

## "UNDERSTANDING SASO"

### INTRODUCTION TO FORMATION SCHOOL, 1971

#### 2. WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Here we are primarily concerned with SASO and its work. We talk glibly of "black consciousness" and yet we hardly show that we understand what we are talking about. In this regard it is essential for us to realize a few basic facts about "black consciousness."

"Black consciousness" is essentially a slogan directing us away from the traditional political big talk to a new approach. This is an inward-looking movement calculated to make us look at ourselves and see ourselves, not in terms of what we have been taught through the absolute values of white society but with new eyes. It is a call upon us to see the innate value in us, in our institutions, in our traditional outlook to life and in our own worth as people. The call of "black consciousness" is by no means a slogan driving people to think in a certain way politically. Rather it is a social slogan directed at each member of the black community calling upon him to discard the false mantle that he has been forced to wear for so many years and to think in terms of himself as he should. In this regard therefore "black consciousness" is a way of life that must permeate through the society and be adopted by all. The logic behind it is that if you see yourself as a person in your own right there are certain basic questions that you must ask about the conditions under which you live. To get to this stage there are three basic steps that have to be followed.

- (i) We have to thoroughly understand what we are talking about and to impart it in the right context. This becomes especially necessary in a country like ours where such an approach lends itself easily to misinterpretation for this reason we have made provision for a historical study of the theory of "black power" in this formation school.
- (ii) We have to create channels for the adoption of the same approach by the black community at large. Here again one has to be realistic. An approach of this nature, to be successful, has to be adopted by as large a fraction of the population as possible in order to be effective. Whilst the sta-

dent community may be instrumental in carrying the idea across to the people and remaining the force behind it, the approach will remain ineffective unless it gains grass-roots support. This is why it is necessary to create easily acceptable slogans and follow these up with in-depth explanations. Secondary institutions built up from members of the community and operating amongst the community have to be encouraged and these must be run by people who themselves understand what is involved in these institutions and in the approach we are adopting. One can expand and give many examples of such institutions but we expect this to come out of discussions at this formation school. Let it suffice to say that such institutions must cover all fields of activity of the black community - educational, social, economical, religious, etc.

- (iii) People have to be taught to see the advantages of group action. Here one wonders whether a second look should not be taken at the government - instituted bodies like UBCs and Bantustans. It is a universal <sup>fact</sup> that you cannot <sup>is</sup> politicise people and hope to limit their natural and legitimate aspirations. If the people demand something and get it because they have an "UBC" or "Territorial Authority" to talk for them then they shall begin to realize the power they wield as a group. Political modernization of the black people may well find good expression in these institutions which at present are repugnant to us. In contrasting the approach adopted in the states by the black people and our own approach here it will be interesting what this formation school thinks of the various "Territorial Authorities" at our various "own areas".

There are some dangers that we have to guard against as well as we make progress in the direction we are pursuing. The first and foremost is that we must not make the mistake of wishing to get into the white man's boots. Traditional indigenous values tell us of a society where poverty was foreign and extreme richness unknown except for the rulers of our society. Sharing was at the heart of our culture. A system that tends to exploit many and favour a few is as foreign to us as hair which is not kinky or a skin which is

not dark. Where poverty reigned, it affected the whole community simply because of weather conditions beyond our control. Hence even in our aspirations basic truth will find expression. We must guard against the danger of creating a black middleclass whose blackness will only be skin-deep/literally. The paper on African socialism will provide us with enough grounds for discussion along these grounds.

Secondly we must not be limited in our outlook. There is miles of difference between preaching "black consciousness" and preaching "hatred of white". Telling people to hate whites is an outward and reactionary type of preaching which though understandable is undecirable and self-destructive. It makes one think in negative terms and preoccupies one with peripheral issues. In a society like ours it is a "positive feed-forward" approach that leads one into a vicious circle and ultimately to self-destruction through ill-advised and impetuous action. In fact it is usually an extreme form of inferiority complex where the sufferer has lost hope of "making it" because of conditions imposed upon him. His actual aspirations are to be like the white man and the hatred arises out of frustration. On the other hand black consciousness is an inward-looking process. It takes cognisance of one's dignity and leads to positive action. It makes you seek to assert yourself and to rise to majestic heights as determined by you. No doubt you resent all forces that seek to thwart your progress but you meet them with strength, resilience and determination because in your heart of hearts you are convinced you will get where you want to get to. In the end you are a much more worthy victor because you do not seek to revenge but to implement the truth for which you have stood all along during your struggle. You were no less angry than the man who hated whites but your anger was channelled to positive action. Because you had a vision detached from the situation you worked hard regardless of immediate setbacks. White hatred leads to precipitate and short-gun methods whereas we are involved in an essentially long-term struggle where cool-headedness must take precedence over everything else.

The third point is that we must not make the mistake of trying to categorise whites. Essentially all whites are the same and must be viewed with suspicion. This may apparently sound contradictory to what I have been saying but it is in actual fact not. A study of the history of South Africa shows that almost at all times whites have been involved in Black struggles and almost in all instances

led to the death or confusion of what they were involved in. This may not have been calculated sometimes but it arises out of genuine differences in approach and commitments. That blacks are deciding to go it alone is not an accident but a result of years of history behind black-white co-operation. Black-white co-operation in this country leads to limitations being imposed on the programme adopted. We must by all means encourage "sympathetic whites" to stand firm in their fight but this must be away from us. In many ways this is dealt with adequately in an article that appears in the SASO Newsletter - August issue "Black Souls in White Skins". The fact that "Sympathetic whites" have in the past made themselves the traditional pace-setters in the black man's struggle has led to the black man's taking a back seat in a struggle essentially his own. Hence excluding whites tends to activate black people and in the ultimate analysis gives proper direction to whatever is being done. This is a fact that overseas observers visiting the country find hard to accept but it remains very true. Racial prejudice in this country has gone beyond all proportions and has subconsciously affected the minds of some of the most well-known liberals.

### 3. WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

SASO stands today at a very important stage of her life. The establishment of the organisation has had a very great impact in three major directions.

Firstly we have created a mood at the black campuses which has set the stage for a complete revision of thinking. Our blacks only attitude has infused a sense of pride and self-reliance on almost all black campuses. Where originally one met with stiff opposition to all exclusive talk, it is now generally accepted that blacks must go it alone. This attitude is welcome to us but has to be guided very carefully and steadily least it falls prey to some of the dangers we have already mentioned. It is hoped that we shall translate all the intellectual talk about "black is beautiful" to some kind of meaningful practical language.

Secondly we have given impetus to meaningful thinking outside the campus. Suddenly black people are beginning to appreciate the value of their own efforts, uncoloured by half-hearted support from the white world. Though this kind of thinking is still limited to

the "black intelligentsia" at present there are all the signs that it shall spread to the rest of the community.

Thirdly we have dealt almost a fatal blow to all black-white movements. One does not know whether to take pride in this or not but definitely it is obvious that we have wasted a lot of valuable time in the so-called non-racial organisations trying to cheat ourselves into believing we were making progress while in fact by the very nature of these bodies we liquidated ourselves into inactivity. The more radical whites have in fact rejoiced at the emergence of SASO and some of them have even come up with useful support in terms of valuable contacts etc., but radical whites are very rare creatures in this country.

Our strength has been difficult to assess because of the battle we were waging for members. With the latest affiliations by Port Hare and Ngoye we now stand in a position to get down to practical stuff.

#### 4. WHETHER ARE WE GOING?

At all costs we must make sure that we are marching to the same tune as the rest of the community. At no stage must we view ourselves as a group endowed with special characteristics. While we may be playing the tune, it is the rhythmic beating of the community's boots that spurs us to march on and at no stage should that rhythm be disturbed. As the group grows larger and more boots join the rhythmic march let us not allow the beating of the boots to drown the pure tones of our tune for the tune is necessary and essential to the rhythm.

substitute longer "whether"  
version

(Document for discussion at a SASO Formation School (Seminar) held at Edendale, December 1971)