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PAN AFRICANIST STUDENTS ORGANISATION OF AZANLA ON FUNDING

The issue of funding has become a very sensitive issue in the educational spectrum. It has drawn serious interest from the student movement, especially with our country being on the threshold of transition, the crisis in funding of tertiary institutions and state withdrawal of subsidies to tertiary institutions in general and historically black institutions in particular. Surprisingly, it is exaggerated with the democratisation of institutions of learning.

(i) the Role of the State in Funding

PASO holds the view that the State has got a vital role to play in alleviating the crisis in which our institutions find themselves.

Despite being a central organ, the State in funding of institutions in general, should actively back all institutions in terms of financial assistance and other resource allocations. The state should make more funds available for subsidies of tertiary institutions in general and historically black institutions which have been hardest hit by withdrawal of subsidies.

Instead of shifting funding responsibilities to the private sector like the present government is doing, it is supposed to play a very important role. The perplexing irony that non-governmental organisations have been at the forefront of funding students notably Kagiso Trust, EAP and other democratic communities has taught us a lesson. The money supposed to help underprivileged institutions particularly historically black institutions never made its way to those institutions, particularly historically black institutions. A Student Trust Fund will avoid abuse of student earmarked funds by forces opposed to resolution of the crisis. It is a fact that organisations like LDT and TEFSA never allocated resources according to the needs of students.

A Student Trust Fund will avoid such errors because, amongst others, students know amongst themselves who has financial problems and they may even set criteria for awarding of such funds. This will also avoid a situation where non-deserving students are awarded funds.

The Student Trust Fund should be composed of all forces who are stakeholders in education, with the students constituting a major force. One can still quote "unused" money from LDT awarded to institutions in 1991-92 despite the funding crisis.

(iii) funding criteria

PASO proposes that funding should be seen in the context of redressing past imbalances. All funding institutions should be sensitive to the demands of historically black institutions because preference was given to historically white institutions. like

RAU, Pretoria and Stellenbosch. The hardest hit of all tertiary institutions have been historically black, like Ingoye, Turfloop and Technikon Northern Transvaal.

Funding should also reflect the racial composition of our country. It should not be seen as if PASO advocates total withdrawal of funding to historically white institutions but we must avoid a situation where very big institutions like Turfloop get little funding on average compared with historically white institutions. Resource allocation should reflect realities manifested in our country.

Historically white institutions have got an advantage over historically black universities because of their good contacts and relations with big companies as opposed to historically black institutions which do not and mostly rely on handouts from "friendly embassies". Historically white institutions have been maintained to an extent by successful white companies.

With apartheid and discrimination having been the order of the day in our country historically blacks were unable to market themselves successfully internationally and nationally. It is only recently with the democratisation process unfolding at a number of universities and the emergence of progressive academics that historically black institutions have been able to start correcting their images and rectifying past errors.

As a gender conscious student organisation, PASO also feels that in order to achieve women's emancipation, affirmative action on funding should also apply to women.

African women have been hardest hit in terms of their socio-political situation in Azania/South Africa.

The nature of funding

Our approach to funding is dialectically linked to the Student Trust Fund (see (ii)). PASO acknowledges the fact that there has to be a final solution to the funding crisis which is of course going to depend on the Student Trust Fund. For the Student Trust Fund to continue existing, there has to be continuous funding and availability of resources. Recently, there has been a mushrooming of student loan schemes to students as opposed to bursaries which are becoming difficult to get. The whole question of loans with interest payable according to inflation has to be seriously revisited. The majority of students applying for loans are from poor backgrounds. It creates a problem of compliance with loan repayments due to class background of our society. Loans institutions should-not be seen as money making institutions but educated within the context of alleviating Financial crisis of individual students in principle.

Of course in principle PASO agrees that loan obligations have to be met. Our contention is that there has to be a 50-60% repayment of the original debt incurred in order to ensure continuous existence of the Student Trust fund which in our understanding will be in charge of all allocations to students.

Financial institutions and big monopolies which want to contribute to financial assistance of students will be urged to transfer the assisting amount with the Student Trust fund.

In conclusion, PASO sees the state and the student movement as forming a very important component of any funding initiative in any future dispensation. The time for the state to entrust financing resources with private institutions insensitive to demands and needs of the students has to end.

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