

CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE QUESTION
OF THE TERROR TACTIC

- Khumalo Migwe

Is individual terror justified as a tactic or not?

In the first place, this question cannot be approached from a purely abstract moral point of view, although that does not mean that there is no moral question involved. Secondly, to attempt to answer yes or no to the question without making a detailed examination of the concrete situation at the given moment at the given stage of the development of the revolutionary war of liberation would be a metaphysical approach to the question and would completely ignore the scientific dialectical method of judgement. Thirdly, we should not permit emotional, subjective considerations to sway our judgement. Our evaluation must be based on the objective analysis of whether such action fits into the immediate aims as well as the long-term goals of the movement; whether such action mobilises the people for the revolution or for the oppressor.

THE PRESENT WAR OF LIBERATION
IN SOUTH AFRICA

The essence of the current combat operations in South Africa under the leadership of the African National Congress is the political struggle of the overwhelming majority of the South African people against racist dictatorship, with a view to destroying it, seizing and maintaining power, and thereby creating a democratic People's State that shall in turn be anti-racial and anti-imperialist. Guided by these revolutionary ideals and by a revolutionary strategy and tactics, the ANC therefore subordinates all military means to political ends - the contrary is counter-revolutionary.

This makes it possible, therefore, for all our combatants to realise that we are engaged in a national war and not in a single act of combat. Under these circumstances each fighter, even in isolation, knows that he enjoys the support of the people and is fighting for the cause of the people. With this understanding - of a guerrilla as a political organiser - it becomes clear why the terror tactic must be justifiable not only to the person or persons who employ it, but to the whole strategic aim of the movement. The people, who bear the brunt of the war, will not forgive actions of those who are only

concerned with needless bravado and not with what is best for the struggle as a whole. More than that, since we are not engaged in some romantic adventure against the Pretoria regime but are fighting a matured and calculated war of national liberation, any senseless and strategically unco-ordinated action can at best benefit the enemy and seriously harm the revolution.

PLAYING INTO THE ENEMY'S HANDS

It is quite understandable how the unbearable conditions of organised state violence, murder and repression against the people, the rivers of blood that flow in all the provinces of South Africa, the daily misery and sorrow heaped upon our people by a racial minority, spur certain individuals to unplanned and anarchic terror tactics. After all, our people can no longer turn the other cheek.

Left to itself this type of action, however, cannot achieve revolutionary victory. It is the type of response brought about by feelings of deep anger and hatred, and true enough, one cannot have a drive for carrying on the war of liberation without deep hatred of the enemy and anger at injustice. But these sentiments should not determine the nature of the tactics to be used. Frustrated liberals easily turn to these tactics because they do not have a revolutionary theory and above all they have no support from the masses. Opportunism often manifests itself in a revolutionary war of liberation by these nihilistic tendencies.

The enemy also uses terror as a pretext to launch a counter-attack on the people, an attack the rulers have always been contemplating but without the public legitimacy. Even the most brutal of governments endeavours to win a great degree of popular support for itself, and seeks to justify even the most fascistic of its activities. This battle for mass support, between the oppressor (who also uses intimidation if bribes don't work) and the vanguard movement, determines finally who wins the war. Suffice it to remind ourselves that in his plan to justify the wanton murder of anti-fascist forces in Germany, Hitler fabricated a frame-up against Georgi Dimitrov (the Bulgarian revolutionary who was in exile in Germany), accusing Dimitrov of setting the Reichstag on fire, thus shifting the blame for terror from the Nazis to Dimitrov and the communists.

Lenin's advice to Russian revolutionaries is most appropriate:

"Far be it from us to deny the significance of heroic blows, but it is our duty to sound a vigorous warning against becoming infatuated with terror" ('Where to Begin', Collected Works, Vol. 5 p. 18).

Nelson Mandela stated at the Rivonia Trial:

"I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love for violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation, and oppression of my people by the Whites."

Going further, to show how he always understood political goals to be supreme and primary to military actions, Mandela said:

"If I formed the organisation I would at all times subject it to the political guidance of the ANC and would not undertake any different form of activity from that contemplated without the consent of the ANC."

MASSES SHOULD FORM THE BACKBONE

A revolution without the active support and participation of the masses is not worth the name of revolution. The most dangerous thing about the terror tactic as a principle is that it separates the masses from the revolution. It creates an atmosphere in which the masses feel that the revolution is the business of a conspiratorial elite which alone knows how and when liberation will come. Frankly speaking, even if individual terror could succeed to scare the enemy out of political power, it is highly unlikely that the revolution could maintain itself against counter-revolution.

This article has not set out to disprove that terror tactics at certain moments and at certain stages of the revolution are not justified. But to emphasise the terror tactic in place of mobilising the masses is a manifestation of anarcho-liberalism and a nihilistic tendency born of theoretical ignorance and frustration. We must be clear that armed struggle is a people's struggle; a struggle for national liberation from the apartheid colonial rule. Guns do not make a revolution, but the type of man behind the gun determines the pace of the revolution. Power will always belong to the people.