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OKHELA AND THE QUESTION OF ARMED STRUGGLE

There is common agreement on a wide variety of fronts that there needs to be drastic change in South Africa and that the Apartheid state needs to be destroyed. Disagreement arises over the means and methods necessary to overthrow the state. One of the questions that will continuously be raised is why OKHELA has chosen to support the armed struggle in South Africa.

NATURE OF THE ENEMY

The situation in South Africa is one of an entrenched settler colonialist regime developed and refined over the last 300 years. A small minority of 4 million whites controls its position of power over 20 million blacks with a fist of iron. The regime has at its disposal a massive, highly trained police force and military, strongly motivated by the politics of survival. Torture, mass arrests, electronic surveillance, infiltration and intimidation are the basis of South African security work. The state also has at its disposal a barrage of repressive legislation that monitors and controls the movement of people. The mildest form of protest or resistance



is crushed by draconian legislation which virtually makes all forms of opposition illegal. The leadership of the Apartheid regime constitutes one of the most entrenched fascist dictatorships of this century. Vorster, security chief Van der Bergh and others in power are known for their membership in the pro-Nazi "Ossewa Brandwag" organization. Hundreds of Nazis fled to South Africa after World War II. Many members of the Portuguese Secret Police, P.I.D.E., and other racist reactionaries fled to South Africa as various African countries became independent.

Like frightened and trapped animals, white South Africans have launched themselves into a battle for survival. Surrounded on their borders by what they consider to be hostile forces, outnumbered at home five to one by an increasingly restless black mass, the regime refuses to negotiate any legitimate forms of meaningful change.

South Africa, however, is not alone. Western capitalist nations with billions of dollars invested there cannot afford a drastic change in the status quo. Besides, South Africa, acting on behalf of the imperialists, performs a



useful policing function in Southern Africa. South African capital, technology and police intelligence have penetrated the sub-continent and pose a continual threat in the area, which may well suit the Imperialists' need to destabilize any of the neighbouring states as they see fit. Furthermore, South Africa's geographic position - vis-a-vis oil routes, and the monitoring of ship movement in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans - makes South Africa an area of strategic interest for NATO and the Western powers.

All in all, the South African liberation movements are up against a formidable enemy.

#### VARIOUS STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

From the earliest days of white colonisation, Africans have waged wars of resistance to counter European greed. Because of superior weaponry the whites settled most of South Africa. In the early struggles, the blacks fought as separate tribes. The formation of the African National Congress in 1912 provided a united front. The Congress' first priorities were



attempts at obtaining a universal franchise and the right to retain their land. Initial strategies included petitions, pleas and delegations to the crown in Britain, who could have vetoed any legislation. All these attempts failed.

Mahatma Ghandi travelled to South Africa at the beginning of this century and there formulated his whole philosophy of Satyagraha. Numerous campaigns of civil disobedience were launched. With the formation of the A.N.C. Youth League in 1943, a series of boycotts and strikes began. May 1950 saw the launching of one of the best organized civil disobedience campaigns the country has ever seen. More than half the workers in South Africa cooperated in a stay-at-home protest. In June 1952 the "Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign" was launched. Thousands were arrested. In 1956, 20,000 women demonstrated in front of the administrative buildings in Pretoria. Resistance increased and reached a critical turning point in 1960. After a series of demonstrations the police opened fire on a crowd of unarmed, peaceful demonstrators at Sharpeville, killing 69 and wounding many more. Within months 22,000 were arrested and their political organisations, the A.N.C. and P.A.C. were banned.



Half a century of peaceful, non-violent struggle had consistently failed to change anything. The reply of the apartheid state was to increase repression, crushing all dissidents with brutality, banning, arrests, torture and death. The liberation movements, at this stage, decided there was no way left to gain their freedom but by preparing for an armed struggle.

Another argument advanced for a method of bringing about change in South Africa has been the "economic progress argument". Nothing in the history of South Africa's recent economic development substantiates the argument that increased investment and speeding up of economic growth and industrialization will inevitably lead to basic social and political change. For the black majority in South Africa, the last twenty years of intensive economic development were precisely the same years that saw increasing oppression, exploitation and increased poverty. White/Black wage gaps increased, Pass laws were tightened, a record number of discriminatory laws were passed (over 100), and further and more monstrous security legislation was passed making all viable opposition illegal. The framework and vicious machinery



of apartheid was strengthened during the same years of what was called an economic boom. The argument of economic prosperity to bring about change is posed by those who stand to lose most by fundamental change and is in fact a formula designed to avert change rather than implement it, as recent history has shown.

### THE ALTERNATIVES

Given the failure of the above strategies for change, there is an obvious need to re-assess what the basic tactics and strategies in the liberation struggle should be. The liberation movements have already decided that armed struggle is going to be an inevitable part of the struggle for liberation in South Africa and OKHELA fully endorses this assesment.

In the first place it needs to be stated that waging an armed struggle is not the only means of struggle. Nor does it mean that the methods described above in the history of the struggle are obsolete. They are not sufficient to bring down the regime. Likewise armed struggle alone will



not bring about a complete revolution in South Africa. It is a necessary tool that will have to be used at times when the situation warrants it, and then only in conjunction with the overall strategies of the struggle, for violence can never be seen as an end in itself. The South African regime remains in power only through its use of violence to control the oppressed majority. Without the use of counter-violence one can have no realistic hopes for change.

By virtue of the state's security apparatus and severe repression against open resistance, OKHELA has chosen to go into illegality and function underground. It is the only way for a group, serious about the struggle, to survive. Having set as a goal the destruction of the state and having chosen clandestinity and illegality as a mode of operation, it stands to reason that, as militants, we risk our very lives in any confrontation with the enemy ; therefore the need arises for the skills of self defence, which may result in the loss of life.

The need for armed struggle has been recognised in other liberation struggles. In Vietnam, Guine Bissau, Angola and



Mocambique, the armed struggle was a crucial factor in the successes of the various liberation movements. However as a white militant group, OKHELA can never "launch" or sustain its own armed struggle. That will be the primary task of the National Liberation Movement. When called upon to do so, though, OKHELA will be willing and ready to take-up its position and fight for total victory and liberation for all in South Africa.

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