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# **SOUTH AFRICA**



## **THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT**

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

When the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned and outlawed by the racist and oppressive regime of South Africa in 1960, a conspicuous political vacuum was created in the Black community. That is to say, there was no organised resistance against the oppression of the Black masses on a national scale.

The ANC and PAC went into exile, where they became organisational ends in themselves, largely detached from the conditions back home. Although they had promised to regenerate the consciousness of the masses and to prepare them for struggle, they actually did very little to attain these objectives.

The Black university students, who saw themselves as being Black first and students second, were

The Black university students, who regarded themselves as being members of the Black oppressed before they were students, were the first to recognise the need to fill the political vacuum in the Black community which had arisen in 1960.

In 1968 a group of these young Black students, including Steve Biko (killed by the South African security police in 1977), Abraham Tiro (assassinated by BOSS in Botswana in 1974), Barney Pityana (presently in detention) and many others, formed the South African Students Organisation (S.A.S.O.). It was essentially with the advent of S.A.S.O. that the philosophy of Black consciousness was born.

### WHAT IS BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS?

Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind, a way of life. Its basic tenet is that the Black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity. It implies awareness by the Black people of the power they wield as a group, both economically and politically. Hence group cohesion and solidarity are central facets of Black Consciousness.

Black Consciousness is the most positive call to emerge from the Black world in a long time. By adopting the philosophy of Black Consciousness the Black people of South Africa have come to see themselves as being a

proud and powerful people, whose historical duty it is to liberate, not only themselves but the entire neocolonial continent of Africa. Having embraced the philosophy of Black Consciousness, the broad masses of South Africa have undertaken to use every possible means in order to gain their freedom.

It was the amazing success of the Black Consciousness Movement in forging a powerful new consciousness amongst Blacks that enabled the Blacks as an oppressed people to confront the white racist police state.

It was the existence of a large number of organizations under the banner of the Black Consciousness Movement which was responsible for the swift and effective spreading of the Soweto Uprising.

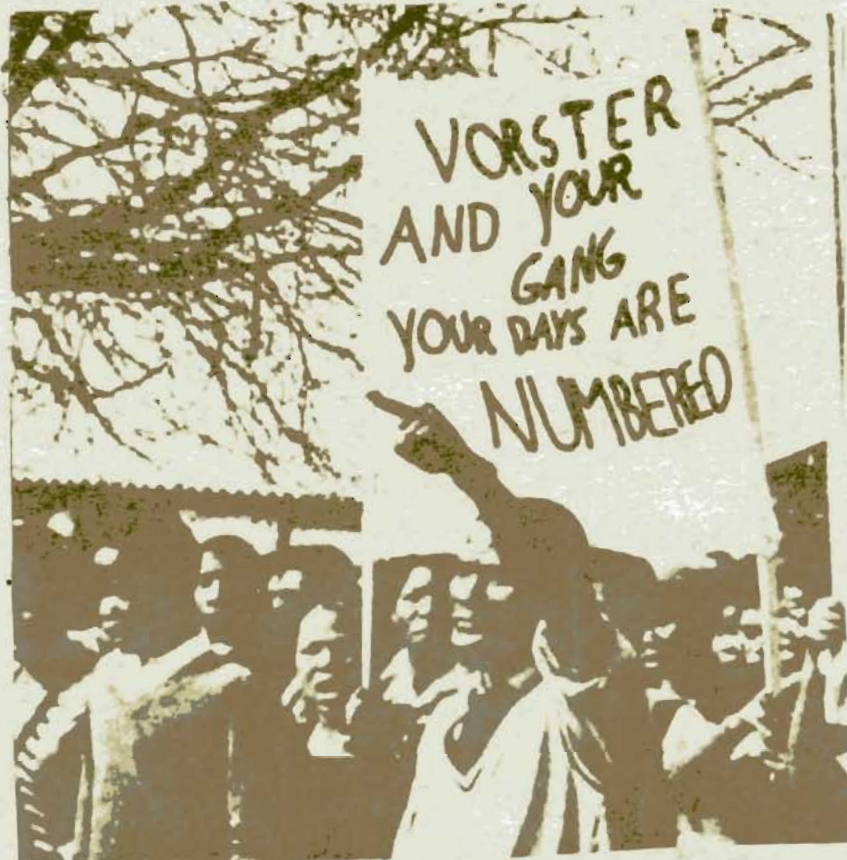
It was the grass roots level of organizing in these organizations, as well as the nation-wide appeal of an aggressive Black Consciousness, that made the Soweto Uprisings qualitatively superior to any other act of defiance and revolution ever witnessed in South Africa.

The Black Consciousness Movement is rooted, therefore, in a philosophy of action, which has developed into the fundamental principles of an umbrella movement, embracing scores of vigorous Black organizations. Every organization is totally autonomous, and operates in its own area of the community. Nevertheless, because Black Consciousness is the basis of every organization's program, structure and strategy, they are all closely united to one another.

#### SOME PRINCIPLES AND AIMS OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

- To unite and solidify the Black people of South Africa with a view to mobilising the masses towards their struggle for liberation and emancipation.
- To popularise and implement the philosophy of Black Consciousness and Black solidarity.
- To create and maintain an equitable economic system based on the principles and philosophy of equal sharing of wealth of the country.

The above cited objectives are only but a few basic fundamentals of the principles of the Black Consciousness Movement, and hence form the cornerstone of the strategy of all the organizations under the banner of the Black Consciousness Movement.



MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS UNDER THE UMBRELLA  
OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT.

S.A.S.O.

In many ways the emergence of S.A.S.O. (the South African Students Organization) marked the formal beginning of the Black Consciousness Movement. The emergence of S.A.S.O. was the manifestation of a mood which had spread across Black campuses after the earlier Black organizations (ANC and PAC) had collapsed.

Dissatisfaction with the white dominated National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) had led to the establishment of several Black student organizations.

A major event was the formation of the University Christian Movement (U.C.M.) in 1967, which gave Black students a greater chance to work together than a patronising NUSAS had ever been able to offer.

At the U.C.M. conference in 1968 about forty Black students from the different Black Universities formed a

Black caucus and debated the possibility of forming a Black student organization.

S.A.S.O. was eventually formed at the December 1968 Marianhill conference of Black student leaders, and was inaugurated at the 1969 July S.A.S.O. conference at Turfloop. This modest birth was the prelude to the Black Consciousness Movement, which is now consolidated at the concrete base for the struggle for real freedom and liberation.

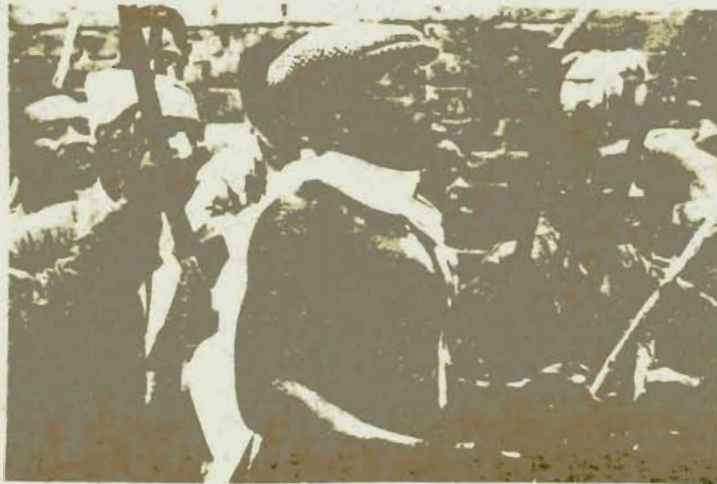
S.A.S.O. was largely responsible for formulating the concept of Black Consciousness, not only as a political instrument, but also as a means of redeveloping Black culture, rewriting and rethinking Black History, expanding on Black philosophy and as a general means of redefining Black society in a powerful and aggressive light.

#### S.A.S.M.

The South African Students Movement (S.A.S.M.) was formed in 1971, but became operational only three years later after S.A.S.O. and the B.P.C. (Black People's Convention) had achieved a position of strength, and after the liberation of Mocambique had imbued all Southern African Youth with a new optimism.

The militancy of S.A.S.M., and its active branches, such as the S.S.R.C. (Soweto Student's Representative Council) was forged by the Black Consciousness Movement.

In many senses the most explicit expression of Black Consciousness came with its canalisation into organizations such as the S.S.R.C. which was one of the only ghetto guerilla movement in history.



As a student movement, S.A.S.M. and its offshoot bodies all over the country had and still have access to the great majority of the Black population, for it has become the characteristic of the South African liberation struggle that the youth relay ideas and forms of action to the adults.

#### B.P.C.

At a congress held at Edendale in Natal in 1972 a group of Black people decided to promote Black solidarity and to foster a philosophy of Black Consciousness. They formed the Black People's Convention (B.P.C.) and held their first National congress in December of that year.

The B.P.C. perhaps more than any other organization, has caused the emphasis of Black Consciousness to shift from mere identity to solidarity in action.

Among many other things the B.P.C. drew attention to the concept of Black Communalism, and by so doing brought about an important maturation of the ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement, accelerating its drift towards a radical socialism.

B.P.C., S.A.S.O., and S.A.S.M. are perhaps the three most militant organizations to have emerged from the Black Consciousness Movement, and the ones that have continued to struggle despite their having been banned.

#### B.C.P.

The Black Community Programs was and at present still is the best vehicle for the transportation of the philosophy of Black Consciousness into the broader community, B.C.P. organized and still does organize Health Programs and leadership centers. It encourages home industries and until its banning, provided a vital service to the Black community through its research and publishing departments. It ran symposia, developed resource centers around the country, and set up a self tax trust fund for the Black community.

#### B.P.A.

The Black Parents Association was formed in Soweto and immediately received nation-wide acceptance as a body that represented the students who fell victim to the unrest that began on June 16, 1976. Together with the B.P.C. the B.P.A. showed its level of political consciousness by recognizing the present unrest as their rejection by Blacks of the whole system of oppression, subjugation and exploitation contained in the so-called policy of separate development.

B.A.W.U.

The Black Allied Workers Union is a strong Trade Union with very broad affiliation. The denial of the growth of a free labour movement in South Africa, and the lack of free political expression in all areas of the society, especially the industrial sector, has actually served to solidify awareness amongst workers. This awareness has enabled unions such as B.A.W.U. to be largely successful in politicizing the workers.

Other organisations under the Black Consciousness Movement which were banned on October 19, 1977, and which now must function clandestinely in South Africa are:

- Black Women's Federation
- Border Youth Organisation
- Medupe Writer's Association
- National Youth Organisation
- Soweto Teachers Action Committee
- Zimele Trust Fund
- Union of Black Journalists
- Association for the Education and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa

The Black Consciousness Movement, having analysed, assessed, and defined the Black community's needs, aspirations, ideals and goals, and having noted that the old political organisations are active only in exile, has declared its absolute faith in the effectiveness, relevance and capability of the broad masses of South Africa, and recognise all Black political movements that enjoy mass support as the only vehicles through which liberation and emancipation can be effected.

The Black Consciousness Movement has clearly brought about a revolutionary situation in South Africa. The jails are filled with prisoners, thousands of militants have sacrificed their lives, thousands are in exile, the individual organisations are banned, but the Black Consciousness Movement continues to generate an air of defiance, and the unrest inside the country continues.

As Steve Biko said, in reference to the Black Consciousness Movement:

TO STOP US NOW, THEY WILL HAVE TO KILL US ALL FIRST.

**POWER**  
**TO ALL THE**  
**BLACK**  
**DAUGHTERS**  
**AND SONS**  
**WHO FIGHT THE**  
**WHITE**  
**OPPRESSOR**