

From: ANC Today <anctoday@lists.anc.org.za>
To: "ANC Today" <anctoday@lists.anc.org.za>
Date: 2007/09/14 03:11 PM
Subject: ANC Today 14 September 2007

DOC 2057-27

ANC Today

Volume 7, No. 36 .14-20 September 2007

THIS WEEK:

- * Letter from the President: The spirit of Steve Biko has not died
- * A fundamental revolutionary lesson: The enemy manoeuvres but it remains the enemy / Part IV: Defeat the resurgence of the workerist tendency

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The spirit of Steve Biko has not died

On the tragic day in our country 30 years ago, 12 September 1977, the Chairperson of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid was the Ambassador Leslie O Harriman, the Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the UN. This was the day that Stephen Bantu Biko died, after sustained and merciless torture by the Security Police of the apartheid regime.

Immediately after the death of Steve Biko was announced to the world, Ambassador Harriman issued a statement in which he said:

"I was shocked to learn that Mr Steven Biko, Honorary President of the Black People's Convention and an outstanding leader of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, died in detention on 12 September.

"This is one more despicable crime by the apartheid regime which has murdered a score of patriots in the past year in its police cells. It is a crime against the oppressed people of South Africa, and indeed, against the United Nations which has proclaimed special responsibility for them. It shows that the apartheid regime is incorrigible, and that any hesitation or delay in decisive international action to enable the national liberation movement to destroy that regime is, in effect, a condonation of crimes against the patriots."

Later, on 5 December 1977, Ambassador Harriman commented on the inquest finding of an apartheid magistrate that nobody could be blamed for the murder of Steve Biko. The Ambassador said:

"The judgment of the magistrate in the inquest over the death of Mr Steve Biko is a contemptible farce which can only be enacted by the institution of apartheid. It should open the eyes of those who saw a modicum of judicial propriety in racist courts managed by racist officials under racist laws...

"The people of South Africa and of the world have made their judgment, and the guilty

men from the so-called Ministers to the Security Policemen will not escape just punishment."

A new anti-apartheid phase

The murder of Steve Biko, the mass arrests, and the banning of the organisations of the Black Consciousness Movement, the Christian Institute, newspapers and individuals, further energised the international community to intensify its offensive against the criminal apartheid regime. This motivated the UN Security Council unanimously to impose a mandatory arms embargo against apartheid South Africa.

Commenting on this historic development on 4 November 1977, less than two months after Steve Biko died, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, the Austrian, Kurt Waldheim, said:

"We have today clearly witnessed a historic occasion. The adoption of this (arms embargo) resolution marks the first time in the 32-year history of the Organisation that action has been taken under Chapter VII of the Charter against a Member State. It is not my purpose to seek to determine whether the Council's decision by itself is adequate to secure its objective.

"However, it is abundantly clear that the policy of apartheid as well as the measures taken by the South African Government to implement this policy are such a gross violation of human rights and so fraught with danger to international peace and security that a response commensurate with the gravity of the situation was required.

"It is also significant that this momentous step is based on the unanimous agreement of the Council members. Thus we enter a new and significantly different phase of the long-standing efforts of the international community to obtain redress of these grievous wrongs."

Recapturing our history

Quite correctly, many activities took place in our country to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of Steve Biko. These helped us to recall the history of our liberation struggle and the role of the Black Consciousness Movement in that struggle.

Perhaps this should inspire us to take an initiative to conduct a comprehensive assessment of what we are doing as a country, and have done, properly to ensure that we capture and preserve this history and make it an integral part of our national public consciousness.

This is important not only to educate our youth but also to inspire our society as a whole to use the examples of heroism and commitment to the common good that were a feature of our struggle through all its phases.

Lessons from the past

The activities to mark the 30th anniversary of the murder of Steve Biko also gave all of us an opportunity once more to make an assessment of the meaning of what Steve Biko stood and died for, especially in terms of what we have to do today as we labour to build a new South Africa.

Again it would seem clear that we should carry out a careful audit in this regard, so that we use our history, the accumulated human experience that represents the

formation of the nation, as the firm base on which we stand as we strive to build the new, for which Steve Biko sacrificed his life.

We began this Letter by citing developments at the United Nations in New York, representing the will of the peoples of the world, occasioned by the cruel death of Steve Biko on 12 September 1977. So important was this moment that, as we have reported, UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, said the UN had entered "a new and significantly different phase of the long-standing efforts of the international community to obtain redress of these grievous (apartheid) wrongs".

International solidarity

This strongly suggests we should also make a thorough assessment of how we integrate in our national consciousness the contribution made by the international solidarity movement to our liberation. This is important not only to respect and preserve the historical record, but also properly to position the issue of internationalism within the work we are doing to rebuild our country, contribute to Africa's renewal and help to build a better world.

With these three initiatives we would ensure that we pay real tribute to Steve Biko and the thousands of martyrs who lost their lives to ensure that we attain the historic success represented by the democratic victory of April 1994.

Tributes by Oliver Tambo & Nelson Mandela

Quite appropriately, two of our most outstanding leaders, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela have, in the past, paid proper tribute to Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement.

In 1977, Oliver Tambo said: "In a way we started from the point of black consciousness too: we formed the ANC from just Africans - because the British had delivered themselves of a constitution which cut us out of power... Black consciousness, looked at from this point of view, is thus a phase in the struggle. It is not outside the struggle for human rights - on the contrary - it grows into the mainstream which has been set by the African National Congress."

Addressing the 1985 ANC Kabwe (Zambia) Conference, Oliver Tambo said: "We have already referred to the contribution that the BCM made to the activation of our people into struggle. This is a positive contribution that we must recognise and to which we must pay tribute. We should also recognise the significant input that the BCM made towards further uniting the black oppressed masses of our country, by emphasising the commonness of their oppression and their shared destiny. These views were built on political positions that our movement had long canvassed and fought for."

On 12 September 1997, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the death of Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela said: "History called upon Steve Biko at a time when the political pulse of our people had been rendered faint by banning, imprisonment, exile, murder and banishment. Repression had swept the country clear of all visible organisation of the people. But at each turn of history, apartheid was bound to spawn resistance; it was destined to bring to life the forces that would guarantee its death..."

"And for its part the ANC from the first years of the 1970s welcomed black consciousness as part of the genuine forces of the revolution. It understood that it was helping give organisational form to the popular upsurge of all the oppressed groups of our society. Above all, the liberation movement asserted that, in

struggle - in mass action, underground organisation, armed actions and international mobilisation - the people would most readily develop consciousness of their proud being, of their equality with everyone else, of their capacity to make history."

Like many others, neither of these leaders had the possibility to meet Steve Biko. As we tell the story of our liberation struggle and draw the necessary lessons, it is important that we pay close attention to Steve Biko's contemporaries and fellow-leaders.

Steve Biko's close comrade speaks

One of these is Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana, currently Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA), who came into the struggle for liberation when he joined the ANC Youth League not that long before the ANC was banned in 1960.

Prof Pityana delivered a Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at UNISA on 12 September 2007. Below I cite only a few of his observations, both to indicate what we can learn from a close comrade of Steve Biko, and to illustrate the challenge we face to gain a deep understanding of our history. Among other things Prof Pityana said:

"Black consciousness as a strategy for liberation built its philosophy on the idea that the black oppressed shared common values and common aspirations. The ethic of black solidarity was critical for black consciousness. It was therefore important that students as the intelligentsia of their society, must remain connected to their social and cultural roots...

"I can assert that in its early formulations black consciousness had no desire to substitute the traditional liberation organisations, neither did it see itself as formulating an alternative ideology. Its primary thrust was that in the circumstances of its time, the disunity of the black people was a luxury that we could not afford. That explains why someone like me could be a loyal cadre of the movement even though I had a strong pedigree in the ANC Youth League. Indeed, at the time of BC I was regularly in touch with the underground at various levels...(This was) about seeking ways of transcending...divisions (within the broad liberation movement) by articulating a meta-narrative of liberation that was unifying rather than particularising...

"I must now come round to reflecting on what all this might mean for a new South Africa. What strikes me first and foremost is how much society needs both intellectuals and heroes. It is correct that this society should honour its heroes and heroines and celebrate its intellectuals. Heroes are never those who set themselves up as such, or who go about their business in the expectation of being hero-worshipped. Likewise intellectuals are not those who draw attention to themselves, but to ideas, their currency and to the critique of society. For both their currency is truth: to stand by the truth, to articulate reality as truthfully as they understand it without calculation of personal benefit...

"I believe that today, (Steve Biko's courage) should call us to a renewed connectedness to the values that sustained and entrenched the liberation struggles against all odds; in particular, to the abiding humanity, Ubuntu, that drove all aspects of the struggle. Today, it would mean I believe, that we would address poverty with vigour, and that we would place human development at the centre of our national development strategy."

Our current tasks

Many on our Continent and elsewhere in the world, inspired by the humanism courageously displayed by such undying heroes of our people as Steve Biko, look to our country to make a critical contribution to the reconstruction of human society globally, by taking the lead in placing human development at the centre of our national development strategy, as Professor Pityana put it.

This we must do to ensure the all-round development of our people, to honour the memory of the martyrs, such as Steve Biko, and to give substance to the confidence that all humanity, including such anti-apartheid activists as Ambassador Leslie O Harriman, had in us that we would use our freedom to build the people-centred society to which we are committed. The commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the brutal and untimely death of Steve Biko has reminded us of the urgency of this task.

Thabo Mbeki

A FUNDAMENTAL REVOLUTIONARY LESSON: THE ENEMY MANOEUVRES BUT IT REMAINS THE ENEMY / PART IV

Defeat the resurgence of the workerist tendency

In the previous article of this series, we reproduced an edited version of an article by the late Dumisani Makhaye. In this article Makhaye said: "(Within the Alliance) the trade union movement would be an independent formation of all workers without regard to the political allegiance of these workers. This was because these workers shared and share a common interest in improving their conditions of life as human beings and members of social units, including the family. Both the ANC and the SACP would work among the workers and their trade union organisations to provide the political consciousness and leadership that would ensure the adherence of these workers to the respective political programmes and goals of the ANC and the SACP."

However, a very vocal tendency, beloved of the bourgeois media at home and abroad, and formerly described as a "workerist tendency", has re-emerged within the trade union movement, seeking to position this movement as a political organisation, with its own distinct ideological and political positions.

In terms of the left progressive movement for well over a century, this has been characterised as anarcho-syndicalism. Throughout this period, to date, both in theory and practice, anarcho-syndicalism has not served as a force for progressive change. It has been used principally to divide and weaken the progressive movement, serving the interests of right wing forces.

In practice, as we can see in our own country even today, it targets the leading force of the progressive movement as its main enemy, the target of its daily offensive. As has been the case throughout history, it carefully avoids a political offensive against capital and the bourgeoisie. For this reason, objectively it acts as an ally of the political representatives of the capitalist class.

In this article we reflect on some of the ideological and theoretical issues relating to anarcho-syndicalism to reinforce the understanding of our readers and members about what our movement, the ANC, must do to defend itself and the national democratic revolution.

Fundamentally and in terms of revolutionary theory and experience, the fact of the existence of a trade union-based "left opposition" represents the re-emergence in our

politics of a syndicalist tendency, which believes that the working class, as organised in trade unions, has the unique possibility radically to change society, including the possibility to achieve a socialist revolution.

Reflecting this syndicalism, consistent with the international experience of the working class movement, these fractions of the leadership of the progressive trade union movement proceed from a political perspective according to which:

- * trade union consciousness amounts to socialist consciousness;
- * militancy in trade union struggles represents the readiness of the workers to mount an offensive for the victory of the socialist revolution;
- * the workers organised in trade unions constitute the sufficient and necessary political force to lead and secure the victory of the socialist revolution;
- * even without establishing a political party, the progressive trade union movement is, at the same time, a political formation united around a distinct political and ideological platform;
- * the trade unions must be welcomed and accepted as the natural leader of the entirety of the progressive movement, with all other component members of this movement accepting that with regard to the conduct of the revolutionary struggle, they must assume a junior position to the trade union movement; and,
- * the progressive movement must accept the ideas and strategies of the trade union movement as the central ideas and strategies of the movement as a whole.

Syndicalism, or anarcho-syndicalism as understood within the international progressive working class movement, emerged as more or less a fully-formed tendency within this progressive international labour movement at the beginning of the 20th century.

One of its outstanding proponents was the German-American, Rudolf Rocker, who is recognised as the founder of syndicalism as a comprehensive theory and programme for the revolutionary transition from capitalism, led by the trade unions.

The 1906 "Charter of Amiens", which, among other things, informed the early policies of the well-known French trade union federation, the CGT, said of the Congress that gave birth to this Charter:

"The Congress clarifies this theoretical affirmation by the following points: in its day-to-day demands, syndicalism seeks the coordination of workers efforts, the increase of workers well-being by the achievement of immediate improvements, such as the reduction of working hours, the increase of wages, etc.

"But this task is only one aspect of the work of syndicalism: it prepares for complete emancipation, which can be realised only by expropriating the capitalist class: it sanctions the general strike as its means of action and it maintains that the trade union, today an organisation of resistance, will in the future be the organisation of production and distribution, the basis of social reorganisation.

"The Congress declares that this double task, the day-to-day and the future task, derives from the position of wage-earners, which weighs upon the working class and which charges all workers, whatever their political and philosophical opinions and inclinations, with the duty to belong to the essential organisation, the trade union."

In his work, "Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism", Rudolf Rocker also wrote:

"Anarcho-Syndicalists are of the opinion that political parties are not fitted... 1.

to enforce the demands of the producers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living [or] 2. to acquaint the workers with the technical management of production and economic life in general, and prepare them to take the socio-economic organism into their own hands and shape it according to socialist principles...

"According to their conceptions the trade union has to be the spearhead of the labour movement, toughened by daily combats and permeated by a socialist spirit. Only in the realm of economy are the workers able to display their full strength; for it is their activity as producers which holds together the whole social structure and guarantees the existence of society.

"Only as a producer and creator of social wealth does the worker become aware of her strength. In solidarity union with her fellows she creates the great phalanx of militant labour, aflame with the spirit of freedom and animated by the ideal of social justice.

"For the Anarcho-Syndicalists the labour syndicates are the most fruitful germs of a future society, the elementary school of Socialism in general. Every new social structure creates organs for itself in the body of the old organism; without this prerequisite every social evolution is unthinkable."

Given the assertions made by the anarcho-syndicalists about the revolutionary tasks of the trade union movement, it is necessary to draw attention to established Marxist-Leninist theory about the place and role of the trade union movement in the struggle for fundamental social change.

We will therefore now take the liberty to quote fairly extensively the founders of scientific socialism, informed by the necessity to respect Marxism-Leninism as a science of socialism.

Deriving from the historical process of the formation of the proletariat and the development of socialism as a science, Marxism-Leninism has always argued that as necessary revolutionary theory, socialism owes its birth to an advanced intelligentsia.

Accordingly it has argued that the organised working class, united in trade unions, does not, in itself, guarantee that these organised workers, however militant their struggles, would emerge as conscious revolutionary socialists.

Accordingly, the workers organised in trade unions would still need a political vanguard to lead them in the struggle for the victory of the proletarian, socialist revolution - thus the need for vanguard Communist Parties.

Marx and Engels stated this in the 1848 Communist Manifesto in the following terms: "The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

In his December 1910 article, "Differences in the European Labour Movement", Lenin wrote:

"The principal tactical differences in the present-day-labour movement of Europe and America reduce themselves to a struggle against two big trends that are departing from Marxism, which has in fact become the dominant theory in this movement. These

two trends are revisionism (opportunism, reformism) and anarchism (anarcho-syndicalism, anarcho-socialism)...

"A constant source of differences is the dialectical nature of social development, which proceeds in contradictions and through contradictions. Capitalism is progressive because it destroys the old methods of production and develops productive forces, yet at the same time, at a certain stage of development, it retards the growth of productive forces. It develops, organises, and disciplines the workers - and it crushes, oppresses, leads to degeneration, poverty, etc..."

"But, needless to say, the masses learn from life and not from books, and therefore certain individuals or groups constantly exaggerate, elevate to a one-sided theory, to a one-sided system of tactics, now one and now another feature of capitalist development, now one and now another 'lesson' of this development."

At the same time as it has understood this subjectivism, leading to right and left opportunism, Marxism-Leninism has always acknowledged the fact that the mass, non-party character of the trade unions necessitates that they play a particular role as a school for the training of workers to develop to the stage when they become revolutionary socialists.

In an 1870 "Confidential Communication on Bakunin", Karl Marx wrote:

"(England) is the only country where the class struggle and organisation of the working class by the trade unions have attained a certain degree of maturity and universality. It is the only country where, thanks to its domination of the world market, every revolution in economic relationships must directly affect the whole world. While on the one hand landlordism and capitalism have their classic seat in this country, the material conditions for their destruction are on the other hand the most mature here..."

"The English have at their disposal all necessary material preconditions for a social revolution. What they lack is the spirit of (scientific socialist) generalisation and revolutionary passion. Only the General Council can provide them with this, and thus accelerate a truly revolutionary movement here and, in consequence, everywhere..."

In his 1885 work, "England in 1845 and 1885", under the heading "They Form an Aristocracy", Engels said:

"The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working-class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then.

"And that is the reason why, since the dying-out of Owenism, there has been no Socialism in England. With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working-class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally - the privileged and leading minority not excepted - on a level with its fellow-workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be Socialism again in England."

In its January 1922 decision on the "Role and Functions of the Trade Unions under the New Economic Policy", the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) said:

"Contact with the masses, ie., with the overwhelming majority of the workers (and

eventually of all the working people), is the most important and most fundamental condition for the success of all trade union activity. In all the trade union organisations and their machinery, from bottom up, there should be instituted, and tested in practice over a period of many years, a system of responsible comrades - who must not all be Communists - who should live right among the workers, study their lives in every detail, and be able unerringly, on any question, and at any time, to judge the mood, the real aspirations, needs and thoughts of the masses.

"They must be able without a shadow of false idealisation to define the degree of their class-consciousness and the extent to which they are influenced by various prejudices and survivals of the past; and they must be able to win the boundless confidence of the masses by comradeship and concern for their needs.

"One of the greatest and most serious dangers that confront the numerically small Communist Party which, as the vanguard of the working class, is guiding a vast country in the process of transition to socialism (for the time being without the direct support of the more advanced countries), is isolation from the masses, the danger that the vanguard may run too far ahead and fail to 'straighten out the line', fail to maintain firm contact with the whole army of labour, i.e., with the overwhelming majority of workers and peasants.

"Just as the very best factory, with the very best motors and first-class machines, will be forced to remain idle if the transmission belts from the motors to the machines are damaged, so our work of socialist construction must meet with inevitable disaster if the trade unions - the transmission belts from the Communist Party to the masses - are badly fitted or function badly. It is not sufficient to explain, to reiterate and corroborate this truth; it must be backed up organisationally by the whole structure of the trade unions and by their everyday activities...

"Trade unions are really effective only when they unite very broad strata of the non-Party workers. This must give rise - particularly in a country in which the peasantry greatly predominates - to relative stability, specifically among the trade unions, of those political influences that serve as the superstructure over the remnants of capitalism and over small production."

All the texts we have quoted make the point that even where you have strong trade unions, they may not proceed to espouse a socialist consciousness. Trade union strength does not necessarily translate into, or signify, a strong socialist movement.

It was for this reason that in the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels said: "The Communists...theoretically...have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

Even during the period immediately following the victory of the October Revolution in Russia, Lenin argued that the task of the trade unions is not to lead the socialist revolution, but to "unite very broad strata of the non-Party workers".

To proceed further, we would like to cite some passages from a 1988 Discussion Document entitled "The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution", written by the then General Secretary of the SACP, the late Joe Slovo, and published by the SACP. Among other things, representing established positions of the SACP, which were fully supported by the international Communist movement, Joe Slovo wrote:

"A tendency (in South African politics), loosely described as 'workerism', denies that the main content of the immediate conflict is national liberation which it regards as a diversion from the class struggle. Even if it admits the relevance of national domination in the exploitative processes, 'workerism' insists on a perspective of an immediate struggle for socialism.

"A transitional stage of struggle, involving inter-class alliances, is alleged to lead to an abandonment of socialist perspectives and to a surrender of working class leadership. The economic struggles between workers and bosses at the point of production (which inevitably spill over into the broader political arena) is claimed to be the 'class struggle'. This is sometimes coupled with a view that the trade union movement is the main political representative of the working class...

"The syndicalist notion that trade unions should act as political parties is so discredited that it has few, if any, open adherents. But, from time to time, the notion is introduced through the back door in the shape of policies which would, in practice, allocate such a role to the trade union movement.

"An example of one such tendency is the premature attempt to formally incorporate the objective of socialism into trade unions and the federation to which they belong. Such a move would narrow the mass character of the trade union movement by demanding an unreal level of political consciousness from its members or affiliates as a condition for joining. It would also, incidentally, give the enemy the very excuse it needs to deal with one of its most formidable foes..."

When he discussed the ANC, Joe Slovo said: "The overwhelming majority of the people are working class. This explains why the ANC's composition and policies show a strong bias towards the working class. It also considers it proper and necessary for socialist ideology to be discussed and understood in its ranks.

"But, despite the fact that the ANC has an understandable bias towards the working class it does not, and clearly should not, adopt a socialist platform which the so-called Marxist Workers' Tendency (expelled from the ANC) would like it to do. If it adopted such a platform it would destroy its character as the prime representative of all the classes among the oppressed black majority..."

In his discussion of the SACP he said: "Workers' political leadership must represent the working class not just in economic struggles against the bosses but, more so, in its relation to all classes of society and to the state as an organised force. We stress again that a trade union cannot carry out this role. Only a political vanguard of the working class can do so.

"A vanguard party, representing the historic aspirations of the working class, cannot (like a trade union) have a mass character. It must attract the most advanced representatives of the working class; mainly professional revolutionaries with an understanding of Marxist theory and practice, an unconditional dedication to the worker's cause, and a readiness, if need be, to sacrifice their very lives in the cause of freedom and socialism. Our SACP is such a Party..."

These quotations from the Slovo Discussion Document represent an outlook that had evolved over a long period of time and which was shared by the Alliance as a whole, as well as the international progressive movement. We believe that the perspective they contain remains correct and relevant to the further pursuit of the NDR. One of the immediate and urgent challenges the national democratic revolution faces is to defeat the resurgence of the workerist tendency, historically known as anarcho-syndicalism.

In 1988, Joe Slovo wrote: "The syndicalist notion that trade unions should act as political parties is so discredited that it has few, if any, open adherents. But, from time to time, the notion is introduced through the back door in the shape of policies which would, in practice, allocate such a role to the trade union movement..

"Workers' political leadership must represent the working class not just in economic struggles against the bosses but, more so, in its relation to all classes of society and to the state as an organised force. We stress again that a trade union cannot carry out this role. Only a political vanguard of the working class can do so."

CORRECTION

In last week's edition of ANC Today (Vol 7 No 35), in the article 'The Revolutionary Phrase & the defence of the Democratic Revolution', we wrongly attributed to Anthony Butler the words, opinions and political affiliations of another writer. We apologise for the error.

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