

March 2023

Greetings,

It's been a while.

Here, once more are my thoughts, reflections, musings and acerbic commentary on the way we were and the way we are – now.

I always enjoy your feed-back. And, go look at my website where I added images and photos I cannot include here.

1. The meaning and importance of solidarity. What Steve Biko taught me.

A rare privilege. I treasure it deeply. As a young student activist in the late 1960s and again when I worked at the Christian Institute in the early 1970s I worked with Steve, considered him a friend and was influenced profoundly by his teaching.

We met by accident at a NUSAS student conference in 1967. I then visited him and his medical student colleagues on many a week-end in Durban where he put me up at the residence for Black students called Salisbury Island. We debated continuously and remained friends after he formed SASO in 1968. In Apartheid South Africa he was Black, I was White.

In 1972 he was deputy at the Black Community Programme (BCP) and I became deputy at the White Community Programme. Both operated under the auspices of the Christian Institute. Our joint sponsor was Ds Beyers Naudé. The BCP was expressly told it was independent with its own governance structure, whilst the WCP was answerable to the Christian Institute. Naudé had broken the liberal and paternalistic tradition which Steve had challenged so fundamentally. Beyers Naudé thus sought no influence or control over the BCP. Instead he exercised solidarity with the BCP in so far as he had the means to raise the funds from donors abroad. I met Steve at bi-annual meetings when respectively, we signed-off reports and motivations for further funding. BCP was the large programme and WCP as a much smaller partner.

When Steve was banned and banished to King William's Town and continued his work through Mapetla Mohapi and Dr Mamphela Ramphele, I visited them. Steve put me up at his mother's home in Ginsberg location. I slept in his bed and he made do on the veranda. I helped raise funds for the Zimele Trust – a Black Consciousness initiative to support the men from Robben Island, who, having served their sentences, were restricted to the near-by township of Mdantsane. Steve was exercising solidarity with those who had gone to prison in the name of the ANC and PAC. I, in my then Christian Institute capacity, exercised solidarity in that we still had the means to raise funds they needed. Our respective solidarities, BC and the CI, differentiated themselves by a fundamental distinction. His was the act of solidarity by those oppressed with other oppressed people; the victim-to-victim solidarity which Black Consciousness gave life and expression to. Ours, the dominantly White Christian Institute, was the act of solidarity that was made consciously, under Apartheid and class rule, that was exercised by the perpetrator class; an identity we, the Whites, could not run away from.

Solidarity is not charity. Important as empathy is, it is not solidarity! Rev Frank Chikane told us that in 1980, they went to Beyers Naudé and other Whites and said to them: real support demands that you 'commit class suicide'. What did he mean?

When is solidarity demanded and when is solidarity a nice-to-have?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined solidarity as: My action must entail the same potential penalty as that which the victim is exposed to, either a passive victim or a victim in resistance to the oppression they suffer. He expressed this in two ways. He helped smuggle Jewish people from Nazi Germany to Switzerland and he helped form a resistance, for both of which he could and, as eventually happened, he was hanged on 9 April 1945. He further postulated that killing another person is always a sin, but that there are situations when the tyrant is such that the sin of killing is demanded – it is however a ‘lesser’ sin. (I’m no theologian but that is how I understand Bonhoeffer’s morality). A friend added comment – see below¹.

Bonhoeffer wrestled with his class background. He came from the better-off class. He was deeply conscious that this class was complicit long before the Nazi’s came to power, in the material exploitation of the poor and importantly, the foundations of hatred toward the ‘other’, Jews and other people’s.

This caused him to define what solidarity means when you come from the perpetrator class. Beyers Naudé and a handful of other Whites wrestled with the same matter. Beyers did not formulate a South African theology or South African ethics about this, but his morality led him to the same or similar motivations.

When Beyers funded the BCP his act of solidarity was a first tentative step only. The essence of it was: I will enable you to have the funds you need and I seek no involvement or control over how you use those funds. He took the vital step of saying: from the class from whence I come I will trust you in what you do and how you do it. This included him telling the Dutch and German church funders: your administrative reporting will be measured not in accounting terms (that too, as Steve and his colleagues provided) but your solidarity in this case is defined as that of coming from the ‘perpetrators’ and neither they nor their intermediary (Beyers) have a right to shape, amend or indirectly control what the choices or actions the oppressed who seek their liberation, seek to exercise.

If support for BPC was ‘tentative’, then Beyers exercised solidarity in the fuller sense, two years after he and his colleagues were banned on 19 October 1977. Initially, and within a week of his banning he tried, with his colleagues in the Christian Institute to reconstitute the CI organisation in the underground. But this was not to be. His closest colleagues, each one of them, foresaw different ways to carry on the struggle, or how to carry on with their compromised lives.

Toward the end of 1979 Beyers and his erstwhile colleague Cedric Mayson re-defined their role in the underground. Their connection was to an underground grouping, based mainly in Soweto. The Rev Frank Chikane, his brother Moss and some twenty others were already deep into secret work. Other key members were Ref Mashwabada ‘Castro’ Mayathula and Rev Drake Tshengkeng both detained at Modder B prison from the same time the CI staff were banned. They are the key to the internal resistance decision to seek a strategic relationship with the ANC. In the prison yard they debated each day with the opposing group opting to form Azapo upon their release. They were able to debate intensively each day because their detention was under a clause of the Terrorism Act akin to holding them in concentration camp conditions. This differed from Section 6 under the Act which determined solitary confinement, interrogation for information so that charges could be laid against them. The seventy-odd Modder B detainees were released toward mid 1978.

There is much, much more to say about this key moment. But on the subject of solidarity, this is the time that Beyers, as much as his colleague Cedric, decided to be actors within a ‘victim’ group rather than being the instigators or leaders of such a group. This defines the moment when they ‘commit class suicide’. They are willing to face the same punishment, the gallows potentially, if found out. Both survived but not without Cedric being tortured and standing trial and Beyers being on the hit list of people the Special Branch men intended to kill.

¹ Bonhoeffer insisted that in acting thus one could not and never should claim that one was acting with the permission of God – that is, it was a human action, not a divinely sanctioned one. This is crucial because it is precisely such a claim that allows for horrendous acts in the name of religion, which Bonhoeffer well understood (he also later, especially as recorded by his brother-in-law Bethge in Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Paper from Prison*, spoke of ‘religionless Christianity’).

What Beyers contributed to that underground group and the risks Cedric took require separate description and analyses. The essence was that they gave that which they had access to, and that which this Soweto et al group needed, to complement the requirements in the final assault on Apartheid during the 1980s. Uniquely, and not without mistakes and set-backs, the group survived throughout the 1980s, a major feat of internal resistance not yet adequately located in the narrative about liberation struggle.

Footnote 1: Bonhoeffer defined Nazi Germany as tyrant rule. The actions that Beyers and Cedric took as committed Christians demanded that they too, came to see Apartheid as rule by a tyranny that demanded actions in opposition, including that of the use of violence. Bonhoeffer made such a decision and then took steps that were intended to end the life of Adolf Hitler. Beyers, in his Afrikaans autobiography makes it clear that he was not prepared to pick up arms but neither was he going to condemn those who did. After all, he joined a struggle well in progress and he did so when he was well advanced in years. He states that he helped young people who wanted to leave the country for military training abroad.

It is important to explain when the definition of tyrant applies. Not least it demands ethical consideration and cannot be based on one person's view, or even that of an arbitrary group of persons. In both the German and the South African situations, the definition of 'tyrant' applied. The history of what events contributed to such a conclusion have not been evaluated here but in the South African situation they include: The SACP decision to operate underground after it was outlawed in 1950, the ANC decision to start the underground armed struggle in 1961, the Cottesloe resolution of 1961, the message to the People of South Africa by the SA Churches in 1968, the Belhar Confession in 1982, the Kairos Document of 1985 and more.

What Steve Biko brought to the national debate from the late 1960s onward is not confined to the liberation of the Black mind only, he liberated that section of Whites who came to understand what 'class suicide' meant in the context of overthrowing rather than reform Apartheid. Did the negotiated settlement the ANC signed with Apartheid postpone the revolutionary overthrow? No. The conditions for overthrow or revolution do not obtain today. This does not mean abandoning the demands for egalité – especially after the new ruling elite betrayed its base of support so scandalously. This requires political education – something we lost after 1994.

Footnote 2: After the Black Consciousness movement organisations were outlawed in 1977, many of its leaders felt deeply aggrieved that White radicals sided with ANC. Such condemnation is faulty in my estimation. The BCM could not advocate its historic call for a greater humanity as the ultimate goal of Black Consciousness, and tell White person ready to commit 'class-suicide', to fold their arms and do nothing at all. As it is, BCM failed to build an exile movement after its internal structures were curbed. The BCM provided, rightly by its own calling, no space for White engagement. The ANC had opened its doors and hence in the 1980s very many White's, not least war resisters, joined the ANC.

Footnote 3: Solidarity from those in other countries. We South Africans benefitted enormously in our struggle through the international solidarity of Anti-Apartheid movements. We saw it as one of the four pillars of our struggle. The AAM's of Western Europe and North America were critical in curbing the outright support Apartheid rulers got from former colonial and related powers. Support for victims of racism and oppression in other countries today must ring true to South Africans who were part of the struggle and who know that Apartheid is being practiced today in a country that gave immense support to Apartheid: Israel. Those who are serious about solidarity cannot turn a blind eye to what is happening to the Palestinians. As Rev Frank Chikane, a visitor to the Region observes, 'it is far worse than Apartheid'. The moral imperative of real solidarity demands that we look beyond our national boundaries.

2. On being a spectator at many a ping-pong match.

Neither side wanted to beat the other. Each player lobbed the ball carefully across the net and each return was as carefully manoeuvred. It was as though they were warming up for tournament - to which I was never invited.

I've been back home for thirty years after fifteen years in exile. Despite the reputation of us exiles, I believe that I did what was within me to help re-build and grow a better society ever since I am back. I served on many

NGO/NPO Boards, Trusts and Foundations, sharing my experience. To this day I cannot let go of being an activist in the cause of human rights and social justice. It was a privilege serving these many organisations after hours and in my spare time, often leading at the head of the curve rather than just going with the flow. And I was rewarded with appreciation. In no instance ever was I paid for serving on these Boards.

But there is another dimension. The Boards of the NGO/NPO and philanthropic organisations, where the children spend the profits their fathers once made, are also the places where ping-pong is being played. Repeatedly I found myself in situations where, in a manner of speaking, I would turn my head left, then right and left again. I found this tiresome because the ball was never played in my direction. I seemed to be consigned to being a spectator, even when I had been elected to chair meetings.

The Black and White members of several Boards I served, were - it took some time for me to work it out - playing polite ping-pong, sizing each other up, getting used to one another, through banter, and easily overlooking the social faux-pas that were inherited from a previous age. I did not want to be left out. Why did I sit around the same table but no-one played the ball to me? Was I guilty of racially insensitive behaviour? At the next meeting I learnt of the laughter that took place the previous Saturday night, but where was I? Was my social IQ too low to warrant a dinner invite?

Eventually it dawned on me why my head turned left-right-left-right. I was relegated to being a spectator at a match because I had no bat. Neither had I the white money nor did I have the dark complexion. White money was meeting potential Black entrepreneurs. The emerging Black middle, even millionaire class was being shaped. The courting across the Boardroom excluded me. Those with no struggle involvement, with little sensitivity for what White and colonial history, were using their ill-gotten gains from a previous era to re-defined the rules, no longer based on colour but on class.

A new elite has by now been constructed. Money rules politics - it always has. White monopoly now becomes a mixed-colour monopoly. The class of underlings – not me - but the majority South African population – their hope for a better life has once more been relegated to nothingness. Don't trust the new elite, the elite of Ramaphosa and Motsepe and Sewale and Macosoma. Their profits are made in the same way White profits were made in the past. And the White elite: they have saved themselves once more. As one of them said to me and my spouse: Fortunately this country is rich enough (in resources) and we can afford the incorporation of 'them'.

- Read Pieter du Toit, *The ANC Billionaires; Big Capital's Gambit and the Rise of the Few*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2022. Reading it I felt kicked in the gut by those I once called my leaders. It is they who wined and dined their way to power and to riches behind our backs. The book also is an indictment of those who might not have become super rich but served as the enablers – the ping-pong players. The games started around 1985, when the majority of those fighting for their liberation still believed our leaders were with us!

3. A Country in Crises!

There is no time to despair! Despite the sell-out, the betrayal, the dishonesty, the theft by our rulings elites each day, there are good young people showing their mettle. Below is a report on a meeting held in St George's Cathedral the day before President Ramaphosa delivered his State of the Nation Address in the make-shift Parliament (since the actual Parliament burnt down last year – due to neglect!). *The Country in Crises* meeting was called the *Real State of the Nation* – addressed by a new crop of able and committed young folk. I urge you to listen to the contributions and also the interview on the SABC afterwards. It takes time to watch it, but it is important:

A Country in Crisis: A Call out for Ethical and Effective Leadership at all Levels

"Our democracy is a daily affair"

On the 8th February 2023, Defend our Democracy (DoD) facilitated a public rally at St. Georges Cathedral, Cape Town hosting hundreds of civil society members, activists, community networks and ordinary citizens to reflect, speak and develop a common understanding on the kind of crises faced by the country and the common solidarity that needs to be forged across sectors to deal with it.

This all took place in the year of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Rev. Frank Chikane, who was the Vice-President of the UDF Transvaal region from 1983 to 1985 and was an initiator of the Defend our Democracy campaign in 2021, did not mince his words in stating that it is nothing else but the coming together of ordinary people in South Africa which will steer the country out of crisis.

This call was bolstered by speakers spanning from the largest trade union movement in Africa, COSATU, the South African Communist Party, views from the perspective of business, the faith sector, and emerging and established civil society organisations. Organisations and speakers included:

- Rev Michael Weeder – Dean of Cape Town
- Rev Edwin Arrison – SACLI
- Axolile Notywala – Movement for CARE
- Rachel Fischer – OUTA
- Tessa Dooms – Rivonia Circle
- Francesa de Gasparis – SAFCEI
- Kholwani Simelane – The Green Connection
- Lukho Nozaza - Equal Education
- Shaykh Ighsaan Taliep – MJC
- Pamela Silwane – Gugulethu CAN
- Nick Binedell – Business Sector
- Matthew Parks – COSATU
- Solly Mapaila – SACP
- Zackie Achmat – Unite Behind

To view the full memorandum sent by Defend our Democracy and acknowledged by the Presidency, click [HERE](#). To endorse it, click [HERE](#).

To watch the live recording, click [HERE](#)

Click, [HERE](#), [HERE](#) and [HERE](#) for media reports, interviews, and write-ups about the public rally.

#UniteBehind hosts rally on energy crisis

On the 9th February 2023, the day of the SoNA, #UniteBehind held a public rally in District 6, Cape Town under the title #FixEskom. Scores of community members and organisations came together to deliver the same message. The people must hold the government accountable to move South Africa forward and out of the state it is in. Defend our Democracy was represented at the event and called on those present to stand up to corruption and state capture, to hold government accountable and ensure that those in power know that trust is earned; as well as to foster solidarity in communities and amongst organisations across the country.

#UniteBehind delivered a memorandum which was received by Adv. Victor Ngaleka which was endorsed by Defend our Democracy. You can access the full memorandum [HERE](#).

4. Woe!

The commentators and contributors in the above section have said it better than I can. I will however add the following:

- The ANC says it is 'renewing' itself. Don't hold your breath - the chances of that happening look ever more dismal.
- Once renewal fails, disastrously the ANC will have paved the road for anti-democrats, populists and racists to gain power in 2024. The possibility of this stares us in the face.
- The implosion of the civil service is all pervasive. The consequences will haunt us for generations to come.
- The culture of let-me-help-myself at the cost of others is rapidly having a domino effect down the social pyramid.
- Unethical conduct at the top has spawned greed and lawlessness right down the social pyramid.
- We need new voices in Parliament who speak truth rather than jockey for power. Such representatives need to be found now!
- The awful circus at our Metros and City Councils will repeat itself at National level after the 2024 elections when the ANC has lost its majority. The conduct at city level will further reduce voter turnout. No political party escapes criticism, including the DA, who are incapable of shaking off their white/privilege mantle.

Civil society needs to unite to compel politicians to account regularly at constituency level on the burning issues of inequality, unemployment, housing, sanitation, water – and electricity. Our Bill of Rights must be given expression to! Civil society, a new UDF can make it happen!

Today we have a national hunger crises, unemployment crises, structural injustice crises. We recite that we are the most unequal country globally, shrug our shoulders and move on. This is an emergency that needs principled co-operation instead of the (male) ego politics we witness at Metro level. To earn trust with the electorate: re-priorities budgets, remove the benefits the bloated politicians award themselves, rid us of fancy receptions and blue-light brigades! The rich need to cede their monopolies. Redistribution is not only a land question!

Some might have expected the SACP to be a whistle-blower along the way, some thought COSATU would not brook the get-rich-quick class project. But no, they are both are complicit in our country's demise. They did not call out the immoral, the un-principled, the unethical, the anti-equality, the power-at-all cost behaviour that dominates. Their complicity has robbed us of the chance we had.

Read: Raymond Suttner's piece below is engaging and important. My sense of egalité and his come to same base values or ethics.

https://www.polity.org.za/article/being-or-not-being-a-communist-in-south-africa-today-2023-02-27?fbclid=IwAR0zy3e5MazMFVz6MODHYIwq9i0equZnFEfBn6MdP9Xbzq2h_zqZWJ-zKek#.Y_zXUBRDqdE.facebook

5, Thoughts on the passing of the British Queen.

Like on British Postage Stamps, the country she lived in does not need mentioning. Everyone knows that her profile on a stamp makes it Britain and similarly it is superfluous to say The Queen of Great Britain – just saying 'the Queen' is enough for those from Accra to Zanzibar and from Belize to Bangladesh. They know.

The director of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Sello Hatang, on radio relayed a pertinent anecdote. Veteran struggle comrade from Robben Island, Cathy Cathrada, one morning entered Nelson's presidential office when Nelson was on the phone. Nelson kept saying 'Elizabeth this' and 'Elizabeth that....' After the call Cathy asked whom he was speaking to. Nelson replied: the Queen of England. Cathy cautiously enquired if Nelson should not have been more reverential in addressing her, to which Nelson replied, 'oh no she kept on addressing me as Nelson'.

I have my own recollections about the Queen. The first was in 1953 when she was crowned after the death of her father George VI. South Africa was a member of the British Commonwealth. Every mourning my father would take us from our home in Orange Grove along Louis Botha Avenue to the German School in Hillbrow. At one point we had to circumnavigate the large roundabout known then as Clarendon Circle. At each of the four approaches stood a traffic policeman doing what is today done with traffic lights. Elizabeth's coronation was celebrated in Johannesburg by a massive replica of her crown built on the whole of the this traffic circle. In my child's eye and with vehement scorn from dad, the structure was three-stories high. Only a slither of South Africans identified with that royalty. And, the traffic was disrupted because the four traffic officers could not see each other because of the b... crown obscured their view making any co-ordination impossible.

Vivid colour, pageantry and pomp rubs off on others. My mother was one of those it rubbed off on to. She bought illustrated German magazines that invariably celebrated British royalty which made them into lovable pop stars. When Charles - now known as King Charles III - and Diana got married in St. Paul's Cathedral in 1981 my mother was visiting me, in exile, in London. I did not have a TV but friend Gloria offered her hospitality. My mother spent all day glued to the television and she had only adoring words for the couple afterwards, despite my scorn for the royals, not conveyed in the words my father used, but those of a left-wing activist. With idolatry come virtues. My mother insisted the Queen was kind, considerate, wise, despite never hearing her in language other than the carefully choreographed pieces by her advisors. The fact that the Queen's mother was an admirer of Hendrik Verwoerd no doubt helped my mother in this acceptance.

Sir Shridath Ramphal, secretary of the Commonwealth was friends with retired Archbishop Trevor Huddleston who, in the 1980s became Chairperson of the IDAF Board. I became IDAF director in 1983. I received invitations to Commonwealth receptions to which my Chairperson expected me to come to. These were immensely pompous affairs which the Guyana-born Secretary, appeared to revel in. The apartheid diplomats were no longer invited to these events but instead, the London based representatives of the ANC and Swapo were invited. I recall being goaded into a trellis when the Queen arrived. Next to me were Shapua Kaukungua the Swapo representative and the (later infamous) Solly Smith representing the ANC. In customary fashion she extended her gloved hand to everyone in turn, slowly moving down the line. My compatriots to the left and right of me obliged but I thought otherwise – and did not extend my hand. She moved on as though I did not exist - and - doubts about my little act of defiance stayed with me.

A flyer that may interest you:

Network, Inform, Educate, Organize, Act!

Let us build responses to the Crises in our Country!

You, we all, are deeply concerned that the crises in our country will not be resolved in the short-term. The months ahead, the elections in 2024 and the period thereafter all have the potential to increase instability in our politics and then increasingly threaten our young democracy. Global events may well enhance our precarious situation.

We must never wallow in doom! We cannot just point fingers! We must become the new beginning! Begrudging silence, complaining or shouting does not solve our problems! THE SCOPE FOR POPULISM AND CHEAP GROUP OR ETHNIC JIBES IS A GROWING DANGER TO OUR BODY POLITIC! This cannot be allowed. We must organize, educate and act!

There is no quick fix to our electricity crises, to the rising mafia syndicates or to dysfunctional municipalities. SLOGANS AND CHARISMATIC EGO POLITICS WILL NOT SOLVE OUR PROBLEM.

As activists committed to building a strong civil society we have formulated some ideas for active civic engagement. We can :

- Demand regular accountability meetings of MPs in every Ward throughout the country, no matter what Political Party has the majority in your area.
- Let us hold all candidates and political parties accountable in the upcoming election and demand that they address the real problems in our country!
- Let us support progressive political education platforms that counter the populism that aims to get the support of the poor only then to become unaccountable and authoritarian rule.
- Let us get ready now and build networks, create reliable channels of information, support existing networks and establishing such where there are none.
- Let us build a civil society that challenges the ruling elites of politicians, business, faith leaders, academia, traditional leaders and others.

The crises we face cannot be solved by kind deeds and charity, much as they are needed in the face of poverty, hunger, unemployment, injustices and the broken civil service. Our crises are systemic and addressing these demands planned programmes built on unambiguous political principle.

We will support or collaborate and co-operate with like-minded national structures. But here, right now, we must build a: **Progressive Citizens Movement**

Please come and join us on Sunday the 26 March, 2.30 -5.00pm and help shape a programme of action. The Venue is

***The International Peace College
44 Johnson Road [corner of Hood & Duine Street]
Rylands, Athlone.***

Kevin Patel, Horst Kleinschmidt, Ari Sitas, Goolam Aboobaker, Judy Favish
