

Introductory essay:

Inqaba ya Basebenzi:

Journal of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC

Inqaba ya Basebenzi (the fortress of the workers) was launched in London in January 1981 as the journal of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC. It represented the crystallization of ideas among comrades within and outside the ANC that the ANC would gain mass support in the 1980s and needed to be transformed into one with a programme for socialist as well as national and democratic transformation, through the establishment of workers' democracy. Among veterans of the struggle who supported the journal were Treason Trialist George Peake, and Nimrod Sejake, exiled secretary of SACTU's Iron and Steel Workers' Union in the 1950s. In 1979 four of those who supported its formation had been suspended by the ANC in London, and were to be expelled from the ANC in 1985.

The journal was circulated underground in South Africa, as well as in other Southern African countries. It was also sold among worker-activists internationally. The original target was four issues a year, and in the decade to January 1990 28 numbers were produced, of a minimum 48 pages, often 64 and sometimes more. Throughout its existence it was financed through sales and donations from supporters. From May 1989 *Inqaba* was supplemented, and then replaced, by the 8-page paper *Congress Militant* produced inside the country.

A significant feature of the journal was its publication of material in different South African languages: it published editorials in four languages from issue 1 to issue 16/17 of January 1985, and thereafter articles and letters. Also (unlike the *African Communist*, where white authors freely used African pseudonyms) it was the policy of the journal that the pseudonyms used by authors identify the 'ethnic' communities from which they came.

The Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC was a section of the Committee for a Workers' International, whose strongest section was the *Militant* in the British Labour Party. The journal therefore reported on world developments as well as South and Southern Africa: it covered the world economy, strikes and struggles West and East, North and South, (especially where its supporters were involved), and in Africa. Most issues also contained a theoretical supplement – usually a piece by Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky.

International coverage included articles on the Solidarity trade union's formation and opposition to Stalinism in Poland, and later on Gorbachev's 'reforms' in the Soviet Union. The last issue 28, of *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, published in January 1990 had eye-witness reports, shortly after the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the overthrow of Ceausescu, on the crisis of Stalinism throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe – along with reports on the imminent release of Mandela! An associated publication, *Congress Militant*, published an eye-witness account of the events in Tiananmen Square in China. The journal included reporting and analysis of unfolding revolutionary developments in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Argentina, Philippines, and South Korea, and on the crisis in the Middle East. There were first-hand reports from Ghana and Nigeria, and reportage on other African countries. From issue 6 in May 1982 *Inqaba* had extensive on-the-spot coverage of Zimbabwe, including reports from workers,

and coverage of workers conditions in Botswana from not long after. It covered also Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zambia.

In all this coverage the journal was not just describing or analyzing events, but trying to point a way forward for the working class.

Regarding South Africa, the journal consistently reported on the economy and on white politics. It had historical articles – a special issue for example on the lessons of the struggle in the 1950s, and articles on the Durban strikes and the Soweto uprising ten years later. It consistently covered strikes and trade union struggles, and from issue 8 of November 1982 onwards carried interviews with and articles by South African workers, women and youth. It paid special attention to mineworkers, as it believed that their organization was a key to the struggle. From the first issue, it covered and drew lessons from the youth movement, particularly on the need to link with the organized workers. Feedback from worker and youth correspondents in the movement inside the country was indispensable to developing the ideas of the journal.

It analysed the practical development of the policies of Umkhonto We Sizwe, armed wing of the ANC. It opposed the methods of guerillaism, which it argued in South African conditions could not lead to victory and was prone to degenerate into urban terrorism. In 1986, it warned against the call from the ANC's Radio Freedom to take the battle to the whites "into their homes, into their kitchens and bedrooms." Such a call – like the Magoo's bar bombing, like MK's border land mine campaigns – only served to harden whites into the camp of reaction. "Indiscriminate attack on whites is not the way forward". It advocated instead a strategy of armed workers' self-defence.

On 1 March 1985, Dave Hemson, together with D'arcy Du Toit and a number of black trade unionists, both Ndebele and Shona, (all supporters of the journal), were detained by Mugabe's ZANU (PF) government – because they had been campaigning for a democratic engineering union and socialist workers' education. *Inqaba* together with the CWI organized an international campaign of workers' protest, and, as a result all were released though Dave, D'arcy and his wife Anneke were deported.

The journal covered key developments in the unfolding of mass resistance in South Africa., for example the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in Mitchell's Plain on 20 August 1983, of which it provided on-the-spot coverage including interviews with workers. Together with this an article called on those (mainly FOSATU) trade unions which had remained outside the UDF to join it, and to struggle together with those trade unions already within it for a UDF committed to a socialist programme. *Inqaba* paid special attention to the discussions on trade union unity which preceded the formation of COSATU, successfully urging the NUM for example to leave the Black-consciousness-allied Council of South African Trade Unions and turn towards the tradition of the ANC.

From the time of the two-day November 1984 Transvaal general strike *Inqaba* published, as supplements or in the body of the journal, a series of statements analyzing the concrete way forward. On the one hand the journal warned against illusions of an immediate victory – thus countering in advance the idea of some ANC leaders at the time of the possibility of an "Iran-type insurrection", through "one big push" to topple the regime. Against this it pointed to the strength of the apartheid state due to its social base among the whites. The need was for the working class to prepare its full forces over an extended period for the defeat of the state – through splitting the whites along class lines.

In the meantime an ebb would come, followed by another upturn. But when the ebb came, the journal stressed, it would not usher in years of silence as after Sharpeville in the 1960s. The balance of forces had shifted in favour of the working class. Thus, “the revolution has clearly begun, while on the other hand, it cannot be said that a ‘revolutionary situation’ yet exists or is even close at hand.”

At first *Inqaba* maintained that the movement had passed its current peak after the declaring of a partial state of emergency on July 21 1985. However the launch of COSATU at the end of November 1985 gave a new impetus, so that from early in 1986 working-class struggles intensified. The lifting of the state of emergency further emboldened the movement, and the ebb set in only after the second nation-wide state of emergency from June 12, 1986. Following this, *Inqaba* together with the CWI took up an international campaign for workers’ sanctions against South Africa. Several South African trade union leaders participated in the campaign, including Cyril Ramaphosa and James Motlatsi of the National Union of Mine Workers, Jeremiah Zulu of the Transport and General Workers Union and Moses Mayekiso of the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union participated in the campaign as reported in the pages of the journal. From before the second state of emergency the apartheid regime began to supplement open military and police repression not only with increasing resort to the clandestine ‘death squads’ of Vlakplaas, but through the financing and encouragement of black forces of reaction – vigilantes, *witdoeke* and the like, with Buthelezi’s Inkatha and UWUSA in the lead. Early in 1986 *Inqaba* identified Inkatha as a “spear of counter-revolution” that “must be broken”. The following year *Inqaba* mourned a worker-supporter at Zincor on the East Rand murdered by UWUSA while leading workers in organized political self-defence against them

Despite the state of emergency, repression, mass arrests and vigilantes, the movement was not defeated, as the long, and victorious, OK Bazaars strike showed in early 1987. *Inqaba* called on COSATU to launch a campaign around a definite minimum wage demand – not just as an ‘economic’ movement, but to rally the whole of the working class politically. The two-day general strike against the white elections on May 5-6, the huge and bitterly fought strikes by railworkers in SATS between April and June, and that by the mineworkers in August 1987 – which elevated the year’s strike statistics to the highest ever in South Africa’s history – appeared to vindicate *Inqaba*’s position – but the strikes were fought separately and not linked by COSATU. As the 1987 strike wave ebbed the journal made its first serious critique of COSATU leadership for its failure to unite the struggles.

The journal reported on, and replied to, an attack on the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC at the July 1987 COSATU Congress by guest speakers Murphy Morobe, for the United Democratic Front, and Peter Mokaba, for the recently-formed South African Youth Congress. In the issue of October 1987 *Inqaba* published a piece by workers at Zincor on the lessons of their experiences fighting UWUSA and an article calling for the smashing of the Inkatha warlords in KwaZulu and Natal titled “No truce with Inkatha!” Less than two months later Buthelezi demanded that the UDF and COSATU leadership repudiate this article, which it did in a full-page advertisement in the *Natal Witness* (16/12/87). The following issue of *Inqaba* responded with fourteen pages on “Defeat Inkatha!”, including letters from youth in Natal. The last issue of *Inqaba* continued the struggle against Inkatha, printing material on how to defeat it, together with an article on the rise and fall of the Zulu kingdom, which argued that Buthelezi, despite his appeals to the tradition of Zulu resistance to conquest, was in fact in the collaborationist tradition of Zibhebu and Hamu.

Botha’s crackdown on 24 February 1988, together with proposed amendments to labour legislation, threatened to illegalise every political gain of the workers. *Inqaba* responded with a statement calling for resistance, and claiming the regime was “trying to exercise a power against us

which they do not have.” The successful boycott of the municipal elections in October was a sign of the revival of the movement, and this continued through 1989. The final issue of *Inqaba ya Basebenzi* appeared, as already mentioned, in January 1990, shortly before the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and SACP in February.

Martin Legassick

Note on contributor: *Inqaba ya Basebenzi* was produced by an editorial board, on which Martin Legassick served as editor, though the theoretical and political input was a collective one by EB members as well as those not on the EB.