

So much more to do.

Events forty years ago this week influenced the way we are today. Apartheid power and violence was reaching its pinnacle, inflicting war on its own citizens and on neighbouring countries. On 19th October 1977, a resurgent internal opposition, as had happened in 1960, was driven into the underground. The white Government, aided by the overwhelming majority of its white support, entrenched discrimination, repression and spread hate even further to levels from which we as a society have not yet healed.

On that day, known as Black Wednesday, 18 Black Consciousness (BC) organisations, the Soweto newspaper *The World*, and the Christian Institute of Southern Africa (CI), were banned – outlawed – and their assets confiscated. Among those banned, the CI was the only one of the organisations that had mainly White staff and membership. Additionally the police detained countless BC leaders and the Minister of Justice banned personally – a form of house arrest - the leadership of the Christian Institute.

A month earlier, on 12th September that year, the police tortured and killed Steve Biko, the acknowledged thinker and leader of the new resistance. His closest associates had been hounded for years, amongst them Mapetla Mohapi, killed in detention on August 1976, and in April 1977 Mamphela Ramphele was also banned and banished – a form of internal exile. Thenjiwe Mtintso chose exile. There were countless others.

Apartheid was acting out its own eventual downfall. Growing waves of dissent made swathes of South Africa ungovernable despite the state's violent rule. The exile movement, headed by

the ANC, as well as international pressure, eventually forced Pretoria to its knees. By the '80's this powerful mix, led by internal dissent, began to balance the military and money weight of the minority Government. It was crunch time: negotiations led to democracy, the constitution and the rule of law we have today.

The 1977 moment cannot be underestimated. The Christian Institute leaders, Beyers Naudé in Johannesburg and Theo Kotze in Cape Town, supported Biko and his movement and importantly took the BC message against white know-all and white lead-all to heart. The CI listened to Black thinking, and applauded Black leadership. They shed the liberal do-good and white-knows-best history to provide solidarity with the poor and follow their leading voices. So the Christian Institute ran White Community Programmes intended to challenge and change white society. We published *White Liberation* in 1972, banned in 1973 when one of its authors, Rick Turner, was personally banned, only for an apartheid assassin to then kill him in 1978. Changing white attitudes proved difficult, a challenge not resolved to this day. The CI also co-sponsored the Black Community Programmes, the base from which Steve Biko helped build the BC organisations.

Ds Beyers Naudé and Rev Cedric Mayson joined the underground, providing support, solidarity and building an all-important bridge between the internal and external movement. Theo Kotze fled abroad to join the call for disinvestment and the isolation of South Africa. Before going into exile Theo and Helen were targeted by security police who shot at them in their Rondebosch home and petrol bombed the CI offices in Mowbray and the Anglican Church hall in Rondebosch where the CI had met. His ministry to the men on Robben Island, including Robert Sobukwe, ended when warders discovered that prayer could also be the means to convey

messages. The close bond between Theo and Sobukwe lasted until the latter's death in 1978.

During his banning Beyers Naudé confronted his deep belief in non-violence when an ANC MK soldier knocked on his back door in the dead of night, seeking medical help for his comrade injured in a shoot-out with police. He found a doctor and an impromptu operation took place on the kitchen table, moved into the back yard so as to be distant from any listening devices in Beyers' and Ilse's home.

Rev. Cedric Mayson, also banned, would wear overalls and a crash helmet to distribute, on a motorcycle, cassette tapes of Oliver Tambo's January 8th speeches to designated addresses in Soweto. Cedric, in possession of a pilot's license and a borrowed light aircraft, flew people, concealed as luggage, into exile in Botswana. For this he eventually suffered torture and imprisonment.

Men and women of the Christian Institute lived and risked much for equality and a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa. The journey to achieve this has to continue. Their contribution should be measured as an important counter to the racial hates and mistrust Apartheid sowed. They may also be remembered for not seeking material reward. They had no truck with those who made money because of Apartheid or those who became rich after overcoming Apartheid.