

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO THE 51st NUSAS CONGRESS

We meet together at this Congress with a sense of real purpose to fashion the future direction and activities of the National Union. The task is an extremely challenging one, but we will prove equal to it. Our strength has always lain and will continue to lie in our unity and our determination to strive for human freedom.

We should remember at the outset that it was fifty years ago that Leo Marquard infused NUSAS with this unity and this vision, and we pledge to him and the people of this country that we will carry the struggle through.

We are well aware that there are those who wait in the wings like vultures bent on destroying us. They have no unity and they have no vision, and that is why they will ultimately fail.

The repressive measures and the continual harassment which have been employed against our leaders and our students, are evidence only of our effectiveness. The fact that we have assembled here today to redefine our role in order to increase that effectiveness, is evidence only of our determination to succeed.

I sense and I feel that we are on the brink of a new breakthrough in our approach. Our brief experience in the sphere of practical activity - of student action - has brought with it a keener perception of the dynamics of this society - of how and why the privileged minority continue to suppress the aspirations of the black majority. It has brought with it too, a much keener perception of our role as a de facto white student organisation, in redding our country of that injustice.

We have learned that to place faith in appeals to those who hold power is a worthless exercise, that formal condemnation of their actions yields nothing. It was Leo Marquard himself, who way back in 1942 stated that the liberal ethic had not chance of effecting change and that, at that time, it was fighting a gallant a gallant vanguard action to stem the forces of repression. We have learned that while our society is divided along racial lines, many of the injustices perpetuated against black people should not be viewed in terms of race discrimination. Rather, that they are rooted in the exploitation of one class by another, and our heritage is the heritage of the exploiting class. We have recognised that the thrust for change - for human freedom - must stem from that class which is deprived and exploited, namely the black people of this country. We have recognised that effective black participation in political power must be an integral part of this thrust for human freedom, and that the white group which holds and exercises it - the Afrikaner Nationalists - will not relinquish power in the foreseeable future.

We have ~~we~~ acknowledged that when we talk about change in terms of the need to redistribute wealth and resources so that all ~~my~~ have equitable access to these, that the struggle is finally a black struggle, and that white people of whatever political affiliation, will not effect these essential changes.

And when I talk about us having a keener perception of our role in ridding this country of injustice, I mean that it is only through our movement toward ~~established~~ activity, that we have established for ourselves a role and realised its limitations.

The days of NUSAS voicing ideals and principles and doing little in their pursuit, are behind us for ever. The question now is just how much reserve of energy, how much dedication, we can display in actively pursuing our ideals.

Our basis of support lies in the universities, amongst students, and it is here that we should direct more attention than in the past. I have already stated that our heritage is the heritage of the exploiting class, and we must examine to what extent our universities play a role in this process, supplying the manpower to perpetuate white privilege. To act effectively we have got to communicate with students on a broad level to encourage them to identify with the forces for change and to evaluate their education in terms of that. If we can do this then not only are we making headway with white students as individuals, but we will also be acting positively towards redirecting the function of our universities towards development and towards a valid identification with a just society.

In essence, we must cleave the liberal myth which surrounds our universities, see them for the technical utilitarian institutions that they are, and act positively to change them.

I am convinced that by strengthening our focus in this area, support for, and involvement in, our specialised projects will grow.

Such focus will require a redefinition of our structure. The organisation has developed over the past four years an orientation towards action. Yet our activities fall into clearly defined structures which militate against co-operation and an integrated approach. We need to be working towards the development of a common approach encompassing different talents and skills, with the thrust towards a common objective

As long as we situate our activities in rigid structures, each developing their own direction, there is little hope of doing away with sectional interests and a sectional approaches. Congress provides us with the opportunity of reassessing our approach and redefining our structure in terms of that. // If we are to continue to act effectively in the service of both students and society as we define it, then we must expect that the ~~Majoritarian~~ regime will continue to act against us. Let us be aware of the fact that there will be many bannings, many acts of intimidation and many repressive measures before the goal of human freedom in South Africa is reached.

But we have dedicated ourselves to this goal, and changes in ~~our~~ ~~organisations~~ ~~and~~ ~~method~~ of operation will be undertaken as a response to the times and ~~the~~ ~~needs~~ ~~of~~ effective action. They will not be dictated.