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PUBLICITY AND THE UDF

Publicity means making public. It means that knowledge is made known to a wider group of people than those already in the know. Central to publicity is media, by which is meant newspapers, leaflets, newsletters, stickers, banners, posters, ~~and~~ public demonstrations, ~~and~~ placards, ~~and~~ flags and songs.

Media in our country can be divided into two camps: those on our side and those against. On the opposing side we have the state radio and tv, the commercial newspapers, the advertisement leaflets that try to rip off our pockets, anonymous smear pamphlets like these put out to confuse us about the UDF launch, and the leaflets and newsletters put out by sell-outs, reactionaries, racists, and the like. In this hostile camp, we can expect two kinds of publicity about our organisations and our struggle: either ~~we are~~ ^{we are} ignored, or ~~we~~ ^{we} tend to be misrepresented.

This does not mean we refuse to have anything to do with the media in this camp. No, we try to use it where we can, we complain when we are misrepresented, we fight for decent publicity in these media. All this is important because the resources for media production in the hostile camp are far greater than what we can muster, and we would be cutting off certain chances of publicity if we did not try to find the cracks in the hostile camp and ensure that our publicity gets through these.

Yet, at the same time, we know that for truly decent publicity we need to rely on the media in our own camp. These media are those put out in the form of community and student newspapers, as stickers and brochures coming from our civics, unions and women's organisations, and as UDF's media.

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However, if we look around us we see that very often we do not make full use of our own media. Some of us think it is too difficult to produce media - but if only they would try, they would see how easy it is. Others of us do produce media, but do not really use it to its best capacity. For this group, it is enough if the media looks good (no matter really the content, or even if it gets outside the office). Indeed, producing media for this group is often only a matter of the prestige it gives them. Then there is a third group amongst us who - perhaps in reacting against the second group - do not produce any media at all because they cannot see the use of ~~it~~ doing so. For them, media is a waste of time.

For all of these groups, it would be useful to actually take a moment to ask why is it that we need publicity, why is it that we need media, what is the ~~xxx~~ purpose and role of our media? In a nutshell, how can media help our organisations?

Media can fulfill many functions. For example, one of the roles of the media produced by those hostile to us, is a dis-organising and confusion-sowing role. But there are other roles they play which we could learn something from: their media helps to mobilize their forces, it helps to educate their forces, and through these roles, it helps to unify their forces. We have, then, mobilizing, educating and unifying.

Media can play a very important role in mobilizing people. This is largely through propaganda. To mobilize people, however, we need to remember that we have to start from where they are. If some people do not ^{yet} identify themselves as being oppressed, then we can't ^{push ahead and} hope to mobilize them as supporters of a movement against oppression.

Propaganda and mobilization has to hit the nail on the head of where people are - it has to give them an identity that will be possible for them to see themselves as. Propaganda can't try to subconsciously address people as 'freedom-lovers' if the people don't feel a need to have this kind of identity. The reason why these points are important, is because all too often, the activists producing mass propaganda tend to forget that the audience has a different level of consciousness to their own. Propaganda must harmonise with the level of consciousness of the audience if it is going to successfully play the role of mobilising them.

This question leads us on to the question of our audience. Many people will read our media: some will be sympathetic, others will be potential supporters, still others will waver, and then there will also be some hostile. When we are aiming at mobilising people, we have to think about which of these groups we are trying to mobilize and for what. For example, we might decide that our sympathisers need morale-boosting, and that they need some mobilising. On the other hand, we might decide that our main target is to try to mobilize outsiders to support our ideas and organisations. In both cases, our propaganda would be different.

The difference between propaganda and education is that while propaganda aims to give people a shared identity, education builds on this. Education adds an outlook, a package of knowledge, and a way of understanding, to this identity. Education, then, is most successful when an audience is sympathetic, and when goals and principles can be taken as given. So education is thus in a way dependent on prior mobilisation for its success. Neither education or mobilization are absolutely distinct from each other -

but ^{media} can emphasize one or the other. The question is what should we emphasize at any one time - education or mobilization? This obviously depends on what the needs of the time are - but it also depends on who we are aiming our media at. If education depends in a way on prior mobilization, then it is clearly going to be difficult to pitch education at unmobilized people. What these people need is mobilization. The question that then arises is - have we got enough media to mobilize new people, as well as to mobilize and educate our own members and supporters? It would be super if we did - but if we haven't enough money to do this, then we have to choose: ^{shouldn't} we concentrate on our already mobilized supporters, ^{rather than} try to mobilize outsiders? The point is that we have to be clear on our aims and our audience.

We come now to the question of media unifying social forces. One can create - or hope to create - a unity through mobilization. What this involves ^{is} giving people common symbols and most importantly a common identity, so that they can all feel they are 'freedom-lovers' or 'democrats' or whatever. Unity through education is a more developed thing. Here one is educating people to have not only a common identity, but also a common outlook and understanding. Education also involves people realizing why it is that unity is important, what that unity ~~means~~ means, and ~~what~~ what the state's plans to counter this unity are.

Our media then can help mobilize, educate and . . . unify our forces. But it is important that we don't therefore over-estimate how important media is. Media can help organisation - but it can never replace organisation. Through mobilizing, educating, and unifying our forces, media indirectly helps to strengthen our

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Organisations. But for media to really be effective and successful in mobilising, educating and unifying, it cannot work alone. The most powerful combination is : when media and personal contact go together. We cannot stand on street corners and give out UDP ~~thereby mobilised, educated and unified~~ N.S.S and think that we have ^{reached} the people. Media is only helpful if we have people to go with it, to make sure the media has the effect we want it have. The point about media is that taken alone, it is very difficult for audiences to respond to directly. It is only through personal, unmediated contact that people can discuss their uncertainties, raise their questions, - and get immediate feedback on these. In contrast, a newsletter or pamphlet does not answer the hundreds of doubts, queries, fears and suspicions that people have. It is also important that personal contact fill in the content of media - try especially to bring education into the mobilization. Only personal contact can discuss what the real content is of a slogan like 'EPARTHEID DIVIDES, UDP UNITES', and what is really meant by 'a free non-racial and democratic SA'.

schwiso don't use though coz lack media consciousness

So for media to ^{be effective and} ultimately strengthen organisation, it needs to be combined with personal contact. Now, this personal contact does not come out of the blue - it has to be organised. What this means is that for media to help organisations, it itself needs its own organisation. To produce media and distribute ^{it} can indeed be a very important tool of organising people. Skills - both technical and political - are learnt, and the very processes of ^{planning} producing and distributing media help to mobilise, educate and unify people.

This direct contribution that media makes to organisation is very important given the need to keep on a process of mobilising, educating

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and unifying people when media is not being produced. The media structures in such times can be used to plan ahead, and more importantly to gain feedback.

For media to strengthen organisation, however, personal contact and media organisation are not themselves enough. ^{The organisation that goes into producing} and distributing media cannot be a substitute for organisers to organise ^{stop organising} ~~we must never~~ people on the basis of personal contact alone ^{on the 1000s of issues not covered in the media but which are ongoing} on the factory floor, in the classrooms, house to house. Producing and distributing media also cannot be a substitute for our organisations doing important fundraising, minute-taking, linising, chairing, seminars, and other sorts of organisational work. These other sorts of organising are what is needed to actually bring people into structures and to keep them there with tasks and responsibilities, and to keep them involved. If people are not involved in this way, not only are organisations not strengthened, but the people themselves grow cynical of hearing all mouth, but seeing no action. We need to remember that to best use the media mouth, we need a strong body to support it. Often, the best form of mobilizing, educating and unifying, and of strengthening organisations is not the rhetoric, but the deeds which people see and are involved in. In order to ^{stop organising} give media its correct importance while not letting it replace other organisational tasks, we need to take seriously the structuring of portfolios in organisations. Not everyone can - or should - become involved in media work, if this means other work is neglected. The idea of having publicity secretaries with a publicity ~~publicity~~ sub-committee around them is the logical answer here.

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We now come to the question of UDF and its media. UDF is a front, not an organisation. It exists to bring together many organisations, in order to broaden their horizons, strengthen the organisation in each group, and to help ~~maximize~~ co-ordinate action between them.

A political front is greater than the sum of its separate organisations, but this is not automatically given by a formal structure. It is a process of building this that depends on the real organic unity and strength of affiliated organisations in the front. The danger is that a political front can become different from the sum of its parts in an artificial way, and certainly no stronger than the sum of the separate parts. This is where the front cannot be held together as a front of many organisations, and where it tends to becoming a separate organisation. This can be a real problem where there is no strong base to support this organisation.

UDF began with a bang that woke many people. It echoed all over the country, and many of us saw this exciting profile as our direction. We need however, to pause, and evaluate our resources as to whether UDF can at this stage play a mass national political role for the oppressed people as a whole. Are we making sure that we are doing enough to build the front first, that we are strengthening the affiliates? Perhaps it is time for affiliates to aim at the public-at-large, or - better - for them to aim at the outsiders who are nonetheless part of their specific constituency; and for UDF to aim itself mainly at its affiliates.

So UDF media should help communication amongst affiliates so as to pool their experience, broaden their horizons, and raise their level of understanding. While UDF media emphasises mobilising, educating and unifying affiliates, affiliate media might well aim at mobilising, educating and unifying the specific constituencies of each affiliate. But it is important to remember in this distinction, that it is up to the affiliates to use both media (UDF and their own) to translate mobilising, educating and unifying into concrete organisation on the ground.

In the recent local authorities campaign, UDF media should have linked the issue to the Koornhof bills, and to the constitution, and from there to the successful struggles against the C&C elections in other parts of the country. Affiliate media at different levels (eg. branches of civics, a single civic's media, several civics' media) should have completed this. While UDF media should have been used by the affiliates to educate and mobilize their own activists, the actual campaign media picking up on local problems, aiming at the township constituency, advertizing local events, quoting local people, and calling for a local boycott - all this should be handled at affiliate level. Only in this way will affiliates be strengthened in the long term.

A similar program could be devised for the media handling of the possible elections in Coloured and Indian areas next year.

We now come to the issue of how national and regional UDF media differs.

UDF media needs to be understood not only in terms of the needs of a front, but also in terms of it being a national front. Here it is clear that UDF media has to put great stress on trying to unify people - across race, class, ~~maximize~~ religion, ~~maximize~~ and sex and region. It has to unify them such that they all see that they have a common source to their problems, that is the central apartheid government and the social order it protects. Unity here involves focussing their grievances and demands on a single spot.

But unifying is not easy. We have very different problems in each part of the country, there are different levels of consciousness and organisation in different areas, and different groups of people face different problems. The task facing UDF media is to show African people in ~~Transvaal~~ ^{affiliates} that the UDF co-ordinated boycott of C&C elections in the Western Cape is part of their struggle too. It is also the task of showing ~~the~~ coloured and Indian people ^{in affiliate nationwide} that the issue of the local authority elections campaign is ~~the~~ relevant to them.

Next year, we have to show that Koornhof's laws are important for all non-racial democrats ^{in affiliates} to know about, and that the new constitution with conscription for coloured and Indian youth is also important to all.

The problem can be illustrated by a real example. One part of the country says their task is to get people to identify themselves as being oppressed. Consequently, their media needs from UDP media meant that articles should be along the lines of 'every day we face high rents, high bus fares, high food prices, poor working conditions, etc.'. Another part of the country says that this propaganda would bore people in their area, as the people there already identify themselves as much oppressed and they want to know where to go from there. In other words, education was the need in the second area. Now, the question is, can one meet both needs adequately with a single ~~medium~~ such as UDP NEWS? What is useful for some groups is useless or even counterproductive for others.

The significance of this is that UDP national media needs to be planned and judged from a national perspective, not from the localized needs of different groups in different parts. The question is, does UDP national media adequately respond to the national political conjuncture, even if it is not entirely to the suiting of ~~the whole membership or constituents~~ of ~~the~~ organisations in the UDP.

However, the question still remains as to what the role and use then is of national UDP media. Some people might argue that in this stage of our struggle, we don't really need national UDP media - especially given the problems of making it work useful nationwide. Against this we would argue that national media is needed, and that there is a way of making it useful nationwide. UDP does need national media because it needs to build a national consciousness. We cannot only have ~~media~~ that mobilises, educates and unifies at the level of regional consciousness. But in order to build national consciousness out of the unevenness that exists, we need to plan our steps carefully. Clearly, it is difficult to get national media to be suitable for every affiliate to be able to use to successfully mobilise, educate and unify their entire constituency. It may even be difficult for national media to 'click' successfully with the ~~masses~~ grassroots organised members of affiliates. Perhaps then, in building national consciousness, UDP media needs as a first step to aim at the more advanced activists in the affiliates around the country. In terms of national media and the present state of our struggle, this first step will be more politically cost-effective than national media being aimed for whole memberships or constituencies. It will be vastly more cost-effective than the present situation where national media is going to mass levels.

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If we have uneven needs and problems at ^{an affiliate and} a ~~mass~~ level round the country, ~~then~~ and if we ~~fall~~ fall between several stools by trying ^{or national media down in} to cater for all these, then we should scale ~~down~~ ^{terms of its audience}.

UDP media also needs to be seen in terms of it being decentralised. UDP is a front of decentralised organisations. At the moment, we have centralized UDP media, and decentralised affiliate media. If we are to build a strong and real functioning unity, however, we need affiliates to start combining and doing joint media work. We need, perhaps, area UDP committees - each with its own media-subcommittee complete with ~~needed~~ ^{needed} machine and skills - supplied perhaps by one of the stronger affiliates in the area.

To sum up then,

- a. Media can help strengthen organisations by mobilizing, educating and unifying
- b. But for media to do this it requires its own structures.
- c. Media, and structures around media, cannot replace organisational work of other varieties.
- d. UDP's media at this stage should aim at affiliates.
- e. Affiliates must translate this media into stronger organisations on the ground.
- f. Affiliates must complement this media with their own constituency specific media.
- g. UDP national media at this stage of the struggle should aim not at ~~affiliates as a whole~~, but at activists in the affiliates.
- h. UDP media production should be decent. ed.

Collection Number: AK2117

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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