



# Stephen Bantu Biko

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/stephen-bantu-biko>

## Synopsis:

Member of the SRC at University of Natal (Non-European section), first president of SASO, Chair of SASO Publications, Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) leader, banned person, political prisoner, killed in police detention

Stephen (Steve) Bantu Biko was not alone in forging the [Black Consciousness Movement](#) (BCM); he was nevertheless its most prominent leader, who with others guided the movement of student discontent into a political force unprecedented in the history of South Africa. Biko and his peers were responding to developments that emerged in the high phase of apartheid, when the [Nationalist Party](#) (NP), in power for almost two decades, was restructuring the country to conform to its policies of separate development. The NP went about untangling what little pockets of integration and proximity there were between White, Black, Coloured and Indian people, by creating new residential areas, new parallel institutions such as schools, universities and administrative bodies, and indeed, new 'countries', the tribal homelands.

The students that launched the [South Africa Students Organisation](#) (SASO) belonged to a generation that resisted the process of strengthening apartheid, in any manner they could.

Biko's rise to prominence is inextricably tied to the development of the BCM.

## Childhood and Schooling

Stephen (Steve) Bantu Biko was born in Tylden in the Eastern Province (now Eastern Cape) on 18 December 1946, the son of Mzingaye Biko and Nokuzola Macethe Duna, one of their five children.

Mzingaye for a while worked as a policeman, and he later became a clerk in the King William's Town Native Affairs office. A relatively educated man, he had enrolled at the University of South Africa (UNISA), the distance-learning university, but did not complete enough courses to get his law degree before he died. The family moved to King William's Town, Eastern Cape and in 1948 to Ginsberg Township, an area designated for Black people living in King Williams Town. The Bikos eventually had their own house in Zaula Street in the Brownlee section of Ginsberg.

Mzingaye died suddenly in 1950, and his mother raised the children on her own, working as a cook at Grey's Hospital. Biko was four when his father died.

Steve's brother Khaya started a rugby club called Sea Lions, which later morphed into the Star of Hope rugby club. Khaya was well-read and well-spoken, probably a result of his love of newspapers. He became a reporter for the school newspaper at Forbes Grant School, and got involved with the local branch of the [Pan Africanist Congress](#) (PAC), a political tendency which had a strong presence in the area. After coming under the influence of Malcolm Dyani, who was

also at Forbes Grant, Khaya was made the secretary of the local branch, and he tried to use the Star of Hope rugby club to recruit people into the PAC.

Steve, who was living in Cathcart before the family moved to the house in Zaula Street, was brought home when the family moved in. Steve was known as a joker by his friends and schoolmates, Zinzo Gulwa, Ndikho Moss, Siphon Makwedini and Siphiso Ceko. Around 1952 (the exact date varies from source to source), he went to Charles Morgan Higher Primary School when he started Standard Three (Grade Five). His teacher, Damsie Monaheng, who remembered him as a naughty boy who was always barefoot, recommended that he be promoted to Standard Five, so he skipped Standard Four. Although his friends never saw him study, he was one of the brightest kids in the class, and he would help the other kids when they did not understand their lessons.

Steve passed Standard Six in 1959 and in 1960 he went on to Forbes Grant, a school through which many passed to become prominent figures in post-apartheid South Africa. At Forbes, Steve eventually befriended Larry Bekwa, who had been expelled from Lovedale College after he took part in a strike protesting against South Africa's becoming a republic in 1961. Steve proved to be a studious high school student, excelling in mathematics and English. In 1962, at the age of 16, Steve and Larry completed their Junior Certificate (Grade Ten).

Steve then went to Lovedale, where Khaya was already a student. However, in April, Steve was taken into custody by the police, who came to the school to arrest Khaya. The police took both brothers to King William's Town, 60km away, and Khaya was charged for being a member of [Pogo](#), the armed wing of the PAC. He was given a sentence of two years, with 15 months suspended, and served his term at Fort Glamorgan jail near East London.

Steve was released and returned home, but he ran away from Ginsberg to live with his friend Larry Bekwa in Peddie (Eastern Cape) for the rest of the year. Nevertheless, he continued going to classes at Lovedale, where he became friends with [Barney Pityana](#), who was at the school on an Andrew Smith bursary. The political tensions at Lovedale were palpable, as Steve arrived at the school soon after [Thabo Mbeki](#) had been expelled, following strikes by students. Following Khaya's arrest, Steve was interrogated by the police and subsequently expelled from Lovedale after only attending for three months. This incident inculcated in Steve a "strong resentment toward White authority", which would shape his political career.

Khaya was barred from attending any school after his release from prison, so he began to work as a clerk for a law firm. Concerned about his younger brother's education, he wrote to various schools and got Steve accepted at St Francis College (a Catholic boarding School outside Durban) in Marianhill in Natal (now kwaZulu-Natal) in 1964, where he began doing Form IV A. By now, after his brush with the police, Steve had become politicised. Khaya remembered:

'Steve was expelled for absolutely no reason at all. But in retrospect I welcome the South African government's gesture of exposing a really good politician. I had unsuccessfully tried to get Steve interested in politics. The police were able to do in one day what had eluded me for years. This time the great giant was awakened.'

Steve was in illustrious company at Marianhill, and he thrived, becoming the vice chair of the St Francis College's Literary and Debating Society. He became friends with [Jeff Baqwa](#), who described Steve's burgeoning analytical and political capacities during a discussion about Rhodesia's (now Zimbabwe) unilateral declaration of independence [UDI]:

'We needed clarity on UDI in Rhodesia, and that's where Steve shone!' and when Churchill died Steve was there to describe the political implications. He was able to make all these connections and link them to what was going on in South Africa.'

Steve underwent the traditional Xhosa initiation rites at his uncle's house in Zwelitsha, King Williams Town in December 1964, 'and returned to St Francis as a man in 1965', according to the author Xolela Mangcu.

## University and NUSAS

After matriculating from St Francis, with very good grades, Steve was admitted to Durban Medical School at the University of Natal Non European section (UNNE) at the beginning of 1966. Known as Wentworth, Steve lived in the Alan Taylor Residence, the segregated living quarters for Black students at Natal University (now known as the University of kwaZulu-Natal–UKZN).

The Black Section had its own Students Representative Council (SRC), which was a member of the [National Union of South African Students](#) (NUSAS). Steve was elected to the SRC in his first year, and he became involved in NUSAS politics, attending the annual NUSAS conference for the first time. But even before he went to the conference, he was engaging in debates about the role of NUSAS, especially since White students dominated the body, there being more Whites than Blacks at South African universities at the time. [The African National Congress –ANC](#)-aligned African Students Association (ASA) was in favour of remaining in NUSAS, while the PAC-aligned African Students union of South Africa (ASUSA) was in favour of breaking off from the supposedly national student body. Besides their numerical superiority, White students also dominated the agenda and policy-making.

Steve befriended [Aubrey Mokoape](#), who had been involved with the PAC, and they engaged in frequent debates about the NUSAS question. Mokoape was against remaining in NUSAS, while Steve argued that it was useful to belong to the organisation – because of its resources, if not for any other reason.

### **The NUSAS Conference of July 1967**

The young Steve went to the NUSAS conference at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape in July 1967, his second appearance at the annual gathering. The Wentworth students travelled to Grahamstown by train, and debated the affiliation issue during their trip, resolving to pull out of NUSAS if the organisers adhered to apartheid legislation by housing the Black students separately.

Biko recalled the circumstances while giving evidence at the [SASO/BPC trial in 1975](#):

‘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.’

In a letter to SRC presidents written in February 1970 after Steve had been elected president of SASO, he wrote:

‘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.’

The students were indeed fed and housed separately, in accordance with the [Separate Amenities Act](#). The Black students were aggrieved, but when the NUSAS executive condemned the University for the Arrangements, the Black students were divided over whether to withdraw their participation.

When the conference opened the next day, Steve stood up to deliver his regional report, and he did so in isiXhosa, to drive home the point about Black students’ alienation from the NUSAS agenda. The President of the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) SRC, Robin Margo, proposed a motion to condemn the University Council, which the conference passed.

Steve then proposed that the conference be suspended, because the NUSAS organisers had known in advance that the students would be housed separately. After a long discussion, his motion was rejected.

The Black students felt disadvantaged by their small number, by the use of English as the medium of the conference, and by the distance between their concerns and those of the White students. Steve and his fellow Black students walked out.

## Caucusing

Steve left the conference and went to Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape to see Barney Pityana, who had just attended the launch of the [University Christian Movement](#) (UCM) in Rosettenville, in Johannesburg, Transvaal (now Gauteng). A law student at Fort Hare University, Pityana was one of many students later expelled from Fort Hare, in 1969.

The UCM was led by Colin Collins and Basil Moore, both radical priests who introduced the ideas of Black Theology to South Africans. They forged links with the South African Council of Churches (SACC), with the [Christian Institute](#) (CI) and with the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). The UCM would play an important role in facilitating the birth of SASO.

Steve travelled throughout the country to caucus for the creation of a Blacks-only student body. Pityana was initially opposed to the idea, but was swayed by Biko, after which he became a staunch supporter of the idea and Biko's most important lieutenant.

## Stutterheim, 1968

At the UCM conference in Stutterheim in July 1968, Steve and his Black comrades were faced with a situation similar to the one at the Rhodes conference a year earlier. The students had to leave the venue after 72 hours, travel to a Black township, and then return – all this so they would not break the law that allowed Blacks to be in a White area for a maximum of 72 hours. The move irritated Biko, who felt it was 'hypocritical'.

After the conference Steve, Pityana and others met at Biko's home in Ginsberg, 35km from Stutterheim, to discuss the launch of a Blacks-only body. Steve was tasked with the mobilisation of Black students from all the Black campuses.

They went to Fort Hare to attend a meeting of Black Christian student bodies where Basil Moore was to be the main speaker, but Moore was not allowed to speak, and Steve was asked to be the main speaker. The meeting was meant to see the establishment of a UCM branch at Fort Hare, which did take place, but more importantly, students there resolved to join in the formation of the [South African Students Organisation](#) (SASO).

At Fort Hare students were polarised between those who wanted to re-establish the SRC and those opposed to the move, with Justice Moloto supporting the former and Pityana the latter. Moloto became the president of UCM, and was thus well-positioned to provide financial aid for SASO when it emerged.

Despite these developments, Steve was still open to NUSAS, hoping to form a pressure group within the national organisation rather than severing ties with it.

Meanwhile, Biko was living at the Alan Taylor Residence, where his close friends included Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Charles Sibisi, Chapman Palweni and Goolam 'Gees' Abram, an Indian medical student from Benoni, east of Johannesburg. Later the group was joined by Ben Ngubane and Ben Mgulwa.

Through Vuyelwa Mashalaba Biko met [Mamphela Ramphele](#), who began her second year medical studies at UNNE in 1968.

## Wits University Congress 1968

For the NUSAS congress at Wits University in 1968, the president of the Wits SRC, John Kane Berman, ensured that problems regarding accommodation would not be repeated, and the Congress was largely uneventful, according to Biko.

But when an Afrikaner student delivered his report in Afrikaans, Gees Abram delivered a report in Urdu, while Steve delivered his in isiXhosa. When, at the conclusion of the proceedings, the White students sang the South African anthem, *Die Stem*, the Black students sang *Nkosi Sikelele I Afrika*. Duncan Innes, a close friend of Biko, was elected president of NUSAS after Biko nominated him for the position.

Steve cultivated radical White student leaders such as Duncan Innes, who he congratulated when the latter was elected president of NUSAS. In a letter to Innes on 22 August 1968, Biko wrote: 'I would like to convey to you congratulations from our local committee on your election as President and a declaration of support and full co-operation during your term of office.'

In November 1968, Steve again assured Innes that he was not in favour of disaffiliation from NUSAS, but his plan to get SASO going continued.

Steve sent out invitations to all the Black student bodies he had been in contact with, on 14 October 1968, asking them to attend the launch of SASO from 1-3 December that year. The students met at Marianhill in December 1968, and officially founded SASO.

### **SASO's founding Congress**

SASO's founding congress was held at Turfloop, Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo) in July 1969, and Steve was elected the first president, with Petrus Machaka as deputy president.

Steve's presidential address was titled 'SASO – Its Role, its Significance and its Future', and as the title suggests, he spelt out the reasons the organisation came into being, and what role it was meant to play. Steve spoke of the organisation being forged by those treading a middle path, between Black militants who rejected any links with NUSAS and White students who saw the organisation as rejecting the liberal stance towards multiracial interaction. At this stage, Steve emphasised that SASO was not aiming to replace NUSAS as a national student organisation, and that they accepted the role of NUSAS in that capacity. But he also said:

What SASO objects to is the dichotomy between principle and practice so apparent among members of that organisation (NUSAS). While very few would like to criticise NUSAS policy and principles as they appear on paper, one tends to get worried at all the hypocrisy practised by the members of that organisation. This serves to make the non-White members feel unaccepted and insulted in many instances.

Steve went on to talk about the fact that NUSAS was dominated by White students, both in terms of numbers and leadership, in a country where Blacks were in the majority – in 1969 there were 27,000 White students at universities, while Black university enrolment totalled 3,000.

Steve also feared there would be a swing to the right within NUSAS, and that the influence of Black students had to be brought to bear on the organisation. For these and other reasons SASO would not become an affiliate of NUSAS. Indeed, NUSAS had been undergoing stormy conflicts from the beginnings of apartheid: its leaders were far more radical than the rank and file members and in 1964, [Jonty Driver](#) delivered a speech that reflected the schism, and there was a reaction that saw more moderate students begin to edge out the radicals. Ultimately the BCM exerted a radicalising influence on NUSAS, with many later leaders drawing on the ideas of the Black militants.

Around this time Biko began to have a romantic relationship with Mamphela Ramphele, who was becoming increasingly conflicted as she was betrothed to Dick Mmabane, whom she had met while in high school. With their two families already making wedding arrangements, Ramphele got married to Mmabane in December 1969. Biko was devastated.

### **The split from NUSAS, 1970**

Steve did not attend the NUSAS conference at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1969, as he was busy travelling to the Black campuses trying to caucus support for SASO. But the Black student leaders who did attend embarked on a walkout. [Neville Curtis](#), far more radical than previous White Presidents, was elected President of NUSAS for the 1969-70 terms. Together with [Horst Kleinschmidt](#), [Paula Ensor](#) and others, he engaged in radical activities that eventually resulted in all of them being banned. Sheila Lapinsky, Paul Pretorius, Clive Keegan, Chris Wood, and Philip le Roux were also banned.

Steve began a relationship with Paula Ensor, who fully supported the creation of SASO. Writing about Biko and SASO years later, she said:

'The withdrawal of SASO and the transformation of NUSAS were outward manifestations of Biko's influence on White student politics. But his influence was also felt in more personal ways, especially by students based in Durban at that time, as I was"! For a small group of White students, SASO represented the re-emergence of radical politics and needed to be actively supported.'

Steve attended the 1970 NUSAS congress in Eston, Natal, as an observer and as a delegate from SASO. Paul Pretorius proposed a motion that NUSAS recognise SASO 'as the body best able to represent the views and needs of Black students in South Africa'. The motion also recommended closer ties between SASO and NUSAS, with 'maximum contact and co-operation', and confirmed that both organisations were committed to non-racialism even if they had different methods of achieving this state. The motion caused an uproar, with the Wits and UCT delegations threatening to walk out of the congress. While the president, Neville Curtis, tried to foster a compromise, the majority of the students rejected the proposition. At this point, Ensor embarked on a piece of anti-apartheid theatre that stunned the congress: she went across to Biko and sat on his lap, effectively announcing that she and Steve were involved in an illegal relationship under apartheid law.

In his personal life, Biko had met Nontsikelelo 'Ntsiki' Mashalaba, a cousin of Vuyelwa, and they married in December 1970 in King William's Town at the Magistrate's Court. They held a celebration at his mother's house. Their first child, a son, Nkosinathi, was born in 1971.

### **SASO Takes Off**

In July 1970, at the 1st General Students Council of SASO, Barney Pityana was elected President, and Steve was elected Chair of SASO Publications. Biko began to publish articles using the pseudonym Frank Talk, under the heading 'I Write What I like', in the SASO newsletters. In the August/September newsletter, he published the piece 'Black Souls in White Skins'. After painting a picture of a more or less homogeneous White community, he turns his attention to the 'Black souls in White skins', '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.'. Steve goes on to set out a history of liberal involvement in Black politics, further honing his critique of South African liberalism.

By now the need to appease NUSAS was dispensed with, and the SASO leaders voted to withdraw from NUSAS, refusing to recognise the body as the national student body.

Mamphela Ramphele has described the years from 1969 to 1971 as 'the trial period " marked by experimentation with community projects in and around Durban'. The students embarked on a series of community-upliftment projects, assisting squatters near the Phoenix settlement, north of Durban, operating a clinic outside Wentworth, south Durban and launching literacy, health and agricultural programmes. These projects continued over the next few years, and helped not only to improve material conditions, but to instil a sense of self-empowerment and self determination, one of the central aims of the BCM.

At the 2nd General Student Council in July 1971 the students set out the aims of Black Consciousness. The students passed a resolution on Black Theology, and rejected the Christianity of the White electorate, which they saw as

upholding the structures of oppression. By now SASO was also considering the launch of other bodies, such as national political movements and trade unions.

In the December 1971 holiday period, students conducted a survey in the Winterveldt area near Pretoria, to gather statistics and knowledge that would inform community development projects. They also helped at the Mabopane private clinic and studied gathering places such as bus and taxi ranks, and informal markets. In the north, Turfloop students helped at the nearby Monkwe clinic and developed important relations with the surrounding community.

Meanwhile, an event that was to project SASO onto the national stage occurred in April 1972 at Turfloop. [Onkgopotse Abram Tiro](#) was expelled after delivering a speech containing a scathing critique of [Bantu education](#) and racist practices at universities and in society in general. Students embarked on a solidarity strike, boycotting their classes, until many were expelled. When they were allowed to return to campus, SASO was suspended, and was only revived in 1974 by [Pandelani Nefolovhodwe](#) and his comrades, but they were forced to base themselves off-campus.

At the 3rd General Student Council in July 1972, SASO president [Temba Sono](#) delivered a speech that recommended better relations with Whites and with some homeland leaders, provoking outrage among the students. Steve introduced a motion of censure, arguing that the speech was 'contradictory to SASO policy' and to the spirit of the policy. Pityana proposed that Sono be expelled from the organisation.

The 3rd council also saw the question of armed struggle hotly debated, with some, led by Keith Mokoape, pushing for SASO to join the military struggle. They were told to 'search for other grazing lands' as SASO was determined to remain an above-ground organisation.

On the other hand, the council took strong positions against apartheid institutions, particularly the Bantustan/homelands system, and Bantu education.

## **Black People's Convention (BPC)**

During the period from 1970, SASO's leaders were beginning to consider the limitations of organisations confined to student membership, and the idea of a broader community formation took root, one which would result in the launch of the [Black People's Convention](#) (BPC). Members of six organisations met in Bloemfontein in April 1971 to discuss the issue, including leaders of the Interdenominational African Ministers' Association (IDAMASA) and the Association for the Advancement of African People of South Africa (ASSECA). A steering committee was established at a subsequent meeting in August of the same year, with editor of *The World* and ASSECA President MT Moerane tasked with drawing up a constitution. After a report-back meeting at the Donaldson Community Centre in Orlando in December 1971, a second steering committee was established under the leadership of [Drake Koka](#), which met in Lenasia, south of Soweto, on 13 January 1972.

Throughout these deliberations, there was debate about the nature and function of the proposed body: some saw it as a simple umbrella body that served a co-ordinating function, while others wanted BPC to act as a vanguard body, leading the people in a thoroughly political project, ultimately to take power. Steve was somewhere in between, and he was concerned that decisions were being made without consulting other members of the Black community, especially in Indian and Coloured communities. It was important to Steve to add substance to the non-racial nature of the Black as defined by the BCM.

Biko approached [Saths Cooper](#) and [Strini Moodley](#) to join the second steering committee, which met again in Dube and later at Wentworth in May 1972. After a number of preparatory meetings, BPC was launched at its first national conference in Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria, in December 1972. With 1,400 delegates from 145 organisations present, the conference proposed to 'unite all South African Blacks into a political movement, which would seek liberation and emancipation of Black people from both psychological and physical oppression'.

From its beginnings, Steve was active in the affairs of BPC. More formally, he was employed as BPC's full-time youth coordinator.

### **Black Community Programmes (BCP)**

The [Black Consciousness Movement](#) (BCM), together with the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas), set up a branch for community activities, called [Black Community Programmes](#) (BCP), in January 1972. [Bennie Khoapa](#), a social worker at the YMCA, was elected to drive the organisation. With funding from [Rev. Beyers Naude's](#) Christian Institute, the BCP embarked on a series of projects, including community development programmes in King Williamstown, Winterveldt and other areas.

Biko, after quitting his medical studies in August 1972, was heavily active in BCP activities. He described the rationale of the organisation thus:

“Essentially to answer [the] problem”!that the Black man is a defeated being who finds it very difficult to lift himself up by his boot strings. He is alienated”!He is made to live all the time concerned with matters of existence, concerned with tomorrow”!Now, we felt that we must attempt to defeat and break this kind of attitude and instil once more a sense of dignity within the Black man. So what we did was to design various types of programmes, present these to the Black community with an obvious illustration that these are done by the Black people for the sole purpose of uplifting the Black community. We believed that we teach people by example” (Biko in Bizos, 1998: 43)

Mamphela Ramphela, who was one of Biko's main lieutenants in BCP, wrote:

The Eastern Cape office was set up in response to Steve Biko's banning and restriction to that area in 1973. Offices in the Transvaal and Natal followed in 1974 and 1975 respectively, but the Eastern Cape emerged as the dominant region in terms of projects and the calibre of staff it employed.' (p160-1, *Bounds of Possibility*)

Importantly, BCP became the publishing arm of the BCM, producing *Black Review*, annual reviews and other publications, such as *Creativity in Development* and *Black Perspectives*, as well as [Black Viewpoint](#), through Ravan Press, an arm of Spro-cas.

### **Bannings: State reaction to BCM's successes**

The BCM was becoming a presence in the country and not only at tertiary institutions – they were visible in the media, at schools, at community theatres, and in events that broke the pattern of quiescence that followed the banning of the ANC and PAC. But the movement also began to suffer casualties, with Tiro perhaps the first of these when he was expelled from the Turfloop University.

Another setback came with the tragic death of [Mthuli Shezi](#) in December 1972, when he was pushed onto the path of an oncoming train after defending Black women who were being abused by a railway official. Although not an official response to BC, the incident demonstrates the challenges BC activists faced in trying to achieve normal relations in an abnormal society. What Shezi did was simply to halt one of countless incidences of everyday brutality that the Black population had become accustomed to, and which BC was trying to reverse.

BPC's plans for myriad sectorial affiliates – unions, women's organisations, school-based student representative councils, organisations dealing with theology, arts and culture, among others – presented a growing threat to the state's determination to implement the homeland policy and ensure that Blacks were not allowed to become anything more than 'temporary sojourners' in the cities and white areas.

In March 1973, [the state cracked down](#), banning Drake Koka and [Bokwe Mafuna](#), who were engaged in union projects. Biko and Pityana were banned in the same month. In August 1973, [Mosibudi Mangena](#) was sentenced to five years in

prison for allegedly recruiting two policemen to join the armed struggle. Tiro followed the way of Shezi when he was killed in January 1974 by a parcel bomb after he went into exile in Botswana, reflecting a new ruthlessness on the part of the security agencies.

The leaders who replaced those banned in March 1973 were in turn banned in August of the same year. However, those who replaced these leaders were themselves banned in October.

Nevertheless the BCM continued to exert a growing influence on the politics of the country, and some decisions brought further repression from the state. The Frelimo Rallies precipitated another huge confrontation between the state and the BCM (more on this below).

The growth, development and outlawing of the broader BCM, which cannot be dealt with in detail in this article, can be read [here](#). Suffice to say that Steve continued on a path that saw his involvement in the movement grow and develop in many directions.

## **Steve Biko: personal life, politics and return to the Eastern Cape**

Steve's medical studies suffered as a result of his political activism, and he was excluded from the medical school during the course of 1972. Having given up the idea of becoming a doctor, Steve enrolled for various courses at the distance-learning university, Unisa, and in 1973 he began studying law and political science, subjects more relevant to his political involvement.

Throughout this early period, Steve had been based in Natal, and the BCM had offices in Beatrice Street in the town centre.

By 1971 Ramphela's marriage had broken down, and she resumed her romantic relationship with Biko, who by now had a son, with his wife Ntsiki Mashalaba. The situation proved to be stressful for all concerned, and added to the pressures of their political activities.

The state banned Steve in March 1973 and confined him to the magisterial district of King William's Town. He returned to Ginsberg, and moved for a while into his mother's house in Leightonville, the address to which he was restricted by his banning order.

With Steve working for the Black Community Programmes, earning a stipend, the family relied on the income of Ntsiki, who had been the main breadwinner for some time. But with the move to Ginsberg, the apartheid authorities ensured that Ntsiki would not easily find a job, and the family struggled to make ends meet.

Steve asked Malusi Mpumlwana, who had been his constant companion in Durban, to join him in King William's Town to help set up an office for the BCM. Mpumlwana went, according to Lindy Wilson, 'thinking he could spare a couple of weeks. The weeks turned into months and years; in fact he never left.'

Steve met up with an old friend, Fikile Mlinda, and asked him to help in the establishment of a BPC branch in Ginsberg. They held their first meeting in St Andrews Church, where Anglican priest [David Russell](#) was based.

A core of strong comrades from all over the country attended the meeting, including Malusi Mpumlwana, [Mapetla Mohapi](#), [Peter Jones](#) and Tom Manthata. Mlinda was soon arrested, evidence that the security agencies were keeping a close eye on Steve's activities. But members of the local community were encouraged by the strong turnout, including the comrades from far-off regions.

The venue, the Anglican St Andrews Church, was provided by David Russell. Steve was drawn to Russell, who became his confidant. Russell had for some time been involved with people forcibly removed from Middelburg and Burgersdorp to Dimbaza, which was part of his parish. Russell had engaged in protests against the forced removals, in one instance

going on a fast to draw attention to the hunger of the people moved to a barren area with no infrastructure. But Russel moved from the area in December 1973, depriving Steve of a close and trusted friend.

Steve was also in frequent contact with [Father Aelred Stubbs](#), who had moved to Alice when he began serving at the Federal Seminary. Stubbs, an Anglican priest, came to South Africa to teach at St Peter's in Rosettenville, Johannesburg. He became a confidant, and Steve frequently wrote to him when Stubbs was moved back to Rosettenville in 1972.

Besides his BC comrades, Steve was lucky to have his family around him to provide a strong support system. His mother, Mamcete, and sisters Nobandile and Bukelwa all played a part in keeping not just Biko but his comrades in good health and spirits. The Biko family house was a gathering place for the movement, but also a place where they had meals, drank and enjoyed socialising.

Steve engaged in several projects in the area. BCP ran projects that created home industries, Njwaxa Home Industries being one of these. These were attempts, often successful, to create businesses and employment. Njwaxa manufactured leather goods and clothes, employing about 50 people in 1974. A further 70 people were employed by the Border Council of Churches, in collaboration with BCP.

Steve set up the Ginsberg Educational Fund, which provided bursaries for students, many of them going to Fort Hare University. The fund, run by Malusi and Thoko Mpumlwana, Nohle Mohapi and Charles Nqakula, grew to include recipients in other Eastern Cape areas.

Steve also helped revive the Ginsberg Creche to look after toddlers whose mothers needed to leave their homes to go out to work.

## **Zanempilo Clinic**

The Zanempilo Health Clinic, in Zinyoka village, 10km outside King William's Town, was established with the help of a donation from a South African citizen of German origin. Steve approached B ka T Tyamzashe, who asked Rev James Gawe to help. Steve and BCP were given permission to build the clinic on Gawe's church land. Steve had a good relationship with Tyamzashe, who was a composer of choral music which Steve was drawn to.

Zanempilo, which opened its doors in January 1975, became the nerve centre of BCM activities. Activists would converge on the site from all over the country, and Ramphela writes that it became a 'guesthouse for visitors from far and wide that came to see the project and consult with Steve over a range of issues. These visits increased as Steve's stature grew both nationally and internationally.'

## **Steve Biko and Donald Woods**

With the emergence of the BCM, several White commentators and institutions reacted to the development of what they saw as a separatist Black grouping that conformed to the wishes of apartheid plans for an intensified segregation. [Donald Woods](#), the editor of the East London based *Daily Despatch*, was one of these. Woods, an honorary president of NUSAS, published several pieces condemning SASO and the BCM for their rejection of Whites, arguing that the movement was doing exactly what apartheid prescribed. Increasingly irritated at Woods's disparaging comments and arguments for the kind of liberalism he was critical of, Steve sent Mamphela Ramphela to meet with Woods and set him straight on the true nature of the BCM.

The meeting is remembered differently by each of the two protagonists. Ramphela recounts that she explained what BC was all about and urged Woods to meet with Steve so the latter could explain the philosophy, strategy and practices of the BCM. Woods remembers a feisty, hot-headed woman who bullied him into a reconsideration of BC.

Woods met Steve sometime after Zanempilo opened its doors. The two hit it off, and became firm friends, with Woods and his family becoming frequent visitors to Zanempilo. Woods gave Steve a regular column in the *Daily Despatch*, but the articles went out under the name of Mapetla Mohapi, since Steve was banned and not allowed to publish anything. Mohapi was later arrested and killed while in detention.

### **The Frelimo Rallies and the BPC/SASO Trial**

With the first generation of BC leaders officially – but not effectively – prohibited from political activity, a second generation of leaders emerged, among them Muntu Myeza. Appointed SASO secretary general for 1974, Myeza came up with the idea of holding rallies to celebrate the transitional government of Frelimo, and the impending independence of Mozambique.

The students decided to hold rallies at Curries Fountain in Durban, and at Turfloop University in the north near Pietersburg (today Polokwane). The rallies were banned soon after they were announced, but Myeza and his colleagues were defiant, determined to hold the rallies nonetheless. Biko was cautious, arguing that they were putting the lives of supporters at risk. He was backed by Mapetla Mohapi and Malusi Mpumlwana, but the younger leaders ignored their advice, and the Curries Fountain rally went ahead, with Myeza addressing 5,000 people. At Turfloop, students clashed with the police.

The State's response was swift: 200 BCM activists were raided by the security police, and 13 leaders were put on trial. After charges against four of the leaders were dropped for various reasons, the State proceeded to put the remaining nine on trial: [Saths Cooper](#), Muntu Myeza, [Strini Moodley](#), [Patrick 'Terror' Lekota](#), Nchaupe Mokoape, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, Nkwenkwe Nkomo, Kaborone Sedibe and Zithulele Cindi. The trial, the State vs Cooper and eight others, became known as the SASO/BPC trial, and became a major political event in the history of resistance politics.

Steve was subpoenaed as a defence witness, and he appeared in the dock at the Pretoria Supreme Court from 3 May to 7 May, 1976 for an entire week. He was faced with a difficult task: he had to present Black Consciousness as a progressive anti-apartheid movement, but he had to take care not to provide the state with ammunition to find the defendants guilty of 'terrorism' or incitement to insurrection, which were the charges the state levelled against the accused.

This was the first time Steve spoke in public after being banned in March 1973.

According to Lindy Wilson:

The prosecutor constantly led arguments in which he attempted to connect BC, and those charged, with the politics of the banned movements and their leaders. Biko was called at the very time that the BPC was embarking on its unifying role aimed at making contact with those banned organisations, and his genius lay in the way in which he kept many balls in the air at once, not compromising, not intimidating and yet maintaining the attention of the judge. Not everything he said was exactly the way it was.

The country was gripped by the reports of Steve's testimony, which some analysts have described as a 'seminar on Black Consciousness'. Steve's friend Ben Khoapa said to Aelred Stubbs: 'Overnight, Steve became the toast of the Soweto shebeens. Here at last was the authentic voice of the people, not afraid to say openly what other Blacks think but are too frightened to say.'

The accused were all sentenced to terms ranging from five to six years on Robben Island – it is possible that they would have received harsher sentences were it not for Steve's testimony.

### **Steve Biko's Last Years: 1975-1977**

Steve was still highly active in the everyday operations of BCP, and he was frequently consulted on issues relating to the larger BC movement, with activists making trips from the larger centres to confer with him. He kept abreast of developments throughout the country, and his appearance at the SASO/BPC trial brought him to the attention of the international community. He became a leader that foreign diplomats sought out to get a picture of the political situation in South Africa.

In August 1975, Steve's elder sister Bukelwa died at the age of 33. A nurse at Fort Beaufort Mental Hospital, she came to Zanempilo complaining of chest pains and was sedated. But she returned home and died of a heart attack the next morning.

In 1975 Steve was arrested and detained for 137 days – but he was not charged or put on trial.

Meanwhile, BPC held its fourth national conference in King William's Town.

At the beginning of 1976, Biko's banning order was tightened, and he could no longer operate as the director of BCP, a responsibility that was passed on to Ramphele. To testify at the SASO/BPC trial in May, special arrangements were made as he had been subpoenaed by the defence.

Following his testimony at the SASO/BPC trial, students in Soweto, who had throughout the year been protesting against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, organised a huge protest on June 16, 1976. Police, confronted by thousands of angry school pupils opened fire, killing hundreds of pupils. The [Soweto youth uprising](#), and the police's brutal response, sent shockwaves throughout the world, and the apartheid regime was condemned even by its allies in the West.

A severe crackdown on BC activists followed the uprising. Mapetla Mohapi was arrested on 15 July 1976, and was killed three weeks later, a development that deeply disturbed Steve. Mpumlwana, MxolisiMvovo, [Thenjiwe Mtintso](#) and Thoko Mabanjwa were arrested in August. On 27 August 1976, at the height of the Soweto uprising, Steve was arrested and held in solitary confinement for 101 days.

Soon after his release, Biko met American Senator Dick Clark in December 1976, one of a string of diplomats who wanted to get a sense of Black thinking at the time. The chair of the Senate Sub-committee on Africa, Clark was an influential contact, but some BC leaders, especially those based in Cape Town, disapproved of the meeting with an American diplomat.

Steve was also close to the Australian diplomat Bruce Haigh, who often consulted Steve on political matters in South Africa, using the latter's insights to inform Australian policy towards South Africa.

Steve was thoroughly immersed in community activities, both formal and informal, simply helping whenever and however he could. When five boys were accused of burning down Forbes Grant School in 1977, he organised lawyers to defend them, but they lost the case and were sentenced to terms of five years on Robben Island. Among the lawyers Steve roped in was [Griffiths Mxenge](#).

But there was play as well as work. Biko enjoyed socialising with friends and people from the area. He frequented local shebeens, such as Getty's Place in the Tsolo section of Ginsberg, where he was on many occasions protected by the patrons when the security police came in search of him.

Steve was close to Sonwabo Yengo, who lived in Zaula Street, where they would have gumbas (parties), and where he made many female conquests. The group loved singing, and Steve in particular loved the song by Donny Hathaway, *To be Young, Gifted and Black*, but they also sang struggle songs and choral classics. His favourite freedom struggle song, according to Xolela Mangcu, contained the lyrics: 'We are leaders of Africa. Rise up, leaders, and let us move forward.'

When Yengo last saw Steve, he was bruised and limping, and told his friend he had been beaten by White men – it is unclear if they were policemen or ordinary people. He said to Sonwabo: ‘These Whites are really beating me now, Tshawe. But I am fighting back. But they are going to kill me at the rate they are going.’

## Attempts to forge unity between the various tendencies

Perhaps the most significant activities Steve was involved in at this time were attempts to forge some kind of working unity between the various liberation organisations, especially the ANC, the PAC and the [Non European Unity Movement](#) (NEUM). Steve began his efforts sometime in the mid- 1970s – Malusi Mpumlwana and Mapetla Mohapi were especially active in these attempts, and it later emerged that Mohapi had recruited people into the ANC, among them [Brigitte Mabandla](#).

According to Lindy Wilson, Mpumlwana and Mapetla were driving from Pretoria to Natal after Mapetla was released from detention in 1975 when they ‘debated the role that BPC might now play. An idea grew that it (BPC) should explore its potential as a catalyst for uniting the liberation movements. This idea emerged for several different reasons: the logic that BC’s evolving ideology should develop from psychological unity to political unity; the fact that , in spite of the bannings, SASO and BPC still had mobility and continued to operate nationally on the ground; the recognition that the ANC and PAC were the established political movements and that BPC would not act as a third force but would endeavour to create a national consciousness involving all existing historical political movements against the common enemy.’

The idea was shared with a select group of BC leaders: Thami Zani, Tom Manthata and Kenny Rachidi among them. Steve met with banned PAC leader [Robert Sobukwe](#), and also with [Griffiths Mxenge](#), at the time an underground ANC operative. Both were sympathetic to the idea, and agreed to speak to their counterparts.

But some BC leaders were already moving to the view that the ANC was paramount and that the BPC should act to realise the aims of the [Freedom Charter](#). At a workshop in Mafikeng (then Mafeking) in May 1976, [Diliza Mji](#), Norman Dubazana, [Nkosazana Dlamini](#) and [Mafika Pascal Gwala](#) argued against Steve’s vision of BPC playing a central role in unifying the movements.

There were plans for Steve to meet with ANC leader [Oliver Tambo](#). [Harry Nengwekhulu](#), who had left the country after he was banned in March 1973, was tasked with securing a meeting with the leader of the ANC in exile. The plan was for Steve to leave the country for the meeting, perhaps through an invitation from a Western government. But the logistics and security issues proved too difficult, and several planned meetings had to be cancelled. According to Mark Gevisser, in his biography of [Thabo Mbeki](#), Steve was to meet with Mbeki as well, but the security situation was not conducive.

Barney Pityana was also set to meet with Tambo after he left South Africa in 1978. He was to be accompanied by Ben Khoapa to Lusaka for the meeting, which had been arranged by Craig Williamson, chief of the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF). Pityana and Khoapa met in Lesotho, where they were told that they would meet with Tambo in Lesotho, flying via Bloemfontein.

They realised a trap had been laid. Indeed, the next day the newspapers, informed by security police, published a story saying the two had been detained, when in fact they never boarded the plane and abandoned the mission. This episode revealed that Craig Williamson was indeed an apartheid spy.

In 1977, Steve was made the honorary president of BPC. Mpumlwana recounts the role Steve was to play in forging a broad movement together with the exiled organisations:

It is here that you begin the process of looking out to negotiate with other organisations. It is here that you begin to see the need of having some kind of central figure. That’s why we decided to make Steve the honorary president of the BPC. Before that he had no formal authority, it was all about charisma and the influence he had as an individual.

The State was desperate to prevent relations between the BCM and the exiled organisations, and Steve was questioned about supposed contacts when he was detained. This partly explains why Biko was detained so often during the last two years of his life. In March 1977 Biko was arrested and once again released. Mpumlwana was also arrested in March, and held for four months. Mamphela Ramphela was banished to Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo).

With so many comrades neutralised, the plan for unity talks faltered. Steve asked [Peter Jones](#), a BPC activist based in the Western Cape, to travel to King William's Town to help run the local BPC offices. It was a fateful move. Jones and Steve, in consultation with their colleagues, decided to meet [Neville Alexander](#) in Cape Town, a trip that would end with the pair being detained.

## The Trip to see Neville Alexander

Soon after midnight on the morning of 17 August 1977, Steve and Jones set out for Cape Town. Steve wanted to meet with Neville Alexander and with his BC counterparts in the city. The latter, led by [Johnny Issel](#), had been critical of Steve's meeting with Dick Clark and of economic policies Steve had contemplated.

The pair arrived in Cape Town by 10am, and after resting at Jones's home, they drove to meet [Fikile Bam](#), who was a close comrade of Alexander. Jones meanwhile drove to see Alexander, who informed him that he could not meet with Steve. When Jones returned, Bam decided that the trio would go to Alexander's house despite his decision. They drove there and parked in Alexander's yard while Bam went into the house to convince Alexander to meet with Steve.

Alexander was reluctant for several reasons: both he and Steve were banned and it would be a crippling blow to the movement if they were caught and convicted. Also, he was heeding the recommendations of Cape Town's BC activists. He later recalled:

Fiks tried every trick in the book to convince me to meet with Steve. But I would not budge. In order to put pressure on me he said Steve was sitting in the car in the backyard. But I was instructed by my guys not to meet Steve because of problems within the Black Consciousness Movement in Cape Town. I did not want to be caught in the crossfire.

Steve decided to immediately drive back to King William's Town on the same evening – August 17. Jones and Steve undertook the 12-hour journey and reached the outskirts of King William's Town when they were stopped by a police roadblock. They were identified after a heavily disguised Steve, realising the hopelessness of denial, decided to announce that he was indeed the man the police were looking for.

Jones was taken to Algoa Police Station and Steve to Walmer Police Station, both in Port Elizabeth. Jones underwent severe torture over a prolonged period, and never saw Steve again.

## The Death of Steve Biko

Steve was stripped and manacled for 20 days before he was transferred to the Sanlam Building in Port Elizabeth, where the Security Police was based. He was told to remain standing, but he defied his captors and sat down. Infuriated, a Captain Siebert manhandled him, but Steve fought back.

Steve was badly beaten, and between the night of 6 September and the morning of 7 September, he sustained a brain haemorrhage. Despite his injury, the police kept him shackled to a grille, still naked. When doctors examined him, they yielded to the security police by glossing over Steve's injuries. Dr Ivor Lang could find nothing wrong with Steve on 7 September. When specialist Dr Benjamin Tucker examined Steve, he suggested that the badly injured detainee be taken to hospital, but he backed down when police objected.

Lang did not object when police said they were driving Steve to Pretoria, 700km away. This they did, on 11 September, in the back of a van, with Steve still naked, frothing at the mouth, and unable to speak. In Pretoria, a district surgeon examined Steve and tended to him, but it was too late.

Alone in his cell, Steve died some time on the night of 12 September 1977.

## The reaction to Steve Biko's death

Steve's death was announced and there was outrage from many quarters. The government was at pains to contradict the obvious interpretation of the event – that the police had killed Steve.

On Wednesday, 14 September, a *Rand Daily Mail* report read:

Mr Steve Biko, the 30-year-old black leader, widely regarded as the founder of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, died in detention on Monday (12th). Mr Biko, honorary president of the Black People's Convention and the father of two small children, is the 20th person to die in Security Police custody in 18 months.

The report quoted a statement by the Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger, in which the minister presented the government's version of Steve's death, saying that he had been on a hunger strike since 5 September, refusing food. Kruger acknowledged that a district surgeon had been called to examine Steve on 7 September 'because Mr Biko appeared unwell'. The medic, Kruger continued, found nothing wrong with Biko.

Kruger continued his account, glossing over the serious injuries Steve sustained while in detention. Later, addressing a [National Party](#) (NP) congress on 14 September, Kruger announced: 'I am not glad and I am not sorry about Mr Biko. It leaves me cold. I can say nothing to you. Any person who dies" I should also be sorry if I die.' There was laughter at this last sentence. Kruger went on to justify the detention of Steve, saying that he had been found in possession of pamphlets inciting arson and violence. He proceeded to give a ridiculous and fictitious account of Steve's detention and death.

According to Donald Woods:

The next day Kruger implied that Steve had died of a hunger strike, but I knew this couldn't be true because he (Biko) had once said he would never take or endanger his own life in detention, and that if he were to die in jail, and it was claimed he had hanged or suffocated or starved himself or cut his wrists, I was to know it was a lie.

*Die Burger*, an Afrikaans government-supporting newspaper, presented the government's sentiments regarding the death of 'the black power activist Steve Biko':

Concern over detainees' deaths becomes deep dismay when the hysterical propaganda against authorities is observed. A vehement campaign is in progress which surpasses all previous protests. The venomous suggestions are of such an extravagant nature that it fills an objective observer with trepidation" I The purpose is to discredit the security police.'

Similarly, the state broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), took the government's version as fact, and speculated that if Steve had committed suicide, this would have fitted the pattern of many recent detainee suicides. It went on: 'To their critics the police point out that so far a court of law has never established that the police have been responsible for torturing and killing a single detainee.'

There was international outrage at Steve's death, with many governments making statements and sending condolences.

Donald Woods published a moving portrait of his friend Biko, saying:

In the three years that I grew to know him my conviction never wavered that this was the most important political leader in the entire country, and quite simply the greatest man I have ever had the privilege to know.

A post-mortem was carried out soon after Steve's death was announced, but the Biko family's pathologist was informed only after the autopsy had begun. Newspapers reported that Steve had sustained brain damage. Woods challenged Kruger about the hunger-strike claims, and 'got a reliable tip-off that he (Kruger) had received the coroner's report on Steve's post-mortem, that it revealed that Steve had died of brain damage, and that although Kruger had had his report for more than a week he had not yet ordered an inquest or corrected his "hunger strike" story.'

## The funeral



A nation weeps. Mourners gather to pay their last respects as Steve Biko's body lies in state in his home before the funeral, attended by 20,000 mourners at King William's Town, November 1977. Photo: Bailey's African History Archives)

Steve Biko's funeral, on 25 September 1977, was attended by about 20,000 people, although the mourners would have numbered many more if police had not turned many away at scores of roadblocks around King William's Town. Police blocked all the routes into the town, and thousands were turned away by the heavily armed officials. Convoys in the major cities were stopped even before they set out for the funeral.

People from the Transvaal who managed to get through had to pass through seven roadblocks before arriving in King William's Town. According to [Hilda Bernstein](#):

One of the speakers, Dr Nthato Motlana, who flew from Johannesburg after he was blocked off when attempting to travel by road, said at the funeral that he had watched as black policemen hauled mourners off the buses in Soweto and assaulted them with truncheons. The physician said he had treated 30 of the mourners, some for fractured skulls, and said he had witnesses who would testify that a number of young women were raped.

Yet, the authorities could not hide or dampen the significance of the occasion, which was attended by diplomats from 13 Western countries – from the United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Holland, Canada, Australia, Brazil and the Scandinavian countries. A small number of South Africans also attended, including Woods, his wife Wendy, and her brother Peter Bruce. Members of the [Progressive Federal Party](#) included [Helen Suzman](#), [Zac de Beer](#) and [Alex Boraine](#).

The funeral was marked by passionate denunciations of the apartheid regime, and became something of a political rally, lasting more than six hours. Mourners thrust their fists into the air and shouted 'Power!' when Steve's coffin was lowered into the grave.

## The Inquest

Calls for an inquest were made by many individuals and organisations, and the Minister of Justice eventually relented. The inquest began on 14 November, two months after Steve's death, at the Old Synagogue in Pretoria. But already, in October, two attorney-generals, of the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape, announced that there would be no criminal proceedings related to the findings of the inquest.

The inquest sought, ostensibly, to determine how Steve had died, and was presided over by a magistrate, Marthinus Prins, with the Deputy Attorney-General Klaus von Lieres acting as prosecutor to lead the evidence. But Hilda Bernstein, in her booklet *No. 46 – Steve Biko*, writes:

This was no ordinary inquest. It was in essence a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice; a conspiracy in which almost all the witnesses and most of the court officials joined. Their purpose was not to establish the cause of death but to conceal it; not to discover who might be responsible, but to hide them.'

Bernstein quoted the impressions of the Past President of the British Law Society, Sir David Napley, who had been invited to observe the inquest by the Association of Law Societies of South Africa:

I may be wrong but I came away with the clear impression that, on such occasions as he (Deputy Attorney-General Von Lieres) intervened, his questions were directed to preserve the position previously taken up. To this end on occasions he intervened to support the police and doctors, although they were already represented by other counsel.

Bernstein goes on to paint the scene: 'The inquest was high drama. Never before at an inquest of someone who died in detention have there been television cameras and reporters from so many countries' every day a crowd of black spectators sang outside the Synagogue.'

Over the next few days the security policemen, doctors and pathologists presented their testimonies about the sequence leading up to the death of Steve. In his submission, Deputy Attorney-General Klaus von Lieres said:

Our respectful submission is that you (the judge) will come to the conclusion that in this particular case there is no positive evidence that the deceased's death was caused by an act or omission of any person.

The judge repeated these words, almost verbatim, in his final ruling.

Although his death was attributed to "a prison accident," evidence presented during the 15-day inquest into Biko's death revealed otherwise. During his detention in a Port Elizabeth police cell he had been chained to a grill at night and left to lie in urine-soaked blankets. He had been stripped naked and kept in leg-irons for 48 hours in his cell. A blow in a scuffle with security police led to him suffering brain damage by the time he was driven naked and manacled in the back of a police van to Pretoria, where he died.

Two years later a South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC) disciplinary committee found there was no prima facie case against the two doctors who had treated Biko shortly before his death. Dissatisfied doctors, seeking another inquiry into the role of the medical authorities who had treated Biko shortly before his death, presented a petition to the SAMDC in February 1982, but this was rejected on the grounds that no new evidence had come to light. Biko's death caught the attention of the international community, increasing the pressure on the South African government to abolish its detention policies and calling for an international probe on the cause of his death. Even close allies of South Africa, Britain and the United States of America, expressed deep concern about the death of Biko and added their support to those asking for an international probe.

It took eight years and intense pressure before the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC) took disciplinary action. On 30 January, 1985, the Pretoria Supreme Court ordered the SAMDC to hold an inquiry into the conduct of the two doctors who treated Biko during the five days before he died. Judge President of the Transvaal, Justice W G

Boshoff, said in a landmark judgment that there was prima facie evidence of improper or disgraceful conduct on the part of the "Biko" doctors in a professional respect.

## The Aftermath

Soon after Steve's death, the state banned 18 organisations on 17 October 1977, the majority of them allied to the BCM. These included, SASO, BPC, BCP and many others. The Christian Institute (CI), led by the [Reverend Beyers Naude](#), was also banned, as was Reverend Naude himself. Scores of BC activists were banned, and Donald Woods was also served with a banning order.

The BCM launched the [Azanian People's Organisation](#) (AZAPO) in 1979, but the organisation was also banned soon thereafter. By the early 1980s the Black Consciousness Movement was in decline, eclipsed by the re-emergence of the Congress movement, most notably in the shape of the [United Democratic Front](#). Steve's dream of uniting the various liberation organisations never came to fruition; rather, the Congress Movement took the reins of the anti-apartheid struggle and eventually the ANC became the ruling party after the first democratic elections in 1994.

Steve is survived by his wife, Ntsiki, and their child, Nkosinathi. He also had a child, and Samora, with Mamphela Ramphele.

His son Nkosinathi has launched the Steve Biko Foundation, which has become a non-profit organisation with a large presence in the Eastern Cape. In 2013, the institute celebrated the opening of a large community centre in Ginsberg, in King William's Town. The foundation promotes debates on current issues and is growing into a valuable resource in Biko's hometown.

Former [Nelson Mandela](#) paid tribute to Biko in 2002, saying:

Living, he was the spark that lit a veld fire across South Africa. His message to the youth and students was simple and clear: Black is Beautiful! Be proud of your Blackness! And with that he inspired our youth to shed themselves of the sense of inferiority they were born into as a result of more than three hundred years of white rule.'

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