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SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION

SUPPORT COMMITTEE

MILITARY DISSENTER'S PROGRAMME



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## INTRODUCTION

South Africa today is in a war situation. Despite international pressure and "verligte" ("enlightened") movements from within the white community, the regime remains resolute in its maintenance of power through the use of violent force. To date this repression has been implemented through the economic structure, legislation, the activities of the security police and the open violence of the South African Police. The backbone of the state's security, the South African Defence Force (SADF), has never fully been put to the test.

It is inevitable, however, that, as the level of confrontation between white and black increases, the SADF will become the key to the survival of the apartheid regime and there is every reason to assume that a significant proportion of the white population will be prepared to fight to the very end. The role of the military thus needs to be seriously considered when looking at the dynamics of the unfolding struggle for national liberation. NO SUCCESSFUL REVOLUTION HAS TAKEN PLACE IN THIS CENTURY WITHOUT THERE HAVING BEEN A SIGNIFICANT LEVEL OF DISLOYALTY AMONGST THE DEFENDING TROOPS.

## THE STRENGTH OF THE MILITARY

The SADF, in an emergency, is capable of putting a force of at least 250,000 in the field whose equipment and loyalty will match any in Africa. With the help of the western powers, the SADF has equipped itself with sophisticated technology and machinery. Anticipating potential isolation years ago, South Africa has developed almost complete self-sufficiency in its capacity to produce its own basic arms and munitions.

The military consists of a small core of professional soldiers, the Permanent Force, and the vast majority, the Citizen Force, who, after an initial two year period of service, are called out of civilian life to perform short tours of duty.

The 35,000 members of the Permanent Force have by their own decision made a career choice to defend the present system. They represent the toughest core of those committed to defending the state. Members of the Citizen Force serve under compulsion from



the state. The loyalty of these troops is a crucial facet of the SADF's strength.

### THE INDOCTRINATION OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA

All white South Africans are prey to the indoctrination of the apartheid system from their earliest conscious moments. They grow up in an environment of material benefits, experiencing the master-servant relationship between their parents and blacks. They enter segregated schools where their history books give them a faultless view of their heritage. In church they learn of the paternalistic way in which blacks "need to be treated". From the media they hear and read daily of the "terrorists and communists who threaten our lives" - this also from the liberal press who criticise the government on so many other points. By the time they start thinking for themselves, the threat of communism and the "swartgevaar" ("black danger") is so firmly entrenched in their experience, that without the option of alternative views they automatically buy the "South African dream".

This dream is not a simple trust in apartheid and the present government, for these can be openly criticised. The dream lies in the belief that white South Africa has the right to control the destiny of all the people of the country. The conservatives are happy with the way things are now, the liberals want to see gradual change "through the democracy of a white controlled parliament". These two groups and the variations thereof may have heated arguments, but their dream is the same; "We as whites are not settlers, but Africans in our own right who over three centuries have built up the wealth of our country. We have to defend our interests, for majority rule will mean chaos, communism and every white having their throat slit. South Africa is our only home and so we must fight for the right to remain in our own territory."

When white South Africans enter the military with this view of the situation it is not surprising that they easily succumb to the blunt indoctrination that is an integral part of the training programme. The vast majority of troops, by the time they are sent to the operational area for duty, are fully prepared to carry out any instructions and believe any reports that come down to them from their commanders. They are efficient, unquestioning soldiers, dutifully serving their country.



The escalating war is by no means confined to the concerns of the troops. In civilian life the state is very effectively encouraging a potent war psychosis. There is widespread hero worship for "our boys on the border" and people in uniform are gaining more and more privileges in civilian life. Every radio station devotes a significant proportion of its broadcasting time to request programmes for those in uniform. Multi national corporations have been sponsoring fund-raising drives to provide home comforts for troops in the operational areas. All men killed during service receive full military honours at their funeral. South Africa is preparing itself psychologically for a massive confrontation.

In general, the state is able at this stage to boast what appears to be a well oiled war machine that presents a fairly formidable picture of what the National Liberation Movement is up against.

#### SALSCOM'S PLATFORM

SALSCOM has defined its role in contributing to the liberation struggle in South Africa as one of addressing the particular role of whites. Already there are a small but significant proportion of whites who are prepared to contribute in whatever way possible to fundamental change in the apartheid system. As the pressure increases and the forces of isolation and liberation begin to drive white South Africa into a more hopeless position, there are bound to be an increasing number of whites who can be won over to the side of liberation or at least neutralised to a decision not to defend the present system.

The SADF is crucial to the survival of the apartheid state. Without the military to protect the system, it would collapse overnight. The absolute loyalty of the members of the military and their willingness to defend the system with their lives is an essential contribution in maintaining the system. This loyalty, SALSCOM believes, is the weakest link in South Africa's chain of military defence.

South African white youth are not fascists by nature. Their absolute loyalty stands on a flimsy base. One crack, one serious question unanswered and a thought process can begin which could bring down the fragile mythology built upon lies and over-pumped



propaganda. We believe that it is possible to penetrate the military and to create an important segment within the SADF who will be prepared to join forces with the National Liberation Movement. The weak links in the chain need to be explored. The seeds of dissension clearly exist in the South African military today. SALSCOM sees its role in enabling the growth of these seeds in whatever way possible as a constructive contribution towards national liberation.

### A CALL TO DISSENSION - THE DISSENTER'S PROGRAMME

#### THE ALIENATION OF THE YOUTH

White South Africa is by no means one monolithic whole that is prepared to defend its laager of interests to the death. Increasing numbers of white South Africans are beginning to seriously question the prospects of living in a police state that is rushing itself headlong towards destruction. It is especially amongst the youth that alternatives are being sought. With the escalating war situation on the borders and in the urban areas, white youth (all men and a growing number of women) are having to face the reality of what it means to fight and die "for their country". More and more of these conscripts are beginning to see their service in terms of defending a system which they abhor and which offers them no future. Clearly the apartheid state is fast alienating a very significant proportion of its youth.

#### THE SEEDS OF DISSENSION

Already there are signs of dissension within the SADF. Isolated incidents occurring regularly within the forces might appear to be totally insignificant unless placed in the perspective of the growth patterns of dissension that have been observed within other military systems. A few examples (all taken from a tour of duty of one infantry battalion) should give some indication of this.



- \* While in Angola, a platoon shaved themselves bald in protest of fortnightly haircuts.
- \* A platoon serving on the Angolan border refused the orders of their commanding officer and declined to co-operate in any way until the officer agreed to make concessions in his treatment of the troops.
- \* Two privates assaulted an officer as they felt he was treating them unjustly.

There are many similar stories which are usually viewed purely in terms of petty disobedience. These incidents must be put in their proper perspective alongside the fact that in 1976 4,000 men failed to report for their allotted duty,

South Africa can boast that it has a military machine with a high degree of patriotic loyalty. Indeed it presents a formidable picture of what the forces of liberation are up against. The state can realistically rely on a significant proportion of its troops to remain loyal to the very end. But the seeds of dissension are clearly planted in the system and can only spread in the escalating confrontation.

#### DISSENSION AND DESERTION - LONG AND SHORT TERM STRATEGIES

Perhaps the most constructive contribution that progressive white South Africans, both inside and outside the country, can make to the liberation struggle lies in undermining the strength of the military from within, in building and supporting dissension within the ranks. The initiative for dissension can only be taken by those in the ranks but is very unlikely to occur in a vacuum.

In encouraging desertion, one is posing as a solution that all progressive white South Africans should leave the country. As a long term strategy this cannot be justified, for it negates the fact that whites are South Africans and are very much part of the country's future. However we believe it is essential to establish a very clear precedent of desertion before one can expect to see the initiative of widespread dissension being taken on the inside. This belief is borne out by the patterns of the growth of dissension in various contemporary situations. Desertion can thus only be seen as a means to the end of establishing a very firm and clear support base outside the country that can give whatever aid necessary to an



initiative on the inside.

This reasoning is based on the belief that whites have a positive and concrete role to play in the dynamics of change in South Africa and that there is a possibility of a significant wave of dissension being established within the military. Even if this is too optimistic a prediction, desertion does have a profound effect on the white population and can go a long way in breaking the morale of the troops. In the past, public statements made abroad by deserters have caused a flurry of reactions in the South African press. These cannot fail to have a significant impact on those faced with the prospect of being sent to the operational areas to fight for the regime. If nothing else, a single act of desertion means that there is one less gun between the present system and liberation.

#### A CALL TO DISSENSION

SALSCOM calls for all draft-age white South Africans to seriously question their role in defending the apartheid regime and to refuse to take up arms against the forces of liberation. It encourages draft resistance, desertion and dissension within the ranks and pledges to help dissenters in whatever way possible. At the same time SALSCOM calls for the support of progressive individuals and institutions outside South Africa to assist those who on grounds of conscience refuse to support the apartheid state by taking up arms.

#### THE AIMS OF THE DISSENTER'S PROGRAMME

At this time, the prospect of any white South African leaving the country is bleak. It is almost impossible for them to obtain residency, work or travel documents anywhere in the world without a great deal of trouble. The decision to throw up one's lot in one's own country is seriously hindered if one is faced with no prospect of any form of security within a new environment. SALSCOM thus sees one of its priorities in providing a support base outside South Africa to overcome these difficulties. The programme aims at assisting refugees of the South African military and to publicise this assistance to generate a flow of deserters that in its own right will establish the first clear precedent inside South Africa of a



widespread move of dissension within its ranks.

Creating desertion and dissension within the ranks of the SADF is, we believe, a viable long term goal, but there are a number of steps to be undertaken, one by one, before we can hope to reach the goal. these are:

#### 1. Getting Asylum for Deserters and Draft Resisters

- 1.) Research and investigate immigration laws and the viability of asylum for dissenters in about ten countries. From a preliminary reading of the situation the picture looks rather bleak.
- 2.) Target three or four countries where the political and legal conditions seem most favourable and in concert with political parties, solidarity groups and legal experts, to organise and lobby for these countries to grant political asylum to soldiers who refuse to fight in the South African military.
- 3.) Work on international bodies like the World Council of Churches, the EEC, the ILO, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, etc. to increase pressure for such a granting of asylum.

Once there are three or four countries, including at least one English speaking country, who have taken definite and positive positions on granting dissenters asylum, we will move on to step 2.

#### 2. Disseminating Information to Soldiers

- 1.) Inform soldiers who about to be called up or are in service that if they wish to desert they will need, for example ; to leave South Africa via a number of possible routes, to go to designated countries bringing with them their passports, call-up papers, etc. and within one week contact support groups, lawyers, etc. who will assist them upon arrival.
- 2.) Get the word back to the soldiers in South Africa; by open publicity in the press if possible, by radio broadcasts into the country, by spreading information leaflets via safe addresses or underground, by word of mouth - speaking to soldiers on holiday



abroad who are going back, etc.

### 3. Providing assistance to Deserters

1.) Provide a counselling service for deserters to help them integrate into a new society by helping them with legal assistance temporary financial assistance and by providing contact with agencies that can assist with job, housing, educational and social security problems.

2.) Put them in touch with other South African exiles, solidarity groups and, through a newspaper, with deserters in other countries. A solid support base will be essential to help them cope with the problem of life in exile and to solicit their co-operation in assisting other deserters.

At this stage maximum publicity is necessary to publicise the case; to organize press interviews, speaking tours etc., to build up international support for the programme, as well as to convey the message of asylum back to South Africa.

### 4. PROMOTING AGITATION AMONGST TROOPS

1.) Monitor contact points to get in touch with these people and to pose to them the alternative to fighting for the regime. Hundreds of soldiers, in between their tours of duty, go abroad for holidays. They gravitate towards youth hostels and certain pubs popular with South Africans.

2.) Encourage them, upon return, to present the case to the soldiers on the inside.

3.) Distribute literature and counter-propaganda amongst troops on the inside. This should stimulate a regular flow of deserters that will increasingly become a major psychological blow to the morale of the troops and will begin to undermine their willingness to fight.



5. Gathering Information

- 1.) Gather information, published and unpublished, about South Africa's military capacity in order to gain a clear picture of the whole South African military system.
- 2.) Gather information directly from the soldiers themselves, a vast and thus far untapped source of information. Every soldier can provide information on what the current political climate in the military is, the strength of his unit, etc.
- 3.) Transfer this information into charts, reports and strategic maps and present this to the National Liberation Movement. This is vital information that can be gathered from every deserter and other sympathetic soldiers.

If the programme advances according to expectations, SALSCOM envisages setting up a centre in England to act as an accessible focus for the programme, to provide temporary accomodation for deserters and an operational base from which work being done in various countries can be co-ordinated.

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