

## 2. Ambivalence on Violence

Not all that long ago Natal was seen as an island of tranquility in the sea of violence which engulfed most of the rest of the country. This comparative calm was often attributed to the strong presence of Inkatha in the province.

All that has now changed. Natal, and Pietermaritzburg in particular, has become the centre of violence, while in other regions it has subsided. People associated with Inkatha are as much a part of it as anyone else. Ordinary people go in terror. If you ask them what is happening where they live the invariable answer is "The people are killing each other." If you ask them why, they invariably blame it on rivalry between the UDF and Inkatha. If you ask them who is to blame, they blame one side sometimes, sometimes the other, as often as not both.

Both groups stand publicly committed to non-violence, yet it is quite plain that many of their supporters do not take that commitment seriously. Why should they when it is hard to recall a single instance of either taking disciplinary action against one of its members for a violent act, either in Natal or anywhere else?

There is a serious credibility gap facing all the extra-parliamentary groups between what their leaders say about violence and what their followers do and it flows directly from a consistent failure on the part of the leadership,

over the years, to act against the violent actions of their own supporters.

It is this failure in the past whose present consequence is a life of terror for ordinary, decent people. And there has been another consequence. Where, before, violence was sometimes the last resort of some elements of the extra-parliamentary groups, it is now often the first. There is a recent example.

In 1979, when the fares were put up on the bus routes serving the Northern Natal resettlement areas of Ezakheni and Osizweni, the people decided to boycott the buses and walk. They did so, some of them over 40 kilometres a day, for weeks, until the fares came down. In November 1987 the taxi fares in the small Natal Midlands town of Mooi River were put up. The almost immediate reaction was to burn the taxis. To boycott the taxis would have involved most people who used them in a walk of little more than five kilometres a day.

There are many reasons, economic, social, the state of emergency, to explain this changed attitude but one at least has been the highly ambivalent position of much of the leadership of all the main extra-parliamentary organisations in recent years, to the use of violence by their own adherents.□

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