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**Academic Labor and Neo-Liberal Transformation
of the University, South Africa/USA:
A Symposium at the University of Natal-Durban (UND),
Durban, South Africa, June 24, 1998**

Participants: Anthony O'Brien (moderator/editor), Queens College, CUNY; Bill Freund, Michael Green, Margaret Lenta, David Newmarch, Corinne Sandwith, Matthew Shum, Ronnie Miller, and Yonah Seleti, University of Natal-Durban

Anthony O'Brien: We might distinguish two kinds of issues here: one, the nature and function of the university: changes and transformation in the university, the future of the university, visions of the university; and two, the academic labor issues: how do we organize, how do we defend our interests, what forms of organization work. On the other hand, we've found in CUNY that the two are distinct but not separate, they bleed into each other in interesting ways, and our tendency is to be Olympian intellectuals and think about the nature of the university, and perhaps with another part of our brain think about our own interests as faculty. We want to think these two things together; to think about the workplace from the point of view of academic labor, and at the same time about difference and stratification of the workplace from the point of view of its reproduction of class society and ideology, of student access, student outcomes. You see the questions I've drawn up begin with our concerns in the U.S.: how do those concerns look to you from a South African perspective? Matthew?

Matthew Shum: Those issues take a quite different form here, e.g., the economic constraints. There is simply mismanagement of public education, the universities also to some extent. But at the same time there is a remarkable ignorance generally of exactly how a State budgets for the university, for tertiary education, what government spends on different parts of the population; it's partially a legacy of South Africa in the past: very few people actually questioned statements their representatives made, and so you didn't get that long acculturation to examining how a State works in any kind of depth, and the result is that when it comes to looking at how the post-apartheid State functions, many people don't have that understanding. And when it comes to the economic program that's behind education policy, GEAR [Growth, Employment, and Redistribution, the neo-liberal macroeconomic plan of the South African government--Ed], restructuring the university takes place along that particular bent. You see many imported university experts refer constantly to the kind of neo-liberal programs, that are most conspicuous in Australia and the US. The discussion I'm aware of never refers to Chile or anything like that. And so as a result these changes take place in a context of relative lack of understanding of what is going on. That's an issue that this kind of questioning opens up, to start with.

Ronnie Miller: The South African higher education system is a fractionated system, and what's most noticeable is that you've got historically white and historically black universities. Under our present leaders, redress for the historically black universities will come at the expense of some of our other educational institutions. The historically white universities are going to be paying for redress for the

historically black universities. So, in terms of the questions you're raising here, many things are peculiar to South Africa: what I was going to ask you is, we're almost inevitably going to have budget cuts, and we're going to complain about them, but isn't there another sense in which, at least in a different set of values, we should be welcoming them? We should be acknowledging that there are a number of institutions in this country that are entitled to redress, and for there to be some kind of justice, we're going to be on the receiving end of that. So it's a problem: on the one hand we don't want to see those kinds of cuts, but we are in an odd situation to be talking about them the way you do.

Anthony O'Brien: OK, but it strikes me that we fight this battle all the time: do we level up or level down? You don't want to get into a "race to the bottom," taking from UND to give to the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) or to the technikons or the teacher-training colleges, but rather: level *up*.

Ronnie Miller: But there's only so much money available: in our situation, I find it hard to justify an argument that higher education should have more money when people are living in squatter camps. It's all very well to say let's gear everybody up: where's the money coming from, in a country like this where people don't have houses, electricity, water? Higher education's a long way away from that. So really what I'm saying is I don't have any kind of answer; we've just got to do this.

Bill Freund: Your questions are mostly, I think, surprisingly relevant, and Ronnie has said what I think you have to say is the whole context here. I'll just add a few comments. First, the South African model was elite universities for a few, and a not very successful attempt to imitate that for larger and larger numbers; and the problem is that we should really have quite a different university culture. Instead of Vendas and Bops and Transkeis and "Bushes" [historically black universities, sometimes called "bush universities" under apartheid--Ed], people should be going in the cities to office blocks and things that do not have "campuses." It doesn't suit what this country can actually afford. But on the other hand we're stuck with this physical inheritance as our starting point. A very difficult problem, that needs a great deal of creativity in people who are managing this. Second, it's not fair to say simply that we have a right-wing political agenda to reduce student access . . .

Anthony O'Brien: Oh no, not here, no. I see the amazing difference in the student body at UND just in four years; walking through the campus, I hear more Zulu than English now--although I believe some of that is what we call "white flight."

Bill Freund: Here in South Africa we have a *confused* political agenda, to try to increase student access AND "gear curriculum to the labor market" AND try to find the money for it--a context of incoherence, very nice statements that can't be implemented so successfully. Finally, the American university has developed a very strong sense of being an intellectual, cultural center (that's where you get this term "ivory tower" from), but in the middle and lower reaches of the system--I'm talking about something like CUNY--you have an outlier of that system, with some elements of it and other elements pushing another way. But the South African university is very vocational; it's not just politicians who want to get rid of the fancy intellectuality. There was lots of interesting critical presence in the apartheid era, but there's not much other than that; I mean overwhelmingly students in South African universities are registered for vocational courses, something that gets more and more extreme all the time, so that, for example, arts and social science and science are a relatively small part of this university. We're very much in the minority. An absolute majority of students on this campus are either doing law or commerce. And there is as well the notion that the really serious intellectual work goes on somewhere outside above all the UK; that if you're really good that's what you aim for, to be part of. There isn't the notion, like say in India, that South Africa is important, that South Africa could build up to be a metropole in some way itself. That's not really the way many people think. We couldn't say that we're falling off from these fantastic standards either; I think people sometimes talk as though the standards were great but in fact they never were.

Anthony O'Brien: Yes, I see. But your formulation suggests that people *are* beginning to think that way, of South Africa as a center of African universities, for African intellectuals.

Bill Freund: That's almost entirely a myth, actually; very few students or academics have that attitude. That's very much an ideal rather than a reality; it would be very nice if it were.

Yonah Seleti: May I pick up on the last point? I'll take a contrary view from Bill. Having visited a number of Southern African universities, it is my impression that other universities and government officials are looking at the South African infrastructure, and a cost structure which is lower than the UK or America, and therefore provides a regional opportunity. Talking to government officials in Zambia, Botswana, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho, that is my perception. Botswana has already changed its attitude; they're sending more of their postgraduate students to this university. Looking at strategic problems of locating the university in Africa is critical, and it could transform our local universities to provide that regional strategy. But let's locate all the issues too in a global framework: it's not an accident that universities in the UK and the US and in South Africa are going through the same process of restructuring, with a managerial approach; it's a critical historical conjuncture with neo-liberal policies affecting every facet of life and being absorbed by everyone. I visited a few American universities while I was away, but also I went over to Canada, and I was greeted by a massive strike! Of academics at Dalhousie University with a number of demands--the same issues, just as you have put them down in your list, being fought over: abuse of junior university staff, no guaranteeing of certain departments, reducing the faculty, the number of students going down, governmental redistribution of resources--the same processes we're going through. So there is a universal thrust, located within the development of capitalism and how it is restructuring society at large. Matthew mentioned GEAR policies: when the initial negotiations framework [of the transitional government--Ed] was being worked out, one of the things they quickly locked in was the GEAR policies, so that those agreements between GEAR policies and university qualifications affirm macroeconomic aims and outcomes. That is a crucial fact, and we can learn strategies from what is happening elsewhere in confronting similar problems that our university is looking at today. There are some historical problems which face us which are unique to South Africa, but by and large I'm proposing that there is a universal structural process. I also want to comment on the finances: there is a scare, but so far the commitment of the present government has been to maintain funding at the level at which they found it, or increase it. But one issue is how those resources within the university are handled and distributed, so we could look at the confusion at the national level as a confusion *within* universities--for example, the disproportionate growth of the administration at the expense of academics. Within the structure, that question has to be sorted out, and we can share experiences on that. Another issue which maybe is as important for Americans as for us: issues of affirmative action or redress . . .

Anthony O'Brien: I believe "equity" is the term people tend to use here for those issues?

Yonah Seleti: Yes. There is a move to compel universities or government institutions to come up with three- or five-year plans. What is not happening yet at UND is to engage that government policy, and this university could be transformed by that. We had the Transformation Forum, but I think it's died a natural death, although . . . [Bill Freund: It hasn't done anything.] I engaged Ahmed Bawa [the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor, or Provost, at UND--Ed] in an open discussion at a public meeting on the university's stand on affirmative action and he said we're going to push for it. And I've also written to Professor Gouley [new Vice-Chancellor, or president, of UND--Ed] saying that their process of looking at affirmative action was not pro-active but rather was relying on people retiring or leaving, and that's not what needs to happen. So there are problems within the institution, to come up with an effective way of addressing those issues, and we need to be looking at it before the government begins to wag a big stick around--which will happen, and then there will be a cry of "Foul!" and stuff like that. Cape Town has begun to act on this issue, discussing it within their university structures, and I think we need to do that. Let me just stop at that. These *are* global issues.

Anthony O'Brien: I was glad to hear that point of view about needing to think the local and the global together. Corinne?

Corinne Sandwith: One point I'd make is that the shift to a student fee-for-service system as Australia is doing--students paying, cuts in stipends, lack of funding--may just reinforce the inequalities that existed before. But I also agree that the emphasis has to go to primary and secondary education.

David Newmarch: All the questions you list tend to get swallowed up in a sense of being in a hand-to-mouth crisis. I'm thinking particularly of the crisis in the school systems, and the sense that fewer students are qualified for university entrance and certainly that fewer black students are qualified for entrance, quite apart from the fact that a lot fewer of them are managing to pick up any kind of funding prospect, so that while the university is restructuring in all kinds of directions, one has this very shaky sense of what it's sitting on, in terms of future access, particularly over the next three or four years; which students are to come to the university or even apply to come to the university?

Anthony O'Brien: I was interested to read in the paper today that students were actually being tear-gassed yesterday down on the Victoria Embankment--the student teachers from colleges around the province; the SRCs [Student Representative Councils--Ed] bussed them in to demonstrate at the Education Department down there; they were refused admission to the building, they began tearing up the pea patch, as we say, and they were tear-gassed!

David Newmarch: The issue there was training colleges being closed.

Anthony O'Brien: Yes, and another issue, as Corinne says, was the loss of student subsidy; in other words, they no longer have access. Of course, they're also worried about their future, they're worried about jobs in the school system.

Matthew Shum: It's a bit paradoxical that we haven't got the very powerful union force that exists among schoolteachers, certainly not at the universities.

Anthony O'Brien: Right: the teachers were marching last week over salaries and layoffs, this week the student teachers are being tear-gassed: it's clearly a crisis situation.

Matthew Shum: We could have a solidarity rally after this meeting . . . but you see, there's no interest in being in touch with teachers on this campus, though it's quite a close struggle.

Anthony O'Brien: Part of the fractionation that you were talking about? That teacher colleges don't fit this model of the European university, the general education model of the university?

Michael Green: I'll try to speak from personal experience with some of the issues. Your comment regarding your students of color and immigrants making the universities their own is clearly something we could freely translate to some degree to ours, but issues of changing student constituencies need, equally, to focus on our responses, our plans for curriculum change. I know that last year at the Cape, at a meeting of people from several universities on other issues, we talked a lot about some of the curriculum changes being made there, and I was impressed, I remember, by the great deal of surprise that we should consider our curricula open to change in relation to changing student constituencies, and some thought that this suggested a failure to set university standards . . . [**Anthony O'Brien:** A conservative argument?] Yes. Two other points: one is that one doesn't, here, get the sense that students of color want the kind of humanist education that there was before (aside from a precious few), and there also appears to be a very

conservative student body: people do come here wanting some kind of vocational stamp of approval, not wanting to rock the boat in certain ways, wanting quick efficient ways of getting something which will enable them to go on to improve their life. And so there isn't the kind of easy sense of faculty allying with what students want that you imply in your questions. The other is that trying to address changes to the curriculum presents its own set of problems and dynamics on another level. Many of the earlier plans that were put in place here were to accommodate the intake of black students, and then there was a cut in funding and that meant a sudden drop in the figures of the very people whom the university at one stage was beginning to gear up to meet. And then virtually no response that I've seen has in any way specifically tried to accommodate the change in student constituencies. We've seen Africanization of all sorts but in the curriculum. One last comment: however one works in the liberal arts to respond gets progressively caught up in the regulatory or administrative part of it--what you call the newly aggressive corporate style of management. It becomes a very difficult thing to be involved in any structural way of responding to these issues without suddenly becoming caught up in, implicated in, misunderstood by colleagues in relation to, the administration.

Anthony O'Brien: Speaking of being misunderstood, I've got a sense talking to other people, too, of actually how painful this process has been, although people here seem to be surviving; at least no one I've talked to is in immediate danger of losing their job or has been employed on a three-year non-renewable contract . . . well--Corinne, are you on one of those three-year non-renewables? [**Corinne Sandwith:** Well . . . Who knows.] Who knows, right. But even so, people have obviously found painful the adversarial relationship with administration. Could we focus now on forms of faculty organization; how have you worked through the union and other structures?

Bill Freund: The administration attitude has traditionally been one of benevolent paternalism, and over a longer period of time the budget for the administration was rather inexpensive. Even today the so-called executives and senior professors are usually on a first name basis, unlike the big American universities. But then last year there was a crisis: we were told (which was technically the truth), "Sorry, nobody has tenure, and if your department is not, according to the State formula, bringing in revenue, you can be thrown out, and we'll identify people likely," and several people were actually dismissed on this basis. A tiny number, given that it caused an immense amount of demoralization, but about a third of a percent of the career list. This happened in part, I've been told, as a way the administration could feel comfortable firing a great many more other people at the university who weren't teaching staff. I would say you may be right, Michael, about a newly aggressive management style, though nobody has said this exactly as a faculty group. But in the last six months that mood has diminished a great deal. And people who were supposed to be fired turned out to be not quite fired after all. Having shown its muscle, and having shown us what can happen if we don't get more with it, the administration is now trying to put paternalism back in place. But it was profoundly demoralizing, demoralizing in the administration as well. The other point that I would make, as an economist, is that what the government says is right, the education part of the budget is not small, it's one of the highest in the world. Almost all that money for schools goes to salaries; maybe too much goes to bureaucrat's salaries, and maybe it's too top-heavy. In universities, obviously, it goes to other things, but a lot goes to salaries too, and simply saying well, the problem's more money for this, more money for that, at some point is not realistic in terms of what the national budget can offer. South Africa is having to adjust from having a State that serves one section of the population well and others according to very different standards if at all, to a State which, with no more money, is having to serve everyone. And consequently all institutions are in certain ways in crisis, and to be honest, in some ways, decline. They ought to be more egalitarian institutions. That's why simply saying let's all join the union and fight this--I can't say that I totally endorse that. I think it's problematic; it's not realistic; I'm not sure it's even entirely what I believe in, professors using their union to get more salary, more finance, a bigger share of the pie.

Anthony O'Brien: Given the general scarcity in the country? I see, yes, although again there's the

levelling down issue. A union question: during the "nobody has tenure" crisis, why did a third of the Senate vote to approve the firing of faculty? [**Ronnie Miller**: Two-thirds.] Two-thirds! Really!

Bill Freund: Two-thirds of the Senate voted with the administration. Well, they were convinced that there was a financial crisis and "there was no choice"; "the university is behind the times," and can't afford to sustain operations that are not holding their own financially. And as I said, the heart of this university is not departments like English and History but Law and Commerce.

Ronnie Miller: You've got to be careful not to talk only about the administration--in this case the major recommendations were made by a task force of academics. One of the problems is thinking it's "them"; I would have a different point of view, that our administration is a weak administration, so, well, we have to take responsibility for those recommendations as well as the administration. I was on a task force that said, we'll draw up those recommendations, we have to reduce our size. Of course we had administrators there but it doesn't help to be unfair to them-- or it's not that it's "unfair": I'm pretty sure it doesn't help us to think through the problem. My experience was that we could not have done anything else. You sit on a task force and you're given a certain financial report, and you're shown that there's going to be a shortfall of fifty million, and particularly when you hear it from the economist sitting across from you. . . it's very difficult to come up with recommendations that are not going to include any reductions in staff, since a huge proportion of the overall budget consists of salary. In thinking through the problems of the university one of the things we could all agree is to stop saying the administration is this or it's that. There are a set of problems, and I think anyone who's confronted quite directly with what you're going to do is going to come up within a fairly restricted set of parameters that are very similar.

Anthony O'Brien: Yes, perhaps, but there's always the debate about whether those parameters should be the compelling ones, and especially taking economics as the ruling deity. It's *hard* to debate, maybe; that's part of this climate that Yonah was talking about, of economism and so on.

Matthew Shum: Yonah's quite right. And it's also a time when we feel a sense of inevitableness about neo-liberalism, a disorientation, an isolation, within the allegedly democratized culture.

Yonah Seleti: In the general climate, which is rather unkind, we face a situation in which one thing is claimed to be basic, a very specific list of fiscal directives about how to run a university. This has set in within the university despite very different ways of conceptualizing the running of the university which have been shared either at university forums or other platforms. But where we are weak, the administration and more importantly the staff, is the fact that we don't seem to know what we ought to be doing, a good example being the ineffectualness of the Transformation Forum. Even in that forum the administrators, whatever you thought about them, did have a very good idea of what they wanted, but we-- the student body and staff and the general workers--are very weak in terms of fighting and putting our case across. So we need to be organized; we could strengthen that. If you look at the issue of junior lecturers, for example, the university administration is pushing one-year contracts . . . [**Anthony O'Brien**: One year and you're gone?] No, it's renewable, but it's not a permanent position. As an example, the Dean and I were supposed to go into the Zulu Department and sort out a situation in which many people were on three-year terminal rather than one-year renewable contracts. This sort of thing reveals for the first time our general weakness, and we really need to talk more about how we can get better organized, how we can define what our rights are, what we think we are entitled to ask, and how we can fight for that. And especially the social sciences and the humanities, as we are the weaker ones: it's only the social sciences and humanities which are being pushed so hard by restructuring; the technical courses remain the same. [**Bill Freund**: Science is not the same; they feel very aggrieved.]. But it's not as massive as in the social sciences and humanities.

Bill Freund: I don't think that's true, they're greatly reduced. [**Anthony O'Brien:** Because they're losing students, fewer pure physics majors?] There are a lot of problems; a lot of the time they just feel desperate--unable to get young people in, they're dying on the vine, very dependent on a few senior people who will soon retire. They get more of a subsidy, of course, than we do, in every way, OK--but they eat up money a lot more than business or journalism in terms of equipment, technicians, and so on, and they're pushed back a lot on that. They actually have done what we haven't, which is to agree they will restructure their schools because of the dramatic shift in science. For instance, in this country geology--historically very important--has declined, whereas everything related to ecology or some parts of biology is booming. So there are dramatic changes that are very difficult for them to adjust to. I sit on committees sometimes with scientists, and they certainly feel an intense sense of crisis. If you're talking about engineers, Yonah, it's less so, and Commerce, with these big deals, are a fount of wisdom that will never change and never need to change; I suspect that Law and Medicine aren't too different.

Ronnie Miller: But science is not faced, I think, with the same problem as the humanities and some of the social sciences. [**Bill Freund:** A different problem.] One problem in science is the talk in this country about the need to increase the number of students in science and technology--now that's a very vague statement. We can't possibly absorb lots of PhDs in mathematics and physics; one maths professor told me students could qualify themselves out of jobs. We haven't thought through this big movement toward science and technology. Our university has interpreted the White Paper to mean that the universities must turn to that, and that's a bad strategy. I'm guessing what's in the minds of the policy makers, but I think the sensible thing to do is have the expansion at the Technikon. In trying to restructure, our university hasn't been very clear about where we fit into macro policies. And now that we've been through the restructuring, my view is that it's been a failure in another sense, that the vulnerable Faculties or departments are more vulnerable than ever, and I don't think that's the desired outcome.

Bill Freund: Thinking about macro policy, it's important to note that under apartheid there was a kind of freedom for the individual university. There's something in that, but it's also very problematic. The great failure nationally is that there is a weak State that *fails* to restructure in important ways. So many expensive departments are duplicated--like music and engineering--in too many different places, and if they came together in a few places they'd be much stronger. There would be a way of changing institutions so you get rid of this quite egregious competition that's gone back and forth between the historically black and white institutions, and you'd create some new structures and start afresh. But that involves intelligent and massive interference which hasn't really happened; and I suppose there are times when I also think, well, maybe it's for the best that it hasn't happened . . . But it does mean that you're stuck with these existing structures that go on, and are in some ways quite irrational. It's of course true that this country can't afford institutions competing with each other, all of them having these things; there has to be some kind of national intelligence that operates and says KwaZulu-Natal universities will cooperate, have specializations, and come together so they can equip them properly, have the right library facilities, etc. I believe that strongly and I'd like to see it happen; I don't know how to push for it.

Yonah Seleti: If you think about it on a regional level two regions are involved, KwaZulu-Natal and Southern Africa. For Southern Africa, there was a report submitted to governments in 1986 arguing that as a region we can't afford to have each university develop all the departments; we have to rationalize, have certain "centers of excellence," as they called them, and then the students within the region could really be rationalized in that way. So that sort of conceptual framework has been thought about and they were supposed to have ratified it last year; but as to how they've translated it into practice, I've heard nothing. As to KwaZulu-Natal, a framework was established to try to rationalize, with some successes like the health sector, which in time may be brought under one roof, with the cooperation of the provincial government and the different universities. That could have been a fair framework: Pietermaritzburg, the University of Zululand, the University of Durban-Westville, and our university, Natal, could rationalize what they offer. Music could be one example among many such areas.

Anthony O'Brien: Is there a faculty body that, if such a thing were to happen, would look out for the interests of all the people employed in music at the three places, to make sure that this rationalization from the top doesn't involve a lot of firings, or a freezing of jobs, so there are no jobs for the new people coming in? Is there any sort of organization that would put that point of view in the process?

Ronnie Miller: Well, there's a problem in what you've said, there's no point in it: you're not rationalizing, just amalgamating. If you end duplication not everyone can stay, so it's very hard to think rationally through the problem and at the same time to protect everybody's job. And that's what I said earlier; I get totally confused, because you get pulled in two different directions.

Anthony O'Brien: That is a real structural problem that we certainly face in the US: how do you reconcile the faculty governance or guild structures with the union that takes care of our interests? I have a question about your experience with forms of organization: how democratic are all these faculty organizations--is the Senate, for example, an elected body or a body of senior professors? We found we could get a lot of mileage very quickly and produce a different sort of forum for discussion by emphasizing issues of democracy within our union, for example, which are actually issues of strengthening the union. How does that issue look to you?

Matthew Shum: The academic structure at the top is completely undemocratic, in my opinion. [**Bill Freund:** The Senate?] Yes, because one has no sense of a democratic direction in the way the Senate works, absolutely none. One would like to *see* more of the conduct governing whole areas of university life, so that at every level there would be the expression of views and time for scrutiny. Here people say that things are public and open to scrutiny but . . . if you could only make the university much more transparent. The hierarchical legacy that you have from the colonial South African university is firmly entrenched. I find it odd that people should think that this argument doesn't have any substantive ground; perhaps I'm looking at it from the limited perspective of one who is not an insider, but I certainly can't account for the way the university is otherwise.

Yonah Seleti: I wonder if it's that there's no constituency amongst the academic members of staff to look at issues thoughtfully, make changes, work it out. For instance, a man not a professor is elected to the Senate: who elected him to the post? Nobody in particular. Whom do they encourage him to represent? Nobody except himself as an individual. Yes, are some representatives of Lecturers and students, but possibly it is only the students, because they are a constituency, whose appropriate issues are unchallenged in there. We need to be coming out and saying, OK, this university needs to be transformed and in this direction. But for now, I can't work with the university administration while the Professors are sitting in the Senate; I don't think that a man should maintain that privilege. But there's no alternative vision that has been put forward.

Bill Freund: The Senate is very ineffectual; there's some sense that it leads, that people who are active all the time are the ones who make the decisions, if anyone does, mainly according to time-honored rules. The best, fairly democratic thing in this institution (but unfortunately of course never in power!) is the Faculty Boards, which all Lecturers are able to join--our sense of "Faculty" being Faculty of Humanities, Engineering, etc. That isn't the way it is in all South African universities, apparently; but here people feel free to raise real issues in Faculty Board, they often use it as a way of venturing their opinions about the world, and so on, in ways that are I think quite healthy. But a Faculty Board, except to the extent that it can do useful things in these powerful but quite distant committees, has very little power. The Senate has more power but is ineffectual to the point of having trouble meeting a quorum.

Anthony O'Brien: This may be a naive outsider's question, but why couldn't JASA [the union-like academic staff association--ed] take on some of those functions, as a more democratic group, representing

everybody's interest regardless of rank?

David Newmarch: I was just going to raise the question of JASA, because it would be interesting to trace its history. JASA, as an organization--I can't think when I last heard anyone in the English Department mention it. [**Anthony O'Brien:** Someone in English described it as people working very hard for no reward at salary, benefits, the parking fee.] Oh. There was a time, I'm not sure when that started to change, when that wouldn't have been the case at all; JASA would have been very much at the forefront of people's consciousness as a structure for various different things. Certainly salary would have been important, but not at the top of the agenda.

Bill Freund: I can tell you the history. JASA appeared about 1983 and became a rallying-point for anti-apartheid activism and excited a lot of people; issues relevant to that were brought to the fore. Then at a certain point it was overtaken by a national anti-apartheid staff association, UDUSA, in which people from the HBUs [historically black universities--Ed] were dominant. I don't think UDUSA still exists, since the 1994 election.

Matthew Shum: That's not the sentiment--there's been an incredible lack of any kind of unionization on our campus; at most, our political imaginations extend to the faculty and not much beyond that, which is unfortunate because after all salary cuts affect everybody. JASA had a brief spurt with a lot of e-mails around the time of the salary crisis. I'd like to raise another question about the issue of governance in South Africa. Even if we do the work to try to make policy, we then don't have the organization, in a situation of crisis, to carry out that policy. So what you get is the kind of confusion Bill was talking about in the beginning: you know, here we have Brenda Gouley [UND Vice-Chancellor-ed] putting the emphasis on neo-liberal economism, and at Durban- Westville we have the university of African Renaissance [a slogan of Mandela's likely successor Thabo Mbeki--ed], where somehow they are finding money to send students on trips into Africa, and they are building their corporate identity around an idea of African culture. We are not building our corporate identity around any kind of culture whatsoever. [**Anthony O'Brien:** In spite of what Michael was saying earlier about transforming the curriculum, and so on?] No, indeed, I don't think so. Brenda Gouley, in response to a question, said she doesn't care what the humanities do; if you mount a course on Mongolian pottery and you get 250 people attending it, good for Mongolian pottery. In other words, you can do any kind of culture you like as long as you put bums in the seats. Bang went two hundred years of the idea of culture, an even more important idea now than it was in the past. Now why should culture suddenly become so unimportant in a university in South Africa--why? The idea of a national culture is being attacked in a lot of teaching, the whole project that sustained English departments, for example, having been just blown off the tracks; but there seems very little regard for that crucial discussion. Are we in the cultural time-warp of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, I wonder, where you have this small elite and this vast proletariat, with a high percentage of illiteracy? If so, how appropriate is the new meritocratic university to our situation here? Do we revolt against the Western European model? Do we just call ourselves universities of excellence? Or throw out oxymorons like excellence with equity--you must have equity in there . . . [**Anthony O'Brien:** This whole official rhetoric is so American.] Yes. So what is going on? Why is there not a critical discourse about the university itself?--because there's not a critical discourse at all that is truly vital. And why doesn't somebody, you know, stand up and say, hey, wait a minute! We don't want the university of excellence, we want the university of reconstruction and development. But the university of excellence is operated in the name of the real; it operates in the name of the development of our economy, etc., etc. And then you go home--I went home last night and saw interest rates up to twenty-eight per cent, my God! [**Anthony O'Brien:** Have you just bought a house, by any chance?] That's it, yes, I'm just trying to get started, and you know, one third of the South African population is like me. The instability of all this! It's just lapping at our shores, and a situation seems to be rapidly emerging where we could have a very, very complicated elite- pacting in South Africa.

Anthony O'Brien: But surely that's already the current situation, isn't it? Elite-pacting--a term I learned from South Africans at the time of the negotiations--is exactly what I hear being described as the way the university runs, as well as KwaZulu-Natal, and the country, and on and on.

Matthew Shum: Yes. I'm not sure whether the administration come with that function, or whether it's voluntaristic: you're not attracting enough people, you can do Mongolian pottery, do what you damn well like, as long as you put bums on the seats. Therefore, if you don't have enough students, then you simply close down. What this actually does is denigrate the activity of academics. I remember Michael saying at a staff meeting that he feels "operated" as an academic, he is irrelevant to the administration, they have no investment in what's important to him professionally, and so on; he is now merely a sort of conduit, a pass-through. The university itself seems, profoundly, almost to despise the activity of academics.

Ronnie Miller: If I may differ here: what are we saying? David Maughan-Brown [Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Natal-Pietermaritzburg, and a Marxist literary critic--Ed] is a professor of English; has he suddenly become the enemy? The people that we call the administration are David Maughan-Brown, they are Ahmed Bawa [also a left-wing academic before becoming UND Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and other examples at UND of Deans who were prominent on the anti-apartheid cultural left include Michael Chapman and Ari Sitas--Ed], they don't denigrate what academics do. And so we also have to ask: why do we think that they do? Because nobody can really tell me that Ahmed Bawa denigrates what people in the English Department do. So why do we--and we do, my colleagues and I do--hold these views? There's a level at which they're silly. A university administration, with rare exceptions like the finance officer--we're really talking about our colleagues, yes? And the academic administration of a university is not the same as the administration of Anglo-American! Why do we have these views? It doesn't add up; Brenda Gouley doesn't denigrate . . . [Matthew Shum: But we're talking about structure, not individuals.] Yes, I'm also talking about structure, not Brenda as Brenda.

Michael Green: Could I come in from a different angle? It struck me, looking at Tony's questions and the way the discussion has gone, that the concerns you ask us to address are *foreign* concerns to us; I suspect that our day-to-day living at the university is not dictated by the idea behind them. There isn't a massive feeling here of a staff body organizing in a unionized sense, and in some kind of alliance with a student body; I just do not find that fitting us--our discussion has shown that it's *miles* from what people discuss! [Anthony O'Brien: Yes and no, I would say; but I see what you mean, yes.] Look, of course, it applies all the time, everything here applies to us; but I would be quite frustrated if I were you now, trying to address your main questions! We're all denying them, actually, we're all following the things that are on our own minds. I see the implications, and as you say it warrants this discussion; but there's something not *matching* between the way you put it and our case. I'm trying to connect what I've said to what Matthew's just been saying; I'm sure I've hoped and wanted to get the administration's more active acknowledgment of the work on curriculum change; we don't get a full hearing of that entire analysis or much awareness. What I do feel, in this painful period, is a huge degree of suspicion of administration, and an alliance of administration with the external constraints in the economy--in the sort of terminology you use here--and what I was trying to speak to earlier was the difficulty of trying to work in some sort of interface with the administration. What you *ought* to have is a very direct attempt to understand what the best teachers need, with the change in students, to design courses that actually *work* in a very immediate way, putting everything else aside.

Bill Freund: I think it partly arises from the weakness of the administration, as opposed to their, say, philistinism; the fact that they aren't able to say, this university is about X . . . [Anthony O'Brien: This is your "weak State" model, again, yes?] The fact that they retreat then to saying, "well, I guess if it comes to Mongolian pottery, OK"; now if all they can find to say to evaluate something is that it pays for itself, then to me that's a clear sign of weakness.

Michael Green: I'd like to try to pull some of this together if I could. The experience of some of us, a very worrying experience--in the framework, actually, of the administration trying to be more friendly academically--has been an experience of distrust. It may be like, in the terms you use here, the breakdown between a staff that was unionizing and an administration aligned with something more hostile, something related to "capital," say. When you think you're doing one sort of job, you suddenly see yourself being understood in relation to something else entirely! And when you sit down and try to think out exactly what went wrong . . . [Anthony O'Brien: You mean the administration doesn't understand what you were doing with curriculum?] No, I don't mean that at all, the opposite; I mean the splits in the staff, the suspicions, the difficult relations, what people feel you're up to . . . say, for example, you're working in some relation to methods in your own discipline, when suddenly you're said to be part of some whole sort of larger scheme of "excellence" aligned with colonial values (not that that doesn't have to be looked at, it does). The alignments are definitely out of joint, is what I'm trying to say; I find it incredibly difficult to work with, because you make a statement in the context of understanding and meeting students' needs, and you find what you do coming out, incredibly, as actually aligned with a university that derides culture, a university of a sort of verbal excellence as opposed to one of global cultures--you see what I mean? That's what I can't negotiate, at the moment; I'm fed up trying to do it! I've really had enough.

Anthony O'Brien: Yes . . . there are conflicting vocabularies, among other things.

Yonah Seleti: Let me go back for a moment and take up the point Ronnie and Bill have made, that the administration's not as strong as it's perceived to be. The problem of a weak State is actually a vital one, but we are weaker, as a staff, than the administration, that's one thing. Second, the terms and direction of discussion are being dictated by the administration, because there's been a vacuum. We haven't contested and come out pro-actively and said, look, this is a vision, this is a program, and we have masses of staff that are behind this. We haven't been able to do anything like that. Another level is the question of curriculum change, language and our new students; definitely we need to figure out a lot about a new curriculum. But that is not really what we need when much of the administration is behind a general policy that students have to move away from the humanities and the social sciences, that otherwise the funding and the scholarships are not going to come through. We are working in a very constrained environment, but part of this constraint is ours: we have not really taken up our part in this process. I'm not absolving the administration of their role, but I want to be accountable for what I should be doing, as a faculty member. We have actually been divided, fighting for a piece of the cake, instead of working together. Suspicion is not always suspicion of the administration; we're suspicious of one another! We don't have that trust that we can work together and build an institution, and we believe too much in our suspicions.

Anthony O'Brien: One problem of doing that is the division of disciplinarity itself, the division into departments, and schools, and so forth . . . I know, we must finish--yes I know, I know! Believe me! I'm going as well [to watch the SA team in the World Cup--Ed]. The union is one way to think of solidarity, but why not just say, as a thought experiment, that what the faculty should do is take over the administration? In other words, construct a vision of the university, and get to those positions, in the administration, to make that stick? Should we really take seriously Ronnie's view that the administration is us? Or not? The divisions between faculty and administrators, though they may be colleagues--in my view this is an older reality that doesn't describe the new one, but then I'm speaking as an American there--nevertheless, they're colleagues who make a lot more money (yes?) than the instructional staff, so one has to think about that; it's not simply a division of labor between the administration and the faculty, there are some elements of interest there as well. Anyway, we are almost out of time. Let me just invite any last closing manifesto, or appeal, or cry of pain, or hope, or whatever . . .

Matthew Shum: One of the ways we might extend the discussion would be to get someone like Mamdani from Cape Town, ask him to come and speak about that experience [the distinguished Ugandan political

scientist was invited to a new Chair in African Studies at Cape Town, then his curriculum plans centered on African scholarship were stymied by administrators and more traditional colleagues--Ed], to generate some debate and talk around here, to get a good attendance; he'd actually be very welcome here [before Cape Town he spent some time at UND as a visiting professor--Ed]. [Anthony O'Brien: Yes, perfect! You need someone like Mamdani to really put this out there, I think.] Yes, to get it out, because I suspect a lot of people have strong feelings about all these questions.

Anthony O'Brien: People have said to me, this university is a colonial outpost, and the thing you have to do is get rid of all those people who made it a colonial outpost and who are never going to change! How would you react to that as a program? It has some relevance to Mahmood Mamdani's struggle at Cape Town. I don't mean by firing them, obviously; but how to advance this new post-apartheid narrative? I get the sense that it doesn't exist; there are a number of strands and elements, but people have not worked it through together as "the new university."

Ronnie Miller: My closing comment would be that we have to take very seriously that there's not necessarily a single shared idea or interest among all academics. There certainly is not agreement about the "excellence" issue, for example. There are among my colleagues people who feel very, very strongly that excellence is the route to go, that policy should be devised in that way; and I think we have to be aware of that. It's just not true that we all have some set of common views or vision; and add that to the sense of distrust by faculty of what the admin is doing--you get exactly what people have been saying, an incapacity for common action to advance the university. [Anthony O'Brien: From the top?] From the Senate; and that's I think what most people would argue, that it should happen from the Senate, be worked out there.

Yonah Seleti: I think there is scope, particularly at the faculty level, for identifying a common ground, or at least what we feel should be where we could move to . . . [Anthony O'Brien: Or a process, at least.] A process. But so far we can't get that from JASA, or the Senate; so then, we must go back and begin on a low level and ask, is there anything that we can do? Because suspicion among the departments about restructuring is quite intense; we would need to see how we could reach beyond that.

Matthew Shum: There's a lot of very bad feeling between departments now that is unspoken, and it's quite a grave mistake, because people would be much better off if they could articulate intellectually what they think the conflict is about. And unfortunately I've met very few people who know enough about this.

Bill Freund: I suppose really, at different levels of generality, the prior question is: how do we conceptualize coming together in this university, as opposed to other universities, as opposed to having a national vision? It has to tie in with something bigger, not get fragmented, not develop into the sense that this institution is framing its own sets of issues; I think that's impossible.

Anthony O'Brien: OK. Well, I hope this is an image of the kind of solidarity you are looking for, and I hope we can construct it, with you, on another level, transnationally. Thanks very much to all of you.
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