

Chief Gatsha Buthelezi: “My People Must Survive”

Theodore Jacqueney

Chief Gatsha Buthelezi is the controversial Zulu chief and leader of the still legal *Inkatha* opposition movement to South Africa's *apartheid* policies. In conflict with both the current Pretoria authorities and black African supporters of violent revolutionary action, Buthelezi is said by his supporters to represent a nonviolent, multiracial and liberal-democratic opposition leadership. His is a middle ground that Buthelezi's critics say is fast eroding under the

increasing polarization generated by the policies of the Pretoria regime. Buthelezi's supporters counter that the chief is the most popular black African leader in the country. They cite among other evidence a recently completed four-year study by West Germany's Arnold Bergstrasser Institute, which polled urban blacks in different parts of the country and concluded that Buthelezi is supported by almost half of the urban blacks. (Political prisoner Nelson Man-

dela came in second with 21.7 per cent, according to this poll.) The overwhelming majority of the urban black population wants a liberal democracy, a peaceful solution, an economic system that embraces free enterprise, a multiracial unitary state, and power-sharing between the various ethnic groups, the West German study found. Buthelezi spoke with *Worldview* Associate Editor Theodore Jacqueney in New York in August.

JACQUENEY: You are said to be an advocate of the democratic process as a form of government that could bring together all the people of South Africa. Could you describe what it is you want for your country?

CHIEF BUTHELEZI: I am committed to the ideals you have just mentioned. In fact, these are the ideals that were worked out by our fathers in Bloemfontein in 1912, when the Pan African Congress was founded. These ideals, I think, were also articulated in the Cape-town Freedom Charter in 1959, where the African National Congress, before it was banned, declared that South Africa was one society, regardless of the racial cleavages that exist in my country. I have always believed in the ideal of a white-black future in my country, for moral reasons, and also because it is a fact that the country has developed to what it is by the endeavors of both whites and blacks. That is why I think that we should also have a share in the wealth of our country.

When you say that you want “the democratic process,” what specifically are the ingredients?

Well, I have always advocated majority rule. I know that the ANC was committed to that before it was banned. On March 14, 1976, I was the first voice to say that on the soil of South Africa since that time. Some people, when they heard me say this, began to talk about black majority rule, whereas I myself am talking about people, regardless of ethnic cleavages or racial differences. That is my ideal, because the country actually was

built up by all the elements in the country, white and black and the various other ethnic groups. But I also believe that a convention is needed to work out a formula for majority rule, because when the whites formed the Union of South Africa, we were excluded. That is why our forefathers decided to have the meeting in Bloemfontein in 1912, to work out our common destiny, because the whites excluded us. So I believe that what is required in our country is another national convention at which all the people of South Africa are represented—in other words, white people, black people, those in exile, those banned, those in jail. We should come together to work out that formula. Personally I don't believe that any group, either we blacks, because we are in a majority, or whites, as they have done all along, should foist their own formula on the rest of the people of the country.

When you spoke about the ingredients of democracy, do you also mean such things as freedom of speech, a free press, the right to contested elections, the right to travel, and free trade unionism?

Yes. Absolutely. In fact, the South African Black Alliance, of which I am chairman, too, has endorsed these freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am chairman of *Inkatha*, and I am also chairman of the South African Black Alliance, and we have endorsed these freedoms. These freedoms are what I want for my country. Take the example of

free trade unions: I have always said that the free enterprise system hasn't got a future in my country if it continues to operate the way it does now and excludes the majority of the people. The way it operates in South Africa today it is only for a white élite. And I also say that part and parcel of the free enterprise system is also a free trade union movement. The free enterprise system, as it operates now in my country, does not allow blacks to have a free trade union movement.

You know last year I was invited to speak to Mr. James Kruger, the Minister of Justice in South Africa, because he complained that *Inkatha*, our national cultural liberation movement, did not confine itself to Zulus, and he threatened me. I told Mr. Kruger that I still believed in the ideals that our patriots of yesteryear had spelled out in Bloemfontein.

The present South African government is trying a three-tier government, with three parliaments, one for whites, one for coloreds, one for Indians. This year the coloreds, represented by the Labor party, and the Indians, represented by a small party called the Reform party, approached me and asked me whether we couldn't form a black alliance, a South African Black Alliance, because we believe that, with the divisions that have existed in our country, black groups themselves live in different worlds in South Africa. They are educated in different schools, they live in different areas. We never really meet. This is true for black Africans, Indians, and coloreds. The only difference is that during our time at university we had colored, Indian, and black African students together. So I think that the work of the South African Black Alliance, in spite of the fact that Mr. Vorster, John Vorster, South Africa's Prime Minister, at present is intransigent about such a convention, we believe that when we get to that time when these things are articulated around a conference table, we should speak with one voice. That is why we believe that the work of the South African Black Alliance is so important: Black groups themselves must get together so that they can work out together a formula and articulate exactly what ideal they have, if and when that time comes, because we see that as the only alternative to violence.

What exactly is *Inkatha*, and how does it differ from the South African Black Alliance?

Inkatha is an African organization that we founded in 1974. It has 200,000 members now. It is the largest black African organization that has ever existed in South Africa. It is a grass roots organization that cuts across urban and rural, it cuts across peasants and ordinary industrial workers, and it has professionals in it. It is the first grass roots organization of its sort that has ever existed in the history of my country. It has a statement of beliefs in which we articulate what we stand for, what we see as a future for all the people of South Africa.

Now the South African Black Alliance, when it was founded, embraced the *Inkatha* statement of beliefs. We only allow people to join us on the basis that they embrace the statement of belief, and all the organizations that have joined us so far have done that.

Now some people in America might ask, why don't you form one organization? In South Africa, according to the Improper Interference Act, people of different racial groups—even all black Africans—are not allowed to belong to one organization. So we could not merge. We could therefore only have this kind of liaison, with some kind of federal organization, because in fact we are trying to prevent the powers-that-be from using that legislation against us.

Some people argue that democratic processes are irrelevant for Third World peoples, a useless luxury. How would you respond?

Personally, even the organizational structures that I am using are based on democratic principles. I am president of *Inkatha*—but I was elected to that position. We have a central committee, which is also elected. We have local branches, and a general conference, which meets every year and decides policy. So we have democratic structures. As for ourselves, it is quite clear that the processes that we work on ourselves are based on democratic principles, and based on constituency.

Should foreign friends of South African freedom work to oppose investment in South Africa, or boycott South African goods, or support embargoes of South Africa?

I don't want to answer this simplistically, because it is very, very important. I had an interview with our newspaper, the *Inkatha* newspaper, in which I articulated my views on this. It is too crucial an issue to deal with briefly.

The reason I ask is that you are said to oppose boycotts, embargoes, or moves against investment.

It is not a question of opposing. I can understand my colleagues, my brothers in the revolutionary movement. When they decided on armed struggle, when they decided on this issue of sanctions, Vorster did not give them any alternative: They must use what they have at hand. Whereas we at home must necessarily use other tools. But these differences must not necessarily mean that we haven't got a common ideal. To say that I am *opposed*—well, that is a matter of interpretation by those who feel that I should speak their language. If people at home say that I must advocate disinvestment, I will say so. But I don't think that I have a right to disregard all the workers who are staying at home. And so far they have not given me that mandate.

Are you not concerned that by rejecting forceful nonviolent means like boycotts and disinvestment you make a violent revolution more likely, and that a revolution would have a Marxist-Leninist leadership that would not produce a free democratic society?

What has been the performance of the West as far as Zimbabwe is concerned? Could a boycott be maintained in such a way to be meaningful in the immediate future for my people? I don't say that it may not have possibil-

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ities. But actually the performance of the West—and including Russia, for that matter—in Rhodesia, does not strengthen me in a judgment that I should involve myself in supporting an effort in which the record of the Western countries does not assure me that they will really carry it out. I am on record, for instance, as applauding the arms embargo. I said so on South African soil. I mean that I welcome any pressures that are brought on Pretoria and make them uncomfortable. But at the same time, I cannot adopt stances just so they can be accepted in certain quarters, without relating to what the people themselves want at this moment at home, where I am operating.

What can Americans do to help the cause of a free, democratic South Africa?

I think Americans have a lot of clout. I think personally that if disinvestment was tied to concrete things—for instance, if America said “if you don’t move to a conference table, we will cease to be your friends”—it would be more meaningful than just talking about it in a vacuum. So I believe myself that both the American Government, and American friends who are involved

with the cause of freedom in South Africa should try to push Pretoria toward that. This is what we are working for.

Is there anything specific that we can do to move in the direction that you are indicating?

I respect the creativeness of Western people. I don’t think it is for me to say in detail what they must do. I have said at home that both *Inkatha* and the Black Alliance have endorsed these “Codes of Conduct” [for Western multinational corporations operating in South Africa—*T.J.*]. In fact, we have undertaken to communicate them at home. I believe that Western peoples have themselves gone through difficulties, and they have a special creativeness of their own which they can employ. These issues have been there for quite a long time in South Africa. White oppression—apartheid—in South Africa has survived for more than thirty years now. I believe that Western corporations can help my people move toward economic justice. They have enough clout to do that. I believe that my people must survive to fight this battle. Whether it is resolved by peaceful means or by violence, my people must survive to fight.