

# BLACK UNITED FRONT

## An Interview with Dr Nyembesi and Mr Mavuso

by Jill Wentzel

"Inkatha and the Black United Front should not be one and the same thing, but they are," said Dr Nyembesi, Chairman of the Black United Front since its inception in October last year. He and Mr John Mavuso, a member of the Black United Front executive, were explaining the movement to a Black Sash general meeting in Johannesburg in May this year.

Inkatha had started in Dr Nyembesi's house in 1974 while a public meeting was being organised to receive Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and introduce members of his government to the Soweto public. The organizers of the meeting felt they would like to establish something more permanent and asked Chief Buthelezi for a name. He suggested the name Inkatha be revived. This was a movement started by King Solomon in 1928 in order to unite the people as an alternative to direct confrontation with the whites. The idea had been to bring people together to develop themselves. In Natal at that time there was a large population of Sotho and Inkatha did not exclude them or anybody else.

In 1974 the revived Inkatha was officially launched. The membership was quickly 70 000 and R69 000 was raised. Now in 1977 it is 100 400 with funds of R136 000. The joining fee is R3 00 with an annual subscription of R1 00.

Feeling that a national movement was necessary, Inkatha launched the Black United Front at a meeting in the Jan Smuts Holiday Inn on 8th October 1976. All homeland leaders were invited. Chiefs Buthelezi, Phatudi and Ntsawanisi attended. Others failed to turn up. A cross section of urban representatives throughout the Reef and Pretoria were personally invited and attended, including Godfrey Pitje, David Thebehale and Sally Motlana. Although personal approaches were made to Saso and BPC they refused to sit down with homeland leaders.

At this meeting the Black United Front was successfully launched and a steering committee elected with Dr Nyembesi as chairman, the three homeland leaders who had been present, Sally Motlana, David Thebehale and Mr Mashao from Pretoria. Mr John Mavuso and others were subsequently co-opted.

Another Black United Front conference was held in Pietersburg on 5th March 1977 when Dr Nyembesi and the executive went to talk to the Pedi, sell the idea of the Black United Front and encourage them not to take independence. It was a big meeting. Six or seven hundred people packed the assembly hall in Teshigo.

The large meeting at Natalspruit early this year was not as had been reported by some of the press a Black United

Front meeting. It had been an Inkatha recruiting meeting called to present urban representative Mr Gibson Thula to the public of Natalspruit. This had been a festive occasion with drum majorettes, singing and many speeches. There was a huge crowd and a number of old congressites had attended. Dr Nyembesi said that good wishes and subscriptions from a large number of exiles were received.

Dr Nyembesi said Inkatha really started because blacks had no bargaining power and their only weapon was numbers. "If we can come together maybe weight of numbers might tell in the end".

He said Inkatha was not an anti-white movement and, "we don't want communism that is certain".

He said he believed that had it not been for confusion and multiplicity of organisations in Rhodesia a solution might have been found by now.

"We must have a disciplined body of people. We have to tidy ourselves. We lack leadership".

"We have lost confidence in the white leadership. We are not sure they are the right people to govern a multi-racial society".

"Majority rule means the best people must govern the country. Separate development will cause disaster".

"Inkatha talks with the PRP because this is the only white political party who want to talk with us".

He said Inkatha believed neither whites nor blacks should bully the other. 'If they want to dominate us we will go for black majority rule. But this is not what we want. We want non-racial majority rule'.

Inkatha was not prepared to have any discussions on the basis of separate development. Dr Nyembesi said he believed Nationalists had not properly thought out separate development and did not really know how it protected the interests of whites or how Transkeian independence could ease the problems of the country.

Inkatha was a grass roots movement which was something that had not been organised before among blacks and certainly not by Saso or BPC. 'Our approach is to the simple people'. Neither Saso nor BPC had been invited to join Inkatha.

**Question:** Is there a diversity of aim between Black United Front and Saso?

**Answer:** We are aiming at the same thing, but they are taking a path which makes us a bit uncomfortable and vice-versa. Some of our tactics don't suit the other.

Replying to Peter Brown's comment that the generation gap in the Transvaal was being emphasised by Inkatha, which surely made it vital for them to approach Saso and BPC very soon, Dr Nyembesi denied that Saso and BPC had all that support. "Not even all the students agree with them". He admitted that membership of Inkatha was largely middle-aged, but said that the problem was not so much the generation gap as the fact that the government had successfully convinced people that there is such a thing as urban and rural blacks.

"We believe in Gatsha but the youth say that he is a homeland leader who works in the system".

"But," he said confidently, "we will relate to them when the time comes". In the meantime, "we are going to join everybody in. We are working fast". He added, however, "Unity does not mean that we involve everybody".

**Question:** How is Gatsha accepted by the other groups?

**Answer:** That's the problem. We must sell ourselves.

**Mr Mavuso:** Half the people have not come forward to join the united front. A barrier is the feeling that one cannot have anything to do with people who operate within the system.

Nevertheless Inkatha was growing steadily as a grass roots movement. Dr Nyembesi claimed that no other black political movement had ever been able to be as financially self-supporting as Inkatha was able to be. "Saso would not be able to collect a joining fee of R3 00 plus an annual R1 00 nor had the A.N.C. or P.A.C. been able to collect sufficient funds.

**Question:** When you have got it all organised what are you going to do?

**Answer:** I'd rather not say.

**Question:** How do you plan to spend the money you have raised?

**Answer:** We have banked the money. That is all.

**Question:** How can you attract new members unless you have a clearly stated policy?

**Answer:** The success of the movement in attracting people shows that we are succeeding in getting the message across.

**Question:** What support do you have from the homeland leadership, the black radicals and on the campuses,

**Answer:** Dr Phatudi and Professor Ntsanwisi have thrown their weight behind us. We haven't invited the campuses as a group. Everybody is invited as individuals. Before we invite them we'd like to have a round-table conference where we can sort out certain things.

**Question:** When you feel you have sufficient numbers for their weight to tell, would you take up short term objectives like rents?

**Answer:** Inkatha would like to be involved in all problems affecting the country, not the problems affecting just one group.

**Question:** What sort of policy-making machinery do you have?

**Answer:** Central Executive and Regional Executive elected by local branches.

**Question:** Will you have white members?

**Answer:** Would you like to join? Yes — I will bring you forms to sign.

**Question:** What plans does Inkatha have for coping with people in the Transkei?

**Answer:** We have made it clear that they can be independent from Pretoria but Independence replaces white elitism with black elitism. They can't be independent from us. Matanzima himself said there was no purpose in multi-racial society and whites and blacks might as well go their own way: but he is prepared to join S.A. if conditions change. We will talk to Matanzima. We are school mates and I have an open invitation to go to him.

**Question:** Why does he deal so ghastly with his opposition?

**Answer:** I will ask him when I go to him.

**Question:** If you feel it is impossible for you to treat with the Nats and if its going to be impossible to get the Nats out of power by any peaceful means, how do you see Inkatha achieving its aims?

**Answer:** People go into the separate development laager because the government says the Nats are the only people who can protect them. The issues are not even looked at.

**Question:** Can you see any possibility of bridging the black-white gap through dialogue?

**Answer:** Yes, we still have time to talk. We think and we have every confidence that we shall overcome those people who will not sit down with other people. We state we can't close our eyes to the white group but we can only talk before we get too strong. We want to avoid a Rhodesian situation. We want Buthelezi to talk now.

**Question:** If as you say you believe in slow consensus among people at grass roots level, without having any clear policy, what do you say when you recruit people?

**Answer:** You have a fine leader in Buthelezi. You must support him. You must work for the Zulu first and then attract all for the good of the black community. □