

# MASTERS OF THE NIGHT: THE CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION OF THE LOVEDALE RIOT OF 1946<sup>1</sup>

**T.R.H. White**  
*Department of History*  
*Vista University*  
*East Rand Campus*  
*Private Bag X025*  
*1500 Benoni*

**Meesters van die nag: die konteks en evolusie van die Lovedale opstand van 1946**

Hierdie artikel plaas die Lovedale opstand van 1946 in die breër konteks van die na-oorlogse malaise in Suid-Afrika. Die redes vir die opstand, beide kort- en langermyn, moet gesien word teen die agtergrond van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog en die swart mynwerkerstaking. Beide hierdie gebeurtenisse het sterk bande gehad met die krisis wat by Lovedale gedurende daardie jaar ontwikkel het. Spanning het sedert 1941 gebroei, maar het kritieke afmetings gedurende 1944 en 1945 aangeneem. Gebeure gedurende hierdie jare word in detail ondersoek. Vanaf 1946 het die situasie as gevolg van verskeie faktore versleg: droogte, die styging in voedselpriese, die besluit om te poog om klaggelde laag te hou en oudsoldate wat kom studeer het. Students was ook beïnvloed deur politieke aktiwiteite van hul tuisdistrikte. Nadat sekere faktore wat tot die opstand gelei het bespreek is, word die beleid van die bestuursraad om opstandige studente her toe te laat, ondersoek. In besonder word daar aan twee temas aandag gegee. Eerstens word die deelname van buite organisasies ondersoek en tweedens die konflik wat in die instelling se bestuursliggaam oor hertoelating ontwikkel het. Die artikel poog laastens om die strukturele swakhede van die sendinggenootskappe se aandeel in die onderwysstelsel aan te toon.

This article sets the Lovedale riot of 1946 within the broader context of the post-war malaise in South Africa. The causes of the riot, both short and long-term, must be seen against the background of the Second World War and the African miners' strike. Both these events had strong linkages to the crisis which developed at Lovedale during this year. Tensions had been simmering since 1941 but became more critical during 1944 and 1945. Events during these years are considered in detail. From 1946 the situation worsened because of a number of factors: drought, the increasing price of food, the decision to attempt to keep fees low, the fact that ex-soldiers now became students. Lovedale students were also deeply affected by political activities in their home districts. Having examined some of the factors

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which led to the riot this article analyses the policy adopted by the Institution's Governing Council in relation to the re-admission of those students implicated in the riot. In particular two major themes are analysed. Firstly the involvement of outside organisations in this event and secondly the conflict which developed within the Institution's governing structures over who should be re-admitted. By examining the Lovedale riot the article attempts to demonstrate the structural weaknesses within the missionary educational system.

During its long period of missionary control Lovedale Institution, in the eastern Cape, experienced two serious disturbances. The first occurred on 25 April 1920 during the Principalship of Dr James Henderson; the second took place on 7 August 1946 during the Principalship of Dr R.H.W. Shepherd. Each disturbance shattered the calm complacency of the missionary ideal as symbolised by Lovedale's imposing brick and stone buildings, leafy grounds and general aura of scholarship.

The 1946 disturbance has occasioned more historical interest. From a practical point of view it is extremely well documented; but also 1946 was a crucial year in the history of modern South Africa and of missionary control of African education in general. This essay attempts to trace the evolution of the crisis at Lovedale as it unfolded during 1946 and to set this against the political context of the Second World War and the African mineworkers strike, finally looking at the conflict that emerged over the policy of re-admitting students implicated in the riot.

## 1. The narrative

For a brief period during the night of 7 August 1946 the established order at Lovedale was overthrown, as some 200 male students went on the rampage throughout the Institution, causing damage to the value of £2 200. Violence was directed against those in authority. Missiles were hurled at the houses of J.W. Maquarrie, head of the Training School and Jack Benyon, head of the High School forcing the inmates to seek refuge within the passages. The accommodation of the prefects was also attacked. It appears that loss of life or serious injury was narrowly averted in more than one instance. Wild scenes of confrontation took place before the students fled up Black Hill overlooking Lovedale. There they waited until, at dawn, the small contingent of police arrested them. While being marched to the charge office the students sang "Onward Christian Soldiers", clearly indicating that they had fully imbibed the ethos of missionary protestantism. The next day and acting in defiance of Institutional authority the remaining students — 185 males and 275 females — marched to the Alice police station in support of those arrested.<sup>2</sup>

Writing to Shepherd on 11 August a committee of students announced, that it was "the unanimous decision of the majority of the students" that from the following day there would be a boycott of classes and that this would only be lifted on two conditions. Firstly, once the case against the arrested students had been concluded and that secondly Lovedale should give "her own decision as to the scholarly position of her criminals". But that once the civil

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2. Interviews, Prof John Benyon, Pietermaritzburg, 12 March 1996; Prof J.W. Maquarrie, Somerset West, 6 January 1991; Ruth White, Grahamstown, 15 August 1996; R.G.S. Makalima, Alice, 14 December 1990.

courts had handed down a verdict, the students should not be given a "double punishment by the Lovedale authorities".<sup>3</sup>

The next day, 12 August, Shepherd intimated that after having consulted the Education Department it had been decided to suspend classes with immediate effect.<sup>4</sup> Meeting in emergency session on 20 August, the Executive of the Lovedale Governing Council agreed that a Commission of Inquiry be set up to probe the question of culpability for the riot.<sup>5</sup> This commission was to be under the Chairmanship of Douglas Smit of the Native Affairs Commission, with A.H. Stander, Chief Inspector for Native Education and Rev Seth Mokitimi, Chaplain of Healdtown Institution, as its members. In the event the Institution was to remain closed for nine weeks while the Commission pondered the complexities which had led to this outburst.

## 2. Political context

The Lovedale Riot needs to be seen within the context of the political events of the 1940s, notably the Second World War and the African miner's strike. Prime Minister J.C. Smuts made a far-reaching decision when he took South Africa into the Second World War at the head of a divided nation and an uninspired cabinet. The War provided Smuts with yet another opportunity to involve himself in international affairs and he left the running of the country to Jan Hofmeyr whom he had brought back into the cabinet to be in charge of Finance and Education.<sup>6</sup> African opinion had generally accepted the need to support the war effort, especially after Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's 1941 campaign against the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

However, the unity which had been achieved by 1943, enabling Smuts's United Party coalition to consolidate its power base and so to return to Parliament with 110 seats<sup>8</sup>, was to be short lived. The War had raised expectations amongst Africans and they believed that a period of reconstruction would follow, leading to a better life for all based on egalitarianism. The Native's Representative Council (NRC) had believed that those "Africans, who had played such a noble part in the world conflict would not be forgotten".<sup>9</sup>

Yet after the War major change did not materialise and this engendered a mood of pessimism and dissatisfaction. Expressing this A.B. Xuma, President-General of the ANC told Smuts that

At present Pass Laws, restrictions, Government refusals of recognition of African Trade Unions, Land laws restrictions and other discriminations

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3. Rhodes University, Cory Library for Historical Research (Cory), MS 16, 453, The Students to R.H.W. Shepherd, 11 August 1946.

Cory, MS 16, 453, Intimation from Shepherd, 12 August 1946.

Cory, unclassified (uncl.), Governing Council Minutes Executive (GCM Ex), 20 August 1946.

See T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A modern history* (London, 1987), chapter 13.

On the changing attitudes of Africans towards the Second World War, see Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter (eds), *From protest to challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1964 vol 2* (Stanford, 1977), document 19, p. 155, document 20, p. 159, document 29b, p. 216 (African Claims), document 25a, pp. 181-184, document 26, pp. 192-194, document 61, pp. 339-340; see also L.W.F. Grundlingh, "The participation of South African Blacks in the Second World War" (Unpublished D.Litt et Phil thesis, Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, 1986), chapter 2.

8. T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A modern history*, p. 337.

9. Cited in Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for my people* (Cape Town, 1981), pp. 144-145.

imposed upon Africans in South Africa hold a future neither better nor happier.<sup>10</sup>

As Z.K. Matthews, Professor of Anthropology at Fort Hare University College, noted, "1946 was a momentous year in the history of race relations in South Africa",<sup>11</sup> a year in which the opportunity to move away from racial segregation was lost.

Rumblings of discontent began to be felt throughout the land. During the Second World War, African trade unionism had advanced rapidly owing largely to Communist Party influence. But War Measure 145 of January 1942 outlawed strikes by Africans forcing them to "accept arbitration of disputes at ministerial discretion." This provision was further strengthened by War Measure 1425 of 1945. The Smuts Government "sought to contain union resistance by prohibiting gatherings of more than twenty people on mine property".<sup>12</sup> The devastating drought of 1946 had resulted in a cut in mine rations and consequent violence. In April the African Mine Worker's Union (AMWU) claimed a basic wage of 10 shillings a day and the repeal of War Measure 1425. However, an impasse was reached because the Chamber of Mines would not recognise the Mineworker's Union. On 14 August over 70 000 African miners came out on strike. But by the end of the week the strike had been crushed by the police and 9 men had been killed and over 1 200 injured.

The claims of the mineworkers were part of the broader policy of the African National Congress (ANC), with the Youth League arguing that the strike was part of a national struggle.<sup>13</sup> The strike provided the immediate cause for the adjournment of the NRC whose Chairman of Caucus, Z.K. Matthews, argued that the Council be adjourned until the Government "undertake such a revision of its Native Policy with a view to making possible better co-operation between white and black in this country".<sup>14</sup> At this critical juncture, on 16 August, Smuts had left the country to attend the postponed peace negotiations in Paris and thence to represent South Africa at the United Nations. This callous disregard for a serious internal situation was interpreted as a snub towards black aspirations.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Evolving tensions

The Second World War was a much debated issue at both Lovedale and Fort Hare with student opinion generally opposed to African participation in the war.<sup>16</sup> Tensions appear to have been simmering since at least 1941 when B.K. Long, Member of Parliament and former editor of the *Cape Times*, visited Lovedale and Fort Hare, in the company of Fenner Solomon, Member of Parliament for the Fort Beaufort district. Neither was well received and when Solomon "had ventured to expatiate on the excellent work of coloured transport drivers with the armies in the north and to suggest that the Natives should take a more active

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10. University of the Witwatersrand; William Cullen Library (Cullen), Historical Papers, A.B. Xuma Papers, ABX 451016a, A.B. Xuma to J.C. Smuts, 16 October 1945.

Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for my people*, pp. 144.

T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A modern history*, pp. 341-342.

Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter (eds), *From protest to challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1964 vol 2*, document 35, pp. 261-262; document 54, pp. 318-319.

14. Cited in Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for my people*, pp. 154.

15. Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for my people*, p. 145.

Interview, R.G.S. Makalima, Alice, 14 December 1990.

part in similar work", he had come under sustained criticism from the Professor of Bantu Languages, D.D.T. Jabavu. Amidst "rapturous applause", Jabavu had reminded Long and Solomon that African opinion to the War differed to that of whites and that Fort Hare students would volunteer "as one man" if they were allowed to carry arms, but if not then they would have nothing to do with the War.<sup>17</sup>

Following the launch of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941 student opinion at Lovedale and Fort Hare — heavily sympathetic to the communist cause — accepted that Germany should be defeated at all costs.<sup>18</sup> However, this was but a temporary lull as serious tensions and frustrations within Lovedale began to develop. Jonathan Hyslop has shown that from the 1940s resources within the missionary network were no longer able to cope with the increasing demands of these schools.<sup>19</sup> Decreasing funds and increasing student numbers posed serious difficulties for large institutions, such as Lovedale.<sup>20</sup>

During 1944 and 1945 signs of unrest had been most evident amongst the Form V students of the High School. A secretive clique of senior students had set themselves up as an alternative power structure to the established prefect and Student Representative Council (SRC) systems. These students had styled themselves "The Board", a title taken from The Board of Guardians in Dicken's *Oliver Twist*. The Board, in the novel, had represented supreme authority and so the aim of these students was to compel others — both teachers and younger students - to bow to "The Board". Numerous acts of defiant insubordination had taken place. Graffiti urged students to strike, to reject the authority of the staff and the prefects, even to "kill Dr Shepherd". The Literary Society was used as a platform to attack those in authority and there was general subversion of established order.<sup>21</sup>

The entire High School refused to participate in the election of members of the SRC and at a meeting of the Literary Society a call was made for Shepherd to step down as its Chairman. In addition, there had been a rapid deterioration in the standard of work and it was expected that there would be a high failure rate in the Joint Matriculation Board examination.<sup>22</sup>

Towards the end of 1945 these incidents culminated in an article published in the student magazine *The Emblem*. The anonymous author claimed that the Lovedale

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17. Cory, MS 14, 712(7), Long to Shepherd, 28 May 1941.

18. Interview, R.G.S. Makalima, Alice, 14 December 1990.

19. Jonathan Hyslop, "Food, authority and politics": Student riots in South African schools 1945-1976", in Stephen Clingman (ed), *Regions and repertoires: Topics in South African politics and culture* (Johannesburg, 1991), pp. 84-115.

20. The only viable entity of the Lovedale Institution was the Lovedale Press, a printing and publishing house, described by Shepherd as "Lovedale's shining star".

Cory, Ms 16, 453, inquiry into the Causes of the Disturbance at Lovedale on 7 August, 1946 (Committee of Inquiry), 30 November 1946. This provides the most complete account of the unrest. Albany Museum, Smit Papers, 35/46, Record of Proceedings of Inquiry held at Lovedale on 23 October, 1946 into the Causes of Certain Disturbances that took place at the Lovedale Institution on the Night of 7 August, 1946 (Lovedale Inquiry Evidence). Wide ranging evidence was taken from staff, students and prominent Africans connected to education. A similar situation arose during the disturbances at Fort Hare in 1955. See T.R.H. White, "Another look at the Fort Hare disturbances of 1955", Fort Hare 80th Anniversary Seminar Series, University of Fort Hare, 3 September 1996, p. 23.

22. Cory, MS 16, 453, Inquiry Evidence, Ivan Bokwe, Prefect and President of the SRC, October 1946; Cory, uncl., Minutes of Lovedale Literary Society 1945-1946; Cory, MS 16, 453 B(2), Senate Circular to Parents, 31 October 1945; Cory, Lovedale Reports, 1945 and 1946 for examination results.

administration had become too decentralised and degenerate thus depriving students of freedom which in turn created in them a strong sense of radicalism. Instead of becoming an example of progress, Lovedale was an oppressive and tyrannical dictatorship. But, the article concluded, all students had been born free, man being "of one flesh, one aim, one desire and most of all of one Mighty God".<sup>23</sup>

The events of the night of 30 November 1945 further illustrates the culmination of these tensions. This was the evening of the Completer's Social which was proceeding smoothly until a Primary Higher student, Sanganmane Zotimba, used the occasion, in her address, to vent her political frustration on the educational establishment at Lovedale.<sup>24</sup> One of the most senior and able of the Lovedale students, Gerald Sihlali, followed, speaking on behalf of the senior students. In a skilful and emotive address he roundly criticised Lovedale's missionary establishment.<sup>25</sup> According to Shepherd's account, Sihlali had submitted a draft of his speech to representatives of the Entertainment Committee, the body responsible for planning the Completer's Social. However, he had departed from the text of his speech and for half an hour "he harangued the audience on the deficiencies of the Lovedale staff". Sihlali's speech was "a eulogy of Major Geddes" which was really "a veiled attack on Mr McGillivray".<sup>26</sup> From the time Geddes had died, Sihlali declared, the spirit of the Lovedale staff had deteriorated. In the Training School, he said, students were not allowed to question, but were threatened with being reported to the Education Department if they did. Sihlali ended by emphasising that there was no freedom of speech at Lovedale, the only positive aspect being the high quality of the sermons!<sup>27</sup>

Shepherd handled this highly volatile situation with extreme skill. By allowing Sihlali to finish speaking he permitted him to air the general grievances of the students openly and publicly. Shepherd was also quick to capitalise here noting that "The Board had been unmasked" and pointing out the contradiction in Sihlali's speech that "if there had been no freedom of speech at Lovedale, then why was a student allowed to speak at such length and so openly?".<sup>28</sup>

Two hours of debate with the senior members of the African staff took place on 3 December. Reluctantly they agreed that police be informed of the situation so that a patrol might be instituted for the remaining two days of term.<sup>29</sup> Shepherd has recorded that this decision was reached without any pressure on his part.<sup>30</sup> However, the African staff were adamant that the police should take no action apart from being present in Lovedale<sup>31</sup>

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Cory, MS 16, 453 B(2), Inside Lovedale: A student's opinion by T. Giqua (anonymous author) September 1945 [?]. This is a typescript. I have not been able to trace copies of *The Emblem*.

24. I have not been able to locate this speech.

25. Interviews, R.G.S. Makalima, Alice, 14 December 1990; Ruth White, Grahamstown, 15 August 1996. I have not been able to trace a copy of this speech.

26. Geddes was widely respected as the Boarding Master during the years 1920-1941 although he was something of a disciplinarian. He was succeeded by McGillivray.

27. Cory, MS 16, 453 B(2), Shepherd's Journal, 30 November 1945. I have only been able to trace extracts from this journal.

28. Cory, MS 16, 453 B(2), Shepherd's Journal, 30 November 1945, Interview, Ruth White, Grahamstown, 15 August 1996.

29. Cory, MA 16, 453 B(2), Shepherd's Journal, 30 November 1945; Interview, R.G.S. Makalima, 14 December 1990.

30. Cory, MS 16, 453E, Shepherd's Journal, 3 December 1945.

31. Interview, R.G.S. Makalima, Alice, 14 December 1990.

although they would be entitled to act if any attempt was made to "interfere with property or persons" within the Institution.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Evolution of a riot

The following year saw the crisis in African education heightening largely owing to the post-war malaise in South Africa. A major effect of the Second World War was the shortage of food as, in addition to the economic slump, the crippling drought gripped the entire country. Meeting in East London on 7 May 1946 the Association of Heads of Institutions called for the Education Department to extend the winter vacation, of the current year, by one week which would lessen the heavy demand on the limited water supplies.<sup>33</sup> One must bear in mind that Alice was a small town with a limited infrastructure having to sustain three large institutions: Lovedale, Fort Hare and the Lovedale Hospital. The small, but intensively managed Lovedale farm which supplied much of the Institution's food supply was heavily hit by the drought and so Lovedale had to look elsewhere for these requirements.<sup>34</sup> Yet the Department refused to be flexible on this issue.<sup>35</sup>

The price of food soared and missionary institutions, all of which operated on limited budgets found it increasingly difficult to cope with these added costs. At a meeting of the Association of Heads of Institutions on 30 July 1946, H.C.W. Williams, Rector of St Matthews Anglican College in Keiskammahoek, proposed that boarding fees be increased to £3 per annum from January 1947. However, this increase was opposed by Shepherd who believed that fees should only move up to £2. Ultimately a £3 annual increase was accepted. This would raise the minimum fee to £18 for Training Schools and £20 for Secondary and High Schools. This fee would also cover, at the discretion of each Institution, any extra fees — such as for medical attention or sport — normally charged as separate levies.<sup>36</sup>

The question of fees became crucial — especially in the post-War economic slump — to the crisis which was developing at Lovedale in late 1946. It also tells us something about Lovedale's controversial and influential Principal, R.H.W. Shepherd. His belief that education should accommodate all people rather than the elite who could afford it, made Shepherd a passionate proponent against increases in fees. With the financial cushion of the Lovedale Press<sup>37</sup> Shepherd was in a stronger position than other missionary institutions and he could argue vigorously to keep fees as low as possible.

Shepherd too had had to struggle in order to become educated because he came from a poor artisan background. By day he would work in a mill coming home to study late into the night by the light of a candle. Through dogged perseverance Shepherd had made considerable achievements, beginning his university training at Dundee University College in Scotland in October 1911 and then proceeding in October 1915 to New College, the Divinity Hall of the United Free Church of Scotland in the University of Edinburgh. This was the supreme achievement for any Scot and it had been gained through dint of hard labour and a brilliant academic record. Shepherd knew that if there had been stringent financial

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32. Cory, MS 16, 453 E, Shepherd's Journal, 3 December 1945.

33. Cory, MS 16, 295, Association of Heads of Institutions (AHI) Minutes, 7 May 1946.

34. Interview, Prof John Benyon, Pietermaritzburg, 12 March 1996.

35. Cory, MS 16, 295, AHI Minutes, 30 May 1946.

36. Cory, MS 16, 295, AHI Minutes, 30 July 1946.

37. See Tim White, "The Lovedale Press during the directorship of R.H.W. Shepherd, 1930-1955", in *English in Africa*, 19(2), October 1992, pp. 77-78.

barriers to educational progress, he would not have been able to achieve so well and he was generally sympathetic to those who were poor but nevertheless sought to break out of their poverty by becoming educated. His hope was, therefore, that Lovedale would accommodate all Africans regardless of their social positions.<sup>38</sup>

Z.K. Matthews was to argue that more money should be spent on improving the living conditions of the students and that this was "so important that if there is no other alternative but to raise the fees, the fees should be raised".<sup>39</sup> Low fees meant poor food described by one student as "scarcely edible".<sup>40</sup> Student unrest in missionary institutions was most commonly articulated in food protests, regarding both quality and quantity. Historically food has always been an important factor in popular revolt because the poor do not have ready access to abundant supplies of food. However, as Hyslop has pointed out, "food was often a normal cause which masked deeper meanings and issues" and so the students "the inferior quality of their food became a symbol of the forms of social domination they experienced in their daily lives".<sup>41</sup> It is necessary to emphasise the nexus between food and the oppressive nature of the society in which the students lived. Students did not readily distinguish between Institutional and State authority often perceiving one as merely an extension of the other. This view was often re-enforced by the apparently conservative nature of the Institutional authorities.

As the Second World War ended many ex-soldiers returned to complete their education. This had serious implications for the fine line of stability which existed in most institutions. The ex-soldiers were older, more experienced and more mature than the average student. They were, therefore, less likely to submit to the more formal control of school life. Ex-soldiers also brought with them the egalitarian notions which they had gained from their contact with Europe. They were bound to agitate for change — particularly as they became frustrated at their lack of academic performance — and they were able to exploit those within the Institution who were waiting to be guided into some form of action. It would be ex-soldiers who would lead the agitation for change within the Institution.

Because of the dramatic deterioration of relations between the students and the authorities, Shepherd had held an interview with Ivan Bokwe, Chairman of the SRC. What emerged, was that Bokwe had held a meeting between the Training School and the High School in order to ascertain views regarding the food, especially the sugar ration. The chief spokesmen were all ex-soldiers, Ebenezer Mali, Potlako Leballo and Andrew Moreoselle. All were considerably older than most other students. The major complaint was that the bread and sugar rations had been cut by fifty percent. And they wanted to know why this had been done without consulting the student body.<sup>42</sup>

While ex-soldiers were prominent amongst those who masterminded the riot, Cynthia Kros has produced detailed evidence to show that the leaders and most active participants were the older students, from the higher standards of the High School, students from the

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38. For background to Shepherd's life see G.C. Oosthuizen, *Shepherd of Lovedale* (Johannesburg, 1970), chapters 1-5.

39. Albany Museum, D.L. Smit Papers, 36/46, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence, Z.K. Matthews, October 1946.

40. Interview, Ruth White, Grahamstown, 15 August 1996.

41. Jonathan Hyslop, "Food, authority and politics": Student riots in South African schools 1945-1976", in Stephen Clingman (ed), *Regions and repertoires: Topics in South African politics and culture* (Johannesburg, 1991), p. 93.

42. Cory, MS 16, 453M, Shepherd Interview with Ivan Bokwe, 8 August 1946.

Training School or apprentices from the Vocational departments.<sup>43</sup> The sense of frustration ran deep and was felt by all students; the riot was not simply caused by the machinations of some ex-soldiers.

Kros has pointed to the fact that many of the leading students involved in the riot "were plugged into broader networks" in their home districts.<sup>44</sup> Students were, therefore, often politicised before coming to the institutions and as Terence Beard has noted they "were united by the single fact of their common identity as members of the dominated groups of the population".<sup>45</sup> But at the institutions there was also an inflow of political and left wing material, a point stressed by the Committee of Inquiry:

An abundance of roneoed circulars of the Communist type appear to reach Lovedale, and during the recent industrial trouble on the Witwatersrand Mines bulletins were received calling upon all Africans to support the cause of the African mineworker.<sup>46</sup>

Readily available publications included the *Guardian*, the *Torch* and *New Africa*, a left wing American publication.

South Africa's policy of racial segregation drew Africans into the web of politics from an early age and the harsh realities of life created within the African youth a premature maturity. Z.K. Matthews explained in his evidence to the Committee that

The African students are more interested in politics than other students would be. Even at the High School stage, the students take a keen interest in the political situation. They are compelled to do so by the situation as it affects the African.<sup>47</sup>

Jabavu drew attention to an important shift in the attitudes of the African youth when he told the Committee that

The real cause is that all present-day students grow up in homes, rural and urban, where the principle staple of conversation is the colour bar, unjust wages, lack of faith in the white man generally, and the whole gamut of anti-Native legislation and ill-treatment by public officers; whereas in my youth

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43. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular Reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), pp. 12, 18.

44. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), pp. 19-21.

45. T.V.R. Beard, "Background to student activities at the University College of Fort Hare", in Hendrik S. van der Merwe and David Welsh (eds), *Student perspectives on Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1972), p. 158.

46. Cory, MS 16, 453 A(4), Lovedale Inquiry, 30 November 1946. A similar finding was made by the Commission of Inquiry which probed the Chilembwe uprising of 1915. See George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African* (Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 93-94.

17. Albany Museum, D.L. Smit Papers, 36/46, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence, Z.K. Matthews, October 1946.

there was no such thing as the phrase "colour bar" (which came into circulation with the 1909 Union Act); instead we worshipped Queen Victoria and the Englishman's sense of fair play ...<sup>48</sup>

The post-war period was primarily responsible for this shift in attitudes. Douglas Smit concluded his Report into the Lovedale Riot by noting that the growth in the African middle class was "becoming of great political significance". African demands were becoming increasingly voluble; their views being expressed by influential organisations and publications.<sup>49</sup>

Alexander Kerr, Principal of Fort Hare since its inception in 1916, was later to identify the "post-war world wide revolution" as the major factor in student unrest.<sup>50</sup> Yet the missionary establishment of the 1940s had not anticipated these changes. As Matthews pointed out to the Committee, students coming to missionary institutions expected them to be free of racial prejudice. But racism did exist and this forced a re-think on the part of the students who saw these missionary institutions "simply as places where Europeans have come to work". Matthews criticised the fact that African staff were housed in inferior accommodation to that of their white colleagues, that wide disparities in salaries existed, that few Africans were ever considered for responsible posts and that the formidable attitude of some members of the white staff was "interpreted as being due to racial prejudice".<sup>51</sup> These factors created deeply imbedded grievances amongst both African staff and students. Matthews suggested that white staff be carefully screened before being employed and that Lovedale open its doors to a programme of affirmative action based on merit. He also believed that greater parental involvement in the affairs of the Institution should be encouraged; missionary paternalism aggravated and alienated Africans.<sup>52</sup>

When the students rioted on the night of 7 August, these were some of the grievances which caused them to act in a generally irrational manner. But we should not get too bogged down in looking solely at the complex network of factors which led to this riot. For as Kros has reminded us the Lovedale Riot also had a human face and she has dwelt at some length with the personal histories of a number of the students most actively caught up in these events.<sup>53</sup> Joel Bolnick has also made a detailed study of the fiery Leballo, one of the main instigators of the riot and in time to become a leading member of the Pan Africanist Congress.<sup>54</sup>

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48. Albany Museum, D.L. Smit Papers, 35/46, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence, D.D.T. Jabavu, October 1946.

49. Cory, MS 16, 453 A(4), Lovedale Inquiry, 30 November 1946.

50. T.R.H. White, "Another look at the Fort Hare disturbances of 1955", Fort Hare 80th Anniversary Seminar Series, University of Fort Hare, 3 September 1996, p. 26.

51. Albany Museum, D.L. Smit Papers, 35/46, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence, Z.K. Matthews, October 1946.

52. Albany Museum, D.L. Smit Papers, 35/46, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence, Z.K. Matthews, October 1946.

53. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular Reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), p. 17ff.

54. Joel Bolnick, "Potlako Leballo - the man who hurried to meet his destiny", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 19(3), 1991, pp. 413-442; see also Joel Bolnick, "Double cross: Potlako Leballo and the 1946 riots at Lovedale Missionary Institution", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990).

## 5. The question of re-admission

The Lovedale Riot had plunged the Institution into a major crisis; the assumptions and credibility of the entire system of missionary education<sup>55</sup> had been rudely opened up for question.<sup>56</sup> The Institution and its three governing bodies — the nationally based Governing Council, the Senate and the Discipline Committee both composed of staff members — now became embroiled in a growing conflict over how to handle the situation. As Lovedale was the country's fore-most missionary establishment, the riot and subsequent closure of the Institution was bound to send disturbed ripples into the wider society.

The major issue at stake centred on the question of the re-admittance or expulsion of the 193 students who had been arrested by the police and many of those students who had marched into Alice in their support. An attempt will be made here to unravel the conflict which developed around this issue.

A special meeting of Senate was held on 26 August 1946 so as to consider the question of the culpability of the students. In order to attempt to uncover the ringleaders it was accepted that a questionnaire be sent to all students and that none "should return until all replies had been received and sifted and that all students who would be allowed to return should be admitted at the same time". The Discipline Committee would then investigate the case of each student who, in some way or the other had participated in the riot.<sup>57</sup> The Senate was empowered in this matter because it was responsible for the internal functioning of the Institution. The Senate also believed that in taking such action it had the support of Lovedale's Governing Council, the highest decision-making body. On 20 August Senator Welsh, Vice-Chairman of the Executive of the Lovedale Governing Council had applauded the "efficiency, consideration and firmness" with which the riot had been handled and he had denounced with "stern disapproval the behaviour of the students".<sup>58</sup>

The brusqueness of the Senate's approach led to considerable alarm among the African community. The Transkei Parent-Teacher Association, while expressing its "sympathy with all those who were affected by the recent strike action at Lovedale", requested the Lovedale authorities "to re-open schools as soon as possible". It went further, demanding that "all the students, irrespective of whether or not they were implicated in the strike, be re-admitted".<sup>59</sup>

The riot was also viewed seriously by the Cape African Parents Association (CAPA) whose Chairman, Rev J.A. Calata, held great influence in the Cape Midlands. Calata was also President of the Cape branch of the ANC as well as being that organisation's Secretary-General, so his involvement carried considerable weight. Towards the end of September 1946 a conference of the CAPA, held in King William's Town, had called for the re-admission of students involved in disturbances.<sup>60</sup>

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See T.R.H. White, "Lovedale 1930-1955: The study of a missionary institution in its social, educational and political context" (Unpublished MA thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1987), chapters 1-3.

56. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), pp. 10-12.
57. Cory, unclassified, Senate Minutes, 26 August 1946.
58. Cory, unclassified, Executive of Governing Council Minutes, 20 August 1946.
59. Cory, Ms 16, 453 C, E.G. Jijana, General Secretary Transkei Parent-Teacher Association to Shepherd, 9 September 1946.
60. University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers, Calata Papers, File 1729, MSD 1, Resolutions of Conference of Parent Association, 28 September 1946.

Calata then set up a meeting of the CAPA, "at great sacrifice of time but I felt that it was important that we meet as early as possible and do what we can for Lovedale students".<sup>61</sup> He also had a personal motive for becoming involved as he had suffered severe anguish over the treatment of his daughter, Noluthando, the previous year, by the authorities of St Matthews Anglican College.<sup>62</sup> Three points emerged at this meeting: the CAPA would plead for the immediate return of all the students, totalling 257; the staff were not in a position to be the judges in this affair and the Principal should accept the responsibility of taking the students back.

Following this initiative, in October, the Transkei Organised Bodies (TOB) sent a deputation to Lovedale so as to assess the situation for themselves. This included its Vice President, J.K. Finca, and General Secretary, Govan Mbeki. The TOB embodied most African organisations in the Transkei. From its inception it had concerned itself with African education, particularly in an effort to establish healthy contacts between itself and the heads of African institutions.

The TOB deputation met with Shepherd whereupon they appealed for the re-opening of the institution and the re-admittance of all the students so that they could write the end of year examinations. However, this meeting deadlocked over the question of re-admittance. All that Shepherd was prepared to divulge was that "the Senate had already arranged to open the Institution on 9 October". Those not re-admitted would be kept out, "not in the interests of Lovedale but in the interest of Native Education which ... is a bigger concern". Such a decision would be taken after careful consideration because, as Shepherd said, "Lovedale was a highly organised place that was not ruled by a dictator".<sup>63</sup>

The question of who was to be re-admitted gave rise to an important principle: where did the final authority for the control of Lovedale lie? Having examined each individual case the Discipline Committee recommended to the Governing Council that 33 male students and 11 females be re-admitted and that 187 males and 10 females be excluded.<sup>64</sup>

At the November meeting of the Governing Council there was deadlock as 11 were in favour and 11 against so many exclusions. The Council then passed a resolution which stated that:

1. The Governing Council learns with appreciation of the long-continued efforts of the Discipline Committee to establish the innocence or culpability of those implicated in the August Disturbances.
2. The Council approves of the measures taken to bring home to all concerned the heinousness of rioting in Native educational institutions, remembering that the adoption of such methods is contrary to established order and the law-

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61. University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers, Calata Papers, File 1729, MS Dz, J.A. Calata to R. Bokwe and D.D.T. Jabavu, 11 October 1946.

62. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), pp. 3-4.

63. Cory, MS 16, 452 p, Minutes of Meeting of Transkei Organised Bodies Mission to Lovedale, October 1946; MS 16, 453 p, R.H.W. Shepherd to Govan Mbeki, 8 October 1946.

64. Cory, unclassified, Senate Minutes, 10 December 1946. I have not been able to trace the records of the Discipline Committee.

abiding nature of the Bantu, and is in consequence bringing disgrace on the African people.

3. The Council approves of the Discipline Committee's action in allowing to return to Lovedale those who have established that they were not deeply implicated.
4. The Council approves of the Committee's determination to discover the ringleaders and records its satisfaction that the identity of these is in so large measure established; also approves of the view that under no circumstances can these be re-admitted to Lovedale.
5. The Council approved of the Senate's action in not re-admitting for the rest of the Session those others who by conviction in the Magistrate's court or by other evidence appear to have identified themselves with acts of violence or insubordination.
6. The Council instructs the Senate to consider individually the re-admission on probation of those who are not established ringleaders, on solemn promise of good behaviour and that never again will they be associated with riotous or insubordinate conduct. Special consideration should be given to those who on account of youth or recent admission to the Institution may be deemed to have acted under the influence of others and that the opinion of the Education Department should be sought with regard to those in the final year of their teacher's course.<sup>65</sup>

This was an important resolution and it signalled a certain amount of conflict within the Lovedale establishment. Essentially, the Governing Council wanted to adopt a soft approach in the face of the Senate's hard line. The Senate asked the Council to reconsider the final paragraph of its resolution.<sup>66</sup> This split was basically between those who lived in Lovedale and had experienced the violence of the riot at first hand and those who remained outside the Institution.<sup>67</sup>

Shepherd appears to have sided with the Senate, informing the members of the Executive Committee of the Governing Council that the last paragraph of the resolution amounted to a vote of no confidence in the Discipline Committee which consisted of the Senate's most able members. In any case on 12 December the Senate had resolved that the "recommendations of the Discipline Committee be confirmed" and that the Governing Council's final resolution be referred back to it for its re-consideration.<sup>68</sup>

Alexander Kerr writing to Shepherd on 17 December noted that a divergence of opinion had developed between the Discipline Committee and the Governing Council as to the policy of re-admitting the students. He pointed out that as the Governing Council made Lovedale policy, the Discipline Committee should re-examine its recommendations for the

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65. Cory, unclassified, General Council Minutes, November 1946; Senate Minutes, 10 December 1946.

66. Cory, unclassified, Senate Minutes, 10 December 1946.

67. Interview, Prof John Benyon, Pietermaritzburg, 12 March 1996; Albany Museum, D.L. Smit Papers, 35/46, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence. This evidence brings this point home most clearly.

68. Cory, unclassified, Senate Minutes, 12 December 1946.

expulsion of the 197 students. Kerr was emphatic that the Governing Council resolution should be read as an instruction to those responsible for determining the admissions for 1947. This policy was one of maximum re-admission, not maximum expulsion. Only those students who had been proved to be ringleaders or who had been unsatisfactory would be permanently excluded. All others were to be re-admitted either immediately or after a period of suspension.<sup>69</sup>

In promoting the Governing Council's more placatory stance, Kerr was supported by R.W. Kilgour, the Lovedale Chaplain, who stated that the Lovedale constitution, approved by the Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland, made it clear that

The Institution shall be under the control of a Governing Council      The  
Council shall appoint or nominate for appointment the staff ...<sup>70</sup>

Having issued an instruction to the Senate, the Governing Council should be obeyed and those members of staff who could not accept its authority should be asked to re-consider their positions. Alternatively the Council should act against those who defied its authority.<sup>71</sup> The impasse that had developed had come about because of the democratic nature of the Council. The "basis of representation on the Governing Council", wrote Kerr, "is in need of review" as

There is too great a representation of the staff, who if they arrange it in caucus, can exercise undue influence in matters which concern the staff. I have seen this happen in making appointments.<sup>72</sup>

The policy adopted on re-admitting students after the 1920 Riot provides an interesting parallel. Then Henderson had set a number of conditions which students would have to agree to before being re-admitted to Lovedale. Students who were not ringleaders and whose conduct and character had been favourable, would be considered for re-admission. However, students should offer the Institution some form of reparation for the destruction that had been caused. In any case, those re-admitted would be on probation and would need to show that they had reformed themselves.<sup>73</sup>

With time, however, Henderson's attitude seemed to harden. He wrote to W.J. Viljoen, Superintendent General of Education in the Cape, that the incidence of rioting in African institutions needed to be examined seriously. He believed that steps should be taken which would "render a repetition of these incidents so fraught with serious consequences to those taking part in them that they will, after perhaps one more trial of strength, come to an end". Henderson maintained that leniency and the fact that the penalties generally affected the parents, meant that these incidents were "lightly regarded by the student body". Rioting would only end when it was known by each student that involvement would mean immediate

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69. Cory, MS 16, 453 A(s), Kerr to Shepherd, 17 December 1946.

70. Cited in T.R.H. White, "Lovedale 1930-1955: The study of a missionary institution in its social, educational and political context" (Unpublished MA thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1987), p. 225.

71. Cory, MS 16, 453 A(5), R.W. Kilgour to Shepherd, 23 December 1946; Albany Museum, 35/46, D.L. Smit Papers, Lovedale Inquiry Evidence, R.W. Kilgour, October 1946.

72. Cory, PR4088, Kerr to J.W.C. Dougall, 12 January 1947.

73. Cory, MS 16, 453(a), Henderson to Parents, Circular Letter, 2 July 1920.

dismissal. It was also necessary, Henderson maintained, for all institutions to stand united against such actions. No students dismissed for involvement in a riot should be accepted by any of them.<sup>74</sup>

Shepherd it seems, took his cue from Henderson's later analysis of student rioting;<sup>75</sup> whereas Kerr stuck to Henderson's initial approach. Essentially this was because the essence of missionary endeavour was to "salvage" as many individuals as possible. His judgement was that where repentance or sincere regret could be presumed, leniency in the treatment of youth was always justified and that the risks involved were worthwhile.<sup>76</sup>

The Lovedale Riot left a sense of despondency within the missionary fold; a general feeling that the African had legitimate grievances but was not yet ready for the responsibilities of nationhood. A.W. Wilkie, Shepherd's predecessor as Lovedale Principal and a missionary with vast experience in Africa, commented:

What infinite patience one needs in these days with our Bantu brethren. Recent legislation has cut them to the heart. I sometimes wonder now on reflection whether I really made sufficient allowance for the deep injury which they felt done to their people by the whole trend of that legislation. I could set over against that the fact that administratively there have been spectacular advances in the last few years. But it must be terribly hard for even the best of them to take a 'balanced view' when by the law of the land they are deprived of one privilege after another and in economic matters not even recognised as employees — just 'things' ...<sup>77</sup>

In a very suggestive letter Kerr added that the

Lovedale disturbances are symptoms, testifying to a wide-spread upsurge of dissatisfaction with conditions on the part of educated and half-educated non European peoples ... all over the world. We of the more liberal-minded group are divided between a desire to see such advances made as will allay this sense of dissatisfaction, and the knowledge that as yet only a minority of the non European group is capable of accepting the responsibilities entailed by the concession of greater privileges. The only course open to us is to do our immediate job ... which, in the missionary sense, is to prepare our people for these responsibilities when the opportunity of exercising them shall arise, and

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74. Cory, MS 16, 453, Henderson to Viljoen, 27 February 1929; *South African Outlook*, 1 February 1947; and R.H.W. Shepherd, *Lovedale, South Africa: The story of a century 1841-1941* (Lovedale, 1941), chapter 6. There is little extant information on the 1920 Riot. It is not mentioned in either the Governing Council or Senate Minutes. There is one slender volume in the central offices of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Umtata. This contains only the names and particulars of students involved. There is also a slender file of correspondence in the Cory Library, Rhodes University.
75. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), pp. 8-9.
76. Cory, MS 16, 453 A(1), Kerr to Shepherd, 27 January 1947.
77. Cited in C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), p. 10.

meanwhile to remember that our enterprise is missionary, and to, discount such manifestations of impatience on the part of our proteges as indicate that they are still in need of our guidance.<sup>78</sup>

Shepherd felt that because of his own large role in the Institution, his position had been brought into question. He seriously considered resigning and put this option to Neil Macvicar, the medical missionary and to Alexander Kerr. Each sought to dissuade him from such an abrupt step.<sup>79</sup> But Shepherd, having struggled through poverty himself, was unable to understand the real nature of the Lovedale Riot and thus he could not endorse the paternalistically liberal views of Wilkie or Kerr.

Shepherd's was a complex personality and in a large measure this was certainly a contributing factor to the events of 1946. His brilliant intellect was buried in a strongly authoritarian and self-willed character that was nevertheless lightened by a subtle sense of humour, fairness and great courage. No fundamentalist, he nevertheless expected the Lovedale staff to attend chapel twice a Sunday and did not look favourably on absenteeism at these services.<sup>80</sup> Most historians have been harsh in their assessment of Shepherd, one going so far as to condemn his "twenty-year reign of terror at Lovedale".<sup>81</sup> Yet Shepherd was equally harsh on himself and he appears to have believed, during this period, that he was an obstacle to the return of normality at Lovedale.<sup>82</sup> He argued that the tendency towards embarrassed silence should be ended because the time had passed

for individual institutions to seek to hush up or minimise their outbreaks. A broad searchlight should be directed on the situation, with a view to exposing causes and applying remedies.<sup>83</sup>

And in the end it was Shepherd who hammered together a compromise which broke the impasse between the Governing Council and the Senate and its Discipline Committee. Shepherd proposed that the number of students not to be re-admitted would total 87. This number had been reached after a lengthy process of investigation. The position regarding numbers and categories was that 152 male students had been convicted in the Alice court; 77 were guilty of offences which related to their march in support of those arrested and 27 females had been insubordinate. This was a total of 256 students. Of these 49 had been allowed to return in 1946: 35 males and 14 females. This left 207 cases still to be dealt with. Of the 207 students, the following picture could be drawn: 20 had completed their courses; 25 had not responded to the questionnaire or subsequent letters; 6 had given notice that they would not return and 28 had applied for certificates to go elsewhere. This was a total of 79 and, therefore, reduced the number of cases to a residue of 128. After having

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78. Cory, PR 4088, Kerr to Dougall, 12 January 1947.

79. Cory, MS 74, 713 (J), Macvicar to Shepherd, 21 September 1946; PR 4088, Kerr to Dougall, 12 January 1947.

80. Interviews, Prof John Benyon, Pietermaritzburg, 12 March 1996; Prof J.T. Davidson, Alice, 8 January 1987; Prof J.W. Maquarrie, Somerset West, 6 January 1991; Ruth White, Grahamstown, 15 August 1996.

81. J.B. Peires, *The house of Phalo* (Johannesburg, 1981), p. 176.

82. Cory, MS 74, 713 (J), Macvicar to Shepherd, 21 September 1946; Interview, Prof J.W. Maquarrie, Somerset West, 6 January 1991.

83. *South African Outlook*, 2 September 1946, p. 142.

held consultations regarding character and quality, he had proposed to re-admit another 41 students. This would mean that a total of 87 students would not be allowed to return.<sup>84</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Shepherd's compromise brought to a close this tortured episode which had been set in motion on the night of 7 August 1946 and for his remaining nine years, as Principal of Lovedale, there were no further disturbances.

By comparison with later disturbances in black education, the Lovedale Riot was a comparatively minor affair, yet the "Black Hill generation", as Cynthia Kros has termed the rioters,<sup>85</sup> was responding to a closed society which was not making any effort to accommodate their needs. The political motive — not yet fully matured perhaps — was nevertheless the driving force behind the Lovedale Riot.

This essay has attempted to provide a very sketchy examination of the climate prevailing in the country which encouraged Lovedale students to riot. The grievances within the Institution were generally part of this larger context and the breath of change being felt throughout the country and the world. Finally the Lovedale Riot had an impact on the internal functioning of the Institution and an attempt has been made to develop this theme as well. Because R.H.W. Shepherd has loomed so large in the modern history of the South African missionary movement some time has been devoted to examining his development as a person as well as his character.

The Lovedale Riot had demonstrated structural weaknesses within the missionary educational system. It is a tragedy that no serious attempt was made, in the years ahead, to correct this situation. Instead African education was left to descend into a major crisis, the effects of which are still with us.

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84. Cory, unclassified, Senate Minutes, 13 February 1947.

85. C.J. Kros, "They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth Walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale", (African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992), p. 22.