

INKATHA

by David Welsh

Africa has certainly spawned some unusual political instruments. Inkatha, the National Cultural Liberation Movement, is certainly unusual on the face of things, but reading through its constitution and other statements of its aims, it comes to look more and more like the proto-type of a mass mobilization-type political party, frequently associated with newly independent African states.

In fact the structure of its proposed constitution and even the language bear some resemblance to Kenneth Kaunda's UNIP. It is to be the instrument of 'African democracy' or a single-party system. In Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's words 'Inkatha provides the machinery within which the people as a whole have a right to participate in National decision-making at all levels'. He has said explicitly that it is an instrument for involving the grass roots.

Membership is open to all Zulu above the age of 18, and provision is made for affiliate membership of organisations as well. As originally conceived Inkatha would be the single KwaZulu party: only its members could run for Legislative Assembly elections or other local elective bodies. The South African Government, however, has rejected the single-party idea, and it remains to be seen whether the people of KwaZulu will voluntarily channel their political forces into a single party. At the present time this seems highly doubtful.

Elsewhere in Africa the rationale for a single-party system has rested on two core arguments: that the competitive party systems of liberal democracies are not congruent with African political traditions, which are themselves democratic; that the effect of party competition is divisive, and in the circumstances of typical poorly integrated new societies of Africa divisiveness must be avoided at all costs.

Members of Inkatha are, in terms of the constitution, obliged 'to struggle for the unity of the country', 'to strengthen the bond between the people and the Movement' (i.e. Inkatha), and 'to explain to the people constantly the policies of the Movement . . .' A whole section of the constitution spells out these aims, which are basically the mobilisation of the people.

Structurally the Movement is strongly centralised, with power being concentrated in the Central Committee, which has among its powers and functions 'the implementation of the entire policy of the National Movement' and 'the exercise of complete control over all officials'. The Central Committee is to consist of not less than 25 persons, 21 of

whom will be elected for a five-year term by the General Conference of the movement.

Members of the Movement are constitutionally obliged to refrain from publicly criticising it or any member in relation to his activities in Inkatha, but the right of members to criticise short-comings, irregularities and to make suggestions regarding policy issues is protected so long as this occurs inside the movement.

In many respects, as I have indicated, these provisions are typical of much of the single-party idea in modern Africa. Whether in fact things will work out in the way prescribed by the constitution is, of course, entirely a different matter. It is possible to keep a quality of openness and freedom alive in the single-party system (as TANU and UNIP have demonstrated) but it is difficult, and depends on the personal qualities of the leadership, the equipoise of powerful groupings inside the movement and a host of other variables which cannot be foreseen.

KwaZulu, of course, is not typically emergent state and the context within which Inkatha will operate is radically different from, say, TANU's. KwaZulu's people reject the 'liberation' offered them by the South African government; and they reject the patchwork-quilt pattern of scattered lands. On these issues, no doubt, Inkatha can secure a ready-made basis of unity. But there are other sources of division whose magnitude may grow. Will Inkatha be able to cope with these democratically?

KwaZulu's 29 different pieces contain a variety of peoples, some with legacies of conflict with the Zulu heartland.

There are traditionalists, labour leaders, young students and intellectuals, businessmen, all of whom are actual or potential sources of opposition that will be difficult to contain and reconcile within the ranks of the Movement.

Inkatha will have to face the opposition of those who believe that it is wrong to 'work for change within the system', a powerful if muted constituency among Blacks; and it will also have to face, as Chief Buthelezi has long done, all the subtle forms of opposition which the Republican Government can mount.

All in all the prospects for a democratic movement are not propitious, and the circumstances of Inkatha will test to the utmost the undoubted democratic instincts of its leaders. □