

Pietermaritzburg : the first real study of a complicated tragedy

LA tells ANC : 'Put the country first!'

THE KwaZulu Legislative Assembly's Caucus has called on the African National Congress Mission-in-Exile to stop diverting the black struggle away from apartheid and into black-on-black confrontation, seeking party political successes against Inkatha.

The Caucus statement calls on the ANC and associated organisations to heed the call of the KwaZulu Chief Minister for black unity in a multi-strategy approach, and to employ this in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area; to put aside the temptation to put party interests above the interests of South Africa.

"We perceive the country of our birth to be in a crisis situation as the politics of violence races against the politics of negotiation to

bring about a one-party socialist state. We perceive the South African Government's recalcitrance in the face of legitimate internal and external demands to scrap apartheid as fanning the upward spiralling of violence.

"We perceive the escalation of violence, whether it be from the State under the national state of emergency or from revolutionaries committed to bringing about change by making South Africa ungovernable through violence, as detrimental to progress in the black struggle for liberation.

"We perceive the total necessity for black unity in the final push to bring about the eradication of apartheid and the establishment of a just society."

THE Inkatha Institute for South Africa has produced a preliminary study on the crisis in Pietermaritzburg.

The report details economic, psychological and political factors relevant to the situation.

Its conclusion was that these three components are completely inter-related.

Research was carried out throughout the entire area over which the endemic violence has spread in the past two-and-a-half years, namely Edendale and its surrounding areas including Sobantu, Impali, Ashdown, Willowfontein, the New Politique area and Vulindlela.

The first question the study attempted to answer was: Is the UDF/Inkatha conflict really the prime and dominating factor? If not, what were the basic factors leading to the current crisis?

The following are excerpts from the analysis which the Institute is continually updating. For instance, its latest research is concentrating particularly on the criminal elements involved.

The researcher consulted both pro-UDF and pro-Inkatha individuals and groups. However, the study and conclusions were based on the attitudes and views of 98 ordinary people who live in the townships concerned.

Interviews were structured around:

- Their personal and family situation
- Their ideas and attitudes towards township violence and its causes
- Their work status



Courtesy The Daily News

A police officer with some of the weapons confiscated during the fighting

• Various other issues including their ideas of how to solve the crisis, education and so on.

Living conditions

All the townships around Edendale are nothing but the illegitimate products of separate development. The inhabitants are workers, middle-class people, unemployed, housewives and retired persons. Many are the victims of forced removals.

The locations are situated far away from town, isolated from bus routes and most remain completely undeveloped with untarred roads, few or no street lights, no drainage, poor service of bucket latrines, few water taps and water supply shortages. Electricity is scarce and too expensive to afford. The increase in rents has created more problems.

The poor living conditions worsened after the floods and damage was estimated at between R5-million and R10-million. Hundreds, probably thousands, of huts were destroyed in the area.

Telephones were cut, roads were closed, electricity was discontinued and repair work stopped due to the violence which has also disrupted community life, with creches and schools being destroyed.

The roots of the violence

The researcher was repeatedly told: *"The chief cause of the violence is unemployment and frustration . . ."*

Unemployment is as endemic in the

township as is violence.

According to latest statistics, over half of the estimated population of these townships are in the working age group.

Analyses by other researchers has revealed that in these areas 30 percent of the labour force were unemployed in 1986, the figure being higher amongst young people and women.

About 80 percent of the unemployed were under 35 years of age, 46 percent less than 25 years old and 15 percent under 20 years of age.

Almost a third of the male unemployed have never been employed. Over half of the women are in the same situation.

More than 42 percent of the unemployed have at least some secondary school education.

Inkatha Institute research found that of the men interviewed for this study, 85 percent had been out of work for more than six months, eight percent for more than two months and the rest were partially employed.

The unemployment figure relating to mothers, wives or girlfriends of the respondents was in the vicinity of more than 90 percent.

The economically depressed state of the area offers little or no opportunity for regular work.

Added to this, people who used to be employed in the "informal" sector (selling dagga, vegetables, dried meat etc) are now afraid to indulge in such activities because their lives and belongings are threatened.

Those who once cultivated vegetables in their backyards or in the open fields say they are frightened to do so because warring factions destroy their crops.

The situation is described by residents as "traumatic."

The consequences

What are the basic consequences of such an increasingly volatile and restless unemployed labour force?

The wrath and frustration of unemployed people who face a hungry future has proved fundamental to the causes of spontaneous outbreaks of conflict and violence.

For instance, following the Sarmcol strike in 1985, the Mpophomeni township faced some of its most violent scenes ever. Two workers, one alleged to be a "scab" (strike breaker) were killed and a number of houses stoned and set alight.

The discussions with residents of the townships revealed that:

- 15 percent of those interviewed had an income of between R250 to R300 per month.

- 60 percent had an income between R150 to R200 per month.

- 15 percent had an income of less than R150 per month.

These figures indicate the extent of the poverty in the locations.

Another important factor in this vicious cycle is that a very large number of people in the townships are dependent on handouts and relief

supplied by Christian agencies and other organisations.

Psychological stress

The Inkatha Institute quoted research by others showing that the loss of a job leads to anxiety and severe psychological stress, which are effects of economic instability and poverty.

The majority of people interviewed expressed themselves in terms of self inadequacy and depression. This depression was directly linked with guilt feelings because breadwinners felt that their families suffered because of their unemployment.

A middle-aged person who lost his job following the closure of a factory said:

"It is very depressing to know that there is no chance to work again. Who will take as an employee someone who is over 40? As a result I feel bad because I see myself as a useless father and bread-winner."

The Institute researcher noted that a "frightening aspect" of the unemployment situation in the Pietermaritzburg area was that only "a handful" of individuals regarded their unemployed status as temporary.

They believed that because of circumstances in the townships, no employer would be prepared to offer

them jobs as bus routes and transport from and within the townships have invariably been disrupted.

The researcher witnessed several important effects of the unemployment issue among the residents. There were signs of serious disorientation and confusion regarding the future. There was a direct relationship between joblessness and the violence and a great many people in the community were shocked at both their personal and the collective experiences of violence.

High anxiety and distress characterised many people interviewed because money was scarce and attempts at job-seeking had proved fruitless.

"At this stage anxiety and distress can easily be transformed into aggression and militancy of all sorts," said the report.

There were "significant factors" leading to the correlation and connection between unemployment and conflict/violence.

In the course of conversations and interviews with the residents, the researcher assessed what the *perceived* feelings of the people regarding the violence were. In short, *why* the violence was the result of poverty and desperation coupled with the increasing criminal activity of certain

sections of the population.

UDF/Inkatha conflict

The UDF/Inkatha conflict was not rated highly among those interviewed. Only 12 percent of the people regarded this political issue as a vital part of the violent situation in their areas.

The words more often used were not "Inkatha", "UDF", "Buthelezi" or "Gumede", but "thugs", "poverty", "sickness", "starving", "no jobs", "no prospects of work" and "crime".

An old worker who was fired by a chemical factory after 23 years of service summed up the situation as follows:

"Now I can feel how having no job is a very bad thing. I know that now people will turn to crime to make ends meet. No job, no food, no clothing, no cigarettes. What can the young ones do, but move around and destroy? For one rand these days, they loot the supermarkets, the outside world says, look at these blacks they loot the capitalists. They don't know, the kids don't hit the capitalists, they loot the place so they can have something to eat and drink. It seems it's the only way these days."

The psychological effects of this deadlocked economic stagnation has



Courtesy The Daily News

Rolling fields that have become killing fields

led to what is known as "senseless" violence among groups of young people who are called "thugs", "gangsters" and "tsotsis" by the residents.

The Institute's report emphasised:

It must be made clear from the start that a very large number of people killed in the Pietermaritzburg violence are not political or ideological adherents of either the UDF or Inkatha. A very large number of the deaths and violence are not related to politics/ideology in any way. They are the result of direct attacks of young, unemployed, apolitical criminals whose only allegiance is to destruction and havoc as a means to material ends.

Criminal elements

Because of the state of emergency, the report emphasised, it is impossible to really identify the extent of such criminal activities and draw conclusions or inferences. However, from discussions with township residents belonging to both the UDF and Inkatha, it became clear that many deaths which are *supposedly* politically motivated are nothing but "revenge killings."

Therefore, when a UDF or Inkatha sympathiser has his/her house set alight and he or she is killed, it is inevitable that the opposition political organisations will accuse their rivals of the killing. Such an incident was spelled out to the researcher by an interviewee who witnessed such an incident.

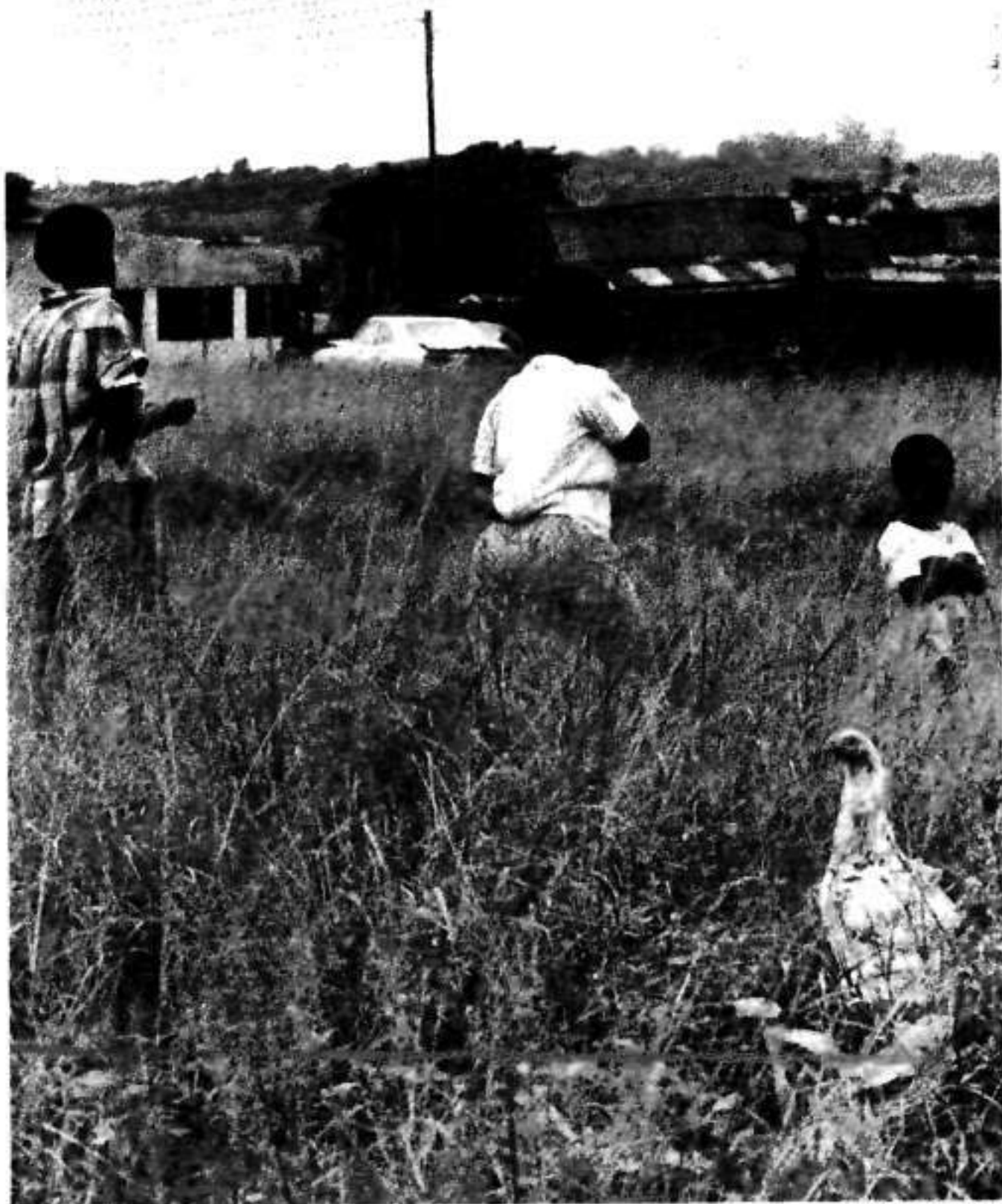
"I was sitting with my friend Edward outside the bottle store. Three of us were drinking there. Edward was dragged by six guys towards the open field. They shot him three times. They took off his trousers, his money, his shirt, even his underpants. They shot him in the head. Edward was no UDF, he was more Inkatha, but not really involved. These guys were not UDF, I knew them, Edward had some problems with them after they attacked his brother's shop. I know who the people are, they are tsotsies but the UDF might be blamed for the killing. Edward will not like this, but I know there will be revenge."

The Inkatha Institute researcher noted that one of the "most crucial" elements was the role of the criminals in the townships concerned.

The "comrades" (who use this term about themselves) were "on the rampage" in the Pietermaritzburg townships.

A large number, the report noted, started their "careers" as politically conscious youths — linked with either the UDF or Inkatha.

Starting off as "negators" of the system of inferior education, they also held uncompromising positions against the police and other instru-



Courtesy: The Daily News

Normality by day . . . terror by night

ments of the State. With the passage of circumstances they transformed their actions into thuggery, hooliganism and indiscriminate attacks and killings.

Their former ideologies had lost their appeal as the economic situation in the country generally, and in the townships in particular, worsened. The "comrades" took on a new attitude.

The "comrades" (basically) operate all over the country and use similar tactics and strategies in their "deadly game." They kill political persons indiscriminately but also indulge in murdering ordinary people in the townships so that rival organisations will be blamed for the killings.

The Institute report noted that various "political murders" committed by criminal elements were carefully planned and that activists of varying political persuasions were killed because it was believed that the murders would destroy any seeds of alliances between various organisations.

"It is the belief of many people interviewed in these townships that

the criminal element has taken strong advantage of the UDF/Inkatha political/ideological conflict," the report said.

The "political" killings are only one aspect of their activity. The "comrades" rampage in the townships. They control the drug and sections of the drinking traffic and many taxis.

In the correct perspective, the "comrades" are the direct product of township life and violence. They are the product of political oppression which deprives the youth of the country of proper education and employment. Unemployment and starvation have killed all hope for their future.

These elements are seen by township residents as a frightening, anti-social, criminal, faceless and parasitic breed whose only friend is the darkness. They operate in gangs or packs. Gangs have between 15 and 25 members but the number varies in different townships.

The power they have recently acquired in the Pietermaritzburg townships has led them into un-

disciplined "revenge" against their fellow citizens and society at large. These "comrades" have no respect for anybody: not the State, political organisations, older people or workers.

They have jumped on to the bandwagon of an unprecedented youth revolt and are giving it a special content and meaning. No organisation or leadership committed to a democratic South Africa can condone or be indifferent to the activities of these criminal elements.

Dealing with the "comrades"

The report stressed that "even if and when Inkatha and the UDF decide on a 'truce' in the townships, the basic problem will remain."

Unless both organisations join the struggle towards the complete elimination of the activities of the thugs, there is no chance for real peace in the townships.

The vital question remained, therefore: If this could happen in a place as small as the Pietermaritzburg townships; if these youth could not be controlled, disciplined or eliminated or neutralised, what hope exists for the overthrow of the apartheid regime which is a million times stronger and more powerful than these killer youths?

The political factor: UDF versus Inkatha?

When the researcher started the investigation, several leading figures and activists in the UDF were consulted. The attitude of the UDF officials, however, indicated that discussions/interviews with the leadership would create something very different from a balanced viewpoint.

The "stubbornness and inflexibility" of the UDF leadership indicated that the best strategy in getting a balanced view on the violence was discussions and interviews with middle-ranking and more specifically lay people belonging to both the UDF and Inkatha.

UDF officials indicated, for example, that *all* townships were controlled by the organisation. It was known, however, that this was not a true reflection of the situation. It was decided that the truth (or part of the truth) could only be gauged by talking to ordinary people.

The "vital question" arising on the political front is who controls (in political and ideological terms) the Pietermaritzburg townships? Inkatha or the UDF?

The researcher found that ordinary people who live in the townships are "highly ambivalent" on this question. With a few exceptions either way

regarding various areas like Imbali and sections of Edendale, there are *no* clear-cut boundaries "separating" UDF and Inkatha supporters.

The report added: "The continuous attacks by the UDF/COSATU and Inkatha leadership against each other does not solve the problem, in exactly the same way as the problem cannot be solved with the neutralisation or elimination of the criminal elements."

People in both the UDF and Inkatha had lost count of deaths, arsons, and other attacks. Many, the researcher commented, had also lost the *essence* of the difference between attack and defence.

During the period in which the survey was carried out, the researcher was made aware by residents of the fact that completely uncontrolled, heavily-armed groups of men, belonging to both political and criminal groups, the former out of touch with their leadership, roamed around the townships in a disastrous binge of vengeance and violence.

The report quoted Inkatha Secretary-General, Dr Oscar Dhlomo, as having stated that allegations of coercion regarding so-called "forced registration drives" were not specific and did not enable Inkatha to investigate.

However, coercion on the part of Inkatha was "strictly contrary to the dictates of the movement and Inkatha leadership would not tolerate such behaviour." (*Weekly Mail*, October 30 to November 5, 1987.)

In townships where the lives and properties of people are supposedly

protected by the Police and the SADF, the Institute report said, groups belonging to both the UDF and Inkatha and criminal elements walk around the neighbourhoods openly carrying firearms, pangas and knives.

The SAP and the SADF

The report detailed the presence and activities of the SAP and the SADF in the townships and allegations of partiality on both sides. Restrictions on funerals were criticised by both the UDF and Inkatha.

Dr Oscar Dhlomo, Secretary-General of Inkatha, was quoted as expressing "serious reservations" about the presence of the army in the townships and said that under normal circumstances Inkatha was against the army becoming involved in the townships. He added (*Natal Witness*, November 6, 1987):

"However, both the organisations have failed to solve the problem and we must now try harder than before to come together so that we can demand that the SADF moves out of the township."

Conclusions

The violence in the Pietermaritzburg area is multi-dimensional.

Three major factors are:

- The socio-economic conditions in the townships — poverty, starvation and unemployment.
- The criminal element which is uncontrolled.
- The UDF/Inkatha conflict.



Another homeless family . . . a makeshift shelter for people whose home has been destroyed in the violence