

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS WELFARE
AND SOCIAL ACTION DEPARTMENT

Planning and assesment Report of the
NUSWEL Secretary General and the NUSWEL
Secretary General Elect to the 49th
Congress of NUSAS, held at Rhodes,
December, 1972.

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Evaluation and plans for NUSWEL, 1973

In this section the following items have been examined:

- i) the role of NUSWEL as a national organisation, its resources and its primary aims,
- ii, its relationship at present with the SRC's and NUSWEL local committees, and the ways in which this might be changed
- iii) the problems that it has encountered and various suggestions made relating to the solution of these
- iv) specific projects and programmes.

The aims of NUSWEL can be briefly stated as follows below:

- i) to make it possible for students to participate in self-help work amongst the poorer communities
- ii) to generate wide-spread support on campuses for the thesis that one of the avenues of social change must be through the development of purposeful self-help schemes.

NUSWEL achieves its identity through a system of stated beliefs relating to social action. With the exception of co-ordination of the wages and economics commissions, little coordination on common activities between NUSWEL local committees exists since each group functions at its own pace and, in any case, emphasis on projects vary entirely. The nature of these beliefs - in a nutshell, "self-help" imply that students working in this field have certain skills and resources which they are able to offer to the communities they are working with. This is an assumption made despite the almost inevitable difficulties of the language barrier and socio-economic distances existing between students and the communities they are attempting to work with. At a national level, thus, one of NUSWEL's primary roles must be to make available to campus groups the recorded experience of other groups operating in this area, to develop communication at a national level between social action organisations which are prepared to work in conjunction with local groups on projects sharing their own experiences of activities and to maintain a constant awareness of NUSWEL's modus operandi. In other words, NUSWEL as a national organisation has a largely supportive role to play in relation to the particular activities of individual NUSWEL local committees.

NUSWEL at a national level - must provide a focus for the open criticism and evaluation of welfare work in the promotion of social change and must encourage local committees to involve different sectors of the university in this kind of debate and evaluation including other welfare organisations, members of staff, some academic departments (e.g. social work) faculty councils and residences.

This leads one directly on to the second point, the nature of the relationship between SRC's and NUSWEL local committees and NUSWEL head office.

Relationship between NUSWEL and the SRC's:

NUSWEL - from a Head Office perspective - works through its action bodies on campuses - the NUSWEL Local Committees. Interaction with the SRC on policy matters relation to NUSWEL, with other social action organisations on campus and other campus groups although constantly stressed has never been satisfactorily catered for. With the restructuring of some of the SRC's to allow for welfare co-ordination on the SRC, a new perspective can be introduced - the more so, in view of the fact that all the wages commissions with the exception of Wits at present function directly through the SRC's. In other words given redefinition of the relationship between NUSWEL local committees and the SRC, it becomes possible for NUSWEL at a national level to have a relationship with the SRC allowing for a more effective integration between NUSWEL and the SRC's. If SRC's did become involved in NUSWEL's second role, it would be far easier for NUSWEL local committees to fulfill their 'specialist' role without straining their resources too disastrously, and it would

considerably facilitate the establishment of NUSWEL as a national organisation.

Welfare co-ordinators (Wits) and welfare representatives (UCT and Rhodes) potentially can assume a key role in promoting this integration and binding of interests, and would further promote a wider-based communication with the rest of the campus.

Given this situation, some of the problems 'itemised' at July, relating to NUSWEL can be solved. In the next section, I propose to briefly outline these problem areas and suggested solutions:

1) Specialisation versus developing a broad campus base:

NUSWEL in one sense is a specialist organisation. Involvement in wages and economics programmes, literacy training schemes and community organisation programmes involves the acquisition of certain skills and implies a certain amount of continuity in leadership and co-ordination. It is necessary for NUSWEL, thus, to fulfil training and information roles supplementing its primary function as a resource organisation for other groups and sharing our resources with groups engaged in similar work to ours.

To spell this out more explicitly, the function of NUSWEL groups may be defined as follows:

- a) spreading ideas: sharing skills and techniques with other campus/off campus groups,
- b) communicating these ideas and experiences through a national network, composed of SRC, NUSWEL local committees and Head Office to other student groups,
- c) maintaining channels of communication with university departments in order to facilitate as far as possible the sharing of research and involvement of particular faculties in our work.

All the above relates to developing a body of skilled people at each campus. This function cannot be allowed to totally dominate NUSWEL's other role of developing a broad base for its ideas on campuses. The difficulty of integrating these two functions was assessed very explicitly in July and the solutions posed were I think realistic given a greater degree of integration between the SRC and NUSWEL local as outlined above.

The specialist vs. developing a broad campus base underlies the difficulties of NUSWEL at large. Many of the problems of lack of certainty of direction, lack of support and failure to secure acceptance of our ideas are derived directly from the fact that we have been unable to secure participation in our ideas and hence support for the projects has lagged, leading to uncertainty and lack of confidence.

Tackling the Problems:

Refer the diagram on student involvement in NUSWEL's programmes opposite.

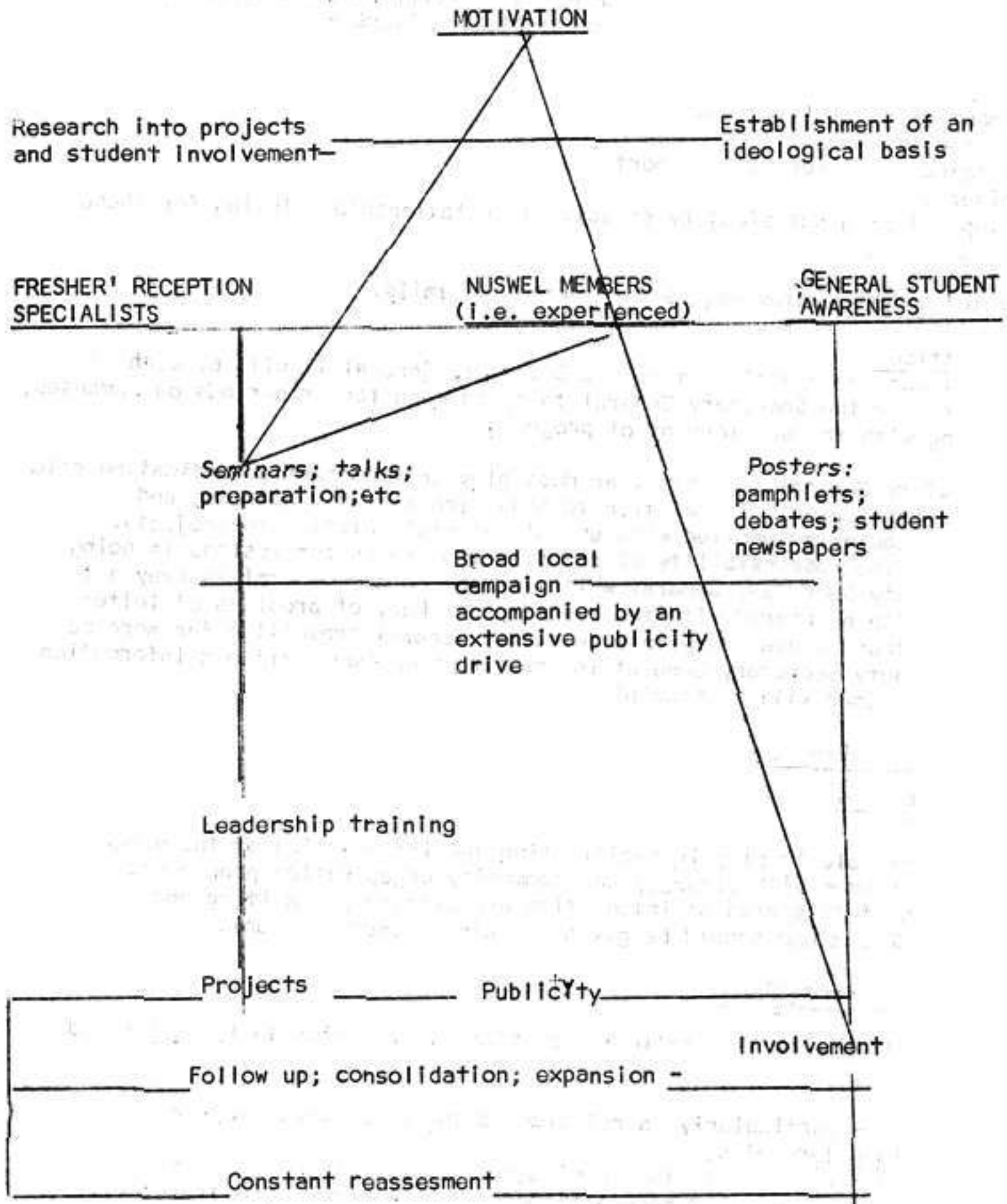
I shall touch briefly on one aspect of the diagram relating to the running seminars.

Student Seminars:

The goal behind the initiating of these small discussion groups/workshops is to establish a body of students and youth fully conversant with the role of NUSWEL in promoting social change. It is imperative to communicate to the student body the ideology of self help and the motivation behind community development as defined in the preamble to the NUSWEL constitution.

Incorporated into the Seminar programme, which must precede involvement in a community must be report backs of the research group into that specific community. This would include an understanding of their life and culture.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE NUSWEL PROGRAMMES



The community seminars should be feeding information as to needs and projects within the community back to the student seminars to facilitate discussion as regards implementation of schemes.

The rest of the diagram is self-explanatory and the function of this congress must I think be to build a year plan for next year based on fulfilling the need for NUSWEL to grow, Consideration must be given to the following items -

- research program
- development of specialist groups
- freshers reception
- general campus awareness and support and seminars,

and the development of a satisfactory structural relationship allowing for these functions to take place.

Please refer to NBSWEL minutes page 9 for further details.

Role of Head Office

With the appointment of an assistant to the Secretary General it will be much easier next year for the Secretary General to spend much longer periods on campuses, actively assisting with the development of projects

The Deputy Secretary General for this year must play an important co-ordinating role from Head Office particularly in relation to answering specific queries, and keeping campuses regularly supplied with useful material relating to projects. Inevitably some of the responsibility of co-ordinating wages commissions is going to fall on the Deputy Secretary General whilst the Secretary General is away but much of this work can be shared with the assistant. Many of problems of letter communication may thus be averted with a Secretary General travelling far more but the role of the Deputy Secretary General in ensuring that Head Office's information resources are fully used will be crucial

Specific Programs and Projects

Integration of programs

NUSWEL has a useful role to play in facilitating the integration of the wages and economics programmes with literacy and community organisation programmes. The possibilities of this kind of integration are extremely exciting and particularly at UNP and UND should be given the utmost encouragement.

Wages and Economics Commissions:

The July Congress identified the following problems in relation to the wages and economics commissions:

- i) lack of strategy - particularly in relation to the wage board, worker publications and long term aims,
- ii) the specialised required in the commissions had precluded student involvement on a large level, had necessitated slow and cumbersome training,
- iii) severe financial problems
- iv) essential administrative work not being done,

priorities of the Wages Commission relate to the promotion of worker organisation. The question of what kind of worker organisation is within our abilities to encourage and which kinds relates to the long-term strategies of the Wages Commission raise certain problems. There are broadly three alternatives:

- i) formation of worker's committees which could be co-ordinated and linked through town-ship-based committees
- ii) encouragement of workers to link up directly with workers' organisations based directly on individual membership.
- iii) formation of conventional trade unions

In addition, the role of benefits society in facilitating such organisation

must be considered and in addition, this kind of relationship that I) we would like to enjoy with other organisations in the labour field and II) the possibilities of developing such communication must be considered.

We do have an option in evaluating what kind of worker organisation we are able to promote. We should not act without consulting fully those people with whom a number of the commission are already working but at the same time, the advantages of a certain amount of national co-ordination must be considered.

Recommendations have not been made on the kind of worker organisation that should be promoted. Paula and Jen will amplify verbally but it is extremely difficult to take a definite option which could be applied nationally at this point in time. The Wages Commissions are in one sense, however, at the cross roads for future directions in growth. A priority, we would suggest, must be the promotion of worker organisations but what kind of worker organisations must still be resolved

Linked up with this, must be the promotion of worker organisation, through worker seminars and worker publications. Worker seminars may possibly be organised by other bodies since there is at least one group operating very competently in this field already. The policy relating to worker publications must be clarified. As far as possible we must attempt to promote community and industrial solidarity through the worker's publications, allowing thus for the integration of community and work problems.

Research:

The formation of economic research units should be encouraged. This will allow for more staff involvement and more co-ordination of research. It will further promote a certain measure of continuity. Clearly the priorities of the research unit must be tailored in with the priorities demanded in worker organisation, although independent research projects must be encouraged.

Co-ordination and Communication:

We are extremely concerned that as far as possible the wages commissions establish communication with all the groups operating in the labour field and make our resources equally available to them all as far as this is possible.

Ultimately unity must be to the benefit of all and conflicting strategies must be avoided if we are to efficiently fulfill our role as a resource and research body, able to assist in the formation of worker organisations.

Continuity:

Many of the problems in this area have begun to be resolved with the drawing in of the wages commission more directly into the SRC sub-committee/sub-council structure.

But it is necessary that year plans be drawn up now stating target areas, expressing achievable goals, relating research projects to the priorities of the commissions and establishing clearly tactics for broader campus involvement.

The Wages Commission Conference will be extremely useful in establishing national co-ordination and defining overall strategy for next year.

JCT wages commission has pressed very strongly for the holding of a major campaign in mid-April next year. I should like to endorse their proposals suggest further that similar campaigns be conducted at the other campuses. One of the major difficulties militating against such a campaign over will be that the prospects for next year are uncertain and that there will inevitably be other priorities, at certain points.

We believe however that the scope of an economic campaign of this nature can be sufficiently broad based to merit the support of students, university departments and other organisations. A campaign of this nature provides scope for the examination of the role of the university in an apartheid society and could thus be effectively related to the removal in the past and the future of

university freedoms and further to the suggested winter school theme.

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION:

Projects at Rhodes, UCT and Wits suggest ways in which NUSWEL could best operate. My key recommendation is that as far as possible only one or two projects at a time should be undertaken, that planning in advance for these projects be done working on a time programme and that in each case as far as possible community seminars be organised to directly facilitate planning. The Congress minutes for the last congress establish reasonably clearly what kind of methods of operation can be used so I shall not elaborate further here.

Deep reservations have been expressed as to the kind of work students can do in this area but these reservations are only valid in as much as we fail to work carefully, slowly and tactfully, and for as long as we fail to train ourselves, and to make full use of all the resources that are available from other organisations.

LITERACY:

It is of great urgency that training seminars be held next year. One of the first priorities of the next Secretary General must be to seek co-operation in the organising of such seminars with Ann Hope at the Christian Institute. If intergration between the wages and economics programmes and literacy training is to be made possible, specific programmes must be drawn relating to industrial requirements.

The fundamental failure of the literacy programme to date has been because of the lack of time that any one person has had to devote themselves to its implementation. The training process is an extremely complex one and unless we are able to absorb some of this training and relate it to specific projects the possibility of extending the literacy training programme must be viewed with the gravest misgivings.

One primary recommendation I would make, though, is that initially, the literacy programme be started on campuses with campus workers, and that the initial intention be to work in English, encouraging more fluency in English and developing a conscientisation programme.

NUSWEL local committees must make provision for the allocation of this portfolio to specific people on each campus, a list of targets must be drawn up specific steps to be taken in the implementation of the scheme detailed. In particular next year Graham de Smidt must make it a particular responsibility of his and must fulfill a co-ordinating role enabling campuses to make the fullest use of what resources- and they are limited- there are.

CONCLUSION:

The priorities for next year rest largely on the kind of local structures that can be fostered. Much of the planning for next year must take place now and in January and as far as possible these plans must be adhered to despite the coming crises. We can, I believe, fulfil these plans if they are realistically formulated, clearly and unambiguously stated and responsibility allocated to specific people and groups. It is going to be of the utmost importance that a good working relationship with the SRC's is created and our base of action and influence, thus broadened.

Empowerment is going to be needed next year and it is important that it be informed, capable and competent. NUSWEL local can play a contributory role in developing this leadership and in ensuring that whatever does happen next year, the ideas for which NUSAS and NUSWEL stand are continued and, moreover that projects continue to function.

The wages commission must develop a structure allowing them to co-ordinate amongst themselves as

amongst themselves far more readily whilst NUSWEL locals must secure themselves firmly on the campuses, and provide a training role for students.

This Congress must indicate clearly what role it wants HEAD office to play so that as far as possible Head Office can orientate itself towards these requirements in the scheduling of 'tours' and in the preparation of material resources. In particular communication problems must be resolved. Letter writing is clearly not a satisfactory medium - whoever heard of a local chairman actually replying to a letter. (?) Constant travelling on the part of the Secretary - General will in part resolve this but this means that centralisation of communication will have to take place via the Secretary General (travelling) through to the other campuses or through Head Office and then to the other campuses.

Consideration of the assessment will be welcomed. We must map out a comprehensive year plan for next year and this involves a knowledge on all of our parts of the resources at both a campus level and a national level.

Jeanette E. Curtis
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