. Odendaal: pp.xv-xxiii.

137 Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

138 He was a president of the Wits SRC in 1950, a member of FOPS, the CPSA and was later arrested at Rivonia in 1964.

139 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.8.

because of their race. The moderates from UCT, Pietermaritzburg and Stellenbosch argued that, were NUSAS to drop its social colour bar,¹⁴⁰ which was in fact what the Wolpe suggestion meant, the organisation would split and disintegrate - UCT for example, made it very clear that it had only rejoined the organisation because it recognised the colour bar.¹⁴¹ They also urged NUSAS to state firmly its position concerning social mixing, as by not doing so, potential supporters and current NUSAS members would be alienated.

Finally, it was decided that the social colour bar would be officially upheld by NUSAS when the UCT proposal that "NUSAS re-affirms its policy with regard to complete equality among all students, but acknowledges that for all practical purposes, there must be in this country a social colour bar, which NUSAS will neither circumvent nor shrink from enforcing" was carried. Wits, Fort Hare, Sastri and Hewat voted against this.¹⁴² This Resolution 12 was in the spirit of the UCT "Status Quo Agreement" and its adoption seemed to signify that the political influence of the radicals had been broken.¹⁴³ The left felt that the breakthrough made with the affiliation of Fort Hare in 1945 had been reversed as NUSAS had "accept[ed] ... the Herrenvolk doctrine" and had in its words become a "political body whose task was to retain the status-quo in South Africa".¹⁴⁴

As a consequence of the adoption of Resolution 12, the assembly, with the exception of the Wits delegates, decided that the mayoral reception would have to go ahead, even though it had earlier voted to cancel a segregated ball hosted by the UCT SRC.¹⁴⁵ The reception was attended by 100 students,¹⁴⁶ a good proportion of the conference delegates, but was boycotted by the left who instead went to the "no-colour bar dance" organised by two members of the UCT Student Socialist Party at a private house off the UCT campus.¹⁴⁷ Lionel Forman was suspended from NUSAS, pending expulsion, not for organising the dance, which the assembly was at pains to point out that he was quite entitled to do,¹⁴⁸ but for deliberately contravening UCT's pamphleteering laws and bringing the

140 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.8.

141 *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

142 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, pp.8-9; *Star*, 1.7.1947; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947; The Wits delegates were all members of FOPS and two were also members of the CPSA.

143 *Nux*, 10.9.1947.

144 *Varsity* Vol.6 No.12, 18.9.1947; Letter from C. Amra, W. Blatchford, L. Forman, B. Krikler, R. Canca.

145 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.9; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947. The Research Conference, which did not have the power to determine NUSAS policy, had already voted 54 to 45 that the dance continue. *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

146 *Cape Times*, 4.7.1947.

147 S. Forman and A. Odendaal (eds.): *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*, David Philip, Cape Town (1992), p.xxi; *Argus*, 3.7.1947; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947; *Cape Times*, 4.7.1947.

148 When they heard that Forman was to be suspended for organising the dance, the Hewat representative threatened to resign and the other black delegates walked out of the meeting in protest, thus forcing NUSAS to say that he was being suspended for other reasons. *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947; *Cape Times*, 4.7.1947.

name of NUSAS into disrepute.¹⁴⁹ Forman and Cassim Amra¹⁵⁰ had advertised the event with a pamphlet on which they had included, without their permission, the names of delegates who supported the "open" alternative, and had then displayed these on UCT notice boards, again without the requisite permission of the SRC.¹⁵¹ Forman threatened legal action if NUSAS did not apologise and re-instate him. This the executive reluctantly agreed to do because it was felt that the national union could not afford, either on financial grounds or because of the potential loss of prestige and integrity involved, to lose a court case.¹⁵²

It would seem that the drastic action against Forman was taken in anger that the freshly asserted colour bar had been transgressed, the mayor of Cape Town embarrassed and, most importantly, *Die Burger* had made political capital out of the incident by declaring that 80% of students wanted social integration after the Research Conference had voted overwhelmingly in favour of NUSAS organising no more functions from which anyone would be excluded.¹⁵³ This issue could also be seen within the context of an internal UCT struggle regarding political organisation and pamphleteering,¹⁵⁴ as well as damage control by South Africanist-orientated students not wishing to jeopardise the reconciliation between all white students which they were attempting to effect.

Immediately after the NUSAS Conference, the SRCs of Stellenbosch and Cape Town got together for a "good party".¹⁵⁵ The Stellenbosch SRC then made arrangements to host an inter-SRC conference, but this venture floundered¹⁵⁶ in the same way that the NUSAS initiative had earlier that year. However, an inter-university press association was founded by conservative United Party and Nationalist members of the UCT student magazine, *Varsity*. Consequently, a new inter-university publication, which grew out of an independent Rhodes newspaper, came into existence in August 1947.¹⁵⁷

Other potential re-alignments in student politics occurred in the aftermath of the controversial 1947 NUSAS Conference. In August of that year, Rhodes students, on blatantly racist grounds, voted

149 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, pp.14,21; *Cape Times*, 4.7.1947; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

150 Amra was a UCT student and secretary of the Cape Passive Resistance Council which was opposing the "Pegging Act". For his efforts he was deported from the Cape. The 1947 student assembly protested to the Minister of the Interior about this in spite of Durban's objection that the political activities of students lay outside NUSAS' domain. BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.13; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

151 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1947, p.13.

152 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1948, p.3.

153 *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

154 In May 1947 a UCT mass meeting had voted against a proposal by Forman of the Students' Socialist Party that the ban on pamphleteering and political party organisation be lifted. *Guardian*, 19.5.1947; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.6, 19.5.1947.

155 *Varsity* Vol.6 No.11, 20.8.1947.

156 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1948, p.5.

444 to 286 to give notice of their disaffiliation from NUSAS.¹⁵⁸ They argued that the national union was a "Jewish and Indian organisation",¹⁵⁹ was not representative of the majority of South African students as motions opposed by the five large universities were carried by the votes of the black institutions, and lastly, that the national union provided few practical benefits to Rhodes students.¹⁶⁰ It appeared that the conservatives had triumphed within the politically divided student body there,¹⁶¹ in spite of an injection of liberalism in 1946 with the return of ex-soldiers.¹⁶² The Natal Training College also gave notice of its intention to leave the national union in August 1947¹⁶³ and NUSAS' ranks were further depleted when the Stellenbosch branch went out of existence after the departure of its leading personality.¹⁶⁴

In May 1948 the National Party and its allies unexpectedly defeated the ruling United Party at the general election and took over the reins of government. The radical left at UCT greeted the result with disbelief and immediately realised that the South African situation could only deteriorate with what they believed was a fascist government in power.¹⁶⁵ FOPS at Wits, together with the Springbok Legion, offered to form an alliance with the United Party followers on the campus, but this was turned down.¹⁶⁶ The United Party-orientated students, particularly at UCT, subsequently turned their attention to co-operation between the two white groups, while the radical left, especially at Wits, began actively to confront the government and the Wits administration over racism. These two differing plans of action spilt over into NUSAS and increased the level of conflict in its forums. Initially, there was little mention of the change of government in NUSAS documents but the social colour bar, university segregation and contact between all white students were matters which received the most prominence at the first NUSAS conference held after the change of government, in Pietermaritzburg in July 1948.

At the initiative of Phillip Tobias, a future president of NUSAS, the Conference, which in the past had been a rather "drab" affair, was re-organised as a festival or congress.¹⁶⁷ It was hoped that the

157 *Varsity* Vol.6 No.11, 20.8.1947; Vol.6 No.12, 18.9.1947.

158 *SA Student* Vol.XI No.4, November 1947. A centre wishing to disaffiliate from NUSAS could only do so after the required two years' notice of this intention had elapsed.

159 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1948, p.3.

160 *SA Student* Vol.XI No.4, November 1947.

161 *SA Student*, Vol.XI No.2, 20.6.1947.

162 Towards the end of 1946, a mass meeting had voted by 400 to 173 to allow black students to register at the university. *SA Student* Vol.X No.2, 1.10.1946.

163 *Cape Times*, 18.8.1948.

164 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, p.18.

165 S. Forman and A. Odendaal: p.128.

166 B. Murray: "The 'Democratic' Left at Wits", p.21.

167 There was disagreement over the naming of the event, but it was eventually decided that it would be a "congress" as "festival" sounded "too Marxist" and too akin to the youth festivals being held under the auspices of

congress, with its faculty bureaux, debating competitions, sports tournaments, art exhibition and drama festival would attract and bring students from non-NUSAS centres into contact with the national union and so foster national co-operation and understanding.¹⁶⁸ However, co-operation and understanding, even between NUSAS-affiliated centres seemed far from likely when the political complexions and priorities of the different delegations were so different.

UCT, which was represented by four conservative United Party-orientated SRC members,¹⁶⁹ was determined that NUSAS should follow a policy of co-operation between English and Afrikaans students and should entrench the social colour bar. The radical Wits delegation,¹⁷⁰ on the other hand, saw the pursuit of a progressive colour policy, particularly in the light of the change of government, as taking precedence over that of co-operation between the two white groups. With this in mind, it was able to have clause c of the 'Objects' of the constitution amended over the opposition of UCT and Durban, so as to remove co-operation between all students as the most important aspect of NUSAS policy.¹⁷¹

Wolpe of Wits then went on to propose a further constitutional amendment - that a clause be inserted that NUSAS would actively work against academic segregation and discrimination.¹⁷² This proved to be too extreme for most delegates and thus a compromise, acceptable to all but UCT and Durban, that the principle of equality and non-segregation in academic affairs be incorporated into the constitution, was carried by a large majority.¹⁷³ Those in favour argued that this constitutional addition was necessitated by the change of government and that it could be used to "fight prejudice and irrationality".¹⁷⁴ In defence of their opposition to this constitutional amendment, the Durban delegation stated that their centre favoured segregation, while the UCT delegation assured the assembly that their constituency did not, but that the inclusion of the principle of academic non-

organisations based in Eastern Europe at that time. (See Chapter 6, p.138) Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997. This was an early indication of Cold War thinking in NUSAS.

168 Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997; *SA Student*, November 1947. It would seem that the inspiration for the festival came from the 1927 NUSAS congress held in Durban which attracted over 650 students to its various activities and which was considered to be a huge success because it bridged the English-Afrikaans division. L. Chisholm: "The Early History of NUSAS: Leo Marquard's Presidency, 1924-1930", BA (Hons) Dissertation, University of Cape Town (1976), pp.49-55.

169 Included in the UCT delegation was a conservative member of the SCA and the daughter of the UP mayor of Durban, (Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997) as well as two local UP Youth members.

170 The delegation and Wits Executive members consisted of a left-wing liberal, Phillip Tobias; an independent radical, Sydney Brenner; and three members of the CPSA - George Clayton, Harold Wolpe and Mervyn Susser.

171 "To maintain and further genuine co-operation in a spirit of tolerance, goodwill and mutual respect among all students [and to make this and other fundamental major issues deciding factors in future determination of policy]. The bracketed section was deleted after the acceptance of the Wits motion. BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, pp.13-14.

172 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, p.11.

173 BC 586 I Assembly Minutes 1948, pp.12-13; *Guardian*, 15.7.1948.

174 *Guardian*, 15.7.1948.

segregation would deter non-NUSAS centres from ever rejoining the national union.¹⁷⁵ The radical left countered that were NUSAS to omit everything with which the non-NUSAS centres disagreed, the national union would become a policy-less organisation.¹⁷⁶

However, it was not the principle of academic non-segregation which evoked the greatest conflict at the 1948 congress, but rather the social colour bar. So as to avoid a repetition of the events of 1947, the congress organised no racially exclusive functions, something which was appreciated by black students.¹⁷⁷ Thus the opening ceremony was marked by a tea-party hosted by the mayor of Pietermaritzburg, to which everyone was invited. Nevertheless, in spite of this careful planning, the event was marred by the opening speaker, Douglas Mitchell, a United Party Member of Parliament, whose paternalistic, white supremacist remarks led to the walkout of the Hewat delegation.¹⁷⁸

The same Hewat delegates requested that the 1947 debate on the social colour bar be re-opened as they were unable "to support an organisation in which they did not enjoy full equality"¹⁷⁹ and were in fact discriminated against at a social level.¹⁸⁰ Against the wishes of UCT, the assembly rescinded Resolution 12 of 1947 and ruled instead "that NUSAS recognises the right of all students to participate in all functions of its national gatherings".¹⁸¹ This did not represent a change in NUSAS policy but merely put into words its social practice.¹⁸²

Some students were so alarmed at the implications of the previous resolution and the evident reluctance of many to openly endorse social segregation, that the UCT delegation called on the national union to issue a statement that it observed a social colour bar. The Wits delegation accused their UCT counterparts of racism as it appeared that they were calling for the return of the racially exclusive dances and social functions of the past and warned that were the UCT request acceded to, black students would leave the national union.¹⁸³ The left argued that "social colour bar" was a legally vague, ill-defined term which was interpreted differently at the various centres.¹⁸⁴ Accordingly, at the recommendation of Wits, it was decided that the prevailing practices regarding segregation at the local centres would be respected, but at a national level, all NUSAS functions

175 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, p.12; *Rhodeo* Vol.1 No.6, 30.7.1948.

176 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, p.12.

177 *ibid.*, p.17.

178 *Natal Mercury*, 4.7.1948; 7.7.1948.

179 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.7, 5.8.1948.

180 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, pp.16-17.

181 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.7, 5.8.1948.

182 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, pp.16-17.

183 *ibid.*, pp.32-34.

184 *Rhodeo*, Vol.1 No.6, 30.7.1948.

would be open to all. Official tea parties would therefore replace dances.¹⁸⁵

The social colour bar was not the only area of conflict between the left and the combined centre and right during the congress. At an international level, the first gusts of the Cold War blew into NUSAS when the national union disaffiliated from the Prague-based World Federation of Democratic Youth.¹⁸⁶ Even at the level of Research Projects, the differing factions could not find agreement. The National Research Project, "The NUSAS Field Survey in the Transkei", led by a radical Wits student, reported its findings to great acclaim¹⁸⁷ and was still utilised by researchers twenty-five years later,¹⁸⁸ was rejected by UCT as being too expensive and not useful.¹⁸⁹ To appease the differing groups, particularly the South Africanist-orientated UCT and Durban delegations, the assembly voted to convene a Round-Table conference of all South African university SRCs.¹⁹⁰ It remained to be seen whether this would paper over the dramatic cracks which were beginning to appear in the national union.

Soon after the conclusion of the 1948 NUSAS congress, *Die Burger* (obviously with its own agenda), began speculating about the possibility of UCT and Durban terminating their association with the national union.¹⁹¹ On 3 August 1948, a motion that UCT withdraw from NUSAS was carried by that university's SRC with the two-thirds majority required to disaffiliate, in spite of an attempted intervention by the new NUSAS president, Phillip Tobias.¹⁹² The SRC president and the Local Committee member on the SRC resigned in protest, but acknowledged that there were severe problems in NUSAS. Those in favour of disaffiliation objected principally to the virtual abolition of the colour-bar in NUSAS and the inclusion of academic non-segregation in the constitution. More generally, it was felt that the national union had become a political organisation dominated by "extremists", often from the small black training colleges and the radical, unrepresentative branches of the Afrikaans universities.¹⁹³ The UCT SRC thus felt that NUSAS would never breach the rift

185 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, pp.32-34.

186 *ibid.*, p.20; See Chapter 6, p.136.

187 BC 586 B1 Report on the Department of Research and Studies, 1948, pp.1-9; Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

188 C. Bundy: "Land and liberation: Popular rural protest and the national liberation movements in South Africa, 1920-1960" in S. Marks and S. Trapido: *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, Longman, London (1987), pp.269,283.

189 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.7, 5.8.1948.

190 *Natal Mercury*, 14.7.1948.

191 *Die Burger*, 31.7.1948.

192 *ibid.*, 4.8.1948.

193 Due to the protests of UCT and Rhodes that the small branches had too much power and together could outvote the larger centres, and that the branches of Pretoria and Stellenbosch were resented by those institutions' SRCs and were thus an obstacle to national student co-operation, the 1948 assembly had already agreed to increase the voting strength of the large and medium-sized campuses. *Rhodes* Vol.1 No.6, 30.7.1948. This was not enough for UCT which wanted the branches to be deprived of their votes. They also wanted NUSAS to become a

with Afrikaans-speaking students.¹⁹⁴ The SRC then went ahead with its arrangements to convene a conference of the SRCs of all the white universities and university colleges, which it hoped would bring about (white) student unity.

However, this decision was taken at an inopportune time. The new National Party government was beginning to implement train apartheid, which generated civil disobedience campaigns while the Cold War was becoming a reality with the Berlin airlift and the Committee of Un-American Activity's purge of "communist" faculty at universities in the United States. Against this background, and closely linked to the UCT disaffiliation crisis, there emerged a new student organisation which aimed to compete with NUSAS for student loyalty.

Since the war, Afrikaans student organisations had been in a state of disarray, the numerous attempts to found one national student body floundering on ideological differences and regional competition. Some of these organisations had the specific intention of countering the influence of NUSAS, particularly in the international sphere where NUSAS was unchallenged.¹⁹⁵ NUSAS was considered to be a "communist" organisation, as, like the CPSA, it supposedly advocated integration. Finally in July 1948, a new Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentebond (ASB) united the various competing Afrikaans student bodies¹⁹⁶ under its umbrella and its constitution was ratified on 14 August 1948 at Bloemfontein.¹⁹⁷ Although this Christian-National organisation was open only to Afrikaans-speaking Protestant students, and had close links to the National Party, it was prepared to co-operate with white, English-speaking students with similar goals, organised along their own separate lines.¹⁹⁸ The ASB also planned to open branches at the predominantly English campuses,¹⁹⁹ although its predecessors had been proscribed at these institutions. Thus, the ASB and the Nationalist press had a vested interest in destroying NUSAS and the secessions led by disenchanted United Party-

confederation of SRCs and all executive members of NUSAS to be members of their SRCs, thus binding NUSAS policy much closer to the SRCs themselves. *Varsity* Vol.7 No.7, 5.8.1948; *Rhodeo* Vol.1 No.6, 30.7.1948.

194 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.7, 5.8.1948.

195 *Die Matie*, 7.6.1946.

196 All of the following organisations, if they were still in existence in August 1948, became part of the new ASB. An Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB) was founded at Bloemfontein in December 1945 (*Die Matie*, 12.4.1946) by the NP to counter the discredited Nazi ANS. *Die Nuwe Orde*, 3.1.1946; *Die Wapenskou*, November 1945. The Christian Republican Student Union was a nationalist group based at Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein which hoped to supersede the OB dominated ANS. It supported a Kruger style, authoritarian, theocratic republic. P. Furlong: p.231. A Republican Student Union also existed at Pretoria University. P. Furlong: p.231. The South African Student Federation was formed at Potchefstroom in September 1946. It aimed to be a Christian Afrikaans united front of SRCs and student organisations against the "communist" NUSAS. "Die Federasie van Blanke Suid-Afrikaner Studente" (FBSAS) was established in July 1947 as a white Afrikaanse studente group to fight for Christianity and Afrikaans language rights and to oppose communism. Its membership included students from all campuses. *Nux*, 25.6.1947.

197 *Star*, 16.8.1948.

198 *Star*, 16.8.1948; *Die Burger*, 16.8.1948.

199 *Die Burger*, 5.8.1948.

orientated students played into their hands.

The UCT decision to secede from NUSAS was greeted with glee and concern respectively by the Nationalist and the liberal United Party press. *Die Burger* pronounced NUSAS dead and alleged that it had dug its own grave through its pursuit of extreme liberal policies during recent years. It suggested that UCT students work with the newly emerging ASB.²⁰⁰ The *Cape Times*, on the other hand, argued that NUSAS would be doomed after "twenty years of bright hope and hard work" if UCT left.²⁰¹

At UCT itself, the SRC attempted to stop NUSAS from functioning,²⁰² and SRC members resigned from the Local Committee.²⁰³ Durban was contemplating secession at this time too. The situation was judged so serious that the NUSAS president, Phillip Tobias consulted Jan Hofmeyr, the deputy leader of the UP and honorary president of NUSAS for advice. He surmised that the disaffiliations were a delayed response to the affiliation of Fort Hare in 1945, a decision which he at the time thought was premature as he would have advised NUSAS first to bring the Afrikaans centres back into the fold. However, he believed that there could be no going back on the decision and were NUSAS to sink, it should do so "with all its flags flying".²⁰⁴ Consequently, a huge pro-NUSAS propaganda campaign was set in motion. Statements and letters to the press were issued, Tobias flew to Durban and Cape Town to address students and a NUSAS support meeting was convened at Wits.²⁰⁵ A special edition of the *SA Student*, which attempted to set the record straight and refute anti-NUSAS propaganda, was brought out to coincide with the UCT mass meeting to decide whether the disaffiliation motion be reversed.²⁰⁶ Over 1000 students attended UCT's largest mass meeting ever on 12 August 1948 to decide the fate of NUSAS at UCT. Present at the meeting were Nationalist supporters and students from Pretoria University who attempted to manoeuvre the meeting in the interests of the ASB.²⁰⁷ Speeches in support of a motion that UCT re-affiliate to NUSAS were made by the former UCT SRC president, by Tobias and ex-servicemen.²⁰⁸ They downplayed the progressive side of NUSAS and emphasised its national, inclusive nature in that it was the only student organisation open to all.²⁰⁹ The conservative United Party supporters disagreed with that assessment of the national union and argued that, far from being representative and

200 *Die Burger*, 5.8.1948.

201 *Cape Times*, 5.8.1948.

202 *SA Student Special Edition*, August 1948.

203 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1948, p.3.

204 Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

205 *Cape Times*, 21.8.1948.

206 *SA Student Special Edition*, August 1948.

207 *Guardian*, 19.8.1948.

208 *Cape Times*, 13.8.1948.

inclusive, NUSAS had estranged the Afrikaans universities, was dominated by extremists and had departed from the high ideals it had set itself at its foundation in 1924. This being the case, they argued, UCT was not dissociating itself from the national union but rather rooting out its "rottenness" and the "unhealthy forces" within it.²¹⁰ The motion to re-affiliate was narrowly lost by 536 to 526 votes.²¹¹

The following day, 13 August 1948, the student body at Durban voted by an overwhelming majority to secede from NUSAS. In justifying secession, Durban argued, as had the secessionists at UCT, that as long as Durban remained linked with NUSAS, co-operation with Afrikaans students remained impossible.²¹² Notwithstanding the racist and anti-Semitic slur that NUSAS was a "Jewish Indian" organisation,²¹³ the mass meeting made it clear that it did not object to the national union's liberal policy, but to the inclusion of academic non-segregation in the constitution.²¹⁴ However, the Pietermaritzburg student newspaper, *Nux* believed that the secession was not really because of the desire for co-operation with Afrikaans-speaking students, but rather that Durban had "Sastri on their doorstep".²¹⁵

On the other hand, Rhodes re-affiliated in August 1948 by a vote of 411 to 358²¹⁶ when the proposer of the 1947 secession motion changed sides. He rejected the accusation that NUSAS shunned the Afrikaans universities and argued that for NUSAS to function effectively as a students' trade union, Rhodes should be a member. Claims that NUSAS was a communist organisation were also rejected on the grounds that, were that the case, the social colour bar would have been abolished and its "native policy" was less liberal than that of the Student Christian Association's (SCA).²¹⁷ This was quite a remarkable turnaround, particularly at a time when the traditionally more liberal UCT had disaffiliated. This occurred firstly because the main protagonist for disaffiliation had attended the 1948 NUSAS conference, had been won over to the organisation²¹⁸ and brought his dissident following with him. Secondly, one of Rhodes' principal grievances had disappeared when the 1948 assembly had agreed to restrict the power of the minority centres by increasing the representation of the larger ones such as Rhodes.²¹⁹ However, the most important reason for the reversal in policy

209 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.7, 17.8.1948.

210 *Die Burger*, 13.8.1948; *Cape Times*, 16.8.1948.

211 *Cape Times*, 16.8.1948.

212 *Die Burger*, 16.8.1948; *Cape Times*, 16.8.1948; *Nux*, 1.9.1948.

213 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1948, p.3.

214 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes, p.2.

215 *Nux* (n.v.), 1.9.1948.

216 *Cape Times*, 18.8.1948; *Rhodeo* Vol.1 No.8, 28.8.1948.

217 *Rhodeo* Vol.1 No.7, 14.8.1948.

218 *Witwatersrand Student* No.2, 24.2.1949.

219 *Rhodeo* Vol.1 No.6, 30.7.1948.

towards NUSAS was probably the change of government in South Africa. Rhodes had disaffiliated in 1947 before the Nationalist election victory and, to judge from later political events on the campus, it would appear that the almost exclusively English-speaking student body realised that the republican tendencies of the new government and its rapid creation of a fully racially separated society represented a far greater threat to their interests than the somewhat radical policies of NUSAS. Thus the student body decided to distance itself from any potential identification with the new government, which disaffiliation implied, and instead chose to remain in NUSAS, an organisation with known aims and a commitment to opposing aspects of Nationalist policy such as separate universities.

It did so just at the time that racially separate universities were receiving official support. At the request of the ASB, which had passed such a resolution at its inaugural conference the previous weekend,²²⁰ on 16 August 1948, the new prime minister, D.F. Malan, called for the imposition of apartheid in the universities and the creation of separate institutions for African and coloured students. He alleged that "an intolerable state of affairs has arisen ... in our university institutions ... which gives rise to friction, to an unpleasant relationship between Europeans and non-Europeans". Malan also incorrectly stated that apart from Wits, all universities had disaffiliated from NUSAS because of the enrolment of black students at the 'open' universities.²²¹ The NUSAS executive responded that it was unaware of any "intolerable situation", and then denounced academic segregation with the usual arguments, adding that the universities should remain unfettered by ideologies and that Malan was interfering in their domestic affairs.²²²

Malan's statement shocked students into the realisation that the government indeed intended implementing its apartheid policy. However, some students, particularly at Cape Town and Durban, still clung to the belief that a broad South Africanism was possible and mistakenly believed that Nationalist-supporting organisations like the ASB were sectional and had little support.²²³ In the aftermath of the Nationalist victory, the disaffiliation of Durban and UCT and the threats to academic freedom, student politics realigned themselves on the various campuses.

In August 1948 the Students' Liberal Association (SLA) was formed at UCT to re-affiliate the SRC

220 *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol. VIII No. 21, 3.9.1948; BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1949, p. 10.

221 Union of South Africa: *Debates of the House of Assembly First Session - Tenth Parliament* Vols. 64-65, 219, 16.8.1948. Some of the "intolerable situations" which had arisen included *Die Vaderland's* objection to black Wits medical students dissecting white cadavers, while in June 1948 *Die Oosterlig* reproved Rhodes students for eating dinner with Fort Hare students in the Rhodes cafeteria. *Rhodeo* Vol. 1 No. 6, 30.7.1948; *Irawa*, June 1948.

222 *Rand Daily Mail*, 18.8.1948; *Star*, 18.8.1948; *Witwatersrand Student* No. 1, 6.10.1948.

223 BC 586 S21 P. Tobias: "A History of the Relations between NUSAS and the African Students 1924-1948", p. 8.

to NUSAS and to fight academic segregation.²²⁴ It was supported by liberals, socialists and elements of the student United Party which had recently split in two.²²⁵ Five of its candidates won seats on the 1948/9 SRC, along with two neutral and four anti-NUSAS candidates,²²⁶ including L.A.P.A. Munnik, a member of the ASB national executive. After the Nationalist election victory, FOPS ceased to exist at Wits, because, as Murray explains, it was too sectarian to mobilise broad campus support against the government's threat to segregate the university.²²⁷ Its place was taken by a Students' Liberal Association (SLA), an alliance of liberals and socialists, which was committed to fighting academic segregation and defending the university's liberal tradition, but, unlike its namesake at UCT, was prepared to pursue an active political role and co-operate with externally-based, like-minded organisations.²²⁸ As far as student government was concerned, the Wits student body still returned a left-liberal alliance to power in the 1948 SRC elections, but this alliance's resolve to oppose apartheid was challenged by a powerful conservative United Party minority on the SRC.²²⁹ At Rhodes, two-thirds of the new SRC supported NUSAS,²³⁰ and a Students' Commonwealth Liberal Union (SCLU), with typical Eastern Cape political characteristics came into being in September 1948. This organisation was unconnected to the SLAs at Wits and UCT. Its adherents were obviously alarmed at the republican elements within the National Party and thus called for greater unity with the British Commonwealth. The SCLU espoused a conservative liberal policy of co-operation with black people "as the only means of preserving western civilisation and averting communism".²³¹ In November 1948, a branch of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) was launched at Fort Hare.²³² This strongly African nationalist organisation injected a new militancy into Fort Hare student politics and eclipsed the popularity of the All African Convention, which, in the aftermath of the NP election victory, appeared too compliant to white rule.²³³ At the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, the political shift occurred later than on the other campuses. In 1950, the Students' Liberal Forum was denied official recognition by the SRC because it was regarded as being a political organisation and suspected of having ties with the United Party Youth.²³⁴

224 *Cape Times*, 31.8.1948.

225 *Guardian*, 19.8.1948.

226 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.10, 1.10.1948; *Cape Times*, 31.8.1948.

227 B. Murray: "The 'Democratic' Left at Wits", p.2.

228 *Witwatersrand Student* No.1, 6.10.1948.

229 B. Murray: "The 'Democratic' Left at Wits", p.2.

230 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1948, p.3.

231 *Rhodeo* Vol.1 No.9, 10.9.1948.

232 T.R.H. White: "ZK Matthews and the formation of the ANC Youth League at the University College of Fort Hare", *Kleio* XXVII, 1995, p.131.

233 *ibid.*, p.129.

234 *Nux* No.7, 19.8.1950.

In spite of the re-alignments in student politics on the various campuses and the emergence of organised liberal groupings, UCT and Durban were still outside the NUSAS fold at the end of 1948. A large section of student opinion at both these institutions still believed that broader white student organisation was possible at a national level. Consequently, the UCT SRC invited representatives from all South African universities (black and white) to attend an inter-SRC conference with the idea of forming a new national students' union. As Afrikaans students refused to attend a mixed conference, a preliminary meeting of white representatives was convened in Cape Town in December 1948.²³⁵ The meeting ran aground on the issue of representation, as all the English universities, with the exception of Durban, refused to be part of a union from which black students were excluded, the condition on which the Afrikaans institutions, with the exception of Huguenot College, were prepared to co-operate. A compromise was offered by Gerrit Viljoen of Pretoria that its SRC would forego its affiliation to the ASB and would join an all-white body which would meet a separate black student federation occasionally, but at executive level only. This also failed to win support.²³⁶ A formal conference which the Afrikaans universities refused to attend but which Fort Hare and Sastri did, followed the preliminary meeting. It subsequently "went into a committee [sic] on apartheid."²³⁷ This was not the original intention of the meeting and demonstrated how the priorities of the student leadership had changed by the beginning of 1949 after the failed meeting with the Afrikaans universities.

With the return to the universities of democratically-inclined ex-servicepeople in 1945, NUSAS decisively broke with its past of trying ineffectually to appease both the South Africanist students wanting to win the Afrikaans-medium centres back to NUSAS and the liberals and the radical left who wanted NUSAS to follow a racially more inclusive policy, by coming down in favour of the latter and opening the national union to Fort Hare and other black institutions. The new world order of peace, democracy and anti-Fascism, promised by the defeat of the Axis powers, allowed NUSAS to redefine the scope of a non-political student union and gave it the space to embark on political activity, which was justified as defending democracy in student affairs. Hence, NUSAS was able to oppose the imposition of segregation at the universities, which the Opposition, soon to be governing National Party was aggressively championing. However, the radical left, based mainly at Wits, Hewat and Fort Hare understood democracy in student affairs in much broader terms than the majority in NUSAS and fought for the national union to adopt an active political policy which would build, and not just defend democracy. The presence of black students in NUSAS forums brought the issue of

235 *Witwatersrand Student* No.2, 24.2.1949; *Rhodeo* Vol.2 No.1, 12.3.1949; *Varsity* Vol.8 No.1, 11.3.1949.

236 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1948, p.23; *Rhodeo* Vol.2 No.1, 12.3.1949; *Varsity* Vol.8 No.1, 11.3.1949; *S4 Student UCT Special Edition*, 31.3.1949; *Witwatersrand Student* No.2, 24.2.1949.

the social colour bar sharply into focus and illustrated, particularly to the left, how blurred the distinction between social segregation and academic non-segregation, the latter supported to differing degrees by most in NUSAS, actually was. The issue of social segregation came to a head in 1947 when NUSAS officially adopted the social colour bar, but this was revoked in 1948 at the insistence of black students. This proved too much for students at Durban and UCT, who, already alarmed at the increasingly left-ward trend of NUSAS policy, seceded from NUSAS on the eve of the launch of a new united Afrikaans student organisation and just three months after the National Party came to power. Not realising the significance of these two events, the South Africanist-inclined students harked back nostalgically to the days of united white student organisation and set about effecting a rapprochement with Afrikaans-speaking students, a large proportion of whom they mistakenly believed were amenable to such an idea. This rapprochement failed, partly because no agreement could be reached on black student participation and because those at UCT, Durban and Rhodes finally realised the threat that the National Party posed to ideals which they were not prepared to relinquish, such as academic freedom and university autonomy. Nonetheless, at the end of 1948, UCT and Durban were still outside NUSAS, a situation which threatened to destroy the national union altogether. It remained to be seen whether the Nationalist threat would persuade the disaffiliated centres to rejoin NUSAS, and in so doing, allow the national union to continue along the path of liberalism and even radicalism which it took in 1945 when it partially jettisoned the policy of South Africanism and opened the organisation to Fort Hare and adopted a policy of democracy in student affairs.

Chapter three

THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF UNIVERSITY LIFE AND THE IMPACT ON NUSAS: 1949-1955

The election victory of the National Party in 1948 served to accelerate the decline in popularity of the policy of a broad white South Africanism. It also deepened the cleavages between liberals and the radical left, but also, paradoxically, led to a growing consensus in NUSAS as radicals, liberals and some South Africanist students united against university apartheid. However, the response of NUSAS to the early years of National Party rule cannot be understood in isolation from the changing social base of the national union. Thus this chapter will briefly examine how the move towards almost exclusive unilingualism at Wits and UCT permeated NUSAS. Furthermore, the response of NUSAS to the upsurge of black militancy from 1949 cannot be fully understood without knowledge of the changes in the patterns of black student enrolment, the new political organisations which were established and the student attitudes towards the values embedded in their education. The final section describes the strategies employed by the national union to win members and legitimacy, without which it would cease to function.

Table 1: Student Enrolment at South African Universities

Institution	1949	1950	1951	1952	1954	1955
UCT	3 999	3 966	4 000	4 068	4 256	3 948
Pretoria	3 256	3 430	3 654	3 817	4 286	4 793
Stellenbosch	2 191	2 221	2 196	2 147	2 319	2 578
Wits	4 616	4 580	4 368	4 377	4 277	4 223
Natal	1 869	1 840	1 880	1 954	2 253	1 984
Huguenot	116	118	closed	-	-	-
UCOFS	1 082	1 082	1 095	1 124	1 234	1 454
Potchefstroom	769	764	900	942	1 076	1 296
Rhodes	856	851	749	758	785	809
Fort Hare	343	-	-	399	374	348

With the graduation of ex-servicepeople between 1948 and 1950,¹ student numbers at English

1 The last 200 graduated from UCT in 1952. *Cape Times*, 9.5.1952. One-third of Wits graduates were ex-servicepeople, while 756 were in the final stages of their degrees. *Star*, 23.5.1950. The average age of students at UCT dropped from 21.02 years in 1949 to 20.78 years in 1950. Union of South Africa (UG No.18): *Department of Education, Arts and Science: Annual Report 1952*, Government Printer, Pretoria (1952), p.57.

speaking universities temporarily dropped, but in 1951 recovered and thence climbed steadily during the decade. (See Table 1²)

Table 2: Student Fees and Government Subsidies in 1950

	UCT	Wits	UCOFS	Stellen bosch	PUCHE	Fort Hare
Student Fees in Pounds	58.68	74.44	29.64	50.03	31.85	21.08
Government Subsidy in Pounds	76.91	75.42	60.38	108.26	95.56	81.85
% of Gov. Subsidy to Fees per Student	47.06%	42.18%	51.57%	62%	57.23%	71.39%

Students remained overwhelmingly middle class. Government subsidies to universities were low, and thus South African university fees were high (see Table 2³), allegedly by 1954 the highest in the Commonwealth.⁴ Although some loans, scholarships and bursaries were available,⁵ university education, in the main, was limited to the wealthier members of the middle class,⁶ particularly at the

2 Union of South Africa (UG Nos.64,18,60,12,20): *Department of Education, Arts and Science, Annual Reports*, (1950-1956).

3 Union of South Africa (UG No.64): *Department of Education, Arts and Science: Annual Report 1951*, p.99

4 BC 586 G1.6(i): "Statement on the High Proportion of Failures among First Year University Students", issued by M. O'Dowd, 11.3.1954. J. Muller: "South Africa" in P. Altbach (ed.): *International Higher Education: An Encyclopaedia*, Garland, New York and London (1991), p.418.

5 H. Phillips: *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948, The Formative Years*, University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town (1993), p.115; *Rand Daily Mail*, 9.7.1951; The Cape Education Department granted interest-free loans and bursaries of 120 pounds per annum to those training to be secondary school teachers. *SA Student* Vol.XX No.2, March 1955; Wits gave out 23000 pounds in scholarships and bursaries in 1950. Union of South Africa (UG No.64): *Department of Education, Arts and Science, Annual Report 1951*, p.64.

6 At Wits in 1949, it was generally held that fees were so high that students from lower-middle class and low-income families were excluded from university. *Witwatersrand Student* No.3, 6.4.1949. South African universities were often referred to as the "playgrounds of the idle rich". *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.1, August 1955. It was estimated that total expenses for the year at Wits ranged from 611 pounds in Law to 1251 pounds in Medicine. *Rand Daily Mail*, 9.7.1951. An Engineering student at UCT in the 1950s estimated that his total university costs were 300 pounds per annum. I. Suttner (ed.): *Cutting through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*, Viking Penguin, Johannesburg (1997), p.473. Tuition and boarding fees at Fort Hare in 1951 were 60 pounds per annum. *South African Native College Calendar for 1952 Fort Hare*, Lovedale Press, Alice (1952), p.82.

residential universities.⁷ Some students entered part-time employment to supplement their income, but at Wits only 13% did so to pay their tuition fees.⁸

The middle class base meant that NUSAS was also a middle class organisation – in fact, many of those actively involved were wealthier than the average student,⁹ a trend noticed world-wide¹⁰ and so NUSAS held the values, political orientation (liberal) and pre-occupations of that class. NUSAS was thus concerned with appearing "responsible", "respectable", "moderate" and "reasonable", and thus adopted lobbying, participatory, non-confrontational tactics in pursuing its goals. This is also true of the British National Union of Students (BNUS) during this period.¹¹

Although this did not probably reflect grass root concern, NUSAS was concerned with the high cost of university education, particularly after the countrywide fee increase in 1949.¹² It thus lobbied and worked with government and university authorities for a review of the state subsidy system,¹³ initiated its own student loan programme for needy students,¹⁴ and supported a proposed government-sponsored, initially white-only state scholarship scheme.¹⁵ When the government abolished the African medical scholarships tenable at Wits, the Wits SRC established the African Medical Students' Trust Scholarships (AMSTF), which were later taken over by NUSAS.¹⁶ NUSAS' initiatives to government were often shunned, while as time progressed, the relationship deteriorated as the National Party saw NUSAS as a body opposed to its apartheid plans. Thus, it became more difficult for the organisation to project a "responsible", middle-class image, particularly when it was constantly being labelled "communist" by the Government.

Although universities remained middle class, their linguistic composition at some institutions did

7 Boarding and tuition fees averaged 250 pounds per annum. Union of South Africa (No UG No.): *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into University Finances and Salaries 1951*, Government Printer, Pretoria, p.112.

8 *Rand Daily Mail*, 13.7.1950.

9 1) An observation was made about the expensive cars driven by delegates to the 1952 NUSAS congress at Pietermaritzburg, which were far superior to the "more humble fare" of local students. *Nux* No.6, 15.8.1952. Access to a car at that time was restricted to a small strata of society. 2) It can be gleaned from SRC election manifestos that many aspirant candidates who made up the leadership of NUSAS had attended private schools. For example, Phillip Tobias, Michael O'Dowd, John Didcott. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.2, 7.3.1950; Vol.II No.5, 10.5.1950; Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

10 P. Altbach: "Perspectives on Student Activism" in P. Altbach (ed.): *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, Greenwood, Westport Connecticut (1989), p.8.

11 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970), pp.93-95.

12 *SA Student*, May 1949. The UCT student magazine, *Varsity* bemoaned the apathy of the UCT SRC and the general student body towards the fee increase scheduled for 1950. According to *Varsity*, so little concern was shown because the increase only affected the next generation of students. *Varsity* Vol.6 No.12, 18.9.1947.

13 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.31; *Rand Daily Mail*, 12.7.1949; *SA Student*, May 1949; *Nux* No.10, 19.10.1949.

14 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, pp.50-51.

15 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.34; *Cape Times*, 19.7.1949; *Rand Daily Mail*, 12.7.1949.

16 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.2, 7.3.1950.

change. The number of Afrikaans-speaking students at Wits declined during the 1950s due to the expansion of facilities at Potchefstroom and Pretoria.¹⁷ Of the 250 enrolled in 1951, many were of mixed English and Afrikaans ancestry and were not members of the Afrikaans churches.¹⁸ Few were ethnically conscientised as suggested by the fate of the Wits branch of the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereniging (ATKV) which was dissolved in 1951 because of lack of support¹⁹ and the ASB newspaper, *Spore*, which ceased publication at the end of 1949²⁰ "because [its] circulation was limited, the readership small and that among that readership many Afrikaners were not conscious of the struggle of the Afrikaner".²¹

At UCT the number of Afrikaans-speaking students did not decline as rapidly as at Wits during this period as a medical faculty was not opened at Stellenbosch until 1956. During 1948 and 1949, a 500-member strong Afrikaans Student Club, to which most Afrikaans-speaking students belonged, flourished at UCT.²² Nonetheless, few of these students supported the ASB²³ which, as at Wits, operated an unofficial branch off the campus. A nominal bilingualism was maintained at UCT, as *Varsity*, the UCT student newspaper, appointed both English and Afrikaans editors. However, by the mid 1950s, both UCT and Wits were essentially "English" institutions. This process was reflected in NUSAS too. Although small, unauthorised NUSAS branches did exist at both Pretoria and Stellenbosch during all, or part of this period, their membership was essentially English-speaking. Therefore, apart from one or two Afrikaans-speaking delegates to the student assembly, NUSAS became even more an "English" organisation after 1949 and reflected this in its policies. Making a much greater impact on NUSAS was the growing number of black students at South African universities during the late 1940s and 1950s.

Table 3: Black Student Enrolment at South African Universities (1948-1955)

	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Wits		188	211		245	220	202	195
UCT		148	162		194	238	271	317
SANC		343			399	384	369	367
Natal	342	227		195	222	291	216	351

17 Report of the Youth Worker at the University of the Witwatersrand of the Nederduits Hervormde or Gereformeerde Church to the Synod of the Church quoted in *Spoorslag* Vol.1 No.3, June 1951.

18 *ibid.*

19 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

20 Letter from S.J. Zietsman to the Librarian at the South African Library, Cape Town, 8.2.1952, inserted in the back of the *Spore* volume for 1945-1949, housed in the South African Library, Cape Town.

21 [Author's translation.] *Spore* Vol.5 No.3, August – September 1949.

22 *Varsity* Vol.8 No.8, 23.8.1949.

23 *Varsity* Vol.10, No.5, 26.4.1951.

The number of black (African, coloured and Indian) students at Fort Hare, Natal, Wits and Cape Town increased during the late 1940s and 1950s (See Table 3),²⁴ the majority continuing to come from far less privileged backgrounds than their white contemporaries.²⁵ Fees at Fort Hare were substantially lower than those at the white institutions²⁶ and thus, if the same courses were offered at Fort Hare, students enrolled at the black college. Figures of the occupations and incomes of parents are not available for this period, but in the mid-1950s, the majority of black students studied only with the assistance of bursaries, a substantial number coming from extremely poor backgrounds.²⁷ By the end of the decade, however, a small, black middle class student population did exist²⁸ and at Fort Hare some students were so wealthy that in 1952 the Senate was requested to permit students to keep their cars on campus.²⁹ Women were a very small component of the black student population. At Fort Hare they were younger than their male counterparts which suggests that they came from wealthy families and did not have to work to earn money before-hand.³⁰

At Wits the number of black students (many of them classified Indian) increased steadily until 1952, after which there was a decline (See Table 3) because of the racial quotas imposed on the medical faculty by the Wits authorities in 1953.³¹ (See Chapter 5, p.98) At UCT too, there was an increase in black student enrolment between 1949 and 1954. (See Table 3) Of these, the majority were registered in the Arts, Science and Medical Faculties and were mostly classified coloured.³²

24 E. Brookes: *The University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg*, Natal University Press, Pietermaritzburg (1966), p.78; H. Burrows, A. Kerr, Z. Matthews: *A Short Pictorial History of the University College of Fort Hare 1916-1959*, Lovedale, Alice (1961), p.48; G. Getz: "Non-Europeans at the University of the Witwatersrand" in *Forum*, November 1952, pp.46-49; M. Legassick: "The National Union of South African Students: Ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities", Occasional Paper No.4, *African Studies Center University of California Los Angeles*, Los Angeles (1967), p.52; M. O'Dowd: *The African in the Universities*, NUSAS, Cape Town (1954), p.13; Union of South Africa (No UG No.): *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Separate Training Facilities for Non-Europeans at Universities, 1953-4 (Holloway Commission)*, Government Printer, Pretoria (1954), p.33.

25 Union of South Africa (No UG No.): *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into University Finances and Salaries* (1951), p.117.

26 See Table 2.

27 H. Burrows et al.: p.31.

28 In 1959, 42% of medical and 29% of non-medical students at the University of Natal (non-European) were drawn from professional and other middle-class families, while only 10% and 13% respectively had fathers in farming, mining or craft occupations. L. Kuper: *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa*, Yale University Press, New Haven (1965), pp.97,98,431.

29 A. Mager: "Girls, War, Mission Institutions and Reproduction of the Educated Elite in the Eastern Cape, 1949-1959", *Africa Seminar*, Centre for African Studies, UCT (1992), p.15.

30 At Fort Hare in 1959, the student body consisted of 432 men and 57 women, whose average ages in First Year Arts courses were 21 and 18 respectively. H. Burrows et al.: p.49-50.

31 G. Getz: pp.46-49; B. Murray: *Wits the 'Op.n' Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1939-1959*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1997), pp.131-133.

32 M. O'Dowd: p.13; Union Government (No UG No.): *Holloway Commission*, p.33.

Student numbers at Fort Hare rose steadily between 1949 and 1952, after which there was a slight drop until 1955. (See Table 3) The majority of students were African. Indian and coloured enrolment never rose beyond 20% and 15% respectively.³³ Most students came from the Eastern Cape, but, during the period under discussion, larger numbers hailed from the Transvaal³⁴ and Natal. By 1958, half the student body came from the urban areas³⁵ and were regarded as being more politicised than those from rural schools, which could account for the growing militancy at the college.³⁶

During this period Sastri College changed its name to the University of Natal-Non-European (UNNE) and to it was added in 1951 the new segregated black Medical School at Wentworth. Student numbers at UNNE dropped in 1949 due to a fee hike and this trend continued until 1953.³⁷ (See Table 3) These fluctuations at UNNE and at Fort Hare correspond to the changing admission policies at Wits during the same period. Full-time medical students aside, most students were part-timers who attended segregated arts, social science and commerce lectures at Sastri College, and later at the Durban campus under the supervision of the Durban staff.³⁸

UNNE remained a predominantly Indian institution. This is borne out both by the composition of the SRC, which in 1950 was 70 percent Indian,³⁹ and the fact that during the 1949 race riots, the SRC was forced to issue a statement that Sastri did not discriminate against Africans, as alleged by the African population.⁴⁰ After these events more Africans were elected to student government.⁴¹

The upsurge of black militancy nationally from 1949 onwards had a notable impact on black students at these institutions. New political organisations were established and student attitudes towards the values embedded in their education, as well as the world views of the university authorities, were challenged.

At Fort Hare in 1949, a branch of the ANC Youth League was established which championed a strident nationalism and challenged the assumptions of missionary and liberal education, while almost the entire executive of the Transvaal ANCYL was at Wits during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

33 H. Burrows et al: p.48. A quota was imposed on the enrolment of Indian students in 1944 when they comprised 15% of the student population. *Fort Hare Calendar*, 1945, p.70.

34 D. Burchell: "The Emergence and Growth of Student Militancy at the University College of Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s", *Journal of the University of Durban- Westville*, New Series 3, 1986, p.151.

35 H. Burrows et al.: pp.24, 50.

36 D. Burchell: p.151.

37 E. Brookes: p.78; *SA Student*, May 1949.

38 *SA Student* Vol.XIX No.1, March 1954; M. O'Dowd: p.11.

39 *SA Student*, October 1950.

40 *SA Student*, March 1949.

41 E. Brookes: p.161.

At Fort Hare too, but also at Hewat and UNNE there were branches of the Society of Young Africa (SOYA), established in 1951 and affiliated to the All African Convention (AAC). SOYA stressed non-collaboration with, and boycott of, white ruling-class and "collaborationist" bodies such as NUSAS.⁴² At Hewat, student politics were controlled by SOYA and other AAC affiliates like the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM).⁴³ According to Beard, SOYA and NEUM dominated student politics at both Fort Hare and UNNE from 1952 and 1954 respectively.⁴⁴ This coincided with their period outside NUSAS.

During the 1950s, politicised students at Fort Hare challenged the ideological foundations on which the college was built. In 1952 students demanded that Fort Hare change its name from the "South African Native College" (SANC) to the "Fort Hare University College" as "college" suggested a high school and "native" was a "weapon used by Europeans" to keep Africans down.⁴⁵ Students unsuccessfully called for a relaxation of the rules regarding compulsory attendance at College and hostel church services, the liberalisation of the rules pertaining at the Women's Residence and the change in control of university dances.⁴⁶ At the time when mission institutions were facing more financial constraints than ever before, Fort Hare students successfully petitioned for improvements in their subsistence.⁴⁷

From the 1940s onwards, a new generation of assertive and more sophisticated students arrived at UNNE, who were not prepared to accept the limited crumbs of education offered to them by the Natal University authorities.⁴⁸ They rejected the paternalism of the administration, academic segregation and to some extent, social segregation. In 1952 the Vacation Schools were abolished as the students believed that their real objective should have been social mingling between black and white.⁴⁹ The Medical School refused to be lumped together with Sastri as one segregated black section of the university and demanded its own separate SRC and representation on the Joint Board of student government of Natal University.⁵⁰ Throughout the 1950s students campaigned for wholly

⁴² T. Karis and G. Carter: *From Protest to Challenge: Hope and Challenge 1935-1952*, Vol.2 Document 98 "Opening Address at First Conference of SOYA" by I.B. Tabata, December 20, 1951, p.506.

⁴³ Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

⁴⁴ T. Beard: "Background to Student Activities at the University College of Fort Hare" in H. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds.): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), pp.160, 169.

⁴⁵ BC 586 Z45: Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956; 17.3.1952.

⁴⁶ BC 586 Z45: Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956; 28.3.1951; 23.5.1951; 17.3.1952.

⁴⁷ BC 586 Z45: Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings 1951-1956; 28.3.1951; 23.5.1951; 17.3.1952; 21.5.1952; 24.3.1954; *South African Native College Calendar*, 1951, p.63; 1952, p.82.

⁴⁸ E. Brookes: p.165.

⁴⁹ Vacation Schools for black students were held annually at Adams College and offered participants social functions, sporting activities and addresses by well-known figures. E. Brookes: pp.45, 166.

⁵⁰ *Nux* No.9, 2.10.1952.

unsegregated graduation ceremonies,⁵¹ which was only achieved in 1960, as well as for the right to wear the Natal University blazer, which was technically restricted to white students as it was that of the segregated Athletics Union.⁵² Although Pietermaritzburg usually supported UNNE students in their demands, it, along with Durban resented NUSAS siding with UNNE, as it was felt that the national union was interfering in the internal affairs of Natal University.⁵³ At the forefront of these campaigns were non-medical Indian students. Kuper has argued that the differences between white and Indian students were less than between those of other groups and thus discrimination was more keenly felt by the latter. The medical students among them were usually less politically active because of the heavy demands of study and the high status and financial rewards on graduating.⁵⁴ However, medical students at UNNE were the most vociferous proponents of disaffiliation from NUSAS in 1954.⁵⁵

Social segregation was the official policy at Wits, UCT and UNNE during the 1950s, although it was challenged by segments of the student body at all three institutions.⁵⁶ Wits and UCT practised academic non-segregation which meant that lectures (apart from clinical training at the medical schools and certain courses such as Fine Art and Dentistry which were closed to black students) were open to all, as were the cafeterias, libraries, toilets (an anomaly during the apartheid period) and student societies.⁵⁷ However, at UNNE, lectures and the libraries were segregated, while at all three universities sports facilities were closed to black students.⁵⁸ At Wits there was a separate "non-European" tennis court,⁵⁹ and by 1953 a black Athletics Union at Natal. Rag was a grey area, but it was segregated at Natal, if black students participated at all.⁶⁰ Social mixing was the exception rather than the rule at the universities, even during lectures.⁶¹ No official mixed dances were held at any institution⁶² except at Sastri but these too were banned when Sastri became UNNE.⁶³ Essentially, the

51 *Nux* No.9, 2.10.1952; *Dome* Vol.7 No.1, 1.4.1953.

52 E. Brookes: p.166.

53 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.11-14; *Nux* No.6, 10.8.1953.

54 L. Kuper: *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa*, Yale University Press, New Haven (1965), p.162.

55 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, p.8.

56 In 1954 the student body at UCT requested the authorities to build a racially "open" student residence. Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

57 R. Segal: *Into Exile*, Jonathan Cape, London (1963), p.84.

58 A.I. Bhoola: "A Non-European looks at University Apartheid", *Forum*, April 1954.

59 M. Shear: *Wits: A University in the Apartheid Era*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1996), p.9.

60 E. Brookes: p.166.

61 Interview with John Didcott; R. Segal: p.84.

62 Unofficial mixed dances were hosted by radical left-wing organisations such as UCT's "Modern World Society" at private houses off the campus. *Die Matie* Vol.VII No.3, 9.4.1953. The National Catholic Federation of Students held 'open' functions. A. Egan: *The Politics of a South African Catholic Student Movement, 1960-1987*, Centre for African Studies, UCT (1991), p.6.

small number of black students at the "open" universities led a lonely, isolated existence.

The growing number of black students at Wits and Cape Town resulted in racially mixed SRCs being a more frequent occurrence from the late 1940s onwards.⁶⁴ Consequently, black students were members of the NUSAS student assembly and some were voted onto the NUSAS executive where they challenged the general political and tactical assumptions upon which the majority operated. Thus, black students were responsible for moving NUSAS and the SRCs left during this period.

It is difficult to determine the amount of support NUSAS enjoyed from black students. At Fort Hare, a significant number viewed it as a potentially useful vehicle for the furtherance of the liberation struggle.⁶⁵ However, by 1952, they were either disillusioned or their views were superseded by those espousing militant African nationalism and/or non-collaboration. At UCT, where NUSAS membership for students was automatic, no black students resigned from NUSAS in 1949, but, either because of the colour bar and thus a fear of rejection, or because they were not interested, NUSAS members had to approach black students personally.⁶⁶ Provision was made for 30 black students to attend the 1950 NUSAS conference, but this was a tiny proportion of the total number of black students at South African universities.⁶⁷

Outnumbering men at NUSAS conferences, but a minority at the universities themselves, were women. Women had faded into the background of student life with the influx of ex-servicemen in 1945, but with their departure in the late 1940s and early 1950s, women again, as in the pre-war period, returned to the public eye as the centre of a youthful, fun-filled, hedonistic student life. Thus, pretty girls, beauty queens and drum-majorettes adorned the pages of progressively more sexist student magazines throughout South Africa.⁶⁸ While some women achieved notable academic, political or sporting successes,⁶⁹ it was always assumed that these took second place to their main role as women, that is, preparation for marriage and motherhood. Although women had a high social

63 A. Bhoola: "A Non-European looks at University Apartheid". Unlike Bhoola, Brookes does not mention that dances were banned, but from 1951 the UNNE SRC was responsible for making sure that no mixed dancing occurred. E. Brookes: p.165.

64 Both Wits and UCT had had a handful of black SRC members from 1944 onwards. Two African students were elected to the Wits SRC in 1950 and two Africans to the UCT SRC in 1953. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.9, 24.8.1950; *Die Burger*, 25.8.1953.

65 D. Burchell: p.157.

66 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.6.

67 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.23.

68 F. Tobias: "The Women of Wits: 1939-1959", BA(Hons) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1992), pp.49-50, 65.

69 In 1951 the first woman ever became president of the Pietermaritzburg SRC. However, her appointment was disputed, either because she was a woman, or on constitutional grounds. Some black women at Fort Hare were politicised and were part of SOYA and the ANCYL. A. Mager: pp.16-17. In 1949, the first African woman graduated from Sastri. *SA Student*, June 1949.

profile on the campuses, their position in other areas of university life was subservient to that of men and as such they were subjected to sexist observations and remarks as they went about their business on campus.⁷⁰ Sexism was not absent in NUSAS. Although most NUSAS congress-goers were women,⁷¹ they played a minor role in the organisation. The few female members of the NUSAS assembly were praised for their kindness, their looks and for providing food for their fellow male delegates.⁷² More overt sexism was evident at the 1955 congress when women dressed up as harem inhabitants and offered themselves for sale to their male counterparts.⁷³ As was the custom at the time, all NUSAS documents were couched in male-orientated language. The first female president, Patricia Arnett, was elected in 1951.⁷⁴

With the departure of the ex-servicepeople from the university,⁷⁵ an element of apathy crept into student affairs,⁷⁶ which was discernible also in the British National Union of Students (BNUS) during this period.⁷⁷ However, apathy in South Africa was partially hidden by the tumultuous political events, of 1951 and 1952 (to be dealt with in Chapter four), but according to contemporary commentators at Wits, in its case, apathy could also have been a consequence of the political pre-occupations of the SRC.⁷⁸

Changes in the way in which university life was organised is evident in the 1950s. The residences

70 M. Shear: p.7. In 1950 the Wits debating union discussed a motion that the university was attracting the wrong type of freshette; namely that they were too ugly and clever. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.4, 19.4.1950. The Wits SRC resigned when the university authorities censored a picture of the bikini girl on the cover of the Rag magazine in 1951. *Nux* No.5, 8.6.1951. "Hags", the women's column in the Pietermaritzburg student newspaper discussed the dating details of the campus and the type of dresses worn at balls. In 1949, women were blamed for financial losses at the Pietermaritzburg student tearoom, as apparently they refused to patronise the establishment for fear of being labelled "man-hunters", while the following year, the student newspaper observed that women spoke at a meeting, obviously a phenomenon rare enough to be commented upon. *Nux* (n.v.), 15.3.1949; No.6, 20.5.1950.

71 Interview with Clodagh O'Dowd, 2.4.1997.

72 *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.1, August 1955.

73 *Nux* No.5, 1.8.1955.

74 She had been a good executive member (Interview with Prof. Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997), had played an important role as a member of the Durban SRC during the Durban Conference of 1950 and was appointed a junior lecturer at UCT.

75 The last 200 graduated from UCT in 1952. *Cape Times*, 9.5.1952. In 1950, one-third of Wits graduates were ex-servicepeople, while 756 were in the final stages of their degrees. *Star*, 23.5.1950.

76 At UCT there were complaints that there was little student involvement in Rag, Intervarsity and student societies. *Varsity* Vol.II No.6, 24.4.1952. At Pietermaritzburg in 1950, there were complaints that apathy had overtaken the campus, that few people attended general meetings and that the calibre and number of candidates standing for election to the 1950 SRC had declined. *Nux* No.4, 13.4.1950; No.5, 3.5.1950; No.10, 14.11.1950; No.8, 21.10.1955. The Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB) also complained about student apathy. *Spoorslag* Vol.2 No.1, October 1952. By the mid-1950s some campus societies at Wits were floundering while only a small proportion of students participated in the Wits Rag. A.W. Stadler: "Student Life in the 1950s", B. Murray: *Wits the 'Open' Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand 1939-1959*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg (1997), pp.329, 330, 333.

77 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970), pp.92, 95.

78 A.W. Stadler: p.329.

relaxed their rules slightly⁷⁹ and Natal University constructed dining halls open to both male and female students.⁸⁰ Although dress codes remained strict and enforced,⁸¹ it is evident that student dress became more casual as some institutions, for example Pietermaritzburg and Wits marginally relaxed their dress rules.⁸²

Initiation was officially abandoned at a number of institutions during this period but the student body usually lagged behind the SRCs in this matter. For example, from the late 1940s onwards, attempts were made to replace initiation with induction at Wits, but this was resisted by the residences.⁸³ At Natal the student body voted to abolish initiation in 1951,⁸⁴ but at Durban the bullying continued.⁸⁵

Religious observance also underwent changes during the 1950s. At Fort Hare, which was still partially administered by missionaries, some of the most protracted struggles between the authorities and students centred around compulsory attendance at church services, Sabbath observance and the subsequent unpopular prohibition of Sunday sport. This can partly be explained by a general decline in religious observance, but also by the political and ideological challenge to colonialism by a new generation of radical African nationalist students. On the other hand, at Pietermaritzburg from 1952, attendance at religious meetings surpassed that of all other society meetings together.⁸⁶ This religious revival came about both as the Cold War set in as well as after Pietermaritzburg's dramatic reversal of policy from that of full participation in politics to an apolitical anti-NUSAS one. (See Chapter 4, p.93) The insecurities of national and international politics could perhaps explain the desire of students to retreat into the secure and known, such as religion. The 1950s in Britain was regarded as a decade of religious "revival" or "restoration".⁸⁷

In 1951 the supposedly non-political Student Christian Association (SCA) divided along separate racial and linguistic lines,⁸⁸ implying that it had capitulated to apartheid and the earlier unsuccessful attempts by Afrikaans students to organise separately. Organised Catholicism in the form of the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS) became more assertive, and by 1955 was allegedly powerful enough to take over NUSAS as many of the key members of NUSAS at that time were

79 *Cape Times*, 9.6.1950; *Die Matie* Vol.IV No.13, 13.10.1950.

80 E. Brookes: p.142.

81 M. Shear: pp.7-8; The principal of Natal warned students that they could not dress as they pleased as he could often not distinguish between students and "what looks like holiday makers on the beach". *SA Student* Vol.XX No.2, March 1955.

82 *Natal Witness*, 20.4.1956; BC 586 0.6.1 Wits SRC Minutes, 17.4.1956.

83 *Rand Daily Mail*, 24.4.1950.

84 *Nux* No.10, 12.10.1951.

85 E. Brookes: p.168.

86 *Varsity* Vol.12 No.12, 19.6.1953.

87 G. Davie: *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Blackwell, Oxford (1995), pp.30-32.

88 *Rhodeo*, 4.8.1951.

also members of the NCFS. The NCFS reflected the anti-Marxist position of the Catholic Church and was influential in diluting the power of the radical left at Wits (See Chapter 5, p.128) as well as furthering the cause of disaffiliation of NUSAS from the eastern bloc-inclined International Union of Students (IUS).⁸⁹ (See Chapter 6, p.157) It is interesting to note that Fort Hare students, with their predominantly Protestant backgrounds,⁹⁰ were more radical than their contemporaries at Pius the Twelfth Catholic University College (CUC) in Basutoland. CUC remained affiliated to NUSAS after Fort Hare, Hewat and UNNE had left the national union. Although Basutoland was further removed from the harsh realities of apartheid and many CUC students were originally from East Africa,⁹¹ the influence of Catholicism cannot be ruled out as a factor. Many of the staff at CUC were clergymen and they were a strong influence on their students.⁹²

Other changes in campus societies occurred between 1949 and 1955 which had important bearings on the direction of NUSAS policy. After the 1948 NP election victory, the Wits-based Federation of Progressive Students (FOPS) disappeared and was replaced by the Students' Liberal Association (SLA), which comprised a larger number of radicals than liberals. The SLA pursued an active political role, co-operated with progressive organisations in wider society⁹³ and participated in anti-apartheid campaigns such as the anti-Western Areas Removal and the African Education Movement against Bantu education.⁹⁴ The active involvement of SLA members (who dominated the Wits SRC and the NUSAS Local Committee there) in these anti-apartheid campaigns generated conflict within the NUSAS assembly, as the national union was only prepared to support the educational aspects of these campaigns. For example NUSAS opposed the removal of the Western Areas because it would entail the closure of schools.

At UCT too, a radical student organisation pushed the agenda of UCT politics leftwards. After the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, the UCT Student Socialist Party dissolved itself and its former members concentrated their attention on the Modern World Society (MWS) and the progressive Modern Youth Society, which they had created off-campus.⁹⁵ One or two radical

89 A. Egan: *The Politics of a South African Catholic Student Movement, 1960-1987*, Centre for African Studies, UCT (1991), p.11.

90 In 1950, the majority of students adhered to the Methodist, Anglican or Presbyterian Churches, in that order. These were also the denominations of the hostels. *South African Native College Calendar*, 1951, p.66.

91 Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

92 Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

93 *Witwatersrand Student* No.1, 6.10.1948; Vol.II No.5, 10.5.1950; *Advance*, 14.5.1953.

94 J. Lazerson: *Whites in the Struggle against Apartheid*, Mayibuye, Bellville (1994), p.96; *Advance*, 1.10.1953; 12.11.1953.

95 I. Suttner (ed.): *Cutting through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*, Viking Penguin, Johannesburg (1997), pp.354-355; R. Segal: *Into Exile*, Jonathan Cape, London (1963), p.91.

candidates were returned to the UCT SRC annually,⁹⁶ but during this period, the SRC was dominated by adherents of the Student Liberal Association, a body which joined together uneasily students who would identify with the left-wing of the United Party.

SRC elections were political occasions at UCT, Wits and Durban,⁹⁷ but not at Rhodes because of the potential divisiveness of politics, and not at Pietermaritzburg either until 1953.⁹⁸ This non-political electoral system impacted negatively on NUSAS as representatives from Pietermaritzburg and Rhodes frequently presented their own views in NUSAS assemblies. During this period both centres threatened disaffiliation and both centres reversed their decisions after the chief anti-NUSAS protagonist was won over to the national union at an annual congress.

Although the deliberations at its annual congress created the public impression that NUSAS was a political organisation, NUSAS regarded its primary function as providing student benefits to as large and as diverse a student population as possible. During the period under review, and due in large measure to the work of Phillip Tobias, a giant in NUSAS history, NUSAS increased both its membership⁹⁹ and its number of student benefits.

Student overseas tours popularised the national union and raised funds for the NUSAS coffers. A levy imposed on each traveller¹⁰⁰ enabled NUSAS to operate a Student Loan Scheme, as well as to employ an assistant in the Central Office to deal with the increasing amount of student benefit work.¹⁰¹ However, insofar as reaching a wider student audience with its overseas tours, it was less successful as only a tiny fraction of the overall student population availed itself of this expensive opportunity.¹⁰²

On the campuses NUSAS publicised itself through lectures, social functions and fundraising like the

96 R. Segal: pp.87, 94-95.

97 *Varsity* Vol.IX No.5, 25.4.1950; Vol.II No.8, 27.5.1952; *Nux* No.7, 19.8.1950; No.10, 14.11.1950.

98 *Nux* No.7, 19.8.1950; No.10, 14.11.1950; Special Edition, 20.8.1953; *Rhodeo* Vol.I No.10, 7.10.1948; 9.6.1951.

99 The new student groupings who joined NUSAS during the 1950s were: Wits Technical College Nursery School Teachers' Association, *Star*, 10.7.1951; The Catholic University College of Pius the Twelfth (CUC) in Basutoland, BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1951, p.6; Bantu Normal College, BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1951, p.7; Barkly House Training College, BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1952, p.1; Transvaal Pharmaceutical Students' Association (TPSA) and the Cape Peninsula Pharmaceutical Students' Association (CPPSA), *Star*, 10.7.1951. The TPSA held its first meeting at Wits in 1925 and affiliated to the Transvaal Pharmaceutical Society. The students were critical of the profession for which they were being trained, for example, the low academic standards required and the apprenticeship system. The TPSA organised social and sporting functions for its members. The CPPSA was established in 1931. M. Ryan: *A History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa*, The Society for the History of Pharmacy in South Africa (1986), p.100.

100 The revenue accrued from the tours increased from 675 pounds in 1949 to 1440 pounds in 1953. BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.50; B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.132-133.

101 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1951, p.41.

102 The cost of a three-month European tour in 1952 was 300 Pounds. *Dome* Vol.7 No.5, 9.9.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.45; *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.3, October 1952.

NUSAS weeks hosted by the Local Committees at the beginning of each year.¹⁰³

NUSAS' showcase, the annual national congress was reconstituted as a student festival in 1948,¹⁰⁴ but failed to attract more than 400 students.¹⁰⁵ (of whom approximately 50 were SRC representatives attending the student assembly) to its activities, a small fraction of the 12 000 students it purportedly represented. This is indicative of both the fact that NUSAS congresses were more expensive than those of other organisations and that student movements worldwide, even at the height of their popularity are minority phenomena.¹⁰⁶ The elite who did attend the congresses¹⁰⁷ were attracted to the abundant entertainment and social possibilities offered by a long train journey¹⁰⁸ to a big city or to a more intimate residential town in the knowledge that these would be unfettered by strict parental and hostel supervision.

Although congresses aimed to bring together diverse groups of students, they could also be divisive. In deference to social segregation at the host university, black delegates were forced to reside, and sometimes even eat, apart from their white co-delegates. In 1950 black students censured the congress organisers when they were forced by the Rhodes authorities to stay in the Grahamstown township.¹⁰⁹ The issue of social mixing was so contentious that Durban refused to host the 1951 congress¹¹⁰ and continued to do so until the 1960s.

From the late 1940s onwards NUSAS encouraged other student groupings such as the Students' Christian Association (SCA), the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS) and the Student Zionist Federation to hold their conferences simultaneously at the same venue as NUSAS in the hope that new recruits could be won to the national union.¹¹¹ At leadership level, NUSAS had a particularly close relationship with the NCFS. The NCFS reflected the anti-Marxist position of the Catholic Church and influenced NUSAS to break its ties with the Eastern-bloc International Union of Students.¹¹²

103 A NUSAS week was held at UCT at the beginning of 1949 to popularise NUSAS during the period of the disaffiliation crisis. It was very successful, attracting over 500 students to the various socials, braais and talks. *SA Student Special* UCT Edition, 31.3.1949.

104 Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997; *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.3, October 1953.

105 Interview with Clodagh O'Dowd, 2.4.1997.

106 P. Altbach: pp.8-9.

107 A. Egan: p.31. In 1952 *Nux*, the Pietermaritzburg student newspaper, commented on the expensive cars driven by delegates to the NUSAS conference. Thus, there were wealthy members of NUSAS who either owned their own cars or borrowed them from affluent parents. *Nux* No.6, 15.8.1952.

108 *Nux* No.7, 19.8.1950.

109 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, pp.2-3.

110 E. Brookes: p.31.

111 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.69.

112 A. Egan: pp.6-11, 29-33.

Between congresses the small bands of activists in the Local Committees (the "nuts and bolts" of NUSAS)¹¹³ were divided into various sub-committees, not all represented on each campus. Small affiliates, like the training colleges, which did not have the time or resources to do much active NUSAS work,¹¹⁴ or, Durban, which had a large part-time enrolment and also suspected that much of NUSAS' activities were "political", concentrated on welfare and student benefit work.¹¹⁵ However, Wits, UCT and, during some of the period, Pietermaritzburg, had strong, active Local Research Committees¹¹⁶ which were responsible for conducting local research projects, like district and special surveys,¹¹⁷ supervising ongoing projects such as the annual Tuberculosis Conference¹¹⁸ and the Adult Night School Projects.¹¹⁹

NUSAS raised money for the night schools and until 1954 was represented on the co-ordinating committee of the Western Cape African Night School Movement. NUSAS members also taught at the night schools, but some adherents of the radical left, both within and outside NUSAS, refused to assist as they felt that they would be "helping placate blacks by giving them a few crumbs" instead of destroying the unequal socio-economic and political system.¹²⁰

The research projects reflected the interests of the members of the committees,¹²¹ their political sympathies (both liberal and radical) as well as the current pre-occupations of NUSAS. For example, black areas were surveyed with a view to having them upgraded, in line with liberal thinking, the 1952-1954 project researched "The Origins and Development of Racial Segregation in South Africa",¹²² NUSAS' evidence to the Eiselen Commission on Bantu education was later published as "The African in the Universities",¹²³ and as the university autonomy campaign got under way, the

113 Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

114 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.6.

115 *Dome* Vol.II No.3, 25.6.1952.

116 *Varsity* Vol.II No.10, 8.8.1952.

117 Local district surveys included those of Cato Manor, Sophiatown, the Booth Road township in Natal, Windermere and Eersterus. *SA Student* Vol.XIV No.4, October 1950; *Cape Times*, 13.7.1950; 11.7.1952. More specific projects included investigations into African transport and eating house facilities in the Transvaal, Transvaal mission hospitals, black sports facilities in the Cape Peninsula, cost of living, employment opportunities for engineering graduates and university finances. BC 586 B1 Report on the Department of Research and Studies, 1948, pp.9-10; *Cape Times*, 21.5.1951; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.9, 24.8.1950; Vol.IV No.1, 11.3.1952.

118 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.74.

119 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.6, 29.8.1951.

120 D. Wilson: "The African Adult Education Movement in the Western Cape from 1945 to 1967 in the context of its socio-economic and political background", M. Phil., UCT (1988), pp.105-106, 108-109.

121 For example, the directors of the "Origins of Racism", Lionel Forman and Harold Wolpe devoted much of their later life to this subject. BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.126.

122 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.126.

123 *SA Student*, March 1951; BC 586 I.3(i) Department of Research: "Recommendations of Eiselen Commission Report with an analysis of the correlation between the recommendations and CNE policy", 1954.

Research Conference held a symposium on the "Concept of the University".¹²⁴ The results of many of the projects had a definite left slant, which was used by the radical left to justify a general move to the left in NUSAS policy. The research committees, apart from the student assembly were the most "political" groups in NUSAS, and on a number of occasions struggles arose between liberals and the radical left for the directorship of the Research Conference.¹²⁵

NUSAS published a *Research Journal* and an *Anthology* but both suffered financial difficulties and lack of student interest.¹²⁶ The bilingual *SA Student* was NUSAS' official organ. It contained NUSAS and campus news and advertised student benefits. However, there were repeated complaints that it was "too political" or boring¹²⁷ and its efforts at bilingualism and broad South Africanism were fraught with difficulties finding Afrikaans writers.¹²⁸

As NUSAS expanded its membership and offered more student benefits, so it became a more financially sound organisation, and by 1949 was recording a modest profit.¹²⁹ NUSAS' income was derived primarily from membership fees and profits made on student tours.¹³⁰ After the reform of NUSAS by Tobias, the larger (white) centres became the foundations of NUSAS, both generally and financially, and thus NUSAS could in effect not afford to alienate them by pursuing policies which could result in their disaffiliation,¹³¹ though it nonetheless did so.

In conclusion, the response of NUSAS to National Party rule in the period 1949 to 1955 cannot be understood without knowledge of the social background of the NUSAS constituency. The increasingly unilingual and culturally separate nature of South African universities, the almost exclusively white, middle-class base of NUSAS with its own specific ideological assumptions and methods of struggle, and the entrance to the universities of a new assertive generation of black students were all factors which led, on the one hand to a growing liberal consensus within NUSAS in opposition to threats to segregate the universities, and on the other, to the exacerbation of the cleavages between the radical left and the liberals. The student trade union side of NUSAS activities were the means by which NUSAS constructed for itself a support base and so won legitimacy for its stand in the public political arena.

124 *Nux* No.6, 10.8.1953.

125 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.3, May 1951.

126 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.15; B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.110.

127 *Nux News Supplement* No.5, 25.6.1953.

128 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.107.

129 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.50.

130 Revenue from membership fees remained at 600 pounds. BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.50; B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.132-133.

131 D. Burchell: p.157.

Chapter four

THE CONTRADICTIONARY RESPONSE OF NUSAS TO NATIONAL PARTY RULE: 1949-1952

1949, the year after the shock National Party election victory, witnessed NUSAS on the verge of extinction in the wake of the disaffiliation of three centres, UCT, Durban and Rhodes. Though it regained their affiliation subsequently, by the end of 1952 it had lost the membership of two other centres, Fort Hare and Hewat. Both of these situations arose from fundamental differences of opinion regarding the definition of a national union and its role in the national political arena.

This chapter will sketch, in the first place, the decline in importance, though not disappearance of, the policy of a broad South Africanism. This decline was caused, at least partly, by the unrelenting implementation of apartheid, attacks on university autonomy by the government, and the emergence of an ideologically orientated ASB. The emergence of the latter resulted in the realisation by the majority of students within NUSAS that the gulf between English- and Afrikaans-speaking students had become unbridgeable. Secondly, it will be argued that the implementation of apartheid had contradictory results which, on the one hand saw a broad, liberal consensus emerging in NUSAS as the radical left, right and liberals closed ranks against the loss of university autonomy, but on the other hand resulted in a large wedge being driven between liberals and the radical left regarding tactics, ideology and the scope and function of a national union. Further developments in the national political arena will be highlighted too as influences on, or causes of particular developments within NUSAS, for instance the rise of African nationalism, the Defiance Campaign, the emergence of white protest around the constitutional crisis, the equivocation of the United Party as it sought to win a future election and the international climate of the Cold War.

To reiterate, UCT had disaffiliated from NUSAS in August 1948 after the student assembly had voted to include the principle of academic non-segregation in the constitution. To make matters worse, NUSAS, had, in the opinion of the UCT SRC, practically abolished the social colour bar. These events had all occurred against the backdrop of a movement to effect reconciliation with students at the Afrikaans-speaking universities. Thus many students at UCT of United Party persuasion felt that, by remaining in NUSAS which was felt to have fallen into the hands of unrepresentative radicals, they would be jeopardising the rapprochement movement which many of them were actively working towards. As a result, UCT attended the first national inter-SRC

conference convened since the 1930s with great optimism. However, this optimism quickly dissipated when even the most idealistic of South Africanists were forced to concede that the gulf between English-speaking students and their Afrikaner Nationalist counterparts had become too great to bridge. Thus the UCT SRC reluctantly came to the conclusion that if it wanted to participate in any student forum at national level, it would have to re-affiliate to NUSAS. NUSAS had also gone a long way towards ameliorating UCT's grievances when it had agreed at its executive meeting in December 1948 to restructure the national union in such a way that the power of the smaller centres would be diminished, giving UCT and the other larger centres a much greater degree of control in determining policy.

As a result of the above developments early in 1949, the UCT SRC voted 7 to 2 to re-affiliate to NUSAS,¹ the two votes against being cast by National Party supporters. A mass meeting and a referendum were to be held to re-assess student opinion, but both ideas were rejected by the Nationalists who questioned the value of student opinion.²

A bitter propaganda war immediately broke out between those advocating a return to NUSAS and those of Nationalist and right-wing United Party persuasion who wanted to avoid this at all costs. Accusations of manipulation of student opinion and suppression of information were levelled at both sides.³ It was alleged that the Nationalists had impeded the legal distribution of NUSAS documents and had concealed the truth about the organisation to further their own political agenda.⁴ The anti-NUSAS group lost the propaganda war though it had the support of the Nationalists, some United Party elements, the Afrikaans national media, and partial support from *Varsity*,⁵ the bilingual UCT student newspaper.⁶ The pro-NUSAS group, on the other hand, realised the likelihood of the destruction of the national union were UCT to remain outside it, and thus mounted a very powerful campaign. The NUSAS Local Committee arranged a gala week, consisting largely of social functions, attended by approximately 500 students. The NUSAS national executive authorised the publication of a special UCT edition of the NUSAS organ, the *SA Student*, in which the current controversy, as well as the strengths and merits of NUSAS were outlined.⁷ The support of the

¹ *Cape Times*, 5.4.1949; *SA Student* (Special UCT Edition), 31.3.1949.

² *Varsity* Vol.8 No.2, 24.3.1949.

³ *Varsity* Vol.8 No.4, 21.4.1949.

⁴ *Varsity* Vol.8 No.5, 19.5.1949: Letter from Ray Kriger.

⁵ *Varsity* was established in 1942 after the SRC had shut-down the pro-ANS Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Spantou* and the United Party English newspaper, the *UC Tattle* because of a political war between the two. *Varsity* was thus a bilingual newspaper which reflected Nationalist, United Party and liberal views. See Chapter 1.

⁶ After UCT had rejoined NUSAS, the *Varsity* editorials in English and Afrikaans asked bitterly whether the pro-NUSAS group supported the organisation as a national union or as one in which to pursue "extreme progressive" policies ie "PUSAS". *Varsity* Vol.8 No.4, 21.4.1949.

⁷ *SA Student* (Special UCT Edition), 31.3.1949.

national press was elicited, the *Cape Times* obliging on the day of the mass meeting with a positive history of NUSAS and an editorial in which it urged UCT students to take cognisance of their two options – either rejoin the only extant instrument for broad student co-operation or, face the consequences of isolation as co-operation with Afrikaans students was not possible.⁸

At the mass meeting on 5 April 1949, the Nationalists and the anti-NUSAS group attempted to have the decision to re-affiliate to NUSAS postponed until after the July conference, at which UCT could assess NUSAS' response to its grievances, particularly regarding the colour bar.⁹ This was rejected amid much acrimony. NUSAS was accused of being "extremist and liberalistic",¹⁰ as well as being undemocratic, as it was prepared to amend its constitution for a minority (implying coloured students) at Hewat,¹¹ but not for 12000 Afrikaans students. For their part, the Nationalists were accused of using the grievances as a smokescreen for their political intentions. The fear was expressed that the longer that UCT remained outside the national union, the easier it became for forces intent on destroying NUSAS and the liberal tradition at UCT, as well as values like academic freedom, to do so.¹² As in the past, the NUSAS caucus emphasised the inclusive nature of NUSAS as well as its consistent record of extending a hand of friendship to Afrikaners and the ASB. The meeting voted 374 to 266 for re-affiliation.¹³ The pro-NUSAS group won a landslide victory in the referendum¹⁴ and consequently the notice of secession was withdrawn by the SRC.

While UCT was taking steps to reattach itself to NUSAS, unverified rumours suggested that Fort Hare had also seceded from NUSAS during the latter part of 1948. This was subsequently denied by the College representatives who explained that any perceived coldness towards NUSAS could be attributed to general student apathy.¹⁵ However, little was revealed to NUSAS about the changing political mood at Fort Hare. Students were becoming more militant and opposed to collaboration with white liberals due to the influence of the All African Convention (AAC) and the newly established Fort Hare branch of the African nationalist, African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL). (See Chapter 3, pp.55-57)

⁸ *Cape Times*, 5.4.1949.

⁹ *Varsity* Vol.8 No.4, 21.4.1949; *Cape Times*, 6.4.1949.

¹⁰ *Varsity* Vol.8 No.4, 21.4.1949.

¹¹ It had been Hewat students who, at the 1948 Congress, had called for what UCT regarded as the abolition of the social colour bar. See Chapter 2, p.42.

¹² *Cape Times*, 6.4.1949.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Varsity* Vol.8 No.4, 21.4.1949.

¹⁵ BC 535 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.6.

One of the leading lights of the Fort Hare ANCYL was Robert Sobukwe, a committed African nationalist and a powerful influence in student politics. As a student leader in 1948 and SRC president in 1949, he called on students to struggle for liberation through non-collaboration and to boycott dummy institutions. His speech at the Completers' Social in 1949, which denounced missionaries and professional liberals as destroyers of African unity and called for the transformation of Fort Hare into a centre of Africanism, like Stellenbosch University was for Afrikaners, received a standing ovation from the students, but also led to the banning of the ANCYL on the campus.¹⁶

Such assertive Africanist sentiments, as well as Fort Hare's preoccupation with drafting the 1949 ANCYL Programme of Action and participation in the nurses' strike at nearby Victoria Hospital that year,¹⁷ had a negative impact on the relationship between Fort Hare and NUSAS. The College did not always send representatives to NUSAS gatherings nor was it always forthcoming with reports on the situation on campus. However Fort Hare was represented at the 1949 NUSAS conference.

The 1949 Congress held at Cape Town celebrated the silver jubilee of NUSAS. To mark the occasion, General Smuts was asked to open the proceedings, his speech being broadcast union-wide by the SABC. In retrospect, the choice of Smuts as speaker (then leader of the opposition and a year away from death) symbolised the end of an era rather than the beginning of a new one, as the philosophy of a broad white South Africanism espoused by Smuts and followed with ever greater difficulty by NUSAS since its inception in 1924 was no longer in vogue.

NUSAS, not without misgivings, was moving in a far more recognisably liberal direction in the face of the Nationalist attack on liberal values. Rights and values, which in the past would have been taken for granted by NUSAS, such as academic freedom, were believed to be so endangered that it was felt that they ought to be enshrined in the constitution. This led to charges by the more conservative campuses, such as Durban, that politics was being introduced into NUSAS.

This was the dilemma for NUSAS, which, under the presidency of Phillip Tobias, followed a policy of "unity without uniformity" which translated at a practical level into incorporating as many

¹⁶ M.R. Sobukwe: "Address on Behalf of the Graduating Class at Fort Hare", delivered at "Completers' Social", October, 21, 1949 in T.Karis and G.Carter: *From Protest to Challenge* Vol.2, p.335; T.R.H. White: "ZK Matthews and the formation of the ANC Youth League at the University College of Fort Hare" in *Kleio* XXVIII, 1995, pp.131-134,138; B. Pogrand: *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg (1990), pp.131,138.

¹⁷ T.R.H. White: "ZK Matthews and the formation of the ANC Youth League at the University College of Fort Hare", pp.131,138.

different groups under the NUSAS umbrella as possible without expecting everyone to agree on the minutiae of policy. However, issues which in the past could be avoided as being too controversial, came to be discussed in NUSAS forums in the face of Nationalist threats and rising black militancy and thus served to sow division and dissension within NUSAS rather than unity.

One of the most important debates of the 1949 student assembly meeting concerned the inclusion of "pursuit of academic freedom" in the "Objects" of the NUSAS constitution. This clause had been one of the reasons for the disaffiliation of both Cape Town and Durban the previous year. The NUSAS executive, shaken by the realisation that the twenty fifth anniversary could become the funeral of NUSAS, were anxious to compromise. Thus, they devised a scheme whereby the "Objects" of the constitution became as broad and conflict-free as possible. All specific policy of a controversial nature was to be confined to an "Entrenched Schedule" of NUSAS policy from which centres were free to dissociate themselves.¹⁸ It was hoped that this would eliminate the constant attempts to revise the constitution which each year destabilised the organisation.

This executive scheme was officially supported by UCT and Wits, though the latter's delegates made clear that they did not support it. However, the delegates from the black colleges and Pretoria opposed the removal of the clause as it was important to black students and its omission would dilute NUSAS principles and open the door to "reactionary elements like the ASB".¹⁹

After a long drawn-out debate, a compromise, suggested by two members of CPSA on the Wits SRC, that the academic non-segregation clause remain in the constitution without the words themselves being used, was accepted: hence NUSAS would "uphold the right of all students to meet, assemble and study together on a basis of academic equality".²⁰ However, to the anger of Fort Hare students and other radicals, Durban was allowed to dissociate itself from upholding the "practice" of academic non-segregation which was included in the "Schedule", while still upholding the "principle" as enshrined in the constitution.²¹ In this way, Durban could re-affiliate to NUSAS, which it did a year later, while still favouring the prevailing segregation at Natal University and NUSAS furthered the cause of "unity without uniformity". Legassick has argued that the reform undertaken by Tobias was extremely important as it brought back to NUSAS its large, conservative student base and so gave it space to enter the political arena in a limited way. However, this reform

¹⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, pp.18-21; 24-25.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *Guardian*, 21.7.1949; *Varsity* Vol.8 No.7, 2.8.1949.

²¹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, pp.18-21; 24-25.

was incomplete, as it did not formulate a corresponding new ideological position.²² Thus, NUSAS was unable to entertain the demands of the left and/or African nationalism that it enter the political arena directly and adopt a positive political policy.

However, the new policy of “unity without uniformity” did allow NUSAS to counter threats to university autonomy and academic freedom.

Within its first year in office, it was evident that the National Party was serious in its intent to separate all aspects of South African life statutorily. Although elements within the ruling alliance initially balked at imposing apartheid directly on the mixed universities by legislation, thereby violating the principle of university independence and autonomy, it was also clear that the mixed status of UCT and Wits was in jeopardy. Already by July 1949, indirect measures had been employed to reduce the limited number of black students at these institutions when, for example, the state African medical scholarships, tenable at Wits were discontinued.²³ As ominous, was the announcement in parliament by the prime-minister as early as August 1948, that “an intolerable situation had arisen at the mixed universities”²⁴

In the face of these developments, NUSAS laid the foundations for a national and international campaign for the maintenance of academic freedom and autonomy in the universities. The press, the universities, students and the public were to be educated to the dangers of the implementation of apartheid in higher education and their help was to be enlisted in the fight.²⁵ As such then, during 1949, letters were sent to all members of parliament, educationists and non-governmental bodies outlining the NUSAS stance.²⁶ NUSAS denounced unwarranted government intervention in education as “party political interference”, believing that education should be “above party politics”,²⁷ while at the same time asserting that its opposition to state interference was justified, as it was acting in the interests of students, not becoming involved in “party politics”²⁸

²² M. Legassick: “The National Union of South African Students: Ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities”; Occasional Paper Number 4: *African Studies Center University of California Los Angeles*, Los Angeles (1967), pp.18-19, 21.

²³ *Die Transvaler*, 18.5.1949; *SA Student*, May 1949.

²⁴ Union of South Africa: *Debates of the House of Assembly: First Session – Tenth Parliament* Vols.64-65, Column 219, 16.8.1948.

²⁵ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1949, pp.10-11; *Witwatersrand Student* No.6, October 1948.

²⁶ Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

²⁷ This attitude towards education is similar to the one held by many South Africans at that time, that “the native question” should be kept “above party politics”.

²⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 12.7.1949.

Resolution 57, passed by all centres (other than the Natal Training College²⁹) at the 1949 student assembly became the guiding document of the unfolding campaign. It was consistent with current liberal values and preoccupations and affirmed NUSAS' support for university autonomy and academic freedom, and its determination to fight the imposition of university apartheid through lawful means. Centres like Durban which supported academic segregation were given the assurance that the successful passage of the resolution did not imply that NUSAS intended to change the status quo at various universities.³⁰ By highlighting university autonomy in this way, it was hoped that conservatives (even some within the Nationalist camp) not overtly sympathetic to liberal values like academic freedom, would be wooed into opposing university apartheid. The emphasis placed by NUSAS on only using lawful avenues of protest to achieve its goals situated it firmly within the liberal camp, as liberals opposed civil disobedience.

NUSAS' reaction to the first attempt to implement apartheid in higher education was strong. It protested vehemently when the Wits African medical scholarships were withdrawn and called on the state to reconsider its decision.³¹ It pledged support for the African Medical Students Trust Fund (AMSTF) which was established by the Wits SRC to replace the state bursaries³² and persuaded its centres to impose a voluntary levy on academic fees to support it, as well as initiating an international campaign on AMSTF's behalf.

Its parallel Research Conference in 1949 condemned Christian National Education (CNE) as sectional and catering for the needs of only a part of the South African population.³³ An executive research committee was established to examine the contents and the effects of CNE on education.³⁴ CNE remained an important preoccupation of NUSAS during the 1950s, and its campaigns, which included material on the ideology being sent to the individual student newspapers for publication,³⁵ achieved a fair measure of success amongst the general student population. This is evident from the fact that even those centres, which felt that NUSAS was "too political", had strong anti-CNE groups themselves.³⁶

²⁹ Training colleges were forbidden to voice political opinions and from this period onwards, the training colleges usually abstained from voting on contentious issues. BC586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.10.

³⁰ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.30.

³¹ *SA Student*, May 1949.

³² *Cape Times*, 19.7.1949; *Rand Daily Mail*, 23.8.1949.

³³ *Cape Times*, 20.7.1949.

³⁴ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.9.

³⁵ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1952, p.24.

³⁶ Even at the disgruntled Pietermaritzburg campus in 1952, 40% of female residence students were members of the Education League, a national organisation set-up specifically to combat CNE.

The Transvaal Language Ordinance, which enforced mother tongue schooling on children in the Transvaal, was also strongly opposed by NUSAS through resolutions at congresses.³⁷ NUSAS was also a member of, and collaborated with liberal, "non-political" bodies such as the Civil Rights League, the Homes and Schools Council and the Education League which were all committed to fighting educational apartheid.³⁸

Further, NUSAS protested against the removal of the "conscience clause" from the charter of the soon-to-be-independent University of Potchefstroom as it saw this as an assault on the liberal claim of freedom of conscience.³⁹ It also opposed "Christian Science" which the University of the Orange Free State was championing.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding their opposition to educational apartheid and the abandonment of conscience clauses from university charters, representatives within NUSAS of both left- and right-wing persuasion were anxious for different reasons, for the national union to clarify its policy towards Afrikaans-speaking students and the newly established ASB.

The ASB had experienced teething problems in establishing a viable student union.⁴¹ It was nominally united but riven with regional and ideological differences of opinion. It was strong in the north, but not in the south, where, by mid-1949 Stellenbosch was still not fully affiliated.⁴² Another weakness of the ASB was the breadth of its brief. It was both a cultural ("culture" in its broadest sense- "everything that is brought into being by the creative ability of man... the entire philosophy of life and the world of a people"⁴³) and a student benefits organisation, seeking to challenge NUSAS in this area which, it acknowledged, provided a very good service.⁴⁴ Its leadership thus consisted of professional students and seasoned politicians⁴⁵ who had to adapt to more practical, non-political activities.

³⁷ *Cape Times*, 14.7.1950; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.12; Presidential Report 1952, p.25.

³⁸ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1951, p.20; B1 Presidential Report 1952, pp.25,41.

³⁹ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, p.13; B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, pp.10-11; *Star*, 29.5.1950. The stand which NUSAS took on the Conscience Clause could be construed as contradictory because, if NUSAS upheld university autonomy, then the Afrikaans universities were also free to decide their own policies. See for example M. O'Dowd: "Politics and the Universities in South Africa", *Vista*, 1950, pp.5-8.

⁴⁰ BC 586 G1.6 (I): M. O'Dowd to the Executive and Student Editors: "Statement on the letters of Prof. Du Toit and Prof. Venter to the *Kerkblad* of 23.1.1953 in which both discuss the Conscience Clause in the Charter of the University of the Orange Free State", 2.2.1953.

⁴¹ The ASB was almost a carbon copy of NUSAS in structure. *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.8 No.21, 3.9.1948.

⁴² BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.28.

⁴³ J. Fick: "Afrikaner Student Politics - Past and Present" in H.W. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), p.57.

⁴⁴ *Die Matie* Vol.IV No.10, 18.8.1950; *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.VIII No.15, 18.6.1948.

⁴⁵ Most ASB executive members were post- graduate students and over the age of 22. *Die Matie* Vol.IV No.10, 18.8.1950.

“South Africanist”-inclined students in NUSAS decided to exploit these weaknesses of the ASB by offering Afrikaans students and the ASB some of NUSAS’ student benefits. The NUSAS Director of Travel thus intended to place before the 1949 student assembly that NUSAS and the ASB co-operate in the area of travel, but was prevailed upon not to by the radical left.⁴⁶ Instead it was decided that NUSAS tours would be open to all students.⁴⁷

The Wits SRC adopted a much less conciliatory attitude towards the ASB. It felt that NUSAS should launch an active campaign aimed at students rather than SRCs, to expose the “undemocratic”, “discriminatory”, “unco-operative”, Christian National nature of the ASB. Durban opposed the overt criticism of the ASB as it felt that it would harm NUSAS; others felt that a practical, rather than a verbal propaganda campaign would be more effective, while yet others pointed out that, as a “group-cultural” organisation, the ASB had every right to exist, but the problem arose when it claimed to be a national union, which it was not. The Wits motion was defeated and instead the executive was instructed to continue its past policy towards the non-NUSAS centres, namely to attempt contact with the SRCs and students, and if possible, address these bodies directly.⁴⁸

NUSAS was unable to forge any fruitful contacts with non-NUSAS SRCs, but a conference hosted by the Durban SRC in early 1950 did. Of all the English-speaking universities and colleges in South Africa, only the Durban branch of the University of Natal was not affiliated to NUSAS by the end of 1949. Its disaffiliation was attributed to differences of opinion in 1947-8 and its desire for autonomy in student affairs, which, according to students at Pietermaritzburg, was a euphemism for upholding the colour bar.⁴⁹ The allegation regarding the colour bar is partially correct, as indicated by Durban’s dissociation from the “academic non-segregation clause” in the 1949 constitution; but, on the other hand, Natal had always displayed features of isolationism and a desire to pursue an independent political policy. Separatism was again beginning to emerge in Natal in the late 1940s and early 1950s and Durban was reflecting this in a different form.⁵⁰ Those opposed to NUSAS at Durban wanted a “kind of superior isolation in university affairs” or the right to co-operate on a

⁴⁶ *Guardian*, 14.7.1949; 21.7.1949.

⁴⁷ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, pp.52-53.

⁴⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, pp.28-29.

⁴⁹ E.H. Brookes: *A History of the University of Natal*, Natal University Press, Pietermaritzburg (1966), pp.162-3.

⁵⁰ The Pietermaritzburg area was “historically antipathetic to separatist parties”. P.S. Thompson: *Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa 1909-1961*, Southern, Johannesburg (1990), p.149. This could explain why Pietermaritzburg did not display separatist tendencies at this time.

federal basis with NUSAS.⁵¹ Thus in an attempt to forge a new basis for student co-operation, Durban called a conference of all student leaders of white South African universities for early 1950.

This invitation fell on fertile ground, as many moderate students believed that both NUSAS and the ASB were sectional organisations and that a large middle ground existed, from the most conservative at Durban to the most liberal at Stellenbosch.⁵²

The stance adopted by Stellenbosch towards student organisation and the ASB in 1949 must have generated a degree of optimism among English-speaking students that inter-university co-operation could be attained. For example, at the ASB annual conference, Stellenbosch championed (in vain) the idea that NUSAS be recognised on all ASB campuses in the hope that the NUSAS ones would reciprocate. It totally rejected the northern motion banning inter-marriage between English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites as well as disagreeing with the majority that academic segregation be imposed on the universities immediately.⁵³

To the Durban Conference the black universities and colleges were not invited, which led to Wits absenting itself and UCT sending official observers only.⁵⁴ These decisions were bitterly opposed by some Wits and UCT students (the latter having closer ties to Stellenbosch), as was indicated by the rowdy mass meetings which followed the conference.⁵⁵ NUSAS was also not invited to attend and initially remained silent on the matter, while continuing its eventually fruitless talks with the Stellenbosch SRC; yet, to prevent its silence being interpreted as approval, the NUSAS executive did subsequently issue a statement which condemned the Durban initiative for excluding black institutions. Left-wing students at Sastri and Wits opposed the mildness of the motion, but some representatives from UCT abstained, obviously in the belief that NUSAS should support the venture.⁵⁶

A cordial atmosphere prevailed at the Durban Conference in January 1950,⁵⁷ with the result that many English-speaking students believed throughout 1950 that Afrikaans students sincerely wanted co-operation. Further, they believed that a great breakthrough had been made when Afrikaans-

⁵¹ *SA Student* Vol.IV No.4, October 1950.

⁵² *Nux* No.7, 9 August 1950. Stellenbosch was undergoing shifts in policy. It was not yet fully affiliated to the ASB; many conservative English students interpreted this as Stellenbosch being willing to co-operate outside an exclusively Afrikaans organisation.

⁵³ *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.IX No.19, 2.9.1949; *Die Matie* Vol.III No.9, 5.8.1949.

⁵⁴ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.2, 7.3.1950; *Varsity* Vol.9 No.2, 21.3.1950.

⁵⁵ *SA Student* Vol.XV No.1, April 1951; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.2, 7.3.1950.

⁵⁶ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1949, pp.2-8.

⁵⁷ *Rhodeo*, 18.3.1950.

speaking representatives intimated that in future they would be prepared to meet black students from the mixed universities if they represented only black students at those institutions.⁵⁸ NUSAS, Fort Hare⁵⁹ and the radical left at Wits, who seemed to have a more sophisticated understanding of how the mind of apartheid advocates functioned, hailed this as no such breakthrough. NUSAS maintained that the old "blood prejudice of miscegenation had become intellectually enshrined in the more abstract ideal of separate educational facilities".⁶⁰

In the opinion of many moderate students, the only incident which "spoilt" the conference was the adoption of a resolution proposed by Pretoria University "That... while accepting the status quo at the so-called mixed universities as temporary and regrettable (the meeting) supports the principle of separate facilities for Non-Europeans...".⁶¹ The Pietermaritzburg delegates abstained from voting on this issue on the grounds of university autonomy, feeling that Wits and UCT could follow whatever system they liked,⁶² while Rhodes delegates voted in favour, though their stand was later repudiated by their indignant SRC.⁶³

UN Durban was wholly satisfied with the meeting which led to two more gatherings later that year, one at Pietermaritzburg where an attempt was made at establishing a student parliament. This was unsuccessful and instead a South African University Press Union (SAUPU) was created which survived for a few years.⁶⁴ Again Wits and UCT refused to send delegates to the Pietermaritzburg meeting unless Fort Hare was invited, which led to the resignation of the United Party and ASB members of the UCT SRC.⁶⁵ Fort Hare was insulted that it was considered a stumbling block to white unity and dissociated itself from all proceedings,⁶⁶ while the Wits SRC announced that it could no longer work with Afrikaans students because of their commitment to apartheid, and more specifically, their rejection of academic non-segregation.⁶⁷

Ultimately the Durban Conference initiative failed, the final meeting taking place in a strained atmosphere as a result of a declaration of war on NUSAS by the ASB.⁶⁸ Relations between

⁵⁸ *Rhodeo*, 18.3.1950; *Varsity* Vol.9 No.2, 21.3.1950.

⁵⁹ *Nux* (n.v.), 29.5.1950.

⁶⁰ *SA Student* Vol.IV No.4, October 1950.

⁶¹ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.2, 7.3.1950; *Varsity* Vol.9 No.2, 21.3.1950.

⁶² *Nux* No.5, 29.5.1950.

⁶³ *Rhodeo*, 18.3.1950.

⁶⁴ *Nux* No.8, 22.9.1950; *Varsity*, 21.3.1951.

⁶⁵ *Varsity* Vol.9 No.4, 31.3.1950.

⁶⁶ *Nux* No.5, 29.5.1950.

⁶⁷ *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.X No.12, 16.6.1950.

⁶⁸ *Spoorslag*, November 1950; *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.X No.14, 11.8.1950.

Afrikaans Nationalist-orientated centres and the liberal universities deteriorated during this period because of the actions of the government.

The period 1949-1950 was notable for the increasing number of government attacks on the liberal universities and NUSAS. The Government members utilised the tried and tested method of focusing on mixed social functions, "miscegenation" and the "red threat" as well as administrative measures to "soften up" public opinion as the fore-runner to its full-scale legislative assault on academic segregation and the final removal of black students from the white universities. At a meeting in Willowmore in July 1949, a new cabinet minister, Eric Louw, charged that NUSAS had no right to exist because it supposedly did not accept a colour bar and later threatened the national union with McCarthyite action for its "ultra-liberalistic or Leftist" leanings.⁶⁹ J.G. Strijdom, the Transvaal National Party leader and the Minister of Agriculture, attacked mixed functions at NUSAS meetings and called on the NP *Jeugbond* to infiltrate the "United Party dominated" universities.⁷⁰

The removal of black students began in earnest in August 1949 when C.R. Swart, at the Transvaal NP Congress, called for the universities to be "cleaned out" and the Non-European" students to be put in their "own" institutions.⁷¹ The state African medical scholarships tenable at Wits were terminated in 1949⁷² and the first black students were removed from Wits because the government would neither grant nor extend the inter-provincial permits required by Natal Indians to travel to the Transvaal. Foreign Africans were also denied study rights in the Union, the first casualty of this policy being a Mozambican student, Eduardo Mondlane, later founder of Frelimo, who was refused an immigration permit to continue his studies at Wits. The SRCs at all the English-medium universities as well NUSAS protested vehemently against these actions the latter, in its traditional, constitutional fashion through deputations and letters to the minister concerned.⁷³

These attacks by the government had contradictory results. On the one hand they prepared the ground for united student action at the English universities against the assaults on university autonomy and the imposition of academic segregation (as in the near unanimous resolution against such steps at the 1949 NUSAS congress), but on the other hand they divided liberal and radical students.

⁶⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 26.7.1949; 29.7.1949; *Die Transvaler*, 1.8.1949.

⁷⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 9.8.1949.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *Rand Daily Mail*, 23.8.1949.

⁷³ P.V. Tobias: "A little known Chapter in the Life of Eduardo Mondlane", *Geneve Afrique* Vol.16 No.1 (1978), pp.120-121; Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

The number of students supporting a broad South Africanism declined as the reality of the differences between the United Party and the National Party, which it seemed a majority of Afrikaners now supported and which wanted complete separation along white-black as well as English-Afrikaans lines, became more apparent and pronounced. This is discernible in a number of events. After the failure of the Durban conference initiative, UN Durban returned to NUSAS. NUSAS terminated its association with the National Youth Organisation which it had supported from the beginning, because it was divided along racial lines, and had the Afrikaans groups got their way, along parallel white lines as well.⁷⁴ NUSAS thus felt that there was no place for bilingual organisations like itself.⁷⁵ In addition to this, an article penned by the NUSAS president in the *Witwatersrand Student* in 1950 unequivocally blamed Afrikaner “race-culture purists” for destroying student unity,⁷⁶ while at UCT, the SRC appointed no Afrikaners to its executive because of the increased government attacks.⁷⁷

At a national level, the liberal voice in South African politics became more prominent as a plethora of organisations sprang up to challenge government legislation. There was also a growing distance between liberals and the more conservative United Party stance on most issues.⁷⁸ At university level, this can be seen in the growing prominence of liberal organisations. For example, the Students’ Liberal Association (SLA) at Wits was reactivated in 1950 after the Durban Conference supported academic segregation, while most of the candidates fielded by the UCT SLA in the 1950 elections were successful. In 1949, Rhodes elected one of its most liberal SRCs ever, which called for the admission of black students to the universities, an issue which it felt could not be compromised for the sake of co-operation with Afrikaners.⁷⁹

Government legislation also exacerbated cleavages between liberals and the left, for liberals and radicals differed in a number of ways. Liberal organisations like NUSAS were “non-political”, in other words, not aligned to any political party, but this issue was not relevant to radicals. Moreover, during this period liberals supported only a qualified franchise and social rights for those embracing “western civilisation”, a position far removed from that of the radicals. At student level this translated into NUSAS officially upholding academic non-segregation but not being prepared to endorse full social rights, thus accepting a social colour bar. Liberals were only prepared to take on a cause if it directly concerned students – the “students-as-such” position. Radicals in NUSAS on

⁷⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.26; *Rand Daily Mail*, 6.4.1950.

⁷⁵ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.26.

⁷⁶ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.8, 27.6.1950.

⁷⁷ *Varsity* Vol.9 No.1, 13.10.1949.

⁷⁸ D. Everatt: “The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960”, D.Phil., Oxford University (1990), p.44.

the other hand, argued for a “students-in-society” approach. It should be remembered however, that at this time NUSAS’ stance was not unusual: the British National Union of Students (NUS) was also a “non-political” organisation and, as in NUSAS, its avoidance of politics created much tension between the left and the rest.⁸⁰

In South Africa, another important difference between the two groups lay in their response to black resistance. Radicals were prepared to entertain action in the extra-parliamentary terrain, but to liberals this smacked too much of revolutionary politics and thus they limited their protest to legalistic, parliamentary petitions and deputations.⁸¹ In 1953, when recruiting overseas support for its university autonomy campaign, NUSAS carefully explained that it did not organise strikes and demonstrations as these only antagonised public opinion, adding that it preferred to work with bodies such as the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) as well as the press and personal contacts.⁸²

The first major parting of the ways between liberals and the left, both within national anti-government groupings and NUSAS, occurred in 1950, with the gazetting of the Unlawful Organisations Bill, later passed as the Suppression of Communism Act.⁸³ Within NUSAS this translated into the first serious attempt to remove NUSAS from the “Cominform-aligned” International Union of Students (IUS). According to Everatt, as explained above, liberals were in the ambiguous and contradictory position of supporting the goals of the anti-communist measures but not the methods employed, which they believed were illiberal and defied the rule of law. They also feared that, with the demise and dissolution of communist groups, communists would attempt to infiltrate and dominate liberal organisations.⁸⁴ Thus anti-communist screening procedures were adopted by liberal organisations.⁸⁵ Because NUSAS was an open organisation it was unable to adopt such screening procedures, but there is evidence of liberal vigilance of left-wing activity, for

⁷⁹ *SA Student* Vol. XIV No. 4, October 1950.

⁸⁰ D. Jacks: *Student Politics and Higher Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1975), p. 82. In 1946 students participated in a bus strike in Manchester. The NUS Council ruled that, “whilst recognising the right of students to play a full part in political life.... (NUS) dissociates itself from any activity of individual students or Student Unions which does not concern students as such”. E. Ashby: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970), p. 94.

⁸¹ D. Everatt: pp. 15, 17, 44–45. He does not refer to NUSAS but to other national associations of similar ilk.

⁸² BC 586 Gi. 6iii, Department of International Relations: Memorandum on the Threat to the Autonomy of South African Universities”, December 1953, p. 6.

⁸³ D. Everatt: p. 45.

⁸⁴ After the dissolution of the CPSA in May 1950, Harold Wolpe, a former member, announced that he intended, by use of prudent tactics, to turn NUSAS into a militant, progressive body which would operate in both the student arena and in society. BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, p. 21; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol. III No. 5, 25.6.1951.

⁸⁵ D. Everatt: p. 45; On one occasion in the 1950s, Harold Wolpe was accused of being politically homeless and using NUSAS to pursue his own political agenda.

instance of Lionel Forman in the IUS, to be discussed in chapter six.⁸⁶ McCarthyism and anti-Stalinism, the latter being associated with loss of liberties and the rise of the Cold War aggravated the cleavages between the two groups⁸⁷

With this background in mind, as well as with the responses of the various groups, organisations and SRCs responsible for NUSAS policy, it becomes possible to understand the NUSAS resolution regarding the Suppression of Communism Act.

In terms similar to that of the CPSA and Congress Alliance,⁸⁸ but with initial hesitation by liberals who felt that many students “did not care what happened to communists”,⁸⁹ the Wits SLA called for the withdrawal of the “anti-communism” bill because it was an attack on fundamental liberties and would result in the suppression of all opposition to the government.⁹⁰ A mass meeting overwhelmingly upheld a similar SRC resolution.⁹¹

After the UCT SRC had ascertained that the UP intended to fight the bill, the SRC got the consent of the student body for its resolution which was couched in terms of academic freedom. It read that the bill constituted a threat to democratic freedoms and student rights and that its terms were so wide as to classify as “communist”, anyone opposing the removal of black students from UCT.⁹²

Once it had gauged the views of some of its constituent campuses, the NUSAS executive issued a press statement expressing its disapproval of a bill which undermined liberal freedoms, the rule of law, jeopardised the existence of non-racial organisations and violated the traditional independence of the universities. It further objected to the wide powers vested in the minister, which could lead to a ban on the teaching of Marxist economics, for example. NUSAS was pledged to fight the bill by any lawful means.⁹³ Subsequently the student assembly ratified this statement but with four centres abstaining.⁹⁴ Thus, by opposing the Suppression of Communism Act, which did not have a direct

⁸⁶ It would seem that liberals in NUSAS and on the Wits SRC tried to block former CPSA members obtaining executive positions on their governing bodies by putting up liberal-radical compromise candidates. They were unsuccessful in this when the compromise candidates for both the Wits SRC presidency and the NUSAS executive stood aside for the ex-CPSA members in 1950. *Witwatersrand Student*, May 1951. From this period onwards, liberals actively tried to block the radical left from gaining positions of power. R. Vigne: *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-1968*, Macmillan, London (1997).

⁸⁷ D. Everatt: p.45.

⁸⁸ T. Karis and G. Carter: *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol.2, pp.442-3.

⁸⁹ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.6, 17.5.1950.

⁹⁰ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.4, 19.4.1950.

⁹¹ *Guardian*, 18.5.1950.

⁹² *Cape Times*, 13.6.1950; *Rand Daily Mail*, 13.6.1950.

⁹³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 19.6.1950.

⁹⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, pp.27-8.

bearing on student affairs, the NUSAS assembly set a precedent, which would be used by the radical left in its attempts to persuade the national union to adopt a more overtly political stance.

The same two NUSAS executive members who had proposed the anti- Suppression of Communism motion proposed that NUSAS disaffiliate from the IUS as the majority of its members were in Eastern Europe and thus pursued a communist policy. The IUS was criticised for no longer being a “student organisation” but a “political group” with “political affiliations” attempting “to further a particular political ideal”,⁹⁵ all attributes anathema to liberals. The radical left was opposed to NUSAS’ secession, and a compromise to delay the decision was carried by 16 votes to 10.⁹⁶ Thus a very definite split between liberals and radicals had occurred, though not on a domestic matter. The IUS debate (which will be discussed in Chapter 6) would dominate NUSAS for another five years until the radicals were defeated in 1955.

Another issue which sowed dissension between the radical left and the liberals/right-wing was the “economic clause” in the “Schedule of Entrenched Clauses” attached to the constitution. UN Durban, with the support of some liberals, called for the deletion of “protection of equality of educational and economic opportunity”.⁹⁷ They argued that it was vague or could be construed as meaning that NUSAS furthered the cause of a political party – the newly banned CPSA, although this was not stated. This motion was however lost, as UN Durban failed to obtain the requisite two-thirds majority.⁹⁸

While the factions within NUSAS wrangled over the constitution, mass opposition began mobilising nationally against the enactment of apartheid legislation. Mass opposition, whether it was essentially black, radical and extra-legal, or white, liberal and constitutional, had an impact on students and thus on NUSAS. This served to generate conflict between the radical left and the liberals over the desirability or degree of political involvement which NUSAS should have in national affairs.

Between 1950 and 1953, the cornerstones of apartheid were enacted – the Population Registration Act, the Separate Registration of Voters Act, the Separate Amenities Act, the Group Areas Act and the Bantu Education Act. Mass mobilisation of both black and white against these measures began in 1951, when Parliament passed the Separate Representation of Voters Act which removed

⁹⁵ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.29.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁹⁷ “NUSAS shall aim to encourage the promotion of equality of educational and economic opportunity for all in South Africa, to ensure that university education is not the privilege of a class.” BC 586 B1 Congress Agenda 1950, p.2.

coloureds from the common voters roll by simple majority, instead of the two-thirds required by the constitution. The Appellate Court overturned this decision and the government attempted to reconstitute parliament as a high court, thus setting in motion a constitutional crisis. Black resistance to these measures mobilised around the Franchise Action Committee whose initiatives eventually culminated in the Defiance Campaign in 1952. White protest was more concerned at protecting the integrity of the constitution and coalesced around the Torch Commando which, at the height of its popularity, had a paid-up mainly white membership of 250 000. The Torch Commando was initially a radical organisation established by members of the Springbok Legion. However, by 1952 its left-wing had been purged as the Commando entered a United Democratic Front with the Labour Party and the United Party, and became a campaign vehicle for the latter in its quest to oust the NP from power in the 1953 general election.⁹⁹

That these events had an effect on student politics is attested to by the fact that, by 1952, even the most apolitical campuses such as Rhodes and Pietermaritzburg, which for years had been plagued by apathy, were galvanised into action as will be seen later. The coloured franchise issue was the backdrop of, and exacerbated the issue of the social colour bar at UCT. This affected NUSAS too and led to a further division in the national union between the radicals and the liberals. The former identified with black resistance and thus voiced their demands for full political and social rights for all and the transformation of NUSAS into a body that would uphold and fight for the extension of these rights. Liberals wanted NUSAS to remain a non-political organisation concerned only with issues in the political domain which were directly applicable to students and education.

The social colour bar crisis at UCT began during the second half of 1950, when four United Party-orientated SRC members resigned from the SLA when it voted for what amounted to the abolition of the social colour bar at UCT, at least to conservative eyes.¹⁰⁰ However a very divided SRC voted against extending social rights at UCT and this was narrowly upheld by a well attended mass meeting.¹⁰¹ The high poll in favour of social rights can probably be accounted for by the fact that it took place against the backdrop of the Torch Commando's anti-disenfranchisement of coloureds

⁹⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, pp.21-22.

⁹⁹ M. Fridjhon: "The Torch Commando: A Study in Opposition Politics in White South Africa, 1951-1953", BA (Honours) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1975), p.15; J. Lazerson: *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle against Apartheid*, Mayibuye, Belville (1994), pp.62-4.

¹⁰⁰ *SA Student* Vol.XIV No.4, October 1950; *Varsity*, 20.9.1950; R. Segal: *Into Exile*, Jonathan Cape, London (1963), pp.86-7.

¹⁰¹ *Cape Times*, 23.5.1951; 12.6.1951; *SA Student* Vol.XV No.3, June 1951; *Spoorslag* Vol.I No.3, June 1951; *Varsity* Vol.10 No.7, 11.6.1951.

campaign¹⁰² and that the coloured SRC representative said that these rights would be held in abeyance if granted.¹⁰³ On the other hand, the fear of having at a later stage to defend mixed dances and swimming pools,¹⁰⁴ as well as Nationalist propaganda, and the concern that government and possibly also the university authorities would be goaded into removing black students altogether from the university were the motion passed,¹⁰⁵ undoubtedly chased students into the opposite camp.

In the meantime, the NUSAS Local Committee at UCT almost unanimously decided that it would host no more dances rather than hold them on a colour bar basis, as the exclusion of "non-Europeans" was "contrary to the very nature and existence of a national union of students".¹⁰⁶ The Nationalist propaganda machine immediately used this as a pretext for the removal of black students from the universities, as supposedly, their presence led to miscegenation and the bastardisation of the white nation".¹⁰⁷ This put NUSAS on the defensive and its president was forced to deny that mixed dances had ever taken place.¹⁰⁸

While the debate over social equality raged at UCT, the Fort Hare SRC appointed a commission of inquiry to investigate NUSAS at the College and then made an unsuccessful disaffiliation bid from NUSAS during April 1951.¹⁰⁹ The reasons for this were never disclosed, but it appears that the national union was perceived to be irrelevant to the needs of African students by limiting its political activity to the student terrain.¹¹⁰ The disaffiliation move also coincided with the announcement of UCT's intention to propose that NUSAS sever all ties to the IUS, a body which

¹⁰² Students from UCT, Wits and probably Rhodes too, joined the simultaneous Torch Commando marches in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth respectively on 4 May 1951. *Cape Times*, 5.5.1951; *Nux*, No.5, 8.6.1951; G. Carter: *The Politics of Inequality: South Africa since 1948*, Thames and Hudson, London (1958), p.304.

¹⁰³ *SA Student* Vol.XV No.3, June 1951; *Die Burger*, 12.6.1951.

¹⁰⁴ Zac de Beer said he would never defend the right of a black person to use the swimming bath. *Varsity* Vol.10 No.7, 11.6.1951.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald Segal mentions that the UCT authorities played down racial integration and concentrated their attention instead on academic freedom in the hope that if the university was discreet, the government would leave it alone. Those advocating social integration were regarded as being provocative and were reprimanded by the principal for their irresponsibility. R. Segal: pp.85-6.

¹⁰⁶ *Nux* No.4, 18.5.1951; No.5, 8.6.1951. It is not clear why this decision was taken. Possibly the Local Committee anticipated (wrongly) that the student body would uphold social equality and so to avoid the embarrassment of holding mixed dances, it abolished them altogether. *Nux* and the *Cape Times* suggest that this decision was a protest against the conservative stance of the SRC, but the Local Committee denied this. *Nux* No.5, 8.6.1951.

¹⁰⁷ *Die Burger*, 13.6.1951; *Spoorslag* Vol.1 No.3, June 1951; *Cape Times*, 23.7.1951. Senator Van Rensburg was quoted as saying, "my hair rises when I hear of these things (dances). When kaffirs danced with White students, who can say there was no kissing. *SA Student* Vol.XV No.4, August 1951.

¹⁰⁸ *SA Student* Vol.XV No.4, August 1951.

¹⁰⁹ BC 586 Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 28.3.1951; B1 Presidential Report 1952, pp.6-7.

¹¹⁰ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.9-10; Addendum 1 to Presidential Report 1952; *SA Student* Vol.XV No.2, May 1951.

African students felt sympathised with their struggle.¹¹¹ The SRC was heavily politicised with strong African nationalist and non-collaborationist tendencies.¹¹²

NUSAS was always of secondary importance to Fort Hare students whose primary allegiance was to the liberation struggle, a fact which became more evident during the 1950s. However, a significant group of Fort Hare students wanted to continue the association with NUSAS in order to harness it to the national liberation struggle,¹¹³ along the lines of student movements in the colonial world. There was thus a fundamental difference in interpretation between Fort Hare and the majority in NUSAS as to the role of a national union of students. This was to lead to conflict.

Subsequently, Fort Hare gave notice of its intention to amend the "Objects" of the NUSAS constitution so that NUSAS would "stand for political and social equality for all men (sic) in South Africa". It was argued that the problems experienced by African students stemmed from the South African political and social situation and that NUSAS should thus attack these problems at source. Further, as students did not live in a political vacuum, it was pointless NUSAS only defending "partial democracy" in the educational sphere.¹¹⁴

This again had the effect of separating the liberals from the radicals, as many of the former did not support full political rights and the abolition of the colour bar; nor did any of them, along with many radicals, want to transform NUSAS into a "(party) political organisation" which moved beyond the sphere of student interests. At Wits the black and white left was split in two. For the sake of the continuation of NUSAS, as well as for tactical reasons which aimed to change NUSAS gradually into a "progressive" body, the radicals on the Wits SRC initially opposed the motion and were mandated to do so at the annual congress too.¹¹⁵ By the time the assembly met, some Wits delegates had switched their allegiances and urged support for the Fort Hare motion on the grounds that NUSAS had already entered the political realm by opposing academic segregation and the Suppression of Communism Act. Delegates from UCT, Durban and the training colleges opposed the motion outright, arguing that, were the motion adopted, NUSAS would become a student political party, the training colleges would be forced to leave and – if it did not disintegrate first- it would be banned.¹¹⁶ The motion was defeated 19 to 2.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

¹¹² T. Makiwane in T. Karis and G. Carter: *From Protest to Challenge* Microfilm Collection Reel 2 XM 26:94, p.4.

¹¹³ D. Burchell: "The Emergence and Growth of Student Militancy at the University College of Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s", *Journal of the University of Durban-Westville*, New Series 3, 1986, p.157.

¹¹⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951 p.19; *Star*, 10.7.1951.

¹¹⁵ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5; 25.6.1951; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, p.20.

¹¹⁶ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.19-20,22.

¹¹⁷ *Star*, 10.7.1951.

Later on during the congress, delegates from Wits and Fort Hare proposed a resolution, substantially similar to the earlier Fort Hare one, that the executive strive to combat the evils of racial discrimination and inequality both in and outside the universities, as there was a close link between education and the conditions in the country. The proposers made it clear that this did not imply a foray into party politics. UCT and Rhodes were implacably opposed to this¹¹⁸ and eventually a compromise was carried, which recognised the closeness of societal and educational inequality but limited NUSAS' involvement in fighting it to the educational realm.¹¹⁹

Nonetheless, however much NUSAS wanted to remain outside national politics, the events of 1951-2 had the effect of changing the perception of a large number of students about the role of a student union in politics. National white politics during the latter part of 1951 and the first half of 1952 were marked by the climax of the Torch Commando's campaign against the Separate Representation of Voters' Act. At the same time, black groupings were preparing the ground for the Passive Resistance Campaign for "the repeal of six unjust laws" which was scheduled to begin on 6 April 1952, the tercentenary festival of Van Riebeeck's arrival in South Africa. The degree to which students had become politicised and were sensitive to the Fort Hare issue is revealed by the fact that at Rhodes, one of the traditionally more conservative campuses, the student body voted overwhelmingly to open the university to all students,¹²⁰ as well as, astoundingly, not to participate in the Van Riebeeck festival because it was segregated, unrepresentative and excluded Fort Hare. This decision was subsequently reversed,¹²¹ as was a similar one at UCT.¹²²

Mass rallies on 6 April 1952 against the Van Riebeeck Festival preceded the start of the Defiance Campaign. A month later, Fort Hare students voted by 147 to 47 to disaffiliate from NUSAS on the grounds that the national union was "a non-political organisation, unequal (sic) to approve (sic) the ideals of equality held by African nationalism".¹²³ NUSAS was accused of "unequivocally" rejecting political equality, of meting out "unsatisfactory" "treatment" to black students at its conferences, of being of no practical value - the NUSAS employment scheme had not provided holiday employment to Fort Hare students - and instead of donating money to the college, NUSAS demanded from it membership fees.¹²⁴ Without having attended the mass meeting, the NUSAS president attributed the disaffiliation to the refusal of NUSAS to pass the Fort Hare "politics

¹¹⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.31-33.

¹¹⁹ *Star*, 10.7.1951.

¹²⁰ *SA Student* Vol.XV No.4, August 1951.

¹²¹ *Cape Times*, 14.8.1951; *Rhodeo*; Special Supplement, 18.8.1951.

¹²² *Varsity*, 7.9.1951; R. Segal: pp.92-94.

¹²³ *Evening Post*, 24.5.1952.

motion" in 1951 as well as to the influence of African nationalism and an abhorrence of working with whites.¹²⁵ Beard held SOYA and the AAC responsible for the disaffiliation,¹²⁶ but according to Makiwane, an entirely Youth League SRC was returned in 1952.¹²⁷ The seceder of the disaffiliation motion was an AAC supporter.¹²⁸ Collaboration between SOYA and Youth Leaguers over membership of NUSAS was entirely consistent, as many Youth Leaguers of that period had strongly Africanist views and were opposed to collaboration with whites.¹²⁹ Indeed as the Defiance Campaign progressed, the majority of Fort Hare students adopted the ANCYL position.¹³⁰ Consequently, in spite of attempts by NUSAS to persuade Fort Hare to reconsider its decision, which included a presidential visit to the college in June 1952,¹³¹ Fort Hare decided to launch a new student organisation with purely political objectives, the Progressive South African Students Union in late 1952.¹³²

While Fort Hare was disaffiliating from NUSAS in May 1952, emotions reached fever pitch nationally over the government's attempts to override the constitution and disenfranchise coloured voters. In Natal, where the first issue was more important than the second, this culminated in a 45000 strong "Voice of Natal" rally organised by the United Democratic Front in Durban.¹³³

Pietermaritzburg students attended the rally and distributed their *Nux Crisis Edition* in which they accused the Nationalist government of being "Malanazi" (a Torch Commando term), of destroying the constitution and defying the rule of law.¹³⁴ The SRC called on students "to climb down from their ivory tower" and enter politics directly as politics had already entered the student arena in the form of the erosion of academic freedom and the wide powers of the Suppression of Communism Act.¹³⁵ A United Student Front (USF), which aimed to safeguard basic rights of intellectual freedom, was then established.¹³⁶ UN Durban, although sympathetic to its aims, declined to join on the grounds that it could offend minorities, "get out of hand" or act as competition to NUSAS.¹³⁷

¹²⁴ BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 21.5.1952.

¹²⁵ BC 586 U2.c: P. Arnett to G. Clayton, 18.7.1952.

¹²⁶ T. Beard: "Background to Student Activities at the University College of Fort Hare" in H. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), pp.167,169.

¹²⁷ T. Makiwane in T. Karis and G. Carter, p.4.

¹²⁸ BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 21.5.1952.

¹²⁹ However, when comparing the language/tone and jargon/phrases appearing in the "Minutes", it would appear that the disaffiliation motion was the work of the ANCYL rather than the AAC. See BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings, 13.8.1952; 21.8.1952.

¹³⁰ T. Makiwane in T. Karis and G. Carter: p.8.

¹³¹ *Varsity*, 19.6.1952.

¹³² *Dome* Vol.7 No.1, 1.4.1953.

¹³³ P.S. Thompson: *Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa 1909-1961*, Southern, Johannesburg (1990), pp.124-7.

¹³⁴ *Nux Crisis Edition*, 6.6.1952.

¹³⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 9.6.1952.

¹³⁶ *Nux Crisis Edition*, 6.6.1952.

¹³⁷ *Dome* Vol.6 No.3, 25.6.1952; *Nux* No.5, 26.6.1952.

while Rhodes followed suit, feeling that the organisation was too close to the UP.¹³⁸ For its part Wits¹³⁹ welcomed it as an “outstanding advance in student affairs”, as did UNNE.¹⁴⁰

However, the USF unraveled, as did the Torch Commando, on the issue of black membership,¹⁴¹ since, were blacks to be allowed to join, the USF would be obliged to fight for their political and social equality,¹⁴² which, being a United Party-orientated body, it was not prepared to do. Thus the USF and Pietermaritzburg had revealed themselves to be quite prepared to enter “party politics” directly, but only on the UP side. This is one of the reasons for the antagonism within NUSAS to “politics outside the student arena”. With the decline of the “broad South Africanism” position in NUSAS and the subsequent possibility of alienating Afrikaners being reduced, students would quite probably have agreed to direct political involvement if it were UP-orientated. However, because the call came from the radical left and entailed championing black rights, “politics” was unacceptable. A left-wing commentator of British student politics noticed a similar trend in NUS. He understood the “no-politics rule” to mean “no left-wing politics”, a position which he attributed to the Cold War.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, in South Africa the national events of 1951-2 led to a significant (though often temporary) shift in the thinking of many students, to the extent that many more were prepared to nudge NUSAS further in the direction of political involvement beyond the student sphere.

The extent to which national events and the disaffiliation of Fort Hare had transformed the political views of student representatives can be gauged from the deliberations at the 1952 NUSAS congress. Firstly, when the delegates of the disaffiliated Fort Hare failed to arrive, a shocked NUSAS postponed its assembly deliberations by a day in order to establish the whereabouts of the delegates and persuade them to attend the meeting. This failed.¹⁴⁴ Secondly, the change can be seen by the fate of a “NUSAS and politics” motion remarkably similar to the one proposed by the Fort Hare delegation the previous year and so comprehensively defeated.

A “statement of attitude” that NUSAS recognised “that society and education (were) inseparably linked” and would thus “uphold the principle of political, social and economic equality of all” was put forward.¹⁴⁵ Wits amended this to the effect that NUSAS would also mobilise its members in the

¹³⁸ *Rhodeo*, 2.9.1952

¹³⁹ The radical left at Wits observed closely and /or participated in both the Defiance Campaign and Torch Commando activities. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.1, 11.3.1952; No.2, 7.4.1952; No.4, 6.6.1952; No.7, 20.8.1952.

¹⁴⁰ It is unclear whether these were SRC responses. *Nux* No.5, 26.6.1952.

¹⁴¹ D. Fridjhon: p.41.

¹⁴² *Dome* Vol.6 No.3, 25.6.1952.

¹⁴³ D. Jacks: p.84.

¹⁴⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.4.

¹⁴⁵ *SA Student* Vol.XV No.3, October 1952.

“struggle against the undemocratic action of the government”.¹⁴⁶ The heated debate again divided the left from the right and split the liberals in two as among other issues, agreement could not be reached as to whether the pursuit of equality was more important than risking the disaffiliation of NUSAS centres. The “statement of attitude” and the amendment were both lost by narrow margins – 19 to 23 and 17 to 21 respectively.¹⁴⁷ This remarkable change from 1951¹⁴⁸ was certainly attributable to the national political crisis as well as to Fort Hare’s disaffiliation. A troubled UCT delegate in fact remarked that “the suppressed sense of panic caused by the actions of the government had resulted in an unbalanced attitude”.¹⁴⁹

As far as direct government attacks on university independence and academic freedom were concerned, the ruling NP was still divided on the issue. University apartheid was official government policy and according to Beale, the need to separate black and white at higher educational institutions was accepted by all Nationalists. However, during the early 1950s there was no unanimity over how the Nationalist government as “trustees” of the black population, should provide alternative university education for black students.¹⁵⁰ The Native Affairs Department, under Eiselen, stressed that African university education should “provide a general education for leaders” as well as “provide high grade technical men for their future economic and technical development”.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, the Minister of Education, Arts and Science, J.H. Viljoen was more concerned with simply segregating the races and was favourably disposed towards the system which prevailed at Natal University.¹⁵² As well as disagreement concerning the nature of future African education, there was no unanimity over how and when Africans would and should be removed from the universities. The *baasskap*-orientated “North” was strongly in favour of immediate legislation and removal of black students from the universities and the withdrawal of state subsidies from those institutions which did not comply with government policy. In this respect, J.G. Strijdom, J. van Rensburg and C.R. Swart were at the forefront of attacks on the mixed universities and NUSAS. Others felt that the changes could best come through the force of public opinion. Thus, as mentioned before, the NP and its press kept the issue of the “dangers” of social mixing and the emergence of a “coffee-coloured race” firmly in the public eye.

¹⁴⁶ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, pp.42-3; *Dome* Vol.6 No.4, 15.9.1952. In June 1952, at the height of national political mobilisation, the Wits SRC decided to mount a campaign for full social equality on the campus. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.5, 6.6.1952.

¹⁴⁷ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.46; R. Segal: p.98; *Varsity*, 8.8.1952.

¹⁴⁸ The similar motion was defeated 2 to 19 in 1951. *Star*, 10.7.1951.

¹⁴⁹ *Varsity*, 8.8.1952.

¹⁵⁰ M.A. Beale: “The Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid” in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* Vol.18, Seminar Papers No.44, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, p.82.

¹⁵¹ South Africa: U6, 53: *Report of the Commission on Native Education (Eiselen Commission)*, Pretoria, 1952, Chapter 10, cited in M.A. Beale: p.83.

As a result, in September 1951, J.H. Viljoen announced that the government would not legislate on university apartheid immediately as this would violate the traditional independence of the universities¹⁵³ and the withdrawal of subsidies was not warranted.¹⁵⁴ Viljoen also contradicted his colleagues and denied the existence of social mixing.¹⁵⁵ NUSAS welcomed the intervention and assurances by the minister, but in the light of continuing administrative measures aimed at limiting the number of black students enrolled at UCT and Wits, for example the removal of passports and study permits, NUSAS requested a firm elaboration of government policy on university autonomy.¹⁵⁶

As 1952 drew to a close, the number and severity of attacks by members of the Nationalist alliance increased, quite probably because miscegenation was a popular election slogan in the run-up to the 1953 general election. More ominously, NUSAS interpreted the arrest of two students (ANCYL executive members) on the Wits campus itself in August 1952 as a means of drawing attention to Wits' student political activity and so generating public opinion sympathetic to academic apartheid.¹⁵⁷ Even more worrying to NUSAS was the fear that the Wits authorities were being pressurised by the government to conform to its policies. In October 1952, the Wits principal, H.F. Raikes, threatened to abolish academic non-segregation if the Wits SRC continued its non-recognition of social segregation on campus and if students continued to participate in outside political activities wearing their university blazers.¹⁵⁸

The government's attacks on mixed universities and NUSAS also affected the relationship between NUSAS and the students at Afrikaans universities, and by extension, with the ASB. Afrikaner student bodies remained hotly contested and the ASB continued to be deeply divided,¹⁵⁹ being particularly challenged by Stellenbosch.¹⁶⁰ This regional conflict within the ASB was reflected in the attitude of the various NUSAS centres towards the ASB and non-NUSAS centres. UCT, with

¹⁵² Viljoen was a member of the Afrikaner Party and had followed Hertzog into Fusion. Thus, his views were sometimes at odds with other Nationalists.

¹⁵³ *Cape Times*, 19.9.1951; *Star*, 10.9.1951.

¹⁵⁴ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1951, p.19.

¹⁵⁵ *Rand Daily Mail*, 26.7.1951.

¹⁵⁶ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, pp.34-5.

¹⁵⁷ BC 586 G1.6(i) "Statement on the arrest of two medical students of Wits on August 14, 1952" issued by M.C. O'Dowd (Vice-President) to SRCs and Student Editors, 2.9.1952.

¹⁵⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 9.10.1952; BC 586 G1.6(i) "Wits Principal's Statement" Memorandum issued by M. O'Dowd to Student Assembly, 20.10.1952.

¹⁵⁹ J. Fick: "Afrikaner Student Politics – Past and Present" in H.W. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), p.70.

¹⁶⁰ At the annual congress in 1952, Stellenbosch delegates delivered a scathing attack on the ASB, proposed abolishing automatic membership as not everyone identified with CNE and attempted later to arrange a mass meeting to decide on Stellenbosch's continued affiliation. *Die Matie* Vol. VI No.9, 15.8.1952; No.10, 29.8.1952; No.11, 12.9.1952.

closer ties to the more moderate Stellenbosch, was more disposed towards co-operation with the ASB than Wits, which had to deal with the hostile and unbending student body at Pretoria.

In 1950 the ASB reversed its relatively open policy on NUSAS. It decided that the CNE principles of the ASB were incompatible with the supposedly communist NUSAS and thus it pledged itself to fight NUSAS at every opportunity. It aimed to destroy NUSAS through mobilising anti-NUSAS students into an "English Students Bond" (ESB) which would co-operate with the ASB at federal executive level.¹⁶¹ This struck a chord in NUSAS as it still regarded itself as a bilingual organisation and also increased its fear that the government intended to segregate the universities, not only along racial, but also along language lines.

Increasing NUSAS' trepidation, was the call made by the ASB in both 1950 and 1952, that separate black universities be established in separate bantustans.¹⁶² However, in what was hailed as a landmark decision by NUSAS and most SRCs, the 1951 Stellenbosch SRC ruled that at any inter-university meeting, the individual student body could determine the racial composition of its delegation.¹⁶³ Because this implied the recognition of mixed universities, the SRC was forced to return to ASB orthodoxy viz, separate universities and separate representation, although it still differed with the ASB on how these were to be achieved, supporting the Cape NP view that public opinion, rather than legislation, was a more desirable means of enforcing segregation.¹⁶⁴

Both NUSAS and its affiliates and the ASB and its members utilised the student and often the public press to draw attention to the weak points in their opposite's policies and activities. *Spoorslag*, the ASB's mouthpiece, devoted much copy to the "mixed dancing"¹⁶⁵ and "Minority Report Crisis" at UCT, resulting in an angry NUSAS response to correct the distortions. NUSAS and the Wits SRC were in turn accused by the Afrikaans universities of destroying the South African Medical Students Union (SAMSU), an organisation which posed a potential threat to it, by drawing constant publicity to the fact that Pretoria had agreed to black participation.¹⁶⁶ Relations between Pretoria and NUSAS and Wits deteriorated as a result of this.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ *Spoorslag*, November 1950; *Die Matie* Vol.IV No.10, 18.8.1950; *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.X No.14, 11.8.1950. An ESB branch of 5 was formed at Stellenbosch during 1951-2. BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.26.

¹⁶² *Die Matie* Vol.IV No.10, 18.8.1950; BC 586 Gi.6 (i) Statement by Vice-President, M. O'Dowd, 9.8.1952.

¹⁶³ *Rhodeo*, 7.3.1951.

¹⁶⁴ *Spoorslag* Vol.I No.3, June 1951; *Die Matie* Vol.VI No.14, 31.10.1952.

¹⁶⁵ See for example, *Spoorslag* Vol.I No.4, September 1951.

¹⁶⁶ *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.12 No.7, 2.5.1952.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

Throughout most of this period, a very small, predominantly English-speaking branch of NUSAS existed at Pretoria University. It was an “underground organisation” which feared for its members’ physical safety as political tensions rose in 1951-2.¹⁶⁸ The NUSAS branch founded at Stellenbosch after the war collapsed after its leading personality graduated in 1949. With the help of UCT, a new 16-strong, unofficial branch was established in 1952, which met at a café in town.¹⁶⁹ Although NUSAS policy aimed to incorporate Afrikaans-speakers into NUSAS, and for this reason, the 1952 assembly voted to publish pamphlets in Afrikaans and to stress the bilingual nature of the national union,¹⁷⁰ it is clear from the documents that NUSAS was realistic enough to expect that any foothold it gained in the Afrikaans universities would be through English-speaking students.¹⁷¹ Even this, according to a NUSAS member at Stellenbosch, would have been difficult to achieve as English-speakers were not prepared to associate themselves with NUSAS.¹⁷²

What official policy did NUSAS adopt towards the Afrikaans centres (re-named “non-NUSAS centres” in NUSAS jargon) and the ASB? After the 1950 NUSAS congress, a left-wing commentator observed that NUSAS appeared to be far less concerned about alienating Afrikaans opinion than in the past.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, in 1951-2, a group of students mainly from UCT and Durban called on NUSAS to make direct contact with the ASB executive, as a means of securing English-Afrikaans co-operation. On both occasions this was violently opposed by Wits, the black centres and most at UCT.¹⁷⁴ The Wits left argued that tolerance could not be accorded to racialistic organisations. Black students said that the motion was an insult to them, others criticised the ASB for dividing students into separate black, English and Afrikaans groups, while others argued variously that the ASB was a party-political organisation and that more could be achieved by other means.¹⁷⁵ NUSAS thus continued in its endeavour to contact directly the non-NUSAS SRCs and students, with an eye to co-operation on projects such as the University Finances Commission and the campaign for increased state subsidies to universities. Non-NUSAS members were invited to NUSAS Faculty Conferences and in 1952 Stellenbosch was represented at the Engineering Faculty Conference.¹⁷⁶ NUSAS invitations were, however, usually ignored.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, pp.15-16.

¹⁶⁹ *Die Matie* Vol.IV No.9, 4.8.1950; Vol.VI No.9, 15.8.1952; *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.3, October 1952.

¹⁷⁰ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.30.

¹⁷¹ BC 586 B1 Assembly minutes 1952, p.26; Presidential Report 1952, p.14.

¹⁷² BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.26.

¹⁷³ *Guardian*, 27.7.1950.

¹⁷⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes, pp.14-16; *Natal Mercury*, 8.7.1952.

¹⁷⁵ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, pp.27-30.

¹⁷⁶ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1952, p.13.

¹⁷⁷ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1951, p.11.

While NUSAS had very little success in courting the Afrikaans universities, by the end of 1952 the national union was experiencing disenchantment within its own ranks. Soon after the 1952 NUSAS conference, the student body at Hewat College, influenced by the Trotskyist New Era Fellowship and the Progressive Forum of Johannesburg which controlled the Hewat SRC, voted to disaffiliate from NUSAS.¹⁷⁸ Hewat erroneously claimed that NUSAS supported the United Party and the Torch Commando and wanted segregation at the Natal Medical School. NUSAS believed that the move in fact stemmed from the failure of the "social and political equality motion" at the 1952 congress and that, like Fort Hare, Hewat was looking towards joining another student organisation.¹⁷⁹

During the second half of 1952, Pietermaritzburg did a dramatic about turn when it reversed hastily out of any political involvement or identification with any political organisation. It denounced NUSAS as being ineffective regarding the delivery of student benefits, as being overly concerned with politics, as interfering in the internal matters of Natal University and as being partially responsible for alienating Afrikaans students. The Pietermaritzburg SRC subsequently attempted to distance itself from NUSAS, abolished automatic affiliation and sought contact with the Afrikaans universities.¹⁸⁰ Contemporary observers interpreted these developments in the light of the arrest of the Wits medical students, the statement of the Wits principal regarding political activities on campus as well as the promising developments at Stellenbosch in respect of its relationship with the ASB.¹⁸¹ The concern shown at the arrest of the Wits students corroborates the view that white students were prepared to enter the political arena if their interests were furthered, but not if it entailed championing black rights. The Pietermaritzburg stand can also be understood within the framework of regional politics, namely as an assertion of regional autonomy, and thus the identification of Pietermaritzburg with the Natal Separatist Movement which was gaining momentum at that time,¹⁸² or with the United Party, which opposed the separatists and which was working towards winning Afrikaner votes in the forthcoming election. The distancing from NUSAS can also be viewed from a far less elevated perspective: disaffiliation from NUSAS was always a useful election plank for aspirant SRC candidates¹⁸³ and much of the change of direction at

¹⁷⁸ *Dome* Vol.7 No.1, 1.4.1953; BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1952, pp.12-13.

¹⁷⁹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.13.

¹⁸⁰ *Nux* No.6, 15.8.1952; No.10, 29.10.1952.

¹⁸¹ *Nux* No.10, 29.10.1952.

¹⁸² P.S. Thompson: *Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa 1909-1961*, Southern, Johannesburg (1990), pp.129-150.

¹⁸³ Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

Pietermaritzburg can be attributed to one person.¹⁸⁴ The student body had also become more conservative with the establishment of the Agricultural Faculty.¹⁸⁵

In conclusion, the period ended as it had begun, with key centres either displaying elements of disenchantment with NUSAS, or having left the national union altogether. This was the consequence of the contradictory response of students to the early stages of National Party rule. The policy of South Africanism steadily lost its appeal but did not entirely disappear. Moreover, it became clear that the majority of Afrikaans-speaking students had come to support an exclusive nationalism and a rigid separation of races, which precluded all efforts at creating a new national union. The rapid implementation of government policy, and particularly the attempts to impose university apartheid, served to unite students in a liberal anti-Nationalist consensus, which moved further into the realm of politics. On the other hand, apartheid was also a divisive factor in NUSAS. The radical left, conscientised by the mass political struggles of the early 1950s, sought to transform NUSAS into an overtly political organisation to fight the National Party. They were thwarted in their attempt by the liberal majority who feared the breakup of the national union. As importantly, the liberal majority feared that the academic freedom and university autonomy campaign would fail as it depended for its success on the support of the "respectable" white establishment which would not be forthcoming were NUSAS to shed its non-political image and champion black rights and methods of struggle, which is what this would inevitably have entailed.

¹⁸⁴ He later became one of NUSAS' most ardent supporters after attending the NUSAS conference the following year.

¹⁸⁵ The Faculty of Agriculture was bilingual and the staff were employed jointly by the state and the university. There were thus additional reasons for traditionally conservative future farmers being conservative. E. Brookes: *The University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg*, Natal University Press, Pietermaritzburg (1966), pp.96-8.

Chapter five

THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM CAMPAIGN AND THE DEFEAT OF THE RADICAL LEFT: 1953-1955

At a national political level, the period 1953-5 opened with a general election during which the National Party increased its share of the vote. The period also witnessed a change in prime-minister, from the segregationist-orientated, constitutionally-inclined Cape based Nationalist, DF Malan, to the overtly racist, populist, republican Transvaal leader, Hans Strijdom. Legislation was passed in 1953 making Bantu Education a reality, the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 began, and the first substantial steps were taken towards the imposition of apartheid on the "open universities" in the form of the appointment of the Holloway Commission of Inquiry into University Apartheid.

Partly in response to oppressive government legislation like the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1953 (which imposed heavy sentences for breach of the peace and incitement) and the Public Safety Act of the same year (which empowered the state to impose a state of emergency), black opposition to apartheid after the Defiance Campaign entered a more reflective planning phase which focused on specific campaigns, for example, opposition to forced removals, Bantu Education, and the Congress of the People in 1955.

For its part, white opposition to apartheid responded in a variety of ways. The increased success of the National Party (NP) at the polls, in spite of a concerted campaign by the United Party (UP) and its allies in the United Democratic Front, disabused many whites of the idea that the NP government was but a temporary hiccup which would be removed when the UP, with its "sensible" and "practical" approach to segregation, was returned to power in 1953. Consequently, the UP began its long process of fragmentation with firstly, the creation of the Natal-based Union Federal Party, secondly its expulsion of its right wing and thirdly, the desertion of its left-wing to the newly established Liberal Party in 1953.

Nor was the LP alone on the left of the white political spectrum. In November 1952, the ANC and the South African Indian Congress attempted to form one white organisation opposed to apartheid. This failed when liberals and radicals split on the issue of the universal franchise and co-operation with former members of the CPSA. The result was the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD), which identified fully with the ideals and principles, and eventually became a member of the Congress Alliance, and the Liberal Party which, although deeply divided on these issues, endorsed only a qualified franchise and decided to concentrate on parliamentary, thus essentially white issues, rather than become involved in black extra-parliamentary activities. Thus by 1953 the white liberal and radical opposition became "organisationally fixed" with the formation of the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD) and the Liberal Party.¹

These national political developments had an impact on NUSAS too. NUSAS was faced with the challenge, greater than in the previous period, of keeping together and attempting to satisfy its different and often conflicting components. Its attempts to maintain a cohesive organisation by creating a united front in opposition to the common enemy of educational apartheid often floundered, not only on tactics, but also on the interpretation of, for example, what was regarded as political. Moreover, the creation of a united front was complicated and hindered by the formation of the LP and the SACOD, as their national conflicts influenced the dominant student groupings within NUSAS and hardened the differences between them. Crudely, the Wits SRC could be said to represent the political viewpoint of SACOD, while the UCT SRC, which was in ascendance during this period because of the disaffiliation of almost all black centres, could be said to represent the LP. The debates concerning political involvement consequently became more urgent and NUSAS became more politicised, but only as far as this was acceptable to the dominant liberals. This essentially meant eschewing black, non-parliamentary political activity. As the Cold War became more of a reality, the debate on international relations and participation in the IUS became more bitter and protracted. The anti-communism of the liberals in the international arena was extended, even more than in the past, to the radical left in NUSAS. The destruction of the radical left in NUSAS occurred in 1955 after the Wits university administration, in alliance with liberal and conservative students, succeeded in wresting control of Wits student politics from the radical left by restructuring the SRC and making it answerable to the University Council.

¹ D. Everatt: "The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960", D.Phil., Oxford (1990), pp.44-48.

A general election was held in April 1953. During the campaign, four attacks were made on the status of the mixed universities, not only by the National Party, but by a United Party MP too.² The tenor of government attacks changed from bringing financial pressure to bear on the universities to conform to government policy to direct threats of legislation. For example, Strijdom announced that, were the mixed universities not "to set their own houses in order, [then] the government, in pursuance of its apartheid policy [would] take action".³ As in the past, the issue of social mixing at Wits and UCT was raised in defence of apartheid, in this instance, by the prime minister himself.⁴ During the run-up to the election, *Die Burger*, kept a close watch on UCT and Wits and reported in detail on social mixing and left-wing student political activity.⁵ NUSAS' customary response to these attacks did not occur for the somewhat obscure reason that, were the National Union to do so, it would be plunging itself into party politics.

Immediately after the election, NUSAS released a statement which received much press publicity which deplored, firstly, the shift in government policy to allow for the legislation of university apartheid and secondly the attempt to use the issue of social mixing to influence public opinion negatively against the "open" universities. NUSAS believed that the force of public opinion generated by students in the past had delayed legislation for five years⁶ and so decided that student opinion should again influence public opinion. Thus the NUSAS executive made it its mission to ensure that public opinion did not swing in the direction of the government, believing that this could only be achieved were students as fully informed and firmly in favour of academic non-segregation as students a few years earlier had been. To this end, national campaigns, not necessarily concerned only with academic non-segregation but also connected to apartheid education and the universities in general, were organised on each campus under the direction of NUSAS and the constituent SRCs. These campaigns met with mixed degrees of success.⁷ Some centres were ill-equipped or too inexperienced to run campaigns, a problem which NUSAS set out to rectify. At other centres, the constant bombardment with NUSAS literature engendered hostility towards the national union to a

² *Die Burger*, 11.4.1953.

³ *Cape Times*, 20.3.1953.

⁴ *Cape Times*, 16.3.1953.

⁵ *Die Burger* reported on a mixed dance hosted by UCT's Modern World Society and later discussed the campaign for social equality at Wits and the degree to which the Wits left consorted with black resistance movements. *Die Burger*, 14.3.1953; 4.4.1953.

⁶ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.37; G1.6(i): P. Arnett and M. O'Dowd to Student Assembly and Local Committees: "Regarding academic freedom, education, CNE and the Eiselen Commission", 22.4.1953.

⁷ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.14.

point where, firstly, the Pietermaritzburg SRC was prepared to disaffiliate and, secondly, the editor of the student newspaper there announced that henceforward *Nux* would no longer carry NUSAS "propaganda".⁸

Differences emerged between liberals and radicals, particularly those located at Wits, regarding the propagation of the academic freedom campaign. A Wits radical argued that the mobilisation of public opinion would not stop government attacks and he thus proposed that NUSAS extend the scope of its activities by fighting for the extension of political rights for all,⁹ while his two colleagues argued for an all-embracing defence of academic freedom to occur, the Entrenched Clauses of NUSAS policy should be so amended that NUSAS not only upheld but also promoted the practice of academic freedom. As in the past, however, the NUSAS Assembly defeated this motion for fear of alienating Durban, which practised segregation, but seemed to be tentatively moving away from it.¹⁰

NUSAS' official attitude to academic non-segregation in 1953 was that there was a place for both segregated and non-segregated institutions. According to the president, NUSAS had never advocated the abolition of the existing segregated institutions, nor the forcible imposition of non-segregation, thus upholding the "autonomy of all universities" position.¹¹ Thus, the gulf between the NUSAS position and that of the radicals on the Wits SRC, who would have no truck with segregation, widened.

One of the NUSAS campaigns to raise student consciousness about academic freedom involved supporting the Wits SRC and the Student Medical Council (SMC) in what became known as the "Wits Medical School Crisis". But NUSAS and the Wits SRC conceived of the aims of this campaign in different terms. NUSAS wanted to "clear[ing] the good name of the University of the Witwatersrand" from having discriminated on racial grounds against black students, while the Wits SRC perceived this as another aspect of its comprehensive campaign, begun in 1952, to remove discrimination generally from the campus and to oppose any attempts by the government to persuade the university authorities to impose segregation. In many respects, the aims and tactics of the Wits

⁸ *Nux News Supplement* No.5, 25.6.1953.

⁹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.38; *Rhodeo*, 30.5.1953.

¹⁰ The Durban SRC appointed a Commission of Inquiry into academic segregation. *Rand Daily Mail*, 26.5.1953; *Dome* No.4, 19.8.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.9-10.

¹¹ BC 586 Gi.6(i) M. O'Dowd to Dr Gale, Dean of the Natal Medical School, 20.11.1954.

SRC were akin to those of SACOD, while those of NUSAS, which during this period had, at the most, two radicals on its executive, reflected the position of the deeply divided Liberal Party.

The core of the Medical School crisis was that selection to Medical School was altered from first to second year, causing a number of black students to be excluded from the second year of study. After making inquiries of the authorities, the Wits SRC and SMC were told that insufficient clinical facilities were available for black students. Further investigation, however, revealed that the authorities themselves were not in possession of the relevant statistics to be competent to take this decision. Unknown to the students, the chairman of the Wits Council had stated that continued black admissions could change the colour and ethos of Wits and that measures should be taken to avoid this.¹² Students were, however, aware that the chairman had stated that academic non-segregation was temporary,¹³ and thus students realised that academic non-segregation was under threat, not only from outside the university, but inside it too.

The Medical School issue broke at the beginning 1953 when the *Witwatersrand Student* issued a "special edition" in which the president of the SRC, Godfrey Getz, responded to a letter from the Wits Principal to the SRC regarding its involvement in politics. In his response Getz attacked the government and also the Wits authorities for having given in to government pressure in a number of areas by, for instance, warning it might withdraw the policy of academic non-segregation if the SRC continued to press for social equality, threatening legal action against students participating in the Defiance Campaign, imposing segregation in the Great Hall, and finally, for giving in to the government threat of 1951 that when the Durban Medical School was fully operational, black students would no longer be subsidised at Wits. In the eyes of the Wits SRC, this last was the reason for the exclusion of black students that year. Getz's letter drew analogies with the situation in the German universities after Hitler's accession to power and thus accused the university authorities of failing in their duty to defend freedoms. It announced that students would defend these freedoms¹⁴ - a clear call to battle with both the Wits authorities and the government.

¹² B.K. Murray: "Wits as an 'Open' University 1939-1959: Black Admissions to the University of the Witwatersrand", *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol.16 No.4, December 1990, p.672.

¹³ *Witwatersrand Student: Special Edition*, 6.3.1953.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

The SRC voted for a one-day strike against the exclusions and the reasons given for them.¹⁵ However, in these actions the SRC moved far beyond its student base and after surviving three motions of no-confidence, a referendum narrowly forced its dissolution. However, most of the original members were returned to office following the fresh elections.¹⁶

NUSAS became involved in the campaign from its early stages but, unlike the radical tactics employed by the Wits SRC in its separate campaign, NUSAS continued to follow its constitutional, lobbying approach. NUSAS also rejected the Wits' authorities justification for excluding the medical students, namely the lack of clinical facilities¹⁷ and decided that a *prima facie* case of racial discrimination existed and thus embarked on a campaign to obtain the admission of those affected and also, importantly, "to clear the good name of the university".¹⁸

SRCs, Local Committees and SMCs were asked to adopt resolutions opposing the Wits authorities' decision, circulate petitions, send telegrams of support to the Wits SRC, organise meetings and generally publicise the matter.¹⁹ Other like-minded liberal and "non-political" organisations, such as the Civil Rights League, the SAIRR, Education League and medical organisations were approached to aid the campaign in the cause of academic freedom.²⁰

SRCs responded sympathetically to the crisis. The UCT SRC demanded that admission should be determined on academic and not racial grounds. Strong support was also given by Durban, Pius XII Catholic University College (CUC), Barkly House and, after some initial hesitation, Rhodes,²¹ as well as independently of NUSAS, Fort Hare.²² The NUSAS assembly subsequently adopted a comprehensive resolution which, among other things, regretted the plan to introduce a racial quota into the Medical School.²³

¹⁵ *Rand Daily Mail*, 5.3.1953; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.1, 9.3.1953.

¹⁶ *Cape Times*, 10.3.1953; *Die Burger*, 30.3.1953; *Rand Daily Mail*, 10.3.1953; 14.3.1953; 28.4.1953; *SA Student* Vol.XV No.2, May 1953; *Witwatersrand Student: Another Special Edition* Vol.V No.3, 20.3.1953.

¹⁷ BC 586 G1.6(i): H.R. Raikes to M. O'Dowd, 13.2.1953; P. Arnett and M. O'Dowd to SRCs and MSCs: "Discrimination at Wits Medical School", 7.3.1953; *Cape Times*, 18.3.1953.

¹⁸ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1953, p.24.

¹⁹ BC 586 G1.6(i): P. Arnett and M. O'Dowd to SRCs and MSCs: "Discrimination at the Wits Medical School", 7.3.1953.

²⁰ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1953, p.24; G1.6(i): Miss Rodger (Secretary of the Civil Rights League) to P. Arnett.

²¹ *Varsity* Vol.XII No.6, 10.4.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.11,12,14,18,19.

²² BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Fort Hare Mass Meetings 1951-1959, 18.3.1953.

²³ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.41.

While NUSAS was actively opposing university apartheid during 1953, it was faced with the challenge of how to respond to demands from the left, both in and outside NUSAS for much greater political activity. NUSAS had already reacted to the Wits principal's statement regarding students and their involvement in politics, saying "that students are entitled to complete freedom of political action and no university is entitled to place restrictions on this freedom",²⁴ but it was faced with a new challenge, the formation of the overtly political South African Union of Democratic Students (SAUDS). This was particularly pertinent as both Fort Hare and Hewat were outside NUSAS, UNNE was displaying symptoms of disenchantment with NUSAS and all three were potential members of the new union.

SAUDS had a relatively long gestation period, though ultimately a short lifespan, as overtly activist student organisations tend to have. The latter notwithstanding, the creation of SAUDS highlights a number of important issues: firstly, the need felt by the white left to play a more direct role in politics, a need that was translated in wider society into the formation of the Congress of Democrats in 1953, but a need frustrated at the student level by the limitations of the NUSAS constitution or, the majority liberal interpretation of it; secondly, the keen sense of isolation felt by black students and their desire for a national student body which addressed their interests; and thirdly, the deep suspicion and distrust with which many black students across the ideological spectrum, viewed white students, who were all labelled "liberal" and accused of hijacking the struggle for liberation.

To reiterate, after the disaffiliation of Fort Hare in 1952, its student body began laying the foundations of a new national political student union. Adherents of the Trotskyite SOYA who wanted no truck with "collaborationists", liberals and NUSAS clashed with the ANC Youth League on the nature of the organisation but eventually the Progressive South African Students' Union (PSASU) emerged, controlled jointly by SOYA and the ANCYL, particularly its more Africanist wing.²⁵ However the Fort Hare authorities refused to allow the national launch of the PSASU on their campus and forbade students to attend the inaugural conference.²⁶ In the meantime, the Wits Students' Liberal Association (SLA), independently of Fort Hare, took the first tentative steps

²⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.40.

²⁵ Z.B. Molete, a founder member of the PAC, drafted the constitution. BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 13.8.1952; 9.10.1952; D.E. Burchell: "The Emergence and Growth of Student Militancy at the University College of Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s", *Journal of the University of Durban-Westville* New Series 3, 1986, p.158; G. Gerhart: *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, University of California Press, London (1979), pp.141,145,305.

²⁶ BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 17.10.1952; *Dome* Vol.7 No.1, 1.4.1953.

towards creating the South African Union of Democratic Students (SAUDS).²⁷ Membership of SAUDS included the Wits SLA, the Students Progressive Association of UCT (the Modern World Society), representatives of the Natal Medical School and UNNE SRC, and the Fort Hare SRC²⁸ which, at the urging of the ANCYL reluctantly agreed to participate. The main argument of those opposed to any association with SAUDS was that its founding organisation, the SLA, was supposedly a liberal grouping whose members were still part of NUSAS and thus the SLA, and SAUDS were both liberal organisations and the “kitchen department” of NUSAS.²⁹

SAUDS aimed to be a “militant student union” which would protect the interests of students, not only as students, but as citizens as well, and would mobilise students in the general democratic struggle and would render assistance to other political organisations. The bone of contention in the new organisation was its relationship with NUSAS.³⁰ PSASU had already delivered a blistering attack on NUSAS for its non-defence of student rights and its diversion of students from the struggle, but after much discussion at the SAUDS conference, it was agreed that the individual affiliates should determine their own policy.³¹

Within NUSAS itself, a fight broke out between liberals and the radical left regarding cooperation with SAUDS, and the nature of the differences between the two organisations. The liberals argued that NUSAS was a non-political organisation and only involved in political issues of an educational nature. The Wits left replied that “the NUSAS interpretation of the meaning of ‘educational and other interests of students’ [was] more restricted than that of SAUDS”.³² The radicals thus argued that NUSAS ought to co-operate with SAUDS whenever the fields of the two organisations overlapped. Liberals felt that, because “the main objects of SAUDS lay outside the scope of NUSAS, no general cooperation with SAUDS [was] possible”, unless the two organisations were

²⁷ BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 9.10.1952.

²⁸ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1953, p.15; Z45 Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 9.10.1952; *Advance*, 22.1.1953.

²⁹ Joe Matthews, the National Secretary of the ANCYL and Tennyson Makiwane, a 1956 Treason Trial defendant, who both remained in the ANC when the Africanists broke away, proposed the motion for participation in SAUDS which was carried by 102 to 34 votes. The reasons advanced for participation were that SAUDS ought to be given the chance to prove itself despite its liberal connections, that black students would outnumber white ones and would thus control policy and that to refuse to join would be playing into the hands of liberals who would categorise them as “racialists”. BC 586 Z45 Minutes of Mass Meetings 1951-1956, 29.4.1953; T. Lodge: *Black politics in South Africa*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1983), pp.80,165.

³⁰ *Advance*, 22.1.1953.

³¹ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1953, p.15.

³² BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.34.

working for the same goal.³³ Conservatives disputed the generally held idea in NUSAS that students, as students, could participate in politics, arguing that they could only do so as citizens. A debate which did not divide along political lines was whether NUSAS was entitled to state that SAUDS had “a place in South African student life” as this could be construed as paternalistic and would give offence to Fort Hare which had recently accused NUSAS of paternalism. Subsequently the Wits left’s motion that SAUDS was a sectional organisation but that NUSAS would cooperate with it if their interests coincided was adopted with the support of Pietermaritzburg, Wits and the Transvaal Pharmaceutical Students’ Association (TPSA). Durban and Rhodes opposed the motion while UCT dissociated itself from it.³⁴

The definition of “political” was not the only issue which divided liberals and radicals from one another, the social colour bar did too. During 1953, two events at UCT, the hosting of a racially “mixed dance” and the election of two Africans to the UCT SRC, had important consequences for social policy at UCT and for the “open” universities.

In March 1953 the Modern World Society at UCT held a mixed dance at a private house in Rondebosch, which could have been in contravention of UCT’s social colour policy, the Gentleman’s Agreement,³⁵ which recognised that all students had equal rights, but that social rights would not be taken up by black students. This incident was brought to the attention of the UCT community and the broader public by letters from a Nationalist member of the SRC to *Varsity*, the UCT student newspaper, and to *Die Burger* in which it was asserted (incorrectly) that social mixing had become commonplace and was the result of the policy of academic non-segregation.³⁶ During the run-up to the general election, as intended, these letters caused a public outcry with letters to *Die Burger* demanding university apartheid.

³³ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.34.

³⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.33-35. The motion read:

“That with regard to the formation of the SAUDS, this Assembly defines the attitude of NUSAS as follows: NUSAS recognises, as it always has done, that sectional organisations of all kinds have a place in South African student life, provided such organisations do not attempt to undermine the ideal of unity of all students or the furthering of their common interests which is embodied in NUSAS. The NUSAS interpretation of the meaning of ‘educational and other interests of students’ is more restricted than that of SAUDS, and therefore the fields of activity of NUSAS and SAUDS do not exactly overlap. Wherever the fields of activity do overlap, the executive is authorised to co-operate with SAUDS where such co-operation is in no way in conflict with NUSAS policy.” BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.35.

³⁵ *Varsity* Vol.12 No.6, 10.4.1953; *Die Burger*, 14.4.1953; *Die Matie* Vol.VIII No.3, 9.4.1953.

³⁶ *Die Burger*, 14.4.1953; *Varsity* Vol.12 No.8, 30.4.1953.

The SRC was caught in a dilemma: whether to do nothing and risk the implementation of university segregation or ward off government interference and legislate against social mixing, and consequently risk a repeat of the bitterness generated by the "Minority Report" crisis of 1951.³⁷ Subsequently, a Nationalist SRC member proposed the imposition of a total social colour bar at UCT. This was not accepted and, instead, an amendment was adopted which recognised that all students had equal rights, but left the exercise of social rights to the discretion of the individual student, thus essentially abolishing the social colour bar. However, the SRC added a warning to students not to conduct themselves in a way which would antagonise those sections of the community opposed to social mixing or which would attract the attention of the government and lead to the imposition of university apartheid.³⁸

This shift in policy could signify only that the majority on the SRC, who would have preferred to avoid the issue, had had their hands forced when the Nationalist member made his proposal. This view is strengthened by the fact that, as late as 1956/7, the issue of social mixing was downplayed for the sake of defending the autonomy of the university.³⁹ However, whatever precipitated the decision, the abolition of the colour bar represented a general shift to the left among those who were politically active and a concomitant shrinking of the middle group, which in 1951 had upheld academic equality but not social equality.

It was not only student organisations which were undergoing realignment and internal change, but national white political groupings too. The United Party, which shared the same middle-class base as the English-medium universities, was haemorrhaging over the racial issue; by 1952 the Federal Party had split off over the issue of provincial powers and the poverty of the latter's racial policy while a far more important breakaway from the UP occurred in May 1953 with the establishment of the Liberal Party. Events in the student world often mirrored those in the national political arena, but the formation of the Liberal Party, in which some SRC members and NUSAS activists were marginally involved,⁴⁰ was certainly influential in moving some of the student body leftwards.

³⁷ *Varsity* Vol.12.No.8, 30.4.1953. See Chapter 4.

³⁸ *Varsity* Vol.12 No.8, 30.4.1953; Letter from J.P. van Niekerk to *Die Burger*, 29.4.1953.

³⁹ Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997.

⁴⁰ A NUSAS executive member was privy to discussions about whether the LP ought to launch itself before or after the 1953 general election. (Interview with Clodagh O'Dowd, 31.3.1997), while a number of UCT students, including the president of the UCT SRC, John Didcott, spoke at the launch of the LP in 1953. (Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997). From 1954, all NUSAS presidents were LP members, but because it would appear that NUSAS was identifying with a political party, this was not openly publicised. R. Vigne: *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-1968*, Macmillan, London (1997), p.153.

The marked liberalisation of UCT students was certainly one of the reasons put forward by National Party adherents for the election of the first two African students to the UCT SRC in August 1953.⁴¹ The new SRC was notable, not only for electing the two Africans, but also for its large liberal majority, which had stood on an academic freedom ticket as a consequence of the strong line taken on the issue by the NUSAS conference a month earlier. From their subsequent actions it would seem that the NP members had a specific agenda to draw the maximum possible negative publicity towards UCT regarding the social colour bar so as to facilitate government interference in the “open” universities. The Nationalists immediately, but unsuccessfully challenged the validity of the elections and one of their number proceeded to inform *Die Burger* of the election of the two Africans, adding for extra effect the “scandalous” but unverifiable piece of information that forty white students from Women’s Residence had voted for the pair.

This action had the anticipated effect. *Die Burger* subsequently devoted four editorials and a number of articles to UCT and social mixing, which precipitated a debate in the House of Assembly. The paper called for the abolition of academic non-segregation as, in its opinion, this policy led to social mixing and full social equality. It tried to link the election of the two African students to social mixing by focusing on the supposed votes they received from white students. The newspaper further announced that the black students were elected, not because they were exceptionally talented, but “because of a sickly sentimentality in race relations cultivated by the English churches” and as a “tonguitstekery” (act of defiance) at the established order.⁴² In reply to those who supported academic freedom, the editor argued that “freedom” should also include the freedom to have nothing to do with “saamboerdery” (social mixing),⁴³ in this way implying that social mixing was both commonplace and compulsory, thus justifying government intervention.

The election debate was taken up in parliament and used to reinforce the arguments of the different streams in the National Party. The crude racist backbenchers targeted miscegenation and the “immorality” which followed when white women voted for black men.⁴⁴ Ominous for NUSAS and the “open” universities was the action of one member who waved a picture of two delegates of different racial groups drinking tea at the 1949 NUSAS congress and announced that this was

⁴¹ *Die Burger*, 25.8.1953; *House of Assembly Debates 11th Parliament*, Vols. 82-83, 31.8.1953, 2567-2569.

⁴² *Die Burger*, 25.8.1953.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *House of Assembly Debates 11th Parliament*, Vols.82-3, 3.7.1953 - 2.10.1953, 2105-2107.

where miscegenation began. As dangerous to NUSAS was the statement that Africans were too “uncivilised” to warrant higher education, that educated Africans became “agitators”, and that the election incident at UCT revealed to what extent “liberalism and even communism” had gained ground at UCT and Wits.⁴⁵ NUSAS believed that this exchange revealed that the NP had no reason for imposing university apartheid other than it went against government policy. Adding weight to this opinion was the threat made by another NP MP that financial sanctions would be applied if the universities continued being “little islands with a foreign policy”.⁴⁶

The Minister of Education, J.H. Viljoen, was requested to impose apartheid at UCT and Wits, but he was evidently reluctant to do so, hoping that the weight of public opinion would force the universities to do so themselves. However, very importantly, Viljoen redefined the contemporary understanding of academic freedom to mean the freedom to teach and to research whatever was desired, but not freedom of admission.⁴⁷

During the second half of 1953 and the rest of 1954, attempts were made to mould all student bodies and the various constituencies of the universities into a cohesive grouping opposed to government interference and supporting academic freedom and/or autonomy. Much of the credit for the success of this could be attributed to Dr T.B. Davie, principal of UCT, on whom NUSAS depended for advice and encouragement.⁴⁸ Indeed, his defence of the universities and their four freedoms⁴⁹ became the basis of the NUSAS academic freedom campaign. At UCT a united front seemed more in evidence than at Wits, with its recent history of sharp clashes between the administration and the SRC.⁵⁰ During 1953 and 1954, Davie lectured UCT freshers about the nature of the university and was accused of indoctrination by some members of the public.⁵¹ Academic Freedom and Education Weeks were held on most campuses with the intention of educating students on education in general and university education in particular.⁵²

⁴⁵ *House of Assembly Debates 11th Parliament*, Vols.82-3, 31.8.1953, 2567-2569.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 2575-2576.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 2592-2594.

⁴⁸ BC 586 G1.6(i) M.C. O'Dowd to T.B. Davie, 8.1.1954.

⁴⁹ The “four freedoms” were originally defined by J.H. Hofmeyr during a speech at Wits in the 1940s. He was inspired by the Atlantic Charter. In 1949 Phillip Tobias reworked them as the foundation of the academic freedom campaign. See Chapter 4. Interview with Prof. Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

⁵⁰ B.K. Murray: “Wits, Student Politics and Apartheid 1948-1959”, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, 6-10 February 1990, p.16.

⁵¹ *Cape Times*, 2.3.1953; *Varsity*, 4.3.1954.

As noted earlier, NUSAS believed that an educated student body was the key to the success of the academic freedom and autonomy campaign. By way of mass meetings the Wits and UCT student bodies, in greater numbers than before, reaffirmed their opposition to government interference,⁵³ while Durban and Pietermaritzburg, supporting the right of open universities to remain so but remaining segregated themselves, moved further towards rejecting segregation at Natal. For example, the Durban campus Debating Society, which attracted more students to its gatherings than NUSAS' meetings did, voted against segregation,⁵⁴ while Pietermaritzburg equivocally did too. A mass meeting there rejected opening the University of Natal to all by 162 to 121, but a referendum found that most students would not object to black students in classes.⁵⁵

Much of the second half of 1953 was directed towards winning the support of prominent members of the public for the NUSAS cause. After the attacks on the "open" universities in parliament and, in the opinion of NUSAS, the extremely poor response of the Opposition to these attacks, which it attributed to lack of reliable information on the subject, a memorandum which outlined NUSAS's views on academic freedom and university autonomy and "denied" any "allegations" of social mixing, was sent to all members of parliament.⁵⁶ After private discussion with various political parties,⁵⁷ the Labour Party pledged its support for the campaign,⁵⁸ but by mid-1954 the United Party was still undecided.⁵⁹ The fact that by mid-1954 NUSAS was prepared to elicit party support revealed that it had made a foray into the political arena and was in danger of losing its "non-political" identity. However, choosing which political parties to utilise led to a clash between the liberal majority in NUSAS and the diminished left, principally the Wits SRC and UNNE. NUSAS' preoccupation with using only respectable legal and parliamentary lobbying, and thus only white political parties, led the Wits left to accuse NUSAS of making the serious mistake of regarding the only worthwhile public opinion as white opinion. It thus moved resolutions that all public opinion

⁵² BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954 (3), p.6; O.6.2 Minutes of the Wits Local NUSAS Committee, 1.3.1956; *S4 Student* Vol. XIX No.2, May 1954.

⁵³ *Cape Times*, 5.4.1954; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, Annexure 4, p.86.

⁵⁴ *Dome* Vol.7 No.4, 19.8.1953.

⁵⁵ *Nux The Day Before the 31st of August* (sic) No.5, 1954; BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p5.

⁵⁶ BC 586 G1.6(i) NUSAS to All members of the Senate and House of Assembly: Memorandum on the proposal to impose academic segregation on the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town by means of legislation or government action".

⁵⁷ BC 586 G1.6(i) M. O'Dowd to T.B. Davie, 8.1.1954.

⁵⁸ BC 586 G1.6(i) A. Hepple to M. O'Dowd, 12.1.1954.

⁵⁹ Towards the end of 1954, the UP announced that it would defend university freedom. BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, p.36; G1.6(i) J. Didcott to J.G. Strauss, 11.3.1955.

opposed to university apartheid, whether inside or outside parliament, be utilised.⁶⁰ Hence, in mid-1954, the ANC, among other groups, was also included.⁶¹

An international campaign was also set in motion late in 1953, with letters and memoranda on the "open" universities sent to sixty national unions, university authorities and the overseas press. The increasingly anti-communist liberal majority in NUSAS was also wary of government propaganda that NUSAS was "communist"⁶² and ensured that approaches were made only to anti-communist student organisations.⁶³ This led again to a clash with the Wits SRC, which, since NUSAS had disaffiliated, independently requested the Prague-based International Union of Students (IUS) to campaign on its behalf. The IUS was tersely informed by the NUSAS executive in 1954 to have nothing at all to do with the campaign,⁶⁴ a decision partially reversed in the latter half of 1954 after NUSAS rejoined the IUS as an associate member. As a result, all copy which was to be used in the IUS publications had first to be vetted and censored by NUSAS in South Africa first.⁶⁵

As part of generating positive public opinion in favour of the universities, prominent clerics were targeted. The Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg and the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, Ambrose Reeves, preached against government interference in the universities.⁶⁶ Bishop Reeves and a co-opted group of notables released a statement decrying apartheid in the universities,⁶⁷ the information having come directly from the NUSAS executive, which also facilitated arrangements for various student leaders to speak on the platforms of several service organisations.⁶⁸ Many of the efforts of the executive to arouse national and international sympathy for the academic freedom campaign had borne fruit by mid-1954. Articles appeared in overseas newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *New Statesman* criticising the government's attempt to impose apartheid on the universities.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, pp.17,22.

⁶¹ *Advance*, 22.7.1954; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, Annexure 4, p.82.

⁶² BC 586 W2 P. O'Dowd to President of the IUS, 22.4.1954.

⁶³ BC 586 G1.6(i) M.O'Dowd to T.B. Davie, 8.1.1954.

⁶⁴ BC 586 W2 P. O'Dowd to President of the IUS, 22.4.1954.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 6, p.148.

⁶⁶ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), p.33.

⁶⁷ BC 586 G1.6(i) "Statement on the Threat to the Universities of Wits and Cape Town", signed by Notables of Johannesburg; BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), p.33.

⁶⁸ For example, the Institute of Citizenship, Rotary, Toc.H, the National Council of Women. BC 586 G1.6(i) R. Murray to J. Didcott, 9.9.1953; J. Didcott to J. Hoal, 20.9.1953. The SAIRR held a conference on "The Function of the University in a Multi-Racial Society" in May 1954. BC 586 G1.6(i) President to Q. Whyte, 10.5.1954; B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, p.21.

⁶⁹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, p.28; B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), p.30; *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.1, March 1954; *Varsity*, 4.3.1954.

The tempo of the academic freedom campaign accelerated in late 1953 after D.F. Malan, the prime minister, again used the platform of a Stellenbosch University graduation ceremony to make a momentous announcement, namely that a commission of inquiry was to be appointed to investigate the practicality of the implementation of segregation in the universities. To silence his critics and to appeal to the many segregationists within the United Party, Malan appealed to tradition and scripture and argued that "apartheid" was historically part of South African education and that when it was fairly applied, there was nothing immoral about it. Like the backbenchers in the NP, he played on the racist prejudice and fear of miscegenation of the average white, saying that, were steps not taken immediately to stop black university enrolment, social mixing would have "injurious results".⁷⁰

These announcements immediately provoked an outcry in the Opposition press and in the universities themselves, but, as always when government attacks occurred during the vacations, mass response was impossible. The *Cape Times* dismissed the apartheid-miscegenation argument by denying that social fraternisation ever took place and, further, that no Nationalist MP had ever "adduced any evidence of positive harm" in academic non-segregation.⁷¹ Both the *Cape Times* and the more conservative *Cape Argus* concentrated on the prohibitive cost to the taxpayer were the government to provide separate higher educational facilities for black students.⁷²

The student leadership at all South African universities was quick to reject Malan's announcement, even though the NUSAS executive and the SRCs were seriously depleted during the vacation, a situation that the government regularly exploited. The Vacation Committee of the UCT SRC stated that, contrary to Malan's information, academic non-segregation had only produced racial tolerance, harmony and no "injurious results". It rejected the terms of reference of the commission of inquiry as it would not examine the desirability of segregation and moved far beyond the "defence of autonomy" argument when it declared that segregation had been proved a failure in the USA and condemned apartheid as immoral.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Cape Times*, 12.12.1953. The "injurious results" were not spelt out, but miscegenation and the "decline of western civilisation" were implied, as he also said that, had Afrikaners not rebelled against British authority, South Africa would have become a "fifth rate basterstaatjie". *Cape Times*, 12.12.1953.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *Cape Argus*, 14.12.1953; *Cape Times*, 12.12.1953.

⁷³ *Cape Times*, 15.12.1953.

From the outset a split occurred between liberals and the radical left regarding participation in the commission of inquiry. The commission was chaired by Dr J.E. Holloway of the Treasury who had also chaired the investigation into university finances, and he was assisted by E.G. Malherbe, principal of Natal University, an exponent of segregation but a respected educationist, and W.F. Wilcocks, a former rector of Stellenbosch. Beale has argued that the appointment of Malherbe underscored Viljoen's approval of the system which pertained at Natal, thus further reinforcing the view that Viljoen understood apartheid as meaning little more than tightening up segregation.⁷⁴ In liberal university circles, the absence of an apartheid ideologue among the commissioners and the overwhelming evidence against university apartheid convinced many that participation could do more good than harm in spite of the restricted terms of reference, which were

"To investigate and report on the practicality and financial ... implications of providing separate training facilities for ... Non-Europeans at universities".⁷⁵

The Wits SRC immediately rejected participation on the grounds that even the appointment of the commission was an invasion and erosion of university autonomy. Its only compromise was to present a statement to the commission to reject it. The Natal Indian Congress and UNNE also declined to cooperate. The UCT SRC decided to give evidence, but made clear that it did not accept the terms of reference of the commission.⁷⁶ Even before NUSAS had decided what course of action it would take, it urged SRCs and other bodies such as the SAIRR to assemble data regarding student numbers and university expenditure to present to the commission. After some disagreement from its vice-president, the national union also agreed to participate, in spite of the failure of the commission to address the desirability of segregation.

Subsequently, the commission accepted written evidence against the practicality of university apartheid from a number of essentially liberal sources as well as oral evidence from various university authorities.⁷⁷ The evidence submitted by NUSAS coincided closely with that of the liberal

⁷⁴ M.A. Beale: "The Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid", in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* Vol.18 *Collected Seminar Papers* No.4, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, pp.83-84. At the opening of the Natal Medical School, Viljoen lauded the UN authorities for their recognition of the need for separate university facilities. *Rand Daily Mail*, 6.7.1955.

⁷⁵ Union of South Africa (No UG No.): *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Separate Training Facilities for Non-Europeans at Universities 1953-1954*, (Holloway Commission), Government Printer, Pretoria (1954), p.2.

⁷⁶ *Varsity*, 4.3.1954.

⁷⁷ These were: NUSAS, SAIRR, the University Councils of Cape Town, Natal and Wits, the Wits Convocation, the Natal Lecturers Association, Fort Hare, the UCT SRC and certain students at UCT. *Holloway Commission*, Annexure.

representatives and the universities.⁷⁸ NUSAS interpreted “practicability” as “providing facilities equal to those at other universities” and thus it examined all the disadvantages of segregated education. It argued that even were one black university constructed or parallel classes introduced at existing universities, they would impose too great a financial burden on the state and on the university authorities and staff. Further, NUSAS argued that the experience of segregated higher education, both in South Africa and in the Southern states of the United States, demonstrated that segregated universities were financially starved, unable to attract the best staff, even if they were setup with the best facilities, and were unable to maintain the same academic standards. NUSAS argued that segregated institutions were disadvantageous in other ways too, as students of different backgrounds and outlook were denied contact with one another.⁷⁹

The approach of NUSAS and those opposing academic segregation was partially vindicated when the committee briefly examined the desirability of segregation, and thus university autonomy and academic freedom too, justifying this breach of its terms of reference by the need to discuss the undesirability and thus the impracticability of university apartheid.⁸⁰ On the weight of all the evidence, it tentatively concluded that university apartheid was not practical. As such, it proposed that Africans be concentrated at Fort Hare and Natal, while those classified coloured and Indian, as well as post-graduate and those following specialised courses, be exempted.⁸¹

When the report was released, both UCT and the majority in NUSAS conditionally welcomed it as, in spite of its limitations and the fact that its very appointment constituted an invasion of the autonomy of the universities, its findings “strengthened the case for the retention of the open universities”.⁸² A member of the Wits SRC abstained as it could be interpreted as meaning that NUSAS only opposed academic segregation because it was impractical, not because it was wrong. For its part, the Wits SRC did not welcome the Holloway Report, maintaining that, had the correct terms of reference been applied, the commission would have “made a clear stand against segregated education”. The report was criticised for being contradictory in places and suggesting no definite

⁷⁸ *Holloway Commission*, p.18.

⁷⁹ BC 586 G1.6(iii)(b) M. C. O'Dowd: “Memorandum of Evidence submitted by the National Union of South African Students to the Commission of Inquiry into the provision of separate facilities for non-Europeans at South African universities. (Evidence)”, 21.2.1954, pp.2,5,11-17,19-20,22,24-25.

⁸⁰ *Holloway Commission*, p.11.

⁸¹ *Holloway Commission*, pp.52-53.

⁸² BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, p.23; Assembly Minutes 1955, pp.12-13.

plan of action. The SRC maintained that objective study could only occur in an environment “free from racialism” and that academic segregation was a “denial of fundamental rights”.⁸³

The report was completed by June 1954, but was not made public until February 1955. According to Beale this was probably because its controversial recommendations would have only compounded the problems faced by the National Party which was in the throes of a damaging leadership struggle in late 1954, that resulted in the victory of the Transvaal NP leader, J.G. Strijdom.⁸⁴ When the Holloway Report was released, the National Party and its allies were, on the whole, disappointed by its findings. *Die Transvaler* felt that it was too sympathetic to academic non-segregation and, ironically, like its opponents, criticised its terms of reference which, in the newspaper’s opinion, ought to have investigated social mixing before examining the practicability of the implementation of apartheid.⁸⁵ The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA) also criticised the report. The government was slow to respond officially, revealing the internal struggles in the NP over what was meant by apartheid. Eventually, Viljoen rejected the report, according to Beale, because of the pressure of the Native Affairs Department and SABRA.⁸⁶

At a national student political level, changes in the balance of power of Nationalist factions within the ASB led to a potential realignment of national student politics during 1953-4. An alliance of “SABRA Visionaries” and NP “liberals” temporarily eclipsed the orthodox SABRA-*baasskap* group in the ASB and called for a more inclusive national student organisation. Those championing a broader basis for student contact were assisted by events in the national political arena. In late 1953, the right-wing of the UP challenged its more liberal leadership while the NP sought to woo them. Echoing this, conservative student centres were also displaying dissatisfaction with the liberal NUSAS leadership, a point noted and exploited by those in the ASB.

NTC⁸⁷ and the CPPSA severed ties with NUSAS during 1953⁸⁸, while the disaffiliation attempts by the increasingly conservative Pietermaritzburg⁸⁹ and Rhodes⁹⁰ in 1953-4 respectively were staved off

⁸³ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, p.13; Presidential Report 1955, p.16.

⁸⁴ M.A. Beale: p.85.

⁸⁵ *Die Transvaler*, 5.2.1955.

⁸⁶ M.A. Beale: p.86.

⁸⁷ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.15; B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.5. It is not clear why NTC disaffiliated, but possibly the student body became politically more conservative as in 1951, NTC became a bilingual institution. *Natal Training College, Pietermaritzburg 1909-1959*, n.p., n.d., pp.18,20,23,25.

⁸⁸ No reasons were given for the disaffiliation of the CPPSA, but in 1954 a specifically white South African Pharmaceutical Students’ Federation was inaugurated. The TPSA, which since its foundation had close ties with Wits,

when they were granted more independence in NUSAS affairs and allowed to dissociate from all NUSAS campaigns. The common threads in the disaffiliation bids were the uneasiness at the increasing leftward trend and politicisation of NUSAS and the lack of contact with the Afrikaans universities.⁹¹ Consequently, feelers were put out to the Afrikaans universities by Rhodes and Pietermaritzburg, and also briefly by a group at UCT. In February 1953, the UCT SRC convened an inter-SRC Conference attended by representatives from most universities. Because of lack of agreement regarding, as always, representation, all structures designed to facilitate contact were rejected except for a Secretariat of South African SRCs,⁹² from which Wits soon withdrew as it felt that the organisation was redundant and as much could be achieved through correspondence.⁹³ This secretariat did not survive long beyond this,⁹⁴ again evidence of the mercurial nature of student politics and the leading role that persuasive individuals, who are only at university for a limited time span, play in student politics.

What was NUSAS' policy towards inter-university student co-operation at this point? Firstly, there were no NUSAS branches at either Pretoria or Stellenbosch, in spite of the attempt to reactivate one at the latter university during 1952.⁹⁵ Few Afrikaners, if any, were active in NUSAS during this period.⁹⁶ The official NUSAS view on contact with the non-NUSAS affiliated universities remained substantially the same as in the past, namely that dialogue should be sought with all students and SRCs directly, as well as through invitations to attend NUSAS congress and faculty conferences and through the student press at those institutions. However, NUSAS realised that overtures of this nature were usually unsuccessful or ignored.⁹⁷ The NUSAS standpoint on representation at inter-university student conferences remained the same, that universities were free to choose their delegations without reference to race. However, the formulation of this policy, in line with placing

and usually voted with the left at NUSAS conferences, remained in NUSAS. M. Ryan: *A History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa 1885-1886*, The Society for the History of Pharmacy in South Africa (1986), p.100; BC 586 S12.1 "Constitution of the South African Students' Pharmaceutical Federation".

⁸⁹ Only 5 of the 18 SRC candidates supported NUSAS in 1953. *Nux (Special Edition)*, 20.8.1953.

⁹⁰ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, Annexure 1: "Statement made to the Assembly by the leader of the Rhodes delegation on points of criticism made by the SRC, NUSAS Committee and student body of Rhodes University against aspects of the functioning of the national union by P. Entwistle, 5.7.1953".

⁹¹ *Nux* No.4, 28.5.1953; *News Supplement* No.5, 25.6.1953; No.6, 10.8.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.19-20,25; Annexure 1; Presidential Report 1955, pp.13-14; B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.5.

⁹² *Varsity* Vol.12 No.3, 6.3.1953.

⁹³ *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.2, May 1953.

⁹⁴ C.J. Jooste, G.F. du Toit and G. van Niekerk (eds): *Eenheid: Grondslae van Eenheidstrewen van Afrikaans en Engelssprekendes in Suid Afrika*, ASB, n.p. (1986), p.45.

⁹⁵ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), pp.6-7.

⁹⁶ Interview with C'odagh O'Dowd, 31.3.1997.

⁹⁷ *Cape Times*, 5.7.1954.

culpability on the Afrikaans universities for the split in student relations, underwent a subtle change at this time, NUSAS arguing that it put no conditions on dialogue and thus expected Afrikaans universities to do likewise.⁹⁸ During a debate on a resolution in 1954 reaffirming the primacy of the policy of seeking contact with all students, two Pietermaritzburg delegates unsuccessfully attempted to remove from the resolution the “freedom-of-representation-at-conferences” clause, obviously in reaction to the positive, in their opinion, developments in the Afrikaans student world.⁹⁹

The ASB suffered mixed fortunes during 1953-4. Like NUSAS, it added faculty conferences and an Arts festival to its annual congress, but its finances were in a parlous state which a large donation from the Afrikaner capitalist group, the Rembrandt Tobacco Corporation was meant to ameliorate.¹⁰⁰ The temporary truce and unity talks with non-ASB centres came to an end in mid-1953 when the ideologically divided ASB adopted the SABRA and University of Pretoria SRC vision of apartheid, total economic and territorial separation.¹⁰¹ The *baaskap* right rejected as “liberal welfarism” the ASB’s endowment of a bursary at Fort Hare in line with its new policy.¹⁰² At the same time, a section at Stellenbosch and the UOFS feared that the isolation implied by the new policy had become redundant with the pre-eminence of the Afrikaner in all areas of society, and that the achievement of the ASB in forging (“*saamsnoer*”) an Afrikaner student consciousness and identity would be undone by isolating itself from other groups.¹⁰³ Thus UOFS and Stellenbosch proposed that the ASB be transformed into a purely ideological organisation for those who subscribed to CNE principles¹⁰⁴ and aware of the rumblings at Pietermaritzburg and Rhodes, the establishment of a non-sectarian, non-ideological student federation concerned only with student issues.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.28.

⁹⁹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, p.19.

¹⁰⁰ *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.XV No.10, 21.5.1954. Piet Meyer, the co-founder of the ANS (see Chapter 1, p.8) was Chief Public Relations Officer at Rembrandt in 1954. I. Wilkins and H. Strydom: *The Super Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond*, Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg (1980), p.125.

¹⁰¹ *Die Matie* Vol.VI No.5, 15.5.1953.

¹⁰² *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.XV No.8, 5.5.1954; No.9, 14.5.1954; No.10, 21.5.1954; No.11, 11.6.1954. The SABRA chairman told the 1953 ASB congress-goers that they should practise apartheid in their everyday life as most people did so only for “egotistical” (sic) rather than altruistic reasons. *Rand Daily Mail*, 8.5.1953; J. Lazar: “Verwoerd versus the ‘Visionaries’: The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs and Apartheid, 1948-1961”, P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds): *Apartheid’s Genesis 1935-1962*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1993), pp.369-370.

¹⁰³ *Die Matie* Vol.VIII No.4, 29.4.1954; No.7, 30.7.1954.

¹⁰⁴ *Die Matie* Vol.VIII No.7, 30.7.1954.

¹⁰⁵ *Die Matie* Vol.VIII No.4, 29.4.1954; Vol.VIII No.7, 30.7.1954; *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.XV No.10, 22.5.1954.

The reorganisation proposals were rejected by Potchefstroom and Pretoria¹⁰⁶ but, nonetheless, the inaugural conference of SAFSU, to which only the Afrikaans students were invited, went ahead. A constitution with a theoretically open membership was drawn up, but through blackballing and non-repudiation of the policy of separate representation, Wits and UCT were in effect precluded from becoming members.¹⁰⁷

NUSAS' response to these developments was cautious as any criticism could be construed as deliberately destructive of inter-university relations. NUSAS did intimate confidentially that, on balance, SAFSU appeared to be an apartheid organisation, but reminded SRCs that they were free to negotiate agreements with any organisation and if these agreements accepted open representation, they would win the support of NUSAS too.¹⁰⁸ At the same time NUSAS embarked on an intensive correspondence campaign with the SRCs and editors of student newspapers at the Afrikaans universities, suggesting that contact would be made for the sake of understanding the views of the opposing sides. This bore more fruit than in the past insofar as some letters received a reply, but all declined on the basis of principle to entertain any discussion with NUSAS.¹⁰⁹ NUSAS essentially regarded attempted contacts with Afrikaans-speaking students as "window dressing", as it had concluded that such efforts were "futile".¹¹⁰

During the period 1953 to 1955, NUSAS was faced not only with dissatisfaction from the traditionally more conservative centres seeking contact with the Afrikaans-medium universities, but also from the radical left, specifically UNNE and left groups at Wits. This was attributable, as in the past, to the failure of NUSAS to pursue a more overtly political course, to the further radicalisation of the left at Wits, to the anti-communism of the liberal majority in NUSAS, and most importantly, to the IUS issue. (See Chapter 6)

At the 1954 NUSAS conference UNNE presented to the student assembly a list of their grievances against the national union in what was quite a devastating indictment. NUSAS was accused of becoming "reactionary" as it had retreated from its earlier decision of 1951 to take cognisance of and oppose racial inequality and discrimination. The UNNE delegation felt that NUSAS' attempt to separate academic segregation and oppression in general was meaningless and believed that it was

¹⁰⁶ *Die Nuwe Perdeby* Vol.XV No.10, 21.5.1954; *SA Student* Vol.XX No.1, August 1954.

¹⁰⁷ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.7; B1 Presidential Report 1955, pp.27-28.

¹⁰⁸ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, pp.24,29.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, pp.24-25.

only through political struggle that freedom could be achieved.¹¹¹ They added that NUSAS' disaffiliation from the IUS the previous year, a body which championed the cause of colonial students and its replacement by the Netherlands-based International Students' Conference (ISC), an organisation hostile to the IUS and funded by organisations opposed to colonial independence, made it more difficult for "progressives" such as themselves to remain within NUSAS. This was compounded by the assertion that NUSAS did not warrant the expensive membership fees and that all it did was pass resolutions which were not acted upon.¹¹²

These grievances were taken seriously as UNNE would be the third black centre to disaffiliate within two years. After adjourning the sitting for two days to examine the grievances, the NUSAS executive released a hard-hitting reply to some points, to which UNNE subsequently took exception. NUSAS argued that as a student organisation, its scope for action in the political sphere was limited, and that where it was able to do something, it had done so, such as participation in the Western Areas Removal Campaign, Bantu Education and the Medical School crisis, in none of which UNNE had participated. In terms of finances and NUSAS benefits, it was pointed out to UNNE that their student body had derived far more from the loan fund than they had contributed, a point to which UNNE objected. Concerning international relations, NUSAS defended its co-operation with the ISC which it believed was not reactionary and also represented the interests of colonial students.¹¹³

One of UNNE's grievances against NUSAS was that it was "European in structure".¹¹⁴ What this implied was not spelt out, and thus NUSAS interpreted it to mean that there were no separate structures for black students, an idea which it strenuously rejected, believing that students should be represented equally with no regard to race.¹¹⁵ This echoed a debate current among liberals and the left nationally - whether political ends ought to be pursued through racially separate structures. The Liberal Party was non-racial, while the SACOD was a separate white organisation within the multi-racial congress alliance.

¹¹⁰ Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

¹¹¹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, pp.10-13.

¹¹² *Advance*, 22.7.1954; *New Age*, 3.11.1956, Letter from S. Maharaj; *Cape Times*, 7.7.1954; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, pp.10-12.

¹¹³ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, pp.13,15-17.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.15.

Although the UNNE delegates had only been mandated to put forward their case for disaffiliation, they offered, in association with Bantu Normal College (BNC), to convene a meeting of all black centres and NUSAS if Fort Hare and Hewat were agreeable, to discuss the changes required in NUSAS which would enable the black centres to return.¹¹⁶ NUSAS held high hopes for this conference, as will be seen later.

Were there factors other than those mentioned to influence the disaffiliation of UNNE? Its dissatisfaction with the IUS disaffiliation and NUSAS' subsequent involvement with the ISC was an extremely important UNNE grievance and remained so, at least until the end of 1956. For example, in 1956, the student body passed a vote of no-confidence in the UNNE SRC because it had had an interview with representatives of the ISC.¹¹⁷ Beard has argued that adherents of the NEUM controlled UNNE student politics.¹¹⁸ This would explain the disaffiliation and the antagonism to the ISC, but not the pro-IUS stance of the UNNE grievances, as the IUS represented a different stream of Marxism to the Trotskyite NEUM; nor would NEUM control of the SRC have been compatible with the UNNE SRC's interview with the ISC in 1956. It would appear that by 1956 Africanists had some influence in student politics, but that they had little support from the general student body, which was strongly supportive of the ANC.¹¹⁹ Didcott noted at a meeting at UNNE shortly after the disaffiliation that medical students were the most vociferous opponents of NUSAS.¹²⁰ As at Fort Hare, it is likely that an unequal alliance of the ANCYL and the smaller NEUM, united in opposition to collaboration with white liberals and radicals, was responsible for the withdrawal. As the 1950s progressed and the Congress Alliance became a reality, the ANCYL lost some of its strident African nationalism, leaving only those who later went into the PAC to espouse the earlier ideas. The same is true of UNNE student politics. The students had moved away from strident nationalism to the

¹¹⁶ *SA Student* Vol. XX No. 1, August 1954; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁷ *New Age*, 27.9.1956; 3.11.1956, letter from S. Maharaj. UNNE believed that the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations funded the ISC. Allegations of right-wing US funding were proved to be correct later. J. Kotek: *Students and the Cold War*, Macmillan, London (1996), pp. 207-210, 219-221.

¹¹⁸ T. Beard: "Background to Student Politics at the University College of Fort Hare" in H. Van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds): *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town (1972), p. 160.

¹¹⁹ In 1956 the UNNE student body passed a vote of no-confidence in the SRC chairman, A Ngcobo, because he was actively opposing the ANC and Freedom Charter and promoting the Africanist ANC faction. According to *New Age*, most students opposed the Africanists. It is unlikely that the vote was carried by a NEUM-ANC alliance because the Freedom Charter is mentioned, which NEUM would not have supported. *New Age*, 27.9.1956. A. Ngcobo was a founder member of the PAC, but was expelled because of suspicions that he was "on the payroll of United States imperialism". T. Lodge: *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1985), p. 311.

¹²⁰ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report, 1955, p. 8. However, Kuper stated that medical students were less politically active and radical than UNNE students. After refusing to be part of the UNNE SRC, as reported in chapter 3, the medical students formed their own SRC but this received no recognition from the authorities, so in 1953 they were again part of the UNNE SRC. *Amoeba*, August 1953; L. Kuper: *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Nationalism in South Africa*, Yale University, New Haven (1965), p. 162.

dominant Congress position which left NEUM without its powerful ally on which it could piggyback to prominence.

As for the UNNE SRC, the severance of relations between NUSAS and the IUS in 1953 was a reason for great resentment by the radical Wits SRC, so much so that an ugly atmosphere pervaded the next NUSAS conference in 1954.¹²¹ Liberal and radical delegates argued bitterly both inside and outside the assembly, while the radicals blocked every debate with points of order and procedural tactics. There was even the possibility of the secession of Wits from NUSAS were the 1953 decision not reversed.¹²² To break the impasse, an agreement was reached between John Didcott, president of the UCT SRC and vice-president of NUSAS, and one of the severest critics of the IUS, and Dan Goldstein, president of the Wits SRC, that NUSAS would negotiate associate membership of the IUS while seeking full membership of the ISC.¹²³

What was the background to this radical Wits stance? The Wits SRC continued to be dominated by the left of various persuasions. The student constituency from which these SRCs derived their support continued to move left. This is indicated by the activities of the various left-inclined campus organisations such as the SLA and the Medical School discussion group, the Diogenes Society.¹²⁴ One of the Wits SRC's most important priorities remained opposing segregation on campus and maintaining a vigilant watch on the university authorities to ensure that they did not bow to government pressure and extend segregation.

After the Medical School crisis had subsided, the SRC and principal, Humphrey Raikes, struck a deal which effectively abolished segregated seating in the Great Hall. This compromise came to a sudden end in February 1954. The new principal, the conservative engineer, D. Sutton, reimposed Great Hall segregation as part of his campaign to break the power of the left and bring Wits' social policy more in line with national social mores, so as to preserve the university's open admission policy from

¹²¹ *SA Student* Vol. XIX No. 1, August 1954; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, p. 31.

¹²² Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997.

¹²³ See Chapter 6, p. 54.

¹²⁴ The SLA was chaired by David Holt, a communist and later Bob Hepple, the 1955 SRC president and later Rivonia trialist. The SLA identified with African nationalist movements and hosted a support meeting for the Kenya African National Union at a time when "Mau Mau" wrought hysteria in white South Africa. It was concerned with "peace" and so campaigned for the abolition of nuclear weapons, opposed the Korean War and hosted meetings of the Transvaal Peace Council. The SLA attended IUS council meetings and the World Youth Congress in Bucharest in 1953. It was actively involved in the Western Areas Removal Protest Campaign, the African Education Movement and the defence of trade unions from government harassment. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol. V No. 7, 17.10.1953; *SA Student*

government legislation.¹²⁵ The left-wing SRC was thus set on a collision course with Sutton and his allies - the Council, liberal members of the academic staff, those students who had forced the dissolution of the SRC in 1953 as well as a well-organised liberal Catholic constituency. A boycott of the Great Hall was heeded by most of the student body¹²⁶ while Sutton amended the Wits Charter as a prelude to the drafting of a new SRC constitution. The new constitution granted the Wits SRC the statutory recognition it had sought (with NUSAS) since 1939, but at the same time subordinated the SRC to the University Council and not to the student body as in the past. After unsuccessful representations to an intransigent University Council,¹²⁷ the Wits SRC appealed to NUSAS in December 1954 to further its cause. NUSAS agreed to do so as it believed that the Wits Statute was an assault on student rights.¹²⁸

Majority opinion in NUSAS on student rights vis-à-vis the university authorities was more moderate than that of the Wits SRC. The NUSAS president stated that he did not believe that an SRC should have full liberty to make whatever decisions it liked, as in some cases intervention by the authorities was justified; but, like the Wits SRC, he believed that the statute denied the SRC the right to make the decision in the first place, which he rejected, as well as the implication that the SRC was not accountable to the student body.¹²⁹ Both the Wits SRC and NUSAS appealed to the Minister of Education to intervene in the passing of the statute, which he refused to do on the grounds that that would have represented interference in the internal affairs of the university.¹³⁰ This tactic was rather surprising in the light of NUSAS consistently asserting the autonomy of the universities and their right to freedom from outside interference. Members of parliament were approached to exert their influence, but their resolutions of protest were never put to the vote.¹³¹ All NUSAS-affiliated universities, as well as Stellenbosch, rallied to the support of the Wits SRC as they perceived in the Wits statute a dangerous precedent for curtailment of their own independence.¹³²

Vol.XIX No.4, March 1954; *Advance*, 12.11.1953; 1.10.1953; *Die Burger*, 30.3.1953; *Die Matie* Vol.VII No.3, 9.4.1953; BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), p.12; *Mail and Guardian*, 10-15 November 1955.

¹²⁵ B.K. Murray: "Wits, Student Politics and Apartheid 1948-1959", *Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid*, History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 6-10 February 1990, pp.13,18-19.

¹²⁶ B. Murray: "Wits, Student Politics and Apartheid", p.19; *SA Student* Vol.XIX No.2, May 1954; *Nux* No.2, 23.6.1954; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VIII No.5, 15.8.1955.

¹²⁷ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.4, 11.8.1955.

¹²⁸ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, pp.18-19.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ BC 586 G1.6(i) J. Didcott to J.H. Viljoen, 28.2.1955; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.4, 11.8.1955.

¹³¹ BC 586 G1.6(i) Letters from J. Didcott to M. Ballinger (Liberal), A. Hepple (Labour), J. Strauss (UP), 25.5.1955; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.4, 11.8.1955.

¹³² *SA Student* Vol.XX No.2, March 1955.

In the meantime, the Wits student body passed a resolution condemning the Wits statute so unanimously that those supporting it were too overwhelmed by their opposition to voice an opinion.¹³³ A petition opposing the statute was signed by two-thirds of the student body¹³⁴ and in May 1955 a “protest rally” adopted a “Student Charter”, which affirmed unfettered free speech and control of the SRC by the student electorate. A “Student Action Council” was established which called for the formation of a “broad mass-based organisation” run from grassroots which would “struggle” for a “democratic SRC”.¹³⁵

The language used and the tactics followed by the Wits SRC reveal the extent to which it was influenced by national political activities, particularly left-wing ones. The mass-based Congress of the People (COP) was a month later to adopt a Freedom Charter, which outlined the basic principles by which a democratic South Africa would be governed. The COP and the Freedom Charter were issues which again demanded of NUSAS to reassess its attitude towards politics and which again split the liberals from the left.

In July 1954, like other organisations, NUSAS was invited by the National Action Council to participate in, or co-sponsor with the Congress Alliance, a Congress of the People which would draw up a Freedom Charter.¹³⁶ The NUSAS executive delayed its response and probably regarded the invitation as unimportant. However, they were alerted to the importance of COP by the possibility that the black centres, who were to hold a conference on their relationship to the national union, might be swayed by the decision of NUSAS regarding its participation in COP.¹³⁷ NUSAS was in a dilemma, as no policy existed to guide its course of action, apart from the defeated “politics motion” of 1952.¹³⁸ (See Chapter 4, pp.88-89) Because of this, the executive decided that it was not competent to make a decision and thus rejected the offer of the NAC to attend the December executive meeting to discuss the matter.¹³⁹ Instead, the resolution was to be put to the July Assembly

¹³³ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol. VII No.3, 20.5.1955.

¹³⁴ BC 586 O.6.1 “Report of the Activities of the Wits SRC since Congress 1954, presented to the 1955 NUSAS Assembly by R. Baranov”, p.1.

¹³⁵ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol. VII No.3, 20.5.1955.

¹³⁶ BC 586 T18 National Action Council of the Congress of the People to the Secretary of NUSAS, 5.7.1954.

¹³⁷ BC 586 T18 J. Didcott to the NUSAS Executive, 27.9.1954.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ BC 586 T18 Y. Cachalia to J. Didcott, 18.10.1954; J. Didcott to Y. Cachalia, 25.10.1954.

but, because the COP was to meet before this, NUSAS was forced to opt for a postal vote, a less desirable method as it precluded discussion.¹⁴⁰

John Horn and Harry Eigalis, members of both the NUSAS and NCFS executive, proposed that NUSAS should not participate in the Congress of the People in any way as this would mean collaboration with a political movement and the risk of losing its membership as well as its advantage of combating attacks on its principles and policies from a non-political standpoint. The radical executive members, Bob Hepple and E. Habedi proposed an amendment that NUSAS participate in a limited capacity in the COP, confining its involvement to educational issues and dissociating itself from all other aspects of the proceedings.¹⁴¹ The amendment was heavily defeated, only Bantu Normal College and the two executive members supporting it while the decision not to participate was carried 30 to 3. Both Wits and UCT cast their ten assembly votes for the motion, although both SRCs had more members than that, suggesting that there could have been dissension.¹⁴² In spite of the argument used to oppose participation in the COP, the president of NUSAS at that time said that the decision was taken for tactical rather than ideological reasons - the fear that conservative students would be alienated from NUSAS.¹⁴³

It is quite clear that the vast majority in NUSAS accepted that the national union could not afford to be associated with anything perceived to be "political". This was a distinct shift away from the direction it had been moving in in 1952 when a "politics motion" had been narrowly defeated. This is not surprising, considering the absence of three black centres which were the driving force behind a more politicised NUSAS. This is borne out by the reaction of the SRCs and NUSAS to the Senate Bill which was a National Party ploy to enlarge the Senate, obtain the two-thirds majority it required to repeal the entrenched clause of the constitution, and thus abolish the coloured franchise. This was a highly controversial measure and elicited a huge outcry from the general public, with even some in the Nationalist camp being disturbed by it. However, NUSAS, as a non-political

¹⁴⁰ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.11; T18 Y. Cachalia to J. Didcott, 17.11.1954; J. Didcott to Y. Cachalia, 22.11.1954; J. Didcott to Executive, 27.9.1954.

¹⁴¹ *SA Student* Vol.XX No.2, March 1955.

¹⁴² The UCT SRC Minutes of 1955 are missing; so it is not possible to ascertain the voting patterns for these motions. However, the UCT SRC declined an invitation to take part in the COP because it was outside the scope of an SRC. (SRC Minutes, 2.8.1954 in Box 32, UCT Library (uncatalogued) During the 1950s the UCT SRC was wracked with conflict and dissension as the left and the liberals fought over their differences, particularly over international affairs. This spilt over into national political issues. Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

¹⁴³ Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1955.

organisation, did not express an opinion on the bill.¹⁴⁴ Thirteen members of the academic staff at Pretoria University made public their opposition to the bill, precipitating similar action by staff at other universities. When Eric Louw, the Minister of Finance, warned lecturers that they were partially paid by the state and as such were not entirely free to participate in political campaigns,¹⁴⁵ NUSAS issued a statement rejecting the minister's statement as a "grave attack on academic freedom and freedom of speech",¹⁴⁶ thus taking no stand on the Senate Bill itself. The Wits SRC, by contrast, associated itself with the stand of the Wits lecturers opposing the bill.¹⁴⁷

Although NUSAS refused to sponsor or participate in the Congress of the People, individual students,¹⁴⁸ even some members of the NUSAS assembly, did participate under the auspices of campus societies. For example, between 12 and 20 delegates and observers from UCT's Modern World Society, which established the non-campus based, non-racial Modern Youth Society, (which in turn had ties with the ANCYL in the Western Cape),¹⁴⁹ attended the Congress of the People in June 1955, departing for Johannesburg a week before those attending the NUSAS congress.¹⁵⁰ Wits students, through the SLA¹⁵¹ and the Local NUSAS branch, were also active in disseminating information and media around the COP and the Freedom Charter.¹⁵²

The Congress of the People had just adopted its Freedom Charter at the time of the 1955 NUSAS conference. A delegate from Bantu Normal College and the Socialist member of the UCT SRC, proposed that NUSAS endorse the Freedom Charter. This was lost by 10 to 24 votes. At another stage, Bob Hepple and E. Habedi attempted to get NUSAS to adopt a statement of educational principles¹⁵³ which was, except for the ordering of a number of sentences, identical to the statement,

¹⁴⁴ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, p.13.

¹⁴⁵ *Star*, 23.5.1955.

¹⁴⁶ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, p.13.

¹⁴⁷ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, p.46.

¹⁴⁸ J. Lazerson: *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle against Apartheid*, Mayibuye, Belville (1994), p.173.

¹⁴⁹ J. Frederikse: *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa*, Ravan, Johannesburg (1990), pp.54-6; I. Suttner: *Cutting Through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*, Viking Penguin, Johannesburg (1997), p.355.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997.

¹⁵¹ For example, M. Picardie of the SACOD and NUSAS Local Director of Studies in 1954-5, participated in the Western Areas Campaign, was Organising Secretary of the SLA in 1955 and collected signatures for the "Freedom Charter Million Signatures Campaign". J. Lazerson: pp.96,188; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.5, 15.8.1955. Murray has noted that the SLA was the springboard for students involved in the Defiance Campaign and no doubt was also for the COP.

¹⁵² F. Tobias: "The Women of Wits: 1939-1959", BA (Hons) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1992), p.50.

¹⁵³ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, pp.16,17; *New Age*, 21.7.1955.

"The Doors of Learning and Culture shall be opened" in the Freedom Charter.¹⁵⁴ The proposers argued that, in the light of encroachments on academic liberties, NUSAS should embark on an active and positive programme in alliance with other organisations for the achievement of fundamental educational rights.¹⁵⁵ This was also lost by 10 to 23, through the efforts of almost the entire UCT delegation supported by Pietermaritzburg and the white training colleges.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, detailed minutes of these two debates were not kept but, apart from the fear of being identified with a political movement, it appears that one of the reasons why the educational principles were rejected was because they were vague, had elements of sloganeering and were not properly thought out and debated.¹⁵⁷ A far more radical document, "The IUS Right to Education" had been adopted unanimously by the student assembly in 1951.¹⁵⁸ This reveals how far to the right the NUSAS assembly had moved within four years.

It is useful at this point to compare the response of another predominantly white middle-class organisation, the Liberal Party to these events. Initially it had agreed to participate fully in the COP, but had withdrawn entirely by mid-1955. The most important reason for this was that the majority of LP members were anti-communist, particularly so in the conservative Cape, and believed that SACOD, in their opinion a communist front, had undue influence over proceedings and that COP was thus unrepresentative. Like NUSAS it also underestimated how historically important COP would become and felt that it was not important enough to warrant splitting the party.¹⁵⁹

Some liberals in NUSAS also believed that the COP was undemocratic and unrepresentative.¹⁶⁰ There was certainly anti-communist hostility in NUSAS too, from the expected quarters of Natal but also from the liberals at UCT. For example, some liberals voted against or dissociated themselves from a resolution protesting against the banning of the left-wing newspaper *Advance*, even though the resolution was entirely consistent with NUSAS policy.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ J. Frederikse: p.67.

¹⁵⁵ *New Age*, 21.7.1955.

¹⁵⁶ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, p.17.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997.

¹⁵⁸ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, p.30. The rights which NUSAS endorsed in 1951 were radical welfare state ones, including tuition and subsistence grants for all needy students, married allowances, state-supported hostels and canteens, subsidised public transport, free health care, cheap textbooks, full employment for graduates with equal opportunities for men and women, unemployment allowances and full student participation in university structures..

¹⁵⁹ D. Everatt: "The Politics of Nonracialism: White opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960", D.Phil., Oxford (1990), pp.247-253; D. Irvine: "The Liberal Party, 1953-1968" in J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh (eds): *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect*, Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut (1987), pp.127-8.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997.

¹⁶¹ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.11; B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, p.22.

Differences of opinion regarding tactics and the motives of the protagonists between the left and the liberal leadership of NUSAS again surfaced in 1955 when Fort Hare was closed by the university authorities because an alleged "secret caucus",¹⁶² using violence and intimidation, had taken control of the campus, forcing even the SRC to resign. When more information became available, it appeared that students had boycotted the graduation ceremony because of the refusal of the Fort Hare authorities to accede over a long period to their bread and butter demands. These were the poor standard of food in the dining halls, the need for a recreation hall, and, finally, the issue which precipitated the boycott of the graduation and the resignation of the SRC, the heavily restricted visiting hours at the women's hall of residence and the ban imposed by the principal on discussing this matter.¹⁶³ All 300 students were escorted to the trains by armed police and, when reapplying for admission, were asked to complete detailed questionnaires on their activities during 1955.¹⁶⁴

The implementation of Bantu education, the transferral of control of African education from the missionaries to the state, the government attacks on the English churches for their outspoken opposition to apartheid, the vulnerable and precarious status of African higher education, the question of university autonomy and the highly topical issue of student rights and powers vis-à-vis the university authorities, were all factors which influenced the left and liberals in their response to the Fort Hare crisis. Liberals, who historically had strong connections and sympathies with missionaries, were careful of any criticism of the Fort Hare authorities, some of whom still fell into the category of missionaries. Many on the left, on the other hand, were more likely to be critical of the role played by missionaries and would thus be less restrained in this respect in their response to the closure of Fort Hare. Those centres like Rhodes and Natal which were jealous of their autonomy were less inclined to issue statements on the issue as this could have been construed as interference in the internal affairs of Fort Hare. Natal students, politically more conservative than others and having few contacts with black students, relied for their sources of information on the national press, which they would have thought was accurate, and which seemed to paint a very alarming, exaggerated picture of student anarchy. Thus Natal students had a very different perspective on

¹⁶² No-one at Fort Hare knew of the existence of the "secret Caucus", but later on students realised that the principal had confused the words "caucus" and "carcass". After a sporting victory the students had slaughtered a goat at Sandile's Kop, where a meeting banned by the principal also took place; henceforth the incident was known as "the carcass". *Golden City Post*, 5.6.1955.

¹⁶³ *Golden City Post*, 8.5.1955; *New Age*, 19.5.1955; Governing Council of the University College of Fort Hare: *Report of the Fort Hare Commission July 1955*, Lovedale Press, n.p. (n.d.?1955), pp.11,23-4; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.3, 20.5.1955.

¹⁶⁴ *New Age*, 2.6.1955; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.3, 20.5.1955.

events¹⁶⁵ from, for example, Wits students, whose source of information was the Fort Hare students themselves.¹⁶⁶

The Wits SRC and student body protested strongly against the closure of the college, the methods employed to effect this (ie the armed police) and thus expressed the opinion that these actions were out of proportion to the seriousness of the situation at Fort Hare. They called for a commission of inquiry to examine the grievances of students and the reasons for the closure of the college, and made the radical demand for that time that students be represented on the commission. Like the ANC Youth League, the Wits SRC called for the readmission of all students but, in Wits' case, pending a thorough investigation. Wits students also drew parallels between the powerlessness of the Fort Hare SRC vis-à-vis the authorities and the Wits Statute which would reduce the Wits SRC to the same status.¹⁶⁷

NUSAS postponed its response to the Fort Hare closure until it had obtained further information from its principal.¹⁶⁸ At the 1955 NUSAS congress the Wits left and the lone UCT SRC socialist attempted to get the assembly to adopt the Wits resolution mentioned above, but this was defeated 25 to 10 and instead the earlier executive decision to wait for more information was upheld. In justification of this line of action (or lack thereof), Didcott, the NUSAS president, said that the Fort Hare authorities had made great contributions to education and thus were unlikely to have taken their action lightly and without good reason. Subsequently, the assembly, far from unanimously, passed a motion deploring the unethical action of the Fort Hare authorities in making readmission dependent on satisfactorily answering the questionnaire as it appeared that, in this way, politically undesirable students were to be weeded out. The Wits delegation's demand that all students be readmitted to the college pending the outcome of a thorough investigation was opposed and, instead, the assembly voted, in typical liberal terms, that if a student was found guilty of any serious offence, through due process of the law, the student ought to be refused readmission. Durban and Rhodes dissociated themselves from the motion and, although the minutes do not indicate why, it is likely that those two centres adopted the earlier Rhodes view that the Fort Hare closure was an internal

¹⁶⁵ Burchell noted that the Natal press took a sensationalist view of events. D. Burchell: "The Emergence and Growth of Student Militancy at the University College of Fort Hare in the 1940s and 1950s", *Journal of the University of Durban-Westville*, New Series 3, 1986, p.163. *Nux*, the Pietermaritzburg student newspaper, carried a story of anarchy, subversion and threats of physical violence at Fort Hare. *Nux* No.3, 25.5.1955.

¹⁶⁶ *New Age*, 19.5.1955.

¹⁶⁷ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, pp.21-22; *New Age*, 19.5.1955; 26.5.1955; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.3, 20.5.1955.

¹⁶⁸ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report, 1955, p.34.

issue and thus the NUSAS resolution was regarded as a violation of the autonomy of Fort Hare and possibly of Rhodes, under whose jurisdiction Fort Hare partially fell. Against the wishes of the liberals, principally at UCT, the assembly did adopt a resolution that NUSAS would solicit moral and financial support for students contemplating legal action against their exclusion.¹⁶⁹

A commission of inquiry was appointed to examine the Fort Hare closure and the commissioners put blame on both the students and the university authorities for the crisis and suggested that the time was over-ripe for the college to move from being a "missionary high school" to a university.¹⁷⁰

By the end of the 1955 congress, the liberals were in the ascendancy. This meant a strong anti-communist stance and the eschewal of politics as far as possible, a distinct shift from 1954. This shift is evident in two policy changes. In 1954 the assembly decided that it would utilise all means to arouse public opinion against the implementation of the Bantu Education Act which it had already publicly opposed in 1953.¹⁷¹ Accordingly, the Wits Local NUSAS committee accepted an invitation to attend a conference on Bantu Education hosted by the ANC. The NUSAS president ruled that the Local Committee had no authority to attend the conference without the permission of the student assembly or the executive,¹⁷² a ruling which Wits disputed.¹⁷³ A bitter argument broke out between the liberals and the left, which culminated in a defeat for the left with the adoption of the liberal motion that NUSAS would attend conferences hosted by political movements in an observer capacity only.¹⁷⁴ This amounted to an eschewal of politics and an attempt to contain the Wits left by constitutionally clipping its wings, a measure which would probably not have been taken against the conservative NUSAS centres which jealously guarded their independence.

The second incident which represented the defeat of the left was the reversal of the 1954 bi-partisan international policy when NUSAS' associate membership of the IUS was revoked. Because of this breach of faith, the left proposed no candidates for election to the executive, thus leaving control of

¹⁶⁹ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, pp.10-11; *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.1, August 1955.

¹⁷⁰ Governing Council of the University College of Fort Hare: *Report of the Fort Hare Commission July 1955*, Lovedale Press, n.p., (n.d.?1955), p.3

¹⁷¹ NUSAS opposed this Act as it setup a separate education system for black children. Control of black education was transferred from the provinces to the Department of Native Affairs. NUSAS argued in liberal fashion, that there was only "one cultural heritage of mankind" and one economic system and thus, there ought to be only one system of education. BC 586 I.3 M. O'Dowd: "Statement on Bantu Education Bill", 9.8.1953.

¹⁷² BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, pp.9-10.

¹⁷³ BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, p.21.

¹⁷⁴ BC 586 Assembly Minutes 1955, p.20; *New Age*, 21.7.1955.

NUSAS in the hands of an alliance of UCT liberals, liberal Catholics and representatives of the more conservative Natal and Rhodes.¹⁷⁵

The final defeat of the radical left in NUSAS came in August 1955 when the Wits Statute came into force. This imposed a new constitution on the SRC and a new electoral system - henceforth, proportional representation partially replaced voting by faculty, which had been to the advantage of the left.

The student body, led by the radicals, fought the statute up to the very end and devised methods of maintaining student control of student affairs in the event of the successful imposition of the new constitution. In July 1955 the SRC threatened to legally challenge the validity of the Wits Statute, but because the majority in student government desired it, agreed to participate in elections to the new SRC, provided that candidates pledged their loyalty to the student body and not the Council.¹⁷⁶ Subsequently, the SRC refused to participate in any way in the elections and was dissolved when the new constitution came into effect, but soon changed its mind about boycotting the elections.¹⁷⁷ Instead, a "Witwatersrand University Students Association" (WUSA) was formed which was accountable only to the student body.¹⁷⁸ Subsequently, three sets of elections occurred. Firstly for the faculty representatives of the official SRC, then university-wide for the complement of the official SRC and finally for the WUSA which, because it was banned, conducted its elections on a traffic island outside the campus.¹⁷⁹

Sutton and Raikes achieved their purpose as liberals wrested control of the new statutory SRC from the radicals. They also seized control of the *Wits Student*, depriving the radicals of their most powerful means of communication. The new SRC comprised a number of Catholic liberals, including the NUSAS treasurer, but also a number of radicals, including Bob Hepple and another three members of the WUSA.¹⁸⁰ The SRC also contained one security police spy who made a point of mixing in "liberal" circles.¹⁸¹ The new SRC was initially very cautious and abandoned political issues

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Neville Rubin, 2.4.1997. See Chapter 6, pp.156-157.

¹⁷⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 2.7.1955.

¹⁷⁷ BC 586 O.6(i) Minutes of the Wits SRC, 9.8.1955, p.1; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.4, 11.8.1955.

¹⁷⁸ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.VII No.5, 15.8.1955.

¹⁷⁹ *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.2, May 1956.

¹⁸⁰ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1955, p.3.

¹⁸¹ *Sunday Times*, 15.12.1959. This spy handed his job over to a woman who was unmasked in 1959. She was responsible for reporting on SLA meetings, finding "communists" and attending NUSAS meetings. It cannot be ruled out that as well as NUSAS liberals, Catholics and the Wits administration, the security police were also responsible for

altogether. For example, it failed to pass a policy statement on the appointment of a new government commission of inquiry into apartheid at the universities, an omission which the Local NUSAS Committee strongly condemned.¹⁸² The liberals on the SRC also attempted to wrest control of the NUSAS Local Committee (which, as seen earlier, was more radical than the NUSAS executive), by altering the system of election and appointment to the committee, a measure which Hepple and the left strongly resisted.

Egan and Legassick have argued that the well-organised Catholic constituency and liberals in NUSAS were responsible for the defeat of the radicals. This was achieved when Magnus Gunther, a member of the NCFS executive and victorious 1955 SRC candidate exposed the “duplicity of the left” which convened the WUSA off-campus but also ran for election in the official SRC elections.¹⁸³

In conclusion, the divisions between the radical and liberal left increased as they responded in different ways to National Party rule. The radical left tended to identify with the SACOD and the Liberals with the LP, both of which were established during this period. The radical left tried to transform NUSAS into a political organisation but was blocked in its attempts by the liberals who still wanted to maintain NUSAS’ non-political identity and oppose apartheid only when it had a direct bearing on education and student affairs. However, as the government extended its tentacles into more areas of South African life, NUSAS began to oppose aspects of government policy which were only marginally concerned with education, thus moving further along the path to direct political involvement. Legassick has argued that the disunity within NUSAS during the 1950s as well as the radical left’s failure to turn NUSAS into a political organisation and its eventual isolation, were a consequence of the incomplete restructuring of NUSAS by Phillip Tobias in 1951.¹⁸⁴ By binding NUSAS to the SRCs, Tobias had brought the mass conservative base and the smaller radical section together under a central moderate leadership,¹⁸⁵ but failed to adopt an ideological position for political action acceptable to all three groups. This “ideological expression”¹⁸⁶ and completion of the Tobias reform was only achieved in 1957 when the victorious liberal leadership adopted the

the elimination of the left at Wits in 1955. At the same time that the spy sat on the Wits SRC, a student at Rhodes was spying on members of staff there. *Sunday Times*, 15.12.1959.

¹⁸² BC 586 O.6.2 Minutes of the Wits Local NUSAS Committee, 24.11.1955, p.2.

¹⁸³ A. Egan: *The Politics of a South African Catholic Student Movement, 1960-1987*, Centre for African Studies, UCT (1991), p.11; M. Legassick: “The NUSAS: Ethnic Cleavage and Ethnic Integration in the Universities” *University of California, Los Angeles African Studies Center*, Los Angeles (1967), p.27.

¹⁸⁴ M. Legassick: pp.18,19,21,22,23,25,27,28,29.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.21.

“Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man” and the concept that a “democratic education” was inseparable from a “democratic society”. These principles were acceptable to conservatives and black nationalists, of whom some of the latter later returned to NUSAS in 1957.¹⁸⁷ NUSAS was thus able to enter the political arena with the tacit support of all of its constituency which it had been unable to do beforehand even if its leadership had had the inclination to do so.

¹⁸⁷ M. Legassick: p.29.

Chapter six

THE HISTORY OF NUSAS' RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORGANISATIONS 1945-1955

The history of NUSAS during the years under review cannot be understood with any degree of clarity without an appreciation of the complex sweep of world events that were occurring at the time. This was, after all, a period in which historic struggles were climaxing with a great world war and the subsequent division of the globe into two hostile camps, East and West. This chapter seeks to show how the functions, ethos and objectives of NUSAS were affected by, and played a part in, the great power struggles which had their centre far away in the northern hemisphere. Hitherto it has not been appreciated to what extent the ideological battles of Great Power rivalry were played out in such organisations as student unions. The ebb and flow of the Cold War struggle can be seen reflected clearly in the history of the world student movement of that time. Though geographically on the periphery, NUSAS was inextricably drawn into taking a part in the drama unfolding at this time.

NUSAS' relations with the two great post-war international student organisations, the International Union of Students (IUS) and the International Student Conference (ISC) can be divided into three periods. The first period, from 1945 to 1948 saw NUSAS and other student organisations led by a combination of radical and liberal ex-servicepeople who were filled with post-war idealism and a desire for international co-operation and student unity. The second period, from 1949-1952, was a time of uncertainty and fluctuation marked by the beginning of the Cold War, around 1948, the eclipse of the influence of ex-servicepeople who graduated from the universities, the emergence of more conservative student bodies worldwide, and the formation of the western bloc-inclined International Student Conference (ISC) or the Co-ordinating Secretariat (COSEC) to rival the eastern bloc-inclined IUS. The liberal and radical consensus began to come apart as the liberals began to realise the futility and impossibility of neutrality in the Cold War. In NUSAS these issues were compounded by the different responses to the election victory of the National Party and the resistance which followed its implementation of apartheid. From 1953 to 1955 the radical left and liberals parted company over apartheid and international affairs. NUSAS' final disaffiliation from the IUS was delayed by a still powerful radical left, the thaws in the Cold War after the death of Stalin, and the need to maintain unity within the national union. However, by 1955 the left had been defeated and NUSAS realised that its liberal nature precluded it from joining organisations with fundamentally different aims.

NUSAS' participation in international forums was as old as the national union itself, participation in these being one of the reasons for its foundation in 1924. The policies pursued by NUSAS in international student bodies, whether after the First World War or during the Cold War, closely followed those of the British National Union of Students (BNUS). This can be explained in three ways: firstly, the colonial perception of many South African students that guidance and leadership ought to be sought in Britain; secondly, South Africa's distance from the capitals of Western Europe; and then, after World War Two, the fact that student bodies in Asia and the Americas made it difficult for NUSAS to attend conferences and receive information at first hand, thus making it imperative that it took the lead from a well-informed and powerful national union with which it shared similar aims and objectives in international affairs.

The creation of an international student organisation came about as a result of post-First World War student idealism. Ex-servicemen who were filled with the horror of the Great War desired international friendship and co-operation.¹ In 1919 the delegations from seven allied or neutral countries established an international student organisation, the "Confederation Internationale d'Etudiants" (CIE) which was loosely modelled on the League of Nations. However, unlike the League of Nations, the constitution of the CIE specifically excluded the discussion of religious and political issues.² The non-political policy of the CIE was the origin of the non-political nature of the British NUS and the slightly younger NUSAS. However, the CIE was unable to isolate itself from politics and thus became a battleground for competing French, Scandinavian and Dutch nationalism. This conflict intensified when the hitherto excluded students from the Weimar Republic were invited to join the CIE.³

Two militant, nationalist German student organisations, built on the pan-German principle and demanding the recognition of German as an official language of the CIE, competed for membership of the international body.⁴ This generated further conflict and consequently NUSAS gave notice of its disaffiliation in 1932 as it felt that the CIE did more harm than good to international student relations.⁵ By 1933 there was evidence of Nazi domination of the CIE⁶ and subsequently the

1 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*, Macmillan, London (1970), p.61; D. Jacks: *Student Politics and Higher Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1975), p.64.

2 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: p.61; L. Chisholm: *The Early History of the National Union of South African Students: Leo Marquard's Presidency, 1924-1930*, BA(Hons) Dissertation, University of Cape Town (1976), pp.ix-x.

3 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: pp.61-62.

4 L. Chisholm: pp.14,15,29,30; D. Peukert: *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Penguin, London (1991), p.226.

5 *SA Student* Vol.XX No.1, August 1954; L. Chisholm: pp.15,31.

6 E. Ashby and M. Anderson: p.65; D. Orlow: *The History of the Nazi Party 1919-1933*, Vol.1, University of Pittsburgh Press, London (1971), p.198.

organisation disbanded during the Second World War as it was unable to contain its contradictions.⁷

During the war NUSAS lost contact with other student unions.⁸ This can be accounted for by the decline and almost non-functioning of the national union during this period and, further, by the fact that hostilities put an end to tours and other exchanges which facilitated contact with other student unions. Not all student organisations were in the same predicament as during 1941, groups of émigré students living in London, in association with BNUS, began laying the foundations for a new international student organisation, the "International Council of Students". It played an important role in aiding a new international student movement, also called the International Council of Students, which was partially infiltrated by Communists. This, according to Kotek, laid the foundation for a post-war Communist-dominated international student organisation.⁹

The International Student Service, a pre-war relief organisation based in Geneva, to which NUSAS was affiliated, also initiated student contact when it convened a conference in Washington entitled "The End of Imperialism: The Coming People's Century: The Peace of Interdependence" in 1942. From this conference emerged another international student organisation, the "International Student Assembly", with headquarters in Washington.¹⁰ Thus, even before the end of the war and the onset of the Cold War, when all the Allied groups were united in opposition to fascism and laying plans for a new world order, it was evident that competition for control of international student affairs existed.

International student affairs were closely linked to those of international youth. The first post-war youth and student conferences took place in London and Prague in October and November 1945 respectively. After careful vetting by a Credentials Committee in London to ensure that organisations invited to attend the conferences were democratic, anti-fascist and anti-racist, from South Africa the Progressive Youth Council received an invitation to attend the International Youth Conference, while NUSAS was invited to both the youth and student meetings.¹¹ However, even before the delegations left South Africa, these conferences caused controversy within the country. Questions were raised whether either NUSAS or the Progressive Youth Council was representative of South African youth, although the Progressive Youth Council had invited the United Party Youth and

7 BC 586 W7: Memorandum from World Student Congress, Prague, 27.10.1945.

8 B. Wilson: *A Time of Innocence*, Murray Coombes, Bergville (1991), p.116.

9 J. Kotek: *Students and the Cold War*, Macmillan, London (1996), pp.15,19,52-53.

10 *SA Student* (n.v.), March 1945; *Varsity* Vol.2 No.5, 11.6.1943.

11 *Star*, 20.10.1945: Letters from Arnold Klopper (NUSAS) and Ismael Meer (Progressive Youth Council). The Progressive Youth Council was a non-racial organisation representing eight Johannesburg youth organisations. These were: the Federation of Progressive Students (FOPS), the Zionist Socialist Youth Party, Hashomair Hatzair, Jewish Workers Club Youth, the Progressive Asian Club and the African Youth Club.

members of the armed services to participate.¹²

Because of the importance of re-establishing international connections, NUSAS was represented at the two conferences by Arnold Klopper, the left-wing president of NUSAS, as well as by a former UCT student studying at Oxford, Cassim Jadwat.¹³ Youth organisations from all parts of the world as widely diverse as junior branches of conservative, liberal and communist parties, women's groups, scouts and guides, religious youth groups and trade unions attended the World Youth Congress in London, which was supported by many world political and cultural leaders.¹⁴ The congress passed resolutions concerning the economic and social needs of post-war youth, as well as the abolition of racial discrimination and the imposition of comprehensive sanctions on Falangist Spain.¹⁵ The NUSAS president gave the national union's support to all these resolutions even though some were overtly political and were outside the scope of NUSAS.

At the end of the congress, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) came into being to bring together formally all youth organisations "interested in preserving peace, democracy and a secure future for all people based on the brotherhood of young people".¹⁶ The first executive of the WFDY was widely representative in terms of both country of origin and political viewpoint,¹⁷ but Kotek argues that this was an illusion and that the organisation was firmly in communist hands from the beginning.

During the World Youth Congress, Arnold Klopper attended a two-day international student meeting which elected a preparatory committee charged with the task of drawing up a constitution for a new international student organisation.¹⁸ There was much debate and disagreement regarding the nature of the new organisation,¹⁹ but finally, a "non-political" international Federation of Students with headquarters in Paris²⁰ was established and a constitution drawn up,²¹ a temporary victory for

12 *Star*, 24.10.1945: Letters from "Another Curious Democrat" and "Democrat"; 29.10.1945: Letter from Ismael Meer.

13 *SA Student*, March 1946; *Varsity* Vol.4 No.9, 23.10.1945.

14 BC 586 W7: World Youth Council: Press Release, 5.8.1945; News Flash, August 1945; Press Statement by Danish Delegation to World Youth Congress, 10.11.1945; Report by M. Gale, British Executive member, World Youth Council, n.d.

15 *SA Student*, March 1946; BC 586 U2(a): Cassim Jadwat to Jimmy Stewart, 10.12.1945.

16 *SA Student*, March 1946.

17 The senior executive members included a representative from the Union of Republican Youth, France, the YWCA of the USA, the Student Christian Movement of Britain and two representatives from non-listed organisations in China and the USSR. BC 586 W7: Memorandum from the World Youth Council, 10.11.1945.

18 BC 586 W7: International Congress of Students, Prague, 20.8.1945; *SA Student*, March 1946.

19 J. Kotek: p.88.

20 BC 586 W7: International Congress of Students, Prague to NUSAS, 20.8.1945; *SA Student*, March 1946.

21 BC 586 W7: World Youth Council, London: "Constitution of the International Federation of Students", (n.d.?1945).

the "western" unions.²²

International Students' Day was celebrated by representatives of 51 student unions in Prague in November 1945 at the International Congress of Students, a meeting hosted by Czech students in conjunction with the BNUS.²³ South African students were represented by Arnold Klopper and Cassim Jadwat, as well as by Ruth First and Harold Wolpe of FOPS.²⁴ According to Klopper, the delegates were afforded "red carpet treatment" as this congress was seen as a huge national event and a "symbol of liberation" by the Czech people.²⁵

The students present were far more radical than those in the CIE as it was apparent that there would be no toleration of racism and fascism. Klopper observed that, had NUSAS not admitted Fort Hare to its ranks, it would have been excluded from international student affairs. In line with the decisions taken at the 1945 NUSAS congress and the objects in the constitution, Klopper, Jadwat and a delegate from Sierre Leone denounced the colour bar and had a resolution accepted that equality of educational opportunity be demanded for all races.²⁶

In 1946 the new international student organisation was established; but instead of an "International Federation of Students", with headquarters in Paris, an "International Union of Students" (IUS), with headquarters in Prague, came into existence. The change was due to a number of factors. Communist students dominated the preparatory committee²⁷ which was "imperceptibly transformed into an actual executive"²⁸ and thus the headquarters were moved further east. Prague was acceptable to western unions as Czechoslovakia was ruled by an alliance of Communists and Socialist Nationals and marketed itself as a bridge between the east and west²⁹ and the French could not legitimately claim Paris as the headquarters as the French student union (UNEF) had collaborated during the war.³⁰ It is clear from an analysis of the draft constitution of the proposed earlier Federation, and that of the IUS, that the radical left had finally gained the upper hand. The Federation's constitution did not elaborate on its "aims", and was explicitly "non-political", whereas the Union's constitution clearly

22 J. Kotek: p.88.

23 BC 586 W7: International Congress of Students, Prague to NUSAS, 20.8.1945.

24 *Wus Views* Special Edition, 19.2.1946.

25 *SA Student*, March 1946.

26 *SA Student*, March 1946; BC 586 U2.i.(a): Cassim Jadwat to Jimmy Stewart, 10.12.1945; *Wus Views* Special Edition, 19.2.1946.

27 J. Kotek: pp.88,93. The representatives of the British, Danish, Czech, Yugoslav and Indian student unions at the International Preparatory Committee meeting in April 1946 were communists.

28 J. Kotek: p.89.

29 *ibid.*, pp.93-94.

30 A. Belden Fields: "France" in P. Altbach (ed.): *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (1989), p.225; J. Kotek: p.94.

spelled out its "aims" which were overtly political.³¹

In July 1946 NUSAS affiliated to the International Federation of Students, which became the IUS at the Prague Congress later in 1946. All centres supported this decision with the exception of Pietermaritzburg, which was opposed, and Rhodes and the Grahamstown Training College, which abstained.³² Both NUSAS and FOPS were invited to attend the inaugural IUS congress in Prague as the IUS made provision for organisations other than representative national student unions to attend. This was an issue which led to much conflict in IUS forums.³³ However, it was amicably agreed that the NUSAS delegates would form the majority of the South African delegation and that no delegate would represent both NUSAS and FOPS.³⁴ The NUSAS president was himself a member of FOPS.

NUSAS conditionally affiliated to the WFDY in 1947 against the wishes of liberals and the right at Durban and UCT³⁵ who felt that membership was redundant as NUSAS was already affiliated to the IUS, and, although this was not stated directly, that the WFDY was political and partisan,³⁶ a reason too why other youth organisations were hesitant to commit themselves.³⁷ Finally, so as to control its representative at the WFDY who was introducing resolutions against the Indian Land Tenure Act and Trusteeship in South West Africa – issues outside the ambit of the non-political NUSAS³⁸ -

31 AIMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

- I. a) To act as a representative students' organisation
- II. b) provide co-operation between democratic organisations of students
- III. c) promote friendship
- IV. d) improve educational standards

BC 586 W7: World Youth Council (London): "Constitution of the International Federation of Students" (n.d.?1945).

IUS CONSTITUTION

- I. a) To be the representative organisation of the democratic students of the whole world who work for progress; in this way to help to solve the problem of all students
- II. b) To secure for all young people the right and possibility of primary, secondary and higher education regardless of sex, economic circumstances, social standing, political conviction, religion, colour and race;
- III. c) To promote friendship between students of the world
- IV. d) To give active support to all governments and social organisations which strive for peace and security; to this end to fight for the eradication of every vestige of fascist ideology and oppression from all educational institutions; to combat all forms of discrimination, the falsification of science, and the propagation of theories of racial superiority.
- V. e) To assist the students of colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries to attain their full social, economic and political development; to this end, to render to the students and peoples of these countries all possible assistance in their struggle for freedom and independence.
- VI. f) To urge that advances in science and culture be published and employed in the service of humanity and world peace.

Witwatersrand Student Vol.3 No.5, 25.6.1951.

32 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.21.

33 J. Kotek: pp.97-98,101.

34 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.20.

35 *SA Student* Vol.X No.2, 1.10.1946; *Star*, 4.7.1947; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

36 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, p.21.

37 *SA Student* Vol.X No.2, 1.10.1946; Letter from C. Jadwat.

38 BC 586 B1 Vice-Presidential Report 1947, p.4.

NUSAS conditionally joined the WFDY.³⁹ This decision was reversed in 1948 as the WFDY had rejected conditional membership and NUSAS felt that the WFDY was a "partisan organisation".⁴⁰ NUS (Britain) followed suit later that year.⁴¹

By 1948 NUSAS not only had reservations about the WFDY but also about the IUS. This can be attributed to the onset of the Cold War.

During the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, students were expelled from their universities. Against Western protests that the purges were politically inspired, the IUS followed the newly imposed orthodoxy saying that the majority of those expelled were wealthy students with poor academic records who were utilising state scholarships which could more profitably have been used by poor students.⁴² The IUS paid no attention to the evidence of Czech students who had fled into exile and decided that changes in the universities reflected the changed social and economic situation in Czechoslovakia which they regarded as a democratic revolution. The IUS thus felt unable to pass judgement on events and recommended that no action be taken against the Czech universities.⁴³

At its annual congress in 1948, NUSAS felt that the events in Czechoslovakia were too distant to pass judgement on. Nonetheless, because of the political nature of much of IUS activity, NUSAS passed a resolution exercising its right to dissent from any decision of the IUS with which it disagreed.⁴⁴ Unlike the several western student unions which severed ties with the IUS, NUSAS believed that it should remain within the international union as it was wrong to disaffiliate from an organisation because of disagreement over some areas of policy. It also felt that many of the IUS practical activities (for example, tours and faculty congresses) were of benefit to NUSAS and that no alternative international student organisation existed.

NUSAS' attitude to the IUS was influenced by that of the British NUS, one of whose representatives was present at the NUSAS assembly. He stated that, although NUS disagreed with some IUS policy, it would remain within the organisation and exert its influence.⁴⁵ Although NUSAS declared its support for continued membership of the IUS, it also expressed interest in a Dutch student initiative to establish a new international student movement.⁴⁶

39 *Star*, 4.7.1947; *Varsity* Vol.6 No.10, 1.8.1947.

40 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1948, p.20.

41 J. Kotek: p.146.

42 *Lidova Demokracie*, Prague, 26.1.1949 quoted in *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.7, 17.10.1953, p.10.

43 BC 586 W2: J. Grohman and G. Berlinguer (IUS Secretariat) to NUSAS, 24.6.1951.

44 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1946, pp.19-20.

45 *ibid.*, p.19.

46 *ibid.*, p.20.

By the end of 1948 NUSAS had decided to take a stand on its relationship with the IUS. It compiled a lengthy "Statement of Attitude" to the IUS which was later adopted, with some additions, by the NUSAS assembly in July 1949. NUSAS would, it declared, remain in the IUS but it objected to the political actions of the IUS which were unrelated to student issues. It opposed the "partisan and political alignment" of the IUS and thus claimed the right, as stated earlier, to dissent from all policy with which it disagreed. An appeal was made to all student unions outside the IUS for whatever reason, to rejoin the international student body so that they could help change things from within.⁴⁷ To this end the NUSAS president sent letters to all national unions urging them to pull their weight and rid the IUS of partisanship.⁴⁸

At this time the majority of delegates at the NUSAS assembly were still reasonably well-disposed towards the IUS as it was the only international student union in existence. Moreover, many students believed that the "crisis" which had overtaken international affairs was in the process of slowly being sorted out.⁴⁹ These observations are borne out by the fact that the Durban SRC president failed to find a seconder for his motion that NUSAS disaffiliate forthwith from the IUS.⁵⁰ In 1950 Durban independently severed ties with the IUS.⁵¹ Yet divisions similar to those which were later to characterise NUSAS over its membership of the IUS were already apparent in some national unions. For example, twenty percent of the delegates to the National Union of Australian Students (NUAUS) congress voted for disaffiliation during 1949.⁵²

The degree of unhappiness of some student unions with IUS policy is revealed by the fact that the BNUS arranged, on behalf of the IUS (though later repudiated by them), a meeting of dissentient unions in December 1949. The seventeen dissatisfied or disaffiliated unions which attended were urged either to remain in, or return to, the IUS so as to balance the views of the international body,⁵³ a position already advocated by NUSAS. The responses of the British and Commonwealth (South African, New Zealand and Australian) student unions were very similar from this period onwards. All were "non-political" like BNUS⁵⁴ and concentrated primarily on educational and

47 BC 586 B3 Assembly Minutes 1948, p.7; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.35; *SA Student*, May 1949.

48 BC 586 W2: P.V. Tobias to National Student Unions, 5.9.1949.

49 *SA Student*, May 1949.

50 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.35.

51 *Dome* Vol.7 No.4, 19.8.1953.

52 *SA Student* Vol.XIII No.4, October 1949.

53 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes, p.12; W2: P. Tobias to SRCs and Executive, 2.5.1950.

54 A.S. Knowles (ed.): *The International Encyclopaedia of Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco and London (1978) Vol.8, p.4004.

student issues, probably one of the reasons for their difficulties with the political IUS.⁵⁵

Apart from espousing political causes, the IUS also promoted practical student activities. NUSAS regarded these as the most important area of IUS activity and the principal reason to remain in the organisation. The IUS introduced an international student travel card, which some NUSAS members took advantage of, as well as opening student sanatoria in various parts of the world. NUSAS did not participate in the IUS international student games because of the expense of sending teams, the difficulties entailed in organising something outside its scope of activities and because of the possibility of being confronted by the social colour which was rigidly upheld in South African sport. However, NUSAS representatives did attend international student clinical⁵⁶ and architectural⁵⁷ conferences hosted by the IUS. Through its relief arm, the World Student Relief (WSR), the IUS worked alongside ISS, Pax Romana (an international Catholic student organisation), the World Students' Jewish Federation and the World Students' Christian Federation to alleviate the damage of war.⁵⁸ In 1948, the NUSAS Director of Relief was sent to Rangoon, Burma to attend meetings of the ISS and the ISR.⁵⁹ NUSAS also participated in international relief projects, for example, the Netherlands Relief⁶⁰ which was aimed at restoring the Dutch universities and in which Stellenbosch University also participated. NUSAS also sent supplies of paper and leather for IUS relief activities.⁶¹

One of the most important activities of the IUS was to organise youth and student festivals. These overtly Stalinist and nationalist festivals dismayed even the most progressive non-Soviet aligned members of NUSAS who attended these gatherings,⁶² possibly because of the strong parallels with the Christian Nationalism of the newly victorious National Party.

One of the unscheduled events at the Festival of Youth and Students in Budapest in 1949 was the kidnapping of the leadership of the Yugoslav student union, the Student Section of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia (SPYY), in retaliation for the expulsion of pro-Soviet students from Yugoslav universities during the Tito revolution in 1948. In February 1950, the IUS executive "sever[ed] relations" with the SPYY for allegedly slandering the IUS and collaborating in the imprisonment and

55 BC 586 U2: D. John: "Report to the Executive on the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Budapest – 14-28 August 1949" which includes an interview with Tom Madden, an IUS executive member.

56 *Star*, 15.4.1948; 13.6.1952. Delegates from Wits, UCT and Pretoria attended the 1948 Clinical Conference as NUSAS wanted the delegation to be representative of all South African medical schools.

57 BC 586 W2: P. Tobias to SRCs and the Executive: "International Student Affairs. No.IV: Fourth IUS Council Meeting, September 1949", 8.5.1950, p.3.

58 *ibid.*, p.1.

59 *Varsity* Vol.7 No.5, 27.5.1948; *Nux* (n.v.), 18.8.1948.

60 *SA Student* Vol.XIV No.1, May 1950.

61 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1949, p.40.

62 BC 586 U2: D. John: "Report of the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Budapest - August to September 1949"

expulsion of students.⁶³

Dissentient unions were so incensed by what in fact amounted to the expulsion of the SPYY on inconclusive evidence, that strong protest action was taken by some of them. BNUS suspended its membership of the IUS until the World Student Congress in September 1950,⁶⁴ while NUSAS temporarily disaffiliated.⁶⁵

These events set in motion a great deal of soul searching within NUSAS regarding membership of the IUS. The NUSAS foreign corresponding secretary recommended that NUSAS disaffiliate. The left-liberals believed that NUSAS ought to remain in the IUS so as to foster international student contact,⁶⁶ arguing that to leave would mean losing contact with students in Eastern Europe and large parts of Asia, deepen the cleavages within the student world and drag NUSAS into the Cold War. However, some felt that NUSAS would eventually be forced to take sides because of the increasingly partisan statements of the IUS.⁶⁷ The left-liberals also rejected disaffiliation from the IUS just because it was "communist dominated", feeling that the real problem was the way in which the non-communist minority was treated.

South African analogies were used to influence their thought. Tobias said that NUSAS found itself in the same position as Stellenbosch in 1936, being a member of both NUSAS and ANS and trying to persuade those in ANS to return to NUSAS in spite of their differences.⁶⁸ It was also observed that, were NUSAS to disaffiliate from the IUS for ideological differences, its action would be as petty as if Durban were to leave NUSAS because of disagreement over academic non-segregation.⁶⁹

Against this background, as well as coinciding with the legislation of the Suppression of Communism Act, the first serious attempt was made at the 1950 NUSAS assembly to disaffiliate from the IUS. Using two arguments, first, that NUSAS was a non-political organisation and second that the IUS used Stalinist tactics,⁷⁰ a delegate from UCT argued that NUSAS should leave the IUS because it was no longer a **student** organisation but a **political** group with **political** affiliations trying to follow

63 BC 586 W2: IUS: "Why the IUS has severed relations with the body of the Student Section of the "People's Youth of Yugoslavia", Prague, March 1950; P. Tobias to SRCs and Executive: International Student Affairs (V): "IUS Executive Meeting, London February 1950", 9.5.1950, p.1.

64 BC 586 W2: P. Tobias to the Executive, Appendix 1, 9.5.1950; D. Mayer: National Union of Students of England, Wales and Northern Ireland: "Announcement of the Decision concerning the Suspension of Membership of the IUS", 20.2.1950.

65 BC 586 W2: P. Tobias to the Executive: "IUS", 1.6.1950, p.4.

66 Interview with Phillip Tobias, 4.12.1997.

67 BC 586 W2: P. Tobias to the Executive, "IUS", 10.5.1950.

68 *ibid.*, pp.1-3.

69 *ibid.*

70 *Cape Times*, 17.7.1950.

a particular **political** ideal (author's emphasis).⁷¹ A delegate from Pretoria also urged immediate disaffiliation because the (Communist) IUS link was detrimental to NUSAS' public image.⁷²

A counter-proposal suggested that NUSAS postpone its decision until after the governing body of the IUS, the Second World Student Congress, had met in September 1950. The proposer of the amendment, Michael O'Dowd (the founder of the Wits SLA and later at the forefront of the disaffiliation group), argued that the secretariat and executive of the IUS had acquired great powers in the day-to-day running of the organisation because the policy-making body of the IUS, the assembly, met infrequently. It was thus hoped that the assembly would reverse some of the executive decisions made over the past three years. The amendment was carried by 16 votes to 10.⁷³

Although NUSAS chose to remain in the IUS, it unanimously mandated its delegates to the Second World Student Congress in Prague to express NUSAS' extreme dissatisfaction with the IUS particularly regarding the political activities of its executive, its expulsion of the SPYY and its treatment of minority views.⁷⁴

The Second World Student Congress was in many ways similar to the 1949 World Festival of Youth and Students. The leader of the NUSAS delegation described it as a congregation for "Stalinist worship". As in 1949, the South African delegates were alienated by this political manifestation, particularly after a warm welcome changed to active hostility when it became evident that the NUSAS delegation, among others, would oppose the IUS line.⁷⁵

The minority unions from Scotland, South Africa and the rest of the Commonwealth, loosely led by the leader of the NUS delegation and supported on most points by Scandinavia and the United States (in observer capacity), mounted a very strong objection along the lines of the NUSAS protest statement. Any hope entertained by NUSAS that the actions of an overly strong secretariat would be overturned by the congress were dashed when the assembly ratified all executive decisions, including the expulsion of Yugoslavia. The minority unions argued that the expulsion was unconstitutional as the Yugoslavs had been denied the right to defend themselves. The IUS in turn attacked the minority unions for not implementing the anti-fascist and anti-colonial clauses of the IUS constitution by failing to denounce their own governments' actions in, for example, Malaya and apartheid South

71 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.29.

72 *ibid.*, p.30.

73 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, pp.29-30; *Cape Times*, 17.7.1950.

74 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1950, p.30. This decision had been taken by the IUS as a justification for not protesting against the arrest of students etc., in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. J. Kotek: p.134.

Africa.⁷⁶

In NUSAS' submission to the Congress, the delegates outlined the main work of NUSAS in opposing apartheid in the universities and Christian National Education. They also denounced the IUS for its political activities. In reply, the IUS unanimously pledged its support for NUSAS' struggle for democratic education⁷⁷ but accused NUSAS of being a "traitor" and "selling out to Malan" by refusing to engage in political activity.⁷⁸ This prompted one of the delegation to recommend to NUSAS that it re-examine its commitment to being a non-political student organisation as, in his opinion and from his experience in IUS forums, student affairs could not be divorced from society. He believed that NUSAS was already acting in a partisan and political fashion by opposing university apartheid.⁷⁹

Most of the British delegates to the Prague meeting called for the disaffiliation of NUS (England) from the IUS, but the NUS Council decided, by narrow majorities, to remain in, causing the resignation of its president.⁸⁰ All three South African delegates, two of whom were known for their radical political views,⁸¹ recommended immediate disaffiliation on the grounds already mentioned, namely the assembly's ratification of the expulsion of Yugoslavia and the treatment of the minority by the chairperson at meetings. One of the NUSAS delegates went so far as advocating the establishment of a new "western bloc" international student organisation which would include colonial students being "duped" by the IUS.⁸²

The first steps towards the founding of the new western student union were taken at a meeting in Berne in 1950, after which national unions were sent a constitution for a new organisation,⁸³ and then at Stockholm in December 1950. The conference was hosted by the Scandinavian student unions and was called with the intention of initiating discussion on how to improve co-operation between national student unions. The conference organisers believed that the IUS was no longer an instrument for student unity but explicitly stated that the conference was not intended to facilitate the establishment of a new western union.⁸⁴ However, secretly the Swedes hoped that a new student

75 *Star*, 1.9.1950. The degree of hostility displayed towards IUS critics is revealed by the actions of some delegations. For example, students from Malaya, where Britain was fighting a colonial war, marched round the table of the British delegates singing freedom songs. *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.10, 4.10.1950, p.3.

76 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.10, 4.10.1950, p.3.

77 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.10, 4.10.1950, p.3.

78 *Star*, 1.9.1950.

79 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

80 *SA Student* Vol.XV No.1, April 1951; J. Kotek: pp.176-177.

81 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

82 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1951, pp.47-48; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.10, 4.10.1950

83 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1951, p.51.

84 *ibid.*, p.52.

organisation would gradually emerge.⁸⁵ The president of the United States-based National Student Association (NSA) received support for the creation of an international student body opposed to the "communist dominated" IUS.⁸⁶ A compromise between those wanting a new organisation and those rejecting such an idea, was finally accepted. A loose organisation, the International Student Conference (ISC) was established which would meet annually to discuss practical student projects delegated to different national unions.⁸⁷ A Student Mutual Assistance Programme (SMAP) was set-up to redress inequalities between students and co-ordinate help for students in developing countries, a specific project particularly welcomed by the American government.⁸⁸

Both the creation of the ISC as an alternative to the IUS and the disappointment of the Prague Congress were turning points in international student relations. Both the deepening of the Cold War, as well as the waning of the influence of the post-war generation of ex-servicepeople who wanted to avoid war, served to diminish the past concern of maintaining international student unity at all costs. Thus more students, who in the past had supported continuing affiliation to the IUS, became more amenable to the idea of a western bloc union. Student unions world-wide were torn in two by these new developments. The BNUS adopted a compromise whereby it would participate in the ISC, but at the same time apply for fraternal membership of the IUS,⁸⁹ which the IUS did not accept.⁹⁰ New Zealand, Australia and Belgium disaffiliated, but Australia, along with France and Scotland opposed the establishment of a new international student union.⁹¹

How did NUSAS respond to these developments? A decision regarding the national union's relationship to the IUS was postponed until the 1951 congress. During the six months leading up to the congress, the NUSAS executive sent out much information on the IUS to SRCs to enable them to make an informed decision at the assembly.⁹² Eventually three positions emerged. A very definite pro-disaffiliation grouping coalesced at UCT, comprising the majority on the SRC who had voted for the "Gentleman's Agreement" and opposed social mixing in 1951.⁹³ They were supported by the traditionally conservative Durban students and some prominent liberals, for example, Michael

85 J. Kotek: p.179.

86 D. Harris: *Dreams Die Hard: Three Men's Journey through the Sixties*, St Martin's/Marek, New York (1982), pp.167-168; J. Kotek: p.180.

87 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1951, p.53.

88 J. Kotek: pp.180-181.

89 *SA Student* Vol.XV No.1, April 1951. The NUS held a referendum and the results showed that 16 000 favoured continued affiliation to the IUS while 18 000 were opposed.

90 BC 586 U2.d.: Julien Hoffman to Phillip (Tobias), 1.7.1951.

91 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

92 *SA Student* Vol.XV No.4, August 1951.

93 See Chapter 4, pp.83-84. UCT SRC meetings during the 1950s were characterised by much political conflict, much of it generated by international affairs and affiliation to the IUS. Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

O'Dowd of Wits. Student leaders at Rhodes, fearing that a decision one way or another would precipitate a split in NUSAS, championed the British compromise of fraternal membership. In other words, the union should accept the IUS principles of peace, national independence and a right to a democratic education as well as participate in practical activities, attend meetings and pay membership fees, but dissociate itself from all "political" policies.⁹⁴ Pietermaritzburg seemed to veer towards the middle path before the assembly meeting, as like Rhodes, it believed, that a decision either way would antagonise various constituencies and that in any case disaffiliation was "cowardly" and comparable with Durban disaffiliating from NUSAS in 1950.⁹⁵

The Wits SRC remained implacably opposed to both disaffiliation and fraternal membership. Its SRC adopted a statement that the IUS was the only potential instrument for world student unity, and that to disaffiliate would foster international war and accept the absolute division of the student world into two hostile camps.⁹⁶ With the help of its allies, the student newspaper, *The Witwatersrand Student*, and the Wits Students Liberal Association, the SRC persuaded the student body to adopt its point of view⁹⁷ amidst allegations from the pro-disaffiliation group that devious and clever tactics were used to confuse and obfuscate the student body.⁹⁸ The *Witwatersrand Student* published positive articles on the IUS, popularised World Youth Festivals, and wrote and published open letters and replies to and from the IUS Executive.⁹⁹

The IUS itself did much to further its cause, not only in South Africa, but in all countries where student unions were threatening disaffiliation.¹⁰⁰ Since the 1950 WSC, it had embarked on a series of practical projects and, as importantly, had toned down its anti-western language in its publications. In its open letters to the *Witwatersrand Student*, the IUS executive argued that, in spite of the religious and ideological differences of student unions across the world, student unity was both possible and essential if students were to fight for peace and avoid another war.¹⁰¹ The Wits SLA took up the peace issue enthusiastically,¹⁰² but, in many ways, although the fear of war was a real one to students, the IUS was addressing a new generation who themselves had not directly experienced war. Few of the idealistic ex-servicepeople world-wide who, in 1946, had helped found the IUS and

⁹⁴ *Rhodeo*, 26.5.1951.

⁹⁵ *Nux* No.6, 25.6.1951.

⁹⁶ *Nux* No.6, 25.6.1951.

⁹⁷ BC 586 W2: L. Forman: "IUS Council Warsaw, August 31st-September 6th, 1951; Report of the NUSAS Delegation to the IUS Council", p.1.

⁹⁸ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.2, 6.4.1951: Letter from J.A. Wassenaar.

⁹⁹ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.II No.9, 24.8.1950; Vol.III No.1, 12.3.1951; Vol.III No.2, 6.4.1951; Vol.III No.4, May 1951; Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

¹⁰⁰ J. Kotek: pp.182-183.

¹⁰¹ *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.1, 12.3.1951.

¹⁰² *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.1, 12.3.1951; Vol.III No.2, 6.4.1951; Vol.III No.4, May 1951.

who would espouse student unity at all costs to avoid the horrors of war, remained in the universities by 1951. The decline in their influence is one of the arguments put forward, apart from the Cold War, for the shift to the right of some student unions in this period,¹⁰³ and consequently their anti-IUS position.

Due to the lobbying done by the Wits SRC, the NUSAS executive and all centres apart from Durban and Pietermaritzburg, felt that, "in view of the deterioration of international affairs and the danger of war", that a "Peace Statement" was necessary.¹⁰⁴ The assembly subsequently adopted an "idealistic" peace statement drawn up by the liberal president of NUSAS, Phillip Tobias, which called for a peaceful settlement of conflict and confined itself to opposing war-mongering in the student sphere. The left opposed this, as they felt that the statement did not go far enough since it did not give the executive a mandate to "fight for peace" (a concept which the president found contradictory) or work with organisations fighting for peace.¹⁰⁵ Thus NUSAS did not adopt a position identical to the IUS.

The debate surrounding affiliation to the IUS was the longest of the congress, setting a trend for later debates on international relations. Members from UCT and Durban moved for immediate disaffiliation on the grounds that democracy had died in the IUS. It had illegally expelled Yugoslavia, the organisation was furthering communist ideology, and, as the leader of the NUS designated it, it had become the "student branch of the Cominform".¹⁰⁶ After six hours of debate, the disaffiliation motion was lost by 8 votes to 22 as was the Rhodes compromise of fraternal membership. Instead, the proposal by Wolpe of the Wits SRC, that NUSAS remain in the IUS and change it from within for the sake of world student unity and the avoidance of war, was carried by 18 votes to 14.¹⁰⁷ Those who voted for remaining in the IUS were Wits, the UCT "Minority Group", UNNE, Fort Hare and Hewat.¹⁰⁸ The votes of the three black centres tipped the balance to the IUS. A factor which swayed the voting in favour of the IUS was the stated attitude of the black centres that they regarded the IUS as allies and would secede from NUSAS were the national union to leave the international

103 For example in France. See A. Belden Fields: "France", in P. Altbach (ed.): *Student Political Activism – An International Reference Handbook*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (1989), p.227.

104 *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.2, May 1951.

105 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.43-44; *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.4, August 1951. At this time the South African Peace Council attended the World Festival of Youth and Students in 1951 to formulate their peace strategy in South Africa which, it was decided, would have strong international links but would play a role in local issues with local organisations. The Wits SLA participated in the South African Peace Council activities. C. Burns: "An Historical Study of the Friends of the Soviet Union and the South African Peace Council" BA (Hons) Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand (1989), p.88,90,91.

106 *Star*, 12.7.1951; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.46-47; *SA Student* Vol.XV No.4, August 1951.

107 *SA Student* Vol.XV No.4, August 1951; *Nux* No.1, 16.8.1951; *Star*, 12.7.1951.

108 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, pp.46-48; *Nux* No.1, 16.8.1951.

body.¹⁰⁹ The possibility of Fort Hare seceding was likely as its motion calling on NUSAS to fight for full social equality had been routed earlier by the assembly.¹¹⁰

Connected to the IUS debate was the question of NUSAS' response to the Stockholm ISC and the international meeting in Berne. It voted to oppose the establishment of any new partisan international student organisation.¹¹¹

In spite of its decision to continue its membership of the IUS, NUSAS passed a motion of censure on the international body and also expressed its continued concern over the treatment of Yugoslavia.¹¹² Both of these motions were conveyed to the IUS council meeting in Warsaw in September 1951 by the NUSAS representatives, the radical Lionel Forman and the liberal president, Patricia Arnett.¹¹³ Although the IUS refused to discuss the Yugoslavia issue, a joint IUS-NUSAS commission of inquiry was appointed to look into the matter.¹¹⁴ The findings were largely the work of Lionel Forman.¹¹⁵

An indication of the degree to which the IUS believed that the world was rapidly being divided into two hostile ideological spheres is revealed by its initiative to call a Unity meeting between the IUS executive and the non-affiliated or disaffected student unions of the IUS. The IUS, however, refused to acquiesce to the demand of BNUS, Finland, Australia, Canada and NUSAS that the SPYY also be invited¹¹⁶ and thus NUSAS refused to sponsor the meeting.¹¹⁷ However, all unions agreed to participate as "in the present international situation, a meeting of this kind (would) increase the measure of understanding and co-operation between students".¹¹⁸

The next stage in the creation of a western student union took place at the second International Students Conference (ISC) in Edinburgh in January 1952. A NUSAS representative attended this gathering¹¹⁹ on the strict understanding that a new organisation would not be established and that

109 *Nus* No.6, 25.6.1951; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.III No.5, 25.6.1951.

110 See Chapter 4, p.85.

111 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1951, p.49.

112 *ibid.*

113 BC 586 U2: Patricia Arnett to Lionel Forman and George Clayton: "Mandate for IUS Council Meeting on PYY Issue", 27.8.1951.

114 BC 586 U2: Lionel Forman to Patricia Arnett, 21.10.1951, pp.1-2.

115 BC 586 W2: L. Forman: "IUS Council Warsaw, August 31st-September, 6th, 1951", pp.1-4; B1 Presidential Report 1952, pp.43-44; *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.1, March 1952.

116 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.1, 11.3.1952.

117 BC 586 W2: P. Arnett to the President of the IUS, 10.3.1952.

118 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.1, 11.3.1952.

119 NUSAS did not accede to Lionel Forman's request that he attend the Edinburgh meeting to squash it. This is evidence of liberal vigilance of former CPSA members' activities, mentioned in Chapter 4. BC 586 U2: Lionel Forman to Pat (Arnett) and members of the Executive, 17.11.1951, p.5.

only practical student co-operation would be discussed.¹²⁰ The IUS declined its invitation to attend on the grounds that the meeting would splinter the student world and was aimed at establishing a separate western bloc.¹²¹ In this respect, the IUS was correct as the ISC voted to establish a non-political supervisory co-ordinating Secretariat with no policy-making functions in Leiden whose members would be drawn only from the United States and Western Europe.¹²²

This was certainly a controversial¹²³ decision and students worldwide protested.¹²⁴ Those opposed to the establishment of the Leiden Secretariat believed, like the IUS, that it was rushed into being so as to wreck the forthcoming "Unity Meeting". They also believed that those national unions sincerely opposed to a western bloc were being drawn quietly into an organisation which, by its loose structure, would in time wear down their opposition to a western bloc and hence force them to break their ties with the IUS.¹²⁵

NUSAS responded to these developments in a number of ways. Its representative at the Edinburgh meeting abstained from voting on the creation of the Secretariat as he believed that it was the germ of a new international student organisation and that it was an attempt to divide the international student body. Six months later the NUSAS assembly echoed these sentiments and passed Resolution 113 reiterating its opposition to the establishment of a new international student body opposing the IUS and refused to have anything more to do with the Leiden Secretariat.¹²⁶

NUSAS also appeared to be more favourably disposed towards the IUS. It provisionally and temporarily withdrew its motion of censure against the IUS over its expulsion of Yugoslavia after receiving the detailed report of the Commission of Inquiry which had been requested at the 1951 IUS Council meeting. The "Unity Meeting" was also strongly supported and, according to O'Dowd, the proposer of the 1951 disaffiliation motion, it was "one of the most significant and hopeful events since the IUS was founded in 1946. Nothing like it ha[d] occurred in the past six years and won't occur again in ten".¹²⁷ However, the arrangements for the "Unity Meeting" were not without conflict. The liberals and the right opposed the appointment of the radical Lionel Forman as NUSAS

120 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1952, pp.47-48; *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.1, March 1952; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.1, 11.3.1952.

121 BC 586 W2: J. Grohman and P. Pescetti: "Statement of the IUS on the Edinburgh meeting. Prague", n.d.

122 *SA Student* Vol.XVI No.1, March 1952; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.2, 7.4.1952.

123 Already in May 1951, allegations of American attempts to subvert the international student movement were being made. BC 586 W2: J. Grohman and G. Berlinguer (IUS Secretariat) to NUSAS, 24.5.1951. During 1952, the CIA began to financially sponsor the National Student Association (NSA), the national students' union of the United States. J. Kotek: pp.200-209.

124 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.2, 7.4.1952.

125 *ibid.*

126 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, p.50.

127 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.6, 13.8.1952.

representative at the meeting although he was already in Europe.¹²⁸ This was probably because he was not trusted to represent NUSAS' views and he had earlier issued a statement to which NUSAS and BNUS had objected. Thus it was decided that the NUSAS president, Patricia Arnett, would be sent to represent NUSAS along with Forman.¹²⁹

Yet, probably because such high hopes were invested in it, the "Unity Meeting" was a failure. This then fuelled the anti-IUS camp to champion disaffiliation more strongly than before. The first disappointment was that, of the 26 non-member organisations invited to attend, 20 boycotted the meeting. The boycotters included the unions of Britain, Scotland, the USA and Sweden¹³⁰ while Australia and New Zealand failed to arrive. Thus, the only critical or non-member unions present were those from South Africa, Canada, Finland, Burma and Chile. Disagreement between the IUS and the dissentient unions about who was to have delegate status was not fully resolved and thus splinter unions and youth organisations had equal voting rights with NUSAS and the other national unions specially invited to discuss their differences.

Another area of difference, and one of disappointment to NUSAS and the dissentient unions, was the agenda of the meeting. Evidently the IUS had learnt from the non-political student benefits unions of the west that the way to avoid division and conflict and maintain student unity was to ignore politics and stress practical student interests. Thus, practical co-operation and areas of unity were discussed and only with great difficulty did NCUS (Canada) and NUSAS get the meeting to discuss differences of opinion and issues such as Yugoslavia, the most pressing political problem of the day. In the opinion of these two unions, these were the main reasons keeping other national unions out of the IUS and they were also the rationale for calling the "Unity Meeting". The Secretariat vaguely promised to issue a statement about Yugoslavia, but did not. In the final report drafted by the IUS, the complaints raised by the disaffected were omitted as the IUS disagreed with them.¹³¹ The discussions on peace, germ warfare, and the Korean War also alienated NUSAS and the dissentient unions.¹³² The poorly attended IUS Council meeting which followed the "Unity Meeting" was as great a disappointment as the earlier gathering. There also seemed to be evidence that the IUS was

128 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, pp.47-48.

129 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1952, pp.47-48; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.IV No.6, 13.8.1952.

130 BC 586 W2: Lionel Forman: "Comments on the Draft Report of the Unity Meeting", 9.12.1952, p.2.

131 BC 586 W2: "Students Unite for Peace, better working conditions of life and study: Resolutions and Appeals of the Council of the IUS and Student organisations of non-members of the IUS, Bucharest, 1-3 September 1952"; "Statement of the Participants of the Meeting between the Representatives of the IUS and the Student Organisations, Non-Members of the IUS" in IUS, Prague, n.d.; no title but summary of documents of IUS Council Meeting and Unity Meeting, August-September 1952, pp.8,11; B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.76; *S4 Student* Vol.XVII No.1, March 1953.

132 BC 586 Report of the "Unity Meeting" in Presidential Report 1953, pp.6-7.

following a harder line,¹³³ refusing in any way to accommodate western unions and thus forcing them out of the international body. BNUS and Scotland's application for fraternal associate membership was turned down¹³⁴ and the Council refused to acquiesce to Scotland and NUSAS' request that the "Unity Meeting" and the Yugoslav question be put on the agenda.¹³⁵

Consequently, the initiative taken at the Edinburgh ISC began to bear fruit. A meeting was held in Paris to collect information about student needs and welfare activities and was attended by the NUSAS president, Patricia Arnett, who, after the Unity and Council meetings, was still in Europe. As the acrimony between the left, the liberals and right increased around the IUS-ISC issue from late 1952, her attendance at the meeting became a stick with which to beat the liberals. Doubts were cast on her integrity and her ability to implement NUSAS policy impartially as the left believed that her attendance contravened Resolution 113, which forbade NUSAS to have any dealings with the ISC. The liberals denied that the meeting had anything to do with the ISC. Attempts to censure the president at both the Executive meeting of 1952 and the 1953 student assembly failed.¹³⁶

The Third ISC took place in Copenhagen in December 1952 but, because of Resolution 113, NUSAS was not represented. The IUS and East European unions were invited to attend, probably because of pressure from those western unions who opposed the division of the world into two hostile blocs. However, the IUS refused to attend, alleging that the invitations were discriminatory and, probably quite rightly, accused the ISC of having links with the Council of Europe and Brussels Treaty Organisation and thus, by implication, of being a hostile western organisation.¹³⁷ Although no unions from Eastern Europe attended, the *SA Student* hailed the conference as the largest post-war student gathering ever held as 35 national unions from Western Europe and the Americas attended.¹³⁸ The NUSAS organ's positive response was indicative of the increasingly liberal and anti-radical direction in which NUSAS was moving. A long list of working papers of practical student

133 The 19th Communist Party (of the USSR) Congress of 1952 was followed by the initial stages of what seemed to be a new massive purge, e.g. The Slansky Trial in Czechoslovakia. This could account for the sudden hard line. J.N. Westwood: *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812-1986*, Oxford University Press, London (1988), pp.353-354, 357,363,378. The accommodating founding president of the IUS was purged from the IUS in mid-1952 because of his association with Slansky. BC 586 W2: "Draft Report of the NUSAS Delegation to the 1952 meeting of the IUS Council, Bucharest, September 5th-10th", p.6; J. Kotek: pp.186-187,259.

134 BC 586 W2: Fred Jarvis (NUS) to B. Bereanu, 16.10.1952; W2: Draft Report of the NUSAS Delegation to the 1952 Meeting of the IUS Council, Bucharest, September 5th-10th", p.8.

135 BC 586 W2: "Draft Report of the NUSAS Delegation to the 1952 meeting of the IUS Council, Bucharest, September 5th-10th", pp.3,4,6,8,13.

136 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.87-89

137 BC 586 W2: "Statement of the IUS Secretariat on the "International Student Conference" to be held in Copenhagen on 1 December 1952".

138 *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.3, June 1953.

activities was presented at the conference, far more than the IUS had ever attempted.¹³⁹

The failure of the Unity Meeting and, more importantly the refusal of the IUS to countenance fraternal membership, led to the disaffiliation of Britain and the announcement that Scotland would follow suit.¹⁴⁰ The increasing success of the Leiden Secretariat also shaped this growing anti-IUS sentiment. From this period onwards, both the BNUS and the Australian NUAUS were faced with real or threatened disaffiliations of their member unions because of dissatisfaction with their international policies.¹⁴¹

In South Africa, sides again began to take shape over IUS or ISC affiliation. At Wits, aspirant SRC election candidates stood on pro- or anti-IUS tickets. Those in favour usually won their seats, thus maintaining for Wits its position of chief protagonist for the IUS. A strong anti-IUS grouping coalesced at UCT and had the support of Durban and Pietermaritzburg as well as Rhodes, which had in 1951 called for the fraternal membership. As most SRCs were mandated on how they should vote at the assembly, there was a great scramble and lobbying for the non-mandated votes and for those unsure of their position.¹⁴² The pro- and anti-IUS forces were somewhat different in July 1953 from what they had been in July 1951 when the previous disaffiliation bid was made. As in Britain, the radical left could rely on a radical left-wing minority on the executive to vote for continued affiliation to the IUS,¹⁴³ as well as support from a small number of mandated UCT votes and the Transvaal Pharmacy Students Association. However, the radical left had lost the black centres, Fort Hare and Hewat, which had disaffiliated from NUSAS in 1952.¹⁴⁴ They did, however, have the strong support of UNNE and the newly-affiliated Bantu Normal College in Pretoria. The disaffiliation group, on the other hand, assiduously lobbied the students from Pius the Twelfth University,¹⁴⁵ but their task had already been made easier by the work of one of the lecturers at the college, a former NUSAS vice-president, who had written an open letter in the *SA Student* urging NUSAS to leave. The Catholic Church in general was opposed to the IUS, Pax Romana being one of the organisations successfully targeted by the CIA for infiltration and funding.¹⁴⁶

In the lead-up to the disaffiliation debate all groups prepared their ground by finding "solid facts" on which to build their arguments. The executive addressed a set of urgent letters to the IUS Secretariat

139 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.93.

140 *Varsity* Vol.XII No.4, 20.3.1953.

141 D. Jacks: p.83; *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.2, May 1953; Vol.XVIII No.3, June 1953.

142 Interview with Clodagh O'Dowd, 2.4.1997; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, p.31.

143 Like NUSAS, BNUS had a radical left-wing minority on its executive until 1955; D. Jacks: p.82.

144 See Chapter 4, pp.86,93.

145 Interview with Clodagh O'Dowd, 2.4.1997.

146 J. Kotek: p.210.

in Prague asking for information on issues such as the expulsion of Yugoslavia and the funding of the IUS,¹⁴⁷ which would help it take an informed decision regarding membership; but by July 1953 it had received no replies.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, letters sent by the Wits SRC to the IUS, without the knowledge of the NUSAS executive, asking for clarification on many aspects of the NUSAS president's reports on the Unity and Council meetings in Bucharest, which would be used for the disaffiliation debate, were immediately replied to by the IUS executive. These "Pescetti letters", as they came to be known, caused much bitterness between the radical left and the liberals, as they implied that the presidential reports on the conferences were biased and inaccurate and, incorrectly, that the president had refused to allow the inclusion of the views of Lionel Forman, her co-delegate and a member of the IUS executive.¹⁴⁹

At the assembly in July 1953, UCT and Rhodes proposed that NUSAS leave the IUS on the grounds that the IUS was politically partisan and was the student wing of the Cominform, that it had disregarded its constitution in expelling Yugoslavia and had failed to adopt the impartiality demanded by western unions, that it lacked respect for the minority and had ignored democratic procedures in its debates, that it had failed in practical student areas.¹⁵⁰ This proposal set in motion a 22-hour debate characterised by much bitterness, harsh words, insinuation and forced apologies for personal attacks on opponents.¹⁵¹

The left initially remained implacably opposed to anything but full affiliation. It was argued that the IUS was "a magnificent attempt to bridge the gulf between East and West" and was the only body possibly able to achieve world student unity.¹⁵² Further, the pro-IUS group argued that it was senseless of NUSAS, the last western union in the IUS, to leave at a time when the possibility of other national unions returning to the IUS seemed promising. The disaffiliation grouping denied the significance of the talks which had occurred, at the IUS' bidding, with Pax Romana, the University of Chicago, and the French and Italian unions.¹⁵³

Delegates from Wits, UNNE, and the Transvaal Pharmacy Students Association (TPSA) attempted

147 According to Kotek, funding came from the Czech government and the Soviet Union. Kotek goes further by alleging that the vast amounts donated for festivals and funding of the WFDY and the IUS could have been partly responsible for crippling the Soviet economy. J. Kotek: p.212.

148 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.56-57

149 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.57-60,157-176; *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.4, August 1953.

150 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.60; *Rand Daily Mail*, 13.7.1953; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.6, 6.8.1953.

151 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.64,65,72.

152 *Rand Daily Mail*, 13.7.1953.

153 *Advance*, 23.7.1953; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.6, 6.8.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.66,67,77.

to answer the indictment made by the UCT delegate against the IUS. Firstly, they argued that the IUS had not expelled the Yugoslav Student Union (SPYY) but had severed ties with its leadership which had not been democratically elected.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, using the analogy of a current NUSAS crisis, namely, whether to officially pursue full political equality for all, they argued that individuals and SRCs, while remaining in NUSAS, disagreed on the extent to which politics infringed on education, and thus, by extension, there could be disagreement within the IUS on how political its policies were.¹⁵⁵ Further, were NUSAS to leave the IUS because it was too political, it would have no grounds on which to persuade black students to remain in NUSAS or, in the case of Fort Hare and Hewat, to reaffiliate.¹⁵⁶

When it became clear that the assembly would vote in favour of disaffiliation, the Wits delegation tabled an amendment similar to those of 1950 and 1951. It was suggested that the decision be postponed until after the Third World Student Congress had met in Warsaw and had decided on whether to allow associate membership of the IUS.¹⁵⁷ Further, those mandated to vote for disaffiliation were urged instead to support the amendment as new information had come before the assembly which could change their positions. This amendment and change to the voting was denounced by the disaffiliation group as a stalling tactic which had been used by the radical left since 1950,¹⁵⁸ and it was defeated by 24 to 16.¹⁵⁹ After a long speech by the NUSAS president supporting disaffiliation, based largely on her experiences at the "Unity" and IUS Council meetings the year before, the assembly finally voted 24 to 16 for disaffiliation.¹⁶⁰ Wits and UNNE dissociated themselves from the result; the UNNE delegate announced that he would recommend to his centre that it leave NUSAS.¹⁶¹

The pro-IUS group, however, did not give up and proposed that NUSAS attend the WSC and, on the basis of its outcome, decide whether to apply for associate membership. This was amended to the effect that NUSAS would attempt to send an observer to the meeting.¹⁶²

With NUSAS out of the IUS, the president proposed that Resolution 113 of 1952, forbidding NUSAS to have any dealings with the ISC (now known as the "Co-ordinating Secretariat"

154 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.6, 6.8.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.65-66.

155 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.68,75.

156 *ibid.*, pp.68, 71, 75.

157 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.6, 14.8.1953; *Varsity* Vol.12 No.13, 14.8.1953.

158 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.69,70,79.

159 *Varsity* Vol.12 No.13, 14.8.1953; *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.4, August 1953.

160 *Rhodeo*, 1.8.1953; *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.4, August 1953.

161 *Advance*, 23.7.1953; BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.80.

162 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.82-83.

(COSEC)) be rescinded and that NUSAS should participate in COSEC.¹⁶³ This was justified on the grounds that COSEC was neither political nor a new student union and had undertaken a large amount of practical work. The left challenged these assertions. Firstly it was argued that the existence of COSEC signified a split in the student world as it was home to students hostile to the IUS and had been described the previous year by NUSAS as "the germ of a new international student organisation".¹⁶⁴ Secondly, the ISC was political, as the 1950 president of NSA had recommended at Stockholm the creation of an anti-communist body, while a later NSA president had said that the predecessor of COSEC was part of the Truman Four-Point Programme.¹⁶⁵ Others alleged (correctly) that the sources of COSEC funds were dubious¹⁶⁶ and that American money was given to the organisation with strings attached.¹⁶⁷ The withdrawal of Resolution 113 was carried by 18 to 14, Wits, UNNE and the Transvaal Pharmacy students voting against and dissociating themselves from the decision.¹⁶⁸

After the congress there was much dissatisfaction among the pro-IUS group.¹⁶⁹ On the recommendation of their delegate to the NUSAS assembly, UNNE set in motion its disaffiliation from the national union.¹⁷⁰ At Wits the IUS debate continued through the rest of 1953 in the columns of the student newspaper.¹⁷¹ The left bitterly concluded that delegates had not listened to the reasoned arguments surrounding the Yugoslav issue but had just fallen for the emotional Cold War sloganeering of the anti-IUS group.¹⁷² However, in spite of the decision, Wits resolved to remain in NUSAS,¹⁷³ but also to strengthen its ties with the IUS. The Wits SLA and SAUDS, a left-wing rival to NUSAS and largely a creation of the Wits left,¹⁷⁴ were invited to attend the Third WSC, while the Wits SRC, much to the annoyance of NUSAS which believed that this contravened the IUS constitution, was offered delegate status at the same gathering.¹⁷⁵

The Warsaw WSC in September 1953 was as accommodating and co-operative as the Bucharest Council meeting in 1952 had been unaccommodating and unco-operative. If one holds the view that

163 *ibid.*, pp.92-93.

164 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.95; *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.6, 6.8.1953.

165 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.95.

166 *Advance*, 23.7.1953; 15.11.1956, Letter from J. Didcott.

167 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.94.

168 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, p.96.

169 *SA Student* Vol.XVIII No.4, August 1953.

170 BC 586 A2.2: Trevor (Coombe) to Ernie (Wentzel), 14.1.1956. The UNNE delegate was M.J. Naidoo, later president of the UNNE SRC, leader of the Natal Indian Congress and the United Democratic Front.

171 *Witwatersrand Student* Vol.V No.6, 6.8.1953; Vol.V No.7, 17.10.1953.

172 *ibid.*, Vol.V No.6, 6.8.1953.

173 *ibid.*

174 See Chapter 5, pp.102-103.

175 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1953, pp.81,83,84.

the IUS was subordinated to the Soviet Union and its foreign policy, then the differences between 1952 and 1953 can be explained by the changes which occurred in the Soviet Union during 1953. Firstly, Stalin died in February 1953, setting in train a thaw in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In July 1953 a cease-fire was signed in Korea and in August 1953 a new policy of "peaceful co-existence" was adopted, both of these events probably contributing to the easing of international tension.

Signs of "peaceful co-existence" were evident at the Warsaw WSC. The Yugoslav Student Union was invited to attend, but at such late notice that it was unable to do so. West Germany and the United States did not attend,¹⁷⁶ nor was NUSAS represented. The most significant event of the gathering was the amendment of the IUS constitution to allow for associate membership.¹⁷⁷ Earlier that year, after the disaffiliation of the BNUS and SUS, the IUS executive had reversed its decision taken at the Bucharest Council meeting and had agreed to recommend associate membership.¹⁷⁸

Although NUSAS was not represented at the Third WSC, a delegate did attend the 4th ISC in Istanbul in January 1954. Student unions from all continents were present and, in the opinion of NUSAS, this was the most representative gathering convened since the war.¹⁷⁹ Of importance to South Africa was the passing of the NUSAS resolution opposing all attacks on academic freedom and university autonomy as well as racial discrimination in education. The ISC pledged its support for the "open" universities, NUSAS and the academic freedom campaign and deplored the actions of the South African Government in pursuing apartheid in higher education. Further, a Permanent Investigation Commission (RIC) (sic) was created to conduct research into academic freedom and related matters. South Africa was designated the first country to be investigated,¹⁸⁰ evidence of its high profile. It was also evidence of the rapid transformation of COSEC into a permanent body with a large bureaucracy, in spite of BNUS, for example, having been mandated to oppose any steps which might further the development of the ISC into a new international union of students.¹⁸¹

Issues concerning students from colonial countries (or, to use the revealing ISC terminology, in the "developing world") were high on the ISC agenda, the battle to win for the west the hearts and minds of the emerging post-colonial world being one of the *raisons d' etres* for the creation of the

¹⁷⁶ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), p.25. If the IUS followed Soviet foreign policy, the action of the two western student unions in not attending the WSC could be interpreted as their following their country's foreign policy. In the USA Eisenhower was elected to the presidency on an offensive policy to "roll back communism".

¹⁷⁷ BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, Annexure 15: "Appeal of the International Union of Students" p.100.

¹⁷⁸ BC 586 W2: "Resolutions of the IUS Executive Committee" s/20, 1953; *Varsity* Vol.12 No.4, 20.3.1953.

¹⁷⁹ BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954(3), p.28.

¹⁸⁰ *SA Student* Vol.XVIV No.4, March 1954.

¹⁸¹ *World Student News* Vol.8 No.15, 1954, p.4.

organisation. Another investigating team was appointed to establish the requirements of, and problems experienced by, students in Africa.¹⁸² Various resolutions on post-colonial countries, considered to be non-political as they focused exclusively on educational issues, were carried; these were later ratified by NUSAS.¹⁸³ The ISC brought NUSAS into contact with colonial students, with the result that colonial issues, particularly those concerning Africa, were placed firmly on the NUSAS agenda from that point onwards. An example of this new interest was the title of the newly inaugurated Congress Winter School, "The New Africa", in 1955.

What were the reactions of student unions to the WSC and the ISC? In January 1954 the BNUS Council voted to apply for associate membership of the IUS,¹⁸⁴ as did Israel.¹⁸⁵ Six months later, NUSAS followed suit. At the 1954 NUSAS congress Wits planned to reverse the 1953 disaffiliation decision. Realising that again student unity would be jeopardised by the lobbying, fighting and hostility that would accompany such debates, as well as to take advantage of the improved international situation, the two chief opposing protagonists in the IUS debate, John Didcott of UCT and Dan Goldstein of Wits, proposed that NUSAS follow a bi-partisan international policy. In other words, NUSAS would maintain contact with students from all parts of the world and with all "blocs". In concrete terms this meant that the national union would apply for associate membership of the IUS, but would simultaneously co-operate more fully with COSEC.¹⁸⁶ This policy was adopted unanimously, although a minority, using Cold War terminology, was opposed to any contact with the "communist-dominated IUS".¹⁸⁷

The Cold War notwithstanding, in the long run associate membership of the IUS was doomed to failure because the political views of the person negotiating the contract were at odds with those of the majority in the NUSAS assembly. The radical pro-IUS Bob Hepple was appointed to attend the Moscow Council meeting only after the two liberal, pro-COSEC candidates preferred by the liberal pro-COSEC dominated assembly announced their non-availability.¹⁸⁸

In the beginning, from a western point of view, the signs boded well for the Moscow Council Meeting. IUS publications were reconciliatory in keeping with the post-Stalin thaw in the Soviet bloc. *World Student News*, the official organ of the IUS, even admitted that the IUS could be one-

182 BC 586 B1 Report of the Department of International Relations, 1955, p.13.

183 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1954, pp.38-39.

184 *World Student News* Vol.8 No.1, 1954, p.4.

185 BC 586 B1 Report of the Department of International Relations, 1955, p.17.

186 *SA Student* Vol.XX No.1, August 1954; *Nux* No.4, 23.8.1954; *Advance*, 22.7.1954.

187 *Advance*, 22.7.1954.

188 BC 586 A2.3: unsigned (J. Didcott) to Michael and Pat (O'Dowd), 30.8.1954.

sided.¹⁸⁹ The Yugoslav Union of Students was again invited to attend, the IUS claiming that it was a new organisation different to the SPYY,¹⁹⁰ which the Yugoslav leadership, however, denied.¹⁹¹ Other student unions were actively encouraged to apply for associated membership, and, in the case of NUSAS, this was facilitated by the payment of the transport costs to Moscow.¹⁹² However, in spite of these inducements, only South Africa and Israel responded.¹⁹³

The agreement negotiated by Bob Hepple on behalf of NUSAS was a contractual one, in other words, if any of its terms were broken by the IUS, NUSAS would disaffiliate. These terms included, inter alia, that NUSAS' participation in the IUS would be confined to practical activities only and that it dissociated itself from all policy decisions and pronouncements of the IUS. Probably as a precaution against Nationalist propaganda and, specifically because of its concern with the success of the Academic Freedom Campaign, it was agreed that the IUS would take no action in regard to events in South Africa. The IUS also agreed that it would make all reasonable attempts to verify the accuracy of any report it published on South Africa.¹⁹⁴ This was later modified and all reports on South Africa had first to be checked by NUSAS.

The NUSAS executive ratified the agreement but not Hepple's report of the Moscow Council meeting, as its positive tone contrasted too greatly with the reports of other western unions whose opinions NUSAS had come to trust.¹⁹⁵ These welcomed the changes in the IUS, but regretted that they had only followed those of the Soviet Union. Further, they believed that the changes were cosmetic and that the IUS revealed its old aggressive and intolerant colours when faced with western questions regarding, for example, the sources of its finances.¹⁹⁶

In spite of such reservations, a reading of the correspondence between NUSAS and the IUS during 1954 and 1955 suggests that the relationship between the two bodies was amicable and co-

189 *World Student News* Vol.8 No.7, 1955, pp.2-3.

190 BC 586 B1 B. Hepple: "Report of the NUSAS Delegate to the IXth Annual IUS Council Meeting held in the Lomonosov University, Moscow, 20th-27th August, 1954".

191 BC 586 W2: J. Didcott to J. Pelikan, 10.11.1954; J. Pelikan to J. Didcott, 14.12.1954.

192 BC 586 W2: IUS (Prague) to NUSAS (telegram), 23.7.1954. Evidently there was much competition between the IUS and the ISC as earlier that year the ISC had offered to pay the fares of NUSAS delegates to its meeting in Istanbul. The money would come from the CIA via one of its New York-based front organisations, the Foundation for Youth and Students. J. Kotek: PP.207-208.

193 BC 586 W2: Ted Levy: "Report of the University of the Witwatersrand SRC Observer to the 9th Annual IUS held in the Lomonosov University, Moscow, 20-27 August 1954".

194 BC 586 W2: Jiri Pelikan and Bob Hepple: "Associate Membership Agreement between the National Union of South African Students and the IUS", n.d., n.p., Moscow, August 1954.

195 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.13.

196 BC 586 B1 Annual Congress 1955: F. Copplestone and A. Barbrook: "Report of the NUS Observers to the Council Meeting of the International Union of Students, Moscow, 1954", London, 28.10.1954, p.16.

operative.¹⁹⁷ However, the increasingly difficult domestic political situation in which NUSAS found itself during 1955 meant that it could no longer afford its association with an organisation perceived to be communist. The Government rejected the findings of the Holloway Commission, thus making university apartheid a real possibility. NUSAS' mail was opened, one of the letters concerned having been sent by the IUS,¹⁹⁸ while at the request of the ASB,¹⁹⁹ IUS publications were banned.²⁰⁰ Moreover, visas were not granted to the COSEC RIC team²⁰¹ and the government also refused to renew the passport of the NUSAS delegate to the Birmingham ISC, seemingly because it initially thought that COSEC was a communist front.²⁰² However, linked to the passport incident, and of equal concern to NUSAS, was that the ASB (a numerically larger organisation than NUSAS) applied for co-operation with COSEC²⁰³ and attended the ISC in Birmingham in July 1955. This led NUSAS to believe that the denial of its delegate's passport was the Government's way of intimidating NUSAS and making sure that only its views were heard overseas.²⁰⁴

It was in this negative environment that the NUSAS assembly met in July 1955. Unheralded, the UCT delegates announced their proposal that NUSAS leave the IUS and apply for full status in COSEC. Although he supported disaffiliation, John Didcott, the co-sponsor of the 1954 bi-partisan agreement, refused to have anything to do with the behind-the-scenes plotting to effect this change.²⁰⁵ Ernie Wentzel maintained that the IUS had broken the contract by not publishing, to NUSAS' satisfaction, the terms of its dissociation from IUS policy. Furthermore, he claimed that the IUS remained a partisan organisation which COSEC, because of its structure and non-political nature, could never be, and lastly, that NUSAS could not afford to be associated with an "unsavoury" (meaning communist) body like the IUS. The radical left, essentially only Wits and Bantu Normal College, accused UCT of a breach of faith both in breaking the 1954 bi-partisan agreement and for ignoring its spirit by not informing or discussing with the pro-IUS group its intentions to alter the agreement. The left dismissed as trivial the alleged breaches of contract by the IUS, rejected the relevance of the partisanship of the IUS as NUSAS had in any case dissociated itself from its policy and, further, accused COSEC itself of bias in that it was anti-communist and had

197 See BC 586 W2 of 1954.

198 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, pp.50-51.

199 *Werda* Part 1, April 1955.

200 BC 586 B3 Executive Minutes 1954, p.9.

201 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4.7.1955.

202 BC 586 B1 Presidential Report 1955, Appendix B, p.5.

203 *Werda* Part 1, April 1955.

204 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4.7.1955.

205 Interview with Neville Rubin, 4.4.1997.

suspicious sources of income.²⁰⁶

The few waverers who wanted NUSAS to continue its bi-partisan policy were probably won over to disaffiliation by John Didcott. Using an argument which had been vaguely enunciated by NUSAS in the past, but had just recently been utilised by T.B. Davie, the principal of UCT, in an address to the SAIRR explaining the constant breakdown of talks between students at Afrikaans and English universities, Didcott argued that NUSAS was confusing the meaning of three concepts namely, "unity", "contact" and "co-operation". He believed that there could be no unity between organisations with fundamentally different aims.²⁰⁷ Elaborating on this in the *SA Student*, he argued that NUSAS was essentially a liberal, humanist organisation which attached great significance to values such as academic liberty, which the IUS (and the ASB) did not; secondly, he argued that NUSAS differed fundamentally with the IUS (and the ASB) over the relationship between education and the state.²⁰⁸ Dan Goldstein, the pro-IUS party to the bi-partisan agreement, denied that unity with the IUS was futile, saying that unity could be achieved without unanimity,²⁰⁹ thus harking back to the tactic employed by Tobias in moulding a politically heterogeneous English-speaking South African student population into one national union.

The NUSAS assembly rejected running international affairs along the lines of "unity without unanimity" and voted by 23 votes to 14 to confirm disaffiliation from the IUS and to participate fully in COSEC. This marked the end of the radical left in NUSAS. Dan Goldstein resigned the vice-presidency in protest against the betrayal of trust by the liberals.²¹⁰ The radical left put up no candidates for the executive,²¹¹ allowing, for the first time, its complete capture by liberals, many of whom were Catholics in the NCFS who through their ties with Pax Romana had played an important role in influencing NUSAS to sever its links with the IUS.²¹² One of the last acts of the radical Wits SRC before it was disbanded²¹³ was to dissociate itself from the NUSAS assembly decision, insisting it would maintain its relationship with the IUS and act as the agent for the *World Student News*.²¹⁴

206 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, pp.31-36; *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.1, August 1955. The pro-COSEC grouping did not believe that there was suspicious financial funding of COSEC. Interview with John Didcott, 18.11.1997.

207 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, pp.37-38.

208 *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.1, August 1955.

209 BC 586 B1 Assembly Minutes 1955, pp.38-39.

210 *SA Student* Vol.XXI No.1, August 1955.

211 Interview with Neville Rubin, 4.4.1997.

212 A. Egan: *The Politics of a South African Catholic Student Movement, 1960-1987*, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town (1991), pp.10-11.

213 See Chapter 5, p.127.

214 BC 586 0.6.1: Wits SRC Minutes, 9.8.1955.

The Wits Local NUSSAS committee adopted the SRC decision unanimously.²¹⁵

By 1956 all western unions had disaffiliated from the IUS and were grouped in the ISC, along with a large proportion of Third World unions. NUSEWNI had disaffiliated from the IUS in 1955²¹⁶ and had voted by a large majority that "the ISC was the best medium for achieving one world student community",²¹⁷ while, from the beginning, the IUS had alienated India by refusing to recognise as representative its largest student movement which was allied to Nehru. There were still, however, attempts by both western unions and the IUS to bring the two sides together.²¹⁸ The international climate of 1955 until the invasion of Hungary in 1956 was conducive to student co-operation, as, after Krushchev's visit to Belgrade, the IUS Council in Sofia in late 1955 admitted that it had been wrong about Yugoslavia. However, this admission came too late and also proved to the liberal leadership in NUSAS that the IUS was compliant to Soviet foreign policy, and that the IUS was ultimately responsible for the breakdown of world student unity which occurred because of the Yugoslav issue.²¹⁹

In conclusion, by the end of the period under discussion, the world student movement was divided into two camps, each student union, with the exception of NUSAS, essentially following the foreign policy of its national government. NUSAS, now firmly under liberal leadership and defining itself as a liberal, humanist organisation which attached great value to liberal rights (such as academic freedom) which were under threat in South Africa, found itself unable to pursue unity with an organisation such as the IUS which differed in its fundamental aims. Thus NUSAS threw in its lot with the ISC which shared its basic assumptions. This was a very different situation to that which had pertained at the end of the Second World War. Students then had believed that student unity, with the common aim of destroying fascism and building democracy, was not only possible but a necessity. Distance from the Second World War, the graduation of ex-servicepeople and the emergence of the Cold War and the implementation of apartheid, were all factors responsible for this change.

International relations and the Cold War had both a direct and indirect impact on NUSAS and other student organisations. In the former case, it led to disaffiliations from, and divisions within student organisations if no agreement could be reached on the direction of foreign policy, as in the

215 BC 586 0.6.2: Minutes of Wits Local NUSAS Committee, 25.8.1955.

216 BNUS changed its name to the National Union of Students of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NUSEWNI). BC 586 B1: Report of the Department of International Relations, p.17.

217 BC 586 A2.3: J. Didcott: "Council Meeting of the National Union of Students of England, Wales and Northern Ireland", n.d.

218 *ibid.*

disaffiliation of UNNE in 1954. Indirectly, international relations exacerbated the cleavages and divisions already existing in the national student union. At a time when a united front was needed against the National Party and the impending imposition of university apartheid, the Cold War hardened the position of both the anti-communist right and the pro-IUS radical left and split the liberals in two. The formulation of domestic policy became bitter and protracted as the different sides played out their international struggles in NUSAS forums. The most controversial debate within NUSAS since 1945, the degree to which NUSAS should involve itself in politics and oppose apartheid, was only resolved once the radical left had been defeated, when there was a thaw in the Cold War and once the majority in NUSAS accepted a common foreign policy, namely, unequivocal affiliation to the western COSEC and withdrawal from the eastern IUS. In 1957, according to Legassick, under the direction of its uncompromisingly liberal leadership, the restructuring of NUSAS begun by Tobias of bringing together the right and the left under a central liberal leadership, was finally completed with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man. This document became the new ideological basis for NUSAS' unequivocal entry into politics to oppose all aspects of apartheid, as had been demanded earlier by the ousted radical left.²²⁰

219 BC 586 A2.3: John (Didcott) to Roslyn, Toffee, Ernie and John H., 18.11.1955, p.5.

220 M. Legassick: "The National Union of South African Students: Ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities", Occasional Paper Number 4: *African Studies Center University of California Los Angeles*, Los Angeles (1967), pp.18,21,22-23,25,27-29.

CONCLUSION

The original, primary function of NUSAS, to improve white English and Afrikaans "race relations" and to cultivate a broad white South Africanism, was challenged by national political developments in the 1930s. The rise of an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism and the subsequent disaffiliation of all Afrikaans-medium universities and university colleges from the national union was the first blow to improved "race relations". The growth of liberalism and the desire of a small but significant minority within the NUSAS constituency to improve black-white relations (the new meaning of "race relations") and include black students, principally at the University College of Fort Hare in the national union, was incompatible with both the policy of segregation which underpinned South Africanism, as well as with Afrikaner nationalism. Thus, from 1934 to 1945, NUSAS policy fluctuated between, on the one hand, furthering South Africanism and sacrificing black membership, and on the other, moving towards a racially more inclusive organisation.

The end of the war witnessed the return to the universities of ex-servicepeople, who, because of their anti-fascist views, were instrumental in NUSAS adopting a recognisably liberal policy and in so doing, partially jettisoning segregation and broad South Africanism. Fort Hare thus joined NUSAS and consequently, the last Afrikaans-speaking branch disaffiliated in 1945.

In other ways too, the war marked a turning point in NUSAS policy. Since its foundation in 1924, NUSAS had described itself as a "non-political" organisation, meaning that it dissociated itself from "party politics" and more specifically, avoided aggravating the fragile relationship between the two white language groups. However, in 1940, NUSAS made its first foray into party politics when it supported the United Party's declaration of war against the Axis powers. It justified this by asserting that the NUSAS constitution upheld democracy, and thus its support of the war could not be construed as party political. At the conclusion of peace in 1945, NUSAS voted to oppose the efforts of the Opposition National Party to impose segregation at the mixed Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, again justifying this as "defending democracy in student affairs". This led to a radical left grouping, augmented by members of the newly affiliated black centres, demanding the removal of the social colour bar from NUSAS as well – the colour bar being upheld by whites across the political spectrum with the exception of the far left. The abolition of social segregation proved too much for the conservative, United Party-inclined student bodies at Rhodes and Durban and also to a large South Africanist group at UCT which felt that UCT's association with the increasingly radical NUSAS was an obstacle to rapprochement with the Afrikaans

universities which they were trying to effect. Thus, by August 1948, just three months after the National Party had seized power, all three centres had disaffiliated from NUSAS.

The election victory of the NP and its rapid implementation of apartheid in the early years of its rule had important consequences for NUSAS. Firstly, UCT, Durban and Rhodes rejoined NUSAS as they came to the realisation that the policy of South Africanism was rapidly becoming obsolete as the majority of Afrikaans-speaking students had come to identify with the National Party, exclusive Afrikaner nationalism and the rigid separation of races. Secondly, the implementation of apartheid, particularly the attempts to remove black students from Wits and UCT, led to the emergence of a liberal consensus within NUSAS, but on the other hand, sharpened the divisions between the liberal and radical left, which were further exacerbated by the establishment at national political level of the radical Congress of Democrats and the Liberal Party in 1953. Radicals and liberals disagreed about the degree to which NUSAS ought to concern itself with politics and the tactics employed to oppose apartheid. Liberals still maintained that NUSAS was a non-political organisation and as such, should only respond to measures which infringed on education. On the other hand, the radical left (which included militant politicised black students) believed that the distinction between "political" and "non-political" organisations was artificial and thus NUSAS should champion black political rights.

As the 1950s progressed and apartheid extended its tentacles into all areas of national life, forcing NUSAS to take a stand against issues only loosely connected to education, so it moved further along the road to becoming a fully-fledged political organisation. This was accelerated by the conscientisation which ensued from the Defiance Campaign and the Torch Commando and surrounding constitutional crisis of 1951-2.

The adoption by NUSAS of an increasingly political policy did not go far enough to satisfy the demands of the militantly African nationalist and/or anti-collaborationist student bodies at Fort Hare, Hewat and UNNE which disaffiliated in 1952 and 1954. Their absence from NUSAS forums was one of the factors leading to the defeat of the radical left in NUSAS and the subsequent liberal takeover of the national union in 1955.

As in other national unions, the Cold War was another factor leading to the sharpening of cleavages between the radical and liberal left and the ultimate defeat of the radicals. In the aftermath of the Second World War, and because of its desire for peace and international student co-operation, NUSAS joined the International Union of Students (IUS) based in Prague. The onset of the Cold

War, the identification of the IUS with the Eastern-bloc and the growing distance of a new student generation from the horrors of war, led to the progressive abandonment of liberals of the ideal of international student co-operation. This led to a protracted battle between liberals and the radical left over whether NUSAS, as a non-political organisation, could remain part of an organisation with a specifically political policy and ideological orientation. The increasing anti-communism of the liberal majority and the disaffiliation from NUSAS of the IUS-supporting centres of Fort Hare and UNNE, enabled the liberals to effect NUSAS' disaffiliation from the IUS in 1955 and substitute it with membership of the western-bloc Co-ordinating Secretariat, based in Leiden. In justifying their disaffiliation, the liberals argued that NUSAS, as a humanist liberal body, which held in high regard principles such as academic freedom and the separation of education and the state, could not seek unity with an organisation like the IUS which held fundamentally different values. The disaffiliation from the IUS in 1955 marked the defeat of the radical left and the takeover of the national union by the liberals.

However, the ideals for which the radicals fought, the transformation of NUSAS into a militant body to oppose apartheid, lived on in NUSAS but were propagated by the new, aggressively liberal leadership. Fort Hare returned to NUSAS in 1957, partly in response to the increasing likelihood of academic segregation being imposed on the universities, but also because of a change in NUSAS policy. Legassick has argued that the structural reform introduced by Tobias of uniting conservative white students and African nationalists under a moderate leadership in one organisation was only completed in 1957 when the liberal leadership gave "ideological expression" to this reform. They adopted the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, similar to the Freedom Charter which NUSAS had refused to adopt in 1955, and the principle, first enunciated in 1951, that the pursuit of a democratic education could not be divorced from the pursuit of a democratic society. During the 1960s, NUSAS was regarded as a radical organisation, but without any of the "unsavoury" associations of the radical left, with whom it would still have no dealings.

The experience of NUSAS mirrors that of the Liberal Party with whom it shared a common social base. In 1960, after much conflict within the party and much criticism by the radical left from outside it, the Liberal Party jettisoned its qualified franchise and specifically constitutional methods of opposition, and like the radical left, adopted a universal franchise and a policy of close co-operation with African nationalism.

How was NUSAS able to become a political organisation and survive when others like FOPS and SAUDS floundered and usually disappeared after a few years? NUSAS, like NUS was established

as a student benefits organisation, serving the needs of all students. To do so, it needed an efficient bureaucracy and financial resources provided by mass membership. In order to maintain this membership, both for financial reasons and for providing legitimacy for its political activities, NUSAS could only indulge in limited political activity. However, as the meaning of “race” and “non-political” changed over time, partly in response to National Party rule, NUSAS was able to become a fully- fledged political organisation. SAUDS and FOPS, on the other hand were purely political constructions, which had grown out of particular political circumstances at a particular time. When the urgency of that political issue had passed, or when a new student generation entered the universities, the organisation faded from the student landscape like most student activist movements usually do.

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