

EXCERPTS AND GENERAL REPORT OF CHICAGO CONFERENCE,
NOV. 2-4, 1979
SPONSORED BY SAMRAF AND SWAPO

Opening comments came from SAMRAF staff co-ordinator, Don Morton: (excerpts of talk)

SAMRAF was started almost two years ago by a few of us white South African exiles with years of experience in white left SA politics and liberation support work. We formed SAMRAF with the support and guidance of a number of our allies in the USA, and otherwise under the guiding hand of the liberation movements that we work with.

Our work falls into three main areas. . .

1. Casework and Counselling. . .Remember that for most draft resisters or deserters the decision not to fight for Apartheid and to go into exile is the first major political decision of their lives. The task of unravelling 20 odd years of racist and sexist propaganda and the attitudes that come with a white privileged lifestyle is a big one!

2. Building a National Solidarity Movement. . .The issue of South African war resisters brings us into contact and coalition with an excitingly broad cross section of people and organizations. From the churches, the peace organizations, the anti-nuke movement, anti-Imperialist left, anti-racist groupings, the womens movement, the anti-militarist organizations. As South African war resisters we have a very legitimate basis upon which to collaborate with all these forces. We have (and hence the conference) the right to come to you as experienced anti-imperialist war resisters, some in fact with combat experience, and to ask you for help. If we can't mobilize your support, then something's wrong somewhere. Key to building a national solidarity movement is doing so under the overall guidance and leadership of the black liberation movements in Southern Africa and the United States. A solidarity movement built in the USA which does not seek the guidance of the third world movements of the US is not building solidarity. From amongst this broad range of people that we work with, we have linked more deeply with those who understand profoundly the importance of national liberation struggles, and who understand the importance of weakening the enemy from within white USA and South African circles.

3. Research. . .The information files which we use come from gathering material on Southern Africa and its connections to the outside world for 8 years. We have come to learn that information is a very powerful weapon in the struggle. We have a large data bank on SA and the military in particular. We do research, often uncovering material for the first time, on a variety of issues, from conscientious objection to sophisticated technical research on the SA military machine which we provide to the liberation movements to use as they may decide. This data bank of information and analysis will increasingly be able to counter the propaganda of the SA military. The research on the SA/USA nuclear axis adds an important ingredient to the anti-nuke movement. We expose companies and governments

illegally selling weapons to SA. And, with research we educate the people about the military side of Apartheid.

. . . This conference resulted from experience over the years, and particularly a nationwide tour we did last year. All around the country we found that those who had organized around the military to stop the war in Indochina were amongst the first to be supportive and from whom we learned a lot about building a war resisters movement in South Africa. So we decided to choose a place in the middle of the USA, invite a few Vets and people with military organizing experience, a couple of SA war resisters, and friends from the liberation movements. . . SWAPO gave their endorsement and off we went: to organize. From then on it just grew and grew. From a hope for maybe 20, we have ended up with over 40 people coming. 90% of those who could not come would have been here if we could have raised more money. So, we must be scratching somewhere in the region where it itches.

One thing we felt at least, was that we ought to bring a lot of you together to reflect on what happened. How come, for example, did so many from that era of resisting the imperialist war in SE Asia not make the transition to understanding the importance of the struggle and war in Southern Africa? We're not going to say that this conference is historic. History is not made that easily. But it's damn important. First because we need help. SAMRAF is a tiny operation. We have a mostly seldom-paid staff of 3 and one half people, and a huge task on our hands. The nature of the SA military machine is such that we cannot hope to tackle it alone. Besides, the critical outside help that the SA state gets from outside, comes almost exclusively from the USA and its NATO allies. The tactics used to impose genocidal war on the liberation movements and peoples in Southern Africa were developed and tested by the US in SE Asia. Those of you who struggled around and inside the US military at that time have a lot to teach us. This conference constitutes the first time that SA war resisters, with the liberation movements, can sit down with US comrades from that same background of fighting an unjust war to learn and exchange notes.

I must mention how important and significant it is to us that representatives of the liberation movements are here to guide and inspire us. The liberation movements of Southern Africa are in the forefront of the international struggle against imperialism and white settler colonialism, both crucial to come to grips with in this country and in Southern Africa. We look forward to much revolutionary leadership from them.

Another reason to see this conference as important is because the Apartheid state is not only willing, but is quite capable of unleashing a race holocaust with chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare capacity. Such devastation might in fact be the war to end them & us all. International solidarity of the highest level with the liberation struggle in Southern Africa is required to bring about the defeat of the madness of Apartheid. The constituency that you represent could play an important role in stopping the madness and building solidarity with the liberation forces.

Finally, this conference is important because of this historical moment. We're on the edge of the 80s, folks. This is it! Three things to note about this period:

1. Imperialism is as determined, as destructive, and as dangerous as ever. I don't need to expand on that, I hope.

2. Secondly is the increasing attack on Blacks in this country that makes it feel more and more like South Africa every day. Blacks and Third World people are being driven out of more jobs and into increasingly deteriorating slums. The unemployment rate amongst them is worse than at any other time in the last 20 years. Blacks, Native Americans, and other Third World nationals are being repressed, discriminated against, exploited, and incarcerated, not to mention the increasing numbers being beaten up and shot by killer cops and KKK. The prisons all across the country have a majority of Black and Third World people rotting in them with KKK prison guards doing their thing there! The gains of the 60s are under increasing attack: Bakke, Weber, anti-poverty programs, abortion rights, etc. We do not believe that our common enemy will be defeated until we can make it a common struggle. As whites that means putting ourselves under the guidance of the black liberation forces in Southern Africa and the USA. It means, for example, that we take the black and Native American demand for land and self-determination very seriously.

3. The other fact to recognize in this period of history is how almost across the board we have not taken the oppression of women seriously. This has had some serious consequences. Firstly, sexism in the movement has meant that thousands of women have dropped out or gone into the womens movement exclusively, a great and serious, though we hope temporary, loss to the struggle against imperialism. The other consequence is that all too many movements, and important segments of the movement, took off on male power trips; dominating the leadership, politics, and program of the movement; using the very methods in the struggle that most women had joined the struggle to overthrow. Whilst the mostly white male and middle class leadership was driving women out of the movement, women came under increasing attack in the communities and societies in which they lived. Violence against women, especially rape, has increased to alarming levels recently. The right wing has focussed on women as well as Blacks and Third World peoples. The only way to bring our sisters back into the forefront of the struggle, is for us to unite and fight for women's rights and full liberation. . .The bottom line is that either we have affirmative action on women in the movement and its leadership ranks, or else we will not have a movement in the 80s.

There are a number of important issues that we want to deal with during this conference. They are Agent Orange, the return of the draft, the potency of an underground soldier's newspaper, the theoretical basis of our work, the horror of thousands of mercenaries being recruited and trained in the US to go and murder Blacks in Southern Africa. We should also ask why there is almost no organizing going on in the military today, especially when historically the highest degree of resistance has come from enlistees and Blacks. The proportion of Blacks and enlistees is higher now than ever in the armed forces. If we are hoping to stop troops being sent to Southern Africa this is the time and place to begin.

All of which is one tremendous task. All the areas to be worked on are the responsibilities of South Africans and Americans. It's part of a real and large dream we are fighting for and which is being successfully led by the incredible determination of the liberation movements. Out of the sea of all the destruction and genocide aimed at them, they have risen up to guide us, teach us who the enemy is, and how to tackle the tasks ahead. It is no accident that on the homefront SWAPO faces 65,000 SA troops occupying their country and at the same time put out a call in the US for Vietnam Vets and others to help build a war resisters movement amongst their enemy's armed forces.

We are fighting for the total destruction of the entire Apartheid colonial system and its imperialist underpinnings. We believe that we will see an end to all forms of exploitation in South Africa, or Azania, as many of its people call it, in which the land has been restored to its people and the people restored by the land. We want the will of the people to be the law of the land. There has to be a re-distribution of the enormous resources of the country. The power of the State and the means of production will have to shift to the oppressed of today who are doing almost all of the productive labor. We want a new society with equal opportunity for all--where no class and especially no whites and no men can oppress Blacks and women anymore. We don't believe this is some utopian pipe dream. It is possible, even likely in our lifetime, though not without massive struggle and sacrifice.

The success of the revolution in Southern Africa will profoundly and I think unexpectedly effect the future of the struggle in the USA. We're asking you who see these crucial connections and the urgency of the situation to join us in making plans to take back our history. A Luta Continua.

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After logistics and lunch, we took the time for some sharing of personal histories, stories about how six guys came to resist unjust war.

Bernie Wolfsdorf, from Durban SA, resisted the draft which conscripts all young white males for two years plus 3 months per year for eight years (10 years compulsory service altogether). He took student deferments for as long as possible, as a form of draft resistance. During his university days he was active in the white student movement, esp. the National Union of SA Students (NUSAS). Then, when deferment couldn't be accomplished any longer, he decided to avoid the military by leaving the country and leaving behind his family and his job as a lawyer. He is seeking asylum in the US. Bernie told how the South African authorities start their militarization program in the schools with the Cadet and Youth Preparedness schemes. Avoiding these compulsory programs was a game (with some risk and adventure) for schoolboys, but was a much more serious matter with the SA Defense Force itself.

Barry Sirmon, a SADF deserter from Johannesburg, had to cancel out on attending the conference at the last minute. Something of his important story was told by Don. Barry is fluent in several African languages and a college graduate, so he was recruited into the in-

telligence division. When given orders to bribe informers from villages in Northern Namibia, he resisted his orders. He was then sent back to his original instructors who tried first through psychological means and then through threats to get him to carry on with his duties. His decision to desert and go into exile was extremely hard on him and his family. He has since had several harrowing experiences with immigration authorities in a number of countries. Deportation proceedings were begun against him recently, during a visit to the UK. Through a lot of pressure, the US accepted him back on his visitors visa. Later he was granted asylum.

Mike Morgan, from Durban SA, also deserted from the SA military machine after a combat tour in the "operational area." He saw a lot of action in the Caprivi Strip, in a series of battles with SWAPO and raids into Zambia. He experienced the common soldier's experience of being broken down by a barrage of army bullshit and then built back up into a super-killer. He witnessed torture and atrocities at very close range and felt the de-humanization of that nightmare experience. He knows the lies that the officers tell about their enemy, the militants and freedom fighters of SWAPO. He resolved that if he got out of that situation alive he would do everything he could to tell his fellow soldiers the truth and persuade them to fight against the system rather than for it.

Art Graves, from St. Louis USA, went into the army to help organize against the war (the US war in VietNam). He served from '72 to '74 as US troops were finally being withdrawn. With massive discipline problems by that time, the withdrawal was meant to save what was left of the army. He told some of the things he learned as a soldiers organizer, specifically in regard to racial tension and the male supremacist basis of army training. The racism of white soldiers crippled the development of unity between black and white soldiers. Of course, the brass came out on top through divide-and-rule tactics and stirring up racism. He summed up the training process as based on fighting to be a man. Male power and superiority are the foundation because few soldiers believe anymore in fighting for God and country. He said military organizing can deal with this reality only as part of an overall movement that is confronting racism and sexism. He clearly spoke to the need for white people to support independent black organization within the US military.

Anthony Lewis, the only Black ex-serviceman to speak, is from Virginia USA and was in the Navy from 1969-73. Like Art, he was drafted. He never even considered trying to avoid it. He described his time in the service as a very racist experience, especially boot camp. He became part of black groups which necessarily had to organize underground. They brought out a newspaper. He saw a recurring pattern with black organizations in the military. When men were discovered to be talking and organizing, the men were split up through transfers to other units. From this, he and others realized the need for a base of support in the community. Without community support the on-base organizing was more easily broken up. Continuity was necessary among civilians in order to counteract all the transfers. He agreed with Art that the experiences of black and white soldiers were very different. He saw the need for independent black organizing

even if there were integrated organizations.

Bob Chenoweth, from Oregon USA, joined the military in 1966 because he wanted to be an aircraft mechanic. While he was vaguely aware of opposition to the war, he was sort of looking forward to landing in VietNam. He didn't question what he was doing until he saw how the US war was being carried out; the US was acting more like conquerors than liberators. He was captured by the Vietnamese freedom fighters when his helicopter was shot down. He had been unable to talk to any of his fellow soldiers about the war, and being captured gave ^{him} someone to talk to. It was an "almost euphoric" experience for him as he saw the extent of the Viet Cong network that had been invisible to him as a soldier. He was housed for most of his 5 years as a POW in ordinary Vietnamese villages. He learned Vietnamese history and took part in the growing of food and other aspects of village life. He was treated well, but was pained by all the US bombing he witnessed. Escape was out of the question because all the local people were capable of dealing with him as an obvious outsider. He and other prisoners started receiving literature from the US anti-war movement. His own views had changed to support for his former enemy and he was encouraged by anti-war, pro-Vietnamese actions in the US to take action himself.

Next came a discussion of the comparisons between building soldiers movements in the USA and in SA in the form of a presentation by Mike Morgan: (excerpts from talk)

When comparing the latent force of military resistance that exists in SA to the much larger war resistance movement that existed in the USA, I think it's essential to deal with a) the present state of resistance to the Apartheid military machine, b) the oppressive legislation in SA which denies the right of soldiers and would-be draftees to organize or resist in any open form, c) the necessity of internal resistance to the military, and d) the need for an external base for deserters and draft resisters to organize themselves.

In 1977, the SA Defense Force had an estimated overall strength of 470,000 personnel although only 130,000 were in active, full-time service. The number is increasing, and the government plans to have a force of almost 250,000 troops in the field with 500,000 trained troops in reserve by 1980-81. Of this force approx. 65,000 troops are stationed in Namibia at any one time, fighting a full scale war against SWAPO, Angola, and Zambia. It is, of course, in Namibia that the battles are currently being concentrated and that the SA forces are suffering their most casualties. As the number of personnel increases and the war escalates, so has resistance to the military increased. According to one statistical indicator published by the regime, the numbers who failed to report when called up for military service in recent years are as follows: (1975) 3,314; (1976) 3,566; (1977) 3,814; and (1978) 3,123.

It is quite likely that these figures have been "doctored" in the interests of white public morale as has been the case in the suppression of the true extent of operational casualties. It is confidently assumed, on the basis of evidence from numerous war resisters who have fled from SA in the past year, that a larger number of South

African youth resisted the draft in 1978 than in previous years. It is not known how many of these were called up for the first time, or how many were avoiding further service. Neither is it known what percentage remained inside the country or left. Again, according to the regime 63,104 men were called up in 1976 and of these 37,730 (60%) applied for exemption or deferment. This high percentage is interesting for it reflects a method of avoiding service (albeit temporary), usually by asking for deferment on the grounds that one is in higher education. And increasingly, students on finishing their education are leaving the country to avoid doing their service.

According to a SA newspaper report in 1976, one regiment (the Rand Light Infantry) had over 15% of its total strength of trained men on the "blacklist" -- a list of names and last known addresses handed to the Military Police for tracking down. It added that the success rate for tracking down was less than 10%. It seems reasonable to infer that other units have a similar number of men avoiding further service by not notifying their change of addresses. Thus, whether they are avoiding initial service or have already been trained, thousands of men are clearly on the run in the country. This is backed up by the fact that of those who failed to report from 1975-78, only about 16% were convicted for the offence.

. . .oppressive laws and the way in which the SA State has made organizing military resistance an extremely difficult task. The initial period of national service in SA is 24 months. This period is supposedly followed by annual training camps of 19 days for the next 8 years. However, the Minister of Defense (Botha, also is Prime Minister) has unlimited powers on the time period of service for the annual camps, this power conferred in "time of war." Because SA is presently at war, the annual camp period has remained 3 months since South Africa's intervention in Angola in 1975-76. Also under the defense act, it is an offence to suggest conscientious objection to someone, not to mention draft-dodging or desertion or resisting orders. This offence is punishable by a minimum 2 year or \$2,000 fine. . .

In the case of the soldiers movement in the US, it was possible to infiltrate bases, to publish resistance newspapers on-base, to organize coffeehouses and off-base meeting places. . .There was a strong and growing anti-war sentiment amongst civilians and students. There were various organizations set up to counsel and assist soldiers who resisted. Above all, there was the opportunity to apply for conscientious objector status.

White South Africans are educated in a severely racist educational system, controlled and dominated by military hawks and steeped in war psychosis propaganda, leaving whites brainwashed and believing that there is nothing for them to learn from the Black majority and their historic struggle against apartheid. There is general acceptance of the apartheid system by whites. Anti-war sentiments and resistance to apartheid are relatively rare in the white community, leaving the individual war resister isolated within the white community, without a base of support. Only 2.5% of the S.A.D.F. are Black troops; they are segregated from white soldiers. There is a sense of isolation, of whites who decide to resist; first, because he is isolated from any real contact with Black people, even though they constitute the overwhelming majority

of South Africans and Namibians, except when facing them on the battlefield. And second, he is surrounded by fellow soldiers only too happy to do their patriotic duty.

A soldier that decides he can no longer serve in the armed forces has no grounds for applying for Conscientious objector status. The Defence Force Act(section 67/3) makes no provision for any conscientious objector(universal nor selective)to do non-military national service. Nor are there provisions for selective c.o.s to do non-combatant military service. Occasionally objectors are accomodated and given non-combatant tasks, despite the lack of legal provision, but they are never given non-military national service.

I have tried to outline the differences between building a soldiers movement in the U.S. in contrast to conditions in South Africa. This is not to say that building a soldiers movement in S.A., similar to the one that existed in the U.S. during the height of the Viet Nam war, is impossible. It is just more difficult and will likely require a longer struggle.

In our efforts to help build a soldiers movement inside S.A., we stress the importance of building organization and resistance both inside and outside the country. We have in all past issues of "Omkeer" encouraged and emphasized the importance of internal resistance. We appreciate that soldiers, who refuse to fight and then flee the country or go underground, weaken the morale of the fighting forces, the weak link in the military machine. Still, the most important contribution that white soldiers can make is to organize themselves collectively to resist on-base and the battlefield. Just as fragging, sabotage of equipment, and refusal to obey orders contributed in Viet Nam, so must the S.A. movement eventually evolve in order to play its most significant role. We also have the examples of the armed forces movement of Portugal and Zimbabwe Democrats, a soldiers movement operating underground within the Rhodesian Security Forces.

The resistance among Black G.I.s in this country was the most militant of all and played a leading role in the G.I. struggle. It is also true that Blacks involved deeply in G.I. organizing were also for the most part involved in Black community struggles and the overall Black resistance and liberation struggle within the U.S. This characteristic can be equated to Southern Africa, where the struggle was initiated by SWAPO, ANC and PAC, and later intensified to such a degree that it created the white war resistance movement. It was SWAPO that recognized the importance of desertion and unrest in the S.A. military and have subsequently nurtured our small but growing movement, and from whom we have taken leadership.

It is in this context that we view a soldiers movement in South Africa. In the United States, more radical elements of the G.I. movement not only put pressure on the U.S. government to pull out of Indochina, but more importantly, assisted the liberation forces in the defeat of U.S. imperialism. It is with this foremost in mind, that we will continue to struggle to build a soldiers movement in S.A., in order for it to play as effective a role as the U.S. G.I. movement did.

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A presentation by Feeb (Steve Feedback) covered quite a lot of information about the current situation in SA. A climate of change is being projected in our media, but, in truth, Botha's government is granting some concessions primarily because the military crisis is increasing and is more threatening. The "total strategy" to deal with the "total onslaught". . . a fit description of how Botha and the State Security Council see the overall situation. A future issue of SAMRAF Bulletin, to be produced soon, will cover most of the information from his research and recent trip to South Africa.

Opening the Saturday session was Clement Hlongwane, a militant of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. He spoke briefly of his life in Azania (SA). He grew up in Soweto, the son of a policeman. In 1976 when Soweto exploded, he was a student at Morris Isaacson High School and active in the student resistance. During the period of the mass rebellion and State terror, he and other activists were hunted at night in house-to-house searches. He described the Soweto rebellion and the related resistance throughout Azania (SA) in '76 as a turning point in their history of struggle. The miseducation forced on black students in the Afrikaans language was only one of many grievances. Overall, the student revolt was directed against the entire process of "Bantu education" and behind it, the entire white power system. The youth of Soweto were already politicized (Marxist leaning) or became so in the process of struggle and organizing. They resisted tribal fragmentation and asserted a national struggle. White riot cops and other authorities escalated their brutal attacks and the Soweto rebellion rose to confront the State's violence. Some black cops resisted orders on June 16th and were not given guns; other black police had to be brought in from the homelands. Many, many black students learned a great deal about their enemy: along with the white government were black puppets (Buthelezi and other bantustan leaders) and imperialist powers (USA, Britain, etc).

Clement stated the P.A.C.'s political views on a number of subjects. He said the English and the Afrikaners of the white community were essentially the same, though the Afrikaners have radicalized black youth more because they are more blatantly white supremacist. Many aspects of the struggle are now racially defined, but the PAC is sympathetic to the problems of whites and is very supportive of the resistance movement among white soldiers. He reiterated the PAC's exposure of the lies Botha's government is spreading about changes in labor policy. The Wiehahn Report is meant more to tighten the control of black workers, not to provide real change. He said the PAC desires unity among the liberation forces of Azania and pointed to a growing basis of unity between the Black Consciousness Movement and the PAC. The PAC believes in as much self-reliance as possible on the part of the liberation movement, willing to accept any aid that comes without strings attached. Clement acknowledged that the people of Azania (SA) and the US face the same enemy: imperialism. He closed by stating his profound solidarity and suggesting closer links with VietNam Vets who resisted the war. He also expressed his pleasure at meeting whites from his country who were willing to act against the war machine and for the liberation struggle.

Some lessons of the US G.I. movement were presented by George

Schmidt. George had helped start a Chicago Military Counseling Service during the Viet Nam war and became deeply involved in the G.I. movement. He presented a background on the US movement, concluding that now is the time to write the history and lessons of the movement. Writing such a history must be from the viewpoint of the mutineers. The ruling elite fears mutiny within its own military above all else. An accurate history will never be written unless those who mutinied write it.

George stated the need to distinguish between the G.I. movement which was mostly working class and anti-Brass, and the more middle class anti-war movement, which had most of the liberal support (and therefore the most financial support). This dichotomy often led to friction between the two movements over direction, means, and access to money. The G.I. movement was also characterized by the autonomous organization of Third World soldiers and peoples. The recognition of imperialism as the common enemy was the major unifying trend between often diverse groups. Among the big problems of the movement were opportunism and faddism, a failure to deal with both white supremacy and male domination, a failure to relate the G.I. movement to masses of people, and the failure to take leadership from the national liberation movements.

SAMRAF staff member Joe Morrissey made a presentation on the widespread use of mercenaries in Southern Africa. He began by tracing the mythology of the white mercenary in US history. This mythology, steeped in the white and male supremacist ideology of the US, is a constant in the recruitment literature for armed service in the employ of the South African and Rhodesian regimes.

The "King of the Wild Frontier" as embodied by Davy Crockett, who in 1836 left Tennessee and went to the aid of a white settler community in then Northern Mexico is a case in point. Crockett's death helped create a climate in which the Southern plantation wing of the US aristocracy could gobble up Mexican territory and subjugate the people. Latin American and Caribbean history is replete with similar mercenary activities up to the present. The end of World War II and the growth of the CIA as the directorate of worldwide covert action, began an era of intensified US use of mercenary armies in countries and situation where regular troops couldn't be used. VietNam in the late 1950s and early 60s is an obvious example. A group of mercenaries were recruited from active duty and reserve troops as well as intelligence officials in order to fight as "civilian advisors." Their presence was soon legitimized by JFK's formation of the US Special Forces, forces to be used exactly as mercenaries had been previously, and using the same white and male supremacist underpinnings for US expansion, as had Davy Crockett 130 years ago. The deployment of these mercenary forces, whatever their legitimacy, created the pretext for later invasions.

A similar pattern is emerging in Southern Africa today. Both active duty and reserve US soldiers are being recruited for action. The precise scale of this build up is not known, but it appears to far exceed the already mentioned covert commitment of mercs in the early stages of the US war in VietNam. According to ZANU's Robert Mugabe, as of May 1979, there were 13,000 foreign mercenaries in

Zimbabwe alone. An estimated 4,000 of these are US citizens of "European origin." Taken together with their Portuguese, British, and South African counterparts, they are the salvation of the Rhodesian army and the racist regimes.

US mercenaries are recruited overtly and principally by "Soldier of Fortune." A slick format magazine that first appeared 4 years ago, its aim is to glamorize the mercenary trade and to sell the viewpoint of the white regimes in Southern Africa. Slogans like "Rhodesia is ready when you are" and "be a man among men" are an update of the "king of the wild frontier" imagery of the past. "Soldier of Fortune" (SOF) magazine is significant not only because it has direct ties to the Rhodesian and South African military machines, but because it has direct ties to the US Special Forces and the CIA. It certainly hasn't been prosecuted for breaking US law by recruiting for service in a foreign military. When "SOF" first appeared as a quarterly 4 years ago it circulated 5,000 copies. Now a monthly, the December, 1979 issue will circulate 208,000 copies with the bulk of these being over-the-counter sales. The real significance of "SOF" is that it creates the climate for US identification with violent racism, white settler colonialism, and other fundamental values of the intransigent Rhodesian and SA regimes. It's not hard to imagine the next step for these soldiers of fortune, these trained killers of Black people, being deployed within the US itself based on the same or very similar values. Such action is not idle speculation. Defeat of US forces in Viet Nam created a large pool of soldiers, many of them frustrated and bitter at national policy makers and anti-war sentiment. Not coincidentally, "SOF" made its first appearance as the US withdrew from Viet Nam.

At the same time, the militarization of US police forces began in earnest. Police force militarization under the guise of "counter-terrorism" began in response to the righteous rebellion of Black people during the 1960s. One place that the counter insurgency skills of Viet Nam Vets could find employment was in city police departments. A popular mythology has been mobilized to support the militarization and counter insurgency training of police departments. As with the creation of Special Forces in the military, the coming of popular TV programs like S.W.A.T., Starsky and Hutch, etc. has created a climate of acceptability for police militarization. And, training for such police counter insurgency teams is done in many cases by precisely the same "private" trainers of mercenaries for service in Southern Africa. There is plenty of evidence, now, that police benevolent associations and the like are important centers of recruitment for mercenaries. It is significant that the movements of all oppressed nationalities within the US, from the urban Black and Hispanic communities to reservation Native Americans, have demanded investigations of the police and an end to their racist brutality.

There can be little doubt that the current upsurge of KKK organizing in the military, the police, and white communities makes it easier to recruit rabid racists. The right-wing has tried to stake out its territorial claim on the organizing of soldiers and vets in particular, even as the left has withdrawn from military organizing.

Progressive people in the US need to understand that there is a reactionary offensive with backers in high places trying to tie US government and popular interests to those of the South African apartheid system and its allies. This is extremely important and underlines the necessity contesting the reactionaries on military organizing. That means aggressive anti-klan and anti-mercenary work among active duty soldiers, reservists, and veterans. This work must be led by those most affected -- the Southern African liberation movements and their counterparts in the US, the movements of the oppressed nationalities. Failure of VVAW and the GI movement to survive the aftermath of Viet Nam's liberation can be traced, in general, to the movement's racism in its refusal to seek overall leadership from Black resistance within the US fighting machine. Similarly, the refusal of most men to listen to women's concerns in the GI and anti-war movements has caused many sisters to back away from "male issues" like military work. We need to change that and ourselves. The women's movement or sectors of it can be consulted on how to best fight the sexist myths that the mercenary recruiters rely on. The report concluded that a national task force must be organized to begin a rising tide of protest and struggle against mercenary recruitment.

On Saturday evening Bernie Wolfsdorf gave two talks. The first was a history of the development of the apartheid system in South Africa. It brought out the nature of early contact between the European colonists and the African peoples of the region. His talk showed how the early settlers took the land by suppressing African subsistence agriculture and forcing African people into the cash economy as the only way to make enough money for the payment of taxes. He traced the development of the laws which institutionalized a sub-human, colonized status for the dispossessed peoples. This view of South Africa's history shows that the system which stole the land and the destiny of whole peoples, the system which brutally exploits the cheapened labor of black workers for the profit of a few international capitalists began long before the 1948 victory of the Afrikaner Nationalist with their apartheid ideology in the whites-only elections.

Bernie's second talk was on the subject of building a national campaign in the US to gain asylum for South African war resisters. It started a good discussion with many concrete suggestions. Efforts by revolutionaries and progressive people to build support for the granting of asylum to white SA war resisters is seen as a small, but very important part of building support for the overall liberation struggle led by the liberation movements of Southern Africa. Direct material aid campaigns are strongly encouraged; there are many ways to support the national liberation movements. We clearly see our work as a complimentary component of the struggle and as a means of building militant solidarity with the freedom fighters. After all, no national liberation movement or revolution in recent times has been successful without some disloyalty within the ranks of the enemy's troops. SWAPO and other liberation forces have a great deal of support for this work. They recognize that discontent among white soldiers, once crystallized into a war resistance movement is a part of their arsenal, another weapon with which to defeat their enemy. We are determined to take the struggle against the apartheid war

machine inside South Africa's white community and the ranks of the white army which is meant to be the fighting force for white supremacy. We intend to sow disloyalty and disunity, as a small, but significant step toward the total liberation of the African sub-continent from all forms of imperialist domination. A fuller and more concrete description of the campaign to win asylum for South African war resisters will be published soon by SAMRAF.

A major presentation, this one on Agent Orange or dioxin poisoning, took place Sunday morning. Joe Bangert, VietNam vet, invited Maude De Victor, a worker in the Chicago Veterans Administration Hospital, to give a major portion of the presentation. She has learned an incredible amount about agent orange from her contact with Viet Nam veterans since the late 1960s. Despite harassment on and off the job, she has continued to speak out. She has joined with the Vietnamese people and US veterans and their families, all suffering the cruel effects of dioxin poisoning, to expose the frightening and massive proportions of the problem. Joe Bangert knows the physical and psychological effects of agent orange from personal experience and from his role in campaigning against the chemical's manufacturers. SAMRAF would like to appeal to anyone with notes or tapes of Maude's and/or Joe's presentations to send these to us. We would like to publish a booklet on the issues of agent orange, and the conference talks could form the core of this publication.

Sunday afternoon was utilized primarily for drawing conclusions and making decisions about on-going work:

1) One criticism of the conference was that not enough discussion of the overall theoretical basis of military organizing could take place in order to concretize the political lessons to guide the building of a soldiers movement in SA. That was a practical impossibility in the length of time available. But, SAMRAF decided to act as a clearinghouse for papers which contribute to the development of greater historical clarity and theoretical understanding of US military organizing. We will then distribute the contributions to that effort. Our first is contained in this packet, a paper by Dave Cortright that was actually prepared for the conference. In the future we will put out something on soldiers newspapers drawn from a paper by Andy Berman and comments by Mike Morgan concerning OMKEER, the South African soldiers magazine. We encourage everyone to participate in building a better historical and theoretical basis for our work. Send your ideas to SAMRAF.

2) The conference had an open and non-sectarian atmosphere which we would all like to see carried over into regional conferences and every aspect of the work.

3) We are preparing a short reading list on the war in Southern Africa. In the meantime, we enclose a few readings about Namibia and SWAPO's struggle.

4) We agreed to call demonstrations now scheduled for January 10th, 1980, against the new intake of conscripted soldiers in South Africa. See enclosed call to demonstrate, and its political basis.

As we begin typing the final page, Pete Rode's notes arrive from Minneapolis. His notes are particularly good on three of the presentations. On George Schmidt's presentation, we can incorporate the material into our next circular on political and theoretical issues of the US GI movement. Anyways, thanks Pete for your note-taking -- you can be sure the notes will be put to good use.

5) The conference adopted a campaign against mercenary recruitment and use in Southern Africa as a focus of on-going activity. It was decided to establish a national task force in order to first gather the necessary information and develop our network. We think it can grow rapidly from the core groups in Chicago and other cities into solid working committees under the umbrella of SAMRAF. We project a national committee called Mercenaries Out of Southern Africa Committee (MOOSAC) with national co-ordination coming from Mike McCain in Chicago along with the core group there. This campaign has gained the endorsement of SWAPO, which together with other of the Southern African liberation movements will be providing overall direction. Joe Morrissey from the SAMRAF staff will be going to Chicago the first week in December to work with Mike on establishing a funding base there and work out a more detailed proposal to be sent out to the list of people who indicated their interest in the anti-mercenary work.

6) The conference has already led to a scheduled speaking engagement at Oberlin College. This and some possible contact work in Cleveland area have been arranged through Norm Peery. The final week in November we'll be in Boston and Philadelphia speaking to meetings, organizing among our contacts, doing some media interviews, and generally continuing the struggle.

7) We want to thank the American Friends Service Comm. in Chicago for the use of their meeting room and for their hospitality. Overall we think it was a great weekend, and we want to thank all who participated and added their individual strengths to a fine collective effort.

IN LOVING STRUGGLE
SAMRAF STAFF.

The Lessons of the GI Movement

A memorandum for the Conference on South African war resistance and the GI Movement

Chicago, Illinois
November 2-4, 1979

by David Cortright
Washington, D.C.
October 26, 1979

(The following notes are an attempt to draw conclusions about American soldier resistance during the Indochina War. The points are made without reference to South Africa or any other area of present world conflict. Discussion of the applicability of these lessons in other settings is left to conference participants.)

The first and most obvious lesson of the G.I. movement is that soldier resistance is capable of restraining and ultimately crippling imperialist military intervention. The soldiers struggle of the late 1960's and the early 1970's was unquestionably a major factor in the defeat of the U.S. military in Indochina. American troops were withdrawn not because they had achieved their mission but because officials were compelled to act in order to preserve the army as an institution and prevent further decay. A spat^e of articles in the press in the latter part of 1970 confirms that military officials at all levels were urging a more rapid rate of withdrawal in order to halt the mass revolt sweeping the ranks.

The Vietnamese themselves have recognized the crucial role of the G.I. movement in the ultimate success of their revolution. As early as 1971, in their celebrated communication to anti-war American soldiers, the Vietnamese acknowledged the powerful force of the G.I. movement. More recent retrospective analyses by the Vietnamese place the soldiers movement high on the list of factors contributing to their victory.

The experience of the Indochina War tends to confirm the view that anti-imperialist revolution must be accompanied by internal collapse within the imperial army. Without resistance and mass opposition within the interventionist forces, the revolution cannot achieve success.

A second important lesson of the G.I. movement is that the locus of resistance shifted with the nature of the war. The major concentration of opposition moved from one service to another as the composition of American forces altered. In the first phase of the G.I. movement, from 1967 to 1970, the army and marine corps witnessed most of the opposition; these were the years when the ground combat force remained large. In the second phase of the movement, from 1971 through 1973, the center of opposition shifted to the Navy and Air Force; this reflected the intensification of the air war and the greater combat burden placed on these two services. As measured by the number of soldier committees and newspapers, the peak of activity for the army and marine corps was in the early part of 1970, while the peak for the Air Force and Navy occurred in the spring of 1972.

Another crucial point about the G.I. movement is that the most active and militant resisters were working class volunteers, not middle class draftees. This is an important point, one which runs contrary to the conventional wisdom. The liberal press assumes that the greatest resistance came from disgruntled draftees; indeed some of those presently advocating a return to conscription use this argument to claim that it will make the military more democratic and accountable. However, the limited empirical evidence available suggests that the most active and committed resisters were volunteers, many of whom came into the military believing in the system, angrily discovering after they were in that they had been deceived. The evidence that G.I. resisters were mostly volunteers, first presented in Soldiers in Revolt, has been recently confirmed by the research of Pete Rode.

Another important characteristic of the G.I. movement was the leading role of black G.I.s. The resistance of black service people was the strongest and most militant element of the G.I. movement, the true vanguard of the struggle. The largest and most intensive rebellions--the uprising at LBJ in Vietnam, the revolt at Travis Air Force Base, the revolts aboard the Kitty Hawk and the Constellation--were the work of non-white G.I.s. (Interestingly, the memoirs of Elmo Zumwalt, On Watch, provide a fascinating glimpse of the Kitty Hawk and Constellation rebellions, viewed from the command perspective. Zumwalt confirms that the top military and political leaders were panicked by the revolts. Nixon and Kissinger personally intervened in the matters, and Zumwalt spent whole days dealing with nothing else.)

One of the major failings of the G.I. movement was the inability of black and white G.I.s to link their struggles. In too many instances, black and white soldiers struggled against the brass independently, without joining forces. Racial separations were overcome in some incidents--including the Constellation revolt--but in too many cases the struggles of black and white soldiers remained separated. If the two movements had been able to join forces, the G.I. movement would undoubtedly have been more effective.

A final point worth noting is the changing nature of G.I. resistance in the post-Vietnam, all-volunteer era. The common assumption is that resistance disappeared entirely with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. In fact, however, unrest and disciplinary conflict continued after American troops left Vietnam and remain widespread even today. The overall level of resistance has certainly declined since the early 1970's, but widespread discord between soldiers and commanders remains. What's most important is that the forms of opposition have changed. G.I. newspapers and other articulated forms of protest have declined, while acts of disobedience and confrontation with the command have continued and in some cases increased. Thus today there are few if any G.I. newspapers or committees, but desertion and AWOL rates remain very high, and less-than-honorable discharge figures continue to set records. This changing form of protest reflects the changing class composition of the military, particularly the elimination of college-educated middle class draftees. With the absence of this group in a volunteer force, verbal and indirect forms of opposition give way to direct confrontation and disobedience.

No G.I. movement can long survive without organized political support. The repression and isolation of the military make it almost impossible for soldiers to link up with their colleagues at other bases or sustain local activity when the leading organizers are discharged or punished. To maintain continuity and provide material support, civilian political support is crucial. The American G.I. movement shows this clearly. While the political effectiveness of some support groups may have been questionable, the overall effect of support efforts--the coffeehouses, USSF, the FTA show, etc.--was wholesome. Future resistance movements in the U.S. or other armies will require the support of civilian political organizations.

A related factor is the importance of sending cadres into the military. During the G.I. movement, a number of political organizations, including the YSA and PL, encouraged organizers to enter the military. Whatever one may think of the politics of these or other groups, the fact is that the efforts of these politicized soldiers were often very successful in mobilizing soldier opposition.