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INTRODUCTION TO FORMATION SCHOOL.

The formation School on which we are about to embark is directed at putting our efforts in the right context. It is no use for us to emulate existing student groups. It is in fact the first step in the wrong part to even accept and adopt their set of values, for indeed we have a different path to tread. Our goals, by their very nature demand of us a dedication unparalleled in the history of student organisations. Our methods and our approach, in order to achieve fruition, must radically depart from the impersonal, bureaucratic and bourgeois type of approach that we have inherited from western-based student organisations.

Thus we must start this formation school with same kind of mental preparation. We must ask ourselves a few basic questions- who are we? What are we talking about? Where are we today? Whither are we going? We have to answer these questions sincerely in order to even approximate the kind of mental preparation that is necessary for the work we want to engage in.

1. WHO ARE WE?

Basically we are a black student group springing from a black community. People at the helm of a ship that constantly sails in troubled waters. People who themselves are not sure how to steer the ship to better waters; people at the vanguard of a new type of thinking that has become reduced to mere slogans without necessarily achieving depth and clearcut definitions. People whose proximity to economical sufficiency dulls their senses of perception to reality and makes them shirk their duties and responsibility to the community. People who constantly pass on the responsibility for the community's emancipation to others as if it were a soccer ball.

Yes, we are a community of cynics whose close identification with the Western world has made them adopt a scientific attitude to the problems of the black community and to declare them insoluble in the face of apparently opposition. In trying to oppose a power-based and machine-orientated society we have ourselves ceased to rely on our traditional leanings on a strong man-based society. We seek to assure our Western friends of our ability to play their own game while we, stripped of our true traditional selves are a mere shadow of the powerful forces we could easily be.

Nowhere is this imbalance of personality better demonstrated than in the student community. Dazzled by the twilight of raised hopes of participation in the white man's world of technology and intoxicated by the flattering remunerations that can be derived from our white-collar jobs, we exist between two worlds. On the one hand there is our own community with whom we increasingly share very little sympathy ill-defined "powers that be" and on the other there is the white community whose values we have learnt to respect through our days at school and whose heritage has a magnetic and tantalizing effect on us.

Who are we indeed? We are a mere shadow of what we claim to be. Besides engaging in mere philosophical and intellectual masturbation about problems that vitally affect our people, we do nothing but stand at the sidelines and

maturity. We console our guilt-stricken consciences with ill-considered claims—at best half-truths—to the effect that we also as students are oppressed but really we know fully well that we live in a walled and heavily protected world of studenthood and that what occasionally hits us is nothing but the occasional rock that results from a ricochet of the actual hail of bullets continually falling on our people.

We must accept that it is not enough to sit and put complaints into words. Each one of us must take it as his personal responsibility to be of meaningful value in this long journey that we claim to be walking jointly with our people, only then shall we have discovered who we really are. This question has to be answered not tomorrow, not some other time but in this formation school.

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 realise 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 student 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.

institutions but we expect that 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.

People have to be taught to see the advantages of group action. Here one wonders whether a second lock should not be taken at the government - instituted bodies like UBCs and Pantustans. It is a universal fact that you cannot politicize 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 realise 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 undesirable 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 all 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 worth victor because you do not seek to revenge but to implement the truth

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 set-backs. 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 black 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.

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 lest 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, unpolluted 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

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 Fort Hare and Ngqaya we now stand in a position to get down to practical stuff.

WHITHER ARE WE GOING?

Since we know what we are talking about it becomes a matter of commitment to go where we want to go. What we need now is dedicated people who are prepared to loose a lot to see an idea blossoming into fruition. That is why you are here at this formation school. You must prepare yourselves to be the vanguard group spearheading all our efforts in your individual campuses. You must count yourselves not amongst many who shall follow but among the few who shall lead. In an effort to bear witness to our determination to play our role as future leaders of the community we must inculcate in our minds the martyr mentality. We must cease to see ourselves as people affected by history but as people who will shape history. We must carve and shape the destiny of our people and defy all provisions that limit our aspirations. As you sit about to start deliberations at this formation school you must be aware that you are setting a programme that you yourselves will put into effect. In other words we must make a habit of thinking about SASO not as "they" but us, our efforts, our sweats, our struggle, our successes and our failures. Not unless one is on this frame of mind will we be able to be what should be.

We have noted that our struggle is essentially a long-term struggle. We have also seen the pitfalls that lie in our way. Hence we must embark on this long journey with the necessary caution and ^{caution} ~~caution~~ ^{steadfastness} ~~steadfastness~~. We must take a vow jointly that we shall not turn back until we have reached our goals. Those ^{of us who fall by the wayside} ~~of us who fall by the wayside~~ must be aware of the reduction in total strength. Hence the need for that fine balance between staying up and going forward.

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.

Somewhere far ahead lies the coveted glittering prize barely visible except for the radiating rays it casts over the hill top. Let us keep our eyes on those rays and march on with a sense of raised aspirations lest if we look at the dividing distance our hearts may be filled with despair.