

# End Conscription Campaign

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## THE POLITICAL STATE OF THE DURBAN FUNCTIONAL REGION

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### Introduction

The political scenario in the DFR - and in Natal generally - is dominated by the violence which has now so tragically become part of everyday life. An average of 3 people have died in politically motivated or related killings every single day of every year since 1985, at least half of those in the DFR. Without being disregarding of the significance of the "township war", an examination of the state of "white politics" will also be undertaken. As sad a fact as this distinction is, it remains a fact that the terrain (both geographically and operationally), the issues and the participants in the respective political processes in the "townships" and the "towns" - in other words, the black and white areas respectively - remain as separate and distinct (save for a few exceptions) as they have always been. Hence the distinction below.

### The Townships

Although the 7 million Inkatha membership claimed by its leader, KwaZulu Chief Minister, Mangosuthu Buthelezi is almost certainly optimistic, and despite growing ANC popularity, it is now widely acknowledged that Inkatha's commitment to mobilizing itself and its capacity to do so, has in the past (especially in the rural areas) been severely underestimated. The level of Inkatha/Security Force cooperation, and the effectiveness thereof in harrasing and curtailing progressive organisation, has also been unexpected. The above, coupled with the ever-declining faith in the judicial process, the lack of redress resulting therefrom and the community's consequent resort to self-help measures are the primary reasons for violence and its huge death toll.

Inkatha's diminishing (though never insignificant) support in the urban townships, as demonstrated by places around Durban like Inanda (to the north), Mpumalanga (to the west), and Umlazi (to the south), and the corresponding growth of ANC support, are still not significant enough to ensure a resolution of the conflict on



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their own. In fact recent peace initiatives by local leaders of both groups are a hopeful sign that negotiations at a higher level may be in the offing. This development has occurred largely as a result of growing frustration, particularly amongst local Inkatha leadership, at the alienating effect of previous tactics. The growing number of ANC branches in the southern Natal region - now numbering 68, with woman's league branches numbering 15 - coupled with increased pressure from the white business sector, have contributed to this turnabout. It should be stressed however, that where negotiations have been entered into, they have seldom matured to fruition, and where they have, peace is usually temporary.

The ANC has nonetheless suggested a commitment to the process of negotiations at a regional level by the summoning of Southern Natal Convenor and ANC "strong-man," Terror Lekota to the Transvaal, to take up office at a national level. The subsequent election of NEC member and Intelligence Chief Jacob Zuma to the position of Convenor, has contributed to this perception. Apart from his widely recognised negotiating skills, Zuma is also a Zulu who originally hails from the area. The latter is seen to be beneficial for 2 primary reasons:

1) It will placate the more conservative Zulu support for the ANC in the region - an element which Inkatha is constantly attempting to attract to its ranks with accusations of Indian and Xhosa domination of the ANC, and

2) It will further facilitate the process of negotiations in that Buthelezi and Inkatha with their well-known emphasis on ethnicity will be more open to negotiating with the ANC - even if only because their allegations of "foreign interference" in the region no longer have any apparent foundation. Buthelezi has in fact already announced his approval at the replacement of Lekota by Zuma.

In conclusion though, it must be pointed out that the peaceful resolution of the violence through negotiation is only a prospect - and a vague one at that - for the future. The materialisation thereof depends on the present; on whether the events of the past can now be forgiven and forgotten, and whether the groundwork for future negotiations, including the creation of accountable and responsible structures of membership and support bases, can be laid at this conjuncture. It is a tall order, but the dawning realisation that it is the only recourse allows for more hope than there has been in recent times.

#### The Towns

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Perhaps the foremost point to be made about the white constituency is its generally overwhelming ignorance of the dynamics and state of affairs of black politics. White perceptions of the conflict seldom penetrate its most obvious manifestations, ie the violence and death they hear about, and the increasing crime rate in the towns and cities which they often experience themselves. It is this ignorance and the fear and resentment it spawns, which further entrench the divisions of an already torn society. It may be argued that whites are not altogether to blame for this ignorance. The effects of

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colonialism and Apartheid are well-known - territorial demarcation in terms of legislation such as the (as yet unrepealed) Group Areas Act, educational and economic disparities introduced and entrenched over many decades, political and legal injustices imposed by force or threat thereof etc. The state-controlled electronic media, epitomised by the highly selective and edited SABC newscasts, combined with the commercial press' reluctance to pursue an issue which is no longer regarded as particularly news-worthy by its predominantly white readership (it has never been given its due in terms of its significance to the state of the regional [and national] economy, and the repercussions it is beginning to have for social life in places as far removed as the suburbs), have all contributed to this ignorance.

But understanding the reasons for the division per se, does not automatically ensure its eradication. It exists as a sad but realistic state of affairs, and it is the context in which white politics is practiced.

This may be the reverse of the traditional "western" view-point in that most people understand the solution to entail the education of black people (my argument is not intended to undermine the legitimacy of that call), but the argument should be seen in terms of the generalisations that it is based on. There is of course a positive side, and these are significant exceptions to the rule espoused above. For example, white membership of the ANC has grown considerably, "big" business as represented by the chambers of commerce and industry has begun to acknowledge its responsibility and interest in stability in the region (irrespective of their motivation), and knowledge of the recruitment and expansion tactics of their one-time ally in economic and other policy (as illustrated by the growing, but still insufficient number of prosecutions of prominent Inkatha and Kwa Zulu leaders for crimes such as murder and attempted murder), is beginning to penetrate more receptive elements of the white community.

But there has been an undeniable and perhaps inevitable shift of white voters to the right. Since FW De Klerk's February the 2nd speech, there has been a nation-wide exodus of right-fringe National Party supporters to the Conservative Party; and this pattern is no less evident in the DFR than anywhere else. In addition, the adoption by the NP of significant portions of Democratic Party policy, means that the DP has lost some substantial support to the NP. White ignorance of township politics and the consequent confusion, fear and resentment mentioned above, have also strengthened this trend.

But with the much publicised general elections not likely to occur before 1992, the present shift should not be regarded as necessarily fixed. A lot can happen in two years, and with the newly acquired characteristic of political dynamism in the country (perhaps particularly in Natal and the DFR) white trends may well be "reactionary;" not in the sense of a pre-determined conservatism, but insofar as they may be attributed to a pendulum effect. In fact the growing support for the Conservative Party has already had the effect

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of consolidating "pro-reform/moderate" white elements. This is demonstrated by the loose alliance being forged between the DP and the NP. Although these initiatives \* are occurring at a national level, and though it may be said that the DP and NP are further apart in Natal than they are in the Transvaal, white party politics in the Durban area is inextricably bound to national developments in a way which black politics is not, eg. the local peace initiatives of local (black) leaders referred to on page 2 (supra) reflects an interesting distinction between white and black perceptions of democratic operation.

In conclusion it may be said that there are many whites who are adopting a wait-and-see attitude with regard to developments in the region. There is a dawning (albeit slow and often reluctant) realisation amongst the powers that be in the white political arena, that prospects for economic prosperity and development of the Southern Natal region as a whole, depends fundamentally on what happens in the townships. While most are passive, there are also sectors which are coming to terms with the need for commerce and industry to use its considerable material and skill resources for the benefit of the region as a whole, more specifically for the aiding of upliftment of the long-neglected black communities. It is a realisation that the chasm which divides us is a largely artificial one, and that it is in the bridging thereof, wherein lies our salvation.

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\* The DP did not oppose the NP in one of the former's traditionally safe-seats - Randburg in the Transvaal; and Harry Schwartz, the DP spokesperson on Financial Affairs, has recently been appointed as ambassador to the USA, by Pretoria.

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