

# Armed Struggle in South Africa

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FOR purposes of our discussion here today we will assume certain basic facts. Firstly, the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa, is taking place within an international context of transition to the Socialist system, of the breakdown of the colonial system as a result of national liberation and socialist revolutions, and the fight for social and economic progress by the people of the whole world.

We in South Africa are part of the zone in which national liberation is the chief content of the struggle. On our continent sweeping advances have been registered which have resulted in the emergence to independent statehood of forty-one states. Thus the first formal step of independence has been largely won in Africa and this fact exercises a big influence on the developments in our country.

The countries of Southern Africa have not as yet broken the chains of colonialism and racism which hold them in oppression. In Mozambique, Angola, South West Africa, Zimbabwe and South Africa, racist and fascist regimes maintain systems which go against the current trend of the African revolution and world development.

The strategy and tactics of our revolution require for their formulation and understanding a full appreciation of the interlocking and interweaving of international, African and Southern African developments which play on our situation.

South Africa is a developed country with a modern industry and agriculture. Indeed the country is juridically "independent" and has even assumed the character of an imperialist state reaching out

for colonisation of its neighbours and the export of capital abroad. Yet the majority of the population suffer colonial type national oppression. The position of the majority of the population places South Africa among the countries in which the chief content of the revolution is that of national liberation of the masses.

South Africa was conquered by force. For over two hundred years the African people defended themselves against the colonist invaders. The primary resistance which consisted of armed clashes, battles and wars went on for over two hundred years and can be said to have ended with the Bambata Rebellion of 1906.

## **Long History of Struggle**

The fifty years following the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 were a period of continuing the struggle by means of modern political methods. Organisations were created. The Natal Indian Congress formed by Mahatma Gandhi in 1894, the African People's Organisation in 1902, the African National Congress in 1912, the trade union movement, and the Communist Party in 1921. This was a period of organisational growth. The method of struggle used then included petitions, demonstrations, civil disobedience, strikes. At times there were armed revolts in the peasant areas. But in general the methods of struggle fell short of organised military struggle.

The years of non-military struggle saw the steady decline in the political rights of the oppressed majority. The repressive machinery gradually

increased. All the doors to peaceful change were closed step by step. The massacre of Sharpeville in 1960 which was far from being the worst in South African history highlighted the determination of the white privileged minority to resist any change in the status quo.

### Choice of Armed Struggle

In 1961 the question of armed struggle came to the fore. This followed the crushing of the strike movement the same year against the establishment of a white republic. The conditions which made armed struggle the correct choice at that stage were many. But the major considerations were that:

- (a) There was no prospect of achieving liberation by the methods of the previous fifty years.
- (b) The struggle of the previous period had created big mass organisations and a leadership capable of gaining the allegiance of the people for armed struggle and with the ability to carry out the planning, preparation and overall conduct of the struggle.
- (c) The independence movement in Africa had, particularly in 1960, swept across the continent and by 1961 stood close to the borders of the unliberated white controlled countries in the South. This was a vital factor for it meant that the opportunity now arose which had not existed before of bases at which our people could obtain the training and facilities for conducting armed struggle.

In South Africa unlike all other formerly colonial territories the mass of the oppressed people had never been allowed to participate in the army or as armed units of the police force. The ruling class never made the mistake of enabling our people to acquire knowledge of the use of arms. There were sound reasons for this. The ruling class in South Africa knows very well to what extent it is hated and could not dare take the chance. Now with the freedom of African states, however weak they may have been owing to the legacy of colonialism, the opportunity existed for creating a nucleus of the future national liberation army of our people. Thus was formed uMkhonto WeSizwe (the Spear of the Nation) as the armed wing of the movement.

In a way the decision to embark on armed struggle was a continuation of the earlier armed resistance. But the conditions were different. In the new situation the art and science—both political and military—had to be grasped and applied in the modern epoch of armed liberation struggles. The resistance of the past had been conducted by conventional armies. That is to say African conventional armies confronted those of the European imperialists. In our day it was clear that the movement and the masses would have to master the science of guerrilla warfare.

It might be useful at this point to state that guerrilla warfare can be conducted in the most varied geographical or climatic conditions. It does not require as a condition the existence of a physical environment which conforms to a special pattern such as jungles, inaccessible mountains, swamps and so on. These conditions are probably an advantage but are not indispensable. Guerrilla warfare has been successfully waged in deserts, in farm fields, in plains, mountains, in countries without friendly borders and even on islands surrounded by the sea. The question is one of adjusting survival tactics to the sort of terrain in which operations have to be carried out.

When we talk of revolutionary armed struggle, we mean a political struggle by means which include the use of military force, though once force as a tactic is introduced it has the most far-reaching consequences on every aspect of the struggle. From the very beginning our movement, that is, the African National Congress and its allies has brooked no ambiguity on the question of the primacy of the political leadership at all levels, whether armed or not. To say this is not to invoke tradition. This approach is rooted in the very nature of the type of revolutionary struggle we are waging and is borne out by the experience of the overwhelming majority of revolutionary movements which have engaged in such struggles.

### The Forces of the People

What are the forces ranged against one another in the struggle? On the side of the liberation movements are the oppressed people—the Africans, the Indians and the Coloureds who constitute the overwhelming majority of the people and who have no interest in the continuance of the present system. The oppressed people in our country have a long experience of political activity and organisation which factor will tell very much in the long run. In addition our country is fortunate to possess an enormous working class which is growing at an extremely rapid rate and plays a vital role in the economy of the country. Already the wage labourers in our country constitute the majority of the economically active section of the population. This is of tremendous significance for the prospects of our struggle. The movement has political organisations and leaders of great authority and is therefore not faced with the need to begin the task of creating an overall political leadership.

The people's movement starts off like all others elsewhere in a materially weak position especially in the military sphere. Hence the need to wage guerrilla warfare which is the weapon of the materially weak against the materially strong. But we have no doubt that once set in motion the process will

accelerate by which the strength of the people will gradually increase until finally there will be military superiority over the enemy. The decisive condition is the support of the masses inside the country and of the entire progressive world outside it.

### **Enemy Forces**

The enemy is in possession of a well developed economy with vast resources which enable it to build a massive military machine. This economy depends in the final analysis on the labour of the oppressed majority. Furthermore unlike other imperialists who have waged war against liberation movements, our enemy lives in the country and has an economy that is itself a target of attack. The enemy can also count on the support of the imperialist powers who at some stages may even intervene in our struggle to defend their vast stake in our country. The liberation movement has to take this into account at all times. The enemy has at its disposal the White privileged minority as a social base for its war against the mass of the

people. But even this group cannot remain monolithic in the face of a determined armed revolutionary struggle. The enemy is also the mainstay of the unholy alliance with Rhodesia and Portugal which involves a responsibility on their part for the defence of oppression throughout the whole of Southern Africa.

The struggle in Southern Africa and in our country in particular will be particularly bitter and long. But we have no doubt whatsoever that with the co-operation and co-ordination of all the people of Southern Africa as led by Frelimo, Zapu, Swapo, MPLA and the ANC, victory will be achieved.

The broad purpose of our military struggle is simply the complete political and economic emancipation of all our people and the constitution of a democratic and non-racial society in accordance with the provisions of our programme—the Freedom Charter. Our programme together with our revolutionary theory provides us with a strategic framework for the solution of the basic tasks of our revolution.