

GORDIMER

2. Quoted in Craig R. Whitney, 'Nadine Gordimer: The Nobel Prize Winner,' *New York Times*, reprinted in *The Island*, 15.10.1991. Of course, the western bias to such awards and their blatant political expediency have been well noted before. *The London Times*, 4.10.1991. p.12 Of course, the western bias to such awards and their blatant political expediency have been well noted before.
3. *The London Times*, 4.10.1991. p.12
4. Tilak Gunawardhana, 'Nobel Laureates in Literature - Significant Biases,' *Ceylon Daily News*, 23.10.1991. p.15.
5. Gordimer's first collection of short stories entitled *Face to Face* was published in 1949. Since then she has published 10 novels and over 200 short stories, her most recent collection of stories being *Jump* which she was promoting in the U.S. when she received news of her award.
6. *The London Times*, p.12.
7. James Wood, 'Lyrical Analyst of a Nation,' *The Guardian* (London), 10.10.1991. p.27.
8. Nadine Gordimer, *July's People* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981). Pagination will be from this edition.
9. Lewis Nkosi, 'Two Reviews,' *Home and Exile* (London: Longman, 1983), p.158.
10. Brutus was particularly active in canvassing for the world-wide boycott of South African sport and served on Robben Island.
11. Dennis Brutus, 'Protest Against Apartheid,' *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro (London: Heinemann, 1969) p.100. My italics.
12. *Ibid.*, p.97.
13. Michael Toolan, 'Taking Hold of Reality: Politics and Style in Nadine Gordimer,' *ACLALS Bulletin* 7 no.1, 1985. p.87.
14. Nadine Gordimer, 'Life in the Interregnum,' *New York Review of Books*, 20.1.1983. p.22.
15. Nadine Gordimer, 'The Bridegroom,' *African Short Stories* ed. Chinua Achebe and C.L. Innes (London: Heinemann, 1985). Pagination will be from this edition.
16. Nadine Gordimer, *A Soldier's Embrace* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980). Pagination will be from this edition.
17. Gordimer considered emigrating to Zambia once, but was very aware of 'the truth, which was that in Zambia I was regarded by black friends as a (sic) European, a stranger.' Quoted in Craig Whitney, p.14.
18. Gordimer, quoted in Michael Toolan, p.78.
19. Toussaint L'Ouverture, eventual leader of the Haitian revolution of 1792-1803 which was the first war of independence fought by a colony against the colonizer (in this case France), joined the revolution late as he stayed back to protect his white employers from anti-white violence in the first phase of the struggle. For a compelling account of the Haitian revolution and Toussaint's role in it, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Allison and Busby, 1983). This book was first published in 1938.

On Campus

UNIVERSITIES : A GATHERING STORM?

Tension is building up again in the universities. This time, the issue is the Affiliated Regional University Colleges being set up by the University Grants Commission. Student opposition has so far been expressed by posters and leaflets and at meetings and seminars. The higher education authorities appear to take little notice of the protests. However, anybody who is sensitive to the goings on in the universities will notice the clear signs of student discontent turning into confrontation.

The 'regional university college' is an innovative idea aimed at reforming the higher education system in Sri Lanka. It was conceived and recommended by the Presidential Commission on Youth Unrest. The government readily accepted the proposal and advised the UGC to set up 9 regional colleges before the end of this year. According to reports, plans have been finalized to take in the first batch of students.

On paper at least, the new scheme seeks to ease the terrible bottle-neck crisis of Sri Lanka's higher education by expanding vocation-oriented tertiary education. The Colleges are not micro-replicas of existing universities. They are expected to give academic training a vocational orientation linked to the economies of the respective provinces.

In its Report, the Youth Commission recommended a scheme which should "constitute a major re-adjustment of our tertiary education system." It also recognised "the fundamental

challenge" facing tertiary education as the maintenance of high academic standards with limited resources.

Why is it that perhaps the vast majority of university students and a considerable number of faculty members appear to object to this scheme?

According to Dr. S. Hettige, the Senior Student Counsellor of the University of Colombo, "Many students feel that this will bring about a devaluation of university education. In the national universities, there are serious problems with regard to trained teachers, with many departments being understaffed. The students, therefore, expect the universities to be affected. They would rather see the existing universities being improved and expanded."

The Student Counsellor, however, did not want to speculate on the likely percentage of students and academics who decidedly opposed the new scheme: "The views are divided, of course, among the critical, the supportive, the indifferent and the non-committal."

Certainly, some sections of the student community have been unequivocal. The General Student Assembly in a statement issued on 23 October states: "This is a fraudulent scheme meant to dupe the youth of this country. If there is a sincere need to provide a university education to every student who qualified for it, the government should stop its wasteful celebrations and divert the money saved to improve university education." The statement also underlines a concern about the newly established 'elitist' private institutions which provide, to a select few, a 'professional' education far more marketable than university education.

This controversy raises a fundamental issue with regard to public policy. Shouldn't the government submit its policy proposals, however well intended they may be, to informed and serious public debate and discussion? On the issue of regional colleges, it appears that the government thinks otherwise.



The Youth Commission was astute enough to 'suggest' that such a readjustment scheme "should be fully discussed in the overall setting of a national policy on education and placed before the public in the form of a white paper." In a perceptively formulated paragraph, the Commission advised that "the views of academics and students should be canvassed before any final decision is made on the matter." Obviously, the Commission was sensitive to the initial scepticism with which the campus community might respond to this proposal: "If it is acceptable to the university community," cautioned the Commission, "then it should be phased into operation over a period of ten years."

Have the authorities noted the suggestion made by the Commission? At a seminar organised by the SLAAS on 1 November to discuss the regional colleges, Dr. Arjuna Aluvihare, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, took great pains to explain the rationale of the regional colleges to the audience. He said that the courses in the new colleges will have a heavy emphasis on practical involvement. "The question won't arise," he declared, "about the usefulness of the education."

The large student representation, who appeared restive and hostile, were not easily convinced. A number of undergraduate students denounced the UGC for having taken an arbitrary decision. They accused the UGC of using the first few batches of students for "experimental purposes" and warned that it should "be prepared to accept the responsibility and take the consequences if the 'experiment' did not work."

According to university sources, protesting students are as ill-informed about the colleges as the authorities are recalcitrant about their establishment. "There is little dialogue between the students and the authorities," says Dr. Hettige. "The students often form their opinions on the basis of emotions, not facts. And they believe they have to be assertive or aggressive simply to be taken note of."

Some students appear to reject the new scheme on moralistic grounds: they are accusing the higher education authorities of introducing 'anti-cultural' disciplines like the 'art of massaging' into the proposed syllabuses. This, presumably, is a reference to 'Beauticulture' - one of the specializations offered for the Certificate/Diploma course in Home Science and Nutrition by the affiliated university colleges of the Western Province and the North Western Province. Many posters which came up on the university walls in recent weeks describe the setting up of regional colleges as the 'bastardization' of university education.

A more serious allegation made by the students is that the regional colleges will erode the free education system. For them, the new scheme contains a 'hidden agenda'. The authorities have not taken the trouble to dispel such fears - or myths. Still more puzzling is their reluctance to explain the whys and hows of this 'experiment' to the public.

The recent past has been replete with reforms implemented unilaterally without due concern to the people affected by

them. School educational reforms in the early 1980s and the setting up of a private medical college led to student dissatisfaction which transformed schools and universities into recruiting grounds for the JVP. Even today, campuses are not devoid of self-proclaimed gurus whose political survival depends exclusively on mobilized youth.

Any well-intended reform programme, if it fails to obtain public consent and support, is certain to create more problems than it attempts to solve.

Social legitimacy is crucial for public policy to succeed. This is one of the fundamental lessons the government should have learnt. The violent controversy that followed the introduction of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution is a case in point. Denied popular support and acceptance, the entire provincial councils system has now degenerated, in the hands of the government, into a mere appendage of the centre.

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Centre for the Study of Human Rights

The Centre for the Study of Human Rights at the University of Colombo commenced its work this month. The primary objectives of the Centre are to provide well-developed educational programmes for both students and the public and to provide facilities to conduct research on human rights related issues. Research that will enhance our understanding of recognized human rights and contribute to the development of human rights jurisprudence will be particularly encouraged.

That Sri Lanka's human rights record is a tarnished one is no secret. All Sri Lankans have, as a whole, experienced unprecedented cycles of violence and brutality in the past decade -- violence perpetrated by all parties to the conflicts in the North and East and the South. Images of burning bodies by the roadside, of young men and women being dragged away from their homes and the trauma of living in constant fear, still haunt us. Denial of basic fundamental rights, whether they be civil and political, or economic, social and cultural in nature, is a daily reality to many. So, how do we bring about change? How do we bring about a social and political order which incorporates sacrosanct liberal democratic values?

Some are of the view that we in Sri Lanka are in this predicament because there is no vigorous public opinion. It could also be said that many do not have an opportunity to let their views be known, or else, most are fearful to express their views and opinions. Yet many are simply complacent and apathetic. Shouldn't one expect more from a society which has a literacy rate of over 85%?

Why our literacy rate does not correlate to political maturity and the ability to sustain democracy could partly be attributed

