

# BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

by Alan Paton.

In this issue we reprint with permission the text of an address given by Mr. Steve Biko, the 1969-70 President of the South African Students Organisation, to a Black Theology seminar in Pietermaritzburg. I hope to examine this address analytically, but wish first to state my own attitude to black consciousness.

Black consciousness is the direct creation of white arrogance. Pride in having a white skin I find an inexcusable vulgarity. I am unable to say the same about pride in having a black skin. I understand the spiritual and psychological necessity for black people to be proud of black skin, even though I regret the reasons for it. Pride in white skin and pride in black skin are for me both vulgarities, but while the first is inexcusable, the second is not, and contains elements not vulgar at all.

Black consciousness is, or certainly appears to be, anxious not to get mixed up with black power. How long can this pretence be kept up? Black consciousness obviously wants to change the order of things, and rightly so. But you can't change the order of things without power. How long will the young zealots be satisfied with a mush of culture, mysticism, lyricism, and going round saying *haven't I a lovely skin?*

## DIRECTED AT WHITE LIBERALS

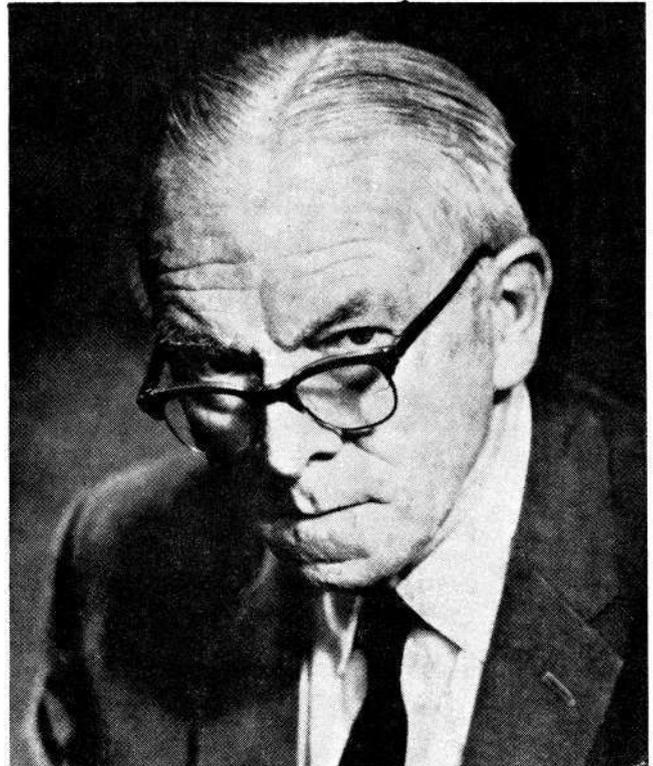
It is not surprising that SASO and the Black Consciousness Symposium held in Durban in December of last year, have so far directed their specific fire at white liberals. If they were to direct their fire at the Government and Boss and the Security Police they would not find it so easy to hold conferences. It does not require courage to direct one's fire against the politically unarmed. I am not suggesting that SASO lacks courage, but I don't think highly of its preliminary sallies.

Indeed, as I asked Miss Masekela of the December symposium, who said that white liberals are a major stumbling block in the way of black liberation, what should white liberals do? Should they leave the country? Should they keep silent for ever more? Should they go north to be trained as guerilla fighters? Or should they just lie down and die?

An intelligent young woman like Miss Masekela should understand that there are some people who call themselves liberals who do not wish to leave their country, who would think it a crime to be silent, who are not by belief and temperament fitted to become revolutionaries, and who do not wish to die. They are there. They are just as real as Miss Masekela. Some of them — perhaps all of them — are just as honest as she. Some of them have paid a high price for their beliefs. Miss Masekela must do her thing. They must do theirs. It is as simple as that. They have just as much right as she to speak, write and work for their country, which is hers too.

## DILEMMA

Now while I write about the dilemma of SASO — whether to be Black Power or Black Consciousness — and though I write with some severity, I do not laugh at it. There are portions of Mr. Biko's address which are brave and honest. That is why I find the following statement unworthy of him, that "blacks have had enough experience as objects of racism not to wish to reverse the tables." Does Mr. Biko believe that black people in power would have a Nobility that white people in power do not? The problem of the future is much more complex than that, and nothing is to be gained by oversimplifying it. I fully realise that Mr. Biko is not concerned with the needs of white people in South Africa, but I am. White South Africans — unless they are going to be driven out of Africa altogether — need to be confronted with the realities of Black Power and Black consciousness — and by the realities of their demands — not by the kind of idealistic platitudes that were once supposed to be the monopoly of liberals.



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I am also strongly critical of Mr. Biko's use of *thesis*, *anti-thesis*, and *synthesis*. He says that for liberals, the *thesis* is apartheid, the *anti-thesis* is non racialism, and "the *synthesis* very feebly defined." But for Black Consciousness, the *thesis* is a strong white racism, the *anti-thesis* is black solidarity, and the *synthesis* is a "true humanity where politics will have no place". Really, Mr. Biko, this is too much. The *synthesis* is just as likely to be war.

#### PERSONAL NOTE

I am going to close this article on a personal note. Mr. Biko says – I am using his language – that I "shouted" from London "perhaps apartheid is worth a try". Either Mr. Biko is deceived or he is deceiving. I have never said a word in favour of apartheid in my life. I have fought it, not only in the life of my country, but in my own life too.

I was not speaking about apartheid at all. I was speaking of those instruments of power which the Government has created, namely the territorial authorities. I was urging that they should be used to the full. Mr. Biko regards them all as contemptible, and thinks they should not be used at all, because white people created them "to give some kind of authenticity to their lie." This is moralistically very grand, but one cannot lay it down as a principle that one must not use one's opponent's moves in order to checkmate him, simply because his desire is to subjugate. That would be the end of all sport, political or otherwise.

Long before I "shouted" from London, I wrote from Botha's Hill in REALITY of March 1971, this paragraph.

"REALITY, and the Liberal Party before it, are and were totally opposed to the policy of separate development, on both moral and practical grounds. The goal is – as it was always – one common society whose rights and obligations are shared by all, free of all racial discrimination, and upholding fundamental rights and the rule of law. But where the Government in its pursuit of separate development creates instruments of power that can be used, however imperfectly, for the achievement of progress towards those ends, then the proposition that one should use them is one fully to be considered."

It is possible that Mr. Biko would think, *or would feel obliged to think*, that I wrote this paragraph to give some kind of authenticity to the white man's lie, and that in secret I rejoice in this clever way of perpetuating subjugation. I suppose that he is entitled – though it would have to be in some contorted way – to such an opinion. And I fear that is what Black Consciousness might become, a refusal to believe – on principle – that any white person can speak the truth. Unless it can overcome this, I predict that it will never have the noble future which Mr. Biko dreams for it, and will become the twin of White Nationalism.

And what, Mr. Biko, would be the *synthesis* of that?

## WHEN THE OVAMBO WENT HOME

by Dudley Horner

On the northern border of Namibia (South West-Africa) in a region consisting of a fairly well-developed type of woodland and dry forest vegetation, which thins out and passes into dry steppe country to the north and west of the Etosha Pan, live some 340 000 Ovambo who constitute nearly 46 per cent of the entire population of the mandated territory. The South African Government's colonial policy, with its basis of so-called separate development, contains the greater majority of these people within a "homeland" which constitutes roughly one-twentieth of the total area of Namibia. This land is called Owambo or Ovamboland, the people are Ovambo. Some 40 000 Ovambo (mostly male) are obliged by various circumstances to seek employment in the southern sector of the territory which has been known for some time, and very aptly, as the Police Zone.

The Ovambo have been in the past, and to a large extent still are today, primarily cultivators subsisting on crops of millet, kaffircorn, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, groundnuts and gourds, all of which are cultivated with particular success during years of ample rainfall. They are, to a lesser extent, also herdsmen keeping cattle of little commercial value and small stock (mainly goats.) Owambo depends for its crops and livestock on local rainfall and the floodwaters from Southern Angola. The territorial Water Affairs Department has devised a water conservation

scheme culminating in the construction of a weir across the Kunene River near Eriksson's Drift which, together with the construction of the Okatana canals, is expected to remove the spectre of famine in years of drought. The question of rainfall is obviously of prime importance and food-supply is a crucial factor in the local economy. In some 82 years between 1883 and 1966 the northern sector of Namibia has suffered 34 years of drought and during the famine of 1961 2 000 tons of maize a month had to be delivered to Owambo.