

Violence and the 'Peace Process' in Pietermaritzburg

A COLLECTIVE OF PIETERMARITZBURG ACTIVISTS explains how State repression has led to the breakdown of the 'peace process' and calls for pressure to be put on the State to release detainees and lift the political restrictions so that the process can continue.

After Inkatha broke off the Maritzburg peacetalks in December 1987, ostensibly because UDF/COSATU were reluctant to repudiate *Inqaba Yabasebenzi*, numerous press statements during late December and January by Inkatha officials and Gatsha Buthelezi suggested that Inkatha was not interested in peace and was unwilling to continue with the peace process. However Inkatha had not officially broken-off the peace-talks. It would seem that the Chamber of Commerce (CC) played a crucial role in maintaining Inkatha's official commitment to the peace process during this time.

The question of including national leaders in the peace process

In a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce the UDF/COSATU delegation made it clear that they are not opposed in principle to including national leaders in the peace process provided the agenda of the meeting focuses on the peace process in the Pietermaritzburg area.

At a meeting with the Chamber in February a proposal which made provision for the participation of UDF/COSATU national leadership

was presented to the Chamber, and they were to pass it on to Inkatha.

Detentions

On the 10 and 11 February most of the UDF's Midlands leadership was detained; viz., Martin Wittenberg, Skhumbuzo Ngwenya (Joint UDF-Midlands secretaries), Thami Mseleko and Reggie Radebe. All these are members of the UDF delegation in the peace talks. The detentions were not only restricted to delegates as in the next few days a number of key UDF activists were also detained. Already the detention of hundreds of UDF activists in the past few months had seriously affected the UDF's ability to consult, discuss and constantly seek a mandate from its affiliates. The detention of delegates was the last straw; it struck a severe and deadly blow to the peace process.

In stark contrast, not a single member of Inkatha was known to be detained during the same period.

Church initiative

The peace process mediated by the Chamber of Commerce seemed to have slowed down considerably during January and February whilst the death toll continued to rise. It was at this point that church leaders, acting through the SACC, started a new initiative. On the 12th February the UDF received a letter from Dr. Mgojo inviting the UDF to

a meeting with Inkatha on the 23rd February. But almost the entire UDF delegation to the peace process were in detention, and the UDF felt that it was unable to attend the meeting. After being informed of the UDF's position, Dr. Mgojo agreed to cancel the meeting. It was agreed with Dr. Mgojo that representatives of the church would also participate in the peace talks convened by the Chamber of Commerce.

State action

It is ironic that on 24th February the Natal Witness quoted Lechesa Tsenoli, (UDF-Natal), stating that Gatsha Buthelezi's allegation that the UDF are the "fetch and carry boys" of the ANC was inviting State repression against the UDF. The very same day the UDF and sixteen other organisations from engaging in any activities whatsoever other than administration and legal action, whilst COSATU was severely restricted. At the same time UDF leaders involved in the peace process, Mr. Archie Gumede, Mr. A.S. Chetty and Dr. S Gqubule were heavily restricted, therefore effectively barring them from making any contribution to the process.

It is ominous to note that on the same day the KLA caucus asked the South African government to give the Kwa Zulu police jurisdiction over all strife-torn black areas.

The banning, restrictions and

detentions effectively brought the peace process to a complete halt.

The UDF/COSATU noted with concern Minister Vlok's utterances in relation to the banning and State action and policy in general. Vlok is reported in the Natal Witness of 27 February to have said, "The police intend to face the future with moderates". Inkatha and its leadership is apparently part of the moderates. The fact that it was unaffected by the recent State action bears testimony to this. "Radicals, who are trying to destroy South Africa, will not be tolerated. We (presumably the police and Inkatha and other moderates) will fight them. We have put our foot in that direction, and we will eventually win in the Pietermaritzburg area", Vlok said.

As reported in SALB Vol 13 No.3, despite numerous affidavits and court interdicts against Inkatha warlords and leaders, they have been left untouched by the State.

After the bannings

On the 26th February, in a meeting between Vlok and the Chamber of Commerce, Vlok indicated his willingness to consider an application by UDF/COSATU to seek permission in terms of the restrictions to continue with the peace process. Such an application has subsequently been made.

The COSATU delegation was to meet the Chamber of Commerce on

the 12th March to seek clarity on Inkatha's response to UDF/COSATU's last proposal (including national leadership). This meeting was cancelled at the last minute by the Chamber of Commerce as a result of the axing of Paul van Uytrecht from its delegation. The meeting finally took place on 24th March. The Chamber was strongly criticised for unilaterally withdrawing Mr. van Uytrecht, general manager of the Chamber, from the mediating team. The Chamber and COSATU agreed to establish a procedure for including or excluding anyone in the future.

On Inkatha's response, the Chamber stated that Inkatha was unhappy about the size (10 of each side) of the delegations proposed by the UDF and COSATU. They wanted to have the latitude to increase the size of the delegation to any number they wished. Secondly, Inkatha was unhappy with the UDF/COSATU proposal to limit the agenda to the peace process itself. They felt that they should be able to raise any matter they wished. COSATU stated its unhappiness with Inkatha's demand for an unrestricted number of delegates. (What if the warlords also want to attend?) In addition COSATU felt that the agenda should be restricted to the continuation of the peace process.

Continuation

It is vital that the peace process

should continue. All parties are agreed on this. Although the death toll has been reduced significantly, people continue to die as a result of the conflict. The warlords still run free. The continued detention of the UDF leadership and hundreds of UDF/COSATU activists deepens the sense of disillusionment with the peace process by the rank and file

membership of UDF and COSATU.

It is imperative that the peace process be resurrected. This is only possible if all parties involved in the peace process put pressure to bear on the authorities to lift the restrictions on UDF/COSATU and allow its leadership to freely participate in the peace process.
