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The Future of South
Africa: Violent
Radicalism or
Negotiated
Settlement?

*By Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi
Chief of the Zulu Nation*



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THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA:
VIOLENT RADICALISM OR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT?

by Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi

The idiom of the American media and the content of American debate on South Africa indicates to me that people in the United States just have not grasped the extent to which the politics of negotiation is under siege in South Africa. Some would retort: What politics of negotiation? And they would point to white political recalcitrance and the refusal of the State President to actually get going with meaningful reform. Such people have to understand that the politics of negotiation is started a long time before people actually sit around a negotiating table. The actual negotiations around that table will be a culminating event of the politics of negotiation. It is the process that leads to negotiation that is now so threatened in South Africa.

Americans are aware of the fact that, when it comes to the final negotiations about who is actually going to form a government in any country, negotiations invariably fail. If this were not the case you would not have Beirut-type situations and you would not have many of the revolutions which take place across the length and breadth of the world. Revolutionaries in South Africa already are just not interested in negotiations. ZANU and ZAPU leaders did not enter negotiations until they had in fact already defeated the Smith regime in all but final deed. The collapse of Mr. Smith's government was inevitable by the time he went into negotiations, and this inevitability made the Lancaster House negotiations possible. Frelimo leaders did not negotiate before they had won the fight against the Portuguese colonial administration in all but final deed. The ANC Mission in Exile see themselves moving to a similar position and they do not want negotiations now.

What prospects are there then for negotiations to get off the ground in South Africa? This is not my question, ladies and gentlemen. It is a skeptical American question. There is pessimism about the politics of negotiation now in South Africa because these Americans I am referring to are drawing parallels about what happened

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in Mozambique and Zimbabwe and about what is happening in South Africa. People like Mr. Randall Robinson already in fact believe that, if the ANC is not the central negotiating party on the side of blacks, there is no prospect of successful negotiations being concluded. This was also the view of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. They too saw the ANC Mission in Exile as a prime negotiating partner in South Africa, and they persist in seeing the ANC as a prime negotiating partner, or perhaps the only black negotiating power, and they retain some kind of idealistic belief or perhaps hope that, if Pretoria started to move toward the negotiating table, the ANC Mission in Exile would soften its approach and participate in black democracy which must surround negotiations. They fail to see that the ANC has now smelt blood and is driving in for what they think will be the final kill, and they are totally convinced that they will be a government returned from exile to establish a one-Party socialist State in South Africa. They see negotiation as something that will rob them of that final reward of their revolutionary endeavors.

Americans must necessarily make their own judgments about what kind of an organization the ANC is and what its real intentions are. I do not want to use this platform today to mount a personal attack on the ANC. I am simply being analytical and telling Americans what happens in our African circumstances. I am laying before you the facts of the matter, and the facts of the matter are that the ANC's stand is that the only thing to negotiate about is the handing over of people to the people, that is, to themselves. They are not interested in negotiating for an open general election from which they will be able to compete as equals. They are not interested in negotiating the kind of constitution which must necessarily be finalized before such an election could be held. Those are the facts of the matter. They see themselves as a government in a future one-Party state and they envisage themselves evolving a constitution once they are in that position. The politics of negotiation in South Africa really is under siege.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not an attack on the ANC Mission in Exile. You cannot attack an organization by telling the world what its cherished hopes are and what it is actually doing. You cannot attack an organization by telling the world: this is what they themselves are saying. The problem comes when the world does not know what the ANC Mission in Exile is saying; and in the West, the problem comes when the West only knows what the ANC is saying to the West. I am not a Westerner. I am a son of Africa, a son of South Africa and I know what the ANC Mission in Exile is saying to black South Africans. That is where they are fighting their revolution and that is where they say what they really mean.

They spend millions saying what they really mean to black South Africa. They have a massive propaganda machine and all one has to do is to examine closely the texts of their actual broadcasts to South Africa made daily on Radio Freedom from Addis Ababa. Those broadcasts

are formulated by the political and publicity brains of the ANC Mission in Exile. They are really the authentic voice of the Mission in Exile. Those broadcasts do not reflect media opinion about what they are saying. The broadcasts are authentically what they say. In these broadcasts they promote the slogan again and again: "Every patriot a combatant and each combatant a patriot." They exhort black South Africa to spread violence from black areas into white areas. They exhort our youth to take up arms. They call on workers to destroy their factories, and again and again they call on black South Africa to destroy black leaders who refuse to toe the ANC Mission in Exile line to pursue violent confrontation. They tell black South Africa that they reject any concept of a National Convention. They tell black South Africa that there is nothing to negotiate about and an analysis of what they say will show very clearly that they will continue to do their damndest to make sure that successful negotiations do not take place before they have won their military victory. Of course once that victory is won, there will be no need to negotiate. There never is in a one-Party state.

Wherever I go in the United States I find a kind of noble and romantic view of the black struggle in South Africa. Apartheid is so hideous and repulsive that any protest against it which is not yet protest in which people are actually throwing bombs, planting hand grenades, and laying land-mines is praised. For Americans oppression must lead to protest, and all protest against apartheid for them is praiseworthy. For Americans, failed protests are seen as lost skirmishes in a battle which will be won by protest. They see even protest bordering on violence as that which stays the inevitability of violence. Protest rhetoric sounds beautiful to many American ears, and a protest leader dramatically proclaiming the hideousness of apartheid and the indomitable spirit of blacks who have not been crushed by it is praised as a hero of the struggle.

But again, ladies and gentlemen, do not hear me as criticizing protest politics in South Africa. It is an essence which lies deep in the very guts of the black struggle for liberation. In our circumstances, however, protest politics is no more than a phase in the development of the true black struggle in South Africa that must be left behind sooner or later. Protest politics can be beautiful, but even a beautiful, chubby cheeked little boy must grow up. Protest is exciting because it shows the indomitability of the human spirit. Protest has immense value because it mobilizes people, and as protest gathers momentum, people are encouraged to do something about their terrible circumstances because they see they are not alone. They find strength and succor in protest. Protest builds up morale. I myself am the political product of the great surge of protest which took place in the 1950s under Chief Albert Lutuli's leadership. I do not condemn protest, but we cannot go on protesting forever.

The problem I see with the American perception of protest politics in South Africa is that they see it with the same eyes that

they saw protest in the black civil rights movement in the United States. They simply fail to understand that protest politics in the United States led to incorporation. Protest politics in South Africa cannot lead to incorporation. Protest politics in South Africa must go somewhere, and there is a deep cleavage between black South Africans on the question of where protest ought to go. There is a kind of natural progression for protest in circumstances such as ours.

Protest starts as people making moral statements. Protest in the form of peaceful demonstrations plays a valuable role beyond making courageous moral statements. It leads people to yearn for organization, and when demonstration fails to win the day, protest politics undergoes a change. Demonstration against the principle of oppression turns into protest directed at specific objectives. Thus you get rent hike protests, protests against increases in bus fares. Moral protest turns into community protest seeking specific limited objectives. Protest in this form starts ringing alarm bells in the citadel of white racist power. This form of protest in South Africa was crushed by brutality; protest was radicalized and ever increasingly took on the quality of confrontation.

Civil disobedience invited confrontation. Passive resistance moves invited confrontation. They were non-violent confrontationist tactics, but further radicalization takes place when non-violent confrontation solicits even greater oppressive violence from the State. Protest becomes an idiom of life and more alarm bells ring and the State makes a massive attempt to crush all protest. It takes on Draconian laws to intimidate, ban, and jail people who do no more than protest and strive for the rights you Americans take so for granted in your everyday life. In South Africa, blacks had to die at the hands of brutal police action because they wanted simple things like freedom of movement; freedom to sell their labor in the best market; freedom to live where their children could go to school and they could work; freedom simply to sit down in a pub and have a glass of beer and freedom to sit on a park bench. Black South Africans died in brutal police suppression of protest because they protested against their exclusion from these God-given rights.

The radicalization of protest deepens and begins to polarize society itself, and an onward march to use violence in protest continues. Protest eventually becomes the means of mobilizing violent action. Protest becomes that which you must organize in order to get people to kill and burn, and when this happens, revolutionaries claim protest as their child. They see protest as the kindergarten of the armed struggle and indeed it is by then just that. After June 1976 when protest met with violent reaction and when the first schoolboy Hector Petersen was shot dead as he walked in front of school mates in a simple school protest march, violent protest spread. When the spreading of violent protest was crushed by massive State power, there was a vast spin-off of young black refugees fleeing South Africa to

escape the brutality of the State. ANC Mission in Exile recruiters for the armed struggle had a field day. Radicalized protest suits revolutionaries very well. Protest is so much more in South Africa than it ever was in the American civil rights struggle.

Radicalized protest in South Africa has begun to seek a political home. I made the point earlier that protest must go somewhere if it does not lead to incorporation. Violent protest must seek a home in violent politics, and this is happening. The ANC Mission in Exile has claimed as its own the violent protest movement in South Africa. The violent protest movement in South Africa now proclaims the ANC as the true liberators of the country, and thus the whole of South Africa is shaping up for a revolutionary future and moving towards violent solutions. The politics of negotiation really is under siege.

American idealism about protest politics in South Africa is understandable. Protest is justifiable. It is essential. It performs a vital task, and its radicalization is inevitable. If radicalized protest were a force working with all other democratic opposition to apartheid strengthening non-violent tactics and strategies, the struggle for liberation in South Africa would by now have been a great deal further advanced than in fact it is. Radicalized protest challenges the State without engaging the State. It endorses itself out of institutionalized politics. It is non-cooperative with some of country's parliamentary forces working for the same change that Americans see protest politics working for. Radicalized protest politics in South Africa does not set itself the task of strengthening the hand of the Progressive Federal Party. It does not set itself the task of strengthening opposition to apartheid in institutionalized South Africa. Radicalized protest is not only extra-parliamentary, it is extra-institutional. As it occupies this position, it endorses itself out of the politics of negotiation.

Non-cooperation has become more than a tactical issue. Non-cooperation is now a principle of radical protest politics. It has thus far only confronted. Radicalized protestors despise those who do not protest. They claim the right to make everyone protest. Radicalized protest now freely uses intimidation, and this again is incompatible with the politics of negotiation. Let me say rather bluntly that black South Africa has the choice between the politics of negotiation and the politics of violence. If the choice is for the politics of negotiation, then it must ultimately be negotiations with the ruling National Party government. The politics of negotiation from the black side involves driving the South African government to the negotiating table. This will not be done by only mounting confrontation and conflict. It must also be done by undermining the basis of the government's own power.

The politics of negotiation must make ever deeper incursions into the seat of power. This is possible, and it is happening. The power of the government is no longer monolithic. The total solidarity of

Afrikaner support, which forms the guts of government power, is beginning to fragment. Government power has always rested in South Africa on the total control of the country's institutional life. This is no longer happening. Big business is not under government control. They are challenging the government. The trade union movement is not under government control. It is challenging the government. The government is being challenged even by its own first and second tier levels of government in white society.

There is now vast scope for democratic opposition to apartheid, which mobilizes institutionalized forces to drive the government to the negotiating table. White South Africa has finally seen that apartheid is totally unworkable and that it is destabilizing the whole of South Africa. White South Africa wants a normalization of South Africa as a modern, multi-party, industrial democracy. It sees that apartheid has threatened the very basis of the free enterprise system. Whites can now be mobilized into participating in bringing about radical change, and because this is now in fact the case, revolutionaries have to make a very concerted attempt to spread violence to inhibit the politics of negotiation.

I come again to my statement that protest politics has to go somewhere if it does not lead to incorporation. I have given in the briefest outline how protest politics has become radicalized and developed into violent confrontation. That is not the only development in protest politics. Protest politics as we know it today crystallized in the early seventies. The same black foment that produced June 16, 1976, produced Inkatha. Inkatha was also fashioned by protest politics, and there is an alternative to both incorporation and to violence. This is the Inkatha option. It is the option of once again establishing a mass democratic organization that now cannot be smashed by the State in the way the State smashed the ANC.

The yearning for organization which I said protest politics produces, the yearning for collective action which I said it produces and the tendency in protest politics to become objective oriented as I so briefly outlined all culminated in the formation of Inkatha. And that ladies and gentlemen, is why Inkatha is in fact the largest political organization ever to have been formed in the history of South Africa. Inkatha plays in the league above protest politics. It has entered constituency politics as the only base from which mass black power can be mobilized in favor of the politics of negotiation. Inkatha actually engages the State. That engagement is a far more effective confrontation with the State than violent street-corner protest. We engage the State in KwaZulu and thump the State there.

We engaged the State in the Ingwavuma crisis and we thumped the State there. We have thumped the State in the Special Cabinet Committee, and we now employ our massive power to fold our arms while we watch the State President squirm in his desperate need for a massive black constituency before his National Council can even begin

to achieve anything. We employ our power to say: Mr. State President, unshackle black democracy first and then we will join you. We say to the State President: Release Dr. Nelson Mandela, Mr. Zeph Mothopeng, and other political prisoners and then we will join you. We say to the State President: Declare the death sentence on the Tricameral Parliament and then we will join you. We engage the State in this confrontation between mass black power and mass State power.

History in South Africa has thrown up the radicalized protest movement, and it has thrown up Inkatha. Both are the products of the same history of the same people, both are legitimate. One can only be finally effective in non-violent change and the other can only be finally effective in violent change. The West must now decide which they want. While the West cannot fight our battles for us, how the West now behaves may well determine how we fight our own battles.

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