

SOUTH AFRICAN CRACKDOWN BRINGS FLURRY OF OPPOSITION

South Africa's recent crackdown against all political opposition demands an urgent response from the American people and the Carter Administration.

Beginning in pre-dawn raids on October 19th, the South African regime banned eighteen opposition organizations, including the Black Peoples Convention of which Steve Biko was honorary president, the black newspaper The World, the Committee of 10 in Soweto, the multi-racial Christian Institute, and many other community and student groups. At least 50 people were detained the first day, many of whom will be held without charge under the Internal Security Act. Another 150 people were arrested October 21st. At no time in the last two decades has the South African government lashed out against its opponents in such a wholesale way. We must respond decisively.

The Administration's Response

The Carter Administration immediately indicated that it was "deeply disturbed about the South African wave of repression, and warned that it would consider the "implications" for U.S. policy toward South Africa. On October 21st, the State Department gave unusual publicity to its announcement that the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, William Bowdler, was being recalled "for consultations on recent events in South Africa." The statement said that "it is anticipated that Ambassador Bowdler will be arriving /in Washington/ at the beginning of next week and will return to his post a few days later." State Department spokesman Hodding Carter said Bowdler's stay might stretch out to longer than a few days.

In fact, Bowdler was already scheduled to come to Washington next week, for a series of internal discussions on South Africa policy. A newly-centralized decision-making procedure is to be used to decide how to follow up on the warning by Vice President Mondale to Prime Minister Vorster at their Vienna meeting in May that the U.S. would re-assess its South Africa policy if Vorster did not take steps to move toward majority rule.

Vorster's giant step in the opposition direction has made these discussions more urgent, and has pressed the timetable forward. Secretary Vance began meetings Saturday morning, necessitated by Security Council debate on South Africa scheduled for October 24th, at which the African states may well force a U.S. veto of a mandatory sanctions resolution. The U.S. is surely trying to come up with an alternative approach.

Congressional Calls for Disengagement

The Congressional Black Caucus and several white House members have called for concrete policy changes toward South Africa in response to the latest wave of repression. The Caucus will meet with President Carter early next week to discuss its 12-point plan of action, beginning with down-grading U.S. diplomatic presence in South Africa, and including denial of tax credits for investments, elimination of Export-Import Bank financing of trade, and an end to nuclear co-operation. As Rep. Parren Mitchell, the Caucus Chairman said, "We're demanding definitive action... As far as the Caucus is concerned, the battle lines have been drawn."

Rep. Andrew Maguire (D-N.J.) and other white members who attacked South Africa's handling of Steve Biko's death have also taken a harder line following the renewed crackdown. Maguire, Diggs, Edward Markey (D-Mass), Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.) and Thomas Downey (D-N.Y.) went to the State Department on October 19 and urged the U.S. to "disentangle" itself from South Africa. They suggested at least ending Export-Import Bank financing.

The new coalition between the Black Caucus and white liberals is calling for a legislative reprimand of South African within the next ten days or two weeks. They want to demonstrate to the South African government that there is support in Congress for concrete policy changes by the Carter Administration.

Their approach is embodied in a broad resolution, H. Con. Res. 383, which was introduced by Rep. Cardiss Collins on October 19th. The text of the resolution follows:

Whereas the Government of the Republic of South Africa has engaged in very severe violations of the civil liberties of the people of South Africa by undertaking a massive offensive against black and white political opponents of that government, such violations including the closing of newspapers, the outlawing of peaceful religious and social groups, and the detention of South African citizens for political purposes; and

Whereas these civil liberties violations are further evidence of the illegal, immoral and repressive conduct of the Government of the Republic of South Africa as a member of the international community;

Whereas the United States holds such actions to be intolerable in civilized societies: Now therefore be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress strongly denounces the above acts of totalitarianism committed by the Government of the Republic of South Africa and urges the President to take the strongest possible diplomatic measures against South Africa in order to register the contempt the American people have for such uncivilized acts.

The resolution, which already had 41 co-sponsors as of October 21st, is scheduled for action in the Africa Subcommittee on Tuesday, the 25th, and in the full International Relations Committee on the 27th. A similar resolution may be introduced in the Senate next week by Senators Humphrey and Clark.

Public Reaction is Already Building

Activities are being scheduled across the country to oppose South Africa's crackdown. At a meeting in New York last week attended by representatives of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, NAACP, Urban League, the American Committee on Africa and others including Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, it was decided to hold a demonstration at the South African consulate on Tuesday, the 25th. A demonstration at the White House is planned for Thursday, the 27th, which will probably be addressed by Parren Mitchell. Actions are being planned in other cities also, but our information about them is not complete.

What We Can Do

South Africa's repression is a horrible thing, but it is obviously creating a renewed anger in the United States, and a new momentum behind calls for real change in U.S. policy. It is important to take advantage and build on this mood. Here are some specific suggestions for immediate action:

- ** Send telegrams to President Carter, Secretary Vance and Ambassador Young calling for concrete, effective action to disassociate the U.S. from the Vorster regime. Organize joint or multiple statements from community organizations.
- ** Cable your Representatives and Senators with the same message, and urge them to co-sponsor and vote for H. Con. Res. 383.
- ** Help organize public vigils, demonstrations, press conferences, etc. in your community to call for decisive U.S. action. You might use the Black Caucus 12-point program as a basis for your statement.

The legacy of Steve Biko lives on

By TAMI HULTMAN AND REED KRAMER

"It never occurred to the liberals that the integration they insisted upon as an effective way of opposing apartheid was impossible to achieve in South Africa. One has to overhaul the whole system before hoping to get black and white walking hand in hand to oppose a common enemy."

Steven Biko, January 1971

No one person has had so much influence on the course of events in South Africa during the last eight years as Steven Biko. He was instrumental in founding the all-black South African Students Organization (SASO) in 1968 and has remained the leading theoretician of what has come to be called the "black consciousness movement."

Biko's death on Sept. 12 while he was detained by the South Africa security police has provoked the largest storm of international protest against South Africa's white rulers since police in Soweto attacked demonstrating school children on June 16 last year.

Ironically, Biko is now being incorrectly called a "moderate" by much of the press, perhaps because he, like Amílcar Cabral, was a soft-spoken, gentle person who charmed acquaintances with his personal warmth and grace and his spellbinding use of language.

But also like Cabral, Biko understood the structural economic basis of racial and colonial oppression and other forms of exploitation. Seven years ago, while still reading widely to formulate his ideas, he remarked that "the black people of the world, in choosing to reject the legacy of colonialism and white domination...have at last established a solid basis for meaningful cooperation among themselves in the larger battle of the third world against the rich nations."

SASO ORGANIZED

SASO was formed from a caucus of black students within the University Christian Movement who decided that a separate political organization of Africans, Indians and "coloreds" was essential if blacks were ever to take the initiative in the South African liberation struggle. They believed that the multiracial organizations which had filled the vacuum left by the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960 had left blacks feeling inferior and unable to take militant action.

The organization's nucleus in those early years was found 15 miles south of Durban at the Wentworth Medical School, the only educational institution in South Africa then attended by a significant number of Indian, "colored" and African students. As the first president of SASO and a Wentworth student, Biko spent time consolidating an alliance among the three black population groups to overcome tensions which the white power structure sought to exacerbate.

As a student organization, not surprisingly SASO quickly generated lively and thought-provoking writings. In August 1970, the SASO journal carried pseudonymously a Biko article entitled "Black souls in white skins?"—a broadside indictment of liberalism. Drawing upon his experience in Roman Catholic schools and in the multiracial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), Biko attacked "that band of do-gooders...who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks." Later he wrote: "The liberals must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone! That the blacks do not need a go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation." But at the same time, Biko rejected dogmatic separatism, saying once "mutual respect" is established, "you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration."

This same theme was written into SASO's policy manifesto adopted at the 1971 general conference. That meeting also took stands going far beyond any other legal organization in South Africa, including a resolution rejecting foreign investments, saying that investors "profit from exploitation and end up with a vested interest in its maintenance." It condemned "the black puppets who go overseas under the cloak of leadership and persuade foreign investors to stay in South Africa with the belief that it is for the betterment of the blacks."

The same meeting rejected the policy of dialog with South Africa adopted by African states such as the Ivory Coast and Liberia, and declared its "solidarity with the students and the indigenous peoples of Namibia in their determination to rid themselves of this unwarranted occupation."

At the beginning, SASO successfully played upon the white government's segregation line. "We have a little breathing space," Biko observed in 1970. "It won't last long, but it will be enough."

—GUARDIAN—SEPTEMBER 28, 1977

The crackdown by South African authorities was inevitable, but by the time it came SASO and its community counterpart, the Black People's Convention (BPC), had set in motion a force which could not be stopped. As Biko himself analyzed it, "the importance of the SASO stance is not really to be found in SASO per se—for SASO has got the natural limitations of being a student organization with an ever-changing membership. Rather it is to be found in the fact that this new approach...heralded a new era in which blacks are beginning to see with greater clarity the immensity of their responsibility."

TIES WITH WORKERS

From the beginning SASO emphasized its ties with both urban workers and rural peasants and rejected a role for itself as an educated elite. It organized literacy projects, self-help schemes such as medical clinics and cooperatives, and devoted much time and energy stimulating and supporting trade union militancy. It also carried its message to the high schools, where students had greater freedom of association than at the rigidly controlled tribal and ethnic universities.

The soundness of SASO's and BPC's political judgment has been proven by the growing force of the resistance movement in the face of escalating repression. Beginning in 1973, when a wave of arrests and bannings decimated the ranks of both groups, every open leader or activist of either organization has been subject to multiple police actions and replaced by new leadership which is, in turn, victimized.

SEVERE REPRESSION

The Pretoria regime's desperate attempts to disrupt the liberation struggle has reached a level that is difficult to grasp. Hundreds of activists are now being held in indefinite detention under the security laws and many thousands of others face eventual charges in court. Among the 20 some detainees who have died in police custody during the past 18 months are 29-year-old SASO secretary general Matetla Mohati (August 1976); Lawrence Ndzanga, former national secretary of the Railway and Harbor Workers Union (January 1977); 32-year-old Luke Mazwembe, a staff member of a Workers' Advice Bureau (September 1976); Dumisani Mbatha, 16, a Soweto student (Sept. 25, 1976), and Joseph Mdluli, a leader of the African National Congress (March 19, 1976).

Political trials have become commonplace and involve both men and women from both ANC and PAC; as well as a wide variety of public or semi-open organizations. The longest trial ever held under the terrorism act ended earlier this year, when 9 members of SASO and/or the BPC were sentenced to six years in prison for organizing a rally to celebrate Frelimo's victory in Mozambique.

What has been described as the most significant political trial in many years ended last month in Pretoria, with reports that nine of 12 defendants had been convicted of recruiting for the ANC. Neither the names nor the sentences have been published.

Although the possibility for above-ground revolutionary work remains limited, new tactics are being evolved to deal with the repression. When the entire leadership of the Soweto Students Representative Council was detained on June 12, after four previous sets of officers had been detained or exiled, the group announced that all future leaders will remain clandestine. Blacks have begun forming smaller groups in the areas of demonstrations or memorial services, increasing the difficulties of police who try to break up all gatherings.

And spirits have remained high. An early SASO statement warned students against the frustrations inherent in a protracted struggle, predicting that victories would be sporadic and hard-won. Nevertheless, political trials are marked by packed observation galleries, freedom songs, chants and clenched fists.

The atmosphere was predicted by Steven Biko in a speech made several years ago: "Now we can sit and laugh at the inhumanity of our powerful masters, knowing only too well that they destroy themselves and not us with their insolent cynicism. We can watch and still not be moved to the reactionary type of anger. We have in us the will to live through these trying times."

Steven Biko's murder in this sense, amounts to one more act of self-destruction by the racist South African government.

In Black And White

Following are excerpts from a statement given in South Africa last December to Senator Dick Clark of Iowa by Steven Biko, that country's most influential black leader, who died Monday in detention after what the Government said was an eight-day hunger strike.

By Steven Biko

It has become pretty obvious to us that these are crucial years in the history of Azania [South Africa]. 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 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 toward 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 color, creed and race shall form no point of reference.

We rely not only on our own strength but also on the belief that the rest of the world views the African discrimination against, oppression and blatant exploitation of, the black majority by a minority as an unforgivable sin that cannot be pardoned by civilized 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 the 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 forever. 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.

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 of 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.

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 insure 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 them any form of recognition is gross insult to the black people of this country.

- America must insist on South Africa recognizing the need for legitimate non-Government-initiated platforms like the Black People's Convention. Equally, organizations 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 . . . and the integration of these people in the political process that shall shape things to come.

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.

Additional copies of reprints and "Congress Reacts to Biko's Death" leaflets available from Washington Office on Africa, 110 Maryland Ave., N.E. Washington, D.C. 20002 (202) 546-7961, at cost.