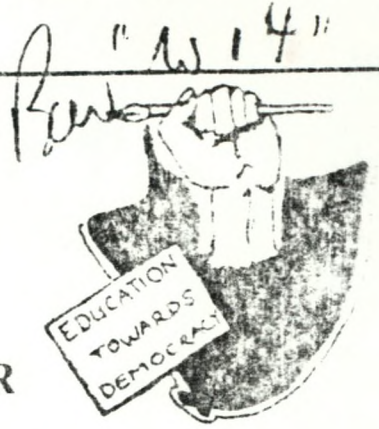


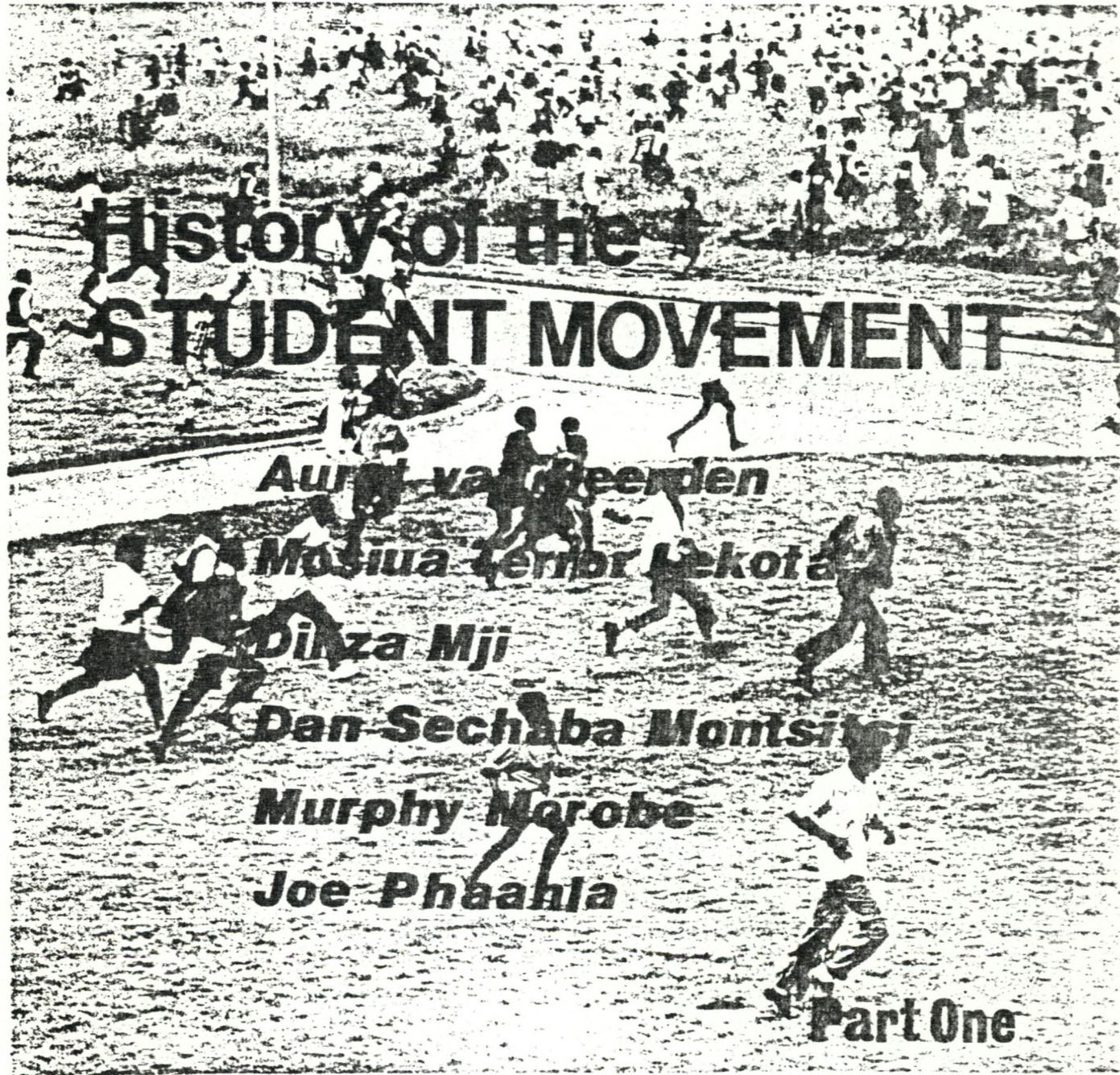
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AZASO

NATIONAL STUDENT NEWSLETTER



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FOR STUDENT UNITY

The Panel

The panel discussion on the history of student movements in South Africa proved to be a momentous experience for all students who attended the 1983 AZASO Congress. The panel featured activists with a wealth of experience in the field of organising students and therefore will undoubtedly go down in the history of our struggle as a magnificent turning point in the attempt by students to learn from the past to sharpen our skills of organisation and contribution to the struggle for democracy.

Featured in the panel were:

1. Auret van Heerden - President of NUSAS 1978. Auret's involvement in the struggle did not end with his term of office in NUSAS. He made a valuable contribution in the emerging broad democratic movement. This resulted in his detention in the mass detention of activists from various fields of struggle in 1981. Having seen Neil Aggett before his death in detention, Auret provided invaluable information during the inquest.

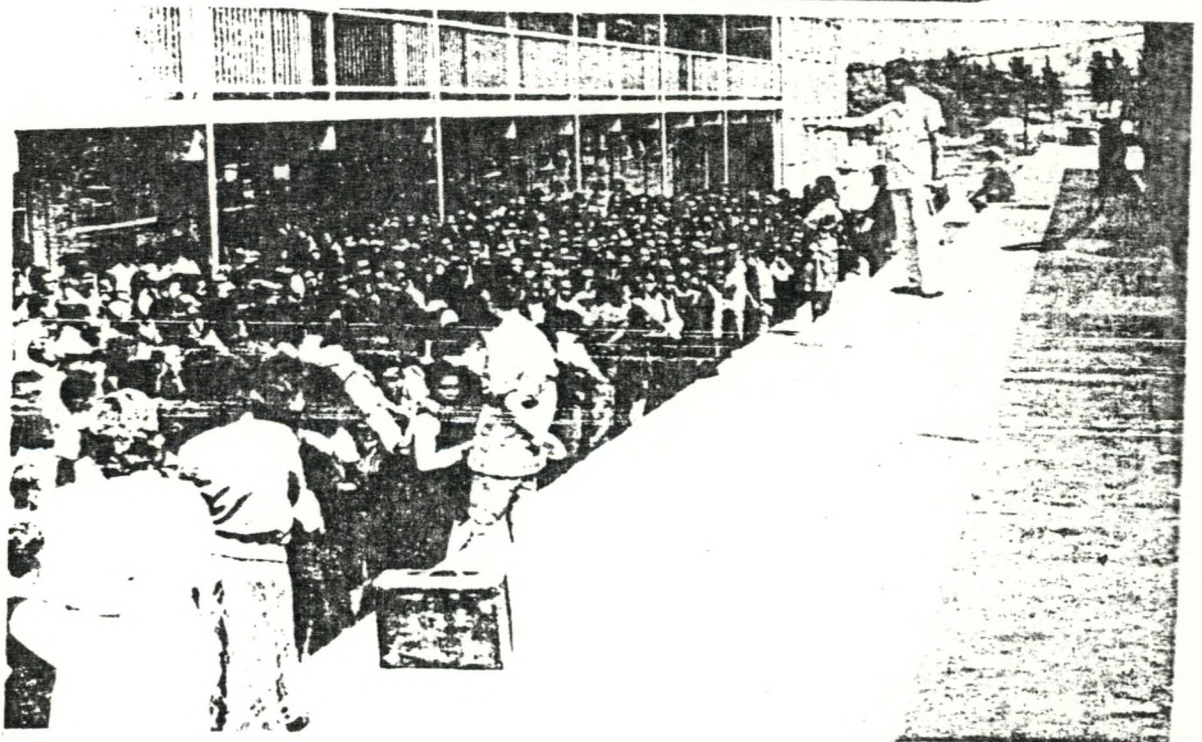
2. Mosiua "Terror" Lekota - Mosiua Lekota finished a six year sentence at Robben Island last November. He and other former SASO/BPC officials were sentenced in late 1976 for their role in the pro-Frelimo rally of 1974. Lekota who was a member of Turfloop SRC in 1971, with the late Abraham Tiro, and permanent organiser of SASO in 1974, has emerged from Robben Island to be a prominent participant in the broad democratic movement. He is at present publicity secretary of the UDF.

3. Diliza Mji - Diliza Mji qualified as a Medical practitioner at the Natal Medical School in November 1979. He was vice-President of SASO in 1974/5 and president in the crucial period of 1975/6. He was among those who were detained during the mass bannings of October 19, 1977. After 15 months detention at Modder B prison, he was banned for 5 years on his release in 1979. He is at present involved with a number of community based organisations in Durban and is General Secretary of NAMDA (National Medical and Dental Association) of South Africa.

4. Dan "Sechaba" Montsitsi - Dan Montsitsi finished his four year sentence on Robben Island in May 1983. Dan was in the hot seat as President of the SSRC during the height of the 1976 uprisings. He was on a charge of sedition with 11 other SSRC members, amongst them Murphyson Mroobe who also contributed to the panel. They had both been members of SASM.

5. Joe Phaahla - Outgoing President of AZASO at the time of the panel. Joe took over the leadership of AZASO at a very crucial time in 1981 when there was still a lot of uncertainty about the future of the student movement. He has contributed a lot together with other student comrades in the building of AZASO to its present status. He is a student at Natal Medical School and has been closely associated with all progressive student structures on the campus.

Tapes covering the panel available at R10-00 per copy.



History of NUSAS

Auret started his talk by explaining that the basic premise of our struggle is a struggle between capitalist exploiters and the vast majority of the working class. "With this in mind we must therefore seek to organise and mobilise in order constantly to confront the capitalist system". Auret then pointed out that as students it was not possible always to confront the ruling class, this being a serious limitation on our part. "We tend to intellectualise a lot and our organisations become talking shops". Auret argued that the student movement needed a programme of action that would keep it engaging the ruling class on a permanent basis. With this introduction he then went on to sketch the history of NUSAS.

For quite a long time since its formation in 1924 NUSAS refused to take a political role, it tried to be neutral. The English students had no political motivation, they had no ideology. In the early 1930s, the Afrikaner students were more conscious of their political aspirations, they developed the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism. Led by people like Nico Diederichs who later became State President of South Africa, they broke away from NUSAS in 1935. They were inspired by the Nazi ideology and learnt quite a lot of strategies from the Nazis. They even supported Nazi Germany under Hitler in the Second War. It was this which shook English students to stand up and support the Allied nations viz, Britain, America, Russia etc, in the war against Hitler. After the war English students started an increasing political role. This led to the question of whether this political role should just be a liberal one or a more progressive anti-capitalist one. Those advocating a more radical line were mainly associated with the Communist Party, the other with the Liberal Party. The conflict surfaced over the affiliation of NUSAS to the International Union of Students based in Prague. The Liberals were calling for a termination of affiliation to this progressive organisation which is an international alliance of anti-imperialist students allied to the non-aligned movement. Led by the now Dean of Wits Medical School, Prof. Tobias, the NUSAS President, NUSAS disaffiliated from the International Union. Throughout the 1950s, NUSAS was under the control of liberals. While the Congress movement was waging a wide range of mass campaigns against the system, NUSAS refused to be drawn into progressive struggle. NUSAS actually refused to adopt the Freedom Charter in 1955, instead, in order to accommodate both left wing and right wing, they adopted the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

With the beginning of the sixties, the more radical white students started getting frustrated by the direction of NUSAS and the Liberal Party. However, according to Auret, they did not have a clear political theory, they had no class alliance. These students then resorted to sabotage, hoping to bring whites to their senses. Their approach was quite naive and ultimately the SB caught up with them, one of their leaders being caught with a lot of dynamite under his bed. They were given heavy sentences, including the death penalty. Later on in 1964 some people were calling on NUSAS to become a student wing of the underground movement. They had a view that the only meaningful contribution to the struggle can be made through underground work, eg. Jonty Driver, then NUSAS Presid-



ent, and Botha's Hill. They still lacked insight into political struggle and were moved by their consciences rather than by a political consciousness guided by a clear political theory.

The 1970's

in the seventies there was a revival of Marxist sociology overseas which started filtering back into the country. People like Legassick and Wolpe started developing a Marxist analysis of the South African situation. There was however still no clarity as to the role of white students. NUSAS developed a programme of social action organising students to get involved in issues of removals, squatters, unions etc. Soon the shortcomings of students playing leading roles in workers' and community struggles were realised. Students would at the height of serious struggles be writing exams and abandoning the workers and communities. It was at this stage that wages commissions were established on a number of campuses with white students ending up playing a very important role in the 1973 strikes. Students were finding this more interesting than organising fellow students but the reality of the situation was that they could not be the leaders of the workers' movements.

More advanced student activists started acknowledging the need to concentrate also on organising students on campus. They saw the need to challenge the values of the racist capitalist system on campus also. Unfortunately while this process was still unfolding, in 1973, 8 NUSAS leaders were banned, BC was also dominating the political scene and as a result had an effect on NUSAS. The 1976 uprising also had a serious effect on NUSAS and thus in 1977 we see NUSAS emphasising a programme of 'Africanisation'. This was meant to lead white students to accept an African identity and not look at themselves as Europeans. This was in a way a reaction to BC. It again deviated from an understanding of the class nature of our society.

1978, NUSAS started to reflect on a more scientific approach and started looking at the way in which the university is interlinked with the system and started organising students around what they were learning. The emphasis was on exposing the reactionary education and challenging it on the campus, using campus as a site of struggle. This has led us to the understanding of the need to organise on campus and still link to the broader struggle and this is why we were then able to identify with the Release Mandela campaign, Anti Republic, the Freedom Charter etc. We realised that students can play an important role, but that our movements cannot replace or become political movements.

Auret concluded by hinting that he believes that students should not undermine their abilities. He stated that since more often political awareness was much higher among students and the student movement is a national movement, we should be prepared to take up political issues and at times play leading roles because unions and civics cannot do that quite often. We should however not see ourselves as playing overall leading role in the broad struggle.

Comrade 'Error' started his talk by pointing out that quite often a mistake is made by assuming that black students only started organising themselves with the formation of SASO in 1968. "Let us point out immediately that the majority of black students in the early period before the 2nd World War were at white universities and the progressive-thinking students at that time joined NUSAS which was formed as early as 1924." The most significant early organisation involving black students was the ANC Youth League launched in 1943. A significant membership of this youth league was based in Fort Hare which at that time catered for all unfranchised groups.

In the late fifties with the formation of the PAC, two students organisations emerged, the African Students Association (ASA) allied to the ANC, and the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA) allied to the PAC. Both organisations disappeared with the banning of the senior organisations. They had a very short spell and therefore even their contribution was minimal. There were other regional organisations like the Cape Peninsula Students Union.

THE BREAKAWAY FROM NUSAS

The 1960s brought new conditions for black students with the implementation of the extension of Universities Act

The Black Student Movement



Cape and UDW came into the picture. Where earlier black students were at Wits, UCT, UND and Fort Hare, now you had four tribal colleges catering for blacks according to race and tribe. This then meant that black students were pushed into a situation where more and more they had to reflect on the peculiar position in which they found themselves and see how best they could contribute in trying to change the situation.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH NUSAS MEMBERSHIP

(1) Social background:

The fact that most students in the country were white and thus the majority of NUSAS members were white meant the dominant perspective within the organisation was a liberal one. Issues which were very sensitive to black students and therefore high on priority list, did not arouse the same sensitivity from white students. The white students being in the majority would always outvote the blacks on an issue of such a nature. To add to that problem, even at leadership level there was no clarity on the part of NUSAS as to the role they could play in bringing

(2) Ideological differences:

The banning of the PAC and ANC did not mean an end to ideological differences. Many of those who were allied to the ANC and in ASA saw a role for NUSAS while most PAC supporters in ASUSA criticised any form of participation of a non-racial character. Black students like Biko, Charles Sibisi etc who were in NUSAS were severely criticised.

(3) Practical Problems of Government Legislation:

The Group Areas Act made it difficult for black and white students to stay together during conferences. Police would come and arrest black students under the 72 hour curfew and leave white students. There were attempts to defy these laws but that meant more and more time spent in trying to fight legislation rather than on conference matters. Other legislation like the Mixed Amenities Act also meant that people could not enjoy equal facilities without interference.

(4) Harassment:

In the high school and university days, black students

NUSAS was being seen as a threat. Fort Hare was the first to ban NUSAS on campus and the rest followed. Some students were actually expelled for NUSAS membership.

(5) Influences elsewhere:

besides NUSAS there were other organisations mostly Christian or denominational, eg. University Christian Movement, National Catholic Federation of Students, Anglican Students Society. Here also discussions were taking place, eg. the UCM 1967 conference at Rhodes. Influences from abroad:

Developments abroad especially America and France did have an effect on local black students. In America black students broke away from the Non-Violent Coordinating Committee to form the Black Power Movement. Through books, magazines, and people, their ideas did flow into South Africa. In 1968 there was also the uprising of French students.

The formation of SASO itself is not synonymous with the emergence of the philosophy of black consciousness. The first SASO constitution still read, "We the Non European

to slogans from the USA, eg. black is beautiful, that a more positive identification of the oppressed groups emerged in the form of 'black' rather than non-European.

The ideas of BC came more into the picture of SASO around the end of 1970 and the beginning of 1971. In 1971 the Abe Bailey Institute hosted a conference in Cape Town at which, amongst the speakers, were Barney Pityana and Steve Biko. The papers delivered by these two senior members of SASO were to be used quite often at a later stage as reference in trying to explain what BC is. Pityana quoted quite extensively from the writings of Stokely Carmichael of the American Black Power Movement while Steve quoted from Senghor and more especially Franz Fanon, both being exponents of the concept of negritude, a French African version of BC.

Looking back, one can see quite clearly that the emergence of the concept of BC was not just a magical discovery but rather an expression of ideas, some of which were inherited from the South African struggle while others emanated from struggles elsewhere in the world. The importance of the unity of the oppressed and dispossessed had always been appreciated by our forebears right up to the Ethiopian movement of the 19th century, to the formation of the ANC in 1912, to the Congress Alliance of the 1950s. Having gone through the fifties, the seventies were just the ideal time for a more defined unity of the oppressed to be expressed. SASO continued to recognise NUSAS as an authentic national union with a specific role to play. The 1971 SASO GSC made it quite clear that SASO regarded South Africa as being a country where blacks and whites are here to stay. This is a position similar to the first clause of the Freedom Charter, viz, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white".

Comrade "Terror" went on to say that throughout their stay in SASO all representatives praised the leadership of Mandela, Sisulu and others on Robben Island. The only problem which arose was that with the high turnover of student leadership the purpose of the organisation was getting confused with its surface picture. With slogans like 'white pigs' coming in from the USA, the picture became confusing.

Comrade Terror concluded his speech by stating that tracing the development of SASO can only leave one with the conclusion that it was natural for those activists to mature into the non-racial democratic movement as people like himself, Barney Pityana, Diliza and many others had done. He emphasised the importance of looking through the formal appearance of things and seeing the core of the problem in order to avoid catastrophe. "Even if we get rid of whites there will still be poverty and then we might decide to get rid of Coloureds". Still the problem remains and then we think it seems Amin was right in getting rid of Indians and then the whole thing becomes a mess".

"We must work very hard to help not only our brothers and sisters to appreciate the situation but we must make it a lifetime goal to make sure that those of our own colleagues, those on campuses with us come finally to appreciate the correctness of the democratic approach."



Taking over from Comrade Terror, Diliza said the main problem which emerged with the development of SASO and the concept of BC was in identifying the enemy and thereby the target of our programme of action. The emphasis was on psychological liberation with the belief that blacks are being oppressed because we are psychologically allowing it to happen. After psychological liberation physical liberation was supposed to follow. In 1972 Abraham Tiro was expelled from Turfloop after a fiery speech at the graduation ceremony. Turfloop went on boycott and all the other black campuses followed. At the height of student resistance, the 3rd SASO GSC was held at Hammanskraal in July. A number of students at GSC felt that the psychological struggle was over since all campuses were out on boycott and moved that all students leave campuses and actually cross the borders. This move was defeated and the line which emerged from people like Biko was that SASO was there to continue mobilising inside the country and that if anybody wanted to leave the country, he could do so without involving SASO and go to join the senior organisations.

As more and more students were leaving campuses in 1972, it became imperative that another direction be worked out. The outcome was the formation of BPC which became the political home of all those who were no longer students. However BPC was also formed along the same premises as SASO - psychological liberation. With the older leadership having been crushed through arrests, bannings and exile, it was very difficult for the young activists to learn from the past. As a result, at the height of the student unrest in the 1972/1973 era, when Durban workers came out on strike in thousands, the students were talking about psychological liberation attaching little or no significance to the strikes.

The emphasis on psychological liberation made SASO activists opt for projects which they felt gave them an opportunity to teach the community something, eg. literacy projects. The projects were not linked to any civic organisation or trade union. The idea was more to disseminate BC than to organise the masses.

"Events around the borders of South Africa had an effect on our understanding of the struggle", said Diliza. SASO used to invite people from SWAPO to address their conferences, eg. Dan Tjongarero and Mr M. Tinabanelo who were leaders of the internal wing of SWAPO. Developments in Mozambique and Angola also had an effect on SASO with resolutions passed supporting the MPLA and Frelimo and later on as we know people like Terror went to jail for supporting Frelimo. Slowly people started learning what these movements were all about and learning from their theories and practices. Around the same time the Pearce Commission came into Zimbabwe, to test peoples' views on independence and Muzorewa was mobilising the people to support (we thought) true liberation. SASO passed resolutions supporting Muzorewa, only to be disappointed later on. The ideas of liberation movements like Frelimo fighting the system of capitalist exploitation and not Portuguese people, as such, and ideas of class struggle filtered through and were giving us light in understanding why blacks like Matanzima were selling out.

While this was happening, the government was creating conditions to let BC leaders meet American people like Senator Dick Clark who were attending the Afro-American Institute in Lesotho in 1976. People who were banned had their orders relaxed in order for them to meet the Americans while those in detention were temporarily released. The imperialist factor was therefore creeping into our organisations, remembering that Anglo-American was supporting the Black Community Programmes to the tune of hundreds of thousands.

The 1976 SASO GSC brought us ultimately into facing the question of the theory of our struggle squarely and the inadequacy of our approach was realised by many people. For the first time papers dealing with the question of class struggle and the role of imperialism in our oppression were discussed. Some people could just not accept the introduction of class in our discussions as legitimate and threatened to walk out alleging that SASO was turning red. This situation was well contained and we emerged from the GSC with a better understanding of our situation and therefore better equipped to face the future. The introduction of progressive ideas into SASO in the later period of its existence did not go unchallenged, like any attempt to introduce new ideas into an already established organis-



ation. Tensions remained within the organisation between those who had advocated the new ideas and those who resisted them, the latter being found mainly among the older SASO members then in the BPC. At the time of its banning in 1977, therefore we can say that SASO was going through a political evolution.

Another problem of student organisation in the early and mid seventies, was the question of developing a coherent relationship between students on the secondary school level and those at university. The South African Students Movement (SASM) formed in 1971, was the organisation responsible for organising black students at secondary schools. As Dan Sechaba Montsitsi, former SASM and former president of the Soweto Students Representative Council, and Murphy Morobe also former SASM and SSRC member explained, SASM was going through a lot of difficulties. Their difficulties ranged from a lack of experience in running an organisation to difficult teachers and principals in various schools and a lack of resources. The relationship between SASM and SASO was largely at the level of ideas and slogans filtering from SASO into SASM. Occasionally SASM would get material assistance from SASO officials but this was being made difficult by the fact that we were being regarded by some SASO officials as the high school wing of their organisation and this was regarded as paternalistic by many SASM members and strongly resented by most of us. This uneasy relationship resulted in a situation where at the height of the 1976 uprising, when SASM members found themselves at the leadership of a mass rebellion providing most of the SSRC leadership, eg. Tsietsi Mashinini, Sechaba Montsitsi, etc.

SASO members even in the Reef, were hardly available for their assistance. "We in SASM took the initiative without knowing how the situation was going to develop early in 1976, to call mass meetings of students to discuss the issue of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction". "We were thrown into a revolution without many of our colleagues having got any prior training in basic political issues". Often people were elected onto the SSRC on the basis of popularity or just bravery when things were going bad. It is therefore not surprising that some of the people who were in leadership positions in the SSRC ended going into a political wilderness.

The banning of SASO, BPC and many other organisations and detention of hundreds of our leadership meant that we had to review our strategies and programmes if we were to engage the enemy further. Those who were in detention at Modder B were provided by their detention with ample time to discuss the future of our struggle. Opposing views which had been developing within the organisations crystallised within the cells of Modder B. Outside, those of us who were free were also searching for further direction. While this was going on, with most of the leadership people in detention, we suddenly woke up on July morning to the news that a new organisation called AZAPO had been formed over the weekend to continue the struggle where previous organisations had left off. This news was received with mixed feelings. Many of us felt that this was an ill-timed move both from a political direction viewpoint and from a strategic point. Before the end of the week, Jimmy Kruger rounded up all exponents of the new organisation and banned them.

Almost a year thereafter in July 1979 COSAS was launched in Wilgerspruit, Johannesburg. The state's response was that of wait and see and the COSAS leadership was only rounded up in December 1979. Meanwhile AZAPO was revitalised in August 1979, again, as in the case of COSAS,

with the state adopting a wait and see attitude. In November the same year an AZAPO sponsored conference in Pietermaritzburg decided to form AZASO as their student wing.

However, in the process of all the above moves there was the re-emergence of progressive mass mobilisation. 1979 saw the formation of SAAWU, a more progressive union as a breakaway from the BC BAWU. The Fattis and Monis strike led by the Food and Canning Workers Union and African Food and Canning Workers Union assisted the development of mass mobilisation being the first successful nationwide consumer boycott in support of workers demands. The tradition laid by the Fattis and Monis joint worker, community, and student action laid the basis for the mass actions of the 1980s. The 1980 student boycotts saw a more politicised student leadership seeking ties with workers and the community in general. Boycotting students were campaigning for support for striking meat workers, textile workers, rent and bus boycotts. In the midst of all these mass actions, the Release Mandela Campaign was launched, providing conditions where the youth could trace the struggle backward in the process of learning more about Mandela and the leadership on Robben Island.

It was as a result of the above conditions and the continuing mass struggles of 1981 that we saw COSAS taking a progressive direction and the historic 1981 AZASO Congress also taking a sharp turn to the progressive side. Since then our two movements have not looked backwards and whatever adjustments we have had to make have been within the context of a mass-based broad democratic movement. As in the case of SASO in 1976, there are those who continue to oppose our direction and of late they have even formed themselves into a rival movement in the form of AZASM. The correctness of the democratic line can only be expressed out by our ability despite all criticisms to mobilise the student masses alongside all other classes of the oppressed and democratic people towards a democratic future.

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