
overextend their organisational resources, that they cannot effectively represent those workers. So they had to become more strategic about who they organised and where they organised, even if it meant turning workers away and refusing to sign them up.

The third problem flowing out of the issue orientation of some of our organisations is that it pursues them into a reactive style of activity because the issues are often defined by our oppressors. The issue are being forced upon us and we are forced to react, to resist, but the initiative is not ours. We are not defining what issues we take up, when we take them up and how we take them up.

We need to plan our own programme of activities for the year, preferably around a common theme, but to do so in a way that still leaves us the flexibility to take up issues as they arise. And if our theme is an appropriate one, those issues which do arise, will more than likely fit into the broad thrust of our activity anyway. The important point to remember though, is that such a programme will mean that we are not dependent on issues for our activity, and that in reacting to those issues we don't neglect our on-going grassroots activity.

In this regard, I think that it's important that we define our organisation around contradictions. In a repressive society like ours, we can identify different sites of struggle — the factories, the communities, the educational system, the oppression of women — and within each site of struggle, there are different issues which we can take up. But rather than defining our organisation according to those issues, we must understand the contradictions at work in that particular site of struggle.

Take the trade union as an example. The reason for the existence of a trade union is the fact that the wealth produced by a lot of people is appropriated by a few and this sets up an antagonistic relationship between workers and bosses. And that antagonism doesn't come and go, it doesn't disappear. It might vary in intensity and form but it's a permanent contradiction, and so the interests of the workers always need to be defended. This means that the trade union always has work to do on behalf of its members. Hence its structure of worker-members electing factory based committees and appointing full time organisers.

Turning to the element of mobilization, I think that we must distinguish between spontaneous or unorganised mobilisation and mobilisation on the basis of organisation. Spontaneous mobilisation is the kind that springs up when people have simply had enough, when the level of oppression and exploitation which people have to bear, reaches an intolerable level and things just break loose. We've seen this happen in the bus boycotts in Natal in late '79, in the boycotts of schools and in wildcat strikes.

Although this spontaneous mobilisation is generally unorganised, organisations are usually drawn in once things are underway and this presents enormous problems because such action is really difficult to channel and consolidate. And since it is usually unplanned there's generally no real strategy behind it and so you're often dealing with ill-advised action which has little hope of succeeding. What's more, spontaneous action tends to be militant and confrontationalist as well, and often strays outside the bounds of legality.

The result is often that such spontaneous action is ruthlessly suppressed and any established organisation which has responded to the needs of those people and involved itself in their struggle may well be weakened or even smashed in the process.

The same goes for issues like anti-Republic Day which I discussed earlier. In such cases our oppressors force us to take the issue up, even though it may not fit in with our organisational thrust and may contradict the strategies we are pursuing, and despite the fact that we may not have any organisation designed to wage such struggles. In all such cases the art that we are going to have to learn is how to respond to spontaneous mobilisation and spontaneous issues in such a way that we do not abandon our on-going programmatic activities and do not weaken or destroy our organisation in the process and manage to translate some of that mobilisation into organisation.

We know that we are going to be faced with issues which we have no option but to take up, and as the conditions under which the majority of our people's lives get worse, we can expect more and more spontaneous outbursts and so we must develop organisational forms and strategies that will allow us to take up such issues, to channel them constructively and to consolidate whatever gains are made.

I have argued earlier that organisation around particular issues in the spheres of labour, community, women and students is important in itself but must never be seen as an end-in-itself. This is something, however, which has to be realised practically and strategically. It has to be a real commitment. We cannot simply say that we are organising for ultimate political liberation because we might find that we put years and years of organisation and effort into an organisation and then find in fact that we have not advanced the cause of liberation.

We may consolidate an organisation and possibly lighten the burden that people have to bear in their daily lives, but we won't necessarily set in motion the processes of political liberation.

I think that the essential element, the catalyst in that process of liberation is education, and this is ultimately the text that our organisations have to pass. Too often in the last couple of years we've relied on advertising rather than education. We've referred to progressive symbols in the course of our struggles, we've referred to the Freedom Charter, we've linked our specific demands to broader long-term political demands, but we haven't in fact educated people. We've drawn those links at mass meetings, in statements, in pamphlets and publications, but we haven't made them effectively in terms of the day to day existence of our members.

At the same time as we ensure that during a boycott or campaign we stress the broader political aspects of our demands, we must ensure that our organisers, in their everyday contact with our supporters draw out the political dimension of people's lives, people's lived experience. Every aspect of their organisation, everything they do, contains within it a lesson about the nature of South African society, a lesson about where we should be going politically, about what a future society would look like.

Organisers must be trained to be able to draw out those lessons in their daily work and contact with members. Involvement and experience in organisation is the key to raising people's awareness but it needs to be drawn out and reflected back to those people so that they can fully grasp and understand it.

Let me turn now to an impressionistic survey of the different fronts of progressive activity. The current phase of labour organisation began in the early '70's when student activity around the issue of poverty

wages combined with the spontaneous upsurge of worker militancy in the Durban strikes in 1973 to produce a number of new unions. Nineteen odd unions emerged in the wake of those strikes and the labour movement continued to grow and consolidate during the seventies.

These unions can be divided into General Unions and Industrial Unions. General Unions are open to workers from all sectors of industry be they motor or metal or food or textile workers whereas industrial unions are open only to workers in one specific sector of industry eg. motor workers.

The impetus for the growth of general unions came partly from the fact that workers from many different sectors of industry wanted to join and it seemed to be important to develop a broad worker base which would unite the working class across industrial boundaries.

General unions, however, seem to be moving in the direction of an industrial union style of organisation because they've found it difficult to consolidate their support and strength in any one industry. It doesn't help when you are negotiating with a metal employer to be well-organised in the textile industry. This problem recurs on a national scale as well since a consolidated presence in one industry on a national scale greatly increases your bargaining power with individual employers. And a national presence is becoming necessary in some industries as the spread of monopoly control of industry meant that you are in fact dealing with one employer on a national basis.

In addition, some general unions are finding that their diverse support base does not allow them to organise strategically enough and that there are certain factories and certain sectors of industry in which it is more strategic to organise than others. For example, if one particular employer occupies a very influential position within the private sector then to organise in that employer's factories and to win concessions could have a ripple effect on other employers (and workers) in that industry.

There's been another interesting shift in the nature of trade union organisation over the last couple of years. In the '70's managements generally refused to acknowledge the existence of trade unions. They were reluctant to concede the right of workers to be represented by

a trade union and so a lot of the struggle between management and labour was over the recognition by management of unions. And after the Wiehahn Commission proposals resulted in a provision for government registration of unions, the Government appealed to management not to deal with or recognise unions who had not registered under the government's provisions.

But they could not stem the tide of history. Independent black trade unions continued to grow and as they came to represent a majority of the workforce managements were forced to break with the government and deal with them registered or unregistered. I think that the growth of labour organisation on the east coast during 1980 in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban, spearheaded by unions who rejected the government's registration provisions, was crucial in splitting management off from the government's strategy and decisively tipping the scales in favour of management recognition of black trade unions.

This is not to suggest of course that managements are falling over themselves to recognise black trade unions, but I do feel that the frontline has shifted from struggles over recognition to struggles over co-optation and control. Management's advanced guard – the monopoly corporations, industrial relations specialists, some academics and journalists – have accepted that black trade unions are here to stay but are determined to define the rules of the game in such a way as to neutralize as far as possible any challenge to their domination in the workplace.

Now the growing acceptance by management of the inevitability (and possibly even the necessity) of black trade unions and their attempts to co-opt unions coincides with an interesting dynamic within and most of the black unions, namely an incredible growth in membership over the last few years which has stretched their organisational resources to the point where unions can not hope to consolidate the large numbers of new members into solid factory structures. The Metal and Allied Workers Union, for example, virtually doubled in size in 1981, going from 15 000 or 18 000 members to around 35 000.

And so we have a situation developing where union organisers who have been swamped by the growth in membership and cannot effectively consolidate their factory organisation are being offered recogni-

tion by management. Having signed up a significant proportion of the workforce, they find themselves invited by management, to negotiations and presented with long and complex recognition agreements drafted by industrial relations specialists.

This shifts the site of struggle from the factory floor to the board room and offers the Union an established working relationship with management, but according to management's ground rules as enshrined in their legalistic recognition agreement with all its clauses and sub-clauses and qualifications and so on. And so I predict that more and more unions are going to find themselves in a Catch 22 situation where the offer of recognition on management's terms is going to be irresistible because they in fact do not have the organisational resources to effectively mobilise their membership, to raise their consciousness to confront management and wage a battle against them.

However, management's desire to co-opt unions does not mean that they are taking a softer line in dealing with organised labour. On the contrary. The success of their strategy depends on them being able to force unions to accept an institutionalised form of collective bargaining. One of the issues over which this battle is being currently fought is that of participation by independent black unions in Industrial Councils.

Industrial Councils are statutory bodies where management and labour meet to set minimum conditions for an industry. Now many unions believe that negotiations should take place within the factory between workers and their individual management.

They feel that the Councils are dominated by management and tame white unions and that their bargaining power in such a forum would be diluted. And anyway they want to preserve the direct involvement of workers in negotiations at a factory level.

So participation in Industrial Councils is being seen by many unions as the threshold of co-option which they don't want to cross. That crossing it would involve them in a bureaucratised, institutionalised system of industrial relations which has less potential for organising, mobilising and educating the workers.

Managements have predictably taken a really hard line over the question of participation in Industrial Councils and have refused

to negotiate with unions outside of the councils and so this has become one of the most contentious points in labour relations over the last two years.

For example, there were 44 reported strikes in the metal industry on the East Rand in the first six months of 1982. 30 of these concerned wage demands. Most employers refused to hold discussions with workers outside of the industrial council, while the Metal and Allied Workers Union which was involved in 33 of the 44 strikes rejected the Industrial Council and insisted on plant level bargaining. The Industrial Council system was thus the underlying issue since many of these strikes would not have occurred had management not refused to bargain with workers outside of the Industrial Council.

Wages have continued to be the major cause of strikes. Of the 111 strikes in the final six months of 1982, 63 were over wages. A new issue has exploded on the labour scene, however, and that is retrenchments. FOSATU Unions, for example, didn't have one strike over retrenchments in 1981, and yet this year they've had 16. Managements have been taking a particularly hard line against demands for living wages and retrenchment and as the economy moves into a recession, I think that disputes over both issues will escalate. Management are likely to try and maintain high profit margins by keeping wages as low as possible while at the same time retrenching workers in this way for further cutting their wage bill and forcing the reduced workforce to work even harder and so boosting productivity.

A major new development in the pattern of strike activity was that of the rolling strike. This is a strike which breaks out in one factory but then quickly spreads through the area. The East Rand saw two rolling strikes in the metal industry. The first wave struck in February/March and totalled 20 strikes before it washed over, and the second wave, in late April/early May came seven strikes. Northern Natal was also hit by rolling strikes and at one stage an entire township stayed away from work in support of worker demands. These rolling strikes seem to represent a high degree of class consciousness amongst workers which is leading them to adopt a more assertive, more militant approach.

Unemployment is likely to increase dramatically this coming year and is going to be one of the critical issues facing all progressive organisations. Unions will find themselves fighting against retrench-

ments while community-based organisations, including student, youth and women's groups are going to have to cope with the rising numbers of unemployed. On a slightly more positive note, I also think that unemployment could be an issue around which community, trade union, youth, student and women's organisations could co-operate in developing a co-ordinated strategy. Hopefully, united action of this sort would help to improve and consolidate the working relationship between the different spheres of progressive activity.

The relationship between trade unions and community groups has been uneven to say the least. We can trace the history of the relationship back to 1979 when Fattis and Monis workers, having gone on strike, saw that they could increase their bargaining power if people in communities stopped buying Fattis and Monis products. If Fattis and Monis sales dropped and the company began to feel the pinch they might become a lot more amenable to negotiating with the workers. But the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) which represented the striking workers played no direct role in organising the boycott and this led to the absurd situation where the AFCWU reached an agreement with the Fattis and Monis management and wanted to call off the boycott but one of the organisations which had been organising the boycott refused because they disagreed with the agreement.

The meat strike in mid-1980 saw the pendulum swing back to the opposite extreme. The General Workers' Union which represented the striking workers insisted on being directly in control of the boycott. Members of GWU chaired the boycott committee and meetings were held at the GWU offices. This was also not a satisfactory arrangement, however, and so we still do not have a precedent which encapsulates the correct balance between the two constituencies - total control of the one by the other or total autonomy of the one from the other.

On the level of support activity then, we have the problem of establishing the equality of the different progressive organisations so that they can lend support to each other without dominating or being dominated. This problem, however, manifests itself at the level of united or joint action. United fronts between trade union, community, student and women's groups are obviously essential on issues such as anti-Republic Day, anti-SAIC and Release Mandela. The people involved in the community and trade union organisations representing the

working class need to come together in a broad front to plan together and organise together.

GWU have recently put forward three points which they feel should guide any such relationship. Firstly, they stress that they are primarily a workers organisation concerned with factory organisation and factory issues. Secondly, their democratic structure makes it necessary for them to first seek a mandate from their members before participating in broader struggles. Thirdly, they affirm their commitment to a national democratic struggle. And I feel that this is the crucial point to bear in mind about any alliance of trade union, community, student and women's organisations. Certainly any such alliance must take into account the independence of each organisation, the fact that they have different support bases, that they are democratic and have to take the interests of their members into account when allying with each other, but the crucial overriding factor is that all these progressive organisations are part of a national democratic struggle. Not one of them is the national democratic struggle.

Unfortunately, we do have problems with organisations seeing themselves as the struggle, or as its leading component, rather than as just a part of the national democratic struggle. The national democratic struggle is a different level altogether. It is not a trade union. It is not a student or community or women's group. It is the explicitly political organisation, mobilisation and education of people.

None of the first level progressive organisations is a political organisation. They take up issues as they affect a particular group of people in a particular place at a particular point in time. And although these first-level issues are ultimately political, and although these first level organisations can and must draw out that political content, they are not waging a political struggle for the political rights of all people. And where first level organisations do try to take on explicitly political roles, they fall between two stools. They become ineffective first level organisations because they devote less of their energies and resources to building and consolidating first level organisation and they are inadequate second level organisations because they have neither the structure nor the mandate and support base to act as political organisations.

Now this is a delicate balance that the first level organisations have to strike — concentrating on immediate constituency issues while

at the same time drawing out its political content so as to contribute to an overall national democratic struggle. Too many groups lose that balance. We've seen, for example, trade unions maintain that they want nothing to do with political mobilisation. We've seen some student groups concentrate almost exclusively on political mobilisation and not give enough attention to local student issues.

As I stressed earlier in my talk, our first level of organisation has to be on a constituency basis. People are brought together in the schools and universities, in the communities and in the factories. In each of these spheres people have the same problems, making it possible to organise them and mobilise them around those issues. But we cannot leave people locked into one compartment of organisation. We cannot statistically define them as students, women or as members of one community or one factory. We cannot limit their involvement to one organisation and one set of issues.

Their experience and their awareness has to be one which goes beyond the confines of any one sphere of organisation for the simple reason that no one sphere is capable of liberating our people. First level organisation must move people beyond the limited problems and solutions of student, women, factory and community organisations and instil in their members an awareness of, and a commitment to, national political liberation.

So we have to start breaking down those compartments between our organisations as we organise, as we mobilise, and as we educate. If we've got to transcend those first level organisations without destroying or neglecting them, the obvious way to do that is to build a degree of co-ordination between the different first level organisations. This will immediately allow us to straddle those organisational boundaries so that instead of community organisations fighting on one front and trade unions on another, we could start to bring those fronts together and advance as a progressive movement.

But this would still be a progressive movement at the first level. The organisations, linking up on an issue like, for example, unemployment, are still going to be doing so at the first level. They are not political organisations and they haven't built a political movement yet. Their structures, their issues, their mandates, their membership are all still growing out of those first level issues, and it is essential that these organisations continue to organise, mobilise and educate people at that level.

These first level organisations form one half of the process of liberation; but liberation is more than just the sum total of all their activities and a national democratic struggle is more than just the co-ordinated struggles of first level organisations.

So our first problem is how we are going to start to co-ordinate and unite our progressive organisations? But secondly, having done that, how are we then going to build a progressive national democratic movement? What structures will it have? What issues will it take up? How will it mobilise? These are all questions which we need to confront because otherwise we are going to build a foundation which can't support the structures that we want to erect.

Let me turn to the realm of student and youth organisations. The student movement has a proud history. Despite its limitations it has played a key role at crucial phases in South African history. In 1956 NUSAS led the campaign against the segregation of the universities and militant campus activity was in many senses given its definition by these campaigns in the '50's. In the early '70's student involvement in labour played a major part in launching the current wave of trade union organisation. The nationwide uprisings of '76 and '77 were student-led, and in the late '70's the student movement played a major role in the remoulding of a national, non-racial democratic movement. Student organisations have been central in articulating a non-racial, democratic position and in fact, the current popularity and wide acceptance of the Freedom Charter is not entirely undue to the emphasis that the student movement has laid on the democratic principles enshrined in the Charter.

However, I can't help feeling that the student movement has not lived up to its full potential in recent years. One of the tasks facing NUSAS, COSAS and AZASO at these congresses and council meetings is to devise strategies and programmes for the coming year which will encapsulate their potential role at this point in our struggle. Let me expand on this point a bit.

The contribution of the student movement to the struggle has to be on the basis of its student activity. The same goes for the unions, community and women's groups. All of these must be working amongst their constituents in such a way that they cater for their immediate interests and contribute to the national democratic strug-

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