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*Natal
violence:
new
conditions,
new
strategies*

There are strong indications that the UDF/COSATU/ANC alliance may be developing a new strategy for peace in Natal. ASHWIN DESAI and KARL VON HOLDT traces the changes.

Earlier this year the Joint Working Committee (JWC) of the UDF and COSATU called for the disbanding of the KwaZulu police, and embarked on an open attack on Buthelezi's credibility as a person committed to 'peace'.

Central to this strategy was a demand that De Klerk must act to stop the violence. To mobilise support for this position the JWC called a national stayaway on July 2 and a peace conference in August.

Millions of workers all over South Africa responded to the ANC/UDF/COSATU stayaway call.

The stayaway kicked off a week of action that culminated in a series of marches across the country. Significantly, there was a 75-80 % stayaway in Natal. These actions led to a meeting with De Klerk on 11 September.

All these events have come and gone, and the violence continues. The JWC strategy has reached a dead-end.

There are now strong indications that the JWC is planning another strategic shift to break the impasse. This new strategic initiative comes in the midst of increasing criticism of the ANC from within its own ranks, of the organisation's response to the recent Transvaal violence (see *Work In Progress* 69).

Alongside this a number of political commentators with a range of political leanings have called on Nelson Mandela to meet Buthelezi.

Shifts in MDM strategy

Since 1986 the strategy of the UDF/COSATU alliance towards Inkatha has undergone a number of shifts. When the violence in Pietermaritzburg developed into an outright struggle for political control between UDF/COSATU and Inkatha around mid-1987, the response of the UDF/COSATU was to form defence committees.

1987: defence committees

The defence committees were to prove fairly successful in fighting off the incursion of Inkatha supporters in the urban townships. In the semi-rural townships too the warlords often met with strong resistance. In some areas Inkatha-supporting chiefs were removed and their supporters driven out.

The primary objective of the UDF/COSATU was to transform the defence committees into mass-based structures. Alongside this objective was a commitment to drive a wedge between Inkatha and support from key sectors such as business, overseas governments and the liberal establishment, by embarking on an aggressive campaign to expose Inkatha as the perpetrators of violence (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 2, p 53 - 62).

.....and peace talks

In November UDF and COSATU agreed to meet with Inkatha to discuss peace.

UDF/COSATU activists felt the peace talks could "put pressure on Inkatha and the police". They could also win the moral high ground by exposing "the role of Inkatha supporters" and serving to "undermine support for it in a number of key sectors." (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 2, p 53-62)

The UDF/COSATU delegation met Inkatha in November 1987. An air of optimism prevailed after the first meeting. However, at the second meeting on 9 December, Inkatha pulled out of the talks (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 13 No 2 for a more detailed account).

This process dented Inkatha's public image. Businessmen, the liberal establishment and foreign embassies began to question Inkatha's commitment to peace. Activists were still confident that they could defeat the violence of Inkatha supporters through organisation and self-defence.

However, the situation changed rapidly in early 1988. Top level UDF leadership were detained just before a fresh round of "talks about peace talks", and COSATU, UDF and other organisations were restricted. COSATU/UDF saw the detentions as aimed at blocking the credibility and moral victories that they were gaining at the expense of Inkatha through the peace process.

At the same time, the restrictions and mass detentions



*Inkatha, COSATU, UDF at peace talks: no progress
1987 - 89*

Photo: Cedric Nunn/Afrapix

paralysed UDF/COSATU's ability to organise on the ground. In the first six months of 1989, 460 UDF/COSATU supporters were detained while only 21 Inkatha supporters were detained.

COSATU/UDF and independent observers made numerous allegations, backed up with affidavits, of SAP and KwaZulu Police (ZP) collusion with violent attacks by Inkatha-supporting vigilantes.

New priority: search for peace

The search for peace now became the priority for UDF/COSATU. Before this point the main thrust of their strategy was to build organisation and defence committees, and the talks about peace were a secondary element. However, now it was clear that progressive organisations could not win a war against both vigilantes and the state on the ground. The violence was out of control. Violence and state repression made it impossible to build organisation, and the State of Emergency left no political space for

UDF/COSATU to operate. Peace would provide the space to build organisation and develop political strategies for again challenging Inkatha and the state.

For much of 1988 the search for peace was accompanied by a campaign to expose the warlords and vigilantes and their close relationship with Inkatha. As Inkatha resistance to any talks increased, so did the UDF and COSATU call for the recommencement of the talks become more insistent.

At last in September 1988 COSATU and Inkatha agreed to set up a Complaints Adjudication Board (CAB) to settle disputes between them. But the CAB collapsed when Inkatha members refused to appear before the CAB because they had already been charged in court.

The focus of negotiations shifted. The churches facilitated a series of meetings between Inkatha and UDF/COSATU in mid-1989. These laid out a peace process, endorsed by both delegations, which included a joint peace conference.

But once again the initial euphoria was short-lived. Inkatha raised a series of problems and new proposals which seemed designed to stall the peace process (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 5). Eventually in September Inkatha declared a moratorium on further talks. This ended the 1989 peace initiative.

Throughout this peace initiative there was a concerted effort by UDF and COSATU to curtail criticisms of Inkatha and draw it into a joint peace process.

UDF and COSATU deliberately refrained from engaging in an ideological offensive against Inkatha. This strategy reached its high point at COSATU's Third National Congress when delegates endorsed the President's Report "and made a conscious effort, in both singing and speeches, not to attack Inkatha in particular." (*Labour Bulletin* Vol 14.5). SACCAWU official and Joint Working Committee (JWC) member Jay Naidoo told *Labour Bulletin*: "A certain level of diplomacy was required - we had to strenuously avoid any accusations of provocation."

New political conditions

By October COSATU and UDF were beginning to re-evaluate their strategy.

During 1989 the political climate in the country was changing. FW de Klerk's reform initiatives were counterpointed by the increasing assertiveness of the MDM defiance campaign. The unbanning of the ANC, SACP

and other organisations on 2 February 1990, and the release of Nelson Mandela a week later, radically transformed the political terrain. This provided new opportunities, but also opened up tensions and contradictions in ANC/MDM strategy.

Mandela's speech: still seeking peace

In February the JWC strategy was still focused on reaching a peace settlement with Inkatha. In pursuit of this strategy, Mandela's first move was to strongly endorse the process of seeking peace with Inkatha. At his King's Park speech Mandela called on those involved in the violence to throw their guns, knives and pangas into the sea. On Inkatha he said: "Although there are fundamental differences between us, we commend Inkatha for their demand over the years for the unbanning of the ANC and the release of political prisoners, as well as for their stand in refusing to participate in a negotiated settlement without the creation of the necessary climate."

Mandela also added that talks between the ANC and Inkatha were being planned. The talks were never to take place.

A month after Mandela's King's Park address, violence on an unprecedented level engulfed Pietermaritzburg. Inkatha member Ntombela mobilised some 12 000 armed vigilantes, according to press reports, who swept through the Maritzburg townships. Within ten days beginning on 28 March, 80 people were killed

and 14 000 people became refugees. This attack took place five days after Buthelezi delivered an extremely bellicose war talk to a gathering of chiefs.

"The sabotage of the peace talks - the horrific scale of violence - makes it clear that any attempt to talk peace with Buthelezi is futile. It strengthened the idea among activists that we were at war, and that we must organise self-defence. The idea of a peace talks lost all credibility," Naidoo told the *Bulletin*.

New strategy: pressure on De Klerk

The new strategy adopted by the JWC was to focus pressure on De Klerk to stop the violence, rather than reaching a peace agreement with Buthelezi. According to Naidoo, "If there's going to be any hope for peace talks there has to be a climate of peace - which must come from disarming Buthelezi and his warlords, the disbanding of the ZP which is controlled by Buthelezi as KwaZulu's police minister, and by the effective neutrality of the peace forces. The man who has got to do that, and who has the power, is De Klerk. Peace will depend on De Klerk."

At the centre of this strategy was the national campaign of action - including the stayaway - in the first week of July, and the convening of a peace conference. The idea is "to force the problem of violence in Natal to the very top of De Klerk's agenda -

and the national agenda. If we can succeed in that, and if De Klerk can take up the challenge, then peace would be possible."

The peace conference held at UDW and attended by top ANC leadership, including Mandela, resolved to persuade De Klerk to act to stop the violence in Natal. Crucially Mandela would not meet Buthelezi.

However the meeting with De Klerk on 11 September made it clear that he was not prepared to act against Buthelezi.

Dead-end

The JWC strategy to end the violence had reached a dead-end. The search for new avenues to peace became increasingly urgent as fighting between Inkatha and ANC-inclined organisations in the Transvaal escalated. The ANC needed to move beyond the hard-line approach adopted by the JWC.

The arrival of Jacob Zuma, head of intelligence of the ANC, in the region had begun to impact on the 'hard-liners' in the JWC. Importantly, high ranking Inkatha members seemed to have a great deal of respect for Zuma.

Zuma's arrival saw the almost immediate signing of two local peace initiatives. On 1 September the Lower Umfolozi Peace Accord was signed between Inkatha and the ANC. Other signatories were COSATU, the South African Police, the Kwazulu Police and the mayors of Enseleni, Ngwelezane and Esikhaweni. The Accord entrenched the

right - to be upheld by law - to freedom of political association.

Two weeks later senior Inkatha and ANC leaders and community leaders from strife-torn Ndwedwe, near Verulam, met and drew up an agenda to bring peace to the area.

Alongside these developments there were two meetings between high-ranking Inkatha and ANC leaders. The meetings were the first between such high ranking officials from the two organisations since they met in London in 1979. The Inkatha delegation included Kwazulu Ministers, Steven Sithebe and Frank Mdlalose, and the ANC delegation included Jacob Zuma, John Nkadimeng and Gertrude Shope.

Crucially, the dashing of the JWC's demand that De Klerk act against Buthelezi meant that the JWC, according to Jay Naidoo, had to "become less vociferous and lower expectations in our strategies to end the violence". It must be remembered that it was Naidoo who first signalled the 'hard-line' approach in a May Day address in Cape Town.

Multi-party agreement

In an important position paper written recently, Naidoo points to the fact that the meeting with De Klerk showed that he

"will not take measures that will prejudice Inkatha against the ANC or in relation to the negotiation process."

This meant that an accommodation would have to be reached with Inkatha directly.

Naidoo argues that what is required

"is a multi-party agreement between Inkatha, the State and ourselves - the main protagonists - which binds all parties because of their mutual interest, and contains an effective mechanism of enforcing and 'policing' the implementation of the agreement."

This proposal, according to Naidoo:

"would mean dropping our demands for the dismantling of the Kwazulu police and Kwazulu homeland structures, leaving such demands to be dealt with in the context of the general negotiations that would take place on the future of the bantustans. Matters such as meetings at the highest level between ANC and Inkatha, in particular, Mandela and Buthelezi would obviously have to be dealt with positively in the process of moving towards such an agreement."

For Naidoo it is only an international agency that will be able to monitor the agreement. In a subsequent interview with the Labour Bulletin, Naidoo stressed that he did not envisage a 'peace-keeping' force but an information gathering force.

Explaining this change of strategy, Naidoo told the *Bulletin* that the current political conjuncture had thrown up the potential for new sources of conflict:

"Right-wing elements both inside and outside the security forces have a tremendous capacity for

counter-insurgency and could feed on emerging new tensions or create conflict. Also the security forces and Kwazulu police could get together to create or take advantage of schisms. This must affect how we approach the issue."

For Naidoo, we have a Renamo situation in the making and the ANC needs to respond.

"De Klerk alone has the capacity to take them out militarily but will only act if it is politically attractive."

According to the position paper, a multi-party agreement will be attractive to De Klerk because it provides

"for the continuation of negotiations with the equal participation of other forces outside of the ANC, in particular Inkatha, while maintaining law and order in the country."

'On the ANC side, it is necessary,' Naidoo told the *Bulletin*, 'that we stop treating Buthelezi as a mere Bantustan leader - a Mangope - who has no role in creating a new South Africa? In any event Naidoo pointed to the fact that singling out Buthelezi contradicts the ANC's position that all parties have a role to play.

For Naidoo, locally based peace accords in the absence of a national agreement are bound to fail. He argues that the major actors involved in the peace accords are not rooted in the area. The accord does not permeate to the ground and is open to misinterpretation. For example, Inkatha leadership in Em-

pangeni felt that the ANC should not have held a Shaka Day rally in the area. Only Inkatha was entitled to a rally.

Also since national leadership were not bound by the agreement, Buthelezi for example could make a speech vilifying the ANC in Stanger and this could feed back into areas covered by peace accords. For Naidoo in the absence of a national accord, locally based peace initiatives can best be described as a "temporary truce".

Naidoo, in outlining the basis of a multi-party agreement, argued it would ensure a code of conduct that would deal with non-vilification, a ban on carrying of dangerous weapons and the creation of practical measures to ensure freedom of political activity of all parties.

"In addition", according to the position paper, "the agreement should include measures to be taken to ensure impartial and effective peace-keeping by the security forces and the establishment of joint management or consultative structures to monitor and supervise the activities of the security forces."

Critical reaction

Naidoo's paper has generated critical reaction. The October edition of WOSA's newspaper, *Vukani Basebenzi*, attacks Naidoo's call for "joint management or consultative structures to monitor and supervise the activities of the security forces."

WOSA argues that such "joint control implies a desire to enter into an agreement with

the government which would give COSATU/ANC joint responsibility for the actions of the police and the army."

WOSA poses three fundamental questions that arise from Naidoo's position:

- "Have we forgotten that the fundamental task of a capitalist police force is to protect capital?"
- Can we really not remember the number of times in the last years that these forces have been used to break our strikes, attack our organisations and kill our people?
- Are we so simple minded that we believe we can collaborate with this state to turn these forces into organs that will protect us?"

In addition to WOSA's position, a paper purporting to be from NUMSA-Isipingo began circulation in COSATU ranks on 18 October. The paper is sharply critical both of Naidoo's position and the JWC of UDF/COSATU.

The paper attacks the JWC for not pursuing campaigns consistently:

"We begin a campaign by announcing a programme of action, and then we change it without explanation or without consultation with your grass-root structures. For instance, when the programme of action for Natal was announced, we said that after the July 2 stayaway a conference of organisations in the mass movement, with representatives from grassroot structures, was going to be called. This conference was never called and no explana-

tion was given about why it was changed to a conference of core forces only. Even the delegation that was supposed to meet De Klerk was supposed to be made up of people from the ground as well as our leaders. But this did not happen. This is just one example of campaigns and programmes of action that have been abandoned without explanation. We must seriously correct this weakness. The effect of programmes that are dropped without explanation is that they demoralise the masses."

Two criticisms are directed at Naidoo's paper by NUMSA-Isipingo. The paper argues that Naidoo is wrong to assert that business has an interest in peace:

"... the business community does not have an interest in peace, but it has an interest in weakening people's organisations. The business community has the same interest as the State and Inkatha. We must also remember that big business has business links with Inkatha. It is only when we undertake mass action against the violence that business becomes concerned about the violence. It will be a big problem to put the initiative in the hands of business, as Comrade Jay suggests."

The second criticism flows from the issues of accountability and democracy. The paper argues that Naidoo is mistaken "when he says we must accommodate Inkatha politically. What we have been fighting for is a basic democratic right. But the most important principle is that of

democracy in our ranks."

The starting point for a way forward according to NUMSA-Isipingo is the building of defence committees and the calling of a national conference. For them the calling of a national conference is crucial because this will prevent a situation where the masses hear in the newspapers "that there has been an accord, and Inkatha likes a situation where our leaders act in a rush without thorough consultation."

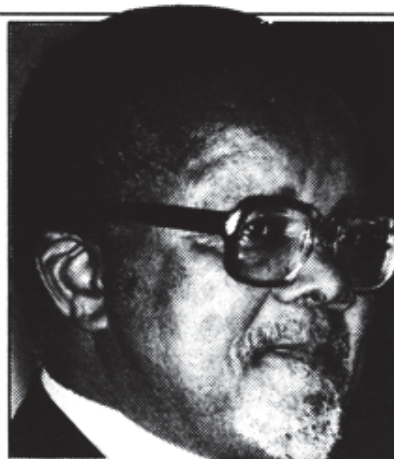
Buthelezi and Mandela.

Naidoo's position is sure to generate controversy within the ranks of the ANC. Harry Gwala, the ANC's Midlands convenor is known to be against a Mandela/Buthelezi meeting and would probably oppose Naidoo's position. Gwala has consistently argued that constitutional negotiations could only take place if FW De Klerk exercised his influence to end the Natal violence. The ANC youth who have manned the battlelines will also need convincing.

Many commentators have pointed to the differences in the approach to the violence adopted by members of the ANC alliance.

Mathew Kentridge has recently pointed out that:

"UDF comrades, for whom the war is a way of life and mistrust of Inkatha the most fundamental component of their world-view, were not prepared to 'throw their weapons into the sea' despite being exhorted to do so by Mandela at a peace rally in Durban in February ... At ANC



Harry Gwala - known to be opposed to a Mandela/Buthelezi meeting

Photo: Anna Zieminski/Afrapix

leadership level there is a major difference in approach between those such as Harry Gwala who favour a hardline attitude towards contact with Inkatha, and leaders such as Archie Gumede who are more conciliatory." (*Innes Labour Brief*, Vol 2 No 1, 1990)

It was these differences that forced the calling of a peace conference of 'core forces' only, in order to try and hammer out a unified position.

The strength of Naidoo's position lies in putting forward a programme of concrete steps that is sensitive to the new political climate. The critics in WOSA and NUMSA-Isipingo are empty of any alternative plan.

Naidoo's position dovetails with the sentiments expressed by Dhlomo in an article in the *Sunday Tribune* (26.8.1990).

Dhlomo argues that the ANC blundered by calling the dismantling of the Kwazulu bantustan without calling for the dismantling of the other homeland governments. This blunder, according to Dhlomo:

"prompted Buthelezi to al-

lege that the ANC is singling out Kwazulu and therefore, the Zulu people, for vilification and humiliation."

Dhlomo ends his article by making an impassioned plea for a Mandela/Buthelezi meeting:

"I have spent sleepless nights thinking of a strategy for ending the violence without Dr Buthelezi and Mr Mandela meeting. I am afraid that there is no such strategy."

Both Naidoo and Dhlomo arrive at similar sentiments - villification of Kwazulu should stop, and Buthelezi and Mandela should meet. Both are influential figures, with Dhlomo still commanding respect in Inkatha circles. It will not be surprising if their positions prevail and a national multi-party agreement envisaged in Naidoo's paper becomes a reality. Naidoo in the interview with the *Bulletin* and Dhlomo in his numerous newspaper articles remain optimistic of this scenario unfolding very quickly. ☆

Stop press:

The ANC National Executive Committee announced on 23 October that there would be a meeting between Mandela and Buthelezi. The meeting would also be attended by the ANC [NEC] and the central committee of Inkatha.

This announcement suggests that the JWC's 'confrontationist' position has been jettisoned for the approach envisaged in Naidoo's paper. ☆