

DISCUSSION PAPER 20

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Armed Struggle and Democracy
The Case of South Africa

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Preface

The Nordic Africa Institute established a research network on “Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa” (LiDeSA) during 2001. An initial workshop in Cape Town (organised jointly with the Centre for Conflict Resolution at the University of Cape Town in December 2001) initiated first discussions with and among scholars in the Southern African region. Some of the papers submitted then have since been published in this Discussion Paper series (nos. 18 and 19). An international conference on “(Re-) Conceptualising Democracy and Liberation in Southern Africa” took place as a follow-up in July 2002 in Windhoek. It was organised in collaboration with two local civil society agencies, the Legal Assistance Centre and the Namibia Institute for Democracy. Most of the 20 contributions presented then will be published in different ways during 2003.

This paper was originally drafted for and submitted to this conference and was subsequently slightly revised. A much shorter version will be included in another conference-related publication. Since this long version has merits in itself, it is also being made available separately as a Discussion Paper. It will, in addition, contribute as a substantial chapter to a forthcoming monograph in preparation by the author, in which he combines his current analytical assessment with a number of earlier articles written during the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The monograph is to be published during 2003.

The separate publication of this paper now aims to achieve a maximum degree of access to the text. Given the personal background and experiences of the author, his analysis is entitled to claim relevance to the debate around issues of liberation and democracy in South(ern) Africa. Suspended and finally expelled from the ANC as an activist in exile for his publicly articulated political ideology and conviction, he returned to South Africa in the 1990s to continue his career as a scholar. This paper uses the author’s own experiences and commitments as a point of departure for a necessary discussion. It thus offers hitherto unknown insights into a controversy with direct impact on the political culture within the ANC and South Africa today. In this regard it is a fascinating piece of contemporary history and a personal account resulting from direct involvement, which hopefully will provoke both politically as well as academically inspired and oriented debate on related issues.

Henning Melber
Uppsala, October 2002

Introduction

It would be possible to draw a line from the founding leaflet of Umkhonto We Sizwe, issued on 16 December 1961¹ (and from the 1962 SACP programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*)² to the Harare Declaration of 1989³—and to the eventual outcome—and state that the strategy of the ANC was always for a negotiated settlement to achieve democracy in South Africa, based on a “change of heart” by the whites. That indeed is more or less the idea which Allister Sparks in *Tomorrow is Another Country* attributes to Nelson Mandela: “I started Umkhonto We Sizwe ... but I never had any illusions that we could win a military victory; its purpose was to focus attention on the resistance movement.”⁴

However, that standpoint is contradicted by the decisions of the 1969 ANC conference at Morogoro (25 April 1 May 1969) and by countless other ANC documents. *Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*, adopted at Morogoro, for example, writes of “the overthrow of White supremacy through planned rather than spontaneous activity” (p. 8), and of developing conditions “for the future all-out war which will eventually lead to the conquest of power” (p. 6).⁵ The National Executive Committee of ANC (NEC) referred in 1973 to “a struggle such as ours which pursues the strategic objective of seizure of power and not reforms or a negotiated transfer of power” and added that “the conscious and purposive participation of

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1. Pamphlet issued by command of *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, 16 December 1961 in T. Karis and G. Carter (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: Documents of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1964*, III, pp. 716–17. Especially: “We hope that we will bring the Government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both Government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war.”
 2. While stating that “The Nationalists are forcing a solution upon South Africa in which patriots and democrats will take up arms to defend themselves, organize guerrilla armies and undertake various acts of armed resistance, culminating in a mass insurrection against White domination,” *The Road to South African Freedom* also stated that “the Party does not dismiss all prospects of non-violent transition to the democratic revolution. This prospect will be enhanced by the development of revolutionary and militant people’s forces,” SACP, *South African Communists Speak* (London, 1981), pp. 31–45. In 1959 party leader Michael Harmel had written “revolution need not involve violence. There have been plenty of examples in history where a combination of factors have been compelling enough to make a ruling class give way for urgent and overdue changes, without dragging the people through the agony of civil war. We can only hope this may also be the case in South Africa.” “Revolutions are Not Abnormal,” *Africa South*, III, 2, Jan–March 1959, p. 17.
 3. “Declaration of the OAU Ad-Hoc Committee on Southern Africa on the Question of South Africa,” reprinted in *Sechaba*, October 1989. See also “ANC Statements” in *Sechaba*, November 1989.
 4. Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, (Struik, Sandton, 1994), p. 26. That this was indeed Mandela’s position is supported by Neville Alexander. “In one of the first political discussions we had with the ANC leadership in prison [on Robben Island] Nelson Mandela told us in 1964 that they had never believed, and did not believe, that it was possible to overthrow the apartheid state by military means. Their strategy was to force the regime to negotiate on terms that would be acceptable, that is, not humiliating to the government.” (*An Ordinary Country*, U of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2002, pp. 179–80).
 5. ANC, *Forward to Freedom: Strategy, Tactics and Programme of the ANC, SA* (ANC, Morogoro, nd, 1969?). This document—henceforth referred to as *Strategy and Tactics*—was written by Joe Slovo: see the version of it titled “The Strategy and Tactics of the Revolution and the Role of the Various National Groups and the Revolutionary Forces in the Revolution” (typescript, dated March 1969, 24 pp.) in Mayibuye Centre, UWC, Dadoo papers 2.6.

the masses in the struggle, on their own behalf and relying on their own strength, is of decisive importance.”¹ In 1979, the SACP Central Committee (CC) stated that “the system of exploitation and oppression in SA cannot be defeated without revolutionary violence involving the whole people.”² In the same year, a Political-Military Strategy Commission of the ANC declared that the aim was seizure of power and that this meant “the dismantling by the popular power of all the political, economic, cultural and other formations of racist rule and also necessitates the smashing of the state machinery of fascism and racism and the construction of a new one committed to the defence and advancement of the people’s cause.”³

An article by Alex Mashinini in the ANC organ *Sechaba* in April 1985 spelled the idea out more precisely and at length:

For the ideals enshrined in the Freedom Charter to be realised, that is, for full national liberation and social emancipation of the oppressed majority of our country and also to make this emancipation complete and meaningful, there is one and only one condition which has to be satisfied. That is the violent revolutionary overthrow of the present system, the armed seizure of power by the revolutionary masses, the destruction of the present state power and transfer of that power into the hands of the democratic majority. This, as a strategic principle, is absolute. ... Put in a nutshell, no other methods of struggle short of an insurrection will succeed in ensuring the meaningful, complete and total liberation of our people from the obnoxious, fascist regime in SA.⁴

The ANC conference at Kabwe (16–23 June 1985) resolved to pursue “the aim of seizure of power by the people through a combination of mass political action and armed struggle ... to overthrow the apartheid regime.”⁵ In 1986, the SACP CC re-emphasised that “genuine liberation will come when they [the masses] seize power, relying on their own strength and refusing to succumb to illusions spread by enemies of our revolution that the Botha regime will, in the near future, be willing to surrender power to the democratic majority.”⁶

Certainly the overwhelming viewpoint in the factories, townships, schools and the countryside in South Africa in the 1980s was that the struggle for democracy would culminate in a revolutionary armed seizure of power by the masses.⁷ This was what the members of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) fought and died for, and what their families believed they died for. The ANC acquired its mass popularity in the 1980s on the basis that these were the aims of its struggle. But what was the

1. Quoted by K. Migwe, “Further Contribution on the Arming of the Masses,” *African Communist*, 89, 2nd quarter, 1982, p. 79.

2. SACP CC, “Forward to People’s Power: the Challenge Ahead,” November 1979 in *African Communist*, 80, 1st quarter, 1980, p. 36.

3. “Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission to the ANC NEC,” August 1979, in T. Karis and G. Gerhardt, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol V, *Nadir and Resurgence, 1964–79*, p. 729.

4. Alex Mashinini, “Preparing the Fire Before Cooking the Rice Inside the Pot,” *Sechaba*, April 1985.

5. ANC, *Documents of the Second National Consultative Conference of the ANC, Zambia, 16–23 June 1985*, p. 39.

6. SACP CC, “The Ideas of Socialism are Spreading,” *African Communist*, 105, 2nd quarter, 1986, p. 11.

7. Qadro Cabesa, “From Ungovernability to Revolution,” *African Communist*, 104, 1st quarter, 1986, p. 31 differentiates between “seizure” and “armed seizure” of power, arguing that the former can imply peaceful transfer of power.

strategy by which the ANC and SACP leadership imagined there could be such an outcome?¹

This paper will review the strategy of MK, and changes in it, together with that of other liberation movements in Southern Africa (FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO, ZANU and ZAPU). It will argue that the political economy of South Africa (secondary industrialization, substantial working class) differentiated it from the other largely peasant societies of Southern Africa.² In the latter (along a similar pattern to China) it was possible under the conditions then obtaining for bureaucratic (one-party) regimes to be established on a non-capitalist basis through rural guerrilla warfare, and such were achieved in Mozambique and Angola. In Zimbabwe at the time of independence a similar outcome would have been possible but was not the option taken by ZANU. A similar outcome in Namibia was cut across by the social counter-revolution taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The possibility of such a “deformed workers’ state,” however, did not exist in South Africa. There would have been the possibility of organizing the working class at the head of a movement to achieve national and social liberation by ending capitalism and establishing a workers’ democracy (which is different from a “people’s democracy”). A huge working class movement developed in the factories, in the communities and in the rural areas with a consciousness directed against apartheid and capitalism together. Despite the fact that “leadership of the working class” was sometimes proclaimed in words in the 1980s by the SACP and the ANC, this was not the basic strategy of the leaders. They followed the ideology of the two-stage revolution, proclaiming the goal of a “non-class people’s democracy”—for the SACP leaders to be “followed” by a “struggle for socialism.” This paper argues that the consequence was that MK lacked a realistic strategy for achieving power, despite the heroic sacrifices of its combatants. In the end the negotiated solution in South Africa was not a “choice” by the ANC leaders but forced on them because they had no alternative.

Ironically the result in South Africa has been the establishment of a bourgeois democracy, which, because of the strength of the working class and hence of civil society, has far greater resilience than in the other countries of Southern Africa.

At the outset, I should declare my own interest in this paper. In 1960 I left for Britain to study. By 1961, to consider whether violence was necessary in the SA struggle, I was reading Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara.³ People subsequently attempted to recruit me to the sabotage organisation African Resistance Movement but I refused because of my support for the ANC. In 1967 I was briefed by Joe Matthews of the ANC on the Wankie campaign and wrote a paper first deliv-

1. It is unfortunate that the prime strategists have passed away: Joe Modise, Joe Slovo, Chris Hani, etc.

2. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1996), pp. 27–32 argues against theories of “South African exceptionalism,” for example, the “economistic” perspective that “highlights levels of industrialization and proletarianization one-sidedly.” While agreeing with Mamdani that “apartheid, usually considered the exceptional feature in the South African experience, is actually its one aspect that is uniquely African,” I also regard the level of industrialization and proletarianisation as an “exceptional” feature of South Africa within Africa.

3. In a book titled Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* with a foreword by Capt. B.H. Liddell Hart (Cassell, London, 1961).

ered to the African Studies Association meeting in the United States that year.¹ As for many others, Che Guevara was a model for me through the 1960s and I was also strongly influenced by William Hinton's account of revolution in the Chinese village of Fanshen.² I wrote in the ANC organ *Sechaba* an anonymous review of books on urban armed struggle at a time when ANC policy was confined to rural guerrilla warfare.³ Subsequently I began to differ with MK's strategy of armed struggle and in 1979 associated myself with a memorandum by Robert Petersen, then editor of SACTU's newspaper produced in London *Workers' Unity*. For this Petersen, myself, Paula Ensor and David Hemson were unconstitutionally and undemocratically suspended from the ANC in 1979 and expelled in 1985. I resigned from my university job in 1981 and worked politically fulltime for the next ten years, financed by unemployment benefit in Britain. During this time we, along with numerous others, were supporters of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC, and continued to support the ANC despite our suspension and expulsion. On the question of armed struggle we argued in 1979 that:

We have stood for the need to arm the mass movement of the oppressed, led by the organized workers, against the apartheid regime of the employers. Every black worker knows that the struggle in South Africa cannot achieve victory without arms. But the working class must be organized and mobilized in their hundreds of thousands, under a clear revolutionary programme and leadership, before the task of armed insurrection is placed on the order of the day. The leadership of the ANC, SACTU and the CP opposes this perspective. Instead it is torn between the policy of guerrillaism, which is incapable of securing a revolutionary victory in South Africa, and leaning towards the pro-capitalist Buthelezi.⁴

1. Subsequently published as "Guerrilla Warfare in Southern Africa" in W. Cartey and M. Kilson (eds.), *The Africa Reader: Independent Africa* (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 381–400.

2. William Hinton, *Fanshen: a documentary of revolution in a Chinese village* (New York, Vintage, 1966). This sold 200,000 copies, while it is recently reported that in the 1968 20% of American students would have voted for Che rather than either of the two presidential candidates! Review of *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*, by Max Elbaum, Verso in *Los Angeles Times Book Review* by Tony Platt, (8/9/2002).

3. "Armed revolution in the city", *Sechaba*, 5, 11, November 1971, pp. 20–22. It includes a review of A. Neuberger, *Armed Insurrection*.

4. *South Africa: The Workers' movement, SACTU and the ANC—a Struggle for Marxist Policies*, Cambridge Heath Press, London, 1979, p. 3.

Part I: A Strategy of Rural Guerrillaism? 1961–75¹

The deliberate creation of organized groups which embark upon protracted armed revolutionary struggle to transform society at a time when the moment of insurrection has not yet matured is a post-October phenomenon and lends a special stamp to the revolutionary guerrilla struggles which have punctuated recent history from China to Vietnam. In colonial and semi-colonial conditions the commencement of armed activity has not always been related to the moment in time when the question of the seizure of power is on the agenda ... The guerrilla fighter is a political fighter, a member of an organized revolutionary force, who uses the struggle itself, the actual physical conflict, as an instrument of agitation and mobilization. He aims to raise the level of popular participation to the point at which revolutionary aims become general.

Joe Slovo, 1973²

The background to the decision to turn to armed struggle in South Africa has been described many times and will not be gone into here.³ Taking up armed struggle in South Africa was followed by similar decisions by the FNLA and MPLA in Angola (1962–63), by SWAPO in 1962, by FRELIMO in Mozambique (1963–64), and by ZAPU and ZANU in 1964.⁴ The southward thrust of decolonisation through West and East Africa, and to Zambia and Malawi had reached its limits by the means of non-violent mass struggle. By 1967, it was possible to describe “a guerrilla front across southern Africa from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic ... The ‘Unholy Alliance’ [of Smith, Vorster, and Salazar] ... has been forced to draw its battle-lines roughly along the Zambezi: the whole of southern Africa has now become a single theatre of struggle.” This included, of course, members of MK fighting in Rhodesia in alliance with ZAPU.⁵

1. I have read H. Barrell’s dissertation, a history of MK, “Conscripts to Their Age: ANC Operational Strategy, 1976–1986” (D.Phil, Oxford, 1993), omitting chapter 1, only after forming my own conclusions on these questions, and discover they are similar.

2. J. Slovo, “Southern Africa: Problems of Armed Struggle,” *Socialist Register 1973*, (London: Merlin, 1974), p. 339.

3. N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp. 258–75; *Strategy and Tactics*, pp. 4–7; Slovo, “South Africa—No Middle Road” in B. Davidson, J. Slovo and A. Wilkinson (eds.), *Southern Africa: the New Politics of Revolution* (London, Penguin, 1976), pp. 179–81; V. Shubin, *ANC: a View from Moscow* (Cape Town, Mayibuye Books, 1999), pp. 17–28; J. Slovo, *Slovo: the Unfinished Autobiography*, pp. 145ff; Luli Callinicos, “Reinventing the ANC: the Shift to Armed Struggle and Oliver Tambo’s Role in Exile, 1961–64” (unpublished paper). We wrote: “The turn of the Congress movement in the early 1960s to the use of armed force, does not signify that the victory of the liberation struggle was previously possible without arms. It was rather that events themselves, especially the Sharpeville massacre and its aftermath, exposed the futility of a strategy of *confining* the struggle to *unarmed* methods of action.” (*The Workers’ Movement, Sactu and the ANC*, p. 34).

4. On the conditions for launching these struggles, see Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, pp. 183–84. The PAIGC launched armed struggle in West Africa in the same period.

5. Legassick, “Guerrilla Warfare,” pp. 388–89. During this period *Sechaba* ran features on all the struggles. Note also a meeting in London on 26 June 1969 addressed by, *inter alia*, Basil Davidson on the politicisation of Mozambican peasants (on the basis of his visit to liberated areas in 1968) and Ruth First on SA moving from the laager to imperialism, thus becoming more vulnerable. (*Sechaba* 3, 9, September 1969).

The models for these struggles were principally the successes in Algeria and Cuba.¹ (In 1954 North Vietnam had won a similar victory culminating in the battle of Dien Bien Phu but this was not referred to at the time). The armed struggle in the settler colony of Algeria against the French was bitter and bloody—but it achieved independence. On the way, the adjacent French colonies of Morocco and Tunisia also won independence, and decolonisation in French West Africa was accelerated. Rural guerrilla warfare, based predominantly among the peasants, was launched in Algeria by the FLN in 1954 and reached its military apogee probably in 1958.² (The Algerian Communist Party opposed the launch of armed struggle; the Soviet Union recognized the FLN only in 1960.³) In May 1958 General de Gaulle assumed power in a France on the verge of civil war as a “man of reconciliation” to pre-empt a right-wing military coup. By May 1961, in the wake of an abortive coup attempt by generals in Algeria, the FLN was in negotiation with de Gaulle. Negotiations broke down but were concluded in March 1962, leading to the independence of Algeria in July, following a frenzied movement of right-wing terror organized by the OAS.⁴ It was then the only African example of a guerrilla movement that had won independence, and hence was highly influential. The FLN initially propped up capitalism in Algeria. Subsequently, under a military regime, state-run collective farms and a nationalized oil and gas industry became the main economic ventures, and arguably Algeria’s economy became non-capitalist by the 1980s before the reversion to capitalism in President Bendjedid’s third term of office from 1988—with the 1990s seeing a campaign of mass terror by the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).⁵

In January 1959 the 26th July movement led by Fidel Castro (and Che Guevara) took power in Cuba after a three-year guerrilla campaign fought in the rural areas. For Latin America, and more widely, it was a watershed. Initially Castro envisaged continued friendship with the United States on the basis of a bourgeois democracy. “Never has the 26th July movement talked of socialism or of nationalizing industries,” he said in May 1958.⁶ With state power in his hands, however, he initiated a radical programme of agrarian reform.⁷ This was followed by the refusal of US companies to refine Russian oil delivered to Cuba and the cutting off

1. “In the discussions which preceded the decision to prepare for armed confrontation in South Africa, the Cuban revolution and the writings of Che figured prominently.” (J. Slovo, “Che in Bolivia,” *African Communist*, 38, 3rd Quarter, 1969). See also Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp. 262–63. There was little consideration of instances where guerrilla wars had been defeated, for example in Malaya, Philippines, Greece or Burma: see Mzala, “Has the Time Come for Arming the Masses?” *African Communist*, 86, 3rd quarter, 1981. See, however, Slovo, “The Lion and the Gnat,” *African Communist*, 39, 4th Quarter, 1969, pp. 81–82.

2. The best-known film on the war is *Battle of Algiers* (directed by Pontecorvo). This, however, portrays the military defeat of an urban war, rather than the success of the rural guerrilla war.

3. Cf., W. Pomeroy, *Guerrilla Warfare and Marxism*, extract from Bashir Hadj, p. 259 quoted by Slovo, “The Lion and the Gnat,” *African Communist*, 39, pp. 82–83, and by Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, p. 182. See also Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, (Macmillan, London, 1977), pp. 405–06.

4. See Horne, *Savage War*, passim.

5. See, e.g., P. Rich, “Insurgency, Revolution and the Crises of the Algerian State” in P. Rich and R. Stubbs (eds.), *The Counter-Insurgent State: Guerrilla Warfare and State Building in the Twentieth Century* (Macmillan, 1997), pp. 97–119.

6. Jules Dubois, *Fidel Castro: Rebel-Liberator or Dictator* (1959), p. 263 quoted in H. Thomas, *Cuba, or the Pursuit of Freedom* (London, 1971).

7. See Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 149.

by the US government of Cuba's sugar quota. This, in turn, led rapidly through 1960 to the nationalization of all US and Cuban big business. The Cuban Communist Party, which had earlier denounced Castro as a "terrorist," was in November 1958 still calling for a government including bourgeois parties, and in 1960 still criticised Castro's nationalisations as excessive. (Correspondingly, the Soviet Union was reluctant to accept Cuba into the so-called "socialist camp.") By April 1961, however, in the wake of the US invasion at the Bay of Pigs, Castro spoke of having "made a socialist revolution," and there were moves towards the merger of the 26th July movement and the Cuban CP. In December that year Castro declared himself a "Marxist-Leninist."¹

It was the first break with capitalism in the New World, and the fact that it had been achieved by armed struggle led to crisis and splits in the generally pacific Communist Parties throughout the sub-continent—which interacted with the split taking place between the Soviet Union and China. The Cuban revolution shone as a beacon throughout Latin America and was obviously an appealing model in South Africa, both for nationalists and members of the SACP. Because of Cuba's achievements in particularly health and education, and Castro's determination to cling to non-capitalism, despite immense poverty in the country, it retains an appeal internationally to this day.

Cuba in particular raises the question of how capitalism could have been ended without a revolution led by the working class—and without even the support of a Communist Party. As the French writer Régis Debray wrote:

Making a socialist revolution without any socialists—in the trenchant phrase attributed to Fidel in the early sixties—is a challenge and an amazing feat. In its way, though it must not be taken too literally, the phrase pinpoints the truly original features of the Cuban revolution, the element in it whereby it transgressed the norms both of Marxist theory and of contemporary revolutionary history. *According to theory*, the passage to socialism can only occur under the hegemony of the proletariat, and proletarian hegemony acts through the recognized representative of the proletarian class—the workers' Party—with its recognized ideology—Marxism-Leninism.²

In seeking an explanation, we need to backtrack further through history. In China in 1949 and in Vietnam in 1954 social revolutions took place that were not led by the working class (though they were led by Communist Parties). In both China and Vietnam capitalism was abolished on the basis not of a workers' insurrection (as in Russia in 1917) but of a peasant guerrilla war. The international post-war

1. For the Cuban revolution, see for example Hugh Thomas, *Cuba*; L. Huberman and P.M. Sweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1961); P. Taaffe, *Cuba: Analysis of the Revolution* (Militant, London, 1978).

2. R. Debray, *A Critique of Arms*, Volume 1, (London, Penguin, 1977), pp. 58–59. Ten years earlier, Debray had defined "Fidelism" as "the belief that in the special conditions of South America the dynamism of nationalist struggles brings them to a conscious adoption of Marxism.": "Latin America: The Long March," *New Left Review*, 33, 1965, p. 54. Also Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, p. 241: "Cuban socialism was born out of a revolution that flew in the face of 'common sense', that flouted every accepted law. It was a proletarian revolution without any developed industrial proletariat; it arose spontaneously without any worldwide conflagration; it was dependent upon a rebel army composed of peasants and led by 'petty-bourgeois intellectuals'; only afterwards did it create the Party of which, in theory, it should itself have been the product." Compare Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, p. 75 where he implies Fidel "tricked" people through his vagueness on aims.

balance of forces played a major part in this. The Soviet Union (although power had been usurped from the working class in the 1920s by a bureaucracy resting on the planned economy) emerged massively strengthened from the Second World War. Imperialism, in contrast, was weakened and incapable of immediate military intervention to prop up capitalism. In China the Red Army led by Mao Tse-Tung, peasant- and initially guerrilla-based, came to the cities, took power, and established a non-capitalist state, a state representing the objective class interest of workers, a “workers’ state.” As in Russia, the establishment of a planned economy proved its superiority over the market in “the language of steel and concrete,” as Trotsky had put it. From the start, however, the Chinese state was not democratic but ruled by a bureaucracy, the hierarchical force originating in the guerrilla army and modelling itself on the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Similarly in Vietnam. In Cuba the objective processes were identical, though the transition was led by the 26th July movement (suggesting that the role of “Communist Parties” is not germane).

The process of these revolutions in fact conforms to the reality that in countries of belated capitalist development (including colonies) the so-called “bourgeois-democratic” tasks of the revolution (agrarian reform, ending the influence of imperialism) could be solved only by the working class taking power (thus collapsing together the “national” and “social” revolution).¹ No section of the weak bourgeoisie was ‘progressive’ in the sense of constituting a reliable ally for the working class. This was explained by Trotsky in his theory of permanent revolution and was where he differed from the Stalinist two-stage theory. However, Trotsky never anticipated that the working class could take power without an insurrection, as in Russia in 1917. In the 1930s, he had argued that if the Chinese Communist Party (with its social base in the peasantry) took power, it would—despite the “communist” label—establish a capitalist dictatorship.² The Eurocommunist writer Claudin (echoing Stalin) therefore accused Trotsky of “underestimating the peasant masses.”³

1. Compare Debray, “Latin America: the Long March,” *New Left Review*, 33, September–October 1965, p. 54: “The lesson of Fidelism is that a genuine nationalism in Latin America implies the final overthrow of the semi-colonial State, the destruction of its Army, and the installation of socialism.” Also Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, pp. 77–78.

2. See, for example, the analysis in L. Trotsky, “Peasant War in China and the Proletariat,” [September 22, 1932], *Leon Trotsky on China*, (Pathfinder, New York, 1976), pp. 522–31, especially p. 528 “Under present conditions the peasant war by itself, without the direct leadership of the proletarian vanguard, can only pass on the power to a new bourgeois clique ...”.

3. “History was to prove Trotsky right in arguing that the Chinese revolution could be victorious only as a socialist revolution, but to prove him wrong (together with Stalin and the Communist International) regarding ... the role to be played by the various classes ... Contradicting his own scheme—since the organic weakness of the Chinese bourgeoisie could not but imply weakness of the working class as well—he [Trotsky] applied to China the stereotype of Europe, and this caused him to underestimate the role of the peasant masses.” (F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement: from Comintern to Cominform*, Penguin, London, 1975, p. 286.) Claudin (a) is wrong that Trotsky regarded the Chinese revolution as purely “socialist”—it combined democratic and socialist tasks; (b) provides no explanation of how the peasantry can cause a “socialist revolution”; (c) does not reconcile this claim about a “socialist revolution” with his earlier characterisation of Mao’s theory as a “stages” theory; (d) in maintaining that the weakness of the bourgeoisie entails the weakness of the working class fails to comprehend the idea of uneven and *combined* development.

However, at the time the paradox of the Chinese revolution received a much more satisfactory explanation from the British Marxist Ted Grant.¹ Grant argued that the revolution was explained by *objective* factors and owed nothing to the policy of the Chinese Communist Party. Imperialism was too weak to prop up Chiang Kai Shek as ruler of China and as the Red Army took state power the capitalist class mostly fled with him to Taiwan. The economy, imposing terrible conditions of exploitation, was threatened with collapse. The programme on which the CCP took power declared, in the words of Mao Tse-Tung, that the revolution “is still fundamentally bourgeois-democratic in its social character during its first stage or first step” and its “objective mission is to *clear the path for the development of capitalism*” [my emphasis].² Nevertheless, under those conditions Mao had little option but to dismantle capitalism and reorganise the economy on the basis of nationalisation and planning. Moreover, the bureaucratically-ruled and non-capitalist (Stalinist) Soviet Union was a pole of attraction and model for the Chinese Communist Party. The hierarchical military organisation of the Red Army was, translated into civilian terms, a bureaucracy.³ The society that emerged in China was a bureaucratic dictatorship over a non-capitalist economy. Without workers’ democracy, confined in a single country, China (just like the Soviet Union) could in no way be called socialist. In 1949 Grant wrote:

While supporting the destruction of feudalism in China, it must be emphasised that only a horrible caricature of the Marxist conception of the revolution will result because of the leadership of the Stalinists. Not a real democracy, but a totalitarian regime as brutal as that of Chiang Kai Shek will develop. Like the regimes of Eastern Europe, Mao will look to Russia as his model. Undoubtedly, tremendous economic progress will be achieved. But the masses, both workers and peasants, will find themselves enslaved by the bureaucracy.⁴

Like the Soviet Union—where the process had resulted from a bureaucratic counter-revolution overturning the initial workers’ democracy—China was a deformed workers’ state.

Analysis of the revolution in North Vietnam and in Cuba reveals similar processes. The absence of the Communist Party in the lead of the Cuban revolution underlines the fact that the processes leading to the overthrow of capitalism were

1. T. Grant, “The Chinese Revolution,” January 1949, in Ted Grant, *The Unbroken Thread: The Development of Trotskyism over Forty Years*, (Fortress, London, 1989).

2. Mao Tse-Tung, “On New Democracy,” [January 1940], *Selected Works*, (Peking, 1965), II, pp. 343–44. Extracts from this work may be found in H. d’Encausse and S. Schram, *Marxism and Asia*, pp. 251–58. Confusedly and contradictorily, Mao added “it is no longer a revolution of the old type led by the bourgeoisie with the aim of establishing a capitalist society and a state under bourgeois dictatorship. It belongs to the new type of revolution led by the proletariat with the aim, in the first stage, of establishing a new-democratic society and a state under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes. Thus this revolution actually serves the purpose of clearing a still wider path for the development of socialism.” See also Mao Tse-Tung, “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party” [December 1939], *Selected Works*, pp. 326–31.

3. Compare Che Guevara on Cuba: “Moreover, this [the guerrilla nucleus] is the area where the structuring of the future governmental apparatus, responsible for efficiently running the class dictatorship during the entire period of transition, will begin” [my emphasis]. Guevara, “Guerrilla Warfare: a Method” in J. Gerassi (ed.), *Venceremos: The Speeches and Writings of Ernesto Che Guevara*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 274, henceforth cited as Guevara, *Venceremos*.

4. Grant, “The Chinese Revolution,” p. 288.

objective and not subjective. Both became bureaucratic dictatorships (with less wealthy and stratified bureaucracies than the Soviet Union indeed) that called themselves “people’s democracies” and “socialist,” because they had abolished capitalism. Because of this, moreover, China, North Vietnam and Cuba (though constrained by US sanctions) were able to advance economically.

It goes without saying that it would be impossible to “plan in advance” a strategy to achieve such a deformed workers’ state. (This shows, by the way, the ridiculousness of the Cold War explanation of these revolutions as caused by “Soviet expansionism”.)

In an interview which I came across on a listserv while writing this article, Ricardo Napuri, a Peruvian revolutionary who is now a leader of the Argentinean MAS, recalled meeting with Che in Cuba in 1959:

Che had never read Trotsky and asked me to find a book where Trotsky presented his thoughts. It was not easy to find a book by Trotsky in Havana in those days, but in a bookshop I found a very old edition of the *Permanent Revolution*. I immediately bought it and took it to the Bank of Cuba where Che was president. A fortnight later, he called me to tell me he had read the book. He had underlined and written on its margins. ... In a long conversation at two in the morning ... he said that Trotsky was consistent and he was right in many things, but that “it was too late” to change the orientation of the revolutionary process in Cuba. Intelligent as he was, he immediately grasped Trotsky’s idea of the transformation of the democratic revolution into the socialist revolution, the uninterrupted character of the revolution to become international and global. In this talk we discussed about everything, about the social and political subject of the revolution: the proletariat. But he said: “Well, we did the revolution without the working class.” And in the end this was what defeated any argument. You gave him the books, and there he was, larger than life with his long beard, and he had led a revolution. He looked at you and you realised that he thought to himself: “And where did you make a revolution?” And you had to give it to him. Besides, he would say: “OK, make a revolution,” as if he meant: “Try it.” Che was a person with whom you could discuss. The only thing was that, as they were in a hurry to expand the revolution, he would say: “I did a revolution. Now you do your own, with all the differences you want, but mine was different, and until somebody shows me that I was mistaken, I will stick to my method.” It was in this sense that he told me that for him it was too late to become a Trotskyist. ... He died believing that his approach to the revolution was the only possible one.¹

Cuba and Algeria, then, were the model for armed struggle in Southern Africa. The first operational plan for *rural* guerrilla warfare in South Africa was titled “Operation Mayibuye” and was captured by police in the raid on Rivonia on 11 July 1963.² It was apparently drawn up by Joe Slovo and Govan Mbeki, and it

1. “Interview with Ricardo Napuri,” ISM, *Frontline*, No. 7.

2. Operation Mayibuye, in Karis and Carter, III, pp. 760–68. I don’t deal here with the “transitional phase” of the 1961–64 sabotage campaign: see Slovo, “South Africa—No Middle Road”, pp. 185–86. See also Cassius Mandla, “The Moment of Revolution is Now—or Never in Our Lifetime,” *Sechaba*, November 1985, where the sabotage campaign is described as a “pressure tactic” and *Ulibambe Lingashoni*, [film] part 4 where Slovo describes it as “armed propaganda.” Ben Turok criticised it because “it did not raise the level of action of the masses themselves ... sabotage was seen as another vehicle for protest, and not as the first shots of a protracted campaign in which the masses had to play a crucial role,” in other words as ineffective armed propaganda: B. Turok, *Strategic Problems in SA’s Liberation Struggle: A Critical Analysis* (LSM, Canada, 1974), p. 45.

appears not to have been fully approved by the time it was captured.¹ However, in 1976 Slovo wrote of it: “Whether then, now or in the future, there can be no strategy for commitment to guerrilla-type struggle in South Africa without the main steps which the plan envisaged.”²

Operation Mayibuye (OM) argued that “very little, if any scope exists for the smashing of white supremacy other than by means of mass revolutionary action, the main content of which is armed resistance leading to victory by military means.” “[I]mportant ingredients” of a revolutionary situation were present. But the “objective military conditions make the possibility of a general uprising leading to direct military struggle an unlikely one. Rather, as in Cuba, the general uprising must be sparked off by organized and well prepared guerrilla operations during the course of which the masses of the people will be drawn in and armed.” As in Cuba, moreover, it was to be “the rural areas which become the main theatre of guerrilla operations in the initial phase.”³

The same idea was repeated by ANC leader Joe Matthews in an article in one of the first issues of *Sechaba*:

... there does not exist a revolutionary situation in South Africa at the moment ... a revolutionary situation [which is the] essential for an *insurrection*.⁴ ... But there is the case in which conditions exist for the organization of an armed revolutionary struggle, extending over a period of years. *The climax of such a relatively prolonged struggle is a revolutionary situation, and an insurrection in which the revolutionaries take over from the collapsing reactionary regime* ... a “revolutionary situation” is not necessary for a guerrilla or people’s revolutionary struggle to be waged successfully. What is required ... is that there is a ripening or developing revolutionary condition in the country—a general political and social instability.

He gave, like OM, the example of Cuba, and in addition Cyprus in 1953, Algeria in 1954, and China after 1927.⁵

The appeal of the examples of guerrilla warfare was, firstly, that it was a means whereby those initially relatively powerless could achieve victory against the

1. The political background to it is provided by Govan Mbeki, *The Peasants’ Revolt* (London, Penguin, 1964), much of the manuscript written in prison on rolls of toilet paper, and edited in London by Ruth First. See on its approval or not, Glenn Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children: three families and the costs of conscience in white South Africa* (New York: Continuum, 2001), pp. 23–24, 26, 107–110, 210, 238, 242, 244–45, 249; Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, p. 188; Slovo, *Slovo*, p. 146; Luli Callinicos, “Reinventing the ANC”; Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner revolutionary*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998) pp. 407, 414. It was opposed *inter alia* by Roly Arenstein, Rusty Bernstein, Braam Fischer, Ahmed Kathrada, Jack Simons and Walter Sisulu. An insight into Slovo’s support for it is provided by his daughter, commenting on the justification in his autobiography of the sabotage campaign as aiming to bring the government to its senses: “A sober assessment this, written by my father, in hindsight of their early military plans. And yet I know that he believed more than that then, and that, caught up in the excitement of the shift to action and of the Boy’s Own adventure on which they had all embarked, the end of injustice in South Africa still seemed to be imminently within his grasp.” Gillian Slovo, *Every secret thing: my family, my country* (London: Little, Brown, 1997), p. 57.

2. Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, p. 188.

3. “Operation Mayibuye” in Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, III, p. 761–62.

4. He used the example of the insurrection in Russia in November 1917.

5. Joe Matthews, “Forward to a People’s Democratic Republic of South Africa,” *Sechaba*, I, 9, September 1967. Similar examples are given in Slovo, “Che,” *African Communist*, 38, p. 49; *Strategy and Tactics*, p. 7; Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, p. 184. In fact (contrary to Stalin’s belief and strategy in the situation) there *was* a revolutionary situation in China in the late 1920s.

apparently militarily strong—by means of the tactics of the “war of the flea,” mobility, surprise, ambush, lightning strikes and retreats. “Shamelessly attack the weak and shamelessly flee from the strong.”¹ As Che wrote:

... the essence of guerrilla warfare is the *miracle* by which a small nucleus of men—looking beyond their immediate tactical objective—becomes the vanguard of a mass movement, achieving its ideals, establishing a new society, ending the ways of the old and winning social justice” [my emphasis].² Algeria and Cuba, states Strategy and Tactics, proved that “in the long run material resources alone are not a determining factor.”³

Secondly, guerrilla warfare gave scope to the “subjective element.” On the first page of Che’s work on the subject, he wrote:

One does not necessarily have to wait for a revolutionary situation to arise; *it can be created* ... [This conclusion refutes] those who feel the need to wait until, in some perfect way, all the required objective and subjective conditions are at hand, instead of hastening to bring these conditions about through their own efforts [my emphasis].⁴

Although the idea is stated rather than developed in Che’s handbook—which is more concerned with the tactics and personal behaviour of guerrillas than with strategy—this is the sentiment that was picked up by Operation Mayibuye and is echoed through all the South African writing on the subject.⁵ Interpreting it, however, was to cause immense problems for the strategy of armed struggle.

Can a revolutionary situation be ‘created’? In a revolutionary situation, to quote Lenin:

... it is not enough ... [that] the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand change; what is required for revolution is that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way ... revolution is impossible without a nationwide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that revolution requires (firstly) that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking and politically active workers) should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes should be passing through a governmental crisis which would draw even the most backward masses into politics (a symptom of every real revolution is a rapid tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the number of representatives of the toiling and oppressed masses—who have

1. “Operation Mayibuye,” p. 763. Hence the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the SA regime in “Operation Mayibuye” pp. 761–63; and (in identical text) in J. Slovo “The Armed Struggle Spreads: a Discussion Article,” *Sechaba*, 2, 5, May 1968, pp. 5–6; *Strategy and Tactics*, pp. 10–12; Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, pp. 197–200, etc. Slovo’s 1968 article and Matthews 1967 article are reprinted with others in *Guerrilla Warfare* (SA Studies No. 1, Publicity and Information Bureau of the ANC, 1971).

2. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 114.

3. *Strategy and Tactics*, p. 7.

4. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 111. He adds: “Of course, not all the pre-requisites for a revolution are going to be created solely by the guerrillas. Certain minimum pre-conditions are needed to kindle the first spark. The people must be shown that social wrongs are not going to be addressed by civil means alone. And it is desirable to have the oppressor, wittingly or not, break the peace first.”

5. It is worth noting that between 1963 and 1969, as Slovo explains, SACP influence on MK was “negligible”: Slovo, p. 152.

hitherto been apathetic—capable of waging the political struggle) weaken the government and make it possible for the revolutionaries to overthrow it rapidly.¹

In such a nation-wide crisis insurrection involves the replacement of the power of the existing state with the power of the armed masses.²

For Marxism, neither a revolutionary situation nor an insurrection can be brought about “at will,” through the pure subjective activity of revolutionaries. As Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution put it in his classic work on the subject:

A revolution takes place only when there is no other way out. And the insurrection, which rises above a revolution like a peak in the mountain chain of its events, can no more be evoked at will than the revolution as a whole. The masses advance and retreat several times before they make up their minds to the final assault ... a victorious insurrection ... can only be the act of a class called to stand at the head of the nation ... Only mass insurrection has ever brought the victory of one social regime over another.³

At the same time, maintained Trotsky, there was a complex interaction between “spontaneity” and the political planning of an insurrection by a revolutionary party:

... an element of conspiracy almost always enters to some degree into any insurrection. Being historically conditioned by a certain stage in the growth of a revolution, a mass insurrection is never purely spontaneous. Even when it flashes out unexpectedly to a majority of its own participants, it has been fertilized by those ideas in which the insurrectionaries see a way out of the difficulties of existence. But a mass insurrection can be foreseen and prepared. It can be organized in advance. In this case the conspiracy is subordinate to the insurrection, serves it, smoothes its path, hastens its victory. The higher the political level of a revolutionary movement and the more serious its leadership, the greater will be the place occupied by conspiracy in a popular insurrection.

It is very necessary to understand the relations between insurrection and conspiracy, both as they oppose and as they supplement each other. It is especially so, because the very use of the word conspiracy, even in Marxian literature, contains a superficial contradiction due to the fact that it sometimes implies an independent undertaking initiated by the minority, at others a preparation by the minority of a majority insurrection.

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1. V.I. Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism, an Infantile Disorder: A Popular Essay in Marxist Strategy and Tactics* (1920) (New York, Pathfinder, 1940), pp. 66–67. Also quoted in part by Slovo, “No Middle Road,” p. 182. See also a very similar formulation by Lenin in 1913, when a revolutionary situation was developing in Russia cut across by the outbreak of the First World War: “May Day action by the revolutionary proletariat (15/6/1913), published in Lenin, *On Trade Unions*, (Moscow: Progress, 1970), pp. 248–49; also Lenin, “The Collapse of the Second International,” *Collected Works*, 21, p. 213. Trotsky adds to these two conditions the discontent of the “intermediate layers, their disappointment with the policy of the ruling class, their impatience and indignation, their readiness to support a bold revolutionary initiative on the part of the proletariat,” L. Trotsky, “The Art of Insurrection,” chapter VI in *History of the Russian Revolution*, (London: Pluto, 1977), III, pp. 1023–24.
 2. Slovo claimed that in “Czarist Russia the creation of mobile and exceedingly small guerilla units was an important part of the agitation among the masses in favour of an armed uprising, achieved in the 1917 October Revolution” (“Problems,” *Socialist Register* 1973, p. 338). In fact he is referring to Lenin’s writings on the Moscow rising in 1905. See footnote 5, p. 43 and footnote 3, p. 49.
 3. L. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, III, p. 1017. Lenin wrote that “insurrection must rely upon that turning point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest”, “Marxism and Insurrection”, *Collected Works*, 26, pp. 22–23 .

History testifies, to be sure, that in certain conditions a popular insurrection can be victorious even without a conspiracy. Arising “spontaneously” out of the universal indignation, the scattered protests, demonstrations, strikes, street fights, an insurrection can draw in a part of the army, paralyse the forces of the enemy, and overthrow the old power.¹

To prepare the insurrection, the conditions for it must be foreseen, requiring correct perspectives. To be placed to carry it out, the revolutionary party must have an organic relationship with, and the trust of, the masses. To carry it through, the revolutionary party needs the appropriate programme. “An active minority of the proletariat, no matter how well organized, cannot seize the power regardless of the general conditions of the country ... In order to conquer the power, the proletariat needs more than a spontaneous insurrection. It needs a suitable organization, it needs a plan; it needs a conspiracy.”² But the ‘creation’ is a political and not a military act: indeed, under certain conditions an insurrection can be carried through completely peacefully.

In Russia the soviets arose, in 1905 and in 1917, out of the experience of workers’ struggle, independently of the Bolshevik party. At the same time, as Trotsky wrote, the soviets were the “organs of preparation of the masses for insurrection, organs of insurrection, and after the victory organs of government.” The soviets were the organs of the masses in the revolutionary situation of “dual power.” He added:

However, the soviets by themselves do not settle the question. They may serve different goals according to the programme and leadership. The soviets receive their programme from the party ... The problem of conquering the power can be solved only by a definite combination of party with soviets—or with other mass organizations more or less equivalent to soviets.³

It was essentially on the basis of this experience that the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC maintained that in South Africa, with the majority of its population working class:

... armed struggle must not be separated from mass struggle, but fused with the development of the mass movement at every stage. It means that politics—the politics of mass struggle—must at every point command the gun. It means the fullest participation of militarily trained revolutionaries in the day-to-day struggles of the people, *as political cadres first and foremost*, involved in the mobilizing, educating, training and arming of the mass movement. It means that the armed action on our side should in its early stages have *mainly* the character of *organized self-defence by the mass movement against the terror tactics of the state*. It means armed defence, in favourable circumstances, of strikes, demonstrations, “squatter” camps and schools; against police raids, pass arrests, forced removals and so forth. As the mass movement gains strength, confidence and fighting skills, as the camp of the enemy weakens and divides, the basis will be laid for passing over to the offensive.⁴

1. L. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, III, pp. 1017–18.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1020.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1021.

4. *South Africa: The Workers’ Movement, SACTU and the ANC*, pp. 34–35.

This was an *alternative* strategy to that of rural (or, for that matter, urban) guerrilla warfare.

Together with this, the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC, along with trade unionists inside South Africa, criticized the disarming of the workers' movement in the country that had taken place in the early 1960s through the recruiting of SACTU shop stewards to MK. "By encouraging the cream of SACTU's worker militants to leave their organizing work in the factories, join MK and leave South Africa, the 'turn to armed struggle' contributed to a devastating rout of workers' organization."¹ Recently there are indications that Joe Slovo, leader of MK and the Communist Party in the 1970s and 1980s, belatedly conceded this. In a recent interview Jeremy Cronin said the following concerning attitudes of trade unionists in the early 1980s:

The reading of what had gone wrong ... was that the ANC-SACP had treated the trade union movement as a simple adjunct to the political struggle in the early 1960s and, when the arm[ed] struggle was launched, the trade union movement was seen simply as a recruitment terrain for guerrillas, and in this way the trade union movement and its cadreship had been recklessly exposed to security police action ... looking back retrospectively, there were elements of truth in that. I think that there was certainly some, and someone as key to the process as Joe Slovo himself was saying ... by the late 80s, that insufficient attention had been paid to the trade union movement and went too easily and not thinking it through, moved people from the trade union organisation to the guerrilla struggle. Largely because we thought that the guerrilla struggle was going to be a short quick sharp blow in 5 years, and therefore we weren't looking to 20 years, 30 years.²

In fact the trainees assumed that they would return to the country within six months of leaving. Only a handful, however, returned at this time. The destruction of the internal underground by the state was a bitter blow for the whole movement, but especially for those who had been plucked out and now remained outside.³ The strategy of taking workers out of the country, it was true, involved balancing the need to militarily train workers' leaders and preserving the strength of the movement inside the country. However, the combination of the wrong belief that guerrilla action could foment a revolutionary situation in South Africa *and* the inappropriate training (especially that in the Soviet Union) experienced by those taken out were devastating mistakes.

For Che, "certain minimum pre-conditions" were necessary for the launching of guerrilla struggle—some of the "pre-requisites for a revolution." "The people must be shown that social wrongs are not going to be redressed by civil means alone. And it is desirable to have the oppressor, wittingly or not, break the peace first."⁴

1. Richard Monroe [Martin Legassick] "Lessons of the 1950s," *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, 13, March–May 1984, p. 43. See also Ben Turok, *Strategic Problems* (p. 49) "Many leaders and hundreds of the best cadres had been set out of the country for training, and this seriously weakened the organization at home."

2. Interview with Jeremy Cronin MP by Dr Helena Sheehan, recorded on digital video on 17 April 2001 in All Africa House at University of Cape Town.

3. These included Wilton Mkwayi, who had trained in China.

4. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 111.

In similar fashion, OM maintained that “important ingredients” of a revolutionary situation were present in early 1960s South Africa: “A disillusionment with constitutional or semi-constitutional forms of struggle and a conviction that the road to victory is through force; A militancy and a readiness to respond to a lead which holds out a real possibility of successful struggle.”¹ Comparing these with Lenin’s definition of a revolutionary situation, we see that what is lacking is a crisis in the ruling class: the inability of the ruling class to “be able to live and rule in the old way.” This presumably was what rural guerrilla warfare was supposed to hasten.

Che’s texts, however, did not elaborate much on how guerrilla warfare hastens the development of a revolutionary situation. There are only a few passages that even bear on the question.

It is obvious that guerrilla warfare is a preliminary step, unable to win a war all by itself. What happens is that the guerrilla army swells in size until it becomes a regular army. Only then will it be able to deliver a knock-out blow.²

The campaign begins with care, asking each person spoken to not to reveal anything he has seen or heard. Next, the guerrilla seeks out persons of obvious loyalty to the revolution for use as contacts, carriers of weapons and supplies, and guides. Then, he goes to the urban masses to bring about a general strike. Such a strike is crucial, but to achieve it requires a chain of events that seldom takes place spontaneously. The necessary conditions must be created. This is done by explaining the purposes of the revolution and arranging incidents that display the people’s power ... [other military measures crumbling the morale of the enemy ... leading to a war of position] ... Thus, the attack carries itself to the city, defeats reinforcements, inflames the whole country, and attains its ultimate objective: victory.³

And:

Let us generalize from the Cuban experience and review the beginning, development, and end of a guerrilla war. At first there is a partially armed band that takes refuge in some remote, hard-to-reach spot ... Next, the band sets up semi-permanent encampments, establishes service echelons, and adopts the characteristics of a government in miniature ... a new band operating in a new area ... saboteurs infest the enemy-held open country ... As guerrilla warfare nears the cities, popular support rallies to the cause ... guerrilla combat forces ... begin positional warfare ... having paralysed the enemy’s logistics by sabotage and exhausted his combat forces by attrition, the guerrillas seize the initiative, attacking on all fronts at will. The enemy can stand it no longer and the remaining forces capitulate ... Final liberation comes only with the total systematic break-up of the enemy army and all institutions that supported the old regime.⁴

1. “Operation Mayibuye,” Karis and Carter, p. 761. To these Slovo added the existence of a political leadership capable of gaining the organized allegiance of the people for armed struggle and also the ability to carry out the planning, preparation and direction of operations: Slovo “Armed Struggle,” 1967, pp. 3–4; “No Middle Road,” p. 184. See also *Strategy and Tactics*, pp. 5–6.

2. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 114.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 136–37, 147. See also Guevara, *Venceremos*, p. 278. Richard Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary: Che Guevara’s Last Mission* (New York, Norton, 1970), p. 58 sums up Guevara’s analysis as follows: “The final phase of the struggle begins, according to Che, when the guerrilla columns unite and engage the enemy’s forces in a conventional war of fixed fronts. It is at this moment that the ‘people’s army’ comes into existence, and the drive toward the cities begins. The death knell of the old order comes as the urban masses turn on the defending troops, and the last strongholds of enemy resistance surrender to the people’s army. This clears the way for the revolutionary leaders to seize power and begin the building of a new society.”

The process thus moves through (a) guerrilla war becoming regular war, and (b) mass consciousness becoming revolutionary. Military action by guerrillas, it is argued, leads to a change in the balance of both military and political force. In the case of *rural* guerrilla war, the change in the balance is achieved through establishing militarily-defended “liberated areas” in which reforms benefiting the masses are carried out (e.g., agrarian reform).¹ “The guerrilla nucleus, *based on territory favouring their struggle*, guarantees the safety and permanence of the revolutionary command” [my emphasis].² The French “Fidelist” Regis Debray was later to expand on this idea:

... it is to their rear base that the revolutionary armed forces look for establishing the organs of *local power*, which is the specific form assumed by *dual power* in a prolonged revolutionary war, given that dual power is the precursor of *power pure and simple*. By setting on foot the first national-democratic reforms (land reform, popular justice, redistribution of taxation, a new system of education, etc.) the revolution is criticizing itself at the same time as proving itself for the world to see. To control this bit of territory makes it possible to build up a solid popular front against the central power. The rear base thus enables the revolutionary forces to demonstrate that it will not be long before they can give the people positive material benefits, a rapid improvement in their living conditions. In this sense, the base offers proof that the revolutionaries are serious and responsible, that their programme will be carried out, and that it is a programme that is credible and practicable on a national scale. It is in the rear base that the “counter-society” is constructed, the administration of the “counter-State,” which, when the time comes, will take over from the vacillating organs of the present puppet power and become the State proper.³

The extension of liberated areas strengthens guerrillas at the expense of the state’s military force. “If the enemy is concentrated, it loses ground; if it is scattered it loses strength.”⁴ The existence of liberated areas strengthens revolutionary mass consciousness in those areas, and contributes to the revolutionizing of mass consciousness throughout the nation, i.e., in urban areas also. This creates crisis in the ruling class. These are the hidden steps in the logic of Che’s argument—which were of course “proved” by the success of the Cuban revolution.

Whatever its applicability to situations in which rural guerrilla war is possible, this logic is clearly not applicable in urban conditions. It is impossible to constitute “liberated areas” in the cities through purely military action.

Regis Debray drew out Che’s lessons in more concentrated and, probably, caricatured form. In 1965 he wrote, “mass action as such has never achieved power anywhere” in critique of the conservatism of Communist Parties in Latin America. Any “general strike which does not pave the way for some kind of insurrectionary strike tends to be blunted or broken by violence. But an insurrectionary strike pre-

1. See for example, Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 113; Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary*, pp. 54–55.

2. Guevara, *Venceremos*, p. 274.

3. Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, p. 120. Similar analysis has been made of equivalent areas in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, etc.

4. A maxim originally attributed to Mao Tse-Tung quoted in Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution*, p. 48; Legassick, “Guerrilla Warfare,” p. 392.

supposes arms and an organization of militia and of leadership which are not going to rise up from the mass action by a miracle of spontaneity.” The “Fidelist” answer was “the theory of the *foco* or the insurrectionary center.”¹ This was the thesis in particular of *Revolution in the Revolution*, published in 1967 almost as a manifesto, at the time when Che Guevara had resigned from the Cuban government to take up armed struggle first in the Congo and then in Bolivia (where he was killed by state forces as a result).²

In *Revolution in the Revolution*, Debray was critical of the ideas of workers’ armed self-defence,³ of Trotskyism, and separated the Latin American experience from the Vietnamese example of guerrilla warfare. He regarded political mobilization in the initial stages as unimportant: “the most important form of propaganda is successful military action” (p. 56). The *foco* was “a minority certainly, but one which, unlike the Blanquist minority of activists, aims to win over the masses before and not after the seizure of power and which makes this the essential condition of the final conquest of power. This minority establishes itself at the most vulnerable zone of the national territory, and then slowly spreads like an oilpatch, propagating itself in concentric ripples through the peasant masses, to the smaller towns, and finally to the capital.”⁴ However, “in itself, the *foco* will not overthrow a given social situation nor even, through its own struggles, reverse a given political situation. It can have no active function unless it finds a point of insertion within maturing contradictions.” Presumably these contradictions were “maturing” purely objectively, with no direct political assistance. At the same time, because of the subjective role of guerrilla war in hastening the revolutionary situation, it was the military *foco*, he argued, and not a political party, that was the vanguard of revolution. He argued that, “The vanguard party can exist in the form of the guerrilla *foco* itself” (p. 105). It was the “small motor” of the *foco* that set the “big motor of the masses” into motion (p. 108).

1. R. Debray, “Long March,” p. 23.

2. See Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary*. One of the main issues in the Sino-Soviet split was of course “peaceful coexistence” versus the Maoist idea of armed revolution in the Third World. The Cuban intervention was “pro-Soviet” yet also pro-armed struggle; it was promoted at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana in 1966, which led to the formation of OLAS (see Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, pp. 234–35). Guevara was “subjectivist” on economic questions also: see for example Guevara, *Venceremos*, Chs. 22, 24 and 32; and Debray, *op cit.*, pp. 241–42. See also Debray, *op cit.*, p. 244 quoting from Lenin dismissing the idea that Russia is “not ripe for socialism”—and in fact putting forward what was to become known as Trotsky’s idea of the permanent revolution—making him in Debray’s words a “Guevarist before his time.” Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary*, pp. 194–204 gives a cogent account of the treacherous contribution of the Bolivian Communist Party to the capture of Che; for another version see Slovo, “Che,” *African Communist*, 38, pp. 58–60.

3. In 1965, however, he wrote of the armed self-defence by miners in Bolivia that this “is the country where the subjective and objective conditions are best combined. It is the only country in South America where a socialist revolution is on the agenda. ... It is also the only country where the revolution might take the classic Bolshevik form—witness the proletarian insurrection of 1952, on the basis of ‘soviets’ which ‘exploded’ the state apparatus by means of a short and decisive armed struggle. The theory of the *foco* is thus in Bolivia ... if not inadequate at any rate secondary.”: “Long March,” pp. 26–27. Yet, because of the defeat of the miners, Debray turned against armed self-defence by 1967—and Bolivia was the location of Guevara’s last campaign, unsuccessful in establishing a *foco*. See also Slovo, “Latin America and the Ideas of Regis Debray,” *African Communist*, 33, 2nd Quarter 1968, p. 43.

4. He added “The process is of course two-way, since from the towns themselves there comes a movement of mass strikes, demonstrations in defence of public liberties, fund-raising campaigns, and an underground resistance movement galvanized by the exploits of the rural guerrilla.”: “Long March,” p. 27. This movement apparently requires no *political* but merely *military* intervention by the *foco*.

Joe Slovo, principal South African theorist of guerrilla warfare in this period,¹ wrote a series of commentaries on these questions. One can sense Slovo caught in a contradiction. On the one hand he upheld the idea that guerrilla warfare could hasten the development of a revolutionary situation—in particular against those (in the Communist Party) who quoted Lenin to maintain that a revolutionary situation was necessary for taking up armed struggle.² On the other hand he rejected the sidelining of Communist Parties implicit in Debray's "Fidelism."

Thus, reviewing a collection of writings on guerrilla warfare by an Australian(?) CP member, Slovo wrote:

... he does not give sufficient emphasis to the importance of the subjective factor in the critical initial period of armed struggle. "A few people taking to arms do not equal a revolution unless decisive masses of people *are already in motion towards revolutionary objectives and the armed action is related to it.*" This is too baldly stated and not altogether borne out by many experiences. In the strict sense it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find in places like Algeria in 1954, Cyprus in 1954 and Cuba in 1957 a traditional revolutionary upsurge to which the armed action could immediately relate. In each of these countries forces outside the organised vanguard both initiated and pursued successful armed action at a time when the traditional revolutionary situation was not present. Armed activity undoubtedly played the major role in helping to bring about the mass revolutionary upsurge and eventual victory ...³

In similar vein, in 1968 Slovo wrote:

Of course, favourable conditions for armed struggle ripen historically. But the historical process must not be approached as if it were a mystical thing outside of man which in a crude deterministic sort of way sets him tasks to which he responds. In this sense to sit back and wait for the evolution of objective conditions which constitute a "revolutionary situation" amounts in some cases to a dereliction of leadership duties. What people, expressing themselves in organized activity, do or abstain from doing, hastens or retards the historical process and helps or hinders the creation of favourable conditions for armed struggle. Indeed in one sense the process of creating favourable conditions for military struggle does not end until the day of victory.⁴

Taken in isolation, this quotation seems to regard the 'subjective factor' as purely military. Again, on Debray, he wrote in 1967:

There may well be substance in Debray's claim that inappropriate and mechanical adherence to this formulation [Lenin on the conditions for a revolutionary situation], regardless of changing and different conditions, may have acted as an obstacle to revolutionary initiatives by some vanguard parties. ... In some countries (including Cuba) the commencement of armed struggle which led to eventual victory was

1. Slovo was principal theorist from the inception of MK until the 1980s. In an obituary, Pallo Jordan notes that Slovo's 1976 publication "No Middle Road" was "the virtual bible of activists in the mass democratic movement and the underground during the late 1970s and 1980s" and that in the 1980s Slovo "was among the small group of comrades active in drafting the so-called Green Book, which served as the central strategic document for our movement before the Kabwe Conference of 1985." (*Slovo*, p. 233).

2. See Slovo's specific engagement with this in "No Middle Road," p. 182. Also Mzala, "Armed Struggle in South Africa," *African Communist*, 82, 3rd Quarter 1980, pp. 67–69.

3. William Pomeroy, *Guerrilla Warfare and Marxism*, in the *African Communist*, 39, 4th quarter, 1969, pp. 83–84. Cf., Slovo, "No Middle Road," 1976, p. 184.

4. Slovo, "The Armed Struggle," 1968, p. 4; also Slovo, "No Middle Road," 1976, p. 183.

undertaken by groups outside the Communist ranks and in some cases with initial opposition from Communist Parties. There is no doubt (and again Cuba is proof of this) that given certain minimum pre-conditions, the actual commencement and sustaining of guerrilla activities operates as an extremely important factor in hastening the evolvement of insurrectionary conditions.

Slovo then, however, turned to the other side of the question: "At the same time it is a dangerous illusion, fostered by so many of Debray's expansive and over-generalised formulations, that the injection of armed groups into a country in which there is severe repression will of itself (and subject only to the professional skill of the armed groups) 'slowly spread like an oil patch.'"¹ He criticised Debray for "Blanquism," labelled him a "spontaneist" and accused him of "military economism" because of his elevation of the *foco* above the party.² "To put it at its lowest we must doubt the adequacy of the 'Foco', isolated from the masses both in town and countryside and unified only by war and its immediate political objectives, to give overall political guidance."³ (In fact, Che also stressed that "Popular support is indispensable.")⁴ In the "violent armed phase there are dangers of adventurism and the devaluing of the political factor," he wrote.⁵ Drawing on the lessons of Che's failure in Bolivia, Slovo wrote "The doctrine that the masses will, in some spontaneous way, respond to an insurrectionary center—a military *foco*—needs serious re-examination."⁶ The lessons he drew from the MK-ZAPU fighting in Rhodesia were similar: it "... underlined the need for careful political preparation of the population and for guerrilla groups to be integrated within the community rather than functioning as isolated *foci*."⁷

In his 1968 article, Slovo wrote "Given the sort of minimum preconditions I referred to above, the actual commencement and sustaining of guerrilla activity operates as an extremely important factor in creating more favourable conditions for eventual victory." To this one side of the question, however, he added immediately, to qualify his 'militarism', "But it is not the sole factor," and, in a footnote, wrote: "Debray ... tends to proceed from the proposition that 'the most important form of propaganda is military action', to a conclusion that in most of Latin America the creation of military skilled guerrilla foci is sufficient to bring about favourable conditions for an eventual people's military victory. Thus he underrates the vital connection between the guerrilla struggle (which in its early stages must of necessity be of a limited magnitude) and other forms of militant mass activity. He sees the FOCI (which in terms of his approach must assume overall political as

1. Slovo, "Latin America and the ideas of Regis Debray," *African Communist*, 33, 2nd quarter, 1968. This article was reissued in pamphlet form and according to the editors "was translated and reproduced in many parts of the world": *African Communist*, 38, 3rd quarter, 1969.

2. Slovo, "Debray," pp. 44–48, 54. Slovo also showed that Debray differed from Castro on the party.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

4. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 113. See also Guevara, *Venceremos*, p. 267: "To attempt to conduct this type of war without the support of the populace is a prelude to inevitable disaster."

5. Slovo, "Problems," *Socialist Register* 1973, p. 325.

6. Slovo, "Che in Bolivia," p. 54. See also Slovo, "No Middle Road," 1976, p. 184.

7. Slovo, "No Middle Road," p. 194. See also "Che in Bolivia," pp. 57–58; Slovo, "Problems," *Socialist Register* 1973, pp. 329–30.

well as military leadership) as having (certainly in the initial phase) to cut itself off from the local population.”¹

In contrast to Debray, in other words, Slovo *appeared* to emphasise the need for political rather than military leadership, as well as the need for political mobilisation of the masses. However, Slovo too could easily slip into Debrayist formulations: “a people which has exhausted the ‘reformist option’ responds to the revolutionary one when the feasibility of hitting the enemy has been *demonstrated by deeds* as well as words” [my emphasis].²

Debray was imprisoned in Bolivia in 1967 and subsequently released. In the 1970s he published a re-evaluation of *Revolution in the Revolution*, which essentially disavowed *foquismo*. In the meantime the alternative to guerrilla war, the strategy of Chile, of trying to ‘get to socialism’ through a parliamentary Popular Front, had failed—in the nightmare of Pinochet’s military coup on 11 September 1973. The struggle in Vietnam, however, had been successful and Debray now based his analysis of guerrilla warfare on this model. He now dubbed his *foco* theory “vanguard war” in contrast to what had been a “people’s war” in Vietnam.³

Foquismo in its most simplistic sense—the sense in which I myself helped to make it widely understood by presenting a unilateral and grossly oversimplified image of the Cuban revolution, for which I must bear sole responsibility—resulted in dissociating the military struggle from the political, the underground struggle from the legal, the action of the vanguard from the mass movement, strategy from tactics, the hills from the towns, the advanced sectors of the populace from the more backward.⁴

What was the basic error of *Revolution in the Revolution*? The argument put forward passed quickly over the (politico-economic) premises to get straight to the conclusions; it presented the result (a guerrilla force in action, linked closely with the people and becoming the nation’s political vanguard) without any cause, a specific military product without the (economic, social and political) conditions that produced it ... the book gave some useful, abstract, indications about *how* to resolve the problem of power, without considering whether, here and now, the necessary conditions existed in which it could *be* resolved.⁵

Elsewhere in his critique he expresses himself more theoretically:

... it is a transposition into military terms of the one-sided exaggeration of the “political” factor at the expense of economic and social factors. Both [militarism and politicism] in fact rest on the basic hypothesis that the spirit of decision and

1. Slovo, “The Armed Struggle,” 1968, p. 4. He continues, “There are many indications, including the increasing devotion of resources to mass illegal propaganda throughout the country, that the ANC’s approach on this important question is different.” Later Mzala was to write, regarding the Wankie etc., operations, “it is doubtful whether these units, even if they reached SA safely, would have managed to survive long in the absence of a pre-arranged political infrastructure to receive them and serve as their first local trainees.” (“Umkhonto We Sizwe: Building People’s Forces for Combat, War and Insurrection, Part I,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 23).

2. Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, p. 201.

3. See particularly Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, the chapter on “Vanguard War and People’s War.”

4. *Ibid.*, p. 107. For his updated account of the Cuban revolution, see *ibid.*, pp. 126–29.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

operational capacity—combined with the highest moral qualities—of a handful of outstanding individuals are in themselves enough to alter an established situation, to reverse class relationships, to overthrow a whole socio-economic structure.

He criticised himself for “voluntarism,” “subjectivism,” “utopianism.”¹ “The vital point was that, in most cases, the armed revolutionary struggle never appeared as the direct expression—or culminating point—of the political and economic class struggle also taking place at the same time in each country.”² He affirmed that the rural armed struggle needed the active support of the peasantry.³ He criticised himself for “separating the military instrument from the social class, the armed method from the economic and social conditions in which it is being used; then, logically, the instrument takes precedence over the class, the method over the concrete conditions, and instrument and method become the predominant and determining factors ...; finally, the instrument—the army or Party—replaces the class whose interest it is, *and the method—the armed struggle—replaces its political and social objectives*” [my emphasis].⁴ “There is revolutionary alienation the moment the element of ‘leadership’, ‘vanguard’, ‘crack units’, ‘political or military cadres’ develops in theory and practice into an *autonomous body*, superior to ‘the led’, ‘the main force’, ‘the reserve troops’, ‘the rank and file.’”⁵ These criticisms could in fact be applied to MK, throughout its existence.

Strategy and Tactics, the Morogoro Conference document, was, according to Mzala, “obviously a development. Unlike Operation Mayibuye, it clearly saw the military strategy as forming part of, and being guided by, a broader political strategy to ensure that revolutionary battles were fought on all possible fronts, involving not just an army but the whole masses of the oppressed people.”⁶ However, the attempt in *Strategy and Tactics* to articulate and summarise both sides of the questions posed in the Cuban struggle was very uneasy. It stated:

We reject the approach which sees as the catalyst for revolutionary transformation only the short-cut of isolated confrontations and the creation of armed resistance centres. Does this mean that before an actual beginning can be made by the armed challenge we have to wait for the evolvment of some sort of deep crisis in the enemy camp which is serious enough to hold out the possibility of an immediate all-round insurrection? Certainly not! We believe that given certain basic factors, both international and local, the actual beginning of guerrilla warfare can be made and having begun can steadily develop conditions for the future all-out war which will eventually lead to the conquest of power.

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 172–77. Debray also argues that the *foco* theory is taken from Lenin’s *What is To Be Done?* (pp. 158–59), though Lenin corrected himself from the misinterpretations of this text (pp. 167–68). Slovo, however, quotes *What is To Be Done?* in criticism of Debray! (“Debray,” p. 48).

2. Debray, *Critique*, Vol 1, p. 178.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 187–88.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 185–86.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

6. Mzala “MK, Part I,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 23. See Maren Saeboe, “Paradox of Exile: The ANC and MK in Angola, 1976–89,” University of Natal, M.A.

It referred to the “danger of the thesis which regards the creation of military areas as the generator of mass resistance” and insisted that “[t]he primacy of the political leadership is unchallenged and supreme and all revolutionary formations and levels (whether armed or not) are subordinate to this leadership ... the involvement of the masses is unlikely to be the result of a sudden natural and automatic consequence of military clashes. It has to be won in all-round political mobilization which must accompany the military activities.” Political preparation for armed actions was envisaged, although

... it is not easy to determine the point at which sufficient concrete political and organizational preparations have been carried out to give our armed detachments the maximum chances of survival and growth within any given area. There is no instrument for measuring this. But we must not overdo the importance of the subjective factor and before embarking upon a path which is in one sense tragic although historically inevitable and necessary, certain of the basic minimum conditions already mentioned must be present and certain minimum preparations must have been made.¹

Military (guerrilla) action, in other words, *could* hasten the development of a revolutionary situation, yet political mobilization was necessary to lay the groundwork for military action. How much politics was necessary was uncertain! This would have been a conundrum even in a rising tide of mass mobilization. In a period, as in South Africa in the latter part of the 1960s, of defeat and counter-revolution, the way out was even more problematic.

In 1971 Slovo wrote of the relation of political and military struggle:

They cannot be tackled chronologically and the movement’s planning must ensure the necessary balance and blending of both sides of this essentially single struggle. This has meant an intensification of the movement’s efforts in the sphere of reconstruction, propaganda and general agitation throughout the country. Creating a core of trained professional armed cadres, putting them into the field with adequate logistical support and a minimum amount of contact to enable them to sustain their operations in the initial period, requires independent planning. It cannot be the overnight response to a sudden twist in the political situation. *In this sense military planning, as opposed to political planning, has what one might term some mechanical aspects which inevitably involve making certain static assumptions about the future.* If operations go smoothly and according to plan the beginnings of action will be the result of a deliberate decision. *If not they could be triggered off by the need of the armed group to defend itself from enemy attack. The exact moment in time when actual armed action occurs will thus not necessarily coincide always with the most favourable local or even national situation. For this reason it is unrealistic to tie the movement’s planning for the commencement of operations in the chosen regions to the probability of the emergence of a special local or national crisis, or to regard it as the culmination in each case of a full programme of propaganda and organizing work* [my emphasis].²

1. *Strategy and Tactics*, pp. 6, 8–9. A document, to repeat, written by Slovo.

2. Sol Dubula [Joe Slovo], “10 years of Umhonto We Sizwe,” *African Communist*, 47, 1971, p. 31. See also Slovo, “No Middle Road,” pp. 194–95 for an identical passage.

In *Dawn* in 1986 Slovo wrote of attempts before 1976 to return militarily trained activists and to reconstruct a political underground:

On the one hand you cannot fight a people's war without the leadership of a political organization. You need an underground, which is capable of providing both political and military leadership. On the other hand the post-Sharpeville and post-Rivonia successes of the enemy had created such a demoralization that *without the beginnings of armed activity, without a demonstration of our capacity to hit at the enemy, it was difficult to conceive of people getting together in any large measure to reconstitute the political underground.* To put it more simply; without a political underground network and internal leadership it is not possible to engage effectively in people's armed struggle and, in our situation, *without the beginnings of military struggle the task of political reconstruction assumed difficult proportions.* And thereafter we entered a phase in which it became necessary, however long it was going to take, to find ways of getting back into the situation and *to demonstrate that we were able to hit the enemy as an important factor in helping to stimulate the process of political regeneration* [my emphasis].¹

All the bold passages were, within an ostensible framework of the primacy of politics, justifications for militarism, for *foquismo*. One can see how the existence of militarily-trained cadres in exile in Africa created pressures to ignore the idea of the primacy of politics in favour of trying to turn the situation around through purely military action. As Debray put it (quoted above), *separating* the military instrument from the social class ... then, logically, the instrument *takes precedence* over the class, the method over the concrete conditions, and instrument and method become the predominant and determining factors ...; finally, the instrument ... *replaces* the class whose interest it is, *and the method—the armed struggle—replaces its political and social objectives.*" This is why, despite constant verbal warnings against it, there was a constant tendency to militarism in the South African struggle—to the methods of *foquismo*, of the "detonator theory," of "armed propaganda, of 'propaganda of the deed'."²

In addition, this strategy was flawed because it was a strategy for *rural* guerrilla warfare. In 1971 Slovo continued to insist that initially at least the struggle must be fought in *rural* areas: "Because of the imbalance of military strength the guerrilla group, in order to survive and maintain its cohesion and mobility, has in general to operate *away from the urban complexes* in which the enemy is strongest and is most highly organised and centralised. It has to operate in terrain in which the basic population from whom it draws its strength is in the overwhelming majority."³ In 1981 Mzala appeared to take a different position, stating that "any strategic perspective would be moving from insufficient, nay, false, premises if it

1. "The Second Stage: Attempts to Get Back," Joe Slovo, *Dawn*, 25th anniversary issue, 1 January 1986, p. 33. There is a similar passage in Slovo, "No Middle Road," p. 194 which Mzala compares to Operation Mayibuye's affirmation that armed struggle will inject confidence into the masses as an example of "armed propaganda," which he supports: "Armed Struggle," *African Communist*, 82, p. 70.

2. In 1973 Turok commented that "the detonator theory [i.e., *foquismo*] which dominated the movement's thinking for some years has not entirely been left behind" (*Strategic Problems*, p. 53). Debray in fact uses the term "armed propaganda" to mean political propaganda by guerrillas (*Revolution in the Revolution*, pp.46–58). I use it here in the sense it has been used in Southern Africa, to mean propaganda of the deed, through armed action.

3. Sol Dubula [Slovo], "10 years of MK," *African Communist*, 47, pp. 32–33.

did not recognise that South Africa is above all else an industrial capitalist society”—apparently, in other words, recognising the need for a struggle based on the working class.¹ But at the same time he tried to justify the emphasis on *rural* guerrilla warfare: “The fact that the 1969 document [*Strategy and Tactics*], like Operation Mayibuye, saw rural areas as the main theatre of guerrilla operations in the initial phase, did not alter our recognition of the fact that only the industrial proletariat can and should play the role of leader of the South African revolution ... The theory of guerrilla warfare maintains that the enemy has to be attacked where he is weakest. It is this consideration, therefore, that gives the rural areas this strategic role.”² What a misuse of dialectics!

In the event there was no armed activity by MK after 1968 until after the Soweto uprising of 1976.³ Crisis in the ranks of MK after the Wankie and Sipililo campaigns was resolved only by the Morogoro Conference, which was critical of the strategy of the campaigns and put a certain emphasis on building a political underground inside South Africa to prepare to receive guerrillas.⁴ Turok, however, could write in 1973 that “the view is now growing within the movement itself that solidarity work and international questions have absorbed the exile leadership to the point where internal work has been neglected.”⁵ But the fundamental difficulty for a guerrilla strategy was the geographical isolation of the ANC, SACP and MK from South Africa. Zambia and Tanzania, moreover, were relatively unreliable as “rear bases,” with MK cadres temporarily expelled from Tanzania in 1969, for example.⁶ Together with this, what Slovo called a “dialogue lobby”—for dialogue with the SA regime—periodically raised its head in Africa.⁷ In 1972 the ANC headquarters moved from Tanzania to Zambia.

1. Mzala, “MK, Part 1,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 24. He argued that by placing the SA revolution in the context of the international transition “from capitalism to socialism” and consequently according a “special place” to the working class, *Strategy and Tactics* made this recognition.

2. *Ibid.* He added, “Such a strategy ... ensures that the enemy forces ... are dispersed and spread throughout the vast expanses of the countryside and the small towns, thereby transforming the cities from being potential to being actual weak links in the enemy’s structure.”

3. “The stark reality is, after more than ten years of effort, there is as yet no evidence of any form of military engagement inside the country” (Joe Slovo, “No Middle Road,” 1976, p. 200). See also Slovo “The Second Stage” in *Dawn*, 1 January 1986, p. 34.

4. “In 1969 the ANC made a deliberate decision to shift its approach from sending into the country armed groups of persons to ‘spark off’ guerrilla warfare, and instead emphasised the need to first extend and consolidate an ANC underground machinery as well as to generally mobilise the people, especially the Black working population, into active mass struggle around both local and national issues.” (Mzala, “Umkhonto We Sizwe: Building People’s Forces for Combat War and Insurrection, Part 2,” *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 21). This indeed was the period (c. 1969–76) when Raymond Suttner (in Durban), Jeremy Cronin, David and Sue Rabkin (in Cape Town) and Tony Holiday (in Johannesburg) conducted virtually solo propaganda activity: see R. Suttner, *Inside Apartheid’s Prison*, (University of Natal Press, Durban, 2001); Interview with Jeremy Cronin MP by Dr Helena Sheehan, recorded on digital video on 17 April 2001 in All Africa House at the University of Cape Town; Interview with Tony Holiday by Martin Legassick and Thozama April, Cape Town, 17 May 2002; R. Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, pp. 114–19, 124. There is no evidence of a connection between this activity and the revival of the mass movement, however.

5. B. Turok, *Strategic Problems*, p. 52.

6. Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, pp. 96–100.

7. Slovo, “Problems,” *Socialist Register* 1973, p. 329.

Part II: What Strategy for the Armed Struggle? 1976–87

History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and ‘subtle’ than even the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine. This is understandable, because even the best vanguards express the class consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands, whereas the revolution is made, at the moment of its climax and the exertion of all human capacities, by the class consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes.

V.I. Lenin¹

We were clearly not dealing with a defeated enemy and an early revolutionary seizure of power by the liberation movement could not be realistically posed.

Joe Slovo, explaining the negotiated settlement, 1992²

Throughout the 1960s, the (guerrilla) struggle of the Vietnamese people against the United States military juggernaut—over half a million US troops at the peak—had formed a central part of the international situation. In 1975 final victory was achieved in Vietnam and the country was reunited.³ Only in 1978–79, however, was there an attempt by the ANC leadership to digest the lessons of Vietnam.

From the late 1960s, however, liberated areas had existed in Mozambique and Angola. The outbreak of a revolutionary crisis in Portugal in 1974, in large part a product of its colonial wars, led to the victories of the liberation struggles in Mozambique and Angola (with an ominous invasion of Angola by South Africa in 1975). As in China and Cuba, the result was the elimination of capitalism.⁴ On

1. V.I. Lenin, *Left Wing Communism*, p. 76.

2. Slovo, “Negotiations: What Room for Compromise,” *African Communist*, 130, 3rd quarter, 1992.

3. It is interesting how little theoretical attention was paid to the Vietnamese struggle in the 1960s and 1970s. In his review of Pomeroy’s collection, *Guerrilla Warfare and Marxism*, (*African Communist*, 39, 4th quarter, 1969, pp. 80–81) Slovo refers in passing to writings included by Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, and he quotes the same passage from Giap in “No Middle Road,” (1976), p. 193. Ben Turok, *Strategic Problems*, refers also in passing to writings by Le Duan. See also “Off the cuff” [interview with Vo Anh Minh], *Sechaba*, 3, 12, December 1969 and reference to Le Duan in my review of *Armed Insurrection* (*Sechaba*, 5, 11, November 1971).

4. Slovo, “Problems,” *Socialist Register*, p. 336–37 quotes Dos Santos and Cabral prior to independence as talking of the real possibilities of “taking the way of socialism.” However, the possibilities for the abolition of capitalism were created, as in China, by the flight of Portuguese capitalists, and did not depend on the (weak) “subjective factor” in the personalities of Dos Santos and Cabral, etc. (who had not even instituted communist parties as elements of the liberation fronts.) Hugh Trevor, “The Question of an Uprising of the Whole People” *African Communist*, 98, 3rd quarter, 1984 refers to a shift in the terminology of the SACP in the 1970s from “national democratic revolution” to “people’s revolution.” This is probably related to a conception of the end result being a Mozambique/Angola type situation rather than a (capitalist) Ghana/Guinea type situation.

the basis of a guerrilla army, the consequence was bureaucratic one-party dictatorship. Within five years, with ZANU able to use Mozambique as a rear base, the Smith regime had fallen as well. Mugabe's sweeping election victory in 1980 revealed that he need only have lifted a finger to have ended capitalism in Rhodesia also. Instead, the capitalists were allowed to remain, although the guerrilla-army-come-to-power in Zimbabwe also came to exhibit Stalinist features in its rule. Thus, by the decade of the 1980s only South Africa and South West Africa/Namibia remained as arenas of the struggle for liberation. Both in the African dimension and more generally, despite the failure of Che in Bolivia, the methods of guerrilla struggle appeared to have been vindicated.¹ In the Southern African context, the "Unholy Alliance" had been broken and white minority rule had lost substantial ground.

In 1973 Slovo had written:

... any revolutionary action in the Southern African region is organically inter-related. Any theory which is based on first liberating one territory and then another must work to the advantage of the enemy. There can be little doubt that the massive potential in terms both of military force and economic resources which South Africa and its allies command will be mobilized at any point at which a breakthrough occurs ... It is theoretically conceivable that the divisions and contradictions present between the white-exploitative regimes might lead these powers to concede a form of nominal independence to some of the less important parts of the area in the interests in the last resort of perpetuating the system as a whole. South Africa might, for instance, consider it expedient, in the face of a collapse by the Smith regime, to tolerate a Black client regime in its place.²

Slovo was too conservative. Mozambique and Angola had won real independence—though the SA invasion of Angola was an attempt to mobilize against a "breakthrough."

The liberation of Angola, moreover, opened up a new base and training area for MK from late 1975,³ and from mid-1976 the Soweto uprising brought a stream of young recruits—perhaps 3000 to the ANC, tripling the size of MK—to the armed struggle.⁴ Defending its colony of South West Africa, however, and in aggression against the Angolan non-capitalist regime, South Africa (together with its proxy UNITA) waged war on and in Angola from 1978 through the 1980s. South African aggression was soon extended to Mozambique and other black-ruled territories of the region, partly against the non-capitalism of the Mozamb-

1. In 1979 the Sandanistas achieved a victory by guerrilla struggle in Nicaragua. The Soviet Union, however, prevented them from breaking with capitalism. In the meantime deformed workers' states had come into being by means other than guerrilla struggle—generally coups by junior officers mobilizing mass support. For example in Ethiopia in 1974 and in Burma, Syria, Somalia, Benin, Congo-Brazzaville.

2. J. Slovo, "Problems," *Socialist Register* 1973, pp. 322–23, 331.

3. See "Viva MPLA!" *Sechaba*, 10, 1st quarter, 1976, pp. 1–6; Maren Saeboe, "Paradox of Exile."

4. Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age," p. 131 on numbers.

ican regime and partly to deny MK rear bases contiguous to South Africa.¹ In this the South African regime got encouragement from the similar United States support for the counter-revolutionary Contras in Nicaragua. This was also the aim of the Nkomati Accord (March 1984), the similar accord signed with Swaziland, and South African support for the coup which toppled Chief Jonathan in Lesotho in January 1986. Crucial entry routes were cut off. However, these were crucial only to a strategy of protracted guerrilla war. Like China and Cuba and Vietnam, Angola and Mozambique (and Zimbabwe) were peasant countries. Success here through rural guerrilla war was an entirely different question from armed struggle in the urbanised conditions of South Africa. While SWAPO might expect victory by means of rural guerrilla struggle, the South African situation required a strategy of armed self-defence of the workers' movement (as a preparation for insurrection), which would have implied far lower-key re-entry to the country for trained cadres.

In the 1970s the mass movement in South Africa had revived.² Mass struggle had ground to a halt in the 1960s after the banning of the ANC and PAC. The revival of the struggle inside the country came about first in the 1972–74 national industrial strike wave encapsulated as the (early 1973) “Durban strikes” and secondly in the national youth “Soweto” revolt and general strikes of half a million and a million workers of 1976. Some ANC activists noted “a combination ... of a number of tactics ... associated with insurrectionary situations: extensive street fighting ... times at which the regime lost control (very brief periods of course) of townships ... the veld fire effect of the mass uprisings spreading from centre to centre very rapidly ... unlike anything one had seen in the past.”³ As Mzala wrote later, “The devastating apathy in the oppressed community that followed the Rivonia arrests had come to an end.”⁴ All this took place independently of the ANC. Contrary to some earlier ANC accounts, this is the message of Govan Mbeki’s *Sunset at Midday*.⁵ This mass movement declined through 1977 and 1978 and began to reappear in 1979–81—through another industrial strike wave and

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1. On SA’s counter-revolutionary strategy see, for example, W. Minter, *Apartheid’s Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1994); J. Hanlon, *Mozambique: The Revolution under Fire* (London, Zed, 1984); *Beggar Your Neighbour: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1986); R. S. Jaster, *The Defence of White Power: SA Foreign Policy under Pressure* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1989); *SA in Namibia: The Botba Strategy* (Lanham, Maryland, University Press of America, 1985); J. Dzimba, *SA’s Destabilization of Zimbabwe, 1980–89*, (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998); R. Davies and D. O’Meara, “Total Strategy in Southern Africa: An Analysis of SA Regional Policy since 1978,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 2, 1985, pp. 183–211. On rear bases see Debray; *Critique*, vol 1, p. 115ff. and p. 119: “the rearguard ... is the condition that makes guerrilla warfare possible in the first place”; Mzala, “MK: Part I,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 22. The Strategy and Tactics Commission at the 1985 ANC Kabwe Conference concluded, “We have never had, we have not got, and we are unlikely to ever have, a rear base in the classical sense ... we have to accept that all [our] objectives have to take off and grow within the limitation of the absence of an effective rear base with a friendly border.” (Quoted Mzala, “MK: Part I,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 22). On rear bases see also Turok, *Strategic Problems*, pp. 49–50; Slovo, “No Middle Road,” pp. 189–90; R. Kasrils, “Peoples War, Revolution and Insurrection,” *Sechaba*, May 1986.
 2. Some have argued that the Wankie campaign of MK in 1967 had a “foco” effect, stimulating the mass uprisings in South Africa. There seems no evidence for this.
 3. Pallo Jordan quoted in Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 141.
 4. Mzala, “MK, Part 1,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 26.
 5. G. Mbeki, *Sunset at Midday*, pp. 17, 25–28, 38. See also Mzala, “MK Part 2,” *Sechaba*, January 1987: “It must be pointed out that the events of June 16th came as a complete surprise for everyone.”

another nation-wide school boycott. Though it declined again through 1982 and 1983, the 1979–81 movement was a herald of a decade of a mass revolutionary upsurge inside South Africa. As Mamdani wrote, “The paradigm of resistance shifted from an exile-based armed struggle to an internal popular struggle.”¹ It was essentially a movement of the working-class majority in the country, organised and unorganised, young and old, women and men. In the end it embraced the working class in the rural areas as well. “Only struggle educates the exploited class,” wrote Lenin, “only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizons, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will.”² This power was achieved by the working class *independently* of the activities of MK, and required armed self-defence to sustain itself.³ The balance of forces was shifted from white power to black power: society was democratised from below by the struggle of the working class.

After 1976, MK members were sent back into South Africa for the first time on military operations. Significantly, the “targets” were almost exclusively *urban*: economic installations, courts, pass offices, police stations in Soweto, etc.⁴ As a then MK leader explained:

It was very different from traditional guerilla warfare, when they fought from the borders in large units to the centre of the country. In this case the ANC basically had an approach where they would infiltrate small pockets of the country deep into the heart amongst the masses of the people, in the townships. ... Because initially, and because of the development of the country, we don’t have bush, we don’t have the forest that we could operate from. And we suffered a number of casualties in the rural areas.⁵

This confirmed what the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC wrote in 1982: “Lacking any basis for a peasant war, guerrilla struggle in our country can only take the form of *urban* guerrilla action.” This, the MWT of the ANC added:

... cannot overthrow the regime. *It is, quite simply, not a strategy for power.* There is no force which can make the revolution for the SA workers. The revolution will be a workers’ revolution or it will be no revolution at all ... Unless armed struggle is developed as the struggle of the working masses, as an expression and extension of their organised strength, their social aims, and their need to change society, it will

1. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 30.

2. Lenin, “Lecture on the 1905 Revolution” [January 1917], *On Trade Unions*, p. 299.

3. The working class is far broader than employed workers. It includes all those who are non-owners of the means of production, and dependent upon earnings to survive. Thus it includes the unemployed (some of whom, however, may become lumpenised), women at home, etc., etc.

4. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 220–21. Between November 1978 and March 1980 MK was probably responsible for 15 out of 17 attacks which involved: 9 of sabotage of economic installations, 4 on police stations or personnel (2 in Soweto and 1 in Soekmekaar), 2 on civilian targets (1 the Silverton siege in a Volkskas bank near Pretoria), 1 on a court building and 1 on a building administering the pass laws.

5. Maren Saeboe, “Paradox of Exile,” p.65. Interview with Aboobaker Ismail (Rashid), a former MK instructor in Angola and head of MK Special Operations, Pretoria 7 December 2000. However, the thinking of the Revolutionary Council in this period, according to Slovo, was still in terms of establishing “liberated zones of varying degrees of permanence” by military action, even in the urban areas: see Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 137–39.

not rise above an impotent method of exerting “pressure” on the ruling class ... Within the ANC, we must urge a turn toward the preparation of methods and tactics in the realm of armed struggle which will lead to the eventual armed insurrection of the mass of working people against the state. Effective preparations are needed for the arming of the workers and youth; importing and stock-piling the necessary arms as well as acquiring and making arms from all possible sources within the country; carrying on military training in SA in conjunction with the building of the underground political networks of the ANC; and so on.¹

For arguing for this position in the late 1970s, however, four supporters of the MWT of the ANC were expelled from the ANC.

Why did we argue that urban guerrilla struggle could not be a strategy for power? Firstly, we argued that armed actions by small groups sent in from outside the country diverted attention from the force which could challenge the regime: the organised working class. Lenin criticised the terrorism of the Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia for the same reason: “the Socialist-Revolutionaries are talking themselves blue in the face in asseverating that they recognise terrorism only in conjunction with work among the masses, and that therefore the arguments used by the Russian Social-Democrats to refute the efficacy of this method of struggle do not apply to them... In their naiveté the Socialist-Revolutionaries do not realise that their predilection for terrorism is causally most intimately linked with the fact that, from the very outset, they have always kept, and still keep, aloof from the working-class movement”.² Trotsky maintained that such armed actions produced “disarray” in the ranks of the working class:

If it is enough to arm oneself with a pistol in order to achieve one’s goal, why the efforts of the class in struggle? If a thimbleful of gunpowder and a little chunk of lead is enough to shoot the enemy through the neck, what need is there for a class organisation? ... In our eyes individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it *belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness*, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission. The anarchist prophets of the ‘propaganda of the deed’ can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses. Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more ‘effective’ the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears ... life settles again in the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And, as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy.³

1. *South Africa’s Impending Socialist Revolution* (March 1982), p. 155.

2. V.I. Lenin, “Revolutionary Adventurism”, (1902), *Collected Works*, VI, p. 187.

3. L. Trotsky “Why Marxists oppose individual terrorism” (c. 1909) reprinted in *Marxism opposes individual terrorism* (London: Militant, 1982).

In South Africa, indeed, the masses were already in struggle. MK actions did not divert them from that, and the ANC in the 1980s called for ‘mass struggle’ in addition to ‘armed struggle’. In that sense many of the actions of MK had neutral rather than negative effects on mass consciousness. Moreover, *to the extent that many people wrongly believed that MK was a defence organ for the mass movement*, MK sustained its popularity. However an MK leader does also refer critically to the “myth that MK [was the people’s] highly trained professional army which would liberate them”—a sign of the disempowering of the masses characteristic of urban guerrilla action.¹ Some have argued that the symbolism of actions by MK infused the masses with the confidence to take on Hippos and other embodiments of the state. The problem was that the creativity of the masses in this respect was deprived of arms and skills in the hands of MK. The requirements of urban guerrilla action kept many potentially excellent political cadres in MK *isolated* from the mass movement, rather than assisting in developing it. Secondly, as indicated in the above quotation by Trotsky, we believed that urban guerrilla struggle played into hands of reaction and gave legitimacy to the state to intensify its means of repression (which by the end of the 1980s included not merely detention and torture but death squads and vigilantes). This was undoubtedly a detrimental effect of MK actions.

Some argue that while Lenin opposed terrorism, he advocated guerrilla struggle during the 1905 revolution. Indeed there are writings of his that do precisely this—but what he is talking about is the use of guerrilla *tactics* by the workers’ movement in the context of barricades and mass street fighting. He is not talking of a guerrilla *strategy* organised separately from the workers’ movement.²

Moreover, the method employed from the start of armed actions after 1976 did not conform with the precepts of *Strategy and Tactics*: put political mobilisation first. Alfred Nzo wrote in *Sechaba* (September 1980) putting essentially the Debrayist line of *foquismo*: armed actions

... instil self-confidence and transform the latent hostility of the people to the regime into open mass confrontation; they intensify the sense of unease and insecurity among the enemy forces; they increase the conviction among the struggling people that victory is certain and popularise armed struggle.³

Mzala tried retrospectively to justify this.

Was our approach to the question of immediate military action to remain the same after the regime had unleashed a reign of terror on the unarmed men, women and children? Should we have continued, even under those circumstances, to insist on patient political organisation, postponing all armed activity until we had built sufficient forces to sustain it ... Swift and radical adjustments had to be made ... unless the ANC demonstrates at all times its capacity to meet racist violence with revolutionary violence it would forfeit [the] leadership position of the SA liberation strug-

1. Cal Salojee quoted by Barrell, “Conspirits to their age”, p. 329.

2. See for example Lenin, “Lessons of the Moscow Rising”, (1906) *Collected Works*, Vol 11, pp. 171–78. See also footnotes 165 and 192.

3. A. Nzo “The People’s Programme: Statement to June 26th meeting, Camden, London,” *Sechaba*, September 1980.

gle ... Also, if MK did not avenge the death of our martyrs, even the apartheid regime would have interpreted its 'silence' as a sign of weakness ... It was under these considerations that our movement arrived at the decision to begin a phase of armed propaganda.¹

In 1980, indeed, Mzala wrote that MK attacks on Soweto police stations were "ideal operations ... in terms of political mobilization of the masses."² If his analysis above is correct, however, the aim was not principally to stimulate mass activity, which was already present, but to maintain the prestige of the ANC. Houston, in a study of the UDF, goes as far as to claim that "armed propaganda" was guerilla activity intended not even to mobilise mass struggle but to "popularise the armed struggle" [my emphasis]!³

In reality, once the mass struggle revived in the 1970s and 1980s, armed propaganda became irrelevant. As Cassius Mandla put it in the midst of the revolutionary upsurge of 1984–87: "The present mass action has by far outpaced armed struggle and armed propaganda. Armed propaganda at a time when the masses are stoning Casspir armoured vehicles is an anachronism."⁴

In October 1978 an ANC NEC delegation visited Vietnam. According to Howard Barrell, the insistence on the *primacy of the political* was the main lesson coming from this visit.⁵ Slovo wrote a report on the visit emphasising the primacy of the political and arguing that "much ANC practice hitherto had been militaristic."⁶ A joint meeting of the NEC and the RC (Revolutionary Council) was held in Luanda in late December 1978 to hear a report back.⁷ This meeting elected a Politico-Military Strategy Commission consisting of O.R. Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo, Moses Mabhida, Joe Gqabi and Joe Modise to discuss the lessons of Vietnam. Besides reaching some (problematic) formulations on the relation of national liberation to working class struggle, the Commission addressed the question "Do we see the seizure of power as the result of a general all-round *nation-wide insurrection* which a period of armed struggle will have helped to stimulate; or are we

1. Mzala, "MK, Part 2," *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 22. He adds, "Not that such military action becomes a substitute for the painstaking task of political mobilization and organization; the point is, without its introduction into the political scene, the very prospect of political mobilization and organization becomes seriously undermined ... [need] to demonstrate that the enemy is not invincible. Attacks on police stations and other vital economic and military targets were proving precisely this point ... They have been living examples to millions that it is MK and not the apartheid regime that is really invincible. These are the operations that made our people say, even as they buried their dead, that here is an army of liberation equipped and capable of leading them to victory."

2. Mzala, "Armed Struggle," *African Communist*, 82, p. 70.

3. G. Houston, *The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa: a case study of the United Democratic Front, 1983–1987*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 25–26.

4. Cassius Mandla, "The Moment of Revolution," *Sechaba*, November 1985, p. 29.

5. See H. Barrell, "The Turn to the Masses: the African National Congress' Strategic Review of 1978–79," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 1, 1992. Compare Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age," pp. 178–208 which de-emphasises the significance of the turn, stressing rather the continuation of old approaches. Houston draws from the Barrell article the wrong conclusion, which is explicitly denied in the article as well as in the thesis, that the United Democratic Front was a simple product of this decision: *National Liberation Struggle*, p. 27.

6. Barrell, *ibid.*

7. Early 1979 was the time when the memorandum by the editor of *Workers' Unity* was presented to SACTU, expressing dissatisfaction with progress internally and linking this to political questions: see page 10.

embarked on a *protracted people's war* in which partial and general uprisings will play a vital role?" It opted for the second approach.¹ This phrase "protracted people's war" was a new one, adopted from Vietnam, and presumably was aimed to stress the idea of the primacy of the political rather than a militaristic approach. The Commission emphasised, however, that the idea of a protracted people's war was

... broadly consistent with the thinking of the movement up to now as expressed in the bulk of our basic documents ... with an added emphasis on the possible role of partial and general uprisings." It did not rule out the possibility of a general insurrection in the future but stressed that this could not be "an exclusive perspective."²

As we shall see, however, it was the idea of nation-wide insurrection that was to be picked up in debate on the question in the 1980s, as the result of developments inside the country.

Vietnam had been fought predominantly as a rural struggle in South Africa the struggle was predominantly urban. The Commission, however, made no explicit pronouncement on the question of rural versus urban struggle! But it consciously did not refer to the "peasantry." "We have restricted ourselves to the expression 'landless mass in the countryside' to describe the rural stratum. We concluded that not enough research and analysis have so far been undertaken to enable us to characterise both the size and social significance of what could classically be regarded as the peasant class and the process of differentiation within it. We consider it of vital importance that such a study should be undertaken. It should also cover those who, as migrant workers, live and work both in the industrial and the rural sectors, and the extent to which these workers continue to rely in part for their survival on 'subsistence' farming undertaken by their immediate and extended families."³ There is no evidence that such a "study" was ever undertaken.

The Commission confirmed in words the primacy of the political: "the armed struggle must be based on, and grow out of, mass political support and it must eventually involve our whole people."⁴ A people's war, it stated "can only take root and develop if it grows out of, and is based on, political revolutionary bases amongst the people."⁵ It admitted errors in this respect when it concluded that "*our revolutionary practice* has in the recent past not always conformed to the strategic approaches contained in some of our basic documents, and has ignored

1. "Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission (the 'Green Book') to the ANC National Executive Committee," Parts One and Two with two annexures, August 1979, Karis and Gerhardt, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol 5, *Nadir and Resurgence 1964–79*, pp. 724, 729.

2. "Report of Politico-Military Strategic Commission," pp. 724–25.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 725.

4. In this respect, wrote Mzala, it "tended to confirm our own belief": "MK, Part 2," *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 23 and pp. 23–24 generally. See also Annexure D to the report (by Chris Hani) on implementation of the primacy of the political: Karis and Gerhardt, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol 5, pp. 732–33.

5. "Report of Politico-Military Strategic Commission," pp. 729, 731. Somewhat contradictorily, it also stated that "We must work for the creation of a widespread network of nuclei among the people which can undertake military and para-military activities, guided and determined by the need to generate political mobilisation, organisation and resistance, which nuclei will become the basis for creating an armed people as the foundation of the struggle for power"—a more *focoist* formulation.

key experiences of earlier phases of struggle. This is particularly in the vital areas of our approach to mass mobilisation, the character of our armed struggle, and the way we see it taking root and growing.”¹ It claimed that:

At the present moment we are at a stage when the *main task* is to concentrate on political mobilisation and organisation so as to build up political revolutionary bases throughout the country. In as much as the growth of the armed struggle depends on the rate of advance of the political struggle, the armed struggle is *secondary* at this time.²

The waters were once again muddied, however, by qualifying lawyer’s phrases:

The forms of political and military activities, and the way these activities relate to one another, go through different phases as the situation changes. It is therefore vital to have under continuous survey the changing tactical relationships between these two inter-dependent factors in our struggle and the place which political and military actions (in the narrow sense) occupy in each phase, both nationally and within each of our main regions. The concrete political realities must determine whether, at any given stage and in any given region, the main emphasis should be on political or on military action.³

According to Mzala, the ANC resolved on the need for *three years* active political mobilisation and organisation before commencing “people’s war.”⁴ However, it was in precisely these three years that a special operations unit was formed, headed by Slovo, to conduct *military* actions: including the sabotage of SASOL in early June 1980; the rocket attack on Voortrekkerhoogte in 1981; the attack on the coming-on-stream Koeberg nuclear power plant in 1982; the attack outside SAAF Pretoria HQ in which 19 were killed in 1983.⁵ In reality the Commission left the way open for this in stating that:

Organised armed activity continues to be one of the vital elements in helping to prepare the ground for political activity and organisation ... the purpose of such organised armed activity at the present stage is (a) to keep alive the perspective of People’s revolutionary violence as the ultimate weapon for the seizure of power (b) to concentrate on armed propaganda actions, that is, armed action whose immediate purpose is to support and stimulate political activity and organisation rather than to hit at the enemy.⁶

1. “Report of Politico-Military Strategic Commission,” pp. 722–23. Even at the level of the Commission, it admitted, “different interpretations emerged and we found it necessary to debate some very fundamental propositions ... which go to the root of our strategic line.”

2. “Report of Politico-Military Strategic Commission,” pp. 729–31.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 731.

4. Mzala, “MK, Part II,” *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 24. Also Mzala, “Towards People’s War and Insurrection,” *Sechaba*, April 1987.

5. See Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 236–80 *passim*, 299–301, 323–24. The SOU, moreover, from 1979 to early 1983, was responsible only to the president of the ANC, bypassing the military command of MK and the Revolutionary Council.

6. “Report of the Politico-Military Strategic Commission, August 1979,” p. 732.

In a recent interview, Cronin “explains” Slovo’s special operations:

What exile had produced was a kind of tendency, an accumulation tendency: to accumulate an armed force in exile, which was more and more like a conventional army, and was more and more diverging from the realities and struggle in South Africa and was more and more about building a bureaucratic and military apparatus that would then give you some kind of standing in the future after liberation happened, rather than an instrument for waging that liberation struggle.¹

Cronin continues:

Slovo had, through the 1980s, the late 1970s really, been fighting that battle inside of the ANC and inside of the party. His way of fighting it was characteristic of Joe Slovo, which was not really to solve the organisational problem, but to bypass it. ... There was this ANC, which was bureaucratic and less and less capable of actually waging a struggle, and stuck in exile and in guerrilla camps. Well he couldn’t do much about that, so he thought, and therefore what he did was set up a special operations team, which carried out the most spectacular military operations.²

The implication present at various points in Barrell’s thesis, from interviews with other ANC leaders, is that Joe Modise was the one wishing to build a conventional army.

The perception created by the “Green Book” was that a *focoist* strategy of armed propaganda had been replaced by a strategy of “people’s war” *a la* Vietnam (with, it is true, no conscious adaptation of this to the urban industrial conditions of South Africa). In reality “armed propaganda” fuelled by the “detonator” idea continued to be the main form of military activity. In Vietnam “armed propaganda” was conducted in an entirely different way. A group of guerrillas, armed, would board a bus, hold it up, and make a political speech to passengers; or take over a cinema and do the same.³ In South Africa, however, armed propaganda simply meant explosions—“propaganda of the deed”. A further document drafted by Slovo was adopted by the Revolutionary Council in about April 1980. While this paid lip-service to the “primacy of the political” analysis of the Politico-Military Strategic Committee it claimed that armed activity “had a vital contribution to make towards domestic political mobilisation.” As examples of “armed propaganda” it stated that “Every clause in the Freedom Charter pointed to a [military] target which would serve to highlight a particular demand.”⁴ Nothing could be more *focoist* than this! Slovo had clearly not lost his enthusiasm for what his daughter, as we have seen, described as a “Boy’s Own adventure”.

1. Compare Slovo, “Problems,” *Socialist Register* 1973, p. 327: “On the individual level participation displaced from the field of struggle nurtures a great range of deformations, from notions of survival to the mentality of the bureaucrat who waits to administer under conditions of eventual victory.”

2. Interview with Jeremy Cronin MP by Dr Helena Sheehan, recorded on digital video on 17 April 2001 in All Africa House at the University of Cape Town.

3. Cf., Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 240.

4. “Our Military Perspectives and Some Special Problems,” quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 247–49. Kasrils is quoted by Barrell in the same vein: “we always felt that we had the people; there was this militancy; and that all that was needed was a little bit of a spark to light a prairie fire.” (*Ibid.*, p. 240).

Slovo's 1980 document argued that "armed propaganda" was a short-term objective, while the longer-term objective was "developing a sustained armed struggle inside South Africa,"¹ presumably "protracted people's war." In an interview with Barrell, Slovo spoke of the need to be prepared for uprisings inside the country:

... a situation in which we [MK?] could enter a region in large numbers relying on the massive and overwhelming mood of militancy to provide cover and protection" and stressed the importance of building up "within the country adequate supplies of ordnance [hand grenades, small arms] which would be protected and adequately preserved for us when such a time came." But these tasks were never undertaken.²

The viewpoint of the machinery responsible for internal organisation was that the continuation of an armed propaganda approach "was not helping to *organise* an ANC domestic political-military base—the single most important task given that the ANC was unlikely ever to enjoy reliable bases in states adjacent to South Africa."³

As late as February 1986, towards the end of the revolutionary upsurge of 1984–86, *Sechaba* printed a justification of armed propaganda—that is, military predominance—identical in words with what it had printed from Alfred Nzo in September 1980!⁴ The retrospective analysis by Mzala was correct:

These successes, however, began to carry with them certain strategic mistakes, which we realised later than we should have. Armed propaganda was supposed to be a phase, but not the permanent characteristic of our armed activity. And these special operations were meant to be only an aspect of, but not a substitute for the main groundwork of military organisation and building of combat forces from among the people. And therefore when the overall pattern of our armed activity became these hit-and-retreat tactics, the main task began to suffer somewhat and this began to show.⁵

However, Mzala, as we shall see, despite the critical examination which he began to make of armed struggle strategy, never fully made the break from guerrillaist conceptions.

1. Slovo document, quoted Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age," p. 248.

2. Slovo interview, Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age," p. 252. Also *ibid.*, p. 366.

3. Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age," p. 253. However, they still had some illusions in armed propaganda: "while not disputing that armed activity helped to create favourable domestic conditions for the ANC in a *general* sense."

4. "Editorial: Umkhonto We Sizwe—People's Army," *Sechaba*, February 1986.

5. Mzala, "MK, Part 2," *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 22. Mzala continues that the problem began to show in casualties, which he then attributes to difficulties in hiding among people who "did not understand who the guerrillas were." (p. 23). The casualties can alternatively be attributed to the fact that MK was externally coordinated, and that its members pursued "targets" which were completely unrelated to self-defence of the movement. Mzala's analysis is, however, more penetrating than the smug complacency of Dan O'Meara: who writes that in the 1979–83 period, "Many ANC attacks were explicitly linked to community struggles—bolstering a sense of local power." (*Forty Lost Years*, p. 324). Which attacks, Dan? And what has bombing a Leyland showroom, for example, to do with winning a strike at Leyland? What has bombing a government office have to do with organizing a boycott of an election? What "local power" is bolstered by either of these actions?

The rise of the mass movement (together with the lessons of Vietnam) sparked off a debate in ANC and SACP publications on the strategy of armed struggle—looking, in the words of Mzala for “a new approach in our military planning and activities.”¹ This was, to my knowledge, the only serious debate that took place in the pages of these publications in thirty years of exile. It reflected serious questioning in the ranks of the activists, and an inability of the leadership to present convincing answers. Mzala launched the debate with an article provocatively titled: “Has the Time Come for Arming the Masses?” This was an implicit critique of “armed propaganda” and pointing to a “people’s war” strategy.

He pointed out that “retaliatory violence” had become a spontaneous but permanent feature of the 1980 mass upsurge.² He quoted Marx and Engels, Lenin on 1905, and Giap to support his case on the need for arming the masses.³ He argued for this “from the standpoint of guerrilla war leading to armed insurrection.” Vietnam, he wrote, showed the need to “create from the masses of the people combat units, self-defence units, etc. ... Combat actions stimulate mass action and mass action further stimulates combat activity.” He cited Giap on turning every village into a fortress. “In this way racist troops and police are drowned in the raging sea of the people’s war, and because the enemy is in the minority, he is scattered and stretched further, so that in spite of his modern war equipment, he is made weak and defeated”—invoking Mao’s axiom on the use of space.⁴

A further article by Khumalo Migwe also drew on the lessons of the post-1976 struggle—where “the masses are *themselves* breaking an old pattern of peaceful struggle” [my emphasis]—and claimed to supplement Mzala’s “strategic” considerations with “tactical” ones. Like Mzala, he drew on lessons of the 1905 Russian revolution.⁵ Like Mzala, he called for the creation of “combat units, armed with modern weapons.” A proposal of his own was that MK members should create temporary training centres

... in some houses or mountains ... and train small groups of carefully selected people from the factory floor, village, migrant worker’s hostel, university or high school. In this way the primary task of the many MK cadres would be to multiply them-

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1. Mzala’s retrospective analysis, in “Towards People’s War and Insurrection,” *Sechaba*, April 1987, p. 2. I have gone through *Sechaba* and *African Communist* for contributions to this debate, but not yet *Dawn*, the journal of MK produced in Angola.
 2. Mzala, “Has the Time Come,” *African Communist*, 86, p. 85. Compare Mzala, “Armed Struggle,” 1980, p. 73, where he had praised the militancy of the 1976 youth by referring to their “suicidal offensive campaigns” [my emphasis]. Gorm Gunnarsen, “Leaders or Organizers Against Apartheid: Cape Town, 1976–84,” (Ph.D, University of Copenhagen, 2002), e.g., p. 149, in contrast, stresses the relative non-violence of the mass struggle in 1980.
 3. Perhaps significantly, the quote from Marx and Engels concerns the need for arming the workers (in Germany in the next revolutionary wave after 1848) so they can prevent their “betrayal” by the party of the democratic petty bourgeoisie which “will begin with the very first hour of victory”—in the address which ends with the words “Their battle-cry must be: The Permanent Revolution”: Address of the Central Committee of the Communist League, March 1850, in K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 326.
 4. Mzala, “Has the Time Come,” *African Communist*, 86, pp. 83–94. Loyally, on the basis of the 1962 SACP programme, at this stage he did not rule out a non-violent transition to democracy. Mzala also had an article in *Dawn*, MK journal, in April 1982.
 5. “In the preceding period Lenin had fought against the use of terror tactics by small groups of conspiratorial intellectuals who disregarded mass organization. Now, however, in 1905–06, Lenin wholeheartedly supported the use of guerrilla warfare in the cities by small groups of workers, which took place as part of the mass struggle [my emphasis].” (K. Migwe, “Further Contribution,” *African Communist*, 89, p. 80). See also footnote 3, p. 49.

selves among the people inside the country rather than all of them doing the actual fighting at this stage.¹

This discussion, however, still assumed that it was “guerrilla actions” that were preparing the way for the emergence of a revolutionary situation—and thus remained within the framework of militarism. Though Mzala and Migwe conceived of arming the masses, they did not address the strategy and tactics of this in terms of the need for self-defence of the mass workers’ movement rather than the conducting of “guerrilla actions” in separation and isolation from that movement.²

As this debate progressed, rural guerrilla struggle was presented as more and more marginal.³ In 1981 Mzala argued that urban struggle needed to be backed up by rural guerrilla operations because of the limitations of actions in the townships. These, he stated, included the distance of townships from city centres (where urban warfare needed to take place), the deliberate isolation of townships, and the inability to use “certain heavy weapons”[which were these, carried by guerrillas?] in townships. “This is not to challenge the feasibility of the urban guerrilla struggle,” he added: the need was to combine both and leave it to “concrete reality to determine which one will play the primary role.”⁴ Later Cabesa maintained that while “armed campaigns will be focused on cities and urban areas,” this needed to be combined with rural warfare to force the state to scatter its forces throughout the countryside.⁵ Interviewed in May 1986 in *Sechaba*, Ronnie Kasrils, while “not ruling out” rural guerrilla war, pointed out that it was “only one element, and maybe not even the leading or dominant mode”—and again dealt with it mainly in the context of dispersing enemy forces. Instead, he maintained that “urban areas are vital terrain of our struggle ... we should utilise

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1. Migwe, “Further Contribution,” *African Communist*, 89, pp. 77–87. One reply was from “Hugh Trevor” who poured cold water on Mzala and Migwe. He was ostensibly arguing from a position of supporting “insurrection”—though in reality his arguments could be used also to justify building MK as a conventional military army outside the country. (Hugh Trevor, “Question of an Uprising” *African Communist*, 98). He maintained that Mzala’s and Migwe’s conception of arming the masses had a “somewhat narrow military-technical tendency,” and concerned guerrilla activities rather than the arming of the masses in the context of insurrection. (For this he was later criticised by Quadro Cabesa, “From Ungovernability,” *African Communist*, 104) He insisted that “an armed uprising of the people cannot be successful in the absence of decisive action by a professional people’s army (professional in the sense that its cadres are full-time and trained in the use of modern weapons and in military technique)” —and there was the need for MK to become this. (Referring to Lenin on this, he completely ignored the distinction between an enemy army from whom soldiers need to be won away and MK, an entirely different kind of force. He also differentiated the Vietnamese from the Chinese revolution—the Vietnamese “resisted the narrow and defensive Maoist conception of ‘protracted people’s war’ (guerilla war, based in the countryside, as more or less the exclusive form of struggle)” and cited on this Van Tao, “The Differences Between the Vietnamese and Chinese Revolutions,” *African Communist*, 2nd quarter, 1981, pp. 98–109.
 2. Curiously, reference to armed self-defence came in a broadcast by Chris Hani and Mac Maharaj on Radio Freedom (published in *Sechaba*, November 1984). They said that “if MK is to become *the defensive organ of the people, the organ protecting our masses*, there is a responsibility from the people also to feed MK; not just with food but with manpower ... [to establish a] link particularly between the mass overt struggles and the underground and armed struggles of our people.” Even before MK came, they continued, people should organise themselves to be ready to join to “defend themselves against all the injustices and brutalities the enemy perpetrates against us.” There is no evidence that this strategy was ever followed up in practice or implemented.
 3. But see, sticking to the idea of rural guerrilla struggle, M. Shombela, “Our Armed Offensive: Military Strategy in SA,” *Sechaba*, March 1986.
 4. Mzala, “Has the Time Come,” *African Communist*, 86, p. 91. He made similar points in “MK, Part 1,” *Sechaba*, December 1986, pp. 24–26.
 5. Quadro Cabesa, “From Ungovernability,” *African Communist*, 104, pp. 38–39.

our urban strength, our township strength, our working class strength as a springboard.”¹ In 1982 Migwe postulated a situation

... where the enemy’s administrative organs are completely destroyed, his administrative stooges sent scurrying away like scared reptiles, leaving the township, location, or village a people’s territory. When the enemy’s administration and other repression offices have been destroyed and troops who come to patrol are constantly gunned down by armed units at night; when the people stop paying rent and other taxes in the township (partly because the rent offices are no longer there), we can then get the people to elect, democratically, leaders who represent their aspirations.

Migwe imagined this happening as the result of “political mobilisation accompanied by an irrevocably determined guerrilla struggle.”² This situation did in fact develop in the townships in 1985–86, but it developed spontaneously, without reference to MK and without reference even to the UDF leadership.

The debate clearly had an impact. A 1983 document (drafted by Slovo) considered the idea of an “armed people” but stated that the movement did not have the capacity or means to distribute arms now, and that if it did they wouldn’t necessarily be used on the side of the revolution. It wrote of the need for “people’s involvement in the armed struggle not merely as spectators but also as participants.”³ This, however, was entirely back to front. It was not really a question of “the people” becoming involved in (MK’s) “armed struggle” but of MK combatants involving themselves in the defence of mass political (and economic) struggles of “the people.” In other respects this document merely reasserted the formulations of the post-Vietnam visit review of 1979. Slovo also complained of pressures on MK—on the Special Operations Unit—to “meet deadlines for sabotage blows” rather than to go for long-term preparations. Barrell correctly comments that this was “a little disingenuous coming from Slovo.” Moreover, the document still envisaged the creation of “liberated zones” in the rural areas. It considered the possibility of insurrection but argued that this could not be planned, but that the forces developed in a “protracted people’s war” could readily be transformed into those of insurrection. It repeated the need—never carried into practice—of making caches of small arms inside the country.⁴ It did not resolve the questions at stake.

The Kabwe Conference of the ANC (16–23 June 1985), second such event to be held in exile, was precipitated by the mutinies in Angola in 1984. It took place, however, in the midst of the biggest upsurge ever of the mass movement inside South Africa. As we have seen, there were deep anxieties and problems among cadres regarding what should be done. Mzala was later to argue that the 1969 Morogoro

1. R. Kasrils “Peoples War,” *Sechaba*, May 1986. See also Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, (1993), p. 195: “The factor missing in SA was a massive peasantry.”

2. Migwe, “Further Contribution,” *African Communist*, 89, p. 85.

3. “Planning for People’s War” (1983), quoted by Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 316. Mzala quotes it as stating that an “armed people” must “become part of a policy to involve more and more armed people as organised contingents in support of our struggle and acting under our leadership”: Mzala, “Towards People’s War and Insurrection,” *Sechaba*, April 1987.

4. See Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 315–21.

Conference document *Strategy and Tactics* defined an “approach to armed struggle that *confines* our military strategy within a perspective of a purely protracted guerrilla warfare” [my emphasis].¹ Moreover, *Strategy and Tactics*, in the face of the facts, defined the strategy as one of rural guerrilla warfare. It was clearly outmoded. Yet no new strategy and tactics document was drawn up beforehand to present to the conference, nor was such a document passed by the conference.²

The Kabwe Conference did confirm the idea of a strategy of people’s war—a strategy which as we have seen had not yet been implemented. The Commission established at the conference on strategy and tactics resolved that:

By People’s War we mean a war in which a liberation army becomes rooted amongst the people, who progressively participate actively in the armed struggle both politically and militarily, including the possibility of engaging by partial or general insurrection. The present disparity in strength between the enemy’s forces and our own determined the protracted nature of the struggles ... Such a struggle will lead inevitably to a revolutionary situation in which our plan and aim must be the seizure of power through a general insurrection (or whatever ways might present themselves) ... Unless we have the necessary force and means under our command and at our disposal, there is no way that we can succeed and the opportunity will pass us by ... The crisis in our country is such that we must be ready to respond to the most dramatic turn of events which might bring the whole situation to a decisive turning point. Already the present explosive situation in the country is pregnant with such possibilities ...³

As in 1979, in addition to the idea of protracted people’s war, the Commission raised the possibility of insurrection. The conference also endorsed the idea (first raised by Migwe?) of MK as the “organised advanced detachment” of the revolutionary army, a sort of officer training corps for the development of a “mass army” out of the youth.⁴

However, there were an additional two Commissions established at the conference (one on national structures and one on internal work). The three came up with different formulations on the key organisational question of the relationship between the political and military direction of the struggle. The final formulation in the main conference talked of “combining” the two, which resolved nothing because it was not precise enough. Pallo Jordan was appointed convenor of a sub-committee to draw up a strategy and tactics document *after* the conference. This sub-committee completed its work, however, only in *October 1989*, more than four years later—by which time the situation inside South Africa had become fundamentally transformed.⁵ Barrell concludes:

1. Mzala, “Towards People’s War,” *Sechaba*, April 1987.

2. However Houston, *National Liberation Struggle*, p. 26 refers to an ANC document of 1985 titled *Strategy and Tactics* which I have not seen and which he claims placed “greater emphasis on the mobilisation of various forces in the country to participate in the liberation struggle.”

3. *Ibid.*

4. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 374. See also Cabesa, “From Ungovernability,” *African Communist*, 104, pp. 36–37; A. Mashinini, “Preparing the Fire,” *Sechaba*, April 1985—“the main force in our drive to seize power in SA should be the political army of the armed masses, supported by the advanced, organised contingents (MK), primarily as a shock force to handle hard military targets and not the other way about.”

5. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 379–83.

At the most crucial moment in its history, in the midst of the most serious uprisings in SA in which its name was being widely proclaimed a leader of a revolution, the ANC had held a conference and concluded it with no generally agreed formulation of strategy.” The result, according to him, was “deepening strategic confusion.” By the end of 1986 the ANC was “stuck in a profound strategic hiatus, if not crisis.”¹

The movement had begun to revive again in 1984 with the boycott of the elections to the tricameral parliament (and the biggest industrial strike figures yet of the decade). In September 1984 a huge rent boycott in the townships of the Vaal Triangle caused the SA government to send in the SADF. The response was a two-day general strike called in the Transvaal on 5 and 6 November. From then until mid-1986 a revolutionary movement unfolded in workplace after workplace and township after township in South Africa. Existing organs of government in the townships (community councils) were dismantled. In every quarter, starting possibly with Lingelihle, Cradock around November 1984, organs of working class democracy (semi-soviets) began to be established—shop stewards committees and locals, street committees and “peoples’ courts.” *Society was being reconstructed from below, on the basis of participatory democracy.* As Cronin put it in an interview with Howard Barrell: “Problems that we [in the UDF leadership] were posing rather abstractly—the question of state power—was being addressed not theoretically but practically, through the destruction of the lower echelons of state power and the building of alternative forms.”² From 1985 until at least 1993 South Africa witnessed at minimum a general strike a year. In 1986 workers began to carry out factory occupations: siyalala la. At funerals mass formations of youth assembled, jogging down the streets, singing revolutionary songs calling for arms, many of them armed with carved wooden weapons—indicating the desire for mass arming in self-defence against the state. Despite the imposition of a stringent state of emergency from mid-1986,³ particularly in urban areas, the movement began to spread to rural areas. Moreover, industrial strike figures peaked in 1987 with the SAHRWU, POTWA and NUM strikes. Though the movement declined again in 1988, by 1989 it was already reviving, and industrial strike figures between 1990 and 1993 were huge.

In the process of the 1984–87 uprising the townships became “ungovernable”—not due to ANC leaders’ call for this, but because of militant resistance to the accumulating every-day problems of rents, councillors, etc., etc.⁴ The initial reac-

1. *Ibid.*, p. 384, 388, 442.

2. Cronin, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 370. Barrell also states that “ANC operational officials acknowledge that their organisation’s role in developing street committees and rent boycotts in the black townships in the 1985–86 period was minimal.” (p. 402).

3. A less stringent state of emergency imposed selectively in July 1985, and finally lifted in March 1986, had relatively little effect on the development of the movement.

4. When this paper was presented at the conference in Windhoek, Raymond Suttner maintained that the general line given by the ANC from Lusaka was followed inside the country, particularly in the case of the ‘people’s power’ slogan. However when we started to discuss chronology, he refused to be specific. My position is that of Lenin, in the quotation which heads this section (II) of this paper—that it is the consciousness of the masses, rather than of organisations, which spearheads revolutions.

tion of the ANC leadership was that a revolutionary situation existed and insurrection was on the agenda. This was the import, for example, of an NEC statement of 25 April 1985 (apparently drafted by Slovo) titled “ANC Call to the Nation: the Future is Within our Grasp.” It maintained that “a long-lasting national work stoppage, backed by our oppressed communities and supported by armed activity can break the backbone of the apartheid system and bring the regime to its knees.”¹ The January 1986 message of the NEC claimed that “This past year we made significant strides towards the transformation of our armed confrontation with the apartheid regime into a people’s war. Of crucial importance in this regard has been the creation of mass insurrectionary zones in many parts of our country, areas where the masses of the people are not only active, but are also ready in their hundreds of thousands to assault the enemy for the seizure of power.”² Both these statements, and others like them, vastly exaggerated the situation, and created completely unrealistic expectations among those that they reached. In contrast, the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC characterised the situation as “pre-revolutionary”—containing elements of a revolutionary situation but falling short of it because of the “long-standing strength and rigidity of the system of white domination—the existence of a powerful, steeled apparatus built almost entirely on the privileged minority”—which meant that “the maturing of a revolutionary crisis, and the preparations of conditions for the collapse or overthrow of the regime, is an unavoidably drawn-out, bitter and bloody process.” It argued that “a fundamental split in the ruling class, paralysing the regime and reflecting itself also in deep divisions in the middle class and unreliability within the state apparatus” was the “most important ‘missing element’ in the situation now.”³ Kasrils was correct when he said “the townships have been made no-go areas for the enemy. ... The enemy can only enter those townships in massive convoys. ... In the vacuum that’s left we’ve seen the rudimentary organs of people’s power being created.”⁴ But even if this was the case, the state retained its strong social basis in the white areas.⁵

The failure of the Kabwe Conference to provide a clear strategy coupled with the intensity of the struggle inside the country sharpened the debate which took place in the pages of movement’s publications. Towards the start of the upsurge Mzala, this time in *Sechaba* (January 1985) rather than the *African Communist*, remarked how “events throughout the country and in the Vaal Triangle in particular demonstrate in no uncertain terms that the masses have definitely resolved to change the

1. Cf., Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 370–72. It was one of the (rare) occasions on which Mac Maharaj and Joe Slovo agreed in the assessment of the situation: *ibid.*, pp. 374–75. Compare the criticism of the NEC statement in Paul Storey, “South African Perspectives: Workers’ Revolution or Racial Civil War?,” May 1985, supplement to *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, 16/17, pp. 44–45.

2. “Attack! Advance! Give the Enemy No Quarter,” (8/1/1986) *Sechaba*, March 1986, p. 6.

3. “SA—How Close to Revolution?,” Editorial Board statement, 12 November 1984, *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, p. 3.

4. Kasrils, “People’s War,” *Sechaba*, May 1986, p. 5.

5. For other somewhat similar (though later) assessments of whether a revolutionary situation existed in South Africa, see C. Bundy, “History, Revolution and South Africa,” *Transformation*, 4, 1987, especially pp. 69–73.

situation by organised violent means.”¹ What were the prospects of arming them, he asked. The task, as Mzala defined it, was “to continue ... to form the nuclei of armed guerrilla units, operating both in the towns and countryside, which should exist not merely to fight to destroy the enemy’s military strength, but also to shoulder such important tasks as mobilising the masses, organising them, arming them, and helping them to form revolutionary organs of self-government.” In this article, his conception was of developing a guerrilla war of a mass character, and he mentioned the idea of armed insurrection only in passing.

An article later in the year by Mzala, however, was significantly subtitled “How Should We Raise the Question of an Armed Insurrection?”² The mass movement, he stated, had “reached another peak.” “[I]f we shelve the question of armed insurrection from our strategy and tactics programme” he continued, “we may as well proceed to support one or other of the local liberal parties ... we will have to stop all talk about ‘The People Shall Govern’ and go for a negotiated peaceful settlement with the racist regime ... we must concentrate ... on the arming of the masses in actual combat and in preparation for the *inevitably coming* armed insurrection” (p. 67) [my emphasis]. However, he added that “to prepare this working class for the task of insurrection, it must acquire the fighting experience and military training through the only feasible combat tactics in South Africa, the tactics of a militarily inferior force against a modern army—guerrilla tactics (p. 71).³ What was needed was for the working class to gain experience in the methods of armed self-defence of mass struggles. But how was “the working class” to gain this experience through the externally-directed activities of MK?

In this article Mzala predicted the formation of “local revolutionary organs of authority,” which was already taking place. By April 1986 Mashinini was writing of a “peculiar form of dual power” and calling for the creation of “Revolutionary People’s Committees.”⁴ A “dispute” developed between him and Mzala, who by September 1986 was emphasising that such committees already existed, and that what was needed were “people’s communes” along the lines of the Paris Commune of 1870. The question was how to organise people’s power—how to estab-

1. Mzala, “Cooking the Rice Inside the Pot,” *Sechaba*, January 1985. The point of the title was to insist on the re-establishment of ANC leadership inside the country (“inside the pot”) “among our fighting masses.” p. 26.

2. Mzala, “On the Threshold of Revolution,” *African Communist*, 102, 3rd quarter, 1985, pp. 66–77.

3. The article [like Migwe’s: see footnote 5, p. 43] refers to Lenin writing on the Moscow rising of 1905 to justify guerrilla actions. However, it is clear from his quotations that Lenin is using the word “guerrilla” to refer to tactics used in armed self-defence by workers. For example “The whole population is in the streets; all the main centres of the city are covered by a network of barricades. For several days the volunteer fighting units wage a stubborn *guerilla* battle against the troops, which exhausts the troops ...” (*Collected Works*, Vol 11, p. 172). In the same way the MWT of the ANC, discussing possible activities during 1984–86, stressed that defensive tactics were paramount—and while opposing the guerrilla strategy of MK—argued that “Guerrilla-type actions by small armed bands of youth, etc., have a role to play, provided these are subordinated to an overall conception, political strategy, and finally an organized plan centred around the mobilization of the big battalions of the organized workers.” (“SA Perspectives: Workers’ Revolution or Racial Civil War?,” Supplement to *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, 16/17, May 1985, p. 45). These tactics may overlap with, but also fundamentally differ from, those of the urban guerrilla such as outlined by the Brazilian Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (June 1969)—on which see Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 140. They also differ from those represented by “Military and Combat Work” (MCW)—the training for “stimulating urban insurrection” developed by the Soviet Union’s security services and provided to post-1976 MK trainees in the Soviet Union—see Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 142–43.

4. Alex Mashinini, “Dual Power and the Creation of People’s Committees,” *Sechaba*, April 1986.

lish people's education, people's courts, a people's militia. "Despite the fact that the racist state power has not yet been smashed and dismantled, people's power in its rudimentary form does exist already" and this was proof "that the people in struggle can seize power despite the economic military strength of a regime."¹ Some ANC activists referred to these organs as "a form of liberated zone."²

Throughout 1985–87, in articles in *Sechaba* and the *African Communist*, the idea of insurrection was promulgated—usually in conjunction with the idea of protracted guerrilla war. Quite wrongly, most people still maintained that it was guerrilla struggle (rather than the mass struggle inside the country) that was preparing the conditions for insurrection. Thus, commenting on Mzala, Mashinini claimed that it was the "unbalanced material forces" between the combatants that required a guerrilla struggle. The essence was to protract that struggle as long as possible in order to wear the enemy out, in particular through disruption of weak links in the economy. Unrealistically, he argued for the creation of dugouts and tunnels and underground depots as in Vietnam. He wanted "every house a guerrilla base, everything a weapon, everyone a soldier" to prepare for the insurrection.³ In a later article Mashinini argued on the one hand that the power and consciousness of the black working class in South Africa had "brought to the fore of the struggle the issue of insurrection, as it can be conceived of in any highly developed capitalist country,"⁴ but still regarded insurrection as the culmination of a process of protracted war and the spread of ungovernability.⁵

Cabesa also stressed that there existed "those conditions which bring to the forefront of the struggle the issue of insurrection" but similarly maintained that the task was "a protracted people's war as a means in a revolutionary process towards the ultimate build-up into an insurrectionary overthrow of the South African state."⁶ In April 1987 Mzala argued that:

... the objective as well as subjective factors have changed radically during the decade of the 1980s giving birth for the first time in our history to mass insurrectionary zones in numerous Black districts of our country ... we must be able to adapt our tactics and immediate tasks to the concrete features of every given situation ... the situation today has within it the seeds and the concrete possibility for an

1. Mzala, "Building Peoples Power," *Sechaba*, September 1986. S. Majola wrote, "It is of little avail to canvass for the destruction of the oppressor state machine unless and until we have come up with some positive and concrete ideas as to the forms of organisation which are to take its place." He also wished to refer to "people's communes," and mentioned the lesson that Marx had drawn from the Paris Commune that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the existing state machinery to use for its own purposes: "The Beginnings of People's Power ..." *African Communist*, 3rd quarter, 1986. See also Alex Mashinini, "Dual Power and the Creation of People's Committees," *Sechaba*, May 1987.

2. Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age," pp. 429–31. Barrell (pp. 203–04) also writes that Slovo had introduced the idea that the revolutionary base for MK was 'the people in political motion'—a subordination once again of the political to the military, an inversion of the relationship of soviets to insurrection in Russia in 1917.

3. Alex Mashinini, "Preparing the Fire," *Sechaba*, April 1985. Contradictions would reach "a point of disintegration as our revolutionary war for the destruction of that system continues to escalate in both its ferocity and its magnitude." In addition, crippling the economy would lead to "deepening crisis, growing disorder and ungovernability; retreat of foreign capital; helplessness of the army in the face of this form of revolutionary warfare, for which it is not trained; other social irregularities found in any society on the eve of a revolution."

4. The same phrase was echoed in Cabesa, "From Ungovernability," *African Communist*, 104, p. 29.

5. Mashinini, "Dual Power," *Sechaba*, April 1986.

6. Quadro Cabesa, "From Ungovernability," *African Communist*, 104, p. 33.

insurrection ... The person who now speaks only of protracted guerrilla war is behind the times; such a person is reiterating old approaches senselessly learned by heart ... we have ... side by side, existing together, simultaneously, the possibilities of preparing both for protracted guerrilla warfare and armed insurrection.¹

Ronnie Kasrils, a leading figure in MK, endorsed this kind of approach when interviewed in *Sechaba* in May 1986.

The “army of stone-throwers has to be transformed into an army with weapons. ... We’ve seen the development among our people of forms of warfare, and our people are showing tremendous creativity ... we’re seeing a people’s militia, a people’s self-defence force, emerging.” While guerrilla war remained on the agenda, “armed insurrection must figure as the key way in which power may ultimately be seized. For, unlike FRELIMO or the MPLA, we are not fighting a bush war against a colonial power that may ultimately grant independence after negotiations, and withdraw. In our situation, if real change is to be achieved, we have to face up to the question of state power. How will the existing state structures and instruments of force be destroyed? ... If we are to learn from our people, the township revolts, the decade of rebellion of 1976–86, then surely we need to devise a strategy based on an insurrectionist approach?²

Up until 1985 armed activity in South Africa still comprised (in the words of Barrell) “mainly sporadic sabotage attacks mounted by hit-and-run units that were usually commanded and supplied from abroad.”³ This was no basis whatever for the mythical “people’s war,” let alone preparation, through armed self-defence, for insurrection. The actual activities of MK escalated during 1985 and 1986. Operation Zikomo was launched from mid-1985, sending in large numbers of combatants with hand grenades to participate as “shock troops” in township uprisings. This led to 136 “incidents” of MK activity in 1985, according to Barrell, more than double that of any previous year. Moreover, the ratio of three guerrillas captured or killed for each 13 attacks was MK’s most favourable casualty rate ever. This campaign was brought to a halt when state agents (*askaris*) started to give youth booby-trapped grenades, causing immense suspicions that reacted on genuine MK personnel. In 1986 the number of “incidents” increased to 231—and more of them directed at military and police personnel than ever before. But MK’s success rate dropped to 4 guerrillas captured or killed for every 5 attacks.⁴ In *Sechaba* in May 1986 Ronnie Kasrils maintained that “our trained combatants are now able to merge among our risen people, more and more of whom are being brought into MK units at home.”⁵ In similar vein Dan O’Meara wrote “by May

1. Mzala, “Towards People’s War,” *Sechaba*, April 1987. [By April 1987, of course, the areas of “people’s power” had largely been crushed by the forces of counter-revolution. My comment.]

2. Kasrils, “Peoples War,” *Sechaba*, May 1986, pp. 8–9.

3. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 260. In 1983 and earlier, MK units were in operation against UNITA forces in Angola—which eventually precipitated the mutinies of January–May 1984.

4. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 388–92, 440. Also pp. 326–30. Apparently MK attacks peaked at 300 in 1988 (beyond the period of Barrell’s thesis). There exists, not presently available to the public, a listing of the targets of every MK attack, which would have been an invaluable research tool for this study.

5. Kasrils, “People’s War,” *Sechaba*, May 1986, p. 6.

1986 ... ANC military operations had risen dramatically and were increasingly being carried out by locally trained guerrillas.”¹ In contrast, Barrell’s study maintains that by 1986 there had been “no qualitative improvement in the ANC’s capacity to locate an armed presence inside the country” and that the organisation never achieved “bridging the gap between a largely externally-based MK and internal militants.”²

In an interview with Barrell, Slovo maintained that “we were considering ... the role of armed activity in relation to mass demonstrations ... We were still a long way from having sufficient armed strength to defend the people in the mass against the armed terror of the enemy. An ill-judged military intervention on our part during a mass assembly of people could lead to a massacre with little hope of effective retaliation.” He claimed therefore that MK was “unable to act effectively in support and defence of our people.”³ This is a characteristic caricature by Slovo—like his identification of the Pol Pot regime with the idea of “leapfrogging to socialism,” or his idea of “pure class struggle.” The idea of “armed self-defence” is not the idea of firing on state forces from the midst of mass demonstrations! In tactical terms it involves “guerrilla actions,” but these are carried out by units directly politically responsible to organs of mass protest, not by units commanded from—having so-called “vertical communication” with—outside the country. For example, an effective defence could have been mounted against *witdoeke* in Crossroads and in many other such instances.

“How will the existing state structures and instruments of force be destroyed?” was a question posed by Ronnie Kasrils when he was interviewed in *Sechaba* in May 1986. The state forces had available 400,000 troops and were financed to the tune of more than R3 billion a year. Barrell claims that “ANC theorists had long considered the winning over of a significant portion of state security forces to the ANC a necessary condition for successful insurrection.”⁴ However, this issue was raised in print in official liberation movement publications for the first time since the 1950s by Mzala in 1985.⁵ “Serious attention, Mzala stated in his *African Com-*

1. O’Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 337, citing *Citizen*, 18 March 1986.

2. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 441, 461.

3. Slovo, quoted by Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 250. It is unclear the date at which this “considering” took place.

4. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 362. He also writes, however, that, “Some in the ANC had long argued that it was unrealistic to hold out the prospect of insurrection in SA because of the persistent unity of security forces in their support of state policy”—and that this thinking changed only as a result of insurrectionary pressures in the Ciskei in the early 1980s, the increasing number of black combat troops, and the success of the ECC: *ibid.*, pp. 318–19.

5. The last person to raise this publicly in “official” writing had probably been Julius Lewin, “No Revolution Round the Corner,” *Africa South*, III, 1, October–December 1958, p. 52 drawing on the historian Crane Brinton: “no government has ever fallen before revolutionists until it has lost control over its armed forces or lost the ability to use them effectively; and, conversely, no revolutionists have ever succeeded until they have got a predominance of effective armed force on their side.” It also is touched on in the document drafted by Slovo, “Planning People’s War” (1983) where he writes that insurrection depends on winning over or neutralizing a portion of the state’s armed forces, refers to winning black troops in SA, and to efforts to “reduce [the] morale and willingness to risk their lives for white supremacy” of white troops: Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 319. Barrell points to the influence on this idea of Soviet Military and Combat Work strategy—whose “military work’ component was directed towards winning over, etc., enemy troops: *ibid.*, p. 320.

munist article, “should also be placed on another (often forgotten) condition for the success of insurrection—the *wavering of the troops and their winning over (or a significant majority of them) to the side of the revolution. Preparation for insurrection ... means the struggle to win over the enemy army or at least to neutralise them*” [my emphasis].¹ However, Mzala was the first since the 1950s in the discussion in print of armed struggle in the liberation movement to draw out this key question.

Until the mid-1980s the published material on the strategy of armed struggle had regarded conditions for victory as emerging simply out of the *dispersal* of the state’s armed forces as the result of protracted guerrilla struggle—involving simple application of the maxim that “if the enemy is concentrated, it loses ground; if it is scattered, it loses strength.” A typical example is Mzala in 1980: “The need for the racist soldiers to stretch themselves to protect every inch of the lines of communication and the need to protect the widely scattered installations on which the economy is dependent, will make it impossible for them to be in the borders of the country, to be in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as in the streets shooting the workers when they are on strike ... the very complexity and sophistication of the SA industrial complex makes it vulnerable to effective guerrilla attacks against economic targets, and within a short period ... great havoc and confusion can plague the country, and thus bring near the revolutionary insurrection for seizure of power.”² However, “havoc and confusion” are not identical with a revolutionary situation. Moreover the “stretching” of the enemy’s forces could in theory hasten the onset of negotiations, rather than of revolution.³

Once raised by Mzala in 1985, however, the question of winning over state troops was stressed by others. It was because the idea of insurrection had entered their minds concretely, even if in an ultra-left way. Thus Cabesa quoted from Engels to maintain that the “unconditional breakdown of the armed forces, their ‘disorganisation and the total breakdown of discipline have hitherto become the indispensable condition and result of all victorious revolutions.” He added that the need to have “government troops siding with the revolution” was a point “of special significance. Owing to the racial factor we cannot look for allies in the military, but we must work all out for the large-scale neutralisation of the South African army.”⁴ From the Bolshevik revolution Mashinini drew the identical lesson, with the same quote from Engels.⁵ In a later article he re-emphasised the point: despite the talk of “dual power,” he argued, it was not the case that two governments existed.

1. Mzala, “On the Threshold,” *African Communist*, 102, p. 74.

2. Mzala, “Armed Struggle,” *African Communist*, 82, p. 71.

3. The same argument on dispersal is central to Quadro Cabesa, “From Ungovernability,” *African Communist*, 104, pp. 37–39.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

5. Alex Mashinini, “Preparing the Fire,” *Sechaba*, April 1985. The history of revolution, he argued, revealed various forms. There was (a) the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia; (b) guerrilla warfare leading to armed seizure of power as in Angola or Nicaragua; (c) (spontaneous) popular uprising leading to the seizure of power as in Iran; (d) guerrilla warfare leading to seizure of power through a [negotiated] settlement; and (e) “intra-parliamentary struggle leading to popular seizure of power” as in Chile 1970–73.

There is still one central government in power, that of the racists, which still kills and maims our people, which taxes and exploits our people, which enacts laws and imposes them on our people. There is this difference: it is the racist government which has lost, and is still losing, control over its local organs of Black administration and law enforcement. It is a central government whose local organs of power are being gradually undermined by the masses, and indeed, are disintegrating. It is therefore a central government which, given the unabated continuity and escalation of these campaigns, will in the end remain a centre without reference coordinates, and therefore isolated and irrelevant. ... But let us not lose sight of the fact that this is but an aspect (legislative and executive at Black local levels) of the South African apartheid system. *Its state, whose purpose is to protect and sustain by force of arms the rule of the White racist minority over the democratic majority, is still intact ... the real power of the majority can only be achieved after the revolution has smashed and dismantled this state power [my emphasis].*¹

In a later article Mzala wrote in the same vein:

If the army of the ruling class is still intact in morale and material, if there is no appreciable degree of dissatisfaction within it resulting in its commanders and rank-and-file losing their dedication to the defence of the state, then such an army is capable of making the victory of the revolution difficult ... The outcome of the revolution very often depends on the degree of sympathy for the revolution in the army of the ruling class and on the extent to which its commanding officers can use it against the revolutionary people. ... There has been a maturing recognition among the broad sections of our people that the single most decisive obstacle standing between us and our liberation at this period is the ability of the apartheid regime to make maximum utilisation of its armed forces and police. In street battles behind township barricades, even during stayaway strikes, we are overwhelmed by this military superiority of the enemy.²

In Russia, Mashinini pointed out, the winning over of the ranks of the Tsar's armed forces was eased both by universal conscription and by a homogeneity of demands between workers and soldiers. The racist character of South Africa and its state ruled out both these conditions. Moreover, it would, continued Mashinini, be "naïve, and even dangerous, to draw rigid comparisons between South Africa and [Angola and Mozambique despite their similarities] for this mode of analysis fails to appreciate, or deliberately ignores, *the unique nature of South Africa, which makes most of its features unconventional and unusual.*"³ "What methods then do we have to apply to produce such effects as would compel the South African armed forces to weaken, become impotent and finally disintegrate in the face of popular country-wide upsurge for the seizure of power?" he asked.⁴ But neither he nor any other contributor to the debate in official publications gave an adequate answer.⁵ *The failure to do so was in fact the strategic Achilles heel of the South African revolution.* Some writers gave up on logical answers, such as one

1. Mashinini, "Dual Power," *Sechaba*, April 1986.

2. Mzala, "MK, Part 1," *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 19.

3. Mashinini, "Preparing the Fire," *Sechaba*, April 1985.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Though I quoted Crane Brinton, my initial answer to the question of defeating the state was equally weak: see Legassick, "Guerrilla Warfare ...," pp. 391-92, 397-400.

Cassius Mandla who concluded an article on the need for unarmed mass battles to be “synchronised with co-ordinating stunning armed blows against the enemy’s armed personnel and installations.” A month of such armed action, he claimed, “may well prove to be the long-awaited abracadabra for the dawn of freedom in SA.”¹ [sic!]. Mzala wrote correctly that:

It would be ... naïve to expect the racist army or parts of that army to waver or even to go over openly to the side of the forces of change without first meeting an intensive military combat campaign directed against its military strongholds and personnel, the success of which is facilitated also by the conduct of political organisational work within the armed forces of the enemy. We are therefore as far away from our freedom day as we are from organising military combat forces of the revolution that match the present level of political organisation, that will be sufficiently strong to break or dislocate the racist army and police, and that will finally lead to the collapse of the government.²

If military confrontation would be necessary, however, the *political line* for splitting the state was crucial. For most participants in the debate, the emphasis was on race. The main concentration, in fact, was on winning the allegiance of *black* troops—who were a marginal minority in the state’s forces. In 1979, for example, the Politico-Military Commission had resolved that: “We must work systematically to undermine the morale and cohesion of the enemy’s forces and their social support base within the country. We must in the first place work to win over or neutralise those amongst the black oppressed who have been recruited into the regime’s puppet armed force”—although it did mention in passing the need “to take full advantage of ... secondary contradictions” in order to win over sections of whites.³ Mzala maintained that blacks in the SADF and Bantustan armies were an advantage for the winning of enemy forces—as was the “non-racial” policy of the ANC against “the racial barrier created by colonialism.”⁴ Mashinini paid attention to whites, but his conclusion was the need to create “white anti-apartheid movements” with an anti-militarist character—essentially the End Conscription Campaign, with its moral appeal attractive to sections of the white middle class only.⁵

Kasrils also devoted attention to this question: “History shows that, in the last resort, success or failure hinges upon the attitude which the armed forces of the status quo government will take towards an insurrection. Revolutionary movements seldom achieve their objectives unless they can convert the soldiers whose duty it is to uphold the existing regime, or weaken their spirit.” It was possible, he continued, to win over black soldiers and police though “we may not expect to convert large numbers of white soldiers.” He quoted David Rabkin, who had written in *Umsebenzi* of the possibility of:

1. Cassius Mandla, “The Moment of Revolution is Now,” *Sechaba*, November 1985.

2. Mzala, “MK, Part 1,” *Sechaba*, December 1986. See also Mzala, “Towards People’s War,” *Sechaba*, April 1987, p. 6 on the need to work politically to neutralize or win over “significant sections” of the state military forces.

3. “Report of the Politico-Military Strategic Commission, August 1979,” pp. 732, 727.

4. Mzala, “On the Threshold,” *African Communist*, 102, pp. 66–77.

5. Mashinini, “Preparing the Fire,” *Sechaba*, April 1985.

... paralysing the political direction behind the SADF.” “The SADF is a largely conscript army, subject to all the pressures and tensions of South African society—political, moral and material. Just as they are not impervious to MK bullets (and unfortunately this is the main way in which White South Africa’s eyes will be opened) neither are they ultimately impervious to the mass struggle and the policy of the ANC. The SADF is no monolith, and during a revolutionary crisis its fabric will be placed under tremendous strain. Differences between the conscripted “troopies” and the officer corps will be accentuated, as well as the old English-Afrikaans language divisions and the differences between those officers and men following Botha-Malan-style reform and those whose allegiances lie with the unpredictable HNP-CP rebels. ... Under conditions of a revolutionary crisis it is quite conceivable that the security forces of the state will not be operating at full strength, will be suffering from desertions and demoralisation, from mutiny among Black troops, from indecision and differences at the top, and will not be able to cope with the situation.¹

However, none of these divisions would have been enough to fundamentally split the whites or the state, or to win over whites to the side of the revolution. (Moral anti-apartheid appeals could, as stated already, only affect a small minority of the whites). The only real way to split the whites was on *class* lines. It is true that the white working class, to the extent it had already split from the NP, had split to the right (to the CP, HNP, even AWB). The fact of the political splintering among whites was, however, already a sign of growing crisis in their ranks. A programme of uncompromising and determined mass resistance to national oppression *and to capitalism* had the chance, *in a revolutionary crisis*, of offering a way forward to the mass of the whites. As Mzala wrote, this would have had to be combined with military force against recalcitrant whites. This appeared to be the line that Mashinini was pursuing when he argued for the need to split the whites apart “on the basis of ... inequality of benefits.”² Nor was it inconsistent with ANC policy: *Strategy and Tactics* (1969) had argued that “it is not altogether impossible that in a different situation the white working class, or a section of it, may come to see that their true long-term interest coincides with that of the non-white workers”³—and, indeed, sections of the white middle class would have followed white workers.

The defeat of the state, in other words, would have required at least a part of the whites to swing to the left behind a consciously anti-capitalist class programme promoted by the ANC (not, by the way, the “pure class” programme often caricatured by Slovo, but a programme combining national and class demands). Together with this it would have required effective organisation by the ANC of armed self-defence of black urban and rural working class struggles. Could this white swing have taken place? It sounds impossible—but the state could have been defeated in no other way. In that case a new and far more democratic state would have come into existence—a workers’ democracy on the basis of the organs of

1. Kasrils “People’s War,” *Sechaba*, May 1986.

2. Mashinini, “Preparing the Fire,” *Sechaba*, April 1985, p. 28. See also A. Mashinini, “Revolution and the White Population,” *Sechaba*, July 1984.

3. *Strategy and Tactics*, p. 13.

‘people’s power’ spread throughout society. Without such a strategy all the proclamations of an armed mass revolution to defeat the state were in fact so much hot air. Indeed, much of the activity of MK only served to cement white support for the state.

The way that in fact the containment of so-called “liberated zones” to the townships was addressed in practice was through the idea of “taking the struggle into the white areas.”¹ This was a call made, for example, by President Tambo on 22 July 1985, shortly after the Kabwe Conference, and two days after the declaration of the first state of emergency inside South Africa.² This was echoed by others in publications.

By Mzala:

Two powers cannot exist permanently in a single state: one of them must pass away. If these Peoples Communes, however, become organs of people’s war and armed insurrection, and *lead immediately and despite all odds to engulf the White areas, extending the war to the very industrial centres and White farms, involving in the process wider and broader sections of the White community*, then our revolutionary struggle shall have taken the road towards decisive victory.³

And by Majola:

Our demand is no longer to be allowed to participate in the present Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban City Councils. Our strategy is to take the present war into white areas, and not to share power with any apartheid structure.⁴

The call coincided with the onset of a campaign of planting landmines in border areas (particularly in the western and eastern Transvaal), directed at white farmers.⁵ It was also followed by such terrorist acts as the bombing of Magoo’s Bar in Durban. By the mid-1980s the whites were increasingly splintered, with big swings towards the ultra-right. The “terrorist” strategy that developed—landmines, the Magoo’s Bar bomb, etc.—merely inflamed and enlarged the white ultra-right. It was totally counter-productive to any aims of creating a split among the whites serious enough to weaken the state.

The Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC opposed the idea. Indiscriminate attacks on whites such as were being advocated, it argued,

... will divide and demoralise the oppressed people, unite whites into a ferocious bloc of racist reaction the like of which has not been seen, strengthen the state forces, and bring down ever more savage attacks on the black communities, youth organisations, and trade unions. The way forward for the struggle is to systemati-

1. The idea is in a sense foreshadowed when Hugh Trevor wrote of the need for wider struggles than those in the townships: “Struggles within the townships and Bantustans must be linked to wide-scale struggle in the urban areas (at the centre of these areas) and in the ‘white farming’ areas.” Hugh Trevor, “Question of an Uprising” *African Communist*, 98, p. 70.

2. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” p. 402.

3. Mzala “Building Peoples Power,” *Sechaba*, September 1986, p. 14.

4. S. Majola “The Beginnings of People’s Power ...” *African Communist*, 3rd quarter, 1986.

5. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 420–23. This campaign fizzled out by 1987 because of the opposition of the neighbouring states from which it was launched on a plant-and-run basis, with units spending only a few hours inside South Africa.

cally build the strength of the mass movement round the growing power of the organised black working class, uniting the militant youth and workers in well-planned nation-wide action campaigns against apartheid and capitalism. There is no other way at this stage to effectively take the struggle beyond the flaming township streets and into the camp of the oppressors. A clear class appeal to white workers and middle-class people, themselves in various ways exploited and used by the system, must be patiently maintained at all times. Only by this route, long and hard as it is, will the basis of the regime be weakened to the point where it can be overthrown by an armed insurrection of the black working people.¹

In April 1987 Mzala wrote that a “revolutionary strategist must take cognisance of the developing revolutionary situation, and accommodate it in planning, and not merely cling to a theory of a decade ago, which like all theories was only outlining the general situation of that period.”² According to Barrell, Maharaj and Kasrils maintained in 1986 and 1987 to him that the idea of people’s war as a protracted phenomenon was no longer relevant, and that the issue was one of gathering the forces for a national insurrection. They were alone among ANC leaders, he states, in “attempting to incorporate the new forms of struggle being developed on the ground into a strategic scheme.”³ In 1986 the NEC appointed a sub-committee consisting of O.R. Tambo and Joe Slovo to organise the movement of top leadership into the country—from where they would lead a future insurrection. It was to have a blank cheque and would not report to the NEC. According to Barrell, this, Operation Vul’indlela (Operation Vula), was motivated by Maharaj with the intention of bypassing those on the NEC “wedded to crass militarism, the detonator theory and political-military parallelism.”⁴ In addition, against the onslaught of the state-backed Inkatha in the Transvaal, some ANC/SACP leaders such as Chris Hani were involved in the building of self-defence units on the ground. Was some convergence taking place between some strategists of MK and the ideas of the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC (four of whose members had been expelled at the Kabwe Conference)?

Insurrection would have been possible only in a real revolutionary situation. However, the balance of forces was for the meantime turning the other way. The forces of revolution had run up against the obstacle of the still-intact white state. “The fundamental political process of the revolution” wrote Trotsky,

... consists in the gradual comprehension by a class of the problems arising from the social crisis—the active orientation of the masses by a method of successive approximations. The different stages of a revolutionary process, certified by a change of parties in which the more extreme always supersedes the less, express the growing pressure to the left of the masses—so long as the swing of the movement does not

1. “Indiscriminate Attack on Whites is Not the Way Forward,” EB statement, 6 September 1985 also published in *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, 18/19, February 1986. See also *SA’s Impending Socialist Revolution* (March 1982), p. 155: “Contrary to the popular myth, guerrilla action does not demoralise the whites—on the contrary, it usually tends to harden reaction.”

2. Mzala, “Towards People’s War,” *Sechaba*, April 1987, p. 6.

3. Barrell, “Conscripts to Their Age,” pp. 427–28.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 445–46. See also, for Slovo’s views, interview with Cronin, by Helena Sheehan, 17 April 2001 in All Africa House at University of Cape Town.

run into objective obstacles. When it does, there begins a reaction: disappointments of the different layers of the revolutionary class, growth of indifferentism, and there-with a strengthening of the position of the counter-revolutionary forces.¹

With its social base still intact, from 1985 onwards the state began to support and promote black vigilante groups in the townships—the Black Hundreds of the South African revolution—in Natal Inkatha, and others elsewhere.² Counter-revolution with a black face came home from outside SA (UNITA, RENAMO etc). MK had no answer to this: *a guerrilla strategy was unable to defend the mass movement*—not in Natal, where the youth heroically organised self-defence against Inkatha impis in the civil war of 1986–90 and beyond; not in Crossroads where there were barely any arms with which to resist the witdoeke. Combined with massive numbers placed in detention (25,000 in 1986), “people’s power” in the townships was crushed, for the moment. The state went too far, however: its attempted crackdown on the UDF, COSATU etc., on 24 February 1988 tried “to exercise a power against us which they do not have,” as *Inqaba ya Basebenzi* put it.³ The successful boycott of municipal elections in that year, together with the defiance campaign of 1989 were already indications of the revival of the movement—and this continued into the early 1990s, combined with the massive escalation of vicious state-organised counter-revolutionary violence. Eventually (if negotiations had not been taking place), the movement would have swept ahead to overtake the movement of 1984–87. Though, without the adoption by the ANC of a clear strategy for achieving national and social liberation through working-class power, the mass struggle would once again have reached stalemate and been driven back.

1. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, Volume 1, p. 19.

2. Vigilantes were operating in Duduza in May 1985, though the main onslaught came from 1986: see N. Haysom, *Mabangalala: the Rise of Right-Wing Vigilantes in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986).

3. “After the Crackdown—How to Advance? Defy the Bans! Build the Locals! Build the ANC!,” EB Statement 15 March 1988 published in *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, 26, April 1988, pp. 2–7.

Conclusion

Rural guerrilla warfare; armed propaganda; ‘people’s war’—none of these were strategies in South Africa for the taking of state power by the masses. A strategy of armed insurrection was talked and written about but not seriously implemented. The ANC leaders had to fall back on the only strategy they in fact had: a negotiated settlement. This was not an “alternative” to a mass revolutionary seizure of power, as Tom Lodge and other commentators of the 1980s put it.¹ *It was the only strategy open to the ANC leadership.* It was presaged by the talks between top SA businessmen and the ANC in Lusaka in September 1985—only months after the Kabwe Conference—by the abortive mission of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons’ Group in 1985–86, and by the overtures of Mandela from prison to government at the same time. By the latter part of 1986 writers in *Sechaba* on armed struggle were already looking over their shoulder at the possibilities of a negotiated settlement.² This, of course, was what transpired in the 1990s, initiated by secret discussions of Mandela and ANC leaders with representatives of the regime in the late 1980s, followed by de Klerk’s announcement in February 1990 of the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and SACP and the release of Mandela. Thereafter every compromise was justified by ANC/SACP leaders in the terms that the forces of MK were “too weak” to secure an alternative.³ MK was “too weak,” however, simply because of a false political strategy. The assessment did not take into account the strength and consciousness of the working class.

On the one hand the capitalist ruling class in South Africa saw the dangers of continuing its rule in the old way. In this sense the mass upsurges of the 1980s were crucial to the transition. It was not the ANC’s strategy of armed struggle which had helped bring things to this point, though ironically the ANC was to inherit the credit for the transition brought about by the masses.

On the other hand the changed standpoint of the Soviet Union was also critical. Under Gorbachev the Soviet Union began to retreat from its international obligations and commitments. The 1988 SA/Cuba/Angola accord (excluding SWAPO) was a crucial preliminary to South African withdrawal from Namibia and the holding of democratic elections. (However, as in Zimbabwe and Mozam-

1. See for example Tom Lodge, “People’s War or Negotiation?” *African National Congress Strategies in the 1980s* in G. Moss and I. Obery, *South African Review* 5, (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1989); I. Phillips, “Negotiation and Armed Struggle in Contemporary South Africa”, *Transformation*, 6, 1988.

2. Cassius Mandla, “MK: Let Us Move to an All-out War,” *Sechaba*, November 1986; Sizwe Mkwanazi, “Our vanguard and the seizure of power”, *Sechaba*, 1, January 1989.

3. See particularly Slovo, “Negotiations: What Room for Compromise?” *African Communist*, 130, 3rd quarter, 1992, quoted in the footnote at the beginning of the second section of this paper. His daughter Gillian argued with him about the decision to call off the armed struggle and he then claimed as follows: “what the ANC had achieved was not an armed struggle but armed propaganda. MK, Joe would say, never had possessed the fire-power to win a full-scale war: its purpose was to show Africans that they didn’t have to be victim but could contest and fight.” Gillian Slovo, *Every secret thing*, p. 154. I would be extremely surprised if Slovo had expressed these ideas in the 1980s when he was in Mozambique or Lusaka.

bique and Angola the heritage of guerrillaism produced hierarchical, bureaucratic, and dictatorial tendencies in the post-independence SWAPO government.)

Such an accord would not have been possible for Cuba or the Soviet Union to agree to earlier. It was a period of what, in hindsight, was the beginnings of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (though not in Gorbachev's understanding). At the same time Soviet academics began floating preposterous compromise scenarios for a South African settlement. The key Moscow bureaucrat relating to the ANC leadership, Vladimir Shubin, has written that the word "armed" set before "struggle" was by 1988 "becoming unfashionable in Moscow."¹

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the restoration of capitalism there took many people by surprise. However, that possibility had been predicted by Trotsky in the 1930s—though not as the most likely perspective. Bureaucratic rule, he argued, would eventually stifle the economy—it would cease to have productivity rises and would stagnate. In those conditions either the working class in the Soviet Union would rise up, overthrow the bureaucracy and institute workers' democratic rule and internationalism—or else (which Trotsky thought less likely) there could be a return to capitalism.

Without the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, the struggle-in-stalemate in South Africa would have continued. In the first place capitalist restoration removed the communist bogey presented to the whites, making it harder for the NP to continue its scare campaign against the ANC and, on the other hand, making negotiation easier. Also the collapse had a seriously demoralising effect on activists, and through them on the mood of mass support for a socialist South Africa. Though the defeat was a defeat for Stalinism, it was seen as one for socialism.

On 2 February 1990 de Klerk drew attention to the changes in Eastern Europe as a central element in his decision to change course: "In Eastern Europe and even the Soviet Union itself political and economic upheaval surged forward in an unstoppable tide ... The year 1989 will go down as the year in which Stalinist Communism expired ... Those who seek to force this failure of a system on SA should engage in a total revision of their point of view." Among the factors favouring negotiations, he mentioned that the events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe "weaken the capability of organisations which were previously supported strongly from those quarters."² Patti Waldmeier, *Financial Times* journalist, also wrote at the time that "the convulsions in Eastern Europe have

1. V. Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, pp. 294ff, especially p. 327, 311–12. He adds "though support for the ANC's armed struggle persisted and was in fact intensified." Reading his book closely, however, the "intensification" of military assistance appears to have been to prepare MK as an officer corps for a post-settlement SA army. See also p. 340 "in the first three or four years of the *perestroika* the ties between the Soviets and the ANC were becoming more regular and wide-ranging assistance in all fields grew. A common approach towards a possible political settlement in Southern Africa was worked out and followed. The democratisation of the political system in the USSR and the working methods of the ruling CPSU also affected the SA liberation movement. The ANC (and the SACP) adopted more critical attitudes towards outworn dogmas [e.g., the idea of the overthrow of the apartheid state? – ML], and undertook more comprehensive and realistic analyses of the situation in South Africa."

2. A. Kamsteeg and E van Dijk, *F.W. de Klerk: Man of the Moment*, (1990), pp. 93, 104.

played a big part in bringing about Pretoria's change of heart." On the one hand, she cited the NP fear of the example of authoritarian regimes being toppled by "peoples power," on the other hand, like de Klerk, she referred to the ideological, financial and moral loss suffered by the ANC.¹ The unbanning of the ANC, PAC and SACP of course prepared the way—again, not in a straight line—for the negotiated settlement and the democratic elections of 1994. The strength that the working class accumulated in the 1980s and early 1990s, even unarmed even battered by the counter-revolution has also been the main factor underpinning the democratic nature of the settlement and of the SA constitution. The participatory democracy characteristic of 'people's power' has been crushed, by counter-revolution, by parliamentary rule, and to a certain extent by the legacy of guerillaism in the officials of the new state. But the legacy of democracy still survives in the strength of the working class and of civil society.

Since 1994 the ANC government has voluntarily implemented a neo-liberal policy akin to the SAPs advocated by the IMF and World Bank. Foreign investment has, however, not been forthcoming, certainly not enough to prevent the loss of half a million to a million jobs since 1994. It is doubtful whether this economic programme can alleviate poverty. In the long run, therefore, it will threaten democracy also. If so, it is the price that will be played by the aborting of a worker-led democratic revolution in favour of a negotiated compromise. In 1990 Mzala could still believe that "the position of the South African Communist Party within the alliance of the ANC, as well as the growing role of the working class within the mass democratic movement, ensures precisely the desire that on achieving national liberation, the South African revolution will proceed uninterruptedly towards the building of socialism".² In reality the Triple Alliance is blocking the road to workers' democracy in South Africa—the precondition for socialism. However it is conceivable that working-class resistance to worsening economic conditions can lead to the establishment of a mass trade-union based workers' party and eventually to workers' democratic rule in South Africa.

1. *Financial Times*, 12 February 1990.

2. Mzala, "Is SA in a Revolutionary Situation?," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 3, September 1990, p. 575.

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