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Ten years later — Biko lives

By Carol Guenther reprinted from the Varsity Canadian University Press

When South African police left anti-apartheid activist Stephen Biko to die after brutally beating him, they thought they had successfully silenced

him.

The South African government should have realized that Biko's influencewould not die with him. On the tenth anniversary of his death, Biko lives on as a symbol of Black resistance.

"Symbols don't die, they become martyrs. And martyrs live forever," according to P.C. Jones, a black activist who was arrested along with Biko in August 1977.

Biko was arrested on August 18, 1977 by the South African security forces because of his anti-apartheid

"Biko was expelled from university for his political activities."

activism. The police beat him severely, causing masive head injuries, chained him to the floor of a jeep and transported him 740 miles to a prison hospital. The thirty-one year old activist died of brain damage on September 12

Biko was a charismatic figure, an intellectual exceptionally able to spur others to action with his vision of a liberated South Africa. He played a large part in the development of Black Consciousness, a movement which stressed Black pride and unity and spurned any involvement with white, liberal anti-apartheid activists.

The senseless killing of one of South Africa's most brilliant and articulate activists left a legacy of bitterness and mistrust among the nation's youth. But the vision he imparted to students like Cerald Phokobye, the political coordinator of the African and Carribean Students' Association at the

University of Toronto, has had more far-reaching effects. Phokobye is a South African who lived in exile in Botswana for six years before coming to Canada. His political views were greatly influenced by Biko's writings on Black Consciousness.

"Steve was the embodiment of Black Consciousness. He trained us politically. Through his own example and practical work, he taught us to organize, taught us how to talk to people and relate to each other as activists. He also helped us to gain a better understanding of Black Consciousness through his writings," Phokobye said.

Black Consciousness began as a

Phokobye said.

Black Consciousness began as a movement in the late 1960s. Many Black university students had become disenchanted with the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and in 1968, they broke away to form the South African Students Organization (SASO) with Stephen Biko as its first president.

Biko criticized the white liberals for dominating NUSAS.

"They made all the decisions for us "They made all the decisions for us. We needed time to look at our own problems and not leave them to peo-ple without experience of the terrible conditions in the black townships or the system of Bantu education (the inferior education system for Blacks)," Biko wrote

After his third year, Biko was expelled from university for his political activities. That year, he helped to form the Black People's Convention,

"Biko's influence would not die...martyrs live forever..."

an umbrella political organization for groups sharing the beliefs of Black Consciousness.

P.C. Jones, Biko's friend and fellow activist, spoke of the influence Biko had on his peers in their struggle against apartheid. "Biko left with us an idea and a movement which are inspiring blacks and whites on all university campuses. He came from a generation of Black students who were asking the question. What is our calling as Black students and what is our historic role to fulfill?"

"The answer is that the interests of the Black student are no different from the interests of the community from which he or she comes."

"Biko advocated nonviolence in the struggle against apartheid . . . '

"Today, Biko is a symbol of hope, having been able to show in practical, non-sensational terms, that it is possi-ble to live an independent life outside the intentions of the government," said Jones.

said Jones.
Jones said there was no political
movement prior to Black Consciousness that could effectively address the
historic division between differgnt
segments of the Black Community.
When the Black Consciousness Movement was banned by the South Africa
an government in October 1977, the effect on the Black community devastating.

The movement that was most able to lead and unify Blacks was destroyed in one brutal moment. Today we see 99 per cent of conflict contained within Black areas. Violence is inverted violence. Blacks are being killed by other Blacks. This is due to a large extent to cowardly behaviour. large extent to cowardly behaviour on the political level by groups like the African National Congress, who do not have the moral depth to denounce what they are seeing," said

During his lifetime, Biko advocated During his lifetime, siko advocated non-violence in the struggle against apartheid. Today, the Black Consciousness Movement is split on the issue of using violence to effect change. The BCM within South Africa

The movement that was most able

does not advocate violence but Pho-kobye said the external wing of the BCM advocates the use of revolu-

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