

THE ADVENTURER EPISODE

— Ronnie Kasrils

IN 1971 the South African police announced that they had made a big catch. They talked of having foiled the dramatic plans of the ANC to land Umkhonto guerrillas and weapons along the Transkei coast. Six comrades had been caught and tried in what became one of the most sensational trials of that period. Four of the accused were MK combatants. They were Justice Mpanza, Theo Cholo, Petros Mthembu and Gardner Sijake. One was a young Irishman Sean Hosey, and the sixth was Alex Moumbaris.

The MK combatants were part of a group which had left South Africa in the early part of the 1960's for military training. Theo and Justice were senior comrades who had participated in the earlier activities of MK. Justice headed MK in KwaMashu and was part of the Luthuli detachment. He fought in Wankie. Theo was from Pietersburg and served in the movement in Johannesburg. Petros also served in Johannesburg, while Gardner was from the Transkei. Hosey was an Irish internationalist and member of the Young Communists of Great Britain. Moumbaris was one could say, a man from many lands. He is actually Greek, but born in Egypt, grew up in Australia, worked in Britain and married a French woman.

SETBACKS

Before going into the case one should review the proceeding period. Following the Rivonia trial our movement suffered serious setbacks. We had many trained cadres abroad and they were to be infiltrated back into the country to our underground structures. But the blows of that period led to widespread roundups of our activists and leaders. The subsequent arrest of Bram Fischer and Wilton Mkwayi also seriously disrupted our plans. Mass struggle was at a rather low ebb and the spirit of resistance was not high. These factors made it extremely difficult to re-infiltrate our combatants.

But there was no question of surrender. Our leadership continued to work on the infiltration of combatants and weapons. So what transpired from the state allegations which really caught the public imagination, was that the ANC leadership had been constantly



endeavouring to build and infiltrate the people's army Umkhonto we Sizwe.

In Somalia a sea operation was allegedly planned along the coast of Transkei. It was planned, the state alleged, by OR Tambo, Joe Slovo and Moses Mabhida. The plan was to land twenty-five highly trained cadres from a ship called the *Adventurer* which the ANC had purchased. They claimed that Moumbaris had reconnoitred the coast and, with people unknown to the state, organised the landing reception. However the *Adventurer* had run into problems off the East African coast. On the high seas the engines failed resulting in the boat returning to Somalia.

What followed was that the twenty-five guerrillas were infiltrated over-land back to South Africa. Moumbaris was one of those who provided border reconnaissance and transportation. Unfortunately one of the comrades who was infiltrated was caught and informed the enemy of Moumbaris's role and identified some of the others.

As a result Moumbaris and his wife were arrested at a Botswana

border post whilst engaged in an operation. Theophilus was arrested in Pietersburg and Justice in Durban. Hosey was trapped by the enemy as he handed documents and funds to a special branch who he thought was Justice. This resulted in what the enemy called the '*Moumbaris Adventurer Episode*'. They had hoped to expose the ANC as some kind of international terrorist organisation.

Instead the people everywhere were inspired and amazed. The imaginative episode really caught their minds even though the *Adventurer* turned out to be a leaky old tub. What was however significant, was that we had succeeded in infiltrating many trained cadres and that only a few were captured. The man who the boers called James Bond was subsequently to shock the boers and the world once again in 1979 when he succeeded in escaping from Pretoria Central Prison with Lee and Jenkins. Moumbaris was serving a fifteen year prison sentence.

SPECULATION

There are many stories and speculations as to why Moumbaris got involved in our struggle. I would say that his background gave him a strong sense of internationalism, although he did not come from a political family. After he went to Britain he began to associate with communists. From there he learnt a lot about the communist resistance to the Nazi occupation of Greece, and was greatly inspired by the internationalism of the British communists. He began to associate with the ANC exiles and in many ways was an exile himself. The state revealed that since 1967 he had been travelling in and out of South Africa transporting literature and material for our movement. He had also once unfurled an ANC banner from a building in Durban.

Like Moumbaris the other comrades were also sentenced to fifteen years. Hosey served a five year sentence and then returned to Britain. The four MK combatants; Theophilus, Justice, Gardner and Petros will soon be free. They in all senses have proved to be exemplary cadres of our people's army. Today Hosey and Moumbaris are active participants in the international solidarity movement with our struggle.