



## The Testimony Of Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa

*Steve Biko , Millard Arnold (Editor)*

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In May 1976, nine Blacks were arrested in South Africa and charged with terrorism for having 'thoughts' unacceptable to the regime. Bantu Stephen Biko, that country's most important Black leader, stepped forward to testify on their behalf and thus broke the ban on his public speaking.

In the late 1960s, Biko had founded the Black Consciousness movement, which called for the psychological and cultural liberation of the Black mind as a precondition to political freedom; the movement spread rapidly among students and the masses, and his goal of using group pride to break the strangle hold of White oppression was partly realized by the time that his colleagues were placed on trial.

Biko's courageous and delicate testimony, recorded here in the dramatic format of direct and cross examination, explores almost every issue in South Africa and..shows something of Biko's brilliance, humor, vision and quickness of mind.

This was to be his last public statement. In Sept. 1977, Bantu Stephen Biko was murdered in a South African jail.

## **The Testimony Of Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa Details**

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## Lisa says

The South African Terrorism Act was the reason I initially picked up this book. It was worse than the Patriot Act, but the Patriot Act is clearly modeled after it. The difference here is that the South African system of law was more restrictive to begin with: no Bill of Rights, and Parliament "may make any encroachment it pleases upon the life, liberty , or property of any individual subject to its sway, and it is the function of the courts of law to enforce its will" (Introduction, p. xxviii.)

The similarities to our Patriot Act: Detention without being charged with a crime and with no right of habeus corpus, and no recourse to the courts. Freedom of speech is curtailed. Any statement which "embarrasses the state" could be considered an act of terrorism. Indeed, "any act" could be an act of terrorism.

A person could be convicted of terrorism if s/he "with intent to endanger the maintenance of law and order in the Republic or elsewhere, commits any act or attempts to commit any act." This broad definition of terrorism allows people to be labeled as terrorists merely for writing a pamphlet, which is exactly what happened to Biko and to the other members of SASO and the BCP that were defendants in the trial chronicled in the pages of this book.

The Terrorism Act was clearly a perversion of the dictionary definition of terrorism.

Terrorism is defined as "the intentional use or threat to use violence against civilians and non-combatants "in order to achieve political goals"[1:]. This tactic of political violence is intended to intimidate or cause terror[2:] for the purpose of "exerting pressure on decision making by state bodies." [1:] The term "terror" is largely used to indicate clandestine, low-intensity violence that targets civilians and generates public fear. Thus "terror" is distinct from asymmetric warfare, and violates the concept of a common law of war in which civilian life is regarded." Definition from Wikipedia.

Clearly, writing a pamphlet directed at the South African State, even if it 'embarrasses' the state, is not terrorism. Biko's accurate assessment that fear is behind its labeling as terrorism, the white fear of reprisal for the inequities of Apartheid, leads to these deeply draconian laws, just as they do in the United States. Although I don't think our fears are so much tied up with whiteness per se, as much as our economic system and our way of life. Which probably does have something to do with racial privilege, although the lines aren't as clearly drawn as they were in Apartheid South Africa. Our African American president notwithstanding.

I suppose the reason this was interesting to me at all is that most Americans can agree on the fact that Apartheid South Africa was bad. They can agree that Nazi Germany was bad. But they can't see those parallels at home. I wanted to compare the legislation that made repression under Apartheid rule possible to our own Anti-Terrorist legislation, and there are striking parallels, with strikingly similar consequences.

Biko died from head wounds sustained from blows incurred during an interrogation in a South African jail. He was charged with disobeying his banning order. He had no legal rights once detained. He was much like those detained under the Patriot Act at Guantanamo, or elsewhere.

I gave this book four stars because it is merely the transcript of a criminal trial with an introduction

discussing the trial, a post-script of inquest into Biko's death, and a reprint of Biko's pamphlet: I Write What I Like. Perhaps the saddest part is that Biko's philosophy was not really one of violent reprisal, but of helping Black people to become self-sufficient, to see their own worth, and to become literate. He was a follower of Popular Education theorist Paolo Friere. (They misspell his name in the court transcript as "Paul Lafrere") This was a great threat to the South African state, which depended on the passive acceptance by Black South Africans that they were worthless and deserved to be maltreated. This idea was a bigger threat than any bomb. And that is the danger of Anti-Terrorist legislation - it can and is used to target even non-violent resistance in a very violent manner.

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### **Stephen Robert Collins says**

I read this in hospital back in the early eighty's but unlikely some sod stole it. The sister on the ward.  
This dark horror auto big of man who stud up to the white bastards

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