

# POPULAR RESISTANCE AND THE GROWTH OF THE SADF

This is an introductory fact sheet which examines the increasing resistance in South Africa in the post-World War II period, and how this has affected the growth of the SADF.

## PRE-1960

Towards the end of World War II resistance in South Africa began to take on a more militant form than it had in the inter-war years. The change was marked by the formation of the <sup>African</sup> ~~ANC~~ Youth League in 1943 and strengthened by the growing militancy of the workers: In 1949 the ANC adopted a Programme of Action along the lines proposed by the Youth League. The Programme emphasized the self-determination of African people and the need for them to play the leading role in the struggle for liberation. It embodied a rejection of white domination, and a call for mass action through protests, strikes and demonstrations.

The adoption of the Programme coincided with the coming to power of the National Party in 1948. In the following decade the N.P. was to consolidate its rule and build the foundations of institution-ised apartheid — the tightening up of the migrant labour system, a more sophisticated Bantustan strategy, the physical separation of races and stricter repression of all dissent.



The Programme of Action laid the basis for the militant mass resistance of the 1950's. Under the leadership of the ANC and its allies in the Congress Alliance (notably, the South African Congress of Trade Unions), the oppressed people were organised at all levels — in trade unions, in schools and universities, in women's and community organisations, and in political parties. Demonstrations, boycotts and acts of defiance were the forms of protest of the 1950's.

The state's response was to attempt to crush vigorously this resistance through banings, arrests, detentions, and with truncheons and bullets. During this period it was the South African Police, rather than the SADF, which was the apartheid state's major security force. Between 1945 and 1960 the size of the police force more than doubled, by which stage it was more than twice the size of the SADF.

Up until 1960, South Africa was under no military threat, and the mass resistance did not threaten to take on a violent form. Consequently the SADF remained a relatively small force of about 10 000 volunteers. Defence expenditure remained under 1% of the Gross National Product and less than 7% of total government expenditure. In 1960/61 the defence budget was R44 million —  $\frac{1}{90}$  of the present budget. Arms purchases were limited to modest amounts of U.K. and USA equipment. According to Chester Crocker, by the

SADF was a practically



obsolete force.

### THE 1960's

The protests of the 1950's reached a climax on 21 March 1960, when, during an anti-pass law demonstration at Sharpeville in the Transvaal, police opened fire killing 67 people. The <sup>massacre</sup> slaughtering of the peaceful demonstrators was followed by protests, demonstrations and strikes all over the country. The government declared a State of Emergency, arresting 20 000 people and detaining 2000. Within a fortnight the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (which had been formed as a breakaway from the ANC in 1959) had both been banned. Both organisations chose to operate underground. Significantly, too, the army was <sup>mobilised</sup> placed on standby, indicating for the first time that the SAP might not be able to contain the future conflict.

\* PTO

Sharpeville marked a turning point in the history of the South African struggle. The brutal repression of the state drove home to many the limitations of peaceful protest. Many felt that while peaceful protest and above-ground organisation (which had characterised ANC activity over the previous 48 years) should continue, it needed to be complemented by a campaign of limited sabotage; ie, attacks on key installations aimed at shocking the government into introducing changes before it was too late. This campaign was launched by Umkhonto we Sizwe, on December 16 1961 the



military wing of the ANC, on December 16 1961. At the same time the PAC launched its armed unit, Poqo, which, unlike Umkhonto, was committed to random acts of violence.

However, both organisations underestimated the repressive powers of the South African state. Within 3 years much of the key leadership had been arrested. 11 PAC members were sentenced to death and most of the Umkhonto high command, including leader Nelson Mandela, received life prison sentences. In all, over 1600 people were convicted of offences relating to the safety of the state.

Nevertheless, some members, particularly of the ANC, remained underground. Others set up bases in exile and concentrated on organising military training abroad, ~~and~~ restoring the underground structures in the country and <sup>beginning to</sup> infiltrating trained guerrillas <sup>into SA</sup>. ~~It was this work which laid the basis for the upsurge in ANC activity (both military and other), from the mid 1970's onwards.~~

While the state had been able to crush the early armed resistance, the formation of Umkhonto and Poqo nevertheless posed the first military threat to the <sup>ruling</sup> regime. In 1961, Defence Minister, Jim Fouché, introduced a ballot system of conscription (a certain laid down percentage of all whites). He called on white mothers "to give up their sons in defence of their land." Initially



there was a selective intake of 7000 men for 9 months service. This was extended, so that by 1964 there was an annual intake of 16500. In the same period the defence budget increases 5-fold, so that by 1964/5, it had reached R210 million, 21% of the government budget.<sup>4</sup>

But it was not only South Africa which was undergoing a process of change. By the early 1960 most of Africa had won its independence, as the new states were hostile to apartheid and supported its opponents. The exception in the independence process was Southern Africa, with the result that guerilla wars of independence were launched by revolutionary nationalist movements in Angola in 1961, Mozambique in 1964, and in Zimbabwe in 1966.

More important for South Africa was the decision by the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) to launch the armed struggle in Namibia in 1966, following years of peaceful protest. In this context the SADF's ballot system was deemed insufficient to cope with the growing threat. So in 1967 universal conscription (9 months service) was introduced for all white males.

Nevertheless, the late 1960's was a quiet period in terms of active resistance, and the SAP remained the major repressive force. SWAPO's guerilla activity had not stretched much beyond the Caprivi area, and <sup>which</sup> the police were adequately



able to control the area. At times the police ~~was~~ took on a more aggressive role. In 1967/8 para-military police units were sent into Zimbabwe to aid the Smith forces in a campaign against the joint forces of ZAPU and South African ANC guerrillas.  
 \* Basis February.

~~The SADF did not grow appreciably~~ Internally, too, the police were able to contain the limited above-ground resistance. This had begun to re-surface ~~with~~ in the form of the Black Consciousness movement. Beginning with the South African Students Organisation (formed in 1969 and <sup>initially</sup> led by Steve Biko), the B.C organisation attempted to conscientise blacks, particularly youth, and to encourage a defiance of repression and a denunciation of apartheid institutions.

With the SAP ~~seemingly~~ <sup>significantly</sup> in control, the SADF did not grow ~~appreciably~~ during this period. In the first 5 years of universal conscription the number of conscripts did not grow appreciably, and the defence budget grew at no more than the inflation rate. (R255 million in 1966/7 to R321 million in 1971/2).

THE 1970's

By the early 1970's signs of change in the Southern African area were already apparent. In 1971 20 000 Namibian contract workers brought the mining industry to a standstill in a strike against the system of migrant labour and influx



control. SWAPO, through its armed wing, the Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), intensified its activity dramatically. To the South African rulers it soon became clear that the conflict could no longer be contained simply by increasing the size of the SADF. So the ~~transfer~~ control of Northern Namibia began to shift to the SADF, a process which was completed by June 1974. At the same time, in 1972 national service was increased from 9 to 12 months, followed by 19 days service annually for 5 years in the citizen force. More effort <sup>too</sup> was made to recruit blacks into the SADF. By 1972 the coloured Cape Corps, which had been formed in 1963, had advanced from being a separate unit to being an integral part of the permanent force. In the same year the first Africans began serving in the SADF, and within 2 years the first African units were formed.

Within South Africa, too, the early 1970s saw a marked rise in militancy and the defiant rejection of apartheid. Particularly important were the Durban strikes of 1973 when 100 000 workers successfully came out ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> demanding wage increase. Although these strikes were largely spontaneous, they provided the impetus to the emergence and growth of the independent trade union movement — a movement which within a decade <sup>included</sup> ~~numbered~~ over 350 000 workers.

Once again, events beyond South Africa's borders



had a profound influence on the course of struggle within South Africa. In <sup>late</sup> January 1975 both Mozambique and Angola won independence from Portugal, bringing to power socialist governments in both countries (FRELIMO and the MPLA). 2 months before Angolan independence in November, and in a futile attempt to prevent the MPLA coming to power, the SADF invaded Angola. By early 1976, and after the MPLA had enlisted Cuban assistance, the SADF ~~was~~ <sup>had been</sup> driven out.

Operation Savannah, as the invasion was known, marked the beginning of <sup>the</sup> full-scale border war in northern Namibia and southern Angola. The new demands placed on the SADF led them to introduce 3 month <sup>border camps</sup> ~~trains of duty~~ in the operational area.

If 1960 and 1973 were turning points in South African history, then 1976 was a watershed year, inspired by the victories of FRELIMO and the MPLA and increasingly embittered by the unequal Bantu Education system, hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren came out in protest. They were soon joined by over half a million workers, who staged successful supportative strikes throughout the country. The sustained uprisings of 1976 and 1977 showed that resistance to apartheid had taken an open and more defiant form and signalled that a more intense struggle had begun.



The state responded ruthlessly. With the SADF on standby, the police moved into the townships. Over 1000 people were killed, and many more injured. In late 1977 18 black consciousness organisations and 2 newspapers were banned.

However, the police could not prevent many thousands of black youth leaving the country. If the victories of the MPLA and FRELIMO had offered inspiration to the students, as importantly, they offered political and military support to the ANC and SWAPO. The ranks of Umkhonto began to swell, and by 1977 the youth of Swaziland began to trickle back, no longer armed with sticks and stones, but with rifles and grenades. Within a year the number of reported incidents of sabotage increased 4-fold, from 6 in 1976 to 24 in 1977.

The new level of struggle forced the SADF on to an increased war footing. In 1977 conscription was doubled to 24 months, plus 30 days annually for 8 years (although many of the "30-day" camps turned out to be 3-month border stretches). By 1979, the number of national servicemen had risen to 60 000 while the budget almost tripled from R707 million in 1974/5 to R1940 million 3 years later.

### INTENSIFIED RESISTANCE — THE PAST 5 YEARS

The past 5 years have been marked by



the growth of internal legal organisation, the intensification of underground activity and the parallel development of the SADF.

The banning in 1977 of ~~all~~ <sup>most</sup> of the major legal organisations created the space for the emergence of new organisations which differed in 2 ~~area~~ respects from their predecessors. Firstly, there was a far wider range of organisations with a much greater emphasis on grassroots, community-based activity. Secondly, most of them proclaimed strict adherence to the principle of non-racialism. By the early 1980's a large number of such organisations had been established, serving as democratic organs in opposition ~~to~~, and as alternatives, to the apartheid institutions such as community councils and management committees.

There were major developments, too, amongst women, youth and students, and among church and sporting groupings. Broad umbrella organisations were formed to co-ordinate specific campaigns. At the same time the trade union movement continued to grow rapidly.

Only on occasions of heightened activity (such as the student, worker and community uprisings of 1980) has the SADF been deployed to curb internal activity. However they have always been on active standby should the police lose control of the situation, and on many occasions they have actively assisted the police, for example, at



road-blocks and in pass raids. ~~through the SADF~~  
 An important focus of their work has been the Civic Action Programme, through which they have (largely unsuccessfully) attempted to woo support away from the democratic organisations. But in the barracks they have more frequently been agents of direct repression, willingly crushing any signs of resistance.

However, it has been the intensifying armed struggle which has most severely put the SADF to the test. Here the trend has been towards increasingly sophisticated operations by well-trained and well-armed combatants, operating within the framework of structures established in the years before <sup>after</sup> 1976. Incidents of armed attack have become more clearly and effectively integrated with struggles on other fronts, for example, intensified action at the time of the anti-Republic Day activities in 1981.

Since ~~from~~ 1976 ~~to~~ 1979, almost all armed attacks have been conducted by Umkhonto we Sizwe. Up till 1979 they concentrated on <sup>attacking</sup> strategic targets such as railway lines, ~~by~~ exploding pamphlet bombs and shooting former guerrillas who collaborated with the security police. A new phase began in 1979 with an attack on a police station in retaliation for the ~~execution~~ <sup>hanging</sup> of ANC guerrilla, Solomon Mahlangu. Since then several police stations and a number of military bases have been attacked. In addition Umkhonto guerrillas have continued to attack



the machinery of the administration of apartheid, (such as administration boards) and transport and energy distribution networks (the most notable being the Koeberg attack in December 1982).

There has also been intensified activity in the border areas of the Transvaal. ~~There~~ In these areas the exodus of white farmers has left little or no presence of white civilians, where civilians remain, they have been closely integrated into military structures.

In Namibia, too, the war has intensified significantly. When conscription was introduced for black Namibians in 1980/81, over 8000 left the country to join PLAN. Each year the SADF has conducted massive sweeps deep into Angola, but each time the SADF has noticeably failed to stem the flow of SWAPO guerrillas.

In an attempt to meet the <sup>military</sup> challenge posed by the ANC, a new system of call-up was introduced in 1982. The period to be spent doing camps was increased from 240 days over 8 years to 720 days over 12 years. <sup>The SADF</sup> They also made provision for all white males to serve in the commando force up to the age of 55. This notorious "Dads Army" has already been deployed in parts of northern Natal and the northern and eastern Transvaal.

A key aspect of the 1982 legislation was the



stress on "area-based warfare." The SADF correctly assessed that the ANC would intensify its activity at a local level. Much emphasis was placed on building area forces, that is, forces integrated with, and depending on structures in localities, including civil defence structures and a greatly expanded commando system.

The SADF's fears were confirmed during 1983 when ~~its~~ ANC pronouncements indicated that the organisation had moved beyond a campaign of limited sabotage to full-scale guerrilla warfare. This shift was apparent in the attack in May on the Pretoria headquarters of the S.A. Air Force.

Attempts by the state to crush the ANC have failed dismally. Even the brutal attacks on ANC and civilian targets in Matola in 1981, Maseru in 1982 and Maputo in 1983 did little more than encourage response retaliation. At the same time, the existence of many arms caches in both urban and rural areas indicates that increasingly guerrillas have a base inside the country for operations, and are not dependent on sanctuary across the borders.

Equally important, there is widespread and increasing support <sup>within the country</sup> for both the ANC, and for the internal organisations which have come together to fight apartheid.



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