SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE CHIEF VISITS THE PENTAGON

Admiral H.H. Bierman, Chief of the General Staff of the South African Defence Force arrived in the United States on May 5th on what has been described as a "private" visit. However private the visit, one of the Admiral's first ports of call was the Pentagon, where he spent some time with Acting Secretary of the Navy Mittendorf.

Admiral Bierman is one of the chief architects of racist South Africa's current military strategy which seeks to involve the U.S. and other NATO countries in a closed regional alliance against what South African Minister of Defence Botha recently described as the forces of "international communism and its cohorts-leftist activists, exaggerated humanism, permissiveism, materialism, and related ideologies." Despite the rather wild range of this "enemies list" Botha and Bierman both understand with considerable clarity the way in which international divisions can be exploited for South African benefit. Thus Botha went on to say: "The Republic of South Africa is part of the modern world, and, as such, involuntarily involved in the prevailing international struggle for power. Furthermore, as a result of the relative check-mate obtaining between the superpowers in the sphere of nuclear weapons, we find ourselves in a..."
position of increasing strategic importance in that struggle."

Admiral Bierman has constantly emphasized the significant role that South Africa already plays in the economic life of the Western world and has stressed its potential military role. As he points out, South Africa occupies a strategic location astride approaches to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, with one of the best equipped naval bases in the southern hemisphere. 600 million tons of oil destined for Europe and the U.S. go past the Cape each year - and the recent establishment of a U.S. base at Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean, despite international protest, indicate rapidly increasing U.S. interest in the whole region.

Given that background it is difficult to believe that Mittendorf and Bierman did not discuss the Indian Ocean, the dramatic military successes of the liberation movements throughout Southern Africa in the last few months and the coup in Portugal - which is a direct result of defeats inflicted on the Portuguese by the people of Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola.

South Africa is urgently in need of allies. As the most powerful and wealthy state in Southern Africa it forms the core of what has been termed the "unholy alliance" of racist white minority apartheid and colonial states in Southern Africa. The South African government has already sent several thousand men to help Ian Smith's embattled Rhodesian regime - there are South African troops in Mozambique; South African equipment and knowhow are widely used - and there are
regular monthly strategy meetings between the upper echelon military
commanders of South Africa, Rhodesia and the Portuguese colonies.

Added to these "responsibilities" South Africa faces increasing
resistance internally and in Namibia, where she still enforces an
illegal occupation. There are attempts to suppress the extent of
the conflict - but recent "leaks" have reported the death of a
constant trickle of South African soldiers on the northern Namibian
borders, where there is open conflict with the forces of the Namibian
liberation movement.

South Africa has a small white population - some 4 million who
seek to control 18 million Blacks. Thus as the conflict grows
throughout Southern Africa she is going to find it increasingly
difficult to find enough men to fight on all fronts.

Her military expenditure has already grown dramatically, it is ten
times greater than it was in 1960, and jumped from some $500,000,000
in 1972/'73 to almost $700,000,000 in 1973/'74.

South Africa must acquire the latest and most sophisticated
equipment in order to make up for the shortage of men.

The events of the last two weeks in which a military coup in
Portugal brought to power General Spinola, on the platform of "ending
the wars and seeking a political solution" in the colonies must
create new uncertainties for South Africa, although at the moment
South Africa seems confident of the continuation of common goals -
and was the first country to recognize the new regime.
The U.S. is still an official adherent of the United Nations arms embargo on South Africa, a measure imposed by the international body in an attempt to hasten the end of racial oppression, apartheid and exploitation. There have been several signs lately, that at least within the Pentagon, and probably at other levels of the Administration, there is a growing desire to establish friendly military relationships with South Africa. In December South Africa's Minister of Information was warmly received in Washington, visited many offices including those of an important Defense Department official responsible for international security affairs. There have been other signs of cracks in the embargo. There is for instance the increasing relaxed interpretation of prohibited materials - so that South Africa now buys all the light aircraft and helicopters she needs, ostensibly because these are for civilian use.

Now, for the first time in at least ten years there is a visit being paid to the U.S. at the highest level by the head of the South African Defence Forces.

Officially Admiral Bierman's visit is being organized by the "United States Strategic Institute", a conservative group of former Army and Navy officers concerned with the "study and discussion of problems of national security in the nuclear age". One of his hosts is Admiral John McCain, an aircraft-carrier task force Commander in the Pacific for many years.
Bierman is visiting many Congressmen and Senators and will attend a dinner especially set up for him by Congressman Barman of Maryland, at which it is reported 17 Admirals will be present.

Inch by inch the ground is being prepared for full military cooperation between the Pentagon and the "unholy alliance" led by South Africa. Whether this is done through NATO or in other ways is unimportant. What is important is that it is being done, in conflict with stated American policy, in contravention of the United Nations commitments, and in sharp violation of the consensus of American public opinion which no longer believes that it is right and proper for the U.S. to enter into alliances which must inevitably drag it into military support of such reactionary racist regimes.