

NTHATO MOTLANA



Dr Nthato Motlana

(picture by the Natal Witness)

Dr Nthato Motlana, Chairman of the Soweto Committee of Ten and President of the Soweto Civic Association, was interviewed by Sam Mabe, Senior Reporter with South Africa's Black daily newspaper, **The Sowetan**. This interview which was especially conducted for **Reality** focusses chiefly on South Africa's international position.

Reality: Dr Motlana, how would you say Blacks in South Africa view foreign investments: as propping up Apartheid or helping to end it?

Dr Motlana: There are specific laws such as the Internal Security Act, Public Safety Act and many others which will not allow any form of campaigning for disinvestment. Anybody who would start campaigning for disinvestment would be running a risk of going to Robben Island. But I can tell you now that by their very nature, foreign investments support the status quo, they support Apartheid. Blacks in this country will tell you that the only way of changing the status quo is to do whatever will wreck the country's economy, to bring the stubborn Afrikaners to the negotiation table. It would seem that more and more Blacks are subscribing to this view.

Reality: But there are people who argue that crippling the economy through disinvestment or sanctions will hurt Blacks most. What are your views on this?

Dr. Motlana: It is not the Black man who says that. In meetings that I have attended, like the one at the South African Institute of Race Relations about six months

ago, I have heard very many Black workers say they will certainly suffer, but they say this will be in the short term only. They say they are prepared to bear the consequences of their own recommendations and that in the long term, they will gain when things shall have changed, and there is a just society. Blacks are not moving into this whole thing of disinvestment blindly, they understand the implications and they say they are prepared to suffer. It has been said by some people that disinvestment will lead to a shrinkage in the economy and therefore greater unemployment, but there is tremendous unemployment right now which is a direct result of Apartheid. There is already a great deal of pulling out by many companies, which means we are already suffering the effects of the iniquitous policy of Apartheid.

Reality: What, in your view, is the Black opinion on foreign pressure, especially from the United Nations?

Dr Motlana: Blacks have become disillusioned with foreign pressure. There was a time when they thought that agencies such as the United Nations, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and others from the West might bring this country to change its views. However, the long and sorry history of

Namibia has shown that South Africa's friends in the West are not pursuing the type of economic and political pressure that needs to be exerted to get the South African government to change her policies.

Reality: What about the pressure from organisations such as Trans-Africa?

Dr Motlana: The campaigns by people like Randall Robinson and others enjoy the support of the masses here because they are bringing the whole question of Apartheid to the attention of the American public, but we are looking at Banks, Foundations, investors and the (American) government. Blacks are convinced that (American) Whites will not turn against their kith and kin in favour of Blacks in South Africa. We know that when it comes to a push it is going to be the governments and major companies that can bring effective pressure to bear on South Africa, but that is what we do not see happening, hence the disillusionment.

Reality: What form of pressure would Blacks recommend to force the South African Government to change?

Dr Motlana: I don't know. But what I've heard from some meetings I have attended, Blacks talk about the need for disinvestment and mandatory sanctions, and support for the Frontline States. More than that, Blacks would like to see the international community use whatever muscle it has to free Namibia and get South Africa out of Angola. They would also like to see South Africa being stopped from destabilising her neighbours.

Reality: Has the Reagan Administration's policy of Constructive Engagement succeeded, and how is it viewed by Blacks?

Dr Motlana: Not only Blacks, even American Conservatives in the Republican Administration are agreed that it was a failure. It has achieved absolutely nothing except encourage South Africa in its intransigence. The American Government's image has been severely tainted in the eyes of (South African) Blacks because of this policy, it has made Washington just as guilty of the crime of Apartheid as Pretoria is.

Reality: Assuming a post-Apartheid situation, in what direction should the country's foreign policy lean: East, West or Non-Aligned?

Dr Motlana: That will depend entirely on how long the struggle for justice will last. There have been many who have commented that the longer the struggle takes, the more certain it is that the unit of currency in South Africa will be the Russian Ruble! I am suggesting that in the post-Apartheid era we will remember who our friends were in our moment of need. At the moment the West is just not interested in our battle for justice, they have taken our battle and made it their own. Our policies will be to accommodate and to give comfort to our friends who gave us arms and education, our policies will lean towards the East.

Reality: Is there anything the West can do at this hour to prevent this?

Dr Motlana: Of course, the West has the wherewithal with the large investment in South Africa to support the struggle going on here, to support a just cause in this country. America's policy towards Savimbi for instance, is most disgraceful. They allow South Africa to play cat and mouse with Samora Machel by arming the M.N.R. It is those

policies which will make it impossible for us to regard the West as our true friends. They have let us down ever so often.

Reality: There have been arguments that the East provides arms to countries which could perhaps do better with food. What is your comment on this?

Dr Motlana: In post-Independent South Africa, there may be a need for food. But the greatest need at the moment is for justice, for freedom, for liberation. Surely Ethiopia and Sudan need food, independent Mozambique needs food, but we are not campaigning for food, we are campaigning for a just society. It is ridiculous to suggest that Russia can only give us arms and not food. What we need is not food, we need liberation.

Reality: The case has been made that Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland are falsely separated from South Africa. What would be the ideal relationship with these states in a post-Apartheid situation?

Dr Motlana: Having attended Fort Hare with some of the leaders like Ntsu Mokhehle and Seretse Khama, I am convinced that in a post-Apartheid South Africa, there will be a federation which might even include Namibia because of the economic, historical and communication links between all these states with South Africa. We surely belong together with all those people.

Reality: How did Blacks view the Nkomati Accord?

Dr Motlana: When Nkomati was announced, somebody asked me if I had been invited for the signing ceremony. I said I had not. If I had been, I would not have gone to witness the ultimate humiliation of an African leader whose country was made ungovernable by South Africa and in the aftermath, forced to sign a friendship treaty. That humiliation brought no joy nor security to poor Samora Machel in his country. We think Nkomati was a disgrace South Africa should be ashamed of.

Reality: Was it a wise decision for Lesotho to have refused to sign an accord with South Africa in view of the fact that they are a landlocked country; entirely dependent on South Africa for almost everything?

Dr Motlana: We Black South Africans cannot understand the need for these accords. These countries have pledged themselves to prevent infiltration of A.N.C. cadres into their countries and they will not allow them training facilities and so on. South Africa which cannot control infiltration of A.N.C. insurgents wants Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland to do that dirty job for her. If they don't, or show unwillingness to do so, she punishes them severely. I think this is a disgraceful case of a bully venting his spleen and his frustration on poor, unarmed and defenceless neighbours. I believe that it is the correct attitude for these countries to refuse to sign accords which merely allow South Africa to interfere in their internal affairs. It is for the outside world to support these weak countries against a bullying neighbour. Botswana is right in refusing to sign an accord that will diminish her independence and turn her into a puppet state of Pretoria.

Reality: What do you say about the A.N.C.'s argument that its cadres are not necessarily in the neighbouring states but are operating within South Africa?

Dr Motlana: Recent events have shown that this is quite true. We do read news and hear suggestions that there are A.N.C. men in Alexandra for instance. If South Africa

wants to make the A.N.C. redundant and ineffective it must institute a just and free society. As things now stand one cannot foresee a situation where the A.N.C. would just call it a day and decide to abandon the struggle it has been involved in over the years.

Reality: How did Blacks view President Botha's overseas trip in May 1985?

Dr Motlana: It was described in South Africa by his cronies as a great success. But it was perceived by Blacks in South Africa as a public relations exercise that misled and misinformed the outside world. Subsequent events, such as the collapse of the South African economy, showed that the outside world had not in fact been convinced about the public relations exercise that had taken place. The trip was, as far as Blacks were concerned, a waste of time.

Reality: It has been suggested that South Africa had a hand in the military coup in Lesotho recently, what is the general belief among Blacks?

Dr Motlana: Blacks are certain that South Africa had a hand in Lesotho's coup. Even if it could not be shown that in some direct fashion South Africa influenced events, there is absolutely no doubt that they then staged a blockade. Making it clear that they were unhappy with Lesotho's relationship with Eastern countries – especially the opening of the Embassies. At that moment, they were setting the stage for a possible revolt by the people of Lesotho who had interpreted South Africa's displeasure with the policies of Lesotho as having something to do with the opening of these Embassies.

Secondly, South African Blacks are well aware that the government of Leabua Jonathan was imposed on an unwilling population after the very first election when it was known that the Basotholand Congress Party, led by Mr Ntsu Mokhehle, had won the elections. Clearly, in South Africa they argued that as long as Jonathan was willing to be a puppet and play South Africa's game he was welcome, but as soon as he showed some an independent line – by opening Eastern Embassies – he had ceased to be their puppet. He, however, wanted to play a meaningful role in the OAU and other international forums, and had to show that he wasn't a puppet of South Africa. For that reason South Africa dropped him like a hot potato.

Leabua Jonathan, not that we are sorry that this usurper has lost his position. We would have liked however that the rightful ruler of Lesotho, Mr Ntsu Mokhehle and his Party, rather than a military regime should have been the alternative government.

Reality: What does the blockade which preceded the Lesotho Coup say for the effectiveness of economic sanctions?

Dr Motlana: It says everything. It rebuts the argument about the ineffectiveness of sanctions. Whenever we talk about sanctions in international conferences, we are always told about the experience of Italy and Ethiopia (or Abyssinia as it used to be called) around 1936 when, as a result of the invasion by Mussolini, the League of Nations attempted to impose an economic blockade on Italy which never succeeded.

We are also reminded of the ineffective blockade over Rhodesia. However, there are those who argue that in fact the economic blockade in Rhodesia was effective and that,

together with the guerilla war, was one of the reasons why the Smith regime capitulated. South Africa of course gives a classic example of how very effective an economic blockade can be. During my visit to the United States, a Mayor I visited was arguing for naval blockade. He said that a few ships could be stationed around South Africa so that no oil or anything should reach the country.

South Africa has proved in no uncertain terms that economic sanctions are very, very effective in bringing a recalcitrant country to heel.

Reality: What are the implications of Nelson Mandela's release for the current strife inside South Africa?

Dr Motlana: I think the release of Mandela should be viewed in its broadest perspective. If, as all of us insist, Nelson Mandela is released together with his colleagues, if this is accompanied by the return of the exiles and if, thirdly, political organisations banned in 1960 are unbanned so as to give Mandela the political base he holds to operate peacefully inside South Africa, then I would imagine that he will become an effective leader of the Black people.

On the other hand, if he is released to his home in Orlando accompanied by numerous restrictions on what he may or may not do, what kind of public meetings he may or may not address (which will deny him access to the necessary political base), and also accompanied by the refusal to release other people convicted with him in 1964, and the further refusal to the return of the exiles, his release will have no meaning at all. It will mean that he will immediately embark on a Defiance Campaign. He will probably organise meetings, he will probably join up with the UDF or put up a new organisation altogether. He will defy restrictions imposed on him and, I believe, the Government is worried by the kind of attitude he may adopt, and is therefore not about to release him. So, any talk about his release is mere speculation.

Reality: There have been suggestions that the Government is prepared to release him if only he would not stay in South Africa. Would he accept this, and what would Blacks say about this?

Dr Motlana: There have been lots and lots of rumours about discussions between the South African and the British Governments, the French and even with Zambia. There is a small number of Blacks who would advocate that he goes into exile. There is even a small number of Blacks who speak about the possibility of a (South African) Government exile. But the bigger proportion of Blacks realise that the struggle for liberation is going to take place and be won right here. So if the government sees itself under pressure it will be because of what is happening right here and therefore, to be effective a leader must work within South Africa.

I have heard that he has refused already to agree to go into exile and many of us support that contention. However, there is no reason why Mr Mandela, having spent 22 years of his life on Robben Island, should go into even more of a prison outside where there will be restrictions on his movement and speeches by the host country. He will not enjoy the kind of freedom that he would like to see. We feel therefore that he should stick to his guns and refuse to go into exile.

Reality: Thank you Dr Motlana. □