

DRUM

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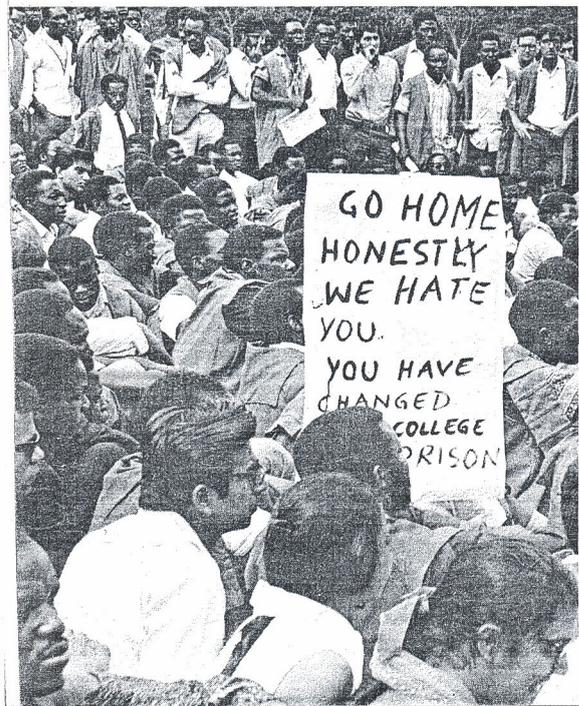


CAPTAINS OF THE CAMPUS

Compared with what went on in France and with what is still going on in the United States, the recent student unrest in East Africa was little more than the ruffling of an academic gown. But it did focus attention on the young people studying at the colleges—and on the men appointed to teach and discipline them. In this special feature the principals of the three university colleges discuss their careers, their jobs, and their plans for the future.



Principals address students during recent unrest. Above: Mr. Yusuf Lule faces students at Makerere demonstrating in sympathy with their colleagues in Nairobi. Facing page: Dr. Porter has his say to the Nairobi demonstrators, some of whom (below) were less than friendly



DISSENT we can have; disorder we must try to avoid." This is how Dr. Arthur T. Porter, principal of University College, Nairobi, sums up his personal feelings towards the unrest which flared up at Nairobi University College earlier this year. Unlike his fellow principals in Dar es Salaam and Kampala, Dr. Porter is not an East African. He was born and brought up in Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone. When he was doing research for his book on the development of Freetown society he came across a reference to his great-grandfather, who once managed a small village outside the capital. In the book there is a full page photograph of his ancestor bearing an incredible likeness to Dr. Porter.

Dr. Porter's memories of his father are faint. "He died when I was just five years old," he recalls. "My father was a little before his time. He had studied electrical engineering in Britain but on his return home he joined the Civil Service because there was no work for him in Sierra Leone as an electrical engineer."

The young Porter, his elder sister and younger brother, were brought up by their mother, a qualified teacher. Today Dr. Porter's sister is in charge of a training school for nurses in Sierra Leone and his brother works as a motor engineer in New York.

From an early age it was obvious Dr. Porter had inherited some of his father's academic ability. After completing his secondary schooling he went straight into Fourah Bay College, Freetown, and by the time he was 20 had gained his Bachelor of Arts degree of the University of Durham (to which the college was affiliated) in English, Philosophy and History. The college—it was the same one his father had been to—asked him to stay on as a lecturer until after the war.

In 1947 he won a scholarship to Cambridge University,

one of Britain's oldest and most famous universities. There he took an upper second class honours degree in both parts of the historical tripos. Later he took his post-graduate teaching qualification at London University and spent a year as an assistant lecturer at Edinburgh University, Scotland, doing research on race relations.

NAIROBI



DR. A. T. PORTER

After he had been five years in Britain and added a string of qualifications to his name, Dr. Porter returned home to take up a lectureship in history at his alma mater, Fourah Bay College. "They offered me twice the amount I was earning at Edinburgh. I jumped at it!"

The following year, 1953, Dr. Porter married. He had met his wife, a Dane, while in England. Dr. Porter travelled to Denmark for the wedding and brought his bride back to Sierra Leone.

In 1956 Dr. Porter was awarded a Ford Foundation fellowship as research assistant in the African Studies Center at Boston University in the United States of America. In 1959 he gained the Ph.D. degree of Boston University and his research thesis was later published by Oxford University Press, London, as a book entitled "Creolodom: A Study of the Development of Freetown Society."

Before going to head University College, Nairobi, in 1964, Dr. Porter was Professor and head of the History Department, director of the Institute of African Studies and vice-principal of Fourah Bay College.

By now his career had been long and distinguished and at 40 Dr. Porter was still a young man. His appointment as principal of Nairobi University College made local history. He was the first African principal the college had had.

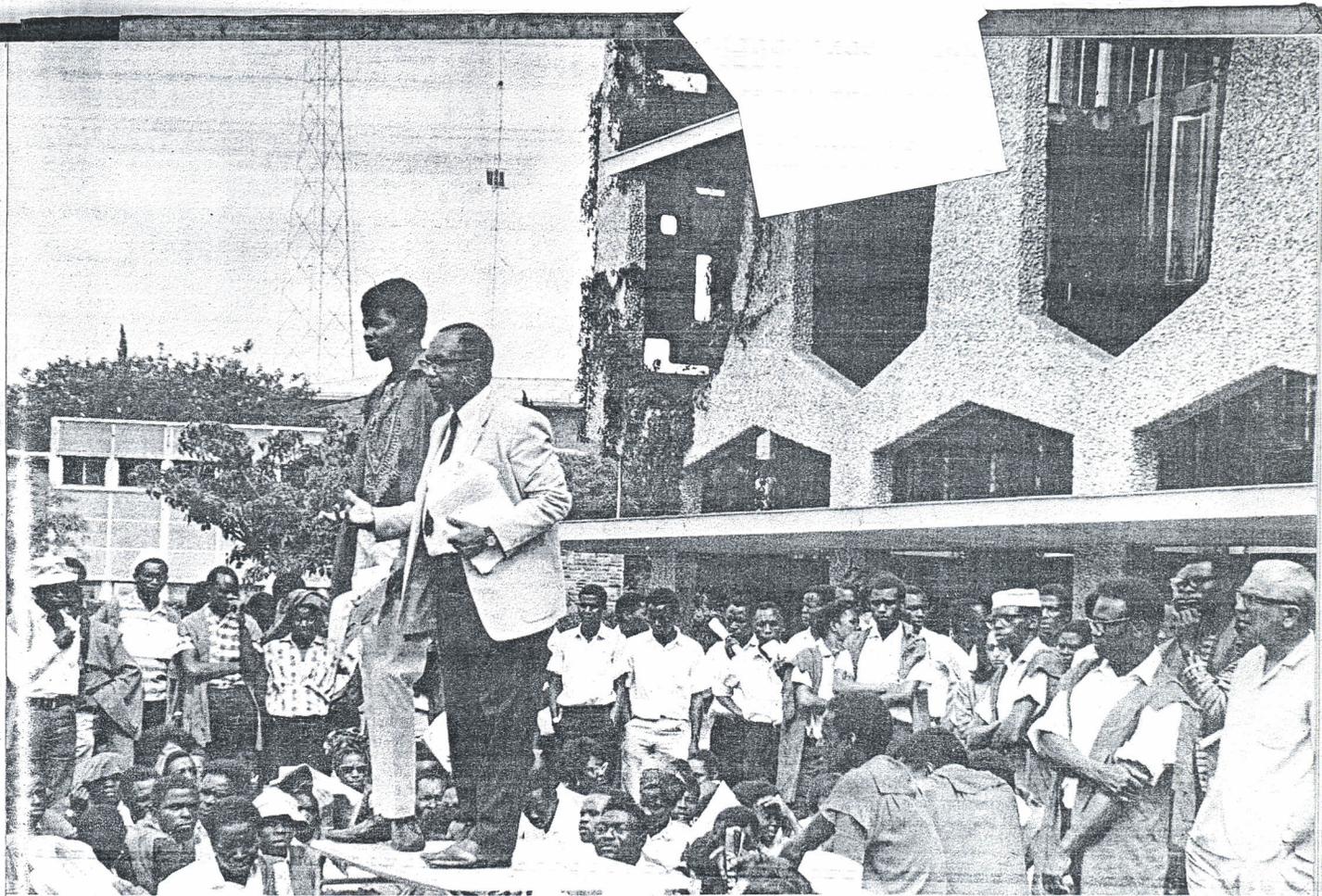
But as the first West African and not East African his job has been fraught with problems. For it is this very fact that has been the cause of so much comment since his appointment.

Why should a West African head a college in East Africa? "Those who invited me to serve in Kenya for a short transitional period must have reasoned that either there was no East African suitably qualified with administrative experience for the post at that time; or those East Africans who were qualified already had good jobs and simply were not interested in this post; or for undisclosed reasons, the initial appointment of a non-East African was reviewed as desirable. It could be any one of these reasons. I don't know which," explained Dr. Porter.

Dr. Porter's original contract was for three years but at the end of 1967 he was asked to stay on a further three years. He finishes next year, when the post will almost certainly be filled by an East African and probably a Kenyan.

Despite all the difficulties of being a foreigner at the head of one of the most important establishments in the country Dr. Porter feels there is "great value" in working for a period outside one's own country, within Africa in a position of responsibility—"I think this is something we in Africa should do more often."

Animosity towards the appointment of a West African is hardly in keeping with the spirit of Pan Africanism. But it exists all the same and has undoubtedly made Dr. Porter's task more difficult



than it might have been for a Kenyan.

In the recent student disturbances he had to contend with large posters proclaiming "Go home." In times of trouble it is this phrase more than any other which crops up. To the local students and many others Dr. Porter is a foreigner.

It is a position he has found trying at times. "At home I can challenge people and say the future is mine as well as yours so let's get down and talk at that level. But here one feels hesitant to participate in any prescriptive way in some of the basic decisions which must be made regarding the future development of the university.

"I can and do suggest and, from my experience, I can and do advise; but I cannot prescribe. Despite the great affection I have for Kenya, I am not viewed by a number as belonging or having the same stake in the country as a number of my East African colleagues.

"It is they who must play the prescribed role in shaping the future of their own national university."

But despite the problems, life for Dr. Porter in a bigger and newer university than the one in Sierra Leone,

which has 800 students compared with Nairobi's 2,000, has been exciting and invigorating. "One is all the time groping for precedents. In West Africa there's more routine to life. A university such as Fourah Bay which was established in 1827 loses much of its excitement. Here it is invigorating because it is so new and is developing very fast."

Transition

With a new university in what is still a new country there are new problems; problems of identity, of staffing, of student/government relations and of the university's role in society. This is what Dr. Porter has to say on:

IDENTITY "We are not yet an African University. We are still in the transition stage to becoming one. Our increasingly African identity is reflected not only in the nationality of academic and administrative staff and in our course content, but also by the fact that our programme of studies is explicitly being directed more and more toward meeting the manpower requirements of the country. However we have yet to achieve a true African identity."

STAFFING: "Our pro-

gramme of Africanisation of academic staff at University College, Nairobi has meant that about 34 per cent of the staff has been Africanised, and we continue to pursue further Africanisation with the greatest possible vigour."

STUDENT/GOV-VERNMENT RELATIONS: "The problem of student/government relations has universally become a highly visible and difficult one. The students here are far closer to their national system than their fellow students in the West. Those who fought for their independence are still not historical but living personalities. Moreover, students here know that they will be directly involved very soon with the decision-making process. You know responsibility falls so early in Africa these days."

UNIVERSITY'S ROLE IN SOCIETY: "There is need for a kind of contract between universities and governments in Africa. The understandings which have become conventions in university government relations in older countries may have to be spelt out, so there is no twilight zone of misunderstanding regarding the respect and functional integrity each requires to be effective. "There is also a need for a

continuing dialogue between members of the university community and government so there can be a continuing appreciation of the problems on both sides. The principle of academic freedom, for example, must be interpreted within the context of each particular situation.

Moving on

"I think it wrong to brand universities in Africa as ivory towers unresponsive to the needs of the country. This is certainly not true of the University of East Africa. We are all working closely with our respective governments in pursuit of national development programmes.

"I think the three governments could use us much more than they do at present. After all, there is a great concentration of professional competence and specialised talent in the university. I think we also need more national activity programmes as, for example, vacation work on development projects, for students than have been developed here in Kenya.

"We must prevent the polarisation of our society; there is a conscious awareness of this both among the staff and students at Nairobi." Whatever Dr. Porter's

dreams for University College, Nairobi, he will not be there to see them carried through. Next year when the three colleges each become autonomous universities and the University of East Africa ceases to exist, Dr. Porter will leave at the end of his contract.

He is returning to Sierra Leone with his wife and two children as principal of Fourah Bay College, to which post he has already been appointed. While appreciating Dr. Porter's services, there are many who will be glad to see a Kenyan installed as principal of Nairobi University College.

Dr. Porter will leave with but one wish which only history can bring about. "I have tried in my own way to make a contribution towards a realisation of what one regards as the aspirations of the Kenyans. I hope history will confirm this. It has been for me a great honour to be asked to be of interim service, and see a job through a particular phase of development. I hope, in the end, when the record is evaluated it will be shown that the job was done satisfactorily..."