

WANKIE - UNITY IN STRUGGLE

- Max Moabi

The importance of the Wankie operations lies in the fact that these operations - Wankie campaign - constitute a clear expression of the joint efforts of two oppressed peoples to liberate themselves by force of arms from the oppressive white minority regimes of Salisbury and Pretoria which enjoy the all-round support of western imperialism.

The ANC-ZAPU alliance of the late sixties, which gave politico-military leadership to the Wankie campaigns is itself a concrete expression of the historic and fraternal ties that exist between the Zimbabwean and South African peoples, so that to speak of the struggle of the people of South Africa is to speak of the struggle of the peoples of Zimbabwe, and that of other peoples of our region.

The revolutionary struggle of the oppressed but embattled people of our country, under the tested leadership of the African National Congress started 67 years ago. This struggle, like that of the oppressed masses of the peoples of Zimbabwe and Namibia under the leadership of their vanguard organisations, - the Patriotic Front and SWAPO respectively - has as its strategic objective the total liquidation of the Botha regime, for genuine independence and for the establishment in South Africa of a popular and democratic government.

The consistent efforts in struggle of both our organisations - one of the African National Congress of South Africa born in January, 1912, and the other, under the same name, the African National Congress of Rhodesia, formed in 1924, now ZAPU, entered a new phase with the opening of clashes between the Luthuli MK Detachment in alliance with ZAPU fighters against the combined Rhodesian security forces and the South African fascist troops in Wankie and Sipolilo in the East. These campaigns have gone down in the annals of the history of the liberation struggle of our respective peoples as one of the most outstanding feats of heroic patriotism and commitment to the just

cause of our peoples.

The long-standing ties of traditional struggle and political cooperation between our organisations and peoples, saw, with these clashes, the introduction of joint operations in the military field: i.e. the introduction of a common revolutionary strategy to counter the then imperialist backed Unholy Alliance between Pretoria, Salisbury and Lisbon.

It must be said here that it had become clear long before 1967 that the fascist white minority regimes that oppress our peoples could be dislodged only by violent means and not through parliamentary discussions and negotiations. Thus on the 16th of December, as far back as 1961, through a decision of the National Executive Committee, the highest organ of the African National Congress - Umkhonto we Sizwe - was formed the armed wing of the people. ZAPU by 1967 had long worked on the formation and moulding of its armed forces.

Once the decision to commit both forces into battle was taken, preparations for confrontation began. The joint ANC-ZAPU forces spent long periods of time in reconnoitering the operational area and subsequently bases were set up. At each base hide-outs and storage places were prepared. After intensive training and adequate preparation, the first unit of the Luthuli Detachment moved in. The joint forces confronted and routed the enemy in many parts of Zimbabwe which included the Zambesi valley, North Matebeleland, Bulawayo, the Wankie game reserve and the whole area between Victoria falls and the Kariba dam. The effect of these operations reverberated not only in Southern Africa but throughout the world. Even the limited accounts given by the enemy testified to the incredible and magnificent fighting calibre, heroism and courage displayed by our men. In recognition of their valour the enemy baptised them as "the Black Commandos".

It could not be otherwise for the Luthuli Detachment consisted of men of exceptional qualities, whose brilliant performance was shown in various battles. Besides they were well armed and prepared to make the supreme sacrifice for national and

social independence, if need be. This was, above all, a revolutionary detachment spurred on by absolute dedication to the lofty ideals of freedom.

The entire force fought with the determination and will that shocked the enemy and struck fear into his ranks. A Rhodesian army officer was forced to comment that "the attackers were very aggressive and their morale was very high". Amongst those who excelled, to name but a few out of a long list of brilliant fighters, are:

DELMAS SIBANYONI: A light machinegunner who halted the advance of a Rhodesian African Rifle's Platoon single-handedly and never withdrew until he was killed by helicopter fire.

JAMES MASIMINI: Who mortally wounded fought like a lion and covered the retreat of his comrades until he was killed.

PAUL PETERSEN: Who single-handedly fought the enemy refusing to surrender until he was killed.

How best can we honour their memory? By equipping ourselves better politically, militarily and technically for the long and arduous battles ahead, by fulfilling our daily tasks both as individuals and as a collective so as to ensure the complete dismantlement of that oppressive and hated system that has kept our people for so long under colonial bondage in their own country. By so doing, we will not only be giving the best honour to these gallants and heroes but will also be contributing positively towards bringing nearer the day of freedom.

We also remember the exemplary stand of comrades like Bert Tamane, Freddie Mnisi, Peter Tladi, Kenneth Nkomo, Alfred Scott and others who whilst captured and imprisoned in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana, remained and still remain firm and loyal to the just cause of our people.

Today as we commemorate Wankie Day, we pay tribute to the lasting memory of all the heroes and martyrs of the South African and Zimbabwean revolu-

tions; to stalwarts like Vuyisile Mini, Bram Fischer, J.B. Marks, Moses Kotane, Solomon Mahlangu, in Zimbabwe to J.Z. Moyo, J. Dube, Nikita Mangena and many others.

Our peoples will forever cherish the memory of these stalwarts and heroes, their best sons and daughters, who so generously shed their blood for the liberation of our Motherlands. Their blood was not shed in vain. It has undoubtedly laid the foundation for the construction of a new Zimbabwe and South Africa free from racial discrimination, fascist oppression and the exploitation of man by man, for a democratic and free Zimbabwe and South Africa, where there shall be a house, bread, employment, peace and social progress for all.

Thanks to the consistent efforts of the liberation forces of our region, the face of Southern Africa has changed radically. In Mozambique and Angola, true bulwark of revolution in Africa, the national liberation forces have genuine and reliable bases of support. Angola and Mozambique contribute concretely towards the national liberation and liquidation of colonialism, racism, apartheid and all forms of oppression in our continent. It is therefore in the best interests of the oppressed peoples and the entire progressive humanity to defend and work for the consolidation of the Angolan and Mozambican revolutions.

In Zimbabwe the forces of liberation as led by the Patriotic Front have scored significant victories. Armed struggle in that country has intensified and ZIPRA-ZNLA forces, the joint command of the Patriotic Front have continued to engage the enemy in well over two-thirds of the territory. The control of the Muzorewa-Smith forces is limited to strategic strong points in the country-side and the cities only. Running away from the barbaric repression of the Muzorewa regime, the people, young men and women, as well as in response to the call of the Patriotic Front, are swelling the ranks of ZIPRA-ZNLA by their thousands. Nothing short of politico - military defeat of the Muzorewa-Smith regime, by the Patriotic Front will restore the fundamental rights of the Zimbabwean people leading to their complete liberation.

In South Africa, the later years following Wankie have seen growing militancy by all sections of the oppressed. To the militant strikes and political battles waged by the black working class in alliance with students, working youth, and revolutionary intellectuals that have rocked the country, has been added the devastating blows of MK units. The working class which has consistently and courageously fought against apartheid is finding new ways of intensifying the struggle for national and social independence.

Despite the reign of terror unleashed by the fascists, our people continue to fight the regime. Threats, arrest of cadres, torture, imprisonment, banning orders and death itself cannot stop the march to freedom. Our struggle is just and it is intensifying on all fronts. The successful operations carried out by our forces, the forces of the people's army against the Botha racist troops and police in Goch Street, Umlazi, Durban, Louis Tri-chardt, Northern Transvaal, Zeerust, Rustenburg and lately against the Moroka police station in Soweto bear witness to that fact; the fact that the struggle is intensifying on all fronts.

Today combatants of the People's Army enter the theatre of war with twelve years experience of Wankie, with the enthusiasm of the first day of battle, 13th of August, 1967, inspired by the unequalled heroism and example of the Luthuli Detachment path-blazers, prepared and equipped to carry out even higher feats of valour.

While at the same time our organisation, working under extremely difficult conditions of fascist repression, continues to politicise and mobilise the mass of the people, all oppressed, anti-fascist and anti-racist sectors, so that they can participate conscientiously on the side of the revolution in a broad democratic front.

Unity in action is being forged at all levels and the enemy is being confronted as never before. And more than at any other time before, our organisation and people, firmly united to the heroic peoples of Zimbabwe and Namibia, who under the banners of the Patriotic Front and SWAPO, fight arms in hand, for national independence and free

dom against combined South African and Rhodesian fascist regimes. For if there is any people interested in the final defeat of imperialism, all its vestiges, and the last remaining fascist minority regimes in our regions, it is the South African people, whose very existence is locked in a life and death struggle against the apartheid monster that prevents Africa from reaching her cherished goal - i.e. the liquidation of colonialism, fascism, imperialism and the attainment of complete independence and freedom.

If it is true that Wankie did not achieve its prime goal - that of carving the way home through Zimbabwe; Wankie served and continues to serve as a mobilising factor and clarion call amongst the oppressed to take up arms against their oppressors. Wankie further proved that it is possible to fight and defeat the joint South African and Rhodesian racist troops, for our men routed the enemy land forces at every encounter forcing them to resort to their highly sophisticated airplanes and embark on the strafing by bombs of the entire areas. The fascist South African Defence Force has, since then embarked on a long term programme of modernization and standardization of its defence force's airwing. This programme has been stepped up to such an extent that it relies absolutely on the air-force. And if we break their back in the air they will have no leg to stand on. We are not by any means trying to underestimate the enemy. Proper assessment at all stages must be made.

The fight before us, comrades, we know, will be long, bitter and arduous, but it must be fought. We, militants of the ANC and combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe, have the complete conviction that there can be no other out-come other than victory for the oppressed over the forces of reaction and counter-revolution: that South Africa will be free as a result of the efforts of her own people, with the militant solidarity of progressive Africa, the socialist camp and the world.

And it is for this reason that from Wankie, Soweto to Pretoria the struggle for people's power continues and victory is certain.