

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT



Chief M G Buthelezi and Princess Irene Buthelezi arrive at King's Park Stadium in Durban on May 1, 1986 where the Chief gave the opening address at the launch of the United Workers' Union of SA.

Inkatha has always supported trade unions and encourages its members to join them. During the decades when black trade unions were not permitted by the SA Government, Chief Buthelezi championed their cause and urged successive governments to reconsider their stand.

Chief Buthelezi is a recipient of the George Meany International Human Rights Award, bestowed on him by the American Federation of

Support for the workers

Labour and the Congress of Industrial Organisations in the United States. He was the second holder of this American trade union award after Nobel Peace Prize winner, Lech Walesa, of Poland.

Inkatha has, in its actions and in numerous resolutions and statements, committed itself to the struggle of black workers in South Africa.

Inkatha (as has been noted) supports the free enterprise system not out of sentiment but pragmatism. It stresses its

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belief that, under successive apartheid governments, the free enterprise system has been exploitative. Commerce and industry have, in fact, thrived on the exploitation of black labour.

Nevertheless, it remains convinced that it is only the free enterprise system which can salvage South Africa from the kind of poverty which leads to social and political decay and ultimately to revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ferment. It is only the free enterprise system which appears to be capable of producing the jobs and the infrastructure which the country so desperately needs.

While being adamantly committed to the eradication of apartheid, Inkatha is not committed to a socialist one-party state. It regards participation in trade unions as part and parcel of the free enterprise system and multi-party democracy.

Workers in South Africa today have the machinery for negotiations — up to the Industrial Court — which were for so long denied to them. They can therefore exhaust all channels of negotiation which were not available a decade ago.

When blacks were eventually granted trade union rights, Inkatha did not attempt to persuade emerging unions to affiliate to the movement — although some have.

Chief Buthelezi says he feels "very strongly" that trade unions have their own important tasks to perform — just as political movements, too, have their own responsibilities. In other words, that unions are not political movements and political movements are not unions.

It is regrettable, however, that some political movements in South Africa — instead of

being membership-based — have now concentrated on literally poaching trade union membership through affiliation instead of building up their own powerbases. Some trade unions are being used more for political agendas than for worker agendas.

The broad mass of black trade union members are rarely, if ever, consulted by these organisations before political decisions are made regarding vital issues affecting them — political affiliations and stances, sanctions and disinvestment are prime examples.

It is no longer conjecture that certain political organisations and trade union leaders are using black workers to destabilise the economy of South Africa. There are organisations which are promoting anarchy in the hope that they will succeed in making the country "ungovernable".

The recent findings of United States Intelligence reports probing communist infiltration and strengths in black organisations fighting apartheid, had specific comments to make relating to unions linked to the United Democratic Front (UDF).

The reports, containing information pooled from all of America's intelligence agencies, found that unions linked to the UDF appeared to have a "disproportionate" say in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

They noted that about 19 of COSATU's 33 unions (constituting about 10 percent of the membership) were closely linked to the UDF and "heavily staffed with ANC sympathisers". The so-called UDF unions were widely considered to be a possible conduit for SACTU (the



communist-allied South African Congress of Trade Unions) influence in COSATU.

"At present these UDF unions appear to have influence within COSATU disproportionate to their membership strengths," the report said.

Observers divided COSATU into two factions: one favouring independence and worker activity above political activism, the other wanting close ties with the UDF and exile movements, the report added.

"Radical UDF elements, possibly in concert with the South African Communist Party or SACTU, have put pressure on COSATU executive members to take positions more extreme than they might prefer."

The report also found "strong" South African



Inkatha supporters at the launch of UWUSA.

Communist Party influence in the ANC, with about half of the 30-man executive committee known or suspected communists.

Chief Buthelezi has asked workers to guard against being used by people who want to carry out their own political programmes by "... standing on the backs of workers ..."

Inkatha does not believe in creating chaos in South Africa where rational negotiations will become impossible and feels that once the economy is ruined, it will be almost impossible to restore it to its normal state. Examples of this are to be found in many countries in Africa.

The economy of the country belongs to all the people of South Africa and Inkatha believes that only the grossly irresponsible embark on

programmes to damage it.

Chief Buthelezi told a mass meeting of workers: "It is easier to promote anarchy and bloodshed if the country is destabilised and the economy is in ruins. I therefore appeal for commonsense and wisdom whenever workers feel that they should use their prerogative to go on strike. Whoever rules South Africa in another decade or two will need the wealth which can only be created through a stable economy. Let us not destroy the future of our children and of their children's children."

The KwaZulu Government supported the 1973 strike of black workers in Natal and at that time and since then Chief Buthelezi has made it clear that "... we accept the right to strike is the workers'

prerogative ... we will continue to stand behind all black workers if and when they feel that we should support them when they use their right to strike. We are prepared to do anything that is in the interests of workers."

Although Inkatha supported the formation of the United Workers' Union of South Africa (UWUSA) it has stated that it believes in adhering to the principle that Inkatha should not interfere in the affairs of a trade union when it performs its job in the interests of its members. For this reason, office-bearers in Inkatha who now are officials of UWUSA were asked to resign their formal Inkatha positions.

"I do not want Inkatha to be accused of breathing down the necks of UWUSA's leadership," Chief Buthelezi said.