

A TALK DELIVERED BY AZAPO PRESIDENT, MOSIBUDI MANGENA, AT THE AZASCO STUDENT EXECUTIVE COUNCIL HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN WESTVILLE: 26-28 SEPTEMBER 2003

Theme: 35 Years of Revolutionary Heroism and the Struggle for a Free Azania Continues

35 years is a very long time. The very same 35 years become even longer when viewed in the context of revolutionary heroism and the struggle for a free Azania. There is no doubt that our country would not have been where it is today without the BCM's 35 years of sacrifices and contributions to the struggle for freedom.

Some people tend to explain the freedom of this country as a direct result of the Kempton Park negotiations. This is a simplistic view of how we arrived at our freedom. The negotiated settlement was never the cause of our freedom. The negotiations themselves came about as a result of fierce struggles by ordinary people. Our 35 years form a substantial part of those struggles.

When the racist regime banned the historical movements in the early 1960s many activists were detained, jailed or forced to leave the country. This left the masses without any organisations, without any leaders to organise and guide the struggle for liberation. They were at the mercy of the white racist regime, which was now the only bull in the kraal. White liberals found this empty political space convenient to step in and take over the leadership of the struggle. What was curious about this move was that the white liberals were part and parcel of the establishment that oppressed and exploited black people. They were, therefore, the beneficiaries of the system. Thus they would not encourage any talk about the radical transformation of the system, for they stood to lose if the system was to change. They were prepared to encourage only reforms here and there, and not too much. To them the political system was just good and acceptable. All that was needed, according to them, was to persuade the system to open some spaces for black people to play some roles in maintaining the system of capitalism.

Whites thought this was a huge task that could not be left at the fragile hands of black people. Hence they would insist that the struggle had to be led by white liberals. So you had a situation where white people were the oppressors and liberators of black people at the same time. This made Steve Biko to capture this phenomenon as a situation where the whites do not only kick black people, but also teach them how to respond to the kick.

This setup generated a lot of negative images and stereotypes about black people. They were not good enough to think for themselves, white people would do the thinking. They were not

good enough to lead the struggle to free themselves from white racism and oppression, white people would do all that on their behalf. The black person increasingly grew to be helpless in the face of awe-inspiring power structures. The psychological damage on blacks had become immense. Whiteness was equated with purity and godliness, whereas blackness represented evil and all sorts of bad things known on earth. This fatal fear of white people by blacks was characterised by Biko as a condition where the black worker throws angry condemnations at his white boss in the privacy of his toilet, and responds with a sheepish smile at the impatient calls by his white boss.

Biko made an earth-shattering observation that was to have far-reaching implications on the BCM and the struggle for freedom. "The mind of the oppressed is a potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor", warned Biko. We are under no illusions in the BCM that the starting point in the physical liberation of the black person is psychological liberation. Thus we set out on a liberation programme to free the mind in order to free the land. Even in this present era of black rule, we would not go far if it were to be discovered that people who were not yet psychologically liberated governed us. This would be a severe setback for our freedom.

As a result of lack of psychological liberation, there are some black people who enjoy the dubious status of being anti-black and anti-African. They would want to be as far as possible from Africa. To maintain their carbon copy images of a European, some have gone as far as barring the teaching of African languages at the schools attended by their children. Mind you, these schools are located in the townships. At some homes parents speak only English with their children.

The project of psychological liberation must never be thrown away. In the BCM we lay a lot of emphasis on it. In our 35 years of heroic struggles, the struggle to free the mind stands out as one of our major contributions.

We also gave our people organisations and hope. At the time when everyone else was too scared to talk about the struggle in the early 1960s, the BCM forcefully revived the struggle and formed a great number of organisations to sustain the struggle for freedom. These organisations, which were later banned in 1977, were the ones that kept the fire burning. We saw the flames of that fire in 1976. That fire was sparked by the teachings of Black Consciousness that removed "fear" from the vocabulary of the oppressed black masses. The message of hope carried by BC and black solidarity made our people assertive. Nothing could stop them. Not even live bullets would deter them. Jail; detention, torture and murder, only motivated them to move forwards with vigour. Such was the spirit of the BCM, the spirit of 1976. One sometimes wonder if there would have been any negotiated settlement in Kempton Park without such heroic struggles led by the BCM. In fact, organisations in exile benefited a lot

from the crop of 1976. Young women and men trained by the BCM left the country to take up arms with the hope of returning to the country and defend the people.

The BCM is best known for training and nurturing leadership. This we have accomplished with distinction, and we continue to do so. We have produced leadership for the struggle, the church, labour unions, business, sport etc.

The challenge lies with Azasco to ensure that all young people are aware about the 35 years of heroic struggle of the BCM. This is an important part of our country's history. All the students at colleges, technikons and universities must be informed of this history. Sometimes this history is told by people who have no interest in it. As a result, they have distorted or badly damaged our history. Sometimes an attempt is made to portray Biko as someone who did not belong to any organisation. They want to make us believe that he was merely an individual that just emerged and preached all the good things with no organisational foundation; and no comrades to discuss and share ideas with. This is another ploy by white liberals to steal the name of Biko and take it away from the BCM. Once they have succeeded in stealing the name, they would then make Biko talk against the basic teachings of BC. Sometimes black liberals are employed to be servants in the crusade to dilute BC and render Biko's movement futile.

Nobody will succeed in removing Biko from AZAPO. It does not matter how much money they may have. The white racist regime had much more money, but they failed. They even had prisons and death sentence at their disposal, but they failed. When all these did not work, they resorted to tanks and guns, but that still failed. So no one will ever succeed in stealing the name of Biko from black people. Biko was made by the struggle. AZAPO members have lost their lives, and have had their homes destroyed by fire in defence of the name of Biko. We want to hear the footsteps of AZASCO as they march in defence of the name of Biko. Let everyone know who Biko was, where he belonged, what he stood and died for.

One of the best ways to defend the name of Biko is to canvass votes for the movement of Biko, AZAPO, for this is the dominant mode of political activity in our country at the moment. It is about time that we implemented the good ideas we have using state power. AZASCO has a big role to play here. A large number of voters are young people. We need to make sure that young people have IDs. These are the instruments that will be used when people vote for AZAPO. One wonders how many of you in this hall do have IDs.

AZASCO is no stranger when it comes to campaigning for elections. Even before our people were allowed to vote in 1994, AZASCO members were already doing it for years campaigning for their candidates in the SRC elections. We will need your experience, and we will count on

your energies and eloquence to be able to go door-to-door asking our people to vote for AZAPO.

Your starting point must be to win SRC elections at your various institutions. This will be a good indication of the readiness of the people to vote for AZAPO. We must then return to our communities and ask everyone in the neighborhood to vote for AZAPO. All our families and friends must vote for AZAPO.

If anything, this Student Executive Council of AZASCO must emerge with a clear strategy of how to go about campaigning for an AZAPO government. If we can do that, then we can rest assured that our "35 years of Revolutionary Heroism and the Struggle for a Free Azania Continues".

I thank you.