

The fight for Maritzburg is far from being over

IF YOU visit the COSATU offices in Pietermaritzburg, you will be stopped by a permanent worker defence guard which protects the building day and night.

Things were not always like this at the COSATU offices. But the struggle for the right to meet, speak and organise in Pietermaritzburg is now one year old. And in that time hundreds and hundreds of black workers and their children have died — mainly at the hands of vigilante thugs.

COSATU workers have been forced by the situation to take every possible precaution to defend themselves and our organisation.

The conflict between Inkatha warlords and the COSATU/UDF alliance has been simmering for some years already. But in May 1987, when hundreds and thousands of workers and youth in the area stayed away to protest against the white elections, it began to come out in the open.

The conflict grows out of a situation of massive poverty, unemployment and landlessness. But its immediate cause is an attempt by Inkatha to take complete political control of the area after the May 5 and 6 stay-

away.

Up till then, neither Inkatha nor COSATU/UDF were dominant in the area. COSATU was fairly strong in the factories — with about 5 000 members in 50 factories — but both Inkatha and the UDF had relied on a small layer of active supporters. The majority of people in the area were not part of either grouping.

So when Inkatha warlords launched a massive recruiting drive in the middle of last year, they chose the COSATU/UDF alliance as their number one target. Thousands of ordinary people, put off by Inkatha's intimidatory recruiting style, were driven towards COSATU/UDF as the only defence available against Inkatha.

The situation rapidly developed into a civil war. At the beginning of the year, an average of ten people a day were dying in the fighting.

Despite nine successful interdicts brought by COSATU/UDF against well-known Inkatha warlords who were instigating or carrying out a lot of the violence, none of them were arrested or charged. Instead three of the COSATU applicants were murdered and two more seriously in-

jured.

In addition, hundreds of UDF and COSATU activists were detained; over 300 kitskonstabels were deployed in the townships and SADF/police forces completely occupied the area. In this way the death rate has fallen over the past three months — but the problems which gave rise to the war have not been solved. They have in fact been worsened by the massive state repression.

In addition, the efforts by COSATU/UDF to try and negotiate an end to the violence has been smashed by the withdrawal of Inkatha from the talks; the detentions of activists and the banning of the UDF. Clearly the state is not in favour of negotiated and peaceful settlement in Maritzburg.

While the level of violence is now lower in Maritzburg, it has flared up in a number of townships around Durban. There have been killings and petrol-bomb attacks in Inanda, KwaMashu, KwaNdengezi, Kwadabeka, Chesterville, Clermont, KwaMakhutha and Magabheni. It appears that this violence has again been triggered by Inkatha intimidation and recruitment campaigns in these areas.



Part of the huge crowd which attended a COSATU/UDF peace rally in Pietermaritzburg last year.

A leading activist from COSATU's Maritzburg local says: "We have always believed that we, the workers, are the only people who can defend ourselves.

"We are prepared to try, and to keep trying, with court interdicts and peace negotiations. But we will not relax for one minute our efforts to build our own self-defence, to mobilise the community against the vigilante forces who are attacking us and to take action to stop these attacks.

"If we had not organised

to defend ourselves, the democratic movement and COSATU would already have been dead here. And that would set the struggle back in our country."

The struggle for the right to organise in Maritzburg/Natal is far from over. Inkatha, backed fully by the armed forces of the state, is determined to impose its will there — in the same way that vigilante forces are trying to take control in townships all over the country.

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The struggle to defend COSATU and the democratic movement in Natal is not one for the workers of Natal alone. It is the task of our mass democratic organisations nationally to mobilise the maximum national defensive action for any region or sector of our movement which is under attack.

Inkatha men blamed for Mphophomeni murders



The funeral of Mphophomeni Youth Organisation members allegedly abducted and killed by Inkatha members.

NINE Inkatha members were found to be responsible for the deaths of two NUMSA SARMCOL shopstewards and the daughter of a SARMCOL striker after they were abducted from Mphophomeni township in December 1986 and murdered.

The finding of the Howick Inquest Court comes over two years after the murders. The Howick magistrate said the following people were responsible for the deaths:

Joseph Mabaso (late) — the assistant national youth organiser for Inkatha at the time of the murder.

Morris Thusi — an employee of the KwaZulu government and caretaker of the Mphophomeni Community hall at the time and seven members of the Inkatha Youth Brigade — all of whom had just completed a year's training at the Inkatha Youth training camp at the time of the murders.

In addition to this, the magistrate found that all the Inkatha witnesses whose evidence was challenged in court were "lying witnesses".

The magistrate said that others might also be found to be responsible for the murders — but that a

finding on this was not possible on the evidence presented to the inquest. The court is going to forward all details of the finding to the Attorney General for further investigation.

During the inquest a well-known Inkatha warlord, David Ntombela, and a number of other Inkatha members had to be disarmed after they came into court carrying guns.

The father of the murdered woman, Philip Mnikathi, is then alleged to have said: "Here are the dogs of Inkatha who entered the court with firearms. We must kill them." Inkatha warlord Ntombela laid a charge of crimen injuria against the comrade and he appeared in court before the inquest was even over.

He was sentenced to six months, suspended for four years.

The comrades murdered at Mphophomeni in 1986 were Phineas Sibiyi, the chairman of the SARMCOL shopstewards and of SAWCO, Simon Ngubane, a SARMCOL shop steward and leading player in the strikers' drama, "The Long March", and Flomenah Mnikathi, a youth activist. Alpheus Nkabinde, also a youth activist, was also murdered.