

EDITORIAL COMMENT

The violence — getting it in perspective

WHAT is going on in Pietermaritzburg? What can be done to halt the spiralling violence?

The media for the most part portray events as a power struggle between Inkatha and the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its affiliates. Inkatha and its President, Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, have been at the receiving end of a barrage of biased coverage tending to imply that the solution is in their hands. This is quite simply not the case.

Few have placed the current issue in its historical perspective.

The roots of the current political conflict (which must be separated from equally important and crucial socio-economic and criminal factors) can be traced back to 1979, the year in which Inkatha held formal talks with the African National Congress in London.

The talks foundered when Inkatha made it clear, among other things, that it did not support the so-called "armed struggle" and would not act as an ANC surrogate within South Africa.

From that time onward Natal, and Durban in particular, became the target of an increasing number of bombings and other acts of sabotage and unrest-related incidents. By 1985 the number of serious attacks had climbed to 69.

The ANC's message was clear. It was out to destabilise Buthelezi and Inkatha in their own backyard. Having failed to persuade Inkatha to compromise its strategy of non-violence and negotiation in the struggle for liberation, the ANC set out to smash the movement and its leadership.

If Inkatha would not defer to the ANC as the "sole and authentic" voice of black South Africa, it would have to be taught a lesson.

A Radio Freedom address from Addis Ababa in November 1986 clearly set out the ANC's determination to deal with Dr Buthelezi. The broadcast, monitored by the BBC, called for "the people of South Africa to neutralise Gatsha, the snake which is poisoning the people of South Africa. It needs to be hit on the head."

The report added that the ANC needed to "perfect and strengthen our organisational capacity, particularly in the province of Natal."

The thrust is obvious. For years Natal and KwaZulu were renowned for the relative peace and stability in the region compared to the uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere throughout the country. Children went to school. Their parents went to work. There was little if any of the bloodshed and intimidation which characterised black areas in the Transvaal and the Cape in particular.

The leadership of KwaZulu and Inkatha were credited by many for this state of affairs.

And then the rot started and it did not start by accident.

Violence in Natal has, in recent years, almost always erupted in areas under "white control" or where the KwaZulu Government has no police functions or instruments to maintain law and order.

First it was KwaMashu, that most unhappy of areas that will for decades live with the bitter legacy of Cato Manor, to which it owes its origin. It was here that the first attempts were made to use the weapon of the school boycott to foment disorder.

Inkatha considers education as paramount and vigorously opposed the slogan; "Liberation Now, Education Later!" and the disruption of schooling for political purposes.

At that time KwaMashu was under white control. An enormous amount of energy was spent by Inkatha's leadership to stop the school boycotts and to halt the violence. While trouble simmered for years, it reduced considerably when the area fell under KwaZulu control in April last year.

Then it was the turn of Lamontville, another township under white control. At Chesterville stability has been absent for years. It too does not fall under KwaZulu, which cannot police the area in an effort to maintain the law and order so badly needed.

From there the action moved to Hambanathi, where ordinary people were subjected to months of brutality and the destruction of their property by so-called "comrades".

The only area under KwaZulu Government (administrative) control that has experienced a short period of serious violence is Umlazi. KwaZulu Police have only been functioning in the area since April this year.

Unrest in Umlazi broke out in 1985 when attempts were made by activists to render the township ungovernable. People were forced into handing over cash to be used for the "struggle." Non-compliance resulted in serious assaults and arson attacks. Youths ran riot, schools were closed, many badly damaged, and the violence spread into other areas including Inanda.

Those who had cars were forced to hand over the keys. Petrol was drained for homemade bombs. In a span of a few days damage to property amounted to more than R20 million.

Both the police and the army moved in but could not contain the lawlessness. Umlazi was not under the control of the KwaZulu Police at that time. When it became clear that the situation was getting worse, Inkatha mobilised its members and the violence was brought to a halt within hours.

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And now the scene has moved to Pietermaritzburg. Again the battleground is under white control. Yet again, the KwaZulu Government and its police force have no jurisdiction in the area.

If Inkatha and the KwaZulu Government are to blame, as so many allege, why is it that in areas under KwaZulu's control there has been relatively little violence over the years?

Why is it that people so readily forget that it is the declared policy of the ANC to make the country "ungovernable"?

Whether or not elements within the UDF act as a front for the ANC, there is no denying that the UDF has closely aligned itself with the ANC. Members of the UDF return from abroad with messages from the ANC.

Last September, for instance, UDF spokesman Maulana Farid Essack returned from a meeting with the ANC and reported that the ANC had said that "Inkatha is not part of the struggle."

Does this not explain in part what is going on in Pietermaritzburg?

It is equally important, of course, to look at the social forces which are also at work in black South African society. Explosive black anger is more often than not a result of what apartheid has done to the people. Decades of Government neglect and discrimination have taken their toll.

Black family life has, to a very large degree in some areas, disintegrated. Poverty, unemployment and overcrowding have resulted in a lowering of self esteem and deep-seated feelings of anger, inadequacy and hopelessness.

Black leaders including Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi are correct in blaming the violence on apartheid and today's generation of young are accurately described: "children of apartheid."

As far back as 1975, the then head of the University of Natal's Department of Psychiatry, Professor R. Cheetham, and Mrs Harriet Sibisi, then a Research Fellow at the University's Institute for Social Research, published a paper on the psychiatric problems encountered by young black adolescents.

They showed that escalating aggression, violence and depression were directly linked to the radical disruption of family life and what they called social "disorganisation."

They noted that the age-set group had disappeared and had been replaced by a loose heterogeneous group. This had brought forth aggressive behaviour, particularly among young men, formerly known as "tsotsis," but later generally known as thugs.

These youths today pose a serious threat to black communities and are widely feared because of their utter ruthlessness.

This is the seedbed into which people, with all manner of covert political agenda's, have directed their energies.

A "quick fix" is impossible.

This edition of Clarion Call attempts to strip away much of the emotional rhetoric, bias and propaganda which has so far characterised the debate on Pietermaritzburg. The KwaZulu Government and Inkatha are totally committed to peace and stability in the area.

They know that for this to be realised, a rapprochement between them and the ANC/UDF is crucial — as is the need to control criminal elements. Equally important, the hundreds of thousands of residents in the area must receive urgent assistance with their housing, employment and educational requirements.

A cure for the ills of Pietermaritzburg is not only a regional priority but one to which the country as a whole should contribute.
