

Hardening attitudes shatter innocence of student movement

AMILCAR Cabral, whose name, along with that of Frantz Fanon and Bantu Biko, invoked since the advent of the #FeesMustFall (FMF) movement and campaign, has been on my mind.

Cabral was the secretary-general of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC). He is said to have been assassinated by Portuguese agents on January 20 1973.

As a leader of the PAIGC, he waged a gallant revolutionary struggle that is reputed to have liberated three-quarters of the countryside of Guinea in less than 10 years.

Cabral distinguished himself among modern revolutionaries, as told through his book, *Return To The Source*, “by the long and careful preparation, both theoretical and practical, which he undertook before launching the revolutionary struggle, and, in the course of this preparation, became one of the world’s outstanding theoreticians of anti-imperialist struggle”.

The depth of thought, intellect and strategy of Cabral, as with Fanon and Biko, is the hallmark of their liberation legacy.

Yet in this social media period, in which profound and substantive historical moments and struggles are told in 140 characters, it has become popular and convenient to reduce significant contributions of revolutionaries like Cabral, Fanon and Biko to ahistorical, acontextual, unrecognisable utterances.

Repeated often enough, with passion and fervour, and necessarily at mass gatherings, the result is that the opportunity to analyse dispassionately, and to arrive at and adopt the best of strategies and tactics, has been lost.

This phenomenon has driven advocates and participants, onlookers and sympathisers into a

forbidding corner, a corner that makes no room for critical voices and positions to emerge.

And so we find ourselves at this ignominious point where a social movement based on a noble cause that promised loads is at a point at which it is in danger of delivering little.

To remind ourselves, the cause, seen as noble and just by many, was about correcting once and for all a higher education system that placed a too high and unfair burden of funding on the poorer section of South African society, thereby absolving the state and private sector, which are the greatest beneficiaries of the output of the very system, from a responsibility which should, to a larger and not lesser extent, be theirs.

Also foregrounded and requiring urgent attention was the need to decolonise and transform higher educational content, curricula, the ways in which knowledge is produced, for whom, for what purpose and for whose benefit, and the role universities play in the life of the people of South Africa and on the continent.

While the FMF movement and campaign may not have been fully understood and supported in its early genesis, support for both the movement and campaign grew steadily over time, culminating famously in the 0% increase proclaimed by President Jacob Zuma at the end of last year.

Over the months, the steady growth in support of the campaign then morphed into a decline, with growing opposition as the strategy changed from “no fee increase” to “no-fee higher education system for the poor in our lifetime”, and then to “free quality, decolonised education for all, *now*”. With

In my View



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lesser feature and the racial divides bringing to the fore the politics of race, in the process invoking what was argued to be the black consciousness philosophy of Biko.

Those who criticised such tactics, attempting to explain what Biko really said or questioning FMF’s strategy, instantly became the enemy as the forced binaries of us and them, friend and foe, black and white hardened.

In this and through this, the innocence of the movement and campaign was shattered, principled and values-based struggle and ethical leadership was sacrificed and lost.

And so we again return to Cabral. In writing in his 1965 *Revolution in Guinea* text, he emphasised the importance of responsibility and intellectual endeavour among liberation movement activists – “that they dedicate themselves seriously to study, that they interest themselves in the things and problems of our daily life and struggle in their fun-

this, tactics were changing from robust debates and engagements to strident and boisterous engagements, to forceful and “violent” enforcement of the campaign.

As the campaign rolled out from campus to campus, the “violent” tactics employed as a source of power in accordance with revolutionary tactics, supposedly espoused by Fanon, articulated into what was proclaimed to be “righteous violence” in response to what was seen as institutional and police violence.

Within this articulation, we saw black bodies becoming de rigueur and a prominent feature of the “no-fee struggle”, white students becoming a



CAMPUS CONFLICT: The day on which NMMU was set to resume normal operations after been closed for nearly a month due to the #FeesMustFall movement was marred by running battles between police and students on campus
Picture: EUGENE COETZEE

damental and essential aspect, and not simply in their appearance”.

“Learn from life, learn from our people, learn from books, learn from the experience of others. Never stop learning,” he said.

He concluded by reminding his comrades to “practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect . . . Every responsible member must have the

courage of his responsibilities, exacting from others a proper respect for his work and properly respecting the work of others.

“Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told.

“Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories.”

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