



LAST month, an 11-person SRC was democratically elected by the students at the University of the Western Cape. It was not the first time that this campus saw an SRC election. The struggle for a democratic SRC began more than ten years ago.

The first protest started in 1970 when students refused to wear ties. In the same year, students rejected elections of an SRC because they believed that under the existing constitution, such a body would be powerless.

1972: In February 1972, the students had their first proper election for an SRC after drawing up their own constitution. However, a dispute arose between the rector and the SRC a few months later. The SRC was informed that it was no longer recognised, that its constitution was not legal. The administration handed it a new constitution which the student body

UWC - The struggle continues

rejected.

The conflict around the SRC issue and other grievances led to a walk-off taking place in June 1973.

The authorities reacted by expelling the entire student body. The students could only be taken back if they signed a form undertaking to endorse all the regulations of the university authorities.

They refused to comply with this condition and called for the reinstatement of all the students.

What followed was the first attempt by the students to organise community support.

Meetings were held throughout the country culminating in a mass meeting in Athlone attended by 12 000 people who demanded un-

conditional readmission of every single student. The authorities gave in.

The fight for the acceptance of their own SRC constitution was continued.

1976 - The year 1976 speaks for itself. It all started with a one week boycott of classes in protest against the social and political situation in South Africa.

Once again the SRC constitution was suspended.

In 1977, SRC was elected but students did

not show much interest. In October a spirit of defiance developed after a mass meeting in honour of Steve Biko who had died in detention.

The SRC constitution was again withdrawn.

UKUSA forms links

MORE than 100 delegates from 50 community and worker organisations in and around Durban attended the Ukusa congress over the weekend.

The congress was considered to be a milestone in the dynamic growth and development of the newspaper which was started just more than a year ago. A delegate at the congress said, "we call on all organisations to throw their weight behind the initiative and to help build Ukusa to be the voice of the silent majority."

The congress was opened by a member of the Ukusa Board, Dr Gangat. He outlined the problems of the newspaper over the past year. Some of which are a poor distribution network, irregular publication of the newspaper and a lack of community involvement in deciding on the content of the paper.

Dr Gangat said,

"Ukusa was started to fill a vacuum in the media field. There is very little coverage of the problems and struggles of our people in the daily commercial newspapers. Ukusa must fill this void, it must also inform and educate our people."

A second speaker, Adv. Zak Yakoob, talked about the role of alternative media in our struggle for democratic change.

He stressed that for a newspaper to fall within the field of alternative media, it must serve to propagate democratic ideals as opposed to Apartheid. It must not only unite our people, but be democratic in its organisation.

A guest speaker from Grassroots Community Newspaper presented a model of how an alternative newspaper is operating in Cape Town.

The afternoon session was by far the

most interesting as delegates debated issues rigorously in the small group discussion. They gave their feedback on what the role of Ukusa should be and how community and worker organisations could participate in the news-gathering process, distribution, and advertising. An important question was how Ukusa should be structured, what kinds of sub-committees are needed and what should the relationship be between the Board of Ukusa and the people.

Arising from the group discussions, proposals were formulated on the future of Ukusa and the way forward.

The spirit of the congress was constructive. Adv. Zak Yakoob summarised the mood of the congress quite aptly when he said, "Ukusa has the will. It now needs the support of all democratic people's organisations to play its part in shaping the future of the project."

The Road to Democratic SRC

MOST communities in the Western Cape were affected by the education crisis that struck in 1980. The memories of the meetings, discussions, fears and happiness still linger on. In the future there will be more struggles taking place in the field of education. Perhaps we need to look more closely at this aspect of the life of our community. In this way we could prevent the mistakes and beware of the pitfalls of the past.

Because we don't have democratic control of our country we don't have democratic

control of the education of our children. The government controls the education of our youth. Below the government are the education departments and campus administrators. These decide what should be taught and how the teaching and learning should take place.

Distribution

The government also distributes money for education in a very unfair way. In 1979 (just before the boycotts) the government spent R551,00 on every white child, R185,16 on every coloured, R236 on every Asian child and R54 on every Black child.

White children are taught skills of leadership and organisation so that they can take up positions of power and management. Black children are taught to be future workers.

The struggle for an SRC lapsed a bit until 1980 when a renewed call was made during the schools boycott of 1980.

An important feature of this boycott was the link set up between students and the community. Parent-student action committees were started in most areas.

1981 - A referendum was held at the beginning of the year. The majority of the students were in favour of an SRC being formed. An ad hoc committee was selected.

It held programmes to popularise and promote the idea of an SRC.

After an ill-timed boycott in June, a nine-person SRC came into being.

1982 AND THE ROAD AHEAD.

1982 started with the orientation programme. Students also showed their anger at the death of Dr Neil Aggett in detention by attending protest meetings and participating in the nationwide work stoppage.

However, the SRC gave too little attention to student grievances. It never really gained the full active support of the student body.

For any SRC to be successful it has to have mass student participation. In order to achieve this at Bush, issues which affect students directly will have to be tackled. Examples are high class fees, high hostel fees, etc. Sub-committees have to be established so as to incorporate students in the investigation of these problems.

The road ahead will be filled with stumbling blocks and it is only through the support and active participation of the student mass that we will be successful in building a strong SRC.

They are given no specialised education. This means that the education of our youth does not serve the needs of the people but of the government.

• Have our youth accepted this?

From 1920 to 1954 to 1976 till 1980 students have challenged the fairness of the education which they receive. No matter what kind the challenge, be it militant boycotts or quietly building SRCs, the link between the student struggles and that of the broader community was always clear.

In many of the student struggles there have been some victories but there have also been losses. In 1976 the Government hit back with terrible force. Lots of students were killed and organisations were banned.

What can we learn

from our actions in 1976 and 1980?

• It is impossible to plan mass student action in advance. We cannot say that next year at such and such a date we will start a boycott lasting so many days. This is impossible. Apartheid and inferior education create pressures in schools and university which build up to the point where any event, a death in detention or a worker strike, can spark off mass action. However,

Organisation

the success of this mass action depends on how much organisation went before it. At schools there should be a democratic SRC which builds strong unity among the students. When a school like this embarks on some form of mass action the chance of effective united mass action is greater.

Students speak out about SRC's

The school is a community

BECAUSE there are many different people who form part of it, it has many different problems. One of the ways for students to handle their difficulties is to elect a SRC (Students' Representative Council).

SRCs have played an important role in our community, especially in the last two years, when many SRCs were formed. Grassroots spoke to students from a number of different schools, where no SRCs exist, or where SRCs exist but are not very effective, and also where they operate effectively.

This brought forward many interesting views which we hope will stimulate debate.

* It should provide 'a link between staff and students'.

* An SRC should keep students informed about what is happening in the community.

* An SRC 'should listen to people's complaints about school as far as possible. It should act on those complaints.'

* SRCs should organise discussions.

One student felt that the individuals on the SRC at his school were too busy arranging sporting activities.

He said it was sad that SRCs were 'not organising discussions on subjects like the role of formal education in our society, what our attitude to boycotts should be, and so on. They need to explain why certain things should or should not be done'.

A student from a school where no SRC exists: 'There is no discussion at our school. We haven't got an SRC. The students didn't want an SRC.'

She felt that her school was lacking something because it had no SRC. There was no unity amongst the students and no communication with the staff.

'They should find out what people want to know and take it

from there. Class representatives know their classes and can easily find out what people are thinking.'

One student felt that teachers, outsiders as well as students could lead discussions. 'Anyone who is prepared to, or knows enough, can help.'

Another student felt that the SRC should conduct awareness programmes on a regular basis. Time should be made available for this in the classrooms.

ARE BOYCOTTS STILL IN THE MINDS OF STUDENTS?

"Yes. Most felt that it had been a good thing. But some are disillusioned because their demands had not been met. They think that there should be another way. They don't know what it is."

Some feel that because many demands were not met, the boycott was not a good thing. The SRCs should take up this discussion, so that the whole matter can be cleared up."

Another student said that there was no discussion of this matter at her school. "The boycotts don't seem to have affected them much."

It is obvious that much more can be said about relationships in schools, especially about relationships between students, between students and other people like teachers in schools and also between schools and the community.

One student said that there needs to be better communication between student organisations and the community organisations. It was suggested that students be represented in community organisations. What do you think about this?

If you would like to join a discussion group about this and other questions about relationships in a school, please phone or write to Grassroots.