

initiatives for change can be constructive but will now be essentially secondary.

If South Africa can avoid the disaster of increasing repressive violence and counter-violence, if it can engineer a transition in ideology, the way will have been opened for a profound renewal of society. What is involved is nothing less than the efficiency of political consciousness and the deliberate articulation of values as a major factor in human evolution. The alternative is the violent defence of privilege and the pursuit of justice with the sword.

In other words, Marxist insights which rely on economic determinism and outline the processes of class friction need to be taken very seriously. In South Africa, class privilege is clearly central and vigorously bolstered by racism. Most Marxists would therefore project the inevitable grinding out of class frictions amidst increasing violence. Yet it is just possible that

this underestimates the immensely important role of social consciousness in history—a consciousness on which Marx, at times, placed great emphasis, but which many of his followers underplayed or ignored. This social awareness has a new potency in a society blessed (not always cursed!) with the opportunities of modern communications. If South Africans can rearticulate their values under bold leadership, then the social consciousness of men will have become a counterweight to the almost overwhelming elements of economic determinism within history.

Man, created in the likeness of a loving God, has the invitation to be co-creator of history—but the invitation has to be accepted. In striving for the fulfillment of this potential we need to shake ourselves loose from the fierce grip of economic interests and the ideology that defends them. The challenge will then be to pursue the full logic of our highest ideal—the dignity of each human being.□

# **SOLIDARITY AS A MEANS TO PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE**

GANDHI MEMORIAL LECTURE. PHOENIX 13.10.74

by Manas Buthelezi

Memorial days are occasions on which we are taken back to the historical roots of our heritage. We are enabled to see our struggle in the light of the invaluable contribution of those whose memory we treasure. Today we celebrate the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, a man who was able to combine political action with religious and philosophical reflection. His life of self-denial and commitment to non-violence, which has turned all of us who feel called upon to continue his struggle, into his spiritual heirs, demonstrates how a moral vision nurtured in the quiet of religious meditation can shape a political career, such as Gandhi's which was studded with intermittent prison spells and crowned with the salute of the assassin's bullet. He died in far-away India, but his spirit continues to haunt the dark corridors of the prejudices and injustices of a South Africa which he did so much to enrich during his life time.

We are gathered at this Durban outpost under the impulse of the living spirit of Gandhi. It is because today Gandhi is more than a memory that we have all converged at this place that incarnates what Gandhi was and still is to our history. At what point in our history do we commemorate Gandhi? It is a time during which a growing number of forward looking Indians, Africans and Coloureds are beginning to discover that, as black people, they have a common purpose of which they have to become increasingly aware if they can hope to continue and complete the struggle which men like Gandhi initiated. It is a time when they are beginning to rebel against the "non-white" label that has been used to describe their corporate identity. Some of our Indian, African and Coloured young people are banned or are enduring one form of physical hardship or the other simply because, among other things, they have dared to suggest

sociological and political models for the substitution of the philosophy of "non-whitism." I will discuss this "non-white philosophy" later. We are living at an important moment of history when things are beginning to take shape. Some stubbornly refuse to be part of that history which is in the process of formation. The case in point is the attitude of some Indians, Coloureds and Africans to the movement towards "black solidarity." Because of this reality I thought it fitting to celebrate the memory of Gandhi by addressing you on the theme, "Solidarity as a Means to Peaceful Coexistence."

The faith to which I subscribe compels me to espouse the ideal of the brotherhood of all men regardless of their race and colour. I shall therefore continually strive to create social and political conditions in South Africa which will make it easy for love to flourish between black and white. It is my firm belief that social, economic and political conditions as they presently exist are not in the interests of the promotion of love and peace between people of various races. This is because the guiding principle is the separation and division of people even in cases where they desperately choose to be and work together.

Two months ago the non-racial Christian Institute tried to organise a fellowship bus which would transport black and white members to attend a meeting in Dundee. We appropriately applied for a permit for such non-racial transport. Our application was typically refused. You can see therefore that the force of both law and policy is not on the side of those who struggle to bring about peace and understanding between black and white: it fights and frustrates them. In order never to falter we must remember the resolve Gandhi used to make every morning: "I shall not fear anyone on earth. I shall fear only God. I shall not bear ill-will towards anyone. I shall not submit to injustice from anyone. I shall conquer untruth by truth and in resisting untruth I shall put up with all suffering."

Indications are that solidarity between black and white is a very difficult thing to strive for. Yet we know that wars have been preceded by a break in communication and a loss of the sense of common purpose between countries and groups. South Africa has had a long tradition of creating divisions where none existed and strengthening those that were there already.

When the Union of South Africa was formed against the background of the close of the Anglo-Boer War, it ironically contained a seed of disintegration. It was a Union not of all the people of South Africa but only of those who were belligerent parties in war. The Act of Union was, as it were, a political finishing touch to the military settlement of 1902. Political power was divided between those who had tested their strength in war. The Act did nothing to enshrine the fundamental human and political rights of the black majority. The Union was for the whites and not for the blacks. This has been proved by the fact that some fifty years later the white man took it upon himself as his messianic mission to destroy whatever unity was there among black people in order to carry out his conceived plan of Separate Development. Considered improper was not only unity between black and white, but also between black and black. South Africa moved constitutionally from the Union to the Republican model under the assumption that

whatever form of government could best foster unity among the white groups and help channel their loyalties to one sovereign state was a good thing to strive for.

The tempting conclusion is that the white man in rejecting the black man is not interested in the ideal of reconciliation among all the people of God, and that we should forget all about him. I have a firm belief that doing good is not the sole prerogative of the white man. We should not let the balance of the scales of morality and justice rest entirely on what the white man does or does not do. Black people can do something where the white man fails. What the black man does will not only help the black man himself but may at the same time help the white man.

It is for this reason that I see the movement of black solidarity among Indians, Coloureds and Africans as something fresh and positive in a situation dominated by negative values like separation and division of people. It is the black man's positive answer to the programme of Apartheid.

All people of good will who at the same time cherish even elementary civilized standards welcome with approval any move towards unity, peace and mutual understanding among ethnic groups living in the same country where there is always a threat of racial riots and rivalries. Therefore when our young Indian, African and Coloured students tell us that the best guarantee for future peace and security is the discovery and realisation on our part of a common identity in our humanity and aspirations, this should be welcomed as a symptom of spiritual maturity which should put to shame all grown-up, privileged and elitist ethnic bigots amongst us. We should be humble and enlightened enough to recognise truth whenever and wherever it appears. Gandhi spoke so highly of truth that he even went to the extent of saying that it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say that God is Truth. We should therefore understand and take Black Solidarity for the truth it is.

1. The quest for Black Solidarity which our students try to articulate may be described as black people's creative and constructive presentation of a model for racial harmony during a time when white people are still sorting out among themselves whether their ultimate survival consists in strengthening or destroying the walls they have erected between them and the black man. It is the first positive move in a negative situation characterised by a deliberate tendency to make a virtue out of spotting and creating more divisions among ethnic groups in South Africa. When the young educated future leaders tell us what they would like their future to be, the least we can do is to stop and listen rather than continue to justify our vested interests in an ethnically divided South Africa.
2. Black Solidarity is a positive substitute of a negative philosophy of "non-whitism." How often have I heard black people say "we non-whites!" It is bad enough when other people call us "non-whites," but it is unbearable to hear it said as a personal confession of identity. It is like listening to a Zulu speaking person using "fanakalo" in order to court approval from his employer.

Non-whitism is more than just a convenient way of speech: it is a philosophy, a deep seated articulation of a world-view and understanding of the self. If I were pressed to classify this non-white philosophy I would say that it belongs to the Neo-Platonist tradition. Put crudely, as you may remember, this tradition distinguishes between reality and its appearances. What we see around us are merely shadows of real things: reality only lies behind its phenomenon. Then what does "non-white" philosophy make out of this neo-platonist tradition?

Reality is white. All else is non-white in as far as it is a participatory shadow of whiteness. What is non-white has no independent existence: it subsists in whiteness. In other words "non-whites" depend on "whites" after whose image they, as shadows, are created. Shadows derive their identity from the things of which they are shadows. Therefore the identity of the "non-white" is the extent to which it approximates "whiteness." "Non-whites" can therefore be classified and divided according to the extent they approximate whiteness.

Is this just useless sophistry? I wish it were that. But it is not. It carries over into the real life we know. In other words "non-white" philosophy has social, cultural, economic and political implications. Let us take each of these implications in turn.

**a. Social Implications:** It is well-known that "non-whites" feel inferior to "whites," just as a shadow cannot but defer to its substance. Similarly the social amenities of non-whites are inferior to those of whites. This applies to toilets, recreational facilities and housing conditions.

**b. Cultural Implications:** Who does not know that non-whites have always tended to despise their cultural heritage? Relatively speaking, Indians have been the only exception when it came to their attitude towards their culture. For an African, to be "civilised" has meant to emulate the white man's behaviour patterns, that is, to be an authentic shadow. No wonder that the white man continued to reject us in spite of the fact that we wore his clothers, spoke his language and even tried to look a little bit white in our complexion. A shadow could simply not become the substance.

While still at this point of culture I am reminded of Carus who, during the past centuries meticulously propounded a theory of the spiritual hierarchy of races which he drew up according to the degree of the imitation of European civilisation. Arthur Gobineau elaborated this further. "For him the 'Aryan race' is the aristocracy of humanity, because only Aryans are of pure white blood: other varieties of the white race have secondary importance, while the non-white are fundamentally lower, destined for subsidiary roles in the history and economy of the world."

According to Gobineau, there would be no civilisation at all outside the white race had it not been for the process of interbreeding. He is of the opinion that inferiority and superiority are inborn and therefore an inferior people cannot by the very fact possess institutions of a higher order.

Therefore you can see how far things can go in this white-non-white dichotomy.

**c. Economic Implications:** Non-whites have predictably been satisfied with the shadow of the substance of the wealth of the land. They were credited with the ability of performing "economic acrobatics" for being able to survive where the white man could not. Such a "credit" did not serve to enhance their dignity and tenacity as human beings, because it was a credit given to a shadow. I have heard an Australian "admiring" the ability of the aborigines of surviving without water for days in the desert by only liking moisture and dew from leaves of certain plants. I myself have sometimes looked with admiration at my shadow reflected on a very deep pool where I would fear to swim. In other words my shadow can sometimes "do" what I cannot do; but this feat does not enhance its dignity because to me it remains my shadow. Have you not wondered why the non-whites do not get sufficient credit for having also developed this land in books on Economics? Look, through their cheap labour the non-whites have subsidised the economy of this country. The amount of subsidy they have paid to the South African economy is equal to the difference between the salary scales of whites and non-whites. No credit is given for this for nobody cares about shadows.



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**d. Political Implications:** All meaningful power is in the hands of the whites. Non-whites can only exercise the shadow of power in their Councils or Homelands. The "parliaments" of the non-whites are the shadow of the real parliament in Cape Town. Since 1910 whites have been brought towards an ever-deepening sense of unity: they are one "nation". The non-whites on the other hand, have been divided against their will into, bits and pieces of "nations." I have seen mirrors which duplicate or triplicate the image: the more multipartite the image the more intriguing is the spectacle. Nobody would agree to have his face cut into pieces, but people do not care what happens to their images. Hence those who wield power do not mind the division of non-whites into citizens of mini-states.

3. But there is a growing number of people who care. Some have already been liberated from the multipartite non-white cocoon into unconditional black people who stand in solidarity with one another. Early this year in one magazine there was a very telling cartoon with the caption: "In every 'non-white' there is a black man, created in the image of God trying to get out."

To move from "non-white" divisions into Indian, Coloured and African to black solidarity is more than a quest for change in official names. It is a process of liberation itself: liberation from non-being to reality, from shadow to substance and from the identity of nobody to that of somebody. It is true that suffering which is found in all forms of life under "shadow existence" will still be with us for quite some time. However at this moment in South African history the suffering of the black man is becoming redemptive. The black man is now regarding his suffering as a step towards liberation instead of a pool of fate and self pity. Right in the midst

of suffering the black man has made himself believe that he can do something about his own liberation. This is proof that he is no longer a non-white who subsists in and depends entirely on the whims of the white man: he is now a liberated black man. Black Consciousness is an instance of how the black man has transmuted his present suffering into the medium of liberation towards self esteem. Look at what is happening in the field of labour. The black worker has transformed his bitter experience of being under-paid into an occasion for discovering his potential. Look at how banned black people face courageously the reality of their bitter experience. They are learning the bitter lesson that you cannot truly belong to a community for which you are not prepared to suffer. Suffering for others is the best expression of solidarity with them.

The kind of black solidarity I espouse is an open one. It is open to the white man who is prepared to accept me not just as a non-white but as a fellow human being who happens to be black. I see black solidarity as necessary at the moment because we need a model of racial harmony which will become so attractive that whites will be forced to join it and abandon apartheid. It is not enough to keep on telling whites what they should do, but we must show them what they should be.

In this manner we shall cease being victims of South African history. Instead we shall be shapers of that history. A non-white is always a victim of the situation, but as black people we shall have become masters of the situation. Being a master of the situation means sometimes undergoing suffering for the sake of others without fear and panic. In this way the whole of South Africa will benefit from the constructive model of racial harmony initiated through black solidarity. □