

OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE, LOS ANGELES

FEBRUARY 1985

A FEW REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF A MEETING WITH OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE
BY MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI, CHIEF MINISTER KWAZULU, PRESIDENT OF
INKATHA AND CHAIRMAN, THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK ALLIANCE
FEBRUARY 1985. LOS ANGELES

Americans are all too frequently unaware of the fundamental differences between Black politics in the South African struggle for liberation and politics as they know it in the United States. Because the Black civil rights struggle here lives in the memory of many, simplistic parallels are often drawn between Black South African politics and Black American politics, and it would I believe serve a useful purpose to talk about the dangers of doing so.

There is today in America an upsurge of interest in what is happening in South Africa, and there is pressure on Americans to redefine their positions. The Reagan Administration is the first Administration to have adopted a defined policy towards South Africa and it is still in the process of being defined and re-defined. This is taking place in the cut and thrust of American party politics and in the circumstances in which big business in America is under pressure to reconsider its investments in South Africa and Church and other pressure groups are working hard to get universities, State governments and pension funds to withdraw their investments from companies doing business with South Africa. Point and counter-point is being made and as the debate swings back and forth, the assumptions that are made about Black politics in South Africa are of course crucial.

Political activity both in bold norm and nuance is always related to the aims and objectives which people are striving for, and the circumstances in which they do so. While parallels can be drawn between the tactics and strategies and the attitudes of Black political activists in the civil rights struggle here in the United States and the Black South African struggle, the different aims and objectives and the different circumstances markedly distinguish the nature of Black politics in South Africa from Black politics in America.

The idiom of protest in particular needs to be brought under scrutiny. Protest against injustice is good. It is more than good. It is an essential moral expression in every situation where people are deprived. Protest dramatises desperate situations; it heightens the awareness of the oppressed and increases their willingness to become involved, and it challenges the immoral basis of the oppressor. Its political utility, however, differs in South Africa and the United States.

Black Americans did not have to re-write their country's constitution and they did not have to change the very nature of the State. Black South Africans have to do just this. Black South Africans therefore have to view politics and the question of tactics and strategies within a demanding context which Black Americans did not experience. It is against this background that I say that there is a tendency in America to over-play the political utility of protest, and it is in this context that I say simplistic parallels between the Black American experience and the Black South African experience is dangerous.

Black South African leaders who are involved in protest politics are feted in the United States for what they do, and Blacks are encouraged to think that protest is a primary political weapon which they should be employing. In South Africa, protest moves people to a mid-point between democratic opposition and the employment of violence for political purposes, whereas protest in the United States was a claim for democratic rights. The consociation of protest and violence in South Africa has been amply demonstrated in experience. The defiance campaign is a classical case in point. In the late fifties protest reached unprecedented heights and was used to mobilise people very effectively. Amongst other things it attempted to develop protest along the lines of passive resistance but leaders in the Congress Alliance directing protest had to call passive resistance off because they found that passive resisters could not be disciplined in the Mahatma Ghandi tradition and that passive resistance invariably led to outbreaks of violence.

The consociation of protest and violence has more recently been demonstrated in South Africa. During the latter part of last year protest politics once again came to the fore, particularly in the Witwatersrand and I received desperate pleas from the people living there to put an end to protest because it was so associated with Black/Black conflicts that ordinary Blacks found themselves beaten up; ordinary Blacks found their houses burned; their cars stoned and there were many Black deaths which resulted from intimidation being used by Black protestors. Protest as a moral statement, an expression of human indignation, is one thing, but protest as a twin strategy to the politics of violence is another thing altogether.

In South Africa the political struggle takes place in a very harsh environment in which the Black population at times swings to and from the acceptance of using violence for political purposes and as a Black strategist, I am aware of just how right ordinary people are in their rejection of protest politicians who raise anger and direct people to protest in the face of police dogs, batons and sten guns, and then disappear from the scene when protest is crushed with a brutality never witnessed in America. The shameful Sharpeville event started out as protest, primarily by the Pan Africanist Congress, in opposition to all considered advice from what was then the ANC's leadership. The massacre of protestors

which followed illustrates the point I am making. I do not want to be seen to be belabouring the question of protest. I raise it to illustrate differences between Black American politics and Black South African politics.

I come back to the point I made earlier and that is that Black South African politics has different aims and objectives to the politics which we witnessed in the Black American civil rights struggle. At the root of the Black/Black political conflict in South Africa is a division of opinion on two levels. The fundamental division is the division between Blacks as to the nature of the State which we should be struggling for. The ANC's Mission in Exile regard themselves as the sole representatives of Black South Africa and aim to return to the country after the violent overthrow of the Government to establish a socialist, one-party State. The majority of Black South Africans inside the country however seek inclusion in the State run by a democratic parliament and organised economically around the free enterprise system. Inside the country we have also got Black groups and Black leaders talking glibly about socialism and worker states. There are then differences between organisations representing the minority of the people and the common judgment of the people on the question of what kind of state we should be struggling for.

There are also differences of opinion on the question of tactics and strategies. There are Black South Africans who have opted for the armed struggle and there are Black leaders and Black organisations inside South Africa who employ violence for political purposes. The burning of schools, the stoning of vehicles, damage to government property and violence against Blacks who disagree with these tactics and strategies is common-place in Black South African politics.

The extent to which Black South Africans reject these tactics en masse was demonstrated last year yet again. The very widespread Black/Black violence and intimidation which broke out last year resulted, as I have said, in numerous urgent pleas for me to go to the Witwatersrand to put an end to the Black/Black confrontation that was taking place. In response to these requests, I went to Soweto on the 25th November to call for a cessation of Black/Black hostilities. Soweto is in the heart of a South African industrial area which has the greatest concentration of Blacks anywhere in the country. The meeting I held turned out to be a phenomenal success. It took place during the height of the unrest, and yet more than 35 000 people flocked to fill a soccer stadium to hear me and after that meeting, there was a dramatic drop in the instances of Black/Black violence.

Inkatha was formed in 1975, which is a mass Black political movement of which I am President, when the rising tide of Black anger was about to erupt in the violence which we saw during the 1976-78 period. Inkatha's commitment to the politics of

human deprivation among Black South Africans, and a job often makes the difference between hunger and starvation. Ordinary people find it unthinkable that any responsible leader can advise foreigners to disinvest in South Africa and diminish the number of jobs available to Blacks.

This deep-rooted feeling of the people that disinvestment is wrong is supported by rational thought on the subject. More than half of all Black South Africans in the country are 15 years old and younger. The Black birth rate is phenomenally high and as every sociologist knows, high birth rates continue throughout the duration of mass poverty. Black South Africa's birth rate of over three per centum per annum has resulted in this huge population bulge of young people who will soon be hitting the market places. There is also a vast backlog in education, health and welfare services, and essential services. There are vast backlogs in housing and community development. Disinvestment which damages the economy, and the growth base of the economy in particular, will condemn untold hundreds of thousands of Blacks, millions even, to circumstances of vastly increased poverty which will take generations to overcome. Black South Africans are cash dependent. Agrarian revolutions are not going to save them, and they either work or starve. If ever we are to reach levels of even minimum decency in standards of living, the South African economy will have to be stimulated into sustained growth and disinvestment as a strategy will militate against this.

Those who think that disinvestment as a token gesture will frighten the South African Government are mistaken. Before the South African Government responds to threats of disinvestment they will have to perceive those threats as the real threats to the country's economic base. White South Africans will further tighten their belts if necessary, and they will leave Blacks to suffer the real consequences of disinvestment.

Beyond the question of South African economic survival and the need for sustained economic growth for the sake of survival amongst Blacks in South Africa, there is the whole question of the development of Southern Africa. Neighbouring States trade with South Africa to survive, and the signing of the Nkomati Accord by President Machel is surely a convincing argument why those who lobbied for disinvestment should be asked to think again. Black States in Southern Africa and Central Africa have achieved political independence only to find that this victory was but a first step on the very much harder road of becoming economically independent. It is just not possible to conduct an economic vendetta against White South Africa without damaging the interests of Black South Africa and Black States around her.

Beyond these Black survival considerations there is the question of Black tactics and strategies in the struggle for liberation. We have either to conquer apartheid with violence in an armed

opposition was severely criticised at the time. In 1976 I was told again and again that unless I abandoned my stand and joined "the people" I would become an irrelevant political non-entity. The fact is that Inkatha doubled its membership in 1976; it doubled it again in 1977 and re-doubled it in 1978. Inkatha today has a membership which is approaching the million mark. This makes it the largest Black political constituency ever to have been formed in the history of the country. Inkatha is Black South Africa's voice rejecting the politics of violence in favour of the politics of negotiation.

Many involved in the current American debate have been misled about Black South Africa. The struggle for liberation must necessarily take place inside South Africa and must necessarily be waged not by an elite few or by any particular organisation. It must be waged by the people across a very broad spectrum of activity. This is why Inkatha is committed to Black unity, and this is why we conceive of Black unity within the framework of a multi-strategy approach in which there is co-operation even on minimal agreement. Inkatha, supported by the masses, has its role to play. Other organisations have their own role to play. In the end these must be made complementary. There is a diversity of strategies which have to be employed before we come anywhere near mounting a formidable attack against apartheid, and yet there are Black leaders from South Africa who come to the States to talk simplistically about a particular strategy as though it is the only one for all Black South Africans, but Americans are misled when they are informed that Black South Africa supports disinvestment.

Black political options in South Africa are dictated by realities and leaders responsible to mass constituencies like myself who lead people in democratic organisations are guided by what the people themselves think about these realities. Black South Africans living in South Africa do not support disinvestment. No Black leader has ever been given a mandate by the ordinary people to campaign for disinvestment. Inkatha is a democratic organisation in which the Annual General Conference is the supreme decision-making body. Every year I and other Inkatha leaders have to account to the people, through the delegates they have chosen to go to Conference, for what we have done. Each and every year I test opinion about the merits of disinvestment as a strategy. Each and every year disinvestment is rejected unanimously by delegates. Each and every year of my political life, I hold mass meetings in Soweto, KwaMashu and other places and every time I tell Black masses who attend my meetings, sometimes in their tens upon tens of thousands, what I have said on this question when overseas I have received a standing ovation when I speak about disinvestment as a strategy which the people reject, I do not do so glibly.

The disinvestment stick with which some want to rap the knuckles of Pretoria will be felt like whiplashes by Black South Africans. There is vast unemployment and under-employment and very widespread

struggle, or in a bloody revolution, or we have to bring about radical change through democratic opposition and the politics of negotiation. The South African economy has now reached the point at which there is an irreversible total dependency of Whites on Blacks. There is also a reciprocal dependency of Blacks on Whites. This situation of interdependency between the race groups favours the politics of negotiation. Before these negotiations can even begin, and they certainly have not yet begun, Black South Africans will have to develop bargaining bases to balance power advantages around the conference table. The development of power bases will be retarded by economic recessions and advanced by economic prosperity.

If the South African economy is to grow for humanitarian and for political reasons then it is vital that we have not only the inflow of capital from abroad, but we also have the inflow of technological and managerial expertise. If Americans are interested in South Africa and if they are appalled by apartheid, then big business in America should be encouraged to greatly increase their investments in South Africa to give them an opportunity to make the contribution towards social change which enlightened management now has the opportunity to do in South Africa.
