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In Ignota Harena:
The Global Workplace From Below

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'o nimium caelo et pelago confise sereno,
nudus in ignota, Palinure, iacebis harena.'

("You trusted far too much in serene sky and calm sea,
And will now, O Palinurus, lie naked on an unknown strand.")

--Vergil, *Aeneid* 5.870-71 (cited by Alan Liu at his "Palinurus" web site, [Teaching the Humanities in a Restructured World](#))

We trained hard--but every time we were beginning to form into teams we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any situation by reorganizing. . . and a wonderful method it can be for creating an illusion of progress while producing inefficiency and demoralization. --Petronius (obit AD 66), cited by the University Reform Group at the University of Queensland

Petronius and Vergil, from a prior tragicomic era of globalization, may lead us into this modest inquiry into the global reshaping of our workplace according to the new needs of capital, at our and our students' expense. "Restructuring" is perhaps the term of art in all recent attempts at reorganizing us from above, and it resounds through the nocturnal waves of myriad high-level Establishment reports from around the world on the crisis in higher education: in the US, the RAND report (1997), *The Fiscal Crisis of Higher Education* (which is analyzed and criticized in this issue by Marilyn Neimark); in the UK, the Dearing report (1997), *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (see the response by the union, the Association of University Teachers, on their [web site](#); in Australia, the West Review of Higher Education (1997), *Learning for Life* (which gets a stringent review by the historian of Australian education, Simon Marginson, in *Campus Review* 8.28, p. 10); in New Zealand, the government Green Paper (1997), *A Future Tertiary Education Policy for New Zealand* (see the "Overview" by Alan Liu on Palinurus). This list testifies to a period of imminent change and political struggle in the universities worldwide, and it could no doubt be extended broadly to many other countries. The managerial discourse is taken to a new level in an international UNESCO conference in Paris this month (October 1998), two years in the making and prepared by regional meetings of university managers and government officials at which the World Bank was much in evidence. Buffeted by these global waves of policy--caught off guard, unemployed, laid off, overworked, underpaid, part-timed, abolished--we may well feel like the Aeneas, and still more the Palinurus, of the passage Liu cites:

Aeneas felt the ship, her helmsman lost, drifting
badly, and himself guided it through nocturnal waves,
sighing often and deeply stunned by the fate of his
friend:

'You trusted far too much in serene sky and calm sea,
and will now, O Palinurus, lie naked on an unknown
strand.'

But all is not lost. For one thing, we can regain the helm, by at least subjecting the RAND and other documents to a searching critique, by winning the argument; for another, as academics we have a natural affinity, like Aeneas, for unknown strands, and can more easily than other kinds of workers compare notes and devise counter-strategies of struggle with our counterparts abroad. This issue of *WORKPLACE* makes a start at combining both moves, with the Neimark article on RAND, and reports from academics' experience with restructuring from two distant shores: the University of Natal-Durban in South Africa, and the University of Queensland in Australia. These take the form of transcripts of small symposia held at both campuses in the summer of 1998 on academic labor and the neo-liberal transformation of the university, and they are accompanied by responses from two US scholar-activists, Barbara Foley and Chris Lowe. The intention is to provide case studies of both the managerial-speak and the faculty fight-back, to help us get organized and theorized for the period ahead when, to quote Marc Bousquet's introduction to *WORKPLACE* 1.1, there will be "no careers, only struggle." I hope also that the examples of Durban and Brisbane will encourage readers to do more of the same: take advantage of research and travel to make contact with local academic activists, to hold meetings and report back on them here, to recruit foreign contributors and editors for this journal, and otherwise begin a network of academic "globalization from below," in Jeremy Brecher's bracing phrase. How difficult would it be to progress from steps like that to coordinating international strike support and other joint actions with colleagues overseas? Barbara Foley remarks that heavy attacks from the agents of capital expose the roots of their power and allow us to go on the offensive ourselves. Her sense is that we have a chance now to try the truth of that view, and perhaps in the process go beyond our own class limits, and the class character of the bourgeois university, and become part of a new turn to the Left among workers in general as the global crisis deepens. Chris Lowe's comparative history lays out the dialectical complexity of such dimensions of "collective hope" in our struggles, pitched as they are between political desire ("one self-conscious historical role of intellectuals") and our "equivocal" placement in "the complex of social roles played by universities within capitalism" (Lowe, paragraphs 18-19). My comments in this introduction attempt to set a context for the Durban and Brisbane documents, and hazard some opinions about what they mean for us in the US academic labor movement--for movement it has become. I write from the ten-year-long battle for CUNY, where such a movement, despite its infuriating weaknesses, has held together a long time, through victories and defeats. So I believe we *can* take back the helm. And it inspires our students to see us try.

I should say at the outset that I am not a scholar in the enormous professional literature of higher education, nor in the history of the South African and Australian university; I write as an academic labor activist coming out of the US Left, a CUNY union delegate in an insurgent caucus, looking to make links with others there. The conversations I had, nevertheless, already highlight certain themes in that literature and that history and connect it to our own. If you read the University of Queensland (UQ) transcript, you will hear the excitement in my and my Queens colleague Bowen's voices as we recognize, time and time again, the texture and feel of "restructuring" there from our struggles with it at home; the profile of their "head-kicker" president in that of our own inept exponent of the same managerialism; the condition of their grad student job-seekers and casualized labor in the lives of those who do most of the teaching here at CUNY; the aborted proposal to abolish our English Department at Queens matched by its very real abolition, with the same rationale, in the Northern Territory; the efforts to organize and confront administrations; and on and on. On the ground, at the shop-steward level, if you like, the main outlines of a global process of retooling academic work are entirely evident. A brief perusal of the local equivalent of our *Chronicle*, the [Campus Review](#), echoes the same themes. In some ways, like adjunct exploitation, we are much further gone than them; in others, Australian Tory policy-makers could give lessons even to Giuliani and Herman Badillo in how to rip education out of the hands of black people, immigrants, and working-class women. [1]

One striking difference we found at UQ was the very high degree of unionization nationally in Australia (as in the UK, seen in their 1997 national one-day strike), compared to its relative weakness in the US and (surprisingly, perhaps) in most South African universities. This was revealing to us, whose main political

investment has been in reviving the moribund union as a means of defense at CUNY; and we envied them the Australian labor tradition and their strong national union, even though the old national, or industry-wide, contracts are giving way to contracts with each university, what they call "enterprise bargaining." But, as Carole Ferrier points out in the symposium, the existence of strong unions has brought stronger responses from management and government, the government effectively nullifying national pay increases by not indexing federal funding to such increases, forcing administrations to pay salary out of the operating budget, which they have frequently done by large-scale firings! Here is strong evidence from Australia for the general analytical conclusion of Chris Lowe's essay in this issue: "ultimately, what the comparisons of academic transformation struggles show is that university institutions are too narrow a frame in which to address the underlying problems or to seek solidarities" (paragraph 22). The dilemmas and impasses of organizing took the UQ symposium into its most somber but also perhaps its deepest reflections, including the heartening feeling of seeing how others face and deal with these all but insoluble problems. Certainly our conclusion there, that we might gain strength by combining forces and analyses, is something I think should spur us to more international links of this sort.

A propos, I'd like to supply some background to the story of activism that emerges from the UQ conversation by referring to the document they and other members of the University Reform Group (URG) produced, as an intervention in the 1996 classic top-down, managerial restructuring of UQ. This densely argued 16-page pamphlet, *A Critique of the Proposed Academic Reorganization of the University of Queensland* (summarized in [Appendix I](#)), emerged from a movement of the "three unions"--faculty, other workers, and students; and it was one instrument in a campaign that also used reading groups, mass meetings, lobbying, and direct action. The URG activists are under no illusion that "winning the argument," as their pamphlet does, actually *wins*, when, as Carole Ferrier says ruefully, "they have the guns and the money." They did in fact lose the battle in a narrow vote of the Academic Board, and the last part of the symposium wrestles with how to construct narratives of defeat. The document summary printed as Appendix I to this article conveys its topics and mood, and its central concern, the destruction of a self-governing community of scholars by "economic rationalism." An elegiac tone creeps in because the restructuring is historicized in relation to a highly developed democratic ethos at UQ, begun in the Sixties and preserved for over thirty years, through an unusual continuity of student radical culture and an ongoing battle with the far-right Queensland government of Jo Bjelke-Petersen. They achieved a degree of self-governance they say is unusual in Australia, and seems positively Golden Age to an American. Something is passing at UQ that was hard won and highly prized, a mood that I'm sure will resonate with many readers of this journal, with anyone who has organized against the removal of our relative autonomy as faculty. The philosopher Ian Hinckfuss puts it well in the URG *Critique*: "It is not that there should not be people whose job it is to manage things within a university. It is that such people should be responsible to the academics and students who have entrusted them to do this managing on their behalf; not vice-versa" (9). We struggle now to keep this simple idea from disappearing altogether!

Barbara Foley's response is sympathetic but stern about this focus on democratic governance, and Dan O'Neill's invoking of medieval guild consciousness to support it; she questions whether this disturbs at all the basic functioning of UQ to reproduce inequality and construct hegemony, the "reproduction theory" of education Leo Parascondola also invokes in the Paul Lauter interview in this issue. Perhaps those hard questions, which I think most of the symposium participants would willingly entertain, fade to the background when it is the closely-held values of a collectivity of friends that are under attack? Or is such a sharp attack--especially on the somewhat counter-hegemonic humanities, the base of all the participants--the very best time to raise those questions, to give priority not to Habermasian ideals of communicative rationality among faculty and students (guild working conditions, if you like), but to opposing the new super-Thatcherite moves of capital in Australia with the other workers and students they have built such unity with? Interestingly, the group at UQ do that very well: see Murray Kane's description of their taking all three unions off-campus to support the striking dock-workers. Another way of framing this debate over strategy would be to understand the UQ document as a text of the "job consciousness" of typical trade-union culture, potentially the seed-bed of a more sweeping *class* consciousness, but not in itself realizing

it. Job consciousness among university intellectuals is not the same thing as among dock-workers, and rather than thinking of reforming or defending our own historically privileged workplace as the first priority, we could with more profit, perhaps, use it as a base for radical thought and action of a wider scope. This could be local in the first instance, since except at very elite places, the university is usually organically connected to the communities of students and a major local employer in its own right.

The South African Jakes Gerwel's idea of the campus (like his own University of the Western Cape) as the "home of the left" is perhaps too utopian or syndicalist a version of that idea, but it is suggestive. [\[2\]](#) Certainly radical thinking in the humanities would grow mightily by reconnecting to political action broader than academic conferences, as the sympathetic admiration of adjuncts all over the US for the UPS part-timer strikers could grow into alliances with them. The very degradation of our workplace, at least at public universities, might prompt political and theoretical moves off-campus, moves seeking primarily to go on the offensive where we have potentially more powerful allies, rather than confining ourselves to the professional and workplace terrain where we--especially the most exploited of us--are politically more hemmed in and put on the defensive. But I see no reason not to fight hard out of our own job consciousness as they have done so well at UQ, even while we follow them into an exciting new terrain of strike support and other links to working-class politics. The alternative is to leave faculty at the mercy of the all too hegemonic ethos of resigned passivity, narrow self-interest, and back-channel maneuvering--or actually encourage by default, as a successful adaptation to restructuring, the new model of the entrepreneurial scholar allied with the schemes of go-getter managers. The Australian scene is full of examples of this brave new world, particularly in "competition for the export education dollar": international students coming in, but also campuses going out, to "offshore" joint projects with other universities or even private firms in Malaysia, Singapore, etc.; "Monash International" will soon have eight foreign campuses including one in Johannesburg. Alan Gilbert of the University of Melbourne, fresh from government approval to build the full-fee-paying "Melbourne University Private" next door to his campus, believes offshore is not the way to go: "Gilbert says Australian universities will soon be competing with 'internationally franchised, good quality higher education' made available over the Internet by a multinational conglomerate such as Microsoft with its courses given the imprimatur of leading international institutions" ("Unis Forge New Links in Global Market," *Campus Review* 8.29 [July 29-Aug. 4, 1998]: 3). Carole Ferrier points to just such a scheme with Random House at UQ, where the restructuring was carried out by a manager who made his mark in IT at another campus. If we don't contest that model of the workplace there is plenty of scope for a new frankly capitalist professoriate to emerge, Aeneas steering straight for the bank. Not all the neo-liberal restructuring may have to be imposed from above.

To shift to South Africa: Ronnie Miller's opening remark makes the first essential point, that their universities are in transition from the apartheid divide between historically white universities (HWUs) and historically black universities (HBUs). Natal-Durban (UND) is one of the former, though its student body has changed now to a majority of African, Indian, and Colored students. This did not prevent a couple of younger faculty from describing UND to me as still "a colonial outpost," a characterization disputed by another younger radical scholar who invited me simply to look at who the students were. These two views reflect the dilemmas of the South African transition, and are therefore possibly both true. The symposium shows a concern about continuing access for working-class students of color, given cuts in student subsidies (the turn to fee-for-service or user-pay schemes pioneered in Australia and now adopted in the UK, as well as standard in the US); Corinne Sandwith remarks that this threatens to reproduce the inequalities of the old regime. Also stressed, as at UQ, is the crisis in humanities departments (including the suspension of tenure and a few faculty firings) under a regime of economic rationalism. The two concerns come together when Michael Green from the English department discusses his efforts at curriculum change to meet the new students' needs, and the difficulties of the interface with administration and of a suspicious, defensive faculty forced to compete department against department. Chris Lowe's essay (paragraphs 12-16) provides a broader context of history and political economy in which to read these "intertwining struggles" at UND.

The UND participants also reveal their concern with a low level of faculty organization (in contrast to UQ), and incidentally provide a model for how to start thinking about that when it doesn't exist. Clearly they were caught off-guard in this respect when the restructuring *mot d'ordre* was given, and are scrambling to catch up--as indeed many US campuses were and are. The prior history of politically active staff associations in the anti-apartheid mass democratic movement like UDUSA, the Union of Democratic Staff Associations, has not carried over into a UND faculty union ready to face the new neo-liberal hegemony now fully in place in the South African government (though not uncontested by Cosatu--the Congress of South African Trade Unions--the Communist Party, and other Left scholars and NGO activists). It may surprise some readers that even an ANC-led South Africa is so far advanced in the globalized neo-liberalism outlined in the government's GEAR policy (Growth, Employment and Redistribution), and some participants lay more stress on GEAR than others; but this is the background of the whole discussion. On the other hand, again emphasizing the particularity of post-apartheid South Africa, there is much support at this historically liberal white campus for not claiming increased funding for themselves when the priority for limited government spending should be on basic needs like housing, water, and electricity, within education on the neglected primary and secondary schools, and within tertiary education on the HBUs. It is hard to argue with those priorities, and if the macroeconomic policy of GEAR (called "Thatcherite" by the metal workers' union, NUMSA) is accepted, the funds available for social programs after international debt-servicing and other pro-investor outlays will inevitably be limited. It raises the question, however, whether progressive faculty should be linking up with striking schoolteachers and teacher-training students to oppose GEAR, rather than accepting a local version of the "fiscal crisis" argument--which Marilyn Neimark's article demolishes in the RAND manifesto as a "manufactured consensus"--to cooperate in their own downsizing. [3] The sense of isolation of UND faculty from others, for example the much better organized campus across town, the University of Durban-Westville (UDW)--and again we in the ultra-privatized and individualist US academic culture recognize the problem--may be part of their difficulties both in organizing and in theorizing a transformation "from below" to contest economic rationalism.

Here we come to the crux of the debate in the UND conversation. In the symposium Yonah Seleti and Matthew Shum lay most stress on GEAR, Shum opening the discussion by noting that "restructuring the university takes place along that particular [GEAR] bent"; and Seleti saying that GEAR was "quickly locked in" during the CODESA negotiations leading up to the '94 election, and that university policies since then "affirm [GEAR] macroeconomic aims and outcomes." [4] GEAR does not proceed without opposition, however. *Southern Africa Report* reported in its issue 13.3 (May 1998) on a conference called by the Campaign against Neoliberalism in South Africa (CANSAs) in March this year, "South Africa Confronts Globalization: A Conference to Build Civil Society Alliances." Backed by 29 organizations and attended by 150 delegates from eight of South Africa's nine provinces, the conference presumably included some university intellectuals though none of their organizations were sponsors; it stands as evidence of a gathering, grassroots movement (i.e., independent of larger organizations like Cosatu and the SACP), which the UND symposium participants might well want to take account of as an ally in confronting restructuring. The conference concluded that

what is really at stake is the problem of unbalanced political power between contending social forces. Business and financial interests--amplified through the World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organization, US government, European Union and the like, with collaboration from Third World elites--exert an overwhelming influence. Their preferred economic policies are, we are witnessing, ineffective on their own terms and are socially unjust. Worse, they have convinced a large section of our society that there is no alternative to orthodox economic policies and globalization. The Conference confirmed our rejection of these policies and the attempt to impose helplessness on our society. A variety of alternatives have been presented since 1993 by the Macroeconomic Research Group (*Making Democracy Work*), the Mass Democratic Movement (*The Reconstruction and Development Program*), Cosatu (*Social Equity and Job Creation*), the Community

Constituency of Nedlac (*Return to the RDP*) and the like. Conference confirms that "there must be an alternative"! (*SAR 23*)

One would think that the UND difficulties with faculty organization owe something to this induced "helplessness" and "inevitableness"(Shum)--the gigantic fake-out that Jim Hightower calls "globaloney," designed to deflect workers from organizing directly in their own interests-- and that the intellectual and political alternative must proceed simultaneously inside and outside the university. Even at UQ, although that perspective seems much more firmly implanted in the participants than at UND, the symposium shows that it is overshadowed by the understandable preoccupation with issues of professional "job consciousness." In the light of the conference against neo-liberalism, Shum's call to move from the HWU as "center of excellence" to "the university of reconstruction and development" looks especially apt, but could only hope to succeed as part of a broader and deeper opposition labor/academic alliance. In my view, that is exactly what is needed in the US as well, so that academic unionism and organization should never be constructed only as an on-campus "professional staff congress," or as a "graduate student caucus," but as part of a return to social-movement unionism more broadly. The grounds for this in South Africa (and probably in Australia or the UK) are immeasurably more advanced than in the booming imperialist US, although efforts are under way here: in the higher education section of the Labor Party (founded June 1996, and holding its second national convention in November 1998); in the much-publicized conferences for a labor/academic alliance at Columbia and NYU in the Fall of 1996; at the thrilling conference of the journal *Labor Notes* in Spring 1997; and otherwise. Barbara Foley's point that even the most vibrant unionism should not be the outer limit of university intellectuals' political theory and action is also well taken in this regard. The recent history of South Africa, to go no further, shows that even a quasi- revolutionary trade unionism, in the brilliantly developed black labor movement of Cosatu in the Eighties, flowed into the sand once the ANC/SACP took over national political direction of the movement and negotiations essentially demobilized struggles in the workplace and community. Their political concessions to big capital (in South Africa and internationally) at the CODESA negotiations not only firmly reined in the labor movement within its historically economic bounds, but positively urged on labor a corporatist ideology of "social compacts" with private- sector and government power, and hence with the "overwhelming" might of the advanced capitalist world system that Cosatu and the SACP-- as they are increasingly sidelined by the ANC--now find themselves protesting against. If we are trying out a strategy to bind our efforts to a renewed labor movement--as faculty struggling with downsizing, deskilling, and vocationalizing in the re-engineered "competitive" university--we had better look again at the political limits of unionism itself. Needless to say, this is not a counsel of despair, but an incitement to more searching theory and more vigorous action. The end of the UQ symposium begins to do this when it takes up--reluctantly, sadly--the crushing of the most exciting Australian labor resurgence of recent times, the mass strike of the Melbourne dock-workers, and connects it directly to their own defeat on the restructuring at UQ. We are the stronger for facing these strategic questions early and head-on, always keeping in mind Chris Lowe's caution that "many of the attempts at such extra-academic 'intervention' exaggerate the role of universities and the importance of academic discursive politics" (paragraph 21).

Two articles by radical faculty at UDW, one written in 1992 and one in the quite changed circumstances of 1997, shed more light on these debates about faculty political options in the age of Palinurus, and, by comparison, on the text and subtext of the UND symposium. I am grateful to Adam Habib, a political scientist and activist at UDW, for making these articles available to me in manuscript. [5] To round out this material from UDW, I reprint as [Appendix II](#) to this article a 1990 piece by Desai and Padayachee from *COMSA News*, the newsletter of the extraordinary union they (with Bawa, Habib, and others) built at UDW, combining faculty with all the other workers at the university in a single labor and reform organization in tight alliance with the Student Representative Council--and going on to launch UDUSA, the anti-apartheid national staff association, from UDW. *COMSA News* also counterpoints the problems of transformation from the other side, as it were, at a place like UND, so different and yet so similar to UDW. And like the University Reform Group text from UQ (where solidarity reached similar heights in the "three unions"), it gives the flavor of campus organizing *in ignota harena* in the words of the actors

themselves. The 1992 article by Bawa et al., "Transformatory Reform," illuminates the UND conversation by laying out the main "broad approaches" to university reform, among which the "home of the left" and "militant abstentionism" options have been discussed above. It is the "centers of excellence" approach which best captures the hegemonic view at UND--although it is interestingly contested, from differing points of view, by at least half the participants.

The Bawa article sees the "centers of excellence" approach as that

which drives the process of change in the traditionally white liberal universities, [and] is concerned with "adjusting" the demographic profile of these institutions within the framework of their existing access policies, their curriculum and their broad orientation to social change (5). [A note here refers readers to the influential African political economist Mahmood Mamdani, "Research and Transformation: Reflections on a Visit to South Africa," *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 16-23, 1992: 1059.]

Their critique, from the vantage point of an Africanizing, historically Indian campus, is severe:

The inadequacy of the "centers of excellence" option is demonstrated by the fact that it allows only a small fraction of the total African student population through its doors, and places the bulk of the "burden" of providing tertiary education for South Africa's black population onto the historically black universities and other tertiary institutions. Moreover, the orientation of these universities remains tied to white business interests, and they appear reluctant to shift their orientation in the direction of the interests of the disenfranchised majority, by engaging in thorough-going changes in their policies with respect to student admission, staff recruitment, affirmative action and the like. The centers of excellence option will simply facilitate the continued reproduction of inequalities in the tertiary educational sector along racial lines, despite minor tinkering along the edges of racial boundaries (6).

Any US reader will notice the uncanny similarity to the same issues in elite institutions here, including the racist stratification of "mission" by institution. In the South African context, it seems to me that in 1998 the fundamental shift to black students at UND has gone far beyond "minor tinkering," and that the problems highlighted here are precisely the problems taken up, from within a HWU, by many at UND. But the earlier UDW perspective is extremely clarifying and still much needed in the UND discussion, which tends to view these matters (don't we all?) through a kind of fog of confusion, caught up in reaction to immediate internal crises. Some points, like the orientation to white business interests, are not considered directly at all. And at neither UDW nor UND do they consider a point the union organizer Adrienne Bird makes: "Will they promote a more colorful and gender-balanced elite, without disturbing the fundamental relations and patterns of power in society?" (*Changing by Degrees?* 225) Bill Freund's caution at the end, that it is foolish to think through these themes one university at a time, takes on added meaning from the Bawa article.

The view from UDW is most forcefully relevant to UND on the issue of faculty organization, the lack of which in many ways dominates the whole UND symposium. Bawa and his colleagues state flatly that a union is absolutely necessary--and add that it has to be much more than a bread-and-butter union. Nearly a third of the article is devoted to analysis of their experience with the Combined Staff Association (COMSA), all of it as pointed for the largely unorganized faculty in US universities as for their Durban colleagues across town. An important theme here is an awareness that even the most progressive university managers have at best a sometime harmony of interests with faculty, and another is the need always to link staff and student interests:

The interests, concerns and demands of staff and students cannot be adequately

represented by either the national political forces, nor individual university managements, Senates or Councils. This is one of the central lessons imparted by the transformatory experiments at UDW . . . Students and staff soon discovered that many of their demands were not being met by the new, progressive administration and this was followed by charges of betrayal and co-option. But was this a fair judgment? COMSA, for one, has gradually come to terms with the fact that the appointment of a progressive manager to an institution does not mean the "transfer of power." Reddy was constrained by his structural location--in reality, he was only able to behave as a manager had to, albeit an enlightened one. This then forced COMSA to reconceptualize its role at the university . . . it began to develop a more complex set of relations with the university management--an approach that might best be described as "constructive confrontation." This involved both resistance and cooperation . . . At times labor struggles were the only focus of the organization's activities. At other times COMSA took up issues around transforming educational practice more seriously (22-3).

An assessment of COMSA's success with an extraordinarily ambitious agenda--much of it mentioned as goals in the UND symposium--follows. They pursued nothing less than "the systematic revision of teaching curricula across all departments"; "the establishment of a program of research priorities"; "the democratization of all university structures"; "the democratization of . . . departments"; "a new and more acceptable admissions policy"; "a living wage for all staff"; and "a systematic review of the conditions of service of all staff" (23-4). This agenda is a revelation to someone coming from CUNY, where the current union leadership rules out of faculty unionism by definition virtually everything on COMSA's agenda save the wage-- which our union also sadly fails to deliver, most egregiously for adjuncts; the leadership, tied to the business-unionism fetish of the contract, even refuses to fight layoffs except on procedural grounds, saying layoffs are a management prerogative! COMSA, on the other hand, has walked right through the contradiction between professionalism and unionism, between guild and union cultures, as if it did not exist, and the result is to strengthen the organizational capacity of faculty both as professionals and as academic labor. The New Caucus within our union has been saying from the beginning that faculty unionism has to mobilize our members as a force within and beyond the university on a whole range of issues just as COMSA has done at UDW, and it is heartening to see a living example at work. At UDW it came at a time of hope for sweeping reform and increased access; at CUNY since 1995 the reverse, at a time of retrenchment and exclusion, most recently of all students requiring remedial courses from the four-year colleges; and at UND now the same approach would meet a confusing mix of both. But what has been COMSA's success?

"The greatest victories can be said to have emerged in the spheres of labor relations and in the democratization of university structures" (24). Wages and benefits, obviously, including those previously denied women staff; representation of students and staff on the Council and of a few non-professorial ranks on the Senate (which is roughly the state of affairs now at UND); but most notably the creation of a "University Policy and Planning Committee (the highest-ranking internal policy structure), with representation from all constituencies at the university" (26)-- something the whole UND discussion laments the lack of but does not imagine in such concrete terms; something the restructuring at UQ was specifically designed to eliminate; and something hardly to be found at all in the US and Canada. The struggle for this degree of faculty control resembles the movement for workers' councils in industry, and perhaps should be subjected to the same questions politically--is it finally control or a kind of co-optation by a juridical and executive power still firmly in place, for example at the level of the Board of Trustees? But at least as an alternative vision we can offer to the managerialism intensifying in the wake of the RAND report, it is undeniably attractive, and a clear answer to the restructuring administration's shibboleth that the faculty wants no change, has no vision, and conservatively defends its sectional interests at the expense of the university as a whole. But on the negative side, a review of working conditions had not been made; democratization of departments was spotty; research (at an institution that

had been deliberately neglected, like CUNY in the Nineties) was not much elevated; curricular initiatives (as at UND) were few and far between. In spite of all that, COMSA had succeeded in

challenging the authoritarian traditions of our past, cultivating an open atmosphere in the institution . . . [and] transforming the individual and collective consciousness of our constituency. As greater numbers of the UDW staff participate in our struggles and in our policy processes, support for the transformative agenda has begun to filter down to all levels of our constituency, while the agenda is itself redefined and clarified in this very process. We would argue that this is one good reason why COMSA's stand in maintaining one staff association for academic and non-academic staff is critical (26-7).

The article ends with the question that animates this whole issue of *Workplace* and that we would like to pass on to our readers: "Are there lessons in the UDW experience which would be exportable to other situations? We should like . . . to believe so . . . in a comradely and collegial fashion, and in a spirit of sharing creatively in the experiences, both positive and negative, of others of like mind" (31). I hope that this brief summary of the UDW document, in counterpoint to the UND and UQ symposia, will raise our expectations of what we can learn in such a process, and that readers will continue it for themselves. It turns out that no matter where he lies Palinurus is not alone.

By way of conclusion to this introductory essay, I want to take up some of the argument of the disturbing, challenging 1997 essay by Desai and Böhmke, "Death of the Intellectual, Birth of the Salesman." That title! When I first heard it, I thought it distilled with wonderful wit exactly what we are experiencing in the demand that we re-engineer ourselves as entrepreneurs in the higher ed market (at my campus, a director of research of the new breed suggested that the English department go, for example, to a large plastics company and ask what we could do for them in exchange for a large grant; and grad students face this in the now official MLA stance that English PhDs should routinely prepare themselves for non-academic careers). But it actually refers to a *trahison des clerics* that the authors lament in the generation of South African intellectuals that was their mentors, a charge that as an outsider I have no way of adjudicating as to the persons charged, and little stomach for doing. I prefer to take up the argument as one about the conditions of possibility of radical university intellectual work in this period of the ascendancy of capital in general, and its retooling of the university in very nasty ways in particular. For me, these are the stakes in the varied efforts at activism and reform many of us are engaged in on campuses world-wide. I feel very close to those I spoke with in Brisbane and Durban as I ask, what can we actually expect to do? What can we expect to come out of it all? What am I doing when I write for this issue without much sense of its impact or when, extremely dubious about reinventing social democracy, I go as a higher ed delegate to the Labor Party convention next month?[6]

"Death of the Intellectual" is first of all enormously bracing and alive on this question, because in a context it regards as almost totally bleak--the co-optation of a whole generation of radicals in a society most of us would have thought exceptionally promising for the kind of work we do or would like to do as intellectuals--it absolutely refuses to give up on the role of the intellectual. Its perspective on that role is therefore what I focus on. Unsurprisingly, it is far from utopian:

The intellectual in South Africa this century has long stooped, like the Old Testament Ruth, picking up the husks left behind by others in the worship of foreign gods. This is especially true in the fields of social and economic research, where pilgrimages to Eurasia have brought back theoretical paradigms . . . The South African intellectual displays one common feature: an eagerness to accept the reigning First World orthodoxy, dress it up and force it down . . . there is nothing new about their wholesale retreat in the face of a world-hegemonic neo-liberal agenda (1-2).

So much for the actually existing "ex-intellectual"--and we would not be hard put to find local examples ready to hand. Desai and Böhmke turn to a surprising figure, C. Wright Mills, to answer their question, "what has happened to dissent [or "rupture," another key term]?" (3). >From Mills they take the essential condition for real work to be critical independence,

the edge of intellectual craft, so cogently captured by C. Wright Mills: "Do not allow public issues as they are officially formulated, or troubles as they are privately felt, to determine the problems that you take up for study. Above all do not give up your moral and political autonomy" . . . The role of radical intellectuals in universities under present conditions is to link up and "compete" in the way Wallerstein meant it, that is, to oppose the new apologists of the status quo. This competition is about power, though, and it should extend into an investment of time and energy in building links with student political formations and unions again and rebuilding journals that will offer a radical alternative . . . This role, best summed up by C. Wright Mills, is to "set forth reasons for human anger and give it suitable targets"(23, 39).

It is easy to hear in this conception a certain willed homelessness, the lonely craft worker never giving up her vision for an official address, and affiliating rather with human anger than with the pursuit of happiness; it has an appositeness, undeniably, when radical work may continue to be professionally out of step for quite some time. But Desai put a decade of work, apparently now in vain, for him, into building a radical political "home" at UDW with his COMSA comrades, as the UND and UQ people and many of us here in the US have done; in that light this invoking of Mills, the redoubtable American exception to the Cold War Fifties retreat, the harbinger of a New Left, is bracing in another way: what if we lose the restructuring battles? Where does that leave us? Speaking for myself, though I resist the heroic loneliness, I find we could do worse than Mills's wit, deadly irony, and patience, rather like Staughton Lynd's voice in his offset Youngstown journal of "solidarity unionism," *Impact*; it's an honorable tradition to bring to steady work with unions, with students, in journals like this one--a tradition worthy of the young.

From Australia, articles on student movements by two of the UQ symposium participants, Dan O'Neill and Peter Thomas [7], come in at an interesting angle to Desai's post-revolutionary sadness about "the compromised institutions that house intellectuals, and the compromised basis of intellectual production itself" (31). Desai and Böhmke's theory of the intellectual (following Andrew Ross, they say) contrasts a "social function" theory of "the responsibility of intellectuals" (e.g., Sartre, Mills, Chomsky, hooks, Lynd, West, etc.) with a "New Class" theory of their "institutional position" (27, 31)--as seen in the people whose recent commitments they attack. From both points of view, they condemn--for its client-like service of the ANC and GEAR--the models of radical work that their South African targets offer to their students, and so point to our links with students as one of the deepest conditions of such work. How do student movements connect with us as faculty, and vice versa? How important is this in forming strategies for what looks like a long haul? This has been neglected in the academic labor movement, but is of intense interest to us at CUNY in the Nineties; we have been there at the moments of true *imagination au pouvoir* in our students' radical work, from climbing flagpoles at City Hall to delivering brilliant *testimonios* on developmental education to a deaf Board of Trustees. We have noticed that the grad student activists legendary around here tend to focus either on working with undergrads and street politics or on working with us as adjuncts in the union caucus; the humanities grad student, in particular, faces both ways, as it were, in practice choosing only one. But could it be that we *all* should be looking both ways, moving both ways? A fraction of the New Caucus has always been on those rainy midnight marches through Harlem after a CCNY sit-in, or welcoming the students doing *sandinista* dances in chains out of the Hunter president's office, and maybe we've been right. Again, there are some legendary examples of senior faculty doing this at CUNY--I must mention the beloved Bill Crain at City College--but very few in number; at UDW and UQ, however, the alliances seem to have been very solid, with a mass base and effective co-organization.

There are liberal inhibitions and other better arguments against faculty working directly with students, but O'Neill and Thomas open up the question afresh, giving some Freirean-Marxist, some anarcho-syndicalist-Marxist grounds to the UDW theorists of the production of *political* knowledge that transcends institutional compromise. Their essential common point is that we've misunderstood the university and the student as mind-factory and once-and-future worker, that a more authentic student movement and a more than notional anti-capitalism and an authentic revolutionary movement would come from an attack on the labor relations in the university itself (that is, on the classroom), in the name of transformative work and study with students and faculty as co-students in collaborative forms of deep democracy and personal growth and militant action. O'Neill particularly traces this possibility back to an idea of the medieval university and regards his theory (which Barbara Foley understandably finds bizarre) as a historical materialist one. Paul Goodman and the Derrida of *Spectres of Marx* jostle in the wings of these arguments, and in an odd way they consort easily with C. Wright Mills. I must say I find O'Neill and Thomas at the same time spellbinding and very hard to believe. But I refer to them here in the same breath as "Death of the Intellectual" because both arguments move to a level beneath that on which I for one am used to acting and thinking politically in the university. I will end by recommending that we explore such a deep politics of the everyday workplace, "in and around the departments . . . here in their daily work . . . [where] students encounter both the reduction of education to the logic of capital and their own potential power to refuse it" (Thomas, 1999). In the US, the early focus of the MLA Radical Caucus and the New University Conference, and the mood of New Left faculty in general, resembled this, and Seventies feminist "teaching the subject" broke new ground in classroom labor relations. Like Paul Lauter in the interview in this issue, I encountered this teaching practice in the Moss Point-Pascagoula freedom school in 1964 as a first-year grad student, and that Civil Rights current has carried my generation ever since. Desai and Böhmke don't speak in those terms, but in a way evoke them as an implicit counter to the "haunting" (Thomas, Derrida) of intellectuals by the structures we inhabit. It may be that it will be as students, in this deep sense, that we work best with students. In any case, the intricate dilemmas and delicate solutions that we throw up organizing against the ripping apart of our lives as university intellectuals (even before they can begin, in many cases now) may well rest ultimately on some such narrative of immersion, accompanied as O'Neill and Thomas believe it will be by a new narrative of ascent to the anti-imperialist battlefield. May it be so, Palinurus, naked as you are.

[Appendix 1](#)

[Appendix 2](#)

Anthony O'Brien, Queens College, CUNY

Notes

1. Some examples from *Campus Review*. On *cuts in the Humanities*--"20 universities have cut . . staff numbers and eliminated courses or . . . entire departments": at Adelaide, phasing out of dance, drama, Russian and downsizing of philosophy, history, linguistics and sociology; at La Trobe, closing of music, Hindi, and environmental science; at Melbourne, closing of classics; at Newcastle, the entire arts faculty split up into other parts of the university; in the Northern territory, closing of English; in Tasmania, classics and Italian closed; at Western Sydney, anthropology and drama closed; at VUT, phasing out of women's studies and sociology; at Monash in Melbourne, the largest university in Australia, 70 faculty lines cut in the Faculty of Arts and a further 60 scheduled to go--out of 300 total (Vol. 8 No. 29, July 29-Aug. 4, 1998, p. 3). On *adjunct labor*: Alan Gilbert, the "entrepreneurial" vice-chancellor (president) of the University of Melbourne, wants to introduce in the next contract with the national academic union (NTEU) the euphemistic "development of American-style 'academic internships' involving teaching opportunities for research higher-degree students" (8.26, July 8-14, 1998, p. 3), an innovation which Peter Holbrook anticipates in the UQ symposium, but clearly not nearly as developed in Australia (or South Africa) as in the US. On *removing opportunity from disadvantaged groups*: in the context of falling enrolments generally with the new higher fees brought in by the Tories (Liberal and National parties), the

NTEU said "the largest fall in commencing enrolments was in areas which had a high correlation with the most disadvantaged groups in Australia" (8.28, July 22-28, 1998, p. 3). On *organizing*: in "Monash, Epicenter of Arts Cuts," Geoff Maslen reports that the president, David Robinson, "told the NTEU it could not use university buildings to hold its forum" protesting the cuts, and "warned that all staff would have their pay docked unless they completed a form stating they had remained on duty" during the stop-work protest (8.29, July 29-Aug 4, 1998, pp. 1-2). [back](#)

2. Gerwel is a Left thinker and to great excitement became the Vice-Chancellor of the formerly Colored University of the Western Cape (UWC) at the end of the Eighties, attempting to realize his vision of the new university there. His view is defined and contrasted with the views of Neville Alexander (of the same university) in an article on university transformation politics in the South African transition by Ahmed Bawa and colleagues, as follows:

The first two of these approaches [to transformation] were pioneered by Jakes Gerwel and Neville Alexander. Gerwel's approach, commonly described as the 'Home of the Left' option, suggests the possibility of establishing an institution that is distinguished by its alternative radical agenda, reflected in its access policies, curriculum, and community orientation (Jakes Gerwel, "Inaugural Address," *Transformation* 4, 1987). Alexander's approach emphasizes the limits of transforming institutions and suggests that no institution can be totally transformed outside a fundamental transformation of the society as a whole. Alexander then argues that the further transformation of individual institutions would be dependent on the capture of state power (Alexander, "The Politics of National and Institutional Transformation," National Conference of UDUSA [United Democratic Union of Staff Associations], 1-3 July 1992).

The argument of Bawa et al. in "South African Universities: Transformatory Reform" (a 1992 unpublished ms.) is discussed below. They criticize both these approaches, as well as more conservative ones, in adopting for their own work at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), a formerly Indian university, "an attempt to find some progressive path between the sanguine optimism of Gerwel and the disarming pessimism of Alexander" (Bawa et al. 8), a path they link to Harold Wolpe's theorizing of transitional demands in the South African interregnum.

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3. In "Death of the Intellectual, Birth of the Salesman: The South African Intellectual in the Democratic Transition" (a 1997 article discussed below), Ashwin Desai and H. E. Böhmke turn roundly upon a "wholesale retreat in the face of a world-hegemonic neo-liberal agenda" on the part of too many South African intellectuals, who have instead, the authors believe, "suddenly turned their attentions to making the system work" (2, 8). One of their examples of this retreat is an economist's setting the limits of the "real" by writing, as a consultant for the government, macroeconomic policy documents that set up "the very constraints and so-called realities, of which he then admonishes other university intellectuals to remain captive" (23). Matthew Shum also implies a need to interrogate the economic reality-effect: "The university of excellence is operated in the name of the real . . . and then I went home last night and saw interest rates up to 28%, my God!" (UND symposium, paragraph 46). A debate on economic "constraints" at an important University of Cape Town colloquium can be observed by comparing Charles Simkins' orthodox opening paper, "Equity, Efficiency, and Tertiary Education" (37-46), and the contestation of Simkins' priorities by the metal workers' union national organizer for training, Adrienne Bird, in her paper "Equity and Access: A Union Perspective" (225-36), both collected in *Changing by Degrees?* (1994). The problems of radical economists in an age of reform are addressed by Vishnu Padayachee (one of those criticized in "Death of the Intellectual") in the current issue of *The Review of African Political Economy*.

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4. The best treatment I know of the ANC-led shift from the "social market" Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) to GEAR, its free-market successor, is Hein Marais' *South Africa: Limits to Change. The Political Economy of Transformation*. Frequent updates on the Southern African situation are succinctly presented in [Southern Africa Report](#), edited by the distinguished Canadian scholar-activist John Saul et al. [back](#)

5. Both articles have been briefly referred to: Ahmed Bawa, Ashwin Desai, Adam Habib, and Vishnu Padayachee, "South African Universities: Transformatory Reform in a Context of Social and Political Transition?" (1992, unpublished); A. Desai and H. E. Böhmke, "Death of the Intellectual, Birth of the Salesman: The South African Intellectual in the Democratic Transition" (1997; a version was published in a South African Left academic journal, *Debate* 1.3 [1997], which I have not seen). I quote here from the manuscript versions of both. Adam Habib tells me that their 1992 piece remains unpublished because of political disagreements among the authors in 1993: "I think that was a mistake because it does reflect the thinking of an activist-intellectual layer in the early 1990s." The Desai and Böhmke paper is intensely critical, often in sharply ad hominem terms (e.g., "ex-intellectuals"), of many of the Left economists and social scientists in South Africa, and drew very strong reactions from some of them, as may be imagined; Desai was dismissed from the editorial board of the *South African Labour Bulletin* as a result, having been already suspended from UDW for his union militancy. For my purposes here, the '92 article illustrates an earlier and more optimistic view of radical reform in the university of the transition, while the harsh '97 piece has a definitely disabused, "morning after" tone. The UND symposium occurs in the latter period of GEAR Triumphant, and despite its excesses I think "Death of the Intellectual" goes far towards explaining the aporias and the feeling of endgame--the Palinurus mode--among the UND participants. [back](#)

6. At the convention, with 1200 delegates representing a million and a half organized unionists, I was very pleased to participate in the LP's setting up of a working committee on education (its current members active mostly in higher ed), which should be of great interest to our readers in the near future, and which we plan to link to this website. [back](#)

7. Dan O'Neill, "The University, the Student Movement, and Democracy" (174-86), and Peter Thomas, "The Student Movement Yet to Come" (187-200), both in the collection edited by another participant in the UQ symposium, Carole Ferrier: Ferrier and Pelan, *The Point of Change*. [back](#)

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APPENDIX I

UQ: RESISTING TRANSFORMATION FROM ABOVE

"Summary," *A Critique of the Proposed Academic Reorganization of the University of Queensland*, by the University Reform Group, August 7 1996.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST:

Unlike the Hay-Brown proposals, previous organizational changes at the University of Queensland were the result of long periods of discussion by a broad cross-section of those involved.

THE PROLIFERATION OF RHETORIC:

The language used in the document is consistently vague, and there is nothing that amounts to actual argument. The proposers' reluctance to state principles and argue gives rise to speculation about their motives.

"I'M GIVING YOU A DIRECTION . . . ":

The procedures for making "comments"--individual letters written to Professor Brown, the contents of which are not divulged to other interested parties--privatizes discussion. There is no provision for public assemblies or any other form of genuine debate of the proposals.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS:

The argument that a time of "crises" requires diminution of collegial and democratic processes to the point of managerial dominance is invalid. It misconceives the way external crises impinge on institutional life. It makes no distinction between short-term contingencies requiring limited devolution of power to individuals, and long-term situations calling for structural change that must be wise, impartial and widely approved of within the community affected. Democracy is the only formula for the latter. The "mass" character for the post-1960's university is no excuse for managerialism either. Already in the 60's democratic means of coping with this were widely known.

BONES OF CONTENTION:

- Discipline and Punish:
- The "academic cognacy" supposedly achieved by the rearrangement of departments into the new faculties turns out to be largely a mirage. It reflects, not the changing needs of intellectual life as the boundaries of knowledge shift, but closer integration of academically-based training with the requirements of industry.
- Power/Knowledge:
- The new structure will increase the Vice-Chancellor's power significantly, drawing decision-making authority away from those whom such decisions affect.
- The Individual That Swallowed the Committee:
- Although the Brown paper begins with what seems an even-handed emphasis on "accountable individuals and committees that "advise and consider," any concern with the latter withers as the paper proceeds. The role of collegiality disappears, and it is clear that the Hay-Brown proposal is based on the assumption of an uncritical determinism in which we move towards "Canadian and American models," that is, overt managerialism.
- From Bad to Worse: The Role of the URPC:
- The peak committee for finance allocation and "strategic planning" has been "downsized." Most of those who sit on it represent central administration rather than staff or student interests.
- Manufacturing Consent:
- Attention to the time-scale for implementation reveals that the extreme haste of the whole process makes a mockery of the supposed desire for consultation. Overall, the time period suggests a fait accompli.

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR:

The Vice-Chancellor's notion of the "excellences" of the University focuses selectively on rather external indicators. He seems incurious about the increasing difficulties of classroom situations across the whole range, where the University's commitment to undergraduate education is being poorly met. Hay's university is the "research-based" university of advertising and PR discourse that can be projected "internationally" by its new "President" to the greater glory of each of them.

"IT'S A UNIVERSITY, STUPID":

The fundamental objection to the Hay-Brown theory of the university is that it is vague, economic rationalist and clearly indifferent to democratic issues. We believe that democracy is a crucial instrument of the ends of the university. The university's pursuit of knowledge, education, critical power and informed discussion of values, norms and social mores is inseparable from collaborative modes of functioning. This applies not only to teaching and learning situations, but to all the practical and resource requirements that underpin them.

"IF IT AIN'T BROKE . . . ":

We agree that the Group system is an obstacle to rational management, but the Faculties should be retained. There should be further discussion about the number of Faculties required, but Faculty Boards must remain democratic, and their Deans elected officers.

FEAR AND LOATHING:

If the present proposals go through, the impact on the University community will be disastrous. There will either be tensions as between individuals and groups, or a mentality of resignation will emerge.

STOP THE STAMPEDE:

We must demonstrate to the aspiring power elite that, in line with our existing tradition of discussion of major changes, we will not tolerate this process of rushed pseudo-consultation. We insist on the need for a university-wide debate on these issues that affect us all.

APPENDIX II

UDW: TRANSFORMATION FROM BELOW?

"The Transformation of UDW," by Ashwin Desai and Vishnu Padayachee, *COMSA News* 2.1 (November 1990), University of Durban-Westville.

This university, like many other universities in South Africa, was "the product of a totalitarian plan created by the architects of apartheid to ensure white racial domination and the perpetuation of capitalism" (Morrell 1989).

Undemocratic

In order to give effect to these objectives, it became necessary to retain power in a highly centralized and bureaucratized form. In addition, positions on these fundamentally undemocratic structures were filled by resolute, conservative individuals who were willing to use their power to thwart any movement of a progressive nature. The period since August 1989 has been characterized by some of the most dramatic events in world history. One fundamental thread which runs through these developments has been the call and active struggle for the democratization of all aspects of social and political life; totalitarian regimes of the left and right have fallen victim to this democratic revolution brought about by mass action, in central and eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Winds of Change

The winds of democratic change are also slowly penetrating through Africa; and South Africa since February 2 [release of Mandela--Ed] has set off hesitatingly on this road. Despite these global and national developments and the election of a new Vice- Chancellor (whose personal commitment to democratizing UDW is undisputed), the university unfortunately continues to reflect many of the realities of its historical legacy--of its undemocratic past.

Authoritarian Tradition

One of these realities is an authoritarian tradition of decision-making, in terms of which nearly all power is vested in (the still predominantly conservative membership of) the Council, and the Vice-Chancellor, as the Chief Executive Officer of the University.

Excluded

What this has meant is that other constituencies of the university are excluded from effective participation in decision-making which affects their daily life. A second reality is that the principle of accountability, so intrinsic to the democratic tradition, and which has never been "very deeply rooted in the culture of rights

in South Africa" (Asmal 1990), has no place at UDW either.

Tempting Option

Ironically, the centralization of power that these realities imply, at least in theory, makes it relatively easy to wrest control of the university if, as has happened at Fort Hare [most famous of the HBUs, Mandela's old college--Ed], these powerful structures are captured by progressives. However tempting such an option may be it is not one which we should pin our hopes on, or one we should emulate in a narrow sense; for the strategy of replacing conservatives by progressives, by itself, leaves the fundamentally unequal and "undemocratic" structures intact. Thoroughgoing transformation therefore requires, in addition, fundamental structural change . . . Unashamedly racist practices of appointment and promotion were replaced by technicist regulations based on "merit," but the power of the conservative, bureaucratized selection committees remain intact. Participation by junior staff, by students and others, at any level, is either heavily proscribed or totally absent.

COMSA's Role

COMSA has played a central role in the gradual transformation of UDW. It was crucially involved in the efforts to elect a progressive Vice-Chancellor and the struggles that COMSA and the SRC [Student Representative Council--Ed] engaged in over the last few years opened the spaces that made the election of a new Vice-Chancellor possible. In the absence of such struggles there would have been little pressure on Council to appoint someone progressive.

Campaign

COMSA was also involved more directly . . . The successful candidate, Prof. Reddy, also cut his teeth in UDW politics via his enormous and active participation in COMSA. It was in part through COMSA that Prof. Reddy's qualities were made known to UDW and the wider community . . .

New Era

Many staff members long cowed into submission by the old guard emerged from out of the closet, dusted their fading progressive clothing and saluted the dawn of a new era . . .

New Challenges Raise New Problems . . .

COMSA's orientation to the old regime was (correctly) one of unrelenting opposition . . . With a new Vice-Chancellor in place we need to reassess our strategy. Our problem is that large segments of the old regime remain intact and powerful. And COMSA itself was in need of fundamental restructuring. For a short time participation in COMSA was the preserve of a few people. Caught up in the struggle against the Rectorate and constantly having to respond to crises on campus, mandates and accountability, the essential features of democracy, were unfortunately sidelined. COMSA was reduced to its Executive and it became a reactive, rather than a dynamic and pro-active, association. It is significant that despite these difficulties COMSA grew, from 500 in 1986 to over 800 presently.

The Restructuring of COMSA . . .

[At] a series of workshops to address these issues . . . the most important general points that emerged from these intensive discussions were that: (1). Too much power was vested in the executive . . . (2). The sub-committees that were set up in 1986 were inappropriate to address the tasks facing us in 1990 . . . The new sub-committees . . . are: Administrative, Academic, "Technical and Services," Labor, Gender, Transformation, Funding, Social, Educare. . . There was a high degree of participation in these elections [for sub-committees], much enthusiasm, and many new people were elected onto the sub-committees.

A New Strategy for Transformation

It is our view that participation in efforts to transform UDW must be entered into in a qualified way. Where the general momentum towards a more open, democratic, non-sexist and non-racial university could be strengthened then COMSA must grasp these opportunities. In other words we must strengthen

the hand of the Vice-Chancellor to push for progressive change. But there will remain issues over which COMSA and the management (including the Vice-Chancellor) will disagree, and that is why it is imperative that we do not collapse ourselves (inadvertently) into these management structures.

New Difficulties Ahead

COMSA faces some difficulties in the present conjuncture. The forces of reaction are still powerful, if no longer hegemonic. How we are able to gel the politics of participation and partnership (on the one hand) with the politics of opposition (on the other) will be crucial in determining our capacity to mount a serious challenge to the remaining bastions of reaction . . .

Conclusion

A new university awaits. A University devoid of nepotism, fear, harassment, etc. A university committed to academic excellence and one which takes seriously its location in the current social, economic and political conjuncture in a transforming South Africa. We believe that COMSA, drawing on its strong tradition of struggle, has the flexibility and commitment to meet the challenges ahead, in the support of this goal of a new UDW!