

WHAT IS SASO?

SASO is the South African Students' Organisation. It was formally founded in July 1969, and it brings together student unions on the black campuses of South Africa. Historically, it has grown up out of the discovery by black students in South Africa that their own aspirations could not be met, with the best will in the world, by 'liberal' white-led bodies.

WHAT DOES SASO DO?

It provides a national focus for the representatives of the student bodies in the black campuses. The South African government's policy in the black universities is designed to prevent contact between campuses, and above all to stifle any sense of national identity among black students.

It also tries to relate black students to the general needs of the oppressed black community: SASO organises summer work camps, literacy projects, medical centres etc., in 'resettlement areas' where these are most needed.

IS SASO AN APARTHEID ORGANISATION?

Certainly not. SASO recognises the role of 'liberal' multi-racial organisations like NUSAS and the University Christian Movement. But it also recognises that these groups, in order to survive, must retain their white leadership. The government's policy of enforced separation of races means that black students must either form their own organisation, or accept a merely token role in the white-dominated organisations.

HOW CAN SASO BE HELPED?

First and foremost financially. African students can't afford even to travel to national meetings unless SASO can subsidise their fares. ~~An estimated budget has been produced for a full programme of field work (clinics, literacy campaigns, building programme) and regional and national conferences. It would cost about £15,000 a year. At the moment SASO can only raise about £500 a year from its own members. At its 1970 conference SASO also appealed to other national student bodies to recognise its existence and try to understand its difficulties.~~

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SASO?

From the: Communications Secretary,
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QUOTATION

"The change must begin within the black people, so that they will refuse to wear the white man's label of 'non people'. The struggle for freedom will begin with the struggle against the dehumanisation denies that black people are people. A black man trying to be a white in South Africa will only be allowed to be half a man. The strength of the black revolution will lie in their affirming their humanity as black people and so as whole people. No fascist regime, no security police poisoning their minds with suspicion, will be able to hold down the power released when a people, knowing they are people and not things, find themselves in open conflict with forces which would deny their humanity.

At the multiracial University Christian Movement conference we attended, both black and white students seemed resigned to the fact that multiracial organisations, with their clash of contradicting white liberal and frustrated black aspirations, had less and less to contribute to the struggle. White liberalism can offer little more than charity to help the black people cope with their dehumanised lot. What little it might achieve would be through channels open to non-whites to become a little more white, at a pace dictated by white interests.

The most meaningful role of multiracial organisations such as the U.C.M. has been, perhaps, the creation of a community whose life pattern is a vision of the society it hopes for and an indication that such a society is possible in South Africa. However, as many African students pointed out, multiracial conferences, in their easy camaraderie, tend to forget the reality of South Africa outside, until blacks and whites go home and become whites and non-whites again.

Students of the recently formed South African Students Organisation (SASO) have turned their backs on multiracial efforts to achieve justice for the black people. SASO excludes whites from its membership, describing itself first as a black organisation and secondly as a student organisation.

In its mission to the black people SASO is the most hopeful movement on the student scene. SASO's emphasis is that freedom can never be given to the black people in hand-outs from white oppressors. Liberation begins first of all within the people when they free themselves from the illusion that they are an inferior grade of whites, and by establishing the fact of their own humanity and a pride in being black people.

The fight for freedom must begin with this affirmation of black humanity".

NOTES FROM AN S.C.M. VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA

David Currie
Edinburgh

c. July 1970