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## **EDITORIAL**

# THE GOVERNMENT AND THE BLACK WORKER

The Government's banning of four young white trade union organisers is an act of madness. It is of course said to be an act of maintenance of law and order, but that does not prevent REALITY from seeing it as an act of madness. It is a mark of our dichotomous society that what one person sees as a highly sensible and necessary act, another should see as an act of madness.

The order is apparently directed at four young white people. But that will not prevent many people, both in this and in other countries, from seeing it as directed against the black worker of South Africa. It is this that

makes it appear to them to be not only unjust, but highly dangerous to the very people who issued it on the grounds of sensibility and necessity.

This act has several terrible implications. In the first place it is directed against the development of black trade unions. The Government is in effect saying to black workers. "We don't want you to have trade unions. We want to act in your best interests therefore we think you should have works committees and not trade unions. This will save you from the evil machinations of those who don't really care for your welfare, but are anxious to destroy law and order for their own purposes."

It should be said at once that it is the Government and some of the industrialists who want the works committees. It is the black workers, and again some of the industrialists, who want the trade unions. The reason is simple. Those who want the works committees want every manifestation of industrial discontent isolated in its own factory, where it can be dealt with by the management, and where the "agitators" can be clearly identified and if necessary punished or penalised. They are afraid lest the discontent should be referred to a trade union, whose power to press for the removal of grievances is much greater, and whose leaders are not necessarily subject to factory control.

Those industrialists who want trade unions have grasped the truth that only fair dealing brings peace, and therefore they are not afraid to deal with trade unions. As for the black worker, he knows that works committees, especially under unenlightened employers, are impotent.

The second implication is much more terrible than the first. All those who work for change know that one of the things that needs changing most is the gross disparity between black income and white income; for while this disparity is so gross, there can be no common society, whether unitary or federal. Will employers reduce this disparity? By themselves, NO. Will the Government reduce it? It appears not. Does that mean that the Government **wants** to maintain the disparity? Either the Government **wants** to maintain the disparity, or the Government does not see the urgent need to reduce it. Either implication is shocking.

The third implication is yet more terrible. The gross disparity means poverty for many black people. Poverty

means hunger. Poverty means malnutrition. Poverty means social insignificance. Does the Government, do some industrialists, do some white South Africans, actually **want** poverty to continue. It would appear, either that they want it, or that they do not care about it.

Poverty also means a poor education, the denial of the right to break out of your poverty. Do the rich volunteer to educate the poor? One is thankful that some of them do—TEACH, LEARN, the ESTCOURT INDIAN ONE CENT BURSARY TRUST (though by no means all of its donors are rich), the INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS bursary funds, the many people who leave their money to educational trusts. This is wonderful, but it should not need to be done. Free education should be the right of all our children.

There is one last thing to be said. The denial of these rights, the right to education, the right to escape poverty, the right to earn a decent living, the right to organise labour, makes it necessary for a government to take to itself powers to silence and restrict all those who actively work to achieve them for all people. The Government is not maintaining law and order. It is maintaining the privilege of the white, the rich, the employers, the enfranchised, to preserve their wealth and their status, a wealth and status that are enjoyed at the expense of others.

REALITY reaffirms its support for all those people who are striving, very often at great cost to themselves, to achieve better and more equitable conditions for the black worker, and to create a social order that will be safe against the attacks of any enemy whatsoever. □

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Shortly before we went to press Mr David Hemson was banned. An article by him was to have appeared on these pages. We leave them blank partly to remind our readers of the impoverishing effects of banning, upon us all.

David Hemson was a member of the Editorial Board of **Reality**—a position which his banning order forces him to resign. He was an assistant-secretary of the Furniture Workers' Union, and was banned along with his fellow trades union workers Halton Cheadle, David Davis and Jeanette Cunningham-Brown. Reality records its thanks to David Hemson for the help he gave on the Reality Board and expresses to him and his colleagues its support for the work they were doing and its detestation of the unjust, cruel and senseless banning procedures. □

# SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1973 BANNINGS

(A talk given to a Progressive Party Lunch Hour Forum in Pietermaritzburg in December, 1973.)

by Colin Gardner

First, some general points about banning. By now it should be clear to any alert person that a banning order, so far from being an indication that the recipient of the order has committed some crime, is in fact more-or-less a proof that he has committed **no** crime. This Government is eager to get convictions; if a person is suspected of having committed an offence he is likely to be charged.

It would be wrong to suppose that the people who are banned are the only victims of banning. Society is a victim. Those who know banned persons or know their writings are unable to quote from them or even to refer to what they have said; those who have not known what they have said are not allowed to know. The impoverishment is serious. This is particularly so in the case of such a person as Dr Manas Buthelezi, who is a man of quite unusual originality and sensitivity. What he has to say, and the exact way in which he decides to say it, South Africa as a whole needs to know. He is in many respects the Martin Luther King of South Africa. He has been gagged, and we are the losers.

And we are the losers in other ways too. Bannings tend to intimidate people. We are all diminished by the silencing of a banned person.



Most of the people who have been banned in the past year—and there are many of them—are blacks. Articulate blacks, leaders of the community, people who have been voicing some of the feelings of the black majority of the population; leading members of SASO, BPC, Black Community Programmes, and now the Christian Institute. These people have not been plotting the overthrow of the state; they have not been breaking the law or (as far as I know) planning to break the law. Many of them have not even spent much of their energy denouncing the Government. They have been pointing out, much of the time in an incisive but reasoned manner (and here I am referring to a whole way of thinking, not to the specific utterances of banned persons)—blacks have been pointing out, firstly, that the present system of racial and economic injustice is

extremely painful to black people, and secondly, that by recognising their own humanity, their own importance as human beings, blacks can exert a steady pressure and thus contribute vitally to the process of change that the country so obviously needs. I wish I could talk about the way in which Dr Manas Buthelezi conceives these thoughts in profoundly Christian terms.

Now many of the people who have been giving particular expression to such thoughts have been silenced. There are still many people who can and will continue to say such things. There is always Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. But clearly the Government has been trying to stop articulate and enlightened black people from stating their views.

What is likely to be the result of this? The result is likely to be the same as in all other instances of the obstructing of a natural and healthy process. In this country black people suffer abnormally; it is natural and right that they should be able to express their feelings and, in doing this, work towards a fair sharing of the goods of society. When you obstruct a natural process, you produce either a certain inertness, or an explosive violence, or both. The silencing of black spokesmen is likely to produce **both**—an inertness in society, especially the dominant white part of society, which is unlikely to modify its views greatly unless it is made to face up (and soon) to the realities of black thinking and feeling; and then, an explosion of black violence, when the thoughts and feelings that are being so dammed up can be contained no longer.

The Government claims that certain English-language newspapers are inciting racial hatred. Such accusations are absurd. Nothing induces racial hatred and despair more than a banning order. The other day I met an old African friend who was so deeply moved and angered by the banning of Dr Buthelezi that he was unable to speak about it at all; he asked me, when I raised the subject, to talk about something else.

But let us not, those of us who are whites, put all the blame on the Government. We are the people who allow this

sort of thing to happen. We are, partly, the society which acquiesces in banning. Many of us only think about it as we read the newspapers. Why? Because we feel secure. And why do we feel secure, most of the time? Because we don't know what black people are thinking and feeling. And if we did know, would we know how to respond? No.

Dr Manas Buthelezi, and many of the other black people who have been banned this year, have been showing the crucial truths about the state of affairs in this country, and they have been suggesting ways of responding creatively, both for blacks and for whites. They have been describing a way in which society might evolve naturally and humanely. Dr Buthelezi is a theologian and a dedicated minister of religion who prefers reconciliation to revolution.

As a reward for his insight and his dedication he has been banned. But in a sense we have all been banned. And in one sense, but an important sense, we have banned ourselves. And most of us don't even care.

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I'd like to say a little more about the question of obstructing a natural process.

It seems to me that the body politic is in several respects like the human body. It depends for its health on many sorts of flow, movement, circulation. Stop up one of these natural flows and something dreadful happens.

The body politic functions in a different way and at a different pace; but there are many points of similarity. And let us not forget that, whether they are officially excluded or not, even if they are fobbed off with unreal provisions and promises, black people are a part of the South African body politic. They participate in and contribute richly to the society in which we all live. They are here, and they matter—they matter a great deal. They also suffer a great deal (as I said earlier), and it is essential that their suffering and their aspirations (whether or not most white people agree with all of these aspirations) be expressed, and be allowed to exert an influence, in the normal and natural way, upon the development of the body politic. People are alive, people change and develop; it is natural that a body politic should be alive, and change and develop. If it is not permitted to behave like a living and changing thing, something dreadful happens.

Now life, change, development within the body politic is precisely what this Government dislikes and is determined—in a Canute-like way—to thwart. The Government is wedded to the status quo. It loves to talk of the "traditional South African way of life"—in other words, it constantly looks back to the past. It loves to say, "If you want to change society, you must do it through the ballot-box"—in other words, live contentedly within the status quo of "whites only" politics. To black people it in effect says—in so far as it deigns to communicate with them at all—"We are busy constructing for you a little side-track of a status quo which will give you a vantage-point from which we hope you won't be able to have any



*Dr Manas Buthelezi.*

influence upon the **real** status quo, which we like to call **our** status quo."

It is all as if some surgeon, some crazed transplant-expert, were to channel the blood of a person's body into a limb, an artificial limb, in such a way that it could never flow back to the heart.

But English-speaking whites of a liberal or progressive persuasion often make the mistake of assuming that the damming-up that takes place in our society, the thwarting of natural movements in the body politic, is wholly or largely the work of Afrikaner Nationalism. I have tended to think so myself in the past. But I now think it is not so. If thoughtful English-speaking whites look around at their fellows, if indeed they look into themselves, they find that there is a great deal of **acceptance** of the situation in which we find ourselves. Of course it isn't easy to know what exactly one can **do** in the circumstances; I don't want to underestimate that problem. But it is surprising how many concerned or supposedly-concerned persons are content to do almost nothing.

They are content to do little or nothing because, essentially, and whether or not they are wholly conscious of the fact, the situation that they are in is a pleasing and convenient one. They too, essentially, are in love with the status quo, the "traditional South African way of life." The economic dice are loaded so attractively in favour of the white man. It has often been said that the English South African thinks Progressive, votes U.P., and thanks