

South Africa's last chance

During the first week of this month, a great *indaba* (tribal gathering) opened in Durban, South Africa. Even though the *indaba* could be one of the most important events in modern South African history, it was curiously ignored by our Canadian media.

I scanned the papers in vain that week for mention of the *indaba*. Aside from a few small wire service items, nothing. Instead, there were long stories on media star Winnie Mandela and even an editorial entitled "Bishop Tutu's wisdom." In other words, more of the usual soap opera material that passes here for reporting on South Africa.

The meeting in Durban's city hall, held under the joint auspices of the Natal provincial government and the Zulu tribal homeland of KwaZulu that lies within Natal, was a truly revolutionary event for South Africa. Gathered were 720 representatives of South Africa's racial, linguistic, ethnic and economic tribes: Blacks, whites, mulattos, Asians, businessmen, union workers and farmers, to name but a few.

This remarkable assembly was the creation of KwaZulu's Chief Minister, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, elected chief of South Africa's largest tribal group, the Zulu. Its dramatic aim is to create the nation's first integrated, multiracial government within the province of Natal. The provincial government of Natal and KwaZulu have already agreed to share political power; the *indaba* will now determine the mechanics of the multiracial government.

For South Africa, the *indaba* at Durban could well be the last chance to avert the eruption of civil and racial war. The federal government of Prime Minister Botha is caught in the dilemma of trying to dismantle apartheid without losing support of its white voters, many of whom are moving to the right in response to mounting black urban violence. The repeal this week of South Africa's hated influx and passbook laws that controlled movement of blacks is a major step in this process but may be too little, too late.

Black groups across South Africa, led by extremist elements and intimidated by rampaging youth gangs, have seized the political initiative and are moving rapidly to the extreme left. The political centre in South Africa is collapsing as tribes and races become dangerously polarized. For this reason, the current efforts of Chief Buthelezi, who is the leader of black moderate forces in South Africa, are being watched with great attention. Even Prime Minister Botha, officially not involved in the Natal talks, is said to be quietly giving government support to Chief Buthelezi's *indaba*.

If a viable multiracial government can be forged in Natal, it will serve as a model for the creation of similar integrated regimes across South Africa. Buthelezi is certainly right when he advocates

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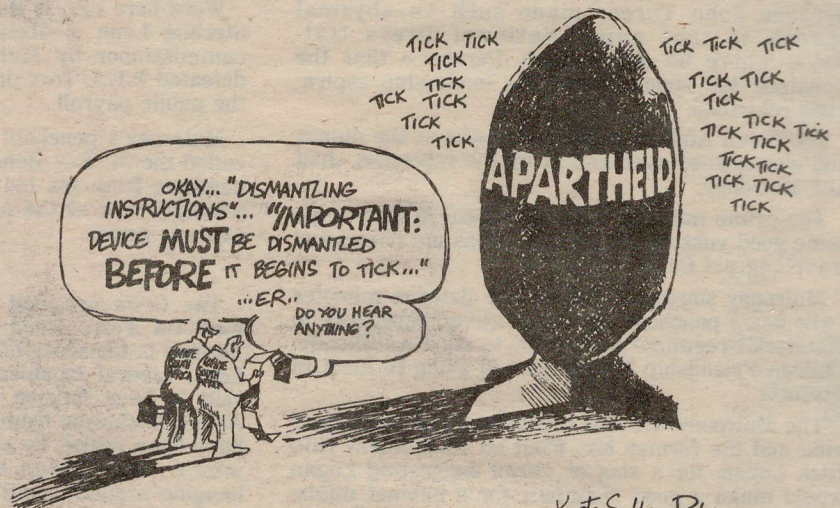


building integrated governments up from the local and provincial level rather than having them imposed from the top.

Buthelezi, a remarkable, courageous man whom I consider one of Africa's leading statesmen, told me that the "Natal Option" would likely be the last opportunity for South Africa's moderates to avert civil war. And I recall him telling me with quiet passion that the outside world had no idea of the power that South Africa's white tribe would unleash if it was forced to the wall. "They will burn this country to the ground," Chief Buthelezi predicted — and this from the leader of Africa's most famous and redoubtable warrior people.

Attacked by black extremists as a collaborator, attacked by white extremists as a radical, Chief Buthelezi is fighting to hold that most difficult position to defend — the middle ground.

The western democracies should give him and the Durban *indaba* effective and dramatic support. Canada, that great preacher of morality, should have observers in Durban to show our back-



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ing for South Africa's moderates. Doing so may help in some small way ensure that South Africa's blacks, about whom we profess to be so concerned, end up with a decent, democratic government rather than another of the despotic Marxist dictatorships that blight Africa.

But our media have chosen to black out these important events in Durban. Better, it seems, to champion South Africa's radicals who would slay all who oppose them, who would destroy their nation in the name of making it free, rather than supporting the voices of reason and moderation. Our media, I think, are damned and determined that South Africa must burn.