

A COMMITTEE

STUDENT POLITICAL ACTION

Assessment of the Theme

a) Weaknesses

1. The group felt the theme was poorly launched, which raised the question of whether a theme such as Campus Action for Democracy could be officially "launched", or whether it should rather be popularised in relation to specific issues. In this respect there needs to be an in-depth assessment of how to introduce the theme to campus.
2. Inadequate ongoing debates around the theme meant no coherent strategy for its implementation was formulated, and there was a poor understanding of the concepts involved.
3. On some campuses the theme tended to be tagged onto issues without being given much content. On other campuses, there was a failure to link the theme to issues taken up at all. Generally, there was a failure to link campus issues and broader political issues, although people felt the theme did have the potential to allow for such links to be made.
4. The theme tended to be incorporated into our response to issues, rather than used as a basis on which to initiate activity.

- Suggestions:
- * the need to define a set of guidelines which could provide an overall framework within which the campuses could formulate appropriate programmes of action.
 - * the need for ongoing evaluation of the theme and its implementation that is not restricted to Projects Comm, but occurs on a broader organisational level. Head Office could play an important role in concretising the theme and stimulating ongoing discussion around it.

b) Strengths

1. There has been a re-emphasis on the importance of faculty councils and their educative and organisational potential.
2. In many ways we have established a new focus in the student movement which can provide the basis for expanding our organisation.

3. We have a better understanding of the relationship between student issues and broader political issues.
4. The theme provided the potential for activity in all areas of the university and provided a basis on which to initiate such activity. However this was not exploited enough.
5. Although we have only come to a full understanding of the theme now, the process of doing so has provided us with some valuable lessons and a basis to build on next year.

c) Role of the Theme

- * The theme needs to be flexible so that we are able to use it to respond to issues arising, but when there are no immediate issues, we must be able to use it to initiate our own positive action, in this way providing a general trend and direction.
- * In relation to campus issues, it was felt that these are usually taken up defensively and in many ways we need to go beyond this and go on the offensive when taking up issues. In this way a step forward could be taken by making new demands and winning organisational gains.
- * The theme needs to be one which students can relate in terms of their existing political consciousness.

d) Suggestions

- * Head Office needs to see the theme publication as a Number One priority for next year.
- * Possibly a smaller 4 or 6 page publication could come out during orientation week which would be far less intimidating to new students. This could be followed up by the theme publication a few weeks later.
- * Seminars around the publication

Strengths and Weaknesses

1. We tended not to follow issues through i.e. we didn't keep campus informed of subsequent developments (for eg. Fort Hare). While specific campus issues were taken up, they were often done in a "once off" fashion, or where they were more sustained, weren't broadened sufficiently to draw the links with "off-campus" issues.
2. Publications were often just put out onto campus and were not used to build awareness within a programme.
3. We failed to sustain an educative process for campus at large. We felt that if we had paid more attention to educating our campus base, mobilization generally and especially in times of crisis, would have been more effective. We tended to present our interpretation of events to campus, rather than starting from where students are at and moving them towards a fuller understanding of the situation.
4. We tended to "expose" issues to students without then providing ways for them to channel their concern. We were not creative in utilising existing organisational structures and in developing new ways of involving people. This pointed to a basic problem of a failure to develop and reproduce leadership which could extend to new structures (for example CAW). This resulted in losing a large number of people who were recruited. On some campuses this was felt to be a result of the centralization of decision making.

For some campuses the prior problem was to maintain and strengthen existing organisations. Inexperience and insufficient leadership was felt to be a major weakness at Durban, Rhodes and Maritzburg.

Wits and UCT dominated the discussion of strengths and weakness, and consequently there was an assumption that organisations were established and functioning, whereas the other campuses felt that consolidating organisation was the main area of concern (all a question of degree - Wits and UCT maybe should not confuse a large number of people with strong organisation).

However we felt that general weaknesses could be drawn out for all campuses without ignoring the specific problems that exist on each campus. For example, the small number of people in leadership positions on the smaller campuses, and

the fact that they are consequently often over extended, sometimes means that personal dynamics consume organisation - whereas on the larger campuses these can be more easily sorted out without jeopardising organisation as a whole.

An overall strength was that attempts had been made to mobilize campus at various stages. The emphasis on campus education was also a strength, although not always fully realised. However, it was difficult to make further generalizations with regard to "strengths", as these tend to be specific to each campus.

Trends in Campus Organisation

- * The student movement must constantly be aware of the need to take up issues with the view to linking those specific issues to broader ones. Most areas of campus activity can be made relevant to broader social areas eg. the issue of sexism in the organisation of res reform. The exposing of these links is essential in the development of awareness of campus, and enables the education, mobilisation and organisation of students on different levels.
- * What must be guarded against in this regard is the danger of, ^{when} taking up local issues eg. res reform, and ~~limiting~~ ^{is limited to} action to defensive demands. Rather, student leaders must attempt to organise those mobilised students to take up further demands and thereby make more concrete, structural gains such as increasing the degree of student representation in the decision-making processes of that particular area.
- * This approach of taking specific student demands or interests and relating them to broader concerns is essential in building up and maintaining a campus support base, but students must also be mobilised and organised on the level of national political issues (by bringing outside issues onto campus and confronting students with them). Here it is especially important that we ^{are} aware of general political trends, and are able to identify those important off-campus issues.
- * There are also issues (eg. militarisation) which are of broad political concern but which also affect the average student in very direct ways. These issues must be recognised as extremely important, and as enabling a continuous programme of e.m.o. to be formulated and run. Because we can anticipate these issues arising, we should establish definite strategies so that the issue can be quickly and effectively taken up.

- * It is also important that we focus attention not only on which issues we focus on but how we do this. In terms of campus trends, NUSAS will be facing fairly strong right-wing opposition on some campuses, and we need to be on the offensive when organising students. It is often necessary for individual S.R.C.'s to take a clear stand on matters of intense student interest. Failure to do so can weaken an S.R.C. in issues where it should be playing a leading role. In this regard, controversy on campus can often be very constructive, but must be carefully handled to avoid any issue blowing up out of expected proportions and seriously prejudicing the role of NUSAS on that campus.
- * Essential to the strength of organisations is a sound understanding among the membership of those organisations of the nature of their role and activities; and because many of the issues which are dealt with are so theoretically complex, a solid internal education programme should be a priority.

Broad Political Trends

The committee isolated some broad political trends which are likely to significantly effect developments next year. Firstly, the economic recession will have widespread implications and most South Africans will be hit very hard by the attack on living standards that it will entail. This, plus increasing unemployment, will increase the likelihood of spontaneous mass action, and will affect the limits and possibilities of organisation for eg. trade unions, community organisations and women's organisations, and will therefore affect the Broad Democratic Movement as a whole. Furthermore, the particular responses of different sectors of the oppressed classes will affect the balance between reform and repression on the part of the state.

The government's latest reform initiatives i.e. the President Council's constitutional proposals, were seen as an issue of prime importance for next year. The links between this and ongoing repression will have to be drawn out and the role of the Bantustans, the question of resettlement, and the Orderly Movement of Black Persons Bill will be ongoing issues in this regard. It was pointed out that these issues can be used to raise the fundamental questions about forms of oppression and exploitation in South Africa.

America's increasing involvement in Southern Africa, South Africa's destabilising strategies in the frontline states and the question of Namibia's future are issues with widespread implications, th are also definitely on the agenda for

next year. These issues raise the question of the increasing role of the SADF outside S.A.'s borders, of the increasing militarisation of S.A. society, which the student movement needs to focus on next year.

The increasingly overt political stands being taken by various branches of the church was also noted as significant. *Most of the issues drawn out relate to the guidelines, so I will only draw on those guidelines which have not yet been touched on:*

Basic Guidelines

1. As students to regard our prime responsibility as being the education struggle.
2. To link mobilisation, organisation and education.
3. To realize in what ways different forms of organisation can be used to successfully link mobilization, organisation and education.
4. To use issues which are directly related to students and their education as a means for mobilization.
5. To have ongoing educative programmes which can draw in the different organisations on campus, such as the student press, faculty councils, etc.
6. To establish and consolidate organisations in specific areas which can then be co-ordinated as part of a long term strategy, both on each campus and nationally.
7. To systematically PLAN activity. Not only in the sense of a weekly programme but also in creatively analysing how best an issue can be taken up to advance mobilization, organisation and education in relation to short and long term goals. This involves constant evaluation and criticism.
8. To focus on the training and reproduction of leadership which is essential for all campuses.
9. To utilise publications for seminars and small group discussion and therefore incorporate them as part of our organisation, rather than an "optional extra".
10. To carefully assess the most appropriate forms for taking up issues. Mass meeting for example should not be seen as the beginning and end of mobilisation. The educative content of mass meetings is often minimal. Therefore we need

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to lay the basis prior to the Mass Meeting, and consolidate and extend this subsequently through the added momentum generated by the mass meeting. We should try and use mass meetings as part of a process rather than the climax and end of an issue.