

THE MILITARISATION OF THE SOUTH

AFRICAN REGIME

P A R T 2.

- Jimmy Wilson

At the end of the first part of this article we left our principal characters, under the directorship of P.W. Botha, scurrying around parliament producing and amending Act after Act as part of their "Total Strategy" for the hopeless task of defeating the South African revolution.

While they are scurrying, their friends in uniform - the military strategists - are filling their ashtrays with stompies and their livers with KWV, trying to fathom out a way to stop an unstoppable force - Umkhonto we Sizwe.

One of their headaches, for instance, is that white farmers are running away from their farms in the border areas - particularly in the Northern Transvaal.

It was reported in the Johannesburg 'Star' of 4th April, 1979, that Lieutenant General Bob Rodgers, chief of the South African Air Force, was calling for measures to stop the "depopulation of the farming areas".

A bright suggestion came from a certain H. Coetzee, deputy Minister of Defence. He said the government was considering the establishment of small "defendable" towns along the borders where farmers from surrounding areas could live under "strictly controlled security". He suggested that the state buy the farms in the area and lease them out to the farmers. One condition though was that farmers should have had military training.

Another attempt to solve this problem is the establishment of 'MARNET' - Military Area Radio Network. The purpose of 'MARNET' is to "supplement vulnerable telephone communications in remote areas". It consists of radio stations in these areas which are in communication with a permanent control station at a commando head quarters. According to the 'Defence White Paper' of 1979, 'MARNET' has so far been established in the Natal, Northern Transvaal and North Western Command areas.

But despite special radio networks and garrison towns, the racists still can't rid themselves of terrifying visions of MK cadres darting unhindered through the bush. So Coetzee has promised that a permanent Defence Force presence will be maintained in the border areas to "strengthen the population" there.

No doubt the population they hope to strengthen is the white population - the ones who are running away. As for the black population - the peasants and farm workers who are more firmly tied to the land they work than are the landowners who exploit them - the intention is not so much to strengthen them as to increase their subjugation by more sophisticated and subtle means.

Botha and his colleagues have at least learnt this much from history - that it is the support of the people which makes people's war so inevitably victorious; that the people are the mountains and forests, the logistics supply, the communications network and the intelligence service of the guerrillas.

So Botha's strategists, their minds befuddled with desperation, have come up with what they think is a brilliant plan. They argue, with reactionary naïvety, that if the success of guerrilla warfare depends on the politicisation of the people by the guerrillas, then the answer is to get to the people before the guerrillas do - to "win the hearts and minds" of the people. They forget that they have been "getting to" the people for over 200 years, and that those years have taught the people that whether the oppressors come with shining white smiles or spattering guns, they are coming with one thing in hand - oppression.

Nevertheless the Boers are very pleased with what they think is their alternative to the laws of history and they are going ahead with their attempts to "win the hearts and minds" of the people.

So while on the one hand the South African Defence Force is pouring into the border areas with its guns, tanks, planes and other fancy equipment to "strengthen the population", on the other hand they are deploying special contingents of "nice Boers" to help the people with their shopping,

their farming, their education, building schools and clinics, giving away bibles and other choice literature, and generally "teaching the ways of the white man".

It's strange that these "nice Boers" are not doing these "nice things" for the people in other parts of the country where there is no immediate military threat. After all these people too have been waiting patiently for many years for clinics, schools and agricultural assistance.

Perhaps the reason for this is best explained by a certain Lieutenant Spiess, a low-ranking officer in the South African army in Namibia, who in an interview with an overseas film team in 1977 said the following:

"LT SPIESS: We want to win the favour of the local population. It's difficult to explain to them the situation they are in at this stage. Terrorists come over and they tell the local population a lot of stories that are not quite true. I believe it is in the interests of the local population that we tell them what is right and not right, and not the terrorists. We do not agree with their aims.

INTERVIEWER: You do not agree with their aims but the people do?

LT SPIESS: Yes, this is the problem. This is what the war is about".

A further indication both of the extent to which the militarisation mania has swept away with Botha and his plotters, and to which these plotters fail to understand the organics of people's war, is their never-ending introduction of new Defence Force units. This is despite the fact that the SADF already has a huge number and variety of units at its disposal - including infantry, mechanised, motorised, parachute, artillery, anti-aircraft, engineering and signals units, plus the many support units, technical, medical, logistical, etc.,

A handful of MK fighters battle it out at Rustenburg and the racists establish a "new battle school to provide continuous conventional training for all the army's conventional formations up to

divisional level".

Three men spend ten devastating minutes in Moroka police station and the racists established a new parachute brigade to "provide the army with a quick reaction force".

Then, perhaps in anticipation of the African National Congress extending its underground activities to underwater activities, the SADF has introduced a new special section of the navy - the Marines. The Marines is supposed to be a "counter-insurgency strike force specialising in land and seaward defence of all ports". To do this they are being equipped with a specially made patrol craft, fitted out with a 50mm machine gun, a 7,62 mm machine gun, scare charges, shotguns, radio and radar.

Botha and his guarddogs are not only licking the wounds inflicted by the Spear of the Nation inside the country. They also have to contend with the powerful ANC external mission and its friends throughout the world.

One of the fruits of the ANC's international work has been the United Nations mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. No one believes for a moment that this embargo has stopped all supplies of arms and military equipment to South Africa. But it does at least have Botha and the imperialists crawling like moles through all the loopholes they can find to get military hardware to the racists.

According to an article in the British newspaper 'The Observer', "Pretoria's network of military agents and arms buyers is far more extensive than the propaganda capers of the Information Department. There is also the strong suspicion that western intelligence agencies are carrying out secret arms deals with the South African government contrary to the policies of their own governments.

According to a book recently published by two American "strategic experts" immense shipments of tanks, guns, armoured cars and aircrafts have flowed into South Africa in the past few years from countries like Britain, France, the USA, Italy, Portugal, Canada, and Switzerland. This equipment of imperialism includes 40 Starfighter

bombers handed down from the West German Luftwaffe and "hundreds of American-built tanks".

In spite of this, Vorster - when he was still a member of the Botha family - was forced to admit in May this year that "SADF men did their operational duties knowing much of their equipment was not readily replaceable".

In order to reassure their supporters, Botha and company are constantly claiming that the arms embargo is in fact working in the regime's favour by forcing it to become self-sufficient in arms production. This is being said so often, in fact, that it seems that it is himself Botha is trying to reassure.

In 1977, by an amendment to the Armaments Development and Procurement Act, responsibility for the purchase and supply of arms to the SADF was centralised in Armscor. Armscor controls nine subsidiary companies whose functions include the design and manufacture of electro-optical systems, aircraft, guided missiles, rifles and artillery, explosives and ammunition, chemical research, the manufacture of armoured cars and other vehicles and the production of navy vessels. Armscor itself has overall responsibility for planning and administration and works in direct cooperation with the South African Defence Force.

In addition Armscor hands out tens of thousands of military contracts to private companies each year. One estimate is that over 1,200 private companies handle Armscor work. This means that a huge portion of the South African economy is caught up in Botha's militarisation web in a frantic attempt to keep up with the growing needs of the Defence Force.

The racists take great pleasure in announcing the development of this or that new piece of equipment. And each new development is announced as the most advanced in the world.

To take a few examples from the first few months of this year alone:

- In February, Botha announced that South Africa had made a "major breakthrough" in missile technology, and that they were now "totally self-sufficient" in missile production. He also claimed

that the "Navy's strike power was strengthened by the addition of the first two of a series of naval vessels constructed in South Africa" - a mine hunter and the harbour-patrol vessel mentioned earlier.

- In March it was announced that the Atlas Aircraft Corporation - one of Armscor's subsidiaries - was manufacturing light aircraft and the Impala strike and trainer military planes.

- In April Botha announced that production had started on a new generation of field guns "suited to South African conditions". The new "South African-designed" G-5 would, he claimed, "place South Africa in the forefront of the production of field artillery batteries at least till the end of the century". He has also claimed that it would provide a strong challenge to the Katyusha - which goes to show the contents of Botha's nightmares.

- At the same time he announced that South Africa's fighter planes have had their "lives extended by the addition of sophisticated missiles". South Africa's fighter planes certainly need their "lives extended" - in February this year the racists themselves announced that their airforce had lost R35-million worth of jet aircrafts in the past year alone - i.e. nine planes, three pilots and two navigators. Add to that the Mirage III, which crashed killing its pilot during training its pilot during training near Pietersburg in April, as well as the planes recently shot down by SWAPO and FAPLA, and you get some idea of their problem. In fact, MK cadres can take heart from the fact that every time they peer along the barrel of their guns at a South African Air Force plane, they have the potential of bringing crashing to the ground approximately R4-million worth of racist equipment.

- Again in April the racists boasted about the production of a new navy missile-carrying strike craft built in Durban. They reassured their nervous constituents that it was the "most sophisticated vessel in the world of its type and size" and that it was equipped with "some of the most advanced electronic systems in the world".

But perhaps Botha's proudest moment was when, once more in April, he introduced what he thinks is the alternative to the AK-47 - the "new light-weight, light-calibre R-4". Not everyone shares Botha's confidence in the R-4 however. The Johannesburg 'Star' of 27th April, reported that there is "unease in foreign circles" about the stopping power of the R-4's 5,56mm bullet. Apparently American 'Vietnam veterans' say that the bullet is "so light it can be deflected by a twig".

This incessant boasting about South Africa's new weapons and weapons-producing capacity seems as much a part of Botha's "Total Strategy" as the weapons themselves - perhaps it's the 'psychological' strand of the militarisation web.

We, MK cadres have enough of a fighting history behind us to look with scorn at an enemy who boasts too much before battle. Botha's chest-

thumping claim that South Africa has become self-sufficient in weapons production is of the same order as Chelmsford's vainglorious boast about the might of the British army before the Battle of Isandhlwana.

A recent interview conducted by Radio Freedom with a British journalist revealed that the racist's 'great new' artillery piece - the G-5 - was in fact designed and produced with the direct assistance of a Canadian-American company with the connivance of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

It seems that after the Boers got their backsides burnt by the Katyusha in Angola, they ran squeeling to the CIA who put them on to this American-Canadian firm which secretly shipped to the racists large quantities of newly-developed long-range artillery shell plus equipment for the establishment of an artillery research unit.

Time will tell just how much more of Botha's boasts are nothing but hot air. Nevertheless the rapidly increasing production and procurement of military equipment remains an important part of Botha's "grand" militarisation strategy, not only in relation to the intensification of the racist's military build-up, but also in its effect on the overall South African economy.

To be continued...