

THE MILITARISATION
OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REGIME
P A R T 3.

- Jimmy Wilson

So far in this series of articles we have looked at a number of areas in which the South African regime is attempting to build itself into a giant, multi-functional military machine, in its desire to confront the escalating rebellion it has nurtured by the only means left to it - armed repression.

We have looked at the frenetic activity of Botha in his "Whites only" parliament as he invents and revises legislation to create the legal facilities for bringing into being his dream 'Total War' state. We have also looked at his military activities as he and his assistants try to solve their many problems - such as white farmers deserting their farms in the border areas; as they try to "win the hearts and minds" of the people they oppress; as they create new military units to help cope with "increasing subversion"; and as they desperately try to bypass the arms embargo by means of the frantic production and purchase of weapons and equipment.

All these are important facets of the militarisation of the South African state. But by far the most important, and the most problematic for the racists, is the preparation of the population - particularly, of course, the white population - for the growing conflict.

Botha himself states his problem quite clearly when he says in his 'Defence White Paper' of 1973:

"Although we may possess the most modern and sophisticated weapons and equipment, we would still not be proof against attack or internal disintegration if the men and women who have to handle and maintain the weapons and equipment did not possess the right inspiration and dedication".

Thus the regime has been preparing its electorate both psychologically and militarily to face

the inevitable consequences of its own policies and practices. This preparation has been going on for some decades, but has reached a level in recent years which borders on an absolute war psychosis.

Just about every white South African is involved in one way or another in Botha's military preparations. Firstly, every white male, when he leaves school has, to do a certain period of continuous military service. The length of this period of National Service has been gradually increasing over the last ten years. In the 1960s it was 9 months. In the early 1970s it was increased to one year. And in 1977 it was doubled to two years. There is already talk of its being increased to three years in the 1980s.

In this 2-year period conscripts do 3 months basic training, 3 months specialisation, 3 months counter-insurgency training, and then they spend 15 months in the operational areas.

It is estimated that in 1978/9 about 65,000 men were doing this 2-year stint of National Service. The extent of South Africa's military build-up can be seen if we remember that in 1960 the total number of troops available to the regime was only 60,000. The 65,000 troops involved in National Service in 1978/9 constituted only 12% of the total strength of the South African Defence Force in that year.

Nonetheless, Botha still doesn't think that these troops are enough to cope with the People's Army. After their 2-year period these men have to do 8 years' service in the Citizen Force. This involves 3 months full-time service (usually active service) a year. This 3-months-a-year system was introduced at the end of 1975 during South Africa's invasion of Angola. At the time Botha promised that this system would be stopped as soon as the "situation allows". But apparently the situation hasn't allowed since then, and this 3-months-a-year service is likely to remain a permanent feature of military service, if it doesn't actually increase.

In 1978/9 the number of these Citizen Force soldiers available to the regime was 260,000 over 40% of the SADF's total strength. However, these

are still not enough to prevent a crumbling system from collapsing.

In the 'Sunday Express' of 18 February, 1979, it was reported that national servicemen who had just finished their 2-year period a month before had been called up again for 3 months' "border duty". According to a SADF spokesman, this call-up was taking place because of an "insufficient number of service trainees in the 1978 intake to counter insurgency by terrorists". This special call-up was in addition to the normal 3-months-a-year call-up, because, as stipulated by the Defence Act, servicemen can be called up for "border duty" anytime if there is "a threat against the country".

But Botha still does not rest easy. In addition to National Service, the Citizen Force, and special call-up, there are the Commando units. These units are manned mainly by volunteers. Their task is to defend the areas in which they live, though they can, if they want, volunteer for duties in the operational areas. In 1978/9 the Commandoes consisted of about 175,000 men - i.e. about 30% of the total SADF strength.

In addition to all these there is also the SADF Reserve which consists of all those under the age of 65 who have undergone military training but have fulfilled their military service commitments. This Reserve will only be called up in a state of "dire emergency".

These various areas of civilian military service - National Service, Citizen Force, Commandoes and Reserve - revolve around the core of the SADF - the Permanent Force. This Permanent Force consists of full-time career soldiers. These soldiers provide the basis of the leadership, instruction and administration of Botha's military machine. And one of the major thrusts of Botha's militarisation drive is to build this core into a larger and larger proportion of the overall SADF strength.

It seems that the needs of the SADF, created by the rapidly escalating situation, are far ahead of the capacity of this Permanent Force nucleus. Already over the past 4 years recruitment into the Permanent Force has increased by over 80%. Yet

Botha and his strategists are not happy. In their 'Defence White Paper' of this year they complain that the Permanent Force is only manned to 80% of its approved strength. They complain that there is a shortage of leaders, "particularly in the ranks of senior non-commissioned officers, junior officers and instructors". They also admit that, in the Navy, there is a high turnover of whites, and that they have a problem of resignations of experienced air-crew in the Airforce. In fact, over the past 10 years the Permanent Force has suffered a turnover rate of 15%.

Botha's assistant, Coetzee, announced in April this year that, as part of their "Grand Strategy", they wanted to double the size of the Permanent Force by 1981, and that in order to do this they were "establishing a committee representative of all branches of the SADF to work out a blueprint for attracting Permanent Force recruits". He also announced that 1980 had been declared "Personnel Year". At the moment the Permanent Force numbers about 42,000 - i.e. about 7% of SADF total strength.

It is a measure of the threat that our struggle poses to the South African regime that this massive involvement of the white population in the SADF is still not enough to satisfy Botha's military hunger. He is still searching in every conceivable corner for more sources of manpower.

Some of the ideas he has come up with are: the forcing of military service on immigrants; the recruitment of women into the SADF; and of most significance - the increasing involvement of Blacks in manning the machinery of their own oppression.

As far as immigrants are concerned, special legislation was passed in 1978 under which any immigrant who has not adopted South African citizenship within two years of becoming eligible for it becomes automatically naturalized - making young immigrant men liable for compulsory military service. Any immigrant who defies this offer of citizenship loses all permanent residence rights in South Africa. Over the past 8 years' apparently 100,000 immigrants have registered for National Service in the SADF. In addition, Botha's friend -

Coetzee - proudly announced early this year that "almost 2,000 citizens of foreign countries registered for military service in South Africa last year". (What - we may ask - are "citizens of foreign countries" doing in the South African Defence Force?)

However, even including immigrants and "citizens of foreign countries", there are still not enough men for Botha's liking. So, for the past few years he has gone all out to recruit women into his defence force. Adverts and brochures appear regularly inviting women to volunteer for military service.

Apparently the percentage of women in the SADF has increased from 0,6% in February, 1973 to 7% in October, 1978. The South African Army Women's College admitted 500 new recruits in 1978 as opposed to 150 in 1976. Also, a fairly large proportion of those volunteering for the Commandoes are women.

Generally women are used in non-combat roles, but an all-women air commando squadron has been in existence in the Airforce for about 3 years. Also, women have been accepted into the Military Academy, the SADF's Permanent Force officer training school. In 1978 the SADF boasted of 2 women brigadiers, 5 colonels and 581 other ranks.

In strict faith with the timeless, cardinal principles of the world's oppressors and exploiters, Botha and his gang - in addition to all the above - are increasingly leaning on the shoulders of the very people they have oppressed and exploited for centuries to help themselves limp through the final agonising paces of their history.

For 60 years, since the formation of the SADF in 1912, Blacks have only been allowed to serve in the SADF in non-combat, service roles. Thousands gallantly gave their lives in the First and Second World wars, sent to the front as cooks, drivers, messengers, mechanics and labourers without even the benefit of a weapon for self-defence.

When Botha's predecessors came to power in 1948 they immediately disbanded the few Black military units there were in the SADF, and repeat-

edly swore that there would never be any role for Blacks in the SADF. Botha himself, in 1970, said that "if the Bantu wanted to build up a defence force, he should do so in his own eventually independent homeland".

But despite six decades of the barring of Blacks from combat roles within the SADF, suddenly, in the early 1970s, Botha and his plotters began to swallow their words. They began to see that if they were to entertain even fragile dreams of defeating the organised, armed and determined masses of South Africa, they would first have to supplement their own meagre minority with recruits from the ranks of the oppressed; and secondly, they would have to try to undo the unity of the masses by making it appear that the war was not between the oppressors and the oppressed, but between the "bad Blacks and their communist allies" and the "good Blacks and their Christian allies".

This new realisation of the racists was succinctly put by their newspaper "Die Vaderland" in February, 1974:

"Arming of and military training for the Bantu is a delicate matter. It is covered under much emotion and has an historical background that fills the White with dread. The border wars and murder and raids during the previous century have not yet been forgotten. But the time for a reorientation of the White feeling on this delicate matter has arrived. We have entered a different era that demands a new approach".

Necessity forced this "new approach" to take root very rapidly. In 1972, armed Black members of the South African Police were used in counter-insurgency operations for the first time. In 1973 Coloureds began training in the Cape Corps Service Battalion. In 1974 the first Black Namibian unit - the 31st Battalion - was formed. Also in 1974 Indians began training in the newly established Indian Corps at Salisbury Island, in Durban, and the first African Permanent Force unit in South Africa - 21st Battalion - was formed.

In 1975 two more Black Namibian units were formed. In the same year a certain Brigadier

Pretorius was sent to Umtata to establish the Transkei Defence Force. In 1976 the formation of the Bophuthatswana National Guard was announced. In 1977 two more Namibian battalions were formed.

At the end of 1977 General Magnus Malan, chief of the SADF, proudly announced that 20% of the troops fighting in the operational area were Black. In 1978 Botha announced that Blacks would be incorporated into the Commandoes and White Citizen Force units. Also in 1978 it was announced that Blacks would serve in the Reconnaissance Commando - South Africa's version of the Rhodesian Selous Scouts. In the past two years there has been recurring talk that within the next few years compulsory military training would be introduced for Coloureds and Indians.

So far in 1979 this process of incorporating Blacks into the regime's militarisation drive shows no signs of abating.

In January it was announced that 160 Indian men had been selected from "hundreds of applicants" for training in the Indian Corps Training Battalion. At the end of their training most will be drafted into the Permanent Force.

In February 100 Black soldiers who had recently returned from service in the operational area were given medals.

In April it was announced that the number of Coloureds and Indians in the Navy had increased from 17,4% of the Navy's Permanent Force strength to 20%, and the first Indian Navy officer - a sub-lieutenant - received his commission. Also in April it was claimed that the intake in January of Coloured volunteers into existing training courses had increased by 33%. And, again in April, the question of compulsory National Service for all "except Africans" was raised. It is estimated that by the end of 1979 about 16,000 Blacks will have undergone training in the SADF.

So, 60 years of withholding weapons and military skills from Black South Africans has been undone in seven short years in the interests of Botha's 'Total Strategy'. None but the blind will believe that the Boers have had a change of heart.

Botha is not so stupid as to put guns into the hands of all the oppressed, or to believe that any but a small percentage of job-desperate Blacks will volunteer for his army.

Black volunteers for the SADF are checked by psychologists, "ethnic experts" and senior military personnel to make sure they have the right "background and personality" before they are allowed into the South African Defence Force.

Once they are inside Botha's military machine they are subjected to constant and intensive propaganda to make them believe they are defending themselves, their families and their people against the most unimaginably horrific monster - the "communist-inspired terrorists". In addition their conditions of work and wages are better and higher than Blacks can expect to get almost anywhere else in South Africa.

Thus, in his desperate desire to create an impregnable fortress in which to hide himself away from history, Botha has drawn on all conceivable sources of manpower. But there are still other ways in which the South African population and society are being prepared for war.

In the fourth and final part of this series of articles we will look at some of these and draw conclusions on the significance of the militarisation of the South African regime for our struggle.

To be continued.

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"IN THIS YEAR 1979 WE MARCH FORWARD TO FURTHER DEVELOP THE PROCESS OF MASS MOBILISATION - BRINGING TOGETHER ALL ORGANISATIONS, GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS OPPOSED TO APARTHEID - UNITY IN OPPOSITION TO ALL ASPECTS OF THE INHUMAN SYSTEM OF APARTHEID, LAYING THE BASIS FOR A PEOPLE'S WAR IN WHICH WE COMBINE ARMED ACTIONS WITH ALL FORMS OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE; IN THIS STRUGGLE THE WORKING CLASS HAS A CENTRAL ROLE".

- DR. YUSUF DADOO -