

Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid

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SOUTH AFRICAN SECURITY FORCES BACK ESCALATING INKATHA VIOLENCE Report on meeting with Cyril Ramaphosa, Sept. 30, 1990

"We believe the South African government is following a conscious strategy to use violence to undermine and demobilize our organizations," Cyril Ramaphosa, General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers told the New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid. "The government wants to negotiate with a weakened ANC to achieve peace on its own terms." And weakening the ANC includes aiding Inkatha leader Gatsha Buthelezi's violent power grab for a place at the negotiating table.

Since 1987, political violence by Inkatha warlords loyal to Buthelezi against COSATU and UDF organizations has plagued Natal. But in August Inkatha violence escalated to unprecedented proportions and spread for the first time outside Natal to the townships and hostels surrounding Johannesburg. Over 750 people were killed in August alone.

COSATU and the ANC now believe that "third force" elements within the South African police and army are orchestrating the attacks at a high level. Ramaphosa cited the following evidence:

1. Inkatha vigilantes have access to highly sophisticated weaponry including AK47 semi-automatics and R1 rifles. Even "traditional" clubs and machetes are now machine-made.
2. Police systematically disarm communities and COSATU members in hostels while refusing to disarm Inkatha vigilantes, even when COSATU and ANC have given the police advance warning that Inkatha was planning an attack. COSATU has documented incidents where police have provided arms, transport and logistical support to Inkatha.
3. The pattern of attacks seems coordinated to disrupt COSATU and ANC organizing at the local level. Ramaphosa cited several incidents where union members on strike were singled out in vigilante attacks.
4. The brutality of Inkatha attacks on Soweto trains and taxi stands are strikingly similar to the "scorched earth" tactics of Renamo in Mozambique and Koevoet in Namibia. Both Renamo and Koevoet have clear ties to the South African Defense Force and security apparatus. ANC and COSATU now speculate there is active coordination of these elements. Recent disclosures by the Weekly Mail that Inkatha vigilantes are being trained at secret SADF bases in northern Namibia and in KwaZulu along the Mozambican border, support this claim.

The violence has had a serious impact on the trade union movement. COSATU affiliates, including NUM, have been forced to abandon strike plans and settle for less favorable terms for fear that a walk-out would precipitate further clashes with Inkatha. Virtually all NUM members live

in migrant worker hostels which have been a springboard for Inkatha violence. In one mine, Ramaphosa explained, Inkatha violence brought a successful organizing drive to a dead halt. At another, 1,800 mine-workers quit their jobs rather than be forcibly recruited by Inkatha. NUM officials have been completely occupied with trying to prevent the violence from spreading rather, leaving other pressing union matters on hold.

"People are terrified," he said. "They've begun demanding arms from the ANC to protect themselves. It is difficult to convince people in the townships that negotiations should go on when the violence is so severe." COSATU has undertaken a resolution to form self-defense committees from the shopfloor up, but has so far emphasized negotiations at the local level while pressuring the government to reign in the police.

The government counters that the ANC is responsible for not being able to control its supporters. "DeKlerk has made the victims of the violence responsible for its continuance," Ramaphosa said. DeKlerk has even suggested that the ANC must end all mass activity including strikes, boycotts and demonstrations before the government should be expected to make further concessions.

But on the ground, Buthelezi and Inkatha's popularity has plummeted even in his base in rural Natal. Ramaphosa cited a poll of urban areas completed last April which found that 1% of black households supported Buthelezi while 58% supported Mandela. But the South African government wants Buthelezi to be at the negotiating table. Some suggest that the Nationalist Party opened its ranks to all races this summer as a step toward entering into a formal political alliance with Inkatha. Buthelezi is also the favored candidate of the business community, which has provided financial backing to Inkatha for years.

COSATU and the ANC are appealing for concerted international pressure on DeKlerk to reign in the police and end the violence. They are demanding that the government immediately arrest, prosecute and sentence all parties to the violence regardless of political affiliation. In addition, the government must be pressured to appoint an independent board of inquiry to investigate police involvement, and to disband the KwaZulu homeland.

It's up to us to get the word out what really lies behind "black on black" violence in South Africa. We need to support COSATU's demands and put the blame squarely where it belongs -- on the apartheid government. LCAA has passed the attached resolution. We urge you to sign and encourage your union to adopt it.

--Kate Pfordresher, LCAA Coordinator
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