

STEVE BIKO

I Write What I Like

Selected Writings

Edited, with a Personal Memoir, by Aelred Stubbs C.R.

Preface by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Introduction by Malusi and Thoko Mpumlwana

With a new Foreword by Lewis R. Gordon

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American Policy towards Azania

*This is a memorandum for U.S. Senator Dick Clark. * It was prepared hurriedly, as Steve had been released from 101 days in detention under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act less than a week before his meeting with Clark.*

When one considers that an important element in sec. 6 detention is the total isolation of the detainee in solitary confinement, with access to no books except the Bible, still less to newspapers or radio, the coolness and lucidity of this memorandum becomes the more remarkable.

The reader will not fail to notice that, in the second of Steve's "minimum requirements", he comes as close as he legally can to calling for "trade boycotts, arms embargo, withdrawal of investments etc." from Mr Carter. This was and is by no means an irresponsible statement by a powerless black who is unaware of the hardships such a policy will bring on his fellow blacks. Steve and his comrades in the Black Consciousness movement are fully aware that the black suffering will increase if America and her allies implement that policy. Their argument, however, is that the people cannot suffer more materially than they are already suffering psychologically (and, in the majority of cases, materially as well); that the white electorate can still be reached through such a non-violent weapon as a trade boycott; and that this is for them an acceptable alternative to the escalating guerilla conflict, which the whites cannot win, but which can only lead to a more protracted state of suffering and bloodshed for blacks, with its legacies of hatred and bitterness.

Thus Steve, speaking this time with mature and conscious authority as leader of the real opposition to the Nationalists in Pretoria, makes his penultimate plea to those who alone can bring about a relatively non-violent end to the tyranny of apartheid. His final word would be his death itself. A year later it appears that still the West has not heard.

* Chairman of the Senate Sub-Committee for Africa. Senator Clark was in Lesotho for a Conference at the African-American Institute. Editor's note.

MEMORANDUM

To: SEN. DICK CLARK

From: B. S. BIKO

On: AMERICAN POLICY TOWARDS AZANIA (SOUTH AFRICA)

May I start off by saying how grateful I am that you have decided to grant me this opportunity to see you? By way of clarification I should point out that I am not speaking only on my behalf but also on that of many followers of the Black Consciousness movement in and out of jail.

It has become pretty obvious to us that these are crucial years in the history of Azania. The winds of liberation which have been sweeping down the face of Africa have reached our very borders. There is no more doubt about the inevitability of change – the only questions now remaining are *how* and *when*.

At this stage of the liberation process we have become very sensitive to the role played by the World's big powers in affecting the direction of that process. In a sense America – your country has played a shameful role in her relations with our country.

Given the clear analysis of our problems, the choice is very simple for America in shaping her policy towards present day South Africa. The interests of black and white politically have been made diametrically opposed to each other. America's choice is narrowed down to either entrenching the existing minority white regime or alternatively assisting in a very definite way, the attainment of the aspirations of millions of the black population as well as those of whites of good will.

We are looking forward to a non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference. We have deliberately chosen to operate openly because we have believed for a very long time that through process of organised bargaining we can penetrate even the deafest of white ears and get the message to register that no lie can live forever.

In doing this we rely not only on our own strength but also on the belief that the rest of the world views the oppression and blatant exploitation of the black majority by a minority as an unforgiveable sin that cannot be pardoned by civilised societies.

While many words and statements to this effect have been made by

politicians in America, very little by way of constructive action has been taken to apply concerted pressure on minority white South African regime. Besides the sin of omission, America has often been positively guilty of working in the interest of the minority regime to the detriment of the interests of black people. America's foreign policy seems to have been guided by a selfish desire to maintain an imperialistic stranglehold on this country irrespective of how the blacks were made to suffer.

The new American administration must however take to account that no situation remains static for ever. Through their political intransigence and racial bigotry, the South African white minority regime has increased the level of resentment amongst blacks to a point where it now seems that the people are prepared to use any means to attain their aspirations.

Equally obvious is the fact that alliances will be sought where they can be meaningfully obtained from. Whereas this was merely a threat a few years ago, it has now become imminent because of the fast changing situation in Southern Africa.

All this underlines the importance of the role America can play in shaping the future of the things to come. Because of her bad record America is a poor second to Russia when it comes to choice of an ally in spite of black opposition to any form of domination by a foreign power. Heavy investments in the South African economy, bilateral trade with South Africa, cultural exchanges in the fields of sport and music and of late joint political ventures like the Vorster-Kissinger exercise are amongst the sins with which America is accused. All these activities relate to whites and their interests and serve to entrench the position of the minority regime.

America must therefore re-examine her policy towards South Africa drastically. The last minute Kissinger-type conferences will not work because a mediator needs to have clean hands.

A few minimum requirements can perhaps be outlined at this stage:

- Mr Carter should reverse the policy whereby America looks to the South African government as a partner in diplomatic initiatives in Africa
- Mr Carter should immediately develop a new approach to involvement by America in the South African economy - whether in so-called bantustans or in metropolitan "white" South Africa.

Whilst it is illegal for us to call for trade boycotts, arms embargo, withdrawal of investments etc., America herself is quite free to decide what price South Africa must pay for maintaining obnoxious policies.

- Where American firms do not on their own withdraw, the least that can be expected is for their government to set rigid rules on questions like remuneration, rate for the job, job reservation, trade unions etc. to completely make sure that America is not involved in the exploitation of South African blacks.
- America should cease showing any form of tolerance to bantustan leaders who are operating as a model and platform obviously designed for the perpetual subjugation of black people. Invitations to people like Gatsha Buthelezi, Matanzima, Mangope and granting of any form of official or semi-official recognition to them is gross insult to the black people of this country.
- America must insist on South Africa recognising the need for legitimate non-government-initiated platforms like the Black People's Convention. Equally organisations banned in the past like the African National Congress should be re-allowed to operate in the country.
- America must call for the release of political prisoners and banned people like Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Steve Biko, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Barney Pityana and the integration of these people in the political process that shall shape things to come.
- American official visitors to this country should insist on seeing authentic black leadership as represented by the people mentioned above and refuse to be involved in the kind of one-sided political circus that Kissinger seemed to have accepted.
- Mr Carter must move fast on the Namibian question. SWAPO is recognised by us black people as an indispensable organisation in the formulation of any independence plans for Namibia.

The direction in which allegiances will go will obviously be affected by the role played by the various world powers. If America goes for a full-scale support of the struggle for the black man's liberation then she stands a chance of influencing political trends and being regarded as a genuine friend. Otherwise so far her role has been seen as that of bolstering the minority regime all at the expense of the black man.

Mr Carter will therefore no doubt be aware that he takes up power

at a time when American influence in Africa has become of particular significance. If he stands on the sides of those whose righteousness may not be doubted – he shall have used the tremendous influence that America has legitimately and usefully. If on the other hand he assists those who are trying to keep the clock still, then America will have irreparably tarnished her name in the eyes of black people in this country.

STEVE BIKO
1/12/76

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Our Strategy for Liberation

In this important interview Steve sums up the core thinking of the Black Consciousness Movement. The BCM philosophy states that the white man in South Africa has carefully constructed a political system which ensures continued white domination by the use of psychological pressure and physical violence against the black majority. Thus BCM leaders such as Steve realised that even the opposition process within the white system was designed to frustrate black aspirations.

White psychological and physical violence meant that by the late 1960s black opposition was in disarray with those who organised either in exile or prison and white-induced fear so pervasive that many aspirant middle-class blacks began to look to white-created institutions such as "homelands" and "universities" as a solution to their desire for comfort.

But the BCM rejected the idea of white societal standards as the norm. They rejected black fear of white power. The BCM calls for black unity in the face of which white domination must crumble and fall. Steve never publically pronounced himself or the BCM as being in favour of "violent change" but this must be looked at in the context within which he was forced to speak. He accepted that white domination was maintained by violence and accepted that a degree of black violence would be needed to counter white violence. He believed that, however violent white South Africa was prepared to be, this would be most easily overcome or averted by solid black unity in a struggle which would be mainly political rather than mainly military.

OUR STRATEGY FOR LIBERATION

Stephen Biko: A number of our organisations are operating at different levels. The history of it starts off after 1963–4. If you remember, there were many arrests in this country which stemmed from underground activities by PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) and ANC (African National Congress); this led to some kind of political emasculation of the black population especially, with the result that