

SACOS vs NSC

by Mncedisi Mbilini



After serving five years imprisonment on Robben Island, Mncedisi Mbilini served as Regional Organiser for AZAPO in the Eastern Cape and Border between 1984-1986. He is currently General Secretary of the Advice Centres Association as also of the Springbok Roses Rugby Football Club, a Saru affiliate. He is the President of the Frontier Soccer Union and the Secretary of the BCM (Queenstown chapter).

There has been a palace revolt within the ranks of the SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL ON SPORT (Sacos was founded in Durban during March 1973), which has long enjoyed the status of being the "sports wing of the liberation movement." The revolt has been spearheaded by those within Sacos who owe their political allegiance to the United Democratic Front (UDF) and has resulted in the queer phenomenon of many Sacos officials holding dual membership – both to Sacos and the UDF-inclined National Sports Congress (NSC).

Self-Proclaimed Sub-Committee

The Chairperson of the Western Cape Interim Committee of the NSC, Ngconde Balfour (who also happens to be the Vice-President of the Western Province Council on Sport (Wepcos) maintains that the NSC "has always been like a sub-committee of Sacos." (*South* September 14 - 20, 1989) While insisting that Sacos must align itself to the UDF, Balfour argues that the NSC "will never ban nor exclude anyone from the oppressed masses, irrespective of their affiliation or ideology."

But Balfour wields a big stick against Sacos, too: "If they abandon us and we have no option but to go on our own we will take the majority of Sacos sport-people with us." The NSC is a self-proclaimed "extension of Sacos" aimed at penetrating "the townships" and bringing "codes there into the fold of Sacos," elaborates the ANC. (*The New African* 24 April 1989)

The only differences between the NSC and Sacos which have hitherto surfaced revolve around Sacos's stated policy of non-sectarianism and the application of its Double Standards Resolution.

Double Standards Resolution

The Double Standards Resolution was first proposed in April 1977. At Sacos's third BGM at the Muslim Assembly Hall in Cape Town on 1-2 September 1979, an addendum was made to this Resolution. The Double Standards Resolution reads as follows:

"No member of Sacos shall in any way condone, encourage, foster or advocate racialism or discrimination in any form and no individual associated with Sacos or its members shall in any way condone, encourage, foster or advocate, racialism of discrimination in any way whatsoever, and for the purposes of this clause, the participation in, association with or support of all forms of government bodies designed to entrench and/or promote the separateness of people via bodies such as the Coloured Persons' Representative Council, the South African Indian Council, Local Affairs Committees, Community Councils, Management Committees and the like, or any successors thereto, shall be deemed to condone or encourage or foster or advocate – racialism and discrimination."

In a paper entitled "Double Standards: A New Dimension" (*Black Students Society Sports Special*: May 1981: BSS (University of Natal (Durban)), Reginald Feldman classifies "the enemy" targetted by Sacos as:

- (a) the known collaborators who had built up records of opportunism over the years in the fields of sports and politics,
- (b) unfortunate people who suffered from the slave mentality and believed in white superiority and non-white (sic!) inferiority,
- (c) social and political parasites who

- enjoyed white status in one season only to return to the non-racial fold the next where they would enjoy the meagre facilities that had been bitterly fought for by the committed,
- (d) out-and-out rascals who blatantly advanced their careers and filled their pockets by encouraging multi-nationalism and promoting and perpetuating it (3)

The significance of the Double Standards Resolution for Feldman is that "the commitment to non-racialism" became "a formal, written one and the incorporation of the double standards clause in the constitution of non-racial sports bodies meant that non-racialism had now, as it were, become law in non-racial sports bodies, it become truly constitutional which the dictionary defines as 'in accordance with, acting under, or abiding by, the fundamental laws governing a state, nation, society or other organized group: secured from, or controlled by, such laws.'" (3-4)

There is no doubt that the Double Standards Resolution includes a very healthy commitment to anti-collaboration and has aided in maintaining Sacos on a relatively even keel. Sacos has done pioneering work in the field of the sports struggle and in the Isolation Campaign and its efforts and contribution can never be disregarded or minimized.

Sportsapartheid

In 1981 Dr Joe Variava, then AZAPO's Secretary for Sport, delivered a paper at an AZAPO Congress calling on Sacos to draw the logical inference from its slogan "no normal sport in an abnormal society" viz that there can never be non-racial sport in a racist society. Sacos considers non-racialism to be both its goal and

"equally important, the means to attain it." ("The S. African Council of Sport" *Sacos Sport* Volume 2, September 1982, p8)

Sacos seems bent on seeing the race problem in our land as merely a matter of defective interpersonal relations. Hence the solution that Sacos posits is one of improving "race relations" viz non-racialism. But racism (as against racialism) is not simply a matter of individual prejudices and attitudes and therefore a moral failing: racism has come to inhere in the very institutions and structures of this society, it has percolated into the various aspects, spheres, working structures and institutions of society. As the WCC's Consultation on Racism, held at Notting Hill in May 1969, put it: "racist ideologies and propaganda are developed and disseminated as tools in economic, political and military struggles for power." It is therefore imperative that the liberal concentration on improving race relations at an individual level not detract from the acquisition of social, economic, political and cultural power by the masses. *Non-racialism is unadulterated liberal cant: anti-racism offers the only meaningful solution.*

The Sacos emphasis on what it laconically termed "sportsapartheid" made Sacos both unable and unwilling to come to terms with the race/class divide in Azanian society. Instead, Sacos spokesperson were heard to equate Reservoir Hills (a plush residential area in Durban designated for "Indian" occupation) with Kwa-Mashu (a Durban ghetto designated for "African" occupation), while trotting out the excuse that "the permit system" made it impossible for Sacos to organize sporting codes in "African" areas.

A demonstration of Sacos's undialectical approach and complete disregard for mobilization in the "African" townships and bantustans was its inability to deal with the 1982 Rebel Soccer tour. AZAPO scuttled this tour by persuading teams then participating in the National Professional Soccer League (NPSL) to refuse to play against the tourists. Sacos

used the Double Standards Resolution to maintain its distance from this strategy (one cannot dirty one's hands talking to Thabe's teams!), yet it commented:

"The obvious and logical next step is for the sportsmen of Soweto to join hands



with all non-racial sportsmen in the struggle to bring about a truly non-racial set-up in this country in a truly non-racial democracy." ("Soweto bursts the bubble of Rebel Sports Tours" *Sacos Sport* Volume 2 September 1982 p5)

Ever since the 1981 AZAPO Congress, AZAPO requested meetings with the Sacos executive and had made it quite clear that Sacos's policies – non-racialism, the Double Standards Resolution, the bar on international hotels, etc. needed explanation and scrutiny in democratic debate. In the wake of the rebel soccer tour, Sacos reciprocated AZAPO's invitation. That AZAPO succeeded in influencing Sacos policies is clear from an appraisal of the documents of the 1983 Sacos "Sport and Liberation" Conference, all of which emphasize the hegemony of the Black working class in the liberation movement.

"... To Cease Playing Sport"

The overall thrust of Sacos policy is to destroy the system's grand design to use sport "as a lightning conductor to divert the thoughts of the masses from their miserable

existence." (Feldman op cit 6) On Biko Day 1982 at a Sacos General Meeting held in Port Elizabeth, the current President of Sacos, Joe Ebrahim remarked:

"It is important . . . to make our sportspersons aware that the time when we shall have to make a decision on whether sports is all-important is rapidly diminishing. Our discussion should centre around the stage at which we have to cease playing sport . . ."

Joe Ebrahim makes a distinction between principles, strategies and tactics in a paper entitled "Sacos Policy-Principles, Strategy & Tactics" (*BSS Sports Special* op cit 10): "A principle is an axiom ie a self-evident truth . . . (A) principle is inviolable and unchangeable. A tactic on the other hand is a method which is employed to attain a particular object or reach a specified goal. It may, therefore, be a method or a procedure with which we are to promote a specific principle or oppose the implementation of some scheme or another . . .

(O)ur principles will determine the tactics we employ and not the obverse." (12) "Strategies are deployed as the principal means of realizing long-term objectives, which constitute an organisation's principles," adds the Lot 14 Bus Passengers' Interim Committee in a pamphlet entitled "Death to Ethnic Sports!"

Ebrahim's statement (quoted above) betrays an inability to understand the role of sport and culture within the context of the national liberation struggle. Suffice it to say that the entire Isolation Campaign seems designed to isolate both white South Africa and the nascent Azania. The oppressed do not need to isolate themselves – their strategy must be to isolate the oppressor! Sacos has skewed its strategies towards "sacrifice" and self-immolation in a manner which defies the definitions Ebrahim so eloquently quotes.

Overall it must be emphasized that Sacos belongs to the oppressed and exploited people. Any change in policies and direction must occur within Sacos itself: after all, if Sacos is under attack, it is our duty to uphold and defend it.

A Disruptive Faction

The NSC has grouped itself into nothing but a disruptive faction hellbent on dragging Sacos into the Charterist camp. The oppressed and exploited are all too familiar with these manoeuvrings. Some examples:

1. The Azanian Student's Organisation (Azaso) (later renamed South African National Students Congress (Sansco)), a student body formed by AZAPO, switched its ideological stance to non-racialism in 1981 and its then President addressed the Congress of the National Union of South African Students (Nusas), thus reversing years of struggle started by Biko and others in SASO.
2. Most affiliates of COSATU have literally had the Kliptown Charter foisted onto them, without any explanation as to what the Charter's contents are.
3. The Media Worker's Association of South Africa (Mwasa) and the Commercial Catering and Allied Worker's Union of South Africa

(Ccawusa) have been similarly riven, with those insisting on the "Charterist" road constituting the minority in both instances.

4. The majority in the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (Nadel) moved into the Black Lawyer's Association (BLA) as a direct result of sectarianism.

It is quite clear that the NSC's orientation is that of collaborating with racist sports bodies and sneaking racist South Africa back into international sport. John Perlman, in an article entitled "Victory thrill as soccer unity talks hurdle the obstacles" (*Weekly Mail* September 15 to 21, 1989) proposes the following "summarised scenario": "... (U)nit y first, development programmes to balance up inequalities in facilities and resources second, gradual re-admission to international sport third. "Feldmans warning resonates:

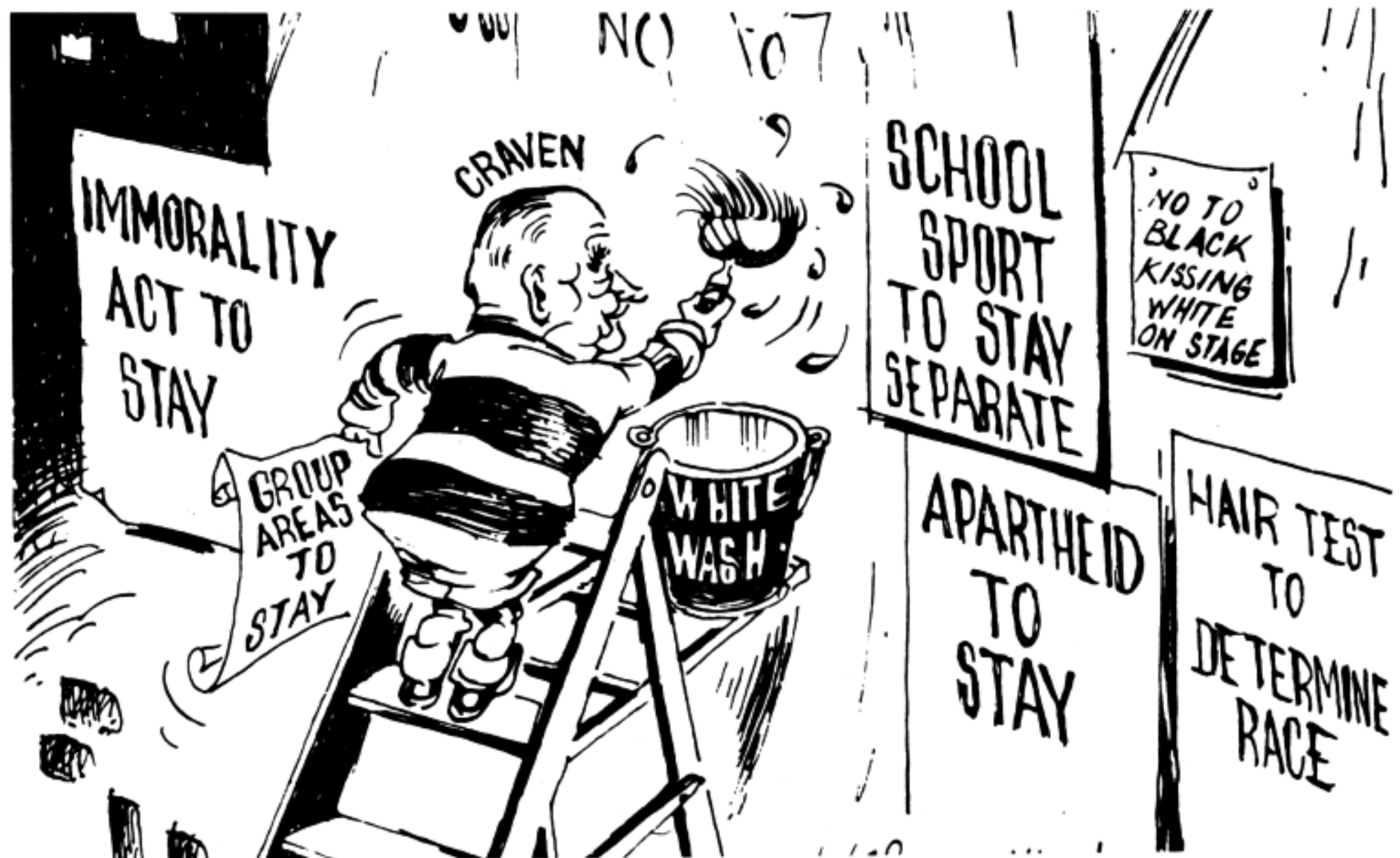
"Most of us will, I am sure, find it very strange that certain persons of influence should find it appropriate at this time of increasing isolation of South Africa to suggest a national convention of sport-

smen which will fly in the face of all attempts to isolate the country, which will negate all efforts to increase the pressure on the privileged sportsmen and which will bring us to the negotiating table where the only result can be a watering down of our demands and a compromise which will set our progress back decades." (8)

The Solution

The real problem is the ideology and the whole set of values that are enforced in South African society in general and in sport in particular.

The solution to the sports impasse is contained in the ideology of BC and is elaborated on in the Draft Position Paper on the Azanian Sports Manifesto which we present to you for comment, criticism and debate. The BCM has concentrated on the correct strategy of operating within Sacos: our task must be build Sacos under the hegemony of the Black working class and to reflect the contents and direction of the Azanian Sports Manifesto within Sacos and in all our sporting and cultural organisations. ■



Palace revolt within SACOS.