

John Vorster and the Extension of University Education Act, 1959

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Abstract

In February 1959, four months after his appointment as deputy minister, Balthazar Johannes (John) Vorster introduced the controversial Extension of University Education Bill in the House of Assembly. University apartheid had been under consideration in the National Party government for more than a decade. The 1959 bill provided for the exclusion of 'non-European' students from the existing universities and their admission to separate university colleges for the different officially designated ethnic groups. Liberals rejected the bill as a threat to academic freedom and university autonomy. The Opposition opposed the bill in all its parliamentary stages. This article analyses Vorster's performance in these debates. It was a severe test for his ability, but he demonstrated his talent as speaker and debater, confidently formulating his arguments in favour of the bill and standing his ground against the Opposition. The parliamentary newspaper reporters were impressed by his contribution to the debates. Vorster's leadership position in the National Party was strengthened. The debates provided an early stepping-stone in his political career, that launched him on his way to becoming Minister of Justice, prime minister, and state president.

Keywords: B.J. Vorster; National Party; United Party; Extension of University Education Bill; House of Assembly; university apartheid; academic freedom; university autonomy.

Opsomming

In Februarie 1959, vier maande ná sy aanstelling as adjunk-minister, het Balthazar Johannes (John) Vorster die omstrede Wetsontwerp op die Uitbreiding van Universiteitsopleiding in die Volksraad ingedien. Universiteitsapartheid was toe reeds

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vir meer as 'n dekade onder oorweging in die Nasionale Partyregering. Die 1959-wetsontwerp het voorsiening gemaak vir die uitsluiting van 'nie-blanke' studente van die bestaande universiteite en hul toelating tot afsonderlike universiteitskolleges vir die onderskeie amptelik aangewese etniese groepe. Liberale het die wetsontwerp as 'n bedreiging vir akademiese vryheid en univeristeitsoutonomie verwerp. Die Opposisie het die wetsontwerp in al die parlementêre stadia beveg. Hierdie artikel ontleed Vorster se vertoning in hierdie debatte. Dit was 'n uiterste toets van sy vermoëns, maar hy het sy talent as spreker en debatteerder ten toon gestel, sy argumente met oortuiging geformuleer en vas gestaan teen die Opposisie. Parlementêre koerantverslaggewers was beïndruk met sy vertoning. Vorster se leierskapsposisie in die Nasionale Party is versterk. Die debatte was 'n vroeë trappie in sy loopbaan op pad na die topposisies van Minister van Justisie, Eerste Minister en Staatspresident.

Sleutelwoorde: B.J. Vorster; Nasionale Party; Verenigde Party; Wet op die Uitbreiding van Universiteitsonderwys; Volksraad; universiteitsapartheid; akademiese vryheid; universiteitsoutonomie.

Introduction

When Dr H.F. Verwoerd became prime minister of the National Party government in September 1958, he enlarged the Cabinet and decided to appoint deputy ministers. The deputy ministers were not members of the Cabinet. Their task was to assist ministers to perform their departmental duties.¹ Among the first group of deputy ministers announced by Verwoerd in October 1958, was Balthazar Johannes (John) Vorster. Verwoerd appointed Vorster as Deputy Minister of Education, Arts and Science and of Social Welfare and Pensions. He and the other new ministers and deputy ministers were confirmed in their offices by Governor-General E.G. Jansen, on 23 October 1958.²

Vorster did not have the luxury of easing into his new office. At the time of his appointment the wife of his minister, J.J. Serfontein, was seriously ill. For this reason, Vorster immediately had to handle certain obligations, which were formally the

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1. For Verwoerd's announcement and motivation, see Union of South Africa, Debates of the House of Assembly (hereafter DHA), volume 98, 3 September 1958, column 2801 and 22 September 1958, column 4434ff. For the relevant legislative measures, see Union of South Africa, *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1958*, South Africa Act Further Amendment Act, Act no. 49 of 1958, 429-431. Throughout this article, offensive racial terminology used at the time is cited: the use of such terms is regretted but necessary for historical accuracy.
 2. *The Star*, 23 and 24 October 1958. For the official notice of Vorster's appointment as deputy minister, see Union of South Africa, *Government Gazette of the Union of South Africa*, vol. CXCIV, no. 6134, Government notice no. 1611, 31 October 1958, 5-6.

minister's responsibility.³ Only four months after his appointment as deputy minister, during the first parliamentary session in his new office, he had to introduce, on behalf of Serfontein, the most important bill he had to deal with in his deputy ministry, the controversial Extension of University Education Bill.

This article analyses Vorster's performance as politician and speaker in the debates on the Extension of University Education Bill during the 1959 parliamentary session and assesses its significance in the development of his career as National Party politician who, in 1966, would become Verwoerd's successor as prime minister.

Vorster's Position in the National Party in 1959

There could be no doubt about John Vorster's allegiance to Afrikaner nationalism, which was nurtured during his childhood and student years. He was born in 1915 in the Eastern Cape to parents who were ardent supporters of General J.B.M. Hertzog's National Party. From a young age he showed an interest in politics. In the 1930s he studied law at Stellenbosch University, a stronghold of Afrikaner nationalism. Dr D.F. Malan did not follow Hertzog into fusion with Jan Smuts's South African Party to form the United Party in 1934, but instead became the leader of the 'Purified' National Party, that served as the official Opposition in Parliament. Vorster remained loyal to the National Party and accepted Malan as his leader. At Stellenbosch, Vorster joined the Junior National Party and became chairman of the university branch. In 1938, he was the student organiser for the National Party candidate, Bruckner de Villiers, in a parliamentary by-election in Stellenbosch.⁴

The late 1930s and early 1940s was a period of Afrikaner dissension in which Vorster also became embroiled. In 1938 he joined tens of thousands of fervent Afrikaners in the celebration of the Great Trek centenary which resulted in an emotional upsurge of Afrikaner nationalism. He was present in Cape Town in August 1938 when the ox-wagons participating in the symbolic trek set off on their journey through the country. The next year he became a member of the Ossewabrandwag (OB), the organisation that was established to perpetuate the spirit of 1938 among Afrikaners. When he moved to Port Elizabeth to join a law firm as an attorney, Vorster was active in both the National Party and OB in that city. He was elevated to the rank of general and became the leader of the OB in the Eastern Cape. When a split occurred between the National Party and the OB, Prime Minister D.F. Malan set an ultimatum to his party's members to quit or lose their National Party membership. Vorster decided to remain loyal to the leader of the OB, Dr J.F.J. (Hans) van Rensburg, and had to leave the National Party. He was never a member of the Stormjaers, the

3. J. D'Oliveira, *Vorster: The Man* (Johannesburg: Ernest Stanton Publishers, 1977), 116.

4. For details about Vorster's childhood and his activities as a student in Stellenbosch, see D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 9-43.

extremist paramilitary organisation associated with the OB, that performed acts of sabotage in protest against the Smuts government's war policy, but was nevertheless arrested and interned at Koffiefontein for fourteen months.⁵

Vorster's political opponents later alleged that his involvement in the OB demonstrated his pro-Nazi leanings. Vorster denied this vehemently, arguing that he had never been a Nazi supporter. There is no evidence that he expressed support for Hitler or the Nazi party when he was a member of the OB, but at the time, he was critical of the parliamentary system as a vehicle for the advancement of Afrikaner interests.⁶

After his release from the internment camp, Vorster and his family moved to Brakpan, where he continued his career as legal practitioner. Still barred from National Party membership, he joined Klasie Havenga's Afrikaner Party as an avenue back into Afrikaner politics. In terms of an election agreement between Malan and Havenga, he could not be an Afrikaner Party candidate in the 1948 general election, and he participated as an independent candidate in Brakpan. He lost by four votes against Alf Trollip, the United Party candidate.⁷ In 1951 the National Party and the Afrikaner Party merged. After a severance of more than a decade, Vorster was a member of the National Party once again.⁸ He swore allegiance to the party and recommitted himself to the parliamentary system.

As National Party candidate, Vorster won in the Nigel constituency in the 1953 election.⁹ His childhood dream of becoming a Member of Parliament (MP) was realised. As a backbencher in his first term as MP, Vorster served in almost twenty select committees, thus acquiring experience in parliamentary procedure and a variety of policy issues.¹⁰ His hard work in parliamentary committees and in his

5. For details on Vorster's role in the Ossewabrandwag, see D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 44-103; H.O. Terblanche, *John Vorster: OB-Generaal en Afrikanervegter* (Roodepoort: CUM-Boeke, 1983), 71-170.

6. Terblanche, *John Vorster*, 121, 123; J.P.C. Mostert, 'Die Vormingsjare en Vroeë Politieke Loopbaan van B.J. Vorster tot 1958' (MA dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, 1980), 42.

7. For Vorster's recollections, see University of the Free State (UFS), Archive for Contemporary Affairs (hereafter ARCA), PV 193 Institute for Contemporary History Collection, K 307-8, Cassette recording of interview with Vorster, 12 March 1980. See also J.M. Wassermann, 'Die Twis oor die Aanwysing van Afrikanerparty-kandidate voor die 1948-Verkiesing met Spesifieke Verwysing na die Kandidature van John Vorster en Louis Bootha', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 34, 3 (December 2009), 1-16; Mostert, 'Die Vormingsjare en Vroeë Politieke Loopbaan', 93-128; D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 107-10.

8. His membership certificate can be found in ARCA, PV 614 M.S. (Tini) Vorster Collection, Scrapbook 0.

9. *Die Vaderland*, 16 and 17 April 1953; B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre Verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976* (Pretoria: Aktuele Publikasies, 1977), 325; D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 111-112.

10. For details, see Mostert, 'Die Vormingsjare en Vroeë Politieke Loopbaan', 173-174.

constituency during parliamentary recess periods, did not go unnoticed by the National Party caucus and party leadership. J.G. (Hans) Strijdom, who succeeded Malan in 1954 as party leader and prime minister, praised him for doing ‘more than his duty’.¹¹ It was significant that Strijdom, who in 1948 had been one of the NP leaders who blocked the Afrikaner Party's attempt to put up Vorster as their parliamentary candidate in the Brakpan constituency because of his OB membership, was so positive about Vorster's performance as an MP. Through his diligence and party loyalty, Vorster had clearly won the attention and support of the party leadership.

Vorster's mettle as parliamentarian was tested in the 1950s, a stormy period in South African political history. During the first decade of rule by the apartheid government, seething emotions marked parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. Black resistance, led by the African National Congress (ANC), became more militant and was met in turn by stronger government repression.¹² In Parliament, the United Party opposition failed to block the introduction of strict political and social apartheid through a barrage of apartheid legislation.¹³ Neither the parliamentary nor the extra-parliamentary opposition could stem the tide of systematic racial separation in all spheres. Under successive prime ministers – Malan, Strijdom and Verwoerd – the National Party consolidated its political power and marched towards the realisation of the vision of comprehensive apartheid.¹⁴ Vorster, as National Party

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11. ARCA, PV 193, K 253, Cassette recording of interview with H.P. Marnitz, 8 August 1978.
 12. Developments in African resistance politics during the 1950s are covered in many publications, including T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London: Longman Higher Education, 1983); P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress, 1912-1952* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1971); G. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1979); T. Karis and G. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), Volumes 2 and 3.
 13. White opposition politics in the 1950s can be traced, among others, in the following works. M. Ballinger, *From Union to Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation* (Cape Town: Juta, 1969); L. Marquard, *Liberalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1965); G. Carter, *The Politics of Inequality* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977); J. Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); R. Vigne, *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1997); and J. Strangways-Booth, *A Cricket in the Thorntree: Helen Suzman and the Progressive Party of South Africa* (London: Hutchinson, 1976).
 14. For assessments from different perspectives of political policy under Malan, Strijdom and Verwoerd, see M.P.A. Malan, *Die Nasionale Party van Suid-Afrika, 1914-1964: Sy Stryd en sy Prestasies* (Elsiesrivier: Nasionale Handelsdrukkery, 1964); D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1996); D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-61: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); B.M. Schoeman, *Van Malan tot Verwoerd* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1973); D.F. Malan, *Afrikaner-*

MP, was part of this relentless march. He participated in parliamentary debates on a variety of topics and carefully toed the party line. His views on issues such as the relationship between Afrikaans and English-speaking whites and the granting of special powers to the police and the courts to nip communism and other threats to state security in the bud, changed very little throughout his political career.¹⁵

With his conservative Afrikaner nationalist background, Vorster was a firm believer in the government's apartheid policy. He often expressed himself on race relations. In most of his public speeches – his parliamentary speeches as well as those at party political rallies of the National Party – Vorster made a point of comparing the racial policies of the United Party and the National Party. He was totally opposed to liberal views in favour of racial integration and assimilation and rejected the UP's multi-racial approach to race relations out of hand. He argued that the UP was softening its supporters to the idea of equal political rights for black people.¹⁶ His view was that the UP's policies would eventually lead to '*gelykstelling*', absolute equality, in all spheres of society between white and black in South Africa. This, in his opinion, would culminate in the subjugation of the white minority.

In debating racial issues, Vorster used typical conservative thin-end-of-the-wedge arguments: if black and coloured people were to be given more say in trade unions or in Parliament, they would, because of their numerical superiority, eventually take control and the whites would be doomed. The NP's 'multi-nationalism', on the other hand, according to Vorster, took cognisance of the reality of the diversity of the South African population. Apartheid, he argued, was not intended to oppress other groups, but granted them the same opportunities and facilities as whites, albeit separately in their 'own communities'. According to him, the Afrikaners and their churches were the group that had indeed done something

volkseenheid en my Ervarings op die Pad Daarheen (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1959); H.B. Thom, *D.F. Malan* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1980); G. Coetsee, *Hans Strijdom: Lewensloop en Beleid van Suid-Afrika se Vyfde Premier* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1958); M.C. Botha, *Die Beleidnalatenskap van Dr. H.F. Verwoerd* (Pretoria: Sabra, 1977); A. Hepple, *Verwoerd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967); H. Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid: H.F. Verwoerd: An Appraisal* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1980); G.D. Scholtz, *Dr. Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, 1901-1966* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1974).

15. For examples, see DHA, volume 82, 1 September 1953, column 2702-2703, 2 September 1953, column 2732- 2734; volume 87, 23 February 1955, column 1570-1574, 11 March 1955, column 2529-2530; 16 March 1955, column 2769-2770; volume 88, 22 March 1955, column 3077-3078, and 24 March 1955, column 3258-3260; volume 89, 25 May 1955, column 6254-6264; volume 93, 26 February 1957, column 1744- 1748 and 14 March 1957, column 2826-2827; volume 94, 28 March 1957, column 3772-3778 and 6 May 1957, column 5408-5410; volume 96, 28 January 1958, column 393-398, 5 February 1958, column 907-908 and 11 February 1958, column 1315-1318.
16. DHA, volume 95, 24 May 1957, column 6689-6691.

constructive for people of colour in South Africa and that the NP was working towards the upliftment of blacks. The NP's policy had, in his opinion, the objective of 'protecting' whites and helping them to 'preserve their civilisation', while at the same time advancing black interests. His unequivocal and simplistic view was that more racial segregation would result in less racial friction. In the House of Assembly, he supported apartheid bills, including those on industrial reconciliation, group areas and the designation of separate facilities. He also supported the process of removing the names of 'coloureds' from the joint electoral roll, one of the most controversial political issues of the 1950s, which provoked strong protest on moral grounds in opposition ranks.¹⁷

Because of his leadership qualities, his effectiveness as a parliamentarian, and his commitment and loyalty towards the party, Vorster moved rapidly through the ranks. He was selected as a member of the Executive Committee of the Transvaal National Party.¹⁸ In the 1958 general election, he won the Nigel seat with an increased majority.¹⁹ When Verwoerd succeeded Strijdom as prime minister and appointed him as one of the first deputy ministers, Vorster was gratified that the party leader was showing confidence in him. His promotion was attributed in NP circles to his ability and hard work and in opposition circles, his party loyalty was admired.²⁰ By that time, he had established himself as one of the young generation of political leaders in the National Party, a politician with a bright future.

Moves by the National Party to Introduce University Apartheid, 1948-1958

The adoption by Parliament of the Extension of University Education Act, No. 45 of 1959, was the culmination of a process driven by the National Party government for a period of a decade. Its aim was to design a model of racially segregated universities in South Africa that would bolster the overall objectives of the apartheid system.

Racial segregation had been applied in university education in South Africa from its very inception. The state had control over tertiary education. In the 1930s and 1940s the United Party government did not interfere with university autonomy and did not

17. For examples of Vorster's views on racial policy, as he expressed them in parliamentary debates, see e.g. DHA, volume 82, 4 August 1953, column 953-958 and 25 August 1953, column 2233-2234; volume 84, 25 March 1954, column 2786-2792; volume 87, 2 February 1955, column 419-420 and 3 February 1955, column 501-503; volume 88, 25 April 1955, column 4510-4515; volume 89, 25 May 1955, column 6254-6264; volume 90, 6 February 1956, column 1041-1048; volume 99, 16 February 1959, columns 875-882; and volume 101, 20 May 1959, column 6276-6283.

18. *Die Vaderland*, 9 April 1953.

19. *Die Burger*, 17 and 18 April 1958.

20. *Die Burger*, 25 October 1958, Dawie, 'Uit my politieke pen'; *Sunday Express*, 26 October 1958, Tantalus, 'New men who will force-march S.A. to apartheid'; D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 101-102.

enforce the exclusion of black students from any university or university college.²¹ However, in practice, tertiary education was already segregated to a large extent. In 1948, when the National Party came to power and began to implement its apartheid policies, there were ten state-subsidised institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The four Afrikaans-medium higher education institutions were at Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein, Pretoria and Potchefstroom and they admitted white students only. The English-medium 'open universities' – the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg – admitted students of all races but applied a colour-bar to social and sporting events. The University of Natal taught 'non-white' and white students separately at its medical school. The South African Native College at Fort Hare only catered for 'non-European' students. More than a quarter of the students enrolled at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, a non-residential distance-learning institution, were 'non-European'. Compared to the number of white students, the number of 'non-European' students at South African universities was low, hardly 5 per cent of the total enrolment at all universities.²²

The report of the National Party's Sauer Commission became the blueprint for the implementation of apartheid. It laid down that it was the responsibility of whites as the 'trustees' of the 'natives' to provide them with education that would fit in with their 'national character, disposition and background'. The objective of such education would be to cultivate what the commission termed, 'dignified and useful Bantu citizens'. Provision had to be made for higher education for 'natives' in their 'own areas' to train students for leadership positions in their 'own communities'.²³ The purpose of university education for 'non-Europeans' was viewed as being different from that for whites – they had to be prepared for leadership of, and service to, their 'own people', and therefore white and 'non-white' students needed to be segregated. There was no unified vision among the white ruling elite of how this 'separation' should be designed, however, and the National Party's model of university apartheid became official government policy through a 'contorted and contested' process.²⁴

Under Dr D.F. Malan as prime minister, the first tentative steps toward university apartheid were taken. Malan was opposed to the presence of black students at white universities and promised that steps would be taken to provide university

21. G. Moodie, 'The State and the Liberal Universities in South Africa, 1948-1990', *Higher Education*, 27, 1 (January 1994), 2-3; J. Davies, 'The State and the South African University System under Apartheid', *Comparative Education*, 32, 3 (November 1996), 321-322.

22. See the statistics in Union of South Africa, U.G. 53/1951, Report of the [Eiselen] Commission on Native Education (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1952), 68-71. See also Moodie, 'The State and the Liberal Universities', 3-4; M.S. Badat, *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1999), 48.

23. Verslag van die Kleurvraagstuk-kommissie van die Herenigde Nasionale Party, 1947, 13.

24. M.A. Beale, 'The Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid', *Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers*, 44 (1992), 83. See also Davies, 'The State and the South African University', 322.

education for them at separate institutions.²⁵ In its report, issued in 1951, the Commission on Native Education (Eiselen Commission) urged the government to align education for blacks with its overall socio-economic development plan for the country and to establish ‘independent Bantu universities’.²⁶ The Minister of Education, J.H. Viljoen, submitted a memorandum on apartheid at universities to the Cabinet in 1953,²⁷ after which a commission under the chairmanship of Dr J.E. Holloway was appointed to investigate the provision of separate facilities for university education for ‘non-Europeans’. In its majority report, the Holloway Commission advised against setting up separate institutions, because of the financial cost, and recommended the accommodation of ‘non-European’ students in separate sections at existing universities.²⁸ In National Party circles, the report was not received well, because it was at odds with the apartheid objective of establishing separate university colleges for the officially designated different race and ethnic groups.²⁹

When J.G. Strijdom succeeded Malan as prime minister in 1954 there was still no uniform vision in the government on how to implement university apartheid. The Universities Act of 1955 granted university councils the explicit right to exclude ‘non-white’ students if they so wished.³⁰ The ideas of Dr H.F. Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, in favour of separate institutions for blacks under the control of his department to prepare them for service in their own communities, were becoming increasingly influential.³¹ An inter-departmental committee chaired by the Secretary of Education, H.S. van der Walt, used Verwoerd’s scheme of five university colleges for ‘non-European’ students as a guideline and produced a White Paper, which according to Beale, made it clear that the aim of the government was to use separate universities to provide ‘skilled but malleable’ leadership for the Bantu authorities.³²

The White Paper was followed by the drafting of the Separate University Education Bill, which was tabled in Parliament by Minister Viljoen in March 1957,³³

25. Cited in Beale, ‘Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid’, 83. See also B. Guest, *Stella Aureora: The History of a South African University, volume 2, The University of Natal 1949-1976* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Society Foundation, 2017), 140-141.

26. Chapter 10 of the Eiselen Commission report deals with universities.

27. Beale, ‘Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid’, 84.

28. Union of South Africa, Report of the [Holloway] Commission of Enquiry on Separate Training Facilities for Non-Europeans at Universities, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1954). See also Moodie, ‘The State and the Liberal Universities’, 4; Guest, *Stella Aureora*, 142.

29. Beale, ‘Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid’, 85.

30. Union of South Africa, Statutes of the Union of South Africa, Universities Act, Act no. 61 of 1955.

31. Beale, ‘Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid’, 86.

32. Beale, ‘Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid’, 87. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 created a hierarchy of black local and regional authorities in the areas demarcated for occupation by Africans in the land acts. These authorities represented a form of indirect rule in the rural areas where traditional rule applied, which later became the Bantu homelands. See also Guest, *Stella Aureora*, 143.

33. DHA, volume 93, 11 March 1957, column 2493.

but withdrawn before the second reading.³⁴ An amended bill, introduced in April 1957,³⁵ assigned control of the proposed university colleges for black students to the Minister of Native Affairs. The institutions for coloured and Indian students would fall under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Education. Admission to universities would be on the basis of race. White students would not be allowed to enrol at any of the new institutions. No black student could be admitted to a university without the consent of the Minister of Education. Black students would be required to attend the university college allocated to their particular designated racial or ethnic group.³⁶

The 'open' universities and other universities that would be affected by the proposed legislation registered their disapproval. The Senate of the University College of Fort Hare passed a resolution to approach the government to retain the *status quo* at the institution. Professor Z.K. Matthews, the acting principal, argued that the restriction of admission to the college to isiXhosa students would be a violation of the tradition and autonomy of the institution and would reduce it to a government department.³⁷ The government's plan to transfer control of the 'non-white' Faculty of Medicine at the University of Natal to the Department of Bantu Education, was opposed by the university and the Natal Provincial Administration. A massive campaign was launched to maintain the university's control over the faculty. When the staff of the faculty threatened to resign, Minister Viljoen gave the assurance that the faculty would remain under the control of the university.³⁸

The revised bill was debated for three days in the House of Assembly. Despite the strong opposition of the Native Representatives and the United Party MPs, supported by liberal organisations such as the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR),³⁹ the bill passed the second reading by 72 votes to 42. It could easily have been enacted at this point. However, it was referred to a select committee, which at the end of the parliamentary session, was converted into a commission.⁴⁰

34. DHA, volume 94, 1 April 1957, column 3871. See G.R. Bozzoli, 'Academic Freedom in South Africa: The Open Universities in South Africa and Academic Freedom 1957-1974', *Minerva*, 13, 3 (Autumn 1975), 435.

35. DHA, volume 94, 8 April 1957, column 4227.

36. Beale, 'Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid', 87-88.

37. Z.K. Matthews, *The University College of Fort Hare* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1957), 34-35. See also D. Stuart, 'Fort Hare University College and the Separate University Education Bill', in Committee on Science and Freedom, *Apartheid: The Threat to South Africa's Universities* (Manchester: The Committee, 1957), 31-40.

38. Guest, *Stella Aureora*, 143-149. See also the booklet by the principal of the University of Natal, Dr E.G. Malherbe, *Die Outonomie van ons Universiteite en Apartheid* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1957).

39. See for example A. Kerr, 'University Apartheid', *South African Outlook*, 87 (1957); Z.K. Matthews, 'Ethnic Universities', *Africa South*, 14, July-September 1957.

40. For the parliamentary debate (second reading), see DHA, volume 95, 27 May 1957, column 6765-6856, and 29 May 1957, column 6951-7007. See also Bozzoli, 'Academic Freedom in South Africa', 435-436; T.R.H. Davenport and C. Saunders, *South Africa:*

Among South Africans there were many shades of opinion about the issue of university apartheid. Black people in general viewed university apartheid as another mechanism to provide them with inferior education and exclude them from the mainstream of South African society. Among whites, the extreme right wing of the National Party was not in favour of the expansion of higher education to blacks ‘at state expense’. Most of the conservative Afrikaans and English-speaking whites, however, were in favour of the creation of separate facilities for ‘non-European’ students. Liberal opposition against the exclusion of ‘non-white’ students from the ‘open’ universities was uncoordinated at first, but with time, it became stronger, more united, and more extensive. At a time when the anti-apartheid movement was just beginning to take shape in some overseas countries, there was also increasing international condemnation of university apartheid.⁴¹

At the universities of Cape Town (UCT), Natal, Rhodes and the Witwatersrand (Wits), a movement for academic freedom was taking root among mainly English-speaking students and academic staff. Their criticism of university apartheid focused on the threat it posed for university autonomy and academic freedom.⁴² The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) argued that to refuse admission to a university on grounds of race was a denial of the academic freedom of potential students to choose where they wished to be educated. It launched a campaign to oppose the government’s intended interference with the principle of academic non-segregation.⁴³ The vice-chancellor of UCT, Dr T.B. Davie, stated that the ‘four essential freedoms’ at universities were to determine, on academic grounds, who might teach; what could be taught; how it should be taught, and who was to be admitted to study. In his view these freedoms were under threat. The university councils of UCT and Wits passed resolutions asserting their right to continue their policies of academic non-segregation. On behalf of the senates and councils of those two universities, a defence of university autonomy and academic freedom was drawn up and published under the title *The Open Universities in South Africa*. Led by their vice-chancellors, thousands of staff members and students of the two universities joined in public protest, marching through the streets of Cape Town and Johannesburg.⁴⁴ The fierce opposition in academic circles contributed to the further postponement of the enactment of university apartheid.

A Modern History (5th edition) (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 398; C.F.J. Muller (ed.), *Vyfhonderd Jaar Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis*, 3rd edition (Pretoria: Academica, 1980), 497-498; Moodie, ‘The State and the Liberal Universities’, 5; Beale, ‘Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid’, 88-90.

41. For the different viewpoints, see e.g. Davies, ‘State and the South African University’, 322; Moodie, ‘The State and the Liberal Universities’, 9.

42. Moodie, ‘The State and the Liberal Universities’, 7.

43. For a detailed analysis of the resistance to university apartheid by NUSAS, see C.E.A. McKay, ‘A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), 1956-1970’ (D. Litt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2015), chapters 3 and 5.

44. Moodie, ‘The State and the Liberal Universities’, 9; Bozzoli, ‘Academic Freedom in South Africa’, 437. See the report in *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 May 1957.

The function of the new government commission under the chairmanship of M.D.C. (Daan) de Wet Nel was explicitly not to reopen the debate on the principle of separate university education, but to ‘refine’ the bill. The commission received written submissions, heard oral evidence, and issued majority and minority reports in 1958. In essence, the commission recommended that the university colleges for ‘non-Europeans’ should initially be controlled by the state, but that control over them should at a later stage be transferred to the *volksgroep* (ethnic groups) which they served, and that they should evolve into full-fledged universities.⁴⁵

Vorster's Role in the 1959 Parliamentary Debates on University Apartheid

The first reading of the bill

The situation in 1958, when Verwoerd became prime minister and appointed Vorster as a deputy minister, was thus that the National Party government had, in principle, decided to create five ethnically-based university colleges for ‘non-European’ students in South Africa. Legislation to create these institutions had already been drafted and refined. This draft legislation, the third version of the Bill on University Apartheid, was ready to be resubmitted to Parliament for final approval. In August 1958, Daan de Wet Nel, who after Viljoen's death served briefly as Minister of Education in Strijdom's Cabinet, without consulting either the University Advisory Committee or the Committee of University Principals, gave notice that the Extension of University Education Bill would be introduced in Parliament during the next session. His successor in this portfolio in Verwoerd's first Cabinet from October 1958 was J.J. Serfontein, with Vorster as his deputy minister.

At that stage, there were 3 819 ‘non-European’ students, comprising just over 10 per cent of the total number of students enrolled at South African universities. The University of South Africa had 1 984 such students (of whom 1 179 were African, 601 Indian and 204 were classified as Coloured). Fort Hare had 438 ‘non-European’ students (of whom 320 were African, 59 Indian and 59 Coloured); while the University of Cape Town had a total of 552 such students (37 African, 127 Indian and 388 Coloured); the University of the Witwatersrand had 253 (73 African, 158 Indian and 22 Coloured); and the University of Natal had 592 (188 African, 373 Indian and 31 Coloured).⁴⁶

The Extension of University Education Bill formed part of a new phase in the implementation of the apartheid system. In the first ten years of its reign the National Party focused primarily on enacting a series of race separation measures to enforce

45. Union of South Africa, UG 32/1958, Report of the Commission on the Separate Universities Education Bill (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1958).

46. ‘The Ratcatcher’, ‘Apartheid and the universities’, Politicsweb, 17 January 2012, <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/apartheid-and-the-universities> (accessed 23 December 2020).

social segregation in every sphere of society. After the 1958 general election, in which the National Party increased its parliamentary majority, the government possessed the political power to extend apartheid. Verwoerd, who as Minister of Native Affairs had played a key role in the implementation of apartheid, became prime minister, which put him in a position to implement his grand vision of apartheid. He was ready to take the move towards self-government for the separate black ethnic groups a step further. For example, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Bill, aimed at creating self-governing 'Bantu homelands', was also debated in Parliament in the 1959 session.

Apartheid education would be an integral part of the greater scheme of separate development. Education on primary and secondary school levels had already been brought in line with the apartheid policy by the Bantu Education Act (1953), which obliged the incorporation of private missionary schools into a national system of state-run schools for 'non-whites', with curricula designed to prepare them for their separate (and as pointed out by critics, subordinate) role in apartheid society. The segregated university colleges which were provided for in the Extension of University Education Bill were facilities that were meant, in the first place, to produce a corps of future leaders for the 'homelands'. To align it with the homelands policy, the bill's objective was not merely to separate students on a racial basis, but also on an ethnic basis.

Mary Beale argues that after a decade of competing ideas in National Party circles, the 1959 bill marked the consolidation of the dominance of the vision of university apartheid that was favoured by Verwoerd, Eiselen and the Native Affairs Department. It was a model that since 1948 had been developed from a range of contending ideas about university apartheid. This version of university apartheid was responsive to the political context and took time to impose on the National Party as a whole. According to Beale, 'university apartheid had become an integral component of a strategy to defuse political tensions through the Homelands policy'.⁴⁷

The third, revised version of the bill designed to institute university apartheid did not differ substantially from the second version, that had been debated in 1957. The 1959 bill, meant to extend apartheid to the sphere of university education, had a dual purpose. Firstly, the existing, predominantly white, universities would be prohibited from admitting 'non-white' students. The only exception would be when a 'non-white' person applied for admission at a university in a course of study that was not available elsewhere. In such a case, the minister could grant permission for that student's admission. Secondly, new university colleges for 'non-Europeans' would be established. One of these would serve the 'Coloured population group', another would serve 'the Indian population group', and three university colleges would be opened for the 'Bantu' population groups. Four of the proposed university

47. Beale, 'Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid', 95.

colleges would be newly created and the fifth, the existing institution at Fort Hare, would be designated for isiXhosa students only. These university colleges were to be placed under the close administrative control of the government.⁴⁸ In the 1959 version, now called the Extension of University Education Bill, there was no more mention that the dispensation at the medical school for ‘non-European’ students at the University of Natal would change. The planned changes in the constitution and the status of the South African Native College at Fort Hare were embodied in a separate bill, the University College of Fort Hare Transfer Bill, which provided for the transfer to the state of ‘the maintenance, management and control’ of the institution.⁴⁹

On 26 February 1959, John Vorster began a series of parliamentary debates on the Extension of University Education Bill in the House of Assembly. He did so on behalf of the Minister of Education, requesting that leave be granted to introduce the bill.⁵⁰ The Leader of the Opposition, Sir De Villiers Graaff, had indicated that he would move an amendment to oppose the introduction of the bill. Opposing the introduction of a bill was an unusual step which indicated that the United Party opposition regarded the bill as particularly repugnant and that they intended to fight it. Vorster had come through his first five years as National Party backbencher relatively smoothly, but now, as a recently appointed deputy minister, he was facing his severest test yet.⁵¹ *The Cape Times* commented that the government was ‘in for a long fight’ from the Opposition, which regarded the bill as a retrogressive step because it would interfere with academic freedom and the autonomy of the ‘open’ universities.⁵²

After Graaff had moved his amendment in opposition to the introduction of the bill and other United Party members had indicated their support of the amendment, Vorster had the opportunity to reply. He argued from an interesting angle by claiming that the idea of racially segregated universities was not a new principle. He quoted from correspondence in 1910, at the inception of the Union of South Africa, between General J.C. Smuts and the powerful mining company, Wernher, Beit & Co., to show that Smuts, who later became leader of the United Party and prime minister, was in favour of separate universities for white and ‘non-white’ students.⁵³

48. For the text of the act, as it was approved by Parliament, see Union of South Africa, *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1959*, part I, Act no. 45 of 1959, Extension of University Education, 486-514. See also Moodie, ‘The State and the Liberal Universities’, 5.

49. Union of South Africa, A.B. 35-'59, University College of Fort Hare Transfer Bill (as amended in Select Committee).

50. DHA, volume 99, 26 February 1959, column 1535.

51. See the comment in this regard in *The Cape Argus*, 26 February 1959, 2.

52. *The Cape Times*, 27 February 1959, 1.

53. DHA, volume 99, 26 February 1959, column 1543-1545.

Vorster's mention of the name of Smuts, the most revered former leader of the United Party, as being in favour of racial segregation at South African universities was no doubt designed to weaken the opposition to the bill among the more conservative members of the UP. After some years in Parliament, Vorster was well aware of the internal division within the ranks of the white parliamentary opposition between liberals and conservatives. This had been evident in 1953 when the Liberal Party had split from the United Party and later, in 1959, there was a second split with the founding of the Progressive Party. Throughout his parliamentary career Vorster would, with much success, make it his business to drive a wedge between the conservative and liberal members of the United Party. From the outset in his speech during the first reading debate of the Extension of University Education Bill, Vorster went on the attack against the liberals, by stating: 'Nobody is as intolerant as a liberalist'.⁵⁴

In his speech, Vorster deliberately dodged the objections raised by liberals against the bill. He argued as if the bill was aimed merely to provide separate tertiary institutions for 'non-whites'. This was an aspect which was supported by the conservative section of the United Party. In fact, the official Opposition did not oppose the creation of such institutions. As far as the other main component of the bill was concerned, the exclusion of 'non-whites' from the 'open' universities, he made no distinction between their exclusion by the university councils or by the state. South African universities, with the exception of the 'open' universities, did not admit 'non-white' students. The bill in fact provided for the extension of this exclusion to all universities, including the 'open' universities. Liberals objected to this measure, which deprived the 'open' universities of their autonomy. They argued that it deprived 'non-whites' of the opportunity to register at the 'open' universities, thus giving them an inferior substitute in the form of the proposed university colleges.⁵⁵

The parliamentary majority enjoyed by the National Party government helped it to defeat Graaff's amendment by 78 votes to 46, after which the bill was read for the first time. This set the tone for a fierce contest between the National Party government and the official Opposition in the second reading debate and the committee stage of the bill some weeks later.

The second reading of the bill

On Wednesday 8 April 1959 Minister Serfontein was back to introduce the second reading debate on the Extension of University Education Bill. Outside the Houses of Parliament 200 students of the University of Cape Town and 70 members of the Black Sash (a liberal women's organisation) stood with placards in silent protest against the

54. Vorster and other Nationalists liked to use the term 'liberalist' to refer to liberals, thereby implying that 'liberalists' and 'communists' were political allies.

55. *The Cape Argus*, 27 February 1959, 16 (editorial).

bill. The ‘battle of the universities’ in the House of Assembly, regarded by *The Cape Argus* as ‘one of the biggest parliamentary battles in history’, would last for 39 hours, and ended at 12:30 on Saturday 11 April after a 26-hour continuous session throughout the night.⁵⁶

The United Party had three main objections to the bill. The first was that the limitations on the admission of ‘non-whites’ to universities was detrimental to the autonomy of universities and tampered with academic freedom. The second was that the proposed university colleges would be inferior institutions without the standing of universities. Lastly, the government had not consulted the Committee of University Principals and had not submitted the principles underlying the bill for consideration by a commission of Inquiry.⁵⁷

As deputy minister, Vorster spoke on the first day of the debate (8 April 1959) in support of the bill. He did not seem to be impressed by the Opposition criticism of the bill. The tactic he employed in his speech was not to defend the positive elements of the bill, which was done by other NP speakers in the debate, but to attack the liberals for their objections to the bill, thus once again exploiting the division between the liberal and conservative sections of the UP. According to him, opposition to the bill was inspired by unwarranted liberalism.

Vorster’s attack on the official Opposition consisted of several components. In response to the speech by E.G. Malan, the United Party MP for Orange Grove, he said that the goal of a section of the UP was that all South African universities should be racially mixed institutions.⁵⁸ That section of the Opposition was, according to Vorster, in favour of *gelykstelling* (racial equality),⁵⁹ something which was anathema to conservative Afrikaners and many English-speaking whites.

Vorster rejected the accusation that the proposed university colleges for African, coloured and Indian students would be inferior institutions. He stated that the Opposition had not produced a ‘shred of evidence’ to prove that the university colleges would be inferior. He pointed out that a memorandum drafted by the University of the Witwatersrand concluded that ‘non-European students do not receive facilities and instruction in all respects equal to those available to the European students’.⁶⁰ Vorster did not expand on this aspect, but as already noted, the situation was that at the ‘open’ universities, ‘non-European’ students were not allowed to participate fully in university life, because they were excluded from social and sporting events. At the University of Natal, the ‘non-European’ medical students

56. *The Cape Argus*, 8 April 1959, 1 and 11 April 1959, 1.
57. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, column 3188.
58. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, columns 3236-3237.
59. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, column 3241.
60. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, columns 3238-3239.

were trained in a separate section of the Faculty of Medicine. In the light of this situation, Vorster argued that ‘non-European’ students would be ‘better off’ at their own institutions, because ‘the full life of university’ could be enjoyed by them ‘only in a university for non-Europeans’.⁶¹ In the committee stage of the bill, Vorster returned to the allegations that the university colleges would be inferior institutions and said:

[W]e heard a great deal in the second reading debate about this question of inferiority but you will recall that not a single member on the other side, apart from using abusing language, tried to substantiate their statement that these institutions will be inferior.⁶²

He realised that this was a weak point in the otherwise sound arguments against university apartheid by the Opposition, because it was impossible to predict in advance that the university colleges would indeed be inferior.

Another point of attack by Vorster was that the opposition to university apartheid was not ‘spontaneous’ but was being incited from within ‘liberal ranks’. The factual situation was that no academic institution outside South Africa had anything to say in favour of the bill. However, Vorster maintained that protest from 296 universities from around the world were the result of ‘instigation’ by NUSAS led by its president, Neville Rubin. Vorster said that NUSAS ‘wrote to all the universities begging them to protest against this Bill and they furnished information to those universities in their own way’. He went on to say that many of the letters of protest to the government were ‘worded exactly alike’, which proved that their objections were not spontaneous.⁶³ Vorster continued his hostility towards NUSAS throughout his political career. He blamed NUSAS for colluding with the ‘enemies’ of the government outside the country. Later, when Vorster became prime minister, NUSAS was one of the organisations he instructed the Schibusch Commission to investigate. This led to the declaration of NUSAS as an ‘affected’ organisation, which could not receive overseas financial support; and to the banning of a number of NUSAS leaders.

In the second-reading debate, Vorster elaborated on the point he had made when he introduced the Extension of University Education Bill a few weeks earlier, namely that segregated universities had been the policy of former governments, including the United Party government (1934-1948). He went on to say that in the House of Assembly debate in 1913, not a single MP had expressed himself against the idea that there should eventually be separate universities for the different races. Under the UP government, a commission of enquiry into the training of medical students had found in 1938 that the ‘training of Coloured and Native students in

61. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, column 3246.

62. DHA, volume 100, 27 April 1959, column 4726.

63. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, columns 3239-3241.

medicine should not be attempted in the same school as that for Europeans'. Furthermore, in a House of Assembly debate in 1945, all MPs were in favour of a motion that government segregate institutions for higher education. 'At that time', said Vorster, 'this whole House agreed unanimously that there should be separate universities'.⁶⁴ Vorster's suggestion was that the United Party was now turning its back on its own former policy of segregated universities.

The debate that followed Vorster's speech was protracted and bitterly contested, because the restrictions on university autonomy and academic freedom flew in the face of liberal values.⁶⁵ Arguments made by supporters and opponents alike, centred on how best to provide higher education for the growing 'non-European' population. On the government side, the new legislation was supported as a 'positive apartheid measure', which would give each 'population group' the opportunity to develop separately and optimally on the basis of their 'own (*volkseie*) culture'.⁶⁶ National Party participants suggested that building a system of segregated higher education was, after the Bantu Education Act, the logical next step. It would contribute to the development of 'native' communities by training their own leaders instead of producing 'black Englishmen' alienated from their 'native roots'. They also expressed concern that the increasing number of black people seeking admission to the 'open' universities would threaten the character of the white universities.

Further arguments claimed that unless new institutions were established for black students, the open universities would either become predominantly 'non-white' or would be 'forced' to impose stricter formal barriers to 'non-white' admission and that black students at the open universities were, in any case, not actually given equal treatment, and were becoming 'alienated from their own peoples' and being subjected to 'liberalist' indoctrination. Those who expressed this argument claimed that the new university colleges would provide better opportunities for black students. Verwoerd's closing response in the parliamentary debate was that the new system was aimed at 'promoting development' and that it was absolutely untrue that the government was establishing an inferior type of institution over which it would exercise tyrannical control.⁶⁷

As could be expected, the National Party won the proposal to read the bill a second time by 100 votes to 55.⁶⁸

64. DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, columns 3245-3248.

65. M. Horrell (compiler), *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1958-59* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1960), 266-267.

66. See minister J.J. Serfontein's speech in DHA, volume 100, 8 April 1959, column 3167-88.

67. DHA, volume 100, 10 April 1959, column 3490-3515. See also Beale, 'Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid', 95.

68. DHA, volume 100, 11 April 1959, column 3725-3726.

The committee stage: The third reading and the passing of the bill

In the committee stage preceding the third reading of the bill, the United Party continued with its determined efforts to make the passing of the bill as difficult as possible for the government by introducing a long string of amendments to the 42 clauses of the bill. On 27 April 1959 when the respective clauses were under discussion, the wrangling lasted a full twelve hours and only ended at 22:00 that evening, at which time only three clauses had been debated. The Opposition then forced division on the other 39 clauses that had not yet been debated. One of the longest sessions of voting in South African parliamentary history followed. It lasted no less than four hours and the press likened it to the 'Mad-Hatter's tea party'. This kept the House of Assembly busy until 02:40 the next morning.⁶⁹

Vorster made more inputs in the committee stage. Once again, he targeted the 'liberalists' in the opposition ranks for his attacks. When he spoke in defence of Clause 2 of the bill, which stated that the Minister of Bantu Education could establish university colleges for 'Bantu persons' and that those colleges would be financed from the Bantu Education account, he specifically referred to Margaret Ballinger, the Native Representative for the Eastern Cape and a member of the Liberal Party. He said that 'the Opposition will know what attitude to adopt, because she [Ballinger] has given them a clear lead'.⁷⁰ By saying this he was suggesting that the United Party had been 'taken in tow' by the liberals.

Vorster's main contribution in the committee stage of the bill was his input on Clause 3 which dealt with the establishment of university colleges for 'non-white persons other than Bantu persons'. The UP speakers expressed themselves in opposition to the separation of students on an ethnic basis. Vorster then focused on the position of coloured students. He rejected the idea that black, coloured and Indian students should be accommodated in the same institutions. He used his typical style of debating –by trying to 'corner' specific opposition MPs. He made a point of saying that he wished to address 'the honourable members who represent the Coloureds'. Then he directed a pertinent question to Mr C. Barnett, the United Party MP for the Boland:

I do not know why the hon. member is afraid. I do not want to trap him. I merely want to put a question. What I am asking here is in the interests of the Coloureds. My question to him is this: Since it is impossible, according to the principle that we have already accepted here, for the Coloureds to go to the mixed universities, what would these Coloured constituents prefer – to be under the same roof with Natives and Asiatics in one college or would they prefer to have their own institution? That is the simple question.⁷¹

69. *The Cape Argus*, 29 April 1959, 2; *The Cape Times*, 29 April 1959, 1.

70. DHA, volume 100, 27 April 1959, column 4690.

71. DHA, volume 100, 28 April 1959, column 4798.

Barnett preferred not to answer Vorster's 'simple question'. One can imagine the atmosphere in the House of Assembly when Vorster embarrassed a member of the Opposition to the glee of his NP colleagues.

When Vorster spoke on Clause 4 of the bill, he expressed himself 'wholeheartedly' in favour of advisory councils and advisory senates for the university colleges. He supported the idea that power at the colleges would gradually be transferred to the ethnic groups for whom they were designated. He mentioned two aspects of the bill, which he would later, as prime minister, often mention as the 'pillars' of separate development. The first was that in his opinion, 'separation of the races' would help to reduce friction between the various 'races'. The second was that the aim, of the colleges in this instance, and of apartheid (separate development) in general, was to create opportunities for the different ethnic groups in the country within their own communities. When he spoke of the creation of opportunities by the NP policy, he became quite agitated about the Opposition's attitude:

If one really believes that opportunities should be created for the non-Whites, one does not pretend to be so blind when the National Party Government makes these opportunities available to the non-Whites. When the University of Natal does so of its own accord, it is a praiseworthy and an excellent system, but when we make statutory provision for the same thing, it is something absolutely unheard of and something evil. Are hon. members so prejudiced; is their blind hatred of everything done by the National Party so great that they cannot realize when something is being done in the interests of the non-Whites?⁷²

He later said that for the opposition, the bill was a case of the 'wrong people doing the right thing'.⁷³ Vorster's agitation gave Margaret Ballinger the opening to hit back at him:

The hon. the Deputy Minister has worked himself up into a nice frenzy over this. Whether he thinks that the force of his words will make up for the lack of solid foundation in his argument, I do not know, but I can assure him that he is not going to get very far with this sort of approach.⁷⁴

Vorster was not admitting defeat. He taunted Ballinger again, until she said that trying to combat Vorster's verbal attacks was 'one of the most discouraging experiences I have had here'. When the Speaker reprimanded her for becoming personal, she replied: 'I must apologise to you for having fallen into the trap set for me by the Deputy Minister'.⁷⁵

72. DHA, volume 100, 28 April 1959, column 4840.

73. DHA, volume 100, 30 April 1959, column 5068.

74. DHA, volume 100, 28 April 1959, column 4841.

75. DHA, volume 100, 28 April 1959, column 4841.

Vorster's standard conclusion at the end of his contributions to the debate on this particular bill was to add:

I make bold to say that not only is this clause set out perfectly clearly, and not only does it state precisely what it seeks to do, but I make bold to say that it is in the interests of everybody that this clause as it stands should be left unchanged and that no amendment of the kind moved by the Opposition should be accepted.⁷⁶

On 30 April 1959 the final parliamentary debate on the Extension of University Education Bill before its passing, took place in the House of Assembly. In his speech in the debate Vorster once again refuted the Opposition's allegations that the proposed university colleges would be inferior institutions. He also repeated some of the arguments he had made in the earlier parliamentary debates on the bill. To support his argument that the separate university colleges would create a better dispensation for 'non-white' students than the 'open' universities he said:

Mr. Speaker, when we look at this bill it is perfectly clear ... that it provides for separation between White students, Indian students, Coloured students and the various groups of Bantu students. I submit that no member of the public and no hon. member in this House has the moral right to oppose the attitude that we adopt unless he or she is prepared to say that a Coloured or an Indian or a Native when he goes to a White university, should be admitted as a full-fledged student and that he should not be excluded from any activities whatsoever.⁷⁷

Vorster then said that as far as the bill was concerned there was no middle road:

[T]here is only the road which this Bill indicates, namely that of separation, or alternatively there is the road of eventual equality at the universities if we allow non-White students to attend our White universities.⁷⁸

He followed this with a rather surprising statement, saying boldly: '[E]very principle contained in this Bill is to be found in some university or other in some civilized country in the world.'⁷⁹ When Colin Eglin, the United Party MP for Pinelands, expressed his doubts about the truth of this claim, Vorster challenged him to identify any principle in the bill that could not be found in some independent university of high standing in the world. When Eglin said that he would reply in his own way in his own time, the National Party MPs called upon him to reply at once, which he was unable to do.⁸⁰ Vorster had won another small battle in the bigger debate.

76. DHA, volume 100, 27 April 1959, column 4691.

77. DHA, volume 100, 30 April 1959, column 5064.

78. DHA, volume 100, 30 April 1959, column 5065.

79. DHA, volume 100, 30 April 1959, column 5067.

80. DHA, volume 100, 30 April 1959, columns 5066-5067.

After the lengthy parliamentary debates and despite the widespread public protest, the bill was eventually passed in the House of Assembly with 85 votes to 49.⁸¹ In May 1959, it was also passed in the Senate, signed by the Governor-General and promulgated in the *Government Gazette* on 19 June 1959 as the Extension of University Education Act, No. 45 of 1959.⁸² Soon afterwards, the university colleges for the different 'non-white' groups were established. These institutions, which later were granted university status, changed the higher education landscape in South Africa.⁸³ Ironically, their establishment had consequences that had not been foreseen by Vorster and his National Party colleagues and in the final analysis they did not support the grand apartheid project in the way that Verwoerd had hoped.⁸⁴

Significance of Vorster's Performance in the 1959 Debates for His Political Career

When B.J. Vorster participated in the parliamentary debates on the Extension of University Education Bill in 1959 he was already in the run for promotion to the Cabinet. Despite the measure of suspicion against ex-OB members that still existed in certain NP circles, Prime Minister Verwoerd saw fit in 1958 to appoint Vorster as one of only four deputy ministers, showing that the party leaders had their eyes on him for leadership positions. In a Cabinet meeting when Ben Schoeman questioned Verwoerd's plan to introduce deputy ministers, the prime minister replied that he needed to create opportunities to promote MPs who aspired to higher laurels.⁸⁵ Thus, Vorster could expect to be brought into the Cabinet soon, probably at the next reshuffle.

This did not mean that it was a foregone conclusion that Vorster would eventually rise to the very top position, that of prime minister. In 1959, he was still in competition with his peers for promotion in the governing party. Of the four deputy

81. DHA, volume 100, 29 April 1959, column 4944-4945.

82. Parliament of the Union of South Africa, Minutes of the Senate, 1959, 352.

83. They were under authoritarian state control, dominated by conservative whites, and their academic standards never reached those of the 'white' universities. Opponents of university apartheid referred to them as 'bush colleges'. They changed the demographics of higher education. The vast majority of black students in the country enrolled at the ethnic universities, while the number of Africans at white universities dwindled. For more on these developments, see Badat, *Black Student Politics*, 62-75.

84. At the time when the liberation movements (ANC and PAC) were banned and their leaders in exile, these institutions became the breeding ground of resistance to apartheid among the younger generation of black South Africans. They developed into sites of struggle against the homeland policy and played a significant role in the development of Black Consciousness, which became the driving force behind the Soweto riots of 1976 and 1977, a watershed event in the demise of apartheid. The role of the black universities in the rise of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) and the development of Black Consciousness is analysed in detail in Badat, *Black Student Politics*, 77-174. See also M. Bot, 'Black Student Resistance to Segregated Universities', *Indicator SA*, 3, 2 (Spring 1985), 12-15.

85. B. Schoeman, *My Lewe in die Politiek* (Johannesburg: Perskor-Uitgewery, 1978), 242.

ministers appointed by Verwoerd in 1958, three would eventually rise in government ranks. F.E. Mentz, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, was forced to retire because of ill health in 1960. Marais Viljoen, the Deputy Minister of Labour and Mines, remained a deputy minister until he was promoted to the Cabinet as Minister of Labour and Coloured Affairs in 1966. He also served as Minister of Posts and Telecommunications before he became the President of the Senate in 1976, and from 1979 to 1984, the fifth and last non-executive State President of the Republic of South Africa. P.W. Botha, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, was appointed by Verwoerd in 1961 in a less important portfolio, that of Minister of Community Development and Coloured Affairs, before being promoted in 1966 to a more prominent position, that of Minister of Defence. Like Vorster, he also served as prime minister (1978-1984) and state president (1984-1989), but only after Vorster had vacated those positions. Vorster was promoted faster than the other deputy ministers. Verwoerd entrusted him with one of the most important portfolios, that of Minister of Justice, as early as 1961. Verwoerd treated Vorster as his special protégé.

My argument in this article is that Vorster's performance in the parliamentary debates on the Extension of University Education Bill in 1959 helped to promote his personal career. The debates provided him with his first opportunity as deputy minister to demonstrate his debating skills. He seized this opportunity with both hands.

What made John Vorster stand out above his contemporaries was his remarkable gift as a speaker. Since childhood he had honed his public speaking and debating skills. In high school he joined the debating society and started developing these skills. At university, the debating society was his favourite extramural activity, and he won several debating competitions. His active involvement in politics began at a young age. During the early decades of his political career, he was a student leader of the National Party at Stellenbosch University. Thereafter, he became the leader of the OB movement in the Eastern Cape, a member of Klasie Havenga's Afrikaner Party and from 1953, the National Party MP for the Nigel constituency. Throughout, he put his speaking skills to use as a spokesperson for Afrikaner interests.⁸⁶

In public speaking, Vorster's voice was sonorous, his speaking style lofty, and he had the ability to capture the attention of his audience. He was able to convey his message clearly and concisely. In Parliament he built a reputation as a formidable debater. He regarded a parliamentary debate as a battle of wits; he had to floor his political opponents and outwit them.⁸⁷ His colleagues and opponents alike were

86. For details, see D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 26-27, 34-35, 41, 58, 101, 113.

87. ARCA, PV 614, Scrapbook 93, Copy of Vorster's Speech, the University of Port Elizabeth, 2 September 1981.

aware that he could think on his feet during a debate and respond sharply.⁸⁸ They had respect for his parliamentary presence and his extraordinary ability to swing a debate in favour of his side.⁸⁹

In the parliamentary debates on the Extension of University Education Bill between February and May 1959, Vorster's tactic as one of the senior government speakers in the debate was to focus his criticism of the Opposition on the ideology of liberalism and on individual proponents of liberalism in their ranks. As an Afrikaner nationalist, who believed that the advancement of the *volk* was essential, he was an unyielding opponent of the liberal ideal of what the NP called *gelykstelling*, i.e. racial integration and equality. The proponents of Afrikaner Nationalism believed that this would eventually deprive whites, including the Afrikaner *volk*, of their right to self-determination in South Africa and would threaten their survival as a minority group.

Vorster addressed his criticism of liberalism not only to his fellow Afrikaner Nationalists, but also to the conservative section of the United Party. As a student of South African white politics, he knew that the Achilles heel of the United Party lay in internal division between its liberal and conservative members. When he quoted from parliamentary debates of the past to show that the United Party was turning its back on its own segregation policies, he was trying to drive a wedge between the factions in the Opposition. He had great success with this approach for the remainder of his parliamentary career.

Apart from his criticism of liberalism and the liberal ideas about academic freedom and university autonomy, Vorster also developed his own arguments in favour of racial separation at university level. He argued that 'non-white' students at the 'open' universities did not enjoy a full student life because of restrictions on their participation in social activities. Therefore, the proposed university colleges would, in his view, provide them with a better option at institutions where they would be allowed to participate fully in all student activities. Furthermore, he argued, the separation of students from different racial and ethnic groups would reduce interracial friction and create better development opportunities for 'non-white' students in their own cultural milieu. The maintenance of white leadership by means of separate development in the political and social spheres featured strongly in Vorster's contributions to the debate and remained a leading motive throughout his

88. Author's private archive, sound recordings of interviews with J.C. (Chris) Heunis (15 October 1991), C.W. (Colin) Eglin (16 October 1991) and S.F. (Pen) Kotze (17 October 1991). ARCA, PV 193, K 254, interview with I. Bakkes, 19 August 1978 and K 264, interview with C.J. Greeff, 19 March 1979.

89. P. du Toit, 'Waar is die gespieerde Afrikaner-man, vra Suzman', *Onder 4 oë* (interview with Helen Suzman), *Naweek-Beeld*, 18 February 2006; Sir De Villiers Graaff, *Div Looks Back* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1993), 201; J. Basson, *Steeds op die Parlementêre Kolfblad: Met Insigte oor die Afrikaner en Afrikaans* (Cape Town: Politika, 2008), 82.

political career. ‘White South Africa’, he emphasised, ‘is not prepared to share its political rights and the heritage of its children with the non-whites, because we have fought hard for it’.⁹⁰

Another contribution to Vorster’s effectiveness as a parliamentary debater in these 1959 debates was the fact that while he provoked his opponents to react with indignation and anger to some of his challenging remarks and interjections, he himself kept his calm and seemed imperturbable. He was able to use the occasion to invoke emotional responses, as seen with Margaret Ballinger. He also proved his ability to stand his ground against members of the United Party who raised strong arguments in opposition to apartheid. At a time when the National Party, after ten years’ rule, was still consolidating its political power and applied strict party discipline, Vorster as an ardent Afrikaner nationalist, proved to the leadership that he was an asset to the cause of separate development.

In the opinion of NP supporters, Vorster’s debut in the 1959 debates was a resounding success. He was described by the political correspondent Schalk Pienaar as one of the best polemic debaters in the House of Assembly.⁹¹ According to D’Oliveira, Vorster’s biographer, ‘Nationalist newspapermen applauded [him], and even Opposition commentators showed reluctant admiration’.⁹²

These accolades do not detract from the fact that his arguments, using the Ballinger example, sometimes lacked a solid foundation. In his memoirs, written many years later, Japie Basson, one of Vorster’s fiercest political opponents over the years, stated that Vorster relied on a forceful style of speaking, but that his argumentation lacked principled depth. Basson was of the opinion that Vorster had the ability to pass off superficiality as profundity.⁹³ In the 1959 debates, he proved to be more populist than intellectual, making an emotional appeal to his colleagues and supporters.

What made Vorster’s performance stand out even more starkly, was the fact that he fared so much better than Minister Serfontein, his senior. The parliamentary correspondents of newspapers emphasised the contrast in their contributions. According to the *Cape Times* correspondent, Vorster ‘nearly turned the whole occasion into a debating victory for the Government’, whereas, in contrast, Serfontein put up ‘probably the worst performance’ ever by a Nationalist minister. The correspondent of *Die Stem* agreed that Vorster’s ‘deft, sharp arguments all but

90. *Die Burger*, 27 April 1959. English translation in the text by the author.

91. *Die Burger*, 1 May 1959, 13, Schalk Pienaar, ‘In die Parlement’. See also Pienaar’s columns in *Die Burger*, 27 February 1959, 9 and 9 April 1959, 11.

92. D’Oliveira, *Vorster*, 117. See *The Cape Times*, 1 May 1959.

93. J. Basson, *Raam en Rigting in die Politiek en die Storie van Apartheid* (Cape Town: Politika, 2004), 149.

annihilated the Opposition's arguments', while Serfontein allowed himself 'to be almost torn to shreds by an Opposition that fought like terriers'.⁹⁴

In conclusion, Vorster's strong performance (from an NP perspective) in the parliamentary debates on the Extension of University Education Bill, served as an early stepping-stone for him on his way to the top position in the government. At the age of 43 after only serving as deputy minister for a few months, Vorster was already putting up his hand for promotion to the Cabinet. Just over two years later, in August 1961, Verwoerd appointed him as Minister of Justice. Vorster's law degree and his experience in legal practice counted in his favour. In this portfolio he rose to prominence as a result of the efficient, but controversial way he managed to ward off revolutionary threats to the security of the state. As Verwoerd's close ally and right-hand man, Vorster secured such a strong position in the Cabinet that he was soon regarded as the second most powerful person in the party.

The National Party caucus elected Vorster as Verwoerd's successor in September 1966 after Verwoerd's assassination. It was no forgone conclusion who his successor might be and the media speculated about potential candidates for the leadership of the governing party. In the last days before the caucus meeting of 13 September, where the party's MPs would appoint the new leader, only two contenders remained, being Vorster and Ben Schoeman, the Minister of Transport.⁹⁵ Vorster's election committee established by a count of heads that their candidate had the backing of a substantial majority of the MPs. His strongest support came from the conservative right-wingers.⁹⁶ The reason for this was that as Minister of Justice he had been extremely effective in stamping out the threat to state security posed by revolutionary movements such as Poqo, Umkhonto we Sizwe, the African Resistance Movement and the South African Communist Party. In the run-up to the caucus meeting, Vorster's supporters managed to persuade Schoeman to withdraw from the race in the interest of party unity and thereupon the caucus supported his nomination as leader unanimously, which meant he was named as South Africa's seventh prime minister.⁹⁷

94. Cited in D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 117-118. For more comments on Serfontein's uninspiring performance, see *The Cape Argus*, 10 April 1959, 12 and 1 May 1959, 15.

95. Details on the events in the week leading up to Vorster's election as leader of the National Party and his appointment as prime minister can be found in M.C. Botha, *Premiersverkiesings sedert 1910* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1979), 136-142; and D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 182-199.

96. ARCA, PV 614 M.S. (Tini) Vorster Collection, scrapbook 18, Letter from Gert Bezuidenhout (M.P.) to B.J. Vorster, 10 September 1966 with list attached of caucus members supporting or not supporting Vorster. The list is replicated in D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 189-192.

97. Schoeman, *My Lewe in die Politiek*, 320; D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 195-196; Schoeman, *Van Malan tot Verwoerd*, 256-259.

Although it was Vorster's image of *kragdadigheid* (being a hardliner) which he attained through his performance as Minister of Justice between 1961 and 1966 that won him the premiership, he would never have been in such strong position had he not become Verwoerd's protégé in the 1958-1961 period. Verwoerd and Vorster worked in close collaboration in the innermost circles of the Transvaal National Party from 1953. Verwoerd was well aware of Vorster's party loyalty and his diligence as an MP. However, his efficiency as a parliamentary debater, which he clearly demonstrated in the debate under discussion in this article, provided extra motivation for Verwoerd to promote him to the Cabinet. The fact that in August 1960, Verwoerd had specifically requested that it be Vorster, who was still a deputy minister, to move the motion that South Africa should become a republic at the unitary congress of the National Party, showed how much trust the prime minister placed in him.⁹⁸ This trust paved the way for Vorster's rise to the top of the apartheid state. By September 1966, when the NP caucus had to elect a new party leader, few of the MPs would recall his role in the 1959 debates more than seven years before, which set the tone for his later career.

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