

Stephen Bantu Biko and his writings on Black Consciousness are a great inspiration to all progressive Africans within and outside the continent. In the next coming months we shall analyse the writings and political thoughts of these brilliant pan-Africanists. Steve Biko wrote various articles in a Newsletter under the topic "I write what I like" mostly on the philosophy of Black Consciousness. In our first instalment on Biko we look at his political philosophy in his article entitled "Black souls in white skins?"

The thinking in this article is still as relevant today as it was in apartheid South Africa as well as in other colonised countries. We have in the 21st century whites who falsely and yet wholeheartedly claim as did their other ancestors in the 20th century that they have always stood by blacks against white colonialism and oppression.

Biko incensed by this false white liberal philanthropy argues that: "Basically the South African white community is a homogenous community. It is a community of people who sit to enjoy a privileged position that they do not deserve, are aware of this, and therefore spend their time trying to justify why they are doing so."

Where differences in political opinion exist, they are in the process of trying to justify their position of privilege and their usurpation of power. The land reform programme in Zimbabwe exposed the white liberal mentality and also on whose side they really are.

The kith and kin issue silenced the white liberal rhetoric of siding with the down trodden poor African masses. The repossession of land by the poor peasants and urban dwellers in Zimbabwe enraged the white liberal community from London to Washington.

As Biko had observed in the 1970s whites are a homogenous group. Whether liberal or radical, whites share a similar mentality, of being a more superior and privileged group than the black man. They all enjoy overriding power over the African.

In the case of Zimbabwe's land reform programme they tried to justify their bitterness by hiding behind human rights abuses and also making special reference to property rights. Rousseau the French philosopher once questioned why the law on property rights had to be enacted whilst only a few people were propertied.

He strongly believed that such laws were to be passed when everyone in the community had at least a claim to some property. In South Africa the white liberals as had been seen by Biko are not at all willing to give away their privileged position in society as to uplift their so called "black brothers" from abject poverty.

These white liberals as well as the other radical whites will do anything, even going to war as to maintain and preserve their grip on the South African economy. As long as their interests and privileges are safeguarded, and as long the status quo is maintained, this group of liberal whites will always pretend to sympathise with the poor Africans shedding buckets and buckets of crocodile tears on trivial political issues concerning democracy and human rights which do not upset their white kith and kin's hold on economic power.

Biko further argues that as Africans we should be concerned with that curious bunch of nonconformists who explain their participation in negative terms: that bunch of "do-gooders" that goes under all sorts of names - liberals, leftists etc.

These are the people who argue that they are not responsible for white racism and the country's "inhumanity to the black man". These are the people who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks and therefore should be jointly involved in the black man's struggle for a place under the sun. In short, these are the people who say that they have black souls wrapped up in white skins.

Biko is very clear on the false generosity portrayed by this shameless group of whites. Twenty

first century Africa is full of these so called "big-hearted" and "kind" whites who are ready to forgo everything as to defend the political rights of Africans.

How disgusting it is that this group of white "do-gooders" is mostly concerned about political and not economic rights. There is hardly any white liberal from Cape to Cairo who has stood up against the inequitable distribution of resources amongst the disadvantaged majority blacks and the few privileged whites.

Land disputes between the Namibian, Kenyan, South African and Zimbabwean people against the white settlers have exposed the true colours of these white do-gooders. None of them is willing to challenge this colonial set up in defence of the marginalised Africans whose black souls they purport to have, enveloped in their white skins.

The nationalisation of mines debate in South Africa was met with a lot of fierce criticism and formidable resistance from the white world and their white controlled media houses and no single group of white liberals or leftists backed it. The Anglo-American Company which has a huge stake in South African mines welcomed the move as reassuring and encouraging.

The silence coming from the "black souls wrapped in white skins" is not surprising at all bearing in mind that these false "black souled whites" actually benefit immensely from their kith and kin's monopoly of capital and resources. Cote d'Ivoire's Gbagbo tested the bitter pill of French liberals as they ganged up against him with their radical kith and kin to remove him from power. Many myopic and blinkered Africans still believe that this group of white "do-gooders" is wholeheartedly concerned with the wretched condition in which most blacks find themselves in. Most Zimbabweans reeling under Western imposed sanctions should be in a better position to tell the whole of Africa if these so called "white-blacks" ever bothered to append their signatures on the anti-sanctions petition.

Very few whites added their signatures on this anti-sanctions petition showing whose side they really are. In any conflict situation in Africa these white liberals quickly call on their home countries to air-lift them to safety. Biko notes that these white liberals want to remain in good books with both the black and the white worlds.

They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalising all the complaints of the blacks while skilfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges. It is not in this 21st century, neither is it in the 22nd or next coming centuries that these "white skins with black souls" will ever change their chameleon tactics. Like in the old story of the bat, they claim to be either an animal or a bird. A good question to ask is, do these so called "white brothers" of the African truly feel the hardships the black man experiences in his daily life? Biko continues to argue that: "A game at which the liberals have become masters is that of deliberate evasiveness . . .

"If you ask him to do something like stopping to use segregated facilities or dropping out of varsity to work at menial jobs like all blacks or defying and denouncing all provisions that make him privileged you always get the answer - but that's unrealistic."

How many of these do-gooders joined the liberation struggles in Africa as a way of showing solidarity with the blacks in dismantling the evil colonial system? How many of them joined blacks in violent protests and demonstrations against their white kith and kin's unjustified iron fist rule?

How many of them are asking for genuine land reforms in South Africa, Namibia and Kenya? How many of them are calling for the removal of sanctions in Zimbabwe? How many of them relinquished the luxuries of suburban life to live with the wretched Africans in the ghettos?

The list of unanswered questions is too long. Biko argues that this serves to illustrate the fact

that no matter what a white man (liberal) does - the passport to privilege - will always put him ahead of the black man. Thus in the ultimate analysis no white person (liberal) can escape being part of the oppressor camp.

This clearly shows the disgruntlement that comes from the liberal camp whenever an African government proposes or comes up with policies that seek to empower the majority blacks. Resistance to nationalisation of mines and industries, black economic empowerment and indigenisation programmes is coming from both white liberal and radical camps.

Biko strongly warns the white liberals that they must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone: that the blacks do not need a go-between in the struggle for their own emancipation. (Let blacks solve their own problems rather than having them solved by foreigners.) No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness. Rather, all true liberals should realise that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society. It is this white society that keeps on undermining policies intended to benefit the majority blacks, and the onus is now on all those who claim to have "black souls wrapped in white skins", to fiercely oppose and fight against such elitist attitudes based on monopoly over resources and wealth.

Despite these white liberal groups, there are also blacks who have been incorporated in this false "black-white" brotherhood. Biko is quick to point out that such a relationship is actually a perfect example of what years of white oppression have done to some blacks.

These blacks have been made to feel inferior for so long that for them it is comforting to drink tea, wine or beer with whites who seem to treat them as equals. Biko continues that this serves to boost their own ego to the extent of making them feel slightly superior to those blacks who do not get similar treatment from whites.

These, according to Biko, are the sort of blacks who are a danger to the community. Wining and dining with one's former oppressor is common from Cape to Cairo. There are quite a lot of "black skins in white masks" amongst us. Weren't Zimbabwe's economic sanctions instigated by such a group? Wasn't a black South African Minister in the forefront of demonising the nationalisation agenda?

Whatever the justification for such deeds the stubborn answer still remains - we have black traitors (uncle Toms) in our midst who are used to defend white interests. Let Africa be warned!

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