

## SOUTHERN AFRICA: PROBLEMS OF ARMED STRUGGLE'

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SOUTHERN AFRICA comprises a sub-system of exploitation which occupies a pivotal place in imperialist strategies for the African continent as a whole. The convergence of interests between the white minority regimes and the neo-colonialist order of imperialist powers in Africa has its roots in the fact that Southern Africa, and especially South Africa, are both economically and militarily the most reliable allies of imperialism and its most profitable base in the region. Imperialist capitalist investment in South Africa (about £3,000 million) is greater than the capital invested in the whole of the rest of Africa. United States investments in South African manufacturing industry alone are four times as much as in the rest of the continent. Sean Gervasi has illustrated how penetrating this western involvement has become:

"It is not only markets and investments which are involved. The NATO countries now depend to a critical extent upon supplies of certain raw materials from Southern Africa. The subcontinent as a whole produces an important proportion of the world's supplies of essential raw materials such as antimony, vanadium cobalt, tungsten, uranium and so on. In many countries as much as 40 to 65 and 70% of the total consumption of these raw materials is coming not just from the Third World, but from Southern Africa. Ten or fifteen years ago the subcontinent stood on the periphery of the neo-colonial system. Today it plays a critical role in its working."<sup>1</sup>

The growth of foreign capital investment in Southern Africa in the post-war period has been spectacular. The raw material resources of the area are being more systematically exploited than ever. But additionally Western capital is building a new international base in South Africa, "a base which can be used to dominate, industrially and militarily, all of Africa south of the Sahara".<sup>2</sup>

Within this Southern African sub-system, South Africa—already one of the newer and minor industrial powers of the world—has expansionist aims in its own right. Under South Africa's hegemony, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi, Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia (South West Africa) are becoming interlinked, and interlocked with international capital, in a vast powergrid covering the sub-continent through hydro-electric projects spanned by the Cabora Bassa and Cunene River schemes and incorporating projects

for industry, agriculture, and further white settlement. Tete Province in Mozambique where the Cabora Bassa Dam is being built lies at the strategic conjunction between Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi and the project will convert the area into a springboard for the further penetration and control of East and Central Africa by white settler and western power, led by South Africa. Within the area foreign investment in the sixties shows a double pattern: on the one hand a weakening of the old colonial powers, Britain and Portugal, and the diversification of the international economic relationship of the area with the United States, Germany, Italy, Japan and to some extent France; and on the other hand an increasing integration between the economies of Southern Africa themselves. South Africa, the largest recipient by far of foreign investment, both direct and indirect, has now become the most significant investor in neighbouring southern African countries.<sup>1</sup> South Africa's economic expansionist strategy has been boldly expressed in the Afrikaans government-supporting journal *Landstem* by a journalist who described the nine countries south of the Zambesi with their 35 million inhabitants as South Africa's "true hinterland" but added:

"just north of the Zambesi is the second belt of countries falling within our hinterland. They are Congo (Zaire), Congo Republic, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zanzibar. Together they have a population of 38,542,000. This means that South Africa now has a chance to become the leader of a population group of about 72 million living in one of the richest parts of the globe."<sup>10</sup>

The managing director of South Africa's state-run Industrial Development Corporation Dr. G. S. J. Kuschke has claimed that "without South Africa's willingness to collaborate, no foundation whatsoever for economic development can be laid by certain countries in Southern Africa".

Side by side with its industrial and trade expansionism, South Africa is building its military potential. Defence Minister Botha recently boasted that the country now manufactures more than a hundred types of arms and fighter planes, as well as napalm. South Africa's defence budget for 1973 amounted to R447 million, an increase of almost a quarter over the 1972 figure; in 1960 defence expenditure was a mere R44 million. Despite the United Nations embargo on the sale of arms to South Africa, the arms purchased abroad by the Republic quadrupled between 1960 and 1969. South Africa imported more arms in this period than the rest of sub-Saharan Africa together. In addition the large-scale local manufacture of basic weapons has been made possible with the aid of foreign governments and multinational corporations. As for Rhodesia, despite sanctions domestic exports in 1972 exceeded the pre-UDI level, and the lifting by the

United States of its ban on the purchase of Rhodesian chrome is part of the collusion of imperialism to strengthen the capacity of these white-controlled regimes to resist African liberation forces. Even more telling than Rhodesian chrome: the Portuguese machine is regularly serviced by NATO supplies and the economy of Portugal by United States base rents, credit and investment.

In the military as in the economic sphere the pattern is of a working alliance between the west and the minority regimes of Southern Africa, and simultaneously of close and active collaboration between the regimes headed by Vorster, Caetano and Smith. South African troops are admitted to be policing Rhodesian territory and have always been in occupation of Namibia. The presence of South African troops in Angola and Mozambique has not yet been conceded but there is mounting evidence of that presence and of the overall defence, strategic and intelligence planning and co-ordination of these regimes and armies. The enemy which confronts the liberation movements of these Southern African countries is thus not defined by the territorial entities in which the movements operate. Allowing for the variants of colonial subjugation and exploitation in the individual units in the area, there is both close collaboration and an essential unity within this sub-system of exploitation.

Yet there are at the same time important structural differences between each of the territories and these differences inevitably influence the precise tactics and specific emphasis of policy for each of the liberation movements. Thus within the sub-system as a whole secondary contradictions and specific historical factors operate to create stresses, divisions and weaknesses which affect the capacity of the sub-system to act as a monolith. In Zimbabwe the Smith regime's unilateral seizure of political power has bruised relations between the metropolitan power and settler interests. Sanctions, although transparently inadequate, have partially weakened Rhodesia's capacity to mobilize its full potential against the liberation forces. Smith's untutored diplomacy has created embarrassments for his natural allies. A case in point is the recent closure of the border of Rhodesia with Zambia: an act which put at risk South Africa's profitable trade and investment links with Zambia (exports of £35 million a year) and its equally important trade links with Zaire. Portugal was embarrassed by the same act because it threatened her freight earnings through the port of Beira. More dangerous for South Africa from the long-term view is the incentive this Smith policy has given Zambia to restructure its external economic links and outlets so as to lessen its dependence on its white-ruled neighbours to the south. Namibia is by now fully integrated as an extension of the South African economy and regime, yet the presence of the apartheid system as not only a variant of the South

African mode of land and labour exploitation but in the shape of a fairly recent foreign conquest and occupation, makes Namibia a special case within the sub-system and gives her liberation struggle a wider range of instruments with which to pursue its purposes. In its present power composition the United Nations is incapable of translating the rhetoric of condemnation into effective action; nonetheless the international forum is a useful one for the indictment and exposure of the enemy, and all weaknesses in the armour of the enemy require to be pierced. On the other hand, if there have been any illusions about South Africa's "concessions" to international debate, these should have been removed by South Africa's Foreign Minister Dr. H. Muller when he reassured white supporters in Namibia, nervous about the UN negotiations initiated by the world body's secretary-general Dr. Waldheim, that they could "safely leave it to the government. We have been looking after the situation for twenty-five years and we have not let them (the whites) down."

Even the closeness of common interest between Vorster and Caetano does not prevent friction between them on matters of strategy in relation to the threat to their power which they face. On the South African side questions have been raised about the effectiveness of Portuguese counter-insurgency measures, particularly as the forces of Frelimo (Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique, or Mozambique Liberation Front) in Mozambique score successes closer and closer to the South African borders. On the Portuguese side Basil Davidson has reported bitter complaints from their military men that South Africa was not sticking its neck out sufficiently in Angola in a battle "which is as much yours as it is ~~ours~~".<sup>8</sup> And it is reported that settlers in Zimbabwe, or Rhodesia, reacting to the recent successes of the freedom-fighters in the eastern sector of the country, have been questioning whether Portugal is doing enough to safeguard this vital sector of the border between Zimbabwe and liberated Mozambique.

But these tensions and contradictions, although they affect the solidity of the white regimes and the postures of their international allies, do not run to the root of the alliance of white-minority exploitative regimes, and they are, in their essence, non-antagonistic. The fundamental fact is that the complex as a whole can be expected to act in accordance with the interests of all its parts.

This basic indivisibility of the enemy must find its response in the indivisibility of the liberation forces. This does not mean that there can exist a single indistinguishable fighting front. The specifics of each territory demand the diverse application of the means of popular mobilization and resistance, and tactics of struggle, whether political, military or in combination. But it does mean that any revolutionary action in the Southern African region is organically inter-related.

Any theory which is based on first liberating one territory and then another must work to the advantage of the enemy. There can be little doubt that the massive potential in terms both of military force and economic resources which South Africa and its allies command will be mobilized at any point at which a breakthrough threatens. The art of popular war dictates a strategy which denies the enemy the ability to concentrate its forces but on the contrary forces him to disperse and over-extend them. An enemy scattered loses strength. In this-way the size of Southern Africa—and South Africa's extending commitment to territories beyond its immediate borders—must be turned into a weakness. For even as she commits troops to Rhodesia, South Africa weakens her own defences, disperses her forces, makes her own communications more vulnerable. This view of the importance of extending the enemy appears to be shared by all the Southern African liberation movements and was recently expressed in an interview with Dr. Agostinho Neto, President of Angola's MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola, or People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola).

"Our idea in MPLA is that it is not very good to separate the parts of the liberation struggle in Africa. There are several divisive tendencies in the Continent—trying to separate the liberation movements from the independent African States, for example, and trying to separate Portuguese colonies from other dominated countries that are not fighting with arms. It is necessary to open different fronts in Africa; to fight in Rhodesia, South Africa and so on. . . . If not we shall always be in a weak position. I don't agree that it is necessary to liberate first one country, then go on to another. It is necessary to struggle everywhere using every means possible."<sup>7</sup>

In the past fifteen years the character of the contest in the unliberated territories of Africa has altered in striking fashion, for it is now the declared policy of all the major liberation movements in each of these countries to challenge exploitative alien rule by a strategy in which armed struggle forms the basic constituent. Broadly speaking there was never a time after conquest in which it could be expected that the minority-dominated regimes would loosen their grip without some form of revolutionary violence. But it was the new post-war Africa-wide and international situation, combined with essential internal developments, which placed on the agenda this form of armed confrontation. The adoption by the liberation movements of the policy to prepare conditions for and to launch armed action occurred within a few years of one another from one territory to another. Those commentators who contrast this revolutionary policy with the trends which preceded it and who characterize the latter as *per se* reformist and conventional, vulgarize the complex social process of which it was a part.

"The art of revolutionary leadership", stated South Africa's African National Congress in a policy document prepared in the late sixties:

"consists in providing leadership to the masses and not just to its most advanced elements; it consists in setting a pace which accords with objective conditions and real possibilities at hand. . . . It is surely a question of whether in the given concrete situation, the course or policy advocated will aid or impede the prospects of the conquest of power. In this—the only test, the advocacy of armed struggle can, in some situations, be as counter-revolutionary as the advocacy of its opposite in other situations. Untimely, illplanned or premature manifestations of violence impede and do not advance the prospect for revolutionary change and are clearly counter-revolutionary. It is obvious therefore that policy and organisation structures must grow out of the real situation if they are not to become meaningless clichés."<sup>9</sup>

In my opinion Ben Turok's treatment of the shift by the South African movement from policies of non-violence to armed struggle as arising out of a shift from what he terms "conventional" to "revolutionary" strategies is mechanical and anti-historical. He implies, wrongly, that the "conventional" strategy of the pre-1960 period was in part the result of an ideological limitation expressed in the belief that it would have been possible to extend the existing parliamentary structures to embrace the Black population. The militant leaders of the mass ferment of the fifties—men like Mandela, Sisulu, Kotane and Dadoo—did not for a moment cherish such illusions, nor was this the predominant theme of the movement as a whole. The selective pronouncements on which Turok drew to support his conclusions dealt with the tactics of the struggle during a phase when the internal and further-flung external situation would have made the advocacy of armed tactics premature, provocative but especially an injunction without force among the people. The African National Congress document concedes that future historians of the revolutionary movement may well be able to pause at some moments during this struggle to examine critically both its pace and emphasis.

"But in general without the so-called reformist activity of the previous half century, the prospect of advancing into the new phase would have been extremely small."<sup>10</sup>

This is because, even in the most typical colonial-type situation armed struggle becomes feasible only if there is disillusionment with the prospect of achieving liberation by traditional processes and when there is widespread recognition that objective conditions bar the way to change; only if there exists a political leadership capable of gaining the organized allegiance of the people for armed struggle, and with the experience and the ability to carry out the painstaking process of planning, preparing and conducting operations; and only when favourable objective conditions exist both locally and, importantly, internationally too, or at least within the immediate region. For the conditions for this type of struggle are

"not created by subjective and ideological activity alone, and many are the mistakes

committed by heroic revolutionaries who give a monopoly to subjective factors and who confuse their own readiness with the readiness of others."<sup>11</sup>

Conditions for armed struggle, as for other forms, the document adds "are not brought about only by developing political, economic and social conditions, but also by the hard grind of revolutionary work".

"We reject the approach which sees as the catalyst for revolutionary transformation only the short-cut of isolated confrontations and the creation of armed resistance centres."<sup>12</sup>

Does this mean that before an actual beginning can be made by the armed challenge, that we have to wait for the evolvement of some deep crisis in the enemy camp, serious enough to hold out the possibility of an immediate all-round insurrection?

"Certainly not! We believe that given certain basic factors, both international and local, the actual beginning of armed struggle can be made, and, having begun, can steadily develop conditions for the future all-out war which will eventually lead to a conquest of power. Under the modern highly sophisticated state (which South Africa is) it is questionable whether a movement can succeed in a programme of mass political organisation beyond a certain point without starting this type of action. . . . It is not easy to determine the point at which sufficient concrete political and organisational preparations have been carried out to give our armed detachments the maximum chances of survival and growth within any given area. There is no instrument for measuring this. But we must not overdo the importance of the subjective factor and before **embarking** upon a path which is in one sense tragic, though historically inevitable and necessary, certain of the basic minimum conditions already mentioned must be present and certain minimum preparations must have been **made**."<sup>13</sup>

In any phase of struggle, whether non-violent or armed, tendencies are germinated against which movements must guard. The non-violent phase fosters constitutional illusions; in the violent armed phase there are dangers of adventurism and the devaluing of the political factor. To suggest that "only the concept of Revolutionary Democracy with its emphasis on popular power and alternative power structures could lead on to a more developed struggle form"<sup>14</sup> is correct—given a situation which is objectively ripe for the more developed form of struggle. In South Africa's pre-armed struggle phase reformist illusions no doubt infected not a few participants in the national movements. But overall the moment of decision for the new armed phase was influenced not by any delusion that the white power struggle would concede a constitutional handing-over of power but by the objective condition of the movement and the region within which it was operating. Here it is surely significant that the decision to embark upon armed struggle in each of the territories within the Southern

African sub-system, occurred virtually simultaneously and in compellingly similar form. It was the overall change in the chemistry of the whole situation which stimulated these new approaches and not merely an ideological shift from a perspective of sharing to one of conquering power.

Although no single incident provided the sole point of departure from non-armed to armed conflict, one can recognize an event or a sequence of events in each country which served as catalyst and which dramatically telescoped the need for fundamentally new approaches. In Guiné-Bissau (which is not in Southern Africa but is part of the general pattern of Portuguese colonialism and the armed response to it) the signal event was the bloody repression of the August 1959 strike at the Pidgiguiti docks of Bissau, in which fifty workers were killed and more injured. In Mozambique it was the 1960 Mueda massacre of six hundred at a peaceful meeting. In Angola it was the killing of thirty and the wounding of 200 at a meeting in Catete to protest at the arrest of Agostinho Neto the MPLA leader, combined with the brutal suppression of the Maria rising led by a militant Christian sect. In Zimbabwe serious preparations for armed struggle were prompted by the unilateral declaration of settler independence and the shattering of any remaining illusion that Britain could be expected to act against the interests of its "kith and kin" to enforce majority rule. In Namibia the turn to armed resistance occurred immediately after the abortive 1966 judgement of the International Court of Justice when the process of international and legal pressure had been tested to their limits. In South Africa the crushing of the mass popular resistance which reached its pinnacle in the fifties (the Defiance Campaign against Unjust Laws, general strikes, boycotts, mass pass-burnings and so on) together with the Sharpeville massacre and the outlawing and persecution of peoples' organizations, helped to create the conditions in the sixties in which armed struggle emerged as both justified and necessary.

The pace and progress of the struggle depends essentially upon the mobilization of internal revolutionary energies. But in the special conditions in which the Southern African struggles have had to be launched and pursued, the external element was and continues to be a crucial factor. The support of contiguously situated countries (like Guinea next door to Guiné-Bissau, Tanzania and Zambia adjoining Mozambique and Angola, the Caprivi Strip as an entry point to Namibia, and the liberated territories of Mozambique giving access to freedom fighters striking into Rhodesia) have contributed immeasurably to the capacity of the liberation movements to get their armed struggles off the ground sooner than would otherwise have been possible. In the case of every one of these embattled territories, the

initial phases of armed action could not be organized from inside the countries themselves, leaderships had to be reconstituted externally, and supplies and trained personnel had, in this opening phase, to flow from outside. In the case of Guiné-Bissau the decisive act was the installation in 1961 of a leadership group in the Republic of newly-independent Guinea where the basic leadership core, both political and military, was prepared.<sup>15</sup> It was only when haven was granted to the MPLA leadership in Congo-Brazzaville in 1963, after the overthrow of the puppet French regime of Abbe Youlou, that the Angolans in MPLA were able to begin in earnest the long task of reconstructing their forces that the harassment of the police in then Kinshasa (now Zaire) had until then made impossible; the first live training ground of this guerilla force was inside the Cabinda enclave which abuts on the Congo-Brazzaville Republic. Only with the opening of the eastern front from Zambia could the transfer of the weight of the movement inside the country be carried forward decisively.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Mozambique the early beginnings of Frelimo in 1962 were at a congress in Tanzania of three organizations all themselves exile-based. In South Africa the capture of the then underground African National Congress leadership and the subsequent Rivonia Trial, together with the repressive aftermath, made conditions for the internal reconstitution of the leadership impossible; measures had to be taken to create an externally-based leadership to help in the process of reconstruction and to lay a fresh basis for mobilization. In Namibia and Zimbabwe leadership groups were created outside for similar reasons.

The existence outside of leadership levels provided the possibility for close collaboration between the liberation movements so vital for maximizing the struggle against a common enemy. On the other hand the liberation movements are supremely conscious of the fact that even limited operations in exile create dangers. Those organizations which have not succeeded in re-establishing an effective leadership presence within their countries must in some measure suffer from the absence of intimate contact with internal conditions and the state of consciousness of their people which effective revolutionary leadership demands. On the individual level participation displaced from the field of struggle nurtures a great range of deformations, from notions of survival to the mentality of the bureaucrat who waits to administer under conditions of eventual victory. It is a measure of the achievement of all three movements of the Portuguese territories that their leaderships are now once again able to operate within their respective countries, in reconquered territory where they constitute the supreme authority. Nonetheless, important functions related to the struggle have still to be carried on outside and the external factor, though no longer as crucial as it was in the initial phase, still plays a vital

role. Since sophisticated counter-insurgency tactics make it difficult to rely on the capture of all the necessary requirements from the enemy, the logistical needs of a people's armed struggle have in large measure depended, and will continue to depend, upon external support and supplies, especially when it comes to heavy weaponry increasingly deployed as the armed struggle reaches new heights. If reliance on the outside remains a problem for the movements in the Portuguese colonies it is one of the pre-eminent problems of the other liberation movements. In the case of South Africa above all the successful return of trained cadres and supplies is the most severe problem, for this movement faces an enemy geographically protected by the cordon sanitaire of the unliberated regions of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and southern Angola, and a Botswana which is far from free of its economic dependence on its white-dominated neighbour. Independent Africa's uneven record in the postures it adopts towards the liberation movements stems from the yet unfinished nature of its revolution, and this situation facilitates neo-colonial influences on policy. The dialogue lobby — advocating negotiation between the South African regime and the independent African states—is for the moment dormant but the conditions which nourished it have by no means been reversed. The white-controlled regimes and their backers continue to undermine concerted and effective support for the liberation movements and the kingpin of their strategy is the reinforcement of the apartheid system itself. This gives to the opening sentence of the speech delivered by Oliver Tambo, leader of the African National Congress, who acted as spokesman of all the liberation movements (from Guiné-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa) at the recent Oslo conference. He stressed that these movements form "the vanguard in the struggle for the total liberation of Africa from colonialism and apartheid".

The uneven development of the struggle is a problem facing the liberation movements together and singly. In some regions substantial slices of territory formerly controlled by the Portuguese administration are already reconquered and under peoples' rule, albeit under special war conditions. In other regions though armed actions are taking place these are still in their initial stages of installation and it is premature to talk of liberated areas. In South Africa no sustained engagement of an armed character is yet in evidence although mass political resistance is once again assuming impressive proportions. In South Africa, of all the territories in the sub-continent, the task facing the liberation movement in its endeavour to lay the proper basis for, and to engage the enemy in, sustained armed struggle is perhaps the most formidable. The enemy here is in stable command of a rich and varied economy which even at the stage when it is not required to extend

itself can afford a massive military budget. It has a well-trained army and para-military Police Force. It can draw on considerable manpower resources because it has the support of the overwhelming majority of the 4 million privileged whites who can be expected to fight with great ferocity and conviction. In addition South Africa has rich and influential allies who are helping to build its military and economic potential. It faces an unarmed people historically deprived of opportunities to learn the skills of modern warfare. It has one of the most sophisticated repressive machines in the world, which succeeded in the early 60s in weakening considerably the internal organizational forces. This was during the critical period when these forces were beginning to adjust from semi-legal to completely illegal forms of organization, and were attempting to train military cadres and to prepare material and political conditions in which armed struggle side by side with mass mobilization, would begin to play its part. The steps taken to safeguard the security of this movement, as yet unpracticed in the methods required by the new phase of struggle, proved inadequate.

Every political action in South Africa will not necessarily be an armed action. But every political action, whether armed or not, should be regarded as part of the build-up towards a nationwide confrontation leading to the conquest of power, according to a commentator reviewing the ten years since the formation in South Africa of Umkonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the national liberation movement.<sup>17</sup> On armed struggle this writer quotes the policy statement adopted at the 1966 Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party:

"The correctness and feasibility of this general policy decision (for armed struggle) were not and are not dependent on the success or failure of any particular scheme or operation. Looked at in broad perspective it remains true that the freedom of our country will have to be wrested in armed struggle and that preparation for such struggle is essential to victory."<sup>18</sup>

No overt guerilla activity has yet taken place within South Africa. In 1967 and 1968 units of Umkonto we Sizwe did engage in battle in Zimbabwe, side by side with forces of the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU). The lessons of this campaign, as all others, have no doubt been placed under review by the movements concerned, in particular the experience:

"that without internal organisation, mass mobilisation and mass support, armed activity becomes strangled."<sup>19</sup>

Recent evidence of the incursions of guerilla groups into Zimbabwe suggest that important lessons have been learned: in the need for

careful political preparation of the population, and for guerilla groups integrated within the community rather than functioning as isolated foci.

In South African conditions the armed struggle and the political struggle are seen by the liberation movement as essentially one and complementing one another.

"They cannot be tackled chronologically and the movement's planning must insure the necessary balance and blending of both sides of this essentially single struggle. This has meant an intensification of the movement's efforts in the sphere of reconstruction, propaganda and general agitation throughout the country. Creating a core of trained professional armed cadres, putting them into the field with adequate logistical support and a minimum amount of contact to enable them to sustain their operations in the initial period, requires independent planning. It cannot be the overnight response to a sudden twist in the political situation. In this sense military planning, as opposed to political planning, has what one might term some mechanical aspects which inevitably involve making certain static assumptions about the future. If operations go smoothly and according to plan the beginnings of action will be the result of a deliberate decision. If not they could be triggered off by the need of the armed group to defend itself from enemy attack. The exact moment in time when actual armed action occurs will thus not necessarily coincide always with the most favourable local or even national situation. For this reason it is unrealistic to tie the movement's planning for the commencement of operations in the chosen regions to the probability of the emergence of a special local or national crisis, or to regard it as the culmination in each case of a full programme of propaganda and organising work. . . . Above all it is necessary to stress once again that the most important task facing the movement as a whole is the intensification of the level of political mobilisation and mass struggle in every part of the country because in the last resort it will only be against such a background that armed activity can take root and spread."<sup>20</sup>

This discussion of the special problems of armed action within South Africa also raises issues of the terrain of armed activity, whether in the cities or countryside: and suggests that in the initial period the main physical environment must be "in the vast stretches of our countryside":

"Armed activity in its initial phases cannot take the form of a head on collision with enemy forces. Militarily there is a vast imbalance between the resources available to the enemy and to the people. The survival of armed groups and their growth therefore demands the use of techniques and tactics which will compensate for this imbalance. Given its popular character and a population which increasingly sides with and shields the armed group whilst at the same time opposing and exposing the enemy, this imbalance can be neutralised by the skilful use of tactics such as surprise, mobility, tactical retreat and other methods which combine to prevent the enemy from bringing into play its superior fire power in any decisive battle. In short, the beginnings of popular armed activity in our type of situation *takes the form of a guerilla struggle* in which the special tactics employed aim to ensure that no individual battle is fought under circumstances unfavourable to the guerillas.

In general, gurrilla type struggles have in their initial phases taken root in the

rural areas. The reason for this is obvious. The guerilla group is a full-time professional armed unit which pops up now here, now there, and which if it is to survive, has to maintain continuously its cohesion and mobility. The guerilla group must not be confused with the armed auxiliaries or the part-time combat groups or civilian defence, all of which have an important role to play at various stages of the struggle both in town and countryside. Because of the imbalance of military strength the guerilla group, in order to survive and maintain its cohesion and mobility, has in general to operate away from the urban complexes in which the enemy is strongest and is most highly organised and centralised. It has to operate in terrain in which the basic population from whom it draws its strength is in the overwhelming majority.

Are there special conditions in South Africa which require us to take another look at the emphasis on the countryside in the opening phases of the guerilla struggle? Of the colonial and semi-colonial territories in which guerilla wars have been fought, there are none in which the urban working class forms such a significant portion of the oppressed population both numerically and politically as in South Africa. More than this, it is a working class whose political consciousness and whose history of militant struggle places it in the undisputed vanguard position of our democratic revolution. The mass upsurge in the 50s which embraced the country areas had its inspiration in the political ferment which was taking place in the main urban centres. In South African conditions it is therefore unthinkable that the main character of the armed confrontation will be a peasants' war despite the fact that the majority of the oppressed population is on the land either as peasants or as rural proletarians.

If all this is true, should the emphasis not be on urban rather than guerilla struggle right at the outset? We believe not. The important factors mentioned do not alter the reality that in the initial phase organised fulltime guerilla groups with fire power can only operate successfully in the vast stretches of our countryside. This does not mean that there is no place for any form of military activity in the urban centres. In fact this is essential from the start. The enemy should be continuously harrassed in the towns by small combat groups which carry out sabotage and other special actions; groups which obtain supplies and money and which recruit cadres for the guerilla struggle and organise and encourage civilian resistance to enemy action against the urban population. But this activity is of a special type and although it is in support of the guerillas, the use of the phrase 'urban guerilla warfare' to describe it should not place it on a par with guerilla struggle in the countryside, which is the main form of peoples' military activity in the initial phases of our popular armed struggle.<sup>11</sup>

It is theoretically conceivable that the divisions and secondary contradictions present between the white-exploitative regimes might lead these powers to concede a form of nominal independence to some of the less important parts of the area in the interests in the last resort of perpetuating the system as a whole. South Africa might, for instance, consider it expedient, in the face of a collapse by the Smith regime, to tolerate a Black client regime in its place. But the overall primary and special characteristics of the imperialisms which operate in the region make such piecemeal solutions unlikely, and still less likely their chances of ceding the way towards any meaningful change. For unlike the rest of the continent, within Southern Africa the conglomerate as a whole and its separate entities will in their nature

resist even a mediated neo-colonial solution. Both Amilcar Cabral, brilliant leader until his assassination this year of Guiné-Bissau's PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independencia da Guiné e Cabo Verde, or the African Independence Party of Guiné and the Cabo Verdes) and MPLA's President Agostinho Neto have discussed the reasons why Portugal, a feeble and backward power and itself a semi-colony of imperialism, clings so desperately to direct rule:

"The main characteristic of present-day Portuguese colonialism is a very simple fact: Portuguese colonialism, or if you prefer the Portuguese economic infrastructure, cannot allow itself the luxury of being neo-colonialist. This enables us to understand the whole attitude, all the stubbornness of Portuguese colonialism towards our peoples. If Portugal was economically advanced, if Portugal could be classified as a developed country, we should surely not be at war with Portugal today."<sup>11</sup>

"We also exclude the hypothesis of a neo-colonialist development, precisely because Portugal is economically a weak country, incapable of facing the consequences of neo-colonialism. If Angola and the rest of the Portuguese colonies were to fall into neo-colonialism, it would be the other imperialist countries who would have economic preponderance, and this time they would not have to work through Portugal. The Portuguese colonial power would collapse."<sup>12</sup>

If metropolitan Portugal's endemic weakness as a colonizing power renders her resources too feeble to negotiate any solution it is the very strength of South Africa as a bastion of local ruling class and colonial-type rule that mitigates against any neo-colonial solution on her territory. In the Portuguese territories the settlers have an undoubted stake in the system but as Marcelino dos Santos, vice-president of Mozambique's Frelimo explained in a recent but as yet unpublished interview with me:

"The real force is not the settler. But they do benefit from and are part of the system. The situation is not the same as in South Africa because the political power is not in the hands of the settlers and economically they are not the owners in Mozambique. All that the chief oppressor has in Mozambique is the machinery of oppression. It has so far been difficult for the Portuguese administration to successfully mobilise the local whites and to form them into a united political front, against us."

In the case of South Africa, and this applies broadly to Zimbabwe, what makes the structure unique and adds to its complex intractability, in the words of the ANC document on *Strategy and Tactics*, is the fact that:

"The exploiting nation is not, as in the classical imperialist relationship, situated in a geographically distinct mother country, but is settled within its borders. The well-being of the white group (including the white working class) and its political, social and economical privileges are, we know, rooted in its racial domination of the indigenous majority. It has resisted and will resist doggedly and passionately any attempt to shift it from this position."

Unlike the Portuguese territories the white minority controlled exploita-

tive system is 'an, internally integrated whole. There is heavy foreign investment in the South African economy but also an impressive rate of internal capital accumulation controlled by a powerful indigenous mining, finance and industrial bourgeoisie. All classes comprising the dominant white minority have a direct and immediate interest in the perpetuation of the system. They cannot operate from a separate geographic entity to retain their advantages and in particular the overwhelming majority of the dominant group—the white working class—has no means other than political monopoly to ensure its favoured economic status. This goes some way towards explaining why this class fears and resists measures like the limited easing of colour bar practice in skilled jobs, and why it suspects any measures which even superficially hint at *autonomous* political expression by the Africans. It is this which stands in the way of any meaningful move towards granting the indigenous majority even the neo-colonial variety of political independence. There exists, in other words, an internal form of colonialism which monopolizes political control locally. Though secondary contradictions do emerge from time to time, broadly speaking the policy cuts across class differences within the white camp.

Yet in the Portuguese colonies and also in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, there have been pressures prompting the ruling classes to advance new "solutions" or to transform old ones, and these policies are then projected as versions of the steps followed by the other colonial powers in Africa when they made concessions towards political sovereignty. The techniques vary in the different territories but they are inspired by the same motives: to create a limited administrative and bureaucratic class drawn in most instances from traditional elements, with a vested interest in working the system or some of its parts because these elements can be made dependent upon it for privileged status and a certain economic advancement. What is the significance of these developments for the Southern Africa liberation movements? Do they offer any cession at all of political control of any leverage of even the limited neo-colonial variety?

The concept of false decolonization has been used wrongly to treat the decolonization process of the period after world war two as changing very little of substance in the relationships between the newly independent territories and their former imperialist masters. But whilst imperialism found a new way to continue its domination, it was forced to do so from weakness rather than from strength. The new conditions in which it was forced to operate in turn created problems for imperialism which proved more or less severe in different regions of the world. The former colonial world, although economically dependent within the world capitalist system, does have a measure of

independent choice which it has asserted numbers of issues and occasions, even in Africa, the most dependent continent of all, where some independent states heavily locked in the capitalist economic order, have made in some instances sporadic and in other crucial and even sustained acts of support of the liberation movements of the embattled south. Some African states have shown that an independence which was in its inception neo-colonial, in the sense that it was achieved by a negotiated hand-over to a colonial-prepared *élite*, does not automatically shut all options towards the building of a more valid independence and greater freedom of domestic and foreign policy initiative.

However, the "neo-colonial" devices prepared by the white minority regimes are of a rather different order. In the Portuguese territories Caetano's version of an "ordered advance" to local self-determination involves perpetual metropolitan tutelage, and any internal reforms attempted from Lisbon in recent years are a measure not of a change of Portuguese colonial policy but of the growing impact of the revolutionary forces. The "reforms" are inspired by text books of colonial warfare and politics in order to "win the hearts and minds" of a dominated people whilst simultaneously breaking their limbs and their capacity for resistance. Counter-insurgency is no solution, even of the neo-colonial variety. In Zimbabwe the settlement terms offered ineffective political representation to a fraction of the African population and the regime found it difficult to ensnare even moderate elements within the Black population under a system which offers token political representation but leaves intact the formidable edifice of economic and labour exploitation. South Africa and Namibia have been presented with the Bantustan "homeland" schemes. The concept of "native nations" and the spurious race philosophy that accompanies it is an attempt to deny and undermine the growth of national consciousness among the African people: it is vital for the continued entrenchment of white power for the African people to be induced into parochial allegiances and for the administration to forcibly stifle the growth of an urban based African working class and trade union movement and to shift the focus of political activity away from the towns and industry and into the remote and economically stagnant homelands. The Bantustan policy ensures the continuance of a permanent reserve pool of cheap labour in rural backwaters for the developed white-controlled economy, and in this sense the more official policy changes the more it remains the same. The South African regime has come to understand that the trappings of political sovereignty alone do not constitute a danger to white rule; that independent-seeming governments can be turned into useful instruments for the consolidation of white power; this explains the forms of

"self-rule" promised the Bantustans in both South Africa and its colony of Namibia. In this sense the constitutional mechanisms created within the Bantustans are calculated to undermine the potential for revolutionary change in the country for within each "homeland" a bureaucracy is to be created of politicians, office-holders and petty administrators to help the white-controlled state to govern more easily through Black officials. Yet every step along the road towards spurious Bantustan "independence" reveals with greater clarity the contradictions within the system and the impossibility of reconciling white power and black poverty and exploitation. Within the Portuguese territories the existence of enclaves of peoples' power expose the limits of the colonial order; in South Africa Namibia and Zimbabwe where there are as yet no contrasting enclaves of peoples' power limited reforms could serve to encourage opportunistic tendencies and divisions among the people. Yet even strictly controlled levels of delegated authority have a habit of overflowing the bounds set for them, as evidenced by the sharp confrontation between some of the Bantustan leaders and the regime, for nothing in the Bantustan variety of policy meets the burning misery of the people as a result of the system's land, labour, economic and industrial policies.

Neo-colonial solutions are also tenable only in conditions in which there are local agents to strike a compromise and social forces able to win gains from reform, however limited. In South Africa where peasant economies have not only been exploited but shattered in the interests of the capitalist mode of production, the enemy is increasingly seen not only as a form of resident colonialism but as capitalism. The existence of a large and growing Black proletariat whose class consciousness complements national consciousness, reinforces the perspective of real emancipation rather than formal liberation. It is this class which through its trade unions, political organizations, and national movement has played a fundamental role in creating and advancing the revolutionary cause. Although the main content of the immediate phase of the struggle in South Africa is the national liberation of the Black majority, it is, in the words of the ANC:

"... a national struggle which is taking place in a different context from those which characterized the early struggles against colonialism. It is happening in a new kind of world—a world which is no longer monopolized by the imperialist world system; a world in which the existence of the powerful socialist system and a significant sector of newly liberated areas has altered the balance of forces; a world in which the horizons liberated from foreign oppression extend beyond mere formal political control and encompass the element which makes such control meaningful-economic emancipation. . . . Thus, our nationalism must not be confused with chauvinism or narrow nationalism of a previous epoch. It must not be confused with the classical drive by an *elitist* group among the oppressed people to gain ascendancy so that they can replace the oppressor in the exploitation of the mass."

In the Portuguese territories the three liberation organizations are relatively recent creations<sup>2\*</sup> yet within a short time of their formation the basis was laid for the beginnings of armed confrontation in their respective territories, and since then revolutionary practice has made a special imprint on the organizational and ideological content of their struggles. It is the dynamics of this process which promises that the revolution will move far beyond the formal trappings of political independence. The evidence shows that each of these movements has mobilized forces which will block the rise of pliant leaderships searching for neo-colonial satisfactions, or the replacement of a foreign ruling class by a local *élite*. The very real sacrifices involved in protracted struggle make it infinitely easier for a movement to reject those elements for whom liberation is restricted to limited gains or self-aggrandizement. But those commentators who imply that the fact of armed struggle on its own is some final guarantee against any betrayal of the aims of social revolution exaggerate and distort its place in revolutionary practice. There have been successful armed struggles in Africa and elsewhere which have not avoided a degeneration of the social aims of the revolution; and experience has demonstrated over and over again that, as Lenin emphasized, a guerrilla struggle without revolutionary ideology behind it tends to become corrupt and a haven for the adventurer, brigand and terrorist. The liberation movements in the Portuguese territories (not without a degree of internal conflict), are progressively moulding a political force which is in undisputed leadership of the armed struggle, and which will be satisfied with little short of real social revolution.

The question of the choice of path is posed, concretely in its embryonic form, in the liberated zones, and this process itself increasingly narrows the options. The needs of a People's War facilitate tendencies towards collectivism, towards social mobilization of resources rather than individual appropriation. In our recent interview Marcelino Dos Santos told me:

"In the liberated areas the question of the organization of a new life arose. Which way should we follow? It was in that phase that the contradictions appeared and those who were mainly fighting for their own individual interests or for the interests of a narrow group, came more openly to the surface. If we do not follow collectivist attitudes we will not be able to face the enemy successfully. In this sense it is true to say that the internal dynamic of the struggle is such that the conditions generate collective thinking. Even if the origin of such collective attitudes are partly pragmatic, there is certainly a strong possibility that in the course of collective effort a situation is created from which it will be difficult to withdraw. If our organization maintains a true revolutionary leadership the special circumstances of the process of our liberation opens up real possibilities for an advance from liberation to revolution."

This approach was given programmatic expression by the Centra

Committee of FRELIMO at its December 1972 meeting when in the course of reaffirming that FRELIMO is a Front which ensures the participation of all anti-colonialist elements it made its point of departure the negation of exploitation of man by man.<sup>25</sup>

Drawing attention to the experience in the rest of Africa, Neto warns of the need to avoid the weaknesses which have in the past impeded access to complete independence:

"It is necessary that the real control of the country whether from the political, economic or social point of view, be in the hands of people who are devoted to the struggle and not in the fists of bureaucrats, who—it could be said in passing—are dishonest and not to be found in the battlefield. . . . it is necessary that the struggle be completely under the orientation of an independent party with well-defined ideas; that its militants must be disciplined and have absorbed fully the doctrines of their party. . . . Our struggle is not an isolated struggle in the world. It is part of a global struggle by Humanity to bring an end to the exploitation of man by man and it is within this framework that we must view our struggle outside the narrow limits of racial prejudice."<sup>26</sup>

The issue is stated more directly by Cabral:

"It is sufficient to recall that in our present historical situation—elimination of imperialism, which uses every means to perpetuate its domination over our peoples, and consolidation of socialism throughout a large part of the world—there are only two possible paths for an independent nation; to return to imperialist domination (neo-colonialism, capitalism, state capitalism) or to take the way of socialism. This operation, on which depends the compensation for the efforts and sacrifices of the popular masses during the struggle, is considerably influenced by the form of struggle and the degree of revolutionary consciousness of those who lead it."<sup>27</sup>

Common to both earlier and contemporary examples of guerilla struggle is the fact that, like regular warfare—to quote Clausewitz' famous formulation—it is the continuation of politics by other means. But unlike regular warfare it is the technique *par excellence* of the militarily weak against the technologically powerful. The one 'side relies on its control of the apparatus and the resources of the state. The other side relies on its roots among the people whose expressed or latent political aspirations it represents. Because of the vast imbalance of resources available to enemy and people, the survival of armed groups and their growth demands the use of techniques and tactics to compensate for the imbalance. These techniques are mobility, surprise, the exploitation of space and time, the use of the tactical retreat and so on. All combine to prevent the enemy bringing into play its superior fire-power in any decisive battle. But if it were only a matter of method—which is enriched by the experience both of insurgent and counter-insurgency forces—the outcome of the contest would be far more closely linked with its effective employment by the warring parties. As in classical warfare the deciding element would be military

technique and organization with the political element playing a part in morale and not much more. The significantly different content of modern revolutionary guerilla warfare is that in the case of the political partisan his or her principal weapon is not the rifle or the mortar but his relationship to the community, the movement, the cause in which and for which he fights. Insurgency or guerilla war has become an agency of social change in an era in which the transformation of the social order is on the agenda. Such struggles are no longer merely the patriotic and near-spontaneous reaction of a conquered people to foreign domination. Guerilla struggle in appropriate conditions has become an effective basis for the conquest of power against the established order whether foreign dominated or locally based.

During the time of Marx and Engels the stage had not yet been set for the deliberate creation and use of the guerilla group as an instrument of radical social change. Armed activity by working people was an expression of the revolutionary ferment which accompanied the rise and consolidation of the bourgeoisie. No real possibility existed for the conquest of peoples' power, and in the objective sense groups of working people acted, more often than not, as the physical force for the ascendancy of the new exploiting class. The main insurrectionary weapons were the street fight and the barricade, and as the bourgeoisie made common cause with authority, so the strength of the barricades was broken. Engels wrote:

"The soldier no longer sees behind it the 'people' but rebels, agitators, plunderers, levellers, the scum of society. If the conditions had changed in the case of war between nations this is no less true in the case of class struggle. The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of the unconscious mass, is past. Where it is a question of the complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for with body and soul."

From the beginning of this century, particularly after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, conscious planning for the armed popular rising became the basic perspective of the emergent revolutionary forces in many of the advanced capitalist countries. In Czarist Russia the creation of mobile and exceedingly small guerilla units was an important part of the agitation among the masses in favour of an armed uprising, achieved in the 1917 October Revolution. But while armed activity of the guerilla type played a vital role in the defence of the revolution against the old order and the interventionists, it would be a mistake not to distinguish the special character of this event from the whole problem of guerilla warfare as an instrument of contemporary

national and class struggle. The deliberate creation of organized groups which embark upon protracted armed revolutionary struggle to transform society at a time when the moment of insurrection has not yet matured is a post-October phenomenon and lends a special stamp to the revolutionary guerilla struggles which have punctuated recent history from China to Vietnam. In colonial and semi-colonial conditions the commencement of armed activity has not always been related to the moment in time when the question of the seizure of power is on the agenda because of the breakdown of state control, internal economic collapse and such circumstances. The guerilla fighter is a political fighter, a member of an organized revolutionary force, who uses the struggle itself, the actual physical conflict, as an instrument of agitation and mobilization. He aims to raise the level of popular participation to the point at which revolutionary aims become general, and guerilla fighters and mobilized masses form part of the instrument of revolutionary struggle guided by revolutionary ideology.

## NOTES

- This article is based on a paper "Revolution against Portuguese Colonialism in the Context of Southern Africa and some Common Problems of the Liberation Movements" presented to the Manchester Conference on The Revolution against Portuguese Colonialism, June 1973.
- Sean Gervasi, "The Strategy of the Neo-Colonialist Powers in South Africa", *The Black Liberator*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 227.
3. Ibid., p. 226.
  4. R. Murray and C. Stoneman, "Private Overseas Investment in Southern and Central Africa", London, unpublished, 1970.
  5. *Landstem*, 4 April 1967.
  6. Basil Davidson, *In the Eye of the Storm*, London, 1972, p. 288.
  7. *Angola in Arms*, Vol. 4, No. 2.
  8. "Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress", 1969, p. 5.
  9. B. Turok, "South Africa: The Violent Alternative", *Socialist Register*, 1972, p. 275.
  10. "Strategy and Tactics", op. cit., p. 5.
  11. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
  12. Ibid., p. 6.
  13. Ibid., p. 6.
  14. Turok, op. cit., p. 275.
  15. Amílcar Cabral, *Portuguese Colonies: Victory or Death*, Tricontinental, pp. 143-4.
  16. Basil Davidson, *In the Eye of the Storm*, pp. 233-6.
  17. Sol. Dabula, "10 Years of Umkhonto We Sizwe", *The African Communist*, 47, 1971, pp. 22-38.
  18. Ibid., p. 29.
  19. Ibid., p. 31.
  20. Ibid., p. 31.
  21. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
  22. Agostinho Neto, *Portuguese Colonies: Victory or Death*, op. cit., p. 34.
  23. A. Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, Stage 1, 1969, p. 64.

24. MPLA and PAIGC were formed in 1956, Frelimo in 1962.
25. *Mocambique Revolution*, No. 53, p. 2.
26. Don Barnet and Roy Harvey, *The Revolution in Angola*, New York, 1972, pp. 30-1.
27. *Revolution in Guinea*, op. cit., p. 87.
28. F. Engels, "Barricade Tactics" quoted in Pomeroy, ed. *Guerilla Warfare and Marxism*, London, 1969, pp. 68-72.