

REPORT OF THE POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE TO NUSAS CONGRESS 1983

A. INTRODUCTION

In assessing political action this year, there has been a need to be clear on exactly why we organise on campus. This is necessary before we can fully assess our activity and how we have employed the theme "Educating for Change". Education, Mobilisation and Organisation were seen as the important ingredients to approaching our activity - we will assess this year's activity in these terms. We will also consider organisational forms specific to campaigns.

B. WHY DO WE ORGANISE ON CAMPUS

The question of why we organise on campus is a critical one. It is only with a fully developed understanding of the role of Nusas on campus that we can plan, implement and assess our activities effectively. The following points, which will hopefully serve as the basis for further discussion were identified:

1. Through our involvement in Nusas organisations - with emphasis placed on internal education and the development of skills - we develop democrats with a lifelong commitment to working for change. By organising democratically we ensure that our actions and conduct are consistent with our goals.

2. The educational content that we give to the issues we take up on campus make students less receptive to state initiatives and more sympathetic to extra-parliamentary opposition.

3. The struggle over ideas: Political domination is enforced through repression and persuasion. The maintenance of the status quo as regards the ruling minority occurs largely through ideological mechanisms - education, media etc. and we are not subject to direct forms of repression which the dominated majority experience.

The state, in its attempts to divide the majority, also simultaneously attempts to reorganise and rally the support of the white minority. Since we have come to define our constituency as white students and our area of involvement as a university, for the above reasons we engage on campus in a struggle at the level of ideas.

This ideological battle is central to our understanding of why we organise on campus. WE must attempt to counteract dominant ideas by challenging students about their own ideas, expose them to South African reality, and to pose real alternatives, drawn from the broad democratic movement. WE are intellectuals, accorded a privileged position in society, and we use the significance of this position to persuade and challenge our constituency.

The nature of the university as an institution of learning, although undemocratic, which allows us access to information, and permits a level of debate, provided us with an ideological space in which we can act. In our ideological battle, we must therefore expose

the undemocratic nature of the university and inject into the political process we attempt to effect on campus, ideas of democracy and the fight for control over our own lives. We must attempt to change the ideas that students hold. This understanding has led to the concept of the university as a "site of ideological struggle" - manifest in the increasing emphasis on things like internal education, the need for greater educative content in campaigns we take up, and a concerted effort to shift students ideologically, rather than simply raising awareness.

4. A crucial aspect of engaging in a "struggle of ideas" is challenging our universities and education, and attempting to change them. University education is one of the ways through the State attempts to win the support of the white community for its rule, and to reproduce the way in which our society is structured. Our education reinforces, for example, the ideas that those with mental skills have an inherent right over those with manual skills, and that white intellectuals and professionals are the natural rulers of society. We are trained to join the ranks of those who enjoy power and privilege, and to serve their needs rather than those of the majority of the people.

It is therefore essential that we develop for ourselves, and then for campus, a thorough understanding of the role that our universities and education play in our society. It is of importance that, where appropriate, we attempt to change this role to make our education more progressive and to make the universities more democratic.

5. The significance of our organising on campus is that it is in this way that we participate in the broader struggle for democracy. It is vital that our activities on campus and within our organisations are firmly grounded in an understanding of the circumstances and demands of the broad democratic movement, and serve to further its objectives.

C. THEME

One of the ways in which we try and link our various campaigns and focusses is through the implementation of the theme. Consequently, we tend to use the extent to which we've implemented the theme as a yardstick of how successful we've been in educating and moving campus.

This year we encountered what seems to be annual confusion over what we mean by "implementing the theme". We differentiated between the theme as the few words we tag onto posters, mention in speeches etc., and the ideas and aims that we try to encapsulate in the theme. In assessing how successful "Educating for Change" was, we concentrated on the latter aspect of the theme.

It seems that we have begun to integrate ideas about the importance of defining campus as our site of struggle; the fact that Nusas held its first ever Faculty Council conference this year is evidence of that. Creche campaigns on Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Wits also attempted - with varying degrees of success - to expose the unequal nature of our universities. Students challenged admin on Rhodes and UCT campuses over the issues of freedom of expression within the universities.

Despite this shift in focus it seems that we did not adequately develop students understanding of the role education plays in maintaining the status quo; the crisis in education, and of what is meant by "the education struggle". Rather, we tended to mobilise around university issues, which constitute an important but limited facet of the education struggle. We neglected to open students eyes to struggles on black campuses, in schools, etc. More importantly, we failed to draw the link between crises in education and the generalised crisis faced by the state. This is particularly evident in one of our major campaigns of the year - that around the Quota Act.

It seems that on the campuses, where there was close co-operation with admin, this prevented us from making those links. In contrast, where admin was not co-operating with the SRC, these SRCs to some extent fell into the trap of identifying admin, rather than the state, as the target of their campaign. Even where attempts were made to link the Quota campaign with the exposure of the S.A. education system, they were not successful. Students were roused by the possibility of the Quota system being implemented, and were impatient with speeches etc. that they saw as not directly addressing that issue.

This raises a set of questions relating to reactive, and formulative or offensive campaigns. It seems the lessons to be drawn from the Quota and other campaigns this year is that high profile, dynamic issues that mobilise campus have their disadvantages as well: they limit the amount of educative content that can be conveyed. We need to address ourselves to the ways in which we can both take up the issues thrust on us, the referendum, quota, banning of student press, and integrate them into a coherent process of education, aimed at exposing the nature of apartheid.

Possibly, one of the means of situating these issues in a progressive context is to have focus weeks, pamphlets, campaigns etc. to lay the groundwork for when we do seize on one particular issue.

D. MOBILISATION

1- In discussing mobilisation, it is important to consider the

following:

- It is essential to mobilise new constituencies in order to extend ones base.
- To be effective, mobilisation must be transformed into organisation

2. In reaching new constituencies there is a need to be more creative. To do this, it is important to understand those constituencies one is attempting to mobilise; more specifically, to identify those issues to which certain constituencies are likely to respond to eg. militarisation might be appropriate for Christian groupings.

2. A problem that arose this year was that although mobilisation was extensive, it was not effectively transformed into organisation. In this regard it may be noted that the form that mobilisation takes will affect the type of organisational gains that can be made. For eg., it is possible to make a distinction between mobilisation leading to short-term organisational forms (eg. the C.P. campaign leading to SCANC) and that leading to long term organisational gains (eg a campaign leading to the establishment of faculty councils).

4. This year has seen the development of particularly exciting forms of mobilisation. New forms of media and new mediums (eg concerts) were used in mobilisation.

A number of points about mobilisation should be borne in mind;

- low profile mobilisation, eg focuses, displays, seminars can be used to maintain mobilisation and even to extend it to organisation.
- Petitions and surveys were used very effectively this year, however care must be taken that they are not overused. An assessment should be made of their appropriateness.

WE should address ourselves to creative ways of mobilisation such as plays, concerts, radio stations and slide-tape shows.

5. Mobilisation must start from the level where campus is at. Furthermore, mobilisation must not be allowed to end in a vacuum but some effective follow-through must be provided (eg. by providing structures into which mobilisation can be channelled).

E. EDUCATION

1. In general campaigns had limited educative effectiveness. For eg., in the Quota campaigns we tended to mobilise well but neglect educating.

2. WE did not plan sufficiently before campaigns as to the ideological position we wished students to reach.

3. This is partly a result of our campaigns being reactive rather than formulative and to a lack of a programmatic approach.

4. The mass mobilisation which characterised 1983 tended to inhibit internal education.

5. While we have educated our campuses to different degrees over the past year, we will not be able to assume the same level of education from the beginning of 1984. New students on our campuses means that the initial pitch of our campaigns must be aimed at those new to campus.

6. Instead of planning and presenting campaigns in isolation from one another, we must direct our political activity at developing an understanding of the states attempts to restructure our society as a whole eg. instead of the tendency to approach the Quota and Constitutional Proposals as two separate issues, we must draw out the connections between the restructuring of education and the political restructuring.

7. WE must link issues of direct concern to students such as bad lecturers, lack of effective participation in decision making, sexual harassment to an understanding of the hierarchies of power and sexism. WE must also promote an understanding of the connection between "reform" and repression eg. between incidents at black schools and the role of the universities.

8. So while in the past we have tended to take up an issue, say the constitutional proposals, and while we may have moved the issue to popularising the UDF, we have not always used or included other political issues. On the other hand, having established a level of mobilisation we can move in the other direction and use support for UDF to give a platform for raising, say the banning of the UDF affiliate SAAWU, or raising struggles on black campuses and in black schools. Linking these back to the restructuring of education as evidenced by the de Lange Commission and subsequent white paper, the Vista initiative, the Quota issue and new university admissions criteria and subsidy formula.

9. By developing a connected and coherent understanding of our society we can then come to terms with the question of what we mean when we talk of change.

10. On the basis of this understanding we can approach the question of how we organise for change, the necessity of extra-parliamentary opposition and pre-empt any misconception of all extra-parliamentary opposition as illegitimate, illegal or violent.

11. Whatever our form of organisation - front, ad-hoc committee, SRC or sub-committee - internal education to this organisation is

essential for establishing the direction of a campaign and for translating mobilisation into organisation.

12. The student press can be used both to provide in-depth follow-up to campaigns and mass meetings, and to raise issues before they are taken up as campaigns, thus helping to cultivate a climate for mobilisation.

13. WE must consider giving educative content to SRC elections where possible by taking election debates into residences and lecture

theatres and introducing general political/campaign issues into elect speeches.

F ORGANISING

When attempting to draw lessons from activity this year, we start from the premise that neither mobilisation nor education occurs in a vacuum; that organisation facilitates and directs this process. A number of questions around organisation can be isolated and need to be addressed in the forthcoming year; -

1. WE need to instill into our organisations an understanding and a commitment to democratic forms of organisation. The development of a broad base of active involvement in our organisations and an ability to collectively plan, is crucial. Here it is particularly important to develop a thorough understanding of the specific nature of our task on campus and a broader understanding of S.A. This will ensure our development in a progressive direction. A further point, already raised at Congress, is that democracy and efficiency are not mutually exclusive.

2. The development of democrats through the process of organisation, the passing on of skills are tasks vital to the continuity and effectiveness of our organisations.

3. There is a need to address the problem of translating mobilisation (especially of the scale witnessed this past year) into organisation. For this we also need to link the issues raised in campaigns as well as to provide thorough internal education within organisational forms specific to campaigns.

We need to be creative as well as sensitive in attempting to draw people who had been involved in issue-based campaigns, into our organisations. Space for active involvement in the structures of our organisations needs to be opened up. Creative forms of organisation need to be sought eg. SCANC at UCT this year. Students on campus are not an homogenous group and each constituency needs to be identified and drawn into our campaigns as far as possible. Flexibility in our structures facilitates this and a creative approach to

organisation in these constituencies is important.

4. Co-ordination between groups has been dealt with in a positive way this year and must be developed upon.

5. The failure at times to achieve a balance between off-campus and on-campus issues have been to the detriment of our organisation. An awareness of balance is vital to ensure the effective building of organisation on campus. Organisations must realise their limitations and their constituencies.

6. There is a need to understand the balance and effectiveness of short and long term organisation.

7. We must as far as possible be formative, rather than reactive in the issues we take up - this should inform the form organisation takes on campus, as well as the organisational gains that can be made.

8. Media and the use of it has been isolated as an important area for promoting and building organisation.

G CAMPAIGNS AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

In this section we discuss three types of organisational structures in taking up campaigns.

1. Ad-Hoc committees.

Although an ad-hoc committee should be defined in terms of the individual campuses a broad definition is that it is an organisational form initiated by our NUSAS organisations and which encourages individuals as well as supportive organisations to join our campaign. Priorities in this organisational form include an internal education programme thereby extending the issue, and NUSAS organisations full involvement in the campaign.

Ad-hoc committees as an organisational form allow for a larger working group, and develop links with other organisations and individuals who may be called on in future campaigns. It must be ensured that individuals who join the ad-hoc comm are drawn fully into the working group through a democratic working process.

2. Organisation

The individual organisation as an organisational structure needs little explanation as it is that form usually used in short term focuses. Limitations are that it does not necessarily encourage students to join, thus limiting the size of a working group, educational input outside the organisation and links being made with other organisations.

3. Campus Fronts.

A front is a form of organisation in which a number of organisations often holding diverse views come together over a particular issue/ issue eg. SCANC. SCANC showed the possibility of playing a popular mobilising role as well as extending organisational links between NUSAS-supporting organisations and others, thereby potentially broadening the base of NUSAS campus support. To ensure this, however, NUSAS supporting organisations which initiate a front must be strong enough to cope with more than their usual activities as well as to play a full role within it. Within the front, there must be clarity as to which issues to take up as opposed to those taken up by constituent organisations. As in SCANC, organisation within

a front can develop to ensure participation of members of affiliated organisation, as well as individuals mobilised during the campaign. Sub-committees can be set up to further allow for individual involvement. These developments were particularly important within SCANC as they played the role of intermediate organisational forms between mobilisation of students around the particular issue (eg. the new constitution) and the joining of Nusas organisations. Central to this process is internal education (within the sub-comms of the front) which can broaden out beyond the issue and thereby encourage students to develop a commitment and understand the importance of their involvement. It is also important that members of Nusas organisations participate in the sub-comms.

The front has a further role of attempting to unite and politicise organisations which would normally be considered "apolitical". eg SCANC served to co-ordinate activities of campus organisations around the anti-constitution campaign, thus presenting a united student expression of opposition to the constitution. By drawing from a broad range of constituencies, the front served to gain much campus support. It also served a role in the pooling of resources.

A final point regarding the unity created between organisations within a front, is that it lays the basis for further joint involvement in later campaigns. A related point is that the front organisational form needs to be seen as campaign/issue specific. Difficulties arise in attempting to extend the front beyond the issue it was originally formed around.

4. Assessing the forms of organisation within campaigns.

- Must assess what effect the organisational form will have on Nusas organisations. Parameters should be defined and limits should be set to ensure that the form of organisation is specific to the campaign.

- Must assess what impact on campus the organisational form will have in terms of its image ie. the image of a front versus the image of an ad-hoc committee vs the image of an organisation.

- Must assess the limits of Nusas' organisational resources, so as not to weaken organisations through over-extending.

- Within the organisational form, must have intense internal education programme, thereby clarifying the direction of a campaign and how and why issues are taken up within it. Specifically the question "Why we organise?" with reference to the pertinent campaign should be a question addressed to ourselves.

- Further, internal education should serve to extend the understanding of those who have become involved on an issue basis.