

# **SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS' ORGANISATION**

c/o MEDICAL SCHOOL, 719 UMBILO ROAD, DURBAN.

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## COMMUNIQUE

(AS DRAWN UP BY THE 1969 SASO CONFERENCE)

For the first time after 1959, Non-White student leaders met at Stutterheim in July 1968. A need for contact, especially among the University Colleges, was strongly expressed. This meeting then requested to act as host to a conference which would investigate ways of establishing effect contact.

In response to this general feeling of dissatisfaction a meeting of student leaders was held at Mariannhill in December 1968. Much as they did not want to form any organisation, this was imperative as this was discovered to be the only way in which effective contact could be effected.

A draft Constitution was drawn and was sent to the different centres for consideration. A steering committee elected at this meeting contacted those centres which were not represented at this conference.

The next meeting was held at the University College of the North and here, a final Constitution was drafted. This then is how the South Africa Students' Organisation (SASO) came into existence.

Our immediate problem therefore is to dream up a workable solution that will lead to a more meaningful, a more lasting and yet an acceptable way of communication.

That there is a need for more effective contact is unquestionable, especially in view of the ever increasing enrolments at the non-white institutions of higher learning, particularly the University Colleges. For all intents and purposes, these students have remained isolated not only physically but also intellectually. There we find institutions which seek to breed or breed pseudo intellectuals with an absolute bogey for anything that associates them with the society in which they live, particularly if this is related to some kind of disagreement with any particular aspect of the general policy of the powers that be. There is no way of stopping this process except by interfering with the programme of indoctrination and intimidation so effectively applied at all South African Universities. What happened at Fort Hare is an indication of just how far the government is prepared to go in maintaining their policy of "divide and rule"

There are two ways in which we can effectively break the isolation of the Non-White centres, and bring them more into the orbit of interaction.

- (i) We can intensify our correspondence with one another not only exchanging minutes but also letters publications and any other material on which we lay our hands. We could then supplement this with inter-visits amongst our S.R.C.s.
- (ii) We can form a loose structured alliance provided for by the SASO Constitution. Thereby we shall be engaging in a prescribed form of interaction which shall include all the provisions in the first suggestion.

These two forms of contact were very effectively discussed at a conference of student leaders from Non-White campuses held at Mariannhill last December. The feeling here was that an unstructured form of contact like the one envisaged in the first suggestion is too fluid and may very easily break down. There is no body to see to it that contact is maintained and no one

feels any particular obligation to keep contact with the others. In addition to this there is the difficulty of maintaining a loose contact. This form of contact is bound to fail morely because of the lack of functional ties amongst the people engaged n it.

The second contact pattern - that of forming an organisation - has also got its own faults and good points. Let us deal with the faults first;

(a) At the time when events are moving so fast in the country it is not totally advisable to show any form of division amongst the student ranks - especially now that students appear to be a power to be reckoned with in this country.

(b) Any move that tends to divide the student population into separate laagers on the basis of colour is in a way a tacit submission to having been defeated and apparently seems an agreement with apartheid.

(c) In a racially sensitive country like ours provisions for racially exclusive bodies tends to build up resentment and widen the gap that exists between the races, and the student community should resist all attempts to fall into this temptation.

(d) Any formation of a purely non-white body shall be subject to a lot of scrutiny. So the chances of the organisation lasting are very little.

All these points were taken into consideration by the conference that drew up the draft Constitution of SASO, but the participants there felt they should go ahead for the following reasons:-

(1) Contact among non-white students is of paramount importance at this stage and where this is possible we should exploit the situation as much as we can.

(2) The alternative to meeting on a segregated platform is not meeting at all, which will be more welcome to the perpetrators of evil and detrimental to our course. This is in the ultimate goal of the "divide et impera" policy.

(3) Meeting on a segregated platform because we cannot help it does not necessarily mean that we agree with segregation.

(4) In choosing to meet on a limited scale than not meeting at all, the non-white students shall be choosing the lesser evil, and striving to offset some of the evils that have accrued from the same system that made it impossible for them to meet freely with other students.

It has been argued that we should keep to our idea of collective policy, i.e. We should battle together with all the other centres in NUSAS by protesting alongside the students at the University Colleges. This unfortunately is not a positive policy. We know very well that at no stage will those students be allowed to take part in NUSAS. The only results of the protests is therefore a further curb on their freedom and a victimization of the few student leaders who sprout out at these places. This serves to intimidate the students further and to frustrate those of them who have been victimized. NUSAS has been encouraging this sort of "protest after the fact". What we need now is a more positive way of approach that will reduce individual hazards and improve the lot of the students at these places.

The position of centres like UNNE is unique in that, since they have relatively more freedom than the University Colleges, their eagerness to participate in a seemingly racially exclusive body may be questionable. However, nobody who understands, seriously, the

interrelated structure of souls in bondage should be surprised at this. Although they are in a more advantageous position they share the colour of skin that has led to the students at the University Colleges being in their present position. They have the same interests as these students. Since they have some room for better manoeuvre, they should provide not only firm support but also strength and direction in their long struggle towards the realisation of the aspirations of these students, which in the long run are the aspirations of any sane South African.

There is another light in which people tend to see the role of centres like UNNE. Because of expressed policy of non-racialism, they find it difficult to support anything that has a colour tinge attached to it. The same view is held by NUSAS and all its affiliated members. It would be tragic however, if they apply this rigidly even if it is to the detriment of our kith and kin, who through no fault of theirs have found themselves in this present position. As far as we know there is no truth in the claims made by the press that SASO is formed in opposition to NUSAS, or as a Black equivalent of NUSAS. According to the draft Constitution SASO makes no claims of being a 'National Union' but is simply an organisation formed to promote contact. The clause limiting membership to non-whites is a sine qua non to the very existence of this kind of limited contact mechanism. In other words, as the preamble shows, SASO is formed under protest and makes no claim of being a pure organisation. It upholds the universal principle that all students in a country should have a right to affiliate to the National Student organisation of that country. The malicious claim, therefore, cannot be reconciled with the draft Constitution, nor the Preamble thereto. Neither we nor NUSAS nor any other body should seek to thwart the attempts of the student leaders who wish to try to effect this kind of contact, for it is the lifeline to intellectual salvation of not only the students at the University Colleges but of the non-white population as a whole since they shall draw their future leaders from these students.

Man has always been a storehouse for ideas and innovations to make the world he lives in a better place for himself. In the face of apparently insurmountable problems, man seeks to conquer by working out ingenious schemes designed to get him out of the doldrums. Where isolation seems perfect, and intellectual stifling apparently complete, let us allow the protagonists of SASO the chance to show how effective contact according to their new formula can be achieved. Only when they fail or when a gross voluntary deviation from accepted principles is seen, may we raise our voices and shout out our repugnance towards the proposed organisation. We apparently conform to the general pattern in South Africa - the tendency to be unreasonably afraid of "dangerous precedents". The theory of the "thin end of the wedge" would also apply equally to us. We refuse to do anything new simply because it will be a "dangerous precedent". This attitude we must reject.