

1. INTRODUCTION : ROLE OF NUSAS AND STUDENTS

Many students and other young people see the urgent need for change in South Africa. However, the privileged position that most of us occupy often tends to run counter to the types of fundamental changes necessary for a free and democratic South Africa.

Our understanding of society begins with looking at our formal education. Whether BA or BSc, Medicine or Engineering, we must ask ourselves the question: Are we being equipped to serve the needs of all South Africans in a democratic society, or does our education condition us to serve the needs of a privileged few?

In the majority of cases, students find that their education plays no role in shaping a new society in South Africa. On the contrary, most of us find ourselves being trained to minister to the needs of the present ruling minority, determined to hang on to their privileged position even at the risk of civil war.

Thus NUSAS students have made attempts to change their education, to prepare themselves for a new South Africa. But ultimately the old adage still holds true: A new education system cannot function within an unchanged society.

Therefore a study of educational changes leads us to a study of broader political changes, and to the question: How do we, as privileged students, become part of that change?

The steps that could be taken are as follows:

- a) Our initial task is to educate (or re-educate) ourselves and our fellow students as to the need for change and our own position within that change.
- b) To align ourselves with other democratic groups working for change and to take direction from the demands of the majority of South Africans.
- c) To actively work for change - a) in the realm of ideas and b) by giving practical assistance, when it is requested, to the struggles of the majority.

2. NUSAS THEME - EXPOSING TOTAL STRATEGY

The theme chosen for 1980 was designed to counter the shift in strategy of the apartheid state under P.W. Botha. To this end, a booklet Exposing Total Strategy was distributed at the beginning of the year, and seminars and talks were organised on each campus to look at various aspects of the "Total Strategy" initiative (e.g. Wiehahn and Riekert, the President's Council, the Urban Foundation, 99 year lease-holds and community councils). This approach was perhaps too theoretical and too stilted, and attempt was made to focus on aspects of popular resistance to "Total Strategy" during the rest of the year.

All NUSAS campuses took part in the Release Mandela Campaign and students helped to collect over 20 000 signatures for the Sunday Post petition. NUSAS campuses also took part in the

the nation-wide education boycott, as well as acting in a complementary role to events such as the Cape Town Meat Strike and Bus Boycott and the Johannesburg Municipal Workers Strike.

In an attempt to explain the upsurge of mass resistance to apartheid controls NUSAS published "A People's History". Further aspects of resistance were discussed at the July Resistance Conference in Pietermaritzburg, Thus the emphasis changed from why the State was restructuring apartheid to why the changes were undemocratic and unrelated to the basic minimum demands of the majority.

Commenting further on areas of mass resistance, NUSAS published The Struggle for Zimbabwe and The Union is Strength. There is a problem with adopting an overtly "political" theme. Many students, shaped by 12 years CNE and two years of SADF, react to political discussion with the question: "What has this got to do with me?" It is important then that students do not get left behind when a new theme is adopted for 1981. Older students, who had the benefit of themes such as "Education for an African Future", saw "Exposing Total Strategy" as the logical progression. However work is needed on all campuses to re-introduce concepts such as "course reform", and "the University in Society" to give new students an adequate groundwork of educational and political knowledge.

3. NUSAS AND STUDENT SUPPORT

During the course of this year, I visited each NUSAS campus approximately 6 times, with 4 visits to Rhodes and two to Pretoria. The rest of the time was spent at Head Office, except for an enforced two month stay in Parow, and a 3 week visit to Europe.

Durban

The Durban S.R.C. has done a tremendous job in picking up activities after the trough of 1978-1979. Many meetings, seminars and talks have been held, as well as active participation in the Release Mandela Campaign and the Education Boycott. The new SRC has even more experience than the last one, and it seems that 1981 could be a very productive year.

Pietermaritzburg

A right-wing take over of the SRC saw PMB disaffiliate from the National Union. This was due in part to the anti-NUSAS Campaign waged by right-wing elements in the residences, as well as a lack of hard work (barring a few exceptions) on the part of NUSAS supporters. If NUSAS is to continue to play a role on this campus, it means that local supporters will have to re-define their approach and their attitude towards working together as a group.

Rhodes

Rhodes failed to affiliate in May by 63 votes in an 80% poll. Although this was a great disappointment it is encouraging to see that so many of the new SRC are NUSAS supporters. It is also good to see the SRC running education and political programmes, the first time since 1976.

Witwatersrand

After a sound defeat for anti-NUSAS elements in the elections, the new SRC is in a strong position to run successful education programmes during the course of 1981. Preparation for the 58th NUSAS Congress is in full swing, with possibly a record number of delegates attending.

Cape Town

Cape Town organised the most successful response to the nation-wide education boycott. Over 4000 students were mobilised, and together with nearly 1000 campus workers, organised an alternative education programme during a week long boycott.

An essential task for the beginning of 1981 is to examine why so few candidates stood for the SRC, despite an active and eventful year.

Touring the Campuses

It is imperative that future tours are better organised. All meetings with SRC's/Faculty Councils/Student Editors/Projects Comms. and other groups should be arranged beforehand. SRC members on each campus must take it upon themselves to suggest students and academics that Head Office staff should meet. If this is not done, much time is wasted on trying to set up meetings at the last moment.

Overseas Visit

As Chairperson of SASTS Board of Directors, I attended a Federation of International Youth Travel Organisations Conference in Portugal. In addition to the SASTS promotional work, Laurine Platzky (SASTS Managing Director) and myself were also able to promote students camping tours to Zimbabwe.

I also travelled to London and Amsterdam where I met student leaders, academics and church-groups, and took part in several seminars discussions on South Africa. While I found some people well informed and up to date with what was happening in South Africa, I found many others, even ex-South Africans, very out of touch. It seems essential that students who have decided to leave South Africa review their decision. Democratic thinking South Africans are needed inside the country rather than outside, if they are going to work for meaningful change.

State Action Against NUSAS, 1980

Virtually every single NUSAS publication has been banned this year, usually for "harming race relations" or "being a danger to State security". In addition, the State has launched smear campaigns, either from the honourable mouth of Louis le Grange or through the noble pen of Ken Owen in the Sunday Times. (see articles on "superspy" Williams).

Many students were also charged this year under various acts - so far all have had charges dropped or have been acquitted. However, three NUSAS students - Chris Watters, Mike Kenyon, Devan Pillay, plus Rhodes lecturer Guy Berger and Rhodes student Alan Zin, are now in their third month of solitary confinement.

Head Office

The powerhouse of NUSAS! Without the hard and often tedious work put in by Andre, Mandy, John, Mog and Sue during the year, very little would have been accomplished. One thing I knew I could always be sure of - despite my long absences from Head Office, (sometimes against my will) - the show would go on. My sincere thanks to the team who have not only been fellow workers, but have also become my friends. I wish them well for the future - I know they will all go from strength to strength.

Head Office very seldom gets a chance to get together during the year. During the times we did manage to do this, I think we all felt able to bring up our suggestions and criticisms. A democratic structure has to be worked at. We often fell short of this goal in many areas. However, on most occasions I think we were able to work out why and rectify the problem.

My thanks goes also to SRC Presidents Chris, Tony, Alan and Norman who were the ones really in the campus firing-lines. Norman especially, as NUSAS Vice-President, often seemed to be landed with the worst tasks, be it tracking down April 1980 or trying to get our publications unbanned.

CONCLUSION

1980 has been an optimistic year. The winds of change that began blowing in the 1950's are now blowing stronger than ever before. However much still needs to be done. While a few battles were won this year, South Africa is still far from being the place where "The People Shall Govern".

We as students are not in the frontline of political struggle. We have never claimed to be. However, the building of a democratic society does not only take place in areas of direct political action, of trade union struggles, or mass mobilisation. Democracy is built at many different levels: education, ideology, the creation of values, social interaction and more. We are all directly involved in these areas - let our voices be heard and our actions felt.

7/11/80