

STEVE BIKO THE MARTYR*

The tortures meted to the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement and his subsequent murder in the apartheid South African prison received the strongest international protestation and condemnation in recent history. In relative terms the universal condemnations could, with some justification, be said to be second only to those relating to the torture and eventual assassination of one of Africa's most heroic and patriotic freedom fighters - *Patrice Lumumba* - in 1961. And there are similarities in the murder of *Steve Biko* and the assassination of *Patrice Lumumba*: both were tortured and humiliated before they were ultimately slain. Despite untold suffering inflicted upon them, both victims refused to surrender their principles and convictions. They struck the fatal blows when the victims were in the prime of their lives but towering high in popularity amongst their people, (Steve Biko was murdered at the age 30 while Patrice Lumumba was, after months of torture, assassinated when he was hardly 37). Yet another similarity is that after the death of each victim, the murderers with their hands dripping with blood, concocted home-made stories to cover up their foul play. In both cases, however, the enemy soon found that in death, their victims became more dangerous to the unjust systems of apartheid, colonialism, neo-colonialism and all forms of inhuman suppression.

By summarily "despatching" off Steve Biko, the fascist apartheid regime aimed at wiping out, once and for all, the conflagration which has now engulfed the whole of the southern tip of Africa. Sooner rather than later; they were to be proved wrong, for the liberation conflagration in Southern Africa had already become a historical process which no power on earth could stop.

Steve Biko died in the apartheid South African prison in Pretoria on the 12th September, 1977 "after a 7-day hunger strike" --according to the fascist "Justice" Minister Jimmy Kruger. Biko was arrested and detained on the 18th August, 1977 but on the 13th September, 1977, that is, not even a month after his arrest, the same Jimmy Kruger came out with the unholy announcement that Steve Biko had died of a 7-day hunger strike.

It would be an unnecessary time-wasting exercise to delve in examining the credibility of the "death from hunger strike" story. Evidence showing the protracted tortures and

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eventual death from severe brain damage is abundant. Moreover, the post-mortem ordered by the fascist regime themselves returned the verdict of "death from severe brain damage".

Faced with the unexpected universal indignation, the apartheid regime found themselves hard-put. Even their traditionally faithful and staunch supporters felt too shy to side with the racist regime this time. In fact some of the traditional supporters found themselves compelled to express outright condemnation of their embarrassing friend - if only to keep within reasonable distance from the boiling world opinion.

Finding themselves in such a spot, the Vorster regime then turned to a desperate attempt to amend their "death from hunger strike" story. The job of manufacturing the home-made stories to bluff the world again fell upon none other than the same James Kruger, the racist "Justice" Minister under whose responsibility Steve Biko and many other martyrs and patriots have perished.

During several press interviews summoned hurriedly, again in an attempt to exonerate the regime of its crime, Jimmy Kruger (who, experts say, would do better as a Dutch baker rather than a politician, let alone a Cabinet Minister) succeeded only in proving beyond doubt of his own, as well as his regime's absolute lack of credibility. Having told the press that Biko's death "left him in cold", Kruger went on to narrate how the victim was dragged in agony from Port Elizabeth prison and ultimately killed in Pretoria jail. Said Kruger, "he was brought up by van 750 miles from the prison in Port Elizabeth to Pretoria. He got into the van himself. He was ill at various stages. In Pretoria prison he was put in a prison-cell. In the evening he died".

Asked whether he has ever cautioned or reprimanded any of his sadistic policemen for torturing prisoners, Kruger replied, "not that I can remember. I haven't got all the facts. I frankly don't think that security police would beat a man. Policemen never really start the trouble. Policemen try to stop it".

Realising, perhaps, that he had failed to bluff the world, Kruger bolted back to usual naivety: "I think that anyone who says my country is not under exceptional circumstances, must have his head examined". Kruger belched and went on: "I must keep this country safe. If blacks were not stimulated from outside, then I think they would change their minds".

No doubt, Kruger's country (if that part of Africa were to be called Kruger's country) is actually under exceptional circumstances. It is a country where the tiny community sits

on top, and lives off the sweat of the vast majority. It is a police state. It is a big concentration camp. It is a huge prison where all the black indigenous Africans are the prisoners and the tiny minority and racist white community are the prison warders.

The recent intensification of atrocities, tortures, murders and other methods of suppression by the Vorster regime are yet another desperate attempt to hold back the "swaart gevaar" (black menace). Biko's murder was but one of the many, except that it received quite considerable international attention. The fascists are, not unexpectedly, slow to learn their lesson. Even at Biko's funeral ceremony the trigger-happy fascist police still went on with their shooting spree-killing many and wounding thousands.

Steve Biko himself might not have necessarily held the belief that armed struggle was the only means of bringing down the hated apartheid regime in South Africa. However, the violence with which he was eliminated left no doubt that the fascists understand no other language but violent resistance.

Steven Bantu Biko was born the third child of Mr. and Mrs. Mzinganyi, at Ginsberg township, King William's Town. On the 30th of March, 1947, Mr. Biko Snr. died, leaving Steve hardly four years old. Apart from his widow, Mr. Biko Snr. was survived by another son (other than Steve) and two daughters.

Young Biko attended the Charles Morgan Primary School and then the Forbes Grant Secondary School in the township. Later he went to Lovedale College in Alice and matriculated at Marianhill in Natal. In 1966 he enrolled at the Medical School of the University of Natal in Wentworth, Durban. In 1967 Steve attended the University Christian Movement Conference in Grahamstown. At this time, Biko came into contact with a Fort Hare Student, Mr. Barney Pityana. Biko, Pityana and other office-bearers traveled the country extensively visiting black campuses and black intellectuals and propounding the philosophy of black consciousness.

Black consciousness, as explained by its leaders, argued that the 'physical' liberation of blacks would be meaningless without their 'psychological' liberation. The psychological oppression of blacks was to be found in black feelings of cultural, economic and human inferiority to whites.

Blacks should assert their culture and values. Only when this had been done could meaningful dialogue take place between black and white and the creation of a non-racial -- as opposed to multiracial society ensue.

They rejected mere black assimilation into white society and its values and called instead for the amalgamation of the best points in both black and white cultures and politics.

In December 1970, Steve Biko married Ntsiki, an Umtata girl. In 1972 Biko was instrumental in the formation of the Black People's Convention (BPC). He sat on BPC's ad hoc formation committee. BPC was formed as an umbrella political movement for other groups following black consciousness ideas. In the same year (1972) Biko started working for the Black Community Programmes in Durban. But in February 1973 Biko, together with Pityana and six other officials of either SASO, BPC and Black Allied Workers' Union (BAWU), were banned for five years. Biko was thus restricted to King William's Town and was not allowed to work for BPC or SASO.

In 1976 he was banned from working for the BPC. He was also detained during the unrests last year.

He founded the Zimela Trust Fund -- to help political prisoners and their families -- and the Ginsberg Education Trust to help students.

On August 18 he was detained and later murdered.

Biko is survived by his wife, Ntsiki, and two young children, Nkosinathi 7, and Samora, 2.