

SASO

SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS' ORGANISATION
86 BEATRICE STREET
P.O. Box Tel. No. —
DURBAN
Cables: SASORG

To: S.R.C./SASO Local
Advisory Panel.

Re: Report on the 2nd National Conference of the Asseca;
New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, March 31 to April 2nd, 1972.

BACKGROUND

As part of the policy of SASO of establishing cordial relations and maintaining solidarity among the existing black organizations the 1970 - 71 SASO Executive held very fruitful talks with the Executive of the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of S.A. (ASSECA).

SASO representatives were then invited to the conference of ASSECA which for various reasons could not be held last year. This year elaborate publicity was made over the fact that the conference which would be held in P.E. over the Easter weekend would be opened by Mr. Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP the intergrationist moderate civil rights movement of the USA.

Prior to the conference it was announced that among the key-note speakers would be Dr. H. J. Van Zyl, the Secretary of Bantu Education. SASO expressed concern in a move of this nature where the policies propounded by Dr. Van Zyl would be at the mildest, insulting to the worth and integrity of the black man. We noted also that such a move is hardly in keeping with ASSECA's commitment to self-reliance.

The sequel to this was a curt reply from the Secretary - General of ASSECA, Mr. Mehlomakhulu, withdrawing the invitation they had extended to SASO. It was also reported that the ASSECA Executive had taken a ruling that no observers would be allowed to speak or to vote.

It was amidst such controversy that over 50 delegates from Johannesburg, P.E. (5 branches), Vaal, Springs, Pretoria, Grahamstown, King William's Town, Cape Town, Pietersburg, Krugersdorp, Natalspruit congregated in P.E. for that fateful weekend.

Procedural matters were dealt with on Friday. The Executive ruling that no observers take part in debates was ratified. To the surprise of many of the delegates Port Elizabeth was registered as five branches. This caused considerable disquiet as it was known that the strength of P.E. did not reflect the activity and enthusiasm at home.

A group of students from Durban gave notice of their intention to register a Durban branch. The credentials of this group were strongly questioned by the officials and one of them was heard threatening violence against

these students with their "SAGO ideas!". The President was approached and he refused to grant registration because he was not convinced about the presence of such a branch since the Executive was never informed of its formation. (According to the ASSECA Constitution only the Executive has the power to form branches.)

On Saturday we sat through a morning of speeches, tributes, votes of thanks presentation of gifts which occupied the whole morning and afternoon sessions.

The conference was then opened by Mr. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP. He traced the developments of the civil rights movement in the United States and the role of the NAACP in working towards integration. He detected changed attitudes among white South Africans which signified "hops" for an improvement of race relations. He suggested that blacks should strive to gain the vote which he regarded as the "missing link" in the South African constitutional system.

I regard Mr. Wilkins' talk as a disappointment. He displayed a very shallow understanding of the work of ASSECA, his hosts. Even his understanding of the overall South African political scene left much to be desired. He never saw himself as a fellow oppressed from far-off land. He offered no inspiration to a people who were looking for direction from the black American example. His entire speech was perforated with banter and pleas for nonviolence. This prompted the Director of Bantu Administration to salute him "Man of Peace".

In his paper the Secretary for Bantu Education gave impressive statistics of the advance of African Education since 1925. It was the policy of his Dept. to hand-over all control of education to the various ethnic groups. He took the opportunity to warn ASSECA that it ought to be organised according to tribal lines. He expressed the view that in its present form ASSECA tended to undermine the authority of the homeland leaders and he was aware that they resented that. Dr. Van Zyl's address evoked an angry response from the audience. He was closely questioned on the evil effects of the policy of his department regarding administration, financing, language medium, teacher salary scales and shortage of teachers and schools. The consensus of the house was summed up by Mr. Drake Koko when he made it abundantly clear that African people saw ASSECA performing a radically divergent social-awareness policy than that of Van Zyl's department. Black people wanted education for liberation and development and not that of race prejudice and oppression. ASSECA must achieve through education and culture the true worth of the black man. The Chairman, Mr. M.T. Moorosi then revealed that it was the intention of ASSECA to "take" over Bantu Education and that African people shall refuse to be divided as ASSECA had met with immense enthusiasm and co-operation from the "homeland" leaders.

The rest of the afternoon was occupied with the reading of the Presidential Address and the Secretary's Report both of which noted the growth of the organisation and that it was increasingly assuming a more national character. Branches have been set up in the major areas and further expansion was predicted.

The activities of the organisation were outlined and future plans laid out.

Emphasis was placed on work done with The Star, American firms in South Africa, the reorganisation of the R1m Fund and a declaration of an Education Day. There was lengthy discussion on the Secretary's Report. Matters raised were :-

1. the resignation of three Treasurers during the period under review. Discussion high-lighted deep dissatisfaction among the members of the Executive themselves about the way matters were run.
2. It was resolved that the R1m Fund had to be speeded up and reorganised. The response so far was not encouraging. Collection would take place on Education Day and all pupils would be expected to bring to school at least 10c from all working members of the family. Cooperation of the teachers's association would be sought in this regard.
3. The recommendation of the Executive that an Executive Director be employed was discussed. It was accepted in principle that such a salaried official be engaged pending the investigation of the financial position of ASSECA, the conditions of service etc.

An *avante garde* banquet was held on Saturday evening where all conference delegates were guests. I decided not to attend this oppressive event. However, we understand that all the delegates were introduced.

Sunday was the last day of conference. Business started very late as the delegates were expected to attend a church service. The day started with the presentation of an audited financial statement. This reflected that the finances of ASSECA were on a sound footing. Membership fees, however, did not reflect the representation at conference. The statement was, however, adopted.

Branch reports were then read. It became evident that it was only Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town branches which were established and had any activity. In the light of the above it became very incongruous that the credentials of the Durban delegation should not be accepted. Port Elizabeth was challenged for declaring itself a region entitling it to five delegations. This provoked tensions and P.E. was challenged to prove the authenticity of the existence of its branches. A Johannesburg delegate painstakingly asked about the financial contributions of each branch. This proved that many of the branches were not entitled to the status at the conference. The above case being similar to that of the Durban delegation it was sought to admit them to the conference. The Chairman ably assisted by vehement support from Port Elizabeth refused to grant the request as he maintained that he was not approached in advance by Durban. Amid protests the Chairman closed the matter without even giving Durban a hearing.

It was then brought to the notice of the conference that there was no more time to complete business. (it being 10p.m. the scheduled time for adjournment). It was claimed by the conference organisers that no other venue could be obtained. It was then suggested by the Secretary-General that elections be

held and then the meeting adjourned to some future date. This proposal had the support of the Chairman, Port Elizabeth delegations and one or two other branches. Johannesburg proposed that the conference be adjourned forthwith. It was clear that this question sparked controversy and chaos reigned. The Chairman had lost control of the situation and after a vote was taken and adjournment adopted, conference rose after singing the National Anthem: Nkosi Sikalal'iafrika!!

COMMENTS:

It is palpably obvious that this ASSECA Conference was a failure. Among the contributory factors were the following:

(1) **THE CONSTITUTION:** The Constitution is silent on so many issues, not least of which is the formation of branches and the composition and constitution of delegations to conference. Hence too much leeway is exercised by the Executive in the formation of branches. According to the ASSECA Constitution virtually every paid-up member of ASSECA can vote and deliberate at the A.G.M. Hence it was difficult to challenge on the constitution, the formation of five branches by Port Elizabeth and the open refusal by the Chairman to grant delegation-status to the Durban group.

(2) The constitution does have standing rules for the conduct of meetings which though very inadequate, could do well to maintain order and uniformity at meetings. It was notable that the Chairman felt no obligation to adhere to procedure particularly when it suited his designs not to do so. The delegates were appallingly ignorant of the rules hence two distinct camps were pulling apart and all competed for the chairman's attention.

It is always helpful to read and explain Standing Rules to the conference to acquaint everyone fully with them from the very beginning.

(3) There was lacking a unity of purpose and general direction from the large Executive down to a delegate of the 'about to - be - born' branch.

It was evident that whatever discussion had been done before the meeting was most destructive. Some delegates apparently attended conference for the sole purpose of electing Mr. So & So. The standard of debate was very low because members were too preoccupied with the 'tickets' they were supposed to support: no logic or clarity of thinking. Personality cults were obvious even to an innocent observer. Unfortunately the Chairman never kept the essential neutrality and was easily alignable with one or the other group.

(4) It was evident that the understanding of the principle behind ASSECA varied from just putting every child to school or taking over Santu Education to an attempt at crystallising the priorities for development and liberation through education and culture and a redefinition and re-evaluation of the mission of education to an oppressed people. It was generally accepted that ASSECA ought to promote self-reliance.

(5) Matters of policy were not clear-cut hence it was very easy for some delegates to call for elections even before they had discussed the programme for the ensuing term. Problems on crisis in schools foreign investments and fundraising 'on our own terms', contact and co-operation with white institutions etc. were not discussed.

(6) It seems urgent attention must be given to the appointment of Executive staff in order to streamline the entire administration and organisational work of ASSECA.

CONCLUSION:

From the above remarks it can be realised that a great deal of leadership training is called for in the black organisations. ASSECA has a great potential as a 'mass movement' which can sensitise and commit the black people towards a programme of action in matters of culture and education so as to build a nation. Practical community development programmes of this nature can successfully shake the parish complex that the multitudes of black people are obviously suffering from. To ASSECA we offer our good wishes and support in their endeavour to build a better tomorrow.

Prepared by: Barney Pityana.

18/4/72.

(Private & Confidential)