SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1973 BANNINGS

(A talk given to a Progressive Party Lunch Hour Forum in Pietermaritzburg in December, 1973.)

by Colin Gardner

First, some general points about banning. By now it should be clear to any alert person that a banning order, so far from being an indication that the recipient of the order has committed some crime, is in fact more-or-less a proof that he has committed **no** crime. This Government is eager to get convictions; if a person is suspected of having committed an offence he is likely to be charged.

It would be wrong to suppose that the people who are banned are the only victims of banning. Society is a victim. Those who know banned persons or know their writings are unable to quote from them or even to refer to what they have said; those who have not known what they have said are not allowed to know. The impoverishment is serious. This is particularly so in the case of such a person as Dr Manas Buthelezi, who is a man of quite unusual originality and sensitivity. What he has to say, and the exact way in which he decides to say it, South Africa as a whole needs to know. He is in many respects the Martin Luther King of South Africa. He has been gagged, and we are the losers.

And we are the losers in other ways too. Bannings tend to intimidate people. We are all diminished by the silencing of a banned person.

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Most of the people who have been banned in the past year—and there are many of them—are blacks. Articulate blacks, leaders of the community, people who have been voicing some of the feelings of the black majority of the population; leading members of SASO, BPC, Black Community Programmes, and now the Christian Institute. These people have not been plotting the overthrow of the state; they have not been breaking the law or (as far as I know) planning to break the law. Many of them have not even spent much of their energy denouncing the Government. They have been pointing out, much of the time in an incisive but reasoned manner (and here I am referring to a whole way of thinking, not to the specific utterances of banned persons)—blacks have been pointing out, firstly, that the present system of racial and economic injustice is extremely painful to black people, and secondly, that by recognising their own humanity, their own importance as human beings, blacks can exert a steady pressure and thus contribute vitally to the process of change that the country so obviously needs. I wish I could talk about the way in which Dr Manas Buthelezi conceives these thoughts in profoundly Christian terms.

Now many of the people who have been giving particular expression to such thoughts have been silenced. There are still many people who can and will continue to say such things. There is always Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. But clearly the Government has been trying to stop articulate and enlightened black people from stating their views.

What is likely to be the result of this? The result is likely to be the same as in all other instances of the obstructing of a natural and healthy process. In this country black people suffer abnormally; it is natural and right that they should be able to express their feelings and, in doing this, work towards a fair sharing of the goods of society. When you obstruct a natural process, you produce either a certain inertness, or an explosive violence, or both. The silencing of black spokesmen is likely to produce **both**—an inertness in society, especially the dominant white part of society, which is unlikely to modify its views greatly unless it is made to face up (and soon) to the realities of black thinking and feeling; and then, an explosion of black violence, when the thoughts and feelings that are being so dammed up can be contained no longer.

The Government claims that certain English-language newspapers are inciting racial hatred. Such accusations are absurd. Nothing induces racial hatred and despair more than a banning order. The other day I met an old African friend who was so deeply moved and angered by the banning of Dr Buthelezi that he was unable to speak about it at all; he asked me, when I raised the subject, to talk about something else.

But let us not, those of us who are whites, put all the blame on the Government. We are the people who allow this

sort of thing to happen. We are, partly, the society which acquiesces in banning. Many of us only think about it as we read the newspapers. Why? Because we feel secure. And why do we feel secure, most of the time? Because we don't know what black people are thinking and feeling. And if we did know, would we know how to respond? No.

Dr Manas Buthelezi, and many of the other black people who have been banned this year, have been showing the crucial truths about the state of affairs in this country, and they have been suggesting ways of responding creatively, both for blacks and for whites. They have been describing a way in which society might evolve naturally and humanely. Dr Buthelezi is a theologian and a dedicated minister of religion who prefers reconciliation to revolution.

As a reward for his insight and his dedication he has been banned. But in a sense we have all been banned. And in one sense, but an important sense, we have banned ourselves. And most of us don't even care.

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I'd like to say a little more about the question of obstructing a natural process.

It seems to me that the body politic is in several respects like the human body. It depends for its health on many sorts of flow, movement, circulation. Stop up one of these natural flows and something dreadful happens.

The body politic functions in a different way and at a different pace; but there are many points of similarity. And let us not forget that, whether they are officially excluded or not, even if they are fobbed off with unreal provisions and promises, black people are a part of the South African body politic. They participate in and contribute richly to the society in which we all live. They are here, and they matter—they matter a great deal. They also suffer a great deal (as I said earlier), and it is essential that their suffering and their aspirations (whether or not most white people agree with all of these aspirations) be expressed, and be allowed to exert an influence, in the normal and natural way, upon the development of the body politic. People are alive, people change and develop; it is natural that a body politic should be alive, and change and develop. If it is not permitted to behave like a living and changing thing, something dreadful happens.

Now life, change, development within the body politic is precisely what this Government dislikes and is determined—in a Canute-like way—to thwart. The Government is wedded to the status quo. It loves to talk of the "traditional South African way of life"—in other words, it constantly looks back to the past. It loves to say, "If you want to change society, you must do it through the ballot-box"—in other words, live contentedly within the status quo of "whites only" politics. To black people it in effect says—in so far as it deigns to communicate with them at all—"We are busy constructing for you a little side-track of a status quo which will give you a vantage-point from which we hope you won't be able to have any

Dr Manas Buthelezi.

influence upon the **real** status quo, which we like to call **our** status quo."

It is all as if some surgeon, some crazed transplant-expert, were to channel the blood of a person's body into a limb, an artificial limb, in such a way that it could never flow back to the heart.

But English-speaking whites of a liberal or progressive persuasion often make the mistake of assuming that the damming-up that takes place in our society, the thwarting of natural movements in the body politic, is wholly or largely the work of Afrikaner Nationalism. I have tended to think so myself in the past. But I now think it is not so. If thoughtful English-speaking whites look around at their fellows, if indeed they look into themselves, they find that there is a great deal of **acceptance** of the situation in which we find ourselves. Of course it isn't easy to know what exactly one can **do** in the circumstances; I don't want to underestimate that problem. But it is surprising how many concerned or supposedly-concerned persons are content to do almost nothing.

They are content to do little or nothing because, essentially, and whether or not they are wholly conscious of the fact, the situation that they are in is a pleasing and convenient one. They too, essentially, are in love with the status quo, the "traditional South African way of life." The economic dice are loaded so attractively in favour of the white man. It has often been said that the English South African thinks Progressive, votes U.P., and thanks

God for the Nationalist Party. He enjoys the advantages of the status quo combined with the pleasures of what he thinks is a clear conscience.

And I think it would be only fair to add that it isn't only those who vote U.P. who quietly enjoy the South African status quo. People who are Progressives, even perhaps active Progressives, are often in the midst of a clandestine love-affair with the status quo. (I don't claim immunity myself, I may add). To take but one instance, some of the things that I have heard from members of the local students' Wages Commission suggest that Progressive people aren't always wholly progressive in practice . . .

I think we whites must all shudder and bow our heads when we think of the implications of these recent bannings, the implications of what is happening in our society—implications which involve us all and which partly accuse us all.

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There is one of these implications that I'd like to develop a little further. I said earlier that an obstruction of a natural process could lead to an inertness—in this case, an inertness among whites, who are unlikely to modify their views unless they are made to face up, before it is too late, to the thoughts and feelings of black people.

Let me apply this thought to the position of the Progressive Party. For all its talent, for all its strong arguments, it has not so far made much progress as a political force among the whites. (Though I support the Progressive Party in very many ways, I am not at the moment speaking as a Progressive, still less am I voicing an official Party view). Now it seems to me that the Progressive Party's arguments, many of which are in themselves very powerful, will make little headway among whites until they are backed up by a **natural pressure from blacks.** It is pressure from blacks, real pressure, that whites understand. When that pressure begins to be exerted, and when it becomes clear that it cannot be stamped out by bannings, prohibitions, legislation, etc., then (I think)—and not before then— many white people will begin to pay attention to the Progressive Party.

"That's it," Mr Vorster might say, "and that's why I am trying to stamp out the black pressure." Mr Vorster might say it; but many whites, even secretly some Progressives, would agree with him. "I ban people," Mr Vorster would say, if he were in the habit of speaking openly about such matters, "I ban people in order to preserve the traditional South African way of life."

But of course society, especially a society like ours, cannot be static. Black people **are feeling bitter resentments** whether they are allowed to express their feelings or not. These resentments are beginning to boil and bubble under the surface. Most whites continue complacently to live their traditional way of life.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, as things are going now, sooner or later something dreadful must happen. □

SOUTH AFRICA AND 'THE CUBIST SENSIBILITY'

by Peter Strauss

The Cubist movement was such a complex affair that it probably changed our sensibilities in a thousand different ways. But why not start talking about the Cubists bit by bit, at any rate? They have changed our lives so radically that we should never stop analysing them. I want to talk about a particular effect that became less and less evident as the movement developed. It is most inescapable in the early canvasses of 1907 and 1908. Let me give some examples: Picasso's **Les Demoiselles d'Avignon** (1907); his **Fruit and Wineglass,** and particularly his **Three Women,** both of 1908; Braque's **Houses at L'Estaque** of 1907. These pictures bring us into an extraordinarily close relationship with them, if we compare them with, say, works of the High Renaissance. It is as though a broad carpet that had separated us from the canvasses were rolled away, and we could step right up to them now—and are almost drawn into them.

In Renaissance paintings I am always aware of this carpet. It is a broad carpet, obeying the laws of perspective, probably marked off in little squares also obeying the laws of perspective, and it calmly separates me from what is behind it: the event. Of course the painting itself is three-dimensional—in fact, it is an extension of this carpeted hall I am standing in; like a mirror in a restaurant