

# **SOUTH AFRICA AND THE FIGHT FOR PEACE**

**by Peter Mackintosh**

With all humanity haunted by the spectre of nuclear war, over 2,000 delegates from 137 countries met in Sofia from September 23 to 27, 1980, at the World Parliament of the Peoples for Peace. It was one of the most diverse, broad and representative gatherings ever held on what is undoubtedly the most vital issue facing mankind today — war or peace — yet not a word about the conference appeared in the great majority of the bourgeois media throughout the world. At a time when the engines of imperialism are working overtime to condition the people for nuclear war, those who work for peace are denounced as the agents or dupes of communism. Patriots are exhorted, not to prevent nuclear war, but to spend their money on building air raid shelters. Naturally, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, only the rich are entitled to survive. The poor, who have no shelters, are told to crouch under the kitchen table and, when the raid is over, take a shower!

The overwhelming majority of the participants in the Sofia Peace Parliament, drawn from a wide variety of political, trade union, religious, cultural and social organisations, clearly identified the imperialist powers

as responsible for the drive to war and the crippling burdens of the arms race. The Charter adopted by the Peace Parliament said:

“To live in peace is the sacred and inalienable right of each person and each people . . . The exercise of social, economic and political rights is possible only with the ensurance of man’s right to peace, the right to life. . .

“The peoples demand a lasting and just peace which will ensure for them the full right to choose their own way of development and to establish a socio-political system in accordance with their wishes. The policy aimed at depriving the peoples of this right is the imperialist policy.”

The conference also denounced the racist regime of South Africa, Zionist Israel and reactionary regimes in Latin America and called upon progressive humanity to increase material and political support for the ANC, SWAPO and the PLO. The Charter said:

“It is essential to prevent the emergence of nuclear weapons in the hands of the racist, dictatorial and other reactionary regimes, to prevent the threat to the independence of the neighbouring states and to universal peace . . . The policy of establishing the progressive regimes in the developing countries is a virtual aggression which is being carried out by means of psychological, economic, political and other means including armed intervention . . . The present exacerbation of the international tension is an obvious relapse to the old imperial policy of world domination. . . .

“The existence of the racist regimes and fascist dictatorships which grossly trample on democracy, elementary rights and freedoms of their peoples is an affront to the conscience of mankind. Militarism and international tension bring about favourable conditions for staging anti-democratic coups and for keeping the fascist juntas and the anti-people dictatorial regimes in power”.

Concretely the Parliament demanded:

1. That the SALT 2 treaty be ratified immediately and further negotiations conducted on further limitation of strategic weapons.
2. That talks on the limitation of medium-range nuclear weapons be started immediately.
3. That all military alliances, including the Warsaw Treaty Organisation and NATO, be disbanded and all foreign bases wound up.
4. That trust between states, trust which in the 1970s had substantially promoted the cause of detente, be restored.

Stating that war is not inevitable, that peace can be preserved and

strengthened, the Parliament called for a mighty international effort to turn back the arms race and prevent the holocaust.

“Let the voice of the peoples for peace sound as never before in mass demonstrations, petitions, appeals to parliaments and governments, in actions on a national and international scale”.

Amongst those who addressed the plenary session of the Parliament, in addition to Todor Zhivkov, general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and Boris Ponomaryev, alternate member of the CPSU Politbureau, were the PLO's Yasser Arafat, SWAPO's Sam Nujoma and the ANC's Oliver Tambo.

The decisions of the Sofia Peace Parliament impose a special responsibility on our South African liberation movement to ensure that the organisations are involved at all levels in the implementation of these decisions, that our people are mobilised, not only for the prosecution of the war of liberation, but at the same time for the struggle for peace. There is no contradiction between the two — they are two sides of the same coin. As the Sofia Parliament pointed out, the drive for war is instigated by the imperialists as a means of holding back the liberation movements and preserving imperialist and racist domination throughout the world. It is only in conditions of peace and detente on the world stage that the best possible opportunities are afforded for the wars of liberation to be brought to a successful conclusion.

It was when detente flourished that victories over imperialism were recorded by the people in Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Nicaragua and elsewhere. It is precisely for this reason that the imperialists have decided to destroy detente and push the world nearer to the nuclear holocaust.

### **Long History**

The South African liberation movement headed by the ANC, of which the SACP is a component part, has a long history of activity in the fight for peace. Both organisations were prominent in the campaigns against fascism and war conducted during the 1930s. When Japan invaded Manchuria, when Italy invaded Abyssinia, when Franco launched the Spanish civil war, and when Hitler threatened in turn Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, all sections of our movement were alerted to the danger of a second world war.

The Congress movement took the initiative in the formation of the South

African Peace Council in August 1953. Recording its opposition to the use of Africa as a war base, the founding conference, attended by 275 delegates from 3 provinces representing nearly 300,000 people, demanded bread and social benefits, peace and disarmament rather than war. In a key paper to the conference Nelson Mandela, Transvaal President of the ANC, said:

“The people of Africa will be the first victims of a future war. Their industries will produce armaments, their raw materials will be used, not to develop their economies, but to destroy those of others. The war danger in Africa is very close indeed. . .

“This mad lust for profits and markets in Africa, the war preparations of the United States and its satellite countries, puts the national independence of the people of this continent and their very right to live in serious jeopardy. The threat to the national liberation movement in Africa resulting from the presence of foreign armies arouses the deepest indignation of all patriots. The people of Africa are being forced to realise that peace is their most immediate concern. They demand the withdrawal from the continent of Africa of all foreign troops, and the end of colonial oppression and exploitation”.

There was some resistance to the peace message from certain sections of our people who thought world wars were fought only in the northern hemisphere, and that in any case, if South Africa was involved, war might be the catalyst leading to the overthrow of the racist regime. ANC leader Walter Sisulu dealt with this misconception in an article in the newspaper *Advance*, successor to the banned *Guardian*, on October 7, 1954:

“Many Africans do not understand why oppressed people should be very much concerned with peace movements. They think, perhaps, that the war preparations are being directed only against far-away countries like Russia and China. They do not realise that these wars are specifically directed against the colonial and semi-colonial countries and, therefore, against the liberatory movement itself”.

The bogey of communism, said Sisulu, was used to hide the imperialist intentions of re-enslaving or perpetuating the enslavement of the colonial peoples. He pointed out that it was the imperialists who supplied arms to the fascist Nationalist Government for the purpose of crushing the liberation movement. The fight for peace was part of the fight for liberation.

The anti-communist flag was hoisted again by the racist regime in 1956, when the Nationalists closed down the Soviet consulates in South Africa. A

joint protest statement issued by the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation and the Congress of Democrats said it was clear the Government was committing the country to military blocs not to "defend" South Africa ("no one wants to attack us") but to help the European powers to retain their hold over the people of Africa by putting down their movements for national freedom from colonialism. The President of the ANC, Chief Lutuli, said the allegation that the Soviet consulates had been responsible for "subversive" activities amongst blacks was sheer propaganda. He added:

"The ANC urges the Government to reverse its action in the interests of peace and healthy relations among nations . . . . The freedom and peace-loving people of our land must demonstrate to the world that, beyond any doubt, they stand with all freedom and peace-loving people in the world such as the people of the USSR".

1956 was the year of the counter-revolutionary uprising in Hungary and the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Suez in a bid to put down the Nasser regime for nationalising the Suez Canal. In the newspaper *New Age*, successor to the banned *Guardian* and *Advance*, Communist party general secretary Moses Kotane pointed out that while the racist students of Stellenbosch university, not hitherto noted for their support of progressive causes, had marched through the streets in support of the Hungarian fascists, the response of the liberation movement to the invasion of Suez had been muted. Calling for more militant action by the people against the imperialists, Kotane said that at a time when western leaders were trying to embroil the world in war, it was only the people who had and must use their collective power to stop them.

### **Role of Anti-Communism**

The clear recognition that anti-communism was the main weapon of imperialism kept our liberation movement on a consistent path through a succession of international crises. The various components of the Congress Movement registered protests against the American invasion of the Lebanon in 1958, France's explosion of an atom bomb in Algeria in 1960, the US threat to plunge the world into war over the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 (demonstrators carried placards reading "Long Live Castro, Cuba Yes, Yankee No"), the US aggression in Korea and Vietnam.

Today the imperialists are intensifying their preparations for war against the Soviet Union, the motherland of socialism and the main ally of liberation

movements everywhere, in a bid to recover the ground they have lost during the past decades, to preserve the decaying capitalist system from further degeneration and total collapse. In their frantic attempt to encircle the Soviet Union, they secretly arm racist South Africa and equip the Botha regime with the materials and know-how to manufacture nuclear weapons. And they forge an alliance with the hegemonist regime in China, which in its blind anti-Sovietism has thrown the principles of proletarian internationalism to the winds.

The imperialists claim it is Soviet "expansionism" which threatens world peace. But the facts are that it is the imperialists who have surrounded the Soviet Union with a network of 2,500 military bases and other military installations, while the Soviet Union has no bases anywhere near the USA. Even Cuba, which the US denounces as a Soviet satellite, has the huge US military base of Guantanamo situated on its southern coast — a heritage from the overthrown Batista regime which the US refuses to relinquish, just as the British refuse to get out of Gibraltar. There are half a million American servicemen outside the borders of the US — in 114 countries, including 325,000 in Europe and 132,000 in the Far East and the Pacific area. Large US fleets armed with nuclear weapons sail the seven seas as though they owned them. There are 12,000 nuclear weapons outside the borders of the US, over 7,000 of them in Europe alone. The US military budget, which was only 12,000 million dollars in 1948, has swollen to 171,500 million dollars for the fiscal year which started on October 1, 1980, and the US government and its allies are all demanding that defence allocations be substantially increased in the coming period. The US forges military alliances and links with Egypt, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, China and other countries directed, not only against so-called Soviet "expansionism", but also against any movement to overthrow the reactionary regimes it props up in these dependent territories. The vicious regime in Thailand, where children are bought and sold for profit, is armed to the teeth by the US as a bastion of "freedom" against alleged Vietnamese aggression. The ASEAN countries, hangers-on of imperialism, demand UN-supervised elections in Kampuchea, but are silent about the bloody Zia regime in Pakistan which came to power and continues to rule by force. The US, which would go off its head if the Soviet Navy were to sail into the Gulf of Mexico, parades up and down the Persian Gulf because its "vital interests" are involved — the oil of the Middle East, which benefits not the people of the area, but a handful of sheikhs and the US-dominated transnational corporations. The western powers continue to loot the mineral wealth of Namibia in defiance of repeated UN resolutions.

## **Global Confrontation**

The confrontation we witness on a global scale today is not between “two super-powers”, as some like to describe it, but between the forces of imperialism and anti-imperialism, between the forces of reaction and those of social progress as world capitalism fights its last-ditch battles to hold back the era of socialism. The imperialists are indeed powerful, but it is out of desperation, not confidence, that they have resolved to resort to war to defend the evil system of private profit which has now exhausted itself, leaving a trail of recessions, ruined companies and mass unemployment in its wake, an ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

During the period of detente an uneasy peace was preserved based on the understanding by both east and west that nuclear war was unacceptable since both sides would be destroyed. The danger to world peace which has now developed flows from the US belief that it is now so strong, its weapons so superior, that it can win a first-strike nuclear war. On July 25 last year President Carter (without even consulting his Secretary of State Muskie) signed the Directive 59 which is based on the notion that nuclear war can be limited, and that in a limited nuclear war the US would come out on top. As a result the US is today openly preparing the world for a pre-emptive first strike. In this strategy the US enjoys the whole-hearted support of the megalithic Maggie Thatcher, though other European powers who have experienced more of the devastation of war are not so enthusiastic.

The fact is that the notion of a limited nuclear war is a myth. Recently the United States Senate requested the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) of the US Congress to evaluate four options of nuclear conflict between the US and the Soviet Union. The results were presented in a book *The Effects of Nuclear War* published by the OTA last year. The first case considered was that of detonating a single nuclear weapon over Detroit and Leningrad respectively (both having metropolitan populations of about 4.3 million). The OTA estimates this would cause 1.84 million deaths and 1.36 million other casualties in Detroit and 2.46 million deaths and 1.1 million other casualties in Leningrad. We do not need to waste time on the other in-between scenarios. The final case considered was that of an attack involving several thousand warheads against strategic, military and urban-industrial centres. In the absence of civil defence measures, US fatalities could total between 155 and 165 million, with another 33 million injured, while Soviet fatalities might reach between 50 and 100 million. If the bombs were targeted on civilian as well as military targets with no holds barred an additional 20 to 30 million on each side would be killed.

A review of the book in the September/October 1980 issue of *Survival*, the journal of the International Institute of Strategic Studies, concludes:

“Damage and deaths caused by fires ignited by blasts, deaths due to economic and political disintegration or ecological collapse, and somatic effects (such as cancers) and genetic effects are *impossible* to calculate with any certitude.

“The effects of any nuclear operation are therefore essentially unpredictable — except that they will generally be greater than the figures cited here would suggest. And all the limited and selective options that have now been incorporated in the SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan) notwithstanding, the possibility of conducting limited and controlled nuclear exchanges in which damage is a matter of policy choice remains no less unreal than it was before the re-thinking of the mid-1970s.”

## **No Cure**

What this means for the common people everywhere has been summed up by Helen Caldicott, a US medical doctor who has given up her practice to campaign for nuclear disarmament because she doesn't see any point in curing people who are going to be blotted out anyway if a nuclear war breaks out. In a press interview last October she pointed out that the US joint chiefs of staff have estimated that the chances of a nuclear war breaking out by 1985 are 50/50. Civil defence measures she dismisses as ludicrous.

“The privileged are going to get fried in their shelters just as much as the under-privileged. They'll be asphyxiated, the fire-storms will use up all the oxygen and they'll die. At a New York conference two weeks ago it was said that in 30 days after nuclear war 90 per cent of Americans will be dead. That would apply to the whole of the Northern hemisphere”.

Don't let us think we are safe because we live south of the equator. Dr Caldicott added:

“Those that survive won't survive for long. They'll die of starvation, epidemics of disease, acute radiation illness or they'll be burnt and blinded by the sun because the ozone layer will be destroyed. Probably all mammals will be killed”. (*Morning Star*, October 21, 1980).

The militarist madmen of the Pentagon and Pretoria who are today attempting to dominate the world by nuclear blackmail must be halted in their tracks before they have brought mankind to the point of no return and we are all incinerated in the holocaust. As the Sofia Peace Parliament declared:

“Only our common struggle can frustrate the criminal conspiracy



against the cause of peace. There is no other way”.

We in South Africa have a special responsibility towards the people of our continent, for Premier Botha now also has a nuclear button to press, and his guns and missiles are directed against all independent Africa. It is our task, the task of the liberation movement to make the fight for peace one of its top priorities and ensure that the racist regime is overthrown before it drags us all to destruction.

