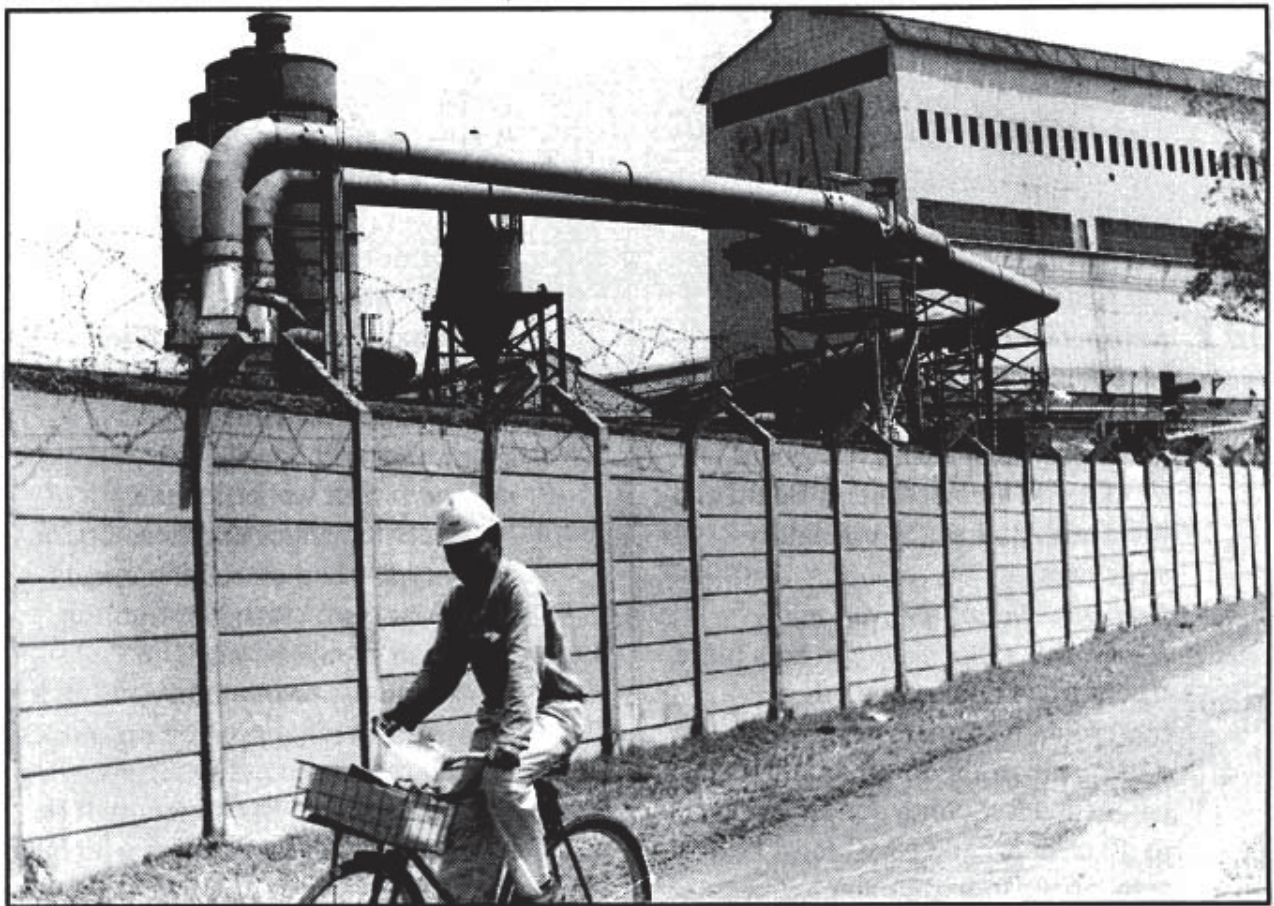


East Rand violence

building unity at work



Recent weeks have seen a series of violent attempts to create division among workers at Scaw Metals. Much of the violence on the East Rand is aimed at weakening unions. How are the unions responding? GEORGE DOR reports.



On 22 August this year, 12 people were killed and many injured when gunmen opened fire on a group of workers at Scaw Metals' Wadeville hostel on the East Rand. The attack was condemned by

organisations across the political spectrum including the ANC, the government and the Scaw management. Police Minister Hernus Kriel expressed "utter disgust", the police offered a large reward for information leading to the killers' arrest and Scaw Metals managing director Tony Harris said the company deeply regretted the incident.

This seemed to be yet another incident of the senseless violence gripping our country. Yet Scaw workers and the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA) – the union with majority representation at the company – are convinced that there is more to this attack than appearances suggest. NUMSA's Bernie Fanaroff said, "We believe the shootings were intended as a provocation aimed at stirring up trouble in a hostel where workers of different political persuasions have co-existed peacefully." Some 2 000 workers live there.

According to NUMSA workers and officials, there were up to eight violent incidents in and near the giant Anglo-owned Scaw plant in the two months before the fatal attack. In July, a taxi from Durban was hijacked on Scaw's private road. Seven Zulu-speaking men, including a NUMSA member at Scaw, were forced to lie face down before being shot. The assassins spoke Xhosa, but Scaw shopsteward Barney Shabalala (not his real name) cast doubt on whether they really were Xhosa-speakers: "Many people can speak Xhosa when they want to." He argued that the attack was deliberately intended to "ignite Zulu hostel dwellers" to attack other Scaw workers, but

no divisions between Zulu and other hostel dwellers materialised.

In other incidents, two people died near the factory and three others were shot dead – one at Union Station and two on Scaw property. Another Scaw worker and NUMSA activist, Zolile Mxhasa, was killed just a week before the 22 August attack. Company security had raided Mxhasa's rooms shortly before he was killed, looking for weapons. They found nothing.

According to Shabalala, these violent incidents were "indications of something big". A delegation of senior shopstewards tried to approach management to discuss the violence occurring in and around the company. They say Scaw management refused to discuss the issue, claiming that the incidents did not occur on Scaw property. Anglo American denies there was a formal approach.*

These developments took place within a context of increasing worker militancy. Scaw has a long history of being unaffected by strikes. A number of its workers support the IFP and belong to UWUSA. However, virtually the entire workforce, including NUMSA and UWUSA members, joined NUMSA's national wage strike in August last year. Since then, NUMSA membership has increased. A growing number of white workers are joining the union.

Shopstewards believe this situation explains the company's lukewarm attitude to ending the violence.

Even after the attack of 22 August, according to the union, management refused to discuss the violence. They instead asked workers to invite political organisations to address workers at the factory. According to Bethuel Maserumule, NUMSA Wits East regional secretary, this could only lead to division amongst workers. Workers attending different meetings would be publicly identified with specific political organisations. A potentially irreconcilable ANC/IFP split would be imposed on the

* Anglo American's response was received the day that BULLETIN went to press, so the union could not be contacted for further comment – ed.



workforce. The union refused the company's suggestion, saying this was an issue for workers and their unions. Anglo American denies making such a suggestion and says all its efforts "were concentrated on trying to restore calm in the hostel", and that Scaw management met the NUMSA shopstewards "as soon as it was possible" – on the Tuesday after the Sunday attack.

The shopstewards question why management did not meet them earlier as part of "restoring calm", and say it was only after sustained pressure, including the threat

of a work stoppage, that management eventually agreed to meet NUMSA. The union proposed that security be provided by NUMSA and UWUSA workers together with existing security personnel. Currently, the company has in-house security and a contract with a private company, Fidelity Guards. According to Shabalala, "We don't believe outside people will have the interest to defend us." Weeks later, management has not yet responded to the NUMSA proposal. Anglo American did, however, tell *LABOUR BULLETIN* that security should be maintained

by a "professional security force". The company said that security is on the agenda of the monthly meeting with shopstewards, and that it is to propose upgrading this in the form of a joint management/shopsteward's subcommittee to meet as often as necessary.

NUMSA local and regional structures, the NUMSA welfare department and national leaders Moss Mayekiso and Jay Naidoo played a key role in preventing the spread of violence at the company. Mayekiso and Naidoo appealed to workers to ensure that the shopfloor remains a place where different political and union allegiances are respected. Shabalala said NUMSA structures and union leaders had "helped a lot". "They calmed down our people. Tensions were high, comrades were saying 'open war, let them have it', but they channelled our anger in the right way. You have to know what you want and stick to it."

Management blocked NUMSA's attempts to organise a memorial service at Scaw, claiming this could lead to more tension and violence. The union then tried to organise a memorial service for Wadeville workers more generally and tried to include UWUSA in the arrangements. According to a union official, "We always endeavour to invite UWUSA and everyone interested in reducing violence." The NUMSA local in Wadeville is trying to address the role of the police. As the official puts it, "Police only come to collect corpses, and mostly white police, who don't have the will to stop the violence, are sent. There are good and bad police and we want proper police who will understand us."

NUMSA and UWUSA workers jointly identified two suspects, who were subsequently arrested. Both are employees of Scaw Metals. Instigators had tried to stir division at Scaw, but the workers have refused to be divided. However, there is a

lingering sense of unease. Shabalala said, "Two have been arrested, but what about those not caught? They might be planning something." In the last week of September there was another armed attack on the hostel, injuring four workers. For 13 NUMSA workers from the rural areas, the insecurity has proved too much and they have since left. But NUMSA membership at Scaw continues to increase.

Violence throughout the region

Developments at Scaw are a microcosm of violence in industrial areas throughout the Wits region. The attempt to fan hatred and violence between workers, the complicity of the employers, the inappropriate response by the police and the union's attempts to channel workers' anger into peaceful responses and build unity amongst

workers across political differences are characteristic features of this situation.

Violence was imported into the Wits region in 1990, and into the factories soon thereafter. According to Maserumule, "The violence is part of a counter-revolutionary strategy of the ruling class, the object being to eliminate the potential vehicle of radical transformation of our society." In the 1984 to 1986 period, the SADF and police overtly carried out violent attacks in the townships. Since then, violence has changed its form. "The allies of the ruling class are taking up the physical dirty work of killing our people. But the use of the term 'third force' is an act of diplomacy - the same ruling class is behind the violence. The violence is stirred up by faceless people as an organised process, with the intention of polarising communities."

Initially, the orchestrators of the violence managed to scare workers sympathetic to Inkatha into a monolithic bloc. They saw the need to act as a unit to defend themselves.

Union leaders calmed down our people. Tensions were high, comrades were saying 'open war, let them have it', but they channelled our anger in the right way. You have to know what you want and stick to it.

COSATU was projected as an organisation which did no legitimate work and acted merely as a labour conduit for the ANC. It was thus portrayed as a threat to Zulu ethnic and cultural identity. The payment of union subs to COSATU affiliates was politicised by Inkatha as being a means of funding attacks on Zulus. People sympathetic to Inkatha began to feel uncomfortable with continued membership of COSATU.

Hostels were the most convenient

organising bases for Inkatha. After capturing a hostel, Inkatha supporters drove out people of other ethnic origins. Known COSATU members were targeted and forced to resign or flee. Large numbers of workers and, in many instances, shopstewards, resigned from COSATU affiliates. According to an East Rand unionist, "Workers explained their resignation to fellow workers and their unions as being due to pressure from within the hostels. They said they remain

Where do the employers stand?

COSATU's resolution on building peace stresses that "employers must take responsibility in supporting workers and communities affected by violence". However, it seems that big business has fallen well short of this. Unionists argue that employers have not pushed for police intervention in violent situations. They have instead kept a distance and allowed killings to continue. It appears that, by and large, employers view political and ethnic tensions as an opportunity to weaken COSATU.

Many employers have gone even further. They have denied shopstewards the right to meet and refused union officials access to their members. Many workers affected by violence have been dismissed for latecoming and absenteeism. Some companies have forced COSATU members to leave weapons at the factory gates while allowing white workers and IFP-aligned workers to carry their weapons onto the premises. Private and public sector employers have responded to industrial action by employing scabs with links to Inkatha. According to Maserumule, "The bosses seem to be willing to stomach immediate disruptions to production, with the intention of getting rid of the militant unions and returning to stability with a shift to sweetheart unions."

However, the unions in the Wits region remain committed to engaging big business

in their moves to build peace. Sicelo Shiceka, COSATU Wits Regional Secretary, argues that employers can serve their own interests by working with the unions to eliminate violence. "Instability affects production. Workers affected by violence don't sleep at night and are unable to perform at work. Violence leads to workers arriving at work late or not going to work at all. Instability also affects the confidence of investors, both local and foreign."

Demands for business

COSATU affiliates in the Wits region have developed a number of demands which they want to discuss with business:

- Employers must support union initiatives to establish worker-based security.
- Employers must stop disciplining workers in areas affected by violence for arriving late or being absent.
- They must help ensure that workers can meet in or near factories to discuss violence-related problems.
- They must release shopstewards for meetings to discuss violence when it erupts and to monitor mass action.
- Employers must take responsibility for workers and their families affected by violence in the townships. They must allow them to sleep on the premises or provide them with alternative

supportive of unions for what they have historically achieved – job security, improved conditions and human respect.”

Violence hits union organisation

The region experienced fighting in an industrial area for the first time in 1991, at Driehoek, Germiston. Workers were attacked at the train station and factory gates. Factories identified as having a strong COSATU presence were clearly targeted.

Attacked workers received poor co-operation from the police. IFP members were known to be making weapons on factory premises, and shopstewards who ran away in fear of their lives were dismissed for absenteeism. Some employers recognised UWUSA in workplaces where it did not have a majority, claiming it had “sufficient representation”.

In the East Rand and Soweto, workers have used trains to consolidate organisation. Trains known to be “COSATU trains” were

accommodation.

- Employers should support calls for democratic and accountable policing, as the SAP needs to be restructured with popular involvement.
- Employers should also assist in rebuilding destroyed homes.
- The Peace Accord addresses reconstruction and development, and some employers have been involved in peace structures. However, their involvement has tended to be superficial. Employers should assist more directly in financing socio-economic development.

COSATU's Wits Region has approached the Chambers of Commerce of most of the towns and cities on the Witwatersrand to meet unions to discuss these demands. The region has suggested to the chambers that they raise their own proposals for discussion. A meeting was set for early September, but only the Johannesburg and Germiston Chambers of Commerce attended. Others cited the short notice of one week as the reason they failed to attend.

There have been some business initiatives to discuss the violence. For example, the Alberton Chamber of Commerce held a three-day conference where COSATU was represented. Employers emphasised community policing and the need to empower

local police stations. According to Shiceka, this was a good initiative. “But we should be able to gather at regional level, agree on principles and then implement the agreement on the ground, in the different localities.”

A second meeting was arranged and three weeks notice was given. The Johannesburg, Alberton, Germiston, Benoni, Springs, Nigel, Roodepoort and Krugersdorp Chambers of Commerce all confirmed, as did Spoornet and the Transvaal Provincial Administration. COSATU regional office bearers and representatives of NUM, SAMWU, CWIU, NUMSA and FAWU were present, but only the Johannesburg Chamber turned up.

It was agreed to arrange another meeting and to invite industrial sector employer bodies, such as SEIFSA, to the meeting. The COSATU region is trying a different approach in its efforts to ensure that this meeting takes place. It is asking the Consultative Business Movement and, more specifically, Andrew Feinstein, chair of the PWV Economic Forum, to convene the meeting.

The lukewarm response by employer bodies fuels the view within the unions that employers are not interested in preventing the violence, or even welcome it because it undermines unions. Stayaways are seen as a way of putting pressure on employers to respond to COSATU's demands.

specifically targeted for attack. The first train killings were orchestrated attacks on COSATU. More recently, aimless shootings of commuters, irrespective of political affiliation, have taken place.

The structures on the trains collapsed, but have since resurfaced in a smaller number of coaches which can more easily be defended.

There was a limit to the ability of Inkatha supporters to force an exodus of workers from COSATU unions. In 1992, a turning point was reached. Workers became more critical of IFP propaganda and more aware that resignation allows greater exploitation by management. The progressive unions were clearly proving themselves to be acting in workers' interests. Resignations slowed to a trickle and there have been no further en masse resignations. It appears that Inkatha propaganda against COSATU has failed. The high level of support for the 1992 NUMSA strike was another clear indicator of this trend.

The pattern of killings also shifted. Initially, killings were conducted by "troop attack", followed by retreat under police guard. Now, most killings are carried out by assassins or assassination squads who travel in disguised cars.

Shopstewards and key members of the unions and other progressive organisations were targeted and kidnapped or killed. Union organisers reported being followed regularly into industrial areas.

The violence clearly affected union organisation in the region. It impacted on the ability of shopstewards to hold meetings inside the factories. Attendance at union meetings dropped. Leading unionists were under direct threat and meetings were often postponed for fear of attack.

According to a senior unionist, throughout the violence, workers and union officials have shown a remarkable commitment to preserving union organisation and the situation is now improving. "Workers and officials have become more vigilant and alert. Monitoring and marshalling have enabled us to stabilise

union activities and structures," he said. Attendance has improved at meetings where workers perceive that adequate security arrangements have been made.

A number of other initiatives have taken place. A NUMSA welfare department was formed in response to the violence. It initially focussed on the violence in the East Rand and the Vaal. The department helps defuse conflict situations and liaises with the police where necessary. It negotiates with managers to standardise starting and finishing times in an industrial area. This means workers can travel to and from work together, with a greater degree of safety. The department assists victims at hospitals. For example, victims who saw their attackers on the hospital premises were assisted in leaving the hospital.

The department was instrumental in establishing the Germiston Dispute Resolution Committee before the signing of the Peace Accord. It now also functions in other NUMSA regions where violence is prevalent, including Southern Natal, Northern Natal and Border.

The issue of violence was specifically addressed at COSATU's Special Congress in September. COSATU's commitment to eliminating violence is captured in the title of its resolution on the issue, "Building Peace". It emphasises the need for strong organisation "to work actively for peace", and worker unity in the factories "to combat attempts to create ethnic polarisation". The resolution mandates COSATU leadership to "play a pro-active role in seeking peace, including intervening in strife torn areas".

Worker-driven security

Many workers, key shopstewards and union leaders have been killed on company premises, as well as on the way to and from work. Company security has been effective in curtailing theft and industrial sabotage, but unions argue it needs to be improved to protect workers. Workers are ultimately responsible for their own security. As such, they must be involved in security arrangements, and this requires resources.

The unions are calling for employers to contribute to a security fund. Resources are needed to train workers and to buy equipment for functions such as marshalling and monitoring.



Scaw workers join NUMSA National Strike, 1992

The unions envisage a transparent process to establish worker-based security at potential points of conflict, including the workplace, trains, taxi ranks and venues for meetings. The structures have to be formed on a non-partisan basis. According to Sicelo Shiceka, COSATU Wits Regional Secretary, UWUSA participation in security structures "will be welcomed" by COSATU in those workplaces where it has a presence.

Maserumule argues that this is a realistic demand. "It is a visible, practical and accountable project, an organised and orderly process of self defence. Workers defend themselves and, in the process, ensure that the workforce can be available to work. Furthermore, police claim that they do not have adequate capacity to improve security." He adds that this is "a test for the bosses with regard to the security of their employees. If bosses fail to participate in worker-driven security, it will reveal their real interests."

Together with the tripartite alliance, COSATU's Wits region is developing a programme of action with the slogans 'In Defence of Democracy' and 'In Defence of Our Lives'. The approach to big business [see box on p40 -41] is only one aspect of this programme. It also involves stayaways in different zones. In September, there was a stayaway in Zone 1, including Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus. There was a march and residents demanded that local police stations be empowered to deal with the violence, as they currently don't have the

necessary resources and transport to respond adequately. The marchers also demanded that police should carry out their duties in the areas where they reside. They are likely to act more responsibly in restoring peace in these areas,

because they will be ensuring the safety of their own homes and families.

A shopsteward council meeting for the Wits region, including Tembisa, debated a possible consumer boycott in November. The meeting also called for a stayaway on 14 October. At the time of going to press, COSATU had not yet formally discussed the proposed stayaway with its alliance partners, but Shiceka was positive that they would endorse the call.

The COSATU region is calling for an "active" stayaway and intends to march to John Vorster Square to demand appropriate community policing, including the removal of the Internal Stability Unit from the townships and the empowerment of local police stations staffed by police from the community. It also intends to march to the Department of Manpower with the demands it is putting to employers.

In the months ahead, COSATU faces a major challenge in its attempts to restore peace. According to the COSATU Special Congress resolution, "the prospect for further intensified violence exists in the run up to the elections and beyond". In this period, COSATU, as an alliance partner, can't claim political neutrality. As such, unionists have expressed fear that union members will be vulnerable to attack. At the same time as supporting the ANC, the COSATU affiliates will need to redouble their efforts to show that, as Maserumule puts it, "they remain the home of all working people". ☆