

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

C O N F I D E N T I A L

JCB-12 An Interview with
ex-Chief Luthuli

June 29, 1962
16 Dan Pienaar Road
Durban, Natal
Republic of South Africa

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The town of Stanger has little about it to indicate its importance in the history of the Zulus. Here was the kraal where the mighty Zulu warrior, Shaka, was murdered by his brother, Dingaan. And today it is the only town of any size within the area to which ex-Chief Albert Luthuli is confined.

With a population of 5,521, Stanger gives the impression of being primarily an Indian town, and it was in the back room of an Indian shop that I met and talked with the Nobel Prize-winning head of the banned African National Congress.

Since arriving in Durban, I had been aware of a steady stream of "tourists" visiting Luthuli, a stream that has accelerated in the last few weeks when it became apparent that the passage of the Sabotage Bill (JCB-11) would prevent further communication with him. My appointment came on what we both presumed might be the last day in which he would be having visitors. (As it happened, the signature on the Sabotage Bill was delayed for another week so we were premature in our presumption). I was soon aware of how much he depended on these visitors for contact with the outside world. It is hard to think that this well-informed and world-renowned man must first be cut off from travelling to see things for himself, and then be denied contacts with his friends from around the world.

A man of small build with short greying hair and a mustache, he wore a buttoned sweater that almost covered his tie, a dark suit, and a dark grey, well-used hat. He puts his visitor at ease with his warm smile and gentle laugh. What started as a brief interview became a most pleasant four hour conversation which I have tried to distill in order to give some impression of his opinions on some of the more pressing questions under discussion in South Africa today.

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ON BANTUSTANS:

Bantustans do not solve our problems. Under the British certain lands were set aside or protected for the Africans. However, Africans, if they were financially able, were as free to buy land as the European. It was only with Union that the African was imprisoned in the reserve. We make up 11 million of South Africa's 16 million and we are given 13% of the land. We are told the reserves are our home land. If you are to be accurate, most of South Africa is our home land. The reserves and their boundaries were established by the Whites after they had defeated us and taken our other lands away.

We have no desire to drive the White man into the sea. We want the opportunity to have more land and to participate politically in the National Government.

It is ridiculous to think of any great business or industry in Zululand. The country is too poor. It lacks the necessary capital. And why should an industry want to build a factory in an area in which transportation is slow and difficult and which is not close to any productive market. There are not enough Africans with money to make it profitable within the reserve although this might come in time. What use will border industries have? There is no real financial advantage in building industries along the border.

There is always talk from the officials that Bantustans will create great new opportunities; clerical help, doctors, lawyers, postmen, etc. But how many will that use out of all our people. Our reserves are over-crowded on the lands that are useable. Our major problem is the workless worker who has been pushed out of the city because he has no job and now roams the reserves. His number is increasing. There is no work for him in the location or in the city. He is a source of irritation and discontent.

Contrary to what some would say there is no rush from the city back to the reserve. Many still go to the city but they are turned away because they cannot find jobs. At present only a few White trading stores are able to operate successfully in the reserve. Even if these were taken over by Africans, how many would that employ?

What can be done about this unemployment?

Education, the opportunity for better jobs, and more useable land. The problem is a difficult one but under the present circumstances where opportunities are limited in the

reserves and restricted in the city the workless workers will continue to grow.

Why don't the rural Africans show more interest in developing the yield of the land?

What difference does it make that we work hard and do the right thing agriculturally if we only benefit in the end by having our yearly income raised from R60 to R120 (\$85 to \$170). It doesn't seem worth it. Those who are trained to become agricultural demonstrators often go to work in the city where the advantage of their increased education helps them find work. Their prospects are limited in the reserves. They will be fortunate if they have ten to fifteen acres on which to demonstrate. This is not much land on which to raise a family and give children an education. He feels he will be able to earn more in the city.

It has been said that the Zulus would have destroyed each other if the White man had not intervened.

The Zulus were unified by Shaka with the sword. We keep that unity to a large extent today, although when the White man defeated us he tried to reinstitute old tribal lines which brought forth old tribal jealousies. When some Whites excuse their interference by saying that if it were not for them the African tribes would have slaughtered one another endlessly they are not being realistic. By that reasoning we should have the right to intervene in European affairs, for the White tribes there have been killing each other on and off over the centuries. We were not as dis-united as the Whites make out, and we would have developed even more if they had not intervened.

What about the leadership of the Chiefs today?

Dr. Verwoerd is clever. The laws affecting the reserves, setting up the duties of the tribal authorities, were passed when he was Minister of Bantu Affairs. Previously the White Government officials tried to implement the Government's orders and they were the ones to be fought by Africans who did not agree. Today the Government has the Bantu Authority accepted and established, and then the Chiefs and headmen are responsible for carrying out the Government's orders. Now the opposition of the Africans is directed at their own leaders. African chiefs are under the authority and direction of the State and they must please the State first if they are to stay in power and receive a salary. Nothing could end the tribal chieftanship more quickly than this process.

Many people eagerly accepted the Bantustan idea. They believed it would give them greater freedom and opportunity for advancement. Some have now found out that it is not so. Africans will still remain under the control of the Government in one way or another. In Bantu education, for instance, the Africans have no control over the curriculum. At most they can serve in an advisory capacity but they are very seldom heeded. For example there is their wish not to be trained in an African language. Boards and Committees are property-carers and must not oppose the Government's way too much or their members will not be allowed to serve.

What alternatives would you suggest to Bantustans?

One that might be suggested - one that I do not accept - is that South Africa be made up of regional political units. There would be regions such as Zululand and the Transkei where the preponderance of people would be African. Whites, of course, would not be driven out of such areas but they would participate politically with the African. In other areas Whites would have the political dominance. These regions would be represented in the Provincial political bodies and the Provinces in the National Parliament.

Any alternative would have to be based on a common political franchise; we want citizenship rights as they are enjoyed by all Europeans in South Africa.

I would prefer the present Provincial-Parliamentary system in which all South Africans would have the right to participate; to vote and to serve.

ON PREJUDICE:

We are constantly annoyed by the unthinking acts of White people. A few days ago I was at an auto garage in Stanger writing at a table. The Indian owner of the garage was talking to a White couple. Their ten year old daughter came over to the table and addressed me, "What are you doing, Boy?"

There are only a few sources of good human relations. Churches have been disappointing, although more and more Church leaders are speaking and acting. Schools have been restricted by race and language so that contact with others is limited. However families can have good influence on their children.

ON AMERICA:

We need the help of America; people who believe in democracy. Unfortunately, the United States does not see its way clear to be forceful economically on South Africa. I understand that it is not always simple to carry out the aims of the democratic principles your Government preaches. However, while the work of independent organizations in the States is appreciated, they can not be effective in making the South African Government stop and think unless the US Government is totally behind stopping the benefits which South Africa gains from it.

It would help if even those Americans who come here with their businesses would stand for democracy and justice. They could do a great deal to improve the wages, opportunities and working and living conditions of their African employees. Although the South African Government might dislike it they would hesitate to interfere. However, this is not the way things have been. Americans who should know better come here and take advantage of us in our situation just as the other White people do. They succumb to the lack of sensitivity they find around them. It is unfortunate that this is so, but it is why I try not to look to the outside for help. I don't believe help will come from the United Nations either. However, the United States must share in the responsibility of what is happening here and in what will happen. They and Britain could do much more to help.

I advised those American Negroes with whom I talked when I visited your South a number of years ago, that they should not think of coming to South Africa. Their coming could not help us. And also they would be victims, more than likely, of considerable cultural shock; they would find things quite different between them and the Black South Africans. (He agreed that Americans tend to think of Africa as one large mass with little differentiation between regions and countries; as if all the African problems were alike and could be solved the same way.)

ON THE "AFRICAN PERSONALITY":

There is no African personality in a literal and strict sense. Although there are things culturally and educationally which make the African different from the European and the White. I think we have been trained to have more concern for the group's welfare than is the case in the West where the European has to be constantly reminded of his responsibility to the larger group. We have not been educated, at least in the past, to be excessively individualistic as the people in your country and in Europe.

Also, there is such a thing, for instance, as African Art and Music distinct from the rest of the world. And if we were left alone I believe in time these forms would advance into a

classical or cultured form of its own. Unfortunately European culture has made great inroads and has influenced these once-distinct expressions. So it is with the "African personality".

Definitely there is a pan-African spiritual feeling; a feeling of relatedness to other Black Africans. We appreciate the concern of those in the North with our problems. Our people cannot help but take pride when reading about an African Prime Minister. It gives us encouragement. However we take no sides in rivalries between the African nations. We have enough problems of our own without taking one side against another. We need the help of them all. Tanganyika looks the most promising from all the reports I have received and what I have read in the newspapers. We have more in common with the East African than with the African nations in the West, many of whom have been French.

ON AFRIKANERS AND ENGLISH:

How would the Afrikaner feel if he were restricted in a geographical area the size of which would be in the same ratio as the land which we have compared to our total population? They wouldn't like it any more than we do.

The difference between the Afrikaner and the English as far as I can see it is this: The English may take advantage of us as an employee, but outside of work our life is our own and we are to a large extent treated as individuals; The Afrikaner, while he may be quite benevolent in his treatment of us as his employee, must always remain 'Baas'. We must always stay under his authority. This is what we dislike - the White Baaskap, no matter how humane the Afrikaners may be in trying to get us to accept it.

ON MR. CARPIO'S VISIT TO SOUTHWEST AFRICA:

As for Carpio's visit, he should never have made statements while he was here. Now, no matter how favorable his report is to me I cannot accept it as being of any value, nor will the South African Government accept his report. They believe he is dishonest, and his example adds to their distrust of the UN and further inflames the controversy over South West.

I see what Carpio did as similar to what some of my world friends wanted me to do when I went to Oslo. I accepted the terms of my South African passport and gave my word that I would not go any other place or give any other speeches except that connected with receiving the Nobel Prize. I didn't like these restrictions, but in order to go I gave my word. My friends said

that when I was out of the country I was no longer under the authority of the South African Government and was free to go anywhere and do whatever I would like. If I had done that and gone to the United States and Morocco and Tanganyika, I would have betrayed my word. While the Government could not have done much more to me than what they are now doing, they could point to me to the world as someone who couldn't be trusted, and therefore whatever I said could be discredited. Carpio is now thus discredited.

ON THE SABOTAGE BILL:

I expect it to be law on Wednesday the 20th of June (actually it was made law today, the 29th) or shortly thereafter. You may be my last visitor and what you take to the newspaper for me may be my last published words (I took a letter from him to the Natal Mercury which they subsequently published.) I want to get the letter to the paper quickly or the paper will not be free to print it.

The Bill incorporates into one act much of the legislation which has previously been passed. And it gives the power into the hands of one man. I agree that what is happening here is parallel to many of the things that happened as Germany became a Nazi state.

The Bill will present a moral dilemma for many sensitive liberal people. Should they continue to quote me or Patrick Duncan and take the possible consequences of jail sentences or restrictions, or should they try to avoid mentioning me and other banned people so as to be free to pursue their liberal aims? I believe that people like Alan Paton, for instance, should avoid quoting so that he can continue to speak for those of us who will be silenced. He may not agree with this since he is a person of strong moral convictions.

ON THE FUTURE:

I don't believe many political leaders whom the Government will attack will leave the country. The Government would, I am sure, like them to leave.

Although I am restricted to the point of silence I would rather stay here among my people in the struggle. I fear the future when the African may be made leaderless by the Government. A leaderless people can be extremely dangerous; you can never be sure what they will do.

I don't think Africans will resort to violence unless provoked. However, with outlets of expression and hope being more and more cut off, my people cannot help but protest in gatherings, even against Government orders. If South African police or soldiers attack Africans for doing this, one of two things will happen: they will be frightened into silence or they will react spontaneously and massively against all authority. The Government is driving us to that point.

I was quite shocked three years ago at the conclusion of almost a day-long session with some of the more liberal members of SABRA, by a statement made by Mr. N. J. J. Olivier, the head of the visiting group. I had agreed that as a beginning we would accept a very limited kind of franchise if we could be sure to have a franchise. He then said that we and the Government could never come together. The Government would not agree to even the most narrow kind of franchise for the African; the African would have to develop in his own area and have his vote there, not in South Africa. He continued that if the Government accepted the minimum of what I asked it would immediately be thrown out of office. If the Government were to do what I asked with even a majority of voters behind it, it would mean civil war in South Africa.

We have tried again and again to talk with the Government about our proposals. They have not even answered our requests. We are banned instead.

South Africa could have solved its racial problems quite reasonably and justly in the past. There has been a considerable amount of good will among the people generally in spite of some bad conditions. If we all could have been treated as South Africans and slowly but progressively given our rights and opportunities along with the Whites we could have learned from the White man the just and democratic way and have followed his example. Today we cannot help but follow his example of racism.

Some young people have told me that they did not consider it to be a negation of the non-violent principle if they only blew up physical things, not acting violently against human life. How much of Ghandi's influence - his non-violent beliefs - are felt today? Little if any. ANC (African National Congress) accepts non-violence because it has seemed to us the most practical way. However, I believe there are times when one has no alternative but to fight violently when one has to defend himself against oppression such as that in Nazi Germany for instance. Or when every other avenue is blocked and you find that you are hitting a stone wall continually.

The new generation has become quite impatient and they look to more active and violent ways of doing things. They are less likely to look to talk or negotiation for a solution, or toward cooperation with the Whites.

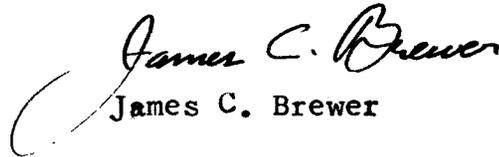
I am less conservative than my predecessor and my successor undoubtedly will be much less conservative than I am. My own children do not agree with my views but since I am their father they abide by my wishes.

However, my life is near its end.

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It was dark outside the small shop when I took my leave and I had a lot to think about on my drive back to Durban.

Sincerely yours,


James C. Brewer