



Political Lessons to Learn from the 1952 Makerere College Students' Strike

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1. Students are often a replica of, and embody, the concerns of society

Recently, there has been interest in Uganda's dailies in explaining student strikes and activism in institutions of higher learning especially public universities. In the *New Vision* of 14th April 2015, page 12 Felix Kulaigye thought failure of student leadership in universities, particularly public ones, is one of the major causes of strikes. The former Prime Minister, Professor Apolo Nsubambi in a long and good article felt campus problems especially failure to guide students were the causes of strikes and hooliganism (*New Vision* Friday May 1, 2015, page 12). However, a study of the first major student strike at Makerere gives good lessons for us to learn about student strikes and what we should do to avert them. There are ten political and higher education governance lessons we can learn from the 1952 Makerere Strike and subsequent student activism in Uganda and the rest of Africa. The reasons that made me come to these conclusions are all premised on evidence supported opinion that campus problems are connected, and cannot be resolved without reference, to external social forces that pertain in the wider society. That is, causes of student strikes and activism cannot be fully understood by looking at campus factors alone as a number of writers and commentators seem to imply. Student activism- including strikes- in this paper will be defined as any student revolt, unrest, or agitation that "constitutes a serious challenge to the established order or authority" within or outside an educational institution (Nkinyagi, 1991: 198). Student activism includes "defiant political conduct, damage/destruction of property, attacks on staff, riots and rebellions that may lead to injury of students or the general public" (Munene, 2003). They also include peaceful refusal by students to co-operate with internal or external authorities.

The first political lesson to learn from the 1952 Makerere student strike is therefore that strikes and other forms of activism by higher education students, particularly university students, reflect and are often caused by, social and political problems in society and addressing only

campus concerns without reference to social anxieties may not end student strikes. As has been noted by Philip Altbach, “ student movements emerge from their own social and political environments” from which the students come and where the university is located (Altbach, 1984). Byaruhanga’s impressive study of student activism at Makerere between 1952 and 2005 indicates that 40% of student strikes in that institution were either motivated by politics or included political motives (Byaruhanga, 2006). In Third World countries, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, students often aimed not only at changing the structures of their education institutions and those of the state but also, in number cases, the incumbent government. In most these countries, alternative sources of power to the executive such as parliament, the mass media, trade unions, non-government organizations, and the general civil society were either weak, suppressed, compromised or non-existent. There were therefore few competing social forces that can stand up to absolute governments, and students often took- and still take- on the role of social representatives. University students, and sometimes the army and police, were often the most organized groups to articulate the problems of, and fight for society. Students thus became “a conscience for their societies”. Further, in nations where incumbent governments are afraid of organized opinion and crush any organized crowds, students are one of the social groups that are easy to mobilize and question incumbent, corrupt, intolerant governments because:

- Students are a replica of, and embody the concerns, of society;
- Universities are often located in the capital, and therefore able to know what is going on in the management of the state;
- Students often have their own media - newspapers, radio, internet connection -- and many live on campus.
- Economic decisions of governments regarding fees, pocket money, and housing, impinge on students immediately and when they graduate and start looking for jobs.
- Unlike grown-ups, most students do not have family responsibilities and have less to lose by rebelling than other social groups.

The 1952 Makerere College students’ “ food” strike should be seen in this perspective. The strike took place in the heyday of the colonial period. It was one of a series of anti-colonial activisms that greatly contributed to the success of the struggle for independence of the three East African nations by awakening anti-colonial consciousness amongst the educated elites in the region (i.e in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania). Together with the Mau Mau

in Kenya and the 1945 and 1949 revolts in Uganda, the Makerere College Strike of 1952 galvanized African opinion for demanding what they considered to be their rights. It contributed to the development of anti-colonial conciseness amongst leading educated elites attending universities in the region who were still attending institutions of higher learning in the period.

The 1952 Makerere Strike, therefore, represented aspirations wider than those of Makerere students on the campus of that name. Major East African wide grievances were against the colonial racial based class structure, authoritarian administrative systems, land alienation and tight control of opinion. Up to the early 1960s, East African class structure run along racial lines and Africans, especially the educated elites, wished to get into the upper layers of colonial society. Presumed racism by colonial officers contributed to the general disquiet of Africans within European led institutions. The alienation of African land and the latter's inability to participate in higher levels of the economy were grievances nursed through East Africa. The rising educated elite from the many high schools and colleges in East Africa were not moving into positions of responsibilities as fast as they wanted. On the other hand, most of the "collaborators" were old chiefs from prominent families whose ranks were difficult to join by outsiders. The chiefs were unelected and ruled their "tribes" through hierarchical administrative structures controlled by colonial officials. These chiefs, particularly in Uganda, opposed any form of democratic governance. Although most of Makerere students were sons and daughters of elites, they were not blind to developing anti-colonial sentiments throughout East Africa.

2. Student strikes have been widespread all over Africa

The second political lesson to learn is that we should meticulously look for causes of strikes rather put all the blame on students at Makerere or public universities in general because student strikes are not restricted to Uganda or to Makerere (see *New Vision*, April 14, 2015, page12). Strikes have been widespread in Africa and many have had a combination of both campus and off-campus causes. Africa has long witnessed student activism organized for general or specific goals. Before and during the 1960s student activisms and strikes were aimed at dislodging colonialism in Africa. The first generation of African leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Azikiwe, and others, started their political careers as student activists (Munene, 2003; Ayu, 1986). African students studying in Europe founded the West African Student Union, a pioneer in demanding African decolonization, in 1925

in London. From around 1925 to the early 1960s, African student concerns and activism aimed at colonialism in Africa. In Uganda, decolonization activism was part of the 1965 protest targeting alleged US involvement in the Congo and the bombing of a Ugandan village. From 1970 to the early 1990s student activism focused on unseating corrupt and dictatorial African regimes, and protesting the economic policies of international financial organizations. The period 1970 - 1989 witnessed many student protests. In the period 1970 - 1979, there were student strikes and protests in twenty nine African countries (Nkinyagi, 1991, Zeiling and Dawson, 2008). In the period 1980 - 1989, there were student protests in twenty five African countries. The first set of protests in 1970 - 1979 were not only caused by campus matters but also aimed at the dictatorial military and single party regimes that ruled or misruled African countries. In 1971 and 1976, there were activisms at the University of Zambia. In Kenya from 1975, the University of Nairobi recorded several strikes especially after the murder of the popular politician, J.M. Kariuki. In 1976, the University of Ghana students questioned the dictatorial regime of Acheampong. In the same year in Uganda, Makerere University students staged a march to Kibuli Secondary School to publicly send a condolence message to the father of a student, Paul Sserwanga, who was killed by security operatives near the campus. In 1978, Nigerian students clashed with the government of General Obasanjo.

Between 1979 and 1989 and beyond, students protested against eliminations of the various welfare components of their education that they thought to be their right. As pointed out earlier, African economies collapsed in the 1970s and 1980s due to misrule, the oil shock, worsening terms of trade with the rest of the world and changes in production. By 1980, African economies were on the brink of collapse and so the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund provided funding on condition that African countries implemented Structural Adjustment conditionalities. These conditionalities were to:

- (a) Reduce the role of the state to cost effective levels so as to balance budgets,
- (b) Expand the role of the market,
- (c) Remove governments from conducting business and
- (d) Refraining from controlling market forces.

Of concern was the Structural Adjustment Programmes introduced not only to save African nations from total economic collapse but also to introduce western, mainly American, free market models into the wider world (Harrison, 2004). As far as universities were concerned, the Structur-

al Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) meant that;

- (a) Cost-sharing would be introduced, meaning students would contribute to part of the cost of their education.
- (b) Cost-recovery schemes including payment of fees would be introduced.
- (c) And private providers of higher education would be permitted to open institutions of higher education. The government would no longer monopolize the supply of higher education.

Thus aftermath of the introduction of the SAPS conditionalities were a series of student protests against governments, the subject international financial institutions and university institutional leaders. There were student protests against cost-sharing and removal of student privileges (boom) in Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and other African countries in the period 1985-1995 (Kamotho, 2000; Wekesa, 2000; Bako, 1994 Nkinyagi, 1991). In 1989, in Nigeria, a number of students were killed as they protested against the conditionalities of a World Bank loan for education (Jega, 1994; Caffentzis, 2000; Bako, 1994). There were protests against SAPS by the University of Zimbabwe students (Cheater, 1991) and Sudan (Al-Zubeir, 1995). These strikes frightened university and political leaders from making bold financial reforms that could make more resources available to universities and therefore improve the quality of higher education delivered.

3. The 1952 Makerere strike redefined the role of students in higher education governance

The third lesson to learn from the 1952 Makerere student strike is that students should be involved in both the management of their institution and be briefed by authorities on reasons behind the implementation of policies affecting their welfare. The 1952 strike redefined the role of students in the governance of institutions of higher learning. The 1952 strike gave education managers, students and the colonial administration food for thought. Managers realized the need to involve higher education students in the governance of the College and to often invite political leaders to address students on crucial policies and hear contradictory opinions on a given issue. Coming at a time when forces opposed to the giving of higher education to Africans were weakening, the strike threatened the existence of all Asquith colleges the British had built to give managed higher education to Africans (at Makerere, Legon, Ibadan, and Fourah Bay). Some African chiefs, European colonial officials, Asian and Europeans had questioned

the merits of giving Africans higher education in the way it was done.

By the late 1950s, Makerere College, under the same principal who was the target of the 1952 strike, Bernard de Bunsen, had learnt a number of lessons in governing itself as an institution of higher learning. Not only was food improved to “European menus” but also the College insisted on its institutional autonomy. While in July 1949 the College (and colonial officers) accepted the resignation of Principal W.D. Lamont for his refusal to dismiss an anti-colonial lecturer, Mary Parker, a critic of the Kenya Colony’s settler policies, in 1958 things were different. Principal de Bunsen insisted that Julius Nyerere and Tom Mboya should visit and talk on campus as invited although he had been told that the pair were “...two of the most dangerous men in East Africa” by colonial authorities (Sicherman, 2005: 249). Although the Governor of Tanganyika, Twining, threatened the Principal that “any moment he might have to arrest Julius Nyerere, and it would be embarrassing to do so, wouldn’t it, on Makerere Hill”. But Bernard de Bunsen was determined to build a university where free speech was allowed. He permitted the two nationalists to speak at Makerere. Thus, for the administration, the Strike of 1952 was a lesson in the arts of managing university institutions. The College realized the might of student power and the concerns of society. Bernard de Bunsen, the Principal of Makerere College, became more tolerant of African opinion than his colleagues were.

4. The general population has a keen interest in what goes at campuses in periods of strikes

The fourth political lesson to learn from the 1952 Makerere strike is that the general public is very interested in what goes on in universities during periods of student activism and strikes. Sympathy with student issues amongst the general population could cause resentment and rebellion in some sections of society. Periods of strikes make the population worried not only because some of them have their children on campuses, but also because of a general feeling that the country has invested a lot in university students. In a strike period, not only should student opinion be handled carefully but also the public must be informed of underlying problems on a subject campuses and strategies for resolving them openly discussed. The 1952 Makerere Strike is a text-book for this assertion. The African press in Uganda took a very keen interest in the strike. Writers and commentators in the press were amazed that students were so bold as to stand up to colonial officials. Most of the papers felt that the students had a point: that the food served was bad. But they were carefully not to be presumed to support

revolts against colonial authorities, or to recommend “European” menus as the students desired.

The local press, sensing the interest the population had in learning the causes of the commotion at Makerere, covered the Strike in detail for about a week. *Ebifa* of 1st September 1952, concluded that the food was not appropriate. On 18 August 1952 an *Ebifa* reporter visited the Mitchel Hall Kitchen. The cooks showed the paper’s representative what constituted the meal that was to be served on that day: matoke, lumonde and groundnut sauce. *Ebifa* concluded that “the meal was in no way inviting”. The paper blamed the College for hiring an inexperienced European lady to supervise the cooking of African food. *Matalisi* of 29 August, 1952 concluded by noting that in its opinion, “to make Matoke more tasteful to Africans, there must be employed at Makerere College Baganda women with experience in that work; ...If that is not done, it is probable that the cooking of African food at Makerere is not going to improve”. *Mugobansonga* of 26th August 1952 called for a Commission of inquiry into the incident. *Gambuze* of 5th September recalled that when an African, Isaaka Mukiibi, was still the supervisor of cooking at Makerere, there was no food complaints. *The Voice of Islam* of 30th August 1952 put the blame on College authorities. Of the six expelled student, three, Said Hamdun, Malik and Abu Mayanja were Muslims and this paper was not amused by their expulsion. *Matalisi* of 29th August, 1952, after concluding that both the type of food given and the way it was cooked were the major causes of the strike decided to inform College authorities on how Matoke should be cooked if it was to be appreciated by Africans. The paper continues:

If you took as an example the cooking of Matoke, you would easily realize the difficulty every European may find in supervising its cooking. After peeling, matoke is not put straight way in the cooking pot, it has to be washed. There are some kinds of matoke which after peeling must be washed if good food is to be obtained, whereas other kinds of matoke need not similar process. For instance the Baganda women here in Kampala who cook matoke which they buy from the market, know definitely that the matoke which comes from Buddu need not be washed whereas other matoke from Kyagwe or elsewhere must be washed in order to get a suitable food.

When the (peeled) matoke has been washed, it is covered with plantain leaves, tied up with plantain dried fibres, and placed in a cooking pot to be cooked. To be suitably cooked firewood must be used; because some of Africans who eat matoke say that the Matoke which

is electrically cooked is less tasteful than that which is cooked with firewood; that is alleged to be so because the electricity cooks very quickly hence the lack of taste. We are not ready to discuss whether or not the food at Makerere College is electrically cooked. When the food is ready it is made into a lump for which special experience is required otherwise it disintegrates into crumbs and also there will remain individual parts of it. But it must be remembered that the food to be properly prepared, it should have been well cooked otherwise it will not be tasteful.

We leave it to the College authority to find out whether the matoke was cooked as we have explained above. Sauce used with matoke must be prepared with same dexterity and experience so as to make the matoke palatable.

The food was neither well cooked for local Ugandans because it was badly cooked and inappropriate for people hailing from non matooke/lumonde eating areas of East Africa. In later years, Bernard de Bunsen admitted that the food served was “pretty piggish” (Sicherman, 2005:32)

5. Student activisms and strikes avail future leaders with political training

The fifth lesson to learn from the 1952 strike is that student strikes and activisms are a training of future political leaders. They are incubators of future political leaders. Most of the involved leaders of the 1952 Makerere College Strike became leaders in East African in their adult years. The 1952 Makerere College strike gave a number of students lessons for their later political activities. It gave them a mobilization experience. As Josephat Karanja, one of the expelled students told de Bunsen years later, the 1952 food strike was “the highlight of my education, it was our first taste of politics” (Sicherman, 2005:34). Abu Mayanja’s elder brother, Kambugu, on hearing of the expulsion of his younger sibling said that “one fall does not stop birds from singing” (Sicherman, 2005:33). Mayanja, Karanja, Omolo and Hamdun became great national achievers in life, academics and politicians. However, those who co-operated with the administration became very good civil servants!

Student leaders are often very brilliant and a number of them emerge as social leaders in their adult life (Hanna and Hanna, 1995). For example, a random review of a few of Makerere’s student leaders reveals brilliant potential. Abu Mayanja is reputed to have been one of the most

brilliant student to go through King's College Budo, passing with distinctions in almost all O-Levels in all the subjects he sat for. He later served as cabinet minister in more than one Ugandan government as well as the Kabaka government. Akiiki-Mujaju (Guild President 1964/5) became a renowned academic and political thinker. Tumusiime Mutebile (Guild President 1971/72) was the bureaucratic head of the Treasury and is now the Governor of the Bank of Uganda. Olara Otunu (Guild President 1972/3) now heads a United Nations agency and leader of the UPC. His relative, Otunu-Ogenga (Guild President 1984/5), is a well-known author and professor. Norbert Mao (Guild President 1990/91) is a successful politician and was the Chair of Gulu District and leader of the DP. It is thus in the national interest for governments to accept student activism as a normal part of university experience. Participation in student affairs is part of leadership training. For the majority of students, activism is fun, something they participate in for enjoyment, to be seen to oppose elders, particularly incumbent governments, and to feel personal independence. However, where hooliganism occurs, authorities should fight it.

6. Leaders of student activism and strikes normally have connections with external forces

The sixth lesson to learn is that leaders of strikes and other forms of student activism normally have aims that are wider and larger than campus complaints. They are often connected to external political, social, or ideologically bound groups. They often do not reveal to their followers the sources of their ideas, funds and strategies of the revolts they lead. Abu Mayanja, the leader of the 1952 strike at Makerere was working with key politicians who, together with him, founded the Uganda National Congress in the same year the strike took place. From the studies I have done, very few student leaders are unconnected to external activist or political organization. A number of organizers have led subsequent Makerere strikes with connections to external political forces including parties and government (Byaruhanga, 2006). Even today, many student elections on campuses are believed to be often influenced by external politics.

7. Students contribute to political and economic development through their activism.

The seventh lesson to learn is that student strikes and activism can, and have in the past, contributed to democratic and national development, not only in Uganda but also in other developing countries. Makerere students

have contributed to national democratic development through their standing up to powers that the general population dared not publically oppose (Byaruhanga, 2006). The 1952 strike was Makerere students' first attempt to stand up to authorities. Later on, as the post colonial era unfolded, Makerere students stood up to dictatorships when ordinary Ugandans were not able to do so. In doing so, they proved that dictatorial regimes could, and can, be challenged. The first major strike, in 1952, led by Abu Mayanja, might have had some political overtones. The previous year, the Ugandan National Congress was founded and he became its Secretary General. He was thus a practicing politician inside and outside the campus. They publically stood up to Idi Amin when most the population was under the yoke of that dictator. On 7 March and 3 August, 1976, Makerere students protested not only the killing of their fellow students, namely Paul Serwanga and Esther Chesire and a staff member, Mrs Nanziri Bukonya but also the policies of Amin's dictatorship. In the former occasion, students boldly took to the streets, silently and without violence, to march to Kibuli despite Amin's ban of all political activities. At the time of the march to Kibuli by Makerere students, no other social group could organize itself and publically stand up to Amin. But Makerere students did so. In August the same year, students stood up again and troops were sent on campus. The 1981 protests by Makerere students that led to the banning of the students' Guild by Obote were politically motivated. Students, like many people in the general society, believed that Obote had rigged the 1980 elections and therefore his government was illegal. However, it was students who immediately resisted the fact, though later other organizations followed the same road. A number of students, including the majority of the Guild government, either left the country or were put in prison. The 2001 rioting on Makerere campus followed a contentious presidential election.

It is generally accepted now that students played a major role in the efforts that led to transitions to democratic behaviour and multiparty political systems in Africa in the 1990s and early 2000s. These actions included enhancing efforts to remove bad governments. Student actions are believed to have played roles in the removal of a number of dictatorial regimes in Africa. Addis Ababa University students are believed to have pioneered the movements that led to the fall of Haille Selassie of Ethiopia (Yeebo, 1991, Zolberg, 1975). Students are believed to have played a role in successful coup d'états in Sudan (in 1985 and 1989), and the six Nigerian coups from 1966 to 1989 (Baffour, 1989). Students supported attempted coup d'états in Kenya in 1982 and Benin in 1989. In Zaire in 1989, the army

unit sent to subdue students joined them in asking for better conditions.

8. Student activism also has adverse impact on university and society

The eighth lesson to learn from the 1952 Makerere strike is that though student activism can lead to long-term positive social change, it has a number of short-term negative results. Strikes lead to university closures, to harsh measures being introduced, to silencing of brilliant potential leaders from amongst students, and can delay positive higher education reform because policy makers are afraid of student power. Closures of universities are the most widespread actions to result from student activism. Student activism does not only delay the completion of academic and practical programmes but also affects quality as some brilliant staff and students do not return when institutions reopen. Student riots destroy infrastructure and facilities. Bad elements within student bodies get off line and damage property, loot and cause injury to life. Some of the riots aim at academic staff, which often results in brain drain. Several university closures in Africa can be cited as examples. In 1986, the University of Madagascar was closed for six months after a strike. After apparent student support of a failed coup attempt in Kenya, the University of Nairobi was closed for thirteen months. Between 1970 and 1988 the same university was closed seventeen times due to student activism (Nkinyagi; 1991).

Because students are a powerful social force when organized, African governments muzzle them and their universities by requiring students to sign submissive agreements before reentry, punish them harshly, interfere in their electoral processes and some times have them killed. Many African governments respond by placing security forces (including the national police) on campuses. In the latter part of the Amin period, a loyal police officer was planted on campus to head the university security force. The silencing of student leaders by governments is perhaps the most negative outcome of riotous student activism.

Perhaps the most devastating impact of student activism is the fear it creates in the minds of national leaders, persuading them to opt for short-term solutions that please students instead of eliminating expensive welfare components of education that stand in the way of core academic funding. I am sorry to say that Uganda has failed to face this issue squarely. Nor have students thought seriously about the quality of education they get. Students need to refocus and support the long-term goal of obtaining quality higher education instead of targeting short-term comforts only.

9. For the majority of students, their concerns are immediate, short term and often selfish

The ninth lesson to learn from the 1952 and subsequent Makerere strikes is that for the majority of students, their concerns are immediate, short term and often selfishly motivated. Any mediator trying to resolve a strike should address these short term concerns if he wants to rob the strike of followers. For example, Makerere students in 1952 demanded to be served “European food”; probably as recognition of the status which western education had elevated them to (above those who did not have higher education). For the majority of students at Makerere in 1952, good food was the issue. They wanted to be on the same status as Europeans. Focusing on short-term welfare components of education, students weakened the greater aims for which some of the leaders of the strike say they wanted to achieve. In 1952 and in subsequent strikes we have witnessed in Uganda, there are no mentions of quality higher education as one of the objects to be achieved by the strike. For many, strikes are a “bread and butter” exercise.

10. Whenever ownership of a higher education institution is seen, or perceived to be, managing the institution, student activism aims at such an owner

The tenth and last lesson to learn is that student activism and strikes aim at those they see as the final makers of policy, normally owners who, for public universities, is the government. The more an owner of a higher education institution is seen to be the final and ultimate controller of what is going on at campus and is not available for discussions with students, the more student strikes and other forms of activism will be targeted at the owner. Students normally consider their activism or strikes as standing up to the owners of institutions, which in the case of public universities, is Government. Matters are made worse when students know that management cannot make final decisions without consulting ownership or that ownership can reverse decisions made by management. By 1952, Makerere College was perceived by students to be owned by the colonial establishment, run by colonial officers and policies regarding student affairs made by an occupying proud racial group. The leader of the 1952 Makerere University students strike was also a member of the first African political party in Uganda and worked very closely with Ignatious Musaazi, who saw Makerere as another bastion of colonial power. Musaazi had opposed the allocation of more land to Makerere and other research institutions seeing them as colonial institutions.

It is clear that the persistent strikes in public universities could be reduced if the government monitored these institutions by chartering public universities instead of controlling them under Section 6A of the Amendment Act, Sections 62(3), 59(5) of the Principal Act, sections 44(4) of the Public Finance and Accountability Act and other sections where the Government is seen to be directly managing public universities. Like Kenya and Tanzania, the Uganda Government should distance itself from managing, or being seen as, universities by chartering all public universities. By so doing, the government will move its ever-present shadow on the floors of public universities. When that shadow is no longer visible, student anger will be aimed at other stake holders like university councils or management. Since the enactment of the Kenya Universities Act a few years back, there have been few student strikes in public universities. With Transparency International listing Uganda as one of the most corrupt country in the world, students feel that they also have a right to feed on the public purse like those controlling the state. Persistent are also caused by social anger.

11. Events of the 1952 Makerere strike

A letter to A. Fenner Brockway Esq. M.P, of 14th November 1952, by Sir O. Lyttelton of the Colonial Office, London, neatly summarized the events of the strike. From his letter, as well as other documents, I have been able to piece the events of the strike as follows:

i. Complaints about the bad food

The students complained and made representations to the Principal (Bernard de Bunsen) that the food they were getting was neither good, nor well cooked. Although there were students from many “tribes” of East Africa, local food of Uganda was provided and cooked under the supervision of a European, Miss Florence Ford. When a group of students complained about food, the principal insisted that he could only address the concerns of the students if these were brought to him by recognized or officially appointed student officials of the Guild. These included those in:

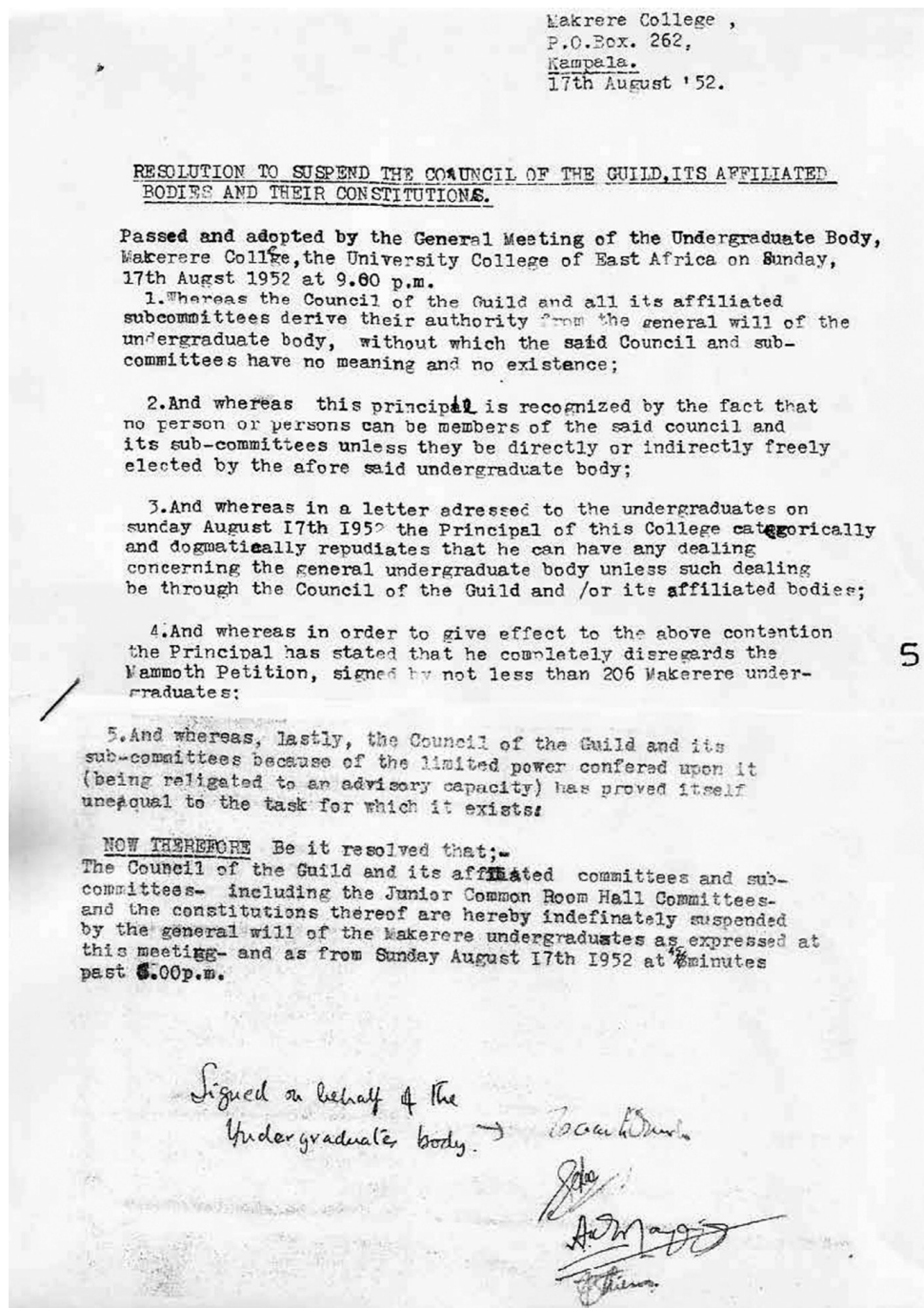
- (a) The Mess Committee
- (b) The student Council

ii. A vote of no confidence in the student’s Council

But the student seems to have been extremely dissatisfied with the channel through which the Principal wanted grievances of the students to come to him. It seems a number of students did not trust those they had elect-

ed to represent them. This is later shown by a successful vote of no confidence that was staged against the student Council. They considered the Council to too compliant to the administration. The members of the ruling Council included Z.H.K Bigirwenkya (Chairman), J.E Kariuki, A.N.L Wina, E.M.Kibaki, M.W.K.Chiume and C.H. Barlow.

Abu Mayanja wrote the resolution of the students in his extremely good English and was one of the major signatories of the resolution shown below:



Clearly, communication between the majority of the students was hampered by lack of an agreed channel. Students did not trust their own representatives or the appointed Mess Committee. In a general letter to undergraduates on 17th August 1972, the Principal wrote as follows:

Dear Undergraduates.

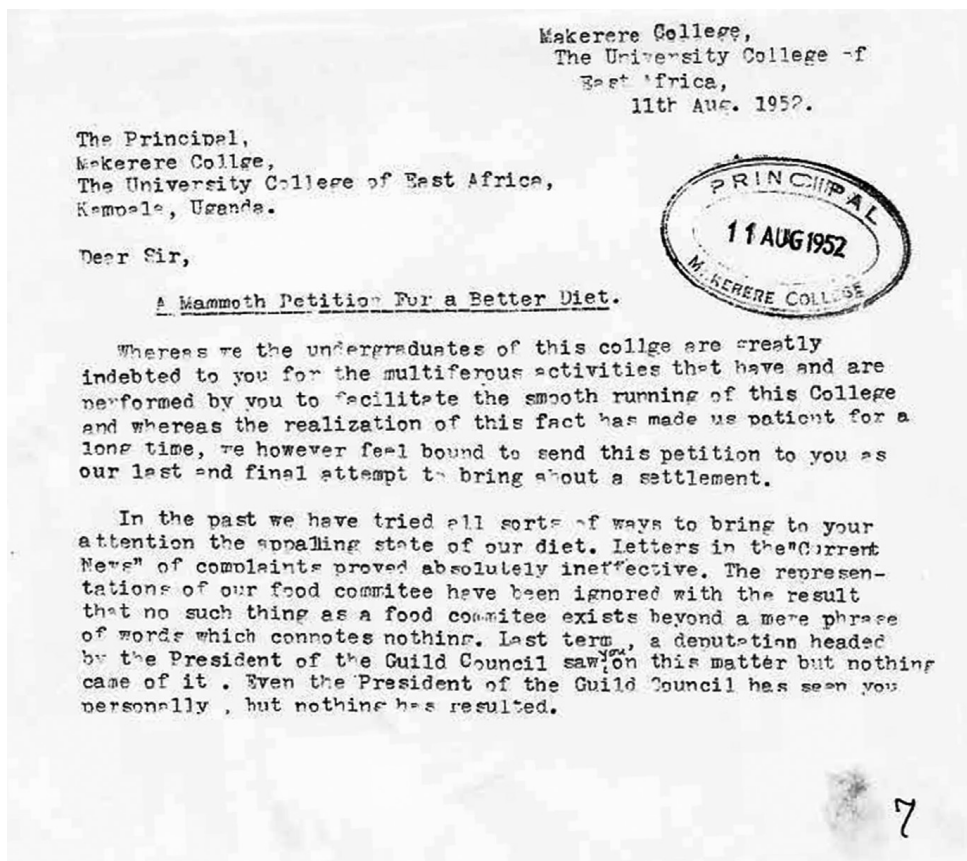
There appears to be some misunderstanding as to the channels through which undergraduates should bring their views to the principal and other college authorities. The Guild, whose officers and Council are freely elected, exists for the purposes, and in accepting its constitution I have recognized the Guild as the appropriate machinery for consultation. When, therefore, a petition was recently brought to me by a group of undergraduates on the subject of food I reminded them that it was with the Mess Committee of the Guild that I would have to deal. I do not know whether or no this was reported to you. Your Mess Committee had already been discussing matter with Mr. Welbourn, and as you know I invited its Chairman, Mr. Muriuki, to a meeting yesterday at which we reviewed the food situation and determined on an experiment in European cooking on the conditions contained in my letter to Mr. Muriuki. The purpose of this letter is to make it plain that I am unable to recognize a deal with unofficial groups not provided for in the constitution of the Guild.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

iii. The Mammoth petition

Having moved a vote of no confidence in their own Guild Council, students moved to send a petition to the Principal signed by two thirds of the 270 students registered students at Makerere College (Uganda Herald, 19 August, 1952). Abu Mayanja wrote the preamble of the petition and was one of the first people to sign. Indeed he was solicitor of signatures to the petition. The preamble is reproduced as follows:



iv. Refusal to eat and attend lectures.

Following the vote of no confidence in the Guild Council and the writing of the Mass Petition, students decided to boycott meals and foods. Abu Mayanja, Mayanja Nkanji and two others sent the following letter to the Academic Registrar. Abu Mayanja gave the same information to the media. By so doing, Abu Mayanja externalized a campus matter to the rest of the country. He was already familiar in press circles as the Organizing Secretary of the Uganda National Congress, UNC, (Uganda Herald, Tuesday 19 the August, 1952). The UNC is regarded as one of the first political parties in East Africa. In 1960, it combined with the All Uganda Peoples Union to form the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC). Obote, who was still a friend and work companion of Abu Mayanja, became the first leader of UPC. The text of the message appears on the following page.

The 1952 Makerere strike broke a calm of twenty years of peace at the College. The first strike at Makerere was staged in 1928; six years after the College had been established. The 1928 strike broke out "when the maize meal ration was first tried," but no rules were broken (J.N Nkata Mukasa, Headmaster, Kako school to the Principal, 25 August 1952). On the 18th August, 1952, the Strike intensified as Lyttelton continues to write...."

It is our sincere conviction that no serious attempts have been made to deal with our food complaints. The diet has deteriorated to such an alarming proportion that we feel that deliberate attempts have been at work to accelerate the deterioration. The "Kiganda" diet which used to be tolerable in 1950 has seen so many changes (perhaps the result of the work of some amateur experimenter in African diet) that now it is the practice to get a mixture of meat, beans, cabbages, cucumber, maize, un-identified type of vegetable, roots etc. on one plate. The present preparation of food lacks foresight, knowledge of preparation, interest, sympathy and imagination. We are sure that for the last six months we have been the model of patience.

That the College has shown an indifferent attitude to our complaints passes our comprehension. We want to point out to you, Sir, that the food situation has become impossible and this in spite of promises of improvement, the implication of which was never intended. We cannot rely on promises now; for experience has taught us that promise does not carry with it the meaning that we were brought up to believe it has.

To put the case very bluntly we claim the following :-

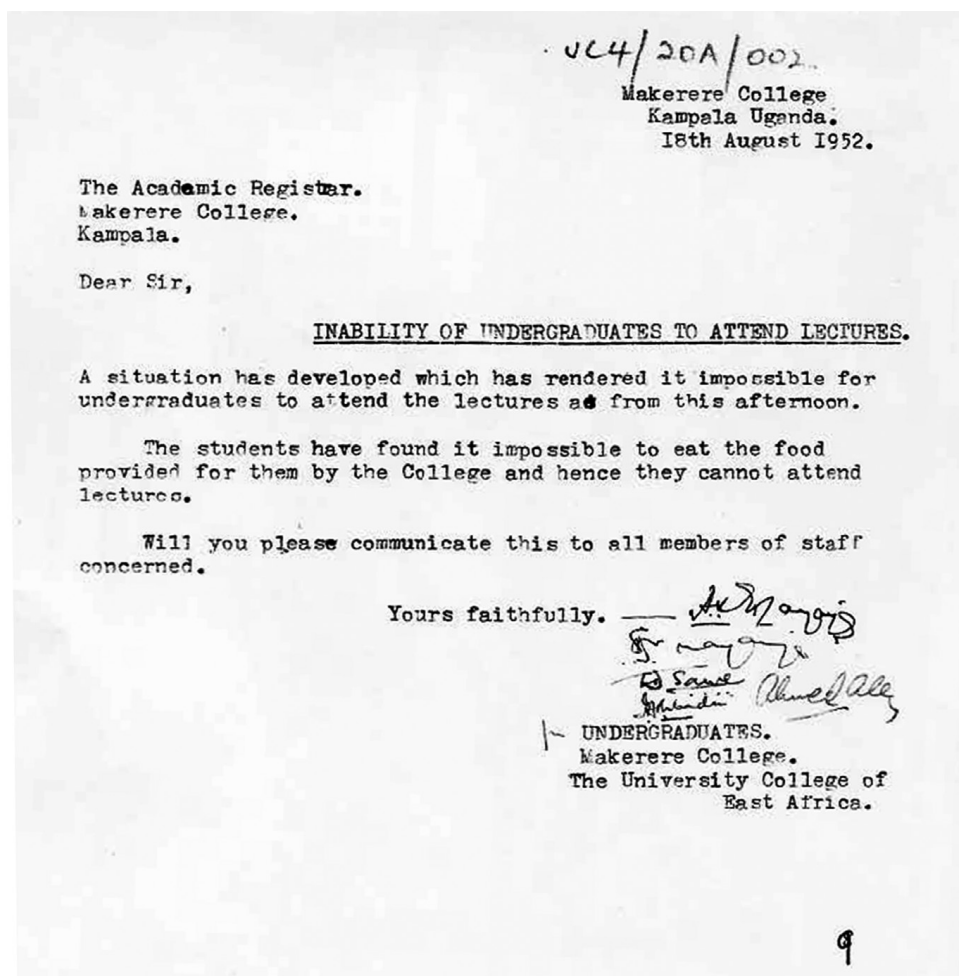
1. An introduction of a European diet. The College is no longer a purely African Institution. There is no standard African diet. The College has proved absolutely unequal to the task of providing an African diet that can be acceptable to all undergraduates regardless of race, colour, or creed. We do not want to see the multiplicity of diets on a racial basis. African, Indian, and Arab students who go abroad adjust themselves without a hitch. We therefore demand the immediate introduction of a western diet at Makerere College.
2. We demand that improvement should be made in the methods of serving undergraduates in the dining halls. The use of a plate for everything does not comport with the standard of a University College.
3. We want to be provided with glasses for drinking water. We demand the immediate withdrawal of aluminium mugs (now confined to Northcote Hall).
4. We demand that the claims be given attention within seven days.

We view with very grave concern the unfortunate consequences that this grave despair may give rise to. We only wish that this grave situation would be dealt with in a manner that will lead to better conditions. In testament to the validity of the statements embodied herein, we attach our signatures as under.....

<p><i>Obioch Njiru</i> E. C. Orieng G. M. Kityo. A. Osewe. Francis Omolo <i>[Signature]</i></p>	<p><i>[Signature]</i> Foya III. Mr. Wambo. Ichabura Somba AWE Anyumba</p>	<p>S. Mbona AB Ntata R. M. M. M. Munge <i>[Signature]</i></p>
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a picketing system was set up to prevent students who wished to attend meals in the dining hall from doing so and physical violence was used to prevent students entering the hall?" The early culprits who were caught using violence were Isaac Foya (from Tanganyika) and Marko Omolo from Kenya for using violence against an individual at Northcote Hall (Principal to students 26 August 1952). When they were caught and students perceived that they could be punished, Abu Mayanja and his supporters



organized a meeting to make students take joint responsibility. Mayanja must have seen the fear that the punishment of students at individual level would bring to the revolt movement. Thus, on the night of 18th August 1952, a meeting to record the solidarity of students was held in Mitchell Hall. The minutes were written by Abu Mayanja and preserved in his handwriting as shown on the following page.

Three other students namely, Said Hamdun (Kenya), J. Karanja (Kenya) and Malik (Zanzibar?) were also caught using violence at Mitchell Hall against students who wished to eat in the dining hall. The Principal closed the College one week before the end of the term and sent students home. It was later decided that six students were to be expelled, "five of whom were sent down for using physical violence while picketing the dining Hall". The sixth, Mayanja was sent down for the "part he played in organizing the disobedience". He was the real ringleader of the strike.

The term re-opened on 19th September 1952 and students were made to sign an undertaking of obedience for re-admission. Only one student failed to do so and never came back. He was from Tanganyika.

This meeting of Makerere Undergraduates assembled here in Mitchell Hall J.C.R. tonight Monday, 12th August, 1952, at 9.30 pm. hereby solemnly resolve that we stick to the principle expressed earlier on in our meetings, that we are all collectively responsible for all the activities in connection with the food movement (including, amongst other things, the steps so far taken and will be taken to make the food boycott possible.) In pursuance of this, we resolve, further, that if the two students, (seae Omolo and Marco Foyg are expelled from the College, so we, too, are automatically expelled. The said two students will not go away unless, and until all of us, whose signatures are attached to this, are likewise sent away. 10

iv. How bad was the food?

Most observers at the time concluded that food served to students at the time was inappropriate. First, Makerere College was the University College of all East Africa. Yet the food given consisted of local Baganda/Basoga dishes: matooke, sweet potatoes, beans, cassava and the like. To address this problem, the students asked for European food, which they said would be neutral to all tribes. In reality, however, they were asking for a diet not different from what their European teachers ate on the High Table. They were therefore asking for equality with their European lecturers. That is why critics assert that the students wanted to be regarded as “Europeans”. Secondly, students objected to the cast iron cups and plates their food was served from and asked for better cutlery, not excluding China. Thirdly, the food was badly cooked. The College made the mistake of employing a European lady who used to cook for European officers at Nyeri military establishment as a Domestic Supervisor. She neither knew how to cook African food, nor got on well with African cooks and other workers who she supervised. In a 10th October 1952 letter to Stapledon of the East African High Commission Office, Principal de Bunsen admits that Florence Ford was a lady “who certainly did her best in the job, even though she failed in

it". He adds in another letter of 13 October, 1952 that "she was temperamentally unsuitable and too old to learn the elements of African cooking and she had to be asked to leave". He added in the same letter: "... I expect she really did well for cooking for small British Officers' Mess, but large-scale organizations were beyond her, and probably her appointment was as unfair to her as it proved to be to ourselves".

v. Were there racial and class causes of the strike?

There were fears that race and class also played a part in the mobilization of students to go on strike. Ebifa noted that students felt they were discriminated by their European teachers. Indeed the concept of the High Table, an importation of the Oxbridge college system to Makerere, must have brought negative connotations to African youths. It was reported that the food served at the High Table was not only superior to what students were served at lower tables, but also whatever was not eaten at the High table was never given to students. It was presumed to be too good for them. Most of the occupants of the High table were European because the table was used by, mainly, academic staff the majority of whom were Europeans. Further, Indian students were given a diet appropriate to their taste and they sat on their own table. A few years back, in 1942 African staff at Budo had resigned citing a number of grievances including racism. One of these teachers, I.K. Musaaazi, was a close mentor and role model of Abu Mayanja. It is possible that Musaaazi was influencing what Mayanja was doing at Makerere though there is no concrete evidence to prove so. Mayanja's mention of racism-if it can be called so, is noted in a letter to the Uganda Herald appealing for appointment of more Africans in government departments (Uganda Herald, 25 September 1952). In March of the same year, Mayanja had condemned the apartheid system in South Africa (Uganda Herald, March 22, 1952, page 16).

On the European side however, there were still some who looked down or patronized Africans. Writing from the Uganda Development Corporation on 20th August 1952, a top official wrote to de Bunsen that, "Those of us in higher councils in the land have suffered a set-back because it will now be said that the time has not yet come for Africans to have higher education in East Africa". In a letter to the Principal of 29 September, 1952, Florence Ford was of the view that a lot of taxpayer's money was being wasted on African University students. She added that "the present lack of discipline amongst students will turn out not an intelligent African fit to teach his less fortunate brethren but a spoilt, undisciplined man, ripe for

political agitation”. In a letter to Stapledon, de Bunsen complained of Miss Ford’s “ungovernable language”. She was reported to have told her African workers that “You are all monkeys” (de Bunsen to Stapledon, 13 October 1952, UC4/20A/018). Isolated as these remarks might have been, they were not music to Africans. Some students might have generalized them as representative of European views of Africans. Racism might therefore played a part in sparking off the strike.

vi. Ineptness on the part of the College administration

It is clear that the 1952 Makerere strike might have been averted if the College administration was efficient in its administrative behaviour. It seems that the College lacked a team spirit to bind the staff, the students and administrators into a unit. In a series of meetings at his house, W.J. Peal had with a number of staff (Messrs Goldthorpe, Greenslade, Harrison and Milburn) with a number of students (Kairuki, Muthiga, Barlow, Asmaron, Rubadiri, A.M.K Mayanja, Isaak, Tungine, Mbiti and Maleche) between 25-28 August 1952, it was clear that the College had not consolidated as a community of teachers and learners working together to search and transmit knowledge. The long report that Mr. Peal wrote showed a number of weaknesses that needed bridging (UC4/20A/047).

The head of the institution made a number of mistakes in the appointment of certain officials who complicated the situation. Mr. Alistair Macpherson, the Dean, was no good in looking after students. In a letter to Walter, de Bunsen notes that “During the vacation, I had to remove poor Alistair Macpherson from the Deanship” and asked him to look around for a suitable job (de Bunsen to Walter 23rd September 1952). He added “Macpherson had his good sides.....to solve problems by scalping others. His appointment of European lady to supervise African food in three halls of residence was certainly a mistake”. As de Bunsen was later to regret, Mrs. Florence Ford was not suite for the job (de Bunsen to Stapledon 13 October 1952). The decision to dismiss two students instantly, Isaac E. Omolo and Foya was a mistake. It galvanized students’ resolve to “stick together and make themselves jointly responsible” as the students’ resolution reads. When this resolution was handed to the Principal, he had no option but to close the College if he was to protect his authority. Students believed that Omolo and Foya were expelled unjustly as they happened to be found out due to bad luck. They just happened to be caught in an act which many others were doing. Professor Baker decided to resign as Chair of a Committee the Principal had set up to advise on the necessary action in respect

of welfare and hostel organization. However, Baker found out that de Bunsen was acting on advice of various submissions before the committee discussed his Committee's findings. Baker wanted "an overhaul of the college administration" (Kenneth Baker to de Bunsen, 12 October 1952).

vii. Was the strike influenced by off campus politics

A number of colonial officers feared that the 1952 food strike at the College was part of an emerging resistance against Europeans occupation in Africa. Sir Eugen Millington-Drake, K.C.M.G, writing from London to de Bunsen on 30th August 1952 scribed that "I cannot but attribute it (the strike) in some part to the general spirit of unrest provoked by the long drawn out federation issues, and possibly to some little extent the spirit which is producing the Mau Mau terrorism". John Goldthorpe wrote to the Principal, "that there is a great deal more in the unhappy affair than the ostensible grievances, and that we must look deeper for other underlying factors" (Goldthorpe to de Bunsen 21st August 1952, UC4/20A/046). In another letter, Goldthorpe thought food was the major spark that ignited a strike that might have had many other causes (Goldthorpe to Principal, 6th September, 1952, UC4/20A/041). He also felt that the leaders of the strike were using the food incident to resist European rule.

Indeed, the history of the Uganda state collaborates with Goldthorpe's view. The colonial state was based on collaboration with complaint chiefs, particularly in Buganda. The chiefs held both political and economic power in the Buganda sub-state and some of the neighboring districts. However, in 1945 and 1949 there were rebellions in Buganda and neighboring districts aimed at collaborating chiefs as colonial agents. The rioters demanded the democratization of local governments and African participation in higher levels of the economy. In 1942 African teachers of the leading protestant school, King's College Budo, resigned citing mistreatment by their European colleagues. On 2nd March of 1952, five months before the Makerere College strike, one of these teachers, I.K Musaaazi, together with the leader of the Makerere food strike, Abu Mayanja, had founded the first political party in the country, the Uganda National Congress. The meeting "representing all tribes of Uganda" that decided to form the Uganda National Congress was held at Aggrey Memorial School a school founded by the "rebel" African teachers from Budo. Its organizing secretary, and the person who wrote most of its documents and produced them for circulation, was none other than Abu Mayanja, the organizer of the food strike at Makerere. Mayanja was therefore exposed and a participant in African

political activities in Uganda. As a brilliant student, he could afford to be away from lectures and yet be ahead in his studies. When he was expelled, Professor Kenneth Baker, then head of the faculty of Arts, lamented that his faculty was losing its best students (date of letter missing). Mayanja was therefore both a student and a practicing politician working with groups that were opposed to the way colonial officers were administering the state. However, the extent to which he used the strike to enhance the political agenda of the Uganda National Congress is hard to determine for himself and most of the actors are dead. Abu Mayanja's link to both state and university politics must have influenced the food strike. However, for the majority of the students, food was the issue.

viii. Conclusions & Lessons

A number of lessons can be learned from the 1952 Makerere College students' strike in particular and student activism in general. Firstly, as I pointed out, "student movements emerge out their own political and economic environment". Students are a replica of, and often embody the concerns of society. The Makerere College Students' Strike of 1952 is located in the general struggle for African rights, particularly African elite privileges, in the last decade of colonialism in East Africa. Secondly, the mass of students does not analyze deeper issues of a revolt before going on strike. They often join strikes for short-term immediate concerns and the psychological satisfaction which opposing elders bring to them. However, leaders of strikes are often connected to, and espouse, ideas external to the campus. Thirdly, the university and society are so intimately bound together that events on campuses reflect, and may be the same, as those in the general society. Lastly, although student strikes and activism may focus on short-term issues like welfare components of higher, they always have social implications that good managers of states and institutions of higher learning must try to discern. It is in this perspective that the 1952 Makerere College Strike should be viewed.

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Most of the original documents appearing in this paper are included to take the reader into the archives and to show young researchers how to find and analyze documents found in the course of a research project. The subject ones can be found in the Africana section of Makerere Library and the National Archives, Kew, London.

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