

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT ON THE 1970 SASO CONFERENCE

The 1970 SASO Conference is probably the most important single event in the history of South African student affairs. No one report can fully contain what went on behind those 'closed doors' of the hall in which the conference was held. Hence what follows below is merely an attempt to put this house into the picture regarding the key items that affect the general South African student community.

Representation

The centres represented included all the major 'University' centres with the exception of Belville, all the seminaries with the exception of St. Bede's and Fed. Sem., and a few training colleges. In all there were eight black campuses represented. Interested persons from Wits. U.C.T. and UNISA also took part in the deliberations.

Structure of the Conference

The conference had a set pattern of - (i) commission sittings in the morning; (ii) GSC sittings in the afternoon and (iii) selected cultural events in the evenings.

The twelve commissions prepared the ground work for most of the 90 motions considered by the GSC, while the cultural events in the evenings gave a platform for the expression of our inner feelings. The symposium on "Black is beautiful" was more than just a symposium. It was a search into the souls of the black masses, both student and non-student, for the rare characteristic - the determination to take up the cudgels in accordance with one's beliefs.

Resolutions

A number of resolutions dealing with various aspects of SASO's work were adopted by the GSC.

One of the first resolutions was that barring the press from attending GSC sittings. It was felt that the press could not be trusted not to misinterpret certain aspects of our discussions. Indeed our fears were realised in the course of the conference when on occasions certain statements were twisted to give completely different meanings from that intended.

From the commission on cultural activities came resolutions instructing the Executive to concentrate on attempts at revival of various aspects of black culture in the belief that a people's culture is their natural rallying point.

From the commission on education came resolutions dealing with deficiencies experienced by black students in the type of education drawn up for them. The Separate Universities Act came under attack and so did the granting of 'independence' as indicated elsewhere.

The black press came under attack for its contribution to the moral degeneration of the black people by its insistence on printing cheap articles. SASO was not adopting a puritan attitude but rather felt that more space and depth should be given to problems affecting the black community.

The structure of the SASO Executive was completely re-organized by the commission on Organization in preparation for a more expanded field of operation by SASO.

Specific plans were also laid out by the commission on Field Work defining the role the black students can play in trying to alleviate the appalling conditions under which the black people are living. While this was felt to be mostly of token value, its psychological effect on the black people could be tremendous.

The Relations commission expressed a need for SASO to expand internationally, laying special emphasis on relations with student unions to the north of us. Attention was also paid to a few student organizations in Western Europe and America. This seems to have ominous implications especially with regard to NUSAS whose image must necessarily suffer as SASO expands its relations abroad.

For a full account of the resolutions adopted at the conference the house should please refer to the minutes which will be coming out soon.

#### Aspects of the new SASO policy.

re: NUSAS. It does seem that the most disturbing feature of our Conference to a group like this one is the change of our policy towards NUSAS. The full resolution is as follows :-

- " THAT this GSC -
- (i) in accordance with its belief that the emancipation of the black people in this country depends entirely on the role the black peoples themselves are prepared to play;
  - (ii) realising that the only form of meaningful thinking that should prevail at black student level is one which takes into consideration the position of the black students in the black community;
  - (iii) aware that in the principles and make up of NUSAS the black students can never find expression for the aspirations that are foremost in their minds;
  - (iv) believing that NUSAS as presently constituted is neither representative nor a true national union despite the openness of its membership;
  - (v) noting that the commitment of the white students to the principles of NUSAS is limited to a few individuals,

THEREFORE -

- (a) withdraws SASO's recognition of NUSAS as a true national union ;
- (b) instructs the Executive to continue the relevance of the organization as to the black student community and to maintain such contact as is compatible with the aims of SASO."

This change in attitude seems to have shocked many people. However a brief examination of our attitudes to NUSAS over the past year will show that there has been a discernible shift from full acceptance to almost complete rejection. This was made necessary by a number of factors. It is logical in this country anyway, that the black man ultimately will reject the white man's proffered hand of friendship in an ultimate determination to go it alone.

re: ASB and NAFSAS: While the ASB was dismissed as an incorrigible group with whom no worthwhile contact can be maintained, NAFSAS was viewed with the contempt it deserved for the terribly presumptuous basis on which it was founded. Hence Geoff MacMinn, who came to speak to the delegates left more disheartened than when he came. As one student pointed out, the blacks want to lead themselves be it to the sea, to the mountain or to the desert. Geoff was only allowed to address the conference in order to stop him from wasting his time by going to the individual black campuses.

re: Protests : The policy adopted throughout the year on protests was not changed. It was generally felt that the only time where we can probably modify our approach is with reference to local authorities and even there with the obvious goal of encouraging group action.

re:/....

re: Education: Probably the following motion speaks for itself -

"That this GSC -  
believing -

- (i) that University autonomy implies the right by a University to decide on such questions as who to teach, whom to teach, who shall teach and how to teach;
- (ii) that it is incompatible with the concept of an independent University that a University should be closely related structurally and/or functionally with the state;
- (iii) that a University College can only achieve the status of a university only when it can show that its content and manner of teaching is mature enough to determine its own direction in keeping with educational standards that merit international acceptance;
- (iv) that it is a travesty of academic freedom and misuse of university autonomy that a University should decide on grounds other than merit on who shall teach, what shall be taught and who shall be taught;
- (v) that degrees conferred by a University should be of such a nature that they are international recognised;

and noting -

- (i) that in terms of various acts passed in 1969 autonomy was granted to the former five University Colleges set aside for black students;
- (ii) that the said autonomy is not in keeping with the beliefs stated above;
- (iii) that according to these acts, there are five different universities with a total population of less than 5,000 students;

THEREFORE -

- (a) condemns the granting of independence as premature especially in view of the fact that the said University colleges are -
  - (i) governed by administrations closely aligned with government policy;
  - (ii) taught by a staff which is, according to our beliefs, not sufficiently experienced to be able to maintain an education of a standard compatible with the beliefs stated above;
- (b) expresses the belief that it is a waste of money by the government to promote separate universities at the expense of efficiency and good planning;
- (c) expresses the fear that the granting of independence may be deliberately directed at lowering the standards at these black Universities in accordance with the belief that blacks are inferior ;
- (d) upholds the idea that these said University Colleges, in accordance with our beliefs as stated above, will only become true Universities when -
  - (i) the government releases its grip over their administration;
  - (ii) academic merit is the only criterion which shall determine who shall teach, who shall be taught, and what to be taught;
  - (iii) the standard of education is favourably comparable with University education standards the world over;

Alteration/....

### Alteration to the Preamble

The SASO Conference also decided to alter the preamble to the constitution in the belief that the old preamble was a negative approach to a positive step. Hence the new preamble reads :-

"We the black students of Institutions of higher learning in South Africa, believing -

- (i) that black students in South Africa have unique problems and aspirations;
- (ii) that it is necessary for black students to consolidate their ranks if their aspirations are to be realised;
- (iii) that there is a crying need in South Africa for black students to re-assert their pride and group identity -

Therefore -

adopt this constitution in the belief that unity and positive re-awakening will result among the black students of South Africa."

Coupled with this was a partial adoption of the stand taken by UNB to desist from referring to ourselves as negative entities and to allow no one to refer to us as such. The term "nonwhite" was thus scratched from the Constitution.

### Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting to conclude with a question to the members of this house; whether they do not think that the time for irrelevant pious stands taken on the question of race is not yet over; whether the extremely narrow role adopted by NUSAS on political questions is not responsible for that organization's tottering on the brink of collapse.

True to the history of all oppressed communities, the blacks in this country have ultimately come to realise that God is not in the habit of coming down to earth to solve people's problems, that only one group is suffering, the blacks, and therefore only one group will turn the tables at some stage - the blacks themselves.

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