

SOUTH AFRICA: THE SEARCH FOR A STRATEGY

Ben Turok

“... A method, a form of struggle can only be reckoned as the best and most judicious one when it fully meets the requirements of a given concrete situation, when it is wholly suited to the conditions in which it is applied, when it makes it possible to muster to the greatest extent the revolutionary and progressive forces and bring them to the battlefield, when it makes possible a thorough exploitation of the enemy's weaknesses, and, for all these reasons, is likely to bring about the greatest successes possible, given the relation of forces prevailing at the moment.”

Le Duan, in *Viet Nam Courier*,
March 1970.

The elaboration of a theory of revolution in South Africa has proved to be an extremely difficult task. This most complex of societies which combines the extremes of capitalism and colonialism in a matrix of harsh differentiation is remarkably resistant to ideal-type analysis. This theoretical difficulty has inevitably spilled over into practical work where the overall strategic sweep and forms of struggle of the revolution have yet to be defined. Instead there has been a great deal of sheer pragmatism, trying here and then there to see where a chink in the white armour will reveal itself.

This article takes up the theme raised in the last issue of the *Socialist Register* of how the liberation movement headed by the African National Congress has grappled with the formidable task of overthrowing white rule in South Africa. In the course of the discussion some aspects of the struggle will have to be dealt with critically and it is hoped that it will be accepted that this is not a matter of apportioning blame or making destructive criticism, but of improving our understanding of how particular methods came to be used and to what effect. This task is even more necessary since there are, even now, organizations inside the country which are repeating the errors of a decade ago.

Two tendencies have been in contest for supremacy for half a century. On the one hand, African (now black) chauvinism has made strident, and sometimes episodically successful, populist appeals to the black masses; on the other, the non-racialists have sought, not only to uphold the goal of non-racial democracy, but also to mould the forms of the struggle in its image. The latter tendency has been the most persistent and is represented by the A.N.C. and its allies

This article will argue that both tendencies have been pushed to unnecessary extremes as a result of an inadequate specification of the goals and tasks of national liberation. It will urge that while non-racial goals are the only ones worth fighting for, and while *only* a non-racial perspective can open the way to a socialist society in the future, the main consideration of the liberation movement at present must be to reassess its policies in the light of the racial realities in South Africa today.

The principal feature of the peculiar social formation in South Africa is the sharp racial division which silhouettes the whites as beneficiaries extraordinary of the most intense oppression and exploitation of the vast majority of black people. Consciousness of this condition is widespread among the masses, but the liberation movement has yet to find a way of articulating it adequately. A study of its publications over a long period shows that the movement has had the greatest difficulty in articulating formulations which correspond with the racial structure, which are capable of harnessing the "national" sentiments of the most oppressed section of the population, the African people, and which nevertheless orient the revolution in a progressive direction.

The Social Configurations Black Consciousness is not False Consciousness

Three explanations have been offered at various times of the nature of South African society. Some have attempted to define the system in the categories of class relations of mature capitalist society and they have produced a lifeless theory out of tune with reality. Others have tried to superimpose a purely colonial model and this has led to a shallow explanation which does less than justice to the complexities of race and class. Most inadequate of all, however, are those of the liberal kind which assert that the South African brand of social injustice is entirely due to colour prejudice and the like. This is nonsense; apartheid is about a struggle for resources by coherent interest groups. We can ignore the last explanation in the present discussion.

It has long been recognized that the presence of a large white minority made a very substantial difference to the prospects of overcoming colonial rule in Africa. This was seen to be the case in Algeria, in Kenya, and it remains true of the Portuguese colonies and Rhodesia. But what has not been reckoned with sufficiently is that in the South African case, the white population is not only large, 3,958,000, having entrenched itself over three centuries, but most importantly, it has established a modern industrial state. The process of transforming a colonial occupation (with a relatively large settler population) into a complex system based primarily on capitalist exploitation both direct and indirect has had enormous consequences for the African people.

In a total population of 23 million, there are now 16,200,000 Africans who are not only politically without rights, but the vast majority of whom constitute a mass of propertyless surban workers, farm labourers, and semi-peasants. Despite separate tribal "homelands", they are nevertheless conscious of a common destiny.

There are also 2,100,000 Coloured (mixed descent) people and 668,000 Indians, who, notwithstanding certain occupational, commercial and residential advantages compared with the Africans, are nevertheless equally without political rights and also subject to acute exploitation. The meagre political rights formerly held by these two groups have been whittled way to the point where illusions that they were somehow an in-between category with prospects of absorption into the arena of white power and privilege have faded away. This has been the result of the harsh application of colour bars even at the most petty level, reinforcing the separation between white and black. Unlike other capitalist ruling classes, South Africa's rulers have been forced by the inner logic of race domination to abandon policies of co-option and social bribery, (the Bantustans excepted). Very little is done to legitimize its authority over any of the black national groups.

Thus, despite three centuries of cohabitation in one territory, social integration between black and white is non-existent, and consciousness of a separate black identity is general. Africans have always retained an awareness of a separate historically constituted "national" identity. Perhaps nationality would be more-accurate. At any rate, "nation" here is not to be read as "nation state". Much African culture, especially language remains, though it is true that modernization has done much to break down tribal structures and bring new values and aspirations to many. But, if integration into a modern industrial svstem has aroused desires for the fruits of that system it has also brought a deep bitterness against the white people who deprive them of the unfettered use of even those products that have come their way.

The reinforcement of "national" consciousness lies deer, within the system. For the vast majority of blacks who are proletarians in town or country, their daily lives drive home the same lesson. And while a minority of blacks who, despite rigorous censorship come to understand the processes of labour exploitation and the extraction of surplus value and develop a socialist consciousness, the structure around them confirms that they are first black and second proletarians. Whereas in a mature capitalist country uncomplicated by race divisions, economic or trade union consciousness is generated spontaneously, in South Africa a sense of black deprivation is uppermost. Also reinforcing black awareness is the role and status of white workers. In no country in the world is there so large a gap between those workers who perform

skilled work and act in a comparatively supervisory capacity (white) and those who have lesser skills and mainly do the physical work, (African). Though there are a considerable number of African workers who do skilled work it is not recognized as such.

The wage gap tells the story at a glance.

<i>Industry</i>					<i>White/African wage ratio</i>
Mining	..	..	..	..	20.3 / 1
Manufacturing	..	..	..	..	5.7 / 1
Wholesale trade	..	..	..	..	5.1 / 1
Construction	..	..	..	..	6.6 / 1

Wages statistics, however, tell only part of the story. The gap between white and black (especially African) worker is marked by lack of trade union rights, low all round status, minimal promotion prospects, by sharp differences in facilities at work and by the hundred and one other discriminatory practices of apartheid. Each of these exacerbate the cleavage between white and black at all levels, breaking the continuities and contacts that might be expected to develop at the work bench and leading to mutual hostility and polarization on racial lines. Even the present tendency to absorb Africans into more skilled jobs which cannot be filled by whites due to skilled labour shortages, has merely raised the colour bar floor level. The white-black gap remains and the main effect of black upward job mobility is to give more supervisory jobs to whites. This in turn leads to higher wages, resulting in the further widening of the wages gap.

I do not stress the gap between white and black for the sake of exposing social injustice, nor in order merely to deplore racialism. That has been done often enough. I want instead to draw attention to the structural features of the system and in particular to show that black consciousness is not false consciousness as some dogmatic "class only" theorists would have it. Furthermore it must be noted that an analysis in terms of race structures ought not to be confused with a discussion of race attitudes. The distinction is important since it helps us to grasp the point that conflict, in this kind of racially structured system, must necessarily work itself out along racial lines². If this is not recognized because of a rigid adherence to class analysis or doctrine, the liberation struggle can only be impeded.

For instance, though it is clear that the white workers cannot be defined in any other terms than those of a top stratum of the working class, a class analysis omitting the political role of the white workers must mislead. It is not enough to say that the white workers constitute a labour aristocracy, that they have been bought off, and that they are racist, though all this is true enough. What has to be stressed is that they have also been incorporated into the political and social realm of

the ruling capitalist class and have a stake in the *status quo* in a way that ensures their loyalty, for at least the foreseeable future. It is a matter of structure, not of degree.

Recognition that there is a deep and peculiar significance in the lot of black workers has recently been given by the U.S. Communist Party. They say: "Black Americans are triply oppressed: because of race; as workers; as a people."³ And this leads them to conclude: "The struggle for Black Liberation in the United States is today the central, most crucial issue before the entire working class and its allies. The call for 'Black Liberation' reaffirms the historical goal of full and unconditional economic, political and social equality for Afro-Americans. More, it calls for recognition by white allies that full freedom can be established *only on such terms and in such forms as seem proper to the black people themselves*. (Their italics). The black liberation movement is at the very heart of the struggle against U.S. imperialism, for the freeing of oppressed peoples must be realized to assure the full freedom of all working people." And again, "The struggle against racism, then, is a central part of the class struggle and the basic question facing the entire country today."

This recognition by the U.S. Communist Party that blacks are oppressed threefold is timely. If correct there, how much more so in South Africa where black workers are in the majority. In the South African case the national question must hold the centre of the analysis and of the solution: this is the main point of this article.

Many socialists fear that emphasizing the national aspect of the struggle will somehow admit a black bourgeois solution or that the struggle will become so contaminated with racism that it will lose its sense of purpose and direction, leading only to a race war. It cannot be denied that these dangers exist and I shall try to deal with them in the last section of this paper. Here we are looking at the formation of black consciousness, in particular among black workers.

Since most Africans, and most blacks, are proletarians, and since almost all employers are white, conflict over wages, general conditions of work, as well as overt political conflict takes on a colour aspect. That the African proletariat, being the most exploited and oppressed of all) should play the most prominent role in this struggle ought to be clear from the preceding argument. But their role will be played out in national (race) rather than in class terms since this is how the contradictions manifest themselves.

But even outside the framework of industrial relations, black and white earnings and prospects, and therefore loyalties, are wholly different. Black petty traders, professionals, businessmen and civil servants are all clearly marked out by the stamp of colour which acts with rigorous consistency in determining the place of people in the

system. The polarity of race ensures that the difference of income and status within the black communities themselves tends to get diminished in a wider solidarity embracing a wide range of strata.

Just as a clear conception of common interest has grown among the whites who think only of defending their privilege,⁵ so there emerges a counter solidarity among blacks, and both tendencies seem to lessen the internal formation of class consciousness within the respective communities. *For the black proletariat there can be no thought of liberation without an alliance of black people of the major strata.* The abolition of the colour bar and of white privilege, can only be achieved by an alliance of the black disenfranchised directed at the destruction of the white state apparatus.

Geographic Isolation

The race polarization thesis has been crucial in determining the perspectives of struggle. It was the recognition that there would be no weakening in white solidarity without a violent confrontation that led to the policy of armed struggle. But armed struggle presents its own problems, not least those posed by geographic considerations. Unfortunately, South Africa offers none of the terrain advantages associated with successful military operations by liberation movements. Worse still, the country is situated at the tip of the African continent insulated from friendly African states by the buffer territories of Mozambique, Angola and Rhodesia. Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho are also not very helpful, though they fall into a different category. At the same time, though the liberation movement is deprived of friendly borders there is not a great deal of solace for the white state either. Since these countries are themselves under siege, they cannot be thought of as a rearguard for white South Africa. Rather the reverse, the pressures to the north are bearing down towards the south, confirming the overwhelming view among white South Africans that they are firmly trapped in a geographic laager from which there is no escape. If serious trouble were to come there would not even be a secure external base for imperialist support though too much should not be made of this point.

The consequences of remoteness are nevertheless very great for the liberation movement. An armed conflict without a nearby friendly border makes starting extremely difficult. Sustaining operations without safe supply lines is even more hazardous, and there is the additional problem of the renewal of guerrillas.

At the same time, South Africa's remoteness has a positive side too. While in the days of Nkrumah's power, many hoped for liberation from the north, this misplaced optimism has now gone. There is a sort of finality about the situation which enforces a hard look at the internal

dynamics as a basis for strategy in place of the easier option of outside intervention. It is said that Southern Africa is a single theatre of struggle, and so it is, with the successes of the armed struggles in Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe making an important psychological impact. But no movement can predicate the stepping up of its struggle at home on successes elsewhere, particularly when these struggles are themselves likely to develop slowly and distances to the south are great.

There is an even greater imperative for focusing on South Africa itself. It is the heart of the white redoubt in the sub-continent and it is unthinkable that colonialism could be sustained in any of the neighbouring countries if South Africa itself was liberated. There is in any case an obligation on the movement there to ease the passage of others by draining the strength of the octopus at the centre.

Nevertheless what happens to the north is in many ways crucial. If the lines of communication of South Africa's armed forces become stretched over the whole of Southern Africa, they will have serious logistic problems. The area is vast, the population overwhelmingly black and the terrain to the north favourable for guerrilla warfare. Furthermore, the political consequences on an international level of South Africa's further military involvement will be serious. But we must needs restrict our vision to the internal situation for the present.

At this stage, the major impact of the armed battles to the north is psychological. The capacity of black guerrillas to hurt white troops and even to make a physical dent in white power is impressive. It cannot but generate a sense of confidence that the same will one day happen further south, and as a South African general astutely observed, confidence is all. He said:

"The objective for both sides in a revolutionary war is the population itself. . . military tactics and hardware are all well and good, but they are really quite useless if the Government has lost the confidence of the people among whom it is fighting. And by the time their confidence has been lost, more armed force will cause the population to become more antagonistic." (*Star* 27/1/73).

"The people are the mountain", said Cabral, and the problem is how they can generate the solidarity to enable them to dominate the plains. The answer lies in the development of a correct political line to which the mass of the people can respond readily and in the elaboration of a strategy and tactics to match. We need to go back a little in time to see how the liberation movement tried to do this in the recent past.

African Nationalism

Two principal tendencies manifested themselves in the liberation

movement in the formative post war years. On the one hand there were those who pursued a non-racial line seeking to isolate the most extreme white racists, and in this category we can place the moderate leaders of the A.N.C., the Indian Congress, the Communist Party and the progressive trade unions, although each of these were by and large going their own way. On the other hand there was a group of young African nationalists in the A.N.C. Youth League who were pressing for a policy of African exclusivism and greater militancy. The Youth Leaguers called for "freedom from white domination and the attainment of political independence" although they qualified this with assurances that the whites would not be excluded ultimately and that what was intended was a democratic state with rights for all irrespective of colour.

One of the main objectives of the young African nationalists (who included Mandela, Tambo and Nokwe) was to put an end to collaboration with government-created bodies set up for consulting with Africans. These "dummy" bodies tended to involve African leaders in endless discussions with government representatives, and led nowhere. The militants wanted the official A.N.C. leadership to break with these organizations and instead set in motion a mass campaign of protest and defiance in support of their demand for "national freedom".

By the end of the forties the Youth Leaguers were wellnigh in control of the A.N.C. They attempted to follow African exclusivist policies but this was eroded by the looming danger of the Nationalist Government. In the face of danger the A.N.C. moved into an alliance with the Indian Congress and the Communist Party. In the process of this new alignment, calls for African self-determination and "political independence" gradually moved to the background and greater stress was laid on anti-facist slogans, general democratic slogans such as 'one man one vote', the extension of political rights to all races and the like.

It was under the umbrella of united front policies for the extension of rights to all that the campaigns of the 50s were conducted.

Moses Kotane, a leading figure in both the A.N.C. and the C.P. wrote in 1954:

"The burning need, however, which cannot be evaded any longer, is to bring about immediate unity of action between European and Non-European democrats check the Government's Fascist plans and policies and to quell the rampant to facialism, among both whites and non-whites, which those plans and policies are daily evoking."

And:

"The alliance of the Congresses is not a 'racial' movement seeking domination and privileges for one section of the population at the expense of the others."¹⁹⁸

Later, in 1958 Kotane wrote:

“It is not only among Africans and other Non-Europeans that the crisis is expressing itself. There is a steadily growing number of serious thinking white South Africans who, although some of them may not care to be associated with our Freedom Charter [which called for universal franchise—BT] are aware that the future of this country lies in the policy of equality of rights for all its inhabitants. . . . It is the duty and responsibility of the progressive organizations and their leaders to assist this process of thinking and realization in these people and do all they can to draw them into the movement for democracy.”⁹

Further:

“A way can and must be found to build a united front for all who are seeking a new beginning for South Africa, including those who at present are not prepared to accept the challenging vision of the Charter.”¹⁰

A salient aspect of the policies of the day was therefore the hope that a major section of the white people could be won over to co-operation with the Congress Alliance or at least neutralized sufficiently to isolate the Nationalist government. In those circumstances it was hoped that sufficient pressure could be generated to force substantial political concessions. There was also some talk of “revolution”.¹¹

In the Congress Alliance, each of the four national groups and the trade unions were represented by its own organization though the A.N.C. exercised overall leadership.

The Communist Party held an anomalous position. It had been banned in 1950, before the Alliance was set up formally and since it was the only illegal body on the left, it could not take its place around the table. No doubt some of the A.N.C. leaders were content with this and there was no attempt to get round the difficulty and meet as organizations behind the scenes. Nevertheless, members of the C.P. belonged to all the Congress organizations, and, since some of the top Congress leaders and outstanding cadres were also in the C.P. it exercised considerable influence within the Alliance. It was the enforced hidden participation of the CP. in the Alliance that led to charges that the A.N.C. was unduly influenced by the CP. and in particular by its more prominent white members. This complaint was made more credible by virtue of the fact that the CP. had had a predominantly white Central Committee at the time it was banned. This gave an impression amongst Africans that the CP. was basically a white organization with a “white” ideology. Many of these people continued to be active afterwards, and it may be assumed that their influence in the movement as a whole continued.

But the A.N.C. rebutted the charges of undue influence vigorously, insisted that its policies were determined independently, and that African Communist members of the A.N.C. **participated** as individuals

only. Furthermore, the A.N.C. defended its alliance with the Congress of Democrats on the grounds of non-racial principle and as being in line with the goals of the Freedom Charter. African exclusivism was now condemned, charges of race hatred were denied, and the platforms of Congress meetings reflected the active participation of all races. In some branches and areas however, notably Sophiatown and the Eastern Cape, probably the most militant in the country, there was a sharp edge of anti-white sentiment and a strong black populist current in the propaganda.

If some reservations remained in the A.N.C. about the increasingly public co-operation with other races in the framework of the Congress Alliance, this was finally put aside after the arrests of the Treason Trial in 1956. One-hundred-and-fifty-six leaders of all organizations were charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government and set up a "Communist" state. The trial consolidated the Congress Alliance, high-lighted the very real commitment to the struggle of all the partners in the Alliance, and brought out the general democratic aims of the movement.

The trial dragged on for four years. During this time, preoccupations with defence and the sheer exhaustion of leaders by long days in court, led to a certain inertia. At the same time hundreds of leading cadres were banned and the Alliance was severely harrassed. Seizing this opportunity a group of Africans broke away from the A.N.C. and formed the Pan African Congress (P.A.C.). The P.A.C. made three main claims for recognition: they claimed the mantle of genuine African nationalism, they adopted an overtly anti-white posture, and they condemned Communism and its influence in the Congress Alliance. There is some evidence that the C.I.A. had a hand in the founding of P.A.C. and its first appearance certainly received surprising support in unlikely quarters. Many white Liberals moved over to support P.A.C., and its leaders gained much publicity in the daily press. It seems likely that this publicity greatly assisted the growth of P.A.C. But we cannot discount the possibility that the rising anger of the oppressed was finding insufficient response from the Congress Alliance while P.A.C. looked like providing some dramatic results. Above all, the appeal of the P.A.C. brand of African populism cannot be doubted.¹²

We have seen how in the crucial decade in the 50s the desire to assert a strong African nationalism in the A.N.C. was blunted and how the all-race Congress Alliance came to be challenged by P.A.C. What basis is there for the assertion, made even now, that whites undermined African nationalism and exerted excessive influence on the liberation movement as a whole? Is there any truth in the allegation that Communists, especially white Communists, strove to play down African

nationalism in an effort to press a non-racial and socialist programme? Did white participation at the highest levels lead to an emasculation of A.N.C. policies?¹³ Did the growing integration of the Congress Alliance and its stress on non-racial democracy undermine its potential black support?¹⁴ These questions remain controversial and are still a matter of contention inside South Africa today.

Other critics of the Congress Alliance have said that the prominent whites in the movement were not fully committed to the struggle by virtue of their affluence and comfortable life-style. It has also been suggested that they could not but fall down in their leadership roles since they were not part of the oppressed and could not possibly interpret what the masses were saying. One particularly hostile critic has said that they had a subconscious "will to fail". These criticisms require an answer, not least because they help to clarify the nature of the choices open to the liberation movement.

First the white liberals. This group exercised considerable influence among the white public after the war, but when the government cracked down on its opponents, liberalism declined as an organized force. Yet white liberals continued to exercise considerable influence generally, and they also had on-going contact with certain of the more conservative African leaders. Apart from urging caution in action the liberals also constantly sought to engage African leaders like Chief Lutuli in discussion with this or that group of businessmen, journalists, or Afrikaner intellectuals, in the belief that a continuing dialogue might in some way hold off the coming confrontation. To a certain extent this politicking diverted attention from the building of the mass movement.

But there were whites of a different stamp, Communists and committed democrats who were active *within* the liberation movement. Can the charge of diluting the struggle be made about them? They were certainly influential through the C.P. and the C.O.D. and their very direct involvement in the action. They could hardly be faulted on the grounds of their commitment. At most it may be said that they (together with many blacks) strove to play down African nationalism in the Alliance in order to develop a non-racial democratic programme.

There was also an implicit assumption in the Alliance that all racial groups could play a somewhat equal role and the necessity of always ensuring the leading role of Africans was sometimes forgotten. Perhaps the participation of whites in the movement did inhibit the development of self-confidence and leadership qualities of Africans as some people suggest, since white South Africans, like intellectuals in any movement, tend to work with greater confidence, using their talents and expertise with effect. Perhaps, though the evidence is far from conclusive.

What could be argued more convincingly is that the mere presence of whites at the top layers of the movement was misunderstood by the masses and that they were not able to identify wholly with a movement which gave such status to members of the ruling race. The demand for national liberation for the black people must have sounded strange coming from white South Africans. Perhaps this is taking a narrow view, under-estimating the ability of the man in the street to comprehend that there were some whites who had broken with their own kin and thrown in their lot with the oppressed.

Three points can be made with confidence. First, there have been a good number of white South Africans totally committed to the struggle and prepared to give life itself for their convictions. And this is no flash in the pan. There is a long tradition among white radicals, going back many decades, of involvement and commitment in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The analysis and questioning in this article must not be seen as an attempt to minimize their contribution.

Second, no matter how exclusive a black movement may be, it cannot for long help but seek the co-operation of white sympathizers. The moment a movement goes beyond words, it is bound by the dynamics of struggle to welcome the participation of anyone, including those who desert the enemy ranks.

Third, since the primary aspect of the struggle in South Africa is the struggle for black liberation from white domination, the movement must be in fact, and it must be seen to be, led by black leaders. The primacy of African leadership and solidarity is not a matter of sentimentality, or of sleight of hand, it is an essential requirement if the movement is to maintain its credibility with the mass of the people, and if it is to lead them correctly.

Though it would be a narrow view which urged that a leader has to be poor to understand the social dynamics of poverty, one must concede that a white intellectual whose life-style and daily experience is remote from that of the oppressed has some difficulty in formulating policies of struggle for the oppressed. One might draw a parallel from the policies of Communist parties which insist that workers should constitute a majority of the leadership. By extension of this principle, most of the important policy makers in a mature and effective liberation movement must be from the oppressed group, and this is particularly important where, as in the South African case, the differences between the two groups are so great.

Transfer to Violence

The Congress Alliance of the 50s pursued a policy of militant though non-violent mass protest which was highly successful in mobilizing

thousands of activists. There can be little doubt about the impact of the campaigns of this period which politicized large numbers of the oppressed, particularly those in the urban areas. But towards the close of the 50s it was becoming apparent that mass support for Congress campaigns was falling off. No doubt the government's systematic use of bannings, banishment and other administrative repressive means was having some effect since public work was becoming increasingly circumscribed. Since the policy was to use only open political action a sense of frustration began to enter into the situation, especially among the unorganized supporters of Congress.

The relative inactivity, at least in the urban areas, led some sympathizers to question the possibility of change at all. Julius Lewin opened a debate in *Africa South* with an article "No Revolution Round the Corner" reflecting his general pessimism.¹⁵ Replying, Michael Harmel, a leading member of the C.P. and of the Congress movement, argued that the poverty and oppression of blacks was gross, driving them into protests and demonstrations which were all working towards revolutionary change. Harmel insisted that "revolution need not involve violence. There have been plenty of examples in history where a combination of factors have been compelling enough to make a ruling class give way for urgent and overdue changes, without dragging the people through the agony of civil war." Two years later Harmel was one of the first to admit that violence was inescapable for revolutionary change.

Yet apart from the apparent reluctance of the urban masses to participate in large numbers in Congress campaigns, there were signs in the countryside that a new momentum of a different order was building up. The immediate issues behind the eruptions of militant and often violent action on a large scale varied, but they were all related to the new oppressive restrictions being enforced by the government and its paid agents, the chiefs and headmen in the reserves (now called homelands).

The reserves consist of eight "national units" of about seven million people and add up to some 13% of South Africa's land surface. Each of the main units has some form of government-sponsored tribal authority which is supervised by white civil servants seconded from Pretoria. The reserve economies have long been undermined by the draining-off of able-bodied labour for work in the white economy, and by overcrowding which has brought productivity below subsistence. *Per capita* income has been declining for a long time and 74% of the land is eroded.¹⁶ Poverty is widespread and deep while the infant mortality rate is phenomenal. The reserves are rural slums ruled by indifferent officials using the harshest of regulations.

In 1957 the grinding mills of poverty and official interference

brought matters to a head. African women in the Bahurutshe Reserve in the Zeerust area demonstrated against the issuing of pass books by officials. Hundreds of women burnt their books and a large number were arrested. Migrant workers from Zeerust working in Johannesburg returned on the weekends to attend tribal meetings which revealed the existence of two factions: supporters of government-oriented chiefs, and their opponents. Unrest continued for about a year, often flaring up into violence. Huts were burnt and there were numerous cases of assault, building up into open warfare. The tribal courts imposed severe punishments. The police were very active and on one occasion used a military aircraft to disperse a crowd of women. About 200 persons were charged with offences ranging from murder and arson to carrying on prohibited political activity.¹⁷

Even more serious trouble developed in the Sekhukhuniland Reserve over the introduction of Bantu Authorities and cattle-culling schemes. Here again there was near civil war with numerous assaults and assassinations. When, in May 1958, the police attempted to make some arrests general rioting broke out and armed peasants attacked government agents. The police returned in strength making more than 330 arrests. Many were given life sentences, others periods of ten years imprisonment for public violence, assault or arson. The Chief of the region was banished to a remote area hundreds of miles away where he lived in isolation and near starvation for a number of years.

In mid-1959 rioting occurred in the outlying towns and countryside throughout Natal. The catalyst in the rural areas was the extension of influx control to women and trouble over dipping tanks. Women held meetings and processions, large numbers of dipping tanks were destroyed, fires were started on white farms and for some days there was panic among whites in various country towns. About 600 women were arrested followed by the inevitable trials and imprisonment.

Other violent incidents occurred in urban and rural areas throughout the country, with loss of life on all sides.

The most dramatic revolt took place in Pondoland during 1959–60. The imposition of Bantu Authorities (a form of tribal local government) and its high-handed implementation by government stooges among the chiefs led to bitter strife. A Hill Committee was formed to lead the resistance which rapidly became widespread. Muriel Horrell writes: "Chiefs who supported government policies were attacked and in some cases murdered; huts were burned; the chiefs concerned appointed home guards who in some cases conducted retaliatory attacks; fences and other betterment works were destroyed. For many months pro-government chiefs went in fear of their lives. In some cases the police opened fire to disperse angry mobs: a tragic occurrence took place at Ngquza Hill near Bizana in June 1960 when eleven Africans

were shot dead and thirteen wounded. Africans murdered two chiefs, two headmen, four councillors, and seventeen commoners; and another three Africans were killed as a result of police action."¹⁸

The revolt was ultimately crushed by a massive military intervention by the crack Black Watch Brigade which surrounded the region, cut off all roads and then went in to smash all opposition.

Urban Protest and the Turn to Sabotage

The significance of these events in the rural areas was to a certain extent lost on the country as a whole. Even in the ranks of the liberation movement, which were excessively urban-oriented, the rural rebellions were not fully understood. The movement continued to focus its attention primarily on the urban areas with most of the work confined to the African townships.

Every town and city in South Africa has its own satellite township for the African work force. In the rural white towns they may be only a thousand or two, but in Johannesburg there is a massive complex of townships for nearly a million Africans. They are controlled by a large black and white force of police and municipal guards who oversee the administration of multiple regulations on rents, housing, visitors and almost every aspect of life.

In the past, some townships which grew up in the period of rapid industrial expansion during and after the war, enjoyed a certain degree of freedom from municipal control. In Alexandra Township for instance, there was a strong communal spirit which resisted officialdom to the point where police did not dare patrol the streets even in vans. When tension was high the roads were barricaded, police and officials were attacked with stones and bottles and fired on by the armed gangs who operated numerous rackets inside and outside the township. In a sense Alexandra was the first "no-go" area in a South African township and not unnaturally it was a strong base for A.N.C. organization.

What was disquieting in the closing years of the 50s was that it was in these townships that active support for the movement was slipping away. A magnificent bus boycott, which made a national impact, was carried out in Alexandra Township itself, but taken as a whole the urban scene was not encouraging. Within the Congress Alliance there was a growing recognition that the masses were expecting a more militant lead than had been provided in the past. The Congress movement therefore decided on a mass resistance campaign to mobilize people against passes which were pressing on Africans more than ever. The P.A.C., however, anticipated the campaign¹⁹ and in March 1960 organized a series of peaceful demonstrations outside police stations. (P.A.C. disavowed violence at this time).²⁰ The demonstrations resulted in the shootings at Sharpeville where 69 Africans were killed

and 178 wounded, an event which triggered off the most intense political reaction. It led to a wholly successful Day of Mourning called by Chief Lutuli during which black South Africans stayed at home. Those who did not were attacked on their return to African townships at night and here and there some public buildings were set alight. On 30 March 30,000 Africans marched on the city of Cape Town under P.A.C. leadership. On the same day the government declared a State of Emergency and detained 20,000 people. In Durban thousands of Africans marched from the township Cato Manor demanding the release of the detainees who now numbered 11,279 Africans, 90 Asians, 36 Coloureds and 98 whites. The Citizen Force and Skiet Commandos (all white) were mobilized and deployed around the towns.

In all, between 21 March and 19 April 1960, 83 civilians and 3 policemen lost their lives in various actions, and 365 civilians and 59 policemen were injured.²¹ During the emergency the A.N.C. set up a skeleton underground organization which was able to keep the organization intact. The C.P. issued its first public leaflet announcing its existence.

The emergency was lifted in August and the detainees were released. Unfortunately the underground organization was then abandoned, and people returned to their former style of work. This decision was in part due to a sense of relief at the ending of the emergency as well as to a failure to grasp the seriousness of the real situation. But the A.N.C. had also decided that it ought not to accept its banning, and that it should resist liquidationist attitudes. It was argued that the organization should maintain its open structure. No doubt the decision was the result of a widespread confidence that the struggle was still on the upgrade with the government on the defensive. Instead, then, of preparing for the next phase by establishing a network of underground positions, the movement placed all its emphasis on the next public campaign: an attempt to unite politically the African people and their organizations, including the P.A.C. The P.A.C. and various African liberals withdrew, however, and the final shape of the conference that emerged, the All-In African Conference in Pietermaritzburg on 25 March 1961, was held without them.

Nelson Mandela made the main speech, attacking the government for its decision to set up a "white republic" and called for the convening of a National Convention based on universal franchise. The resolution stated, "We declare that no Constitution or form of government decided without the participation of the African people who form an absolute majority of the population can enjoy moral validity or merit support either within South Africa or beyond its borders."

The Conference called for nationwide demonstrations and for all

Africans not to co-operate or collaborate with the "proposed South African Republic or any other form of government which rests on force to perpetuate the tyranny of a minority . . ." Mandela then went into hiding to lead a national strike.²² But one is bound to say that his action was largely symbolic. The movement was carried along on a wave of euphoria and a refusal to recognize that the police state that was always referred to in speeches really existed. Hundreds of leaders had been banned, the organizations were banned, as were meetings, and most forms of public work. There was ample evidence that the state apparatus was being sharpened for the counter push, yet the movement was unable to break away from its open style of operation. The three-day strike began with considerable support but the police reacted with great vigour, arresting pickets and intimidating the hesitant in house-to-house raids. Employers and the daily press issued sharp warnings of dismissal and worse.

The strike was broken, and the movement was left to reassess its policies. The smashing of the strike by brutal police action showed that open peaceful mass demonstrations were no longer possible. Even when people were prepared to risk their jobs and face arrest on various technical infringements, the scale of police force made it well nigh impossible to break through. And the memory of the Sharpeville massacre was still very fresh. Open resistance seemed naive and even irresponsible since the movement could provide no protection for defenceless workers.

At the same time it was recognized that isolated and spontaneous acts of violence were of no value and often counter-productive. There had already been numerous cases of people taking action against police and against traitors, and not only in the countryside. In the African complexes in Johannesburg scabs returning from work on the evening of a strike had been assaulted and even fired on by young unorganized men who had also acted against isolated police patrols. But a national struggle could not be built on this sort of action.

The strike brought home to the movement and the oppressed people as a whole that the army and police in South Africa would stop at nothing in a showdown. It was an important reminder that, unlike in Europe or in other countries, the army in South Africa is recruited not from the working class or peasantry, but from the privileged white workers and farmers, and they would give no quarter in a confrontation.

There was now a widespread belief that the violence of the authorities had to be reciprocated by the movement.²³ In some sections of the movement the conviction was growing that there would be a loss of morale unless ways were found to demonstrate that the oppressed were not without the capacity to retaliate. The blacks had to show that

the white rulers were still vulnerable and could be hurt. More, if the A.N.C. was to maintain its place it must be seen to be working to a plan which was leading to total struggle.

There was also a reluctant recognition that the effect of the national strike was to unite white opinion and strengthen the hand of the Nationalist government.²⁴ The line was being drawn ever more sharply between black and white. Most important of all, the belief was growing that a revolutionary and necessarily violent struggle would have to be waged to break the apartheid state.²⁵

In retrospect it may seem remarkable how slow this idea was to attain ascendancy in the liberation movement. And even when the need for violence was recognized, how tardy the implementation was of the first steps. But we must recognize that with the constant harassment of the leadership, it was difficult to conduct the kind of cool reassessment that was needed for a major change in direction.

In an interesting paper called "Reason and Violence", Roy Edgley has discussed the futility of engaging in argument with a person who has closed his mind to argument itself. Only some form of coercion then remains. But the transition may be difficult, particularly where the person who considers himself the victim believes firmly in the validity of argument as a means of settling disputes. The analogy holds good in the South African case. On the one hand the government had long relied entirely on force to maintain the white state intact, while the oppressed had engaged in numerous efforts at dialogue and protest to bring about change. Recognition that neither would do came hard and implementation even more so especially for men who had spent a lifetime in open non-violent politics.

The difficulty lay in part in the isolation from the rest of the world which all South Africans suffer and which, because of the banning of literature and travel restrictions, the leaders of the liberation movement suffered more than others. Increased world contact would have revealed new options much earlier.

At the turn of the 60s black Africa was rapidly gaining freedom from colonial rule but their freedom was won without violence. There was no model here for the South African movement to follow. In Algeria, the only other country with a large white minority of the settler type, the struggle was swimming in blood and not encouraging. Only Che Guevara's book on guerrilla warfare seemed to suggest a new model of struggle. But conditions and traditions were very different in the two countries, and the lessons of Cuba were not easily applied. Mandela himself spent much of his time in hiding reading Von Clausewitz and similar works, but the working out of a wholly new strategy and tactics was bound to take time, particularly as police harassment was constant and steadily increasing. Police surveillance

was vast and they were in the favourable position of knowing all the key figures in the movement and the organizational structure down to branch level. For the movement to embark on new methods it would first have to build a new secret organizational machine.

It was also soon recognized that there was a great lack of full-time trained cadres at the crucial middle level. Men who had performed magnificently as local leaders at branch or regional level in open conditions were not always suitable for the rigours of the underground and for violent methods. Many lacked necessary skills like driving a car, using tools and implements and the numerous other skills that the freedom fighter needs. Nevertheless the pressures for a new initiative were overwhelming. A seemingly revolutionary situation was developing, violence was breaking out in town and country, political consciousness had never been higher and the liberation movement had to move, and in a new direction.

The White State Focussed

The form of violence decided upon was a campaign of sabotage on government buildings and installations and a core of men was created for the purpose. It was hoped that sabotage would have a profound demonstration effect, raising morale, seizing the initiative from the government and turning the movement away from the old-style protests. The sabotage was, as Fischer told the court, directed primarily at symbolic targets. The first acts were carried out on a symbolic day too—it was Dingaan's Day, the day when white conquest was finally established.²⁶

The sabotage attacks were explained in leaflets issued in the name of a new organization linked to the Congress Alliance called Umkonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation). The leaflet said that Umkonto was "formed by Africans. It includes in its ranks South Africans of all races. . ." and that it would "carry on the struggle for freedom and democracy by new methods, which are necessary to complement the actions of the established national liberation organizations. . . It will be the fighting arm of the people against the government and its policies of race oppression . . . We of Umkonto we Sizwe have always sought—as the liberation movement has sought—to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We do so still. We hope—even at this late hour—that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realization of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist [Government] policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the stage of civil war."

The sabotage attacks were enough to throw the government and the

white ruling class as a whole into a frenzy. Though it took a few months for the government to organize its repressive agencies on an even higher level, and also to pass necessary validating legislation, when counter measures came, they were very tough.

Umkonto was not alone in the field. Other sabotage organizations were the African Resistance Movement, formed by young white leftists and disillusioned members of the Liberal Party, and Poqo, the military wing of P.A.C. which was also founded in 1961. Poqo criticized Umkonto for diluting African nationalism by admitting non-Africans and so the feud between the two mother bodies was carried over into the battle *areas*.²⁷

Poqo was primarily active as a terrorist organization. Evidence in court was that Poqo had killed three African policemen and a white man between March 1962 and February 1963. Poqo seems to have been responsible for the action at Paarl on 21 November 1962 when a police station was attacked, some shops burnt, and two white civilians killed. Five Africans died from police bullets and some 400 were arrested. Poqo was also involved in several attempts on the life of the now Prime Minister of the Transkei, Chief Kaiser Matanzima, a most unpopular man, hated for his violent suppression of all opposition, and for collaborating with the government and imposing its harsh measures in the reserve.

The Minister of Justice revealed in Parliament on 12 June 1963 and 10 June 1964 that by the latter date 202 members of Poqo had been found guilty of murder, 12 of attempted murder or conspiracy to murder, 395 of sabotage, 126 of leaving the country illegally, and 820 of lesser *crimes*.²⁸ The scale of activity by all organizations is shown by the figure of 2,169 arrested under security laws in 1963. In addition to the persons charged about 1,000 were detained under the Ninety Day law.

It can be seen that the sweep of sabotage was considerable. It was used in town and country and by all the liberation movements. Yet it failed to ignite the prairie fire as many had hoped. While sabotage provided the government with every excuse for unleashing a brutal wave of terror it failed to mobilize the mass of the people who seemed to be left outside the arena from the time of the first blasts. Sabotage remained the weapon of an *élite* corps in the liberation movement. As a consequence, sabotage had the effect of isolating the organized movement from the mass who felt unable to join in this new phase or even to defend the actionists when they were *seized*.²⁹

Many were inevitably caught and forced, under systematic torture, to give away their contacts. Here too, the movements revealed their unpreparedness. Having talked of fascism for a decade and more, the movements were nevertheless caught by surprise when the police

behaved like fascists. Under torture, many victims found to their regret that they knew too much and that the police knew that they knew. The process of extraction of information was carried out in all its horror of vicious torture, murder and suicide. Remorselessly the police uncovered the networks and suppressed the organizations. Those who were not caught either went into hiding or fled abroad.

Looked at as a single phase of the struggle—it must be said that the sabotage campaign was abortive. While most members of the liberation movement would agree that the turn to violence was necessary and historically correct, the actual form of the campaign led down the road to disaster. It has been claimed that sabotage lifted the psychological shackles of legalism and of respect for white authority³⁰ and that if the movement had not taken these steps it would not have survived politically.³¹ In later years explanations for the setbacks suffered included "mistakes of insufficient vigilance and inadequate organization" and "security lapses".³²

In the last analysis, however, what is important is that *the sabotage campaign failed on the main count—it did not raise the level of action of the masses themselves*. Although it seems that the masses supported and even welcomed the resort to force, they could find no way of joining in and expressing their support. They were left on the threshold, frustrated bystanders of a battle being waged on their behalf. Perhaps the over-sophisticated methods used in sabotage was itself the consequence of the political outlook of the movement. As the leaflet of Umkonto suggests, sabotage was seen as another vehicle for protest, and not as the first shots in a protracted struggle in which the masses had to play a crucial part. Instead of using highly technical gadgetry, the movement might have begun with the simplest methods, which would have been easily assimilated in a country where "the population" is friendly and widely dispersed, while the authority is easily identified and spread thinly over the country as a whole. The essential thing at this stage was raising the level of struggle, step by step, in the words of Le Duan,³³ and if the assessment that the people were deeply disturbed by the Sharpeville and subsequent events was correct, then the more effective methods were those that the masses could use too. It has often been said that the very deep involvement of the Vietnamese peasants was due to the simplicity of the weaponry in the earlier days and it would seem that the parallel is appropriate.

As the sabotage mounted so the tone of the propaganda of the A.N.C. and Umkonto altered. The African character of the movement was highlighted and the *white* state was focussed sharply. In a leaflet issued around May 1963 the A.N.C. said: "The South African people are at war with Verwoerd. Twelve million people (the number of Africans, Indians and Coloureds at the time—B.T.) will be slaves no

longer. . . To destroy Verwoerd we must destroy the instruments of white power. . . How are we to smash them? With planned, strategic violence. Already scared, the whites are on the look-out . . . We say that just as Africans bear the brunt of oppression under the white state, so will the white state be broken by the main force of African people. But this is no reason we say, to reject comrades of other races whom we know are ready to fight with us, suffer, and if need be, die."

In other statements Umkonto said, "Umkonto is for activists. We have struck against the white state more than 70 times. . . Umkonto has powerful allies. The African states and the democratic world are four-square behind us. We have allies among other races in South Africa." In 1963, when five white civilians were killed in the Transkei by alleged Poqo militants, the A.N.C. issued a statement headed, "After the Transkei killings—Listen white man." And it went on, "Political violence has become the South African way of life. Why? What can be done to stop it? . . . Like the raid on Paarl last year, when seven people died, the motive is a massive political wrong, fury, frustration and contempt for what whites do . . ." "Black, Coloured and Asian are sick to death of white supremacy. Sabotage erupts every other week throughout the country, now here, now there. The whites are turning vicious and panicky . . ."

And in a major policy document "The People Accept the Challenge of the Nationalists" dated 6 April 1963, the A.N.C. National Executive said: "The government will certainly be more ruthless than it has been, it already considers itself at war and is fighting a desperate battle. Every European citizen has been called to defend white supremacy. Whites have been called upon to sacrifice not only time and money but life itself.

"It would be criminal on our part not to prepare the Africans throughout the country on a similar scale. No one can afford to be neutral in this situation . . . The times have changed, we must make only one call, WE DEMAND FREEDOM OR DEATH, there can be no middle course."¹⁴

These quotations seem to indicate that the exigencies of the situation were now beginning to sharpen the policies of the A.N.C. in two directions. The "whiteness" of the oppressor was no longer minimized (and talk of rights for all went by the board) and a protracted civil war was implied even when not directly expressed.

Catastrophe at Rivonia

The sabotage campaign had the effect of polarizing black and white loyalties and sharply increasing repression. Meanwhile the A.N.C. and Umkonto took up the task of planning widespread armed action.

Nelson Mandela and a small group of organizers began an organizing drive to recruit into Umkonto. The proposed structure was similar to the M-plan previously used by the A.N.C. for its volunteer corps which set up cells with group leaders in a tight network in African townships.

An important policy statement was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in April 1963. The statement said that things were coming to a head in the country and that while legal channels of political activity were being closed, "the oppressed masses are turning to methods that are illegal and non-peaceful." It pointed out that violent outbreaks were becoming more common and that many of these were local spontaneous reactions by a harassed people. The statement urged that unplanned local actions should be discouraged and that what was needed was "organized and planned mass self-defence and resistance." It called for "No desperation; no adventurism, but firm, resolute and revolutionary action!" Every local issue must be linked with the political issue of destroying white power, but that correct policies were insufficient. There must be adequate machinery to convey it to the people, and it warned that "Failure to take necessary organizational steps would lead to a dangerous gap opening between the people and their leaders." On the situation as a whole, the statement said, "Verwoerd and Vorster are steadily turning the country into an armed camp, ruled by decree and martial law. They are heading for civil war." It emphasized that if the government persisted with the present course "the only effect can be that the present outbreaks of sabotage and violence will develop into full-scale war, beginning with guerrilla operations in various parts of the countryside and culminating in an armed insurrection of the whole oppressed people throughout the country."

At the same time, a group within Umkonto was working on a plan named Operation Mayebuye. There is still some doubt whether the plan was ever properly adopted by the leadership of all the components of the movement, or whether this kind of consultation was possible in the prevailing conditions. The ambitious plan was nevertheless set in motion. In retrospect, it seems that if sabotage had not been able to establish itself as a continuing form of struggle because the method was too advanced and the organization inadequate, then Operation Mayebuye was an even more dubious proposition. In a short time it led to the decimation of the movement.

The plan opened with the following statement:
"The white state has thrown overboard every pretence of rule by democratic process. Armed to the teeth it has presented the people with only one choice, that is its overthrow by force and violence. It can now truly be said that very little, if any, scope exists for the smash-

ing of white supremacy other than by means of mass revolutionary action, the main content of which is armed resistance leading to victory by military means. . . . We are confident that the masses will respond in overwhelming numbers to a lead which holds out a real possibility of successful armed struggle."

The plan envisaged "organized and well-prepared guerrilla operations during the course of which the masses of the people will be drawn in and armed." The document stated that there would be tremendous difficulties since the white state was powerful and the government could at least initially count on the support of three million whites. But South Africa was isolated in the world and the movement could expect "almost unlimited assistance" from friendly governments.

"Although we must prepare for a protracted war, we must not lose sight of the fact that the political isolation of South Africa from the world community of nations, and particularly the active hostility towards it from almost the whole of the African Continent and the socialist world, may result in such massive assistance in various forms that the state structure will collapse far sooner than we can at the moment envisage."

"In the initial period when for a short while the military advantage will be ours, the plan envisages a massive onslaught on preselected targets which will create maximum havoc and confusion in the enemy camp and which will inject into the masses of the people and other friendly forces a feeling of confidence that here at last is an army of liberation equipped and capable of leading them to victory . . . The time for small thinking is over because history leaves us no choice."

The operational section of the Plan envisaged the "simultaneous landing of four groups of 30 based on our present resources whether by ship or air, armed and properly equipped in such a way as to be self-sufficient in every respect for at least a month.)' These groups would then select targets and attack. Prior to these arrangements guerrilla units would have been established in crucial areas. "Our target is that, on arrival, the external force should find at least 7,000 men in the four main areas ready to join the guerrilla army in the initial onslaught."

In the meantime the political wing of the movement was to "arouse the people to participate in the struggles that are designed to create an upheaval throughout the country." There was also to be a "flood of leaflets by plane announcing the commencement of our armed struggle . . ."

The implementation of Operation Mayebuyee cannot be dealt with here in any detail, nor is it relevant to our analysis. What must be said however, is that once the main leadership was arrested at Rivonia in 1963, the Plan collapsed.

Many leaders and hundreds of the best cadres had been sent out of the country for training, and this seriously weakened the organization at home. Those who remained were either jailed or immobilized. A serious miscalculation was the effectiveness of torture in extracting information leading to the uncovering of a sector of activists. As a result of arrests and the consequences which followed prolonged interrogation, the underground was wiped out, and the heroic effort of top cadres like Wilton Mkwayi, who returned after training abroad, were insufficient to renew the struggle.

There is an important lesson here. There can be no move towards the attack until a line of defence and retreat has been prepared. The line of defence lies in organizational arrangements which ensure that a leak to the police does not lead to the disclosure of a long chain of the organization. The line of retreat refers to an adequate underground network of hiding places and routes for flight over nearby borders. It has become all too clear that without sound organization at home, no developments abroad can really expect to lead to success, not least because of the absence of a friendly border,

Assault on the Fortress

As noted above critics of the South African liberation movement tend to overlook the serious obstacle that is presented by the lack of a friendly border. One has only to consider the importance of the North for South Vietnam, of China and the USSR for North Korea in the Korean war, of Tanzania and Zambia for Frelimo and MPLA, of Guinea for PAIGC, of Tunisia for Algeria, for it to be evident that this is a crucial factor for the conduct of an armed struggle. The outstanding exception is Cuba where an insurgent force survived miraculously and went on to mobilize an insurrection. But that is an exception facilitated by the vacillation of the U.S. Certainly in the South African case, the problem of returning trained guerrillas from abroad and then keeping the action going is a formidable one. How Operation Mayebuye meant to overcome this is not known but the fact that for some ten years, a significant number of guerrillas have not been able to return is an indication that the proposal was unrealistic from the start.

The only serious attempt to return in force was in the Wankie and Eastern Front operations in Zimbabwe when A.N.C. and Z.A.P.U. joined forces to enter Zimbabwe. In both those cases Rhodesian and South African security forces were able to intercept the guerrilla bands and prevent them marching further south. Some managed to enter Botswana where they were arrested and imprisoned, while others returned over the Zambesi. The road to South Africa remained blocked. (Some of the participants in these incursions have argued that although it may be true now it was not so at the time. They assert that

the main error was the long delay. If the guerrillas who were itching to go home to fight had been allowed to do so earlier when the Rhodesian forces were not yet prepared they would have succeeded. The fact remains however, the road is now blocked.)

The Rhodesian Minister of Defence disclosed on the 11 and 27 December, 1968 that during the previous period more than 160 guerrillas (including 35 from South Africa) had been killed while others had been captured. On the Rhodesian side 12 were killed and 30 wounded, while three of the South African security forces died. It is likely that these figures are inaccurate since information from Rhodesian hospitals was that the government casualty lists were far greater. ■■

Much criticism has been levelled at the Rhodesian incursions. It has been said that the first band of 100 men was far too large, inevitably attracting the attention of the security forces. Again, the populace were not prepared to receive the guerrillas beforehand and the political organization in the villages was lacking. Rhodesian security had terrorized the villagers into refusing to give food and water to the guerrillas, and on occasion Rhodesian African army men entered villages in the guise of guerrillas and if they were not immediately betrayed the village was punished terribly. In the end the villagers could not distinguish between genuine and fake guerrillas. ■■

These lessons have now been grasped fully. In the current 1973 incursions by ZAPU and ZANU guerrillas there have been no concentrations of men and they have successfully exploited the broken terrain. The classic pattern of guerrilla warfare is now unfolding in that region, and if sustained, will bring much nearer the co-operative endeavours of the liberation movements in all Southern Africa. The essential requirements for guerrilla action are local support, space for mobility and supply lines for materials and trained men. As the struggle throughout Southern Africa grows, so the different movements will be forced to help each other increasingly with routes through liberated territory and logistic arrangements of all kinds. This is already happening in the case of ZANU with Mozambique, and SWAPO with Angola.

The Movement Abroad

From 1960, when the first leaders were sent out to rally international support, the movement abroad has grown steadily. Men like Oliver Tambo became the nucleus of a political mission (later called the External Mission) which encouraged anti-apartheid work around the world. Other leaders followed charged with the specific task of organising an external armed force in the context of Operation Mayebuye. When Mkonto collapsed inside the country, these men were faced with the need to deploy trained military cadres into camps in a number of

countries. They were also responsible for the incursions into Zimbabwe already discussed. This function was later placed in the hands of the Revolutionary Council, a department of the National Executive of the A.N.C.

The External Mission placed a number of Chief Representatives in offices in various friendly countries and their work was co-ordinated from Morogoro in Tanzania which housed the A.N.C. External Mission headquarters. A vast amount of propaganda work has been carried out by this department, but the view is now growing within the movement itself that solidarity work and international questions have absorbed the exile leadership to the point where internal work has been neglected. There is the evident danger for any exile movement that it will become remote from home and that the possibilities of return will become even more unlikely. It has been said that in the hustle of international conferences and lobbying some leaders have temporarily forgotten that in the last resort, the only justification for an external organization of South African freedom fighters lies in the work they do for the struggle at home and in preparation for their own return.

Some critics have blamed the weakening powers of an ageing leadership which has sat in frustration thousands of miles away from the scene of action for ten years. Others have pointed to the bureaucratic structures that have grown up in exile. No one questions the importance of solidarity work though it is often now accepted that it may become a bottomless pit for financial resources and manpower.

One of the difficulties is that once a large number of civilian members are organized abroad the movement is tied down with work which is only tangential to the struggle. A similar difficulty has faced other liberation movements and in the case of MPLA and FRELIMO it was solved by disbanding the civilian structure and insisting that everyone become a trained fighter. Of course their geographic location and the advanced stage of their armed struggle made such a decision possible.

But what of the A.N.C.'s Revolutionary Council which was charged with revitalizing the organization at home and with returning the trained army cadres? It is evident that success has been elusive and the words of Cabral "The rice cannot be cooked outside the pot" come to mind. We can only refer here to public evidence of the return which is available mainly from press reports of trials of men who have infiltrated from abroad. There have also been various propaganda campaigns carried out by some internal network such as that run by Ahmed Timol, who was murdered by the Special Branch in 1972. But of military action inside South Africa there has been none thus far though the Revolutionary Council has been grappling with the problem of getting going for some time.

The most recent pronouncements of the external movement, however, indicate that the emphasis is once again moving away from immediate armed struggle and there is greater stress on rebuilding political structures at home.¹⁷ The urgent need seems to be for political organizers who can return home and take root among the masses rather in the way this was done in the early days by Cabral in Guinea. But the possibility of the infiltration of armed units has not been dismissed and the theoretical basis for this, the detonator theory which dominated the movement's thinking for some years has not entirely been left behind. Its implementation of course depends on the possibility of returning armed men safely and setting them up with a chance of surviving.

Something needs to be said about the possibilities of concealing activists in the conditions of tight control obtaining in South Africa. Is the town more suitable than the country? Experience indicates that the possibilities are equal in town and country though both are extremely difficult. In the country there is the advantage of a homogeneous people and a more relaxed police surveillance. But this is offset by the existence of a stooge administration with its spies and agents everywhere. In the towns the density of population is an advantage as is the anonymity provided by any city area. But here the police vigilance is intense and raids on houses are frequent.

In South Africa it would be foolhardy to force dogmatically a pattern of organization based on the Cuban or some other model when the situation is still so open.

Conclusion

The terms of the conflict have now been laid down irrevocably and there can be no going back on violence and armed struggle. Though the first attempt in the early sixties was crushed there can be no return from the struggle for power that opened up then. Even while the wages issue rises to the surface at present and while other partial demands are manifested in a variety of struggle forms in the present stage, the major issue of power remains the crucial one.

I have tried to show that the system itself generates an impulse for a total solution. The absence of mediating political institutions, the sharp lines of class and colour cleavage, the nature of oppressive authority, all of these operate to focus on the extreme injustice of white rule. What is more, one cannot conceive of the intensification of any aspect of the struggle without seeing that the fundamental character of the system will become increasingly challenged. Confirmation of increasing polarization between the races comes in the responses of current African and other black student opinion which have begun to stress black solidarity as never before. Recently, there has emerged a

militant black South African Students Organization (SASO) and the Black Peoples Convention. Both organizations include African, Indian and Coloured members, though Africans naturally predominate. These organizations take on a sharply colour oriented position and they exclude whites from membership and from their activities. They argue that they need to assert blackness to boost the unity of all black people at a time when the government is trying to divide Africans on tribal lines and Indians and Coloureds in separate ethnic and geographic entities.

While the black consciousness movement reflects an inward looking tendency (a student spokesman recently said about white student demonstrators, "the white students are helpless, why should we who have so difficult a task be burdened with their helplessness too.") I would suggest that it is also indicative of an instinctive tendency to close ranks for the coming confrontation in the country.

It is not only the students who are stressing blackness. There have been serious rifts between white and black clergy, with black ministers staging several marches highlighting the discrimination against them. Black solidarity is stressed in the sports world where the government and white controlled official bodies are constantly trying to introduce Uncle Tomism, and black terminology and postures are creeping into political and other literature in a way unknown before.

Does the increase of black consciousness mean that black South Africans are becoming anti-white in any sense of ultimate values, or is it a vehicle of struggle in reaction to white oppression? Doubtless there is a widespread loss of patience and a growing intolerance of white domination at all levels; including that of ordinary human contacts where white means privileged at every turn. But there is considerable evidence that blacks can still discriminate between friends and foes no matter what their colour, even while they take up a strong black consciousness position. In the liberation movement abroad, for instance, despite many strong pressures and temptations, there are no signs that the African National Congress leadership wishes to remove that sprinkling of white revolutionaries which has always distinguished this movement. Oliver Tambo, the Acting President, put it this way in a speech on 26 June 1972. Black consciousness, he said, posed tremendous problems at the theoretical level only. In action, barriers between the races would cease to exist and there would be room enough for fighters of all races. Yet the A.N.C. itself has increasingly come to use the language of blackness and, as I have shown, when the struggle was at its sharpest, it focussed on white rule, on the white state apparatus, and called for black solidarity.

Black solidarity is the contemporary expression of the demand for national liberation. It is not pure demagoguery, it has a social basis, and no political movement can succeed which fails to articulate this idea. To talk of

national liberation however, requires an answer to the question, which nation? And power for whom? It is not possible to present a systematic answer to this most thorny of theoretical questions of the South African revolution in this article. Instead of looking at the issue theoretically for the moment, let us look at the practical aspects.

Speaking first of the African people, what strata are included in the term national liberation? Are there significant strata other than the working and peasant classes? The answer has always been in the negative on the grounds that the deprivation of land-ownership has prevented the emergence of an African middle class proper. This may be true but there can be little doubt that the tremendous growth in the modernized sector has in fact led to the emergence of a fairly large sector of salaried, semi-professional and trading people who serve their own people in the large townships and in the reserves. There is also a growing number of black civil servants in the homelands.

The question arises whether this stratum is in any sense an in-between stratum, having a stake in the system, as collaborators with the ruling class? All the evidence leads against this conclusion. Even the civil servants in the corrupt administration in the homelands face two ways. They are dependent on white authority but nevertheless answerable to some degree to the African masses. Outside the reserves, Africans are drawn into government administration only at very low levels, and their loyalty is minimal.

Even if one were to concede that the semi-professional and trading strata were not wholly committed to opposing the system at present, it is also clear that these groups which are small in numbers, are not a force in their own right. They have power only in combination with the deprived masses.

National liberation must needs embrace most classes and strata of the black people, giving particular importance to the main force of this alliance, the African people. Africans being the most oppressed, the poorest and at the same time the most homogeneous group, it is they who stand to gain most by liberation. This position has been clearly enunciated in the most recent policy statements of the A.N.C.

In the document adopted at the Morogoro Conference in 1969 the A.N.C. declared, "The main content of the present stage of the South African revolution is the national liberation of the largest and most oppressed group—the African people. Amongst other things, it demands in the first place the maximum mobilization of the African people as a dispossessed and racially oppressed nation. This is the mainspring and it must not be weakened. It involves a stimulation and a deepening of national confidence, national pride and national assertiveness . . . The national character of the struggle must therefore dominate our approach . . . But none of this detracts from the basically

national context of our liberation drive . . . To blunt it in the interests of abstract concepts of internationalism is, in the long run, doing neither a service to revolution nor to internationalism."³⁸

If African demands are to be in the forefront for political reasons, this is no less important strategically.

The strategic importance of African action is highlighted by the fact that Africans live and work in large numbers in the major urban areas in the country. Not only are Africans the largest population group in almost every urban area but they are the largest group in the industrial labour force as well as being numerically significant in the white residential areas by virtue of domestic employment. In the black housing complexes the size of the African presence is massive. Despite all the talk of separate development the permanent African population in a city like Johannesburg is large, and well exceeds the total white population. If the "non-permanent" migratory African population is added, Africans outnumber whites by more than two to one.

In the white farming areas Africans are vastly predominant with some 3,653,000 as against 600,000 whites. Most physical farming work is done by Africans with whites acting as overseers and managers.

In the Bantustan areas the potential of African power is obvious. While the official leaders spar with the government over the degree of autonomy they have, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that real resistance will emerge among the mass of impoverished Africans which will either force the official leaders into greater militancy or they will themselves come under attack. This is what happened in the rural rebellions in the 50s and in the classic Pondo revolt in 1960.

If anything, recent government manipulation of the Bantustan scheme has quickened the pace of political involvement in these areas. Bantustan leaders are jockeying for more favourable ground in their negotiations with the government, and while they have yet to set out with determination to organize popular support, mass unrest is very near the surface. Perhaps of decisive importance for the future struggle is the possibility that the Bantustans have the potential of generating the kind of communal solidarity which enables armed guerrillas to set up bases. Once this happens the whole character of the confrontation between the white rulers and the black mass will rapidly be transformed throughout the country. While it is impossible to predict whether serious struggle will begin in the countryside and then spread to the towns or vice versa, there can be little doubt about the potential for militant mass action awaiting release in these areas.

In an earlier section I argued that the liberation movement had been too prone to act in an *ad hoc* manner, giving insufficient thought to the long term aspects of the struggle. This criticism might be qualified by the suggestion that this arose as much out of the overwhelming sense

of permanent crisis as from deficiencies in leadership planning. The 1973 spate of strikes throughout the country involving some 100,000 workers came, it must be conceded by all, wholly unexpectedly. Just when the last commentator was bemoaning the seemingly overwhelming weight of repressive institutions, black workers shook them off and even won a round. This sense that an eruption is around the corner has never been far away, and though it is intuitive, it is also based on reality.

What this article has been saying is that there is an overwhelming sense of alienation from the white state and its agencies among the black people. If it were possible to harness this feeling and turn it into a concrete posture of hostility to authority backed by organization, the revolution would be half won. There have been times in the past when the A.N.C. spoke of the need to move towards an attitude of non-collaboration and non-co-operation. But somehow these ideas could not be worked through, and they were only applied in the rather weak areas of municipal council elections.

It seems to me that these concepts have a great deal to offer in the South African situation where one of the first tasks of the resistance ought to be the undermining of the institutional practices of white rule. The guiding idea should be to make it as difficult as possible for the government and authority at all levels to carry out its tasks, and this means rallying the black people in the name of resistance and of national liberation. If white rule and white oppression is highlighted sharply in the process, it is history and racism which is at fault.

Will such a policy not block off the possibility of a split in the ruling class?

It must be conceded that it is extremely difficult to carry out, at the level of the mass, a policy which highlights black solidarity and yet maintains an open door to white defection and split. The first condition is necessary to rally the masses, the second to ensure the most favourable conditions for the resolution of the struggle. But if revolution is seen to be a creative act as Le Duan has urged then the issue of black solidarity has to be faced squarely.

Since there is so large an element of compressed resentment, what is required is a concept which will unleash popular feeling, give it scope in practical tasks, opening the way for further struggle. Non-co-operation may be a useful concept for this purpose. It is capable of application in many subtle ways, some of them merely symbolic, yet effective nevertheless. It is a posture that can grow into resistance in many forms, and can be combined with the most dramatic methods of struggle including sabotage and guerrilla warfare. In some circumstances, refusal to co-operate could be as effective and as revolutionary in its effect as other more advanced methods.

What needs to be stressed is the need for the liberation struggle to start out with a correct conception into which its strategy and tactics is located. It seems that a form of peoples war is inevitable and that there can be no equivocation about the fact that the main dynamic in that struggle will be black masses and that the opponent is the white state apparatus.

The following are some of the crucial strategic considerations that apply. The S.A. ruling class is indigenous and cannot retreat. This means that it will cling stubbornly to its policies since there is no room for manoeuvre. It is a strong modern state too powerful for subversion by a small *élite* corps. Only a massive popular upheaval can hope to break the apparatus of white power.

On the other hand, the black people constitute a large hostile population in a comparatively large geographic area. There are regions of dense black population, as well as thinly populated regions difficult to police. The government have forces of great mobility which can be fairly easily concentrated in one spot and overwhelm by force anything but the largest of crowds. In the case of an armed group the government forces could outnumber and outmanoeuvre it fairly rapidly.

This means that an armed group would have to operate with great care and even then, public support would be absolutely essential. The thought of armed propaganda operations without such widespread and deeply committed public support is clearly unacceptable. Given the lack of a friendly border, the one absolutely essential pre-condition for armed activity is a soundly organized structure with real mass support.

The importance of developing the struggle in a popular form is therefore illustrated on political as well as on strategic grounds.

This article would be incomplete without an answer to those sympathizers of South African liberation who have some reservations on the grounds that the movement appears to be subordinating socialist goals to black nationalism. They believe that black nationalism has proved to be sterile in the rest of Africa and fear that unless socialism is incorporated in the liberation movement's objectives now, the revolution will misfire and bring to power, not a peoples democratic government oriented to socialism, but a black bourgeois government which would be no less exploitative than the present white capitalist class.

There can indeed be no guarantees in politics. No one could say with absolute certainty that the revolution in South Africa will not go astray and disappoint the many supporters it has throughout the world. On the other hand, if the revolution were not to take place because of these fears then they would be spared their disappointment but the people would be without the opportunity to prove their creative political energy.

I think that my analysis has shown that the primary aspect of the contradictions between ruling class and oppressed in South Africa is that of colour domination. That is to say the socio-economic divisions and political arrangements tend to coincide. I have also tried to show that the system has not allowed the emergence of anything like a comprador class from the oppressed, and those who have been drawn into the orbit of the ruling structure, in administration and so on, have only been incorporated at low levels of responsibility. Thus far, with the possible exception of the homelands, and even there things are not clear, the white ruling class has not established any stratum of reliable allies among the black people. On the contrary polarization grows daily.

On the other hand the pauperization of the mass of Africans grows visibly, and other black groups are infected by the general disaffection with white rule. More and more, Indians and Coloureds begin to call themselves blacks, identifying with the African mass.

Another aspect that is crucial, is that since there is no prospect of a peaceful solution, and armed conflict is only too certain, we cannot envisage the possibility of the high points of the capitalist structure being entered by any sector of the black people and used for their own enrichment. Furthermore, a large sector of industry is run as state corporations and would be part of the prize of national liberation for the oppressed as a whole.

Given the favourable circumstances there is every possibility that a black liberation struggle will produce a progressive government. Support for this view is to be found in the character of the leadership and cadres of the A.N.C., in the importance given to the continuing collaboration with the S.A. Communist Party, and above all, in the generally progressive positions taken by the A.N.C. on international questions. But this cannot be explored fully in this article.

(I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. M. Legasick and A. Brooks for some useful critical comments on an earlier draft of this essay.)

NOTES

1. *African Communist* (Journal of the S.A. Communist Party), Jan. 1962, No. 8, p. 25. Inkululeko Publications, London.
2. The application of a structural theory of conflict to South Africa has been dealt with by E. Webster, M.Phil. Thesis, York University 1972.
3. *New Programme of the Communist Party USA* (New Outlook Publishers, New York, 1970), p. 55.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
5. See the article by Joe Matthews, in *Africa South* (1959), p. 15.
6. The *Johannesburg Star* reported on May 10, 1963, that a new Defence College

- had been opened: "Western powers were more concerned with the conduct of a world war, but South Africa had additional threats to prepare for. . . . And while other countries worked on the basis of unlimited manpower and weapons deployed in a limited theatre of war, South Africa had to contend with limited manpower and resources in a relatively unlimited theatre of operations." Kotane, Moses, *South Africa's Way Forward*, p. 13 (Advance Publications, Cape Town, 1954).
8. Ibid.
 9. Kotane, Moses, *The Great Crisis Ahead*, p. 7 (New Age Publications, Cape Town, 1958).
 10. Ibid., p. 10.
 11. Joe Matthews wrote, "It is true that looking at the situation today it is hard to see how any sizable section of the European group will side with the oppressed. But then—at the moment—conditions are 'normal'. Revolutionary situations are not normal." *Africa South*, (July–Sept. 1959), p. 13. Joe Matthews expressed the A.N.C. view in the quoted article. "Racialism *per se* cannot be the main vehicle of revolution. It can only be one of the objective factors that might have to be borne in mind." Ibid. Meer, Fatima discusses this in "African Nationalism: Some Inhibiting Factors", in Adam, H. *Sociological Perspectives* (O.U.P. 1971).
 14. Ibid.
 15. *Africa South*, Oct.–Dec. 1958.
 16. For a useful review see Rogers, Barbara, *The Bantu Homelands. International Defence and Aid Fund*. London 1972. Horrell, Muriel, *Action, Reaction and Counter-Action*, p. 32. Institute of Kacc Relations. Johannesburg 1971.
 18. Ibid., p. 36.
 19. However, that the A.N.C. was the first to formulate the plan for the campaign is conceded by a generally hostile commentator, Feit, Edward, *Urban Revolt in South Africa 1960–64*. p. 37. Northwestern University Press 1971.
 20. Ibid., p. 40.
 21. Horrell, op. cit., p. 40.
 22. Feit, op. cit., p. 40.
 23. *African Communist*, No. 20, 1965, p. 37.
 24. Feit, op. cit., p. 25.
 25. Meer, op. cit., p. 146.
 26. *African Communist*, April 1965, p. 8.
 27. Feit, op. cit., p. 4.
 28. Horrell, op. cit., p. 83.
 29. *African Communist*, No. 33, 1968, p. 45.
 30. *African Communist*, No. 35, 1968, p. 100.
 31. *African Communist*, No. 39, 1969, p. 76.
 32. *African Communist*, No. 20, 1965, p. 40.
 33. Le Duan, op. cit.
 34. Duplicated copy dated 6 April 1963. Issued by National Executive of the A.N.C.
 35. *African Communist*, No. 31, 1967, p. 5; 32, 1968, p. 4; 33, 1968, p. 6.
 36. The danger of sending in guerrilla units into territory which had not been prepared politically was well understood. In a statement in August 1965 the Central Committee of the S.A.C.P., now in exile, called for greater efforts at home with organization and propaganda and with mobilizing the masses. "Indeed, it should rather be said that without constant efforts to arouse the resistance and patriotic spirit of the people, activities of a purely military character will become isolated from the people and bound therefore to fail. The real advantage of the liberation forces over all the planes, armoured cars

and other superior equipment of the enemy, is the support of the masses. This is our decisive weapon, without which we cannot win." *African Communist*, No. 22 (1965), p. 10.

37. In a report published in 1968 the S.A.C.P. stated, "The question of armed struggle in South Africa cannot be approached purely as a military question. Particularly in its opening stages, armed conflict cannot take the form of a head-on confrontation with the military and political forces of the South African state. The task of the armed units is basically a political one. Their operations must be designed to help organize and rally the masses, and arouse them to action around their practical problems and grievances." The document goes on to suggest that guerrilla activities will serve as a powerful stimulant to political organization and adds, "*But this will not come of its own accord.* The duty the political movement owes to the heroic freedom-fighters in the field is to support and to make use of their inspiring struggles by opening new fronts against the oppressor in every possible field of action." *African Communist*, No. 34 (1968).
38. *The Strategy and Tactics of the A.N.C. Sechaba*, July 1969 (A.N.C. London).