

# 4

## “SASO on the Attack”<sup>4.1</sup>: Organisation, Mobilisation and Collective Action

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I now turn to examine select aspects of SASO’s organisation and its activities related to student and popular mobilisation and collective action. However, there are no hard and fast boundaries between many of the activities. Thus, SASO’s initiatives around publishing, which I deal with in the first section, can be considered to be equally a form of collective action like the education protests and political mobilisation that I describe in the later section. Conversely, the community development and other projects of SASO that I cover under “mobilisation and collective action” can well be seen as aspects of overall organisational activity.

Similarly, although I separate activities in terms of the “education struggle”, political initiatives related to the building of the Black Consciousness movement, and “political mobilisation and struggle”, in reality it is not possible to make any clear-cut distinction between them. Indeed, all can be considered “political” activities of different forms. Moreover, since the principal objective of SASO was to politically galvanise students and the black oppressed against apartheid, what is treated as organisational initiatives – for example publishing and leadership training – can also be regarded as essentially “political” activities. In short, the mode of presentation should not obscure the connections and relations between the various activities in which SASO was engaged. Finally, while there is some analysis and assessment of SASO’s organisation and activities, this is fairly specific and limited in

nature. A more detailed and general assessment of the character and role and significance of SASO is left to the following chapter.

## **Organisation: Membership, Structure and Process**

SASO condemned both ethnic political and education institutions. However, an important distinction was made between participation in political and education institutions. Participation by blacks in separate development political institutions was seen as optional, whereas for purposes of schooling blacks were obliged to attend ethnic institutions of learning. Moreover, SASO's view was that ethnic political platforms were inappropriate and dangerous vehicles for any project of national liberation. Education institutions, on the other hand, despite severe constraints, afforded the opportunity and space for black student mobilisation and organisation into radical organisations.

### ***Membership and infrastructure***

While activist black students felt the need for an exclusive black student formation that would connect the black campuses and promote student contact, and proceeded to launch SASO, there was little certainty that the various campus authorities or the government would permit SASO to operate, and little guarantee that the organisation would gain a mass following. The repressive political conditions bred fear and acquiescence, and campus authorities maintained strong control over student activities. During 1969 SRCs existed at the University of Natal Medical School (UNMS), and at the universities of Zululand (UNIZUL), the North (UNIN) and Western Cape (UWC). However, only two months prior to the formal launch of SASO in July 1969, UNIN students were still protesting against the refusal of the campus authorities to allow the SRC to affiliate to NUSAS. They also objected to the banning of the UCM and the lack of powers enjoyed by the SRC (SAIRR, 1970:224). Thus, both support for NUSAS and curbs on free activity would condition the development of SASO. At Durban-Westville (UDW) and Fort Hare (UFH) no SRCs existed, students remaining in a deadlock with the authorities over the powers to be accorded to the SRCs.

However, there were also facilitating conditions. The conditions on campuses and within the broader society that were noted in Chapter 2

meant there was much that aroused student anger, resentment and disaffection. The banning of NUSAS at the black campuses potentially left the field clear for SASO. Moreover, SASO began by adopting a strategic approach with respect to both NUSAS and its own objects. Finally, and crucially, the scope for SASO to grow and implant itself on the black campuses was provided by two unexpected sources – government and the campus administrations.

According to Pityana, the first general secretary and second national president of SASO, "the government was at first ambivalent about SASO. The new student organisation attacked the liberal establishment ... and seemed, superficially at least, to echo some apartheid principles" (1991a:205). To the apartheid government's way of thinking, any organisation that attacked white liberals, and especially NUSAS, the bane of Afrikaner nationalists, and emphasised exclusive black organisation, was a potential ally and new recruit to the programme of separate development. There is also evidence that independent black organisation was encouraged by some of the Afrikaner nationalist rectors of the black campuses. Wolfson states that at UNIN two former rectors encouraged students to "shake off the yoke of NUSAS and to establish their own ... organisations" (1976:12). The UWC rector was reported as saying, "I don't want them affiliating to NUSAS ... They must stand on their own feet and learn to do things for themselves ..." (SAIRR, 1968:288). However, consistent with the ideology of separate development and measures to prevent united action by all oppressed national groups, the government departments responsible for UDW and UWC were to prohibit Indian and coloured students from joining SASO.

During 1969 and 1970, SASO's constituency was defined as black students "of institutions of higher learning". By 1971 membership was declared to "be open to all black students" and, under certain conditions, even non-students. Employing language typical of BC, "studentship" was defined by one SASO national president, as "a state of mind, a particular ambition, a particular awareness of one's social role" (quoted by Kotze, 1975:115). Four modes of membership were provided for: "an SRC affiliating on behalf of the student body"; "a majority student body decision for affiliation", especially where there was no SRC at an

institution; branch affiliation through ten or more individuals constituting a branch; and individual affiliation through the SASO executive. The predominant forms through which students became members of SASO were student body affiliation via the SRC, and branch affiliation. In reality, SASO's membership was essentially university students, enrolled primarily at the black universities and UNMS, a small number of students at religious seminaries, and a tiny number at teacher-training institutions.

Between 1969 and early 1972, SASO adopted a low-key approach and concentrated on establishing an organisational infrastructure, expanding membership, and formulating and elaborating BC ideas and disseminating these among students. This work was rewarded by en masse affiliations, via SRCs, at UNIN, UNIZUL and UNMS. At universities where the authorities either prohibited formal affiliation to SASO (UWC and UDW), or where there was conflict between students and authorities over the role and powers of the SRC (UFH), SASO enjoyed a presence through the formation of local branches. Since nothing precluded SASO activists from standing for elections to SRCs, SASO also began to be the hegemonic force within SRCs. Thus, in the 1972 SRC elections at UWC, eight out of 11 elected candidates were SASO members (Lewis, 1987:278).

Outside the universities, branches were established at the Federal Theological Seminary (FTS), adjacent to Fort Hare, and the Lutheran Theological College, as well as at the Transvaal College of Education, an Indian teacher-training institution. An interesting innovation was SASO "locals", branches which catered for UNISA correspondence students and, in some cases, also ex-students. By early 1972 there were locals in Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. At this point SASO claimed a national membership of 4 000 and predicted that membership would reach 7 000 by the end of 1972 (SASO 1972a:3).

In 1973 membership was reported as over 6 000, with locals showing especial growth. New branches were established in Lenasia, Springs, Krugersdorp, Middelburg, Mafeking, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Maphumulo, and Umlazi and a second branch was formed in Durban. Locals were also said to be in the process of formation in various other towns and cities, including Pietermaritzburg, Port

Elizabeth, East London, King Williamstown and Umtata. In addition, a branch was established at the Hewat college, a coloured teacher training institution in Athlone, near Cape Town (SASO, 1973a:21; SASO, 1973d:2; SASO, 1973f:4).

According to SASO, the locals in cities and towns arose "from a need to foster communication between the correspondence student and the full-time student" (SASO, 1973a:21). However, in the aftermath of the mid-1972 mass student protests co-ordinated by SASO, and the repression of SASO on some campuses (see below), there was also a strategic rationale to the locals. They were a creative organisational measure for it was

realised that this kind of branch became instrumental in side-stepping the vicious action of the university authorities who have banned SASO on the campus. Many off-campus branches are now catering for students at full-time universities (ibid.).

Still, despite their innovativeness, the "locals" held the twin dangers of SASO activists becoming isolated from rank-and-file students on the campuses, and of the campuses being surrendered as the primary terrain of mobilisation and struggle.

## ***Structure and organisational culture***

While the affiliated SRCs, campus branches and city and town locals constituted the infrastructure and operational field units of SASO, inter-unit contact and co-ordination and overall organisational coherence and direction was achieved through a number of national and regional structures. The highest policy and decision-making body was the General Students Council (GSC) which met annually. The GSC consisted of the elected national executive of SASO and delegates representing the various affiliated SRCs, branches and locals. The national executive itself was a five-person committee elected by the GSC. It consisted of the president, vice-president, general secretary, "permanent organiser" and publications director, and was responsible for the day-to-day affairs of SASO. The general secretary and permanent organiser (responsible for liaison between the executive, the various affiliated SRCs, branches and "locals", and for research and co-ordinating certain projects) were full-time employees whose appoint-

ments were on a three-year basis, to be ratified annually by the *GSC*. In between the annual *GSCs*, an executive council made up of the national executive and chairpersons of affiliated *SRCs*, branches and locals met biannually. At the regional level, regional councils existed to promote *SASO* and co-ordinate the activities of affiliates within a region (*SASO*, 1973a:12-13).

The *GSCs* appear to have been lively occasions, and organised so as to deal not only with policy and organisational matters but to also provide space for exploring particular themes and cultural pursuits. Much time at *GSCs* was given over to small working commissions – on education, culture, community development, external relations and so forth, possibly to enable issues to be explored in depth and to facilitate participation. Themes such as “separate development”, “creativity and black development” and “black theology” were the subject of symposia featuring invited speakers from various organisations and within *SASO*. There were poetry readings, drama, music and art exhibitions by emerging *BC* artists and the *GSCs*, as well as other *SASO* forums, provided artists with a platform for cultural expression and a means of becoming known nationally (*SASO*, 1971; *SASO*, 1972b).

A significant feature of the *SASO* national organisation was the continuous turnover of key elected officials. Indeed, each annual *GSC* saw the election of a new president and vice-president. Initially, this was a matter of conscious choice as *SASO* sought to develop a broad leadership corps. Later, the turnover of leading officials became an effect of the continuous banning of *SASO* leaders by the state. Previous officials, however, continued to play important roles in other portfolios and as advisers. Moreover, the full-time general secretaries and permanent organisers who were elected for three-year periods provided continuity.

Continuity and organisational integrity was also facilitated by employing staff and field-workers for various *SASO* projects and initiatives and for day to day administration, leading one commentator to state that “*SASO* is the best-staffed Black political organisation in the country” (Kotze, 1975:106). A *SASO* head office operated from Durban, and there were branch offices with full-time regional secretaries in Cape Town, Johannesburg and King Williamstown, with proposals

to establish more (SASO, 1972b:21; 1973d:27). Compared to many anti-apartheid organisations, an impressive feature of SASO was its written output in the form of reports to meetings, reports and minutes of meetings, information publications and newsletters.

Offices, staff, and organisational activities, however, cost money. Branch contributions of between 50 cents and R1 (1972) per member brought in some money, but were an insufficient and irregular source of income. Instead, many of SASO's operations were made possible by overseas funding from European church and student organisations, agencies in the United States and organisations like the World University Service and the International University Exchange Fund. Locally, the Christian Institute and other organisations provided some financial and material support.

### **Organisational culture: Key features**

Five features of SASO's organisational culture deserve special mention. First, with the advent of SASO there also emerged a semi-public space for intellectual and political discussion and debate. Institutionally, this semi-public space took the form of on and off-campus social gatherings that were informal and vibrant in nature, and which stood on their own or were attached to SASO conferences, meetings and events. These gatherings assembled black intellectuals, professionals and activists across occupational, geographical, and organisational boundaries, and provided a medium for the testing of ideas, for the circulation of political tracts, and for conversation around literature. Issues and ideas raised at these gatherings would later crystallise in articles, conference resolutions and projects (see Wilson, 1991:30-31).

Second, with SASO came a particular style of leadership which recognised the enormous advantage of widespread consultation. This did not only mean consultation to win over a proposal but the creation of an atmosphere where individual opinions were considered and taken seriously. They were valued equally (Wilson, 1991:27).

One practical manifestation of this was Biko's use at UNMS of student groups of different ideological and political persuasions as a sounding board for his ideas. Another example was the establishment by SASO

of the "Advisory Panel". At each C<sub>7</sub>SC, "distinguished Black persons" from different parts of the country were elected to advise SASO on student politics, regional, legal and financial matters.

Third, SASO provided considerable leeway for individual members to express views and opinions, and much scope for independent initiative by members operating under the auspices of various working commissions. The formulation of policy documents and statements appears to have been often entrusted to commissions (education, culture, etc.), and responsibility to implement conference resolutions was also decentralised to the commissions. SASO publications like "Creativity and Black Development" (Langa, 1973) reflected the intense debates around culture while the SASO Newsletter encouraged, within the overall doctrine of BC, a diversity of views.

The only, and dramatic, exception, was Sono's call at the 1972 C<sub>7</sub>SC for a different approach to bantustans and even to the security police. However, even this case reveals the extent to which some leading members of SASO sought to ensure latitude of expression. Biko's response to Sono's speech had been to sponsor a resolution that censured Sono for views that were "contradictory to either SASO policy or to the spirit of the policy", and to confine the rebuke to the C<sub>7</sub>SC's, dissociating itself from Sono's views (SASO, 1972b:6). The more stringent resolution calling on Sono to recuse him from the chair; to resign as president, and to leave the conference was adopted later, in Biko's absence. The wording of this resolution was particularly harsh. It stated that "the dangerous and horrifying references to security police" and Bantustans smack of sell-out tendencies", that Sono was a "security risk to our organisation and black community" and it labelled his views as his "personal "non-white" stand" (ibid.:8). It is possible that members, already angry with the content of Sono's speech, became more hostile on learning that Sono had also violated traditional procedure and the consultative approach that SASO had sought to cultivate by not attending the executive meeting immediately prior to the C<sub>7</sub>SC, and not testing his views with other executive members.

Fourth, as the slogans and discourse of SASO ("Black man, you are on your own"; the "Black man", "Your black brother") reveal, its organisational culture was highly masculine, male-dominated, and even



sexist. Ramphela's observation that in UNMS "student politics on campus at that time were dominated by male students" (1991b:214) was also true for all the black campuses and SASO. There were three women at the launch of SASO in 1969, and at the 1972 CJS only nine out of the 68 participants were women (SASO, 1972b:3-4). The priority of BC was national liberation and "women were thus involved in the movement because they were black. Gender as a political issue was not raised at all" (Ramphela, 1991b:215). The responsibility for domestic chores at conferences, seminars and formation schools fell on women and in "general, sexist practices and division of labour along gender lines were never systematically challenged ... " (ibid.:219).

If there were more progressive positions among some activists, the general environment of sexism curbed women from playing as full a role as men and also made difficult addressing sexism at a mass level. Those women who displayed a determination to challenge their subordination were granted the status of "honorary men". As Ramphela puts it, "We had, after all, entered the domain generally regarded as the preserve of men and were treated accordingly" (ibid.:220). The new status provided benefits such as fuller participation in meetings, greater involvement in social activities and various other advantages.

Finally, although there was little concern to address and undermine gender inequities and sexism, considerable attention was given to the political and organisational development of current and future student leaders and activists. The primary instruments for the training of cadres were national and regional "formation schools" and leadership seminars. A number of SASO leaders attended a leadership-training course, which covered issues such as social analysis, organisational dynamics and administration, and public speaking (Ramphela, 1991a:163). Such leaders then acted as trainers for local, regional and national leadership seminars for SASO members.

Buthelezi gives an indication of the focus of some of the early formation schools and their nature.

In order to clarify among themselves the kind of language of liberation they sought to popularise, student leaders had to acquaint themselves with the history of the liberation movement in South Africa. This education process was embarked upon at

"formation schools" as well as leadership-training seminars organised in 1970 and 1971. These sessions normally lasted four days and involved in-depth discussions on many topics. Participation at the seminars and formation schools was limited to the core cadres from centres and branches; these were locally selected in consultation with the SASO national executive (1991:118-19).

Apart from studying topics and issues deemed crucial for the ideological and political development of SASO cadres and SASO as an organisation, formation schools and leadership seminars also examined in greater depth issues that were to be discussed at C<sub>7</sub>SCs. In addition, they were concerned with questions of strategy and tactics, and skills related to leadership, and organisational management and administration (SASO, 1973a:24; SASO, 1973c).

A SASO "fact paper" entitled *The politics of protest for Black students* gives an inkling of the content of activist training. Participants were introduced to the context of and impediments to protest, such as apathy, fear, lack of unity and repression, and it was argued that "educated leadership and the creation of the right political climate among Blacks [was] a sine qua non for effective protest" (Kotze, 1975:183). Political work was said to entail the representation of student grievances and needs, the education of students and the development of their political awareness and confidence, promoting black unity and BC, and developing self-reliance. The conditions for protest activities are seen as including initiatives promoting black solidarity, the "co-ordination of all Black activities", black self-pride and black theology (ibid.). Finally, channels for protest were said to include the issuing of statements, boycotts and meetings (ibid.).

### ***Organisational and ideological diffusion***

The fact that one of the five national executive members was director of publications, and that from 1970 an editor of SASO publications was also appointed, signalled the importance that SASO attached to media. Numerous occasional publications, bulletins and pamphlets were produced, as well as a fairly regular newsletter (the SASO Newsletter). By 1972, circulation of the SASO Newsletter reached 4 000 copies

(Gerhart, 1978:270). The newsletter and publications were crucial instruments of ideological and organisational diffusion. First, they helped to propagate and popularise SASO's ideas and views, and its leadership. Second, they disseminated news and information about SASO initiatives, activities and organisational matters. Third, through articles on events such as the anti-pass demonstrations and the massacre at Sharpeville in 1960, they played an education function. Fourth, they mobilised support for SASO, helped build membership and, through diaries, T-shirts and the like gave SASO an organisational presence.

Finally, newsletters and publications also served as forums for the exchange of ideas and debates. The production and dissemination of media, as organisational activities, also enhanced solidarity among members and loyalty to SASO. SASO publications were not confined to the black campuses but made their way into other institutions and organisations, and to the youth and student groupings that began to emerge in the black townships during this period.

Notwithstanding the problems of male domination and sexism, the organisational achievements of SASO were impressive. In 1969, Biko had seen SASO as "a challenge to test the independence of the non-white students leaders ... organisationally" (1987:7). Without doubt, the black student activists of SASO met the challenge and, as Ramphela puts it,

The initiative taken in launching a new student organisation, training leadership, and formulating and enunciating the Black Consciousness philosophy, was living testimony that self-reliance was a feasible strategy and objective (1991a:169).

SASO had also sought to "boost the morale" of black students and "heighten their own confidence in themselves" (Biko, 1987:5). Again, there is ample evidence that that active within SASO developed, through practice and training, a range of skills and considerable organisational expertise, and became confident, assertive and articulate activists.

In a letter sent to various student and other organisations in early 1970, Biko had asserted "The blacks are tired of standing at the touchlines to witness a game that they should be playing. They want to

do things for themselves and all by themselves" (1987:7, 15). SASO also enabled this to become a reality. Through the day-to-day tasks of maintaining an organisational infrastructure and structure, the production and dissemination of publications, the formation schools and seminars, and various other organisational initiatives, numerous black students were able to become active participants and agents in the building and development of SASO, in the shaping of BC thinking and activities, and in the manifestation, popularisation and spread of BC. SASO ensured that black students committed to social change and political liberation would no longer be mere spectators, but would have the opportunity "to do things for themselves and all by themselves".

## **Mobilisation and Collective Action**

### ***The education struggle***

Conditions at black institutions engendered in student's feelings of isolation, frustration and alienation. Rules and regulations were authoritarian and oppressive. There was a strong resentment of curricula, especially in the social sciences; and, generally, there were poor relations and little communication between white administrators and academic staff and black students (Buthelezi, 1991:112-113). Still, as SASO recognised, the black universities exposed the "naked hell" with little of the "blurring" provided by the white liberal institutions; and it was asserted that " ... these dungeons of oppression can be used to unite the artificially created divisions amongst us" (SASO, 1972a:6). The conditions at, and racial constitution of, the black institutions in many ways shaped the content of student demands and protests.

Prior to May 1972, when SASO called for countrywide student protests, the focus of SASO activities was primarily on the low-key recruitment of members, the mobilisation of students through meetings and publications, the establishment of an organisational infrastructure and structure, and the elaboration and dissemination of the doctrine of BC. There were no initiatives directed towards co-ordinated national mass action. What student action did take place was of a local nature, involved meetings, sit-ins and marches, and demanded, in the main, greater autonomy and powers for SRCs. At UNIN, in 1971, there was

a student boycott of celebrations to mark the institution's attainment of full university status. In March 1972, there was a further confrontation between the university administration and the SRC when the latter rejected an administration demand to remove the SASO Policy Manifesto from the official student diary, and students instead made a bonfire with the official diaries (SAIRR, 1970:223; 1971:246; 1972:291, 1973:387).

The trigger of the 1972 student protests that SASO co-ordinated was the expulsion from UNIN of Onkgopotse Tiro, a former SRC president, for a graduation ceremony speech that attacked segregated education and white domination of black institutions, and called on students to be active participants in the liberation struggle (BCP, 1973:174-75). A student meeting called by the SASO-affiliated SRC resolved to boycott classes until Tiro was reinstated. The UNIN administration responded by suspending the SRC and banning all meetings. Thereafter, the administration tried to get students either to sign declaration forms promising orderly behaviour or to leave the campus. When this met with no success, the 1 146 students were informed that they were expelled and the police were summoned. However, only after essential services were cut off did students leave the campus.

Parent delegations that resulted from meetings of parents and students, and other black organisations, including SASO, failed to get the UNIN administration to lift the expulsions on Tiro and the other students.<sup>4.2</sup> instead, students were required to apply individually for readmission, sign an acceptance of the expulsion of Tiro, the suspension of the SRC, and the suspension of all student groups, including SASO. The students were advised by SASO to return to UNIN "to continue their fight for education justice", without respecting the conditions of their re-admission. On returning, students discovered that a number of SRC and SASO members had not been readmitted, and this led to a walk-off of 500-700 students, while the remainder resumed lectures under police monitoring (SAIRR, 1973: 388-89).

The Tiro and UNIN student expulsions led to solidarity boycotts, and also served as a catalyst for student protests at UNMS, UWC, UNIZUL, UDW, UFH, some teacher-training and advanced technical education colleges and the Federal Theological Seminary. Initially, only

UNMS and UWC embarked on solidarity boycotts. A few weeks later, however, all the black universities and a number of other black higher education institutions were in the throes of conflict. The pattern of the conflict at UNIN was more or less repeated at these institutions. First, there was student expression of solidarity with UNIN students" or/and demands related to conditions at the particular campus. Then, there was student action and counter-action and reprisals by the administration, and harassment and questioning of student activists by the security police. This led to parents" attempts to mediate the conflict. Eventually, there was a return of most students to lectures. Frequently, the return of students was accompanied, or followed, by reprisals against students which took the form of suspensions, expulsions, loss of bursaries, and a ban on SASO.

SASO was instrumental in extending the student protests country-wide to almost all the black campuses. Shortly after the UNIN expulsions a pre-arranged SASO National Formation School issued what became known as the "Alice Declaration" (after the town Alice, near Fort Hare). The Alice Declaration stated that, given the "oppressive atmosphere in the black institutions", passivity in the light of the UNIN expulsions would be a "betrayal of the black man's struggle". It added that

the black community is anxiously and eagerly waiting to learn and hear of the stand taken by black students on the other campuses who invariably are subjected to the same atrocities and injustices (BCPs, 1973:176).

The Declaration then went on to state that SASO believed that the UNIN incident could "be escalated into a major confrontation with the authorities". It therefore called on all black students to "force the institutions/universities to close down by boycotting lectures" on a particular day (ibid.:176-77).

The Declaration, publicised through the commercial media, was well heeded, and resulted in the largest, most widespread and sustained protests yet by black higher education students. If SASO extended the terrain of the conflict, the SRCs, SASO branches, or ad hoc student groups at individual campuses themselves expanded the scope of the

protests beyond that of the expulsion of the UNIN students and Tiro. At UDW, the SRC constitution was put at issue, and at UFH an end to police activity on campus and the "dictatorial attitude" of the rector was demanded. At UNMS, students demanded that a black person be appointed as the superintendent of residences, while UWC students sought the appointment of a black rector. The reasoning advanced was that "it is an undisputed fact that the rector at a Black university has supreme power ... to manipulate and gear the situation into whichever direction he desires". A meeting of student leaders from black institutions collated the demands of students from the different campuses into a single document, the minimum student demands. One general demand was for black university councils and senates and freedom of organisation on campuses (SAIRR, 1973:389; 391; 388).

## **Importance of the 1972 protests**

The 1972 student protests were important for a number of reasons. First, the display of student solidarity, and unity across ethnic and racial lines, showed those BC ideas were having an impact. Second, the heeding of the SASO call for countrywide protests and the extension of the boycott from UNIN to other campuses confirmed SASO's support among students and its organisational strength. Third, there was some attempt on the part of the government to meet student demands – especially those related to the calls for black rectors and council members (Laurence, 1979:60). For example, although not quite what SASO had intended, two members of the Coloured Representative Council were appointed to the UWC Council. Fourth, the protests catalysed SASO's efforts to investigate the role of education in South African society and to elaborate in greater detail its views on the role that education and universities ought to play. Fifth, and in relation to its ideas on university education, the protests also led SASO to develop the "free university" scheme. Finally, the mass student actions gave rise to an important debate around future strategy. SASO's ideas around education, prior to the May 1972 protests, and after, have already been discussed in the previous chapter. The Free University Scheme (FUS) and the debate around strategy merit greater attention.

The FUS was conceived in the aftermath of the protests, initially to provide financial and academic support to students refused registration at black institutions. Such students were meant to register at UNISA, and the FUS was to arrange tutorials related to UNISA curricula, as well as additional seminars concerned with "black studies". Thereafter, the idea was for the FUS to be expanded into an institution that would be based in various centres, and which would service students registered for correspondence courses with overseas institutions, and offer a curriculum "meaningful to the Black student" (SASO, 1973a:22). The FUS, however, was not much of a success. At the GSC in 1973 it was noted that 64 loans had been provided under the FUS, but that three attempts to hold Free University seminars failed to materialise, and that in one case no students turned up (SASO, 1973f). There was a complaint that students granted loans under the FUS were generally not attending Free University seminars, and a resolution was adopted to make compulsory attendance a condition of the loan (SASO, 1973d:13). A year later it was reported that funding was a problem, and that there were initiatives underway to make the FUS an independent entity.

Another education initiative was the Promotion of Black Education Advancement Trust (PROBEAT). This project sought to raise over R100 000 to provide financial support to needy students at black institutions. However, since its aim was the "inculcation of education for self-reliance", PROBEAT sought to link recipients student loans to a "student voluntary service" that would provide services to black schools. PROBEAT also aimed to involve students in setting up soup kitchens near black schools and establishing an inter-university system of providing text books on loan to needy students. However, PROBEAT also struggled to raise funds and was unsuccessful.

A final consequence of the 1972 student protests was the debate that was provoked around SASO strategy. At the July 1972 GSC there was a motion that SASO members withdraw from "non-white institutions of higher learning", and that the GSC formulate an "action programme". The motion appealed to the spirit of the Fort Hare Students Manifesto, which had called on students "to leave this tribal university of Fort Hare" (SASO, 1972b:22) and signalled, in the aftermath of the student protests and the harsh response of the campus authorities, the beginning



among some SASO members of an impatience with activities centred around psychological liberation and a desire for more confrontational and militant action.

Those proposing the withdrawal of activist students from black institutions, in effect, no longer sought to make any distinction between separate development political and education institutions, but sought to elevate the education boycott from a tactic to a principle. Biko, who strongly opposed the motion, raised four questions.

As SASO, were they, in fact, operating within government institutions? Was there much to be achieved by students if they were not to be registered at universities? Would SASO be able to sustain political activity with a large number of students outside the campuses? What would happen to the remainder of students still at these universities? (cited by Wilson, 1991:32).

These were, of course, all pertinent questions. To make no distinction between political and education institutions was to condemn black students to no schooling at all. Whatever the limitations and frustrations of black institutions, they did – as SASO showed – provide a space for the mobilisation and organisation of students into a progressive formation. For activists to withdraw would mean not only losing an important organisational base, but also leaving the field open for reactionary political forces.

However, the fundamental difference between those calling for the withdrawal and Biko and his supporters centred around the meaning given to the 1972 protests. Whereas the former interpreted the protests as signalling the need to move to a new phase of struggle, the view of the Biko group was that SASO was still at an early and preparatory stage of its liberation efforts and could not lose the base that the black higher education institutions provided. While the motion was eventually defeated 29 to 15, with seven abstentions, it highlighted how a particular event, and its implications for strategy, was interpreted in different ways by activists with similar commitments. The debate around strategy was also a harbinger of differences that, as was noted, arose after 1975 around strategy, but was linked on this occasion to questions of ideology and politics.

## Post-1972 student education protests

After 1972, and until the banning of SASO in 1977, there were no further nationally co-ordinated struggles. On many campuses, SRCs and SASO branches were engaged in rearguard actions in the face of the increasing hostility and repression of campus authorities, and there were ongoing skirmishes around the autonomy and powers of SRCs, the suspension and expulsion of students, and police action on campuses. There were also protests around the quality of education and food in the residences.

In 1973, at the UFH an unpopular hostel warden was attacked and his home damaged. The police were summoned and 159 students rusticated, only to be reinstated after the threat of a mass student walk-off. Nearby Federal Theological Seminary students engaged in a sympathy boycott with the UFH students (SASO, 1974a). The main flash point was the UWC. There, issues "such as the oppressive rules and regulations, the preponderance of white teaching staff and unequal pay for equal work, and poor lecturer-student relations" and security police raids on campus residences were a focal point of student grievances (SAIRR, 1974:336). Students, led by SASO, also demanded that the white rector, a Broederbond member, resign. A deadlock led to the closing of the UWC.

The students received considerable support from the UWC Black Staff Association and the coloured community. A mass meeting of 12 000 people addressed by, amongst others, Gatsha Buthelezi and Sonny Leon, both participants in separate development political institutions, helped secure the readmission of students. In the subsequent ongoing contestations a number of students were suspended and a few hundred students left UWC with the effect of considerably weakening SASO. With respect to the demand for a black rector, the student campaign was "victorious". R. E. van der Ross, a coloured educationist, was appointed the new rector. The irony was that van der Ross had described the student position as a "large dose of Black Power with political overtones"<sup>4.3</sup> (Cape Times, 10 July 19973)

## ***Political initiatives: building the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)***

From the outset, Biko had stressed that SASO had a "responsibility" to the black "community" and that the "leadership of the non-white peoples" and the shaping of black political thinking rested with SASO (Biko, 1987:5;7). In line with this, the SASO constitution committed it "to the realisation of the worth of the black man, the assertion of his human dignity and to promoting consciousness and self-reliance of the black community". The Black Student Manifesto set the challenge of the "assertion, manifestation and development of a sense of awareness politically, socially and economically among the Black community" (SASO, 1972b:24). Finally, the SASO Policy Manifesto emphasised "group cohesion and solidarity" as "important facets of Black Consciousness", the need for "the totality of involvement of the oppressed people" and for BC "to be spread to reach all sections of the Black Community" (Appendix 1, SPM).

To give expression to its commitments and objectives, a host of initiatives related to "community development", literacy and education, media, culture, sport, "black theology", worker organisation, the establishment of secondary school student and youth formations and a political organisation, were launched. As a result of these initiatives, BC ideas were diffused beyond SASO's student base; relationships were established with a range of black secular and religious bodies, some of whom were won over to BC; new BC formations came into being; and there was a revitalisation of black cultural and political life. The BCM of the pre-1977 period was largely the achievement of SASO. The essential and core ideas of BC emerged from SASO, BCM intellectuals by and large cut their political teeth within SASO, and for much of its existence SASO, ideologically, politically and organisationally, stood at the head of the BCM.

### **Community development projects**

SASO's community development projects were influenced by Nyerere's notion of self-reliance and "ujaama" and the Freire approach to developing political awareness among oppressed groups. The objective

was to assist black communities to determine and realise their own needs. SASO did not seek to be a welfare organisation and community projects were seen not as ends in themselves but rather as a means to win the trust and confidence of people and provide a platform for their education and mobilisation (Dlamini, cited by Fatton, 1986:98). Projects were meant to instil in students and communities the self-reliance that was seen as a prerequisite for self-emancipation. They were attractive to SASO because they provided the opportunity for students to use their skills for community development, instilled the notion of service to the community and enabled black students to give expression to the claim that they were "black" before being students (SASO, 1972b:29; Ramphela, 1991a:154; 156).

Community development projects began with the involvement of the SASO branch at the University of Natal Medical School, attempting to address the needs of squatter and poor communities near Durban for clean water, shelter and health services. Once taken up by other SASO branches and SASO nationally, these projects were meant to include the building of small dams, the construction of school buildings and community centres, a rehabilitation scheme for people uprooted and relocated at Winterveld, near Pretoria, health and preventive medicine projects, soup kitchens, and assistance to a relocated community in the north-western Cape (SASO, 1974a 3). Initially, responsibility for many of the national initiatives lay with the permanent organiser. However, given the numerous duties attached to this official's portfolio, in 1973 SASO decided to appoint a full-time director of community development (SASO, 1973d:14).

Overall, the track record of SASO's community development initiatives was poor. Apart from the construction of some dams, school buildings and a community centre, few projects were fully implemented or satisfactorily operated, serviced and concluded (SASO, 1973f:15; SASO, 1974b). Problems cited included poor planning, the lack of funds and transport, and police harassment. According to Ramphela, who was involved in various SASO projects, there was also a lack of continuity, time and advisory and material support as well as problems related to consulting adequately. Moreover, the assumption of community unity also proved to be an obstacle. However, work of the kind that was

conducted at Winterveld represented a "valuable education opportunity" (Ramphele, 1991a:157-59). It revealed the enormity of the economic and social problems of the poor, the extent of poverty of relocated people and put "paid to the romanticism we as students had about poverty and people's responses to it" (ibid.).

As part of community development, SASO was also involved in literacy programmes and a "Home Education Scheme". The literacy project was taken over from the University Christian Movement in 1972. Literacy was seen as playing an important role in "bringing the black community closer to liberation" and in contributing to "political, economic and social awareness and consciousness by permitting wider communication and conscientisation". A director of literacy was appointed to "plan, execute and set up literacy classes throughout the country" and students were urged to "play their role in the sensitising of our community". The Home Education Scheme was also established in 1972 and was meant to be a "natural follow-up of the literacy project". It was intended to provide adult education for the newly literate and tuition for correspondence school students by running classes near universities and vacation schools in select centres (SASO, 1972b:27; SASO, 1973a:15-16).

A number of seminars were organised in different parts of the country to train both students and other interested people as literacy co-ordinators, and literacy work was conducted by some of the SASO branches with various groups, including domestic and campus workers. However, in 1973, the director of literacy was banned. There was also a complaint from the national executive that many people trained as literacy co-ordinators showed no drive and dedication and that, as a result, literacy programmes had not taken off (SASO, 1973f:21). A year later, various SASO branches made much the same complaint, some adding that there was a general reluctance on the part of members to become involved in community development initiatives (SASO, 1974b). In July 1974 it was stated that there had been no major literacy undertakings in the previous six months and plans were underway to decentralise the literacy project and hand it over "to the community" (SASO, 1974c:15). The Home Education Scheme appears

to have been even less of a success and to have suffered from a similar person-power problem.

In SASO's view, the essential problem of the community development initiatives was the lack of interest on the part of students, and their low level of participation. In 1974 the SASO national executive had to acknowledge that

to a very small scale we did live up to our ideals but somehow things took a new turn and students shied away from projects. Lack of funds cannot be used as an excuse, lack of initiative and dedication is our strongest drawback (SASO, 1974c:12).

At the same time, community development was emphasised even more strongly. It was argued that SASO had achieved its goal of making BC "a fact in the community", but that

the community is tired of listening to speeches, all people want is some tangible manifestations of self-reliance and self-determination. Community Development work offers us this chance and we need to snap it up without much waste of time (ibid.).

However, there is little evidence that after 1974 community development work was "snapped up" by students, or that community projects were in any healthier state.

I noted earlier that for SASO publications were a vital means of disseminating BC ideas. SASO also understood the role of the commercial media in shaping black opinion, recognised the need to develop "good relations with the press", and welcomed coverage given to events like *GSCs*. However, relations with the commercial media were generally strained. The control of much of the media by white-owned companies, the media's hostility to, or lack of support of, SASO, its failure to be "truly objective" and its tendency to refer to blacks as "non-whites" were all strongly resented (SASO, 1972b; 1973d:6). At the 1972 *GSC* a resolution, noting that the "white press" was "completely irrelevant" to black "needs and aspirations", and that it was "determined to misrepresent and misdirect the black community", called for the establishment of an "independent black press". The secretary-general was instructed to make contact with black journalists, business people and organisations, to arrange a seminar on the "the role

of the Black press" in South Africa and to set up a "Black Press Commission" (SASO, 1972b:20).

The seminar was held and instituted the Black Press Commission. The Commission was to form a private company whose objects were to be to establish a monthly newspaper, and a publishing and printing house. There were, however, no tangible results. The banning of key SASO officials stalled the activities of the commission, and while reference was made in 1974 to the floating of a company it was admitted that little progress had been made. One indirect outcome of this initiative, however, was the formation of the Union of Black Journalists by some of the Transvaal participants (SASO, 1973f:24).

Two of the fields in which SASO had considerably greater impact and success were culture and "black theology". At the 1971 GSC a lengthy resolution was adopted which defined culture as "a dynamic phenomenon involving all activities of a people", and asserted that BC was "a supremely cultural fact". The resolution called for a "cultural orientation" that made blacks realise that they were united by a common experience of political and economic oppression and "insult to human dignity", and for the appointment of an organiser who would be responsible for organising and promoting black cultural activities and disseminating literature (SASO, 1971:22-24). The following year, in lieu of an organiser, a Cultural Commission was established to promote and disseminate black cultural production. Black parents were to be encouraged to give black names to children and to teach folklore, and initiatives were called for to promote black values among children.

SASO and BC played a major role in stimulating and facilitating black cultural production during the 1970s. The 1972 GSC included an art exhibition, poetry reading, and a drama and music festival, and cultural activities were to become an ongoing and vibrant feature of SASO national and local meetings and events, and of campus life. SASO forums provided platforms for BC cultural production and exposure for emerging black artists, while SASO publications carried numerous articles on culture, and also featured black poetry. SASO members were instrumental in establishing a number of cultural formations, played an active role in various theatre, art and music bodies, and a number of them were to go on to establish national and international reputations as novelists, poets and playwrights.

Mzamane has argued that BC realised ... the essentially political importance of the cultural struggle. It was active in all the arts, but in none more effectively

than theatre, which included poetry performances. Black Consciousness emphasised the education function of cultural and artistic activity and exploited the political resources of art, theatre, music, dance and culture in general (1991:185).

The character, form and content of poetry, drama, art and music influenced by BC was strongly conditioned by the audience that it sought to communicate with – primarily the black oppressed, rather than white cultural consumers or any other social group.

While not all of SASO's members were Christian or even religiously inclined, as an organisation SASO understood the importance of religion, and especially Christianity, in the lives of the black population. It promoted "black theology" and achieved some success in popularising it among black theologians, clergy, students at seminaries and members of black Christian student formations. A 1971 resolution defined black theology:

Black theology is not a theology of absolutes, but grapples with existential situations ... .Is not a theology of theory but that of action and development. It is ... an authentic and positive articulation of the Black Christian's reflection on God in the light of their Black experience (SASO, 1971:21).

Christ's liberation was understood as freedom not only from "internal bondage" but also "from circumstances of external enslavement", and therefore black theology meant

taking resolute and decisive steps to free Black people not only from estrangement to God but also from slave mentality, inferiority complex, distrust of themselves and continued dependence on others culminating in self-hate (ibid.).

Black clergy were seen as crucial to the spread of BC ideas and liberation and a commission including other "relevant" religious bodies was established to "study, direct and popularise" black theology. However, another resolution that "black Christians within the white-dominated churches should be encouraged to break-away and form their own independent churches" was resoundingly defeated (SASO, 1971:22). It was probably realised that any break-away call would have little success and would lead SASO into a headlong confrontation with many of the religious bodies with whom it was associated.



The BC ideas and black theology enjoyed strong support among theological students who were active in SASO branches at the Federal Theological Seminary and the Lutheran Theological College, and via them reached sections of the broader black population. Black theology also had adherents within the Students Christian Movement (SCM), and on some campuses there was a close working relationship between SASO and SCM branches. Finally, it had a resonance within the Interdenominational Association of African Ministers of Religion (IDAMASA), and some support from sections of the Christian Council of South Africa, which consisted of most of the major churches and various religious organisations. One indication of the spread of BC and black theology among committed and more activist black Christian students is provided by the disbanding of the non-racial UCM in 1972. The dissolution of the UCM, according to its president, was the result of the "growth of Black Consciousness among the Black members" (quoted in Hirson, 1979:83).

## **Organisational relations**

SASO's projects and its various activities brought it into contact with a range of organisations. Relations with organisations were generally governed by three considerations. First, relations with certain organisations were necessitated by practical considerations, although the general policy was to avoid contact with these organisations. Essentially liberal and white organisations like NUSAS and the Christian Institute (CI) fell into this category. Even though SASO was generally hostile towards NUSAS, and had, in 1973, secured its expulsion from the Southern African Students' Movement conference, the way was always left open for the SASO national executive to liaise with NUSAS around minor practical matters, and there was some contact around these matters. In the case of the CI, formed by white ex-Dutch Reformed Church clergy like Beyers Naude, although it gave some attention to black theology, SASO drew on it essentially for financial and material support.

Second, relations with a number of black organisations were based on co-operation around practical issues and areas of shared concerns and thinking. SASO saw it as fruitful and strategic to have relations with such organisations and to attempt to influence them to embrace BC.

Many of the religious organisations with which SASO had relations, as well as the numerous organisations that attended the meetings to explore the formation of the Black Peoples Convention (BPC) (see below) are cases in point. The initial relations with some bantustan leaders, including Buthelezi, had also been governed by such a strategic consideration.

Finally, there were a number of organisations with which SASO had a close relationship based on shared goals and strategies and common commitment to BC. Some of these organisations were initiated by SASO, in other cases, SASO had played a key role in their formation and development. Collectively, these organisations and SASO represented the core of the BCM. The prime example of an organisation initiated by SASO was the BPC. In April 1971 SASO convened a meeting of some church groups and an education organisation to discuss co-ordination of activities. Two further meetings, during which the number and range of organisations grew to cover the welfare, sport and youth fields, brought participants to the choice of forming an umbrella national cultural or political organisation. Some SASO members favoured the formation of a political organisation; others, including Biko, preferred a cultural organisation on the grounds that more time was required for activities related to psychological liberation (Buthelezi, 1991:125).

Those favouring a political organisation carried the day, and in 1972 BPC was formally launched. Its aims included the liberation of blacks from "physical and psychological oppression", and they were to "formulate, apply and implement the principles and philosophies of Black Consciousness and Black Communalism" (Hirson, 1979:83). BPC sought to establish a countrywide network of branches and sign up a million members in three years. However, few of its organisational or political objectives were achieved and, according to Buthelezi, BPC "continued to operate in the shadow of the more highly organised SASO and relied on SASO for both resources and political direction" (ibid.:126).

As a result of a decision at the 1972 GSC, SASO also played a key role in promoting and establishing a number of local and regional youth organisations and in running leadership training seminars for youth (SASO, 1972b:16). The following year, at a joint SASO and BPC

seminar for regional youth organisations, the National Youth Organisation (NAYO) was formed. While not directly involved in the formation of various local and regional student organisations, SASO undoubtedly created the political climate for the emergence of these organisations, maintained relations with them and also sought to link them into a single national formation (SASO, 1973d:9). By 1973, however, there was a move towards handing over various support activities for youth to the black community programmes (BCPs) which had been formed in 1971. SASO had close relations with BCPs, and provided political direction and advice around projects and person-power for the BCPs' initiatives, like the journal *Black Review*.

## **Worker organisation**

Not all initiatives to draw new social groups into the BC fold and expand the base of the BCMs were successful. In 1971 a project called "EDUPLOY" – Education by Employment – was launched. The idea was to put students into employment to experience working conditions so that they could better advise workers around their problems. A year later, a decision was taken to establish a Black Workers Council as a co-ordinating body to unite black workers and serve their needs and aspirations, to "conscientise them about their role" and to "run clinics for leadership" (SASO, 1972b:17). The initiative arose out of a recognition that "black workers are a massive force", that existing legislation and repression had served to circumscribe "effective bargaining by black workers", and from a criticism of current trade unionism which was seen as seeking to produce "a contented worker" (ibid.). To give effect to this decision, the Black Workers' Project (BWP) was founded as a joint initiative with the BCPs, and full-time organisers were appointed.

Poor planning was blamed for the failure to implement EDUPLOY during the 1971-72 summer vacation. Thereafter, there was a complaint that there was a lack of participation by students, and by 1974 EDUPLOY was considered to be a "closed book", due to poor student response (SASO, 1973f:15; 1974c). Despite widespread worker strikes during 1973, the BWP also failed to take-off. The pre-emption of the Black Workers Council by the launch of the Black and Allied Workers

Union (BAWU) by a BC notable, a lack of experience and state repression all contributed to the BWP's lack of progress. However, the fact that BAWU itself made little headway among black workers suggests that the philosophical themes and intellectual approach of BC failed to attract workers. Meetings were held between BAWU and the the BWP to look at collaboration, but these did little to enhance worker organisation.

### ***Political mobilisation and struggle***

One effective way in which SASO mobilised students and non-students was through its publications that were disseminated on campuses and beyond. Another mode of mobilisation was through mass meetings, demonstrations and protest marches on campuses, and public rallies in the cities and black townships, often hosted jointly with the BPC, to commemorate particular events and focus on select issues. "SASO days", which branches were expected to organise, included 21 March, termed "Heroes Day", in memory of the shooting of anti-pass demonstrators at Sharpeville; 10 May, which was billed as "SASO Day" to celebrate the establishment of SASO; and August 17, which was meant to be for "mourning ... assaults on the Black man's dignity" (SASO, 1972a:8).

Other mobilisations were triggered by events such as the killing of Tiro, a leading SASO activist in exile in Botswana, by a parcel bomb, the shooting of workers at Carltonville in 1973, and the detention and banning of SASO and other BC leaders. At UNIZUL, there were meetings and demonstrations in 1976 at the award of an honorary doctorate to Buthelezi (Brooks and Brickhill, 1980:130). Meetings were usually advertised through the regular SASO publications, commercial media, as well as special posters and pamphlets, and featured SASO and BPC's leaders and other BC notables.

The only national political campaign organised by SASO involved the "Viva FRELIMO" rallies, which it organised jointly with the BPCs in 1974, to celebrate FRELIMO's ascension to power in Mozambique, and Mozambican independence. The campaign propelled SASO into head-long confrontation with the state. Twenty four hours prior to the rallies being held, the state banned all BPC-SASO gatherings to celebrate Mozambican independence. In Durban, a combination of the

late notification, and defiance, of the banning, resulted in a large crowd congregating for the rally. At UNIN, since the celebration was organised by the SRC, it was understood to be exempt from the ban which referred to the SASO-BPC meetings. In any event, both in Durban and at UNIN, police intervened, with a number of people being injured and arrested. The arrests at UNIN were to result in a class boycott, and a protest march to, and picket of, a nearby police station. Thereafter, police raided the offices of SASO and BPC and arrested numerous officials. Following on this, a number of BC activists were charged under the Terrorism Act Number 83 of 1967 and after a two-year trial for "endangering the maintenance of law and order", six BC leaders, including three SASO national executive members, were jailed.

## **State Repression and the Decline and Demise of SASO**

Initially, SASO was viewed favourably by the state and it was hoped that, because of its rejection of multiracial organisation, it could be persuaded to accept separate development. This attitude provided SASO with the space to operate on the campuses and root itself among students. However, the increasingly public attack by SASO of apartheid, bantustans and segregated education, and especially its leadership of the mass student protests during 1972 ended any hopes that the state may have entertained about SASO as a potentially compliant and pro-separate development organisation.

In 1972, two SASO members were served with banning orders (SASO, 1972b:35). Thereafter, in March 1973, the SASO president, general secretary, permanent organiser and editor of publications, and three other leading members, including Biko, were served with five-year banning orders by the government. The 1973 GSC elected a new leadership. However, during the following six months, nine more leading officials were banned. The banning orders, which restricted the SASO leaders to their hometowns, had the effect of dispersing them all over the country. By mid-1975, 29 leading officials of SASO had been banned (BCP, 1975:113). During 1975-76, the entire SASO national executive was detained at one point or another, the same fate being experienced by the 1976-77 national executive members. Throughout

the 1973 to 1977 period, numerous SASO activists were forced into exile to escape repression.

From 1972 onwards, SASO was also under continuous attack from campus administrations. During 1972, SASO was banned at UWC and UDW, and suspended at UNIN on the grounds of being responsible for the mass student protests. At UFH the administration precluded the SASO branch from using its funds for affiliation to SASO. The reasoning of the UFH rector was that

[u]nder normal circumstances I feel this part of the allocation may be used to pay affiliation fees. However, while SASO could have wonderful work at University level on the black campuses, in my opinion they have failed miserably. Its present leaders have by far overstepped the limits of tolerance (quoted in SASO, 1973f:12).

In 1973 the organisation was banned at UFH, and in 1975 at UNIN. At UNIZUL there were various initiatives to undermine SASO and frighten students away from the organisation. However, although formally banned at many institutions and some branches became defunct or moribund, SASO continued to operate through other organisations and the locals.

The bannings, detentions, arrests and trial and flight of members into exile had numerous effects on SASO. First, as a consequence of state repression early 1973 represented the peak of SASO's membership and organisation and thereafter SASO went into a decline, from which it was not able to fully recover. At the fourth GSC in July 1973 the acting president complained that "activity at branch and local level has left much to be desired. Volunteers for our physical projects have not been coming forward" (SASO, 1973g:5). Almost a year later, in May 1974, the permanent organiser stated

[w]hereas in the past we have progressed very fast and with lesser difficulties the year 1974 has presented us with challenges and even threatened our continued existence. Both in terms of membership and leadership our resources have waned terribly (SASO, 1974b).

This admission came after the special GSC in January 1974 to replace banned leaders had mandated the permanent organiser to concentrate on re-establishing branches at various institutions.

At the same time, however, the permanent organiser was requested to discourage central affiliation through SRCs (SASO, 1974a:2-3). With a sharpening of the conflict between SASO and the state, student leaders appear to have become impatient with what they termed "passengers" – students who were members of SASO by virtue of central affiliation through SRCs. The feeling was that branches provided a base of more committed members. Moreover,

[c]entre affiliation has the one disadvantage that many things may not get done because students mandate is lacking. In terms of propaganda it is all very well to boast of 20,000 students whereas there are 20 followers. Therefore, it is high time we become realistic and fight with our real members (SASO, 1974c:6).

SASO was then proclaimed to be an organisation that was "no more a membership-conscious organisation but a more expansion-conscious organisation, in that we shall not count people in terms of numbers but in terms of work"(ibid.:4).

However, it seems that the repressive measures of the state and campus administrations also began to deter students from being active in SASO. During a tour of campuses in early 1974, the SASO president found that, even at an institution like UNMS, there was "difficulty in harnessing the students' co-operation" (SASO, 1974b:1). The UNMS SRC president's own opinion was that the UNMS "student populace had been presenting a false image of itself during the past years and that this had now become difficult to circumvent" (ibid.). The reference to "false image" hints at the frustration that probably began to be felt by some activists. While the conditions of repression were interpreted by activists as requiring more committed and greater student activism, the repression, of course, also raised the stakes of participation and held back student involvement in SASO. This, coupled with the emphasis on quality of membership rather than quantity, meant that after 1973 SASO began to become a smaller, more selective and exclusive organisation.

A second effect of the repression was the lack of experienced and competent leadership cadres. The SASO permanent organiser's complaint at the waning of "leadership resources" was noted earlier.

The problem of lack of leadership, and its effect, was confirmed by a representative of the Transvaal SASO locals.

One snag with these branches is that people who have no clear conception and understanding of the struggle are being chosen into positions of leadership and thus contributing to the general lethargy of members (SASO, 1974b).

The problem was said to exist not only at the level of branches: the SASO head office, too, was accused of displaying a lack of direction and initiative and there was a call for leadership training (ibid.). The focus of a SASO formation school in May 1974 was, however, on youth (SASO, 1974c), and while a regional formation school in late 1974 was devoted to political education, and some branches used certain commemoration days for leadership seminars, there is little evidence of any major initiative around leadership training.

Third, the crisis in the organisation and the removal of important leadership figures appears to have contributed to discipline problems. A SASO official claimed with respect to a seminar on strategy held in April 1973 that

[i]t was not as fulfilling owing to certain things that need not be repeated anywhere. There was singular lack of self-discipline and motivation from a number of participants (SASO, 1973f:18).

Some branches complained of "idlers" who frequented SASO offices and used organisational resources such as telephones without becoming formal members or participating in SASO activities. As a result, in 1974 a resolution was adopted to draw up a code of ethics that would be binding on SASO members (SASO, 1974a:4).

Fourth, the government declaration of SASO as an "affected" organisation under the Affected Organisation's Act Number 31 of 1974 meant that SASO could no longer receive funds from overseas sources. At the same time, funds were increasingly having to be diverted towards the support of banned officials, families of detainees and for court trials. As a result, SASO came under severe financial pressures which hampered its activities and the running of the organisation.

Fifth, as a combined effect of the removal of leading officials, financial pressures and the harassment of SASO's printers by the security police, SASO publications began to be produced only intermittently. In



mid-1973 it was reported that the circulation of the SASO Newsletter had not risen above 4 000 copies, and it is likely that this represented its peak (SASO, 1973f:21). A year later it was stated that the "least said about our publications department would be the best thing" (SASO, 1974c:21). The SASO Newsletter was not produced for almost two years between mid-1973 and mid-1975, and after a brief revival, disappeared after early 1976. Despite good sales being reported for publications that introduced students to SASO, these also no longer appeared, and were said to be one of the reasons for SASO's membership problems. The inability to produce publications deprived SASO of a crucial instrument of ideological and organisational diffusion.

According to a journalist who observed the rise and demise of SASO, "from 1973 to its banning in October 1977 SASO went through one crisis after another as it battled to survive in the face of counter-action by the Government" (Laurence, 1979:61) Laurence also writes that "by mid-1974 SASO began to take up a defiant and even provocative stand towards the authorities, in spite of the battering it had taken the previous year" (ibid.), and suggests that continuous repression and harassment of SASO, as well as the killing of Tiro by a parcel-bomb in early 1974, "helped to produce a reckless, almost desperado anger" (ibid.). The FRELIMO rallies are then interpreted by Laurence as representing a trial of strength between the SASO-BPC and the state.

Certainly, state repression appears to have seriously hamstrung SASO. By mid-1974, one SASO official even stated, "I am sure that some organisations think we are no more. We are actively campaigning to crush that image. SASO is and will be for a long time to come" (SASO, 1974b). Yet, interestingly, key officials blamed SASO's membership, infrastructure and organisational problems principally on internal weaknesses rather than repression. For example, for Myeza, the underlying problem was

an inherent tendency of exclusiveness among the SASO members which develops to the formation of what could be called cliques. This gives the impression that SASO belongs to a chosen few and is therefore "underground". This deters potential SASO members terribly (SASO, 1974b:3).

It was also alleged that SASO activists were tending to "to compromise on their principles and adopt a defensive role" which limited the spread of BC ideas and activities (ibid.). A third problem was

said to be leadership: "Campus leadership leaves much to be desired and the leadership training must be intensified greatly" (ibid.). Finally, it was suggested that a lack of organisational activities meant that new students were poorly informed about SASO.

The attribution of all SASO's organisational weaknesses to internal subjective factors with no consideration of the effects of changed objective conditions, and the concomitant prescription of deeper commitment, a redoubling of activist effort, more open organisational activity and greater leadership training is voluntarist in the extreme. Indeed, I will argue later that SASO was characterised by a distinct voluntarism and a tendency to underestimate the ruthlessness of the apartheid state, and it is perhaps to this that Laurence refers to when he speaks of a "reckless anger" on the part of SASO.

Yet, it was probably only such a voluntarist stance that enabled SASO to survive until its banning in October 1977. After 1973, there was some revitalisation in particular areas of the organisation. During 1974 branches at UWC and UNIN were revived – at the latter the SASO branch president also captured the SRC presidency (SASO, 1974c:5). Furthermore, during 1975 there was also a revival of the publication of the SASO Newsletter, and a SASO Bulletin was published in mid-1977. In general, SASO continued to have a presence, in one form or another, on most black campuses. Notwithstanding state repression, SASO C<sub>5</sub>Cs also continued to be held. The sheer commitment, bravery, courage and fighting spirit of numerous student activists meant that SASO survived as an organisation and never totally collapsed.

Still, after 1973 the decline in membership and organisation was real and never completely reversed. The intense and continuous repression, the arrests of leading officials in the aftermath of the pro-FRELIMO rallies, the long and debilitating court trial and imprisonment of key officials all meant that on the eve of the 1976-77 Soweto uprising SASO was in a severely weakened state. As a result, as far as the uprising is concerned, apart from the roles played by individual members and the initiatives of branches on some campuses, as a national organisation SASO was not much in evidence and its contribution to the trajectory and course of the actual uprising was minimal.