

Langsyde Catholic Mission

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COSG CONFERENCE

SEPT. 1990

P.O. Elandskop
4540 Natal
South Africa

TALK TO ROTARY CLUB

12th July 1990

THE NATAL CONFLICT

Thank you for the invitation to attend your dinner today and to talk about the situation in Natal. I am aware that this is a replacement for a speaker who could not be here. Nevertheless I trust that the subject will be of interest to at least some here.

I must confess that although it is a subject that I think about a great deal, it is not one that I find it easy to talk about. Being born and raised in Natal, it has been exceedingly PAINFUL FOR ME TO SEE the state into which the Province has fallen. Added to that has been my own personal experience of the violence, some of which I shall share with you, which makes this a subject of considerable emotion for me and many others. I have that feeling, common to many people in those situations of not really being able to communicate what is going on. Nonetheless, it seems worth the effort to try, if we are going to broaden people's understanding of the conflict.

The Natal conflict has taken a staggering toll in the sheer destruction that has been achieved: a death toll in the region of 3,000-4,000, many thousands of homes burnt and destroyed, an untold number of refugees in the immediately affected areas. All of this has had other effects e.g. on the infrastructure of the region, the situation as regards housing, public transport, medical services, pensions and the other services normally carried out by magistrate's courts, commerce and industry, the situation of unemployment etc. Others have dealt with these subjects better than I, and it is not my intention to do so. But I mention them so that at the outset we have an idea of the enormous human cost of this struggle.

What I would like to do is simply tell you the story of one community, the one in which I worked for six years. It is a story of a peaceful rural community torn apart by a conflict it did not start. And then at the end I would like to draw some conclusions which I think can be generalized to the whole conflict.

I was ordained in 1983 and sent to work at the Mission of Elandskop, about 30 kilometres from Pietermaritzburg. The parish comprised four communities, about 4000 people, spread out over rolling hills which are the foothills of the Drakensberg. The people there are, I think, fairly typical of a rural community in KwaZulu. Although there have been rapid changes in the last thirty or forty years, and people are far more reliant on the city of Pietermaritzburg for their livelihood, traditional ways are still strong. Most families have the traditional Zulu kraal, though increasingly you see rectangular huts built with bricks, and electricity is beginning to appear in some houses. Most families have cattle, and crops are tilled. Water is fetched from the river, firewood from the forest. There are now many schools in the area, though the standard of education they offer is appalling. The chief impression one gets is of a community in transition - in transition from a traditional rural style of life to a more urban, modern one, with all of its values, or lack of them, if you will.

Politically the area was and is conservative. The only movement in existence when I arrived was Inkatha, which was all that people knew about. The traditional form of government was firmly in place; which meant that the whole valley was divided into chiefdoms, and each chiefdom was divided into smaller areas under indunas. This system may have worked well in the old days when the population was small, and there was considerable contact between a paternal induna and his people, to whom he was usually related. But with the population explosion the cracks in the system were beginning to appear. Indunas were now responsible for the lives of literally thousands of people, and chiefs for tens of thousands. To be available and present to all of these people all the time for all their various needs, and to arbitrate between them for their quarrels, was impossible. The system was too open to misuse as well, and it soon became clear to us that a number of the chiefs

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and indunas in the area were thoroughly corrupt. Which meant that the poor, the elderly, the widows, those with no one to defend them, were very vulnerable to exploitation.

Nevertheless there was and is a tremendous warmth among these people, and my first years there were very happy. The turning point came in 1987, just after the floods of the end of September/beginning of October. We were still helping people to recover from the disastrous effects of the floods, when we started hearing about the violence lower down in the Edendale valley. It took about three months and then it was upon us too.

My first experience was at a funeral. A small crowd of UDF youth were present, and when the funeral was over, they set fire to a hut opposite us across the river. Pandemonium broke out, with much screaming and shouting of the women, and it took me some time to realise that they were cries of support. Within a few weeks we were hearing that many of our youth had joined the UDF, that they were meeting every night, marching around and demanding other youth to join them. Parents were terrified, since there were often threats accompanying these demands. Inkatha seemed to be totally on the defensive - there were reports of chiefs and indunas running away, or even of them joining the UDF themselves.

And then suddenly the Inkatha counter-attack came. I was there the day it took place at Elandskop, and it was a terrifying sight: more than a hundred men and boys armed with knives, sticks and spears. I found myself driving through the midst of this attack and stopped to intervene. The police were called, and eventually came. But then I was horrified by what happened next. They ordered me to leave, and accompanied some of the Inkatha men in their attack. Eventually a fourteen year old boy was caught by the police, handed over by the police to the attackers. Next morning his blood-stained body was found lying next to the road.

And this pattern now repeated itself in the following weeks. Inkatha held enormous rallies, which everyone was forced to attend. Anyone failing to do so, was threatened with having their homes burnt or being killed. Police were often present at these rallies. Attacks followed, sometimes in our area, sometimes lower down in the valley, and people were killed. A large number of the youth who had joined the UDF at Elandskop were arrested under the Emergency. We never heard of any Inkatha member being arrested. Many of the chiefs and indunas came to be considered as "warlords", as indeed they were - able to command large numbers of armed men into battle at a few hours notice. I saw this for myself on several occasions. And many of them, especially our local warlord, seemed to be on the best of terms with the police.

After a short period of almost open warfare of this kind, things settled down. The police presence was increased, and it was no longer possible to conduct war on this level. So a new phenomenon appeared, that of the 'hit squad'. Now I know we have all heard enough on this subject in other contexts, but it is now becoming clear from all the evidence that the hit squads are in fact trained and equipped by Ulundi - the Inkatha headquarters and seat of the KwaZulu government. We did not know this at the time.

The first hit squad killing took place in June 1989, just after I got back from the USA. There followed several shootings, none fatal, during the months from July to December. Then in December the killings started properly. On 12th December, three young men were shot, two fatally, and then again three nights later, another three. - All the victims were on the UDF side, or AT LEAST non-Inkatha side. And then the members of the hit-squad started killing each other and their was a lull.

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The effect of all this on the community can be imagined. A community which had been largely peaceful, living in reasonable harmony, was now rent asunder. Often the cleavage was generational - with the youth attracted to the UDF and their parents much more at home in Inkatha, but mostly it was geographical - if you lived here you had to be Inkatha, over there you were declared to be UDF. Free will had very little or nothing to do with the matter. My impression was that most people became alienated from both. Too scared to join the UDF because of the consequences, and sickened by the carnage produced by Inkatha.

Although our little community at Elandskop was divided, it was as nothing compared to the great divide in the Edendale valley of which we were the top part. The valley became divided between a lower "UDF" half and an upper "Inkatha" half. It did not help matters that the lifeline for the people in the top half, the tarred road, ran straight through the middle of the bottom half. There had always been problems along this lifeline, and in late March they exploded.

On Sunday 25th March there was a large Inkatha rally in Durban. Confusion surrounds the facts on this day - whether buses were actually stoned or not is unclear. But Inkatha people certainly believed they were, and the result was a massive armed attack that took place on Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th March. The attack decimated two whole areas of the lower valley, more than fifty people were killed, hundreds of homes burnt, and nearly 12,000 refugees fled down into the lower Edendale valley. It was the worst day of carnage in the whole war, and the police had been totally unable or unwilling to stop it.

The night after this attack there was a much smaller foray into the non-Inkatha area at Elandskop, and huts were burnt, and the two daughters of our mission gardener shot as they lay in their beds. I was present a short while after this and discovered the bodies. It was then that a decision was taken for me to leave the area.

What conclusions can we draw from all of this ?

Firstly, about the nature of the conflict. Many theses have been advanced, and not all of them have the same value. Some speak of a "tribal conflict", others of "faction fighting", others of poverty and unemployment and squatting. None of these for me, touch on the heart of the conflict.

1. For me, the Natal conflict is IN THE NATURE OF A REVOLT. It is a revolt against the KwaZulu government and its corrupt administration, and in that way it is similar to the revolt of people in Bophutatswana, Ciskei, and other homelands. It is therefore in my view a real POLITICAL conflict, and to underestimate the political nature of the conflict is foolish. Young, more urbanised, and increasingly also rural Zulus are saying "Enough" - Enough with the corrupt chieftainship system with all its patronage, enough with all the decisions being taken by one or two people, enough too with Buthelezi and the whole homelands system. Now I want to say at once that there are a lot of other things mixed up in this revolt - a revolt against discipline for example. But I have talked enough to young Zulus in our area to know that however confused, that is the thrust of their thinking.
2. A second conclusion is that the major responsibility for the continuation of violence rests with Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha. I know this is not a popular view. It is not the view that is carried by the SABC. But the evidence of Inkatha's responsibility for the violence is now incontrovertible. Today the KwaZulu Deputy Minister of the Interior stands accused of four counts of murder, five of attempted murder, and seven of incitement to murder. Chiefs and indunas in the Maritzburg area are on murder charges, including one from our area, Elandskop. But many will never be brought to trial, though the evidence against them is piling up, simply because no one will be prepared to take the witness-box against them. The criminal justice system in Natal has broken down.

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Further there is increasing evidence of the existence and use by Inkatha of hit-squads, which I have already mentioned. It is still unclear where and how these are trained, but there is more than a suspicion of SAP involvement.

But most damning of all, is the simple fact that every single peace initiative has been stopped by Inkatha. All the initiatives, from the first by the PMB Chamber of Commerce, through the attempts by the churches to get both sides together, to the latest visit by church leaders to both sides in the conflict, have resulted in a failure, and always because of a decision by the Inkatha central committee or by Chief Buthelezi himself.

3. My third conclusion is also tendentious, but not in Natal. It is that the State too bears a big responsibility for the continuation of the conflict. From the beginning the State, represented by the police in this case, was not neutral. This has been extremely well documented by several people, including members of Parliament, and by the Press, where they could. Not only have they failed to arrest or disarm Inkatha warriors, instances have been documented of police accompanying Inkatha on attacking forays, and actually supplying them with weapons. I have also the evidence there of my own eyes.
4. My fourth and last conclusion results from the above three. It relates to how the conflict may be resolved, and I know that no one should attempt to propose a solution where so many have failed before.

If I am right that this conflict is at base a REVOLT, a political revolt against what is felt to be a corrupt and repressive system, then there are some conclusions which stand out if we are to resolve it.

- a) the first is that the State must stop backing a losing horse. That Buthelezi now no longer speaks for all of the Zulus must be patently clear, even if we have no idea of his real constituency. Why therefore does the Government go on supporting him, supplying him with arms, allowing him control of vast areas of territory where the very name Buthelezi evokes contempt? Why is the KwaZulu police allowed to operate in so many of the townships in Natal, where it is thought of as little more than an Inkatha police force? Why is Inkatha membership obligatory in all areas of KwaZulu - in order to get a reference book, a job as a teacher, a civil servant, a doctor? At the very least, if the KwaZulu homeland is to survive, it will have to practice the democracy it preaches so volubly for the rest of the country. At the moment it is simply a one party state. Free choice in political life must become a firmly established principle.
- b) There is now a dangerous vacuum in those areas of UDF support, which are still controlled by Inkatha. The army presence has simply frozen, not resolved the conflict. New, democratic structures, however clumsy have to be created whereby these communities may have a chance to govern themselves.
- c) Then, once the political problem has been resolved, and only then, can much needed money be poured into KwaZulu and Natal - money on education, on health services, on housing. BUT any money spent on communities engaged in civil war is simply money burnt.
- d) Respect for law and order has to be restored. Lawlessness in Natal has reached critical proportions - witness yesterday's headlines in the Star re the army being sent to guard farmers. The police must be seen to act impartially. All those engaging in violence, including the warlords, must be prosecuted, and witnesses must be protected. Special courts and prosecutors may be necessary. But if these things are not done, and soon, the consequences in the Province could be too ghastly to contemplate.

COSG NATIONAL CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 22/23 1990 JOHANNESBURG

Theme: Conscientious objection and the toleration of dissent.

Proposed programme.

Saturday Sept 22.

- 9 a.m. Welcome, announcements and agenda review.
- 9.30 Keynote speaker (?Jackie Cock) on violence and dissent, followed by discussion and summing-up (with the idea that possible action arising from this will be carried forward to Sunday morning)
- 10.30 Tea
- 10.45 Discussion on COSG's policy document:
Introduction
Small groups
Plenary
- NB. 1. Use of the document as a lobbying tool to be incorporated in the Lobbying workshop later
2. If final decisions have not been made in the time available, COSG delegates to reconvene for a short session after supper.
- 12.45 Lunch
- 2 p.m. Three simultaneous workshops, run as practical training sessions:
- Media production
- Press and how to make the most of it
- Public relations/lobbying/use of media.
- 4.30 Tea
- 4.45 Report on the ICOM meeting in Vienna, followed by discussion on
- International CO Day 1991
- Our involvement with CO's in other countries
- Affiliation to WRI
- 7 p.m. Supper
- 8 or thereabouts. Return to a venue in town for a "Farewell Mandy" jorl

Sunday September 23rd

- 9 a.m. Simultaneous groups to plan national campaigns:
- The exiles Safe return campaign - with ECC
- National campaigns for Mike and Doug
- Support for Violence dissenters
- International C.O. Day 1991, if not already finalised
- 10.30 Tea
- 10.45 Reports on National campaign discussions, and plans for action
Finance
Any other business
- 1 p.m. Lunch
Closing exercise.

Finance
Letterhead
Manual
Policy Statement
mailing list
National coordinator
Objecta distrib + deadline
to Jim

WEG JOFFE (0391) 50453.

20942

Steve
708-1582

4 ways

CHARTWELL

west + north of 4 ways

from Sandton side turn toward Kalap = L

first R \pm 500 m Cedar Rd

old Kalap Pta road

on R from Kalap
pass L park cafe its
 \pm 3 km from there

pass Lion park

cross Jukshii river just beyond on R

meet at Yale rd.

used to be called Paradise Bend

DF Malan

passed trees

~~at stop at turn R~~

~~at Shell Ferreira's~~

passed Fer on L

can't pass Garden World

turn R at Doilgedacht (left is Muldersdift)

keep going passed Lion P

don't turn Louseria.

on bend

M5 at Randburg
Kalap high take
Muldersdift

Kalap R swings.

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