

HAS THE TIME COME FOR ARMING THE MASSES  
THE CALL TO ARM THE MASSES IS IT SCIENTIFIC OR UTOPIAN

Notes Delivered At Regional Youth Seminar by Joe Nhlanhla.

Introductory remarks.

Is it time to arm the masses? Is this call realistic or emotional? Is it proper to dismiss the idea as unrealistic or inopportune. It is a fact that the idea is popular. After all we say that the masses are the decisive force, the makers of history. What is wrong therefore in arming the makers of history, the force of destiny. Any attempt to answer this question without taking into consideration a whole range of circumstances and factors would be utopian and unscientific. A whole range of questions come to the force as soon as this question is posed.

1. What do we understand by arming?
2. What do we have in mind when we speak of the masses?
3. Are we thinking of countries where the People are in power and hence it is the question of arming themselves?
4. What organisational structures do we have to organise and mobilise the masses?
5. What is the strategy and tactics. Role of correct strategy.
6. What are the prevailing objective and subjective conditions? have the masses reached the level where they are no longer prepared to be ruled in the old way, where they are ready to make all kinds of sacrifices to effect change and where a Party exist as a vehicle leading the revolt.
7. Are we thinking of a situation like in our country where the people are not in power, where our people are not trained except for puppets, where arms are not available to the people and where possession of arms by the people is a serious crime against the existing order of things.
8. What is our own conception of the people's war. What are the contending forces in our country. Various stages of people's war and the idea of arming the masses.
9. Who is to be armed in the name of the people. Is it feasible to think of arming the whole black population.
10. If indiscriminate distribution of arms is not acceptable, then how to distribute and how to control.
11. Availability of arms always not limitless. Sources of arms.
12. Availability of training facilities limited.
13. The role of the Party in organising and leading of the masses
14. Role of ideology in the arming of the masses
15. Some examples of the concept of arming the masses
16. Concretely the South African situation, our strategy, our Party and our people.

These are some of the many questions that come to ones mind as soon as the question of arming the masses is placed on the agenda of the day. We shall have to probe some of these questions in order to have an idea about the meaning of the question concretely and on the ground.

What do we understand about the concept of arming the masses? When Chile under the leadership of the late President Allende broke away from the imperialist orbit and opted for a more just and equitable socio-economic order, it antagonised the ruler of USA. The Popular Front of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and other left patriotic parties posed mortal danger to imperialist interests. On the agenda of imperialism was clearly the elimination of the popular President of Chile and overthrow of his coalition government. President Allende knew that, and so did his government. President Allende and his popular government were a government that did not control the state. The government that had come into being was popular People's government but the inherited state remained untouched by the results of the popular elections. The government and people of Chile were faced with the problem of changing this state of affairs. There were numerous calls from well meaning revolutionaries and ultra-leftists demanding that the MASSES BE ARMED TO COUNTER BALANCE AND CHANGE THE STATE OF THE GENERALS, POLICE and REACTIONARY JUDICIARY. It was clear that a confrontation between the Government and masses of the people of Chile on the one hand, and the reactionary inherited state machinery on the other was inevitable. The army, particularly the navy was under USA tutelage. Dr. Kissinger and his Committee of 40 were obsessed and infuriated by the popular example of Chile in Latin America. President Allende was killed and his government overthrown by the army. The debate still continues on why didn't President Allende arm the masses to stave off the attack by reactionaries. Was it possible? Could the coup have been avoided? Could the masses have been armed? My answer is no. The army would not have allowed the arming of the masses. The army would have intervened. Incidentally I and some world youth leaders met President Allende in 1971 and posed the question of survival and the attack by the reactionaries.

In Chilean politics there was always the myth that the history of Chilean army is a history of an army that respected the popular will and the constitution of the country. President Allende to some extent believed in that. Secondly we had a feeling that President Allende believed that in case of a coup attempt the patriotic forces in the army will remain with the government and together with the people would defeat the reactionaries. We now know that this was a serious miscalculation on the part of the President and his government. Even the loyalty of the commander of the army did not dent the army. It was an imperialist trained army defending the interest of imperialism. It watched the airports of Chile and its harbours for any arms sent to arm the masses. The idea of arming the masses was good but in the conditions of Chile was not feasible. This is one example. Here an important element to bear in mind is the fact that the Popular Government had come into power through the electoral process. Was the fate of the Popular Government sealed? In a way yes. How much politicisation of the army had been done is a question mark. The notion of professionalism of the army-out of politics, was not useful.

The situation in the Soviet Union, in Russia between the February revolution and the October revolution was different. On the 25th October 1917, the revolutionary forces had superiority of forces in the battle. The arming of the masses in preparation for the

insurrection must be understood within the context of a whole series of factors namely:-

- a) Existence of a strong party ideological very clear and accepted by the masses of the people of Russia as the indisputable leader.
- b) Iron discipline of the Party and Army
- c) Level of political consciousness of the masses had been raised very high by the Party.
- d) Masses demanded overthrow of Czarist regime and were ready to make all sacrifices for achieving that.
- e) The 1905 and February events paved the way to October.
- f) Russia's adventurous imperial aims necessitated the creation of large armies and since Russia was backward it was a large army in poor conditions and composed of workers and peasants.
- g) Work of the Party in the arming. Lenin's famous call of changing imperialist war into a civil war, a revolution.
- h) The Bolshevik Party itself trained lots of comrades particularly during the period of dual power after the February revolution.
- i) Revolutionary situation existed and both the objective and subjective factors were there.
- j) Large section of the army moved over to the side of the revolution, with their arms.

The Cuban example is that of a growing people's war. Here it is worth noting that because of the limitation of the arms at the initial stage, Comrade Castro and his collectives demanded that those who join the guerrilla army should bring their own arms. The arming of the masses proceeded under those conditions.

The Vietnamese example is by far the most complete example ~~because of the scale and duration of the conflict.~~ ~~Here important elements of~~ a People's war fought in the form of guerrilla warfare is vividly discernible. At the end of the period that could be relatively termed period of peaceful struggle, the Party of Vietnam made the following analysis:-

"Now the period of peaceful development of the revolution is over, but that of nationwide uprising has not yet begun. To limit ourselves now solely to carrying out our work under political form is not sufficient to speed-up the movement. But if we start armed insurrection right now, our forces will be destroyed by the enemy. The present struggle must necessarily proceed from the political form to the military form.

But for the time being more importance must be given to the political form. We must therefore adopt a more appropriate form in order to bring the movement forward."

The call of arming the masses must not be understood in absolute terms and even in relative terms must not be understood as automatic. That as soon as peaceful conditions seize, conditions for armed struggle, automatically come into being. The truth is that deliberate systematic preparations for launching and sustaining armed struggle.

In this context therefore the word arming must be understood in a broad context involving educating, mobilising and organising of the masses of the people by the revolutionary Party leading the revolution. The education of the masses means the masses are being armed politically with revolutionary ideas. It means removing the cobwebs and myths implanted on the masses by years of reactionary propaganda. Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary party and no victory. The lessons of the Paris Commune where a successful revolution was reversed because there was no clarity on what to do how to defend the revolution and what to attack. Lenin's State and Revolution was meant among other things to correct that short-coming. It was a response and lessons from the Paris Commune. The people must know why they are fighting what they want to change and how to change it. Finally they must know what they want to create in the place of the smashed order of things. It is not enough to rise because you are fed-up with the old form of order because new versions of that order under new names might be acceptable to you. The arming of our people must start with political education. An unpoliticised army is open to misuse and banditry. Secondly an unpoliticised army will lack motivation and inspiration and therefore cannot fight tenaciously like the Red Army, an army that is predominantly a combused of Communists and Komsumols, ready to perform its patriotic duties anytime in defence of Peace and Socialism.

The mobilisation of the people is an important condition for arming the masses. For the masses of the people to be brought into full play in defence of their birth rights and for the overthrow of their oppressors, the revolutionary Party must mobilise them and organise them for the fight and victory. Clearly for the mass of the people to become a force, they need to be united. This unity is not achieved automatically. It comes into being in the field of united struggle first over local issues and later national ones.

When we consider the fact that it is impossible to arm the whole people with arms because of variety of reasons, availability of arms, state of preparedness for the people to carry services, the need to continue with production and other essential religious beliefs and state of health of the population. But many of these people can contribute in one way or another to the war effort. In a people's government by increased production whilst for the workers in fascist oppressive regimes can sabotage production and increase the strike action.

There is the need to be very selective in arming the masses in order to avoid arming the enemies of the people masquerading as part of the people. We deliberately favour workers, peasants and revolutionary youth. The important thing about a People's war is the total involvement of various sections of the people in the struggle for victory. The People must believe in the justness of their cause, and be prepared to make any sacrifice.

The Vietnamese liberation war proved that in the face of an enemy as powerful as he is cruel, victory is certain only by uniting the whole people within the bosom of a firm national united front based on the workers-peasant alliance.

When we are speaking of the masses or the people we are obviously not including every human being enemy or friend. The concept of the masses is discriminatory or selective. We say that our Party is primarily the Party of the oppressed blacks and progressive and democratic whites. It is essential the Party of the Workers, Peasants and revolutionary intellectuals. We do not include the puppets and sellouts among the blacks, the reactionary whites the main pillar of apartheid. Even then, among those we define as the masses excluding the sellouts in the black community and the reactionaries among the whites, we choose those who are politically and physically fit to be armed for arming. (in the narrow sense of the word.)

Political struggle play a fundamental role in the unfolding of armed struggle because our basic strength and the enemy's basic weakness lies in the political field. The political army of the masses includes the whole mass of our people, irrespective of sex and age. This army is gathering strength throughout the length and breadth of our country. It is the reliable reservoir of our army. This army is armed and is forcing the enemy into retreat and change of tactics. It has made him unable to rule in the old way.

#### Concept of a People's War.

When the Vietnamese people were asked why they won against such overwhelming odds. The answer "The Vietnamese people won because their war of liberation was a People's war". The resistance to aggression was the task of the entire population. In addition to that they won because they had the support of the whole of progressive mankind because their cause was just.

The imperatives of a People's war requires the adoption of appropriate Strategy and Tactics on the basis of the enemy's characteristics and of our own, of the concrete conditions of the battle fields and the balance of forces facing one another. Ours is a strategy for protracted warfare whilst ready to adjust to any change of situation arising from the influence of international and national factors. Ours is a strategy of maximising support for ourselves and isolation for the enemy.

Guerrilla warfare is a war of the broad masses against a powerful equipped and better trained at the beginning army of the oppressor.

One feature of the People's war is the growing involvement of the people in all fields of confrontation with the enemy. There is no diminishing of the political role. As the struggle intensifies, the confrontation becomes total engulfing all spheres of social life, political, economic, social, cultural and military. The saying that war is the extension of politics by other means is clearly discernible here.

As the People's war goes and intensifies, so do we witness a growing arming of the masses as more and more people get directly involved in military confrontation with the enemy. In the example of Vietnam the three stages of guerrilla armed struggle are clearly visible. The period of initiation of the armed struggle marked by growth whilst pre-occupied with survival. The main task at this stage is armed propaganda, breaking the enemy's monopoly of force and violence. The Vietnamese called their army at this stage "The Vietnam Propaganda and Liberation unit". Clearly at this stage the enemy's pre-occupation is the elimination of the Guerrilla army. The next stage of accelerated growth which they called the stage of balancing. The final stage the stage they called stage of mobile warfare where they had superiority of forces.

In actual fact all these stages have a direct bearing on our conception of the process of arming the masses both in its narrow and broad sense. In Vietnam the arming of the masses reached a particular high level because of various factors political, organisational and military. At the final stage of the war, the Vietnamese people had a regular mobile army, they had a Territorial army or what you might call Area or Regional armies and Militia army. The mobile army by its very name stood guard over the whole country moving into defence of threatened area liberated areas or beginning the offensive. In enemy occupied parts the territorial army ensured that the armed struggle was well spread and that the enemy was bogged down. The existence of these three categories, ensured the widest arming and involvement of the people. In Vietnam it is said that every Vietnamese was trained to use a rifle, a grenade and learned how to swim. But here we must also bear in mind that the war had continued for a very long time and spread over several generations.

In Vietnam, the students who studied abroad, for instance those who studied with us in the Soviet Union considered themselves as part of the war effort. A good part of their stipend (allowance) was collected and used for the home war effort. They mobilised international support for their struggle and set themselves very high goals as students. They were the best students in the Soviet Union Even marriage was no a factor to attract Vietnamese away.

Clearly the concept of arming the masses is irremovable from the actual happenings at the arena of battle. As more and more operational and liberated zones come into being so will the prospects of arming more and more of our masses with actual arms.

Apart from MK units, there will be need to create para-military units for the protection of the people in such places as demonstrations etc. Also with the growth of our armed struggle, the prospects of small units coming into being independently whilst awaiting to make contact with MK and coming under its control cannot be overruled as it has happened in other areas. Our people are beginning to display a high sense of creativity as seen in UDF and the creation of Youth Organisations in various regions of our country. Our people on their own are unbanning the ANC and are displaying such militancy that sometimes they prove us to be more cautious than themselves. Comrade Oscar Mpetha favourite song for instance is about the MK cadres coming back from Angola bringing arms. The word MK is not banned by our people. It is on their lips. One of the important things about a revolution is that it brings to the fore the creative ability of a people. It is no different with our people.

In the Soviet Union during the Patriotic war, the size of the Red Army and that of the guerrilla units were such that they necessitated very high level of the arming of the population. The enemy left no part of the vast Soviet land untouched. Resistance to occupation and aggression was total. Both in the Soviet Union and Vietnam the approach was to turn these countries into grave yards for the occupant forces. The famous statue of a mother clad in black and calling on her sons and daughters to come in defence of Motherland served as an invaluable recruitment call. At this hour of destiny, when the enemy in our country together with his shameless imperialist supporters have gone into the offensive, threatening our unity as a people and that of our motherland, a similar call is urgently necessary.

When Ethiopia was threatened on all sides by imperialists plots to dismember the country, general mobilisation of the people and effective support from friendly countries especially the socialist countries headed by USSR, guaranteed sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

Under conditions of people in power, the process of creating the necessary infrastructure for general mobilisation and control of those under arms is relatively easy. The levers of state machinery can be used for arming and controlling of the arms. The Party and the army gives direction and supervises.

The situation is vastly different and much more complex when the masses are not in power and when they are pitted against the existing state machinery. Here to begin with it is necessary to have a Party that is strong underground and has great influence upon the masses of the people. The people in this case look forward to the party for leadership. Here it will be the party that will effect the arming of the people.

The approach is basically two fold. The first is the need to recruit large number of our people for training and arming. We need to intensify the recruitment of our people in their army, MK. Recruitment does not presuppose waiting for people to come on their own like what happened in 1976 and after. It means that the underground ANC inside the country should deliberately recruit the best of the sons and daughters of our country, the most politically conscious advance guard from among the masses, workers and peasants (mainly) and revolutionary intellectuals, to swell the ranks of the army. Those of the MK operating underground in the country have two tasks

- a) build the army inside the country by training and arming the masses and also
- b) by continuing with the armed struggle. It is clear that for the underground recruitment will be necessary to select the most disciplined and trusted cadres.

There are many other potentials that exist in our country for swelling the ranks of MK. When the late racist Prime Minister Dr. Hendrick Verwoerd was alive, he warned against any attempt to train the blacks into the SADF. He said that the history of every revolution shows that revolutions become successful only when a section of the Government army breaks and joins the revolutionary forces. He warned that at crucial moments the blacks in the army would join the revolution and therefore under no circumstances should blacks be trained. Today the revolution has forced the apartheid hierarchy to break this truism of apartheid. It is clear that serious effort must be done to reach and educate these people in the racist army. If whites despite all the privileges can desert and resist service in the army then there is still less reason why blacks cannot desert with their arms in large numbers as the armed struggle intensifies. We must increase our work in the reactionary racist army wooing away both blacks and whites. This we should consider as potentially an important way of arming our people. We shall have to deliberately infiltrate the enemy army to politicise it, demoralise it, divert it and finally to destroy it. All successful revolutions have considered the enemy as important source of arms and soldiers for the revolution. Some of the best Generals of the Red Army came from the Czarist army. Our policy in this direction must be deliberate and aggressive. We must bear in mind that many of our people in the army have joined because of unemployment.

In our country the sources of arms is the enemy. The arsenals of the enemy are beaming with arms bought from our sweat. These must be repossessed. We must work out a strategy of repossession of those arms in order to arm the masses of our people. Clearly we cannot rely on supplies from our friends alone. The Vietnamese captured billions worth of arms particularly in the base Danang (here alone it was reported that some 2 billion worth of arms was captured.)



There is also the fact that every white house has arms. Tsotsis have made these houses the main source of their supplies. Without hurting the occupants either in holds-up or pure stealing they have succeeded in keeping themselves supplied. The civilian policy of ANC remains intact and operative. We cannot do what fascists are capable of doing otherwise we shall be no different ourselves from those who deliberately murder children and pregnant women. We cannot follow the motto that the end justifies the means. This is found in the vocabulary of fascists thugs.

It is clear to me that the process of infiltration of arms into the country will be greatly assisted by tapping the internal sources of arms. It also means that it is permissible to train more people including those we can presently arm. The possession of arms must be by specially trained and organised units. Former enemy soldiers both black and white would be best suited to serve in such units.

The arming of the people should not be viewed in terms of dropping arms from the air or scattering arms to troubled spots. Firstly distribution of arms to untrained people becomes more of disaster than assistance. They will not know what and how to use them. Secondly they might fall into the hands of undesirable elements. Thirdly, even if some of the arms fall into the hands of trained people if there is no organisation, no organised resistance, the effective use of those arms will be minimal. Arming of the masses, we repeat presupposes, the existence of organisation and infrastructure for arming the people. It means that the problem of how those arms reach the people in a controlled way is solved. In case of the repetition of Soweto uprisings for instance what do we do. An unplanned adventurous approach might cause more casualties than it can prevent.

We must approach the question of arming the people on the basis of politicisation, mobilisation, and organisation of the masses as a whole and in their various formations. Any other approach can only be called sloganeering or phrasemongering. It is said that when a whole people rises up nothing can be done to stop them. No force on earth can stop a people from achieving what is legitimately theirs, when they dared struggle for it.

The example of Iran despite its obvious serious short-comings afterwards illustrate this point very forcefully. The uprising here almost without arms was too strong for an army that was lavishly equipped by USA without regards to its most sophisticated technological secrets. It was an army supported by a visible CIA army, presence in Iran and also by the numerous army of secret agents serving the Shah. When the army of the Shah wanted to intervene by armoured cars and tanks, Multitudes of peoples closed the garrison doors by their bodies ready to sacrifice themselves. In this way they succeeded in rendering the army of the Shah ineffective. They came to the streets in their millions in response to the political-religious call, to replace the rotten dictatorship of the Shah.

It is true that problems arose after the overthrow of the corrupt Shah. This had to be so because the front that overthrew the Shah had not worked out the important problem of what replaces the Shah, what kind of government, what kind of socio-economic order and what are the forces for change. But the Iranian uprising did show the power of a united people ready to sacrifice even if that power was short lived. We should not miss this lessons. One basic lesson here is the one of ideology. People often say don't be worried about ideology since that can be a divisive factor. But if you scrutinise carefully the identities of the exponents of this approach you will find that they have an invested interest in the status quo. They hide behind amorphous defence lines. Any revolution must know where it is going and by what forces.

ANC is an organisation of the broad masses of the South African people. It is at this stage not a party, yet nobody can say that ANC as an organisation has no clearly defined general line on all major issues nationally and internationally. Our Freedom Charter represents our blue print of the kind of South Africa that we want. It is our Programme of Action. We have our strategy and Tactics.

Our Strategic conception is very clear. We aim at the forceful overthrow of the fascist regime and to achieve this we have set ourselves several strategic goals. First and foremost mass mobilisation of our people, mass recruitment of our people into ANC underground and into the ranks of MK. ANC is not training an army of invasion. It is training a nucleus of the People's army that will grow from inside the country. Obviously all available facilities for training will be utilised. The Peoples's Army will grow from the political army of the masses politically conscious and loyal to their own revolution. Wherever the masses are found, political bases and revolutionary organisations must be set up. In our strategic conception we see the masses as the political army and combat force of the revolution. We believe that our victory will be possible through the conscious and active participation of the masses of the oppressed people.

The African National Congress is the vanguard of our revolution. Without the ANC in contact with and being part of the masses, enjoying their support and confidence, and leading them into the many sided action, our victory is impossible. MK is the military combat force of the revolution.

Comrades we are armed politically and militarily. Our cardinal task is to impart this knowledge to our people, participate in the organisation, mobilisation and arming of the masses whilst learning from them, feeling their pulses as part and parcels of them articulating their interests. There is no short cut. Our task is not only to understand our situation but to change it.

To understand is an important initial step. "A slave that is aware of his slavery is a semi-slave, a slave that has begun the struggle to end its slavery is no longer a slave.

The process of arming the masses is a long one in our situation. It must be understood to have begun on the 16th December, 1961 by the ANC. It is the continuation of the battles that were fought by our fore-bears Hintsa, Moshoeshe, Tshaka, Cetshwayo, Sikukhuni, etc under new conditions.

A Luta Continua.

21/10/83

LUSAKA - Zambia.