

The Weekend Australian Review

South Africa's hopes of a peaceful end to apartheid and an ordered re-entry into the world community have been shattered by the worst violence since the Boer War, with more than 5000 killed. **BARRY COHEN** talks to the man who holds the country's future in his hands

UNDERSTANDING politics in South Africa used to be easy. Colour enabled one to determine the goodies from the baddies. To an outside world pre-occupied since the 1960s with racism and colonialism, the white South African regime was the epitome of evil and the blacks, coloured and Indians who constituted 80 per cent of the population, the downtrodden and oppressed.

All that started to change when last year President F.W. De Klerk announced apartheid had failed; that it would be dismantled, that the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress and the South African Communist Party would be unbanned, that exiles would be permitted to return and political prisoners released from jail.

When Nelson Mandela, who symbolised the fight against apartheid, was released after 27 years in jail, the world rejoiced as if the Messiah had returned.

Anyone returning to South Africa as I did after 12 years would find it unrecognisable. In 1979, although the first cracks in apartheid had appeared, there was little change in its fundamental structure, with the odious Group Areas Act, Mixed Marriages and Immorality Act and the notorious pass laws rigidly enforced to ensure the segregation of the races.

A five million-strong affluent white community controlled the economy, the media, the judiciary and the security and defence forces. I returned to Australia convinced white ascendancy would remain for the foreseeable future.

I am delighted to say I was wrong.

As apartheid disappears, there is a new-found confidence among blacks as they move around their country no longer apologising for their presence. White attitudes have also changed. The old arrogance is at worst considerably reduced and among most there is an acceptance of the immorality and injustice of apartheid, and the stupidity in trying to maintain and enforce it.

Gradually South Africa is ceasing to be the world's No 1 pariah. Sanctions are slowly being removed as one international organisation after another welcomes it back into the fold. Cricket, rugby and soccer internationals should soon be resumed, with South Africa a fair chance of competing in the Barcelona Olympics.

Yet just as South Africa appears certain to end decades of isolation, it is beset by its worst outbreak of violence since the Boer War. Since 1987, clashes between the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party and the ANC have resulted in more than 5000 deaths.

Rumours abound of a clandestine "third force" of army and police operating outside the aegis of government with its own agenda to disrupt negotiations aimed at bringing a peaceful transition to democratic government. Tensions also exist within the white community. Afrikanerdom was shocked recently when 1000 right-wing farmers, attempting to remove black squatters from a farm, were fired on by South African police. Nothing like that had happened before.

Who are the goodies and who are the baddies now depends on who you talk to in South Africa today. For 350-odd years, one white minority group or another ran South Africa. Now as the black and white tribes of South Africa move inexorably towards a multi-racial society, every ethnic group and every political ideology is jostling and manoeuvring to gain a share of the power. Some are



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none too fussy about the methods they use, ensuring South Africans remain apprehensive about their future.

The world's attention has focused on negotiations between the National Party Government and the largest and oldest black nationalist organisation, the ANC. One man, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, has refused to be shouldered aside and demanded, as the leader of the largest single ethnic group in South Africa, the Zulus, to be party to any negotiations about the country's future.

There are 36 million people in South Africa: 75.3 per cent are Africans, 8.8 per cent coloureds, 2.5 per cent Asians and 13.4 per cent whites. Of the 27 million blacks, approximately 7-8 million are Zulus.

Buthelezi and Inkatha cannot be ignored, and the ANC is not ignoring them. It has, in fact, spent a considerable amount of its time and energy ensuring South Africa and the rest of the world are aware of their shortcomings. Heading the list is the claim that Inkatha is a political party based on tribalism which it, the ANC, rejects. This conveniently forgets that it was the ANC that encouraged Buthelezi to assume the chieftainship of the Zulu homeland, KwaZulu, and only changed its attitude towards him as his power and influence grew.

Formed in 1975 and based on a mass membership which grew to 1.8 million, Inkatha's approach to apartheid was "participative opposition". With most other opponents of apartheid banned or in exile, Inkatha remained the only black organisation able to carry on a constructive dialogue with the white community.

Buthelezi became further offside with the ANC for opposing sanctions and the armed struggle, and as an enthusiastic free enterpriser.

Although the ANC attempted to paint Buthelezi as a "stooge" or "puppet" of the National Party Government, he is a fierce opponent of apartheid who has denounced it at every opportunity. If Dennis Worrall, deputy leader of the anti-apartheid's Democratic Party, and Helen Suzman, the former MP, are to be believed, it was Buthelezi's refusal to accept "independence" for KwaZulu that was the "brick in the wall" that wrecked apartheid. Strong words indeed.

Zulus have a fearsome reputation, and not without justification. The battles of Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift are etched in the military history of both the British and the Zulus as fierce and bloody clashes. The 19th-century exploits of Shaka, who revolutionised Zulu battle tactics with his rampaging *impis* (regiments), and Cetshwayo are still recounted by Zulus with pride. It is not surprising the ANC takes them seriously.

Aware of the bloody clashes between ANC and Inkatha supporters and being way past my best fighting days, I was delighted to accept the chief's offer to be flown from Durban to the capital of KwaZulu, Ulundi. Travelling with his genial Minister for Health, Dr Mdlalose, and wedged between two sturdy young Zulus armed with howitzer-sized shotguns, was an interesting experience. The good doctor's laughing comment that he had been lion hunting — and missed — did nothing to calm my jangled nerves.

Ulundi was chosen as the capital of KwaZulu for historical and symbolic reasons. A visit to the memorial for those who fell at the Battle of Isandhlwana preceded my arrival at the magnificent KwaZulu Parliament to renew my acquaintance with the chief I last met in 1979. The warmth of his greeting reminded me why I and my family were so entranced. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, despite ANC propaganda, is difficult to dislike.

I had thought carefully about my opening question. Any descendant of Shaka is not to be trifled with. I decided to gamble. "No political leader in South Africa has so many fervent admirers or detractors as you. You seem to be a cross between Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler."

The handsome chief with the twinkling eyes threw back his head and roared with laughter. I relaxed. He became serious.

"I don't know. Who can explain it? I'm the most open political leader in the country and I'm the most consistent. There is no vagueness about where I stand. I've never changed."

"It's said you don't take criticism kindly."

"Criticism or vilification?"

"You may say it's vilification."

"It's not a question of opinion, it's a fact. I won all the court cases."

One of the most oft-repeated and damaging allegations against Buthelezi is that unless you are a member of Inkatha, you cannot get a house or a job in KwaZulu. This seemed an appropriate time to ask him about it.

"I have nothing to say except that it's bullshit, utter bullshit! It's just vilification. The ANC have been hurling insults like that at us for a long time but not one case has ever been produced." He

looked me straight in the eye. "I challenge them to produce just one case."

Whether they could or not is open to question. What is beyond doubt is the violence between ANC and Inkatha. Since 1987, 5000 people have died in clashes between the two. Many I spoke to claimed that while both sides were guilty, the Zulus were the more aggressive and that a rogue "third force" of police and defence personnel were either aiding Inkatha or turning a blind eye to its aggression.

I quoted in part from an article in Johannesburg's Sunday Times in which the author stated he no longer believed the Inkatha leaders' protestations that they were committed to peace after a recent rampage by Zulu *impis* after a rally at Bekkersdal on the West Rand.

AT the rally, Inkatha central committee member Musa Myeni "stamped around telling reporters that Inkatha would put in place 250,000 fighters in Soweto and other townships", the article said.

"It's bullshit," Buthelezi roared. "The whole thing is utter bullshit, because I was there." I wished I had chosen another quote. "Musa made that statement before I arrived. His house had just been burned that weekend and he made that wild statement on his own and he has nothing to do with me or the Central Committee."

"No one was blaming you," I got in quickly. "No. But when a man's house and everything he possesses is burned down, it's not unnatural for him to react like that. We were setting up a branch at Bekkersdal and I was invited for the inauguration. People came to boost morale and to have a rally."

"We didn't want to be provocative, so we held our rally far away in the football ground. There was almost as many ANC people there as we had at our rally. They started the trouble. As people went to the buses, we discovered a car had been wired to explode and kill our people. Then Inkatha members, acting to defend themselves against a bomb

set up by ANC, killed four people. It happened again when we buried a prominent Inkatha mayor killed by the ANC. After the service, they fired on one of our buses and our people chased and killed the man who shot at them. The ANC start the trouble, and the press blames Inkatha."

"They suggest you are not doing enough to stop the violence and have lost control of your supporters."

"Lost control? Mr Cohen, you were a politician like myself. This violence is similar to Lebanon. People, my people, have lost wives and children. My own children have been threatened, although, fortunately, not killed. I really don't know how I, as a Christian, would react if my child was killed. I don't know how people should react when their loved ones are killed."

"They say I've lost control, but I don't know what they expect me to do. I appeal in all my speeches to stop the violence and then they brand us hypocrites."

IN 1955, a "Congress of the People" was held in Kliptown, just outside Johannesburg. There, a group of black, coloured and Indian organisations seeking a democratic South Africa framed The Freedom Charter.

It commenced: "We the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people...'"

It set out the principles on which a future democratic South Africa would be based.

The driving force behind The Freedom Charter was the ANC. Formed in 1912 and banned after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, it established its military wing Umkhonto We Sizwe under the leadership of Nelson Mandela. After a series of attacks on government property led to the Rivonia Trial, which jailed many of its leaders including Mandela and forced others into exile, it led the worldwide struggle against apartheid.

Now the major political force in South Africa, it feels, with considerable justification, that it has the "right" to be the first government of a multi-racial South Africa. Although estimates of its support vary from a low of 40 per cent up to 65 per cent, no one can be sure.

The forces gathering to stop an ANC "takeover" include a revitalised and more liberal National Party that recently absorbed, almost en masse, the South African Labor Party, which claims to represent the majority of the 3 million coloureds. Political pundits predict it will also attract those white voters who previously voted for the Democratic Party, the only parliamentary party that has consistently opposed apartheid.

There are many other players, but it is the 7-8 million Zulus who will determine who governs South Africa. Estimates of Inkatha's support vary from 2 per cent to 25 per cent. If this is anywhere near the upper limit, then a combination of the National Party, Inkatha and other minor groups could leave the ANC out in the cold. It is the reason, many claim, for the ANC continually bad-mouthing Inkatha and Buthelezi, and blaming them for the violence.

The question that occupies the minds of most South Africans, particularly the whites who have so much to lose, is the ideological bent of the ANC. Once avowedly socialist and an advocate of nationalisation, it has, since the collapse of communism, been backtracking at remarkable speed and talking of a "mixed economy". Nevertheless, with its long-standing connections with the South African Communist Party, doubts remain.

It is said the only thing that holds the ANC together is its opposition to apartheid and its leadership in the armed struggle to "liberate" South Africa; that it contains every political ideology from the extreme Left to small "I" liberals, and that once in power, it will fragment into half a dozen political parties. ANC officials admitted to me that this was possible, although they desperately hoped it would not happen.

Chief Buthelezi represents all the things the ANC dislikes. He was against sanctions and the armed struggle, and is strongly in favour of a free-enterprise economy. Worse, as Inkatha is overwhelmingly Zulu, it accuses him of fostering tribalism — the curse, as the ANC sees it, of other black African countries. What then did he think of the ANC?

"It is a revolutionary organisation that for 30 years has thought and practised revolution. They believe they have the right to direct change in this country and rule after change. It is not in their nature to open the way for other political parties to take control."

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Rorke's Drift: etched in the memory

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INSIDE

THE WARRIOR CHIEF

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"They are responsible for the present crisis, by demanding that Mr De Klerk sack his Minister for Defence and Law and Order and to ban Zulus from carrying cultural weapons. They'll drop the demands for sackings, providing Zulus are disarmed."

"Mr De Klerk knows the ANC has arms caches all over South Africa and the Government permits them to recruit young people for military training. The Government can't complain about Zulus carrying 'cultural weapons' while the ANC is so well armed."

"Estimates of your support in the polls vary from 2 per cent to 25 per cent. Who's right?"

The smile returned to the chief's face. "Are they prophets? How do they know? A lot of these polls were taken after Mandela was released from jail and there was all that hype. How do you conduct a proper poll in a country with all this violence?"

Having read that morning in the paper of a poll in which the category after yes, no and undecided was 26 per cent "too scared to answer", I had to concede he had a point.

"There's a great deal of paranoia, par-

ticularly among the white community, about the ANC being communist dominated. This must be the only country in the world where communism is still taken seriously," I said.

The smiles were coming thick and fast now. "Irony, isn't it?" he replied. "A young lady from Ivestia (the Soviet newspaper) came with a big delegation from Russia and said they didn't want to hear anything about communism because it had destroyed their country. Yet here we have Joe Slovo (secretary-general of the SACP) saying there is nothing wrong with the engine of communism, it was only the pilot who was wrong. Absolutely ridiculous!"

"I don't know whether communism is making any headway as far as recruitment is concerned, but I believe that a lot of Council of South African Trade Union officials are also members of the Communist Party. I'm concerned because of the dominant part Joe Slovo plays in the ANC. There is no member of the ANC on the Communist Party executive, but there are communists on the executive of the ANC. It's obvious who influences whom."

"There are a lot of different political ideologies in the ANC," he explained. "Only last week a new, possibly more lib-



Nelson Mandela: symbolised the fight

eral, organisation was formed by ANC supporters. There's also vying for positions. Those who were in the country before the ANC were unbanned are telling the leaders, who were in exile, that they can't come back here and automatically

get positions in the ANC. And look what happened when my brother Mandela was released last year. He said he wanted to meet me but then refused to because if he did, some of his supporters would throttle him."

It's hardly surprising that after decades of bitter fighting between black and white, that despite the dramatic changes, there are still deep suspicions about each side's motives. Many believe the Government, while proceeding with reform, hopes to maintain a de facto apartheid with a minority veto over any elected parliament. "Was this possible?" I asked.

"I don't think so," Buthelezi replied. "Mr De Klerk has been emphatic there would be universal adult franchise. However, it's no use pretending cultural groups don't exist, with their interests safeguarded. There are different race and language groups in this country and we are not unique."

"None of us would want any camouflage of the old apartheid policies under the pretext that one is protecting cultural groups, but to pretend they don't exist is absurd."

"I have always supported one person, one vote, a la Westminster. There is nothing wrong with the Constitution of South Africa except the exclusion of blacks. We also need a federal system, but not one based on ethnicity."

The standard of living of middle-class

whites is the best in the world and while most seem to be accepting an end to apartheid, some have difficulty coming to terms with any diminution of their privileged position.

The very term "redistribution of wealth" fills them with dread, although when questioned, one finds it is confiscation they fear most. Whites seem unable to comprehend that merely removing the obnoxious apartheid laws is insufficient. Blacks are demanding a share of the wealth as well.

"What," I asked the chief, "could be done to force whites to face this reality?"

"I've always told them I believe in the redistribution of wealth to end the gross disparities and inequities of the past. Much more is spent on white education than black education, pensions, health, etc. There must be redistribution of opportunities. The gaps must be narrowed. What we have to do is recreate wealth so that there is a bigger slice for everyone."

His reply prompted the 64,000-rand question. "What will happen to the South African economy with the multi-racial government?"

"The economy of this country is in the doldrums and, with a 5 per cent or 6 per cent growth rate necessary to cater for the 3 per cent black population increase, we are in deep trouble. At the moment, the growth rate is 1 per cent to 2 per cent and if it doesn't increase, we are back to

square one. If liberation does not mean the improvement in the quality of life of ordinary people, then it's all meaningless."

"Sanctions have been lifted but no one's going to invest in South Africa while we have this violence. We've got everything in South Africa — gold, uranium, coal, diamonds, agriculture. The potential is enormous. There is no other country in Africa which has the same self-sufficiency as the economy of South Africa. The nearby States are interwoven with the economy of South Africa, and there is great potential."

"Imagine when apartheid has been fully removed. Imagine the backbone from Zaire to Zambia through Zimbabwe to this country."

"Look at the ports and infrastructure and minerals that this country has. Once you get rid of the violence and apartheid, this country can end up as one of the strongest economies in the world. But if we don't address these issues, there will be a situation where we will not be able to cope."

● On Monday in *The Australian*: Barry Cohen talks to Helen Suzman, a prominent white opponent of apartheid, and Denis Worrall, deputy leader of the Democratic Party and a former ambassador to Australia. Mr Cohen is a former federal Labor minister who writes a fortnightly column for *The Australian*. His next column also appears on Monday.