

BIKO LIVES!!!

BIKO LIVES!!! Two words slashed across a ghetto wall. A phrase that haunts the nights of South Africa's rulers. Reactionaries and opportunists of every stripe hope and pray that it will disappear under a rain of blood and the white-wash of reform. But it remains, bold and powerful; not a tired and worn out slogan but the battlecry of a generation whose hopes and aspirations are for revolution, for an end to all exploitation and oppression.

This September marks the tenth anniversary of the brutal murder of Steve Biko by the South African state. Biko was beaten to death by the police while in detention. His so-called crimes were the ideas he espoused and developed, ideas that took root among the Azanian people and were turned into the material reality of the Soweto Uprising.

The decade since Biko's murder has been one which has shaken the foundations of settler colonial rule and imperialist domination in occupied Azania — years of intense rebellion punctuated by ever briefer periods of lull. It has been an era born of the ideas and the movement unleashed by Biko. And there is no greater testimony to the continuing importance and relevance of the revolutionary spirit of Steve Biko and its influence among the masses than the flames that erupted with the Rand Revolt on September 3, 1984 and that have engulfed the entire country over the last three years.

The commemorations of Bantu Steve Biko should by no means be confined to the honouring of a martyr. Instead, it will be much more fitting if this occasion is seized upon to rededicate ourselves to the cause of liberating Azania. And, a crucial part of this process should be a critical examination of the current situation and the road forward, drawing inspiration and guidance from the revolutionary stand and spirit of Steve Biko.

Genuine Leadership versus Capitulation

An overview of the situation in Azania today shows both promis-

ing and some very troubling developments.

For the last few years the Azanian people have shown in their millions that they are more than willing to take on and battle the regime and its imperialist backers. They have heroically sacrificed on every front. Yes, for some it has been out of sheer desperation but many, many others have been moved to rebel by a spontaneous and raw yearning for liberation. At the same time, these very favourable conditions have essentially been left at the raw and spontaneous level and, especially under severe state repression, a certain amount of demoralization and exhaustion has set in among the masses, however temporary it may prove to be.

In trying to explain this phenomenon there is a disturbing tendency by the various organisations who claim to be the leadership of the struggle to point the finger everywhere but where it belongs. Perhaps the most commonly heard excuse has been that the state of emergency and other forms of state repression make it impossible to move things beyond the spontaneous stage. Some have even found solace in blaming the masses themselves for their supposed "backwardness", "lack of consciousness" and susceptibility to misdirection and "mob psychology". What sickening condescension and haughty paternalism!

If the truth be told, these and the multitude of other excuses currently making the rounds these days fall far wide of the mark in explaining why the situation has not progressed further than it has.

Certainly the state of emergency and other state repression has made things far more difficult and risky than in "normal times" — whatever "normal times" means in our society. But surely this is not the first country in the world where the state has utilized every means at its disposal to try to crush the struggle of the people.

In any event, simply because the state brings down repression does

not mean that this repression is insurmountable and that the only option is to capitulate to it.

Nor can the masses be blamed for the state of affairs that exists today: they have never been found wanting in their willingness to sacrifice and their desire to struggle for liberation.

The problem has been the lack of any real vanguard revolutionary leadership both willing to and capable of uniting with the most advanced sentiments and actions of the masses and LEADING them in an overall revolutionary direction.

It is a law of historical and social development that the masses of people on their own, no matter how heroically they struggle, will never develop revolutionary consciousness and action spontaneously.

Who among all of the various organisations has taken this law to heart? Who has been consistently out there among the masses mobilizing and organising around a revolutionary programme?

Has it not often been the case that the masses have been left to struggle on their own — and even then have left many of the organisations eating the dust behind them — while the so-called "vanguard organisations" have busied themselves clucking over how terrible the situation is and how the key task now is to "protect our structures" and positions.

No one is saying that there is never a time when it is necessary to temporarily retreat. But even when it is necessary to do so, it must be remembered that within this defensive posture there has to be elements of the offensive and work has to be done to turn the defensive into an overall offensive position. Otherwise the temporary retreat quickly degenerates into capitulation. What is more, it is not even all that clear that such a situation exists in occupied Azania today and it certainly did not exist when the partial state of emergency was

declared at midnight on 20 July 1985 and the masses were at the height of rebellion throughout the country.

The Real Content of Biko Lives! It is precisely within the context of the situation that exists today and in considering the questions raised above that the real content and importance of "Biko Lives!" emerges. What are the key lessons that Biko's life and ideas hold for the movement today?

One of the earliest and most important contributions of Biko and the BC Movement in general was bursting through the wall of intimidation and repression that had been built up around the Azanian people through the sixties. In the aftermath of the banning of the ANC and the PAC the regime unleashed very severe repression against the masses in general and against any and all revolutionary opposition that existed among the masses in particular. Politics, most especially revolutionary politics, was forced into a subterranean existence.

Biko and the BC Movement were not put off by this situation nor did they use it as an excuse for submission to the regime and complacency. Instead they attacked the monster head on. And while their understanding and the tools used were limited by the conditions at the time, especially by the fact that they had been born into a political vacuum, they did indeed attack the regime with unprecedented vigour and determination.

Biko realised that one of the first tasks that had to be accomplished in order to advance the struggle was to shake the fear and complacency out of the masses of Azanian people. Biko struggled for a correct assessment of the situation among the masses of Black people at the time and concluded that: "The type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction — on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people. No longer does he trust leadership, for the 1963 mass arrests were blameable on

bungling by the leadership, nor is there any to trust. In the privacy of his toilet his face twists in silent condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatient call. In the home bound bus or train he joins the chorus that roundly condemns the white man but is first to praise the government in the presence of the police or his employers.... All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity." (Steve Biko "We Blacks")

While Biko accepted this as a true picture of the mood of the masses, he did not capitulate in the face of this situation and use it as an excuse to do nothing.

Instead, he recognised that this "fear" was a two sided issue — that it was not only an obstacle to the advance of the struggle but that, since it was a product of the system, it also went hand in hand with a tremendous hatred for the regime. And this hatred provided fertile ground for revolutionary work.

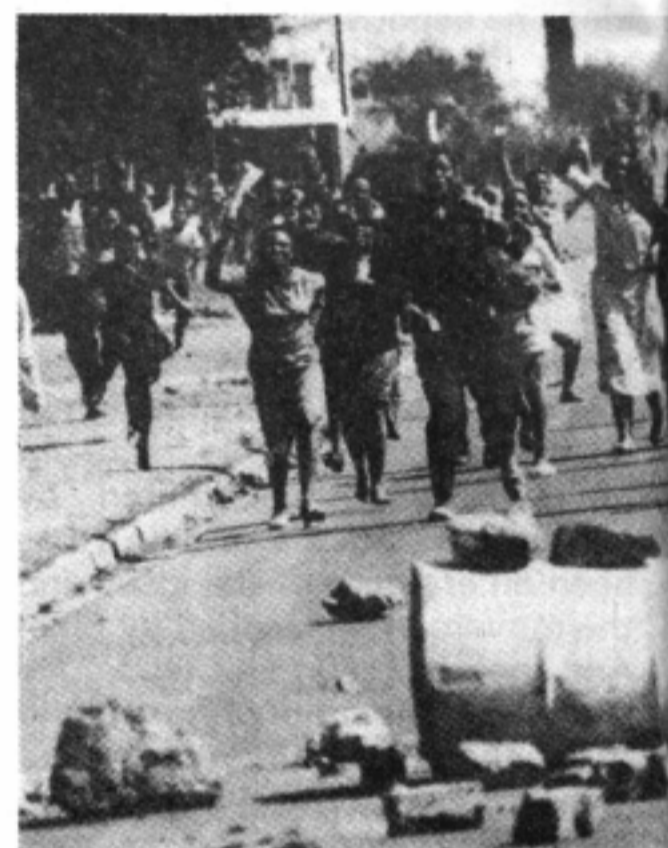
For Biko the task was not berating the masses for fear and inactivity or falling prey to misleadership, but for the leadership to actually play the role of leadership. The purpose of recognising the situation was to act on it and change it. "This is the first truth, bitter as it may seem, that we have to acknowledge before we can start on any programme designed to change the status quo. It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you realise that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality."

For Biko the realization of the need for genuine leadership was not just idle chatter or a platitude reserved for scholarly treatises and political haymaking.

On the one hand he waged a relentless struggle against the white liberals who had seized upon the absence of revolutionary leadership among the Black people in the previous decade to declare themselves "the leaders" of the Black struggle in order to

keep them from attacking and challenging any of the fundamental contradictions in society.

At the same time he vigorously organised among the Black people themselves around all of the key issues facing the struggle for liberation. In opposition to white liberal "leadership" he urged Black people themselves to seize control of their destiny. He attacked and defeated all attempts by the regime to divide the masses of oppressed Azanian people. He led the way in fully developing the concept of one Azanian nation as opposed to the divide and rule schemes of the regime concentrated in the phoney "racial" divisions the government had tried to impose upon the Black people. And, he ruthlessly exposed and welded Black opposition to all of the various collaborationist



IN ONE WORD "SOWETO"

schemes and "solutions" propagated by the government and various agents.

Not surprisingly, Biko's activities elicited a severe response from the state. In 1973 he was banned and restricted to his hometown of King William's Town. In 1975 an extra clause was added to his banning order which prohibited him from engaging in political work for the Black Community Programmes. From August to December of 1976 he spent at least one hundred and one days in prison and was then released without being charged. Throughout these years he was also arrested and charged many times under security legislation but was never once convicted. And finally, on 18 August 1977 he was detained under sec-

tion 6 of the Terrorism Act. It was during this period of detention that Biko, held naked and manacled, paid the ultimate price for his revolutionary activity.

Biko's response to this state intimidation and repression holds valuable lessons for activists today. It stands as a direct slap in the face to all those who argue that state repression automatically precludes revolutionary work. No matter what the state brought down against him, Biko continued to push forward with his revolutionary work. During the time of his banning and restriction to King William's Town he organised the Eastern Cape branch of the Black Community Programmes. And moreover, his home, intended by the government to serve as an isolated prison of sorts, became more like a centre of political



discussion and ferment as young activists from all over the country continued to seek out Biko and discuss his ideas and various programmes of action.

One of the most powerful and inspirational examples of Biko's overall orientation towards state repression and all of the other risks and threats involved in struggling for liberation was captured in a statement Biko made during an interview conducted a few months before he was murdered. "You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can't care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicizing thing. So you die in the riots. For a hell of a lot of them, in fact, there's really nothing to lose — almost literally,

given the kind of situations that they come from. So if you can overcome the personal fear of death, which is a highly irrational thing, you know, then you're on the way." "On Death")

Is it Terrible or is it Fine?

While there are undoubtedly many more examples from Biko's life and actions that could serve as important lessons for the struggle today, there is one outstanding fact about Biko that can never be highlighted enough. Throughout his political life Biko never failed to stand solidly with the masses in rebellion. When he was once asked for proof of the success of Black Consciousness he proudly announced that such proof could be shown in one word — Soweto!

Far from being an empty or arrogant boast, this statement not only recognised the very real effect of BC on the masses of Azanian people but staunchly defended the actions of the masses against the oppressive system. Biko not only upheld the rebellions of the masses, he celebrated them as righteous festivals of the oppressed.

While Biko recognised the "untidy" and spontaneous character of these revolts, he did not use these weaknesses to scold the masses and suffocate their revolutionary enthusiasm but instead studied the weaknesses in order to correct them and transform them into ever more powerful tools in the hands of the people.

In the final analysis it must be said that Biko and the BC Movement not only stood with the masses in the abstract, in a very real sense they **taught** the masses of Azanian people to dream the wild and crazy dreams of liberation. More than that, they boldly stepped forward to lead the people in acting upon those dreams, to reach out and seize the future. And in doing so, they helped to create the conditions necessary for many thousands more Bikos to rise up out of the struggle and lead the masses in storming and tearing down the walls of oppression and exploitation in occupied Azania.

This, more than anything, should be taken to heart and made a material force by all who commemorate the tenth anniversary

of the murder of Steve Biko and who continue to share his yearning for liberation.

Indeed, Biko proceeded from the fact that all correct leadership comes from the masses. In practice, this meant taking the unformulated ideas of the masses, systematizing them through study, going back to the masses to explain them in a new and concentrated form, namely BC. Naturally, the masses embraced BC as their own and implemented it — and continue to do so!

BC also ignited and fuelled revolutionary fires among the oppressed on every continent as evidenced today in the uprisings in Haiti and South Korea to name but two.

Biko taught the masses that it is possible to bridge the gap between the grinding horror of the present and an entirely different world which can genuinely be called beautiful — a world of radically different conditions, radically different relations between people and radically different ways of looking at everything.

The future is bright, the road is tortuous. The South African ruling class is like a wounded beast which will not retreat from the stage of history on its own accord but will carry on a last ditch struggle to protect itself by every possible means. It will be buried only after many more reverses, many twists and turns.

We must fight against the deliberate attempt to reduce Biko to a mere icon by revisionists. Biko and BC are a living force: let the words "BIKO LIVES!!!" ring with revolution.

It is a quaint notion that the revolution should be neat, tidy and predictable — in other words, not revolution! Revolution can never be so very refined, so gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.

STOP PRESS!!!

We greet the news of the murder of Comrade Peter Tosh with horror and indignation. We will feature an appreciation of Tosh's life and work in the next *Frank Talk*.