

OFFICE AUTOMATION SEMINAR

COMPUTER SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA

CLOSING ADDRESS

(read on behalf of Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, Chief
Minister KwaZulu by Dr. O.D. Dhlomo, Minister of
Education and Culture KwaZulu, Secretary-General, Inkatha)

WITKOPPEN. 4TH JUNE 1985

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CLOSING ADDRESS BY MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI
Chief Minister, KwaZulu, President of Inkatha
Chairman, The South African Black Alliance

(read on his behalf by Dr. O.D. Dhlomo, Minister of Education and
Culture KwaZulu, Secretary-General, Inkatha)

HELDERFONTEIN CONFERENCE CENTRE
WITKOPPEN

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I presume that I have been asked to deliver the closing address of this seminar on Office Automation because the end of things require a human touch. I certainly was not asked because I am expert in electronics and automation. I wouldn't even know how to fry an egg in a computer. But putting jokes aside, in thinking about the seriousness of life in this computerised world of ours, I realised the other day I cannot open this address with the remark that the seminar organiser wanted a human touch at the beginning and the end of today's proceedings. When I started thinking about what to say, I thought I should say that seminars, like life, must begin and end with the human touch. I decided, however, that I could no longer say this because damned machines are also entering into the field of procreation. The end, the final act, the final thing about my life is something that I have got to do on my own. We have not reached the stage yet when an electronic device can die on my behalf. When I lay down and expire, it is me that will be doing it. So unlike the beginning of life, the end of life will forever remain a human event which at most could be advanced or delayed electronically.

I am renowned for the brevity of my speeches and because I know that I am no more than an interlude which makes the step from the seminar room into the cocktail lounge a dignified step, I will be briefer than usual. In these circumstances my short address should be light-hearted, spiced with wit and should contain only a dash of wisdom. However you could not very well dump your papers, leaving me standing there with no audience, and you see, I am a politician and I know that I have got you captive and that you will listen to me because you love hearing me talk more than you love sipping cocktails.

There have been vast changes in the world in my lifetime. I feel somehow that I am caught up in an ever-quickenning spiral of changes in man's lifestyle and changes in everyday things. And it is as though as the spiral increases to dizzy speeds, man's horizons expand to assume awesome dimensions. The twentieth century has hurtled us from ox wagons to interplanetary probes and just as man's geographic horizons have been pushed back by technology, so

has his knowledge of the minutia of life been advanced by technology. When I look forward into the future, it is as though I am seeing a technological kaleidoscope in which progress will hurtle into unknown distances.

The conquest of things by man, the reaching to the unknown, the constant drive for things new and better, needs to be balanced with things old and trusted. Our deepening knowledge about electronics and machines demands a deepening knowledge about the nature of man and his spirituality. Electronics do not help us love better and we cannot find loyalty and honour under a microscope. When I think about South Africa and the role of automation in my country's life, I am aware of just how much more time and effort South Africa pours into technological exploration than it pours into human exploration.

There is a vast backlog in education and the standard of Black education we have ended up with as a result of so-called Bantu Education leaves much to be desired. Desperate attempts will have to be made in innovative schemes to produce Black mechanics and plumbers and other artisans the country needs. Desperate attempts will have to be made to turn artisans into supervisors and supervisors into managers. This is now recognised but I believe that we have not escaped the trap which makes this recognition a belated recognition.

We face the desperate shortage of human skills we now face because under apartheid assumptions were made about the self-sufficiency of White skills which were just not valid. I believe we are making the same invalid assumptions about the future self-sufficiency of White society to produce the leaders we will be needing in the field of advanced technology. Advance technology industries need to put every available resource into finding ways and means of bringing Blacks into their endeavour. The industry needs to employ the same ingenuity in doing this that it is currently employing in pushing technological frontiers forward.

Some mistakes cannot be undone. I am reminded that this is so by the story of the two gentlemen riding along a Free State road on a motorcycle on a bitterly cold winter's morning. The fellow in front wore protective clothing, but the poor fellow on the back only had a cheap overcoat on. He found he could stand the cold no longer and tapped his mate on the shoulder and asked him to stop. He got off the motorcycle, turned his coat the other way round and asked his mate to button it up at the back, and off they went again. Sometime later the driver realised that he longer had a passenger, and he turned around to look for him. He eventually found him in a small village lying on the pavement with a crowd around him, and he ran up asking whether his friend was all right. 'Well', one old man said, 'He seemed to be all right until we turned his head the right way round.' Some mistakes cannot be undone.

We have already made mistakes in South Africa that cannot be undone. We cannot afford to make more such mistakes. There is

very little time left at our disposal to begin sharing with each other, and for Whites to begin recognising the extent to which seminars such as this are shamed because Black experts are not here to take the floor.

Black South Africans do in fact value every kind of reform that is introduced in apartheid society. Tens of thousands of Blacks know they are better off in their lifetime because the Apprenticeship Act, which precluded Blacks from artisan training, was scrapped. Workers know that they are better off because of revised labour legislation. Current reforms being talked about of providing Blacks with freehold title rights will mean better things for some people. The greater mobility of Blacks between urban areas will be meaningful to many people. However, as a society we urgently need to come to the recognition that there are no Black experts at seminars such as this because there is something very fundamentally wrong with our social, economic and political systems. If advanced technology is going to have the circumstances in which it will continue to have utility, then all of South Africa's leaders need now to start planning for those circumstances. The future of this country is at stake and the kind of reforms which are being mooted are inconsequential when one takes a broad view of the totality of our country's requirements.

We must stop thinking in terms of White concessions to Blacks. We must stop thinking in racial terms. We must stop thinking about how far this or that party political restraint restricts the bold decision-making which in fact we need. We must start thinking about South Africa and the immense needs of the future which we will just not be able to fulfill if we do not have the courage to be daring and bold in innovative change.

I sometimes hear people talk about the difficulties Blacks experience in making a transition from a pre-literate rural society to a modern technological society. I sometimes hear people talk about the difficulties with which Blacks are faced in the process of vertical mobility, but I seldom hear people talk about the difficulties Whites face in adapting to emerging modern South Africa. If Blacks do face problems when they are involved in rapid vertical mobility and if the transition from a peasant society to a Western industrial society is difficult to make, the difficulties pale into insignificance when compared with the difficulties a great many Whites experience in making the necessary transition from apartheid society to an open democratic free enterprise society. Everywhere we are confronted with the human factor, and everywhere human beings - both Black and White - are faced with the historic demand to do what appears to be impossible for the sake of the future.

We have to do that which is well nigh impossible in our social and political life because we have to break the barriers of existing impossibilities in our economic life. Millions of people are hungry and there is a huge population bulge measured in terms of more than half of all Black South Africans being under the age of 15 moving towards the market place. There are already destructive pressures on natural resources in rural areas. People are

gravitating towards metropolitan areas and unless we vastly increase the productive capacity of our country, what is already a difficult situation will become totally unmanageable.

The totality of our economic needs are such that we need to do everything in our power to increase economic efficiency. This seminar on office automation is therefore grappling with a kernel issue. I believe that there are many who are concerned about the extent to which automation swells the ranks of the unemployed. The debate about this aspect of automation is a complex debate and I want to throw in a thought which will perhaps increase its complexity. The hungry hordes in South Africa's Black ghettos and in the so-called homelands pose very real problems. Those problems will not be aggravated by automation and if increasing efficiency of the instruments of development results in a few amongst the relatively privileged classes suffering what in national terms is relatively little hardship, then we must ask ourselves whether it is true that that is a price our society cannot afford to pay.

Wherever we can do something in a labour intensive way, we should do so. There is a desperate need for the development of labour intensive industries wherever they can be established. But capital intensive industries are vital for the growth of our economy. On balance, we as a society cannot afford anything but the best standards of efficiency, and quite clearly automation offers scope for evolving efficiency. I am aware that many companies may be bringing in automation for image purposes and that is a luxury we cannot afford. The industrial consumption of automative equipment must be justified by increased productivity. We must automate for efficiency wherever it is possible and we must automate for efficiency both in urban and in rural areas.

Technology is important to South Africa. It is not picked off our indigenous trees. Mining, commerce and industry in South Africa share in international technological developments and recognise themselves to be dependent on the continued sharing of these developments. Why do so many Whites believe that the rule of law and Western democratic institutions have validity elsewhere but not here? People are people wherever they are. South Africa is no different to any other country as far as the basic organising principles of society are concerned.

The claim that our situation is unique is misconceived. Blacks hear statements about the uniqueness of our circumstances as apartheid statements. They hear them as National Party propaganda and they hear them as the White man's rationalisation of his immoral claim to retain the rights to make final decisions in 87 per cent of the country, over virtually all its wealth and therefore in fact over all internal and external policy matters.

If Whites have insufficient wisdom to share power with Blacks, they have insufficient wisdom period. It will take every scrap of Black and White goodwill, pooled as a national resource, to overcome the immense social, economic and political problems we face. We must

all realise that Black and White goodwill can in fact in the final analysis only be pooled by power-sharing. Black goodwill is not something there for the White man to spend in the White man's interests. Black goodwill is a national asset which only Black/White power-sharing can spend in the interests of the country.

Real goodwill, wherever it is found in Blacks or Whites, is the same thing. It is as indivisible as power itself is indivisible. It is as contradictory to talk about Black goodwill among those who want to drive the White man into the sea, as it is to talk about White goodwill among those who want to drive the Black man into ghettos and into the country's apartheid structures. Access to the goodwill in the country must be gained by opening doors of negotiation and through the politics of compromise. The common goodwill on which we in the final analysis so utterly depend must be unleashed as a potent force against the evils which beset us. This unleashing will only come as a consequence of negotiation. It is there in the majority of the hearts and minds of Blacks but it will only have utility for the country at large if apartheid straitjackets are taken off it and it is unshackled from racial prejudice and fear.
