

PLANNING FOR A PEOPLE'S WAR

Howard Barrell interviews the ANC's Oliver Tambo (right)

Harare

WHEN AFRICAN National Congress President Oliver Tambo repeated the slogan a third time, the 500 exiled South African ANC members packing the small hall in central Lusaka must have been forgiven for fearing that they were to be subjected to a stream of rhetoric.

'La-lu-ta con-ti-nua' shouted Tambo yet again, dragging out each syllable. 'Continua', responded the faithful, fists in the air.

He, like the Blacks and the few whites of all ages sweating and singing in Lusaka's muggy summer heat a fortnight ago to celebrate the ANC's anniversary had to accept the fact that they and their forebears had struggled for 73 years and were still some way short of victory. Tambo told them as much. Indeed, as Tambo's former legal partner, the jailed ANC leader Nelson Mandela, once put it, the road to South African freedom is 'no easy walk'.

One hopeful sign is the rising number of white South African journalists, academics and businessmen now either calling for talks between the government and the ANC, or making pilgrimages to the ANC external mission headquarters — down an obscure, littered alley in central Lusaka. One of President P.W. Botha's own MPs, Wynand Malan, is now among those calling publicly for talks with the ANC. He is from a new breed of Afrikaner nationalist, known as a *oorbeligte* — that is, one of the 'over-illuminated'.

Tambo told me in an interview in Lusaka that he sees this snowballing white response arising out of the realisation that 'the Botha government is fast running out of options'. The government's new constitution has failed miserably to attract black support. Far from the ANC being crushed by last year's Nkomati accord between the Botha government and Frelimo in Mozambique — the opposite has happened. Government attempts to keep the rapidly growing black union movement out of politics had failed. Late last year, South Africa witnessed unrest in black townships which Law and Order Minister Louis Le Grange characterised as more serious than the Soweto uprising of 1976. Apartheid's inequalities and the insatiable demands of 'security' were major causes of the country's worst economic crisis in 55 years.

'So, for the regime, things are getting out of hand, and the ANC remains intact. That is basically why these white voices have arisen', said Tambo.

OPTIMISM IS A REQUIREMENT of 73 years in the field. And Tambo does not lack it — thought this soft-spoken and thoughtful lawyer is not given to the normal extravagance of most revolutionary rhetoric. He does not doubt that those surrounding Botha (for whom the vision



'Botha is fast running out of options'

of South Africa's future is visible only down gun sights) will soon seek to reassert themselves — to halt this (premature) 'talk about talks' with the ANC.

Tambo rejected press reports that there had already been talks between the ANC and the South African government late last year. There had been no such talks, negotiations, contacts of any kind, he said. He laid down two broad conditions under which talks might occur: one, that Botha agree to negotiate over the 'modalities of putting an end to the system of apartheid' with the goal of a 'united democratic and non-racial South Africa'; two, that the ANC get a clear 'mandate' from its supporters inside the country to enter such talks.

The ANC, Tambo said, is now in the midst of preparations for a major consultative conference this year — the first since 1969. The dates and location are being kept secret in order to avoid a South African raid. Between 100 and 200 delegates are likely to attend. The major focus will fall on military strategy and the need to extend the ANC's underground activity inside South Africa, said Tambo.

Following the anti-ANC security pacts signed by the Botha government with Mozambique and Swaziland, the ANC must develop methods of sustaining and expanding political and guerrilla activity inside South Africa which depend to a lesser extent on transit through, and support from, neighbouring countries.

Tambo is confident that it can be done. 'We have never proceeded on the basis that we are going to rely on the ability of neighbouring states to support our struggle — invaluable as that support is. Armed struggle is coming on within South Africa. There is a lull now, but it is a short lull relatively. That is because arrangements are being made, organisation is taking place. And it is all going to develop within South Africa', said Tambo.

TAMBO INDICATED that guerrillas in the ANC's military wing, *Umkhonto We Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation), may not be required to exercise quite so much caution in future to avoid inflicting casualties on civilians. 'Over the past 23 years armed struggle has consisted largely of attacking economic and similar targets — of sabotage. Now and again, the

struggle has manifested a shift towards what are called 'soft targets'. The general preference for sabotage in the past is going to come under very serious review', he said.

But the ANC said in an official statement from Lusaka last week that whatever military escalation took place, ANC attacks would not be 'specifically directed at any civilians'. He expected that guerrillas would in future also 'combine armed struggle with political mass actions. We think the two belong together'.

He was unhappy with the way the ANC underground had been operating inside the country. 'We certainly don't think it has been working well'. He hoped that the conference would promote to more senior positions some of the thousands of young black men and women who have joined the ANC since the 1976 Soweto uprising. He came out clearly in favour of opening the ranks of the ANC's top administrative body — the national executive committee — to non-Africans for the first time. The conference would 'test opinion' on this issue.

Until now, a small though significant number of whites, Coloureds and Indians have served on other top ANC bodies with Africans — occasionally authorised to take decisions in the name of the executive. 'But we cannot mark time when we have grown to be the embryo of a future non-racial South Africa. We must move forward and reflect in our structures the kind of South Africa that we say we envisage', said Tambo. He thought it likely that the conference would endorse the political strategy set out at the last consultative meeting in Tanzania in 1969. This is based on the forging of political unity between all sections and classes of the black population (together with South Africa's few 'progressive whites') in a national liberation struggle in which a primary position is assigned to the black working class and its interests.

Left-wing pressure at the conference for greater emphasis on the role of the black working class could cause problems. The issue has been thrust to the fore in South Africa, where some of the major black unions have indicated a preference for 'non-involvement' with multi-class political groups. These 'independent worker' unions did, however, combine with multi-class organisations in a two-day general strike in the Transvaal last November, which brought South Africa's economic heartland to a virtual standstill.

But Tambo expected 'no problems' on this score. He pointed to the two-day strike as evidence of a 'very substantial shift on the part of the workers towards the acceptance of the view that they must be part of the popular mass struggle'.

'I think the conference will (decide) that the ANC must take steps to help in the organisation and mobilisation of the workers, not just in the cities but also among the unemployed and the farmworkers as part of the national liberation effort'.

What Tambo terms 'popular mass struggle' is one area where the ANC appears well pleased. He estimated — probably realistically — that the considerable amount of organisation inside the country over the past two years mobilising Blacks against the new constitution meant about 'two million' people were now involved in the struggle against apartheid in a reasonably active way.