

organizations and activists from more community-based organizations.

For the latter, once the event (ie, the Festival) was prohibited, it didn't mean that the issue or the end had to be forfeited as well. rather, the banning was but an affirmation of the conditions in which the development of a people's culture occurs. Politically then, we were once more obliged to wrest the initiative from the state and explore creative ways of advancing our original objectives, not least because of the level of grassroots support which had emerged for the Festival. This did not mean that we had to be reckless or irresponsible martyrs, but even more certainly, if progressive culture was rooted in the struggle for liberation, then there was no way that the advancing of progressive culture could simply be forfeited in the face of state repression.

This was the spontaneous reaction of community organizations who were going to participate in the Festival as well. Soon after the banning, representatives from community organizations contacted some of us in the executive, and asked what was going to happen. for all of them, the Festival had to go ahead in one form or another - there was no question of surrendering to the State.

Against this background (ie. on the one hand, the decision of Festival activists not to pursue alternatives, and, on the other, the strong sentiments of community organization representatives that the festival should go ahead, albeit in a different form...), and ad hoc committee formed spontaneously to explore a possible alternative, though much more limited programme. the committee consisted of two or three members of the Arts festival '86 executive, reps from community organizations that were already part of the festival, and reps from community organizations that were going to participate in the festival itself.

Initially an ambitious seven-day programme covering all the various disciplines (literature, art, drama, music, film etc) was mooted, but then in recognition of limited resources (material and human) and the limited time available to the ad-hoc committee, a much smaller scale programme was devised. The objective of this programme was not to be a large, political, public spectacle, rather, it was simply to consolidate some of the grassroots organizations' support for the festival which had been generated during the preceding weeks and months. Rather than make gains at a public level, the programme intended to ensure that culture remained reasonably high on the political agendas of community organizations and perhaps to initiate discussion about how to advance progressive culture in the Western Cape. This was seen to be particularly important in the light of the Festival experience and increasingly repressive conditions.

The programme was to consist of a music gig on the Friday evening, a festival of progressive theatre on the Saturday, support for a gig organized by Musical Action for People's Power (MAPP) on the Sunday to

raise money to pay bands who had been affected by the ban on the Festival, an all-day seminar on Monday, a People's Creative Space (where anyone is encouraged to perform their original work in an informal coffee-bar type atmosphere) on the Wednesday evening and a creative vigil for detainees and fallen comrades on Christmas eve.

The programme of the gig at the Samaj Centre on the Friday was not the greatest - the street/guerilla theatre showed how unrehearsed it was and there was some problem with the bands who seemed concerned that the State might try to bust the gig - but the turnout at the gig with representatives and grassroots activists from trade-unions, para-church organizations and CAL and UDF affiliates reflected the broad support that the Festival had generated at least at an organizational level.

Again, at the Community Arts Project hosted festival of drama the next day, not only did the varied programme which lasted from 4pm till midnight impress upon the audience the richness and diversity of creative forms (dance, mime, cabaret, revue, street theatre etc) being used within the struggle for liberation, but the packed and diverse audience itself reflected the unifying potential of the Festival.

MAPP's gig at UCT on the Sunday was a huge financial success - not least because of the participation of Johnny Clegg and Savuka who played for free as a gesture of solidarity with those who had been affected by the ban on the Festival.

The Monday conference was cancelled because of poor attendance by community organizations - there had not been enough of a momentum created by cultural events to encourage community activists to attend this symposium. The People's Creative Space was cancelled as well because the ad-hoc committee was informed that security police had visited the Lutheran Youth Centre (venue for the event) twice that day to find out about the "cultural evening" happening there that night. The director of the centre had also been served with a deportation order, and since he had appealed against it, the Centre was reluctant to allow the PCS to happen there as it might jeopardize Svenson's appeal. As there was too little time to organize and advertise an alternative venue, the event had to be cancelled.

For security reasons, the Wednesday night vigil was to be advertised by word of mouth at the People's Creative Space since the vigil fell foul of the recent ban on any organization organizing any event which would promote the Christmas against the Emergency campaign. In the end, this vigil was cancelled as well.

The first two events of this alternative programme and the art exhibition which continued under a different name, showed to what extent we could have organized alternatives and got away with them had we had the political will to do so. On the other hand, the last few events showed the dangers that we could have faced in organizing alternative events, but in such cases we would simply have needed to act responsibly. While in retrospect Arts Festival activists and executive members realized that the advice of the lawyers was not

wholly sound the reality was that not only had the state taken the initiative away from us, but we had capitulated and had given them the initiative when we could have wrested it back and made significant political gains.

#### General Gains made from the Festival process.

The following list of gains emerged during an internal evaluation of the festival by Festival activists on Sunday 18 January 1986. (This paper was presented as the basis for an overall assessment of the festival process. Small group discussions and report-backs in plenary generally agreed with the themes outlined in this paper).

- i) 'culture' was placed much higher on the agenda of organizations engaged in the struggle for liberation. culture is now regarded as integral to the struggle rather than as a secondary or irrelevant phenomenon.
- ii) Positive relationships were established between cultural workers and between progressive cultural organizations which could serve as a basis for ongoing work in the cultural sphere.
- iii) New ways of working ie, democratically and in an interdisciplinary manner, were explored, and many good lessons learned.
- iv) While grassroots organizations developed a better understanding of the role of culture, cultural workers who had worked individualistically before developed a better understanding of the need for organization and organizational discipline.
- v) The Festival process highlighted the wealth of skills and resources that are available to the progressive movement. The average age of Festival activists was approximately 25 years. The organization of an event on such a large scale proved the abilities and skills among the youth sector.
- vi) The evaluation of the Festival process itself taught very many valuable lessons about how to advance progressive culture in the future. eg. who the leadership should be, the importance of political rigour, etc.

#### Some Needs Highlighted By The Festival.

- i) There is a desperate lack of venues suitable to progressive cultural activity. Very few venues are financially or geographically accessible to grassroots organizations. There is a great need for buildings/venues in central locations which community organizations have control over, and which are suitable for the teaching of cultural skills, and the performance of progressive cultural work.

ii) Because of the legacy of 'culture' being regarded as secondary or irrelevant, cultural workers have stunted the development of their cultural skills and art in favour of general activist work. Now with culture assuming a higher priority within the democratic movement, there is a severe shortage of cultural workers located within the community who have the theoretical and practical skills necessary to teach others and to play a significant role in the long term building of progressive culture.

There is altogether an alarming lack of venues and teachers to serve the cultural needs and interests of historically dispossessed and deprived communities.

iii) Cultural workers need to be organized. In order that progressive cultural activity may be advanced in a coordinated, effective manner, cultural workers need to be organized to discuss, plan and effect strategies and programmes to achieve this. They also need to be organized to discuss issues relevant to them as cultural workers located within the progressive movement and to develop the theory necessary to guide their activity in the cultural sphere.

iv) If we are genuinely concerned about organizing politically and culturally in a non-racial manner, then much more thought needs to be given to how to effectively involve township comrades in the leadership and grassroots organization of cultural/political initiatives. It is much easier and so much more tempting to organize and involve people from the Cape Flats and the suburbs, people who have skills because of access to higher education and who, given their class positions, have access to resources such as transport, telephones, money, etc. Activists in the townships generally do not have cars, few have telephones, and with high unemployment, very few can afford bus fares. Also, with increasing repression, it becomes more difficult for activists to leave the townships and for 'outsiders' to enter the townships.

We did attempt to overcome these problems in some ways by subsidizing taxis to transport folk to meetings from the townships, having some meetings in the townships, subsidising individual taxi fares for persons involved in the leadership, etc, but this was generally inadequate and much more concerted attention must be given to solving the problem of effectively involving township activists.

#### Conclusion.

A brief conclusion would be that despite its banning, the festival was an invaluable experience. Important gains that would benefit the long-term growth of progressive culture were made. Needs and problems that would need to be grappled with were highlighted, and most important, we learned the necessity for political rigourousness and maturity when organizing in the cultural sphere.

The problems and mistakes and oversights within the Festival process are things for which we as Festival activists must all share responsibility. The purpose of this paper was not to "lay blame" with

any particular sector or organization for the mistakes and oversights, rather, it is an attempt to analyse what these mistakes were and why they were made, so that we do not make them again in the future.

Given ECC's involvement in the history of the Festival process, it is inevitable that the influence of this history would need to be critiqued in any evaluation. However, it is not correct to "blame" ECC for the oversights and mistakes in the Festival process since once this process became independent of ECC in mid-August, all of us who then became involved must assume responsibility for the oversights and mistakes. While ECC's historical influence may have been significant, once the process became independent of ECC, there was no reason why the process could not have been thoroughly re-evaluated at its inception. While the aims and objectives were changed significantly, we were all responsible for not playing enough attention to the processes necessary to achieve these aims.

Full-time organizer's report of work from 1 September 1986 through to 31 January 1987:

Main areas of work-

- 1) Increasing the base of the Festival.
  - personal contact with, and invitations to trade unions, UDF and CAL affiliates, para-church organizations, cultural groups, etc to become part of the Festival.
  - keeping organizations informed of what was happening within the Festival process through letters, personal reports and documents on the Festival.
- 2) Organizing, planning and co-ordinating pre-Festival activities.
  - introductory seminar on people's culture (late September)
  - inauguration of Festival (1 November)
- 3) Fundraising.
  - contact and basic work for movie shows at the Gem and Cine 400 and the disco "bop till you drop" at the Space Odyssey.
  - contact and liaison with international funders.
- 4) Involvement in sub-committees.
  - drama: coordinator of worker play festival; street theatre.
  - symposium.
  - rally.
- 5) Miscellaneous activities.
  - assisted venue officer in looking for and booking venues.
  - helping to co-ordinate People's Creative Space.
  - liaison with printers, T-shirt factory, screenprinters etc.
  - writing documentation on Festival.
  - press articles and interviews.
  - coordinating alternative festival programme.
  - as one of three co-ordinators, chaired General Forums, Exec and

extended Exec meetings.

- national liaison with groups and individuals invited to Festival.
- involvement in evaluation process.
- elected onto contact committee to set up meeting with organizations on Saturday 28 February to discuss "where to from here?" re progressive culture.

It was very hard work, sometimes frustrating but mostly stimulating and enjoyable. I certainly feel that I have grown through my involvement - short (5 months) but intense. Having been away from the Western Cape for a period of about 18 months (a one year exchange programme in 1985, and working as organizing secretary for the Kairos Document during the first half of 1986 in Johannesburg), it was an ideal job to have in terms of re-immersing myself in the issues of the Western Cape. Although it didn't leave much room for personal cultural creative work (broader organizational and time commitments militated against this), it was also an ideal transition from normal, general activist work to involvement in the cultural sphere, an area to which I am committed to working in in the long term. I have also been made aware of my personal inadequacies - both in terms of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, hence my decision to do Drama Honours this year.

The banning of the Festival was not in itself deflating and depressing (given the hard work that had gone into it, the personal sacrifices, emotional involvement, etc) Rather, what was most depressing and even angering was the decision of counterparts to strictly adhere to legal advice and to desist from exploring alternative means of pursuing the Festival. The two days following the ban were emotionally exhausting days.

It took quite a few days after the alternative programme to unwind and reflect on the Festival process. As a result of that reflection, on the overall process and my personal involvement in it, I have decided to:

- to do Honours in drama this year to acquire some of the skills and theoretical knowledge necessary to make an effective long-term contribution in the cultural sphere.
- withdraw from high-profile progressive cultural activity and intense activism - for a while at least - while maintaining links and/or a low profile involvement in developing alternative initiatives.

I am deeply thankful for the opportunity to have worked as organizer for Arts Festival '86: Towards a People's Culture, as I learned a great amount and derived much clarification about my role and the direction of my activity in the cultural sphere in the future.

MIKE VAN GRAAN.

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