

The Spear of the Nation at Twenty

- LOVEJOY KARAS

"UMKHONTO W I L L BE AT THE FRONT-LINE OF THE PEOPLE'S DEFENCE. IT WILL BE THE FIGHTING ARM OF THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS POLICIES OF RACE OPPRESSION. IT WILL BE THE STRIKING FORCE OF THE PEOPLE FOR LIBERTY, FOR RIGHTS AND FOR THEIR FINAL LIBERATION!"

The above quotation from the MK Manifesto - a flyer released during the first daring actions of Umkhonto in 1961 - expresses in unambiguous language the optimistic vision cherished by the founding fathers, leaders and combatants of our army. The firmness of this statement is also a reflection of unflinching patriotism and devotion to the popular cause for liberation. These lucid but militant words that carry with them an irresistably motivating power, express the ideas upon which is founded the strong qualities of the true patriots serving in Umkhonto we Sizwe: their courage, determination, heroism and valour are in the interest of the oppressed masses of our country and for the sake of a revolution that will remedy all the political ills of today's South Africa.

On December 16 this year as we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of our army, and therefore 20 years of armed struggle we'll naturally have to evaluate our position and role in terms of the vision expressed above. Not only this, but also to review our brief history and our records of struggle with the view of perfecting our tactics of struggle, introducing adaptations and variations if the obtaining situation so demands. We sincerely ask ourselves, "What have we got to show to our people, allies and friends?"

A NEW STAGE

The unceremonious banning of the ANC in 1960 by the racists which automatically implied the stopping of the peaceable channels of struggle, albeit not a blessing, was to mark a historical ascendancy into a new stage in the liberatory efforts of our people. The point reached in 1960 was t h e

inevitable length towards which the entire so-called 'Native Policy' of the white minority regime had been pulling. And to accelerate the process the fascistic authorities had mounted up repression through legislation and physical harassment employing the army and police particularly during the decade of the 50s. This demonic measures, instead of becoming the hoped for panacea in the face of mass militant actions characteristic of the 'roaring fifties', provoked a new fighting spirit within the masses of our people. During the second half of the fifties the people were already questioning the advantage of white-flag politics and the wish to work for winning white opinion. Like Chief A.J. Luthuli, they said we've been "knocking in vain... on a closed and barred door". So the pressing issue of the day was to become the resort to other forms viable enough to produce worthy results. Spontaneous outbreaks of violent struggles punctuated the whole period of the marathon "Treason Trial" (1956-60) - the trial itself was not only an intransigent slap on the faces of non-violent strugglers but perhaps one of Pretoria's most arrogant political shows. In the light of mounting state coercion vis-a-vis obvious disillusionment and a threatening recourse to spontaneous violent upsurges, the responsible leaders of our liberation movement had to grapple with the urgent question "What is to be done?"

During the "Rivonia Trial", Comrade Nelson Mandela, outlining the immediate reasons behind the launching of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961 pointed out:

"I, and the others who started the organisation, did so for two reasons. Firstly, we believed that as a result of Government policy, violence by the African people had become inevitable, and that unless responsible leadership was given to canalize and control the feelings of our people, there would be outbreaks of terrorism which would produce an intensity of bitterness and hostility between the various races of this country which is not even produced by war. Secondly, we felt that without violence there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle of 'White Supremacy'. All lawful modes of expressing opposition to this legislation had been closed by legislation..."

This statement attests to the sobriety, seriousness and social conscience of the leaders who took the historic turn of 1961. There was no other viable option besides the path of revolutionary violence - our leaders and movement are always at pains to put across the fact that the option of armed struggle was imposed on us as a result of a historically evolving policy of exploitation, oppression and repression through race discrimination and apartheid.

Viewed in the light of the evolution of the Strategy and Tactics of the ANC since its inception - a strategy within which moderation and some strong element of trust in the human conscience are easily discernible - the announcement of its birth through a series of bomb explosions in the major cities of South Africa, signalled a transition into a new revolutionary stage to be spearheaded by Umkhonto we Sizwe - The Spear of the Nation. Of course there were voices from even some of the patriotic ranks that sought to challenge the correctness of the decision to take to arms. These voices have since been either convinced or silenced by the historical realities of apartheid rule whereas the existence of Umkhonto has been a source of great strength and morale within the fighting ranks of our people. Throughout the past two decades in its relentless history, MK has always striven to be in "the front-line of the people's defence".

When, in future the full history of Umkhonto is properly documented they, will have to reserve a chapter on individual and collective acknowledgement, by the people, of our MK as our people's spear in deed.

RICH STOREHOUSE OF EXPERIENCE

The path of struggle is not smooth. It is full of many an obstacle and bogs. It wears out the weak and vacillating and only the tenacious and steadfast succeed in surging forth uncompromisingly to the end. Such has been the case also with the rich history of our young People's Army.

The epic of MK's fighting record carries us through important landmarks;

* The Sabotage Campaign of 1961-62 which signalled the birth of the liberation alliance's armed wing. This militant campaign of sabotaging important governmental installations which were symbols of the regime's reactionary policies of its maintenance was not conceived as a principal tactic, but as an important means of bridging the gap between the period of non-violence and the new option. In this connection it was to be an important bridgehead to the future more demanding stage of

guerrilla warfare.

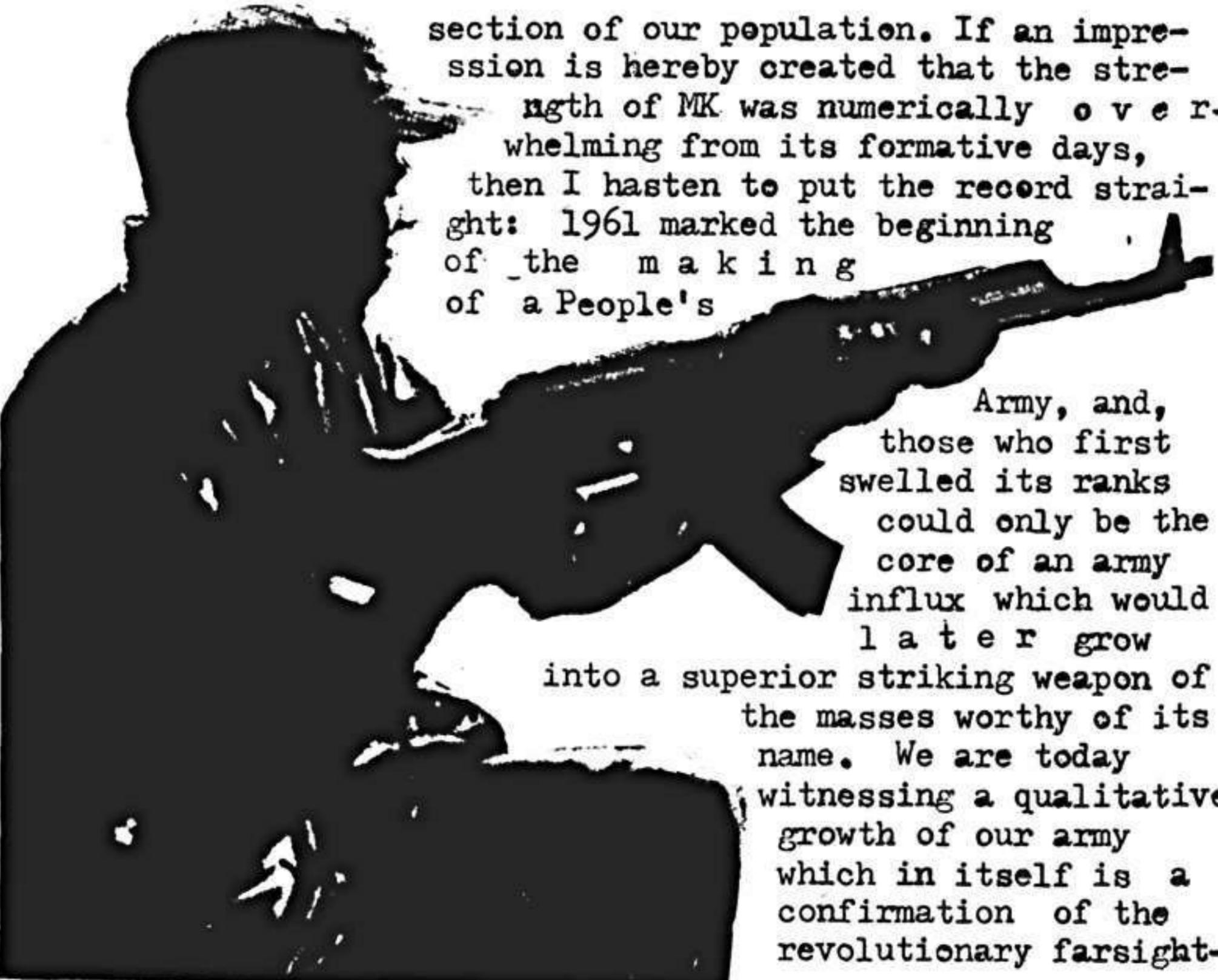
* We have also seen bad days: The consequences of the "Rivonia Trial" were to deal the clandestine structures of our movement a staggering blow. But as is the tradition with all committed revolutionaries, the racist dock was turned into a rostrum from where perhaps the most inspiring, motivating speeches of South Africa's political history were made. Apartheid was attacked and exposed whilst the whole world listened. This was yet another front where though we suffered casualties - the cream of our leaders was incarcerated for life - we rightfully claim victory.

* The Wankie/Sipolilo Days: The heroic Luthuli Detachment was injected into Zimbabwe during August of 1967 together with militants of ZAPU. The African National Congress combatants were destined for South Africa where they were to establish themselves and begin the necessary preparations for guerrilla warfare as envisaged in the draft document "Operation Mayibuye" (the document was amongst the valuable archives captured by the enemy at Rivonia). They were intercepted by Smith's forces and bitter battles ensued. Our comrades fought heroically, putting the enemy to flight and routing him on several occasions. The Zimbabwe battles were on the other hand an obstacle to the main mission. Though the main objective of our combatants was thus foiled, the Wankie/Sipolilo Campaign is a golden page in our history. This was MK's baptism of fire and it set our combat record, thus inspiring a new fighting mood inside our country by shattering the myth of the invincibility of the oppressor.

* The recent history of MK has been well publicised and is reported upon daily even by the reactionary press. It is one record full of examples of devotion and daring feats. For the purpose of brevity I shall not dwell on this period since it will continue to be covered in many ways as it must. But perhaps at this stage it becomes important to discuss some aspects relevant to the nature of our army, to make an attempt at showing what it has become in these twenty years.

WHO ARE MK COMBATANTS?

The formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961 brought into the van of the popular struggle young militants from the different sections of our population. They were from the intelligentsia, the discriminated middle strata and small traders. They came from the land-starved rural masses and the super-exploited urban working class - the latter constituting the majority of our people's soldiers. Indeed the core of our army was from its inception a representative of a cross-



section of our population. If an impression is hereby created that the strength of MK was numerically overwhelming from its formative days, then I hasten to put the record straight: 1961 marked the beginning of the making of a People's

Army, and, those who first swelled its ranks could only be the core of an army influx which would later grow into a superior striking weapon of the masses worthy of its name. We are today witnessing a qualitative growth of our army which in itself is a confirmation of the revolutionary farsightedness and perspicacity of the then "MK High Command".

A UNITED ARMY

An unfortunate impression is always created that Umkhonto we Sizwe consists only of the generation of the June 16 Episodes. Much as this is not necessarily deliberate, it is yet a serious and dangerously misleading approach. We acknowledge with immense pride the rejuvenating role these militants played in opting for swelling the ranks of our army (the author himself belongs to this generation). But there is a hidden danger in overstressing this fact, for in the ultimate the tendency is to obscure the historic contribution of the first combatants, without whom the present heights of our revolutionary war could have never been conquered.

Above all, the generation of the "Luthuli Detachment" is not important only in the historical sense for they are still very active within our ranks - both as commanders and commissars at varying levels of our military structure and as rank and file combatants. They are the epitome of the resilience and tenacity of our war. They carry with them the steeling experience of the Sabotage Campaign of 1961/62 and the hero-

ic Wankie/Sipelile Campaigns of 1967/68. In many ways than one, it is their courage and unflinching devotion to the cause that serve as an important inspiration to us who are fighting with them today. Together we are a dialectical whole, a fast growing army that is fully united from top to bottom. In the words of Comrade President O.R. Tambo:

"... Umkhonto we Sizwe, the army of the people of South Africa, is itself united throughout its heroic ranks within its detachments and between its cadres, its commanding personnel and its political leadership. Thanks to this unity, it has decisively and successfully repulsed enemy attempts to destroy it from within through the infiltration of spies and provocateurs."

OUR POLITICAL AND MORALE SUPERIORITY

The South African revolution is poised to dislodge and destroy the most entrenched colonialist enemy who has at his command an advanced economy, sophisticated repressive machine, powerful army and police that cannot be taken for granted. An evaluation of this evident material strength of the enemy has led some myopic people to shout; "but how do they hope to defeat such a powerful enemy?" They even go further to dismiss armed struggle as suicidal and senseless. This type of approach definitely betrays wilful ignorance and a failure to understand the nature of the war and the calibre of the people's soldiers.

All of us here in the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe are a people who at some stage or another have laboured under tonnage of apartheid's humiliating legislation. Together with our people we have waded in the squalor of ghettos where we have been daily victims of police harassment, disease, hunger and denudation. Some have been in the countryside where the Afrikaner farmers are the alpha and the omega whilst the land-starved masses toil for a pittance at the crack of a sjambok. These realities through which we have lived have instilled in us an implacable hatred for the boer-fascist oppressor.

We are convinced that the enemy is not a monolith that cannot be moved. The basis of this unshakable conviction is knowledge of the fact that ours is a just war for popular liberation that draws its strength from support by the broad masses. It is invincible because it is waged by the people

themselves employing as they do every means at their disposal including strikes, demonstrations, boycotts and arms. In this connection we understand and play our role effectively as a spearhead of this P e o p l e ' s W a r. The enemy knows and fears our political strength that is solidified by the overwhelming popular support we enjoy at home, amongst our people, and abroad amongst the peaceful and progressive communities of the world. Our trumps are the liberating ideas of our revolution and a commitment to a democratic order.

The justness of our cause is therefore the great inexhaustable pool of our political and moral strength. It is this knowledge that more than ever convinces us of the imperative of struggle and the inevitability of victory. This is the basis of all the tenacity, daring and selflessness of true MK combatants. Our record speaks for itself: the courage of Solomon Mahlangu, the resilience of Gordon Dikebu (Linda Jobane) - the lion of Chiawelo, the valour of the Silverton Trio, the spirit of no-surrender of Basil February, etc.

MASTERY OF THE ART OF PEOPLE'S WAR

An MK soldier is a volunteer and he goes through his training with no inhibitions - he is free in body and spirit. He therefore goes through his military preparation with high morale, looking forward to his turn to taste the blood of the enemy, the tormentor of our people. But acquisition of the military skill alone is not the primary thing in our army. We recognise the fact that "our military line grows out of our political line." Therefore, we are political soldiers in military uniforms. The domination of the political aspect in our army guarantees our consistent revolutionary approach, enables us to be better able to know our enemy - his strength and weaknesses in order to be appropriately equipped for bringing about his downfall, and above all, imbues us with high moral qualities and sense of duty.

This does not in any way suggest that we are not competent militarily. The enemy himself has admitted that the MK combatants are "highly trained" and described some of our operations as "sophisticated". The fact that we sustain our operations under difficult conditions and manage to evade the boer-fascist security indicates the importance we attach to military competence and the skilful exercise of tactics.

Military instruction in our army is calculated to prepare and steel the combatants, to develop in them endurance and steadfastness. All the positive qualities in a comrade are emphasised and developed. The spirit of comradeship and

mutuality is cultivated through continuous political education. This constitutes the basis for the high combat efficiency, morale and discipline of U m k h o n t o combatants. Indeed, in our army we have been transformed into a proud selfless people. True as in the words of the President of our people's organisation, the African National Congress, Comrade Oliver Tambo:

"In building up our own popular army we aim (therefore) not only at the overthrow of the fascist regime, we aim also at building up a politically conscious and revolutionary army, conscious of its popular origin, unwavering in its democratic functions and guided by our revolutionary orientation."

An army such as ours is definitely invincible. We are a dynamic force, and, the more we fight the stronger we become. Our prestige grows with the steady escalation of the struggle, attracting more practical support from conscious people everywhere. As ours is a protracted war, its immediate future guarantees further development of our politico-moral superiority and an increase in our material strength. This will hasten the undermining of the present advantages of the enemy and finally bring them to naught. This will mark the great turning point to inevitable victory. But we know that the decisive stepping stone to victory lies in the organisation and preparation for the winning of victory. It is precisely on these aspects that we place our emphasis today.

FORWARD TO A PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT!

DAWN politiXword No.10 – Answers

ACROSS: 1. Turret 4. Mob 6. Envoy 7. Meal
8. Late 10. Baton 11. Sofia 13. Snipe
14. SAM

DOWN: 1. Tsedenbal 2. Revolution 3. Egypt
4. Meses 5. Bullet 9. Gaol 12. Arm