

## Chapter Two

# BLACK ORGANISATIONS EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL GROUPS

ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL  
ADVANCEMENT OF AFRICAN PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA  
(ASSECA)

### *Background*

ASSECA WAS ESTABLISHED in 1967 through the efforts of the late Mr P.Q. Vundla and Mr M.T. Moerane. Initially Asseca was designed to operate mainly in the Reef area but the leadership soon saw the need for such an organisation to be established on a national basis.

Asseca operates on a city/town branch basis. According to reports tabled at the 1972 Asseca Conference, the organisation has 19 branches in the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Eastern Cape and Western Cape whilst new branches are in the process of being formed in Natal. Each year these branches send delegates to a conference which is the supreme policy-making organ for Asseca.

The Conference elects an Executive of 9 members. The present Executive is headed by Mr M.T. Moerane as President.

### *Activities*

In 1972 Asseca consolidated its drive to interest African people in the education of their children. A point by point account of the work done by Asseca in this field is dealt with in the chapter on Primary and Secondary Education (see Chapter 8).

One of Asseca's goals is the establishment of a R1 million fund for

scholarships for African children. Although, according to some reports, not many scholarships were given at the beginning of the year, the 1972 Asseca Conference decided to give a total of 100 bursaries to each branch at R20 per scholarship. This is regarded as an interim measure whilst the R1 million fund is being built up.

Asseca is a beneficiary from Polaroid's recent decision to pour some funds into black efforts. The First National City Bank has also made some donations to Asseca. At home, Asseca claims to have been mainly responsible for some grants to African education made by the South African Breweries. Representatives of Asseca are involved in the administration of these funds. In addition the *Star* of Johannesburg has started a fund, TEACH, also earmarked for use in African education around that area. The *Argus* in Cape Town has a similar fund, LEARN.

In April, 1972, Asseca held its annual conference at Port Elizabeth. Due to the work load and to some poor planning, the conference could not be finished and had to be adjourned till July in Bloemfontein where it was finished. The opening speaker for the 1972 Asseca Conference was Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in the United States. Dr van Zyl, Secretary for Bantu Education was also a guest speaker at the conference. Dr van Zyl was booed by the crowd at several points in his speech but particularly when he stated that in South Africa everybody has a vote but it is a complicated matter and it would probably take a long time to explain.

The major decision taken in Bloemfontein was that administration of funds arising out of branch efforts would be decentralised to allow branches to make allocations of scholarships to pupils and students from their areas. The branches are still free to recommend to the National Executive any needy cases from their areas.

In the elections at the end of the conference, Messrs. Moerane, Mehloimakulu, Kweyama, Mabiletsa, Mokoditsoa, Angoma, Khumalo and Mesdames Mabiletsa and Phakathi were returned to office as Executive members. The Executive now has the discretion to determine whether conference will be held annually or biennially.

### **Natal Workshop for African Advancement (NWA)**

NWA is a new organisation established on the initiative of some African professional people in the Durban area. The organisation is a few months old and its constitution was adopted on the 19 November, 1972 at Lamontville, Durban. Membership to NWA is open to all Africans above 21 and residing in the geographical areas of Natal, Zululand and Kwa-Zulu.

According to its constitution, NWA aims at two main functions: to carry out research into problems affecting the educational, social and economic development of Africans in its area of operation and drawing up relevant programmes designed at alleviating the conditions or eradicating the causes responsible for limitations in the fields mentioned above.

The President of NWA is Mr H.J. Bhengu. Branches of NWA are currently being organised throughout Natal.

## SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS' ORGANISATION (SASO)

### *Background*

The following historical background has been extracted from SASO's 1972 information pamphlet (1):

The emergence of SASO was a manifestation of a mood which had been spreading in the black campuses ever since the collapse of other black students' organisations which preceded SASO.

The complexity of the South African scene makes it impossible to have a pluralistic organisation that satisfies the aspirations of all member groups. Social and political stratifications in the country coupled with preferential treatment of certain groups results in different aspirations prevailing in the different segments of the community. Thus it often becomes almost impossible to show allegiance to both sides of the colour line. Attempting to keep both opposing segments more often than not results in internal strife within the organisation. This is the mood in which black students have decided on several occasions to go it alone.

Dissatisfaction with the white-dominated NUSAS led to the establishment of several black student organisations. The Durban Students' Union and the Cape Peninsula Student's Union who later merged to form the Progressive National Students' Organisation, were fanatically opposed to NUSAS initially and adopted the emotional slogan of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) - 'non-co-operation with the collaborators'. The CPSU refused to co-operate with NUSAS in their protests and other forms of activity. They saw NUSAS as a student wing of the imperialist front whose interest was to control the blacks.

In 1961 and 1962 the African Students' Association (ASA) and the African Students' Union of South Africa (ASUSA) were established. Both ASA and ASUSA were concerned much more with national issues and saw themselves as student wings of the national movements. The differences between ASA and ASUSA were ideological. Attempts to unite the two organisations failed. Perhaps the fact that the blacks never attained a strong solidarity on the campus was attributable to these divided loyalties. Lack of co-ordination prevented progress in any recognisable direction as the various groups were bound to compete with each other. Moreover at the time NUSAS was by no means a spent force on the black campuses and commanded quite a following which capitalised on the differences of opinion between ASA and ASUSA. The fact that this was coupled with intimidation and victimisation of the individual leaders of these organisations served to hasten the collapse of both ASA and ASUSA.

A period of isolation of the black campuses followed the collapse of ASA and ASUSA. The new University Colleges which had been established in 1960 for blacks were born into a tradition of restriction. Their SRC's were under strict surveillance and served more the function of a prefect body than that of student representatives. Not one of the Colleges was allowed any interaction with NUSAS although branches existed underground on some of the campuses. In the meantime NUSAS assumed the role of being a spokesman for these campuses. More often than not this accompanied debates on the 'Separate Universities' Act.

The formation of the University Christian Movement in 1967 gave black students a greater chance of coming together. Because of its more radical stance and also because at that stage it had not developed a 'bad' complexion politically in the eyes of the black campuses' authorities, UCM tended to attract more black students to its conferences and this opened channels of communications amongst the black students.

Amongst the black students, one of the most talked about topics was the position of the black students in the open organisations like NUSAS and UCM. Concern was expressed that these were white-dominated and paid very little attention to problems peculiar to the black student community. In fact some people began to doubt the very competence of a pluralistic group to examine without bias problems affecting one group, especially where the unaffected lot is from the oppressor camp. It was felt that a time had come when blacks had to formulate their own thinking, unpolluted by ideas emanating from a group with lots at stake in the status quo.

At the 1968 UCM Conference about 40 blacks from Fort Hare, Ngoye, Bellville, theological seminaries, Turfloop, UNB (University of Natal, Black Section) and teacher training colleges resolved themselves into a black-caucus and debated the possibility of forming a black student organisation. The UNB group was asked to investigate the chances of holding a conference of black student leaders that same December.

Back at home the UNB representatives openly argued the case for a closer co-operation amongst the black centres and as a result the student body mandated the SRC to convene the Conference.

SASO was ultimately formed at the 1968 December Mariannahill Conference of black student leaders and inaugurated at the 1969 July SASO Conference at Turfloop. At both conferences the student leaders were faced with a complex problem. On the one hand there were accusations by the right wing elements on the black campuses to the effect that the move to establish a blacks-only student organisation was a manifestation of conformism. This attitude was more expressed in liberal white circles.

Then, too, there were several warnings from the middle-of-the-roaders that SASO wouldn't survive for long and therefore its establishment did not warrant the breaking of old ties.

In the face of this the SASO leadership adopted a cautious approach to the 'relations' question. While still maintaining their recognition of NUSAS as a National Union, SASO constantly took a very critical stand regarding NUSAS and refused to consider the possibility of affiliation to the organisation. They maintained their distance from NUSAS and gradually explained themselves to their black campuses with whom they quickly found favour.

At the 1970 SASO Conference the attitudes that had been carefully hidden came to the surface. At once SASO withdrew its recognition of NUSAS as a National Union believing that 'the emancipation of the black peoples in this country depends on the role the black peoples themselves are prepared to play (and) ... aware that in the principles and make-up of NUSAS, the black students can never find expression for aspirations foremost in their minds'. Since the 1970 Conference SASO has been much more positive in its outlook and is working towards a much more intimate involvement with the black community.

1971 saw SASO rapidly increasing her membership and gradually consolidating her position within the black community. The statement that 'we are *black* students and not black *students*' was thoroughly substantiated as SASO set about consulting with many black community organisations in an effort to completely weld the student efforts with those of the rest of the community in this great surge towards attainment of the black man's aspirations. Black Consciousness was highly stressed by SASO as the philosophy and approach to be adopted.

To date SASO has come to be accepted as one of the most relevant organisations in this search for the black man's real identity and of his liberation. The involvement of students with the community by way of community development projects remains a testimony of the oneness of the two, both in plight and in efforts.

On the broader student scene a new and welcome pride is developing amongst black students; a pride in themselves and their achievements; a pride in their own community and a strong faith in the righteousness of their struggle. It is this pride that has ultimately led NUSAS to grudgingly concede that SASO is the only organisation that can effectively represent black students. It is the same pride that has led the black community to welcome the emergence of SASO and to willingly work together with SASO in the setting up of programmes designed to build a self-reliant and a politically conscious black community'.

SASO has mainly been instrumental in the spreading of the philosophy of black consciousness through its projects, publications and papers delivered by its leaders who consistently relate all issues affecting the black man in this country to the need for black people to face these through black consciousness and black solidarity. The slogan 'black man you are on your own' expresses the attitude black students and indeed most black people have now adopted in fighting for survival in this country.

## **Activities and Events**

### *The May student revolts*

For a long time black students at South African universities have al-

ways expressed their rejection of the educational system given to blacks by the South African regime. The full account of the May student revolts is given in the Chapter on Universities (see Chapter 10).

On 13 May student leaders meeting at a SASO seminar in Alice drew up the famous Alice declaration which was mainly to the effect that black students as a sign of protest against the oppressive and racist education they were being given should force the institutions they were studying in to close down by a mass walk-out.

Shortly thereafter the President, Mr Temba Sono, issued a statement to the press communicating this decision to the members of the organisation. Following this declaration a series of protest demonstrations erupted on black campuses all over the country.

Most of the black universities in an attempt to quell these protests decided to close much earlier than scheduled.

The expulsion of the students was subsequently picked up as an issue by a number of parents' committees who sought to liaise with university authorities on behalf of the students. In a sense the attention of the whole population was focussed on the type of educational system operative at black universities.

In a post mortem following the student crises Mr Ben Khoapa, Director of Black Community Programmes wrote (2):

*Black students are increasingly resisting efforts to get them to co-operate in their own educational genocide. No longer can they be contained by white rhetoric; nor can they be seduced into rejecting the interests of their own people. They have learnt what a large number of black people are beginning to learn from our young people that the revolution is not over and it is not just beginning, it's continually with us. The struggle is the educational struggle ... Our job is to assist them in becoming men and women we never became and still love them.*

## **Harassment by the white oppressive forces**

### *(i) Passport refusals*

Passport snags prevented 3 top SASO leaders from fulfilling invitations to take part in student conferences and educational tours overseas (3).

Mr Nyameko Barney Pityana, Secretary-General of SASO, early in the year was refused a passport to tour the U.S.A. at the invitation of the Department of State's Education Travel Programme.

Mr Strini Moodley, Administrative Assistant of SASO, had to abandon a trip also to the U.S.A. after waiting for 5 months in vain for a passport. His trip was scheduled to take place between 28 June and 12 August.

Mr Rubin Phillip, immediate past vice-president of SASO, applied at the beginning of the year for a passport in order to attend the All Africa Conference in Kumasi, Ghana. No word about his application had been received by November although the conference was held in July.

*(ii) Nengwekhulu arrested*

Mr Harry Nengwekhulu, Permanent Organiser of SASO, was arrested at his office by officials of the Non-European Affairs Department. According to Mr Nengwekhulu these officials were in the company of security police (4). He was charged under Section 29 of the Bantu (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act as an 'idle or undesirable Bantu'. Friends managed to locate him at the Modder B prison 28 hours after his arrest and paid his bail fixed at R100,00

Mr Nengwekhulu claims that at the prison he was questioned for nearly an hour by security policemen. In a subsequent court hearing on 31 July, Mr Nengwekhulu's case was dismissed.

*(iii) Mr Jerry Modisane*

Mr Modisane, newly elected President of SASO, was arrested at the station in Cape Town in September and charged with trespassing at the university of the Western Cape. Members of the Western Cape branch had to pay on behalf of Jerry an admission of guilt of R50,00 (5).

This followed an earlier attempt by police to arrest Mr Modisane inside the campus where students heavily protected him and arrest by the police became impossible.

*(iv) Mr Henry Isaacs*

Henry Isaacs, the vice-president of SASO, and 14 other members of the



Western Cape SASO Branch were detained and interrogated at great length by the police both before and after Modisane's visit.

Further to this the security police have issued threats and open accusations 'all levelled at intimidating and frightening us from our resolve' (6).

(v) *Banning of the SASO T-Shirt*

Two designs for the SASO T-Shirt have to date been banned by the Publications Board.

The first one, a black fist with a circle around and the slogans Power and Solidarity and SASO, was banned when the firm that prints the T-Shirts submitted the design for approval.

The second design, a black fist and the letters SASO, was banned in September after about 1 000 skippers had been sold and issued to members.

In a statement in their September/October newsletter SASO said:

'The whole intimidation campaign being conducted by white South Africa comes at a time when SASO and the black consciousness movement are sweeping the country. All attempts to kill the movement cannot succeed to any great degree - black people are coming out of their trance and the philosophy of blackness cannot be intimidated'.

(vi) *SASO Conference Guest Speaker debarred from S.A.*

Prof. Robert Williams of the Union Theological College, New York, invited as guest speaker to open the 3rd General Students' Council of SASO, was at the last moment refused a visa.

Prof. Williams revealed this information in an express letter to SASO a few days before conference. In a statement to conference he said: 'I send you greetings from black people in the U.S.A. and wish your conference a success. I can assure you the black people in America are watching with pride and interest the work of our black brothers in South Africa' (7).

**Sono Expelled**

In a dramatic move at their conference in July at Hammanskraal, SASO expelled their 1971-1972 President, Mr Temba Sono.

This followed a speech by Mr Sono who replaced Prof. Williams as opening speaker. In his speech Mr Sono made the following points:

that SASO had to learn to be flexible in its approach that they had to avoid stagnating in the 'Servitude of ideology' that they should be elastic and learn 'to talk even to our enemies'.

He then called for open-mindedness towards Bantustan leaders, white liberals and even towards security police.

Sono argued that by carrying passbooks and attending universities established by the government they had already compromised themselves and hence it meant that 'we have to accommodate even contradictions in our struggle'.

At first SASO unanimously dissociated itself from the speech made by the President. It was argued that the speech was contradictory to the SASO policy and very dangerous and that it could be regarded as more than the opinion of the President (8).

On the following day a more drastic motion expelling Sono from conference was again unanimously accepted by conference. The motion was moved by Strini Moodley and Barney Pityana. The movers argued that Mr Sono's speech was calculated to mar the image of the organisation and to confuse rank and file membership of the organisation on these crucial issues. This claim was made much more valid by the fact that Mr Sono had not consulted his own executive in spite of his knowledge that this would be a complete about-face by SASO on these issues. It was further felt that choosing that particular occasion during which publicity was concentrated on the movement, was calculated to publicise his utterances as widely as possible to the detriment of the organisation.

Following his unanimous rejection, Sono then left conference and subsequently left the country for the U.S.A. where he is currently studying at Pittsburg.

### **Community Projects undertaken by SASO**

SASO's community projects are aimed at realising one of the aims in their constitution:

'to heighten the sense of awareness and encourage them (students) to become involved in the political, social and economic development of the black people'.

The projects are in various parts of the country, mainly in rural and semi-rural areas, e.g. Winterveldt, in the Transvaal, near Pretoria;

Dududu on the Natal South Coast; and some parts of the Eastern Cape.

Projects so far undertaken involve the following:

*Literacy campaigns* which are given priority because of the high rate of illiteracy in the black community.

*Health projects* which take the form of assistance by students at already established clinics and attempts to establish new ones.

*Physical projects*, e.g. building of schools, clinics, community centres.

*Home Education Schemes* which take the form of assistance to literate adults who want to obtain higher educational certificates.

### *Black Press Project*

At the SASO conference in July, 1972, delegates adopted a resolution instructing the Secretary-General to arrange a seminar on 'The Role of the Black Press in South Africa'.

This seminar was ultimately held on 9-10 October in Johannesburg where black pressmen, businessmen, relevant black organisations, and professional men discussed the role, establishment and management of a black press.

*One recognises the overall intention of the white press as a whole: to suppress relevant news and lend a deliberate bent to general news. But when existing so-called black newspapers also seem part of this calculated campaign of news distortion, and continued adopting and emulating white news standards, then there is very real necessity for a representative black press based on the raison d'être: A black press of the black people, only for the black people and totally by the black people (9).*

At the end of the Seminar a Black Press Commission was elected consisting of:

Howard Lawrence  
Man Lenamile  
Harry Mashabela  
Bokwe Mafuna  
Ben Langa (Publications Director of SASO)

These men were charged with the responsibility to float a private company the objects of which shall be:

to establish and publish a newspaper, initially a monthly;  
to establish a printing house;  
to establish a publishing house;  
to establish the company as manufacturers and distributors of paper and paper articles.

The Black Press Commission has a mandate to complete their business by the beginning of 1973.

## **THE BLACK WORKERS PROJECT**

The SASO Conference in July 1972 adopted a resolution mandating the Permanent Organiser to look into the effectiveness of establishing a Black Workers' Council.

This stemmed from a feeling by delegates that it is a universal understanding for workers to negotiate in a united voice for those conditions they regard as essential to their survival. Yet in South Africa black workers by various legislative enactments and sheer practice have been dissuaded from establishing and belonging to trade unions.

It was further felt that the complexity of the race situation in South Africa, however, does require that this sector of great importance to South Africa's economy should claim adequate representation.

The objects of the Black Workers' Council shall be:

to act as a co-ordinating body to serve the needs and aspirations of black workers;  
to unite and bring about solidarity of black workers  
to conscientise them about their role and obligation toward black development;  
to run clinics for leadership, in-service training and imbue them with pride and self-confidence as people and about their potential as workers.

In an effort to achieve this purpose SASO has set up a Black Workers' Project and together with the Black Community Programmes they have seconded two men to the project to do all the necessary spade work for the establishment of the Black Workers' Council.

## FOREIGN INVESTMENTS

SASO's stand regarding foreign investments is contained in a resolution adopted at their 1971 Conference. The essence of the resolution was a complete rejection of foreign investments on the following grounds:

that foreign investors profit from such exploitation and end up with a vested interest in its maintenance;

they make it possible for South Africa to spurn world opinion to maintain her racist regime;

they boost South Africa's international image and make South Africa an ideal land for investment whilst the social evils practised by the regime are lost sight of;

they give South Africa an economic stability that enables her to gain diplomatic and economic acceptance in the international scene.

Using this as a basis, the SASO Executive had interviews with a number of foreign firms that indicated interest in the stand SASO had taken. These include:

IBM

Volkswagen

Ford Foundation

Anglo American

Anglo Vaal

General Motors only sent an inquiry about the stand.

Other groups and individuals interested in this stand who were interviewed by SASO are:

President Nixon's Advisory Council on Africa and this resulted in one of the members of the group, Mr Edwin

Munger, addressing a symposium of the African Studies Association on the stand taken by SASO as opposed to that adopted by people like Chief Gatsha Buthelezi.

An American Church Mission that conveyed SASO's stand to their congregations in U.S.A.

U.S.A. Congressman Charles Diggs.

## REFERENCES

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2. SASO Newsletter May/June, 1972, Vol. 2 No. 3.
3. SASO Newsletter September/October, 1972, Vol. 2, No. 4.
4. *Rand Daily Mail*, 19.7.72.
5. SASO Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 4.
6. SASO Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 4.
7. Press statement at SASO Conference.
8. *Rand Daily Mail*, 3.7.72.
9. Report on Black Press Conference (Prepared by SASO).