

Defence committees in Angola

INTRODUCTION

A recent United Nations report shows that 140 000 children under the age of five died last year in Mozambique and Angola as a direct result of the apartheid regime's policy of destabilisation. This means that every four minutes a small Angolan or Mozambican child is lost, who would otherwise have lived. This is just one more mass-scale crime against humanity committed by the fascist, apartheid regime.

The UN report speaks of "mass terrorism carried out by forces which have burned crops and farmhouses, pillaged and destroyed schools, clinics, churches, mosques, stores and villages, poisoned wells by throwing bodies down them, and attacked the transport system which is a vital part of rural life."

The report adds : "Health workers, as well as clinics and other health posts, schools, teachers and pupils, foreign aid personnel and vehicles transporting health and relief supplies, are all deliberately chosen as targets of the war for the purpose of causing a breakdown in civil administration."

Those who shout loudest in our country about attacks on 'soft targets' and about a 'terrorist total onslaught' are directly implicated in these horrific crimes in our neighbouring countries.

What is it that the apartheid regime fears so much about Angola and Mozambique ? PW Botha is terrified of the shining example of unity, democracy, non-racialism, peace , prosperity and progress that these countries with a socialist orientation can provide to the peoples of South Africa. The apartheid regime is determined by all means to destabilise these countries, so as to be able to say 'national liberation does not work, socialism does not work'

In Angola (as in Mozambique) patriots have learnt in many years of difficult struggle, they have one irreplaceable weapon : popular mobilisation and organisation. In this issue of Isizwe we present the first of a series of articles that will look at the major mass organisations in Angola. In future issues we will look at trade unions, and the women's and youth organisations.

BACKGROUND

Just over 30 years ago, in December 1956,

Angolan patriots formed the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and demanded independence from Portuguese colonialism. The only response of the colonialists was to increase their military presence in Angola, and make arrests among the patriotic forces. The founding president of MPLA, Agostinho Neto, was deported to Portugal and held in jail.

The people of Kaxihane, Neto's birthplace, organised a peaceful demonstration calling for his release. The colonial army's reply was spelt out in machine-gun bullets. This massacre started a fire which the colonists would not be able to extinguish.

On December 6, 1960 MPLA announced the beginning of the armed struggle. In Malange province, peasants calling for an increase in cotton prices were bombed with napalm and thousands were killed and injured. On February 4, 1961, a group of MPLA militants, armed only with pangas carried out daring raids on the radio station, police posts and prisons in Luanda. The following day, the enraged colonial authorities took reprisals, and more than 3000 people died.

This was the beginning of the popular insurrection. Gradually, MPLA equipment, skills and experience improved. In the following years the MPLA opened the Cabinda front, and the eastern front. Liberated zones were established and these increased in size.

Under the combined pressure of national liberation struggles led by MPLA in Angola, and FRELIMO and PAIGC (in Mozambique and Guinea Bissau-Cape Verde) the Portuguese

colonial army collapsed completely in April 1974.

For the MPLA, however, the fighting was still not over. Another war began immediately, this time with the racist South African regime. The SADF invaded Angola to try to prevent the liberation of the country by MPLA. Independence was declared on November 11 1975 when the troops of the racist regime, supported by US imperialism, still occupied a large part of Angola's territory. With aid from their Cuban allies, the MPLA eventually forced the invaders to flee back into Namibia. By the end of March 1976, the last SADF troops had left Angola after suffering some significant defeats.

However, there was to be only a brief interlude. Since 1978, there have been continuing incursions, attacks and bombing raids. The SADF has occupied large areas in southern Angola on several occasions. The apartheid regime has also been making use of the UNITA puppet group to aid in its destabilising policies.

It is against this background that, one year ago, President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, in his New Year's message, said : "The year 1986 will be devoted to the defence of the popular revolution. No revolution can triumph unless it knows how to defend itself."

PEOPLE'S VIGILANCE BRIGADES

For the MPLA-Workers' Party and the people of Angola, the defence of their country and their revolution is not just the task of the people's army FAPLA. Defence is

the task and duty of every patriotic Angolan. In order to better structure this work, the first Peoples Vigilance Brigade (BPV) was established in November 1983. Since then BPVs have been established all over the country.

Although the BPVs are, in fact, the most recently formed of all the major mass organisations in Angola, their membership has already grown to include about 800 000 people throughout the country.

The BPVs are under the direct discipline of the MPLA-Workers' Party, rather than under the military discipline of FAPLA. The BPVs are community based committees and their task is to watch for those seeking to undermine the revolution from within.

Brigade members are selected by the district MPLA-Workers' Party committee on the basis of their proven commitment. They receive basic military training, including the use of small arms. The majority of BPV members are workers and peasants, and their participation in the BPVs is part-time. However, a member may be released from work for brigade activities if the need arises.

Once a brigade is established, its first task is to do a thorough survey of the inhabitants of its district. This enables it to identify additional, potential recruits. In carrying out the survey door to door, the BPV members introduce themselves and explain their duties to the community. In this way they begin to seek the help of the entire community in isolating anti-social and criminal elements.

In certain districts where enemy agents might be active, the BPVs draw up guard duty rosters. Members then take turns to patrol their district and ensure its safety.

With the aim of increasing efficiency, the national co-ordinator of the BPVs, Balthazar Missoji, has suggested contact be maintained with foreign organisations established for the same purpose. Contacts and exchange of information have already been made with the Cuban Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, and Patriotic Front of Bulgaria.

Besides their major task of defending revolutionary gains within their own districts, the BPVs also play an important support role for various national campaigns. In particular, they encourage popular participation in those campaigns which set out to resolve the social and economic problems confronting this newly independent country. For example, BPVs are active in blood donation and vaccination campaigns. They have also been playing an important role in education and literacy programs.

Another area into which the BPVs have been drawn is the supervising of goods distribution in their districts. Their task is to ensure that workers and peasants are not exploited by individuals channelling scarce goods into the kadonga (the black market).

But, at this stage of the Angolan revolution, it is the defence task, maintaining local vigilance, that remains uppermost for the BPVs. In the words of President dos Santos, the task of defence is not just the specialised task of the people's army, "it calls for the

active participation of all Angolan citizens, from Cabinda to Cunene."

For the people of Angola, the defence of their hard-won liberation is not an easy task. There are many powerful forces determined to wreck their country. But, guided by the scientific approach of the MPLA-Workers' Party, and strengthened by mass mobilisation and internationalist support, the Angolan people will win through. They have shown their ability in the past to overcome the most formidable obstacles. A luta continua - but complete victory will be won.

