

Sparg Sets Out ANC Policy On Violence

Marion Sparg placed limpet mines in three South African police stations. Two exploded, causing R2 600 damage at the Cambridge police station in East London and R38 500 at John Vorster Square. The mine at Hillbrow police station failed to explode. Police detonated it, causing R7 630 damage.

She undertook these actions as a trained soldier of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe - the ANC's first known white women guerilla.

As a young journalist, Sparg fire-bombed Progressive Federal Party offices in 1981, protesting the PFP's failure to boycott Republic Day celebrations. Subsequently she worked as a journalist in the ANC's Lusaka-based Department of Information and Publicity, writing for the women's section journal, 'Voice of Women'. Together with Stephen Marais, she smuggled limpet mines and detonators from Lesotho into South Africa.

Marion Sparg did not dispute the substance of the treason and arson charges against her. She was more concerned to explain her development from student at Rhodes University, to Sunday Times journalist, to ANC member, to Umkhonto we Sizwe soldier.

She pleaded guilty to the charges, apologising only for 'political immaturity' in attacking the PFP offices: she was not a member at the time of the PFP attacks and was not acting on ANC instructions. 'My political thinking at that time was immature and emotional...I today regret the fact that I chose the PFP as a target for violence. I still stand by some of the criticisms I made of the PFP'. Sparg said she did not believe she was correct in choosing the PFP as a target for such violence.

Together with fellow-journalists Arnold Geyer and Damian de Lange, Sparg fire-bombed three PFP offices on 31 May 1981, causing over R20 000 damage. Days later, she left South Africa illegally for Botswana, and made contact with the ANC. She then travelled to Lusaka as an ANC member and left for Angola in 1982, where she underwent military training at the ANC's Caxito camp.

At the time, neither the ANC nor Sparg intended her to be deployed as an

Umkhonto we Sizwe fighter. But the ANC wanted as many members as possible to be able to defend themselves. 'The training took place in 1982 and the raid on Mozambique in 1981 by the SADF in which the ANC had lost 12 members was still very fresh', Sparg explained. During these six months, she was the only white South African in the training camp, and at times the only woman. Blacks training spoke to her about white South Africans whom they respected and admired: 'they spoke in particular of Joe Slovo,...a white South African prepared to fight and die alongside them for a South Africa all could enjoy'. Sparg said she became aware her presence in the camp sparked off discussions on the nature of the ANC's enemy, and what type of targets Umkhonto we Sizwe should strike. ANC members, particularly in Umkhonto we Sizwe, 'are growing younger every day because of the situation inside the country... For many of them my presence proved that the ANC is not fighting a racial war', she told the court. Sparg returned to the ANC's Lusaka office in August 1982.

In December 1982 the SADF raided Lesotho, killing 30 South African and ten Lesotho citizens. Sparg explained that some survivors reached Lusaka and told them the SADF 'did not seem to care that they were attacking homes, not military camps... Children and babies were killed and injured'. She could not forget the challenge she faced as a white member of the ANC doing military training in Angola. 'I felt the raid left me with no alternative but to join Umkhonto we Sizwe'.

Sparg left the Lusaka office in mid-1984. By early 1985 she was ready for deployment and in about May she entered South Africa from Lesotho with a false passport. She established herself in South Africa, set up communication links with the ANC in Lesotho, and investigated potential sabotage targets. In mid-February 1986 she and Stephen Marais, an ANC supporter living in the Transkei, went to Lesotho where limpet mines and detonators were hidden in their car. Over the next three weeks, Sparg placed limpet mines at the Cambridge police station (19 February),

John Vorster Square (4 March) and Hillbrow (4 March). On 7 March police raided Sparg's Hillbrow flat. She was detained under section 29 of the Internal Security Act until 15 August, when she first appeared in court.

Like many South Africans, Sparg was deeply affected by South Africa's violent raids into neighbouring territories. Her attitude on violence hardened: 'If I stop to think of the people I knew in that first camp in Angola, particularly those who instructed and commanded me, there are literally only one or two still alive. I was in Maseru in December last year (1985) when a raid took place in which several South Africans and two Lesotho citizens were killed. I am aware that the South African authorities deny participation in that raid. However, there is no doubt in my mind and in the minds of most ANC members that it was either the South African police or SADF.

'I knew all the South Africans who died, not only as colleagues or comrades but as very close friends. I was particularly close to a young white woman who was killed, Jacqueline Quinn, whose only connection to the ANC was that she was married to a member of the ANC. She had a child. That child was only one year old when both her parents were killed in front of her'. Sparg said the ANC accepted raids like this would happen, but said the SADF soldiers were aware the people they intended killing were all unarmed, and included Lesotho citizens and others not connected to the ANC. 'That did not deter them'.

Trial judge Van der Walt asked Sparg whether the potential effect of limpet mines in police stations was not similar to the Lesotho raid she described, especially as far as people and their families were concerned. She disagreed strongly: 'In the first Maseru raid (1982) 30 South Africans died... Ten Lesotho citizens also died... Of the 30 South Africans some were ANC members. There were however many South African refugees and family members including children. Those raids were directed at private homes. My actions were directed was threatening the families of any policemen or women'. Sparg said the ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe do not simply regard any supporter of the Botha government with or without military training as a military target. 'By placing limpet mines at police stations I was directing them at supporters of this government with considerable military training and experience'.

In the course of her evidence, Sparg set out both ANC policy and her personal position on a variety of subjects:

Violence: 'When Umkhonto we Sizwe first began its campaign of armed actions it did so by avoiding loss of life completely'. That is no longer possible, she said, and escalating ANC violence is the result of actions by South African police and the SADF.

Sparg expressed the hope that before much more blood is shed 'white South Africans and the Botha government will realise the conflict can be settled peacefully at a conference table.

'The ANC leadership has indicated on enough occasions that they are quite prepared to take part in such talks, but you cannot expect the ANC to simply suspend violence without a similar commitment from the Botha government'.
Civilian targets: After the ANC consultative conference held at Kabwe, there was speculation that Umkhonto we Sizwe would no longer draw a distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' targets. 'I insist that no member of Umkhonto we Sizwe has been instructed to strike directly at a civilian target'. She said the senior Umkhonto commanders instructed that whenever possible she should avoid civilian casualties, and where this was not possible she should still consider the number of civilians put at risk.

She could easily have placed limpet mines in police station charge offices: 'I rejected this because in any charge office there are usually more civilians present than police'.

On white farmers: ANC policy towards the white farming population has developed over some time. Sparg said in 1982 this became a very emotional topic in the camp. 'A number of members of Umkhonto we Sizwe had died in clashes with white farmers, mostly in the border areas. When members of Umkhonto we Sizwe enter this country they have absolutely no desire to clash with any white farmer'. But clashes continued, and Umkhonto we Sizwe had no option but to go on the offensive. 'Most of the areas in which landmine explosions have taken place are areas of great strategic significance to the SADF... The ANC does now regard certain white farmers as a legitimate military target, but not the whole farming community'.
The police station attacks: Sparg said the bombings at John Vorster and Cambridge police stations were actions on behalf of an organisation which represents the majority of black South Africans and a significant, increasing

number of white South Africans.

'I deliberately timed those limpet mines to go off at noon, both at Cambridge and at John Vorster Square and at Hillbrow... The policy in Umkhonto we Sizwe now is that because of the increasing indiscriminate aggression practiced by the South African police, and also because of the policy of the authorities to cover up as many actions of Umkhonto we Sizwe as they can, it is necessary for MK actions to happen in broad daylight where it is very difficult for that action to be hidden from the public. But that does not mean that I personally wanted death or injuries as a result of those explosions'. She said the value of her actions was that the bombs were directed at targets symbolising apartheid, violence and brutality.

The Geneva protocol: In 1980 ANC President Oliver Tambo became one of the first leaders of a national liberation movement to hand a declaration to the international committee of the Red Cross, in which the ANC stated it was prepared to recognise the broad sections of the Geneva Convention, in particular the 1977 protocol. 'This (protocol) takes into account the type of war that is being fought in South Africa, in which one party to the conflict does not recognise the existence of the state of war'.

While a signatory to the 1949 Geneva Convention, South Africa has so far refused to ratify the 1977 protocol. **ANC leadership:** 'I regard it as a privilege to have met people of the calibre of Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Professor Jack Simons, Joe Slovo and many others... No matter how much I agree with the aims of an organisation, I would have had very serious doubts about laying down my life for that organisation if I did not know its leaders to be capable, rational, sensitive people'.

The relationship between military and political in the ANC: When the ANC decided to move to armed struggle it did not abandon all other methods of struggle. 'Outside South Africa the ANC has departments dealing with health, culture and education... Inside South Africa ANC members not only carry out armed action, they also carry out important political tasks'.

Sparg said recruitment for military training and armed struggle are not the ANC's central theme. A political-military council controls ANC activities

inside South Africa. 'That body has two sub-committees, a political headquarters and a military headquarters. Both are seen as equally important... The importance that the ANC attaches to other tasks other than military tasks can be seen by developments in the last two years in Angola. A decision was taken to move a considerable number of members out of Angola (to South Africa)... not to carry out military tasks. Many were sent to the South African Congress of Trade Unions and an equal number sent to carry out political tasks'.

On joining Umkhonto we Sizwe: 'I do not regret joining the ANC or Umkhonto we Sizwe. But I do regret the suffering I have put my family through. This is a conflict that many black families have faced for generations... a conflict which increasingly white families are beginning to face. When I joined Umkhonto we Sizwe I was very much aware of the fact that I have three brothers, all of whom have completed military training in the SADF and that it was very likely that any of them could be affected by the actions of Umkhonto we Sizwe. I resolved that conflict only because of my belief that the type of South Africa we are fighting for in Umkhonto we Sizwe is a South Africa which we are all going to enjoy, black and white'.

In passing sentence, presiding judge Van der Walt indicated he considered Sparg's race an aggravating factor. 'The fact that as a white South African you chose to espouse the cause of revolution I regard as an aggravating feature'. It was more understandable for a black to undertake such actions, he said.

Observers interpret these remarks as meaning that while whites have proper political channels, blacks do not. This view was challenged by defence attorney Norman Manóin, who noted that 'the thrust of Sparg's evidence was to say that political avenues open to whites had become totally frustrated'.

Sparg, too, did not see it the judge's way: 'As a white South African I do not owe any loyalty to a government that is clearly not based on the will of the people. I believe that my actions amount to patriotism, not treason', she said.

On 6 November 1986 Marion Sparg was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment - five years for the 1981 arson attacks on PFP offices, and 20 years for treason.