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A NEW PERSPECTIVE AND DIRECTION FOR SACOS

A POSITION PAPER PREPARED BY NACOS FOR PURPOSES OF DISCUSSION

There has been a foment of ideas in SACOS over the past few years, often raising these to the level of severe polemic, which is good but with also aroused emotion, animosity, acrimony and anger. At times this discussion took the form of personality clashes, and this in itself goes against the grain of normal healthy debate which is important to democracy. SACOS has never been greatly partial toward theoretical exercises, and there has developed a socio-political divide in the membership.

The purpose of this short paper is to explore the nature of the role of SACOS in the present situation, and the tasks that need to be undertaken.

Let us commence by asking what is the objective situation facing us. At the outset, it must be stated emphatically that SACOS has played an important role in the past in one of the fields of human activity. But what of the future?

At all our meetings, conferences, etc., over recent years, we have spoken of the crisis in South Africa. Indeed the state is in a crisis situation, and this situation is worsening. To the majority of the people it is a matter of life and death. What do we mean by a crisis? A crisis is the breakdown of the operating principles of a society. The crisis could be a partial crisis or collapse. On the other hand, it could be a crisis leading to the transformation of a society or social formation. This basic concept must be constantly kept in mind. As examples of the various aspects of the crisis can be mentioned the following:

(i) the economy is being eroded and destroyed.
(ii) political rights and aspirations are not being met.
(iii) there are massive levels of repression reaching unprecedented heights.
(iv) the emergence of new social and political movements.
(v) international developments and the way they affect changes in our society.
(vi) It is also essential for us to understand the global context in which South Africa finds itself. As an example the Reagan and Thatcher regimes with their puppets in S.A. talk about ‘Russian expansionism’: in reality this is merely an excuse and euphemism for the struggle between those (Reagan & Co.) who want to retain basic power relations and those who wish to change these age old relations for an egalitarian world. S.A. fits into this situation in a symbolic way. However it is not our purpose to expand on this point. Suffice to say that an historical impasse exists in S.A. today.

The crisis also involves the popular forms of resistance of the people. We cannot deal with this matter in detail, but only mention some important points in order to place it in proper perspective.

In this crisis, there are emerging mass organisations which are beginning to shape and define a response. Pre-eminent are the organisations of the working
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class. There are also other organisations responding to this crisis but because of their very political nature they have greater difficulties in their response to the massive oppression. Again let us emphasise: community and labour organisations are foremost in responding to these decisive times. The labour movement is not only the trade unions themselves and their peculiar problems, but the labour movement encompasses a broad range of activity which the working class finds itself drawn into, and this includes campaigns against transport problems, housing, rents etc.

In like vein, SACOS still has to find itself. It has to come up with and frame a response to the crisis we are talking about in real terms like all other popular organisations. SACOS needs to raise its own level of acceptability. Thus, in this sense SACOS is itself in a state of crisis. Up to the present, SACOS has no coherent response or programme of action, and certainly no semblance of broad based democratic structures. This means that it has remained bound by its rhetoric. It cannot galvanise a broad base of members into any meaningful group. In effect, the SACOS rhetoric of being a sports movement sounds hollow. If we are honest, at best we can describe ourselves as disparate pockets of sporting bodies linked together into a federation. Each affiliate has its own autonomy, each organising its own activities, united only on the basis of policy: non-racialism. Incidentally, one of the principle tasks undertaken by SACOS in recent times is as 'defender of the faith' and guardians of doctrinal purity. In the present crisis, there seems to be an inability to draw all sportspersons into an all embracing sports movement for the purpose of using sport as an ideological institution. There are vague ideas of a sports movement and a quasi-fatalistic conception of an inexorable growth of these disparate groups into a movement.

In summary we have tried to indicate that if SACOS does not take stock of itself, does not respond realistically, the organisation will become moribund.

What needs to be done?

If SACOS does not wish to be a tailist organisation some drastic changes are essential.

It is quite clear that SACOS must develop a coherent comprehensive programme which will enunciate a set of immediate, medium and long term objectives.

We in SACOS have stated repeatedly our policy. In itself there is no harm in doing this. By making this point, we do not mean to denigrate SACOS policy, but this kind of approach can become trite as well as edictal and prescriptive. Policy itself has no programatic content.

In order to illustrate this point, let us look at a theme that has been discussed at numerous previous conferences. It has been stated over and over that we must work closely with the trade unions. What do we understand by these statements?

What does working with the labour movements mean in practical terms. Therefore let us enumerate these factors.
I. Changes in the nature and amount of free time available will play a crucial role in the sporting scene of the workers. In order for the broad masses to participate in sport, they must have leisure time. We are here talking of the vast majority of workers who wake up in the dark and are away from home for 14 to 16 hours daily. At present there is a campaign by the trade unions for a reduction of the working week to 40 hours. This is not only important for health reasons but it is also of signal importance for the sports movement. To talk of working class participation in sport without the physical capacity to do so is nonsensical. To think of working class sport means that the workers must have the leisure time to do so. Thus one aspect of an immediate program is to be part and parcel of this campaign. Thus we suggest strongly that SACOS take a resolution to this effect at our conference. The resolution must support this demand, and more important, steps must be taken to actively participate under the guidance and direction of the labour movement.

II. For too long we have adopted a moralising and hectoring attitude to sport and sportspersons. We have compiled a litany of do's and don'ts which amount to nothing more than mythological demons. What we have to do is devise a program much like the labour movement - translate the rhetoric into concrete practice. For instance, we must demand that the state and capital during this phase of history provide the means of sport for the workers. This point of view was clearly indicated to us at the first M.N. Pather memorial lecture given by Mr. Gwede Mantashe of NUM In the present circumstances, the working class and SACOS cannot realistically provide the means of mass sport. At the same time, SACOS must refrain from being presumptuous and dare to speak on behalf of the trade unions.

III. If we are in agreement that there must be mass availability of sport, and it is a right that is envisaged in an egalitarian society, then we need to plan that the resources of sport, now and in the future society, must be under the joint control initially of SACOS and the constituency it serves, i.e. the labour movement. Eventually, with the transformation of society, sport must be controlled by all members of an egalitarian society. At this stage, then, it logically follows that SACOS must develop structural links with the working class organisations to control the means of sport. Therefore very careful attention must be given as to how exactly this can be achieved with the labour movement. This is the only basis for the evolution of a truly national movement in sport.

IV. At this stage, it might be pertinent to reiterate and re-emphasise the message of the M.N. Pather Memorial Lecture where Mr. Gwede Mantashe was the guest speaker, and he gave us an important insight into the problems of working class sport in the mining industry in particular and working class sport in general. The hands of the workers were stretched out to SACOS in an effort to join forces in a meaningful way to work towards creating a new working class culture of sport. Whether or not SACOS has responded to this offer is not certain. However, CACOS has made some effort in this direction, and a part time
education officer has been working from the beginning of this year.

SACOS has much work to do in the coming period. The organisation must provide concrete resources in the immediate future. There can be no equivocation on this issue. Assistance is needed in the labour movement for drawing up rules of games, coaching manuals, personnel to assist, literature, policy statements, studying the political economy of sport, the use of sport as an ideological state apparatus etc. This is urgent!

V. The SACOS program must include a look internally into its own re-organisation. We need to look into the question of the democratisation of sports as practised in the present era, as well as in the future transformed society. No longer is it feasible to rely on hard working dedicated groups of bureaucrats. All officials of SACOS and affiliates are the most hard working devoted people. But this does not detract from the fact that they are bureaucrats with an obvious lack of accountability with the constituencies they purport to represent.

Like all areas of social life, sport has been greatly influenced by the institutionalised divisions and inequalities that serve to differentiate society. There are three general categories of social stratification in industrial society viz:

(1) class inequality
(2) racial and ethnic inequality
(3) gender inequality

Another variant contributing to the scope of social inequality has been the great increase in the functional division of labour provided by the industrialisation of society. This has meant the development of complex structural inequality based on market position and reflected in occupational and educational attainment. The controllers of the 'means of administration' are the new upper classes of post-industrial societies. When we talk of the democratisation of sport, we are not talking about the controllers or owners of the means of sports production, but of the producers themselves.

What does all this mean in practical terms? We must take a serious look at democracy. Electivity, accountability and removability of leadership must be cornerstones of the democratic process. The vanguardist attitude of bringing political consciousness to the workers from without is not acceptable. As a certain writer has stated this attitude reflects 'messiannic utopianism'. On the contrary there is an innate feeling of democracy which exists in the present new labour movement, i.e. accountability, mandates, participation on a basis of information and knowledge in decision making, etc. The whole basis of the working of SACOS must change. We can commence by identifying issues that will be able to mobilise sportspersons at club level and as individuals. Active participation at all levels is essential for players to feel part of the organisation, to feel a sense of loyalty and to acquire a sense of achievement. This kind of feeling cannot be inculcated and moulded if we conduct our selves as we have in the past. The clubs and players must engage in concrete activity jointly and in consultation. We must find building blocks for democracy.
VI. In order to give direction to such programatic intentions, we must seriously give thought to the problem of education. Again, as a further reminder, and we constantly need to question our objectives, we wish to refer to the M.N. Pather Memorial Lecture. Our guest speaker spoke of the role that SACOS could play, having had over a decade of experience. Our educational program must include all the problems raised by NUM.

The issue of education and an education officer was raised several years ago but there seemed to be a dragging of feet on the question. Good intentions by themselves cannot achieve anything. SACOS must now seriously set about creating machinery to give effect to contributing new concepts in sport and the organisation of sport. The concept of education, in our view, is not the formal concept of official education departments, e.g. students are not passive recipients of the ‘truth’ and teachers are not ‘all knowing’. On the contrary, the learning process is a two way one of dialogue between people in sharing and participating in knowledge. Our proposed education office with its teachers has an immense task to create a people’s culture of sport. Integral to the dissemination of a people’s culture poses a number of questions, some of which are:

(i) We have to find the resources.
(ii) If these are lacking at present, then the organisation must set aside more time and energy in obtaining these resources.
(iii) There must be a deep commitment to help in creating the necessary resources.
(iv) The organisation must spare no effort in finding the money and the personnel for the job.
(v) These ideas must be put into practice with immediate effect, otherwise SACOS will become effete.

The major immediate commitment is to find these resources for the development of a program.

Before concluding this position paper it may be pertinent to put to rest certain misconceptions that have arisen since the commencement of the polemic which began a few years ago when the question of breaking down racial barriers was first raised. If we really understand what we are trying to achieve, then perhaps we can place certain irrelevancies in proper perspective. SACOS’s task in the struggle is to achieve egalitarian sport in an egalitarian society. This can only be achieved in a society having democratic control over social and economic life; in other words a classless and egalitarian society. The progressive forces that emerged in the past decade are the mass organisations of the people. These forces are beginning to shape and define clearly the road along which we have to travel. The organisations with the clearest degree of political focus are the organisations of the working class. There are elements who cling to outmoded concepts and are not able to see change in objective conditions. They argue about trivialities. Some of us are vying with each other in trying to be more radical than the rest. As one prominent historian has said, the intellectuals are in a state of overheated paranoia. These issues are of low priority to the working class. The best we can
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do with these individuals is to leave them to their own devices to continue their esoteric arguments in the blissful comfort and happiness of armchairs.

It is our contention that there must be a correct assessment of priorities and it is hoped that this paper has been able to initiate thought on where we need to move.

The final question that we should ask ourselves.
What is the purpose of this discussion?

The objective is to focus clearly on the task of a sports organisation claiming to be part of the labour movement. SACOS must make a meaningful contribution to creating a different order in the country. There must be new input into the institution of sport as we understand it. We are a society in transition, and we must commence the task of creating a working class culture of sport in which we eliminate concepts of elitism, nationalism, Western type competition, etc.

This paper has been prepared by a collective in NACOS and approved at a Council meeting.
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