



THE TRAIN DECISION

Steve Biko, the Founding Father of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), would have been 72 years old on 18 December. This date carries a lot of significance in Black History because a Black child who would later have a profound impact on the Azanian political landscape was born.



Our knowledge of Biko's death date of 12 September 1977, should excite our curiosity to find out about his birth day and all that relates to it.

We have to do that because Biko was not an ordinary human being. He was a revolutionary intellectual whose political activism, theorising and philosophising left an indelible mark on the Azanian political landscape.

Biko was the third child of Mzingaye and Nokuzola. Mzingaye was of the amaGcina clan, while Nokuzola was of amaCethe. Interestingly, the name Mzingaye means "home because of him", while Nokuzola refers to serenity or calmness and peacefulness. It makes sense that the parents have their child the name

Bantu (People) as if to instruct him to serve his people with a commitment anchored on calmness, which would bring about lasting peacefulness among the people.

It should provide us with a curious contrast that Biko's father was at some stage a policeman during the height of white racism and oppression in our country Azania. Mzingaye was a typical Black father who moved his family from place to place in search of a better life. It should interest us that Biko's father dropped the policeman job for being a clerk, during which time he studied towards a law degree. There must have been a sense in which such introspection had influence on Biko because he himself switched to law studies after he was expelled from his medicine studies at the "black section" of the University of Natal.

Biko was born in a small Karoo town of Tarkastad on the banks of the Tarka River in the Eastern Cape. Of interest is that the name Tarkastad comes from the Khoikhoi "traka", which means women because of the landscape of two peaks overlooking the town.

Biko's father died in 1950 when he was only four years old. That meant that Biko was brought up almost single-handedly by his mother MamCethe through the impossibly limited wages of a domestic worker.

Of course, Biko grew up in Ginsberg after his father later moved there. Situated near Qonce, Ginsberg was named after a white councillor and a "Cape Colony" parliamentarian Franz Ginsberg.

There is no doubt that the people of Ginsberg should be restless of living in a piece of Azanian land named after a colonialist. Just as much as they should not be happy with the de-naming of Qonce to King Williams Town, they should not be happy that they have not yet reclaimed Ginsberg by properly renaming it.



However, Biko started his schooling in Ginsberg schools of St Andrews Primary, Charles Morgan Higher Primary and Forbes Grant Secondary. While he was an all-rounder, he excelled in Mathematics and English subjects. He was so intelligent that he was allowed to skip an academic class. That intelligence propelled him to move on to prestigious boarding schools like Lovedale in Dikeni (Alice).

He did not last long at Lovedale where he had joined his elder brother Khaya. They were both detained by the apartheid police after Khaya was accused of being associated with the then banned PAC. Biko had to move to Thekwini (Durban) to carry on with his studies at the St Frances College in Mariannhill.

The political experiences of being detained and expelled from schools prepared him well for the hype of political activity at the University of Natal from 1966 onwards. His Blackness meant that he could not enter that University directly. He accessed it through a special opening created for Black students, which was referred to as some "Non-European section" located at a Wentworth township. This segregated life followed Biko even in his temporary political home, NUSAS. This was a white liberal students organisation at tertiary schools.

It is at that organisation where he observed that Black people were not only oppressed by white people, but were made to be depended on the very white people for solutions to liberate themselves from that oppression. While it were Black students that were living in the mud of a segregated "black section" at university, white students tended to be more advantaged by the English language, which was used in political meetings, to articulate Black problems better than Black students. That gave white students a false appearance of superiority and knowledgeability. In other words, the Black students came to accept their inferiority complex as natural. Something had to be done to psychologically liberate Black students.

In 1967 at a conference in Makhanda (Grahamstown) the non-racial facade of NUSAS was exposed. When the Black students got there, they discovered that the university dormitories were exclusively arranged for the "superior" accommodation of white students, while the Black students were to be dumped in a township church building. Biko and his fellow Wentworth Black students had travelled by train. To show that they were already fed up, they took a decision on the train that they would leave NUSAS if it obeyed the apartheid law of Separate Amenities Act.

Biko narrated the train decision at the 1975 SASO-BPC Trial as follows:

"It so happened that when we got to Rhodes University, in the first instance the conference organiser could not quite say where we were going to stay. We were all put in the hall in different places, and we eventually noticed that all the White students went first, then some of the Indian students, then eventually he came to us to say he had found a church where we could stay. At that moment I felt we had ample reason to stick by our decision on the train."

The segregated accommodation was a decisive moment for the Black students. Such was the impact that Biko had to recapture the moment in a 1970 letter to the SRCs after his election as the SASO inaugural President:

“In the NUSAS conference of 1967 the Blacks were made to stay at a church building in the Grahamstown location, each day being brought to the conference site by cars etc. On the other hand their White 'brothers' were staying in residences around the conference site. This is perhaps the turning point in the history of Black support for NUSAS. So appalling were the conditions that it showed the Blacks just how valued they were in the organisation.”

This scenario makes it clear to us that the decision to form SASO was in fact taken in a train in mid-1967, even though it was implemented in December 1968 where SASO was officially formed.

SASO became the pioneer BC organisation, which ironically gave birth to its mother organisation Black People's Convention (BPC). That is why this year Azanians commemorate the 50th anniversary of the BCM, of which AZAPO is the leading political organisation.

Symbolically, it would be difficult to talk about the Founding Year of 1968 and the June 16 Uprisings without saying something about 18 December 1946 in Tarkastad.

Happy birthday, Bantu!

OUR LAND—THE REAL FREEDOM

One of the primary reasons AZAPO decided to boycott the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) - that forum established to abort the Azanian revolution - was the fact that the Kempton Park negotiations were explicit that talks would not be about the transfer of land from the white tribe to the Black majority who lost their land through colonial conquest.

AZAPO also resolved to stay away from the 27 April 1994 polls because it was clear that the elections were just about the co-option of non-whites into a system that will preserve the ill-gotten wealth of the white tribe and that the government led by the non-whites would have limited space to radically change

the ownership patterns as it would have to honour sacred clauses inserted in the Constitution about respect of individual ownership rights.

AZAPO warned then that there can't be real freedom without land. When the section of the liberation movement was campaigning, on the eve of the 1994 elections, on the ticket of providing jobs and free houses for the poor, AZAPO maintained its position about the land being the paramount issue that needed to be addressed first. But we were dismissed by those who said we did not read the mood of the majority as people wanted jobs and houses not land.



More than two decades later, the freedom honeymoon is over. We have been vindicated. The majority of people, including the governing party, now realise that the land question needs to be resolved. The issue of land has become fashionable. It has become clearer that any party that seeks to win the 2019 election would have to put land on the top of its agenda.

But people are being fed propaganda. They are being told that yes, they need land but they actually need land for residential purposes. They are told that the majority of Black people have no capacity – financial resources and experience - to utilise the land productively.

Because of the power of this propaganda, many of our people are buying into this lie. The colonisers invade our country, take our land, cut our connection with the land, force us to go and work in the mines and factories in the towns and then turn around and say we have no experience to work the land! How rich!

The best way of exploding this myth is for Black people to acquire modern technology to work the land so that we can make it highly productive and be able to feed ourselves and export some of our produce. When we do that, we would have started on a journey to liberation and self-reliance. We will then be a free people.

EDCON CRISIS

In response to a report published in The Sunday Times about the possible closure of Edcon Holdings, the owners of a giant retail business Edgars, Jet and CNA. Some trade unions have called on the government to intervene and ensure that the 140 000 direct and indirect jobs are saved.

Shortly after the story broke, Edcon management moved swiftly to repudiate the report saying most of the things covered by the Sunday newspaper report were speculation. However, they admitted that the company needs huge sums of money to stay afloat. One of the options that Edcon management was considering was to get a rescue package deal estimated at about R1.2bn from one of the major investors, the Public Investment Corporation (PIC).

It is understandable why unions would react in this fashion to try to save jobs. After all, unemployment is one of the biggest challenges facing our country. However, unions should be careful about calling on the PIC, which is the custodian of public servants pension, to spend money to save private companies. The PIC's main brief is to ensure proper investment of the workers' pension.

There are lessons that the Edcon story offers. The first lesson is that the working class is always used by the rich to protect the interests of the rich. All of a sudden, the mainstream media is essentially imploring government to intervene to save 140 000 jobs by ensuring that Edcon does not shut down. It is as if Edcon is this sensible employer who is in business purely to create jobs for the poor. Edcon has a very interesting history with our apartheid past. This company, like many established during white rule, is yet to be fully transformed to empower Black people just not as workers

but also to procure merchandise from Black suppliers. The unions and other interested parties that are concerned about the workers losing jobs should rather direct their energies to get Edcon to fully embrace transformation so that Black people can also benefit from operations of this giant retailer.



The other lesson that should be learnt from this story is about the pace of South African government and businesses to respond to globalisation. Clothing shops such as Edgars are vulnerable to cheap imports from other countries such as China and Taiwan. The labour movement, business and government should have an honest dialogue about how to respond to this challenge.

Edcon management can in the meantime dismiss the story of massive job losses as speculation but if nothing is done to address factors that are putting pressure on the retail space, massive job losses will soon become a reality.

EDITORIAL

This being our last publication for 2018, AZAPO Voice Editorial Collective wish you, our loyal readers, a joyous festive season and all the best for the coming 2019. We look forward to continue sharing the Black Perspectives of our society with you and welcome your views and opinions on the year that was and the articles we carried. With the coming year being an elections year, please remember to check your voting eligibility with the IEC offices or during the registration weekend of 26-27 January 2019. AMANDLA!