

The Pretoria bomb blast- CAN THESE METHODS LEAD TO LIBERATION?

Killing 18 people and injuring 217, the car bomb blast in Church Street, Pretoria, on 20 May produced more dead and wounded than any other action by the ANC since the turn to 'armed struggle'. The casualties included not only military personnel, but black and white civilians.

That civilian lives were lost appears to represent a change of military tactics on the part of the exile leadership. "President Tambo has made clear in recent speeches" states comrade Slovo in *Sechaba*, April 1983, "that we are entering a stage in which we have to answer the enemy's murderous and terrorist tactics against civilians, against women, against children, against unarmed refugees, by more than just hitting their economic targets."

To the Pretoria bombing, the SA government reacted with yet more murderous and terrorist tactics. SAAF planes bombed Maputo on 23 May, killing at least five Mozambicans and one South African—all civilians, and not even at ANC military bases as SA claimed.

This was the second terrorist act of this kind in six months, following the murder of 42 people in Maseru by SADF commandos on 9 December last year.

On 9 June three more brave young guerrillas, Simon Mogoerane, Jerry Mosololi and Marcus Motaung, were hanged by the vengeful regime in Pretoria.

Where is this vicious spiral

By P. Qubulashe

leading? Does it advance the workers' struggle for power, for the liberation of all the oppressed? The escalating costs of the present forms of 'armed struggle' make these increasingly urgent questions.

Indeed, every war involves costs. But all war, as every serious military commander knows, is concerned with achieving political ends. Military strategy cannot be governed by abstract moral debates—such as whether or not it is right to take lives—nor, on the other hand, by the reactions of revenge.

The fundamental question is: what is the nature of our enemy and how can he be defeated?

The wanton aggression and murder by the regime is, in the words of Defence Minister Magnus Malan, "an example of our capabilities, and of what we are prepared to do to defend the integrity of our country".

But what is this "integrity of our country" which General Malan vows to defend?

The pass system imposes on Africans, the overwhelming majority of the people, a status scarcely different from slaves. The slave of ancient Greek society was, at least, assured of shelter and food. But

modern capitalist SA cannot provide to black people even these elementary needs.

In 1982 200 000 Africans were arrested for failure to produce passes at the instant demand of a policeman or other state officials—a rate of 550 a day.

Ten people every day die of TB. Hundreds more, young and old, die of typhoid, cholera, measles, and many other preventable and curable diseases.

Yet the Minister of Health, Dr Nak van der Merwe, found it possible to say: "Responsibility for a high toll of dying children should be shared by those people who bred uncontrollably." (!!) (*Daily News*, 13/4/83). Perhaps the Doctor is only prepared to accept responsibility for the death toll of whites who die of diseases associated with excessive food-intake?

This apartheid system not only murders black people in their hundreds of thousands every year by the slow but very painful means of starvation. Not only does it every year administer the 'justice' of the whip on thousands of Africans (40 253 in 1982). It also breeds gangs of white thugs who make killing of black people their hobby.

On 17 April, two white brothers, surname De Beer, stormed into a train compartment (from Pietersburg to Johannesburg) and gunned down at point blank range five Africans, leaving three dead and two injured.

One of the brothers made it quite clear in the magistrates court that if he were to escape "he would shoot more black people." Reason? Both

brothers have "hatred for blacks" and believe they were correct in committing this murder.

With no exaggeration, the magistrate might well have found himself sympathetic to the beliefs of the De Beer brothers. Many of the apartheid judiciary have the same hatred for blacks.

On 27 October 1982, a 19-year-old Mr Ronnie van der Merwe fulfilled his desire to hit a 'houtkop' black by killing a 23-year-old African, Japhta Kgopa, with *nunchaka* (karate) sticks. The Pretoria regional court has sentenced Mr van der Merwe to "no more than" two years in jail. He will serve only 2 000 hours of "periodic imprisonment" at the weekends, of which 800 hours have been suspended for the next five years!

A system gangrenous with white racism; a system which relentlessly grinds black people with poverty and disease; which locks them up in the squalid labour camps (Bantustans and townships); which super-exploits them at the point of production; which mutilates their bodies with sjamboks; which hounds and shoots them like rabbits; which has not only privileged whites but succeeded in churning out lunatics of the type of Ronnie van der Merwe and the De Beer brothers...

...this is the system which General Malan vows to defend with

all the means at the disposal of the state!

This system, dehumanising and enslaving black people in our country, does not result from racial discrimination alone. It is the historical product of capitalism in SA which has developed on the basis of cheap labour—the migrant labour system.

However, apartheid as a political-cultural system has also acquired a relatively independent logic and momentum of its own. Experienced in this sense, it appears as the ultimate cause of the oppression of the black people.

State violence

But underlying all the bloody racist violence of the state, and the lunatic mutants it has given birth to, is the need of the capitalist class to defend their private ownership of the factories, mines and land—in order to perpetuate their profit-making system against the demands of the working class and all the oppressed.

In countless struggles, for example at Bulhoek in 1921, at Sharpeville in 1960, in Soweto in 1976, our resistance has been met by the bloody violence of the state. There has never been room in our country for pacifist illusions in the minds of the

masses—or for doubting that, to end this monstrous system, the regime's force will need to be met with a greater counterforce.

A search for the means to defend the masses against the violence of the system, and for the means to defeat the state, has impelled thousands of courageous youth and also workers to seek training in the use of arms.

The previous misguided adherence to the principle of 'non violence' by the ANC leadership was drowned in the blood of Sharpeville. Since then—and, even more, since Soweto—the leaders of the ANC and other organisations have reacted to the violence of the system by organising guerilla activity.

The task, writes comrade Slovo (*Sechaba*, April 1983) "is to transform what we are doing into something which approaches much more closely the words people's war". The term "people's war" refers to the struggles fought in such countries as China, Vietnam, Cuba, Mozambique, Angola etc., over the last thirty-five years.

It is true that in such underdeveloped countries rural guerilla armies have succeeded in taking power. But the social conditions which permitted this to take place do not exist in South Africa.

One condition for rural guerilla war is a massive peasant population. SA has undergone a powerful



capitalist development, building an industrialised economy, and bringing into being a massive working class—depending not on the land but on wage-labour for survival. The peasantry has virtually disappeared.

Today the overwhelming majority of the people—in town, on the farms, in the Bantustans—belong to working-class families.

This fact is acknowledged by comrade Oliver Tambo when he refers to the rural population as being “not...peasants”, but “members of the proletariat who happen to be in the countryside because of the way the system operates in South Africa.” (*Southern Africa*, XVI, 1, Jan-Feb 1983)

The history of the last ten years—even the history of guerilla action—shows still more clearly than before that the decisive terrain of struggle is in the big industrial cities—built by the sweat of cheap black labour, but under the control of the capitalist class and its divide-and-rule state machine.

It is only here, in the heartlands of capitalist property and rule, that our enemy can be decisively defeated.

Where guerilla armies have taken power in underdeveloped countries, it has been against decrepit regimes resting on weak support in society. On its industrial base, in contrast, the SA capitalist class has developed a mighty and ruthless state—with a strong social base in the (increasingly militarised) white population.

Can a guerilla strategy defeat this state? “In the military field”, continues Slovo, “we have proved that there is no target beyond our reach; whether be it Sasol, Voortrekkerhoogte or nuclear power stations”...and now, he could add, buildings in the heart of Pretoria.

Unsurprisingly, the state and the class it defends regard the taking of arms against them as an intolerable challenge to their authority. Inevitably, these actions goad the ruling class to fury, and to vengeance.

The state reacts to each bomb blast and attack not only by intimidating peoples of neighbouring countries, but by stepping up repression. After the Pretoria blast, as has happened many times before, police mounted roadblocks—in Soweto, on the Lesotho border, etc.

It is reported that this year alone 25 000 roadblocks have been

mounted—well over a hundred a day!

Every hunter knows that a beast is most dangerous when aroused by surface wounds. What every activist in our movement needs to address with the utmost seriousness is this: are guerilla actions capable of finishing off the beast that is goaded into wounded anger?

Some in the movement appear to believe that the system can be paralysed by blowing up railway lines, factories, etc. ‘The sophistication of the SA economy is also its weakness’, they argue.

Wasteland

Let us leave aside the fact that, could these intentions be carried fully into practice, it would be at the price of squandering the product of the labour of millions of workers: our movement would inherit only a devastated wasteland.

Spectacular bombings may frighten a few investors into selling off their shares. But, rather than weakening or intimidating imperialism and the local capitalists, it only consolidates their unity.

What history has shown in other relatively ‘sophisticated’ economies like ours—in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay for example—is that urban guerillaism is easily contained and defeated by a ruthless state machine,



Malan

at huge cost to the working class movement and also to the brave but misguided guerilla youth themselves.

Is there any reason why things would be different in SA? This is the question advocates of guerillaism must answer clearly.

The point is that a developed and entrenched capitalist system does not depend only on the individuals who rule in its name at any moment, on the factories and buildings in existence, even on the present personnel of the armed forces and police.

When Verwoerd was assassinated, did anyone expect more than that...a Vorster would replace him? Likewise, if the Presidents' Council building is bombed a hundred times—even if all its members were assassinated—would that destroy the power of the ruling class to continue its divide-and-rule constitutional manoeuvres?

But this does not make the ruling class invincible. The mass movement spearheaded by the working class has already, even at this early stage of its resurgence, shown its ability to inflict defeats not only on the employers, but even against the state—forcing it, for example, to withdraw its Pensions Bill. When Botha's constitutional proposals are made inoperable, it will be as a result of this same mass power.

The miserable and worsening conditions of the working people compel them into struggle, not just in this factory and in that, over these wages and those working conditions—but in an increasingly generalised struggle to end poverty wages and the pass laws, and to secure a government of their own.

This movement, developed to its fullest, is the only counter-force able to defeat our enemy. It is the only force in this oppressive system over which the ruling class has no ultimate control. The labour of the working class in production is the essential life-blood without which their profit system and their state cannot survive.

In far less favourable conditions than in SA today, the Russian working class took power in 1917, abolishing capitalism, establishing its own democratic rule, and creating the conditions for the liberation of the peasantry, oppressed minorities, and women.

The Soviet workers' state subsequently degenerated, with a privileged bureaucracy usurping power. But



The central task of all activists is to assist in the building of this movement of the working class, fully confident of its own power and conscious of its historic mission.

But, as comrade Slovo admits, the present organisation of the armed struggle does not contribute to this task: it leaves the masses as mere "sympathetic onlookers... who welcome what we are doing... people who cheer the brave deeds of our cadres and who weep when any of them are caught and destroyed by the enemy."

This is the inevitable consequence of a strategy that is conceived, planned and executed outside the organs of the mass movement itself.

The mass struggle is not a passive 'anvil', existing in order to absorb the 'hammer' blows of a military strategy conceived from outside. The mass struggle of the 1970s and 1980s, spearheaded by the working class, is **itself the active force in the situation**—the hammer against the bosses and the state.

Every struggling worker knows that it is not Morena that can free us. But the present strategy of 'armed propaganda', instead of developing the self-confidence of the working class in its collective capacity to liberate society, inevitably creates an impression that liberation can be brought from outside its own ranks, "from the north".

To overcome the problem of passive identification with guerilla actions, Comrade Slovo proposes to "more and more involve the people in actual participation". But participation in what?

The only answer emerging from his article is 'participation' in the activities of MK, now to involve not only "economic targets", but also direct response to SADF terror against civilians.

But this would continue to subordinate the actual struggles of the working people and their political requirements, to an externally-conceived military strategy; it would perpetuate the very problem Slovo identifies.

Conditions themselves are impell-

only around 7-8% of the black working class are organised in the independent unions. Even on this modest basis what can already be seen is the 'subversive' capacity of the working class to end the apartheid system and its capitalist base.

Slovo appears to recognise this in writing that "it is the working class which is the only force that will guarantee that our victory will lead to real social emancipation, will lead to the abolition of that kind of exploitation (why not call it what it is: capitalism?—*Editor*) which is at the foundation of racism, and not just a regime which will just replace the one set of exploiters by another, even though they might be of a different colour."

In short, the revolutionary struggle of the working class to change society is the struggle for national liberation in its only effective form. It embraces the aspirations of every oppressed struggler.

To guarantee the victory of this struggle—the only lasting victory possible—what is necessary is the development of the working class movement to its full potential, as a conscious mass movement for the transformation of society, rallying round it all the oppressed.

this does not by one jot diminish the historic lessons of October 1917.

In the face of the rising workers' movement in our country, the capitalists' *Financial Mail* has had to whimper "it is not just employers who had to make fundamental readjustments to their attitudes and policies. **The government has been compelled to heed the power being exercised by emerging unions.**" (Our emphasis).

At the same time, in response to the ANC attack on Koeberg power station, it roared that guerillas "must be hunted down and eliminated." (*FM*, 24/12/82)

This difference of approach to the unions and to guerillas does not reflect a sudden benevolence by the bosses to the organised working class. **The point is that, far from feeling seriously threatened by guerillaism, the capitalists feel adequate and strong enough to deal with it.** Confronted with the organised power of the working class it is a different matter.

Every strike of the last ten years has been 'illegal'—organised, like guerilla action, in defiance of the bosses' state. Yet the bosses cannot "hunt down and eliminate" the lifeblood of their system. Hence the nervous talk of "readjustment" and "heed".

These chilly ripples are being driven down the spines of the capitalists and their state even though

"The government has been compelled to heed the power being exercised by emerging unions."

ing wider and wider layers of working people to 'participate' in a mass struggle that throws up increasingly generalised and political demands. It is this struggle which calls out for the defence and advancement of what it has achieved.

To serve its needs as appropriate, weapons are a tool, and only a tool.

Each tool is useful in different ways in different conditions. The movement of the recent period has been governed by a flexible assessment among the workers of what actions are possible to undertake in particular conditions.

In no factory are workers continuously on strike. When action is to be undertaken, it is an assessment of the balance of forces which determines such matters as whether to 'go slow', to strike, or to occupy a factory; how, when and where pickets are deployed; how scabs are to be disciplined; what support can be mobilised from other workplaces and how.

It is through making such assessments, translating them into action, and digesting the lessons as a guide to future actions, that the workers' movement develops its consciousness, its confidence and power.

Through the conscious and scientific development of this method, embracing the lessons of the working class movement internationally, the working class will rise to its tasks in the revolutionary confrontations that are inevitably unfolding—and, organised and armed in its millions, will have the ability to take on and defeat the capitalists' apartheid regime.

But, whether in a single factory, a region, or nationally, the strategy and tactics of the workers' movement can be effectively formulated only by the direct organs of that movement itself.

This is the real meaning of Marx's saying that "the emancipation of the working class can only be the task of the working class itself."

The strategy and tactics of the use of weapons involves no different considerations. In what strike, in what demonstration, in what uprising, what weapons are to be used and how is a matter for decision and control by the elected organs of the workers' movement itself.

The guerilla method, on the other hand, is governed by secrecy, not only from the state, but also from the

Inqaba's cartoon (August 1982)



workers' movement.

What organs of the motor workers were even consulted when a decision was taken to 'support' the Leyland strike by bombing a Leyland showroom in Natal?

Were the workers at Sasol and Koeberg involved in the decisions to try to destroy the very places they were building and working in?

Instead, despite the shelter and support available to the guerillas, their strategists make a fetish—for security reasons, they argue—of their need to isolate themselves organisationally from the mass movement.

But if the need for security justifies this, it is precisely an indication that such actions are not appropriate to the workers' struggle in the existing conditions. When conditions are appropriate, every revolutionary worker will welcome with open arms the weapons and the skills which armed and trained cadres can deploy, provided that those cadres participate fully under the organised discipline of the working class.

The workers movement, developing in struggle against the state, will acquire the necessary collective experience to guarantee security.

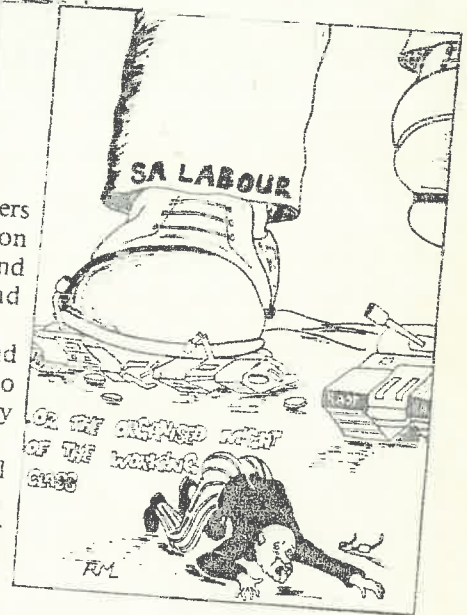
The present task is to build, openly and underground, the forms of workers' organisation which can effectively lead the liberation struggle—mass trade unions, and an ANC of the working people themselves.

Such organisation will provide the

necessary forums for the working class to decide on what methods are appropriate in particular struggles—including what weapons can be used, and when, and how.

Out of this will develop the means to prepare and carry through, on a conscious basis, the mass armed insurrection which alone can isolate and defeat the regime.

The tragedy of the present organisation of the 'armed struggle' is that, far from being able to defend the workers' movement, it cannot even defend its own cadres. The three young revolutionaries just hanged in Pretoria were arrested, tried and con-



victed of attacks on four police stations during 1979-81, after their underground hideout was discovered by an African herdsman.

At the same time, the dangerous armoury developed by the state in reaction to guerillaism...is turned also against the workers' movement. Every bomb blast gives the police and the army more excuse to harass and terrorise workers.

Workers are prepared to make sacrifices—but not unnecessary ones for the sake of a futile strategy.

After Pretoria, armed police stopped cars and buses in Soweto, opening boots and bonnets searching for bombs—and anything else that interests them. On the Lesotho border, every returning migrant worker was forced to queue up and be subjected to the same searches.

Oscar Mpetha, veteran class fighter now 74 years old, was placed on trial

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and convicted...under laws pertaining to 'terrorism'. The SAAWU leaders are harassed under the same laws.

Many more workers are detained and killed, caught in the net of the SA regime's 'total strategy' against guerillas. These victims are not only in SA, but, as a result of the regime's attempt to root out 'guerilla bases' in the surrounding countries too. No end to this is in sight, as long as the methods of guerillaism are continued.

Guerilla methods also cement white support for the bankrupt capitalist class. Such support will be multiplied a hundred times if guerillaism degenerates into indiscriminate violence against civilians.

In Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, imperialist armies of occupation fighting far from home, cracked under rural guerilla pressure. But

in SA white workers with nowhere else to go will grow crazed under guerilla pressure, and provide fanatical cannon-fodder to garrison the profit system.

In contrast, the workers' struggle, for workers' unity, democracy, and socialism, offers a future for all working people.

The independent trade union movement cannot afford to remain silent on the dangerous consequences of guerilla methods—not from the standpoint of 'non-violence' or confining itself to 'trade-union politics', but from the standpoint of what advances the workers' struggle for national and social liberation.

This was one notable omission in the major political speech by Joe Foster endorsed by the FOSATU Congress last year.

The only means to ensure the success of the struggle against apartheid and capitalism is the mobilisation of

the workers and youth around the programme of Marxism—for democracy and socialism through workers' control of production and society.

There is a thirst for revolutionary ideas among the black youth. Even the capitalist press reports that "a large proportion" of youth arriving in the ANC training camps express "an interest in Marxism." (*Financial Mail*, 10/6/1983)

The youth are drawn to Marxism not for the sake of ideas themselves, but to find a way to change society. Their thirst can be satisfied not by formal study of Marxist theory but by using the method of Marxism to work out practical solutions to the problems facing the oppressed.

Pre-requisite

As the essential pre-requisites for the liberation of the black people, the tasks for the ANC leaders, and for every activist, are:

- *to assist in the organisation of the working class into trade unions on a revolutionary programme, for workers' unity in action, for decent wages, jobs and homes, for an end to racist oppression and exploitation—through workers' power and workers rule.
- *the rebuilding of a mass ANC—as an organisation of the workers rallying all the oppressed, on a socialist programme, with a leadership developed among the workers' own ranks, schooled in the ideas and methods of Marxism.

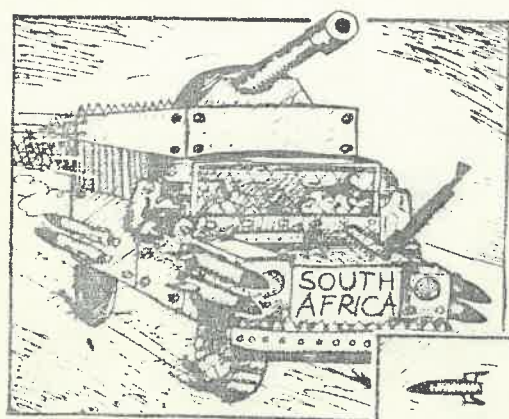
This achieved, victory will be certain.

Only a mass socialist ANC can undercut the sinister efforts of the apartheid regime to foster a racial confrontation as the last line of defence of capitalist property!

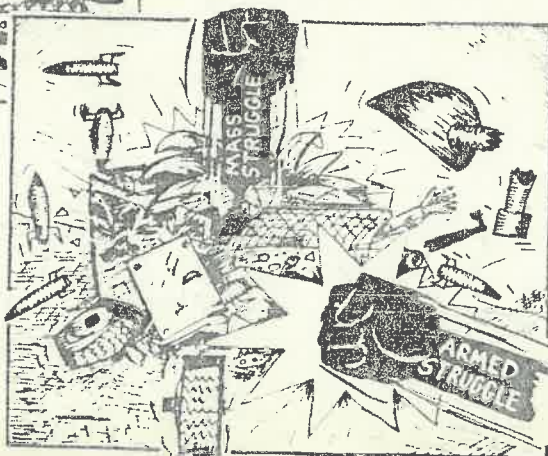
Only an organised working class can stop the terror of the apartheid system!

Only the united development of the workers' struggle can offer a secure future to all workers, white as well as black!

Only the unity in action of working people throughout Southern Africa can end once and for all the domination of the region by the terrorist SA capitalist regime!



Sechaba's answer
(April 1983)



...Sechaba reaffirms the separation of the armed struggle from the mass struggle.