

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

ZULU! ZULU!

Power "prayers" demonstrate even in South Africa there is a way to speak out

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2000 Johannesburg, South Africa
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Dear Peter,

Sunday mornings in Johannesburg the streets are empty. All major businesses, movie theaters, and most of the small stores in this city are closed. The whites' Dutch Reform Church was overly successful when it created blue laws to shut the city down at the week's end. They managed to shut down most of the inhabitants too.

So, on Sunday, October 17, 1982 I am not at all surprised to find myself one of the few persons, either in a car or afoot, travelling the wide avenues of the "Golden City." Even though I am on my way to Soweto for a mass meeting of Inkatha (the predominantly Zulu cultural organization) I am surprised when I drive past a large black man walking down the street carrying a spear and wearing only a leopard skin around his waist. (Is this a real African?)

I avoid a stalled Afrikaner hot-rod (that pink, fuzzy carpet glued to the dashboard, "Challenger"

hand-painted on the trunk, and a white wearing shorts and matching knee-socks bent under the hood) and quickly drive around the block.

There are actually three people, but I only noticed the one man when I drove by the first time. Two large, middle-aged black women, both dressed in khaki uniforms with multi-colored epaulets are with him. The man, I confirm, is a straight standing, proud looking, pot-bellied black who is wearing absolutely nothing but a leopard skin loin-cloth. He has sandals on his feet, and there are strings of beads all over his body--around his neck, on his head, on his wrists--everywhere. What are really impressive though, are his spear and the shield.

I stop the car right there and get out. I stand and smile at them and they respond with warm smiles. This scene is very unusual because we are all standing on Mooi Street, one of the major avenues in Johannesburg. It is a concrete city here; apartment buildings, stores,

Kendal Price is a fellow of the Institute studying the cultures of South Africa, her black homelands, and the bordering African states.



Out of respect for Buthelezi, in traditional garb headmen stand for entire day

gas stations, office buildings. This is the heart of a fast paced town. Three piece suits, or jackets and ties, or coveralls and peaked caps are what are worn in Johannesburg, but not loincloths--not even on Sundays. Yet here is a black man--smiling yes, but with me, not for me--looking as comfortable in his genuine leopards as Tarzan did in the movies. (Tarzan was the only man I have ever seen wearing a leopard skin loincloth before today.)

"If you folks are on your way to the Inkatha meeting in Soweto," I ask, still taking in every bit of their outfits. "Do you want a ride?" At the prospect of a ride all the way into the black township they nod excitedly, and then move very quickly to get their things and selves into the car. There is a surprising urgency to their movement, as if the ride

might disappear if they do not take it quickly enough. (For a moment I think about the hundreds of blacks I have seen trying to get space in a taxi at the end of the workday in Johannesburg. For them the above thought is a rule of life.)

"Oh thank you so much," says the woman who has climbed into the front. The old man and the other woman squeeze into the back seat. "We were already late, and then we were going to have to pay so much for the taxi."

All of them are Zulu and they are going to hear Chief Gatsha Buthelezi speak. Bright yellow, green, and black epaulets, buttons, and ties are worn by the women. They explain these are the colors of the Inkatha cultural movement, (and just coincidentally the colors of the banned African National Congress, I say to myself).

When they ask me why I am going to an Inkatha meeting, I explain that I am an American writer. The two women squeal with delight. ~~Murmuring his~~ approval, the old man says something in Zulu while nodding.

"You must write to America and tell them all about what is going on here," says the woman in the front seat whose name is Elizabeth _____. (Most people I speak to in South Africa will not give their surnames if I tell them it might be published.)

"I will do just that." I say to them before I ask, "what is going on here?"

"Oh, today's meeting is about Ingwavuma, the Zulu land the South Africans want to give to Swaziland." I nod, but I am now concentrating on driving. The car is a bit full. Silvia, the woman in the back seat adds, "it is to show our solidarity with the people of Ingwavuma."

However, I am not paying attention to her now because I have caught sight of a car full of white men behind me. Then, when I look forward again I realize I have driven through a set of yellow lights, which is an offense here. Looking into the rearview again I see the car full of men drive through the red light, and continue behind us.

The car full of men catches up to us and then starts to overtake. Through my side window I see a uniformed policeman in the other car and he is pointing his finger at me. I slow the car but he only stares in the car for a moment, shakes his finger up and down a few times and then whips his car off the road into a dirt driveway.

Both women and the old man are singing now, a song about Ingwavuma. I am content to let them sing on their own for a few minutes while I sort out the police encounter. I wonder if the other men in the car were from the Security Branch, but I quickly come to the conclusion I simply ran a light with an unmarked cop in tow.

Within a moment I am mentally back with my companions and they teach me the chorus to their song. It is simply "Ungwa-Vuma, Ungwa-Vuma."

"When was this song written?" I ask.

"Oh it is not written anywhere."

"Then, when did people start singing it?"

"A few weeks ago, when the South Africans said they were going to give Ingwavuma away," Silvia tells me proudly.

Nice. It makes me think of the sixties protest song, "Ohio." Although it was written by Crosby, Stills & Nash after the Kent State shootings, it also had a chorus anybody could easily sing; "four dead in Ohio."

They ask me more about what I am doing here and what it has been like for me in South Africa.

"Well, as a black—" I start but hesitate as all of them look at me curiously. A writer, an American, perhaps a colored they can accept. A colored American writer who starts talking about being black however, is going to require a bit of explaining.

"No, you see, in America all non-white people call themselves black—"

"But you're not black, you're colored," says Elizabeth with some exasperation. (Goodness, Man. Take what you've got and get what you can with it, her tone implies.)

"Okay," I say, "let's look at it this way. Here in South Africa the white man has many privileges—"

"All of them!" Silvia interrupts.

"Okay, but he gives coloreds and Indians some of those privileges, although he doesn't give the black man any. Yet, even with more privileges than the black man, the Indians and coloreds don't have any of the rights of the white man, like the right to vote." My companions are totally silent now and wait for me to go on.

"In America, almost the same thing existed, except there were no laws saying the lighter skinned man got more privileges than the dark skinned man. All non-white people were discriminated against in America."

"They were?"

"Sure. Until the mid-1960's there were many things all non-white people couldn't do and many places they couldn't go."

"Really?" Elizabeth says,

the surprise and maybe just a hint of disillusionment showing on her wide, expressive face.

At first I am surprised to find out they have no idea of the experience of blacks in America. Then it dawns on me that if the Nationalist Government allowed the history of black Americans to be taught, it would have to include not just the years of oppression but also the recent moves towards equality. Better to leave them completely in the dark.

I continue, though not entirely sure they are still with me.

"So, the black leaders decided to try and take away the one tool the whites used to keep black people picking on each other. That tool was the difference in the color of their skin. They said, let's all call ourselves black and stop all of this nonsense about who is lighter or darker skinned. And that's how it came to be that somebody as light-skinned as myself calls himself black."

Inwardly I wince at this gross oversimplification of the American civil rights movement. From them there is only silence. Now I am convinced I lost them about two blocks ago when I first mentioned the sixties. Fortunately, we are now in Soweto, and Elizabeth's energies go into directing me to Jabulani Stadium.

We drive along thin, curbless streets. It rained earlier this morning and there are small lakes at some of the intersections. On these Soweto streets there are no drainage sewers, even though this is certainly a residential area. Drab, single story, square houses sit every fifty feet or so. Where there might have been lawns the earth is bare and worn, obviously from the passing of many feet. Almost no trees can be seen, and there is something almost like a dense fog hanging just above the houses.

"Suppose there's a fire somewhere, Elizabeth?"

"There are many fires," she answers. "The people must burn wood and coal because there is no electricity for them."

Yet, amid the grey-looking houses, and the brown, barren soil surrounding them, there are many people out walking. Most of the blacks we see are dressed well this morning. Pastel colored dresses, hats, and dark suits we see in abundance. Except for the few individuals obviously just coming from work, or on their way to catch a bus to the city, there is little of that air of tired urgency I have gotten so accustomed to seeing on the faces of Johannesburg blacks.

Relaxed is hardly the word normally used to describe the barely controlled chaos of Soweto, an all-black city of approximately 1.5 million people. This morning though, a discernable calm exists among the clusters of people on their way to and from church.

Even in such dismal surroundings a genuine Sunday morning feeling is here. Maybe it is similar to how happy I felt as a small boy visiting my grandparents' house in Washington D.C. Although the house on Warder Street was only two blocks from the rows of stores burnt out during the 1968 riots, it would feel special, and good to be there.

Jabulani Stadium. The parking lot is unpaved, filled with puddles and as trash strewn as the parts of Soweto we have just driven through. Only a dozen of the ever-present pale blue Putco Company buses are parked in the lot. (The Nationalist government does not really control the lives of blacks in South Africa, the Putco Bus Company does. Blacks are totally at the mercy of the dirty, uncomfortable, perpetually late, and overcrowded Putco buses.) Approximately 150 cars barely fill one quarter of the remaining space.

I park and we unload our respective equipment from the car. The old man holds my camera bag while I fish his spear and shield from the trunk. They ask if they can get a ride back and I make the best arrangements I can.

"I can't promise I'll be here through the whole meeting, but if I'm around you've got a ride." (I sincerely doubt today will be a repeat of June 16th 1982 when all journalists--and one INCWA fellow--in Soweto were detained for the day by police. However, I do not want them waiting for me beyond the time when they can find other transportation.)

Together we stroll towards the stadium entrance and I begin to see more khaki uniforms adorned with various forms of the Inkatha colors. Mom and pop-style vendors line the entrance to the stadium. I see fruit, sodas, and candy first because there are scores of little boys standing with one tray of goods in front of them. I immediately notice a difference between the way the boys here are selling, and the way I have seen them hawk at white events. The contemptuous aggressiveness, or outright hustling attitude is absent, as are the words "master" and "Baas." Perhaps even a hint of respectfulness is detectable in the way they say "apples, candy, only twenty cents." When I see the huge, powerful-looking women behind the fold-up tables where there is hot food for sale, I wonder if maybe they are the mothers of the boys. Looking at the women again I concede they would insure my good behavior.

Seeing my cameras, a middle-aged man at the entrance to the stands directs me to walk down the stairs and across the field to the press tables. Jabulani Stadium is built into a hill; the parking area is level with a point midway up the bleachers. Walking down the stairs I can see the entire stadium, which at the moment is only partially filled. A concrete stage has a wooden podium placed at the front, and rows of chairs for special guests to sit behind the speaker.

It is still very overcast and colorful umbrellas dot the stands.

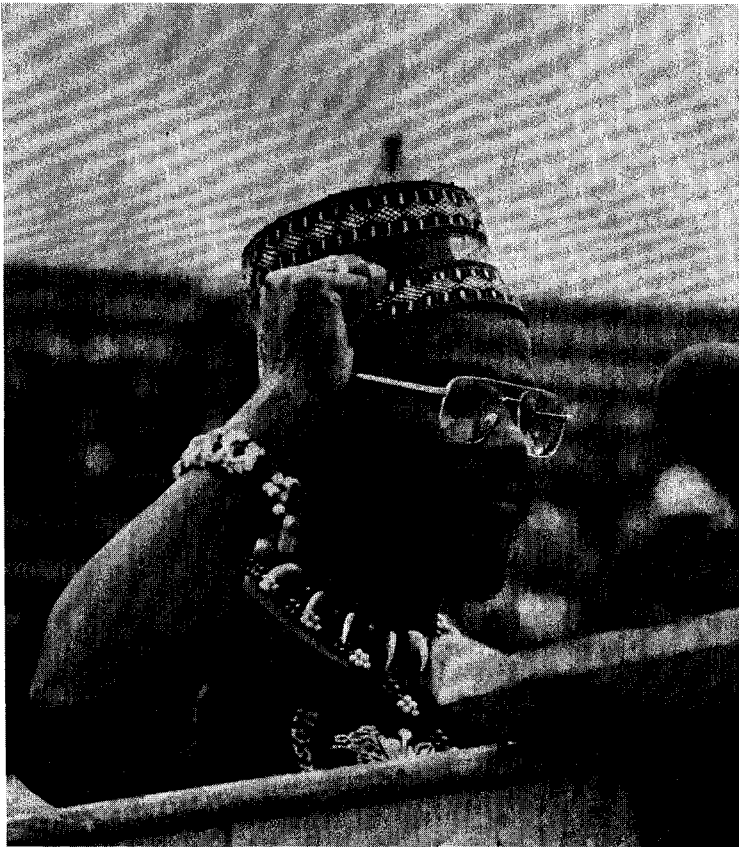
However, it is the sea of yellow, green and black hats, ties, and banners that catch my attention. This is the first time I have seen a uniformity of dress among South African blacks when it has not been something dictated by a white employer.

After a year of travelling throughout South Africa the sight is beyond reassuring, it is encouraging. This has to be one of the few examples where a large number of black South Africans are making a public display of free will. Granted, it is merely the wearing of a banned combination of colors, but considering the disproportionately harsh consequences for any act of defiance in South Africa, these people are being quite brave.

A group of perhaps fifty people are walking down the stairs from the main entrance where I arrived. They carry a banner, and are chanting in unison. The stadium is only a third full at the moment, but the crowd sends up a loud cheer for this obviously well-known chapter of Inkatha. The expressions on the faces of the people around me are ecstatic, so I take pictures quickly anticipating this to be the unexpected highpoint of the rally. Except for when Buthelezi arrives, I can not imagine another catalyst for such enthusiasm.

Jabulani Stadium is beginning to fill as people stream steadily through the main entrance. By the speaker's podium the atmosphere is similar to a family reunion. Several dozen black and colored community leaders are welcomed and shown to their seats by Inkatha women marshals. They greet each other on the stage as long-lost relatives, contributing all the more to the air of almost unbelievable good will.

Another cheer goes up from the crowd. I look down the driveway next to the stage to see if Buthelezi



Buthelezi speaks...supporters shout...black power gets a hearing

is here now, but the center of attention is in the opposite direction. Back at the main entrance another group of people with a banner has arrived. They are singing and stepping in unison with the rythm of the song. Both their music and the response of the crowd are captivating.

Before there is time for a pause a whistle pierces the air and a battery of drums start pounding a wildly syncopated beat. This time the sound does come from behind me in the driveway, and as I step out of the way the sight that confronts me is remarkable.

A troop of black girls are dressed in typical majorette outfits--almost. They are wearing short skirts and boots that are normal enough. However, the color of these uniforms and the headgear are simply amazing. On their heads are what can only be described as Ku Klux Klan-style cloth, peaked

hats, and both the hats and dresses are day-glo yellow.

What an impact they have, though. The crowd roars its approval as these girls march onto the field, and give the phrase "strut your stuff" a distinctly African meaning. Moving together as one they turn, step, turn again in perfect unison. Their coordination is terrific. They move themselves and the thousands of people here already.

However, before the marching troop is even finished, another entrance draws the attention of the stadium's aproximately 5,000 people. Children's group do traditional dances on the infield, and more chapters of Inkatha arrive to the cheers of the crowd. With each new arrival and each new performance I can feel the excitement building, and the crescendo of voices, cheers, and wails rising.

Without a single speaker having yet spoken, this meeting of Inkatha,

this gathering of Zulus, this coming together of black South Africans is already an exciting and vibrant gathering. An incredible amount of energy is concentrated here in the form of these thousands of individuals.

Uniforms are being worn, and caps, ties, and buttons can be found on every person here. Yet, there can be no doubt that as opposed to one indistinguishable mass, these are individuals who have chosen to wear similar things.

I call them individuals not out of wishful thinking, that because I have experienced a year of dull eyes and "Sorry, Baas" blacks I am reading all of the defiance I would like to see into this one gathering.

No, these men and women are alive in the truest sense of the word. Today they are alive because they are expressing themselves, and that expression "hey look at me, I am black and proud of it" is being expressed freely and greeted with open arms here.

I walk around in the crowd, up the bleachers, by the food concessions, and there is a tangible feeling of calm and togetherness. The Inkatha marshals are everywhere, helping people find seats, giving directions, treating people with the deference I have only seen at funerals.

However, a funeral this is not. The feeling is closer to that of a late sixties campus rock concert--minus the drugs and loud music. Even when a drunken man stumbles into people at the main entrance, two middle-aged men take him by the arms and gently sit him down under the bleachers just a few feet away. No attempt is made to hide him, to shoo him off where he will not be seen. By where they place him, and the way they handle him it is

as if they are saying sure he has misbehaved, but even our errant brothers must take part today.

This holds me fast for a moment as I remember a recent conversation with an Afrikaner journalist. "The blacks are really quite amazing. They have been so abused by whites, and yet they look at us tolerantly, as if we are younger brothers who somehow just haven't learned how to treat them right yet." At the time I thought this was just a white man's wishful thinking. Now I think it might have some truth to it. Definitely there is a greater reserve of tolerance in the blacks I am seeing heretoday than I have seen in most whites since I have been in South Africa. (The whites can be extremely abusive to one another, which demonstrates how dehumanizing apartheid is to everybody here.)

I work my way through the crowd and return to the press area in front of the stage. Khalil Aniff, an Indian journalist from the Post Natal in Durban asks me to take a few rolls of photographs for him. He explains all the angles he wants and promises the negatives and a check within two weeks. "Thanks brother," he says warmly. "I couldn't bring a photographer with me. I really appreciate it." (Aniff will prove to be a brother of a different color. He will eventually publish one of my photos on the front page of the Post with no photo credit, steal five rolls of my negatives, and send a check for less than the cost of one roll of film.)

We are interrupted by a deafening roar from the crowd, and we turn to see a red Mercedes drive in with Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi in the back seat.

Things quiet down for a while after the chief minister's arrival, and he is able to sit quietly by himself up on the stage while waiting for the meeting to begin. During this lull, Gibson Thula, the Inkatha

representative in Soweto asks me if I would like to meet him.

I am led up to the stage and brought directly to where Chief Buthelezi is seated. There are no bodyguards nor obsequious aides at his sides. The few men who came with him are middle-aged, relaxed, and intelligent looking.

When I am introduced to Chief Buthelezi I am impressed by the lack of pretense in his manner. He is about to address more than eight thousand of his followers on the most pressing issue in South Africa at the moment, but he is relaxed and confident. He extends his hand, smiles warmly, listens with interest as Gibson Thula tells him who I am. He conforms to at least one image of a good leader; he makes me feel I am the center of his attention for the few moments he has to give.

Other speakers precede Buthelezi and during this time I walk around, up and down the stands, and through the crowd. I take pictures, sit and talk with people, and just watch the goings-on. Unlike any other gathering (black or white) I have attended or taken pictures of there is no hostility shown towards me. When I raise my camera no one hastily turns their head in the other direction, nor angrily demands where the picture is going.

The air of confidence is unusual, but in many ways justified. No other group of people can claim their leader is virtually immune from imprisonment in South Africa. Yet, the thousands of members of Inkatha and 6 million Zulus who have the same leader in Buthelezi, can make this claim with a fair measure of confidence.

The latter group is the most significant in this equation. Even for those people with almost no political aspirations, there are

strong tribal ties that few Zulus would renounce or ignore. For this reason alone, Buthelezi has a certain amount of protection from even the most conservative members of the Nationalist Government. Few leaders in the world would allow an action which could mobilize millions of people against his government overnight.

My assertion is further supported once Buthelezi begins to speak. Although this is officially a prayer meeting his speech is titled "Black Unity Only Key To A Successful Liberation Struggle." It is delivered in both English and alternately, Zulu.

He begins with the criticism, "white South Africa has for generations successfully managed to stamp out black opposition to white domination in this country, mainly because we on this side of the color line are so hopelessly divided."

He elaborates by illustrating the techniques of separation* whites have used to inspire disunity. However, he does not hesitate to poke holes in the romanticism by the young blacks of the supposed "solid block of unity" among blacks in the late 50's and early 60's. "People today speak romantically of the heyday of our banned organisations, as if black unity had then been accomplished. Nothing can be further from the truth."

As a more recent example he points out that it was he who called the "1973 Umtata conference of black leaders from the so-called 'Homelands'" in an attempt to combat Pretoria's usage of ethnicity to divide South African blacks. "My disappointment was rapid when following closely after those conferences [and the reputed agreement among homeland leaders not to accept independence] the Transkei decided to take so-called independence followed by Bophuthatswana, V[er]anda and the Ciskei."

"Let me not be misunderstood here. I acknowledge that those amongst us

* The Group Areas Act was the first concerted policy to separate non-whites along rigid racial lines. The homelands policy was formulated to divide tribal groups, evict them from land desired by whites, and isolate them in largely desolate areas euphemistically called "homelands."

who have gone the whole hog and accepted so-called 'independence' which foists a foreign status on millions of our people, have swallowed the apartheid bait, hook, line, and sinker."

To this comment there is applause and an interesting interruption. A line of Zulu headmen dressed in traditional clothing surge towards the stage, chanting what I am told are praises of Buthelezi. Several of the marshals gently herd them back, but the impact has been made.

Buthelezi smiles at the interruption, then continues his attack on dissenters. He defends working within the system as the only way to destroy it, and chides those who criticize but remain aloof. "Here in Soweto we have quite a number of black brothers, who think that once they have shouted a few slogans [criticizing] those working within the system that they have completed their task in the liberation struggle."

The subject of the kaNgwane and Ingwavuma land dispute was the main reason for the meeting today. South Africa was attempting to give the independent state Swaziland several thousand hectares of land as well as its nearly one million predominantly Zulu South African blacks. On this issue Buthelezi speaks for his outrage and that of his people. "our people were being driven like cattle at an auction...and were being given over together with hectares of South African territory to a foreign State. Swaziland has chosen to be a puppet State of South Africa by involving themselves in this dirty land deal."

To this comment the entire stadium full of people stand and cheer and shout; "Amandla! Awathu! Ingwavuma! Ikagwane!" (Power! Power

to the people of Ingwavuma) and give the black power clenched fist salute.

The tempo of the meeting is high now but there is another interruption that diverts the entire stadium's attention from Buthelezi.

First dozens, then what turns out to be several hundred men march through the entrance and down into the stadium's field. They carry long, carved sticks, are chanting, and enter like an army. These are the men from the hostels; the hardened miners. Able to work in the excruciatingly hot gold mines, thousands of feet underground, these men carry the distinction of being some of the toughest workers in the world. Their fellow Zulus know this and the response to the arrival of the hostel men is overwhelming. Not even Buthelezi's arrival brought on such a thundering wave of cheers, shouts, and whistles.

Only a childhood memory of the awe inspired by a military parade in America gives me the tool with which to grasp the emotions here. To the crowd these men are Zulu warriors. A hundred and fifty years ago they could have been the undefeated troops of Shaka Zulu, the Zulu king who conquered an area larger than Napoleon's Europe. Today they are the Zulus with an undefeated spirit, and the undefeated spine of Buthelezi's Inkatha. The people in this stadium know that should the time come for fighting, these men will be the Zulu nation's, Inkatha's, black South Africa's soldiers. Deprivation and hard labor have shaped them into people to be respected and perhaps feared. (It is noteworthy there are only two policemen in the entire stadium, and they are black traffic police.) Seeing this first-hand makes it possible for me to understand the woman standing next to me who says, "these boys are our men."

When the crowd settles Buthelezi launches into the other current major issue: the government's constitutional

proposals that will completely exclude blacks from any participation in the government.

"The white package on Constitutional proposals is based on the same principle of seeking to destroy once and for all that common South Africanism transcending race and ethnicity....

...if these Constitutional proposals are allowed to go through and South Africa does in fact establish a Confederation of States, with Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei...this will in fact be a coup for the Apartheid Regime. They will have won in their race to implement apartheid hands down."

What he says next however, is the most startling change in his policy, and will have repercussions as far as Washington, D.C.*

"If the government is able to push its constitution plans through, that will be the end of the strategy of peaceful change. If we cannot resist these final apartheid plans of the government, we will have been successfully 'flushed out' of the arena of democratic opposition and the only alternative left will be violence in whatever form."

In case there is any doubt about his commitment to that statement, he adds, "While I do not approve of violence, let me say that to me, it would make



Mine workers show support of Buthelezi's criticism of continued black exclusion from the government

* President Reagan sent two Republican senators on presidential transport to speak with Buthelezi and Prime Minister Botha the following week the South African press reported.

a lot of sense if there were more white victims than black victims in the current guerrilla warfare encounters."

It is a bold statement, but it is also a reaffirmation that Buthelezi is potentially one of the most powerful men in South Africa. As much for the power he wields, as for the dexterity with which he wields it, Chief Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, Chairman of the South African Black Alliance, President of Inkatha (National Cultural Liberation Movement), and Chief Minister of Kwazulu is a man to keep an eye on in the future. Personally, I will be keeping my other eye on those tough-looking Zulu miners.

Sincerely,



Received in Hanover 3/9/83