

PP/JM

11th January, 1973.

Memorandum to the Shiebusch Commission of Enquiry into Certain Organisations on the paper presented to the NUSAS seminar at Botha's Hill by Jonty Driver - by Paul Pretorius

It must be stressed initially that most of the comment included in this memorandum is my own personal viewpoint.

I have picked out several points in the paper and commented briefly on these but I would nevertheless make one general comment. That is that many of the terms and phrases used in Driver's paper may be misleading because their meaning and connotations might well have been vastly different in student circles in 1964 to what the same terms and phrases might mean today.

Bearing this in mind I have the following comments to make.

When Driver terms NUSAS non-communist I believe that he is not being quite accurate. He is quite correct when he says that NUSAS does not have any form of communist ideology, or any ideology for that matter, and that it is not controlled by communists. The point to note about communists being members however is that NUSAS is a completely open organization and would not prevent anyone from participating in its activities provided that such member complied with the constitution of the organisation and with the law. This does not prevent the organization from opposing authoritarian government policies, be they nationalist, communist or any other. For instance a national party supporter could be a member of NUSAS, but the organization could still oppose National Party policy. The word anti-communist has been distorted by National Party propaganda and I think it is for this reason that Driver preferred to use the word non-communist. According to my interpretation of the reference by Driver, it can in no way be deduced that NUSAS is in any way in league with or controlled by communists.

I disagree with Driver when he uses the term Liberation Movement in the way he does. To me the term refers to those organizations and people who have chosen to use force and violence to overthrow the South African government, normally from outside the country's borders. It would certainly not refer to any organization working openly in South Africa for peaceful and legal change.

Driver's use of the term revolution may have some academic merit but it seems that his choice of a word does have unfortunate connotations which would arise by people using a restrictive interpretation of the word, i.e. violent overthrow of the state. This however is a matter of semantics and if people wish to twist the real meaning of the word used in its proper context there is very little one can do about that. Suffice it to say that NUSAS is a legal organization working for peaceful changes in South Africa.

2) Martin Legassik's propositions

The views of Legassik as stated from pages 2 to 5 of the paper by Driver are all based on a particular view of what a student union should be. He sees as the prime aim of a student union the political liberation of a country according to his particular point of view. I disagree fundamentally with his view of what a student union's prime function is. This function must always be determined by the policy-making bodies of the union in the light of student views and aspirations. The union should actively provide for a multitude of these views and aspirations on a variety of levels.

When Legassik talks of NUSAS being schizophrenic, he is referring to an issue that no longer exists in NUSAS. That is the attempts of the organisation to represent the aspirations of black students and the black population of the country. Now with the breakaway of SASO and the greater majority of black students from NUSAS the question is an academic one only. NUSAS does not claim to represent black aspirations and whether it can or not is thus not relevant any longer.

My personal view on the matter is that while it remains impossible for NUSAS to become a part of the liberation movement as defined by Legassik and Driver, even if this were possible, I could never support an elitist group of white South African students who are part of a privileged group trying to 'liberate' another group on behalf of the latter. It is my conviction that true freedom can only be attained for an oppressed group by the very group that is oppressed.

As I have said above, I am clearly opposed to Legassik's three fundamentals for a student movement in South Africa. He sees as the task for a student movement in South Africa a political liberation according to a single ideology. My reasons for opposing his viewpoint are stated above.

Legassik is being overdramatic and purely nonsensical when he says that the student movement might have to move its base outside South Africa. Even if a movement of the type he envisages could exist it could never retain support without a continued and open presence within the country.

2) Magnus Gunther's propositions

When Magnus Gunther says that any role of the National Union must be determined by internal priorities and not by a desire to cultivate international acceptance and support I agree with him. I do believe however in international contact between students as being an important function of the National Union.

2) ... I agree

I agree too with Gunther when he says that the following are some of the roles that NUSAS does play (while not necessarily being the prime reason for the existence of the organization):

- that it is a vehicle of protest against the government
- that it is a source of public education and public encouragement in the defence of fundamental freedoms and democracy
- that it has been a practical and everyday experience in nonracialism.

It is not the role of NUSAS however to bridge the gap between the various forces in the liberation movement (whatever that may mean) nor do I agree that it is the most effective source for the training of leaders in this country.

I do agree however that one of the major functions of NUSAS and indeed any student organisation is to equip those who pass through it with skills and abilities in various fields and on a number of levels.

That NUSAS should actively seek to have itself banned is a preposterous suggestion, and I agree with Gunther insofar as he rejects this suggestion.

I am opposed to the transformation of NUSAS into an individual enrolment organisation because I believe that this would negate one of the basic principal functions of NUSAS, i.e. to act as a student union. On a purely practical basis, however, Gunther's objections to individual enrolment as a basis for membership are largely valid.

While I think that for NUSAS to become an underground overseas based organization is a flight of ridiculous fancy, his objections are in my opinion also valid.

I am in basic agreement with Driver when he describes NUSAS as a democratic organization with a democratic policy and decision-making process.

I agree further with Driver's views expressed in relation to NUSAS adapting to new situations and ensuring that as an organisation it progresses and changes with the times.

NUSAS has changed somewhat since the time when Driver expressed his views and while the provision of skills and abilities to student leaders who will later play some role in society may remain an EFFECT of involvement in the affairs of NUSAS, it is no longer the chief AIM and FUNCTION of the organisation.

When Driver says that one of the main roles of NUSAS is the 'unity of the liberation movement' I must disagree with him for reasons that I have outlined above. (John Daniel, a president of NUSAS in 1968, also expressed disagreement with Driver's views on this point in a paper given to a seminar in April 1968). NUSAS furthermore no longer distinguishes between public and private projects and all NUSAS programmes receive as much publicity as we are able to give them. I agree with Driver though



that NUSAS should not attempt to make political capital out of the good work it does and the priority is obviously that the aims of the various programmes and projects of NUSAS are fulfilled as best and as efficiently as possible.

My rationale for student services, 'welfare for students' differs from that of Driver's in that in my opinion this is one of the inherent tasks for any student organisation that claims to serve students and not some sort of public relations stunt.

I agree with Driver's rationale for the education of white students if this is to be referred to only in a political context, as Driver does. However, education for its own sake is equally important in my opinion.

One of the most valuable roles that NUSAS has performed in the past is the provision of practical experience in non-racialism. This is no longer the case as there are now very few blacks active in the organisation. It is still however an important role of the organisation to uphold this ideal wherever possible and remains one of the cardinal principles of NUSAS.

I believe that through public protest NUSAS fills a very important function in South Africa although I do concede that its immediate effects are limited.

As far as international pressure against apartheid (not against South Africa) is concerned, wherever this is legal and peaceful, I feel it is important to use this method to bring home to South Africans that apartheid will not be tolerated by right thinking people throughout the world.

I do not feel competent to comment on Driver's conclusion as to whether NUSAS should have changed in 1964 or not as I am not fully aware of the circumstances under which he was operating at the time. I can however comment on the qualifications Driver makes of his conclusion (page 14 of the paper):

- 1) There is now no distinction between the private and public activities of NUSAS.
- 2) Whether NUSAS is on the offensive or the defensive is dictated largely by the type of activity the organisation embarks upon and by the immediate circumstances in which it finds itself. This cannot be directed by the attitude adopted in public statements, that Driver suggests, for he is only suggesting another form of defence.
- 3) I do not understand what exactly Driver means by the term radical.
- 4) I agree that NUSAS policy must continue to develop, but along the lines dictated only by its students.
- 5) Agreed.
- 6) I personally agree with Driver's interpretation of the term non-racialism.
- 7) &
- 8) These suggestions are not feasible in NUSAS any longer.

The two points made by Driver on the page 15 headed conclusion are to my mind largely valid.