

Review

A LITERATURE OF WOLVES

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Inge Runge and Uwe Stelbrink (1990), *Markus Wolf: 'Ich bin kein Spion'*, Dietz, Berlin.

Markus Wolf (1989), *Die Troika*, Claassen, Dusseldorf.

I saw the infliction of pain broken away from the will that creates it...the Siberias of snow and gun...
— Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (1979).¹

The Spy-Chief as Author

Runge's and Stelbrink's book is the record of a series of interviews with Markus Wolf conducted in the summer of 1990, and published by a former East German state publishing house. This book directs an interesting light on the past and present of the South African Communist Party, and in particular on the training of the security apparatus of the ANC. Markus Wolf was, until 1987, a director of the security apparatus of the former German Democratic Republic, the Stasi (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit).

Before what Wolf calls 'die Wende' or turning-point of late 1989, the GDR was a crucial link in the international logistical network that upheld the exile operations of the ANC. East Germany was the base from which the SACP publication *The African Communist* and the ANC monthly *Sechaba* were published. It was also a major training base of cadres for Umkhonto we Sizwe. There, recruits in the June 16 Detachment, formed from the youth that went into exile after the 1976 school students rebellion, received political training from ANC luminaries such as Pallo Jordan (Secretary for Information and Publicity), Ronnie Kasrils (head of Military Intelligence)² and Alan Brooks. It was also a primary centre for training of the ANC security department, responsible for replicating the apparatus of totalitarian political control within the ANC in exile. Through nearly all the countries in Africa in which it had a base in exile, the ANC had alongside its political office...a prison. It is this institution of modern South African political life that the interview with Wolf helps illuminate.

Wolf's *curriculum vitae* are given as follows on the back of *Die Troika* (The Troika), an autobiographical account published by him in 1989:

born 1923 as son of the writer Friedrich Wolf. From 1933 to 1945, in exile in Moscow. From May 1945, editor and commentator with Berlin Radio. After that, special correspondent at the Nuremberg Trials. From 1949 to 1951, first counsellor in the diplomatic mission of the GDR in Moscow. From 1951 to 1987, worked in the Ministry for State Security [the Stasi], finally as director of the Intelligence Department [Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung] and as deputy Minister. Retired in 1987. (Translated)

Wolf's 11-year youthful exile in the Soviet Union under Stalin followed the route of the German stalinist emigration. His father was both a member of the German Communist Party and a Jew. When Wolf retired in 1987 as one of the most impor-

tant security functionaries of the entire bloc of stalinist states, his life was an epitome of two generations of stalinist politics. Lasting well over three decades, his career in the East German secret police began under Stalin and concluded under Gorbachev.

The agency he headed is credited with having penetrated the German Federal Republic with hundreds of agents, and probably several thousand more informants, so that 'at virtually every level of government, someone worked for the Stasi'. (*Independent on Sunday*, 19 May 1991) In the GDR itself 'Big Brother listened and watched in every factory, office and church...Stasi agents were present in every opposition group — in some cases, they formed a majority of founder members. The Stasi's role in training and sheltering Palestinian guerrillas and West German RAF [Red Army Fraction] terrorists was equally spectacular'.

In his extended interview with Runge and Stelbrink, Wolf acknowledges the role of the Stasi in training the security apparatus of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). He remarks that PLO officers received training from the Stasi

fundamentally in the same way as contacts from Syria, Iraq, Egypt and South Yemen, where we had the strongest presence as an intelligence service, along with several African countries...These people came here and were trained. I think this consisted of training at the party political level, in the military field through the army, in the area of the Interior Ministry for 'internal' personnel and in the area of state security in the various departments. (pp 77–78 Translated)

He adds that individuals were trained in the general principles of intelligence work, in various sectors. Referring to Iraq in the early stages of the conflict over Kuwait, he notes that previously Iraq had been what he describes as 'a position in the Soviet foreign policy' ('dann war ja Irak eine Position in der sowjetischen Aussenpolitik').

Consequently it was given military support, delivery of weapons and so on. In this confrontational division of the world and through the existing collection of allies, the ruling principle was that each one which goes along with me is my ally and to it I give everything, and thus it is automatically the enemy of the other side. (p 81)

The same logic obtained in Stasi support for the ANC. The security apparatus of the ANC functioned no less as 'a position in Soviet foreign policy', along with the regimes of Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia. According to Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, it was the Stasi that built up the security apparatus in Angola and Mozambique, where it also set up a system of labour camps for 're-education'. (*KGB, The Inside Story of its Foreign Organisation from Lenin to Gorbachev*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1990, p464) Ryszard Kapuscinski has noted the crucial role of the Stasi in Brezhnevite Ethiopia, as the force that guarded the dictator Mengistu and 'managed his political militia'. (*Independent on Sunday*, 1 September 1991)

It is most probable that this experience was brought directly to bear on the setting up of the ANC prison camp, 'Quatro', in northern Angola in 1979, and of the ANC security department itself. The Stasi played a crucial role in Africa's ex-

perience with Stalinism, and it is essential for the future of southern Africa that the exact nature of this relationship, especially in the formation of an apparatus of coercion, becomes public knowledge.

With the Stasi in Africa

In 1990 Samir Al-Khalil noted that the 'methods, instruments and structures needed for effective torturing institutions in the Third World normally get imported from the outside', and that in Iraq these were provided by the Soviet Union and the GDR. (*Republic of Fear: Saddam's Iraq*, Hutchinson, p 66)

A first-hand account of the ANC prison camp Quatro was published in *Searchlight South Africa* No 5, July 1990. Procedure in the camp, according to a former prisoner, followed the same principles as in a security prison in East Germany, as shown in a recent TV documentary. The prison in the GDR had a system of red and green lights in the corridors to control the movement of prisoners, to prevent inmates whose identity was to be kept secret from being recognized by other inmates. At every corner in Quatro, inmates were strictly required to ask 'Permission to pass'. On the order 'Cover', ANC prisoners were required immediately to crouch close to the ground with their arms over their heads. (personal communication) Differences in procedure were mainly those appropriate to the different technical levels of East Germany and the north Angolan bush.

The stalinist states had a system of general training centres for 'third world' states and nationalist movements. Iraqi security officials and personnel from other countries were trained in the GDR at a Stasi school at Massow, near Berlin. (*Independent*, 30 January 1991) ANC security personnel studied in the GDR at Dieterhof. Towards the end of the 1980s, ANC security and prison staff were trained in Cuba (the last redoubt to which SACP political and military personnel continue to be sent). Training of military personnel above the rank of captain included the methodology of intelligence, and here all roads led to the KGB, which kept files on its pupils so as to monitor their careers.

In the Soviet Union, individuals from the military wing of the South West Africa Peoples Organization (Swapo) were trained in military intelligence at Simferopol in the Crimea — at 45 degrees north of the equator, one of the warmest areas of the Soviet Union — where they were taught methods of torture used by the partisans in the forests in the western areas of the Soviet Union in world war two. These were unsophisticated methods which did not require modern technical apparatus, and appear quite similar in character to those used by Swapo security in its purges in southern Angola from 1984 to 1989. The methods taught at Simferopol included:

- * suspension of a prisoner by his arms;
- * suffocation, by means of a plastic bag tied around the neck;
- * tightening of a rope tied around the prisoner's head, by means of a stick twisted in a tourniquet;
- * burning the body with live coals.

While Swapo military personnel at Simferopol were kept segregated from trainees from other parts of the world, they were aware that the base was being used at the same time for training of military personnel from other countries such as Nicaragua. (communication from former Swapo soldiers)

Wolf of course does not reveal such arcane secrets of his craft. Nevertheless, the interview is interesting, and not only for the implied relation of the Stasi to the training of the ANC security apparatus. Wolf reveals how little exceptional is the 'new thinking' of the SACP, summed up in the article by the party's former secretary-general, Joe Slovo, 'Has Socialism Failed?' The new turn by Slovo, chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe at the time of the mutiny in 1984 and during the torture and imprisonment of dissidents at Quatro, is shown to be essentially the same as that of Wolf, the Stasi-chief over the same period. Slovo's generation of SACP leaders is steeped in the same process of cultural, political and historical formation as their German colleague, and in the changed currents of the 1990s follows the same route towards political self-preservation.

The old Stalinist Wolf cries *mea culpa* over the state system in which individuals such as he held the leading strings. Concerning that which 'wrecked our system', he pins the blame on: 'what one now — I long rejected this concept — describes as Stalinism or the consequences of Stalinism'. (p 12) Sir William Harcourt, one of the venerables of the old Liberal Party in Britain, was supposed to have stated that 'we are all socialists now', but it is left to the old apparatchiks Wolf and Slovo to inform us that we are all anti-Stalinists now.

Wolf adds flesh to these bare bones. He states that the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, at which Khrushchev delivered his secret speech denouncing Stalin, was 'naturally a point of intersection (Schnittpunkt) for me. From then on Stalin as a person was finished for me...Since the 20th Party congress, the question of crimes was clear cut for me, and also: that one had to do everything so that such things could not be repeated'. (p 41) This did not prevent the GDR from presiding, two decades later, over construction of a prison system in Africa borrowed by the ANC and the SACP from the crimes denounced by Khrushchev.

Wolf is nothing if not self-effacing. For a spy-chief this is doubtless a matter of habit. Reflecting on the changes of 1989, this life-long native son of the apparatus declares: 'I only know...that one must get rid of the apparatus'. (p 92)

Thirty years' opposition to the crimes of Stalin, at the head of the apparatus, do not prevent Wolf however from presenting only minimal information in his autobiography about the demise of Wilhelm Wloch, a German Comintern militant and father of his close friend Lothar Wloch (one of the 'troika' of Wolf's autobiography). Wilhelm Wloch perished in the Soviet Union in Stalin's purges of the 1930s, after which the Wloch family, long-standing socialists, returned...to Hitler's Germany. Wolf states only that Wloch, like others, was a victim of 'arbitrary, unprovable accusations'. To this (in words written before the downfall of his state) he adds the callous routine chorus:

His companions of fate, who survived, continued undiverted in the struggle against fascism, for the liberation of their fatherland and thereafter for the building of socialism. I am convinced that if Wilhelm Wloch were still alive, he would be among them and with us. (*Die Troika*, p 36)

Thus the Stasi-general lays claim to the memory of the victims of Stalinism, while at the same time training the modern Berias and Poskrebyshevs of southern Africa and the Middle East. This sickening literature, by death-bed converts from Stalinism, has a whole school of scribes busy with their word processors in South Africa. The tone of this literature is characterized by romantic *schmaltz* in the manner of Wolf's 'liberation of the fatherland', a liberal hand in the revising of history, sticky passages concerning the unfortunate Wilhelm Wlochs, dishonest protestations concerning democracy, and serene faith in the stupidity of the reader.

A Little Matter of Torture

At present our knowledge of who taught what to whom, and how, in the apparatus of torture is slight. Investigation into this sump of modern southern African history is at its merest beginnings. Outside the various intelligence agencies (not least, that of the ANC), which generally already know all there is to know, the present account — imperfect, allusive and tendential — is so far the most complete that exists. However, with a nationalist Ukrainian government having taken control over the training base at Simferopol in the Crimea, and as investigators plough through the relics of the Stasi training centres in the former GDR, a more complete picture relevant to southern Africa must emerge. Piece by piece, more will be learnt about the obscure past of many of the returned heroes of South Africa's political destiny.

In the 30-year history of the ANC in exile, it was the military discipline of the SACP that held the whole show together, especially in the leanest years. In this relation, the greatest strength of the SACP was its position in the military high command — in Umkhonto we Sizwe — crucially through its arterial role through which was pumped Soviet and East European military hardware, funds and training. In the military high command, it was ultimately the security department that had the decisive say; and in the security department, it was the apparatus of torture and imprisonment of dissent that assured the place of the SACP, and thus also the ANC, in present and future South African political life, in particular against the thought-currents of black consciousness and democratic debate that migrated north to the Angolan camps along with the generation of 1976.

In so far as its war against this unreliable climate of opinion (from the viewpoint of the SACP) was won in exile — and not for instance through the man-hunt of Azapo in the townships of South Africa, after the demonstrations against Senator Edward Kennedy in January 1985 — it must be understood that each and every member of the ANC abroad was prisoner of this security apparatus. Even in parliamentary and judicial Britain, with a free press and open political debate, ANC members had their passports kept under lock and key by the security department, operating out of the Chief Representative's office in London. This served as a war-

rant not only against defections to the South African state police, but still more as a means of thought–control. ANC members studying in Britain were under continuous threat of transfer of residence from a university or college to the university of pain at Quatro. A command system, with its local station chief from the security department, extended to every centre of ANC exiles abroad, no different in its internal distribution of authority from a Soviet or East German embassy. It still does.

All this while the ANC, through the left and the liberals active in the Anti–Apartheid Movement, was upheld within British intellectual life as an altar of democracy. A systemic corruption of concepts thus continued for decades, colouring southern African political life in an unwholesome dy, and with it the moral climate of political thinking in Britain and other countries, as well as the entire context of black politics internationally. It is a world where the major categories derive straight from Orwell's *1984* (incidentally, the year of rebellion against the rule of double–speak, in the mutiny among ANC troops in Angola).

Here is where torture, the gulag and the omnipotent rule of lies were in effect classified internationally as good, acceptable, justified, the lesser evil – as in Spain in the 1930s. A major corruption of discourse, continuing the worst of the 1930s, was thus preserved as an international norm of great obduracy through the late 20th century, mainly among the intelligentsia and trade union officialdom, but also in the churches, the political parties, the press and the schools. The effectiveness of this internal regimen of the ANC may be measured by the fact that almost total silence was preserved about it internationally until early 1990.

Markus Wolf was one of its most accomplished practitioners and educators. Thus his significance for southern Africa. This review has nothing to say about his personal fate after publication of his extended interview with Runge and Stelbrink, his journey to Canossa via Moscow and Austria and wherever else. The spy–chief will no doubt take care of himself. But how does one begin to take care of the heritage of Stasi and KGB thought–control in what is now the most important political organization in the sub–continent of Africa, in the principal industrial base of the continent as a whole? What kind of training for democracy was there, with the brutalism of the racist state confronted abroad by the more accomplished and hypocritical brutalism of the ANC security department? On this issue, in South Africa and abroad, the tongues are locked. Except a few marginalised pariahs, it is an issue on which no–one is prepared to speak. Wolf and his colleagues did their work well.

Notes

1. Nadine Gordimer (1980), *Burger's Daughter*, Penguin, p 208. The character around whom the novel revolves, a leader of the SACP who dies in prison in South Africa, is derived from the life and death of Bram Fischer, former chairman of the party and one of the founders of Umkhonto we Sizwe.
2. In addition to indigestible political poetry of 1930s vintage, written under the name 'ANC Kumalo', the intelligence chief Kasrils performed an interesting service to academic knowledge through his editing (with a fellow South African, Barry Feinberg, later director of International Defence and Aid) of various collections of trivia from the archives of the philosopher, Bertrand Russell. The first volume, *Dear Bertrand Russell*, appeared in 1969. Given Russell's relation to the movement against the war in Vietnam at this time (he died in 1970), this was an extraordinary relationship.