

On the pending closure of the Centre for African Studies (CAS) by UCT

When students of the Centre for African Studies (CAS) discovered earlier this year that moves were afoot to close their department by the end of this year, they took the matter into the open. This has forced the UCT authorities temporarily to retreat from finalising the form of the closure.

We are reminded of the words of Karl Marx when he wrote in the Afterword of the Second German Edition (24 January 1873) of Capital Volume 1:

“...the bourgeoisie had conquered political power. Thenceforth, the class struggle, practically as well as theoretically, took on more and more outspoken and threatening forms. It sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy. It was thenceforth no longer a question, whether this theorem or that was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prize-fighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and evil intent of the apologetic.”

The point is that universities in capitalist society are not ‘independent’ but serve the ruling elite. Further, the role of universities in semi-colonies like South Africa, are servants of monopoly capital, of imperialism, ensuring the continuation of the violence of class rule, of the rule of the minority over the majority. Thus the global trend of closure of school libraries, of cutting of funding to the arts, of the general ‘dumbing down’ of school education (euphemistically called ‘Outcomes-based education’) has in its inherent logic the ‘dumbing down’ of scientific inquiry at tertiary level. This is the basis for the pending closure of the CAS. This is what UCT means when they talk of the emphasis on the (practical) Sciences. What capital needs to study, receives funding; what is ‘inexpedient’ is ignored or so under-funded as to make scientific inquiry impossible.

To propose to dis-establish the AC Jordan research chair is to set up the CAS for failure; it means the de facto closure and ending of the little inquiry that they have struggled to produce with only 1 full time academic and two half posts. If the aim had been to set up a ‘New School’ for contemporary studies for Africa, surely the proposal should have been to establish two or more research chairs, not dump the only one the department has.

The Boeringher-Ingelheim Lung Institute does not have the funding for studying the relation between the increased Sulphur emissions from Platinum converters and the increasing number (to crisis proportions) of respiratory problems of children; yet it has funding for matters which can help expand the market of the monopolies that fund the Institute.

The CAS has little resources to fund the study of the wars for resources (paraded by the mainstream as inter-ethnic clashes), such as the wars in the DRC where over 6 million people have been killed since 1996. There are no

resources to follow up on the UN report of Jonathan Oppenheimer, director of Umicore, that is one of the companies dealing in smuggling of cassiterite (plundered mostly from the DRC). Cassiterite and similar metals plundered from the DRC end up in cell phones, laptops and Playstations while their bloody trail has been covered up by the mainstream media and the research institutions.

Is it coincidental that Platinum and Cassiterite are both linked to Anglo American, one of the main, if not the main, private funder of UCT? The evidence shows otherwise.

Mamdani objected to a 'bantustan' Foundation course on Africa being established at UCT. Today the CAS community, the broader student community, the working class community outside the ivy-covered towers on the mountain, object to the neutering of the study of Africa by the UCT authorities.

The authorities claim they have 'learnt' from the Mamdani 'affair' and apply no 'administrative fiat' to stifle debate. The facts show the contrary: The matter has been discussed for 6 years and no-one thought of involving the CAS students; the students have requested documents but only extracts and summaries are presented, not the full documentation of the discussions of the past 6 years. Administrative fiat to force through the dis-establishment of the CAS is the modus operandi of the UCT authorities. The ABC of academic inquiry is study of the parts and the whole and the inter-connection between the two.

Hebrew and Jewish Studies has 3 full-time academics, cross-subsidized by other departments at UCT, yet the CAS, which has to study the full gamut of culture and struggles across Africa has only one full-time academic. Who has the funds to study the dollarization of Zimbabwe; there is no department of Amharic studies, for example; there are no funds to study the rich resistance that has now flowered in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and elsewhere? This is not the end of history but its violent evolution continues.

What is posited as one of the areas of concentration of further study is the supposed Brazil/India/China/South Africa axis; in other words, the promotion of a new front of semi-colonies who front for imperialism for the continued plunder of Africa. This is important as direct exploitation by imperialism always needs new forms to disguise their control as each time their plunder means the continuation of violence against the masses in Africa.

What is needed is an intensification of the struggle for the class history of the oppressed and exploited in Africa to be told, for the role of imperialism in the silencing and distortion of Africa to be critically examined, for the establishment of a full Centre for African Studies with a minimum of 6 full-time academic staff. This will open the doors for students of Africa to blossom instead of being limited by supposed lack of academic staff.

Many billions of Rands from the public coffers have been poured into UCT over the years; it is time the working masses begin to take control over the fruit of our labour. We call for petitions, pickets, marches, protests, strikes and a general mass action campaign until the critical study of class struggles in Africa is established at UCT and beyond. Only 13% of the 10 million youth between 15 and 24 have some form of employment, even fewer are studying. The youth in the North of Africa are showing the way to initiate resistance to capitalist dictatorship. We call on the youth from Cape to Cairo to take up the fight for freedom.

Free, liberatory education up the highest level! For the combination of work, study and leisure! For the establishment of a Journal of critical thought on Africa!

What is needed is the end of class society, an end to the expropriation of the African masses; the time has arrived to expropriate the expropriators.

Issued by Workers International Vanguard League
19.3.2011 email: workersinternational@gmail.com
Web: www.workersinternational.org.za
Ph 0822020617