

# Winning Away Inkatha's Base

In a previous article, former General Workers Union organiser Mike Morris criticised COSATU's tactics in the ongoing conflict with both Inkatha and UWUSA in Natal. A senior COSATU official, writing in his personal capacity, agrees that COSATU blundered in attacking Inkatha at its December 1985 launch. But he argues that Morris' alternative strategy for dealing with Inkatha is flawed, and based on a now-rejected FOSATU position of the early 1980s.

Mike Morris' article *Lessons from May Day* (WIP 43), sets the stage for wider debate about Inkatha in Natal.

Although the Morris article focuses mainly on trade unions, it involves a debate which concerns all progressives struggling for an alternative society free of exploitation and oppression.

His contribution is a valuable eye-opener on the extent to which Inkatha organisation and political control has rooted itself in Natal. It is especially instructive to those outside the province who often underestimate the dimensions of the problem.

But there are serious shortcomings in Morris' suggestions as to how trade unions could tackle the Inkatha problem. His plan is to hold out against the Inkatha onslaught rather than to dislodge Inkatha from its politically dominant position in the province.

Given Inkatha's political clout, it cannot be correct to argue that the political terrain should generally be left alone. Trade unions should retreat, Morris says, to the arena in which they are dominant and safe: there they must consolidate against the Inkatha-linked United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), take up shop-floor struggles and discuss socialism.

Socialism cannot be born out of mere independent trade union struggle concentrated primarily on the shop floor. Socialism is not just an aim of struggle for workers in trade unions, it concerns the whole of society. It is a struggle to install working-class leadership, in the words of COSATU's policy resolutions, 'in all spheres of our society together with other progressive community organisations'.

Progressive trade unions are the most important layer of the working class,

certainly. However, they cannot bring about a transformation to socialism on their own and without involvement in political struggle.

It would be a different matter if Morris suggested that unions abandon a political profile as a tactic. But nowhere does Morris say that he sees it this way. Nowhere does he attempt to address himself to COSATU's well-known position on political struggle; nor does he spell out how his proposed strategy of political non-involvement will relate to the national political campaigns to which COSATU is committed (for example pass laws, education, forced removals etc). He appears to show scant regard for the overall COSATU policy position.

It can thus be assumed the position he asserts is not a tactical one; he sees himself at odds with COSATU's general programme of concerted and calculated involvement in the liberation struggle.

## REVIVING THE FOSATU LINE

What Morris presents as fresh ideas on advancing the socialist struggle in Natal are really the old, un lamented positions adopted by Natal FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) in its heyday.

Whenever FOSATU was faced with the challenge of involvement in struggle around a particular issue, it held up the independent working-class position as the red light. The working class was not consolidated enough to begin playing the leading role in 'community struggles', was the stock reply.

This position was coupled with an

equally dubious line on political alliances. 'Because we have members in both UDF and Inkatha, we cannot make alliances with either. To do so would be a source of division among workers'.

What could be more reactionary than to lump progressive civic and militant youth groups with Inkatha, and deal with all as the treacherous populists waiting to waylay the interests of the working class. This policy made it so much easier for Inkatha to consolidate huge political gains in Natal.

Now Morris wants to resurrect this position, which has become generally irrelevant to workers and the progressive labour movement. It goes without saying that workers as workers want to address themselves to conditions of oppression and exploitation outside of the factory. Issues such as rents, housing, education, influx control, unemployment and forced removals are firmly on the agenda for workers. COSATU and its unions have been compelled to take up these demands.

COSATU has also been forced to take a stand on the larger issues of apartheid, repression and the political demands of the liberation movement. Hence COSATU's preamble states: 'We... firmly commit ourselves to a united democratic South Africa, free from oppression and economic exploitation. We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of a united working class'.

It adds that a key objective is to 'encourage democratic worker organisation and leadership in all spheres of our society together with other progressive sectors of the community'.

Gone forever are the days when unionists could get away with the contradictory reasoning that 'workers must play the leading role in the struggle' and say in the same breath that 'unions should only enter the political terrain once they have consolidated on the shop floor'.

Today many workers suspect that, by and large, proponents of economism want to avoid political activism for the worst possible reason: that the state (or Inkatha in this case) will clobber those who engage politically.

It is difficult to see why else Morris is trying to resurrect the old strategic approach associated with FOSATU in Natal. On his own admission, it has not even thwarted the rise of Inkatha.

Morris is right that it was poor strategy for COSATU to launch its blistering attack against Inkatha at the federation's inauguration last year. The fierce Inkatha counterattack caught the unions in the region flat-footed. COSATU did not have a clear strategy that unions were geared to take forward and defend on the ground.

Further, such sweeping outbursts do little to highlight and exploit the contradiction between the thousands of passive members and the reactionary leadership. On the contrary, that leadership responds by typically whipping up feelings of tribalism, driving a wedge between Inkatha members and progressive groups.

Time and again the UDF, for example, has come off the loser after Buthelezi used the vast media resources at his disposal to slander the front.

Whatever strategy we adopt must take into account that thousands of workers are Inkatha members. The main concern should be to break the mass-base away from the leadership.

FOSATU responded to the reality of workers' support for Inkatha by avoiding the politics of the day altogether. It saw worker unity on the factory floor as all-important. COSATU, on the other hand, argues that the answer is to deepen workers' experience of political struggle.

The task is for unions (and other local mass organisations) to draw Inkatha members into struggles around issues which directly affect them. We will need to engage Inkatha as an organisation: perhaps even challenge it to come into particular campaigns. We know that Inkatha is not interested in taking up the issues through democratic mass struggle, but nevertheless we must challenge it to demonstrate its bankruptcy. This is part of the process of isolating the Inkatha hierarchy and dismantling its support.

During the Sarmcol struggle last year, Inkatha as an organisation was called in to be part of the support committee. After the first meeting, it pulled out. But the move made it easier to tap broad-based Inkatha support than it would otherwise have been.

Buthelezi, sensing the popular support for the Sarmcol strikers, belatedly tried to buy himself into that struggle

by issuing a statement of support.

Inkatha members among the Sarmcol strikers were thus exposed to the sterile politics of Inkatha. Through MAWU, they went on to form the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative, consolidating their primary allegiance to the union and democratic organisation.

In a similar vein, groups taking up resettlement in the Ladysmith area approached Inkatha for assistance. It made little more than token gestures. After all, the affected people were being removed from black spots into KwaZulu where they would fall under KwaZulu government jurisdiction. At this point Inkatha seemed more concerned with leading deputations to Pretoria for more land to effect the consolidation of KwaZulu than launching a major resistance struggle.

Although progressive organisations as such were not involved, this struggle weakened Inkatha support in the area.

The unions, as well as organisations like the UDF, need to be creative and find tactics of struggle that will draw Inkatha members into struggles over issues which directly affect them.

As always, decisions as to which struggles unions should link into, and the nature of such campaigns, should flow from thorough discussion in the structures.

This approach should be coupled with a vigorous education programme in the unions. By providing information, discussion and debate, the plan should be to peel away confusion and deepen understanding of issues. There must be thoroughgoing discussion of COSATU policy and resolutions. This should plug into discussion about an alternative society in which worker control predominates and where capitalism has been replaced by socialism.

A problem with education in many unions today is that resources and programmes are geared mainly to shop stewards. Unions should ask: how can we ensure that education is turned out to include wider union membership?

**VIOLENCE: THE DILEMMA OF DEFENCE**

The most difficult problem presented

by Inkatha is its violent attacks on union members and officials. It is unlikely that these will abate if unions confine themselves to factory-floor issues. On the one hand, Inkatha is acutely aware (and terrified to the point of paranoia) of the broad relationship between COSATU and UDF and its militant youth and student affiliates. Furthermore, by launching UWUSA, Inkatha has brought the conflict onto the shop floor. Unable to match the organising skills of the progressive unions, UWUSA turns increasingly to strong-arm tactics. As many violent incidents involving unionists stem from shop-floor clashes as from political parrying in the townships.

Progressive groups thus face the dilemma of either taking the violence lying down or defending themselves. Where people have resisted attacks, the impis have invariably been routed. At the NECC conference, as well as at schools in Lamontville earlier this year, the impis were repulsed and severely embarrassed. Inkatha was at pains to deny that it orchestrated the attacks.

Understandably, progressive unions and township groups are reluctant to raise the levels of violence. The unions' forte is democratic working-class organisation and essentially this is the way the struggle will be advanced.

However, it has become imperative to consider defence in the townships. Shop stewards and progressive youth have found themselves natural allies in the bid to protect their families and themselves in the townships.

It is also politically important for progressive elements to stand up to Inkatha coercion. For continued defeats at the hands of the impis will eat up morale in trade union ranks. And Inkatha doubters toying with the idea of switching loyalties must have confidence that to do so would not necessarily be suicidal.

There is no easy solution to the Inkatha problem. Any strategy that will succeed in loosening the tight control of Inkatha and opening up the real way forward will involve initial setbacks. More debate and discussion is warranted.