

# THE POLITICS OF GUERRILLA WARFARE

## Part One.

- William Pomeroy

In commemoration of the 18th anniversary of the formation of our People's Army we begin publication of this series of articles on guerrilla warfare. This series is a transcript of a talk recently given by William Pomeroy to an ANC discussion group. William Pomeroy, an American, is a well-known writer on guerrilla warfare. He took an active part in the 'Huk' guerrilla movement which was active in the Phillipines in the 1940s and 50s.

The subject of the discussion, as given to me, is "The Politics of Guerrilla Warfare", which is rather a broad subject and really has theoretical implications, but I'll try to avoid too much theory.

Actually, I don't think I would call myself an expert or authority on guerrilla warfare. I've had experience in only one armed struggle - in the Phillipines - as the Comrade Chairman mentioned. But like you and your fellow members, and the liberation movement you belong to, my tendency is to learn from experience and from necessity. If you waited for everybody to become an expert or an authority in the subject before they did anything or took any action, no struggle would probably ever occur. People learn through doing things, through their experience, through the necessity that is presented to them, before which they have to work.

So I don't intend to speak from a standpoint of authority to you, or to deliver what you would call 'doctrine', but just to present some opinions, a few ideas, raise a few questions, to stimulate some thought and some discussion.

Most of what I have to say you may have already heard before, but even so I think it's important enough to bear some repetition.

I'd like to start with something that is probably very familiar to you, and that is the statement that "War is the extension of politics by other means" - a very well-known statement - but nevertheless it's a good starting point for this discussion.

It's a statement which is true of all wars - large or small, just or unjust. It means that warfare or wars are rooted in political or political-economic reasons or motivations. All wars are of this character. And this is also true of guerrilla warfare. In Southern Africa today, for instance, the present guerrilla wars that are occurring are an extension of liberation politics, an extension of those politics by other means.

Incidentally, this fact (that wars are an extension of politics) did not stop some people a few years ago from advocating very strenuously that guerrilla warfare itself could create a political situation - a revolutionary political situation.

This theory, which is commonly known as the 'guerrilla foco' theory, became very popular, especially amongst some Latin American peoples. Che Guevara, for instance, was identified with this theory, and he attempted to put it into practice in the country of Bolivia - creating first an armed unit conducting an armed struggle, with the intention of provoking the political situation to create a revolutionary situation. The French theorist, Régis Debray, was also connected with this theory.

Essentially it was rooted in a rather distorted concept of the guerrilla war for liberation in Cuba. The theory was that the forces of Fidel Castro, in an armed way, provoked the situation which led to the overthrow of the Batista regime. This, I think, is a distorted view of the Cuban struggle. It really has a much more complex character than that. Many more forces than those of Castro's guerrilla group were involved in the struggle against Batista.

At any rate history and the events of history have taken care of this theory of the 'guerrilla foco' - that the guerrilla struggle produces the political situation. In truth no revolutionary struggle (and guerrilla warfare can be a form of revolutionary struggle) can take place without very clearly defined conditions first existing - clearly defined political, economic and social conditions - which create a situation whereby guerrilla warfare is possible. Furthermore, each guerrilla struggle that has occurred, or ever will occur, arises from a set of conditions peculiar to the country where it occurs.

In other words, it is not possible to formulate a complete blueprint of guerrilla struggle that can be applied to all countries and all situations. It simply cannot be done, because

each guerrilla struggle has its own character, its own identity, flowing from the conditions produced in the country where it takes place.

In the decades of the 1960s a certain mystique developed about guerrilla warfare, especially amongst students and intellectual groups. People were impressed very much by the very great victories of guerrilla struggle that had occurred in Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria, or were going on in the Portuguese colonies of Africa at the time. And the idea grew up that guerrilla warfare is in itself revolutionary warfare. In other words, guerrilla warfare is people's warfare - that was the idea that developed in the 1960s.

Now this is not really a true concept. The fact is that this form of struggle - i.e. guerrilla struggle, which is conducted by comparatively small groups using conditions of secrecy, surprise and very great mobility - is used in a great variety of ways by all kinds of forces, both revolutionary forces and counter-revolutionary forces, both progressive forces and reactionary forces.

For example, in Southern Africa today, guerrilla warfare is used by the ANC in South Africa; it is used by the Patriotic Front forces in Zimbabwe; it's employed by SWAPO in Namibia. But it's also employed by such reactionary groups and counter-revolutionary groups as UNITA in Angola, the anti-FRELIMO armed group which has been publicised recently in Mozambique, and even to some extent by the so-called 'Sellous Scouts' in Zimbabwe - the counter-insurgency unit of the Smith-Muzorewa regime in Zimbabwe.

In other words, guerrilla warfare can be utilised by all kinds of people - by revolutionary forces as well as by counter-revolutionary forces. So it is really not correct to say that guerrilla warfare as such, as an entity, is revolutionary or a form of people's warfare. It is not the form of warfare itself that makes it revolutionary, but the political aims of its leaders, of its organisers - the political aims that are represented in the guerrilla struggle, in the guerrilla movement - i.e. the politics of guerrilla warfare are its key factor.

Not surprisingly, Marxists, with their very deep ideological and political commitment, have been the most effective practitioners of guerrilla warfare, although even Marxists, at the beginning, were not so sure of its use.

The first time that we saw a major use of guerrilla warfare by Marxist movements was during the 1905 revolution in

Russia. At that time armed groups were organised by the left-wing peasant and trade union movements and were conducting guerrilla warfare against the Czarist regime. Many of the Marxists in Russia at that time questioned this kind of warfare because it was drawing into its ranks certain elements who were not formally members of mass organisations, even lumpen elements from the cities and people with rather unsavoury backgrounds who were willing to take up arms and fight with the left against the Czarist regime.

So a lot of questions were being asked about this, and Lenin at that time wrote a very significant article called 'Guerrilla Warfare' (it was dated around 1905) in which he defined what guerrilla warfare really was from the Marxist standpoint and how it should be used. I'd like to quote a section from this article by Lenin because it pertains to the topic under discussion:

"It is said that guerrilla warfare brings the class-conscious proletariat into close association with the greatest drunken riff-raff. That is true, but it only means that the party of the proletariat can never regard guerrilla warfare as the only or even the chief method of struggle. It means that this method must be subordinated to other methods, that this method must be commensurate with the chief methods of warfare and must be ennobled by the enlightening and organising influence of socialism. And without this latter condition, all, positively all, methods of struggle in bourgeois society bring the proletariat into a close association with the various non-proletarian strata, above and below it, and if left to the continuous course of events, it becomes free, corrupted and prostituted."

In other words, what Lenin is pointing out is that guerrilla warfare, if its going to be practised by the people, needs a clear-cut, as he said, "ennobling influence of socialism" - i.e. a clear-cut political leadership - in order for it to become a revolutionary movement.

To be continued...