

*Biko death  
gave focus  
to forces  
in play*

Qoboza had joined *The World* as a reporter in 1963 and had become editor by 1974. In 1975 he was a Neiman Fellow at Harvard. By 1977 he had become more than an editor – he was an important leader of the black community centred in Soweto. He was one of the Committee of Ten, an unofficial group that organized itself after the 1976 Soweto riots in an attempt to provide some kind of constructive political leadership for the townships. In this role, Qoboza found himself caught between the whites and conservative blacks who thought him a dangerous radical, and the young revolutionaries of Soweto who thought him a sell-out. Bombs were thrown at his home, and the police more than once routed him out in the middle of the night and took him away for questioning. All this was before this actual detention and the closing of *The World* last October.

The death and funeral of Steve Biko in September had given a theatrical focus to the forces that were in play in South Africa – the blind rigidity of white authority, the helplessness of the black masses, the rage of the black activist minority, the bravery and the pathetic impotence of the few white liberals.

Some 15,000 to 20,000 people, many from distant cities, attended Biko's funeral in the village of King William's Town where he had lived. Most of the mourners, of course, were blacks, but there was a sprinkling of whites who felt they had to be there

to express their sympathy for Biko's fate or their revulsion for the manner in which he died. Among the whites present was Helen Suzman, who encountered some hostility before she explained who she was, and Donald Woods, as well as the American Ambassador (the Canadian Ambassador was to leave).

### A kind of miracle

In this emotionally-charged atmosphere Woods wrote later, "it was a kind of miracle that no white person was harmed and that no racial incidents occurred. He reported

My wife and I were in the middle of a standing crowd and afterwards compared notes about certain moments of apprehension. One came for me when I noticed what appeared to be a hard-bitten township tough-guy standing fairly close and looking at me with stony face through slitted eyes. He had a large knife-scar on one cheek and appeared in my imagination to be sizing me up for a cutting. One is very conscious of one's whiteness on such occasions.

However, when he became aware that I was looking back at him that rock-hard face broke into a friendly smile and a wave of greeting. I have never been so relieved in my life! . . .

I think what motivated many of the whites who attended, apart from natural motives of condolence, was a sort of ad-



*In the wake of Steve Biko's death, white newspaper editor Donald Woods was one of seven whites banned by the Government. On New Year's Eve, Woods managed to escape to asylum in neighbouring Lesotho. He is shown here reunited with his wife and children in Maseru, Lesotho.*