UWC 30 YEARS

SUPPLEMENT TO FRONTLINE — OCTOBER 1989

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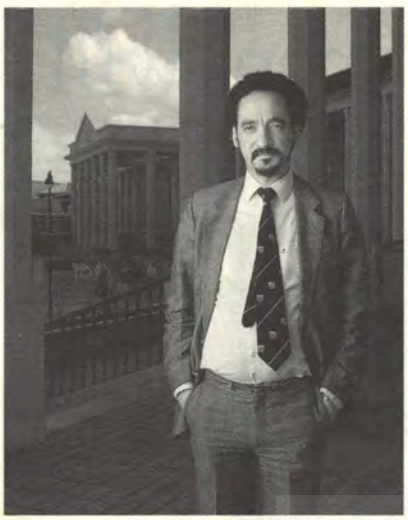
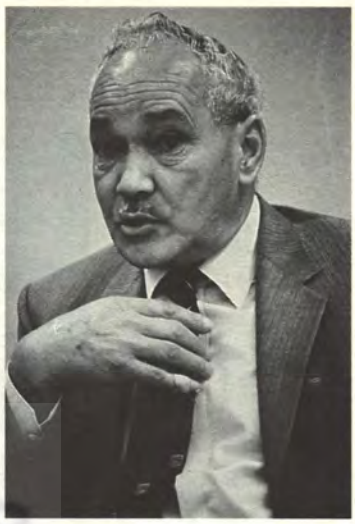


The rector of UWC, Prof Jakes Gerwel, at the construction site on campus. *PICTURE: Jac de Villiers*



A FEW ACHIEVERS AT UWC

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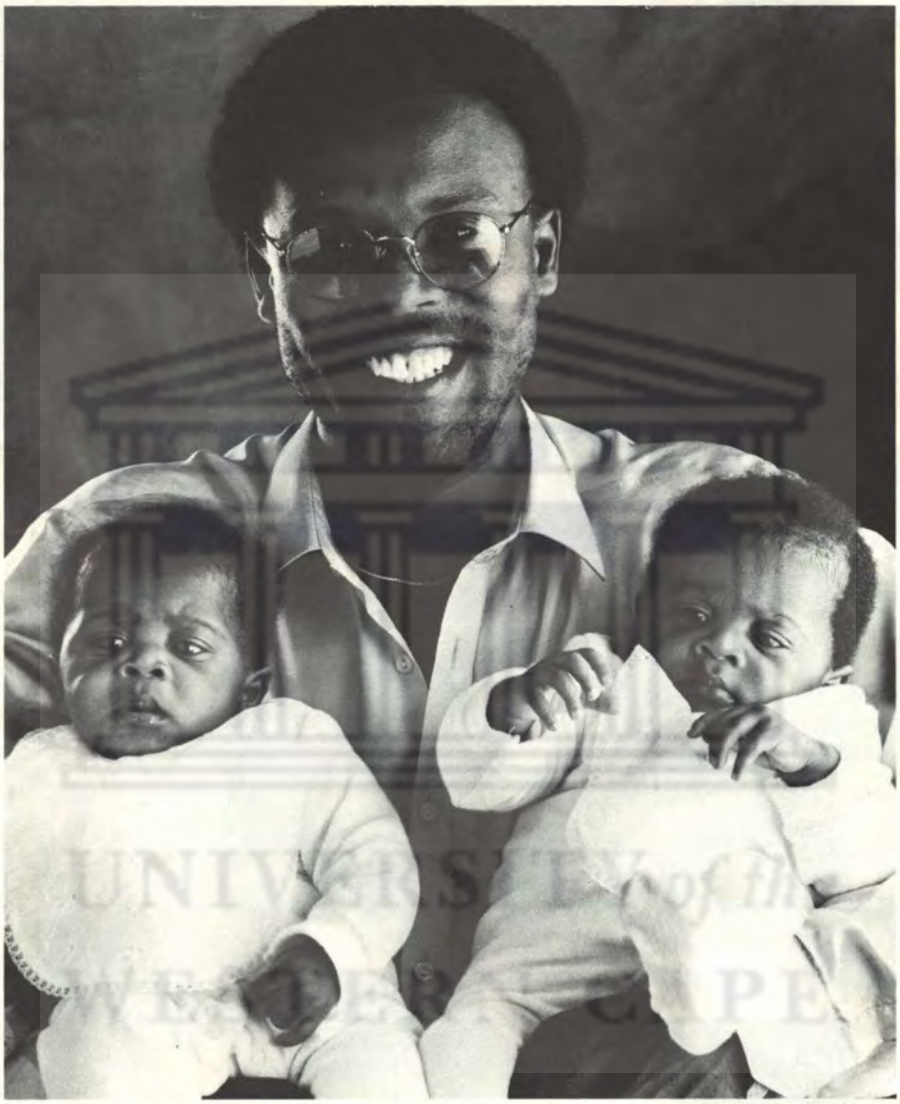

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From 'Bush' to credibility

The University of the Western Cape from the air. The Senate building is in front with the main campus in the background.

The University of the Western Cape was established by legislation in 1959 as a separate institution for ''coloureds''.

The following year the then ''university college'' opened its doors in a Bellville South primary school.

''Its origin, so clearly defined within the ideological framework of Verwoerdian apartheid, was a guarantee of the failure of the institution as a university,'' says an extract from *UWC 2001*, a UWC planning document which sets out strategies for the next decade.

The new campus was built ''between the bushes'' of the Cape Flats (which would lead to the nickname ''Bush'' that has since become a term of endearment), and the first buildings were eloquent testimony to a lack of imagination.

The initial staff were often not very well qualified academically and were mostly supporters of apartheid.

The slow growth of student numbers was a consequence of these negative factors; most potential UWC students preferred to try to gain admission to the University of Cape Town with its superior facilities.

According to the compilers of *UWC 2001*, the year 1973 can be regarded as a watershed in the history of UWC. It was the year in which opposition to the prevailing circumstances went public for the first time.

Students and a small group of lecturers (themselves mostly products of UWC) began to challenge the system openly. The reaction was predictable; the university was closed, all students had to reregister, and a commission of inquiry was set up.

The only real concession that followed was that the government acknowledged the need to appoint a black rector. ''For UWC this meant a change in the leadership of the university, which in turn brought with it a change in the course of its history.''

The first black rector, Prof Richard van der Ross, came under enormous pressure from the establishment to fit in with the existing pattern. The traumatic 1976 uprising and demonstrations on campus quickly showed that he was not prepared to play the role of a black figurehead. A fierce battle for control of the direction of the university developed between the conservative whites in control of the administration and the senate and elements under the authority of Van der Ross.

By the end of the decade it was clear that the conservatives had lost. With the support of his junior members of staff (mainly black) and a growing group of senior staff, Prof

University had to earn respect of community

(Cont from p5)

Van der Ross was able at the beginning of 1980 to outline a possible future for the university. This included:

* Breaking away from apartheid in education and addressing the problems of those educationally prejudiced by the system;
* The ideal of a totally open university;
* Dedication to the cultural and socio-economic development of Third World communities, particularly in the Western Cape.

The election of Prof Jakes Gerwel as successor to Prof Van der Ross in 1987 gave further momentum to the process of reorientation within the university. Prof Gerwel's rise - from student to junior lecturer in the conflict-torn 1970s and then to professor and dean - gave him the necessary background to define the role of UWC more clearly.

While UWC's commitment to the development of Third World communities in South Africa was already known, Prof Gerwel began to spell out further the ideological context of this commitment. It boils down to the view that an honest involvement is possible only within the framework of the democratic movement in South Africa, which means, among other things, a critical alliance with the extra-parliamentary democratic forces.

The orientation of UWC's role is summed up like this in *UWC 2001*: "In the first phase the emphasis fell on the *relevance* of UWC in regard to the community, and the university became known as the University of the Working Class. In the second phase, only just begun, the university is striving for greater relevance while at the same time stressing the need to maintain its own *identity* as a university by naming itself the intellectual home of the left."

The changes within the university can be understood only if the role of its students is taken into account. The process of renewal was initiated by the students of 1973. The most drastic changes came in 1980 with the start of school boycotts. The unco-ordinated youth uprising of 1976 became a more organised and sophisticated movement which exerted strong political pressure on the Western Cape community and also made its presence felt at UWC.

The struggle of the 1980s - in boycotts and clashes with police; in political demonstrations and an open commitment to a policy of non-racialism - firmly established UWC's image as a progressive institution. Overseas and in the eyes of the black community, UWC found greater acceptance.

But the disruption also had negative consequences: a decline in the morale of lecturers, a high dropout rate, a weak academic profile. A re-evaluation of teaching methods and practices followed, and alternative strategies were developed, discussed and implemented. Meetings between students and staff were arranged to find practical solutions to problems. These negotiations continue.

"It is still uncertain," says *UWC 2001*, "what the results of these negotiations and developments will be, and whether UWC really will be able to respond creatively to challenges from students in order to to avoid irreparable damage to its identity as a university.

"The problems of student involvement will have to be addressed through strategic planning in an attempt to find a *modus vivendi* that reconciles political relevance with the academic identity of UWC." ❑

A non-racial, democratic South Africa is the goal, says Gerwel

QUESTION: Newspaper reports often refer to the problems experienced by UWC. Some newspapers ascribe the problems to the stand you took in your inaugural address, defining the university as ''the intellectual home of the Left''.

PROF GERWEL: That there are problems and tensions cannot be denied. After all, what university does not have problems? But it depends on how one defines these problems. I hope that in my inaugural address I motivated and explained in a rational and coherent way the concept of the university as an ''intellectual home of the Left''. However, it does not surprise me that some people would want to attribute any phenomenon that can vaguely be defined as a problem to the political situation at and the orientation of the university. Such an explanation is not only over-simplification, it is political mischief and malice.

Trying to establish at UWC ''an intellectual home of the Left'' entails many and complex facets. It involves arguments about the relationship between a university and ideological formations. It involves the whole debate about the university as part of the ideological apparatus, and the role that it plays as such. One of the consequences of the commitment of UWC is the use of its educational activities to make a tangible contribution to the realisation of a non-racial, democratic society. And there shall certainly be problems on that route, not only here at UWC but in society generally.

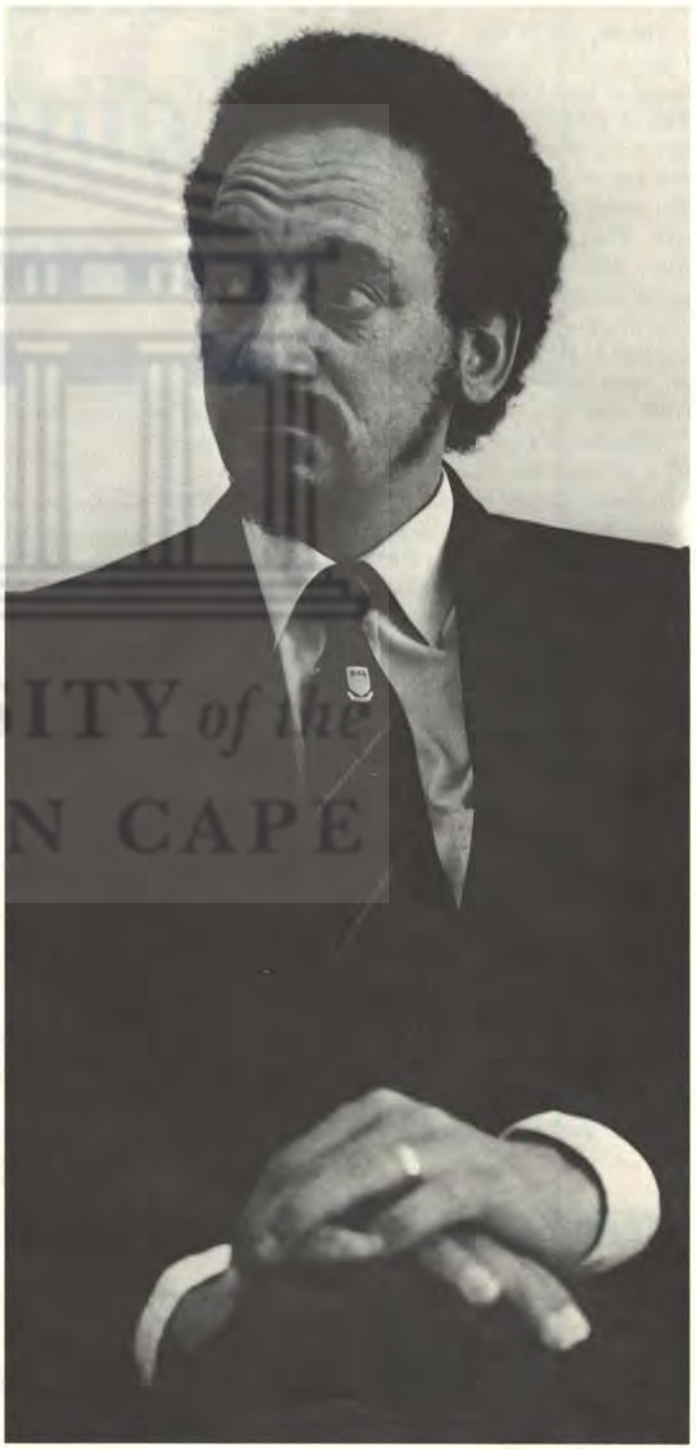
What exactly does this commitment entail?

People often use the phrase ''non-racial, democratic South Africa'' as if they were deploying two separate co-ordinating adjectives, while in fact non-racialism and democracy belong to one concept in the idiom in which we speak. In our situation – in the anti-apartheid, decolonialising thrust in which we stand – one cannot have non-racialism and then have democracy. South Africa is democratised in the non-racial struggle and non-racialism is achieved through democratisation. In our context the two are inseparable.

For UWC, therefore, the commitment to non-racial democracy implies many things. For instance, our council has had a long standing policy on democratising access to higher education. It means addressing the situation where the total number of university students for 1 000 of the total population are: 29,2 for whites, 4,7 for coloureds and 2,2 for Africans.

An ever larger mass of black students – Africans and coloureds – are coming through the matriculation system. And at precisely this stage you find that South African universities are setting admission standards much higher than those which applied only a few years ago. This is done for a variety of reasons but the objective effect of that is that fewer black students are entering the university system.

Against the background of UWC's declared commitment, how we admit people to the university is very important. For us at this moment, the democratising of access to higher education means that – unlike historical white universities – we generally have not imposed addi-



picture: KARINA TUROK

tional requirements over and above the statutory minimum, the statutory minimum being a matric exemption for admission to degree study and a senior certificate for diploma study. What is more, the white universities have an actual policy of no growth or one of very limited growth. Again the effect is that it is largely black students who are excluded. And this is a situation that we want to address.

Does this easier admission not cause academic pressures?

Pressures and tensions are the unavoidable consequence of the policy of democratisation. It means, for instance, that we have to do much more work on academic development as a core activity rather than as a peripheral activity for a few students. Academic development and bridging programmes are not subsidised by the state and the effect is a greater strain on our infrastructure and private resources.

From this year on we too must begin to include in our strategy a programme for planned growth, but up to the present students who applied in time and who qualified found a place at UWC.

Does "planned growth" mean that not all aspiring students will be admitted in future?

Yes, but the limits we are setting in specific areas have more to do with the fact that UWC is totally under-equipped in terms of facilities, if you compare it with white universities that are even younger than ourselves. Our commitment to opening access coupled to the historical inadequacies of our facilities create problems of means and resources.

There is a second aspect to democratisation, which relates to my previous comment about the relationship between democracy and non-racialism. The struggle for democracy is crucially linked to the recognition of the *majority* character of our society and UWC wants to reflect South Africa to a greater degree in its community than is now the case in universities divided by apartheid. The growth in the number of African students at our university is consequently rapid.

How do black students fit in to the ethos of the university?

African students did not come apologetically to UWC, asking to be accommodated in a "coloured" university. That's one of the most cheering aspects, because very quickly there was a considerable shift of leadership – politically and otherwise – to African students, so that the interaction between coloured and African students created a new vitality. The dominant political tradition at the university among most coloured and African students is that of non-racialism.

One of the exciting things about UWC is that in many ways we find ourselves in a kind of South African microcosm, almost a sort of laboratory situation, and that we undergo experiments that a non-racial, democratic South Africa will have to undergo at some stage.

I referred to the tension between democratising access on the one hand and the constraints of limited means on the other. A democratic South Africa will have to face and deal with the same problem: heightened expectations balanced by resource constraints.

The same applies to the vital, uninhibited coming together of people from different South African backgrounds, but with a shared political philosophy on non-racialism. The non-racial ethos does not automatically translate into non-racial unity when people are brought together. Non-racialism is something for which one has to actually work; it is borne from common struggle and interaction. That is why I suggested non-racialism as the university theme for this year, 1989.

But in practice there are still problems?

This is sometimes a little exaggerated. It's not as if there is open conflict - or war - between coloured and African students. On the contrary. And I am always a bit hesitant to talk about student politics, because it is the students' prerogative and obligation to solve their political problems. However, in the Congress tradition – which is a dominant one in this context – there is a long established view that non-racialism in South Africa should be understood as non-racialism under African leadership. This flows from the analysis in terms of which the main component of national liberation is and must be the liberation of the African majority as the most oppressed and exploited group in society.

How does this view manifest at the university?

On our SRC, for instance, nine out of 11 members are African students. This is a potentially very significant development, particularly in the Western Cape as a manifestation of African leadership. On the other hand the question remains: is this a form of abdication on the part of coloured activists? Because UWC has a proud tradition with more emphasis on producing coloured activists. So, are there organisational reasons for the apparantly reduced participation of coloured students? Are we as an institution doing less towards creating the environment for the continuation of that tradition? Is it a question of coming from different political experiences so that different political styles have developed to which we must give attention if we want to bring about non-racial unity?

How does the more visible presence of black students affect the character, the nature of the university?

I think the African students bring a different experience with them. They grew up with the Casspirs and the soldiers in the townships and schools and with much more direct oppression and exploitation. They bring to the campus a political experience in which activism is perhaps more emphasised, by contrast above all, perhaps, with a Western Cape tradition of theorising.

This brings us to another interesting phenomenon of the Western Cape. Striking about a dominant discourse among coloureds has always been the consistent denial of the existence of such a group. Naturally this is a strong response to the attempts of apartheid to create artificial groups and divisions.

But as UWC is moving towards non-racial unity – because it must be stressed that we are moving there and that these so-called problems are the indication of that movement and the lessons we learn in the process – we see that the material reality of a social grouping of coloured people, has political implications for the working out of non-racial unity.

If there is a group sharing a particular tradition, is it not a little artificial to try to compel a South African microcosm? Do people from a specific background not need their own academic home?

The big problem of South Africa is apartheid. And one of the facts of apartheid is the division of people, the creation of separation on grounds of such cultural factors as language. The struggle against apartheid, by definition, therefore has as one of its objectives a united, or a unifying, South African culture. This does not deny national diversity; in fact cultural unity depends on the recognition of diversity.

A university is precisely one of the places in a society where the possibility of creating such a unity is greater. Let me tell you what my own idea for the university is. I would like, and I have put it to one committee so that it can become a topic for discussion in the university community, consideration of this: what are the chances of arriving at an arrangement whereby English is the academic medium of instruction and we create a strong supporting environment in Xhosa and Afrikaans as the two predominant regional languages?

How would this work in practice?

Our history department, for example, has a project which involves the translation of key historiographical texts into Afrikaans, and making them available to students. One could do the same with Xhosa – make supporting material available. Naturally, one won't go too much over the top with this, but develop the material that can usefully be translated into Afrikaans and Xhosa.

If one takes a document like the Freedom Charter seriously, it means that one speaks of non-racialism and at the same time acknowledges that different cultural traditions exist. These are the sort of things we want to help work out at UWC. ❑

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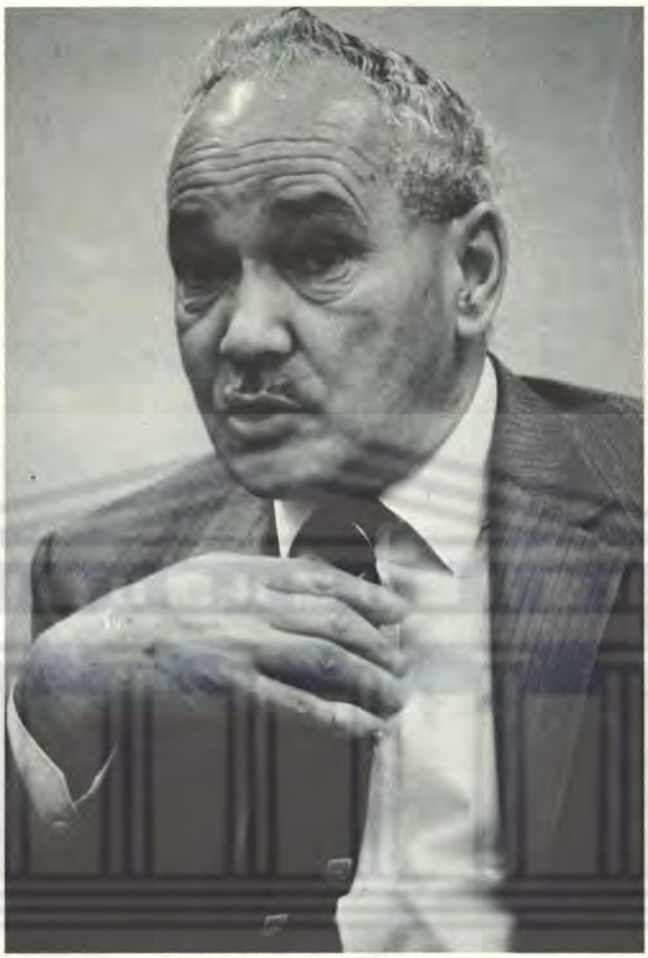
"THE University of the Western Cape has found its soul today," Prof Richard van der Ross said in September 1985 after leading a march of about 4 000 UWC students and lecturers to the Bellville police station to demand the release of several students detained there without trial.

Only ten years earlier, when Prof Van der Ross took over the rectorship of UWC, such a demonstration would have been completely unthinkable. But since his appointment in 1975, a process of dynamic change has gained momentum and UWC has been transformed from an apartheid institution into a fully fledged university.

In his eleven years as rector, Van der Ross presided over the stormy and sometimes painful birth of a new UWC, furthering the interests of the university with a policy of pragmatism.

In an interview Prof Van der Ross describes how out of touch with students the university authorities were before his arrival. "In 1973 the rector issued a decree requiring all male students to wear ties on campus. In protest against this, students burned their ties on campus one day and this demonstration gave the people a big fright. The university itself was closed for a few weeks and the rector, who had been there for barely a year, decided rather to return to the restful work of a professor of theology. But it was such an over-reaction. Particularly if one thinks of what would happen later on the campus."



Prof Richard van der Ross

In 1976, hardly a year after Van der Ross took over the helm as rector, the youth uprising ignited in Soweto also hit UWC.

"It burst out in a form of resistance to the university," he explains. "The resistance was directed inwards because the university was seen as a creation of the government. Buildings were damaged and one or two were set alight."

But this attitude has changed over time. In the last years of Van der Ross's rectorship, protest and aggression were no longer directed against the university and students and lecturers were able to work together in 1985 to protest against detention s.

"We managed to change the racist image of the university which existed in the community by achieving the admission of other than 'coloured' students and lecturers," Van der Ross explains.

UWC was also the first university to introduce equal pay. "There were three wage scales in those days," he says. "Whites got the biggest salaries and then coloureds and then black people. We changed that.

"So acceptance began to take hold in the community and among students and UWC lost the image of a thing forced upon us and contributing to our oppression. We said to the students: Your fight is our fight."

Nevertheless, Van der Ross had to perform a delicate balancing act, on the one hand persuading the authorities to "entrust" more autonomy to the university, and on the other winning legitimacy in the eyes of the community. He explains that he was never directly involved in any political activity. "I felt that as rector I had to keep the campus together. The problem was that I didn't know the politics of the students."

The attempts to steer UWC in a new direction also contributed to the university's struggle for academic standards. This was closely bound up with another battle Van der Ross had to wage - the campaign for academic acceptance of his university.

"In 1975 many of the English language universities didn't want much to do with us," he says. "We didn't have the academic standards or the overseas connections and we were despised in the academic world. They were also sceptical because we were such a direct creation of apartheid.

"When the other universities saw that we were beginning to take control and to move away from our submissive position, they gave us a lot of help. The fact that I promoted the concept of a 'people's university' wherever I found myself clearly made an impression, precisely because I could so easily have maintained the status quo, and UWC could have remained a slave of apartheid."

Van der Ross says that he began to speak of the "workers' university" in his first year as rector. "People in the community do not have behind them a history of universities and university education and did not attach much value to the university and its qualifications. Then I came with the idea of a university for the workers. So that the children of these workers could also have an opportunity to qualify themselves. It all contributed towards the students and the whole community giving more worth and status to the university."

He says he began noticing around 1982-83 that the university colours were being worn more often and that students had become proud of UWC.

Meanwhile students had also begun raising their political voice. Van der Ross's style sometimes clashed with the students' but results flowed from this dynamic process. As he himself acknowledges, the students began through their political activism to play leadership roles in the community. "Students were in the forefront of political initiatives and the community began to look up to them for leadership."

To a degree, therefore, Van der Ross prepared the way for people like Jakes Gerwel to extend within the community the acceptance of UWC as an intellectual home. "It makes me proud to see what a leading role UWC is playing today in the community," Van der Ross says. ❑

UWC 30 YEARS

Hammering and tinkering at UWC

The large number of new buildings that have sprung up at UWC in the last five years speak more eloquently than anything else of the unprecedented growth that the former "bush college" has recently undergone.

The doubling of the number of registered students in 1984, the year the university became completely autonomous, has required a total transformation of the campus. Construction workers are still working flat out to complete projects at UWC scheduled for completion this year.

The large variety in style of the buildings erected in the last five years contrasts sharply with the older UWC buildings, put up under the watchful little eye of the department of community development and planning. After the university became autonomous, the planning division of the foremost architectural firm in the country was retained for a development project which, at its peak in 1987, saw UWC enriching the construction industry by more than R20 million.

LEFT and TOP: The Post-modernist style of the new buildings . . . Architects were commissioned to design buildings with which one can fall in love.
ABOVE: The old library . . . The new library is a great deal bigger and more modern than the old building.

pictures: ZUBEIDA VALLIE

The giant student centre on the main campus was the first building to depart from the official architectural style. It was followed by a modern library built of red brick and glass, completed at the beginning of the year. The conjunction of these two buildings with the university's great hall now forms an enormous square for student gatherings.

The faculties of mathematics and computer science were housed in new quarters earlier this year and a new building for the chemistry department was completed at the same time. Each of these buildings has its own unusual style, ranging from the classical columns of the student centre to the violet pillars of the chemistry building.

"While the university was an apartheid institution without control over its own affairs, officials in Pretoria decided what buildings the university needed," says Reg Patterson, former lecturer in architecture at the University of Cape Town.

"The buildings built on contract are almost without exception unsuitable for the purpose for which they were designed and are of poor quality. So we decided to move away from the grey buildings of apartheid and instructed architects to design buildings that they themselves would love."

Because of the enormous increase in student numbers, most buildings could be partially financed from from state subsidies. Other projects were sponsored by private institutions.

A new residence for 300 students completed last month was financed in this way. "Some people jokingly refer to the residence as the Mount Nelson of the Cape Flats," Patterson says.

The R10 million to be spent this year on erecting new buildings is necessary to clear the backlog in housing and lecture rooms, he adds. "There was such a huge backlog that the building programme of the last five years could not even begin to wipe it out."

More construction is envisaged for the future. A complex for the commerce faculty will be constructed in the next 15 months while architects are already designing a building for the physics faculty. The plan is for this building to be ready for occupation in 1992. Various other projects, including the renovation of existing buildings, are under consideration but have not yet been financed.

"The flattening out in the growth of student numbers and the cutting of government subsidies may cause a decline in our development programme," Patterson explains.

One project that will definitely go ahead is the creation of an artificial lake over 500m long and at least 12 metres wide. A landscaping architect has already been instructed to design the lake.

"The lake is necessary to provide for all the university's irrigation needs," Patterson says, "and students will be able to row and windsurf on it."

If all the plans are realised, very little will remain of the Port Jacksons of the erstwhile "Bush". ❑

When your mother earns only R120 a week . . .

WHEN Nomathamsanqa Pinky Mbonda decided to go to university, she knew it would be difficult. But this first-year student from Port Elizabeth was not worried about her matric results. She was worried that she would not be able to meet the costs of her studies.

"My mother tries to help, but she is working for other people in the household – there are another six in the family who have to be supported. My two older brothers barely survive by doing casual jobs because in Port Elizabeth there are more and more people and less and less work."

But UWC's lenient policy requiring students to pay a fee of only R60 at registration, and a bursary of R1 200 from the UWC Education Aid Programme (EAP), meant that Nomathamsanqa could forget her financial problems – at least for this year.

Vuyiswa Ntloko of Guguletu, a second-year student in social work, is not so lucky. "Last year I had a bursary from the Kagiso Trust," she says, "but this year there was no money, although I passed all my subjects."

Vuyiswa's mother works as a cleaner and earns about R120 a week. She has three other children – all younger than Vuyiswa – to support.

There are hundreds of students in Vuyiswa's position who come to study at UWC each year and who find it difficult to scrape together the necessary cash. Most students are dependent on bursaries to further their education. But because the money available for bursaries has not kept pace with the growing number of students, the university has to stretch its limited funds further and further.

This state of affairs can be ascribed partly to UWC's policy of not discriminating against anybody on grounds of colour or belief – and also of not allowing financial reasons to prevent students from acquiring a university education.

"We believe in giving everyone a chance," says the director of bursaries and loans, Graham Renecke. Students have to pay a fee of only R60 when they register. And even if they have not paid up the balance by the last deadline for payment in September, they are still allowed to write exams.

The maximum fine for late payment is R50 and it is only at the beginning of December that the files of debtors are handed over to collectors. "We realise that students have huge problems in this regard and that many of them come from underpriveleged homes. We try to be as lenient as possible," Renecke says.

But the university's generous policy actually causes further financial problems. UWC had debts of around R4 million last year and cannot afford to "carry" indefinitely students who are unable to pay. It is also unlikely that students' parents will be able to meet the deficit, given the rise in both inflation and unemployment and the fact that much less money is available. More bursaries and loans are the only solution.

Last year more than two thirds of UWC students – 7 866 of a total of 10 592 – were receiving financial help of one kind or another. But only 282 had bursaries or loans worth more than R4 500 from which to pay tuition fees of R1 900 and hostel fees of R2 500. Most students, 4 451 to be precise, received support of between R2 000 and R4 200, while 3 133 received less than R2 200.

There are four kinds of financial support available at UWC: State and semi-state bursaries, bursaries from local and international donors administered by UWC, and private sector bursaries and loans allocated by the UWC bursary committee.

ALMOST half the students are dependent on state bursaries which make a R16,2-million hole in the estimated R19,9 million available for financial assistance at UWC. But these bursaries are given only to students doing teaching courses. The result is that many students who would otherwise pursue different study options enrol for education courses for purely financial reasons.

This policy has its source in the days when UWC was still a "coloured" university, says Vincent Morta, the chief administration official. The Department of Coloured Affairs freely offered bursaries to students wanting to enrol for education degrees.

Students who wanted to pursue other courses struggled to find financial assistance – and they are still struggling today. "What's more, in the past two years the state has started to threaten to reduce bursaries further," says Morta. In the pharmacy class of 1988, for example, "only three or four" of a total of 80 students received state bursaries.

Two reasons are offered for the decline in state bursaries. "Students are now thinking twice before they make teaching their profession, particularly those who are more politically aware. Then a large number of students who apply are rejected and we don't know why. The state gives no reasons when it dismisses applications," Renecke says.

UWC would like to expand the financial help available to students by enlisting support from the private sector and from local and international organisations.

"At the moment we have to administer bursaries according to criteria laid down by the donors. Thus, if someone donates money for BComm and BSc studies, we have to apply it there even if there are other faculties who also need funds. And first year students also urgently need help which they don't always get," Renecke says.

The educational careers of first years without full bursaries are hugely uncertain. Those unable to afford the increased hostel fees of R3 000 squat in friends' rooms or rent rooms from families who sometimes live far from the campus.

Nomathamsanqa Pinky Mbonda, for instance, who comes from a "site and service" scheme in Kwazakhele, squats in one of the UWC hostels. "Three of us stay in one room. It is difficult to study there and I try to work in the library until as late as possible."

Her fellow student, Noxolo Cynthia Mapingana, has similar problems. She stays with a family in Mbekweni – which is an hour's train ride from the campus. Noxolo has an EAP bursary of R1 200 – almost enough to meet her tuition fees of R1 680, but not enough to afford hostel fees. Her mother, who earns R79 a week at a Worcester restaurant, can afford only to pay her travel costs.

The university is continuing to investigate new ways of managing the financial problems that accompany its open policy. Other ways of financing students have to be found. For instance, private companies that provide bursaries to students in particular courses could place those students in "apprenticeship" positions. In this way students could both earn money and acquire valuable experience.

A bureau for financial aid could also help to find weekend work for students.

Given the cut in state subsidies, UWC itself will not be able to provide a very much greater contribution in the form of bursaries for the foreseeable future. ❑

A first generation of students

WHAT IS the background of UWC students? How do they finance their studies and what is their home language?

It is clear from answers to a questionnaire distributed annually to first year students by the centre for student welfare and health that the majority of students are a first generation of university-goers.

Only 7,1% of the 1989 first year students have fathers with one or more university degrees, while only 3,1% of their mothers have degrees. The highest academic qualification of over 32% of the fathers and 38% of the mothers of these students is lower than Std 6.

It is selfevident that the incomes of UWC parents cannot bear the cost of maintaining one or more children at university. The combined income of almost 63% of the parents of 1989 first year students is lower than R1 000 a month, while 17,9% of parents earn between R1 000 and R 1 500.

It is therefore not surprising that 68,8% of first year students in 1989 indicated that they were financing their studies through bursaries and loans. The figure is significantly lower than the corresponding figure for last year, when no less than 80,2% of students indicated that they were relying on bursaries and loans. The decline may be ascribed to the government's reduction of bursaries and subsidies which hit students hard.

As a result of the university's declared policy of non-racialism, the number of students whose home language is other than Afrikaans has increased dramatically over the last few years. In 1988 a total of 65,9% of first year students indicated that Afrikaans was their home language, while 25,2% said English was theirs. Some 7,1% said they spoke an African language at home. This year the picture changed dramatically with only 52% of UWC's first years identifying Afrikaans as their home language. English first language speakers remained steady at just over 25% but the number of students indicating an African language as their mother tongue jumped to 19,4%. ❑

Community criticism welcome

The university welcomes involvement from the community.

THERE IS a strong consciousness at UWC of the university's image and standing in the community. For the rector and student leaders it is of cardinal importance that university action does not alienate parents and other members of the community.

A series of information meetings were held in Cape Town and the Platteland in the second half of last year to inform parents and others interested in UWC about the role of the university in a changing society.

The meetings were arranged by a committee formed by various organisations at UWC. The information campaign was launched after allegations about malpractices at UWC were made by some newspapers.

The news reports were based on internal investigations into violations set up by UWC itself. The university authorities admitted that there had indeed been instances of vandalism but described them as ''isolated''.

''The newspaper reports created the impression that the university was in a state of chaos, that the residences were in turmoil and that students were unable to act in a morally acceptable manner,'' UWC's head of publications, Zubeida Jaffer, said in an interview.

About 800 people attended the first meeting at the Kasselsvlei High School in Bellville South, where the community was given an opportunity to ask the rector, Prof Jakes Gerwel, about events on the campus and to express criticism of UWC.

Prof Gerwel told the meeting that he did not want to deny that the university was experiencing problems. ''We are slowly and painfully struggling towards a genuine non-racialism that will serve as a stronghold against the divisions of apartheid,'' he said.

''It is not an easy path that we have chosen but it has never been believed that the way to freedom would be an easy one. We are walking a dangerous road.''

He invited parents to assist the university in this task by visiting the campus or phoning to express their criticisms. ''What is finally at stake here is the institution's contribution to the democratising of the community as a whole,'' Gerwel said.

The information campaign was launched after consultations with a range of groups on the campus. The campaign was planned in broad terms at a launch committee meeting where the decision was also taken to carry the message into the Platteland.

Meetings were held at places like Worcester, Saldanha, Oudtshoorn, Port Elizabeth, Paarl, Upington, Vredendal and Kimberley.

On occasion, community leaders such as Franklin Sonn, Dullah Omar and Faried Esack addressed the meetings. In this way the attempt was made to place the campaign in the widest possible political perspective.

Writing in UWC's fortnightly paper, *Bulletin*, the editor of *South*, Moegsien Williams, said the campaign could also have consequences among students. ''Over 100 students were involved in organising these meetings. The potential of such action to channel the energy of students creatively, and to move away from the suffocating politics of mass meetings, is enormous.

''The students' exposure to the concerns and problems of the community and the necessity for them to defend their actions, can only contribute to raising the level of student activists on the campus,'' he wrote. ❑

Home of new thinking

THE University of the Western Cape has made its mark solidly on an academic level, particularly in the last decade. UWC initiatives are breaking new ground in many spheres.

The achievements of which the university is rightfully proud include:

* In January last year UWC established a Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (known as CACE), which offers a two-year course on a part-time basis for community workers who have only a Std 8 certificate.

After completing the course the students receive a diploma from the university which declares them qualified for work related to adult education. The head of CACE is Prof Shirley Walters. Most of those enrolled for the course are people involved in educational work in Platteland towns.

* Community work is of the highest importance to UWC. The university is very proud of the dental clinic it runs in Guguletu which offers a free service to local residents.

* On other terrains UWC is also doing pioneering work in the community. Last year a house was bought in Cradock which serves as a base for UWC students providing assistance to community projects in the area. The house is also used on a co-operative basis as a place where unemployed women make clothes, and a library is housed in one of its rooms.

* From next year, UWC's School of Pharmacy will be the only one in the Western Cape to offer postgraduate courses. It is also the only pharmacy faculty in the country registered with the Pharmacy Board to provide practical training internally.

* Academic support programmes have been instituted for students of physics, maths, pharmacy, geography and economics. The programme is known as Supplemental Instruction (SI) and is modelled on a system used in more than 180 institutions in the United States.

Last year the SI co-ordinator, Lionel Benting, attended a course at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, where the programme was developed. The aim is to help students who suffer the effects of a poor education system, to cope.

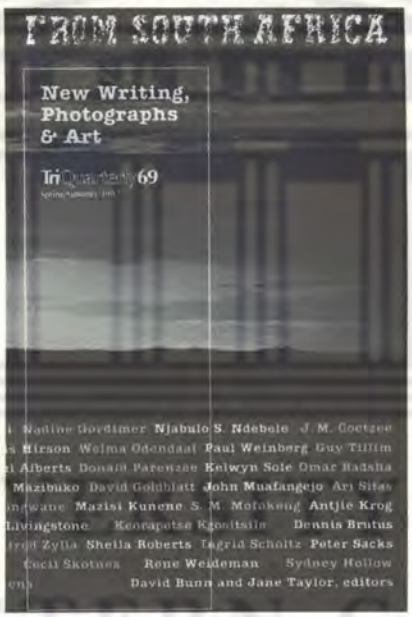
* Links have been established with overseas universities and a special relationship exists between UWC and the University of Missouri. This university, which consists of four campuses with over 50 000 students, has links with only three foreign universities: the universities of Beijing and Moscow - and UWC. The relationship includes, among other things, an exchange of academic staff.

* The history department, under the guidance of Prof Colin Bundy, is doing pioneering work in the reinterpretation of history. A ''People's History Project'' was begun in 1986 with the aim of making history more relevant for students.

Participation in the project is voluntary – but over 2 000 students have already made an active contribution. The history department is building up a reservoir of original material and new, alternative sources for the interpretation of historical events.

Workshops, films and conferences are arranged regularly around the theme of ''people's history''.

* The English department of UWC, headed by Prof Stan Ridge, is thought to be one of the best in the country, according to the rector, Prof Jakes Gerwel. The department received international recognition last year when the prestigious American literary magazine *Triquarterly* invited two members of staff, David Bunn and Jane Taylor, to serve as editors for a special edition devoted to South Africa.



This particular edition of *Triquarterly* received high praise from the American media. Columbia University lecturer Rob Nixon had this to say: ''The editors' adventurousness and their intimate sense of the South African social context should ensure their anthology a place in many African studies and political science courses as well as, more obviously, in literary ones.''

* The Afrikaans department is making its mark in the debate being waged around the concept of a national South African literature. The department, under Prof Ampie Coetzee, was the first in the country to institute a comparative approach to literature. On second year level, for instance, English texts are offered for comparison with Afrikaans texts.

The three UWC lecturers who attended the recent Victoria Falls meeting with the ANC also had a strong influence on the course of the debate there.

According to Prof Coetzee, his department's aim is to show that ''literatures in the different languages of South Africa can be different interpretations of one social and political reality''.

This would mean that literatures up until the present would have to be reinterpreted from the viewpoint of a national literature. ''Hopefully such a discipline could eventually grow into a department of national literature.''

* The theology faculty as UWC is regarded as one of the leading faculties in the country, relevant particularly in the debate around ''contextual theology''.

The achievements of more and more UWC students and lecturers are receiving international recognition. Just a few examples from the last year or two:

* The sought after Fulbright research scholarship was awarded recently to the head of the biblical studies department at UWC, Dr Richard Stevens. The scholarship is awarded by Harvard University.

* Earlier this year, postgraduate dentistry student Dr Ameenah Sheikh won a national competition - and a trip to Dublin - with her thesis entitled ''Gingival health of transplant on cyclosporine therapy''. She delivered an address to an international dentistry conference in Dublin.

* The director of the Goldfields Resource Centre, Prof Merlyn Mehl, was recently asked to serve on the board of an international research institute concerned with human intelligence. The headquarters of the Human Intelligence International Research Institute are at the University of Puerto Rico and it has wide contact with researchers in Third World countries.

* The Special Academic Assistant at UWC, Prof Owen van den Berg, was asked by the University of Namibia to oversee the transformation of the education faculty. Prof Van den Berg's task is to advise the university on re-evaluating its role in the light of Namibia's passage to independence. He has already had wide-ranging discussions with academics, politicians and student leaders in Windhoek.

* Prof Shirley Walters of the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education is a member of an international group of 13 women who have begun a project on adult education. ❑

Clashes unavoidable, says SRC chairperson

The SRC at UWC seldom takes important political decisions off its own bat. So says SRC chairperson Noby Ngombani. "We hold mass meetings where the issue is talked through before a decision is taken," he says. "The SRC regards itself as bound by any decision taken in this manner."

He stresses that the SRC tries not to impose decisions on students "from above". But in practice it is not always so easy. Precisely because the students are not a monolithic group which agrees about everything, and because intense debate occurs around political policy and strategy, SRC decisions are not always popular among all students.

An application by Azasm (Azanian Students Movement), the black consciousness organisation for students, to register as an organisation with the SRC, was recently rejected, for example, and led to tension on the campus.

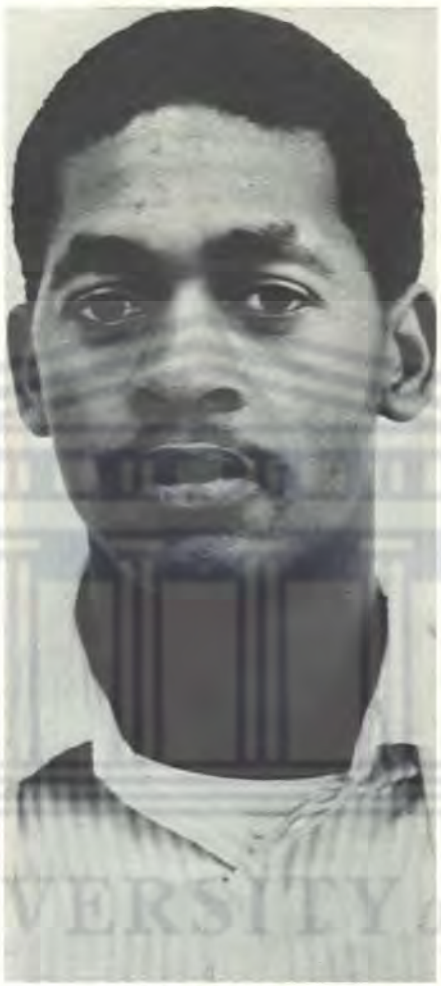
"We are trying to assemble a broad, non-racial front on the campus and because of Azasm's racist policy we could not accommodate them," Ngombani explains. "If the SRC action was unpopular it would have been clear at a mass meeting. But all the structures at UWC agreed after consultation that non-racialism is the cornerstone of the society we want at UWC.

"We feel also that we have a duty to politicise the struggle. The SRC cannot simply remain neutral and it cannot simply address the problems of the university. There are also very important, wider political questions that we address."

It is selfevident that this political policy can be dangerous for the SRC because it can easily encourage division rather than unity among students – a fact underlined by the low percentage poll in the election for the outgoing SRC. In the election at the end of last year only 25,5% of students voted – only 0,5% above the 25% required for the election to be valid.

"Students experienced the previous SRC as aloof and uninvolved because they did not address students' immediate problems," Ngombani explains. "The students lost confidence in the SRC as an institution. It's natural that people don't want to vote for an institution that does not further their interests."

This year's SRC has given far more attention than its predecessors to questions like the lack of hostel accommodation and problems over exam dates. "Students complain to us and want us to do something about these issues. But when we act, some lecturers think that we are inciting students," he says. He emphasises that in fact the SRC tries to avoid creating friction, and names the postponement of exams in June as a good example.



Noby Ngombani

After students decided at a mass meeting that the exams should be postponed for a week to give them enough study time, lecturers dug in their heels and decided that the postponement of exams was absolutely unacceptable to them. The students also stuck to their guns: either the exams were postponed or they would boycott for a week, after which they would be prepared to write exams.

Prof Jakes Gerwel attempted throughout the crisis to bring the two sides together. "Gerwel is in a catch-22 situation because he must account to his lecturers and not take decisions alone on these issues. But he knows also that the students sometimes have legitimate grievances," Ngombani says.

During this most recent crisis Gerwel tried to overcome the problem by taking an elected delegation of lecturers with him to negotiate with student leaders. This enabled them to hear for themselves what the students' grievances were and how serious they were about their demands.

This gave the lecturers pause and eventually the exams were indeed postponed for a week. The way in which the whole crisis elapsed gives a good indication of how conflict is handled by the different groupings at UWC.

"We want at all times to solve the conflicts that arise in a manner that excludes confrontation," Ngombani says. "Students like it if we can address their problems without confrontation and class boycotts."

Nevertheless, it was finally the threat of exam boycotts that was the decisive factor in resolving the conflict.

Eventually the exam week ran into the vacation, but, according to Ngombani, students were more than prepared to accept this.

He acknowledges that the confrontation would not have been necessary if problems had been identified and addressed at an earlier stage.

A system of faculty committees, where students and lecturers can address problems arising in the faculties, is already being introduced. However, only four of eight committees are operational and that is why the exam problem could not be systematically solved, says Ngombani.

"The ideal is actually that we don't reach a point where we threaten to boycott. The ideal is that all problems are sorted out in the faculty so that we can give more attention to the broader issues."

But does the SRC not run the danger of being co-opted by the university administration if all problems are addressed through discussion and non-confrontation?

Ngombani does not think so. "As long as there is injustice, and as long as there is still a struggle in the community, we will play an important role on campus. Also, because of the history of UWC, it is unavoidable that there will be clashes of interest between students and the administration from time to time. And we will be there to see to the interests of students." ❑

A new language policy

A NEW language policy is on the cards at UWC. A special working group has been created to investigate language attitudes and needs in the light of the change in the composition of the student community.

All the indications are that the university is unavoidably headed in the direction of an English regimen.

According to the rector, Prof Jakes Gerwel, the ideal is that English should be the most important medium of education at the university, with "support courses" in Afrikaans and Xhosa for students lacking full command of English.

Prof Ulrich Pluddemann, head of the working group on the language question, says that the large number of Xhosa-speaking students streaming into UWC over the past few years has made a new language policy necessary.

"There is now a large group of students on campus some of whom have never learned Afrikaans – including students from Botswana, for example. It is unreasonable to expect them to follow lectures in Afrikaans."

University authorities emphasise that no hasty decisions will be taken. "We don't want to offend anybody." Particularly students from the northwest, where Afrikaans is the spoken lingua franca, find it difficult to follow classes in English.

According to Prof Gerwel, a definite inclination towards English is evident among the majority of students - for political but also for practical reasons. "Most of the textbooks are in English and students often find it difficult to translate concepts into Afrikaans again during exams."

When UWC was founded, Afrikaans was the only medium of instruction. "Lecturers could get away with throwing in a little bit of English here and there," Pluddemann says.

Traditionally, the university is actually dual medium but in practice, according to Pluddemann, it has been "mixed medium", with classes taking place in a mixture of both official languages.

The change in the composition of the student community made it necessary to reassess the language policy. This led to the decision to form the working group on the language question, comprised of senior members of staff. The most important guideline followed by the group is "to accommodate the language needs of the students so that they feel at home and are not academically prejudiced".

A questionnaire is being drawn up in which the following issues will come under the spotlight:

* Language competence (formal qualifications as well as the speakers' own evaluation of their capability);
* Usage (what language is used in typical situations, coupled with expectations for the future);
* Language preference (in different circumstances - for example, at home, among friends, in class);
* Interest in remedial measures.

The aim is to establish whether it is possible to move in the direction of an English language university without estranging traditional students, and also to investigate how to accommodate students who are not fully competent in either of the official languages.

"We don't want Afrikaans to again become a medium for reactionary political mobilisation as in the days of Dal Josafat," Gerwel jokes.

Pluddemann, who began working at UWC in 1975 with Richard van der Ross, has personally experienced the transition towards English. According to him, all minutes in the arts faculty, for example, were previously kept in Afrikaans. "At that time we went out of our way to accommodate English speakers." These days, minutes alternate between Afrikaans and English. The reports of some academic committees are exclusively in English, particularly when there is, for example, a person of British extraction on the staff.

Pluddemann characterises the university's language policy as "pragmatic". So, for instance, when in the past it was found that law students required to do the Afrikaans practical course were experiencing serious problems, a junior lecturer was immediately appointed to provide more intensive instruction.

In the English special course there was a similar problem. Great emphasis was laid in the past on literary studies. The approach is now different: more emphasis is laid on content value than on the level of aesthetic criticism. "It is becoming a more occupation-directed education."

Pluddemann says it is extremely important that students feel "safe" in the medium in which they receive education. "This may help to reduce boycotts, to make students more motivated and to limit the damage suffered by the university." ❑

Fewer and fewer speak Afrikaans

IN TERMS of language distribution, the composition of the student community has changed dramatically in the past few years. In 1980 some 72% of students were Afrikaans speaking. This year Afrikaans is the first language of only 48%

At the same time, the number of students with an African language as mother tongue has increased from a mere 53 in 1980 (and 43 two years later) to a total of 1 998 this year. This means that almost 14% of students speak neither Afrikaans nor English as a first language.

The change in language distribution of students over the past decade is tabulated:

YEAR	STUDENT TOTAL	AFR	ENG	AFR/ENG	AFRICAN LANGUAGE
1980	4 153	2 998	806	296	53
1981	4 131	2 765	937	385	44
1982	4 310	2 595	1 247	425	43
1983	4 885	2 739	1 549	529	68
1984	6 125	3 258	2 085	644	138
1985	7 701	4 866	1 622	877	336
1986	6 772	4 192	1 411	769	400
1987	9 034	4 912	2 045	1 126	951
1988	10 592	5 729	2 230	1 235	1 398
1989	11 556	5 572	2 400	1 586	1 998

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Students and democracy

THE political unrest that reigned in South Africa in the 1980s also had an impact on UWC. Demonstrations, class boycotts and stone-throwing were merely some of the symptoms for which the apartheid virus was responsible.

An exchange of letters in the UWC campus media, including the regular *Bulletin*, suggests that these forms of protest were not accepted by all students. In particular the "undemocratic style" of activists during class boycotts attracted serious opposition from a constituency including lecturers frustrated by being unable to plan their courses properly.

In an attempt to prevent gross friction, university authorities have firmly committed themselves since 1985 to a process of democratisation that includes all levels of the university community: administration, academic staff and students.

The measures taken include:

* The development of a comprehensive system of senate and faculty committees;

* The decentralisation of financial planning;

* Provision for representation of non-professorial staff on the senate;

The former Chancellor of UWC, Prof Erika Theron, and Prof Jakes Gerwel.

* The formation of student faculty committees to give more attention to faculty issues within the present SRC system;

* Joint workshops for students and staff to discuss problems and spell out the objectives of UWC;

* Attempts to strengthen contact between students and staff at departmental level by means of a system of elected class representatives.

At times of crisis, special meetings of senate, faculty and staff are called to discuss policy and consider action. The university authorities are clearly ranged on the side of the students, particularly when it comes to political demands. On the question of strategy, however, there are sometimes real differences.

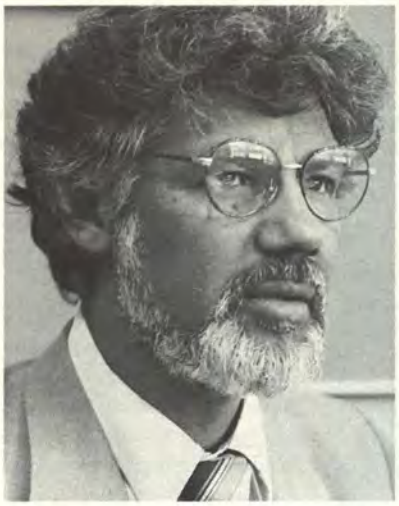
For this reason, since the election of Jakes Gerwel as rector, he and other key university officials have gone out of their way to maintain close ties with student leaders, including the Student Representative Council.

The idea is to involve students in a responsible way in decisions that affect their lives. This includes the right to participate in the management of the university.

In *UWC 2001*, for example, formal representation of students at faculty, senate and council level, is held out as a prospect.

It is also proposed that students should be more involved in decision-making about courses and the whole teaching process. At the same time it is envisaged that student leaders and representatives should be more actively and responsibly involved in organisational decisions such as exam dates, prescribed literature and course content. ❑

Achievers at 'Bush'



Dr Richard Stevens, MA Duquesne University, Pennsylvania; PhD at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey 1983-84. Head of Bible Studies.

Prof Fanie Sonn, MSc (clinical psychology) at Fresno College, California 1977-79. Acting Dean of Community and Health Services Faculty.

Brian O'Connell, MA and MEd at Columbia University, New York, 1983-84. Senior lecturer, History of Education.

Prof Colin Johnson, post-doctoral studies at Harvard University, Massachussetts 1983-1984. Head of Botany.

Norman Saunders, awarded Harvard/SA fellowship 1984. Director of computer centre at UWC.

Dr Jan Persens. DPhil at Cornell University, New York, 1981-85. Senior lecturer in Mathematics.

Helping schools bit by bit

Mathematics made easy

UWC became the first South African university to break the high-tech ground of computer based education when it bought the PLATO system in 1980.

After 1982, when the university council accepted an education policy committed to striving for greater community involvement, the PLATO system was first experimentally and then fully implemented to service surrounding schools.

In this way the university attempted to move away from its elitist past and at the same time to address the real problems of oppression in the community. The PLATO system begins by offering computer instruction in the form of single lessons in mathematics and science. But it also gives students access to courses specially developed for the South African school syllabus. The system helps matriculants in the Cape Town area to get on top of mathematics and science.

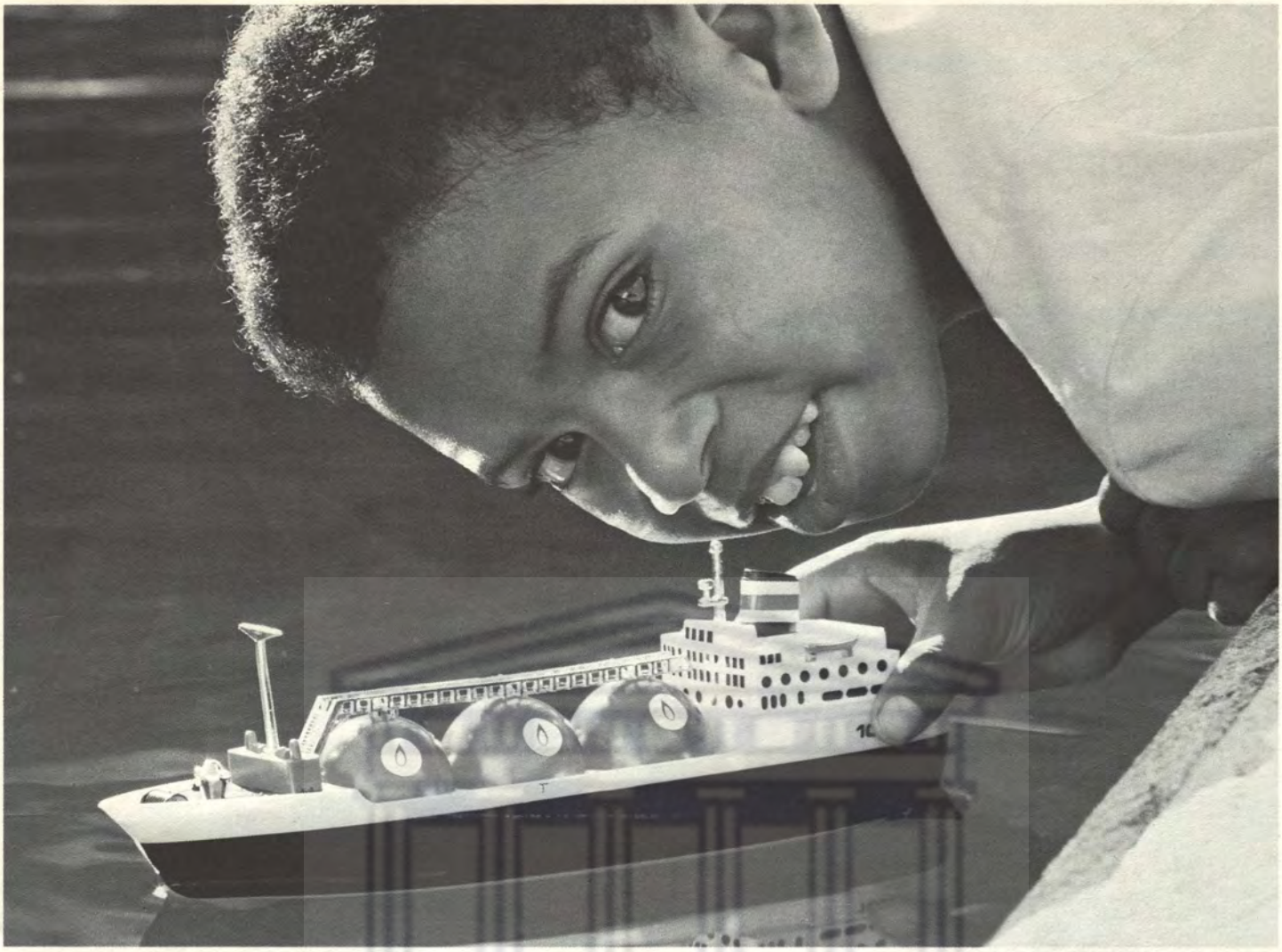
Every week some 1 000 matriculants from surrounding schools are brought to the resource centre for three-hour courses. The whole class is invited to attend the programme. Under the supervision of trained staff, the system is used to identify students' weak and strong points and to prescribe additional resources to help students overcome weaknesses.

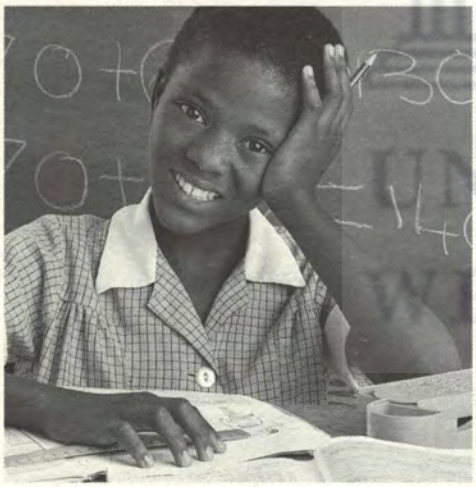
The system can be used in this way, on a limited scale, to give those students worst off under apartheid education a chance to close the gap.

The results of the programme are well above average. Some schools are achieving a pass rate of as high as 80% in science and mathematics while the average pass rate in these subjects for students under the Department of Development and Training is around 20%.

The 52 PLATO terminals are in the Gold Fields resource centre on the campus. In addition, a mobile unit stationed full-time in Mitchells Plain contains another 18 mini-computers for the use of 12 local high schools.

The programme encourages teacher participation to ensure a measure of continuity between work done in the classroom and the problems being addressed by the unit. ❑





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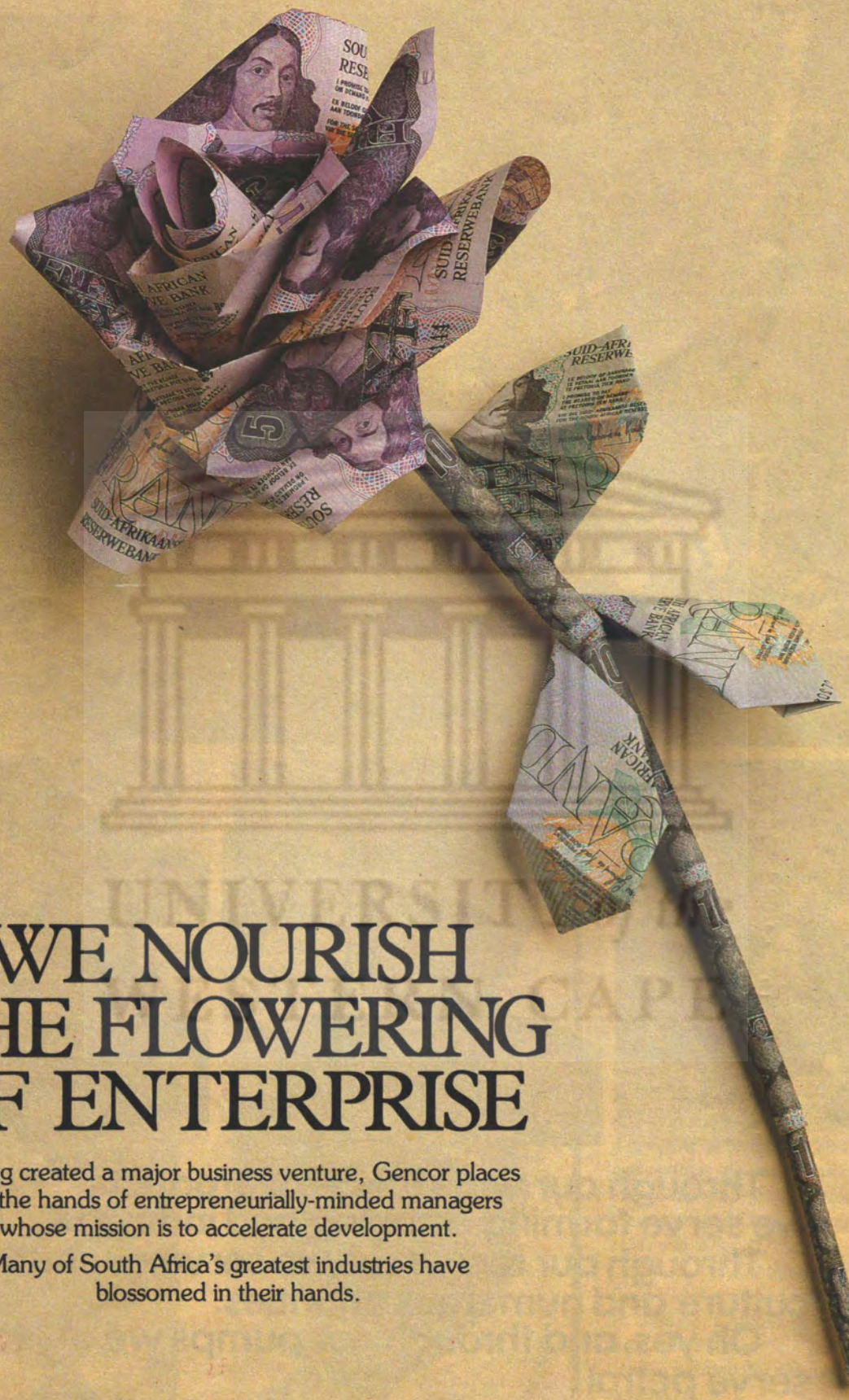

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