

## Harry Gwala, Natal's (other) warlord

FROM OUR SOUTH AFRICA CORRESPONDENT

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**M**ENTION Zulu "warlords" to most people outside South Africa and they will think of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party. But in Natal itself Harry Gwala—small, bearded and bespectacled, with the voice and manner of a kindly grandfather—has an equally fierce reputation.

Mr Gwala, a former teacher and trade unionist, is one of the African National Congress's "prison graduates", a member of both the national executive of the ANC and the central committee of the South African Communist Party. But he is best known as the chairman of the ANC's Natal Midlands region, which includes the provincial capital of Pietermaritzburg and has become the centre of the ANC's bloody war with Inkatha.

Since Mr Gwala's release from prison in 1988, the ANC has seized control of vast tracts of territory that once fell under Mr Buthelezi's sway. Mr Buthelezi's lieutenants, conceding that Mr Gwala has driven Inkatha out of one place after another around Pietermaritzburg, accuse him of using brutal methods, including massacre. Recently the violence has intensified. On October 24th gunmen entered the kraai of an Inkatha notable and opened fire, killing 24 people. Seven Inkatha supporters were killed two days later in a squatter camp outside Durban.

Mr Gwala denies being involved in any massacres. He does not gesticulate. He cannot. His arms hang lifelessly at his sides, casualties of an incurable motor-neuron disease. "Inkatha loves to hate

me," he chuckles, "I enjoy it."

Inkatha hates him, he reckons, because he has rallied ANC supporters against Inkatha's warlords. Although he rejects the label "ANC warlord" that many observers hang round his own neck, he admits that he is no believer in turning the other cheek. If his followers are attacked, he says, they will fight back, not seek refuge in "false prayers". They will soon, alas, have a chance to show the truth of this grim promise: on October 27th Mr Gwala's deputy, a former Inkatha member, Reggie Hadebe, was assassinated in a carefully planned ambush.

When hardline Communists tried to oust Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991, Mr Gwala sent them a premature telegram of congratulations. He is no respecter of proprieties. Whereas most ANC colleagues refer deferentially to the Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelethini, in the hope of prising him away from Mr Buthelezi, Mr Gwala appears to relish revolutionary insolence. He has called Mr Zwelethini a "king without power" and a paid servant of the apartheid state.

Mr Gwala has no patience with the oft-repeated claim that the ANC is dominated by Xhosas. He points out that the movement's founder, Pixley Seme, as well as its first president (John Dube) and its leader when it was banned in 1960 (Albert Lutuli) were Zulus. Inkatha's influence among Zulus, he says, is left

over from when the ANC was outlawed, in the 1970s and 1980s. By adopting the ANC colours of black, green and gold, Inkatha persuaded many Zulus that it was carrying on the ANC's fight. Now, he argues, a growing number of Zulus see Inkatha in its true pro-government colours.

In Mr Gwala's eyes Mr Buthelezi is an apostate, a man of "rare ability" who was once loyal to the ANC, but who then went on to make Inkatha a vehicle for his own ambitions. The ANC is under pressure to hold a peace meeting with Mr Buthelezi. But though Nelson Mandela is now ready to acknowledge the ANC's part in township violence, Mr Gwala has been among those who argue that it is too late for a rapprochement. He is reconciled to a fight to the finish against Mr Buthelezi. Given that at least one in four South Africans lives in Natal and KwaZulu, the outcome may determine the nation's future.



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## Guest Column

by Castro Dakawa

# South Africa's future will be haunted by past atrocities

THE ANC faces still further revelations of human rights abuses committed while the movement was in exile. These will form part of the intensified campaign by the South African government to force through a general amnesty which would enable the state to bury its own much greater record of atrocities, certainly in terms of scale and duration.

But the atrocities game also serves the purpose of undermining support for the ANC by tarnishing its image. This is a lesson the Pretoria government learned well in the run-up to Namibia's independence elections. Revelations of Swapo excesses against 'dissidents' and suspected spies probably played a major role in denying Swapo the two-thirds parliamentary majority it seemed certain to achieve.

Some harm was already done to the ANC image when it failed to respond promptly to demands for an inquiry when allegations of torture and killings in ANC prison camps in exile first became public. Because of complaints over the years by victims and concerned ANC members, the fact that abuses took place was known — although not necessarily approved of — by the entire exiled leadership.

But old loyalties, ties of patronage and even kinship made it difficult for the exiled movement to take hard action against alleged offenders among the leadership. In any event, in an atmosphere of paranoia and at a time when South African security forces were bombing and shooting ANC activists across the borders, excesses could easily be rationalised. Besides, people who had often gone through hell together and suffered barbaric abuses in such places as Robben Island prison felt it necessary to be perhaps too understanding if any of their number transgressed.

Such was the case with Andrew Masondo, who withstood some of the most barbaric treatment meted out on 'the island'. In exile, as national commissar, he was removed from Angola in the early 1980s following allegations of brutality and threats by young MK cadres to shoot him. After a brief sojourn in Lusaka, he was appointed to head the ANC school in Tanzania. There was no hearing to clear the air. Nor was there a hearing after repeated complaints and allegations of decidedly sordid behaviour at the school. Masondo was simply moved again — to become chief representative in Uganda.

With his record it seemed obvious that at least he was not an enemy agent. And in those paranoid days, enemy agents seemed everywhere. It was an atmosphere which the South African security services undoubtedly exploited to the full, and all of us, to one degree or other, became caught up in it.

The paranoia no longer exists, but the other ties and loyalties still apply. Which is the main reason why the ANC leadership has found it so difficult to agree to release the names included in the report from its internal commission of inquiry.

The ANC leadership had hoped, by setting up the commission of inquiry, to limit the damage caused to the movement's image. And the commission's report has clearly underlined the impartiality of the three investigators. But it has also created considerable

problems and has precipitated some hard arguments within the executive. The apparent confusion in senior ANC ranks about how to react to the initial allegations and the subsequent report has enabled the government to avoid being the focus for allegations of gross human rights abuses. Coming at the same time as the inquest into the 1989 murder of anti-apartheid activist David Webster (with its evidence of military and police involvement in death squads) this confusion has been fortunate for Pretoria.

Much of the pressure on the ANC has so far been initiated by right-wing groups, ironically often using information gleaned and published by a small group of exiled leftists based in Britain. But the government, from President F. W. de Klerk down, has not been slow in using such information as a propaganda battering ram against the ANC.

The government, through its security services which did heavily infiltrate the exiled ANC, must also be in possession of other evidence of human rights abuses. These range from floggings administered to women for alleged infidelity, to the harsh treatment of psychiatric patients and various brutal punishments inflicted on army and civilian personnel, often for minor infringements of regulations.

The bulk of the ANC leadership favours dealing with human rights offenders once an election has been fought and a democratic — and probably ANC — government is in place. There is also a strong feeling that the violence of the oppressed should not be equated with that of the oppressor; and that it is the government which bears primary responsibility for what occurred.

This does not mean that abuses which took place can — or should — be excused or justified. But they must be understood — and the context in which they occurred is vital. We, as South Africans, come from a particularly brutal and brutalised society. The distortions of apartheid crippled not just bodies, but minds. And the people responsible for this monstrous barbarism are the very people such as F. W. de Klerk who today point fingers at the ANC.

Of course, De Klerk probably never went near a torture chamber. He has probably never shot anyone nor seen anyone shot. But he has sat on the committees which gave the orders and created the conditions for the tortures and the murders and the maiming.

This is what creates so much confusion in ANC circles: not that the image of the ANC has been sullied, but that members of a government held to be guilty of crimes against humanity are the ones throwing the mud. That they will continue throwing it there is no doubt. After all, the National Party now sees itself, against all the odds, winning a majority in elections, provided it can sufficiently fragment the electorate.

Vital to such a strategy is the undermining of the ANC. And this will be done assiduously. Those whose names appear on the eventual ANC election list can rest assured that every transgression will be dug up and used against them. Surely, therefore, the best way forward would be for the ANC to make a clean breast of it: admit to what happened, who did it, explain the background — and invite the government to do the same. Then allow the rank and file to select the future candidates and get on with the business of trying to eradicate apartheid.

*Castro Dakawa is the pseudonym of a long-term ANC exile.*