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"Creative Organisers" rather than "Powerful Speakers": Education as a Site of Struggle

Having analysed SANSCO's ideology and politics, I now examine particular aspects of its organisation. Specifically, I focus on its structure and membership, its modes of recruitment and education and training of its members, its organisational culture, and the conditions that shaped its activities. These issues are considered in relation to two distinct periods. The first period is the years 1979 to 1986, which were generally characterised by reform initiatives on the part of the apartheid state and by an upsurge in political opposition and mass action on the part of the dominated classes and strata. Organisational issues during this period are, in turn, discussed in relation to two phases of SANSCO's life. The first phase tracks the organisation between its formation in late 1979 and mid-1981 when it moved from a commitment to Black Consciousness towards a Congress movement perspective on struggle. The second phase covers the period mid-1981 to mid-1986, when it established a strong organisational presence at higher educational institutions.

The second period encompasses the year's mid-1986 to early 1990, which were characterised by states of emergency and extremely repressive political conditions, which only ended with the government's liberalisation measures of February 1990. Issues around organisation are posed in relation to the severe state repression experienced by SANSCO

and other mass organisations – repression that involved not only the occupation of some campuses by the army and police and the detention of activists, but also, from February 1988, a de facto proscription of SANSCO.

Although I cover certain of SANSCO's activities and initiatives in this chapter, and leave others to the next chapter dealing with "mobilisation and collective action", there are no hard boundaries between many of the activities discussed. Thus, SANSCO's initiatives around education and training and women students which I deal with as a feature of its organisation can also be considered to be forms of collective action. Conversely, the Education Charter campaign that I cover under "mobilisation and collective action" can, of course, also be seen as aspects of overall organisational activity. Finally, in this chapter my analysis and evaluation of SANSCO's organisation is of a specific and limited nature. A more detailed and general assessment of issues related to SANSCO's organisational character is left to Chapter 10.

Organisation and Activities, 1979 to 1981

In line with BC doctrine, membership of SANSCO was restricted to black higher education students. There was much debate around the form that local-level organisation on the campuses should take. One position was that affiliation to SANSO by Student Representative Councils (SRCs) should be the ideal. Opponents of this position argued that SRCs were an attempt by the university authorities to control the student body. The rejoinder to this was that SRCs had been affiliates of SASO, and that at some campuses SRCs were largely autonomous and an outcome of mass student struggles. The debate was eventually resolved with the decision that "branches independent of SRCs be formed on the campuses" and that SRC members should join SANSCO as individual members of branches.[8.1]

Between late 1979 and mid-1981, SANSCO made little headway in establishing an organisational infrastructure on campuses. Yet the period April 1980 to mid-1981 was characterised by widespread mass student, worker and civic struggles and political campaigns, conditions which should have facilitated the building of an infrastructure on the campuses. However, for a number of reasons SANSCO was unable to

mobilise students or to tap into this mobilisation and translate it into organisation.

First, the conflict that emerged in early 1980 between the SANSCO leadership and AZAPO was debilitating for the SANSCO officials and the fledgling organisation. Criticism of the AZAPO action meant that the "the next thing that happened is we were kicked out of the offices" (interview with Nkoane, 1995). Moreover, the effective ending of the relationship with AZAPO also denied SANSCO vital financial and material support and resources, which hindered its activities during 1980.

Second, and a more serious problem, was that student activists already committed to the Congress movement stood aloof from SANSCO. Such activists were hegemonic or influential in the SRCs at the universities of Durban-Westville (UDW), Western Cape (UWC) and Natal Medical School (UNMS), in the Black Student Societies (BSS) at the universities of Natal (Pietermaritzburg), Witwatersrand (Wits) and Rhodes, and in various other local campus-based organisations at the different higher education institutions. According to the Wits Black Students' Society the lesson of the 1980 student boycott was the "need to establish strong organisations and to elaborate a precise theory (i.e. the ideas in terms of which we understand the nature of our society and how to overcome oppression)"[8.2] – the kind of theory it was felt that SANSCO lacked. One of the tasks of the Interim Committee (IC) established at SANSCO's launch was to convene a more representative follow-up conference during 1980. Owing to a ban on all political meetings the conference could not be held. However, given the attitude of the Congress students it is likely that this conference would have been no more representatives than the inaugural one.

A number of meetings were held by SANSCO in early 1980 in Soweto, on its own, or jointly with COSAS and AZAPO. These were directed at introducing SANSCO to students, at discussing problems in education and generating parent support in resolving student educational grievances, and at pledging support for civic struggles as part of the programmatic commitment to involvement in community issues.[8.3] Such meetings, while they may have popularised SANSCO and won it some members, contributed little to mobilising and organising its

constituency on the campuses and, in general, there was stagnation at an organisational level. Individual members of SANSCO were active in the 1980 boycotts at the universities of Fort Hare, the North (UNIN) and elsewhere that expressed solidarity with the secondary school student boycott. However, it was only at UNIN that a formal branch of SANSCO existed. One SANSCO activity at UNIN was the setting up of political reading and discussion groups

> because we realised that a number of activists were not reading and we wanted to make it easier for them to read so that they could be able to get engaged in debates. So there was an effort to try and have discussion groups and then what we'd do is try and organise literature, particularly banned literature because it used to be very appealing to people ... (interview with Nkoane, 3 August 1995).

The participation of SANSCO in the anti-Republic Day campaign of 1981 provided it with a greater and national public profile. Moreover, its participation also began to attract the interest of Congress student activists. For many of the Congress students SANSCO, however weak, was a reality. Some of them had participated in a meeting organised at the end of 1980 by the SANSCO Interim Committee (IC) to exchange ideas. It had become clear that many of the IC members were in fact supporters of the Congress movement and that the real difference lay around strategy. Phaala acknowledged the view of the IC that, in the aftermath of the banning of Black Consciousness organisations in 1977, what needed "to be done was to show the state that we are not afraid" (Phaala, 1983b:2). IC members supportive of the Congress movement treated SANSCO as a fait accompli and were of the view that that it's future direction and content had to be fought for from within.

With the public movement of the SANSCO leadership towards the Congress movement there was a softening of attitude towards the organisation on the part of those Congress activists outside SANSCO. More immediately, the strong appeal by Nkoane to Phaala and others to attend the first congress in July 1981 posed the question of how they should respond and also formally relate to SANSCO. The lawyer and underground ANC activist Griffiths Mxenge, assassinated in 1981, urged Phaala and other Durban-based activists to attend the congress.[8.4]

A grouping from UNMS and UDW did, Phaala describing himself as not a member or delegate but as a "reluctant supporter."[8.5]

Between 1979 and mid-1981 SANSCO existed largely in name. On the eve of its first national congress it was organisationally weak, numbering within its ranks only one branch, and a few score individuals – predominantly male university students. It lacked any substantial organisational base within higher education institutions and was thus largely marginal to student political activity. Moreover, the tendency for SANSCO to concentrate on macro-political and township-based civic issues and to put its energies into township-based activities meant that the mobilisation and organisation of black students on the campuses was largely spearheaded by formations led by Congress activists outside of SANSCO.

Organisation: Structure and Membership, 1981 to 1986

Structure, infrastructure and membership

SANSCO's infrastructure at the campus level was constituted by a "branch". Individual affiliation to SANSCO was not permitted and those seeking membership had to belong to a branch, which had to consist of at least ten members to qualify for affiliation to SANSCO. No specific provision was made for en masse affiliation via SRCs. In practice, however, some campuses did affiliate en masse via their respective SRCs, although branch structures were also established on such campuses to co-ordinate the day-to-day work of SANSCO. On campuses where SANSCO had just begun to organise, aspirant members and supporters constituted a SANSCO "working group" as a vehicle for organisational activities. Such working groups generally participated in all SANSCO activities and policy- and decision-making forums but were precluded from nominating persons for national office and from voting in elections for national office-bearers.

The "supreme policy-making organ" of SANSCO was the Annual Congress (AC) to which each branch was permitted to send three delegates. The AC elected the national executive committee (NEC). During 1981 the NEC comprised the president, vice-president, national

secretary, correspondence secretary, minutes secretary, treasurer, national co-ordinator and an additional member to who were delegated special tasks. 1983 created additional positions for a project officer, publications officer and women's organiser (AZASO, Constitution and Policy, 1983). Later, the positions of the three secretaries were merged into a single portfolio of general secretary, and a position created for an education and training officer (ibid.). Members seeking election to national office had to be nominated by their branches, a practice that sought to ensure that national officials enjoyed the support and confidence of their branches and that branches were not handicapped by the loss of members to national office. NEC members were all volunteers in that none were full-time paid officials.

Apart from the AC there was also an annual General Students' Council (GSC). NEC members and delegates attended the GSC from branches and, later, also from regional councils and sub-regional councils. Regional councils were created in 1983 to co-ordinate activities of branches in a particular region, while sub-regional councils were established somewhat later to alleviate co-ordination problems in large regions. By the late 1980s there were five regions: Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal, with five sub-regions in the Transvaal and four in Natal (SAIRR, 1992: 56-58).

Apart from constitutional and policy changes and election of the NEC being the preserve of the AC, there was little else that distinguished the GSC from the AC. Both forums included not only delegates but also large numbers of members and aspirant members from working groups who attended as observers. Both considered reports from branches and regions and assessed the state of SANSCO. The GSC did, however, tend to be more concerned with issues such as the state of education and training within SANSCO, with reflecting on national campaigns and projects, and with discussing the state of relationships with other progressive organisations. Since the GSC was normally held during early December, it was also its specific task to define a political and organisational theme for SANSCO for the coming academic year and, in relation to overall political and educational conditions, to formulate a programme of action and to discuss strategy and tactics.

Organisation building: Campus conditions and challenges, 1981 to mid-1983

From the outset, the emphasis of the SANSCO leadership elected in 1981 was on the building of SANSCO as a mass democratic organisation. The priorities were defined as building local branches that were characterised by democratic participation and decision-making. Phaala stressed that "the only thing that will ensure our survival from attempts to divide and repress us is mass mobilisation and democratic organisation".[8.6] The secretary, Motswaledi, elaborated that "for such an organisation, we don't need powerful speakers as much as we need creative organisers", adding that it was imperative to strike a balance between mobilising around non-educational and educational issues and conditions.[8.7]

From the beginning, SANSCO was confronted by the authoritarian attitudes and repressive controls of campus authorities at black institutions. According to Phaala, this meant

> that it has been very difficult to organise on some campuses; various means have been used, on some of the campuses actually AZASO becomes an underground organisation to survive; students know they can't walk around and declare himself an AZASO member (1983a:6).

Motswaledi asserted that campus authorities were "taking over the role of the security police" and outlined various forms of "academic terrorism".[8.8] One form of control was the attempt by administrations to impose on students unacceptable SRC constitutions. Thus, at the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) the constitution prepared by the administration prescribed that it was duty of the SRC president to "see to it that students don't propose motions that are against the rules and regulations of the university"; that permission had to be obtained from the rector before press statements could be issued, and that no student club or society or organisation could affiliate to any organisation without the prior approval of the university.[8.9] Other forms of control were measures to prevent SANSCO leaders from speaking at campuses; prohibitions on the dissemination of newsletters and pamphlets unless these were first approved by the authorities, and the

practice of deliberate scheduling of exams and tests on well-known commemorative days in an attempt to preclude student mobilisation.

Conditions at technikons and colleges were even "more difficult actually than at the universities" (Phaala, 1983a:7). While the longer duration for degree programmes at universities provided scope for activist development; the shorter period of study at colleges (sometimes only two years) meant that, no sooner had activists developed experience, they had to leave.

> It is very difficult, because there is a slow process of making contact, and by the time contact is made and leadership emerges, and there are people who are willing to help you work they are already leaving (ibid.).

Furthermore, according to Phaala, teacher-training colleges had the "most dictatorial administrations in the country" because of their desire to maintain tight control on the ideas of teachers and their fear of progressive ideas being taken into schools.[8.10] At technikons, apart from authoritarian controls, an additional challenge was the nature of the academic programme. Frequently, academic courses comprised a combination of a semester of academic study followed by a semester of on-the-job training with the result that continuity in branch personnel as well as branch organisation and activity was severely disrupted.

Organising on the predominantly white campuses represented two different kinds of problems. One was the responses of conservative white students to campaigns such as those demanding the release of Nelson Mandela, the cancellation of "rebel" sports tours that occurred in violation of the international sports boycott against South Africa, or protesting Republic Day. Such events occasionally led to clashes between black and conservative white students. For SANSCO the problem was more than just the intimidating conditions created by conservative white students. As Phaala put it, the "dominant problem of organisation" on white campuses was that

> in that type of situation, it becomes very easy for attitudes of racial hatred to develop; and a non-racial approach to the struggle is affected by some of the experiences which students on these campuses have gone through (1983a:8).

However, threats and challenges to SANSCO's growth and development on campuses did not come only from campus authorities. One challenge, at campuses like UCT and Rhodes, stemmed from the activities of students supportive of the Unity Movement, a small left-wing grouping based predominantly in the Western Cape. In terms of the Unity Movement policy of "non-collaboration" with separate development political and social institutions, student organisations at campuses were condemned as an act of collaboration with the state, and Unity Movement students campaigned against their formation. Some left-wing students, dubbed "workerists", argued that student organisations were "petit bourgeois" and that students should rather join off-campus popular organisations. Both these groups of students were also hostile to NUSAS, which was labelled a "ruling class organisation", and strongly attacked any relationship with NUSAS and its affiliate SRCs. Although these groups did not represent a major organisational threat, they did obstruct somewhat the open and unfettered mobilisation and organisation of black students.[8.11]

A second challenge came from a combination of left wing and BC-supporting students who, while not opposed to black student organisation on campuses, attacked SANSCO's commitment to the Freedom Charter and also criticised its affiliation to the UDF and alliance with NUSAS. Both groups practised "entryism" – joining a SANSCO branch or attending meetings in order to either attempt to wrest control from Congress students or to frustrate and obstruct activities. As will be seen, the failure of an alliance of such left-wing and BC students to win control of the UCT branch of SANSCO led them to form the Students of Young Azania (SOYA) association which was based in the Western Cape.

With respect to the authoritarian controls and repressive measures of campus authorities, SANSCO stressed the need to "organise around these immediate issues" since "these restrictions and intimidatory methods allowed for the creation of an ill-informed and co-opted student body".[8.12] Repression and the attempt to create a docile student body was not seen as being in contradiction with the reformist thrust of corporate capital and the state to create a black middle-class but as an integral part of the reformist agenda. Thus, SANSCO activists

spearheaded campaigns for democratic and autonomous SRCs on campuses and engaged in mobilisation to defend and expand the space for student organisation. On especially repressive campuses, alternate vehicles for activism had to be utilised and/or created, "including people getting into the various allowed societies, academic societies, faculty councils, also things like religious organisations and so on" (Phaala, 1983a:6). At technikons, the problem of students alternating a semester of academic study with a semester of on-the-job training was addressed by having a branch committee for each semester. Finally, SANSCO leaders emphasised that challenges from progressive students of differing political persuasions could only be overcome through "all round mobilisation around concrete day to day and political issues and through building up strong organisation with well equipped activists".[8.13]

The continuous emphasis on building branches and membership and patient and principled organising was to be handsomely rewarded. At the 1981 congress SANSCO had consisted of just one branch. In contrast, some 300 students participated in SANSCO's second congress in July 1982, and in attendance were branches and working groups from all the black universities and white English-language campuses, and some colleges. Almost 600 delegates and observers attended the third congress in Cape Town and SANSCO claimed to have a presence at 14 university and technikon campuses and seven colleges (SAIRR, 1984:62). Students at UNMS and UDW affiliated en masse through their respective SRCs. Branches existed at UWC, UNIN, UNISA, MEDUNSA, UCT, Wits and the Pietermaritzburg campus of Natal University.[8.14] Working groups operated at Fort Hare, Zululand, at the Durban campus of Natal University and Rhodes, at the Mangosuthu technikon, Mapumulo theological seminary, and a number of teacher-training colleges. Regional councils were also established by mid-1983 in the Western Cape, Natal and Transvaal.

"Organising for people's education", mid-1983 to mid-1986

Notwithstanding the progress that was made around the building of an infrastructure on the campuses, Moseneke, elected president in 1983, declared himself to be not completely satisfied.

> To date we have done a lot of work at grassroots level, getting students to understand our analysis of the situation, encouraging them to read and to discuss things. But we haven't managed to achieve an effective national presence.[8.15]

To ensure an "effective national presence" branches were called on to consolidate and expand organisation and membership and to further extend organisation to new campuses. The reference to ensure that SANSCO was "effective" was also an attempt to rally activists to deal with new threats and challenges that had the potential to seriously impede progress. Phaala, in welcoming members to the congress, had emphasised that

> [t]he road ahead is going to be a very turbulent one and will require maximum vigilance, determination and discipline of our members. Attempts from various quarters to frustrate our organisation at various campuses are going to gain momentum (AZASO National Newsletter, June 1983:1).

Already, in early 1983, there had been verbal and physical clashes between SANSCO members and supporters and student supporters of AZAPO at a number of campuses. The most serious clash, however, was at the black student residence of UNMS. The pro-AZAPO BSS at the University of Natal (Durban) alleged that its members and guests were "attacked by a mob of about 60 people armed with sjamboks, batons, pangas, iron bars and knives, led by AZASO President – Joe Phaala".[8.16] While the allegation that Phaala led the attackers was untrue, the skirmish did signal an unwelcome development in student politics. SANSCO accorded the blame for the clashes to the "entryism" and obstructionist activities of AZAPO supporters, and stated that "if this is not deliberate provocation, opportunism, destructiveness, then we don't know what else we can call it".[8.17]

AZAPO's attitude towards SANSCO was also said to contribute to tensions and clashes.

> It is common knowledge that ever since AZASO decided to align itself with progressive forces ... AZAPO people have persistently regarded AZASO not just as an opponent but actually as enemy number 1. AZASO has been accused of being Marxist-Leninist, Communist, ANC fronts etc. At all times our

> organisation has tried to avoid confrontation but AZAPO people have persistently pushed our members to the final limits of their patience and tolerance – and this has of late led to outbreaks of violent confrontations.[8.18]

SANSCO called on its members to exercise restraint in the face of "provocation and opportunism". However, between 1984 and 1986 there continued to be occasional clashes between SANSCO members and BC supporters (SAIRR, 1985:698; 1986:405).

In July 1983, BC students eventually launched the Azanian Students' Movement (AZASM). Whereas the campus activities of BC supporters had previously been characterised by spoiling tactics and purely criticism and opposition, the formation of AZASM meant that SANSCO was now confronted by an organisational challenge for membership and hegemony on campuses. According to the first president of AZASM, the rationale for its formation was that

> Black Consciousness faithfuls found themselves politically homeless ... after the up to then BC AZASO abandoned the BC ideology for something "more contemporary" ... This act constituted an inexcusable abrogation of responsibility to the legacy of SASO (Johnson, 1988:111, quoting AZASM publication, Awake Black Student [March 1985]).

A concomitant challenge came from yet another new formation, the Students of Young Azania (SOYA), which was confined to the Western Cape. The formation of both AZASM and SOYA related to their differences with SANSCO regarding political approach and strategy, and to their attempt and that of their parent groupings to win a base among higher education students.

AZASM's strategy of claiming to represent the SASO tradition in order to facilitate its mobilisation of students had been expected by the SANSCO leadership. On the one hand, the SANSCO leadership saw no purpose in becoming embroiled around the question of which organisation was the "true" successor of SASO. It was believed that claims to SASO's legacy would not confer any advantage, and that the ultimate determinant of success or failure would be day-to-day organisational efforts. On the other hand, it was seen as necessary to neutralise the notion of an essential continuity between SASO and

AZASM through two means. The first was to acknowledge SASO's contribution to the liberation struggle but to also critique its weaknesses. Second, it had to be shown that AZAPO and the post-1977 BC movement was not the political home of many past SASO and BC leaders and that, indeed, many such leaders were now part of the Congress movement.

The tactic of pointing to the political trajectory of BC leaders subsequent to the banning of SASO and BC organisations in 1977 was put into operation at the July 1983 congress of SANSCO, which coincided with AZASM's inaugural conference. To underlie its claim to be the successor of SASO, AZASM invited Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, a previous SASO president, and Strini Moodley, an ex-SASO publicity director, to address its conference. The SANSCO congress, in contrast, was addressed by the ex-SASO president Diliza Mji, "Terror" Lekota, a previous SASO organiser, and Murphy Morobe and Dan Montsisi, previous leaders of the secondary-school based South African Students' Movement. All four ex-BC leaders were now key members of the UDF (AZASO National Student Newsletter, November 1983).

If AZASO and SOYA represented a new challenge, hostile campus administrations remained an intractable threat. In late 1983, the SANSCO UDW branch was banned for being a political organisation, and the UDW SRC was suspended by the administration. A new feature of repression was the open collusion of campus security personnel with the security police – two students distributing pamphlets were arrested by the campus security and handed over to the security police.[8.20] At MEDUNSA, because of a hostile campus administration, SANSCO was forced to operate off-campus. At Fort Hare too, SANSCO had to function off-campus. In 1984, after establishing a presence at the University of Transkei, SANSCO was banned in the Transkei (SAIRR, 1985:21).

After a KwaZulu Legislative Assembly discussion on its activities (WUS/AUT, 1986:10), SANSCO was also banned at the University of Zululand (UNIZUL). More ominously, in October 1983, four students were brutally killed and many others injured by supporters of Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha Party.[8.21] SANSCO, of course, condemned Buthelezi for his participation in separate development structures, and

had verbally clashed with him on a number of occasions. Immediately prior to the killings, SANSCO members at UNIZUL had been in the forefront of opposition to Buthelezi visiting the university. Buthelezi expressed no regrets over the killings but issued the threat that

> if those in AZASO have not yet learnt the errors of their ways and corrected their thinking, they will find the Inkatha lion has up to now only growled ever so softly. We have not bared our fangs and I pray ... that AZASO never makes us do so (quoted in Frederikse, 1986:157).

He also called upon his supporters: "Let us deal with them at every opportunity and let us do so with valour and honour" (ibid.). In early 1984, he issued an edict that students receiving KwaZulu bursaries had to sign a pledge of loyalty to KwaZulu and Inkatha, a move which involved SANSCO in raising funds for students.

In addition to physical attacks and killings, SANSCO members also became the target of state repression. A number of SANSCO members and supporters were detained, banned, and imprisoned for alleged ANC activities. Increasingly, the state viewed SANSCO as a front of the banned ANC. However, an especially repressive period for some campuses was ushered in by the declaration of a partial state of emergency in mid-1985. Activists at various campuses were detained and SANSCO called on its members stating that "in this climate the chief task of the day is to close our ranks; consolidate our struggles and membership" (AZASO National Student Newsletter, late 1985:2). There were also individual casualties. At the Transvaal College of Education, a student was killed by police during a campaign for an SRC. Another tragic casualty was Ngocko Ramelepe, a key SANSCO and UDF activist who had helped establish a SANSCO branch at Modjadji teacher-training college in the Northern Transvaal. Also in the forefront of efforts to form a democratic SRC at the college and, indeed, ita first president, Ramelepe was beaten to death by Lebowa bantustan police.[8.22]

With the declaration of the state of emergency, SANSCO defined the task as being

> principally to organise ourselves against this onslaught, understanding very clearly that there is no reason to be intimidated by

this emergency. We have a task to organise every student and challenge apartheid ... Organise! Organise! Please organise! (AZASO National Student Newsletter, late 1985:3).

Physical repression was not the only threat. New legislation was also passed which gave councils of universities and technikons the power to exclude students without a hearing. Recognising its potential to intimidate students, SANSCO

resolved to fight tooth and nail this Act which will academically and politically terrorise students from challenging wrongs which are deliberately created by these authorities (ibid.:4).

While the various repressive measures did make SANSCO's existence on many campuses extremely tenuous, they did not entirely prevent it from operating on campuses, and new issues were also provided around which to organise.

Despite the increasing repression, the process of growth of branches and expansion to new campuses continued. On many campuses activists innovated new ways of functioning and SANSCO operated through various front organisations – for example, at Fort Hare hostel committees were established as vehicles for meetings and activities. On many campuses various clubs and societies began to come increasingly under the hegemony of SANSCO activists – from the debating and drama societies and college choir at the Cape College of Education to sports and house committees at UNMS.[8.23] The previous working groups at Natal University (Durban), Rhodes, Zululand and Fort Hare all achieved branch status. There was also a penetration of some teacher-training colleges in the rural areas of the Cape and branches were formed at the Northern Transvaal and Mangosuthu technikons. SRC elections at UWC also brought into office an SRC that was strongly pro-SANSCO.[8.24]

At the end of 1983, it was noted that

1983 has been a year of growth and a year of lessons. Co-ordination and communication between the campuses has improved, organisation has been consolidated on existing AZASO campuses and the student organisation has expanded into new ones. The importance of strong organisational structure

has been highlighted by the onslaught on the student movement from both university administrations and the state.[8.25]

The third GSC of SANSCO in December 1983 saw the adoption of a new theme, "Organising for people's education", to replace the previous theme of "education towards democracy". Two reasons were advanced for the change in theme. First, it was felt that while 1983 had seen high levels of mobilisation and widespread popularisation of SANSCO, there was a need to go beyond just mobilisation: "We must draw more students into AZASO and get them committed to working on a day to day basis in building AZASO. Without strong organisation we will never win our freedom" (AZASO, 1984). Second, the new theme was also an attempt to direct student mobilisation and organisational actions towards a greater engagement around the form and content of education and relations in education as contrasted with issues related to state and political power. The new theme also dovetailed with the greater emphasis that SANSCO sought to give during 1984 to its campaign to formulate an Education Charter (see Chapter 9).

SANSCO continued to expand during 1984-85. By mid-1984 the mood of the organisation was distinctly buoyant. It was claimed that many battles were won in early 1984 and that

> [w]e have achieved this only through our organised strength. This strength is increasing with the large numbers of techs and training colleges joining AZASO. The AZASO approach is a practical one which ensures that we are consistently engaging the enemy in struggle. Our honesty and dedication is ensuring the rapid growth of AZASO. The 1984 congress will certainly be bigger than the 1983 one (AZASO, June 1984).

The 1984 congress in Soweto was considerably larger, bringing together "700 students from 34 universities, technikons and colleges". The new SANSCO president, Simpiwe Mguduso, stated that SANSCO "has expanded to all corners of the country",[8.26] and noted that "there is a greater preparedness among students to take up issues, even on repressive campuses such as Fort Hare".[8.27] Significant inroads were made into teacher-training colleges in Natal, the Southern Cape and Western Cape. Furthermore, students at institutions in the

"independent" bantustans like the Transkei and Venda were becoming incorporated into SANSCO. The expansion and growing influence of SANSCO was not confined to an increase in the number of affiliated branches and working groups. SRCs at UNIN and UWC and at the M L Sultan Technikon were also dominated by SANSCO members and supporters. Nonetheless, technikons and colleges were targeted for still greater organisational efforts.[8.28]

The 1985 congress, on the eve of the declaration of a state of emergency, was attended by some 600 members from 52 campuses. Priority continued to be accorded to campaigning for and building democratic organisation and SRCs. At the same time there was renewed stress on improving the participation of women in SANSCO. During the three years since the low level of women's involvement in SANSCO was first identified by members at the 1982 congress as a problem, initiatives such as the creation of a women's organiser portfolio on the national executive and the establishment of a women's committee had yielded no significant improvement in participation (see also below). There was also a continued emphasis on organising in the colleges and technikons. Colleges were considered to be "strategically placed in the communities" and since many of them were located in rural areas, expansion of SANSCO into these was regarded as having the potential to contribute to resistance in "the rural areas and outlying places which we know are so important in our struggle".[8.29] A presence in colleges was also seen as part of the process of challenging the use of teachers as propagators of apartheid ideology. Finally, there was a commitment to also helping form youth organisations in townships around campuses where SANSCO had a presence.

The state of emergency disrupted SANSCO's activities and, according to Ramokgopa,

> [s]ome student organisations couldn't operate at all. Our major campaigns, such as the Education Charter campaign, were severely affected – our national programme had to be drastically changed.[8.30]

The "short term response" of SANSCO was to mobilise students against the state of emergency while the organisational challenge was

defined as "to bring back the level of organisation that existed before the state of emergency". Strong local organisation in the form of SRCs and branches were viewed as "as being very important because if we become strong at the local level we will be able to absorb this heavy blow".[8.31] Although communication and co-ordination between the SANSCO national executive and local SANSCO structures, and between local structures themselves, was hampered, the establishment of SRCs and new working groups continued unabated. Numerous colleges in the Lebowa bantustan were incorporated into SANSCO's fold, and representatives of student formations at these colleges pledged to campaign for democratic SRCs, to promote the National Education Union of South Africa, a non-racial progressive teacher organisation with whom SANSCO had a close relationship, and to isolate a Transvaal-based conservative African teachers' organisation.[8.32] New working groups were also "set up at Bellville Technikon, Rand College, in Oudtshoorn and at Bechet College, Durban".[8.33] Thus, by the end of 1985, and despite many of its activists and members being in hiding and detention, SANSCO was not only organisationally intact but also growing. At a GSC in December 1985 the new theme of "student action for people's education" was adopted, a signal of SANSCO's confidence in its organisational infrastructure and capacity to mobilise in pursuit of its educational goals.

If the expected repression from the side of campus authorities and the state did materialise and was generally withstood, the challenge for membership and hegemony on campuses from AZASM and SOYA failed to materialise. Although these formations did establish a presence on some campuses they posed no serious threat to SANSCO's growth and expansion and did not limit SANSCO's influence on the student constituency. SOYA was restricted to a small presence at UCT. AZASM, while it enjoyed a presence among secondary school students in some areas, was less successful at higher education campuses. Where AZASM did attempt to challenge SANSCO's hegemony, through contesting elections to SRCs and black student societies, SANSCO members and supporters were generally able to achieve complete control

of such bodies or secure comfortable majorities. Thus, for example, during a referendum among black students held by the Black Students Movement (BSM) at Rhodes in late 1983, students "voted overwhelmingly to affiliate to AZASO rather than to the black consciousness oriented ... AZASM" (SAIRR, 1984:464).

In summary, SANSCO's organisational development during the period 1981 to early 1986 was conditioned by authoritarian and repressive measures on the part of many campus administrations and the state. However, despite the difficult conditions and challenges from other progressive student groupings, SANSCO was able to grow in membership, establish a strong presence at the universities and also expand into a number of technikons and teacher training colleges. The theme of "student action for people's education" reflected SANSCO's satisfaction with its organisational achievements and signalled its intention to harness its organisation to campaign more vigorously around relations internal to higher education.

Organisation under National States of Emergency, 1986 to 1990

Between mid-1986 and early 1990, SANSCO was to confront its severest challenge as the apartheid government imposed successive national states of emergency. The state of emergency introduced in mid-1985 achieved only limited success in dampening mass popular resistance, and the declaration of a state of emergency on 12 June 1986, and its annual re-imposition until 1990, signalled the determination of the state to re-impose control.

The effects of the new conditions were felt almost immediately. Four months into the state of emergency, a SANSCO spokesperson reported that "administrations have been conniving with police, or else they are taking advantage of the state of emergency to make life unbearable for students" (Weekly Mail, 8 October 1986). A report commissioned by the World University Service and British Association of University Teachers summed up conditions and confirmed the close relationship between campus administrations and state authorities:

> Some of the black campuses exist in a state of almost constant conflict and siege. The students enrolled at most of the black campuses have been confronted by a rigidly authoritarian approach to dissent. University administrators have collaborated fully with the state authorities in dealing with incidents on their campuses. Security forces are often called onto campus when incidents occur (WUS/AUT, 1989:10).

Administrations also utilised the state of emergency to deal with SANSCO members and supporters. Thus, 277 students were expelled from UNIZUL in 1987, and a further 44 in 1989, the latter being reinstated only after appeals by a delegation comprising students, parents and prominent community leaders (SAIRR, 1992:56-8).

The state of emergency impacted on SANSCO in various ways. A number of SANSCO activists were detained for varying periods while others were forced into hiding and a life on the run. At a number of campuses, activists were not able to attend classes, live in the residences or participate in student political activity because of the presence of security police in the guise of students and police raids on residences. A Wits activist asserted that "this total onslaught on BSS and SANSCO should be seen against the background of the state's systematic campaign of repression" (New Nation, 4 June 1987). Police spies were another hazard, a UCT student confessing in 1987 that he was in the pay of security police who had instructed him to monitor and report on SANSCO, and especially on its internal workings and any "divisions which could be used by the state to destroy" it.[8.34]

One immediate effect of the state of emergency was that the annual congress had to be postponed. With some institutions under siege by the army and police, it was felt that the congress "would not have been adequately representative"[8.35] Of course, branches and activists already had some experience of operating under emergency conditions, and arrangements were made for the sixth congress to be held in secret in December 1986. Even this congress "did not turn out to be what we expected. Key activists were in detention at the time".[8.36] Although, for security reasons, the congress was attended by only 190 members, some 72 branches were represented. As a response to the repressive conditions and the ongoing crisis in education, one decision of the congress was for

SANSCO "to embark on an intensive campaign to consolidate our branches and to form strong parent committees which will deal specifically with the crisis at local level".[8.37]

The sixth congress was especially notable for the decision to change the name of the organisation from the Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO) to the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO). Having lived with the name "AZASO" for over five years, and having continuously insisted that the organisation should be primarily judged by its approach, what accounted for the organisers' changing the name six months into a national state of emergency? Debate around the name "AZASO" had been ongoing since 1981, and its retention had been a "tactical decision". In the early 1980s the non-racial approach was new and untested among students, and in order to not confuse them the issue of nomenclature was shelved and the organisation concentrated on organisation-building. However, by the mid-1980s there was a hardening of the ideological and political divide between the Congress and BC movements. "Azania" was the name by which BC adherents referred to South Africa and was thus strongly identified with BC organisations. Its retention by Congress students thus led to constant debates between SANSCO members and other Congress activists who urged their student comrades to be more "ideologically pure". Thus, to bring its ideology and politics and its name into alignment and leave no doubts about its political affiliations, the name SANSCO was adopted. It was also asserted that the name of South Africa would be "decided upon by the people of this country and not a few excitable and well-read intellectuals".[8.38]

The timing of the name change also had to do with the conviction that the Congress movement was hegemonic on campuses. As Johnson writes in an essay on youth politics in the mid-1980s:

> One of the most striking characteristics was the overwhelming dominance of the Charterist groupings. Not only in youth structures ... but also in the student- and pupil-led organisations, the Congress tradition held sway. An indicator of this trend was a decision by AZASO ... to drop the anomalous "Azania" from its title in December 1986 (1988:140-141).

Elsewhere, Johnson elaborates on the significance and meaning of the name change:

> The significance of the decision to change AZASO's name does not lie in any alteration of the organisation's ideology, structure, approach – or, indeed, prominent personnel. The content of the organisation will not change at all. Rather the change reflects a high level of organisational confidence, somewhat surprisingly, given the harshness of the state of emergency. For AZASO to risk losing the media and membership notoriety of a well-marketed trademark in favour of ideological consistency is, amongst other things, and indication that the organisation believes that it has so far outstripped its rivals (like AZASM) that it need not be concerned about their exploiting this period of change and uncertainty amongst rank-and-file supporters.[8.39]

Indeed, it was SANSCO's view that AZASM's influence on campuses was negligible and that it no longer represented any threat to SANSCO's hegemony within higher education.

The effects on SANSCO of the first eighteen months of the state of emergency were revealed by a newsletter published soon after SANSCO's seventh congress in December 1987, and in a newspaper interview given to the New Nation by James Maseko, the SANSCO publicity secretary. According to the newsletter, whereas "during the period 1983 to 1985 our organisation was in a fairly strong position", the state of emergency

> had a material effect on our organisations. SANSCO has not escaped this onslaught. Branches at Turfloop, Fort Hare and Ngoye have been virtually destroyed. At colleges we operate under extremely repressive conditions and this has retarded the qualitative development of organisation (SANSCO National Newsletter, 1st quarter 1988).

Furthermore, activists were detained, communication and co-ordination with various branches was disrupted, and important advances made in organising colleges in the Northern Transvaal collapsed. Although the seventh congress was attended by 276 members SANSCO was

only able to count 62 branches, 10 less than our 1986 congress. We also have the situation where many of our branches, while still in existence, have been weakened significantly. In this sense we openly admit that the state of emergency has materially affected our organisation.[8.40]

Still, one success was that SANSCO was able to establish itself at three institutions in the Orange Free State (OFS), and constitute the OFS as a new region (SANSCO National Newsletter, 1st quarter 1988: 5). Moreover, Maseko was of the view that the state of emergency was a time of "learning". Although SANSCO had "made mistakes"

we have also been able to pick ourselves up. While we may be weaker than before the emergency was declared, we are a lot more mature politically. The emergency also exposed the weaknesses that existed in our ranks. We were, as a result, forced to confront these weaknesses and we have overcome them to a certain extent. But we are under no illusions that we have a long way to go.[8.41]

One of the "mistakes" alluded to concerned the lack of attention to formulating strategy and tactics appropriate to organising at colleges. In this regard it was stressed that

[i]t has long been emphasised that our strategy and tactics are shaped not only by theory, but also by the material conditions obtaining in any context of our political operation (SANSCO National Newsletter, 1st quarter 1988:12).

Regret was also expressed for the impression that SANSCO catered only for university students and once again the need to concentrate on colleges and technikons, and for regional and national leaders to emerge from these institutions was emphasised. There was a pledge to continue fighting repression on campuses and state attempts "to crush opposition at educational institutions".[8.42]

The theme adopted for 1988 was "organise, consolidate and advance towards people's education" (SAIRR, 1988:183). The new theme was an attempt to adjust to the realities of the state of emergency that confronted SANSCO. Maseko contrasted the new theme with the previous one of "Student action for people's education" which had been adopted in 1985 when SANSCO felt itself to be organisationally strong

and poised to expand into new institutions. Consequently, SANSCO was able to

> talk of student action without concerning ourselves with deep questions of organisation and consolidation – not because they were not important but because they already existed in most cases.[8.43]

The new theme was

> a realisation of the effects of the emergency – it has disorganised, weakened and in some ways rolled back the gains we have made. It is therefore only after we have reorganised branches that have collapsed, organise the unorganised and consolidate the stronger structures that we can effectively talk of advances.[8.44]

It was pointed out that while SANSCO had a presence on 62 campuses there were well over 100 higher education institutions in South Africa and thus much work to be done to incorporate students into SANSCO and the struggle for democracy.

Whereas during the initial twenty months of the state of emergency SANSCO was subject only to the general restrictions imposed under the state of emergency, this situation was to dramatically change on 24 February 1988. Together with the United Democratic Front, the National Education Crisis Committee, and another 14 organisations, SANSCO was effectively banned under new emergency regulations. The regulations outlawed almost all activities. Only administrative functions related to the keeping of books and records, the obtaining of legal advice and the taking of judicial steps, and activities permitted by government, were allowed. In a profile of the 17 banned organisations the Weekly Mail noted that "SANSCO is the dominant organisation at university and college campuses ... Its membership, difficult to estimate reliably, certainly ran to several thousand".[8.45] In December 1988, the SANSCO affiliates at Rhodes and at Wits were also proscribed under the new regulations and there were police raids on the offices of SANSCO and the SRC at UWC (SAIRR, 1989:300; Weekly Mail, 2 December 1988).

With the banning of SANSCO, activists operated through ad-hoc formations and new structures – thus, at Wits a Black Students Interim Committee was established and at UCT a Black Students Society

(SAIRR, 1990:874). Notwithstanding the state of emergency and the banning of popular organisations, from mid-1988 popular forces were again resurgent. Once again students on campuses were mobilised in support of campaigns and actions. When a "defiance campaign" was launched in late 1989 to defy, amongst other things, restrictions on organisations, SANSCO and its branches and affiliates publicly declared themselves "unbanned". The extensive mass mobilisation of the 1988-89 period provided the opportunity to revive and revitalise branches and overall organisation.

Having declared itself unbanned, SANSCO proceeded to convene its eighth congress in December 1989, and to celebrate its tenth anniversary at the University of Western Cape. SANSCO was said to comprise 77 branches and 5 regions (SAIRR, 1992:56-58). The keynote speaker at the congress was Ahmed Kathrada, one of the ANC leaders released in October 1989, in what was to become a process leading to the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela. Kathrada praised SANSCO's contribution to the democratic struggle but also questioned whether SANSCO, given its racial composition, could claim to be a truly non-racial organisation and raised the possibility of a merger with NUSAS (personal notes, December 1989). At about the same time, Andrew Mlangeni, another recently released ANC leader, issued a more forthright challenge to the NUSAS congress: namely, for NUSAS and SANSCO to form one organisation (Weekly Mail, 15 December 1989).

The outcome of these challenges to SANSCO and NUSAS was that both organisations adopted resolutions to look into the question of a merger. However, within months SANSCO was to be confronted with other crucial questions. On 2 February 1990, President de Klerk announced the lifting of the ban on the ANC, the SACP, and numerous other exiled organisations, and an end to restrictions on internal popular formations such as the UDF and SANSCO. Soon afterwards, Nelson Mandela was released from prison unconditionally and multiparty negotiations around a new constitution and elections for a democratic government began. The new conditions gave rise to questions and debates about the future role of SANSCO, including its relationship to the ANC and other mass popular formations.

Organisation: Issues, Processes and Culture

Having tracked the contours of SANSCO's organisational growth, I want to now discuss a number of issues related to SANSCO's organisational functioning and general culture.

Organisation building and organisational reproduction

Methods and techniques of student recruitment varied according to conditions on campuses. Where SANSCO was faced with hostile administrations and repressive conditions, the norm tended to be selective person-to-person recruitment. Individual recruitment took the form of visiting students in their rooms in residences or arranging to meet students who expressed an interest in SANSCO, or appeared regularly to attend SANSCO activities. While the building of membership was seen as an ongoing day-to-day task of all SANSCO activists, there were sometimes also concerted recruitment drives. Thus, a newsletter made mention of a recruitment drive by the SANSCO branch at UDW which netted over 30 new members (AZASO National Newsletter, June 1983).

Other means of recruiting members included beginning of year student orientation programmes, public seminars and workshops, campaigns and mass meetings and media in the form of SANSCO newsletters and occasional flyers and pamphlets. Thus, a *Getting to know AZASO* pamphlet produced for the 1983 student orientation period informed students that the formation of student organisations related to problems of students around day-to-day issues. The pamphlet added,

> [s]imilarly there are some problems that are common to all students throughout the country. For us to handle these problems effectively we need to have a forum which we can use to share ideas and experiences, and to develop an approach to these problems. AZASO as a national student organisation acts as such a forum (*Getting to know AZASO*, pamphlet, 1983d).

In similar vein, an orientation period issue of the Wits BSS newsletter Challenge, apart from welcoming black students to Wits, also urged them to use their knowledge and skills to further the struggle for

democracy and to participate in BSS and other popular organisations (Challenge, "Orientation '84"). For some students, membership of SANSCO represented their first involvement in popular organisation. Other students had previous experience through membership of the secondary-school based COSAS, youth organisations and civic and women's organisations. The contact of SANSCO activists with popular organisations and the UDF also yielded names of members of such formations who were potential recruits for SANSCO.

Generally, SANSCO encouraged mass affiliation through SRCs, one advantage of SRC affiliation being access to SRC resources and a larger financial contribution to SANSCO's national coffers. This practice however had its critics who argued that mass affiliation represented a largely paper membership and provided no indication of SANSCO's real organised strength on a campus. As a compromise, but also to ensure that the state of SANSCO on a campus was not entirely tied to the standing of the SRC, on campuses where there was mass affiliation autonomous SANSCO branches were also established to complement SRC activities. However, the relationship between SRC-affiliated campuses or SRCs which were strongly pro-SANSCO and local SANSCO branches was not always smooth, the essential problem usually being an appropriate division of labour between the SRC and the branch with respect to campaigns, meetings and programmes.

The relationship between the SANSCO national executive and local SANSCO branches and working groups was generally harmonious. On the one hand, this was the result of the strong participation of local SANSCO formations in annual congresses and GSCs, the key national policy- and decision-making forums. As noted, these forums were large gatherings comprising both delegates from branches and substantial numbers of members as observers. The congress was viewed as providing

> the opportunity for people from various branches of our organisation to know each other, understand each other's common problems, differences in conditions and ways and means through which we are advancing the struggle. Congress provides a forum for national assessment of the progress or stagnation of our organisation (AZASO, 1983c:3-4).

Furthermore, its purpose was to achieve "clarity among comrades about all issues relating to the challenges facing the democratic movement ... Out of ensuing discussions emerge national principles, policy, strategies and tactics" (ibid.). Democratic participation and involvement of branches and members in policy formulation and decision-making conferred local formations with a sense of ownership of the priorities, strategies and tactics that were adopted. This contributed to a situation where the national executive played essentially a guiding and co-ordinating role, providing local formations with a large degree of autonomy around forms of organisation and activities related to local conditions.

However, two other factors conditioned the relationship between the national executive and local formations and had the effect of conferring considerable autonomy to local formations. First, the same commitment to participation and democratic decision-making that resulted in large national congresses and GSCs meant that the national executive was generally strongly respectful of local-level decision-making. Second, there was also the factor of limited finances. SANSCO's income was extremely limited. Although membership fees were levied, income from this source was irregular, small, and often utilised by branches themselves. Fund-raising through the sale of T-shirts and cultural activities only raised modest amounts of funds. What external funds did come SANSCO's way, mainly from the South African Council of Churches and intermittently from European church bodies, was either largely consumed by national gatherings or earmarked for specific projects. Often, small donations in cash or kind from traders were crucial to the holding of local and national workshops.

The lack of finance meant that many activities such as a proposed national annual leadership-training forum and regular national publications could not be activated (see below). More significantly, SANSCO was unable to afford central or regional offices and to employ full-time staff and had to rely on facilities and resources of branches and the volunteering of time by officials who were usually also full-time students. In this context, even had a SANSCO national executive sought to be more directive and interventionist in the affairs of local formations, the person-power and resources for such a mode of operation

were simply not available. Of course, and as was recognised, one means of funding some full-time officials would have been to eliminate the GSC and/or to severely limit the size of congresses and GSCs (AZASO, 1983c:3). However, this trade-off, which would have limited the participation of branch members in policy formulation, planning and decision-making, was seen as unacceptable, reflecting the strong commitment to membership involvement and democratic decision-making within SANSCO.

SANSCO: Internal composition and institutional and geographical spread

To protect members from repression, no membership cards were issued and no formal membership lists were kept. Consequently, the active membership of SANSCO is difficult to estimate. It is likely that active membership was about 1 000 students in 1983, expanded to a few thousand in the mid-1980s, and reached a peak of about 5 000 in the late 1980s. While there was strong emphasis on building SANSCO as a mass organisation and SANSCO was able to mobilise large numbers of students with relative ease, the consolidation of mass mobilisation and the translation of popular support into permanent organisation proved more difficult and represented an ongoing challenge. The key problem experienced was that while students were willing to participate in protest meetings and even militant forms of mass action, they were reluctant to become organisationally active. Indeed, a very small minority of students, although strong in their support for SANSCO and always in the van of mass action, positively shunned organisational participation, preferring militant action to the grind of organisation-building.

Although SANSCO developed a national presence, and throughout the 1980s the general organisational trend was one of expansion into new campuses and new areas of South Africa, there were certain features to its organisational spread. Initially, SANSCO was essentially an organisation of university students. Only in the mid-1980s did the strategic importance of colleges begin to be realised and was serious attention paid to organising at colleges and also technikons. Still, whereas by the late 1980s almost all the university and technikon

campuses were incorporated into SANSCO, only a small proportion of teacher-training colleges had SANSCO branches or working groups. Given that the majority of teacher-training colleges were located in the rural areas of bantustans, this meant that SANSCO also had a greater presence in large cities and the more urbanised areas of the bantustans and that its presence in the rural areas of both "white" South Africa and the bantustans was limited.

One other key feature of SANSCO's membership composition was that, throughout the 1980s, members were predominantly male and women were severely underrepresented in relation to the gender composition of the student body. At the 1982 congress this was recognised as a serious weakness and there was a lengthy discussion around how to address the problem. The outcome was that an interim committee was established to identify issues specifically affecting women students around which they could be mobilised and organised, and also generally to investigate ways of drawing women into SANSCO. Informal surveys conducted at various campuses identified the key problem to be socialisation processes within the family and educational system. A member of the Womens' Group of the Wits BSS expressed the problem in the following way:

> We see the lack of involvement of women students as largely due to the fact that women have been socialised into particular roles and have been forced to accept their subservient position in society as natural.[8.46]

In 1983 the portfolio of Women's Organiser was created on the SANSCO national executive, and in April 1984 a national SANSCO women's conference was held. A document argued that "black women in South Africa suffer a triple oppression, i.e. race, class and sex" (AZASO Women's Working Programme, April 1984). As a result there was a need to "organise women as an oppressed sector around issues that directly affect them and to link this to the National Democratic Struggle" (ibid.). The reason for organising women students was that

> the content of the educational system and the way it is organised perpetuates sexism. Women have to be organised to challenge these specific problems. Because sexism cannot be eradicated from

> our society without fundamental change, women students need to be organised to play a role in the National Democratic Struggle (ibid.).

Activists were urged to

> understand the constituency we are dealing with. There are certain problems that hinder the effective participation of women students in struggle. Our methods must take cognisance of these facts and we must work from the level at which students are (ibid.).

It was stressed that the methods used to organise women had to ensure "that we raise awareness, involve the maximum number of women and strengthen organisation" (ibid.). The strategy opted for was to establish women's sections within SANSCO branches which could provide forums for women to develop confidence and leadership skills, help them to assert themselves within SANSCO, and could organise women so that their representation could increase and SANSCO could also be strengthened.

SANSCO branches commemorated National Women's Day (August 9) annually, regularly focused on the role of women in the national liberation struggle in South Africa and elsewhere, and arranged seminars around sexism and feminism. However, throughout the 1980s little progress was made in establishing women's sections within SANSCO branches and drawing women into SANSCO. According to a SANSCO publication, at the 1987 congress

> not one region could report a favourable state of affairs, and it became clear that this is one area of our organisation that needs serious and consistent attention ... The congress took the attitude that this failure in the organisation of women should be shouldered by the whole organisation and not women comrades alone (SANSCO, 1989: 1-2).

The 1987 congress developed a programme of action which included the production of a newsletter with a specific focus on women, branch workshops on the women's question, the popularisation of branch womens' sub-committees, meeting of national and regional women's organisers, mobilisation of women around sport and culture and the heightening of political education on issues related to women (ibid.).

During 1988-89 some gains were registered. The participation of women in the Western Cape region was said to be

> very impressive. In most campuses women's groups existed and ... there was also very good regional co-ordination ... In Natal also people were at least able to meet at a regional level and co-ordinate issues ... In the Transvaal some gains have been made in certain campuses where in the past there were no women's structures but the level of participation is still very poor without regional co-ordination (SANSCO, 1989:4).

A number of factors were identified that hindered progress in organising women. First, there was "still a lack of seriousness amongst comrades in addressing the issue of women" (ibid.) and blame was put on the lack of political education around the women's question and the lack of political understanding around the importance of the liberation of women. Second, many of the decisions of the 1987 congress were not implemented by many branches, with the result that "practically, the issue of women still remains the problem of the few women in the organisation with very little or no assistance from the rest of the branch" (ibid.).

The fact that the organisation of women became a "problem of the few women in the organisation" placed a special burden on women activists. According to a female activist

> people who were in the full-time women's sector were often very heavily committed to organising students more generally. Those of us who had dual responsibilities often experienced a tension and very often found ourselves neglecting the women's specific issues (interview with Africa, 1995).

A final problem was that of finance. No budgets were provided for organising women and financial problems also meant that regional programmes had to be cancelled and a newsletter for women could not be produced (SANSCO, 1989:4-5). However, it was acknowledged that there may also have been a lack of understanding of the "diverse character of the body of women students" (interview with Africa, 1995). According to Africa,

> I ... have a feeling that perhaps we may have missed the point, missed the issues which affected women students because ... we

didn't understand the complexity of our sector of women students (ibid.).

Moreover, it was also conceded that the approach of women activists could also have been a problem.

> It may also have had to do ... with the fact that in our youth and enthusiasm we may have projected in a way which was not very attractive to other women, being seen as loud and too assertive and aggressive may have scared women away from organisation (ibid.).

In summary, the structural problem of patriarchy and sexism, a possibly flawed understanding of the women's sector of the student body, a lack of organisational commitment, and possible weaknesses in strategies and tactics combined to ensure that SANSCO remained a predominately male organisation.

Ideological and political education

Political education within SANSCO was conducted at branch level as well as at national level through numerous designated education sessions at the annual congresses and General Students Councils (GSCs). At branch level, seminars and workshops were common mechanisms for political education. Such forums were used to induct new students into SANSCO through presentations and discussions around the history of SANSCO, its ideological and political orientation, organisational approach, and principles, policies and programme. Beyond this, seminars and workshops were used to develop among students a knowledge and understanding of theoretical, historical and contemporary issues. Thus, seminars spanned a wide range of topics which included capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism; education under capitalism and socialism; trade unions and popular resistance; women's oppression, and liberation struggles in countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Mozambique.

Of course, there was also coverage of issues pertaining to South Africa: South African political economy, class, racial and gender domination in South Africa, the character of the South African liberation struggle, and the history of political resistance. When required, seminars and workshops were also organised around issues of immediate

political concern – for example the government's 1982 constitutional proposals and the implications of the "independence" of the Ciskei bantustan. While some seminars and workshops were deemed internal education and restricted to SANSCO members, others were advertised publicly. The public forums, apart from keeping students informed and raising their political awareness, were also used to recruit members. Education sessions were presented by SANSCO officials as well as by guest speakers from political and popular organisations and trade unions. However, the form of education sessions was not confined to papers and oral presentations. Tape-slide shows, videos and films were also utilised. To expand the knowledge of SANSCO activists and also provide material for education sessions, readers and dossiers were occasionally compiled and distributed to branches. There was also generally much circulation of political literature, including banned literature, to enhance SANSCO members' theoretical and political development. Occasionally, reading groups comprising new and old members were created for reading and discussing literature.

A regular feature of annual congresses and GSCs was numerous education sessions explicitly devoted to theoretical and political questions and to issues that had a bearing on political strategy and tactics. Presenters were usually key SANSCO intellectuals, as well as leading intellectuals from political and popular organisations and trade unions. A constant topic was an analysis of the "state of the nation" which examined conditions and developments in the economic, political and social spheres, initiatives of capital and the state, the trajectory and dynamics of mass anti-apartheid actions, and the state of popular organisations. This topic, apart from having an educational dimension, was also crucial to the formulation of the SANSCO theme and its strategy and tactics. Another regular topic was the character of South African society and the national democratic struggle, while the roles of particular social groups and organisations in the national democratic struggle also received consistent attention. Since the Freedom Charter served as SANSCO's political manifesto, a number of topics related to it received ongoing attention. Finally, education in South Africa, the role of students, and the history of the student movement and student

organisations in South Africa was another consistent subject of national gatherings.

With reference to organisational skills, there was no formal or explicit training provided around meeting procedures and the chairing of meetings, general administrative and financial matters, and planning programmes, meetings and campaigns. Some members were organisationally highly skilled, as a consequence of previous membership of school-based organisations and/or concomitant membership of other popular organisations. Neophyte members generally developed skills by learning "on the job", through immersion in the day-to-day activities of SANSCO and with skilled members and older SANSCO activists serving as exemplars. The development of skills and confidence was also promoted by members being attached to branch sub-committees and the decentralisation and delegation of tasks to such sub-committees. While there was generally a spirit of "each one, teach one" (slogan of the school-based COSAS), much depended on the initiative of individual members.

One field in which there were attempts to ensure some formal training was the production of print media such as banners, placards, posters, calendars, newsletters, pamphlets, T-shirts and badges. Media training was usually organised by members already possessing skills and/or by popular media organisations such as the NUSAS-linked South African Students' Press Union, and regionally-based community newspapers to which some SANSCO branches were affiliated. The attempt to ensure that media skills were developed among members was related to the extensive use which SANSCO branches and national organisation made of print media.

First, print media were used to advertise seminars, programmes and meetings and thus had an informational function. Second, they were used to popularise SANSCO, the UDF and the Congress movement, jailed and exiled political leaders, and to express SANSCO and student demands. Third, they were utilised for mobilising students in support of planned educational and political actions and campaigns, and for harnessing student support for SANSCO candidates contesting SRC elections. Fourth, media also played a role in attempts to recruit students into SANSCO. Finally, print media also served an educational purpose,

being used to raise the awareness and consciousness of students. The organisational newsletter played all these roles as well as serving to keep SANSCO members informed of developments on various campuses. However, because of a lack of finance the newsletter was produced irregularly. Newsletters, banners, T-shirts, and badges and calendars were composed in the distinct black, green and gold colours associated with the ANC, and thus explicitly symbolised SANSCO's political allegiances.

Despite the time and energy devoted to political education, successive national executive committees of SANSCO emphasised the need for greater efforts in this field. A proposal that an annual national leadership training forum be instituted failed to materialise because of a lack of finance. At the 1987 congress, a decision was taken to establish political education units at all levels of SANSCO. However, in 1989 it was noted that such units "never really [got] off the ground and presently as an organisation we cannot talk of a functional political education unit" (SANSCO, 1989:5). Nonetheless, overall, education and training was sufficient to ensure the continued functioning, organisational reproduction, and even expansion of SANSCO, and continuity in its ideology and programme. Moreover, organisational reproduction and ideological continuity was also ensured by the continuous entry into SANSCO of students who had belonged to COSAS, and by members initially schooled within popular Congress organisations.

Finally, the collective singing of "freedom songs" and the performance of the "toyi toyi", a militant "dance", in which participants imitated the actions of guerrilla fighters, were important informal means of political socialisation. Songs, melodic and rhythmic, sung with gusto and different kinds of movements and expressions contributed to making SANSCO gatherings lively and even exhilarating occasions. However, beyond the vibrant mood that singing and the "toyi toyi" gave to events, they also facilitated bonding between members from different campuses and areas and regions and fostered feelings of solidarity and a sense of belonging to SANSCO. Songs continuously changed in relation to political conditions, and often expressed commitments to particular political goals and strategies that could not be acknowledged in formal speeches.