

A comment on four speeches by Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu, President of Inkatha YenKululeko YeSizwe (National Cultural Liberation Movement), and Chairman of S.A. Black Alliance. The speeches were:

1. Opening Address on 'The Bias of Historical Analysis' at a Conference on THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR - A CENTENNIAL REAPPRAISAL - 1879-1979, at University of Natal, Durban on 7 February 1979;
2. Preliminary Remarks before the closed session of the S.A. Black Alliance, Fifth Session, in Port Elizabeth, on 24 February 1979;
3. 'Where is the Alliance Going', at a S.A. Black Alliance Public Meeting in P.E. on 25 February 1979; and
4. Speech at Graduation Ceremony held by International Computers (S.A.) Ltd in Johannesburg on 28 February 1979.

G.B. is very aware and proud of his ancestry: a lineal descendant on the maternal side from King Cetshwayo and on his father's side from Chief Mnyamana Buthelezi, Prime Minister of the Zulu Kingdom in 1879 and Commander-in Chief of the entire Zulu army. He 'planned Zulu strategy', 'phaka'd' the army, and personally led some Zulu forces as at Kambula and Hlobane.

He claims to be pursuing the same historic mission as that undertaken by Shaka to unite peoples. In the present era, unity involves all South Africans, black, brown and white. He speaks as an aristocrat, proud of his lineage and people, with a sense of history and a conviction of a destiny.

He says he is a 'leader' and recognises the responsibilities of leadership. The process of bringing about unity, he claims, is 'peculiarly my responsibility' (7/2/79) What Shaka did for Natal, 'I continue to do in the tradition of others, for the whole of S.A.'. It is 'part of my business to provide leadership at the National level'. I cannot do so without accepting the challenge .... of one day having to determine the policy which will run our economy' (28/2/79)

He rejects white domination absolutely and with contempt, comparing it with bankrupt businessmen who persist in marketing a product (apartheid under different labels) that is unsaleable. Blacks have never ceased to struggle for liberation. He often uses the word 'continuum' to stress the unbroken record of resistance. Blacks are not cowards, but neither will they commit suicide. They are patient in the knowledge that the majority is bound to overcome.

As a leader he must take note of 'realities': his people's poverty, land hunger, deprivation of opportunity. Ideologies alone won't enable them to survive. The correct strategy is to press for immediate gains - any addition, however small, to their territorial area, job training, admission to skilled work, development of rural economies, decentralisation. There are no 'make or break' policies. We need a 'multi-strategy', an attack on many fronts. Though totally opposed to 'independence' for Bantustans, he wholly supports their development (28/2/79). The liberation struggle is not injured by economic development, even when carried out by capital intensive enterprises. These must be encouraged to provide training facilities for blacks on equal terms with whites.

Black workers have reached the stage of being able to curb excessive profit-making. The only obstacle to strike action is the inability of strikers to survive for long periods without wages. No leader or organisation is in a position to mobilise workers for united action. Durban strikes of 1973 were the most successful of such efforts. He, G.B., will mobilise labour, in his own way and time, for the good of all.

He sees himself therefore as the great national unifier and leader of Black workers. His approach is pragmatic: he refuses to be bound by 'ideologies' or 'Isms'. Though committed to peaceful change, he does not reject the 'initiatives of our brothers who have chosen armed struggle'. The two strategies are 'complementary' (25/2/79) A multi-strategy approach is necessary to avoid 'internecine' civil war among the oppressed, as in Zimbabwe.

For these reasons, it is a mistake for the UN and OAU to recognise only one force against apartheid. In effect, they are sabotaging the internal struggle. The Black Alliance is searching for initiative that the international community and Africa will support and that will encourage coordination between the internal and external forces.

The oppressed must take practical steps to promote a common South Africanism. It is as much the right and prerogative of black people to unite in the interests of their country as it is of whites. Unashamed appeals are being made for South Africans of all races to 'die together', but slaves have never of their own volition staked their lives in defence of their bondage. To call on the oppressed to defend the system that denies them rights and dignity is an absurdity. The Alliance rejects the insanity of racism and apartheid which now, at the eleventh hour, is destroying our country (24/2/79).

Enemies of the Alliance accuse it of being the instrument of a Zulu imperium. This is a false gospel. The Zulu nation was indeed the most powerful military power in Southern Africa before 1879. Shaka is still revered as a hero of Africa and a military strategist. But though the Zulu are the largest ethnic group, they are heavily outnumbered by the rest of the SA population.

Everyone knows that the Alliance came into being through initiatives undertaken by leaders of the Reform Party and Labour Party. It was only later that the Alliance adopted Inkatha's 'Statement of Beliefs' as its own political credo.

Any scheme aimed at dividing our people will always flounder. We can succeed only if we emphasise the urgency of seeking common ground before we are overtaken by Vorster's 'ghastly alternatives'. Condemnations of apartheid mean little in the absence of a 'viable alternative to the status quo' (25/2/79)

Members of the Alliance recognise the possibility that punitive action will be taken against them. 'We know that each past attempt by black people to find common ground has always been trampled under the jackboot of the oppressors. do not pretend for a moment that we will escape the fate of past Black initiatives' Nevertheless, 'those of us who are still at large have a heavy moral responsibility to try to save our Country from utter destruction' (24/2/79).

So much for Buthelezi's public pronouncements. They tell us something about the man and his thinking, but hardly enough for an in-depth assessment of his role and potential value for our revolution. To make an adequate evaluation, we need to know more about his activities in KwaZulu, Inkatha and the Black Alliance, and also his contacts with foreign capitalists and governments. Without such information, one can only draw tentative conclusions and speculate about his probable reactions to the development of our struggle.

1. While rejecting apartheid and Bantustan 'independence', he occupies a leading position in a Bantustan and wants to make it prosper for reasons of personal prestige and to vindicate his policy to the people. By operating within the system, he serves as an instrument of government policy and reinforces its stranglehold. Like all 'traditional' leaders with official positions he is both an agent of the administration and a reputed representative of the people. Unable to reconcile these contradictory roles he walks a tightrope between countervailing pressures from the people and the government.
2. He insists on the necessity of projecting a 'viable alternative to the status quo', but fails to present a coherent programme for social reconstruction. The 'Statement of Beliefs' subscribed to by Inkatha and the Alliance is essentially a list of civil rights. Its strategy amounts to no more than an appeal for a multi-racial round table conference. The document is characterised by vague and questionable formulations that denote a poverty of political theory as in the appeal for 'all men' to 'enter into a partnership with the State to effect the greatest possible redistribution of wealth'. No attempt is made to examine the existing social structure or define the nature of the apartheid State.



3. Buthelezi relies on moralising sermons, rhetoric and demagogy to conceal the poverty of his politics. He projects the image of a militant activist ('This is the era of doing things rather than of churning out beautiful abstract rhetoric'), breathes defiance against notorious racists and Afrikaner hardliners ('We love our land too much to fold arms and watch it being destroyed by the Treurnichts of the World'), but peters out in a futile appeal for dialogue ('Anyone with a modicum of commonsense should appreciate that it is in the interest of black and white to come round the Conference table'). In so far as one exists, his practical programme consists, on the one hand, of pressing for international recognition and, on the other hand, of seeking foreign investments for his Bantustan.

4. International recognition, he claims, would strengthen the 'internal forces' arrayed against apartheid and facilitate coordination between them and the external liberation movement. The essential element of the argument, however, is the recognition. If this were achieved, he would have less reason than now to join in our struggle. As regards foreign capital, he argues that it is necessary to relieve rural poverty and diminish the dependence of peasants on the 'white' labour market. There is no substance in this contention. The activities of multi-national corporations in underdeveloped regions intensify the exploitation of rural populations and creates new areas of economic dependence. On both points, Buthelezi's position is diametrically opposed to basic principles of the liberation movement.

5. The movement's attitude to Bantustans is examined in the 'Special Bulletin' on 'Unit Discussions on the Bantustan Document'. All units emphatically oppose any relaxation of our rejection of the regime's policy of territorial fragmentation. A few units would have us distinguish between those chiefs who endorse the so-called 'independence' of Bantustans and those who, like Buthelezi, claim to reject such 'independence'. The majority view, however, is that all are puppets of the regime and that Buthelezi is no different from the rest, but probably more dangerous to our cause.

6. The question remains, however, whether Buthelezi belongs to the category of 'true patriots' who are called upon in our President's New Year Message to join in 'a determined assault on the artificial political, economic and racist barriers which go under the term apartheid or separate development'. Buthelezi can claim with some justification that he has publicly declared a commitment to the principle of 'one country, one people, one government - a government of the people of South Africa'. In terms of these criteria, he is to be regarded as a potential ally of the liberation movement. It is our responsibility to create the conditions or discover the means of achieving unity in struggle.