

SPEECH OPENING 47th ANNUAL NUSAS CONGRESS

BY DAVID THEBEHALI - UNIVERSITY OF NATAL, DURBAN 5/7/71

Your President has been most kind in his introductory remarks, for which we are humbly and deeply grateful. At the same time we realize that he is such a perfect gentleman that he never speaks unkindly of anyone. Furthermore, we should remember that introductory remarks may be at best only approximately correct. This is illustrated by the introduction of the two men when one said to the other:

" I certainly am glad to meet you, for are you not Mr Jones who made a million rand in diamonds in Kimberley recently?"

And the other replied "Well, that is approximately correct but it wasn't recently, it was over five years ago; and it wasn't in Kimberley, it was in Windhoek; and it wasn't in diamonds, it was in tourism; and it was not a million rand it was two million rand; and it wasn't made, it was lost. and. by the way, my name is not Jones but Smith".

As a Black man who has the first responsibility to 14 million Blacks who have been robbed of the essence of existence in the country of their birth, who can not decide and carve their own destiny, who live with the daily ugliness of township, settlement, slum life, educational castration, and economic exploitation; who is desperately trying to hold on to "physical life amid psychological death", who listens and reads daily to non-Black politicians and individuals talking eloquently for the maintenance of the status quo, and in the same breath denying that they are racists, who is "harried by day and haunted by night by a profound sense of nobodiness"; to him it means "the ache and anguish of living in so many situations where hopes unborn have died"; I am dreaming of a better South Africa.

I want a South Africa which stands tall in the World, not by virtue of military might and sophisticated racism, nor its material achievements but because it is the incarnation of human liberty, of the rights and dignity of man, of justice and honour.

I want a South Africa whose light will so shine throughout the world that it will illumine the pathway of all millions who seek to rise out of the valley of tyranny and adversity and reach the peak of man's loftiest aspirations.

I want a South Africa whose citizens understand the true meaning of freedom. The freedom I cherish is not passive freedom from something - from want or fear or trouble or injustice - but dynamic indivisible freedom for something: freedom to work out our own destiny according to the pattern of our own minds and the strength of our own dedication - freedom to build a better world. I want a South Africa that will be ever ready to meet any challenge with high courage, moral resolution and constancy of purpose.

I think one of the greatest historical tragedies of South Africa is the 1648 Harlem shipwreck and the arrival of Johan van Riebeeck and after 323 years racial injustice is still the Black man's burden and South Africa's shame. Yet for his own inner health and outer functioning, the Black man is called upon to be as resourceful, as productive and as responsible as those who have not known such oppression and exploitation. This is the Black man's dilemma. He who starts behind in a race must forever remain behind or run faster than the man in front. What a dilemma! It is a call to do the impossible. It was enough to cause the Black man to give up in despair. The Black man has now seen the light. We are going to "go it alone". With a dynamic will, Blacks are going to transform the Black minus into a Black plus and move on aggressively through the storms of injustice and jostling winds of daily handicaps towards the beaconing lights of fulfillment.

The role of the non Black man towards the Blacks has been a frustrating one. The first time the Blacks came into contact with the non-Blacks the former were mystified, overwhelmed and puzzled. The non-Black was able to do things that were beyond the comprehension of the Blacks. He spoke so eloquently about his culture, religion and civilization that the Black mind became so brain-washed to associate power, creativity, intelligence, knowledge

and wealth with a non-Black skin. The psychological effect of this was that it was an "in thing" to be Westernized, have a black face with a white soul, and move around with a non-Black slave name like David. The missionaries were very successful in casting this magic spell. They made us fasten our gaze upon a blond-haired blue eyed Jesus. We found ourselves being compelled to worship a Jesus who does not look like us. The non-Black missionaries in their unmatched enthusiasm to evangelize and take over our land taught us to shout, sing and pray until we die, to wait until death for some dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we are dead, while the non-Blacks have their "milk and honey" in the streets paved with golden rand right here in South Africa.

The Missionary's strong attachment to the institutional forms of western Christianity is most apparent in the historical development of the Church in South Africa. The missionary ignored the lineage - the social organization in traditional religion and introduced the church and school as organisations of worship. Moreover, the missionary tabooed the recurrent events of the lineage rites of passage, ceremonies, participation in state functions and marriage forms. Western forms of marriage and the family were made compulsory. Material objects, used in traditional society were rejected. The missionary substituted the institutions of Western Christianity. The indigenous arts - music, drumming, dance, architecture - were forbidden. With respect to marriage the ~~middle~~ ^{middle}some missionaries committed a great blunder, which has resulted in producing those conditions in the morals of the Blacks everywhere associated with the observance of a form of religion, which recognizes one law for the rich and another for the poor!!

There is no authorization for a monogamous marriage in the Bible; it is simply a law of the non-Black Church.

Too often the Blacks were taught that everything Black was heathen, wrong, and ungodly. Our names were designated as pagan and we were given non-Black "slave" names.

Black people must now closely study the manifestations of the non-black churches and they will find that they are always on the side of the status quo. in any struggle of a people towards freedom. "Where was the church in the 1830-1845 revolutions in Europe; in the uprising of the workers during the 19th century; when six million Jews were killed? Where is the church in South Africa? The non-black church preaches the universality of the brotherhood of man and fails dismally to practice that universality. There is a lot of hipocrisy in those churches, a lot of discrimination - black ministers do not have the same earning power, and benefits as their non-black counterparts.

So the answer is one. The blacks must get out fast from those non-black churches, so that Christianity as related to the Black man's culture can have true meaning. Let us have a Black Roman Catholic church, Anglican church, Dutch Reformed Church with our own Black Bishops etc. If we can do that a Black man would have re-discovered his black soul, and spiritual convictions.

The situation in South Africa particularly for the blacks is a very sad one. We find seperation 24 hours a day, and development at no hours a day. The educational and economic facilities are not sufficiently available to us. The education of a black child is neutralised in the hands of the government under the Bantu Education Act. No. 47 of 1953. This Act has pegged government expenditure on Black education at a fixed annual amount. In 1968, the government was spending the following amounts per capita expenditure: Non-black children R114.1 and black children R13.5 These figures are a sad reflection of a deliberate policy of preventing blacks from acquiring education, advanced skills and professional qualifications. The door of opportunity is closed to all but a few.

In the economic field the blacks are denied access to acquiring meaningful livelihood. Under the industrial Conciliation Act. Blacks are not recognised as employees and therefore wages are shamefully and scandalously low. From 1935 to 1968 the average earnings of the non-blacks rose from R452 to R3,124 and for the Blacks, from R84 to R566.

These low wages encourage poverty and malnutrition that is unknown in a highly industrialised country like South Africa. According to the South African Institute for Medical Research, Black infant mortality rates are 137 per 1000 in the rural areas and 122 per 1000 in urban areas. Comparative statistics for non-blacks are 46.8 per 1000 in rural areas, and 31.1 in urban areas. "From surveys conducted by the National Nutrition Research Institute it appears that some 1,000,000 children in the age-groups 1-4 are malnourished.

It is an established fact that it is not in the "scheme of things" to develop the Bantustans, so as to become habitable and have a viable economy. So Black people must now go to the homelands to develop those areas using the knowledge they have acquired in the cities. Black money must be used in this venture to start industries and businesses. The market is already in existence. The black leaders must now call on the South African government to reduce if possible to nil - the number of non-blacks in those areas. If there is any expert, and specialised assistance that they require they must call on black Americans to come and impart their knowledge. For example medical facilities and the availability of black doctors are insufficient. Let us get black doctors, black dentists etc., from the United States to work in the homelands. Let us get Black economic experts to assist us to develop this 13% of the land. If the government is honest and sincere in seeing to it that we help ourselves then black people must be left to do their own thing in their own areas. The idea of starting a National Black Bank must be seriously looked into. Also a well-thought out plan requesting the 5 million economically active Blacks to levy themselves R20 per annum for the coming 5 years, to contribute that amount to the Black Economic Development Fund of the Homelands.

AMERICAN INVESTMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

In the United States and also here there is a debate on "engagement and disengagement" of American companies in South Africa. There are 300 United States firms with 76 United States citizens as chief executives. The overall average return is 14.4% the highest in the world. The U.S. investment earnings is 127 million dollars.

These companies in outlook are no different from the South African companies. They pay low wages to their Black employees. Management in these firms is dead against any sort of inter-racial contact. The Managing Director of Ford Company said "I do not mix with them in the States; I do not mix with them here, and if I went back to the States, I would not mix with them either."

Pressure must be brought to bear on American firms to recognise a Black man as a worker. They must pay meaningful wages to justify their presence in South Africa. It is utterly ridiculous to hide behind the skirts of government legislation. They must win back the trust and confidence of their parent country. Apart from training their black workers to take responsible positions, how about ploughing back 4% of the 14.4% for the development of the homelands? Black organisations such as SASO, ASSECA and others must now work on plans and strategies to pressurise these firms to live up to their American Creed back home.

DIALOGUE.

During the last few months the word dialogue has been included in the cliches of the world politics. To a black in this country dialogue between the non-Black government and Malawi or the French speaking Black states has no meaning in my quest for Black pride and freedom. Dialogue can be only meaningful to me when it is found amongst blacks in their own struggle for black solidarity. The leaders in the Homelands must grasp this opportunity to start dialogue amongst themselves. Chief Gatsha Buthelezi must now call a round table conference even if it will not be recognised by the government, of all the black leaders to discuss issues of common concern. For instance influx control affects every Black man irrespective of tribal nationality.

Racism is a philosophy based on a contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the centre of value and object of devotion before which other nations must kneel in submission. It is the absurd dogma that one race is responsible for all the progress of history and alone can assure progress of the future. Racism is complete and total estrangement. It is not found amongst Black people; it is obviously found among the non-blacks. Here is your responsibility as NUSAS. To pay less attention to the struggle of the black man and concentrate on white racism. For 300 years the liberals have been misdirecting their energies to the blacks and the blacks have since seen through their efforts. Blacks are now committed to bring about their own change in this country in their own way, at their own terms.

NUSAS and all liberal institutions must understand this new Black mood. It is the feeling that Blacks must be their own spokesmen, that they must be in the primary leadership of their organisations. It is a psychological search for manhood. It is the mood of those who have had such a crushed and bruised history to know that they are men, that they have the organisational ability to map their own strategy and shape their own programs. This means liberals must be prepared to accept a transformation of their role.

Your role as NUSAS is only beginning. White racism can bring this country to its knees, and so all your programs must now be directed to the non-blacks particularly the non-black youths. If that can be achieved then the future of South Africa will be guaranteed and assured, and the outward-looking policy will meet with no problems at all.

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