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COMMENT

Victim of
a peculiar
hysteria Y

T MIGHT well be true
Ithat Sir Richard Atten-

borough, film director of
Gandhi fame, has erred on the
side of indiscretion in his con-
troversial visit to South Af-
rica.

But our knowledge of the
kind of flagrant Government
propaganda from the SABC-

- TV does seem to indicate that
some of the things said about
his visit to Mrs Winnie Man-
dela were extravagant. There
was even something salacious
.about the way Sir Atten-
borough was described as
â\200\234holding handsâ\200\235 with Mrs
Mandela.

Our belief is that in its
eagerness to spot Reds under
the bed, the pro-Government
media was rather hysterical in
its reportage of the directorâ\200\231s
visit.

Obviously some hard .thingÃ© ;

had to be said by them about a
world figure such as this
openly making friends with
people who are generally con-
sidered to be the countryâ\200\231s
â\200\230â\200\234â\200\230enemies.â\200\235

One possible result is that
Sir Richardâ\200\231s anger will now
make him a mest suspicious
and even belligerent commen-

- It could well be said that a

director coming from a coun-
â\200\230try where freedom of investi-
gation is more liberal than in
South Africa, laid himself
open to such attack. It does

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seem though that South Afri-
_cans have a phobia about peo-
. ple they perceive as their ene- ;
mies. :

While it is certainly difficult
for us South Africans to be ob-
Jective or rather more cir-
cumspect in our reaction to
those â\200\230who do not necessarily
see things our way, we believe
a certain amount of restraint
is more effective.

Strangely enough, this
country was rather too eager
to show the controversial film,
Gandhi, here and Sir Richard
was actually invited to attend

The least we can say is ne-
body is perfect, especially in

same time indulge ourselves
by observing that even for-
eigners are infected by this
- phobia.

R P

SIR RICHARD Attenbo-
rough said this week that
he had been set up for a
hatchet job by an SABC-
TV reporter who ap-
proached him â\200\234like a
snake out of a basketâ\200\235â\200\231,
Calling political re-
porter Freek Swart a
liar, Sir Richard said:
â\200\234To say I wouldnâ\200\231t be al-
lowed back because of a
piece of gutter journa-
lism is scandalous.â\200\235 He
was referring to an after-
noon newspaperâ\200\231s re-
port that he might not

be allowed back into SA

as a result of the furore
after an SABC-TV re-
port. .

The TV report on
Thursday night claimed
the filmmaker had said
he would make a film to
improve the ANCâ\200\231s
image.]

This resulted in doz-
ens of telephone calls to
newspapers afterwards
complaining about the
harassment of Sir Rich-

WINNIE MANDELA -

â\200\2301 WA

SOWETAN
I!eporter

ard and his wife
Sheila.
The

Lady

report also

. claimed Sir Richard had

told Mrs Winnie Man-
dela, whom he visited in
Brandfort on Thursday,
that he was in favour of
the ANC accepting aid
from Moscow because
aid from Paris, Wash-
ington and London was
not forthcoming. '

~ Sir Richard told a
Press conference of in-
ternational journalists in
the quiet Johannesburg
garden of a friend, Mr
Christopher Newton-
Thompson, that he be-
lieved he had been set-
up for a hatchet job by
Swart, a Cape Town-
based reporter for the
SABC.

Sir Richard said:
â\200\234Maybe we should give
him (Mr Swart) the ben-
efit of the doubt, per-

- - spoke to Attenborough,

S SET UP

haps he was told to say
what he did. We have
travelled all around the
world and never any-
where in the world have
we experienced this sit-
uation before.â\200\235

When the Sunday Tri-
bune attempted to con-
tact Mr Swart through
the SABC-TV newsdesk
in Johannesburg, Mr
Dave Viljoen claimed
that Mr Swart was driv-

â\200\230ing to Cape Town and

would be unavailable for comment until at least 6pm on Saturday, if at all.

However, less than 10 minutes later the Sunday Tribune contacted Mr Swart at his home in Stellenbosch. Mr Swart who was hostile to questions and would not

.even give details about

his precise job description refused to say anything other than:â\200\234I can only say I stand by every word I said.â\200\235

Swart refused to answer more questions.

Sir Richard said: ' â\200\234I was very interested in meeting with Mrs Mandela, having in no small

degree been involved in

the UK in various pleas and petitions for some amelioration of Nelson Mandelaâ\200\231s position.

Sheila and I would meet her at the post office in Brandfort. We arrived

â\200\234We agreed that-

quite early and within 20 minutes it was evident that Security Police were around.

â\200\234When Mrs Mandela arrived, Sheila stayed in our car as we knew that because Mrs Mandela is banished and banned she can only see one person at a time.

_â\200\234I went on to say:
â\200\230How do you do,â\200\231 and at that moment, like a snake out of a basket came Mr Swart and TV news, filming us and

- Winnie.

â\200\234We went with Winnie to the police to get a

permit to visit her and then drove in separate cars to her home.

Within 30 seconds the TV crew was there as well. They immediately started questioning Mrs Mandela.

- â\200\234I then went in and chatted with Winnie for an hour while my wife waited outside. :

Lady Sheila who waited outside said the SABC news team with Mr Swart and one other Bloemfontein journalist were the only journalists present.

. She said that although

Sir Richardâ\200\231s voice was audible inside the house, she could not make out what he was saying.

When7S?r Richard came out with Mrs Mandela, Swart briefly interviewed her, while Lady Sheila went in and chatted with her.

Sir Richard said he naively consented to speak to Swart who never once â\200\230asked him

-about any of the items

Mr Swart claims to have heard Sir Richard say in the house.

â\200\234Why -didnâ\200\231t he ask me to verify what he thought I said about the African National Congress?

â\200\234That T am supposed to have said I will do

something in support of the ANC is an outrageous lie. The man is a liar. He also said I would complete a film by Christmas and it would be released to coincide with riots.

â\200\234I am considering
doing a piece on the last
10 years of politics in
SA. But why did Mr

~ Swart not ask for clarifi-
cation?

â\200\234I spent a major part
of my life trying to make
a film on Mahatma Gan-

_dhi, whose message was

non-violence. Do you
think I could advocate
violence? I believe in
reconciliation and a
peaceful solution of
problems.â\200\235

SIR RICHARD

ATTENBOROUGH |
SABC set him up.

. . says the

|

s it seems everybody and his dog is into

the act, it might just be useful to dis-

course on films and plays. It is even
' more urgent after our reading of a scurrilous
| attack by a certain waspish reactionary on
Steve Biko, whose life and death is in the
process-of being staged and put on film.

Writing for an afternoon newspaper as

guest columnist, one Martin Spring says the
most astonishing things about Steve Biko,
which we would have treated with the con-
tempt they deserved, but for their wildness.

The sum of it is, Mr Spring is against the

intended filming of Biko's life and death by

world famous director Sir Richard Attenbo-

rough, who did such a monumental job on the
life of Mahatma Gandbhi.

Politician

This is the drift of his vitriolic attack: 'Cer-
tainly there can be no other reason for making
a film about an obscure politician who died
| under unfortunate circumstances.' (The em-
phasis is mine.)

He proceeds to say things like Steve Biko

was a political nonentity till he died. 'Only

" after his death did the media, the left and the
enemies of South Africa, following the pat-
tern of the Nazis with Horst Wessels and the
communists with Patrice Lumumba, raise him
from obscurity and make him into a martyr.'

That's tough luck, Mr Spring. It is also a
most indelicate way to describe a man who set
the Black Consciousness flag (so dreaded by
some quarters) going. It is even more crude to
call his dreadful death an 'unfortunate cir-
cumstance'. It sounds awfully close to the no-
torious words by one worthy who said Steve
Biko's death left him cold. Good company
you keep there, Mr Spring. But it might just
be helpful to him and others of his ilk to note
that the 'media, the left and the enemies of
South Africa' deliberately ignore this kind of

| extraordinary political acuity from a black

| man. They prefer the black man who sings

their tune.

Indelicate

- You might have noticed even today, Mr

Spring, that these same circles will wax poetic
over the kind of black leader who fraternises
with whites and white liberals and eschews

Progressive democracy is an awful anomaly
in & country so ensnared with abnormalities
As soon as a black leader,

or group, â\200\230goes i
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Aggrey
Â£ Y Klaaste

Steve Biko was not exactly on top of the popu-
larity lists in Western circles and the fact that
he is now being accused of aspiring towards
being a CIA pawn, shows the depths these
circles will sink to. The facts are these self-
same circles were rudely shocked by the man-
ner in which this man died in jail.

Actor

Readers of this space might just be aware
that Albert Finney, the well-known British
actor has a play running in London on Steve
Biko. And this is what one foreign scribe had
to say about that: â\200\234The fact that a two-hour-
plus play consisting of a virtual verbatim tran-
script of key sections of that inquest can at-

tract full houses for its entire run at the River- .

side studios here at Hammersmith is proof
that Steve Biko lives on to haunt South Af-
rica. It also shows that death can be a deeply

_politicising act.â\200\235

Auspicious

Thatâ\200\231s the liberal point of view from
abroad. Letâ\200\231s get back home. Steve Bikoâ\200\231s
death, like the deaths of most historic person-
alities, came at a most auspicious time politi-
cally for South Africa.

This was just one year after June 16, 1976.
It was the time when the Government was
running around like a chicken without its
head, banning people, organisations and gen-
erally making a capital ass of itself. It was a

time when Black South Africa was angry as

hell, and White South Africa frightened to
death. It was the time of Bophuthatswanaâ\200\231s
independence and political crisis after crisis
was hurtling through the embattled land. It
\usatimeofmorryheï¬\202 ;

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Then a man died in a cell, a man who stood

" head and shoulders over many, a man who

bestrode this narrow land like a Colossus. For a brief spell the heartbeat of the world came to a stop. That was followed by some of the

.most extraordinary statements made inside and outside parliament.

Despite all these things the story that unfolded at the inquest was one that would make the hair of a Nazi creep, if we have to use Mr Spring's unfortunate analogies.

That should in, a manner of speaking suffice for Mr Spring.

Hogwash

He might incidentally happen to note that there are certain unhappy quarters, sponsored by the SABC/TV no less, who are in the process of making a film on the life of Emperor Shaka. I was among those who felt deeply affronted by the fact that the SABC-TV, or any South African white for that matter, would have anything to do with the life of this black hero. Not after the kind of hogwash we used to be fed in school about this exceptional man of genius.

Comcudence

I am at the moment, by sheer coincidence [as it turns out, going through that magnificent epic poem by Mazisi Kunene, 'Emperor

Shaka, the Great.' It is published by Heinemann

the Zulu idiom and accent translated into English. It dances with heart-stopping poetic movement and rhythm. It is also a damn good historic piece. It should be made a prescribed work for all black students. Read it if you get the chance.

mann and fairly sings with the liquid beauty of a

Which reminds me of an unfortunate accusation from a man in Durban I respect who

once accused me of writing patronisingly about the Zulu nation. God knows I was badly shaken by this allegation, and heaven help me after reading the book on Shaka, my respect of the Zulus takes a quantum leap forward.

WORD of GOD

'Old Testament

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them

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