

# PERSPECTIVES OF OUR STRUGGLE

## PART 1

Below we publish excerpts from a RADIO FREEDOM interview with COMRADE THABO MBEKI, a member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress. "DAWN" publishes these excerpts with the view that they will provide concrete guidelines on the ever continuing discussions on the strategy and tactics of our revolutionary war for liberation.

**QUESTION:** A few days ago, you'll remember that a unit of Umkhonto we Sizwe blasted or sabotaged some electric transformers in an electric depot in Durban, bringing the whole town into darkness, and some of the factories could not be used for almost the whole day. What was the purpose of the attack?

**CDE. THABO MBEKI:** Well, as you know, the Chief Representative of the African National Congress in Dar-Es-Salaam issued a statement after that explaining this attack. And as you will remember, he said that the African National Congress as is the majority of the people of the country is opposed to the fascist republic, whose twentieth anniversary the racists are celebrating during the month of May. He said that this action is part of the whole offensive for the birth of a democratic non-racial united republic of all the people of South Africa.

The Chief Rep., in Dar-Es-Salaam also said that the action proved that the units of Umkhonto we Sizwe are not outside of South Africa, that they are not operating from Mozambique - they are in South Africa. They are based in South Africa, they are operating from within South Africa. This is obviously so because we carried out an operation in Durban, and Durban is very far from anybody's border. And therefore the Chief Representative said, this was an affirmation of a point which the ANC has been making all the time, that the armed struggle is being carried out within the country. Now I would like to add that the very fact of the action represented a defeat for the enemy. You remember that the enemy came in January to attack houses in Matola, Mozambique, claiming that these were ANC bases. They made a lot of noise about having killed a lot of leading commanding personnel of Umkho-

nto we Sizwe, trying to project the image that by carrying out that operation, they had succeeded to make it impossible for Umkhonto we Sizwe to carry out the military struggle within the country. Now I'm saying that the fact of this action shows that the enemy failed in its intentions.

We have told the enemy anyway; We have said it in public that these were residences, they were not military bases, they were not military headquarters and if the enemy really wants to get Umkhonto we Sizwe, they've got to find Umkhonto within the country. I'm saying that in addition to what the Chief Representative had said in Dar-Es-Salaam, the operation in Durban was an affirmation by the ANC, by MK, that the option of armed struggle is a permanent part of our struggle to destroy this racist republic and create a Democratic Republic of all the people of South Africa.

### METHODS OF STRUGGLE

**QUESTION:** It would seem that you are saying that violent means of overthrowing the fascist republic is the only way, the only strategy which is viable. You don't seem to be giving a chance to other strategies like the non-violent way of achieving this goal. Why do you think the violent means is the only strategy which can work there?

**CDE. THABO MBEKI:** It is not the position of the ANC that the only feasible way of struggle in South Africa is armed struggle. Now first of all, I think I should say that there is no people in the world, never anywhere, who would willfully, recklessly, irresponsibly decide that the only way to bring about change (the only way we like to bring about change) is by force of arms. The ANC least of all. The ANC was founded to liberate the oppressed people in order that the oppressed people should enjoy a better life. The ANC couldn't therefore just set out, out of that willful irresponsibility, to decide that people must die. Therefore, I'm saying the option of armed struggle for the people of South Africa and for any other people for that matter, is always forced on the people by the enemy. I don't have to talk about the whole long history of peaceful, non-violent struggle that our people under the leadership of the ANC carried out for decades. I don't have to speak about that because everybody knows about that. There were moments when the masses of the people were in fact beginning to query the wisdom of the leadership of the ANC, which said, at moments of provocation, that the time for armed struggle is not yet. There is still a little bit of a chance

that we can bring about a peaceful change in this country, and so on. And the people were beginning to say no, but that is an illusion. The enemy is refusing to move, the enemy is refusing to change! Therefore, I'm saying that the decision to adopt the option of armed struggle, is a decision that was forced on the ANC...

### CHOICE OF METHOD

**QUESTION:** But I would think if you look into strategies for revolution for instance, you find that no sane person adopts suicidal strategies. Now given the South African strength and the odds which the ANC is facing military wise, do you think it's wise now for the black oppressed in South Africa to engage in violent struggle, military overthrow of the fascist republic?

**CDE. THABO MBEKI:** The first point to make is that we in fact have no choice in the matter. It is not a question of us sitting down and saying between the two strategies or two options of armed struggle, and peaceful struggle, which one shall we choose. And then we say OK let's decide on non-violent peaceful struggle and hope that is going to bring us any change. We've got a history of decades of struggle, of peaceful struggle which resulted in greater repression and a vast growth in the military expenditures of the South African regime, number of soldiers, etc.

Take an example, a recent one: Bishop Tutu tours Europe and America and talks as a man of peace and thinks that it is still possible in South Africa, a small chance exists for change to come about by peaceful means. (The ANC respects that opinion, but doesn't agree with it - it respects it). What happens? The enemy then decides to use state violence against him, they seize his passport. I'm saying that the people have no choice. That was the lesson of Soweto.

For instance in 1976, the students came out to demonstrate solely on the question of education. Initially they were not even talking about the whole apartheid system. They were talking about a specific issue of education. They were unarmed, they were walking in the streets and the enemy came and shot them down. This is happening everyday. The other day as you know with the workers' strike at Sigma, they were completely unarmed. They were in the streets in a demonstration to express their demands and some white woman took out a pistol and shot. I'm saying there is no choice... the position that the regime takes, the actual activities of the enemy oblige

the oppressed people to take up arms because not to take up arms means in fact to submit, certainly the ANC is not prepared to submit. Therefore, necessarily because of the position that the enemy is taking, the option of armed struggle becomes inevitable.

### COMBINING FORMS OF STRUGGLE

**QUESTION:** But in my question I stated that I wanted to know whether this strategy is the only one. As you know at home you find workers striking, there are people who push for negotiations, they go to the government like the 'homeland leaders', they go to negotiate. What is wrong with that?

**CDE. THABO MBEKI:** The African National Congress says that victory in South Africa can only come to the oppressed people if the oppressed people engage in struggle to liberate themselves. The vast masses, the millions of the people, every man and woman and child, as well as saying that everybody, must be involved in struggle because everybody who is oppressed has got a stake in liberation. We are not saying that all these millions will be involved in struggle only when and if they are carrying guns. We are saying it is necessary for this vast millions of oppressed people to be involved in struggle to engage the enemy on all fronts. To engage the enemy with whatever means and method they've got available to them, that includes the question you have mentioned - strikes...

It is necessary for the students on the issue of education not to wait for somebody to come and solve the problem of education for them... It is necessary that these hundreds of thousands of students must be engaged in the struggle to liberate themselves. Take any section of the community on any issue, whether it is a rent issue, a bus boycott question, bus fares or whatever the issue is. The masses of the people have got to be actively engaged... That is part of the struggle. Therefore, there is no issue of a choice of saying either we shoot or we have strikes. We are saying that both have got to happen.

The armed struggle has got to continue. The mass political struggle has also got to continue at the same time. We've got to get the masses of the people involved as the struggle develops, even beyond the immediate question of rent; immediate question of wages; immediate question of the character of education, to be involved in their millions in the question of the character of education, to be involved in their millions in the question of power, in the question of struggle for the

transfer of power to the hands of the people. And strikes, demonstration, protests and so on are also very relevant in that struggle, in the struggle for the transference of power to the people. Therefore, the ANC has never said and the ANC can never say that strikes have become outdated, have become a useless option, and if you are not carrying a gun you are not part of the revolutionary mainstream. That position is wrong and the ANC has never said that. It says it is necessary to combine mass popular actions around local issues, around national issues and to combine this mass popular actions together with armed struggle. And it is a combination of those that is going to bring that liberation. I should also say that the ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe don't have a conception of armed struggle as of specialised units which are bearing arms and the masses of the people are conducting their strikes, demonstrations, boycotts and so on, but are otherwise as far as the armed struggle is concerned, spectators.

The ANC is saying that when we talk about mass popular struggle in South Africa, we also mean mass popular armed struggle. We are saying that the masses of the people have got themselves as the struggle develops, to be part and parcel of this MK, this people's army. It's got to be a People's Army because the people are in it, because the people become MK. Therefore I'm saying that the concept of how we will achieve victory becomes very important to understand. This is not a matter of specialised groups of people whether it is political struggle or military struggle. It is a struggle of the masses of the people and the masses of the people today can only engage with the only thing they've got in their hands, the strike weapon. Let them use it in spite of the process. Tomorrow those masses of the people will have guns in their hands and they will use both guns and the strike until that fascist regime is destroyed.

### **THE BANTUSTAN 'LEADERS'**

**QUESTION:** Now let's go back to this question of the homeland leaders 'negotiating' with the regime.

**CDE. THABO MBEKI:** I've been saying that what has to happen if we are going to attain victory is that the masses of the people have got to be engaged in struggle. The apartheid regime listens to its own voice. They decide for instance that what will be good for the oppressed people is if we allow them to share the same lunch or supper table with a white person in a hotel somewhere in South Africa, and therefore, let us amend the law in order to be able to allow these hotels

to serve everybody without discrimination. They are listening to their own voice. They are deciding what it is that we want, they are deciding what it is that we are complaining about. But we have never said that our struggle is about these segregation of hotels. We said that our struggle is about political power. But the enemy wouldn't listen. We then get somebody who calls himself a leader of our people, who goes to talk to that regime. And there is not a single one of them, not a single one who can truthfully say, I went and spoke to Botha, Vorster or anybody. I went to speak to them and put these demands - like abolish the pass laws - and they sat and listened and they said: If that is the view of your people we accept it...

There is not a single issue of importance to the oppressed people that the bantustan leaders have raised to Pretoria which Pretoria has conceded. I'm saying there isn't any. The reason there isn't any is because the Botha regime is not prepared to listen. So in the first instance it's a waste of time, secondly but perhaps even more dangerous, it perpetuates an illusion that you can persuade Botha to stop to be a racist, to stop to be an oppressor... It perpetuates an illusion that change can come about because of the change of heart on the part of the oppressor. That is an illusion, and it is a dangerous illusion because it attempts to persuade the masses of the people not to struggle...

In the history of South Africa I remember the statement made by the late Chief Luthuli when he received the Nobel Prize: "Who will deny that I've spent thirty years of my life knocking at a closed and barred door." That door was closed when Chief Luthuli was alive. It is even more firmly closed today. And it is a dangerous thing to try and spread an illusion among the people that that door can be opened by the knocking of the bantustan leaders. The only way to open that door is through mass action, through armed struggle.

**QUESTION:** But history also shows that there are some countries which achieved their independence through negotiations like Malawi and others. What will stop us from achieving independence in South Africa through such means?

**CDE. THABO MBEKI:** The issue cannot be, in my view, argued in that way. Let's take an example which people who use that argument, don't want to talk about. This century there has been two World Wars, the First and the Second. Both of these World Wars broke out in Europe - supposedly the most civilised countries in the world, people who had diplomatic representa-

tives in their capitals, had common economic interests and were all whites together. Very destructive wars broke out in Europe twice in this century. Now that situation of war became necessary because there was no other way.

There is a specific, particular historical situation which resulted in war in Europe as there were specific particular historical situations which resulted in for instance, Nigeria getting its independence without having to resort to armed struggle. A specific historical situation in which the British Empire was collapsing and the British government saw that there was no way in which they could hold Nigeria - that they didn't have the possibility even if they put the British troops in there... Therefore, they decided that the best thing to do, let us concede the independence of Nigeria - a specific historical circumstance.

We've got a specific historical circumstance in South Africa which we have found everywhere else in this region. No amount of talking to the Portuguese would have removed them from Mozambique or Angola, or the Ian Smith regime from Zimbabwe nor will any amount of talking remove the Botha regime from Namibia. We've got a clear example of that today - a whole conference is organised in Geneva to discuss the Namibian question and what does Pretoria do? They torpedo and sabotage that conference because they feel that the pressure on them including the armed pressure of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia is not yet strong enough to gain victory.



## DAWN PolitiXword No. 4 - Answers

**ACROSS:** 1. Hero 3. OTRAG 5. Green 6. OPEC  
9. Makana 10. Lap 11. Navy  
14. Wealth 14. Militant

**DOWN:** 1. Hegemonism 2. Opera 4. Repel  
7. Cape 8. Dance 12. Veil  
13. TT 14. Wet 15. Let 16. Hot