

INSIDE QUADRO

End of an Era

The first-hand testimony by former combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) about the ANC prison regime, together with press reports that began to appear in Britain in March this year, are an event in South African history. Never before has such concentrated factual evidence been presented about the inner nature of the ANC and its *eminence grise*, the South African Communist Party.

If people wish to understand the operation of the ANC/SACP, they must look here. This is the view behind the proscenium arch, behind the scenery, where the machinery that runs the whole show is revealed in its actual workings.

The ANC/SACP did a very good job in preventing public knowledge of its secret history from emerging, and the testimony of the Nairobi five shows how. (Two other South Africans, both women, are with the five in Nairobi at the time of writing, but they have not yet come public about their experiences). Those who survived the Gulag system of the ANC/SACP did so knowing that to reveal what they had been through meant re-arrest, renewed tortures and in all probability, death. They had to sign a form committing them to silence.

As they repeat in this issue, the ex-detainees in Nairobi have revealed that other prisoners, including Leon Madakeni, star of the South African film *Wanaka*, as well as Nomhlanhla Makhuba and another person known as Mark, committed suicide rather than suffer re-arrest at the hands of their KGB-trained guardians. Madakeni drove a tractor up a steep incline in Angola, put it into neutral and died as it somersaulted down the hill (*Sunday Correspondent*, 8 April).

The ex-guerrillas in Nairobi displayed immense courage in speaking out publicly, first through the *Sunday Correspondent* in Britain on April 8 and then in the *Times* on April 11. It was another indicator of the crack-up of Stalinism internationally: a snippet of South African *glasnost*.

Their courage might have contributed to secure the lives of eight colleagues who had fled Tanzania through Malawi, hoping to reach South Africa on the principle that better a South African jail than the ANC 'security.' This group, including two leaders of the mutiny in the ANC camps in Angola in 1984, arrived in South Africa in April, were immediately detained at Jan Smuts Airport by the security police for interrogation, and then released three weeks later. The day after their release they gave a press conference in Johannesburg, confirming the account of the mutiny published here.

This regime of terror, extending beyond the gates of the ANC/SACP 'Buchenwald' of Quadro, was a necessary element in the total practice of repression and deception which made the Anti-Apartheid Movement the

most successful Popular Front lobby for Stalinism anywhere in the world. No international Stalinist-run public organization has ever had such an influence and shown such stability, reaching into so many major countries, for so long.

In its thirty years' existence, the AAM put international collaborative organisations of the period of the Spanish Civil War and of the Stalin–Roosevelt–Churchill alliance to shame. Extending to the press, the churches, the bourgeois political parties, the trade unions and the radical, even 'trotskyist' left, the AAM has been an outstanding success for Stalinism, as the review of Victoria Brittain's book in this issue shows.

Vital to its success has been a practice of open and covert censorship, now blown wide open, in which individuals such as Ms Brittain have played a sterling part. The ANC's prisoners were its necessary sacrificial victims.

The KGB in Africa

The prison system to which they were subject goes back to the late 1960s. It was the successor and the complement to the prison system on which blacks in South Africa are weaned with their mothers' milk. In 1969 one of the editors of this journal met two South Africans in London who said they had fought in the first MK guerrilla operation in mid-1967 – a disastrous fiasco across the Zambezi River into the Wankie area of Rhodesia, along with guerrillas from the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), then led by James Chikerema. (The ZAPU president, Joshua Nkomo, was in detention). The two men described how they had eventually succeeded in escaping from Rhodesia, and how their criticism of the operation had led to their imprisonment in an ANC camp in Tanzania. An article on the theme appeared the same year in the British radical newspaper, *Black Dwarf*, then edited by Tariq Ali.

The revelations by the Nairobi five indicate how little has changed. In his book on black politics in South Africa since 1945, Tom Lodge, (*Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, Ravan, 1987), writes:

In 1968 a batch of Umkhonto defectors from camps in Tanzania sought asylum in Kenya, alleging that there was widespread dissatisfaction within the camps. They accused their commanders of extravagant living and ethnic favouritism. The first Rhodesian mission, they alleged, was a suicide mission to eliminate dissenters. In political discussions no challenge to a pro-Soviet position was allowed (p.300).

From 1968 to 1990, nothing basic altered in the ANC's internal regime in the camps, except that in the high noon of the Brezhnev era it operated para-statal powers under civil war conditions in Angola, where a large Cuban and Soviet presence permitted the ANC security apparatus to 'bestride the narrow world like a Colossus.'

From the account of the ex-mutineers, ANC administrative bodies ruled over its elected bodies, the security department ruled over the administrative organs, and KGB-trained officials – no doubt members of the SACP – ruled over the security apparatus. Umkhonto we Sizwe functioned as an extension in Africa of the KGB. Its role in the civil war in Angola was to serve primarily as a surrogate to Soviet foreign policy interests, so that when the ANC rebels proposed that their fight be diverted to South Africa this counted as unpardonable cheek, to be ruthlessly punished. Over its own members, the ANC security apparatus ruled with all the arrogance of a totalitarian power.

There is a direct line of connection between the ANC reign of terror in its prisons – which a UN High Commission for Refugees official described as more frightening than Swapo prisons – and the ‘necklace’ killings exercised by ANC supporters within South Africa, especially during the period of the 1984-86 township revolt, but now once again revived against oppositional groupings such as Azapo. (The ANC’s ‘necklace’ politics was also a definite contributory element provoking the carnage in Natal). Two former ANC prisoners, Similo Boltina and his wife Nosisana, were in fact necklaced on their return to South Africa in 1986, after having been repatriated by the Red Cross (letter from Bandile Ketelo, 9 April 1990).

This is the significance of the ‘Winnie issue.’ When on 16 February last year, leaders of the Mass Democratic Movement publicly expressed their ‘outrage’ at Winnie Mandela’s ‘obvious complicity’ in the abduction and assault on 14 year-old Stompie Moeketsi Seipei, leading to his murder, this was in response to very widespread and very well-founded revulsion among Soweto residents – especially ANC supporters such as members of the Federation of Transvaal Women (Fetraw). They were enraged by the jackboot politics of the so-called Mandela United Football Team, whose ‘coach’ – to the satisfaction of Fetraw members – has been convicted of Stompie’s murder.

This squad of thugs, based in Mrs Mandela’s house, acted within Soweto in the same way that the ANC/SACP security acted abroad, in Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Uganda. (According to the ex-detainees, the KGB-apparatus in the ANC even sent its troops to Rhodesia in 1979 to fight against the guerrillas of the Zimbabwe African National Union: ZANU, which was not a Soviet client).

For this reason, the integration of certain members of MK into the South African army and police – as the MK commander, Joe Modise, and his second in command, Chris Hani, are seeking – should not present any serious problems. They speak the same language, they are ‘all South Africans.’ The welcome of Captain Dirk Coetzee, head of the regime’s assassination squad, into the arms of the ANC is an indication of the future course of development, as is the decision by the new Swapo government in Namibia to appoint a number of top South African security policemen, including the former chief of police in the Ovambo region, Derek Brune, to head its secret organs of coercion.

The South African prison system was replicated in the ANC prisons even into everyday terminology, above all at Quadro. This is a name that requires to become common currency in political discourse: it is the Portuguese for 'No.4' the name used throughout South Africa for the notorious black section of the prison at the Fort. Sneers by warders at soft conditions in 'Five Star Hotels', the common description of punishment cells as 'kulukudu' (*Sunday Correspondent*, 8 April) and the whole atmosphere of brutal crassness is quintessentially South African, spiced with the added sadism of the Gulag. The ANC prison system combined the worst of South African and of Russian conditions fused together, and it is this new social type – as a refinement and augmentation of each – that is now offered to the people of South Africa as the symbol of freedom.

Beginning of an Era

In returning to South Africa, the ex-ANC detainees have the advantage of the Namibian experience before them. They need an organization of their relatives, along the lines of the Committee of Parents in Namibia, and an organization of former prisoners themselves, such as the Political Consultative Council of Ex-Swapo Detainees (PCC). The ex-detainees who returned to Johannesburg in April have already mentioned that they intend to form an association of 'parents of those who died or were detained in exile' (*Liberation*, 17 May).

These young people - the Nairobi five are aged between 28 and 33 - represent the flower of the generation of the Soweto students' revolt. This was the beginning of their political awakening. The experience of Stalinist and nationalist terror at the hands of the ANC/SACP represents a second phase in a cruel journey of consciousness. A third phase is now beginning, in which these young people will be required to discover what further changes in society and thought are needed to bring a richly expressive democracy into being in southern Africa.

Compared with the Namibian experience (see *Searchlight South Africa* No.4 and this issue), South African conditions are both more and less favourable. Unlike in Namibia, the churches in South Africa are not absolutely glued to the torturers. A letter from the group in Nairobi was sympathetically received by the Rev Frank Chikane, secretary of the South African Council of Churches. Archbishop Desmond Tutu met the ex-detainees when he was in Nairobi early in April and arranged for them to get accommodation at the YMCA there, paid for by the All-African Council of Churches. (Up to that time they had first been in prison in Kenya, since they had arrived absolutely without documents, and had then been living rough). The Archbishop later took up the mutineers' demand for a commission of inquiry with the National Executive Committee of the ANC. He got no response.

We join with these ex-detainees in demanding that the ANC set up an independent commission of enquiry into the atrocities perpetrated in the Umkhonto we Sizwe camps.

Mandela's statement acknowledging that torture had taken place was in any case very different from the ferocious silence of President Nujoma, the chief architect of Swapo's purges. The ex-detainees' demand for action against top leaders of the ANC, however, goes way beyond what the organization is likely to be able to concede. Therein lies its radical character.

These positive currents, however, are negated by the convergence of very powerful capitalist and Stalinist interests which together aim to fix the future with the utmost *Realpolitik*. The leaders of the unions, previously independent and now politically prisoners of the SACP, have become the engineers of the SACP/capitalist fix, and the workers – even when eager for socialism – are disoriented.

It is likely that there will be a very violent period as the ANC's drive for its supposed target of six million members gets under way, through which it aims to wipe the floor with rival groupings that accuse it of sell-out. It is possible that the methods of Quadro will become part of the daily metabolism of South African life. Future capitalist profitability requires in any case that a massive defeat be inflicted on the workers. The Young Upwardly Mobile (Yuppy) stratum of black petty bourgeoisie will ruthlessly attempt to enforce and secure the conditions for its material advance.

Under these conditions, the ex-detainees will need to find the route to the consciousness of the workers, both to win a base of support for their own defence (even survival) and to help speed up the process of political clarification about the nature of the ANC. In the meantime, defensive alliances need urgently to be made: with the left wing of the unions, socialist political groupings of whatever kind, opponents of the new capitalist/ANC autocracy, concerned individuals in the press, the universities and the legal system; and not least, with the ex-Swapo detainees in Namibia.

As a yeast in which the fermentation of new ideas can develop, the ex-ANC detainees on their return to South Africa will prove one of the most favourable of human resources for a democratic future. They know the future governors of South Africa from the inside. They need the greatest possible international and local support to protect them under very dangerous conditions of life in the townships.

They too will need beware the siren voices of their KGB-trained persecutors, who seek to persuade them that the Brezhnev wolf in Angola has been transformed into a Gorbachev lamb in South Africa. In particular, they will need to inquire whether Joe Slovo, the scourge of Joseph Stalin in 1990, and general secretary of the SACP, is the same Slovo who was chief of staff of MK in the glory days of Quadro. What did he know? When did he know it? And what did he do about it?