

gle at the same time. If there is not a direct link between these two components of progressive activity, organisations may participate in broader national democratic struggles without the support of their members, and at the same time will not be feeding the political content of those national democratic struggles back into their first level organisations.

If there is a dichotomy between our programmes and activities inside the schools and universities and the broader political issues and struggles which we are taking up outside the schools and universities, then we are going to lose the pulse of history. Both sets of activities are likely to become less relevant, less appropriate to the situation that students and the progressive movement as a whole, find themselves in. And both sets of activity are important.

Organisations within the schools and universities allows the student movement to consolidate its support base, to raise the awareness of students, to force the educational system to play a more meaningful role in South African society. It allows them to expose and exploit the contradictions of South African society, to disorganise the ruling classes.

But developing an internal support base is only half of the task facing the student movement. That student support base has to be mobilised to play a constructive role on a much broader scale — to contribute to the development of the struggle as a whole. But there has to be a link between the two. You can't organise students around one set of issues and then take up a different set of issues which concern a struggle outside the education system because if you do you'll find yourself addressing two different audiences, a student audience on the one hand and a trade union/community audience on the other. You have to somehow marry the two, weld them together. They have to feed into each other.

The issues and demands and campaigns which are being mobilised around in the schools and universities have to lead logically, axiomatically into the consideration of broader social issues. So that if you are taking up a factory or community struggle the reason for you taking it up has to somehow flow out of the type of demands and issues that you have been raising within your schools and universities. And at the same time the political content of those broader issues must be fed back into your local structures in such a way that it raises

the awareness of your members and helps to strengthen your local organisation. There has to be a reciprocal, a dialectical relationship between the two.

To take the NUSAS theme of Campus Action for Democracy as an example — it had the potential of mobilising students around issues which they thought were important, but which were not limited to students, which raised broader issues about the nature of our society. But somehow the link was not adequately made. That theme has not provided a framework within which on and off campus issues can be dealt with, a framework which would make it logical and necessary for students to be concerned and involved with both on and off campus issues.

Let me give you an example. I attended a meeting at Wits a few years ago on the Wilson-Rowntree boycott. Two unionists spoke. They gave good speeches and it was a very rousing and important meeting. But when I looked at the audience of about 400 I saw that very few of them were students, and those who were represented your more involved actionists and organisers. I felt that the issue, the Wilson-Rowntree boycott, had not arisen out of the mainstream of student activity on campus and the mobilisation being created by that meeting was not being converted into ongoing organisation on the campus.

Let's look at some of the other reasons why I regard the student movement as so important. Firstly it acts as a recruiting and training ground for activists. If we look at struggles in South Africa and world-wide we see that many leading activists received their initial politicization and organisational training in the student movement.

The second reason is that people involved in student organisations are all involved in the education process; in thinking, analysing, questioning. This means often that they are developing a higher level of knowledge and awareness than the rest of society. Students see things that the rest of society doesn't see. They develop a progressive analysis to a greater extent than other organisations. I think that a lot of the progressive analysis that the trade unions and community organisations have assimilated actually originated in the student movement and I cannot overstress the importance of the student movement as the melting pot for that progressive analysis, as the generator of that progressive analysis.

At the moment there is a drastic shortage of progressive analysis of our struggle, analysis that would help organisations develop more relevant and effective strategies and which would in turn enable the people in those organisations to understand the oppressive conditions under which they live and work.

Another facet of this process, and again one which the student movement is particularly well placed to cater for, is information. The saying that "information is power" has become a cliché and we need to give it a concrete political role. Information in our society is monopolised and controlled and only fed to us in selected doses to limit what we know and consequently what we think. The student movement has the intellectual and material resources to be able to make information and knowledge available to other progressive organisations.

We can also plug in a lot of other organisational resources. Relatively speaking the student movement is highly organised. It has a lot of facilities and resources at its disposal, anything from printing equipment right through to the ability to organise a seminar or a conference.

Thirdly, I think that the student movement can play an important role in campaigns. Anti-Republic Day, the Wilson-Rowntree and red mean boycotts, anti-SAIC and Release Mandela are all campaigns in which students played an important part. And I think that the contribution of students to such campaigns is particularly important because the student movement is, to a greater extent than other progressive organisations, organised on a national scale. I don't think that any other constituency of progressive activity can mobilise and initiate activity on a national scale as effectively as the student movement can.

The nationwide stoppage by some 70 000 workers in protest at the death in detention of trade unionist Dr Neil Aggett is an example of the potential power of the labour movement and a highly significant example in its own right but I think that it represents at this stage at least, something of a special case and doesn't affect my argument about the role of students in "political" campaigns.

In addition, student organisations have a more highly politicised

support base. Obviously, I don't want to exaggerate the political awareness of students, but let's face it, the way students take up issues, the discussions and debates that go with issues, are more explicitly political than in other branches of the progressive movement. This is partly due to the greater freedom that sometimes prevails in the schools and universities, but it's also got something to do with youth, the fact that youth question, youth have energy, youth are rebellious. This often means that students can develop an issue into an explicitly political one far more quickly and sometimes more thoroughly than other groups can.

On a more sober note though, I think that we still have a long way to go in consolidating student organisation. The student movement has at times also fallen into the trap of mistaking a high degree of mobilisation for organisation and radical rhetoric for political education. This has sometimes resulted in a neglect of basic student issues and organisation. It is essential that local structures be built which can initiate programmes to take up those basic student issues on an on-going basis so that students always have organised activities in which they can involve themselves and which are doing something for them, helping them deal with day-to-day problems.

I think that youth organisation in the communities is going to grow and become an increasingly important focus of activity. Youth have often provided much of the people power for community based organisation but have only recently started to concentrate on building their own organisational structures and activities. An interesting example in this regard is the rapid growth of the Lenz Youth League. Lenz is an Indian community near Johannesburg which after the 1980 school boycott had four SRC's established itself and is in the process of organising a week-long youth festival. Obviously the raised awareness and organisational energy resulting from the boycotts has been channelled into youth rather than school organisation.

I mentioned earlier that a new approach to organisation, mobilisation and education emerged after 1977 — an approach which emphasised grassroots, democratic organisations around issues which directly affected people. This "new wave" has been most noticeable in the sphere of community organisation. Taking up issues like housing, high rents, bus fares, township conditions, health and child care to name only some of the more common areas of activity these organisa-

tions have established themselves in their communities and have developed local leadership and organisational structures which will play an increasingly important role in the progressive movement over the next couple of years.

Community groups have developed an exceptionally democratic method of organising by using a system of house meetings and street representatives. A house meeting is essentially a discussion between an organiser and members of one or more households over particular issues that concern them. As such, it ensures the direct participation of residents in defining issues and deciding on courses of action. This door-to-door mobilisation usually leads up to the election of an action committee and eventually the formation of a civic or Residents Association.

In taking up issues community organisations have been concerned to link up their immediate local demands to broader demands of the oppressed majority. The point that has come out every time is that problems experienced at a local level in the community can be traced back to the lack of political rights and representation experienced by the members of that community. Because people do not have the role or because no effective or meaningful local government structures exist, people have no say in decision-making processes. And because they don't elect those who do make decisions, they don't act in the people's interests.

The same problem is mirrored at a national political level — the people don't have the right to elect the government and it consequently does not represent their interests. The ultimate long-term solution to local community problems then lies in the achievement of majority rule in a unitary state.

Certain overall demands, certain rights, have also been stressed, such as "housing for all" and "rents which people can afford". This is very important in terms of what I was saying earlier about the importance of drawing out the political content and potential of local grassroots issues, and in terms of defining issues in such a way that they provide a basis for on-going programmes of action. So that rather than just taking up a local community issue which is fought and won or lost and then disappears, we take it up in a way that ensures that the issue endures in terms of both organisation and awareness.

The Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation, PEBCO, for example, made clear that while it was a civic organisation concerned with local community problems, all the issues it was taking up were at the same time political in that they were part and parcel of the exploitative and oppressive system people are living under. PEBCO also stressed that it was not a political organisation, and that although the long-term solution to civic problems was a political one, that a national political movement, and not a local civic one, was needed to wage those political struggles.

Community organisations have provided a means through which people can get involved, where they can develop confidence in their own organisation and power, where they can learn the skills of organisation and democracy and, through the experience of struggle, come to understand their situation in an oppressive society. They have developed a progressive, community based leadership and have started to reach out to other local organisations to form regional umbrella structures.

This is a particularly interesting and important development in that it may be the first step in overcoming the limitations of isolated, individual struggles. The umbrella structures can establish a degree of unity and co-ordination which greatly extends the potential of issues taken up by the individual affiliates. The next step will be to try and overcome the uneven growth of community organisation. All over the country we find cities with a high degree of organisation in some communities and almost none in neighbouring communities. Overcoming this unevenness I would see as a priority for community organisations over the next 18 months.

At the same time, community organisations, and in particular their umbrella bodies, need to develop their working relationships with other spheres of progressive activity. By this I mean linking up with similar groups locally and nationally, and with other spheres of organisation like trade unions, student and women's groups.

One final point on the question of the structure of community organisation. I discussed the problem of sustaining organisation, and particularly by the involvement of the members or supporters, and I gave the example of the trade union which has a membership that it has to constantly defend against the bosses. This obviously makes it easier

Community organisations have been relatively successful in overcoming these problems but I can't help feeling that if they are to become more effective, if they are to develop from here, that they are going to have to explore new and different organisational forms and structures. Membership, elections, full-time organisers, local offices are just some of the options which spring to mind, and I'm sure that the appropriate ones will emerge in time from the concrete organisational experience of these groups.

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