

# SASO

SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS' ORGANISATION  
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DURBAN  
Tel. No. 31778  
Cables: SASORG

3rd March, 1972.

TO: ALL SRC's  
SASO Local Committee,  
Advisory Panel.

RE: SASO v. NIC CONTROVERSY

I wish to bring to your notice the facts surrounding the controversy between SASO and the Natal Indian Congress:-

BACKGROUND:

The Natal Indian Congress was founded by the Indian passive resistance leader Mahatma Gandhi in 1894. As a political movement it stood four-square on the universal principles of democracy and a common humanity and its action was set on passive resistance and civil defiance. It saw the storm through the repressive '60 when most of its leaders were banned or arrested.

Because the Natal Indian Congress itself was never banned Mewa Ramgobin (who married a granddaughter of Gandhi) started the revival movement of NIC in 1971. This revival was seen as 'the symbol of a revival of our faith in freedom, in justice, in truth' Besides rejecting separate development as a way of life Congress vowed 'to be a movement against sectionalism in race, colour, social and political status or creed' At this meeting the Ad Hoc Committee received a mandate to revive Congress and a Convention was set for October at Phoenix Settlement. A message of support and solidarity with the Indian people from SASO was read. We made it clear that we saw Congress's role as tied with the suffering and destiny of all the black peoples of this country and maintained that all forms of sectionalism among the blacks would militate against the black men's struggle.

At Convention the Chairman noted that 'Congress ..... must not be merely for the people, but one which must grow out of the struggle and the dynamism of the vast mass of the oppressed ..... must aspire towards the unity of all the oppressed and although the Congress bears the name 'Indian' we must not forget our human responsibilities and regard towards other sections of the people.'

At the same Convention the Durban Central NIC Branch's memorandum was rejected out of hand.. The memorandum read in part:

'6) While Mahatma Gandhi may have served as the impetus and the crystalising factor in the struggle of the people here towards the end of the last century, this period is exactly where the cherished memory of this great person should remain ensconced,

this period is exactly where the cherished memory of this great person should remain ensconced, not permitted to improve upon a modern and vibrant climate totally unsuited to finite, retrogressive and impractical tenets,

7) in the interests of the black community, Congress immediately give effect to the movement of black consciousness and black solidarity that is prevalent in the entire third world.'

In December Durban Central staged a very successful symposium on Black Consciousness. The idea was to examine and debate the concept as an attempt at formulating future policy for Congress.

At a subsequent Executive meeting the Natal Indian Congress rejected black consciousness and all policies that promote race exclusiveness. It was even suggested that black consciousness is an apartheid concept. One member R. Ramesar, the Permanent Organiser made bold to say that SASO was the architect of black consciousness, '..... in fact propagating the policies of the banned Pan African Congress.' This was duly reflected in the minutes of that meeting and the Chairman saw no legal implications when his attention was drawn to this.

#### THE IMPLICATIONS OF R. RAMESAR'S STATEMENT:

Most Indian students who belong to SASO are also members of NIC. The fear for African domination has always been paramount in many an Indian's mind which is the direct cause of their reticence towards SASO. While black consciousness is all embracing, Pan-Africanism excludes Indians and Coloureds. We noted that Mr. R. Ramesar was in an influential position and the SASO = PAC equation was gaining ground, we felt it was necessary to issue a public statement:

- (1) to reassure many of our members that SASO was for all black students;
- (2) to propagate the policies of a banned organisation is illegal in South Africa, therefore, our very survival was being threatened,
- (3) to reject once and for all the SASO -PAC equation.

A statement was issued to the black press (whose attention was being drawn to the unfortunate events) calling upon both NIC and Mr. Ramesar to apologise and withdraw the statement. Private letters were also written to them warning them about the grave implications of their utterance. The following week we read a letter addressed to us in the press from Mr. Ramesar accompanied by a statement from Mr. Sewpersadh the President of NIC. Mr. Sewpersadh maintained the right of any member of NIC to criticise any organisation. Mr. Ramesar in his open letter upheld the truth of his statement and his right to say it. Thus both parties would neither withdraw the statement nor apologise to SASO. We received a letter from Mr. Ramesar two days afterwards.

#### THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS:

All members of the SASO Executive are at one in the feeling that this entire controversy heralds a break in the ranks of black freedom fighters. We, however, believe that when issues threatening our very survival are brought up we must fight back. It has become clear to us that NIC has declared .....-2-

It has become clear to us that NIC has declared itself the enemy of SASO and black students at large. It becomes evident that we have been reluctant bedfellows. Strange enough it is not only the white oppressor who has made it his task to vanquish SASO but it is proving to be the determination of a growing number of 'non-whites' too. Hence we had to find a quick counter to save our lives against NIC.

However, we have not withdrawn our statement of support to Congress whenever we see the best interests of all black students served thereby. The determination 'to project at all times the black consciousness image culturally socially and educationally' shall remain the cornerstone of our policy.

Hence:

Aware of our above stand and taking full cognisance of the insult we have received from the Natal Indian Congress and noting full well their 'killer' approach towards SASO; we have nevertheless refrained from taking further action against the NIC for defaming us and their vicious animus injuriandi, so blatantly unmasked in Mr. Sewpersadh's statement to the press, will not shake us from our resolve to: 'commit ourselves to the realisation of the worth of the black man, the assertion of his human dignity and to promoting consciousness and self-reliance of the black community.'

Power and Solidarity!

Yours faithfully,

.....  
N. Pityana.

(Secretary-General)