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SOUTH AFRICAN ZIONIST FEDERATION

40TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Address by Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi
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"Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow"

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Mr. Master of Ceremonies, Mr. H.A. Rosenberg Director-General of the South African Zionist Federation, Professor Antony Arkin Chairman of the Natal Zionist Council, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

There are times when an unexpected thought or idea captures a perspective that would take a lot of analytical writing to convey. Such a thought struck me most forcibly when I was thinking about the theme "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" to which I have to talk today. The thought followed the fact that KwaZulu's 90 000 square kilometers of ground is four times larger than the whole of Israel and KwaZulu's nearly seven million citizens approach being twice the number of Jews in Israel. I then thought of the Jews' 18 centuries in exile, the launching of Zionism in 1897 and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The thought that struck me most forcibly was that all of this was crammed into the yesterday of the Jews. For me that was quite some thought.

KwaZulu goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and Inkatha goes back a mere 13 years. Our yesterdays are one century long. However modern history condenses time and however much more we cram in a decade than was crammed in a decade centuries ago the Zulu people and other Black South African groupings with their own cultural identities are relatively speaking at the beginning of their time. This funnels us outwards into the future and I want to talk about the yesterday, today and tomorrow in South Africa as a launching time.

When I look back at the yesterday of South Africa, some dominant thoughts claim attention. In the broad sweep of something like a century's history experience in South Africa can be seen as an historic striving to achieve a twofold objective. The one is

achievement of an industrialised country in which efficiency and productivity enable us to conquer poverty, ignorance and disease. The other is the achievement of a multi-party, multi-racial democracy.

All of the last century's history has directed this country towards an industrialised future and what is more, towards an industrialised future in which the free enterprise system dominates. The discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa had an impact and aftermath which has unmistakably put South Africa ahead of the rest of the continent of Africa in terms of progress towards the establishment of a modern industrial democracy.

It is what South Africa is destined to become that is driving into apartheid to destroy it today. When you are looking at cause and effect it is not useful to go into infinite regression and start looking at causes of causes as being the causes of phenomena under discussion. On the other hand in human experience linked events provide a continuous history and right from the outset the discovery of gold began leading to a South Africa locked into a import/export survival development. The discovery of gold and diamonds in the phase of South African history in which they were discovered gave the white man an opportunity to seek exclusive advantage from economic developments but this phase could not last.

First there was the Boer/Uitlander division. Then there was the Boer/Brits division. Then there was history that made Boer and Brit come together. Then there was the Black/White division and

then there was the history that made Blacks and Whites come together.

The yesterday they produced produced the togetherness of today. We are irretrievably mixed up as South Africans in one country. There is nothing apartheid can do about that. The economic integration of Black and White now represents a social, political and economic egg that cannot be unscrambled.

The whole of South African history as riddled as it always has been with racism has been one voyage after another in search of democracy. Right from the early Dutch occupation of the Cape relationships between authority and people gave rise to problems. The relationship between colonial powers and settlers created problems. The main causes of the Great Trek itself ensured a quest for democracy. The bands of Boers who trekked together had to find ways of dealing with each other. The Republics in the Free State and Transvaal, and briefly in Natal, had to start searching for democratic solutions to their internal problems.

It really is vitally necessary that at this juncture of South Africa's history where we stand on the cross-roads that we see South Africa's yesterday for what it is. We must not be so blinded by the racism which is so abhorrent in apartheid that we fail to recognise the fountains of the past which give rise to movements today. We have in South Africa a deep white veneration for democracy. It is there in the white man's church; it is there in his sports clubs; it is there in his racist parliament. The white man most certainly relies extensively on democratic practice to

arrange his white man's world. The whole of history has written the norms of democracy in the hearts and minds and souls, even, of white South Africans.

South Africa's yesterday which sowed the seeds of the free enterprise system in our society also sowed the seeds of democracy"

in our society. It is vitally important to understand this. These two driving forces which are impregnated into the very web and weave of South African life demand to be picked up and to be made productive for peace.

The today in South Africa in South Africa's yesterday, today and tomorrow is so vitally important because in historic terms today stands so close to yesterday that today and yesterday merge into

one. We are still in the position of being able to reinterpret South Africa's past. History is not some objective movement of events out there that occurred in the past. History is what we in

fact make of the past. History is that part of the past which we make sense of in today.

We could look at the Great Trek of bands of Whites setting out to establish a Boerestaat and giving historic validity to the stances of Dr. Treurnicht and the likes of Mr. Eugene Terreblanche. Alternatively we could look at the Great Trek as I have done in

this address - look at it as a drive for democracy and the beginnings of a free enterprise industrial society. Closer to my own home I could look at the Battle of Blood River as having made sworn enemies out of Black and White. Or I could look at the

Battle of Blood River in a perspective in which I saw it as being a particular event in a series of events which characterised fearful Whites and fearful Blacks who did not yet know how to deal with each other.

The time, however, must come when one loses the historic right to be flexible and one loses the right to make sense of the past

because that has already been done in one way or another. Right now South Africa does stand on the cross-roads of history. Tteds probably the juncture point in history beyond which reinterpretation of the past becomes impossible. There is

something very awesomely demanding about our position as a country as we stand on this cross-roads.

I do not scenario-build when I think about future political

developments. I leave the scenario-building to academics which have the information and to ideologues who think that they can fashion a new South Africa out of their own ideas. There never is the kind of leap into the future which cuts a country off from its past. There is never a leap into any kind of Utopia. There is only the past working to become the future. There is only the continuum which is indestructible. Direction can change but that

which changes direction is the creation of the past.

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I know that I need not fear that the basic ingredients of a just society cannot be found in South Africa.. There is a yearning for a just society amongst all race groups. There 'is a deep-rooted feeling of respect for Western democratic life-styles and social, economic and political practices among South Africa's Whites. I believe that the majority of Whites in South Africa are now ready to begin negotiating an open democracy for this country. They are ready to negotiate with Blacks in order to thrash out how Black and White could come together to establish such a democracy and to make it work afterwards.

Even those who cry out against reform do not do so because they reject a multi-racial democracy in principle. They reject it because they are frightened of it in practice. They reject it because they think it will not work. The majority of right-wingers in Dr. Treurnicht's party would leap to put their hands to change if they thought change could work.

In black society there are many who so fear white racism that they too fear for a simple Western-type multi-party democracy. They fear that white racism will not be contained in it. They point to the fact that white racism flourished under one of the world's ideal Western democracies - a democracy of the Westminster-type Parliament. They do, however, not reject a multi-party, non-racial democracy as an ideal.

We have other things going for us in this country as well. We have a veneration for the rule of law in all race groups. All race groups would agree that the freedom of the press is important. All races would agree that a society in which the idiom of contract is sacrosanct is ideal. In all race groups individual rights are deeply valued and the right to work where you will is part and parcel of the right to trade where you will if you can and to try even if you cannot. The fundamentals of the free enterprise system are not challenged by the value systems of Black and White in this country.

I do not build scenarios of the future, as I say. I can, however, look at the present as a product of the past and say that in South Africa today there are all the ingredients that a modern, multi-party industrial democracy could want. We simply lack that collective will to put it into practice.

This lack of will, however, is a complex thing. Even the die-hard right-wingers in the National Party who eventually broke away to form the HNP and later the Conservative Party participated in the evolution of a new South Africa in which racism and apartheid would be doomed. The Afrikaner businessman and the Afrikaner worker may have had qualms at times, and may have resisted at times, but as a people Afrikaners produced a situation in which Afrikanerdom can no longer rely on apartheid.

It lies almost as though Whites have been working for a multi-party democracy for a long time and only take fright when a name is actually put to the political gain that they are really playing. There lies no way in which apartheid can any longer comprehend the interests of Afrikaners. It cannot protect their vested interests.

They know this to be the case. They themselves have actually been behaving in such a way that Afrikanerdom will be a cultural phenomena within a multi-party democracy. A multi-party democracy

as I understand the meaning of those words will hold no threat to the Afrikaans language. It will hold no threat to the Dutch Reformed Church and any other church in the reform tradition. The cultural identity of Afrikaners could in fact best be preserved if it was decontaminated by taking it out of politics.

Zionism must surely have something to say to South Africa today. I am always very cautious when it comes to talking to people about their own religion but I am I believe safe in asking questions. I ask the question of whether or not the State of Israel came because Zionism had created it in hearts and minds long before anybody had any right to look at a future State of Israel as being even remotely feasible. Is there some kind of magic in Jewishness? Is there some kind of special super-natural power in Judaism? It may well be that historic reasons and unexplained factors quite beyond human understanding must be presented to explain the miracle of a people who could be dispersed and live without a State for 18 centuries and yet remain a people. I have, however, a feeling that in 18 centuries' time, we will still be Zulus and Afrikaners will still be Afrikaners and the Irish will still be Irish, and the Scots Scots and the English English even if the three of them live in one parliamentary democracy.

I come back to asking questions of Zionism. Were the idealists living a lie because the Zionist ideal looked so impractical for so long? I ask the important question of whether or not the advent of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust is something quite outside Judaism which created the circumstances in which a State of Israel was possible? These questions set me thinking about South Africa. Above all they remind me that ideological perceptions and ideological arrogance which thinks that the few can shape the destiny for millions in this country can only really live in misfit historic nobodies.

A South African holocaust would of course shape history but a holocaust in this country will only be consequent upon the failure of the people to get together. It is not as though fate has

already prescribed some kind of doom for South Africa. Fate has decreed that South Africa is our country and we can make of it what we will - it is decreed that we can shape our own destiny.

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It is so tragic that the State President so wavers on the very threshold of becoming a statesman. He heads a government which must reform and reform successfully or be thrown out of power. The State President cannot rush back into taking refuge in classical Verwoerdian apartheid. The circumstances in which Verwoerdian apartheid existed are irretrievably lost. The State President knows that Dr. Treurnicht will fall flat on his face should he ever be given the opportunity of heading a government of this country.

I really do not know whether the State President would risk falling on his face just to stop Dr. Treurnicht from having the opportunity of doing so.. The strange preoccupation with right-wing developments by the State President does need some explanation. 1If he moved forward into the future leaving the right-wingers to do their damndest, the march of progress which would come so rapidly would isolate the far right and make them politically impotent.

The State President could in fact move determinedly and could boldly establish the circumstances in which there would be really massive support for a meaningful reform programme from Western Europe and North America. He could establish the circumstances in which reform attempts would be applauded by Africa. He most certainly could establish the circumstances in which Black and White could rally together to do that which has to be done.

I have always been ready to enter negotiations about the future of this country but they must be real negotiations aiming at real things by earnest men and women prepared to back up their negotiating positions amongst multi-racial audiences. Real reform will require a kind of partnership which would make nonsense of the State President running around the Western Cape and the PWV area seeking white support, while I run around rural areas and black townships, seeking black support.

That is, in fact, what he thinks should happen. He has rigged his National Council in such a way that I would not even need to go out of KwaZulu and he would not need to go into KwaZulu or into any other black area, whether it be inside or outside a homeland. He can go on his show-piece visit to Cross Roads but that does not fool anybody. The State President has to accept that Blacks are South Africans. He has to accept that he has to expand his support base into black society. Claiming it is not sufficient. He will have to campaign for it. The National Party would have to establish branches in black areas to convince the world that he had black support.

I campaign across all racial barriers. I am here today speaking to a white audience. When does the State President do the equivalent among black audiences? I make the point, ladies and gentlemen, that the State President has not even progressed to that point where black audiences would want him to be their key-note speaker

in the way white audiences want me to be a key-note speaker. I have been invited by President Reagan to see him personally. I have been invited by Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Dr. Helmut Kohl, by Mr. Jacques Chirac, by Dr. Mario Soares and Dr. Chaim Hertzog to see them personally.

The emergence of a democracy in this country can only begin to happen when we as leaders start behaving as democrats. The people want democratic leaders. There is a demand that the State President drop his whites-only politicking and become a Head of State for all South Africans. However much the people demand that leaders act as democrats and no matter how much the final emergence of a democracy in South Africa depends on leaders behaving democratically, the structures of apartheid dam up democratic forces and buy time for the forces of violence.

I have repeatedly said that political prisoners will have to be released and that black democracy will have to be unshackled before the full value of any Black participating in national negotiations could be had. It will help nobody for Blacks to participate in the State President's National Council while they are not free to campaign in black townships and in black society generally for the acceptance or rejection of what they are promoting in negotiation. Agreements between those negotiating would have to be endorsed by the public. They could not be endorsed unless they could be sold and they cannot be sold while black democracy remains shackled.

Everything from the past is poised to thrust South Africa into a new democratic future. Whites must now take the State President by the hand, and if necessary, be ready to take him by the scruff of the neck and thrust him into the future. It is not as though there are ten other little State Presidents waiting to step into the limelight. It is probably a case of it being the State President or nobody. It is probably a case of he being the only one who can

lead Whites away from the cross-roads. His removal by white politics would so disrupt white political intention and unity of purpose that it would be counter-productive. We are saddled with him and he in fact is saddled with me. You are also saddled with me. We are actors of today who must produce the tomorrow.

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