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### An Experiment in Confrontation: The Pro-Frelimo Rallies of 1974

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## *An Experiment in Confrontation: The Pro-Frelimo Rallies of 1974\**

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*This article examines the political nature of South Africa's Black Consciousness movement through an account of the pro-Frelimo rallies organised in Durban and at the University of the North by the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BPC) in September 1974. It places these rallies in the context of these organisations' adoption of confrontational and public forms of protest after 1972. These represent a high-water mark in Black Consciousness organisation and provided the excuse for the state's prosecution of the leaders of the movement. Despite this, these rallies have been understudied. This article therefore presents a new account of these protests. It shows how the leaders of SASO and the BPC progressively revised their ideas about public confrontation through the process of organising these rallies. After the Minister of Justice announced his intention to ban them, these leaders refused to back down. The rallies each took place as planned, and each provoked a response from local police forces – which, in turn, were clearly expecting the rallies and prepared for the task of dispersing them. This article suggests that the embrace of confrontational forms of protest by SASO and the BPC should be understood as representing a significant moment in the development of public forms of mass protest in South Africa.*

On its website, the South African political organisation AZAPO locates itself within a tradition of politicised Black Consciousness. It claims that 'like the legendary phoenix, AZAPO emerged from the ashes and cinders of the Black People's Convention (BPC), South African Students' Organisation (SASO)...' It adds that: 'It was our youth who staged the Viva FRELIMO rallies in 1974! It was our children who fought with stones against armoured cars during the June 16, 1976 Uprisings! We are our own Liberators!'<sup>1</sup>

Leaving aside the question of whether or not AZAPO can be said to have inherited the mantle of Black Consciousness, these events are a surprising pair of antecedents. While one – the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976 – is well known, the other – the 'Viva FRELIMO rallies' (or the 'pro-Frelimo rallies') – is not. Indeed, these rallies have been largely overlooked even within the specialist literature on the subject.

This article takes these rallies as its primary focus. A close study of their particularities shows how the organisations and ideologies of Black Consciousness developed models and methods of political protest in apartheid-era South Africa. This, I suggest, can help to reshape our understanding of the politics and political character of these movements.

This argument is not uncontroversial. Forty years after SASO's formation, the nature and character of Black Consciousness remain subjects for debate – both in South Africa's public

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1 Azanian People's Organisation, <http://www.azapo.org.za/background1.php>, accessed August 2011.

sphere and within the more limited world of academic historiography. This context will briefly be addressed in the first section of this article. In the remainder of the article I will describe these rallies and, in the conclusion, point towards their broader significance for the histories both of Black Consciousness and of public forms of political protest in South Africa.

## The Politics and Historiography of Black Consciousness

Black Consciousness thought and organisation have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention over the past four decades. Any survey of this literature must begin with the work of Gail Gerhart which, influentially, placed Black Consciousness thought within the historical development of an African nationalist ideology inside South Africa.<sup>2</sup> SASO was seen in the context of earlier Africanist organisations – most notably, the ANC's Youth League and the Pan-Africanist Congress. Her study emphasised ideology over actions, and national organisation over local decision-making. This emphasis was picked up by the scholars following her lead, including Lodge and – in a different context – Nolutshungu.<sup>3</sup> Although their conclusions were challenged by Hirson, his critique was based nevertheless on a similar emphasis on the ambitions expressed in SASO's national conferences.<sup>4</sup>

These standard accounts all end with the banning of SASO and the BPC in 1977, and presumed – to greater or lesser degrees – that the immediate political effects of their ideas was brought to an end by state action. Black Consciousness, seen from this perspective, is thus understood as a moment in the process of revitalising political consciousness – and, particularly, a self-consciously African nationalist body of thought – in the mid-1970s. Its influence is then incorporated into the re-emergent nationalism of the ANC and other movements in the next decade. Indeed, only a small number of scholars have focused on its development in the 1980s, as AZAPO and other successors emerged.<sup>5</sup>

Recently, a number of younger scholars have returned to the history of Black Consciousness in the 1970s and have sought to reinterpret its significance. Charney, for example, has emphasised the social and cultural activities of SASO and the BPC over its political ambitions; his account presents Black Consciousness as a civil-society orientated social movement – in clear contrast to earlier accounts.<sup>6</sup> Macqueen, in his doctoral thesis, has suggested that the emphasis on Africanism in the earlier literature may have obscured the extent to which SASO developed its ideas in dialogue with radical white students in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Magaziner has challenged the political emphasis of the earlier literature and argued that theological and ethical concerns were central to Black Consciousness thought. He extends his argument, controversially, to the idea that the betrayal of these concerns in favour of political struggles sapped Black Consciousness of its revolutionary potential.<sup>8</sup>

2 G. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978).

3 T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, Raven, 1983); S.C. Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1983).

4 B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London, Zed Press, 1979).

5 S. Badat, *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From Saso to Sanco, 1968–1990* (Pretoria, HSRC, 1999); N. Gibson, *Black Consciousness 1977–1987: The Dialectics of Liberation in South Africa* (Durban, Centre for Civil Society Research, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Report no. 18, 2004); N. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali Basemjondolo* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011).

6 C. Charney, 'Civil Society Vs the State: Identity, Institutions and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa' (PhD thesis, Yale, 2000).

7 I.M. Macqueen, 'Re-Imagining South Africa: Black Consciousness, Radical Christianity and the New Left, 1967–1977' (Doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2011).

8 D.R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2010 and Johannesburg, Jacana, 2010).

Despite their differences, however, I would suggest that these works share a general focus on the intellectual production of Black Consciousness: on the expressions of either political or non-political ideologies through speeches, poems, articles, books and other writings supplemented, in many instances, by interviews. They do so to the exclusion of close studies of the public acts of protest organised by SASO and the BPC after 1972: the public marches, rallies and boycotts that took place on campuses and in cities. This focus on intellectual production rather than on either moments of mass action or organised protest events has emphasised the grand scale of the political ambitions of SASO and the BPC over the (far more limited) effects of their sporadic political interventions in this period.

This is not to say that the history of Black Consciousness as an ideology – or, indeed, the history of the private, biographical contingencies of its leaders and members – actively misrepresents the politics of the period. Rather, it is to suggest that the complexities of on-the-ground activism have often been overlooked in these necessarily panoramic accounts. In this article, I take one of these interventions as my starting point. In doing so, I bring to the fore the practice of political protest within SASO and the BPC in this period. This focus on the micro-scale of an event allows for a nuanced study of the possibilities of protest, judged in the light of a specific set of contexts – and contingencies – rather than in the light of the organisations' ambitious rhetoric. It is these practices that link these protest events, in general, and the pro-Frelimo rallies, in particular, to the later development of mass action.

## Neglect of the Rallies

Before turning to such a close study, however, it may be useful to survey the ways in which these rallies have featured in other works on Black Consciousness. Such a survey will necessarily be brief, however, as the rallies were largely discussed in passing in these writings – mainly as a prelude to the SASO/BPC trial of 1975 and 1976. The longest account of the rallies is thus found in Michael Lobban's study of 'political trials in the black consciousness era'.<sup>9</sup> Lobban uses the rallies (under the alternate name, the 'viva FRELIMO' rallies) to set the scene for the state's decision to prosecute Saths Cooper and eight others for conspiracy to 'commit acts to bring about revolutionary change . . . [and] to cause, encourage or further feelings of hostility between the White and the other race groups . . .'.<sup>10</sup> The acts were, at least in part, allegedly committed during the organisation of the pro-Frelimo rallies in September 1974.

This focus – on the rallies as providing the excuse for the trial – is also found in Gerhart's passing mention of the rallies and, later, in Karis and Gerhart's magisterial survey of the period.<sup>11</sup> Lodge's account overlooks the rallies altogether while, amongst more recent work, Magaziner's once again evokes them only as background to a discussion of the ensuing trial.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, a number of ancillary works – most of which derive from the trial itself – also place some elements of the events of the pro-Frelimo rallies into the public record.<sup>13</sup>

9 M. Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996).

10 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers Collection (hereafter WHP), State vs Cooper and 8 Others (A2021), 14.1, 'Heads of Argument'.

11 Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, p. 298; T. Karis and G. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964–1979* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 1997), pp. 142–43.

12 See, for example: Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, p. 1.

13 S. Biko, *The Testimony of Steve Biko* (London, Maurice Temple Smith, 1979); IUEF, *Who Are the Real Terrorists? A Document on the SASO/BPC Trial* (New York, International University Exchange Fund, 1977); J.G.E. Wolfson (ed.), *Turmoil at Turfloop: A Summary of the Snyman and Jackson Commissions of Inquiry into the University of the North* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1976).

By contrast, Badat's study of black student politics – while equally cursory in its discussion of the actual events – is unusual in that it recognises that the rallies had a further relevance to their participants. Badat suggests, in passing, that these rallies constituted 'the only national political campaign organised by SASO... jointly with the BPC...' in this period.<sup>14</sup> Another indication of an alternate approach to the rallies comes from a passing reference in an article on the relationship between Black Consciousness and the exiled ANC and PAC: 'In effect, the rally was an indirect endorsement of the strategy of armed struggle'.<sup>15</sup>

The brevity of these accounts means that this article must, in part, work to reconstruct the events of the day. To do this it draws upon documents collected for the SASO/BPC trial – including covertly-taped telephone conversations, memos, letters, press releases, and photographs of placards and banners displayed by protestors. It is important to note that materials presented in courtrooms – and particularly in apartheid-era courtrooms – need to be treated with caution. The context necessarily leads to the exclusion of ambiguous accounts, and tends to favour strong statements over weaker ones. In addition, both prosecution and defence teams have attempted to select and shape evidence and testimony to reflect their different ends. Beyond this, a significant portion of the evidence presented at trial – such as the taped telephone conversations – was never intended for public consumption and may not represent the considered opinions of the organisers of the rallies. Nonetheless, keeping these cautions in mind, it remains possible to make productive use of these rich sources to ground a detailed account and analysis of the events.

## The Roots of the Rallies

Despite the prominence of the SASO/BPC trial both in other accounts of the pro-Frelimo rallies and in the sources for this study, it is important to recognise that the origins of these rallies lie in an earlier period of the development of Black Consciousness thought and politics. In its first years, SASO's leaders discouraged its members from participating in mass action – whether on university campuses or in public.<sup>16</sup> This caution was driven by the desire to build first an institutional network of university branches across the country. The leadership believed that premature confrontation would provoke the state into aggressive reaction and that – without the strength derived from a broad membership base and institutional depth – such a reaction could destroy SASO before it could reach its intended audience. This informal policy was articulated largely in critical responses to the increasingly-confrontational protests of white students associated with NUSAS.

In May and June 1972, however, SASO's leadership was forced to reconsider its position. A student protest at the University of the North provoked a repressive response from that university's administration, leading to the suspension or expulsion of the entire student body. Students at black universities across South Africa then embarked on a series of protests in sympathy with their peers at the University of the North and openly challenged SASO's national leaders to adopt a more confrontational approach. This move coincided with a police crackdown on SASO and a concomitant compression of the space available for organisation. Campuses could no longer be seen as sheltered spaces for political action.

14 Badat, *Black Student Politics*, p. 132.

15 K. Mokoape, T. Mtintso, and W. Nhlapo, 'Towards the Armed Struggle', in B. Pityana, M. Ramphela, M. Mpumlwana and L. Wilson (eds), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991).

16 I have given a more detailed account of this process in J. Brown, 'SASO's Reluctant Embrace of Protest', *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 4 (2010).

Harry Isaacs, for example, remembers visiting the University of the Western Cape (UWC) late in 1972 and – once there – being ejected from the campus and detained by the police.<sup>17</sup>

During this period of political flux, the leaders of SASO and the newly-launched BPC emphasised the necessity of resisting the state's repressive pressure and, at times, suggested that more confrontational forms of protest should be adopted. In a sense, the ideological radicalism of Black Consciousness thought was increasingly being incorporated into the organisations' modes of action. At its first national congress in December 1972, the BPC sought to 'make it clear that in spite of all the forces of evil ranged against us we will relentlessly defend our God-given rights whatever the cost'.<sup>18</sup> A pamphlet released in 1973 was evocatively titled 'The System on the Attack' – and insisted that the BPC would have to 'defend' itself 'with more vigour and determination'.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, black students continued to exert pressure from below by experimenting with campus-bound protests. Although none had the impact of the coordinated protests of 1972, these demonstrations – often against specific policies and decisions of university administrators – introduced a generation of students to the methods of protest and localised mass action. Indeed, a protest at UWC – organised originally against the administration's non-recognition of a new SASO-dominated SRC – was able to build towards a mass public meeting held at the Athlone Athletic Park in Cape Town on 8 July 1973.<sup>20</sup>

It is in this context – of the fading caution of SASO's leaders and the increasing willingness of its members to embark on protests – that the initial organisation of the pro-Frelimo rallies took place. It was no longer possible to avoid the state's repressive attentions, and so the logic behind caution was no longer compelling.

## Organising the Rallies

The immediate impetus for the rallies came on 7 September 1974, when the new Portuguese military government announced that it had signed a cease-fire agreements with Frelimo, the dominant local liberation movement, and would grant Mozambique its independence on 25 June 1975. This event provided the leaders of SASO and the BPC with an opportunity to experiment with different forms of public response – escalating, in practice, from press statements to public rallies.

On 9 September, the main SASO office in Durban circulated a press statement acclaiming the successes of Frelimo and congratulating them on their imminent assumption of power.<sup>21</sup> The statement was issued under the name of Muntu Myeza, the General-Secretary of SASO, despite the fact that the national president of SASO at the time was Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, a 27-year-old student at the University of the North. Nefolovhodwe had been expelled following the 1972 protests, but had re-registered to complete his studies. This meant that Myeza had the run of SASO's central Durban office, and responsibility for this and similar press statements. He was only 23 at the time, and had already been SASO's national president; his appointment as general-secretary (a full time, paid position) testified to his continuing influence within the inner circle of SASO's leadership. The decentralised distribution of authority between Nefolovhodwe and Myeza – and between Myeza and others – would influence the organisation of the rallies.

17 H.E. Isaacs, 'Full Circle: Reflections on Home and Exile' (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2002).

18 WHP A2675 (Karis-Gerhart Collection) III/282, 'Minutes of the 1st National Congress of the BPC, Dec. 1972'.

19 WHP A2675/III/284, 'The System on the Attack'.

20 Isaacs, 'Full Circle: Reflections on Home and Exile'; see also Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964–1979*.

21 WHP A2675/III/756, 'Press-Statement Concerning the Transition in Mozambique'.



This press release condemned the ‘maladjusted schizophrenics’ who were refusing to accept the ‘inevitable reality’ of a black-led political order in Mozambique and suggested that the response of South Africa’s white public served to reveal its deep insecurities. For ‘black South Africans’, however, the victory of Frelimo was ‘a revelation that every bit of Africa shall be free . . . The dignity of the Black Man has been restored in Mozambique and the white people are turning out to be what they truly are – violent people’. This statement thus posited an implicit comparison between the political situation in Mozambique and that in South Africa. In this way, it avoided explicitly suggesting that the apartheid state should be overthrown and, instead, merely suggested that its overthrow was historically inevitable.

In asserting this stance, the statement was demonstrably the product of a still-developing confrontational rhetoric. The fervour of its language was constrained by the remnants of SASO’s earlier organisational caution: as rhetoric, it pushed at the limits of what was sayable in this period. Although it invoked violence, it did so in a notably impersonal manner – it insisted that an insurrection would occur, but shied away from suggesting who might start that uprising.

Following the release of this statement, Myeza discussed the possibility of organising a rally with Saths Cooper – an activist associated both with SASO and the BPC. Although he had not held any formal position in SASO – having been expelled from university in 1969 – Cooper had been central to the launch of the BPC, being elected its first secretary. He was banned shortly afterwards, and restricted to the Durban magisterial district. Despite his banning order, however, he was able to influence the leaders of SASO and the BPC and appears to have had ready access to the Durban offices. Like Myeza, he was 23 years old at the time. Myeza and Cooper approached other leaders and, on 15 September, the representatives of SASO, the BPC and the Black Allied Workers’ Union (BAWU) met in Durban. They came to an agreement to coordinate multiple rallies across the country, with the aim of celebrating FRELIMO’s victory. They agreed that each regional office should organise its own rally.<sup>22</sup> In the event, however, only Durban and the University of the North held their own rallies.

On Saturday, 21 September, Myeza publicly announced that SASO would hold rallies on Wednesday, 25 September. These rallies were intended, he said, ‘to show our solidarity with the people of Mozambique who have been freed by Frelimo’. Myeza also said that a Frelimo leader would be asked to address the rally in Durban. He refused, however, to reveal the identity of the leader, explaining that: ‘We do not want to risk the possibility of his being stopped at the border’. The *Sunday Times* seized upon this detail, and printed Myeza’s statement under the headline: ‘SASO invites Frelimo to SA’.<sup>23</sup> Further stories followed, also emphasising the proposed presence of representatives of Frelimo at the rally, and suggesting that SASO would smuggle these speakers into the country.<sup>24</sup>

Myeza was willing to encourage this story and the association between SASO and Frelimo. On Tuesday, 24 September, two Johannesburg newspapers – the *World* and the *Star* – reported that four Frelimo leaders had already entered South Africa for the rally. The same day, the police recorded a telephone conversation between Myeza and a reporter for the *Rand Daily Mail* in which Myeza hinted that there were indeed Frelimo representatives currently incognito in the country – but that he could not officially confirm this. In addition, according to Durban’s *Daily News*, Myeza told reporters on the morning of the rally that: ‘This afternoon’s rally will go ahead as scheduled and the Frelimo leaders will be there’.<sup>25</sup>

22 WHP A2675/III/286, ‘Judgment in S v. Cooper, 15 December 1976’, pp. 118–19.

23 *Sunday Times*, 22 September 1974.

24 Lobban, *White Man’s Justice*, p. 40.

25 WHP A2675/III/286, ‘Judgment’, p. 129; *Daily News*, 25 September 1974.

A further sign of the organisers' willingness to associate the rally so closely with a revolutionary moment could be found in the flyer produced to publicise it. The flyer read: 'Viva Frelimo! Support Frelimo! Reactionary or Revolutionary? Afrika is Black. South Afrika??' It added: 'Mozambique has been oppressed for 400 years. South Africa is oppressed for the past 322. How long are we prepared to wait? How much longer??' Finally, it stated that speakers from SASO, the BPC and Frelimo would address the rally.<sup>26</sup> This flyer was printed, but not distributed. This was not because of its confrontational tone, but because its contents were believed to be 'too intellectual' for mass distribution.<sup>27</sup>

The very fact of issuing a press statement on a revolutionary transition in a neighbouring country was, for SASO at this time, a controversial act. In earlier years, such a change in regional politics would have been the subject of lengthy discussions in formal 'Formation Schools' and at the annual general meetings of the organisations. Delegates would have debated and proposed the text of a resolution for adoption by the meeting on behalf of the organisation. Only after this would any such opinion be officially held by SASO itself. In addition, press statements themselves – while not unknown to the organisations – were also relatively rare in this period. Periodic announcements of SASO or BPC projects would be made, and occasionally – but not inevitably – the adoption of particular policies would be publicised. In general, however, it is safe to say that these did not overly trouble the South African media and that SASO was, to the white reading population at least, largely unknown.

The transition, in the sequence described above, from the release of an initial press statement to the instigation of a small press frenzy around the idea that representatives of Frelimo would be appearing in Durban was, therefore, almost entirely unprecedented. It was not the decision of any general meeting of SASO, and the processes behind it are thus relatively under-documented. However, it is clear that in responding to a contingent set of circumstances Myeza and his allies were suddenly accelerating the pace at which SASO was moving towards confrontational forms of public protest – not merely in organising the rallies themselves, significant as that may be, but also in publicising SASO's opinion in this way.

Unsurprisingly, this provoked some reaction within the two organisations. For example, in the course of Saturday, 21 September, Aubrey Mokoape approached Cooper to complain that he had been left out of the decision-making process. Mokoape was one of the founding members of both SASO and the BPC and had the reputation of being a relatively radical Africanist within both.<sup>28</sup> He was, at the time, a member of the BPC's executive and should have been consulted about the plan for the rallies if ordinary procedures had been followed.

After this approach, Cooper took Mokoape to see Myeza. They were accompanied by two other members of the Durban offices, Nkwenkwe Nkomo and Harri Singh. In the course of this meeting, they were apparently able to assuage some of Mokoape's fears and proceed to include him in further discussions – most notably over whether or not Myeza had in fact been in contact with Frelimo at the time. When Myeza admitted that he had not yet spoken to any representative of Frelimo, it was decided that Nkomo and Singh should attempt to cross the border and approach Frelimo directly. (Their experiences suggest something of the makeshift nature of the organisation of the rally: they left Durban that evening and crossed into Swaziland. Once there, they contacted the SASO representative in Botswana and asked him to place them in contact with Frelimo. Apparently, they were referred to a representative in Lusaka, who they telephoned without success. It is unclear from the evidence at the trial whether or not they ever crossed into Mozambique; they were not contactable on the Monday,

26 WHP A2675/III/276, 'Viva FRELIMO! Support FRELIMO!' (September 1974).

27 WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', p. 122.

28 M. Ramphela, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York, Feminist Press, 1995), p. 60.



and themselves only returned to South Africa on the morning of the rallies – notably, unaccompanied by any representative of Frelimo. Their mission thus failed.)<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless – and despite the fact that it seemed to have originated solely from Myeza – the invocation of the Frelimo speakers remained central to the publicising of the rallies. The prominence given to their planned appearance suggests that the rally in Durban was not only or primarily portrayed as an event organised by SASO and the BPC to show their solidarity with the people of Mozambique, but was also portrayed as an event that would present an opportunity for Frelimo to appear within the country and address a mass audience. In addition, the flyer originally circulated in Durban emphasised parallels between Mozambique and South Africa to suggest an implicit continuity between the events across the border and development of black resistance to the Apartheid state in South Africa.

This approach was strikingly successful in attracting the attention of the white press and public. The rallies – and the proposed presence of Frelimo leaders – was reported in the local and in the national press each day from Sunday. These stories inflamed white public opinion, leading to ever greater publicity for the rallies and – at the same time – ever greater publicity for SASO and the BPC. The profile of these organisations and their planned rallies soared. This sudden rise in public prominence, however, was not without its complications: As Lobban has noted, the repeated invocation of Frelimo – ‘not SASO or BPC’ – ‘caused . . . white panic’.<sup>30</sup>

## Confrontation, Contingency, and Ideology

And a measure of white panic did, indeed, ensue – bringing the planned rallies increasing public prominence. Immediately after the initial press reports, a Durban businessman – Cornelius Koekemoer – sent a telegram to the Minister of Justice, urging him to ban the rallies. Koekemoer warned that thousands of whites in Durban were willing to rise up to prevent Frelimo from addressing a mass audience. He noted that this action would lead to bloodshed, violence and unrest. The Minister, Jimmy Kruger, used Koekemoer’s telegram in a public statement. He said that this telegram illustrated the depth of the fears provoked by the proposed rally, or rallies; it was not, he added, the only such message he had received. Kruger was reported to suggest that ‘the way the rallies had been advertised had “evoked a strong emotional response among certain section of the public”’. He then announced at a press conference that he intended to prevent the rallies from occurring.<sup>31</sup>

Kruger’s statement was widely reported on the morning of Tuesday, 24 September – the day before the rallies were due to take place. However, this statement was not accompanied by the official proclamation of any such ban; the banning order would only be signed later that evening, and published in the Government Gazette on Wednesday – the day of the rallies.<sup>32</sup> This meant that for the length of Tuesday and part of Wednesday it was not clear whether or not the rallies had actually been banned or whether, instead, the government and the white press were conspiring to undermine SASO and the BPC by creating the impression that the rallies would not happen. With the legal situation unclear, some members of the two organisations were concerned that they would appear weak if they were to surrender to threats made without any legal standing. On Tuesday, Cooper and Myeza consulted two experts. Both told them that the rallies could not legally have been banned as a consequence of the press statement alone: it was essential that any banning order be formally published in the Government Gazette.<sup>33</sup>

29 WHP A2675/III/286, ‘Judgment’, pp. 123–25.

30 Lobban, *White Man’s Justice*, p. 41.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

32 Government Gazette, 25 September 1974. See also: WHP A2675/III/756.

33 Lobban, *White Man’s Justice*, p. 41. WHP A2675/III/286, ‘Judgment’, pp. 126–27.

Myeza therefore issued a press statement denying the legality of Kruger's statement. He stated that: 'We are not aware of any banning'. He also asserted that, nonetheless: 'We couldn't care less if it [is] banned. We are going ahead at all costs with the rallies nationally'.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Myeza telephoned a number of reporters to reassure them that the rallies would go ahead. These conversations were recorded by the police and introduced as evidence during the later trial. According to the transcripts, Myeza attempted to convince journalists to report that the rallies would be going ahead regardless of the Minister's words. He encouraged them to believe that the threat of state repression was insufficient either to disrupt the organisers or to prevent the black public from participating. 'Look, I am telling you everything is going ahead as planned' ... 'Right, what we're going to do, we're going to push it until the very last moment. We want to crack them completely'.<sup>35</sup> 'These guys can't stop us with anything' ... 'We want to see exactly, we want to call their bluff, you see'.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, some of the organisers of the rallies – notably, Myeza and Cooper – were so confident of their right to hold the rallies that they were even willing to risk the possibility of their violent repression. If the state were to use violence to repress the rallies, they reasoned, this would only serve to strengthen the moral authority of SASO and the BPC. It would demonstrate the illegitimacy of the apartheid state while simultaneously demonstrating the ability of SASO and the BPC to defy it. Some of the language used in their telephone conversations suggests that they may have been courting such repression. Speaking to Nat Serache, a reporter for the *Rand Daily Mail*, Myeza said:

Shit, Nat, we're going to have a ... a very big thing tomorrow. And of course it means I'll ... I'll have to go to gaol for a year or something like that. So we have to take it to the final end ... we want to see exactly, we want to call their bluff ... they must come out clearly, their true colours ... We want to see them shooting us.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Cooper told Gerald Phokojoe – the regional secretary for SASO in the Transvaal – that: 'These guys can't stop us with anything ... Mobilise all the resources ... it's an act of warfare, this, and we must retaliate in a like manner'.<sup>38</sup>

In considering these statements, it is important to recognise that while these conversations were clearly not meant for general public consumption, neither were they entirely private. Although Myeza may have assumed that Serache and the other journalists sympathised with him, they were – unlike, for example, Phokojoe – in no way insiders. These conversations were intended to influence the tone of the articles written by the journalists. As such, they reveal both something of the emotional context within which Cooper and Myeza acted, and also something of the ways in which they sought to present their actions.

The tone of these conversations was far more confrontational and aggressive than anything publicly released at this time. The language of warfare deployed by Cooper presumed the probability of violence and, thus, the probability of a violent reaction. Myeza invoked the likelihood of police violence. The youth and experiences of both Cooper and Myeza may explain part of this rhetorical radicalism, and this largely unquestioned embrace of violence. Unlike the first generation of SASO's leaders, Cooper and Myeza were acting under the shadow of state repression – for them, the repressive actions of the apartheid state were not merely a future possibility but, instead, a present reality. Cooper was already living under a banning order. Myeza was contemplating the probability of prison time. Neither was reluctant to invoke the possibility of a confrontation with the state, in part because they were

34 WHP A2675/III/285, 'Press Statement, 24 September 1974'.

35 WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 126–27.

36 Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, pp. 41–2.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

38 WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', p. 128.

already living with the consequences of such a confrontation. As these conversations suggest, they understood themselves and their organisations as already embattled, and may thus have believed that a confrontation with the state would only serve to make this more visible.

Beyond this, the escalation of both press and state attention in these days – and the concomitant escalation of SASO's confrontational rhetoric – point towards the continuing influence of contingent circumstances on the development of SASO's public politics. Rather than operating according to policies considered and adopted by the organisation as a whole, Myeza and Cooper were revising SASO and the BPC's political policies on the spur of the moment – and in response to unforeseen pressures. Once a political intervention into the public sphere had been launched, the loose institutional frameworks that characterised SASO and the BPC gave their spokespeople unusually wide authority to speak for the organisations. In addition, the broad ambitions of both organisations' political ideologies were swept up in the rush of events and reaction. Although the shadow of Black Consciousness politics as understood in the existing literature is discernable in the background of Myeza's statements, it is clear that the statements emerging from Durban were rapidly moving away from them.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that this meant that all Black Consciousness politics were changing simultaneously. Over this same period – the weekend during which the rallies were first publicised – students at the University of the North participated in a SASO 'Formation School'. Formation Schools were intended to air contemporary issues in such a way as to give students the opportunity to debate and consider the issues, and to develop opinions on these issues that reflected the ideals of Black Consciousness. In this instance, the participants discussed, according to the title of the report drafted at this meeting, the 'freedom struggles of the past – and what we can learn from them to enhance grass-roots involvement'.<sup>39</sup> This document reveals the intellectual and imaginative context within which students and activists in SASO and the BPC were re-creating forms of protest.

This report opened by noting the 'lack of a thorough insight into the history of the freedom struggle of the past organisations like ANC, PAC' and so on'. Using their 'limited information', they concluded that these organisations had been able to mobilise a mass public for four reasons. First, because 'the Bantustan system was still in its embryonic stage' and had not yet diverted loyalties away from national struggles; second, because 'they emphasised on basic needs like food . . . unlike us, who seem to be more philosophical than practical'; third, because 'the ANC had a committee in which chiefs were included', thus reassuring a rural and newly-urbanised population of its legitimacy; and, fourth, because 'rallies were used in an attempt to reach the people'. These four reasons were clearly highlighted as differences between the liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s and SASO in the early 1970s.

The report concluded by arguing that SASO needed to develop a mass support before embarking upon further confrontation with the state: 'although resorting to arms (getting to the Bush) is a *practical necessity*, in coming back we might find ourselves fighting an alien war. Our people regarding us as terrorist. Hence the necessity of preparing the mind of the people'.<sup>40</sup> Public rallies would serve to raise the consciousness of the masses and – in conjunction with community projects – convince the black public that SASO and the BPC represented their best interests. Only at that point could their support be depended upon.

The discussions at the University of the North thus provide both an insight into the processes of conceptual exploration and experimentation that shaped how members of SASO were developing models of protest and, at the same time, a nuanced contrast to the model of violent protest being considered by Myeza and Cooper in Durban. It demonstrates that

39 WHP A2675/III/756, 'Freedom Struggles of the Past', 21–22 September 1974.

40 *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

members of SASO were attempting to look back – even if in partial ignorance – to the precedents set by protests of the past. The details of their account of the ANC's protests reflect the students' own self-criticisms, rather than any accurate reflection of the organisation of the ANC and its campaigns. They shared a clear sense that the protests of the previous years – on university campuses, mainly – were insufficient, and that a new model of protest needed to be developed if they were to be heard outside of their own circles.

On the other hand, these students had a relatively cautious approach to the adoption of confrontational and violent forms of protest. Like Cooper and Myeza, they saw violence as inevitable; unlike them, they were sceptical of its ability to stir the support of the black masses. Like the first generation of SASO's leaders, they suggested that further work needed to be done before embarking on violence; unlike that generation, though, they saw protests and rallies – rather than organisational consolidation – as the key to this process. This suggests that while questions of confrontation and violence were in the air during this period, there was little consensus amongst students and members of SASO and the BPC. Different models of protest were being considered, by different groups in different places.

## Planning for Repression

In Durban, however, the escalation of the rhetoric of confrontation was pushing the organisers of the rallies to the brink. The more they insisted that they had to demonstrate the strength of SASO and the BPC by refusing to back down in the face of the state's threats, the weaker these organisations would then appear if they were to decide to cancel the rallies. This dilemma became acute on Wednesday morning, when the Minister's banning order was finally published in the Government Gazette. It was no longer possible to argue that the rallies had not yet been properly banned: they were now clearly prohibited and any gathering would certainly attract police attention and quite possibly police violence. Nonetheless, the organisers scrambled to determine the possible limits of the banning order, and to discover what types of gathering – if any – would be permitted under its provisions.

Myeza and Cooper latched on to a section in the order in which the Minister explicitly prohibited any gathering associated with SASO or the BPC. They suggested that if none of the speakers at the rallies were members of these organisations at the time of their speeches, then the rallies would not fall under the provisions of this order. Although admitting that this sophistry was unlikely to convince the police to leave the rallies alone, Myeza insisted that 'the onus of proof' would rest on the state. They would have to establish, he suggested, 'for instance ... that you have not resigned from SASO'.<sup>41</sup> Myeza thus suggested that speakers should claim to have officially resigned from SASO and the BPC that morning; their presence at the rallies would not therefore be associated with either organisation and, following from this, the police would be legally obliged to allow the rallies to proceed.

Myeza also drew up a handwritten document to be released either as a speech during the rally, or as a press statement after the rally had concluded. (In the event, it was never publicly circulated and only revealed at the trial.) In this statement, he asserted that 'we have decided that our guests of honour [should] excuse themselves from addressing the rallies in the county ... [and] they have since left'. In addition, he emphasised that 'the rallies are going ahead despite the threat from the violent irate whites'. He suggested that 'white civilians and several white mercenaries' were conspiring to 'massacre our people and disrupt our meetings' and that the Minister's ban meant that 'the Black Community now realises exactly where they stand with regard to the white racist regime'. Despite this, he stated that, 'the

41 Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, p. 42.

Black people have not at any stage taken up arms against the regime but we have been maimed, massacred, butchered, assassinated and emasculated of our dignity and manhood'.<sup>42</sup>

If this statement had in fact been released – as Myeza seems to have planned – it would have marked a significant shift in the public rhetoric associated with SASO and the BPC. It portrayed the rally as taking place within a pervasive atmosphere of violence, intimidation and threat; this was not simply the repressive actions of the state as then experienced by SASO's leaders – arrests, harassment and banning – but rather an apocalyptic invocation. The processes of experimentation that had led SASO's leaders to this point was thus driven by a conscious series of attempts to re-conceptualise the role of public forms of protest in Black Consciousness organising. It was shaped, however, largely through contingent events, whether the actions of university administrators in 1972 and 1973 or the eagerness of the white press to report on the possible presence of Frelimo leaders in the country. This process reached a particular culmination in the pro-Frelimo rallies.

## The Rally at the University of the North

The organisers in Durban thus spent Wednesday morning anticipating violence and preparing defences in the event of their arrest. They were also waiting to hear from the University of the North – where the first rally of the day was planned for 14h00 that afternoon (the Durban rally was only scheduled for 17h00). The events in the north would determine how the rally in Durban would proceed and what its local organisers could expect to see happen.

Preparation for Wednesday afternoon's rally had already begun on the evening of Tuesday 24 September, when students gathered to produce placards. Lobban describes them as 'makeshift, handwritten efforts' and the photographs presented as evidence in the trial support this.<sup>43</sup> Some of the slogans on these placards and banners drew connections between the events in Mozambique and the situation in South Africa. For example: 'The dignity of the Black man has been restored in Mozambique and so shall it be here'; 'Mozambique Free. Azania?'; 'Frelimo killed and won. SA Blacks?' Others referred to South Africa with little reference to Mozambique: 'Down with Pretoria Regime!'; 'Azania my love don't let pigs rape your children'; 'Down with Mulder, up with terrorism. To hell with Vorster Government'; 'Who next if not Vorster?'. One particular placard juxtaposed the two explicitly: 'Viva Frelimo!!! Azania is bored and from this boredom a revolution shall erupt. Down with Vorster and his dogs (Boers)! Power!!! We shall overcome'.<sup>44</sup>

One further banner positioned SASO and the BPC as the brokers of a coming revolution: 'Vacancies. Government of Azania. Majors, Lieutenants, Captains, Duties. To train and lead 50 million Blacks. Apply: SASO, BPC before the reach of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century of racist oppression'. The other banners and placards invoked the success of Frelimo's violent insurgency and threatened the replication of that insurgency in South Africa. These slogans presented a more confrontational approach to protest than had previously been noted – suggesting that even the relative caution of some of the students was heavily shaped by the increasingly-radical rhetorical context, and the pressures of the moment.

On Wednesday morning, the official publication of the Minister of Justice's banning order prompted authorities on the campus to discuss the legality of that afternoon's planned rally. The Black Academic Staff Association (BASA) – which had been a supporter of the campus branch of SASO, issuing statements of support and participating in SASO activities during

42 WHP A2675/III/285, 'Statement re: Viva Frelimo Rally – Durban'.

43 Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, p. 43.

44 Photographs of these placards can be found in: WHP A2675/III/285. Transcriptions of their slogans can be found in WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 180–83 and in Wolfson (ed.), *Turmoil at Turfloop*, pp. 28–9.



the previous week – decided to withdraw from the rally.<sup>45</sup> The students, however, seem to have decided to follow the example set by the organisers of the Durban rally. They agreed to claim that they were appearing as students and not as members of SASO. Given that the Nefolovhodwe was one of the planned speakers, and was spending the morning on the telephone coordinating planning with Durban, this was at best a tenuous argument. Nonetheless, this appears to have convinced the university's Rector to permit the rally.

By 14h00, several hundred students had congregated in the campus's main hall. Gilbert Sebide, the SRC president, informed his audience that this would be an SRC rally, and not a SASO rally, and would therefore fall outside the remit of the Minister's banning order. He followed by adding that anyone who wished to address the rally should do so in his or her personal capacity, and not as a representative of any organisation. He outlined the programme of speakers, and spoke on the history of Frelimo. Finally, he exhorted the crowd to shout, 'Viva Frelimo. Viva Machel!' and raised a clenched fist in the black power salute. Sebide then called upon Nefolovhodwe to speak. Nefolovhodwe once again claimed to be speaking on his own behalf, and not for SASO. According to his account, he told the students that they were gathered 'to commemorate those who had suffered for freedom's cause and those who had ultimately gained their humanity'. He 'called upon them to re-dedicate themselves to their own struggle in South Africa'. Following this, an unidentified 'lady-speaker' addressed the crowd; she was interrupted when the police entered the hall.<sup>46</sup>

## The Police Response to the Students' Rally

The leaders of SASO and the BPC in Durban had discussed the possibility of the police intervening in the rallies in telephone conversations over the previous days. Their appearance at the university's main hall now demonstrated both the accuracy of these predictions. The police were well prepared: that morning, a force of 32 white and 50 black policemen had gathered at the nearby Mankoenj police station. Each policeman was armed with a rubber baton; the white policemen carried service revolvers. Two of the white policemen were also equipped with shotguns; four others carried tear-gas launching pistols. Police dogs were kept on long leashes. According to the report of the later Commission of Enquiry, 'Orders had been issued that no fire-arms should be used or action taken except on the orders of Major Erasmus and that a minimum of force should be used'.<sup>47</sup>

They arrived at the main hall of the campus at 14h20. There, they found the students 'whipped up to a highly emotional state'. Major Erasmus entered the hall and informed the students that the meeting had been banned. He ordered them to disperse within fifteen minutes. According to the police testimony, this resulted in 'mass pandemonium'.<sup>48</sup> According to the testimony of Nefolovhodwe and others, however, the Major's megaphone was squeaking so loudly that his announcement was inaudible; it took several attempts for him to be heard, thus leading to general confusion in the hall.<sup>49</sup>

Approximately 1,200 students began to leave the hall, but not all dispersed. Instead, some 700 regrouped on the university's sports field. According to the police, they were singing and marching in formation. Male and female students separated – in part, in response to a suggestion that they

45 Wolfson (ed.), *Turmoil at Turfloop*, pp. 21–3. See also: G.M. Nkondo (ed.), *Turfloop Testimony: The Dilemma of a Black University in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1976), pp. 43–4.

46 The quotes are paraphrased in WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', p. 188.

47 Wolfson (ed.), *Turmoil at Turfloop*, p. 29.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

49 WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', p. 188.



return to their respective hostels. The police continued to count down the fifteen minutes given for the students to disperse; at the end of this period accounts of the rally diverge. According to the students, the police began to attack the crowd. Tear gas was released; dogs were allowed to roam at the end of their long leashes and were encouraged to bite the students whilst the police used their batons to assault male students. Two injured students were hustled into large police vans.<sup>50</sup>

The police did not dispute the use of tear gas, baton charges and dogs. They suggested, however, that these actions were all consequences of the students' own violent actions. The baton charge was a direct response to the throwing of stones, during which a dog handler was struck in the face; stunned, he released his dog's leash and the dog then attacked the student who had thrown the stone. A second – more plausible – version of this story suggests, instead, that the handler came to arrest this student and, in the process, allowed his dog to bite.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of the exact sequence of events, both the police and the students agreed that violence had been used by both sides in the course of this confrontation. The police assaulted the students and the students had attempted to assault the police, using stones and whatever other makeshift weapons they could find. Whether one accepts the chronology of the police accounts – in which their violence came in response to the students' actions – or that of the students – in which, likewise, their violence was retaliatory – this episode remains remarkable. No such situation developed during the earlier student protests of the 1970s; the violence of the students at the University of the North – short-lived and ineffectual as it may have been – represented a new form of confrontation for this time. The events of this protest did not neatly match the plans developed in the discussions in Durban and at the university itself over the previous few days. It developed in response to the actions of the police – and to the absence of the university's administration – and, in so doing, exceeded any expectations that may have arisen during those conceptual processes.

## The Durban Rally

Meanwhile, in Durban, Myeza, Cooper and others waited for reports to arrive from the first rally. At 16h00, Nefolovhodwe telephoned Aubrey Mokoape in Durban to report on the success of the rally. Cooper, Myeza and Mosiuoa 'Terror' Lekota – another senior member of SASO, and one of the accused in the later trial – were all present at the time of the call. They heard Nefolovhodwe report that he had attended the rally accompanied by a journalist, and that 'things' would soon be reported in the press. Nefolovhodwe told the Durban organisers that 'there were policemen with tear-gas, some 15 students were injured and there was a lot of throwing of batons'. He dramatically misrepresented the clash between the students and the police, saying that the students had 'had to order the police to leave them because it was a university, and they then left'. He stammered in response to a question as to how many students had been arrested. Nat Serache, the *Rand Daily Mail* journalist who had been present at the rally, and who had been speaking to Myeza, then took the telephone and explained that he considered the rally to have been violent. He said that he 'had heard shots being fired'. In response to further questions, he said that he didn't know whether fifteen students had been injured but he knew of one who had been taken to hospital; he said that this student had been injured during a baton charge. The Alsatian dogs, he added, had been 'desperate, wild'.<sup>52</sup>

The Durban-based audience was excited by this news. Myeza told Nefolovhodwe that he thought 'it was beautiful'. He agreed with Serache that the event 'was truly a victory for the

50 WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 188–91.

51 Wolfson (ed.), *Turmoil at Turfloop*, pp. 29–31. WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 191–97.

52 WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 148–51.

Black people'. Both the successful organisation of the rally and the inability of the police to finally force the students to disperse heartened him and his colleagues. Beyond this, the combination of the defiance shown by the students, the violence resorted to by the police, and the apparent ability of the students to resist that violence reinforced the confrontational position he had adopted earlier. It appeared as though the rallies might indeed succeed in sparking an insurrectionary reaction amongst the gathered crowd – police violence might prove insufficient to disperse a crowd and thus prove able to provoke a real confrontation. This was not necessarily a general belief either amongst the organisers or those participating in the ongoing debates over the advisability of the Durban rally. Certainly, the tension between confrontation and caution continued to play itself out during the course of Wednesday morning and afternoon. Nonetheless, the telephone conversation with Nefolovhodwe – and his reports of the success of the first rally – bolstered the arguments in favour of risking confrontation and even violence by allowing the Durban rally to go ahead.

At the time of the telephone call, the question of whether the rally would proceed was moot. According to the newspaper report, 'two hours before the rally was scheduled to go ahead the crowd began to gather outside the locked gates at Currie's Fountain'.<sup>53</sup> According to the police, between 50 and 60 black men and women were gathered outside the site at 15h15. By 17h30, one police witness estimated that between 1,000 and 1,200 people had gathered, while another estimated that there were up to 1,500 people present.<sup>54</sup> This crowd was not permitted to enter the Curries Fountain stadium. The police had locked the main gates and had stationed themselves at 'strategic points in the sports grounds'. The crowd thus gathered on an open area between the entrance to the stadium and the road itself; on the other side of the main road, a ten-foot high sloping embankment was also occupied by the crowd. According to police testimony, the newspaper report, and the statements of the Minister of Justice, the massed crowd was silent until a point between 17h30 and 18h00.

Shortly after 17h30, part of the crowd began to move from the embankment onto the road. A few minutes later they began to sing – apparently under the direction of Vino Cooper, Saths Cooper's wife and an activist herself. According to the *Daily News*, the crowd 'began to sing "Inkosi sikele Africa" [sic] and other ANC songs'. According to the police testimony, parts of the crowd chanted an eclectic mix of words and slogans, including: 'Viva Frelimo! Power!' 'Amandla Uwethu', 'Lesotho', 'White man go home' and 'Uhuru'. According to Myeza's own description, however, he arrived at the site to find people, 'singing, dancing and making whoopee, it was jolly, some were hugging each other'. To the police, the crowd appeared threatening. They saw people making 'rhythmic movements with their bodies while singing and clapping their hands. They made contemptuous and provocative remarks to the police and moved up to the police and retreated again... some of the people made finger-gestures'. One of the senior policemen present believed that 'the shuffling movements of their feet were the kind used in Zulu war dances...' The crowd was said to have raised their clenched fists in the Black Power salute, calling out, 'Power! Power!'.<sup>55</sup>

## The Police Response to the Durban Rally

The events following the police intervention in Durban were less dramatic, although the police were equally well prepared. They arrived at Curries Fountain in the mid-afternoon, some hours before the rally was scheduled to begin. The Station Commander of the Somtseu Road station

<sup>53</sup> *Daily News*, 26 September 1974.

<sup>54</sup> WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 155–56.

<sup>55</sup> WHP A2675/III/286, 'Judgment', pp. 156–58; *Hansard*, 27 September 1974, Cols. 598–607.

took twelve policemen to the site; at 15h15, these officers locked the main entrance and stationed themselves around the sports-field. A further 20 police, dogs and dog handlers arrived at the entrance furthest away from the gathering crowd; according to the summary of the events, they were purposefully 'kept out of sight'. Others arrived in small groups. A Major Stadler estimated that, by 17h30, 'there were approximately 28 patrol dogs with the handlers and approximately 30 members of the police' present in or around the sports-field.

The *Daily News* reported that police were also clustered in the side streets leading towards Curries Fountain. The newspaper noted that 'plain clothes and uniformed officers, dog cars and vans were strategically placed' throughout the area. It estimated that the police in the area may have 'numbered more than 300'.<sup>56</sup> The area around Curries Fountain was thus surrounded by policemen while the actual site was rendered off-limits to the protestors.

Shortly before 18h00, Myeza arrived at the site of the rally, 'a little west of the gates, more or less on the apron between the road and the gates'. He said that as he arrived he learned that the police had just ordered the crowd to disperse. He then told his companions, 'Let us get the people away from here. Let us move off'. He started to sing *Shosholoza* – a Zulu language workers' song – and began to lead the crowd away from the entrance to Curries Fountain and down along a large side road. After they had moved twelve paces forward, according to Myeza's account, the people in front of him began to turn around and rush back. Through the opening thus created, Myeza could see a group of policemen and their dogs. He spoke to the policemen as he moved forwards, saying, 'You can't stop us from going away'. He was moving diagonally away from Curries Fountain, towards the embankment on the other side of the road when the dogs attacked.

The police interpreted this short sequence of events differently. Myeza was seen giving 'the Power salute ... [and] the crowd again responded to this by give the Power salute and shouting "Power"'. Myeza addressed the crowd and, pointing at the policemen, said: 'These guys can't stop us'. He moved towards the crowd, 'and they then formed a mass-formation behind him, one holding the other from behind, and with shuffling movements moved in a semi-circle towards the east gate'. Major Stadler recognised these movements as forming part of a Zulu war-dance. He heard people in the crowd shout: "'Ngena, Ngena" ("Go in, go in")'. He believed that they were thus about to invade the sports-field and, in response to this, he ordered the police 'to surround and arrest the crowd'.<sup>57</sup>

It appears that the crowd rapidly dispersed after the police charge. Lobban suggests that Myeza was at Curries Fountain 'for less than five minutes' and that the crowd did not respond to the police violence. The apparently abrupt ending of the gathering was followed, that evening, by a raid on SASO's Durban offices, during which documents – including Myeza's planned press release – were seized. The next day, ten people were charged in connection with the organisation of the Durban rally; the day after that, police raided homes of Black Consciousness leaders, including that of Steve Biko in King William's Town, as well as the Johannesburg offices of the BCP and BPC. Leaders were arrested as part of a general round up, while the state decided how to proceed with what would become a major trial.

## Conclusion: The Significance of the Rallies

Karis and Gerhart have suggested that 'the abortive rallies might have caused little stir had they been allowed to proceed unobstructed ...'.<sup>58</sup> They thus locate the significance of the

<sup>56</sup> *Daily News*, 26 September 1974.

<sup>57</sup> WHP A2675/III/286 (S v Cooper, Judgment), pp. 145–46.

<sup>58</sup> Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 5, p. 143.

rallies in their aftermath and the subsequent period of state repression. It is undeniable that the protests had an immediate galvanising effect on the state. By the end of 1974, at least 20 activists belonging to Black Consciousness organisations had been placed under banning orders and at least 35 activists were held incommunicado under various forms of detention. In January 1975, thirteen members of SASO and the BPC were arrested and charged under the Terrorism Act. After a series of preliminary hearings, nine men were brought to trial, including those involved in the organisation of the pro-Frelimo rallies. All were eventually found guilty of ‘encouraging and furthering feelings of hostility between the Black and White inhabitants of the Republic’.<sup>59</sup> Six were given sentences of six years imprisonment, and the remaining three were given sentences of three years each.

The immediate effect of the trial and the lengthy sentences then imposed on the leaders of SASO and the BPC was to render these organisations leaderless. After the Soweto Uprising of June 1976, most remaining activists either fled into exile or refocused their activities on the new civics or the emerging trade union movement. Black Consciousness ideology continued to permeate through these bodies, but did not have a political presence of its own. Nonetheless, it is important not to allow the obvious consequences of the state’s further actions to obscure the significance of the rallies themselves. These rallies provided students and activists in the Black Consciousness movement with the opportunity to experiment with new forms of protest and confrontation. They also demonstrate how these students were developing new models of public protest before the 1976 Uprising.

A close study of these events – such as that given above – also demonstrates the limits of a purely ideological understanding not only of political protest, in general, but, more specifically, of the politics of Black Consciousness in this era. The pro-Frelimo rallies derived from an attempt to experiment with the boundaries of what was possible in the period. They pushed against the limits not only of what was publicly possible, but also against the limits of SASO and the BPC’s stated approach to politics. Black Consciousness politics, in this period, did not develop purely as the result of intellectual or ideological considerations but, rather, in large part in response to encounters with contingent public circumstances.

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59 WHP A2675/III/286, ‘Judgment’, p. 256.