

COMMITTEE REPORT - EDUCATION CHARTER CAMPAIGN

The Education Charter Campaign (EdCC) comes after a year of educational unrest and anger which is greater than both the 1976 and 1980 school boycotts. Few people in SA can ignore the seriousness and reality of student grievances. The Charter can create a very positive climate for mass mobilisation around the issue of education, and for the strengthening of all the organisations involved.

Broad Objectives of the Charter

1. To gauge how people feel about their education - past, present and future
2. To draw up a guideline for future education in a democratic South Africa, that will satisfy the needs of all people
3. To provide a means of analysis of education in our society
4. To build student unity and strengthen the non-racial student movement
5. To build and deepen organisation in the process of the ed charter campaign.
6. To actively resist and take initiatives against oppression in all spheres of education.
7. To reach as many people as possible through the campaign; to transcend barriers between parents and children, teachers and students and members of the community (bearing in mind that education affects all aspects of society).

1. THE INCORPORATION OF NUSAS

While the EdCC was initiated by AZASO and COSAS, NUSAS's integral involvement will mean that this is the first joint campaign of these 3 student organisations. This represents a significant step in building in practice a South African Student Movement.

The extent of NUSAS incorporation in the EdCC has been subject to regional conditions. Although some discussion and planning has taken place throughout the year, it was only in the post election period that intensive attention was given to the EdCC. The campaign was then launched in the E Cape, Tvl and Natal.

In the Eastern Cape, NUSAS was only incorporated at the regional launch of the EdCC. Here an Interim Committee consisting of AZASO, COSAS and NUSAS as well as civil, women and youth organisations, was formed. In the Tvl, NUSAS was incorporated in the preliminary planning of the conference, where Head NUSAS reps, were elected as Treasurer and Resource Officer for the Tvl. The committee which has met several times is comprised of a whole range of organisations.

In Natal, NUSAS people have been involved in discussions and workshops from early this year. Students from AZASO, COSAS and NUSAS as well as members from NEUSA, make up the Committee. As yet, no formal structure has been set up to incorporate other organisations but there has been consultation. Activities have been largely concentrated in the Durban area, although there have been attempts to reach surrounding areas.

While in the Western Cape, NUSAS has not been formally incorporated, informal discussion has occurred.

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2. NUSAS's CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAMPAIGN

a. What are the key issues for our constituency?

We discussed this question in a 2 fold way.

Fistly, we would need to appeal to students in a direct, immediate and personal way ie what do they think of their own education and where could there be improvements? Demands and grievances likely to arise are along these lines:

- the exam system
- admission and subsidies
- improved lecturing standards
- lower bookprices
- more cultural activity
- improved library services
- better representation, liaison and representation

All these points can be seen in the light of students gaining control over their education and thus progressive demands could be made of them. This could provide a basis for the second set of issues likely to appeal to at least part of our constituency ie. linking their education to the broader education crisis across the country, and appealing to students on the grounds of a free, equal and democratic education for all.

It was felt that some prior education would be needed (eg in Orientation Week, in the student press) about the education crisis, so as to place the Charter in its context. It would be especially important to counter ideas of the school boycotts as 'irresponsible', an idea frequently held by first years coming out of 12 years of CNE.

It was also felt that we can't ask campus for demands immediately - we may get completely unprogressive and short sighted demands. Rather we should first do a broad preliminary survey on how campus feels about their education (university and school). This would be a fairly 'objective' and neutral survey, possibly put out as an EdComm/SRC/Academic Freedom survey. From this initial survey, we could draw out the main trends and issues for campus. A few months later, we could go back to campus with a highly structured questionnaire to get concrete demands from our constituency, making it clear that their demands will be contributing to a national document and that NUSAS is part of the non-racial student movement.

b. Our approach to campus

We'd have to constantly bear in mind NUSAS's understanding of our liberal/apathetic constituency. So firstly, we'd have to guage (possibly through the initial survey) where students are at and draw on their own direct experience. It was suggested that the survey could outline the Charter in an appealing personal way eg 'You can be part of making history/chart your own education'. The second questionnaire would explain more fully the nature, objectives and political impact of the campaign. The questionnaire would have its own context (eg an education focus week/rallies etc). It could also coincide with June 16 or the anniversary of the Freedom Charter. The anniversaries would provide an added dimension to our approach by setting out the general principles of our organisation ie non-racialism, democracy, unity and non-sexism.

Our approach to campus in thus 2 fold: 1. catering for direct student interest,

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2. trying to move white students to an understanding of education in SA; and an identification with and commitment to the direction which the Ed Charter offers.

c. The gains which we hope to make by the campaign:

- to generate awareness and understanding of the education crisis and to dispel myths about student boycotts
- to create maximum participation in the campaign, and to incorporate as many students, clubs, societies and organisations as possible. We felt that the nature of the campaign (education) would allow us to extend our political activity into unprecedented areas
- to further a strong alliance between NUSAS/COSAS/AZASO and to increase student understanding of the role of the non-racial student movement
- to popularise the Freedom Charter on campus and in the white community (especially as NUSAS didn't participate in the drawing up of the Freedom Charter, it's vital that we're part of the EdCC)
- to popularise NUSAS on campus (ie. to get to students in such a way that they're not alienated, but see NUSAS for the democratic and active organisation which it is! This would involve countering smear campaigns effectively)
- to mobilise students, to draw them into the campaigns and in the long term into our organisational structures
- to create an atmosphere of unity and solidarity on campus
- to break new ground with white schools
- to develop our access to publicity channels
- to further close working relationships with AZASO groups on our own campuses
- to build skills and resources within our organisations

There are many gains to be made; and also a few problems and limitations to watch out for:

- It is difficult for white students to conceptualise the problems of black students, in the education sphere and more generally
- it may be difficult to make students feel an integral part of the education campaign
- we can't guarantee or count on progressive demands
- there may therefore be a gulf between campus demands and the end product
- there will probably be a large time lapse between the launching of the campaign on campus and the actual drawing up and publicising of the charter. This could dilute student interest in the campaign
- the process of consultation will require a lot of work if it is to be democratic and widespread - manpower for this may be a problem
- there is uneven development in organisations around the country, and some organisations have been weakened by the current wave of detentions. This could mean that the campaign would progress at different rates around the country.

3. TYPE OF CAMPAIGN

The Education Charter Campaign (EdCC) is envisaged to run over a fairly long period of time and this will influence how we take the campaign up. The committee suggested that the campaign would have to incorporate different levels of intensity. The Education Crisis is likely to be raised in Orientation Week in platform meetings, in Media and as part of the Education Action Group's recruitment programmes.

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The idea of running a campus survey to gauge opinion quite early on in the campaign has been mentioned. It would raise questions about education both university specific and about the South African education system as a whole. The survey result could provide NUSAS with an assessment of how students see education issues and thereby assist in planning of the campaign. The student press should be used through the campaign to initially introduce it and later in the year to provide feedback on the campaign's progress in other constituencies. Although the Education Charter could (and should) be linked to a broader range of topical issues eg schools' crisis; IYY; Freedom Charter Anniversary; SADF in townships; Faculty Council issues; it was felt that the campaign should peak at some point during which time demands would be collected. There was some uncertainty about the exact things, given that NUSAS constitutes part of the regional committee structures that are coordinating the campaign.

We would have to balance our campaign carefully with both regional and national timing - but still taking into account our own limitations (ie not being able to sustain the campaign at a high profile level for very long).

In addition, NUSAS will have to coordinate its campus campaign closely with AZASO - the issue of the different constituencies of the organisations was addressed and the committee felt that the EdCC would necessitate both joint activities (eg Mass Meetings, launch, etc) and separate activities (eg preliminary planning, res seminars etc).

The peak period of the campaign could coincide with an intensive education focus week with high profile coverage of the Charter and systematic collection of demands. During this phase, the committee discussed the possibility of using a questionnaire format which would be administered to students in a variety of ways - door-to-door canvassing, NUSAS table on campus, in canteens, mailing and distribution after mass meetings/seminars. Person-to-person contact was prioritized as it enabled effective discussion and input.

Following the collection of demands, we would have to ensure that awareness about the campaign was maintained until the Charter is completed - including methods such as student press coverage, pamphlets/fact sheets, press letter campaign, linking in to other meetings and focusses.

When visualising a campaign it is important for us to realise that this does not necessarily mean a rigid format, for a campaign of this nature we must be creative in the ways of stimulating interest in it over a fairly long period. We must also address ourselves to finding ways of reaching a broad range of students. (see below)

4. a) METHODS

A wide variety of exciting and innovative ideas came up during the discussion about ways of taking the campaign up. Not all of these would be suitable to all the campuses but they are listed below:

- displays
- photographic exhibitions on education
- NUSAS tables for selling publications and collecting demands
- door to door canvassing in residences
- guerilla and street theatre
- cultural evening
- concerts

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- creative media forms (with eyecatching logos or cartoons)
- press letter campaigns
- jingles over radio stations (and also where possible interviews with key individuals about the campaign)
- film festivals on education
- regular updated news displayboards
- newsflash pamphlets on the progress of the campaign or focussing on aspects of education crisis
- slogans/graphics on graffiti walls
- statement posters (using interesting quotes/pictures)
- banners, stickers and T shirts (suggested banner making and silk screening T shirts was done out in the open to encourage student involvement)
- National slogans and logos for the campus campaign
- seminars in residences and faculties
- speaking in classes
- slide/tape show on Bantu Education which could be distributed to all the campuses

4. b. STRUCTURE

The committee looked at the question of structure in 2 ways. Firstly, examining the kind of structures which we could draw upon in the campaign and secondly, what sort of structure would be most appropriate for coordinating the campaign. Key constituencies and structures to use to popularise the campaign and reach students were identified: faculty councils and class rep structures, where these existed (and depending on each campus's particular conditions) could be a viable channel for reaching a broad range of students. This could also assist in strengthening and developing the class rep structures. EdComm would be a useful forum for coordinating this aspect of the campaign. Sattelite campuses (eg music, medicine or law schools) should also be focussed on and contact with them could assist generally in strengthening links with the SRC. Lecturer associations, where they exist, could also be approached to participate in the campaign - sending speakers to meetings, support statements and encouraging their students to attend meetings.

The EdCC could be promoted through discussion in SRC leadership weekend programmes and raised at meetings of campus leadership throughout the year. Education students as a specific constituency were identified as an important focus for the campaign.

Res structures, such as House Comms, if accessible are an important channel to investigate. It was stressed, however, that report backs to residence students often do not occur, and methods such as res seminars would be more effective. The distribution of media during meal times, outside the residence and in dining halls was proposed.

Clubs and societies include a very broad constituency and need to be seriously considered. In the past, communication about such issues has occurred only through mail - individual contact with clubs and society chairs, or seminars to those groups should be structured into campaign activity.

The committee looked at the possibility of forming specific EdCC structures (eg Charter sub committees of EAG's or Academic Freedom Committees). It was stressed this would depend entirely on the various campus' organisational strength, existing structures and person-power.

Adhoc structures could perform a useful function, in drawing in other groups who were interested in participating eg. Christian groupings, SAUJS, societies etc. EAG's would probably play a major role in the campaign although other organisations such as Projects Comm, EdComm and Comm Comms are likely to be drawn in during the peak period of collecting demands.

5. CONTACT WITH WHITE SCHOOLS, TTC's, AFRIKAANS CAMPUS AND TECHNIKONS

The committee felt that while it is desirable to reach a broad range of people, we do need to determine our own available resources, so as not to overextend our organisations.

The drawing in of progressive organisations, particularly church, progressive, teacher and white democratic organisations was suggested. The problem was then whether these organisations would run their own campaign or join with our campaign.

Constituencies that would be most accessible need to be prioritised. We saw important areas being white English speaking schools and teachers training colleges. NEUSA was seen to be able to play an important role in the schools but due to the limited number of white progressive teachers could be assisted by NUSAS to some degree. Suggestions of how we could assist included the following:

- using existing Youth Structures
- pamphlet blitz to schools (as happened in Jhb during the stayaway)
- inviting school children to concerts and meetings where some input on EdCC would be given
- using respected community figures especially religious to popularise the campaign
- taking drama workshops on education into the schools
- holding a literature competition around ed system

The importance of contact with Teachers Training Colleges was emphasised, since teachers are the ones directly involved in propagating the present ed system. However the committee also looked at the possibility of reaching Afrikaans campuses and technikons through existing links with more progressive groups as, was used in the MSC. Student newspapers could be distributed to satellite campuses, containing surveys or info about the campaign.

6. THE INVESTIGATION OF BROADER ISSUES WHICH CAN BE LINKED TO THE CAMPAIGN

The Committee felt that because the EdCC would be a long term one, it would be important to link it to the various other campaigns conducted during 1985. At the same time however, it was suggested that each campaign be conducted separately to avoid the danger of one particular campaign becoming submerged by another.

Issues which might be linked to the EdCC:

a) International Year of the Youth

The advantage of linking these two campaigns is that they are complimentary and would enable us to focus specifically on the youth constituency and to promote youth organisations, it was suggested that the two campaigns peak at different times. If possible, separate structures should be set up to coordinate the two campaigns; this might not however, be feasible on the smaller campuses. The EdCC would be the student contribution to the IYY. It would be important to stress that education is not an issue specific to students but that it affects all South Africans, including youth.

b) the End Conscription Campaign

It would be possible to link the EdCC to issues such as

the schools boycotts

- . violence in the schools
- . the cadette system
- . the hearts and minds campaign
- SADF involvement in the townships

c) Feminism

It would be essential to relate the EdCC to feminist issues by focussing on:

- . the sexist nature of our present education system
- . sexual harassment in black schools
- . academic rape
- . the discrimination against woman teachers, pupils and medical students

d) The 30th Anniversary of The Freedom Charter

It was felt that the EdCC was an amplification of the Education Clause of the Freedom Charter; that the use of the FC would accentuate the demands for a free and equal education system for future society. The FC would be useful in explaining the history of charters and to provide people with a sense of historical continuity. While it would be important to strongly relate the two campaigns, it was suggested that the FC only be promoted in the later stages of the EdCC. This would also depend on the degree to which the FC has already been popularised on the various campuses. Once again it would be important to ensure that the two campaigns did not swamp one another. Furthermore, we must be alert to the possibility that both the Freedom and Education Charters could be manipulated by the State and right wing groupings and presented as subversive documents. Here it was suggested that NUSAS confront such attack head on through debates etc.

Other issues which can be lined to the EdCC are:

- . Admissions and Subsidies
- . The De Lange Commission
- . Reform and The New Constituion
- . Popularising the UDF by promoting non-racialism

CONCLUSION

Although we haven't addressed these questions fully in the report, here are some of the key questions and areas for discussion which Abba Omar outlined. Each campus will need to examine them according to campus and regional conditions.

1. How do we involve people not directly part of formal educational institutions or structures?
2. What FORM of consultation should occur - ie. how do we ask people what kind of education they want?
3. How do we obtain a complementary idea of the campaign among all the organisations involved?
4. How will national coordination among the participating organisations occur?

Even though there are some problems, we feel it is an immensely exciting and positive campaign - and one requiring lots and lots of work. Forward to a people's education!