

Graduation Speech by Onkgopotse Tiro at the University of the North , 29 April 1972

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Vice Chancellor and gentlemen, allow me to start off by borrowing language from our Prime Minister, Mr. Vorster. Addressing the A. S. B [Afrikaanse Studenteond] Congress in June last year, Mr Vorster said, "No Black man has landed in trouble for fighting for what is legally his." Although I don't know how far true this is, I make this statement my launch pad.

R. D Briensmead, an American lay preacher says, "He who withholds the truth or debar men from motives of its expediency, is either a coward, a criminal or both." Therefore Mr. Chancellor I will try as much as possible to say nothing else but the truth. And to me "truth" means "practical reality." Addressing us on the occasion of the formal opening of this university Mr. [Cedric] Phatudi, a Lebowa territorial authority officer, said that in as much as there is American Education, there had to be Bantu Education. Ladies and gentlemen, I am conscientiously bound to differ with him. In America there is nothing like Negro Education, Red Indian Education, and White American Education. They have American Education common to all Americans. But in South Africa, we have Bantu Education, Indian Education, Coloured Education and European Education. We do not have a system of education common to all South Africans. What is there in European Education which is not good for the African? We want a system of education which is common to all South Africans.

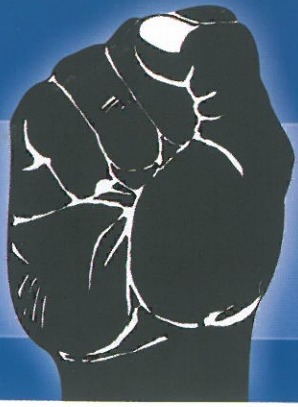
In theory Bantu Education gives our parents a say in our education but in practice the opposite is true. At this University, U. E D [University Education Diploma] students are forced to study Philosophy of Education through the medium of Afrikaans. When we want to know why, we are told that the senate has decided so. Apparently this senate is our parents. Time and again I ask myself: How do Black lecturers contribute to the administration of this University? For if you look at all the committees, they are predominantly White if not completely White. Here and there one finds two or three Africans who, in the opinion of students are White Black men. We have a Students' Dean without duties. We feel that if it is in any way necessary to have Students' Dean, we must elect our own Dean. We know people who can represent us.

The Advisory Council is said to be representing our parents. How can it represent them when they have not elected it? These people must of necessity please the man who appointed them. This Council consists of Chiefs who have



never been to University. How can they know the needs of students when they have not subjected to the same conditions. Those who have been to University have never studied Bantu Education. What authentic opinion can they express when they don't know how painful it is to study under a repugnant system of education? I wonder if this Advisory knows that a Black man has been most unceremoniously kicked out of the bookshop. Apparently, this is reserved for Whites. According to this policy, Van Schaiks has no right to run a bookshop here. A White member of the Administration has been given the meat contract to supply the University - a Black University. Those who amorously support the policy may say that there are no Black people to supply it. My answer to them is: why are they not able to supply the University? What is the cause? Is it not conveniently done that they are not in a position to supply these commodities?

White students are given vacation jobs at this university when there are students who could not get their results due to outstanding fees. Why does the Administration not give these jobs to these students? These White students have 11 universities where they can get vacation jobs. Does the Administration expect me to get a vacation job at the University of Pretoria? Right now, our parents have come all the way from their homes only to be locked outside. We are told that the hall is full. I do not accept the argument that



Long Live the Spirit of Tiro ... Long Live

there is no accommodation for them. In 1970, when the Administration wanted to accommodate everybody, a tent was put up and close-circuit television was installed. Front seats are given to people who cannot even cheer us. My father is seated there at the back. My dear people, shall we ever get a fair deal in this land? The land of our fathers. The system is failing. It is failing because even those recommended it strongly, as the only solution to racial problems in South Africa, fail to adhere to the letter and the spirit of the policy. According to the policy we expected Dr. Eiselen to decline Chancellorship in favour of a Black man. My dear parents, these are injustices no normal student can tolerate-no matter who he is and where he comes from.

In the light of what has been said above, the challenge to every Black graduate in this country lies in the fact that the guilt of all wrongful actions in South Africa, restriction without trial, repugnant legislation, expulsions from schools, rests on all those who do not actively dissociate themselves from and work for the eradication of the system breeding such evils. To those who wholeheartedly support the policy of apartheid I say: Do you think that the White minority can willingly commit political suicide by creating numerous states which might turn out to be hostile in the future? We Black graduates, by virtue of our age and academic standing are being called upon to bear greater responsibilities in the liberation of our people.

Our so-called leaders have become the bolts of the same machine which is crushing us as a nation. We have to go back to them and educate them. Times are changing and we should change with them. The magic story of human achievement gives irrefutable proof that as soon as nationalism is awakened among the intelligentsia, it becomes the vanguard in the struggle against alien rule. Of what use will be your education is not linked with the entire continent of Africa it is meaningless. Remember that Mrs. Suzman said, "There is one thing which the minister cannot do: He cannot ban ideas from men's minds."

In conclusion Mr. Chancellor I say: Let the Lord be praised, for the day shall come, when all shall be free to breathe the air of freedom which is theirs to breathe and when the day shall have come, no man, no matter how many tanks he has, will reverse the course of events.

God Bless you all.

