

Conflict - in the community and in the factories

In 1985 violence exploded in communities around Durban. Youth fought *amabutho*. Pondo fought Zulu. Conflict spilled into the factories. COSATU was launched. Then UWUSA. How did shopstewards cope with this? How do they see trade unions and politics? SHAMIM MEER reports on interviews with 36 shopstewards in Durban, with a postscript by A Sitas. This is the second in a series of two articles.

1. Youth versus *amabutho*⁺ in Inanda

By contrast with earlier township experiences, the events of August, 1985 made their impact on all the factories.

The August 1985 unrest was

more widespread than the earlier unrest in Natal. All major townships around Durban were aflame as youth and Inkatha-supporting *amabutho* battled it out in the streets. In the words of Ari Sitas, "The carnage in Durban's townships in August 1985 left behind the burnt-out shells of shopping centres, the ashes of local government buildings, the gutted and looted houses, the 75 deaths and over 1000 injuries, the racial animosities, and social trau-

+ '*Amabutho*' is a Zulu word, meaning 'warriors'.

racial animosities, and social traumas ...". The trade unions and the shopsteward leadership were forced to reckon with these happenings as conflicts spilled over into the factories and as workers who were loyal union members by day were forced - or chose - to become *ama-butho* at night.

The events of August 1985 have been discussed in the Institute for Black Research publication, "Special Report: Unrest in Natal August, 1985", and in A. Sitas "August 1985, "Where Wealth and Power and Blood Reign Worshipped Gods", published in SA Labour Bulletin Vol 11 No.4. The following is a brief description of the events.

Assassination of Victoria Mxenge

The unrest in Durban's townships began with student protests at

the assassination of Victoria Mxenge, lawyer and civil rights activist. School children in Umlazi, Kwa Mashu, Clermont and Lamontville boycotted classes and marched through the township streets in protest. Unemployed youth joined in the protest and soon thousands of youth were out. Workers, returning home at night, found a heavy police presence and militant youth ready for action.

By the second day of the protests, conflict between police and youth had heightened. The youth were trying to attack homeland government and quasi-political targets. They tried to bring more schools out. Shops of councillors who were also traders in the areas were attacked. Some were burnt. The schoolchildren began to lose control as lumpen youth began to join in the attacks, looting and acting in the 'name of the struggle'. In Kwa Mashu the police teargassed, baton-

The survey

We selected 100 large factories in Durban. One third of Durban's workers work in these factories, which belong to all the industrial sectors.

From the 100 factories, we then selected all the factories that were organised. We contacted the union organising each factory, and arranged to interview the shopstewards. By November 1986, we had managed to interview 36 shopstewards.

The average shopsteward interviewed was an African man in a COSATU-affiliated union. He was 37 years old and had completed Standard 7 at school. He started work in 1970, had joined the union by 1981, and was a semi-skilled worker earning an average of R569 per month. He had a family of 6 dependants to support and he rented accommodation in a township which his family sometimes shared. At the same time, he had strong links with the countryside, with family and dependants living in a rural area of Kwazulu.

The shopstewards were therefore not an entirely urban labour force. The majority had substantial families and dependants in the countryside. Because they were not permanent residents there, they did not have great material interests in the Durban townships.



Inkatha supporters chasing mourners at the funeral of victims of an attack on the memorial service for Victoria Mxenge

charged and dispersed a crowd of about 2,500 that had tried to attack the shopping complex.

In Inanda, an informal settlement where African and Indian families had for years lived side by side, the situation took a racial turn. Gangs of youth threatened Indian shopkeepers and residents with stoning and burning of properties. Indian families fled in fear of their lives as the protest turned into a racial conflict. Many were protected by African neighbours.

By the second evening townships were in a state of fear and uncertainty with workers not knowing what to do. Youth were demanding money, and petrol. They also demanded that workers join them.

Chaos reigned

On the third day things became chaotic. Youth and progressive organisation lost control of events. The turning point came at the memorial service for Victoria Mxenge. The approximately 4,500 people attending the service were attacked by an impi of about 300 men, identified as Inkatha supporters from Lindelani. Seventeen people were killed and many were injured. The mourners, including shopsteward leaders fled for their lives.

On the fourth day chaos reigned in most areas. Shops belonging mainly to Inkatha councillors were under attack in most townships.

Looting and burning continued

in Inanda and unemployed youth and adults looted shops and homes that had been evacuated. The media's coverage of events fanned racial tensions, and Indian vigilantes in the Duffs Road and Phoenix areas began to organise defence against expected attack.

Amabutho gain control

Inkatha supporters began to mobilise members and all able-bodied men to defend the shops and to attack and scatter youth. Those who refused to join the Inkatha-supporting *amabutho* were accused of being UDF and were assaulted. Some joined the *amabutho* willingly but others joined for fear of their lives.

By the fifth day Inkatha-supporting *amabutho* were in control of Umlazi. The rampage in Inanda continued and the Phoenix settlement came under attack and buildings were burnt down.

Progressive community organisations and the UDF attempted to intervene but it was clear that Inkatha supporters, through their use of physical force, continued to hold the townships.

Shopstewards met to decide what to do. They felt they could not be "bullied" by either youth or Inkatha supporters. They wanted to meet youth and to call a mass meeting. Some wanted to call Buthelezi to a meeting to make him answer for what was happening in the town-

ships. But they soon sensed the mood of the workers, many of whom saw Inkatha as a peace-keeping force who had acted in a positive way.

The situation was complex. Shopstewards had to negotiate with union members who also had decided loyalties to Inkatha.

Tension in the factories

From our interviews the picture that emerges is that workers were afraid to go home, were arriving late at work, were discussing events taking place in the townships and were becoming embroiled in arguments on the rights and wrongs of the organisations acting in the township. Shopstewards found that they had to intervene in conflicts that were emerging in the factory with workers on both sides becoming heated over the issues.

At least a third of the shopstewards interviewed said that at the factories workers were not at work or were late in coming to work as a result of the disturbances in the townships.

There was much heated discussion and debate in the factories among workers. In 11 (52%) of the factories, unity among workers was threatened as result of township conflicts. Workers who supported Inkatha clashed in argument with those who supported FOSATU or UDF. Older workers blamed the youth for the unrest and quarrelled

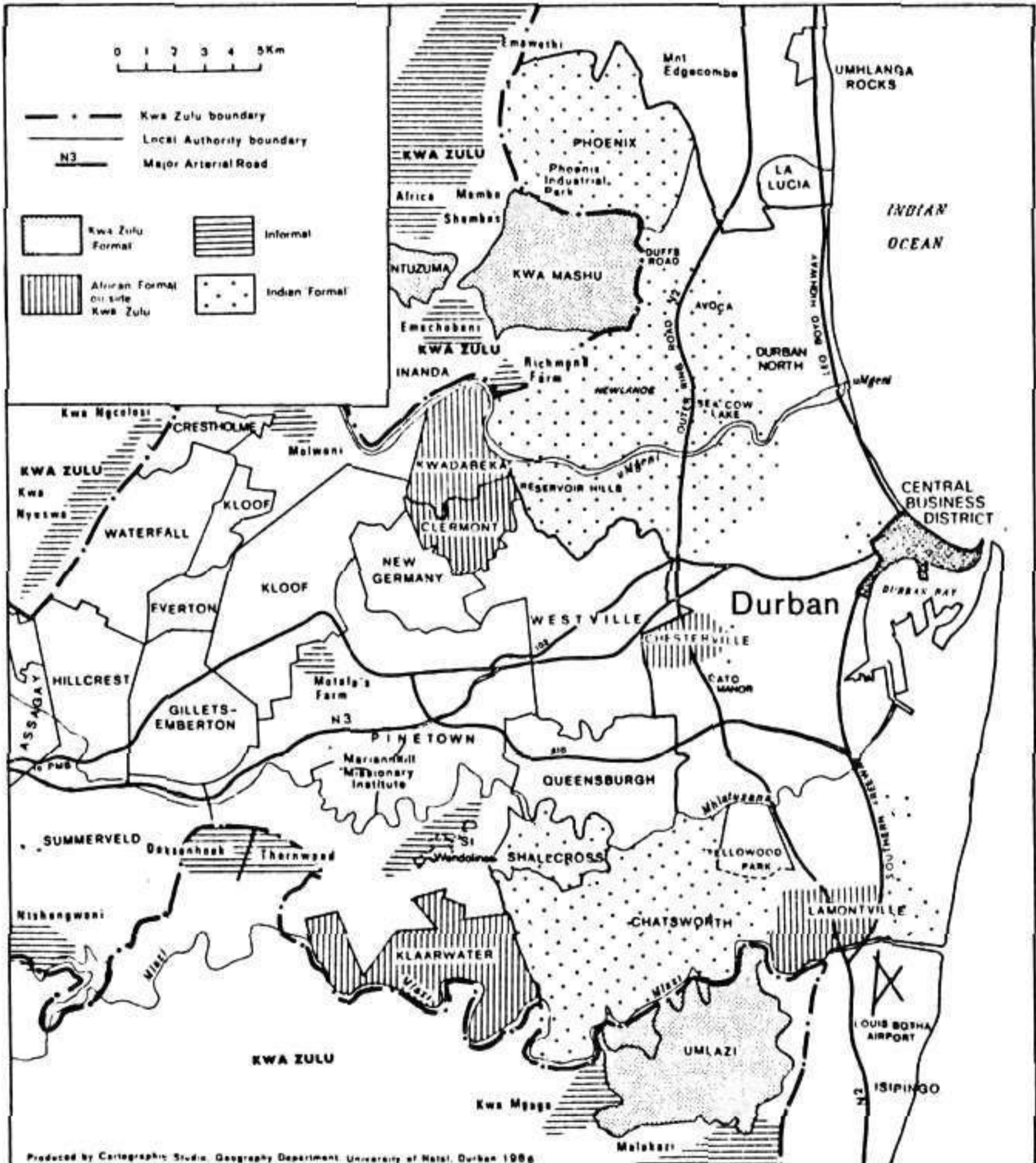
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with younger workers who tried to explain their views on the situation. In some factories workers blamed UDF for the violence in townships, and in one of these shopstewards saw this as a result of the way in which the media had handled the In-

anda uprisings.

The shopstewards' own view of the situation reflects their militant consciousness which is far ahead of the consciousness of the workers they represent.

In the words of the shopste-



Durban metropolitan region

Taken from 'An appetite for power' Mare/Hamilton

wards, in the factory:

* "People had divided viewpoints about the situation. Some were supporting the struggle and complaining about the formation of the *amabutho*. Others were saying the *amabutho* should be there to protect the damage to others' property. They also remarked that no liberation could be achieved by killing and burning one another. Some people blamed the UDF as a bad organisation instigating violence."

Shopstewards responded to the tensions in the factories by calling meetings, discussing events and presenting their interpretation of events to workers. One shopsteward explained: "Inkatha members were told they must become *amabutho* because this is an old Zulu custom. That people when grown up must become part of an *amabutho* without being told what they would be asked to do. We explained what the *amabutho* really was. We attacked the chief. Some were irritated with us, but with the help of the workers from the floor who are also part of youth organisations in the township we were able to change people's views about Inkatha." Shopstewards had to fight against traditional beliefs, the ideas propagated by the media and the statements made by Buthelezi.

As another shopsteward said, "keeping unity is a continuous issue. It is hard to get workers to see things as a united force. We tried to

cool the workers who were Inkatha and who said they wanted to see UDF and kill them because they want to make the situation ungovernable. We said to them we should unite as workers against other classes. We discussed what was happening and tried to convince workers not to take part in these things that were happening in the townships."

While shopstewards, as recognised leaders and representatives of workers, were able to find ways to restore unity in the factories, they had little control over events in the townships, Inkatha had gained control.

Clashes in the townships

The shopstewards described what happened in the areas where they lived. Workers from Kwa Mashu and parts of Umlazi were unable to go to work as youths set up barricades in the townships. In the areas where the shopstewards lived in Umlazi shops were burnt, and Inkatha *amabutho* fought with "guns and bombs". Shopstewards from Umlazi said that people were forced to join the vigilantes. Some in the township blamed the UDF for the trouble in the townships.

In Clermont there was conflict in some sections as shops were burnt and "UDF was torn apart as some blamed the Xhosas for all the unrest, and as youth and hostel-dwellers clashed. Ethnic identity

was strong." Local organisation was able to make some impact, though, as youth and workers met to discuss the situation. Organisations came together to "address community issues. We looked at ourselves as workers and community." In some sections things were quiet "as most residents were COSATU or UDF."

In Lamontville children were on boycott and buses and offices were burnt. Workers feared stayaways and blamed the government for the troubles as there was no money, no houses and no jobs. All communities lived in fear.

The shopstewards saw the immediate cause of the outbreak as being the death of Victoria Mxenge. Underlying causes were seen to be the political climate, awareness of oppression, no jobs, unemployment, communities wanting equal rights, children wanting equal education. The ethnic and racial turn of events was seen as a result of discrimination in this country and the way people are taught to look at each other. The unrest was seen as the result of a lack of proper organisation, and as a result of grassroots being unorganised. Some saw the conflict as being between two organisations who were vying for support and wanting control over "who would be the boss of tomorrow."

In the shopstewards' view the aggressors in the community battles were Inkatha supporters and the *amabutho*, aided by the police and army. They identified traders, coun-

cillors and shacklords as the force supporting the *amabutho*, and working closely with the SADF.

Shopkeepers guarded their shops against being burnt. They organised and financially supported the *amabutho*.

Unemployed youth were seen as supporting the struggle and playing a vital role together with students who were seen as the vanguard of the struggle. but some unemployed youth demanded money at Umlazi roadblocks, and others were recruited into the ranks of the *amabutho* at R4.00 a day. Students tried to control the situation and to link up with workers but were not organised well enough.

The shopstewards saw the police and army as worsening the situation through their conduct. An alliance between the *amabutho* and police was seen to exist in all the townships. Inkatha supporters were seen to be working with the SADF in attacking innocent people, and to be causing ethnic hostility. Inkatha supporters conducted house to house raids in Umlazi to search out UDF activists, while the SADF conducted house to house searches in Lamontville.

Inkatha supporters were seen as "attacking the comrades and setting the struggle back".

UDF was seen as "fighting for our rights, enlightening the community through pamphlets, and tried to change the situation". But UDF was unable to come out with

strong action and was seen as not having "good structures".

Generally workers and the community around them were afraid. Shopstewards felt powerless and feared for their lives. As one shopsteward said: "If you took direct

"I was forced to join the vigilantes. They went around beating people up after 8p.m. They came with a list and collected everyone after work. They held a roll call. If someone was not present they would go to him the next day and



Amabutho on the move - KwaMashu

Photo: Billy Paddock

action, Inkatha supporters would kill you, so we kept quiet.' Another said "things were bad and I and my family could do nothing. I was afraid because my neighbours are Inkatha members."

Three COSATU shopstewards, one from Kwa Mashu, and two from Umlazi, were forced to join the *amabutho* in attacks on youth and suspected UDF activists. They said:

ask which meeting he attended. It was safer to tag along with them. They threatened to burn your house or shoot you if you did not join. Because of late nights I was getting late for work."

"I was armed and attacked youth against my will. I stay in the hostel. I was aware we were being misled but I could not voice this out for fear of my life."

"*Amabutho* forced me to go with them to Phoenix."

Some workers joined the *amabutho* willingly. Others were forced to join while others went into hiding to avoid being recruited. As individuals and community members only four shop stewards (11%) attempted to take some initiative in the section where they lived.

One shop steward, a member of a youth organisation in Umlazi spoke to five *amabutho* who lived in this section. "I knew them as neighbours. They listened. They told me they were not working and were doing this to get money. But they did not get paid. They stopped being *amabutho*."

A shop steward from Kwa Mashu who was also president of a savings club called members of the club and their families together to explain the situation and urge them not to join the *amabutho*.

A third shop steward, living in Umlazi, "calmed down people who were seeing each other as enemies."

A fourth shop steward in Umlazi contacted all workers living near him and "discussed issues affecting us at work and what is happening in the townships. We decided we should talk to workers not to get used by others. Shop stewards decided they would participate in an area where they were staying."

Shop stewards helpless in the community

Shop stewards decided that the time had come for them to act in the community. They attempted to intervene where they could. But their previous lack of participation in community politics limited them.

As representatives of workers the shop stewards found they were unable to act because they "were not organised into structures" to respond to community issues. One shop steward said, "We don't meet as shop stewards in the township. I believe the time has come where we should meet." Another said, "we did nothing because it was not clear as to what to do. We need more education. Twenty-nine of the shop stewards interviewed did nothing."

The majority of the shop stewards were only able to influence the conflict inside the factory. Three shop stewards in Clermont and four in Umlazi attempted to act through linking up with local progressive community organisations. They attempted to reach the community for as they said, "*Amabutho* are members of unions and also workers." But this was a battle lost, for neither progressive community organisations nor trade unions were sufficiently in touch with township politics at grassroots to make an impact.

It was clear that traditional beliefs were strong or could easily be

roused among workers and township residents. Identification with traditional authority was one of the factors that caused conflict on the factory floor and that led to some workers willingly taking up arms as *amabutho*. The shopstewards opposed these ideas and actions but they had not given much thought as to how to resist them. Past union practice had been to avoid these issues. But it was impossible to avoid them any longer.

The crisis the shopstewards found themselves facing was therefore not only an inability to influence events outside the factories, but also an inability to exercise their authority over their own polarised membership inside the factories during August and September 1985. It has been an ongoing struggle since then to unite the membership again.

2. Battles between Zulu and Pondo

In December 1985, while factories and communities tried to recover from the violent conflict of August, new battles broke out on the Natal South Coast, once again having implications for progressive organisation. These battles pitched Zulu-speaking residents against Pondo-speaking residents on the South Coast, who were in the Southern-most industrial area of Durban.

It is clear that these battles took place against the background of homelessness, increasing unemployment and deprivation in the area. Many Pondo workers had migrated there to seek work and had brought their families to live with them some years before. This was facilitated by shacklords who allowed their brothers from Ixopo, Polela, Harding and so on, to settle.

The interpretation given by Zulu chiefs and residents in the area was that Zulu workers did not have jobs or homes because the Pondo had come to poach what rightfully belonged to the Zulu. It took an argument one morning at the only communal tap at Umbogintwini for the simmering discontent to flare up into an 'ethnic' riot between Pondo and Zulu.

The conflict between the Pondo and Zulu on the Natal South Coast made its impact on the lives of workers in their factories and communities. All thirty African shopstewards had been affected by this conflict.

Ten had experienced conflict in the factories where they worked; fifteen know of other factories where conflict had been experienced; seven experienced this conflict in the areas where they lived. Unity in strongly unionised factories was threatened as Zulu workers reacted to the conflict, and in some instances approached management asking that Pondo workers be dismissed.

This was a burning issue for the

majority of Durban's workers. By contrast, the five Indian and Coloured shopstewards who worked in garment and leather factories where there were very few or no African workers, had not even heard of this conflict.

"Apartheid causes this"

From the interviews it was clear that there had been much discussion about the conflict. There were many stories of how the conflict had begun. The common threads that ran through the varied responses were that Pondo had come into the area, there was much unemployment and a shortage of housing, a fight at a tap broke out into conflict with Zulus on one side and Pondos on the other.

"I don't know why this happened", said one shopsteward, "They were staying together for ages."

Another shopsteward said, "Apartheid causes this because there is a looking down on each other and intolerance because one is Pondo and one is Zulu."

Another said, "There were differences in organisations. Zulus are Inkatha. Pondos have their own organisation. Zulus resent Pondos and think they should not be allowed to build houses."

One shopsteward who was also Inkatha chairman in the area where he lived said, "It was just like 1949. It started quick and it spread quick.

One Zulu was killed, then one Pondo was killed and it spread like fire."

Conflict in the factories

Of the ten shopstewards who had experienced difficulties in the factories where they worked, eight were COSATU and two were SAAWU.

Although workers at these factories were organised in one union and were at most times united, relationships became threatened as a result of the South Coast disturbances. "Zulu workers agitated that Pondo workers be attacked or dismissed."

Pondo workers were given leave until the disturbances subsided in two of these factories. In one factory organised by a COSATU affiliate many Pondo workers resigned because they were threatened with death by Zulu workers. "Zulus were victimising Pondos in the factory, saying that they were killing their brothers on the South Coast."

Shopstewards in troubled factories called meetings and addressed workers in an attempt to put a stop to "disuniting actions".

In one factory where unity was not threatened within the factory workers talked of how "we killed AmaPondo in the community". The senior shopsteward for this factory realised that they still had a "big job to do". The workers leadership at

this factory put out and distributed among the workforce a pamphlet on worker unity.

In two other factories where unity was not directly threatened shopstewards "consciously tried to stop referring to each other as Zulu and Pondo" and ensured that unity was maintained by talking to workers.

Fifteen shopstewards interviewed had heard of other factories where unity had been affected by these disturbances. These included factories near Umbogintwini and in Prospecton. According to the shopstewards interviewed, Zulu workers had threatened to stop working in two factories until the Pondo workers were dismissed. In another factory "the ex-president of Chemical Workers Industrial Union, who had worked more than seventeen years at the factory, was forced to take leave when workers began fighting among themselves". At other factories also Pondo workers were given leave.

Shopstewards' action

In most cases shopstewards attempted to restore unity through meetings. In one case the shopstewards issued a pamphlet calling for unity and an end to the fighting. One shopsteward saw their task as "Organising workers and making it clear to them about race and struggle in and out of the factory".

Another said: "There were big

problems. Some took sides with either group. There is a lack of thorough training of shopstewards who still have a nationalist approach and lack experience."

A minority (three), thought that the situation was beyond our power as shopstewards, we can't do anything outside the factory".

3. Trade unions and politics

COSATU is launched.

The situation in Natal was volatile. Durban's shopstewards had no time for reorganisation or respite. Even before any stock could properly be taken of the August/September experience COSATU was launched November in Durban with an aggressive political profile. The launch sparked off reaction from both the state and Kwa Zulu government. This had implications for worker leadership because "when Botha and Buthelezi criticised the launch, workers became suspicious and panicked". Despite the support for the creation of this working class giant there was no consensus about the high political profile it had adopted.

All the COSATU shopstewards interviewed attended the conference and launch. Workers they represented were jubilant at the



COSATU launch - a giant is born

Photo: Afrapix

launch because they would now be stronger as part of a militant and progressive federation. "They were happy saying it will build worker power and make workers' voice powerful". But at the same time some workers and shopstewards were somewhat concerned with the newly elected president Elijah Barayi's speech which attacked homeland leaders. This created some controversy with some workers saying that COSATU should not be political and with some being concerned at the attack on Chief Buthelezi.

"Workers were confused, especially Inkatha members who claimed that COSATU wants to use workers in political issues."

"Workers were hesitant after the COSATU launch and wanted to resign. We held meetings to explain what the federation is all about. The issue of disinvestment has raised difficulties. Some of our members are Inkatha members as well so they were being influenced that COSATU is preaching the gospel of disinvestment. When I tried to explain the issue of disinvestment to them they labelled me as a UDF or ANC affiliate. As a person who always attends union seminars I gradually explained to the workers the history of the working class in South Africa and they started to understand.

From the townships where the shopstewards lived the overall feel-

ing was a divided one. Some said that COSATU would bring big changes for the country and would help to unit workers, while others who were Inkatha supporters saw COSATU as linked to the ANC and as anti-Inkatha. "Some criticised COSATU by saying that COSATU wants to put them in jail because it is related to the ANC. Others say COSATU leads to liberation." "Some compared Inkatha and COSATU, saying COSATU is pro-disinvestment and Inkatha against sanctions and disinvestment."

The COSATU shopstewards identified with COSATU strongly, yet they were worried about the im-

plications that any confrontation with Inkatha would bring about.

The conflict in the townships heightened as COSATU leadership came under attack from Inkatha supporters. These attacks took the form of attacks on persons as well as the burning down of homes. The attack on COSATU leadership continued, becoming most heightened in the Natal Midlands, and in Northern Natal through 1986 and continuing into 1987 and the present. Worker leaders lived in fear of their lives, some being forced to flee their homes as a result of threats from Inkatha supporters.



Uwusa launch - an attack on Cosatu

Photo: Billy Paddock

Inkatha launches UWUSA

In April 1986 Inkatha publicly announced that it was to launch a trade union - UWUSA - on 1 May 1986.

The choice of 1 May as the day of the launch was clearly not a coincidence. This was 'workers' day' which COSATU affiliates had begun observing two years previously, and which was being negotiated with employers as a paid holiday. COSATU had planned a rally for this day and many workers had negotiated time off to attend the rally. Inkatha was clearly attempting to take over this day and wanting to show up COSATU in a test of strength over which of the two rallies would get greater support.

Inkatha used its authority, the media and massive laying on of transport to mobilise for the UWUSA rally. King Goodwill Zwelithini in a radio message urged all Zulu people to support UWUSA's May Day launch. Local chiefs followed up this broadcast with frequent messages advertising the rally.

Mobilising in rural areas took the form of headmen, and in one area homeland police, urging people to go to the rally. Kwa Zulu MPs and community councillors held meetings in their constituencies to mobilise for the launch.

The UWUSA launch was organised around an attack on

COSATU's disinvestment policy and around slogans of "Jobs not Hunger". The message put across by Inkatha and Kwa Zulu officials was that COSATU was asking people from overseas to take away their money and that this would cause loss of jobs and hunger.

Pamphlets advertising the launch attacked "unknown Xhosas and an Indian" who were in control of COSATU. One pamphlet stated that were Mandela not in jail he would be at the UWUSA rally.

The UWUSA rally was attended by about 60 000 people from all over Natal and some from the Transvaal. At one point in the rally a coffin with the words "Barayi and Naidoo are dead" and "COSATU is dead", were brought into the stadium and a mock funeral was held.

Inkatha's support among Natal's people and among significant numbers of Natal's workers could not be underestimated. But it was yet to be seen if Inkatha could successfully take on COSATU in the factories through its newborn union.

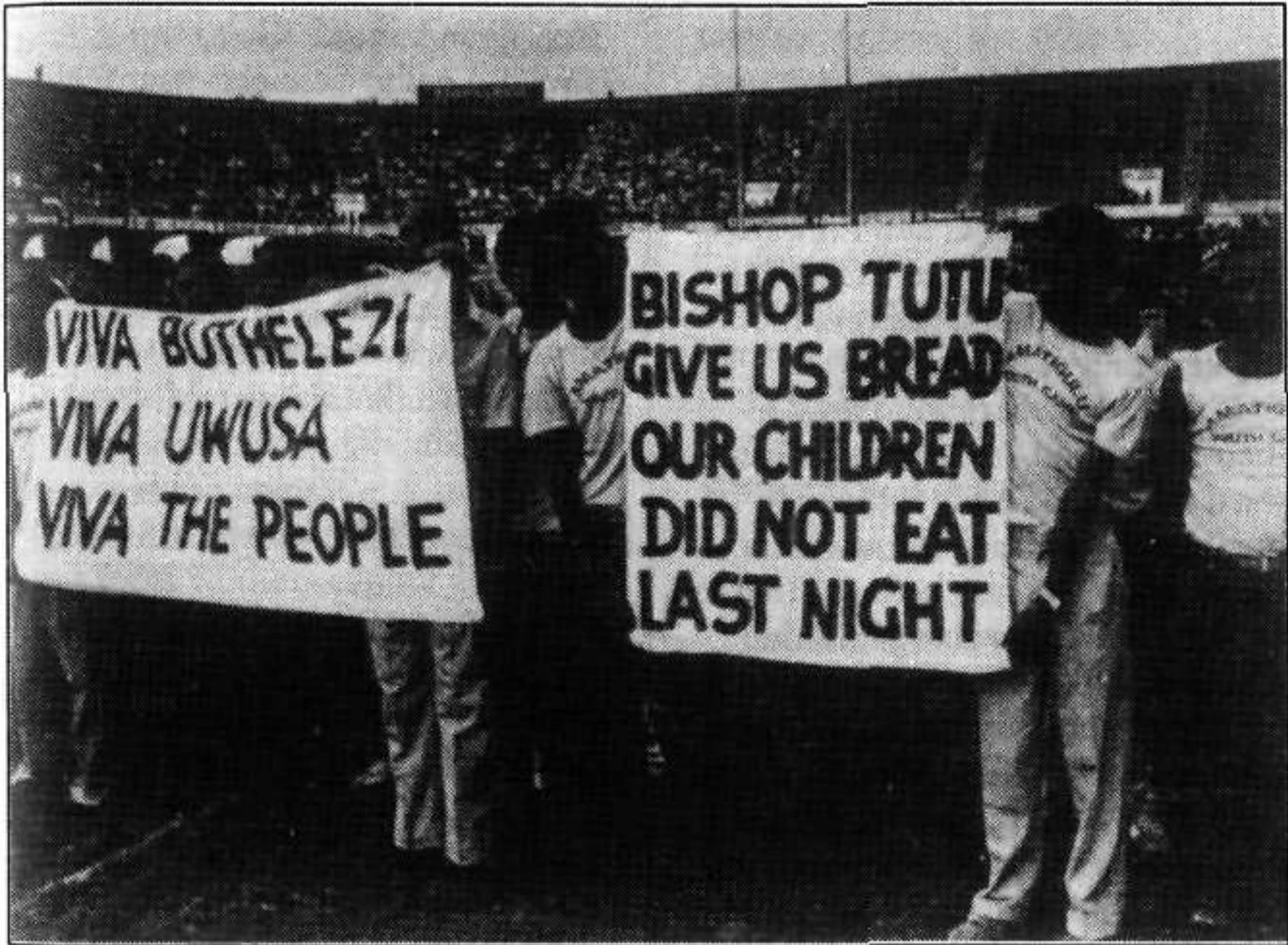
COSATU affiliates had been campaigning for May Day as paid holiday since 1984. Planning for the 1986 May Day rallies to be held in Durban, Hammarsdale, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith and Newcastle were undertaken by a planning committee set up by COSATU Regional Committee which also set up a liaison committee for May Day with the UDF. The UWUSA publicity led to some confusion and in many

instances unions had to clarify the issues of disinvestment and the UWUSA rally. Most unions held meetings to discuss the day and to mobilise workers attendance at the rally. There was no conflict in the factories over the two rallies.

However, in the townships at-

and his home burnt.

The UDF, NIC and UCC attempted to mobilise for the COSATU rallies through pamphlets and house visits. There was considerable tension in the weeks before the rallies as communities speculated about possible violence



UWUSA launch - attacking sanctions

Photo: Billy Paddock

tacks on individual unionists continued. On 26 April Thami Mohlami, COSATU regional secretary was shot at and his home was petrol bombed. An Inkatha youth member was arrested in connection with this attack. In Northern Natal MAWU Vice-President and Alusaf shopsteward, Vilane, was shot at

on the day.

For all this, the COSATU rallies were very well attended by an estimated 28 000 people of which 9000 were youth from the local communities. COSATU and UDF speakers addressed the rallies. There was one recorded violent incident after the Durban COSATU

rally at Curries Fountain, when an Umlazi youth was shot dead on Berea station. A local community councillor was arrested for the murder.

The Labour Monitoring Group (LMG), recorded the highest industrial stayaway the region had seen up to then.

Shopsteward's views on COSATU rally

All the COSATU shopstewards interviewed went to the COSATU May Day rally as did many of the workers they represented.

COSATU members were loyal to their federation, for as one shopsteward said, "COSATU is the only organisation fighting for workers rights. Most workers believed that COSATU is the real organisation which represents workers."

The shopstewards knew of some who had gone to the UWUSA rally to hear UWUSA's aims, to listen to their leader, because jobs were being offered, or because they were rounded up from hostels, townships or rural areas and forced to. In one factory which is known as a particularly strong and militant factory shopstewards went to the rally after being threatened by Inkatha supporters. "Some workers told their councillors that we shopstewards were forcing them to go to the COSATU rally and not to Kings Park. So as a trick some (shopstewards) decided to go to Kings

Park." Shopstewards from this factory were under threat of attack and were living away from their homes to stay alive.

At one hostel, "The councillor called a meeting before the UWUSA launch. He asked the people questions such as 'Do you want to starve?' So the people said, 'No'. Then he said, 'Go to the UWUSA rally to express your feelings.'"

There were some, a minority, who went to neither rally, "because there were some rumours of the fight between the two. They feared for their lives because there were rumours that UWUSA would attack COSATU."

Shopsteward's views on UDF

For the first time in Natal there was active co-operation between the UDF and trade unions in organising and sharing a platform at the rally.

Most shopstewards interviewed were pleased at the participation of UDF in planning the May Day rally with COSATU. They saw such co-operation as strengthening their fight as workers.

* "I was glad of that because it showed me that they are both progressive and for workers."

* "It was good that workers and politicians were on the same platform fighting against capitalists. One cannot separate politics from the economy. It is a step forward."

* "Joint activities linked youth

and workers together, and encouraged youth-parent relationship."

* It was becoming clear that a worker is still a worker in the township."

* "I was happy because both fight for workers rights and both are being smashed by Inkatha."

Only two COSATU shopstewards interviewed were unhappy at UDF's participation in the organisation of the rally. One of these said "Our policy is not to affiliate to any political organisation. This will make our task difficult."

The other said, "I don't think a worker movement should be deeply involved in a political movement. As workers we can participate in some issues in the community, but not as a workers' movement. Some issues like rents workers cannot avoid. But we must draw lessons from the past, from older unions like SACTU. By deep political involvement factory issues get left behind and too much time (is spent) over political issues."

Two other COSATU shopstewards thought the UDF participation was good but were somewhat wary that some others were not happy as they felt COSATU would fall under UDF control and become the frontline of the ANC. As one said:

"For me it was good but others thought COSATU would fall under the control of the UDF. Others believe UDF is political and they want an organisation solely for workers."

Most of the shopstewards said

that the UDF has support. This was seen as being mainly among youth and because the UDF took up struggles for genuine change.

* "Most of the children support UDF. The children today know what they want. And the want change."

* "They have support because they are fighting the people's struggle. They are on the side of the people."

* "They are opposed to the system that oppressed us".

The shopstewards saw UDF as not having organisational structures, but saw this as a result of harassment by the State and Inkatha.

Shopsteward's views on UWUSA

Most shopstewards viewed the formation of UWUSA as a deliberate attempt to divide and disrupt COSATU and weaken workers organisation. The emphasis on Zulu organisation went against union principles.

The vast majority of COSATU shopstewards said that workers they represented were unhappy at the formation of UWUSA. They saw UWUSA as dividing COSATU, as 'a bosses' union', an 'amabutho federation', 'supportive of free enterprise and not for workers.' Shopstewards said of workers' responses to UWUSA,

* "They said it is not a workers' federation, it came to oppress them."

* It was seen as disorganising the organised."

* "Inkatha just wanted to do away with COSATU."

* "Workers did not like UWUSA. They said UWUSA was formed by management and members were puppets for management."

* "Workers say UWUSA is not progressive. It is not for workers. It is a federation of *amabutho*. It came to destroy workers."

* "Some said that Buthelezi 'has failed to do his job, now he's jumping to labour'. They said they never saw a government organising unions."

* "They said, 'Inkatha and its union is out to blind them, while COSATU is busy enlightening them.'"

Four COSATU shopstewards said that workers were confused and unsure how to respond to UWUSA. Two others said that workers were not disturbed as UWUSA has no members.

At the time of interviewing, (September - November 1986) all COSATU shopstewards knew of attempts made by UWUSA to organise in factories around Durban, Newcastle, Vryheid, Hlobane, Kwa Zulu. The shopstewards said that UWUSA had gone about organising through getting access from management, through support from Inkatha members inside factories, by using threats and the support of vigilantes, by using ethnicity and slurs against COSATU for having

an Indian leading, by promising jobs and through extensive use of the media.

"They are helped by a supporter of Inkatha inside the factory. If workers refuse he fills in the form himself and gives it to management. In Hlobane vigilantes came and asked all those who did not support a Zulu union, and fighting broke out."

Only three of the shopstewards interviewed had themselves been subject to threats of violence. One had to leave home for three months, another received threatening phone calls and the third was present during an attack on COSATU members by an UWUSA impi. Others had heard of UWUSA attempts to get workers to join through use of force. Shopstewards had heard of the conflicts between Inkatha and COSATU unions in the Northern Natal areas. "It proved that Inkatha is not all for peace."

None of the COSATU shopstewards thought that UWUSA would win workers support. This was because UWUSA did not "not organise like we do, they have no experience of organisation, they are not worker controlled, and they work with the bosses and (KwaZulu) government."

* "Workers see that no leader who is a capitalist can lead the working class. They are not using strategies workers are used to in recruiting members."

* "Workers have been long in

their unions. They know of the struggles they fought. Most UWUSA leadership has no factory floor experience so no one would ditch their own union for such."

COSATU unions and membership were seen as being critical of UWUSA generally.

"Because UWUSA is not worker controlled. Rather management controlled."

* "There is no strong reason why workers have to run away from COSATU to join a new federation."

* "They are unhappy because UWUSA is formed to divide workers into their ethnic groups. UWUSA is perpetuating the idea that COSATU is for Ponds and Indians. So because Inkatha knows that Natal is predominantly Zulu it tries to win over all the Zulus so that COSATU would flop."

Interestingly, even the two shopstewards who were Inkatha members in their townships were not supportive of UWUSA, being jealous protectors of their trade unions at work.

"To tell you the truth there's no other union that has benefits like the one I have so I can never allow them (UWUSA) to come. My union disagrees with UWUSA. They say it was formed under a political wing."

Thus although Inkatha had resonance among workers and in the townships in general, this far from guaranteed support for a trade union set up by Inkatha. Only three shopstewards thought that UWUSA

would pose a serious threat to workers unity. However, shopstewards were aware of the disorganising potential of UWUSA, particularly through its Inkatha link, and they took this into account in talking about the way forward.

Shopstewards views on Inkatha

Some of the shopstewards interviewed thought that Inkatha had considerable support. This was seen to be the result of Zulu identification, loyalty to chiefs, the influence of councillors, and in some cases through coercion. The majority, however, said Inkatha had no support because it had failed to show results and had been discredited through the violence perpetrated by Inkatha supporters.

* "It is seen that they can't keep promises. The community is not openly criticising it but they are against it."

* "Some people are loyal to their chiefs."

Inkatha was seen as having lost support in recent years:

* "Since 1976 I don't think they have much support. They were well organised before, but are less well organised at present."

* "People saw during the August troubles that Inkatha supporters were killing (people) and it is not clear to them."

In Lamontville people did not support Inkatha "as they predomi-

nantly support UDF."

* "Inkatha only divides the community."

But as one shopsteward said, even though there are "not many supporters of Buthelezi, some respect him as chief. They see the mistakes of Inkatha but the chief still has the people's support. Workers say he is good because he has not accepted independence." In one factory of about 1000 workers the shopsteward said that there were about ten workers who supported Inkatha. He then qualified this by saying, "They support Mtwana rather than Inkatha. He is the chief."

The way forward

The majority view amongst shopstewards was that they and their trade unions should educate the memberships better and that they should initiate more involvement in township issues. In the first case, they felt that workers, through discussion and seminars, should strive for a clearer awareness of the political life around them. In the latter case, there was an argument that, "unions should extend their work to political matters and should not be confined to the work situation only."

They could not leave community issues unattended because conflict outside the factories was affecting relations and dividing memberships inside e.g., Pondo versus Zulu conflicts, Indian versus African

conflicts and so on. One of the shopstewards stated that, "We need strong organisation among ourselves. Our mistake was not getting involved in the community. We said our struggle was in the factory only. At that time it was right. But now we need to become stronger in the community."

Most of them insisted that trade unions could still achieve a lot despite the political climate of the time. "They are the only organisation" argued a shopsteward, "that educates workers on democracy and participation... Trade unions, go beyond tribal links and emphasise non-racialism."

The majority also felt that the UDF was unable to initiate any crucial campaign or action in Durban because it was under direct attack from the government and from Inkatha. But despite such limitations some shopstewards insisted that whatever the cost, closer links needed to be forged between the unions and the UDF. Finally, half of the shopstewards pinned their hopes on Nelson Mandela's release and leadership, as the only possible resolution of conflict in Natal. Twelve of them, that is a third of those interviewed, were fatalistic; no-one or no organisation could resolve the conflict in Natal in the foreseeable future. They could only see violence, conflict and a protracted struggle ahead of them.

Postscript 1988

Sixteen months after these interviews, six shopstewards were approached again for a retrospective review. All were in agreement that 1987 was a year of extreme hardships and unforeseen difficulties. From their accounts five issues crystallised as central and need further comment:

1. UWUSA's failure

UWUSA's attempts to roll back COSATU failed. Yet it remained an "irritation" in many factories as many decisions on shopfloor issues were vigorously resisted by UWUSA members. Nevertheless, in all the factories they knew about from their Branch Executive Committees, UWUSA failed to attract more than a handful of supporters.

2. Involvement in the community

Community involvement increased at three basic levels:

* Most shopstewards got involved in their individual capacity, as community residents. They involved themselves in township issues and especially in Umlazi, Lamontville, Newtown and Clermont, they managed to build strong relationships with youth groups. This

often misled residents to think that the entire organised strength of the unions was behind them; or that COSATU members were becoming more active, which was not entirely a true reflection of the situation.

* Some of them developed a more structured relationship, primarily through one shopsteward council. Through this a better relationship between youth groups, residents and shopstewards was beginning to emerge.

* They were all aware that COSATU had nationally a more direct relationship with Congress-aligned organisations. But none of them were personally involved in meetings as regards this alliance at leadership levels.

Finally, most of the shopsteward's families in the broader study, and all of the ones interviewed in 1988, resided in the Natal/Kwa Zulu countryside. Whereas their physical communities were in the urban areas, their real homes were further afield in areas which were impervious to trade union organisation and ruled by headmen and chiefs. For them community involvement also meant involvement in their homestead areas. All agreed that they had no lever through which to challenge rural corruption and poverty. And due to the escalation of conflict between COSATU and Inkatha, all down-played their trade union involvement when they were in the countryside.

3. Different political lines

This community involvement, together with the more political direction COSATU was initiating, created tensions and in some instances conflict within unions over political "lines" and methods of struggle. Most tension was emanating from two issues; the adoption of the Freedom Charter by unions and COSATU, and methods of action over political issues. In the former case, all felt that officials were to blame for the tensions as workers were more or less in agreement.

Yet the shopstewards themselves were in sharp disagreement. Two of them argued that the Freedom Charter should be adopted the "MAWU way", as a minimum demand. At the same time a more socialist perspective should be developed. One shopsteward strongly objected to "all this talk of socialism" - he called it a foreign ideology and he saw it as an obstacle to freedom. For him the Charter was a question of principle; it was not an issue to be made into a minimum demand.

One shopsteward attacked Charterists for being pro-capitalist. Two shopstewards were worried that COSATU's political stance confirmed all of chief Buthelezi's insinuations about COSATU being an ANC front. They wanted a more neutral role for unions, leaving membership free to participate in any political camp they chose to.

Much disagreement arose also from the methods of action that COSATU affiliates were adopting. The disagreement was between shopstewards, but also between them and their memberships. All of them agreed that direct action, whether in the workplace or in the community could publicise and demonstrate protests and disaffection. But they were divided over which were the best forms of action, some favouring shopfloor campaigns - sleep-ins, go-slow, stoppages, demonstrations and so on - others favouring stayaways.

All agreed that there had been too many calls for such actions and they felt they were not able to "pull them through". They were sceptical about whether their membership were able to sustain direct forms of action indefinitely. All of them were also worried about the continuing readiness of youth groups in the townships to call on them for major confrontation. Most stoppages in 1987, though, were about working conditions and wage disputes, even in these workers were beginning to get "action-shy".

4. Problems in union structures

1987 was for most of them a frustrating experience for a further three related reasons:

- * They had no access to information save through rumours in the township, on the shopfloor and

through office-bearers reports. This made them rather cautious.

* Save factory-floor meetings, all other meetings they attended throughout 1987 within COSATU structures were ill-attended.

* Most of the time despite decisions taken at meetings, workers would act in different ways or not act at all, which undermined their ability to guarantee mass support for campaigns: "They would agree or endorse a decision at a meeting but they would go and not implement it". All of them stressed that despite such "slackness" all the structures survived.

5. What is unity?

They all agreed that the task ahead would be to build "unity" on factory floors, between factory floors, within unions, at local level, within COSATU and so on. But such unity at this stage means different things to them.

For two unity means unity with the national democratic movement. For two it meant unity of all wor-

kers despite political affiliation, that is worker unity first and alliances later. The other two were vaguely hinting at a unity over common principles of practice, e.g. with all those who organise on a democratic basis. Yet without unity, they all argued, neither the State's onslaught, nor the managerial counter-offensive could be stopped.

In short, in the words of one shopstewards:

"Workers have advanced themselves on the factory floor. Workers have been finally recognised as important by communities - workers are not just 'rubbishes' or 'nothings', people sing about them. Most of my brothers understand how they are exploited, and why they are pushed around as blacks. To get here we have achieved a lot. But we sloganise about "amandla" ... we don't have it yet. We don't have the power, or the magic ability, the **muti**, to change things yet ... We know that too, and that is also an advance. As the bible says we are in the wilderness, but we know we are going to places like Canaan"...

Thank you

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