

HOW STRONG IS VERWOERD?

The demonstrations in South Africa itself, and especially the scene in the Johannesburg court when Nelson Mandela first appeared for formal remand, were a reminder that our people are still confident, strong and determined. It is their jailers who are the frightened men, fearful of the future. This is the truth about the South African scene, however much the surface appearance of things may seem to differ. Minister Fouché's £60-million-a-year army, Minister Vorster's death penalties for 'sabotage', his bans and gags and deportations have given some casual observers the impression that the South African government is strong, entrenched and virtually unassailable. It would be more correct to say that they reveal the fears of the Nationalist government for its own stability and future.

The appearance of strength derives from this, that the government controls a formidable army, police force and state apparatus; that it is backed from abroad by powerful interests who have invested hundreds of millions of pounds in the regime of white supremacy; that it is supported, actively or passively, by the overwhelming majority of the three million white citizens, whose white skins entitle them to political privileges, sheltered employment and economic benefits once reserved for hereditary noblemen; that this white aristocracy controls a highly developed industrial society.

But behind this show-window of strength is the reality of weakness. The South African government has not a single reliable friend in the world. Its millionaire backers from abroad will turn tail and run when the era of low wages and high profits nears its end. But the freedom movement has genuine friends and supporters through-

out the world, anxious and willing to assist it as soon as, *and to the extent that* it enters into a serious struggle for power. Without foreign support, no government can survive unless it rules with the confidence and consent of the majority of its people. But here is the fatal weakness of Verwoerd. And it is to overcome this fatal weakness that the Government desperately enters into all manner of absurd deceptions to attempt to gain support from at least a section of the non-white people—into fraudulent talk of ‘self-government in Bantustans’, into establishment of bogus ‘Bantu Authorities’, and into frenzied efforts to multiply its own propaganda machinery while suppressing the voice of the democratic opposition.

They have, from the very outset, excluded the only possible peaceful solution to the country’s problems—the solution of testing the people’s will in free election. They exclude rigorously all serious public debate, by gagging their opponents, and censoring their press. Thus, step by step, they force the country closer and closer to the only other possible solution to the real problem of South Africa—and that is: who must rule? They are driving the country steadily towards a solution determined by force.

But looked at realistically, weighing all the political and military factors involved in a ‘solution by force’, the prospects from the Government point of view are fatal and disastrous. As perhaps they themselves realise in their moments of sanity when they speak of the dark, imponderable future, when everyone is against them and they can do no more than fight to the death—an increasingly common refrain. Only in their moments of megalomania do they convince themselves that a violent solution can be of any possible advantage to them.

True, at the beginning of any hostilities which may break out, the state could field infinitely better trained and equipped forces than any their opponents, the people, can muster. In a modern war between states, this might be of crucial moment. Not here, in an essentially different type of war, a war of colonial liberation of the type which is now familiar in Asia and Africa. In such wars, as all experience—notably that of Algeria—shows, the key factor is *not* which side can initially command the better trained and better equipped force. Such wars are not wars of head-on clash of field force against field force. They are, invariably, prolonged wars of attrition, in which the key factors are political and moral—popular support, endurance, determination.

The South African government’s military resources, and the

industrial-economic base behind them appear tremendously strong, when juxtaposed to the present forces of the South African people. But compared with the vast military resources of a great imperial power like France with its advanced industrial-technological base, the resources of the South African government are puny indeed. If the experience of Algeria has not yet been a sobering influence on the Verwoerd government, it has certainly been quietly assessed and measured by the people.

The French ruling classes were as determined to hold Algeria as the white supremacists are to hold South Africa. They were as ready to spill blood recklessly, as ruthlessly prepared to unleash OAS terror. The De Gaulle government was brought into power by the most reactionary forces in France—and above all by the fanatical white-supremacist two million in Algeria—precisely for the purpose of holding Algeria. To do so, he made sweeping concessions throughout the French Empire, 'cutting his losses' in order to concentrate his army and his resources on the battle for Algeria.

The French forces in Algeria were the bulk of the entire French imperial might. They received the most advanced weapons and equipment which French industry was capable of producing, together with equipment from the United States and all the advanced NATO countries; they were backed with the almost unlimited financial resources of the French Empire. Against this massive force, the Algerian FLN could reply only on its own meagre resources—which included no industrial rear, no financial reserves, no vast military reserve to draw upon—together with the comparatively small aid received from neighbouring North African states and from the socialist countries.

Yet, despite all these enormous initial advantages, the French had to give way to the stubborn, heroic fight of the Algerian people, just as they had to give way in Viet Nam, and just as Britain, Holland and Belgium have been forced to give way throughout Asia and Africa, the United States in China, Korea and Cuba.

Militarily, strategically, the South African government starts off infinitely weaker than the French in Algeria. Its armed forces are smaller; the exclusively white pool from which it can draw further recruits is minute by comparison with the French 'reserves' of population; its armaments are inferior; its industrial base is infinitely smaller, incapable of producing an internal combustion engine, a tank or an airplane. It is isolated. Not a single supporter—neither British reactionaries with fascist leanings nor millionaires with heavy investments in 'Kaffirs'—would dare raise a hand to

support Verwoerd in civil war. The drastic and sudden flight of capital from the country and the catastrophic stock-exchange slump after the Sharpeville events were a warning of the even more drastic repercussions which will afflict the South African government if, finally, its oppression precipitates a civil war in this country.

If the South African government wishes to fight, it will have to go it alone—despite the Unholy Alliance with Salazar and Welensky, both of whom only cling precariously to power in their own territories. And the Nationalists know it! Minister Fouché, in a moment of sanity, whines that “. . . world opinion cannot be fought.” Dr. Verwoerd whines that he is really in favour of “. . . self determination and equality”—at the very time when the principled advocates of self-determination and equality are in jail, exiled and gagged, and their organisations suppressed. These are the symptoms of a government on the edge of crisis.

Despite the surface appearance, South Africa is a country on the brink of a democratic revolution. The people are closer than they imagine to the realisation of the dreams of liberation which have inspired the patriots and leaders of the people for many years. There is only one thing that now stands between the dream and its realisation.

The people have not yet realised their own strength, nor the fatal weakness and sickness of their oppressors.

■ **RELEASE NELSON MANDELA!**

The arrest of Nelson Mandela by the Verwoerd government has roused widespread protests at home and abroad, as well as significant demonstrations of solidarity with Mandela and his cause—the liberation of the people of South Africa from white domination. Mandela is one of the most respected and talented of the younger leaders of the African National Congress; in the stirring post-war years of struggle in South Africa, he has grown in stature through every major campaign, until today he stands alongside ‘the chief’, Albert J. Luthuli, as a symbol of the people’s struggle against Verwoerd and against white supremacy. The slogan ‘Release Mandela’ has been painted up overnight on walls and hoardings throughout the country—though slogan painting in Verwoerd’s South Africa now carries a minimum penalty of six months imprisonment. The political battle for his future has only begun; the courtroom where he will stand trial together with the former Secretary-General of the African National Congress, Walter Sisulu,