

Introduction:

The role of NUSAS in the national democratic movement has developed through a number of distinct phases over the last ten years. In the early 1970's, our role was largely one of protest against apartheid. This developed, in the mid-70's, into an important resource role, led mainly by the Wages Commissions which gave input into the embryonic labour organisations

There was then an identifiable shift in the late 70's towards a support role played by students in relation to the now strengthening labour and community organisations. Since then, our role has changed to a greater emphasis on constituency politics. The different roles have developed alongside and in response to the changing needs and state of organisation within the democratic movement.

These changing roles which NUSAS has played in the national democratic movement are clearly not exclusive, and there is a great deal of overlap between them. Thus, for instance, elements of our protest and resource role continue today. Nevertheless, our contact with other groups should be seen in the context of our role being primarily defined as a constituency one - working for change through organising our campus base.

We have been included in the United Democratic Front as equal partners, operating in our own constituency. There are two elements to this concept of campus as an arena of political activity. The first is that progressive changes can be worked for in the nature of the university and the attitudes of students. The second is that it is important to draw elements of the white community into the forces working for change in SA.

The implications of constituency politics for us is that we have to look very carefully at the make-up and dynamics of our constituency, which differs from campus to campus. Nusas is incorporated into the UDF on a regional basis and the differences in our campuses means that there will be different possibilities in and limitations on relationships with other groups in each region.

It was stressed in the committee that our relationships with other groups require a high degree of sensitivity to their organisational dynamics. Undisciplined relationships with some organisations in the past have reflected badly on Nusas. Individuals within Nusas who come into contact with other groups must realise

that they are taken to represent Nusas and their actions are a reflection on their organisation.

Many of these relationships are based on trust, usually between individuals in the two organisations involved and this means that the relationships have often been informal ones rather than structured. There is generally a responsibility in the cases on those individuals on the Nusas campuses to pass on those contacts, to avoid the situation where the organisational relationships are broken when those individuals with the contacts leave campus.

1: Black Student Organisations

The context of our relationship with Azaso and Cosas is that we are all members of the UDF involved in the education struggle. There is a great deal all three organisation can learn and benefit from working together. Yet our constituencies are very different and we have to be extremely sensitive to the dynamics of the other organisations. It was also felt that there needs to be more education in our own organisations as to why we organise our different constituencies separately.

At some campuses recently there has been a more overt relationship with Azaso in particular, such as on joint platforms at mass meetings. It was felt that this is important in building a public image of non-racialism. Suggested areas for common campaigns next year are the new admissions criteria, the repression of SRC's on black campuses and the extension of conscription to coloureds and Indians.

Solidarity campaigns with SRC's facing repression on black campuses have proved to be a significant area of mobilization in the past. They have played an important role in focussing on conditions on these campuses and building the solidarity aspect of the non-racial student movement.

With Cosas our relationship has largely been one of providing resources, which is extremely important for that organisation at this stage.

2: Community, Labour and Women's Organisations

Nusas' participation in the UDF has this year increased the opportunity for both formal and informal contact with these organisation. The committee stressed however, that the extent and nature of this contact varied considerably from region to region.

The emphasis within the democratic movement on building strong organisation within specific constituencies is important for Nusas. As we organise in the in the context of our participation in the national democratic movement, it

is crucial that our relationships with community, labour and womens organisations and the forces that these relationships assume, is always weighed up in relation to our specific organisation and campus conditions.

In taking up national political campaigns and in popularizing UDF on our campuses, it was felt that speakers from community, labour and women's organisations should be included as much as possible on our platforms. This would serve to illustrate to campus the nature of the UDF; to give content to the principle of non-racialism; to educate students about issues being taken up in different areas; and to extend student support for and awareness of these organisations.

Given the necessity to be sensitive to and be well informed about the needs and dynamics of these organisations, internal education programmes should include (on an ongoing basis) information and discussion on off-campus developments.

Nusas' resource role remains important. But the extent and limits to which such support can be given must always be carefully considered and made clear on every occasion. Where provision of resources involved making skills available, these should be passed on wherever possible in order to decrease dependence on campus resources.

3. Academics

Relations with sympathetic academics have been largely informal and student-initiated around specific issues on most campuses this year and these relations should be strengthened. Academics can give valuable input to the student movement both in seminars and on platforms. Their knowledge of and influence in the universities can be of significant benefit to students. It was felt that some issues (eg. new Admissions policies and Subsidy formula) joint campaigns could be considered, and academics encouraged to organise into formal bodies when possible.

4. Liberal Organisations

These groups are not homogenous and with the role of parliamentary opposition being severely curtailed in the new constitution, there are liberal groups moving more solidly into the arena of extra-parliamentary politics. This opens opportunities for closer relationships between these liberal organisations and the

student movement and will be important to pursue these opportunities.

As in the past, bringing well-known liberal speakers onto campus enables us to reach students we would not otherwise get to in campaigns. In addition, organisations such as the Black Sash continue to provide information resources that are valuable to our organisations.

Nusas speakers have, on some campuses, been invited to give seminars to groups like Habonim and PFP Youth, providing the opportunity to introduce an alternative perspective on various issues and to begin to build the possibility of future working relationships.

5. Religious organisations

Particular campaigns often provide space for working with some religious groups on our campuses. These channels should be explored creatively bearing in mind our campus-specific organisational capabilities when defining the form that such a relationship assumes. With the anti-conscription campaign high on the 1984 agenda, working relationships with religious groups, both on and off campus will be important.

6. COSGs and Anti-Conscription Committee

COSG's play an important role in raising the question of the militarisation of our society and organising around the issue. Although their composition differs in the different centres, all have close contact with the student movement. It is important that this relationship be maintained and strengthened as COSG's can provide us with information and ideas on militarisation and resistance to it.

The Anti-conscription Committees have the potential to draw together a wide range of groups in their campaigns. Our role on these committees must be to link our mobilisation and education on campus with other groups working in the area. In this way we are able to strengthen our working relations with other organisations in the white community.

Furthermore our participation in the UDF enables us to link the anti-conscription campaign to organisation against the extension of conscription in the communities. In 1984 this campaign will be of much importance and many gains can be made in extending our support base as well as solidifying organisation in the white community.

7. Afrikaans Students, Technikons and training colleges

Relations with students on the Afrikaans campuses have been largely non-existent over the last few years. While these campuses are not a priority for Nusas organisation, informal contact should be developed with progressive students here. It is vital that any contact with existing Afrikaans Students Organisation be continually assessed in the light of our participation within the national democratic movement.

If we are to build a national student movement we should not confine our work to universities but continually look to new areas to provide progressive input. In this regard, the opening line of the preamble to the Nusas constitution is information (and foresighted), reading: "We, the students of universities, colleges and other institutions of higher learning in South Africa". Many students at techs etc. are disaffected with regard to their education and the political situation in this country. We are in a position to provide encouragement and educative input to these students and these avenues should be explored.

8. Schools

Schools play an important role in forming people's ideas and are a significant area in which challenges and changes need to be made in the process of the democratic struggle. However, the control exercised in schools leads to antagonism towards progressive content and imaginative ways need to be explored in getting to school students. Work need not be overtly political, but should stimulate critical thought and an alternative viewpoint. School newspapers, history societies and Christian groups are potentially useful avenues.

(Women's groups established in schools in our area has been useful in raising both womens and broader political issues). The success and impact of our work amongst scholars has important implications for first-year recruitment into our campus organisations.

9. The commercial press

Nusas has maintained good relations with newspapers and news services this year. Difficulties arise when our statements are subbed badly - editors and subs showing more respect for the cutting knife than the pen (on our organisation). We need to build up good relations with both editors and journalists to help counter this. It is important to keep newsdesks informed of forthcoming activities on campus.

We haven't used the independent commercial radio stations to their full potential. Capital Radio has shown itself to be very sympathetic to student organisations and the democratic movement and campuses should make contact with Capital's correspondents in their area.

10. Resource Groups

Groups such as TAG, ERIC, CRIC and MARS are important in providing information and education in their spheres of work. Contact with these groups should be strengthened.