

**SASO Newsletter - Vol. I, No. 1**

**Turfloop**

**July 1969**

[NOTE: While based on true events, this letter is fictional]<sup>i</sup>

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**WE HAVE COME HOME TO OURSELVES**

May I be clear to you from the start. This newsletter exists because we decided that, permission or not, the people need to hear about our efforts. The people of South Africa need to be filled with hope that change is coming, and that we are making great steps for that change. We are making moves that non-white students in this country are not supposed to make. That, my brothers and sisters, is what SASO is about.

I was a medical student at the University of Natal when it became clear to me that something was badly wrong. Not just with our segregated society - nobody needs to be told that - but instead with us as a people. The problem, my dear readers, is how we carried ourselves inside it. We learned, through years of patient instruction, to see ourselves through the eyes of the white man. We had been handed an image of ourselves that was not our own, and we got comfortable with who that image showed us.

The most insidious achievement of apartheid is not its law. It is this: the oppressed agree with the oppressor about their own inferiority.

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I want to name something that has been said about SASO since our formation, because it will continue to be said and it deserves a direct answer. Cries of "shame" have come from white students who have, in their own way, struggled to maintain what they naively call "interracial contact". From some black militants, SASO is not our answer. These black students see it as too cautious. Meanwhile, white students worry this is a swing toward militancy.

In the middle of it all stands SASO. This move by non-white students is defensible, it was also very long overdue. It appears as though is a crime for the black student to think for himself. The idea that the blacks need some kind of help

from the whites is an old and comfortable assumption, but this shall be no more! We separate so we can stand upright. We gather among ourselves so that we may come to any future table as equals, not as slaves of the white man.

The moment the black student says he would prefer to do things for himself, suddenly he is a risk. He is seen as dangerous. He has committed the sin of independence.

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### **THE ROAD TO TURFLOOP**

Eight years ago, in 1961 and 62, attempts were made to establish non-white student organisations. These were torn apart by the ideological rivalries between ANC<sup>ii</sup> and PAC<sup>iii</sup> supporters! None of them survived, except NUSAS<sup>iv</sup>, whose influence was on white campuses like Wits, Rhodes, the University of Cape Town. It was impossible for black students to attain leadership positions in that organisation, and least of all could NUSAS truly speak for non-white campuses.

At the UCM<sup>v</sup> conference in Stutterheim in July 1968, about forty black students from all the main black centres of higher education in the Republic agreed that a nationally representative black student organisation was not only possible but necessary.

I am proud to inform you that in December of last year, a representative conference was held at Mariannhill, outside Durban. Approximately thirty black student representatives sat together and founded this organisation that we hoped for. We called it the South African Students' Organisation.

This July, we held our inaugural conference at Turfloop<sup>vi</sup> where our constitution was approved, and I was elected as SASO's first president.

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### **THE CHALLENGE AHEAD**

SASO has had many difficulties since its founding. We lack the financial resources - as with every non-white organisation in this country - and we need mutual support to survive it. Communication between campuses remains sluggish as a result.

There is also the fear of authority. I understand this fear. I do not dismiss it. But I ask every student leader at every non-white institution to consider what it costs us to let that fear win.

The future depends on what we do next. I believe there will be a swing to the right on the white campuses. When that day comes, SASO may be the only student organisation in this country still concerned with contact between the races. We shall, for now, prepare for that moment to arrive.

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I, and the rest of SASO, will continue to work hard. We will write honestly. We will argue with one another when necessary. And most importantly, we will not perform for an audience that has never respected us.

The leadership of the non-white people in this country rests with us. No one will take that challenge up until we accept it. We have begun.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B.S. Biko', written in a cursive style.

B.S. Biko

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted primarily from: Stephen Biko, 'SASO - its Role, its Significance and its Future', in *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings*, ed. by Aelred Stubbs C.R. (University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 3-7.

<sup>ii</sup> African National Congress.

<sup>iii</sup> Pan African Congress of Azania.

<sup>iv</sup> National Union of South African Students.

<sup>v</sup> Unified Communications Management.

<sup>vi</sup> University of the North.