



Ending the violence in Natal

The recent meeting between the ANC and Inkatha, led by Mandela and Buthelezi respectively, is an important step in the direction of peace. JAY NAIDOO raises some of the issues facing the democratic movement in attempting to build on the current peace initiative.*

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Ending political violence and developing a new democratic political culture which enables political differences to be discussed freely and peacefully is one of the most important and difficult tasks facing the 'new South Africa'.

In a discussion paper issued last September (which provoked much debate within our ranks), I proposed that "what we require is a multi-party agreement between the main protagonists - Inkatha, the state and ourselves - which binds all parties, because of their mutual interest, and contains an effective mechanism of enforcing and 'policing' the implementation of the agreement". (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 4)

ANC - Inkatha agreement

The recent meeting between the ANC and Inkatha, and the agreement which came out of that meeting, is a step forward in the same direction as that proposed in my discussion paper. The agreement commits both organisations to "take steps to prevent acts of violence and destruction amongst their members"; to promote "political tolerance and freedom of political activity" and, in particular, "to create a climate between them free of forced recruitment and vilification".

Agreement was also reached on opening up public facilities for use by all, in particular meeting venues and schools; on the need for "an effective peace-keeping role

by security forces"; on co-operation in "initiating and implementing non-partisan reconstruction programmes in areas devastated by violence"; and developing "codes of conduct based on accepted principles and practices which do not impinge negatively on the rights of individuals and political groups and which are equally applicable to both organisations and all security forces".

In addition, a process of communicating down to members was agreed. This will include a joint tour of affected areas by Mandela and Buthelezi, and further peace meetings between the youth and women's organisations of both ANC and Inkatha.

In the three weeks following this meeting, while there has been increased contact between the leadership of the ANC and Inkatha, there have still been serious incidents of violence in at least three areas of Natal.

In trying to assess what possibilities of success the current peace process holds, we need to take a sober look at our strategies and the role any agreement could play in bringing about peace.

Nature of the violence

Firstly, though, I would like to comment on the causes and nature of the violence.

Violence has been a key part of the state's internal destabilisation strategy - through the direct role of the security forces and hit squads, as well as through vigilante groups throughout

the country.

Inkatha represents African middle-class interests and the interests of the traditional chiefs. By pursuing a policy of participation in apartheid structures, it inevitably came into conflict with the mass struggles of the MDM and the ANC.

There was thus a coincidence of Inkatha and state interests in attacking a common enemy - the democratic movement. But we should not make the mistake of seeing Inkatha simply as a puppet of the government. It is a political organisation representing specific interests, and thus, as the situation changes, it is possible that Inkatha may adopt a role which conflicts with the government.

There is plenty of evidence of state support, training, encouragement and even leadership in the violence by Inkatha against its opponents. It has, therefore, been accurate for us to say that this is not 'black on black' violence but violence of the apartheid regime against the people, with Inkatha as its agent in Natal.

However, after four years, the violence has become much more complex. A culture of violence has developed. A cycle of revenge killings perpetuates violence. Deteriorating social conditions, the collapse of the education system and rising unemployment have all seriously compounded the problems.

The violence of the apart-

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heid state is fuelled and perpetuated by social conditions of poverty and competition over scarce resources - for example, between squatters and township residents over housing. Differences among the people, based on class, race, ethnicity, residential area, and others, have been ex-

major factor has been an inability to build an effective and disciplined organisation in the townships over the past years. The link between the grassroots and the leadership has been very weak in Natal, so leadership has been unable to intervene effectively in crises.

ters - and not only in self-defence. In certain areas, the state has been able to manipulate our grassroots organisations into fighting amongst themselves, as happened in several areas near Pinetown.

Through its sophisticated security machine and agent



Victims of the violence

Photo: Aron Mazel/Afrapix

ploited by the state and its allies.

On the ground Inkatha structures are often dominated by warlords, chiefs and renegade police. This means that Inkatha as an organisation does not always have the capacity to discipline its own members.

Subjective weaknesses on the part of the democratic movement have also contributed to the violence. One

Many young people, supporters of the ANC, deprived of proper schooling and employment, have turned to crime. Of course, it is not only ANC members who have chosen this route - but it is something which could possibly have been prevented through political education and disciplined organisation.

Against this backdrop, acts of violence have been committed by ANC suppor-

provocateurs, the state has managed to directly manipulate certain opposition structures, including the ANC, PAC, AZAPO, Inkatha and other opposition forces.

Multi-faceted approach to end the violence

Clearly, ending the violence will take much time and a multi-faceted approach. Often we have suffered from

the illusion that an agreement alone will end the violence. This is as mistaken as the view that defence and 'bringing in MK' will provide a final solution. An agreement on paper alone will definitely not be sufficient to bring it to an end.

It has always been perfectly clear that a policy of trying to win this 'war' militarily (by physically overpowering the state/Inkatha forces) could not succeed because the state could always increase its firepower and repressive capacity in the situation.

While it is essential to defend our communities against violence as best as possible, the struggle to achieve peace has to be a political effort. This means doing political work and winning over as many people and forces as possible to the cause of peace. A culture of political tolerance needs to be developed to enable political differences to be settled peacefully.

In the middle of last year, Inkatha had made peace talks a mere illusion of words, lengthy correspondence and broken accords. The JWC (Joint Working Committee of COSATU and UDF) decided to launch the highly successful "Defend Natal" campaign to pressurise De Klerk into taking meaningful action (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 4).

This did not imply that peace talks with Inkatha had been rejected absolutely. Under circumstan-

ces where sufficient pressure had been built up on Inkatha and the state, peace talks could again become viable, as has now become the case.

Implementing an agreement is, like the phase of negotiation itself, a new phase of struggle. Once an agreement has been signed it will not simply implement itself as we want. We will have to struggle over how it is implemented in an attempt to shift the balance of forces in our favour.

Developing a way forward

In developing a way forward we need to address a number of matters :

1. Popularise the 29 January agreement

We need to ensure a clear understanding and commitment from leaders, members and supporters to what has been agreed. Copies of the agreement should be distributed in as many languages as possible. The agreement makes an important contribution to developing a culture of political tolerance and gives the ANC and COSATU greater space to organise.

It is important that senior leadership does not act in a way to undermine the agreement and the peace process. If there are mixed signals from the leaders it will create confusion on the ground and lead our members and supporters to act wrongly. This will make it impossible to demand that other people comply with the agreement.

2. Campaign and organise to implement the agreement

Where necessary, campaigns should be conducted to ensure that Inkatha and the state comply with the terms of the agreement. There will have to be campaigns at various levels to ensure that, for example, pensioners are not discriminated against because they do not carry an Inkatha card, or that excluded students are re-instated at schools even though they refuse to join Inkatha.

This holds possibilities for extending our organisational base and support. In residential areas and hostels the agreement can be used to win people to a position of peace - without having to change their political affiliation. Those who oppose the agreement or who wish to continue with 'warlord' type activities can thus be isolated.

3. Campaign for peaceful conduct by the security forces

The codes of conduct which have to be drawn up in terms of the agreement will set a standard of behavior for the security forces, as well as both the ANC and Inkatha. This will ensure a certain measure of public accountability. In the context of negotiation and political change, this will facilitate the drive to clean up the security forces. A vigorous campaign will have to be conducted to expose misbehavior and weed out those who are unfit to serve in the security forces in a new South Africa.

4. An effective monitoring mechanism must be developed

It is also vital to establish an independent monitoring mechanism that could identify problem areas where violence may break out, so that it can be prevented.

Monitoring could also serve as a check on both organisations and the security forces to ensure peaceful conduct.

5. The state must be bound by the peace process

The state is a key actor in the violence, both actively and passively. It must be compelled to stop provoking and participating in the violence. It must also be compelled to accept responsibility for preventing violence and for implementing justice. So far, it has been able to create the image that the violence is a problem among blacks. The state needs to be drawn more formally, through negotiations and pressure, into the peace process, since it holds the key to any real hope of peace.

6. Development and reconstruction projects must consolidate the peace

Peace has to be sustained by material improvements. The struggle for resources fuels the current violence. Consolidating a peace process will require also that serious thinking and effort is given to socio-economic development projects - particularly for refugees and displaced people, the youth, squatters, hostel dwellers and the unemployed. It is essential that such projects are not partisan

but distribute the benefits to all people regardless of political affiliation.

7. Disciplined community defence must be established

Defence has still to be developed in a systematic and disciplined way. Defence is not purely a military activity requiring weapons and street battalions. It is essentially a political process in which the community participates in resolving differences, gathering intelligence which may assist it in preventing attacks, conducting local level peace talks, recruiting, meeting with the police and so on.

Many of these types of activities have been conducted in different areas in an uncoordinated way already.

8. Local level peace talks must be encouraged

The experience of the Lower Umfolosi Peace Accord must be taken to other areas. With an overall agreement in place, local level accords have greater a possibility of consolidating peace on the ground.

The processes mentioned above must go hand in hand with the other ideas contained in the agreement such as the joint tours. It is essential to take a coordinated and systematic approach.

ANC role

Since the JWC was restructured late last year, the ANC has started to assume a pivotal role. In order to live up to its tasks, the ANC will have to address important organisational issues.

Firstly, the ANC has to

achieve a coordination of its leadership structures so that its senior leadership are tuned in to what is happening on the ground and can act effectively. At the moment they are fire-fighters rushing from area to area.

At the same time, the ANC has to be able to plan and lead. This requires that the ANC develop its own cohesion among its leadership, and develop effective links with COSATU. Since its unbanning, the lack of cohesion of the ANC leadership has become a well-known problem, and this is true in Natal as well.

Building effective organisation is essential if we want to build on the peace process and take advantage of its opportunities. A half-hearted approach will be worse than doing nothing, because it will lead to disasters and lead people to believe that no political process can end violence. This will surely lead to anarchy and the loss of credibility of the leadership.

The obstacles are enormous. Violence will not end overnight. The cycle of revenge killing will not end suddenly. The wounds of these years of violence and of thousands of murders will take a terribly long time to heal. The task of our organisations, despite all obstacles or frustrations, is to continue all our efforts until we achieve peace among our people. ☆



Mandela and Buthelezi with fellow delegates at the peace talks in January - will the smiles lead to real and lasting peace?

Photo: Rafs Mayet/Afrapix