



CHAPTER THREE

THE FORMATION OF UMKHONTO WE SIZWE (MK)

Once the decision to establish Umkhonto we Sizwe had been taken by the underground leadership by mid 1961, the next step was to set into motion the necessary machinery to bring this about. Not a great deal is known about the process and exact manner in which this was done or exactly when Umkhonto was established, except that it was done sometime in November, according to Mandela.⁽¹⁾

The reason why so little information is available on the formation of Umkhonto is not difficult to understand if one takes into account that not only was Umkhonto a revolutionary underground organisation designed to conduct a campaign of armed violence against the State, but its very existence after November 1961 depended on its ability to maintain absolute secrecy and not to reveal anything about its leaders or structure that might lead the police to its door. Although some information has been revealed over the years since the beginning of the armed struggle, this does not amount to a great deal, with the result that any account of the organisation's formation in 1961 remains sketchy and incomplete. Perhaps the three most useful and informative sources on the formation of Umkhonto are Bruno Mtolo's Umkhonto we Sizwe: The Road to the Left, which covers the origins and development of Umkhonto in Natal up to the beginning of 1963; Edward Feit's Urban Revolt in South Africa, which deals with the history of Umkhonto in more general terms during the same period and which makes extensive use of Mtolo's court evidence in 1963/64; and thirdly, the recently published monograph by Howard

1. Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom, p. 170. See also Barrell, MK, p. 7 and Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 24 - 28.

Barrell, MK, the ANC's armed struggle. The latter source, which is the first up to date account of Umkhonto in years, contains interesting information and points of view on Umkhonto and this has been incorporated as far as possible in this chapter and the rest of the study.

1. THE SETTING UP OF AN UNDERGROUND HEADQUARTERS

The setting up of an underground National High Command (NHC) for Umkhonto was the task of Nelson Mandela. For this he was given the amber light by his colleagues in the ANC's Emergency Committee (of which he was the Chairman) and the SACP's Central Committee. He was assisted by Joe Slovo who had been especially appointed to the task by the SACP. At its birth Umkhonto was thus a joint venture of radical ANC leaders and the SACP.⁽²⁾ According to Howard Barrell

In the SACP there was no equivocation on the issue. After dissolving in 1950 under threat of the Suppression of Communism Act, the Communist Party had secretly regrouped in 1953. At an underground congress held in a private house in Johannesburg shortly after the lifting of the post-Sharpeville state of emergency in August 1960, the SACP leadership had resolved to create an armed force In view of the SACP's overlapping membership with the ANC, and the vital role the Party had played from underground in keeping the Congress Alliance alive during the post-Sharpeville emergency, the SACP's decision strongly reinforced the arguments for armed activity coming from leading ANC nationalists such as Mandela.⁽³⁾

Having decided to form Umkhonto one of the first steps taken by the combined underground was to find a suitable place to set up an underground headquarters from which the formation and eventual operations of Umkhonto could be conducted with relative safety. Since Umkhonto was the brainchild of both the ANC and the SACP, the headquarters (HQ) had to be situated in an area where the presence of

2. Barrell, MK, p. 7. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 24 - 28.
3. Barrell, MK, p. 6. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 24 - 28.



Whites, Blacks and Indians and the constant movement of these people in and out of the area would not attract undue attention from neighbours. These requirements immediately ruled out any of the Black urban areas (townships) around the country.

Secondly, the proposed headquarters had to be as close as possible to the workplace and homes of most of the underground leaders. With the majority of the underground leaders of the ANC and the SACP either working or living on the Reef, Johannesburg was a logic choice. Moreover, it was thought to be the last place that the police would look for such a set up. The logic behind this thinking was borne out by the fact that when the police began their search for Mandela and the newly created underground headquarters of the ANC (and later the SACP and Umkhonto), they first concentrated on the African townships around the Witwatersrand-Pretoria area.⁽⁴⁾

According to the evidence presented to the court at the trial of the NHC of Umkhonto in 1963, the SACP played a significant if not the leading role, in the establishment of the underground headquarters that facilitated the establishment of Umkhonto some months later. It was for instance instrumental both in the purchasing and running of the various premises at Rivonia, Travellyn and Mountainview that came to comprise the underground headquarters of the ANC and Umkhonto by the end of 1961.⁽⁵⁾

The search for a suitable premise to set up the underground headquarters apparently began shortly after May 1961, when Michael Harmel, a member of the SACP using the alias Jacobson, began visiting various estate agents in the Johannesburg area. According to Jacobson he needed a relatively secluded place to house his brother-in-law who was sick and needed peace and quiet. Some weeks later, after a number of properties were found to be unsuitable for his "sick

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4. The World (Johannesburg), 1961.05.14 (Police still looking for underground).
 5. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Opening Address by Dr. Percy Yutar, pp. 4 - 5.



brother-in-law", Jacobson finally settled for a small-holding of some 28 acres in Rivonia just outside Johannesburg. The name of the property was Lilliesleaf Farm. The owner of the property, Mr. Fyffe, wanted R32 000 for it but in the end a purchase price of R25 000 was agreed upon. Of this amount R10 000 had to be paid as deposit while the balance of R15 000 had to be paid in three equal instalments of R5 000 each. (6)

The "sick brother-in-law" on whose behalf the property was being purchased was Vivian Ezra. But Ezra was neither sick nor did he have the money to pay for the property. He acted only as a front for the purchase of the property, which he bought on behalf of a company that was still to be formed called NAVIAN (PTY) LIMITED. The directors of this fictitious company were Vivian Ezra himself and a fellow member of the Communist Party by the name of Harold Wolpe. Wolpe was a junior partner in the legal firm of KANTOR, ZWARENSTEIN AND PARTNERS in Johannesburg. (7)

To meet the deposit requirements for the Lilliesleaf property, a cheque of R2 500 and a bankers guarantee for the remaining R7 500 to make up R10 000 were released to the estate agents handling the sale. Once this part of the transaction was completed the registration of Navian (Pty) Limited and all further dealings with the purchase of Lilliesleaf was handed over to another Johannesburg firm of attorneys. At this point, probably to erase any possible connection between the purchase of the Rivonia property and the SACP, the name of Harold Wolpe as co-director of Navian (Pty) Limited was removed from all further documentation. Yet, inspite of all this clever manoeuvring, the firm of Kantor and Partners remained in control of Lilliesleaf Farm. All payments in respect of the property, including the purchase of furniture, were done by Vivian Ezra through the offices of Kantor and Partners. To minimise the possibility of anyone

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6. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Opening Address by Dr. Yutar, p. 4. See also M. Norval, Inside the ANC, p. 63.
 7. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Opening Address by Dr. Yutar, p. 4. See also Norval, Inside the ANC, p. 63.



being able to trace any of the purchases made in connection with the Rivonia property to the SACP or its members, most, if not all transactions, were made in cash,^(*) which confirmed the allegations made by Jordan Ngubane that, since the SACP came to control the activities of the ANC after 1960, there were all of a sudden large amounts of money available to the organisation. (See Chapter two, pp. 84 - 89.)

Once Lilliesleaf Farm had been bought, it was rented out to Arthur Joseph Goldreich, whom it later turned out was not only a senior member of the SACP (probably a member of its Central Committee), but one of the founding leaders of Umkhonto. Goldreich, according to Slovo, served Umkhonto in an auxiliary capacity as a member of its Johannesburg Regional Command.^(*) Lilliesleaf Farm was rented to Goldreich and his family for a nominal rent of R100 a month with effect from 1 December 1961. No records, however, were ever found to confirm that he indeed paid the rent. Thus, on the surface, Lilliesleaf Farm was legally occupied by Arthur Goldreich, his wife and two children as from December 1961, but in reality it was the headquarters of Umkhonto's NHC.⁽¹⁰⁾

While Goldreich and his family occupied the main building, the out-buildings were occupied by the African and Indian members of Umkhonto's NHC, which presumably was set up between July and November 1961. The reason why these people stayed in the out-buildings was undoubtedly to create the impression with neighbours that they were servants on the small-holding, a position that was not uncommon for Africans and Indians in South Africa at the time. This allowed them relatively free movement on the property without drawing any undue attention from neighbours. Among the ANC/Umkhonto leaders who stayed at Lilliesleaf in 1961 were Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed

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8. Ngubane, An African Explains Apartheid, pp. 169 - 171.
 9. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Revised indictment, pp. 1 - 9 (See also Annexure A to the revised indictment pp. 1 - 19), and Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 24.
 10. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Address by Dr. Yutar, pp. 5 - 6.



Kathrada, Govan Mbeki, and Raymond Mhlaba. Whether they stayed at Lilliesleaf on a permanent basis between 1961 and the discovery of the headquarters in mid 1963 is not clear, but the fact that they were all there when the police raided the place in July 1963, indicate that this could indeed have been the case. Such an arrangement would have fitted in with the type of operations conducted by Umkhonto and the fact that quick decisions had to be taken on a day-to-day basis. This would not have been possible if those involved in the decision-making process had to be constantly summoned to Lilliesleaf. Moreover, a constant coming and going of people, particularly Blacks in cars, would definitely have drawn unwanted attention. During their stay at Lilliesleaf, Mandela made use of the assumed name of "David" while Sisulu was known as "Allah" and Ahmed Kathrada as "Pedro". Members of the SACP who frequently visited Lilliesleaf Farm included Wolpe, Slovo, Michael Harmel and Lionel Bernstein.⁽¹¹⁾

Although information becomes available on the subject of Umkhonto all the time, very little is still known about the actual process that was involved in the formation of the organisation in the six months that led up to the beginning of the armed struggle on 16 December 1961 (it began a day earlier in Natal).

Although in his statement at the Rivonia trial, Mandela provide some insight into the reasoning that gave rise to Umkhonto and the date upon which it was formed, it does not adequately explain by what process or processes Umkhonto was actually established in 1961. This vacuum in our knowledge of the history of Umkhonto is however partially filled by Bruno Mtolo and more recently by Howard Barrell. Although Mtolo's description of events pertains mainly to the establishment of Umkhonto in Natal, some deductions can be made about events in the rest of the country. When these are contrasted with other information such as that contained in Barrell's book, a

11. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Address by Dr. Yutar, pp. 6.



reasonable accurate picture can be composed of developments outside Natal prior to 16 December 1961.

Returning to Mandela's testimony at his trial in 1963, he told the court that Umkhonto was officially established in November 1961. The reason why a new organisation was formed instead of the ANC being turned into the type of centralised organisation that was needed for armed resistance and eventual guerrilla warfare, was that the ANC was totally unsuited to such a development. Most of the ANC's members who had joined the organisation before it was banned in April 1960, had done so on an explicit policy of non-violent protest. To many in the organisation, especially its President-General, Albert Luthuli and those who supported his moderate views, the idea of the ANC taking up arms against the State was unacceptable. It was a result of this inherent opposition to armed resistance among a large section of the ANC's old and established leadership and members, Mandela told the court in 1963, that it was decided not to turn the ANC into a full fledged underground organisation for revolutionary armed struggle, but rather to form an entirely new organisation.⁽¹²⁾

But a factor that was perhaps more important in the decision not to convert the ANC was the fact that as the brainchild of the SACP and the radical leadership of the ANC, Umkhonto was to be a fully multi-racial organisation involving people from all races at all levels of organisation. This would have been impossible in the ANC whose National Executive Committee had an exclusively African membership. This means that although the ANC in theory subscribed to the principle of multi-racialism, non Africans were not allowed onto its NEC.

The ANC, Mandela informed the court in 1963,

12. Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom, pp. 169 - 170. See also Barrell, MK, p. 5, and Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 24.



was a mass political organisation with a political function to fulfil.

... Because of all this, it could not and would not undertake violence One cannot turn such a body into the small, closely knit organisation required for sabotage. Nor would this be politically correct, because it would result in members ceasing to carry out this essential activity; political propaganda and organisation. Nor was it permissible to change the whole nature of the organisation.

On the other hand, in view of this situation, ... the ANC was prepared to depart from its fifty-year-old policy of non-violence to this extent that it would no longer disapprove of properly controlled violence. Hence members who undertook such activity would not be subject to disciplinary action by the ANC.⁽¹³⁾

Having explained their thinking behind the formation of Umkhonto, Mandela went on to explain to the court how they determined the type of violence that was to be used by Umkhonto.

When we took this decision [i.e. to form Umkhonto we Sizwe in November 1961] and subsequently formulated our plans, the ANC heritage of non-violence and racial harmony was very much with us. We felt that the country was drifting towards a civil war in which Blacks and Whites would fight each other.

... The avoidance of civil war had dominated our thinking for many years, but when we decided to adopt violence as part of our policy, we realised that we might one day have to face prospects of such a war. This had to be taken into account in formulating our plans. We required a plan which was flexible and which permitted us to act in accordance with the needs of the times; above all the plan had to be one which recognised civil war as the last resort, We did not want to be committed to civil war, but we wanted to be ready if it became inevitable.⁽¹⁴⁾

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13. Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom, pp. 169 - 170. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 24.
 14. Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom, p. 170.



According to Mandela, four forms of violence were open to them, namely sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and open revolution. He told the court:

We chose to adopt the first method and to exhaust it before taking any other decision. In the light of our political background, the choice was a logical one. Sabotage did not involve loss of life, and it offered the best hope for future race relations. Bitterness would be kept to a minimum and, if the policy bore fruit, democratic government could become a reality.⁽¹⁵⁾

With regards to Umkhonto's choice of sabotage as its first method of armed struggle, Howard Barrell writes that whatever the hope expressed by Umkhonto's leadership in 1961, the National High Command apparently did not seriously expect the State to retreat from its policy of apartheid in the face of the first few explosions.

It anticipated, that the state's response would leave MK no choice but to move towards developing a sustained armed struggle. This had a bearing on MK's choice of sabotage for its initial ventures. Sabotage would show doubters in the Congress Alliance the need for, and benefits of, armed activity. It could also demonstrate to the populace at large that there had been a break with a half century of non-violent politics. Yet the fact that sabotage would avoid loss of human life would make it morally less offensive.

Sabotage could also attract recruits and familiarise them with the procedures of controlled revolutionary violence. Sabotage could, in other words, [argue Barrell] provide a 'useful bridge' to carry people politically from the old to the new phase. It would be the means to begin building a revolutionary armed force.⁽¹⁶⁾

Of course other factors such as the awarding of the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize to Albert Luthuli in 1961 could also have influenced the decision of the radicals in the underground not to transform the ANC but to set up Umkhonto apart from the former. Although the announce-

15. Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom, p. 171.

16. Barrell, MK, p. 7. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 24.



ment that Luthuli (and thus the ANC) would receive the prestigious award was only made on 23 October 1961, it was known before this date that Luthuli was being considered for the Nobel Peace Prize.⁽¹⁷⁾ There can thus be little doubt that the decision in 1961 to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Luthuli and by implication the ANC must have had an effect on the thinking and planning of the radicals in the ANC and the SACP with regards to the formation of Umkhonto by the end of 1961. The Nobel Prize, which is normally awarded to someone who has done the most to further the course of peace and brotherhood among men and to cut down on standing armies, would certainly not have been awarded to Luthuli if it could be proved that he was the leader of a revolutionary underground organisation that had as its aims the destruction of the South African State through the use of revolutionary armed violence. In view of this, it can thus be argued that once the recipient of the Nobel Prize was announced on 23 October 1961, the radicals in the underground had little choice but to openly sever all ties with the ANC and to establish Umkhonto as a separate organisation from the ANC - something they went to great lengths to stress in the Manifesto of the new organisation (see Appendix A).⁽¹⁸⁾ This might also help to explain why Umkhonto was only formed in November and not earlier in 1961.

As far as the actual formation of Umkhonto itself is concerned, Mandela's testimony reveals little information as to how this was done. Here one has to turn to other sources such as Mtolo and

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17. Contact 4(22), 1961.11.02, p. 3. See also The Daily News (Durban), 1961.10.24.
 18. Karis and Carter (eds.), From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, pp. 716 - 717 (Document 66 "Umkhonto we Sizwe" (Spear of the Nation). Flyer "issued by the command of Umkhonto we Sizwe" and appearing on December 16, 1961). See also South African Communists Speak. Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915 - 1980, pp. 274 - 275.



Barrell to piece together the puzzle. According to Mtolo, the first recruits in Natal (and one would presume that this was also more or less the case in the rest of the country) were drawn into Umkhonto towards the end of 1961. Most of these first recruits were drawn from the ranks of the banned SACP and its allies in the province. SACTU in particular provided the bulk of the initial leadership of Umkhonto in Natal. Although Mtolo does not provide the exact date on which Umkhonto was first established in Natal, it appeared that he and the rest of the Regional (High) Command were recruited either by the end of October, but more likely by the beginning of November 1961.⁽¹⁹⁾ According to Mtolo, they were drawn into an organisation with no name at the time. Towards the end of 1961, (presumably November) Mtolo was approached by Billy Nair, an Indian and member of the communist led SACTU organisation, who told him that a White man, Rusty Bernstein was being sent down from Johannesburg to Durban with a list of names of people to contact in the city. According to Mtolo, Billy told him

that this man's mission was to introduce us to the sabotage movement, which had been decided on by the ANC National Executive Committee in Johannesburg.⁽²⁰⁾

With the banning of the CPSA in 1950, Bernstein, who was a devoted member of the Party, was one of those who worked towards the establishment of the Congress of Democrats in the mid 1950's, to serve as a front for the now banned Communist Party. Bernstein was also a defendant in both the 1958 Treason Trial as well as the Rivonia Trial in 1963. After the restructuring of the Communist Party in the early 1960's, following the revival of the Party in the early 1950's Bernstein was elected to the Central Committee of the SACP.⁽²¹⁾

According to Mtolo, he was informed by Nair that the decision to adopt sabotage and to form a movement to execute the decision, was forced upon the ANC

19. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, pp. 1 - 15.

20. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, p. 15.

21. Karis and Carter (eds.), From Protest to Challenge, vol. 4, pp. 6 - 7.



-125-

... because of the Government's stubbornness. The ANC had changed its policy of non-violence ... [and that he and four others] were to form a Regional Command. There was already a High Command in Johannesburg from where this man [Bernstein] was sent. Our task as a Regional Command was to organise and form sabotage groups in Durban and other centres in Natal. Another man from the High Command would teach us how to commit acts of sabotage. This was a top secret which was never to be discussed by anyone of us out of our movement. (22)

Mtolo went on to say that at the beginning of December (by which time Umkhonto had been formed in Durban) he was notified by Billy Nair of a meeting in Ronnie Kasrils' flat where they were to be taught "about sabotage". Their "teacher" was Harold Strachan who was sent down by the NHC in Johannesburg. According to Mtolo,

This man, Harold Strachan, told us that the ANC had decided to launch this sabotage movement because of Government retaliation with force against [our] non-violent methods. ... we, as a military wing for the ANC, were under no circumstances to take lives.

He went on to say that Strachan told them to direct their attacks at government buildings, properties, and institutions or those institutions that collaborated with the government's policies. They were further instructed to locate places where arms, ammunition and dynamite were kept. This had to be stolen by them for use in their attacks. (23)

The membership of Umkhonto's Regional Command in Durban came to consist of six people, one short of the seven determined by Mandela's M-Plan. The six members of the RC were Curnick Ndlovu, Billy Nair, Ronnie Kasrils, Erick Mtshali, Brain Chaitow and Bruno Mtolo. (24)

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22. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, p. 15. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 13 - 15.
23. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, p. 15. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 13, 17.
24. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, p. 16. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 14.



According to Howard Barrell, the four or five people each who were recruited to the various Regional Command structures around the country, were selected because they were regarded as "resolute members of Congress Alliance organisations" or because they had the necessary technical or military skills. Curnick Ndlovu who led Umkhonto's Regional Command in Durban was a senior regional official of SACTU in Natal. Similarly, Looksmart Ngundle and Fred Carneson who led Umkhonto in the Western Cape were both senior members of the banned Communist Party and SACTU. Washington Bongco who was Umkhonto's Regional Commander in the Eastern Cape's Border Region was also a senior SACTU official. Similarly, Vuyisile Mini who was the leader of Umkhonto in the Eastern Cape was also a senior member of SACTU and the SACP. In the Transvaal, senior members of the Communist Party and SACTU who led the activities of Umkhonto were Elias Motsoaledi and Jack Hodgson. The latter was a veteran of the Second World War. (25)

Although an illegal underground organisation, only a few members of Umkhonto, mainly those of the NHC, operated from hiding. Most of the founder members of the organisation, who totalled less than 250, were well known anti-apartheid activists and as such continued to hold key public posts in still legal Congress Alliance organisations such as SACTU. This meant that unless a member was specifically sought by the police, they often lead normal public lives during the day within view of the police but at night they became part of Umkhonto's underground structure and its subversive activities. (26)

Edward Feit in his book Urban Revolt in South Africa argued that because of the secret nature of Umkhonto and the fact that its members kept their identity as far as possible a secret even to people of the ANC (particularly in Natal where the ANC was strongly opposed to Umkhonto), Umkhonto did not receive its final form in a single action or movement. On the contrary, it appeared to have passed through a series of development phases. He wrote

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25. Barrell, MK, pp. 9 - 10. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 7, 14, 30.
26. Barrell, MK, p. 10. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 7, 14, 30.



Its founding seems to have been empirical. Those who came together at the beginning, in mid-June 1961, joined a nameless organisation. Groups of Africans, Whites and Indians, most of whom were members either of one of the Congress Alliance organisations, or of the Communist Party, were assembled in different centres. The only qualification, at this stage was the willingness to undertake acts of sabotage.⁽²⁷⁾

Felt further claimed that Umkhonto "was shaped slowly and was only made known to the branches some months after its foundation".⁽²⁸⁾ Thus, according to Mtolo and Felt, those who joined Umkhonto prior to its formation in November - December 1961, joined a nameless organisation and were only told some months later that the organisation they belonged to was "Umkhonto we Sizwe". This is a strange state of affairs. While it is possible that Umkhonto was not known by name to some members of the organisation before 16 December 1961, there can be little doubt that after 16 December most members of the newly established organisation must have known fairly well that the organisation to which they belonged was Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC and the SACP. The first acts of sabotage committed by Umkhonto in 16 December 1961 was given extensive coverage in the daily press. What is more, on the same day that the first acts of sabotage were committed, leaflets announcing the birth and existence of Umkhonto were distributed throughout the major centres in the country (see Appendix A for the text of this leaflet). In this it was clearly stated that a new organisation had been born and that its name was Umkhonto we Sizwe.⁽²⁹⁾ It is thus not clear why Mtolo (who is supported by Felt) claimed that they were only told some months later that the organisation they belonged to was Umkhonto we Sizwe.⁽³⁰⁾ A possible explanation for the apparent contradiction has been advanced by Felt. According to him the reason for this may be two-fold: first of all, the turn to violence may have sparked opposition from those leaders still committed to political struggle; and secondly, all the leaders may have agreed that some preparation was necessary before the decision was made

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27. Felt, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 168.
 28. Felt, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 168.
 29. South African Communists Speak, Document 111, "Manifesto of Umkhonto we Sizwe, issued on December 16 1961" pp. 274 - 275.
 30. Mtolo, Umkhonto we Sizwe, p. 23.



known. (31)

These explanations may be applicable to developments in Natal where Umkhonto was established without the prior knowledge of the local ANC leadership but it is doubtful whether it holds true for the rest of the country where much closer co-operation existed between the local ANC, the SACP, SACTU and the leaders of Umkhonto at the latter's formation in 1961. According to Mtolo's description of developments in Natal they were initially told that Umkhonto was the military wing of the ANC and as such its formation was sanctioned by the ANC's NEC. They were therefore very surprised when they subsequently discovered that their instructions did not come from the NEC but from Umkhonto's NHC in Johannesburg and that the local ANC leadership in Natal were never consulted on nor ever informed about the decision to form Umkhonto in 1961.⁽³²⁾ As a result trouble broke out between the leaders of Umkhonto and the local ANC in Natal almost immediately after the first acts of sabotage were committed on 16 December 1961. Mtolo claimed:

The ANC in Durban wanted to know who these anarchists were who were causing all the trouble. I think this was sparked off by an article in the press about leaflets which had been distributed in Johannesburg, introducing the sabotage movement to the people as [the] military wing of the ANC. There were fireworks about this in Durban. We were just as surprised as anyone else because we had been told that this [the move towards violence] was a decision of the ANC executive in Johannesburg ...

After the sabotage attempts it became clear that the local officials of the ANC in our province were never consulted.⁽³³⁾

In terms of the above account it appears thus that Umkhonto was established in Natal without the knowledge nor the support of the local leadership of the ANC, including Albert Luthuli, the then President-General of the organisation. The immediate implication of

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31. Felt, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 168. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 24.
 32. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, pp. 15, 23.
 33. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, pp. 15, 23.



this was that Umkhonto could not recruit its initial leaders and members from the ranks of the ANC in Natal. The only member of the Durban Regional Command who was a member of the ANC was Curdnick Ndlovu and according to Mtolo, he was more a communist than a member of the ANC.⁽³⁴⁾ Although the hostility between the leadership of the ANC and Umkhonto in Natal would explain the reason why most of Umkhonto's initial leaders were drawn from the ranks of the underground trade union and communist movement, it should also be remembered that Umkhonto was first and foremost a creation of the SACP and it would thus be logic to assume that the Communist Party would have given preference to members who were both members of the ANC and the underground communist movement. On the other hand, there are other sources such as Howard Barrell, who claim that senior leaders of the ANC in Natal, among them Albert Luthuli, were not only consulted on the formation of Umkhonto early in 1961, but that they actually gave their permission for its formation. Barrell, who quotes Umkhonto leader Joe Modise (to whom Mtolo also frequently refers in his book), writes that a number of clandestine meetings were held in early 1961 to discuss the need for a change in strategy. According to Barrell, Modise recalled a meeting at the home of Luthuli in Stanger, Natal in early 1961 to discuss the armed struggle. Present at this meeting were representatives of the ANC, the SACP, the CPC, SAIC and COD. According to Modise

After two days of consultations it was agreed that the ANC and SACP were going to undertake this new form of struggle [sabotage] whilst the other movements that were still legal should continue working legally. It was then decided that MK was going to be launched.⁽³⁵⁾

If this meeting with Luthuli and other members of the ANC in Natal took place the way Modise described it and the ANC in the province knew about the formation of Umkhonto, then why the denial that they knew about it? The answer to this can be one of two things, namely,

34. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, pp. 15, 23.

35. Joe Modise as quoted in Barrell, MK, pp. 5 - 6. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 10.



that the ANC leadership wished to create the impression that the organisation was and remained committed to a policy of non-violence and that on the whole it had not as yet committed itself to violence. The awarding of the Nobel Prize in 1961 to Albert Luthuli is confirmation of this thinking. Secondly, the possibility exists that only Luthuli and a handful of his closest aids in Natal knew about the decision to form Umkhonto and that the majority of the organisation's leadership in Natal were genuinely unaware of what was happening. The latter argument is particularly significant if one takes into account what Mandela said at the Rivonia Trial in 1963. He said

... the ANC was prepared to depart from its fifty year old policy of non-violence to this extent that it would no longer disapprove of properly controlled violence. Hence members who undertook such activity would not be subject to disciplinary action by the ANC. (36)

The picture is unclear and this will remain to be the case until more information has been unearthed on the subject of Umkhonto's formation in 1961. According to Barrell,

The political disagreements within the ANC and the Congress Alliance over armed activity were a potentially serious problem. It would, in time, become one factor which warped the way ANC strategy expressed the relationship between violent and non-violent political struggle. ... it remains a fundamental tenet of revolutionary armed activity that its success depends upon political mobilization of the populace at large. It depends not merely on popular support but on popular involvement. And the disagreements were to undermine the ANC's ability to do the necessary political work. (37)

In the rest of the country, the formation of Umkhonto followed a somewhat similar pattern to what happened in Natal. The only difference was that unlike in Natal where Umkhonto and the local ANC leadership were at loggerheads, in the rest of the country the formation of

36. Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom, p. 170.

37. Barrell, MK, p. 7.



Umkhonto and the activities of the local ANC became closely associated with each other. As a result of the latter situation, the ANC-Umkhonto-SACP leadership in Johannesburg could make effective use of the various Congress Alliance organisations to recruit members for Umkhonto. It could also make extensive use of the local organisation structures of the ANC and the underground communist movement to quickly establish Umkhonto. This was particularly the case in the Border region of the Eastern Cape where the ANC and the SACP always had a strong and loyal following. Moreover, the Eastern Cape region with its predominantly Xhosa population was also the heartland of the ANC which was largely a Xhosa organisation.

Exactly how Umkhonto was established in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere in the country and what processes were involved is not entirely clear and can thus only be speculated upon. Indications are however, that most of the leaders who came to serve on the Regional Command structures around the country were drawn into Umkhonto at more or less the same time as those in Natal, but not necessarily in the same manner. It appears that many of Umkhonto's initial leaders outside Natal were drawn from the ANC or the labour movement. As was the case in Natal, once a Regional Command had been set up, the same people who were sent to instruct the Regional Command leadership in Natal, also visited the other Regional Commands to explain what was happening and to train them in the art of bomb making and sabotage. Harold Strachan was for instance first sent to Durban and then to Port Elizabeth to instruct the local leadership of Umkhonto.⁽³⁸⁾ Strachan was arrested shortly afterwards. Nelson Mandela as Commander-in-Chief of Umkhonto apparently also visited Port Elizabeth in late 1961. The exact date of this visit is not known but it probably was shortly before the formation of Umkhonto.⁽³⁹⁾

38. Mtolo, Umkonto we Sizwe, p. 22. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 7, 10.

39. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Evidence of B. Mashinyana, pp. 10 - 11.

During these visits Mandela apparently informed the local leadership of Umkhonto of the ANC's decision to adopt a policy of armed resistance against the State. In more or less the same way that Strachan informed the Regional Command of Umkhonto in Natal, Mandela informed the ANC's chief contact person in Port Elizabeth, Govan Mbeki, that the new organisation to which they belonged was the military wing of the ANC and that it would launch the first phase of the ANC's sabotage campaign against the government on 16 December 1961.⁽⁴⁰⁾

In view of this one can thus assume that once Umkhonto had been established in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere, the regional leaders were instructed to select suitable targets for the opening phase of the attack on 16 December.⁽⁴¹⁾ Beyond these rather superficial comparisons, little else is known about the formation of Umkhonto prior to 16 December 1961. Equally little is known about the formation of the organisation in, for instance, the Transvaal or the Orange Free State. None of the numerous trials involving members of either the ANC or the SACP have so far shed any real light on the subject. With Johannesburg being the centre of command and in the absence of any reference to a Transvaal Regional Command, one is left with the impression that Umkhonto had, besides the NHC, no clear regional organisational structure in the Transvaal, nor that it actively recruited people for local and overseas work from the province. There also appears to be no information on, or reference to, an Umkhonto Regional Command in the Orange Free State nor is there any indication that recruits were also drawn from the latter province. All the available information on the subject points to the fact that Umkhonto was mainly concentrated in Natal, particularly the Durban region; the Eastern Cape region with specific reference to the Border (Port Elizabeth) region; the Western Cape and the Transvaal. The latter province it appears, served mainly as a headquarter and an assembly point for recruits who were earmarked for guerrilla training

40. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Evidence of B. Mashinyana, pp. 10 - 11.

41. See Dawn Souvenir Issue, pp. 7 - 12, 24 - 25; Barrell, MK, pp. 9 - 10.



outside South Africa. If a Regional Command did exist in the Transvaal, it was probably closely tied up with the NHC. It is, however, not clear who were responsible for the acts of sabotage that were committed in the Transvaal after 16 December. Barrell is of the opinion that it was done by Umkhonto leaders such as Elias Motsoaledi and Jack Hodgson.⁽⁴²⁾ Motsoaledi was one of those brought to trial with Mandela in 1963 for allegedly being a member of Umkhonto's NHC. According to Motsoaledi's testimony at the trial he joined Umkhonto in 1962.⁽⁴³⁾ However, according to Heidi Holland in her book The Struggle. A History of the African National Congress, Motsoaledi together with Jack Hodgson (mentioned above) as well as others such as Arthur Goldreich, Dennis Goldberg, and Mac Maharaj were involved as "auxiliaries in the Johannesburg Regional Command ..."⁽⁴⁴⁾ The fact that these people were present at Lilliesleaf Farm when the police raided the underground headquarters of the ANC, SACP and Umkhonto in mid 1963, indicate to the fact that they probably operated from the same premises as the NHC of Umkhonto. The picture is simply not sufficiently clear to make a sound analysis of events. When the police raided the Rivonia headquarters of the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto they had little interest in drawing a distinction between those who were members of Umkhonto's NHC and those who belonged to the organisation's regional structures in the Transvaal, nor was such a distinction at any time highlighted by the Rivonia Trial.

One thing is certain, security was a key element in Umkhonto's strategy in the early 1960's and the best manner in which to secure this was to keep the organisation small and flexible and this could only be achieved if its leaders could have close and constant contact with one another. Lilliesleaf Farm with its secluded character and many buildings provided the ideal setting for this development. Unfortunately, it also turned out to be one of the weak links in the ANC and SACP's strategy; for when the police raided the small

42. Barrell, MK, p. 10.

43. Karis and Carter (eds.), From Protest to Challenge, vol. 4, p. 102.

44. H. Holland, The Struggle. A History of the African National Congress, p. 136. See also Dawn Souvenir Issue, p. 24.



holding, they netted virtually all the key leaders of Umkhonto, if not the underground movement in South Africa as a whole. The evidence found at Lilliesleaf Farm opened the door on the rest of the underground movement, a development that led to its destruction inside South Africa by the mid 1960's. As a result of the latter development the ANC-SACP alliance had to relocate their command and organisational structures outside the country; thus starting what became commonly known as the exile phase of the armed struggle.