

**national union of south african students**  
**nasionale unie van suid-afrikaanse studente**

**NUSAS**

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TO: SRC PRESIDENTS.  
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE.  
LOCAL CHAIRMEN.  
STUDENT EDITORS.

FOR: INFORMATION, COMMENT,  
PUBLICATION AND  
DISSEMINATION.

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CRITIQUE ON NUSAS BY SASO ( SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS ORGANISATION)

At their Formation School held in December 1969 SASO established a Commission to prepare a critique on NUSAS. This is reproduced in full below, and as it contains a number of strong criticism of NUSAS we draw it to your attention.

The purpose of the Commission was to "take a look at the proposed reconstruction of NUSAS in terms of; How necessary it is; What could be changed if any change were necessary."; and the authors comment:

"We wish to point out that all the points were examined in an effort to communicate some of the grumbles constantly heard from the black centres. Whilst doing this we wish to reiterate that SASO is by no means linked with NUSAS has merely done this effort in a spirit of co-operation in accordance with our aims. Our co-operation should not be interpreted to mean anymore than a mere presentation of non-white thinking insofar as we can interpret it. We further wish to attend the deliberations. (the special NUSAS CONGRESS) and to press on some of the points mentioned in this memo. We hope that these findings will be of use to NUSAS".

BELOW IS THE FULL TEXT OF THE COMMISSION:

1. AIMS.

The aims of NUSAS as they stand on black and white might be alright but it is the feeling of this commission that NUSAS has no programme of action. Instead of having long term offensive programmes NUSAS has relegated itself to the role of being reactionary. This snags of being nothing much more than publicity seekers, whose effectiveness is very little. NUSAS protests are also opportunist programmes. Nobody doubts the sincerity of at least some of the students but to reveal oneself only in protest after the fact and keep quiet during the rest of the year shows a grave lack of a principled programme and of real clarity about one's goals and how to achieve them.

While criticising NUSAS' day to day activity the commission is nevertheless prepared to acknowledge the immensity of the problem with which she is faced. However it has to be supposed that when the aims were coined it was in full sight of what lay ahead and any deviation for an unqualified attempt to achieve these goals should meet with criticism.

Some constructive suggestions about what we are hinting at might be useful at this stage.

- (1) Since suffering of the millions of oppressed is a daily experience probably getting worse by the day NUSAS has to maintain an initiative programme of protest throughout the year. This can best be done by appointing a series of national days for this purpose e.g. "Sharpeville day", etc in the line with the national day on Academic freedom.
- (2) Rather than having colourful speeches only these should be precluded by meaningful protests with the speeches as the final event.
- (3) Dissemination of information literative by way of pamphlets should be calculated to reach the man in the street.
- (4) There must be an intensive drive to involve more students from each campus.
- (5) The reactionary type of protest which follows a major upset should be abandoned since it fails to change the situation and its subsidence leads people to believe that the value of protest is very little. Only when a situation serves to focus attention upon a particular item on the programme should it be used. One strong feeling in the commission was that NUSAS must always differentiate between the specific and the general. Protesting at the fact that Mafeje's appointment has been cancelled is different from protesting against the erosion of academic freedom or University Autonomy. Thus the difference must always be made clear.

#### PRIORITIES.

- (1) NUSAS' priorities must be long term projects which will result in permanence for those affected e.g. education.  
The different forms of education obtaining in this country cannot possibly be equal and need a constant surveillance by an unbiased group that will always expose inadequacies where these are apparent. This is but one example. Lots of other long term projects could be seen to.
- (2) On the other hand one can indulge in a few meaningful short term projects like fighting against illiteracy. The significance of these is to alleviate the ills that have accrued as a result of the policy of apartheid. Here too there are lots of other examples.

Self education seems to be badly needed by Members of NUSAS. There is no doubt that very few white students taking part in the activities of NUSAS really understand some of the "principles" that talk glibly about. This is understandable in a way since the bulk of them were born after 1948 and have had the medicine of apartheid infused into their blood. However to articulate this lip service being paid to beautiful principles.

NUSAS must:-

- (a) make use of the genius of professional men in planning her formation schools such that the principles of nonracialism are thoroughly examined and the doctrine clearly enunciated to all dedicated supporters.
- (b) concentrate on creating a hard core of students who shall bear the responsibility of planning and putting into effect NUSAS' programme for the year.

#### BENEFITS.

- (1) Not much can be added here except to point out that there is an increasing tendency for NUSAS to be sectional in the distribution of the so called benefit. All NUSAS officials will want "student discounts" "vacation jobs" etc amongst other things all of which have never been experienced by the non white students of our era. Perhaps some of the blame could lie with local organisation but it is the responsibility of the latter body to see that all promises are fulfilled and when this fails we shall be point a finger at nobody else other than the parent body.

There is also a growing feeling that money collected overseas for use by non white communities never reaches the intended people or at best only a small portion does so. This is very hard to substantiate since none of us have any knowledge of what funds come from where and for what purposes but nevertheless it is a point worthy of mention if only for the fact that noise is being made about it.

Unlike other trade unions, NUSAS must be made aware that its members while presumably enjoying equal shares within the organisation itself, they are nevertheless far from equal terms of political rights economical and social privileges. Therefore it becomes imperative the treatment meted out must be in favour of the less privileged because of the difference in starting points.

Racial privilege in "benefits" should not be reason for interracial strife within the organisation and therefore NUSAS must ban scholarships such as the "Abe Bailey Scholarships"

It is the belief of this commission that NUSAS must make scholarships available for students studying at University Colleges ( where possible ). The point to be made here is that all universities in Southern Africa are deferent in one way or the other and therefore do not qualify for the term University. Hence one may refer to them as tribal colleges. Since scholarships have been granted to students studying at universities other than the university colleges we believe that the argument that giving university college students bursaries is furthering the aims of apartheid does not hold water for reasons mentioned above.

#### CULTURE

Much fuss has been made about our differences in culture and the need to obscure this fact. We believe that all South Africans are not mature enough to examine their differences in culture without the danger of this enhancing racial prejudice. The commission therefore believes that NUSAS must do away with all provisions for perpetuating culture cleavages through unnecessary cataloguing of our cultural difference. Rather than lavishing time studying our difference NUSAS should concentrate on similarities.

#### STRUCTURE.

While upholding the principle that any progressive organisation must constantly examine its role and direction we nevertheless feel unhappy and suspicious about the new moves by NUSAS to examine its direction. This is sparked off by utterances from some of the executive members which seem to indicate that the general direction is towards a more conservative NUSAS with an implied aim of concentration on items apparently applying to whites only. While there have been denials of this from the top we nevertheless cannot see NUSAS changing for the better i.e. in terms of structure. It is therefore the express wish of this commission to request SASO to do all it can in persuading NUSAS to retain its general structure as a Students Union while effecting changes in the above topics. We are not opposed in any case to minor constitutional changes which are calculated to enforce participation by all other centres within the S.A. student community.

We note however that because of paucity of numbers the non white voice is hardly heard within the organisation. To partly alleviate this we would recommend the incorporation of more heads of centres, even the smaller centres, into the Standing Committee.

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I would like to thank Steve Biko, the President of SASO, and the SASO Commission for drafting this Commission. Could anyone who reproduces it in part or altogether acknowledge this to SASO.

Yours sincerely,  
NEVILLE CURTIS.  
PRESIDENT.