

The Dalhousie International

Volume 2 Number 3 November 1976

Armed Struggle in Western Sahara

by Jim Robson

While world attention is focused on the wars of national liberation in Southern Africa, another struggle for independence is taking place in the deserts of formerly Spanish-controlled Sahara.

The Sahraovin people are currently fighting off an annexation attempt by Morocco and Mauritania which began a year ago. This national war of liberation is being led by the Peoples Front For The Liberation of Sagniet el Hamra and Rio de Ono (Polisario) which was formed May 1973.

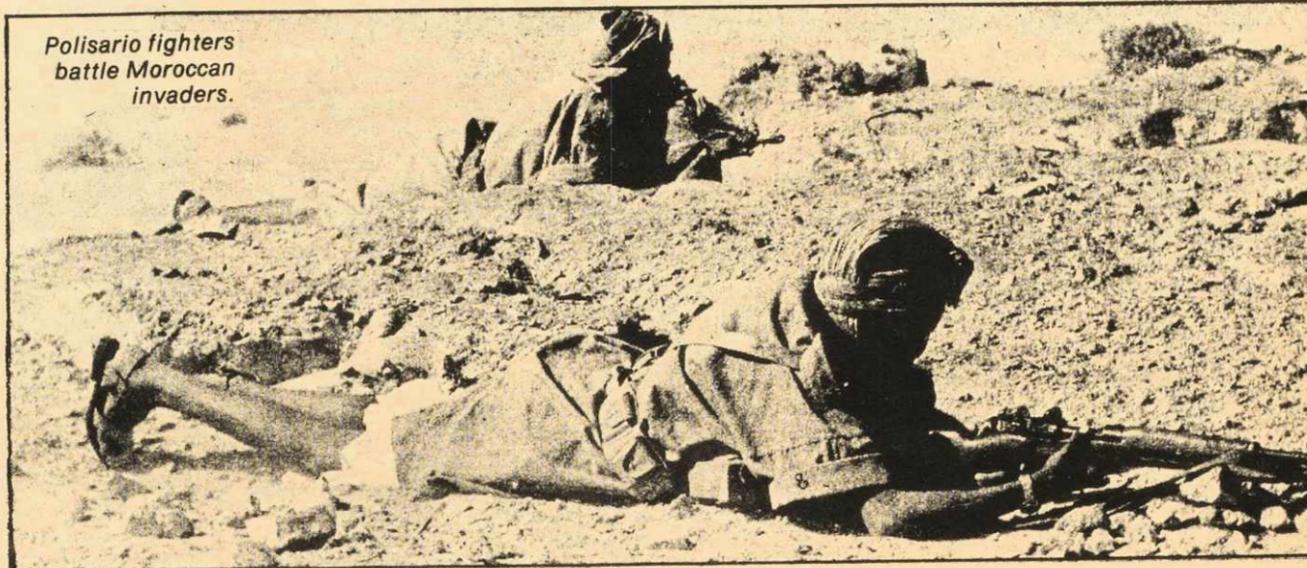
The Sahraovin people have always maintained a fierce sense of independence. In the colonial period, the French were unable to control them until 1936. Rebellion against the Spanish occurred as late as 1958. As one recent observer commented; "This fierce independence is based on their familiarity with the desert and their comparative freedom of movement within it, ignoring national boundaries which in the depths of Sahara are almost theoretical."

The origins of annexation of the former Spanish colony can be found in the expansionist policies of Morocco under the **feudal Dictatorship** of King Hassan II. Control of Sahara is just the first step in a move to annex

last six months they have knocked out the Mauritanian railroad which transports iron ore to Nouadilon. They have also blown up (in several places) the sixty mile long conveyer, in Western

crop destruction, and the killing of animals. Morocco, backed by U.S. military, hardware, first invaded Western Sahara under the guise of the Green March in October, 1975. King Hassan

poly control over this strategic resource for decades. Profits from stockpiled phosphate ore left by the Spanish has been conservatively estimated at \$5 million for the year 1975.



Polisario fighters battle Moroccan invaders.

Sygm

Sahara, that transports phosphate ore from BonCraa the capital, el Aioun. In May, they infiltrated el Aioun and successfully attacked the airport, destroying six helicopters.

The Attacks

In June, Polisario attacked the capital of Mauritania, Nouakchatt, damaging several western embassies as well as the Presidential Palace. To date, Polisario has been able to move and attack at will in both Western Sahara and Mauritania, warning tourists and businessmen that the whole area, including Southern Morocco, is now a war zone.

Polisario is supported by the vast majority of the population of Western Sahara including the traditionally-minded Jemma, a tribal assembly previously set up by the Spanish. Both Libya and Algeria have given their support to the movement, and the Organization for African Unity (OAU) recently rejected the tripartite agreement in favour of self-determination for Saharouins. Previous to this, the International Court of Justice had adopted a similar ruling.

Polisario receives extensive logistical support from Algeria and humanitarian and medical aid from Sweden. The major objectives of the Front include the following:

- 1) to protect refugees from continuous bombing and harassment from Morocco;
- 2) to eliminate disparities between the richer and poorer parts of the country;
- 3) to nationalize the wealth of the country
- 4) to guarantee social services, education, health care, and the right to employment
- 5) to follow a policy of non-alignment

Despite widespread international opposition to its stand, Morocco has persisted in occupying Western Sahara. Polisario successes have continually frustrated the Moroccan military. As a result, they have introduced many of the hideous instruments of counterinsurgency reminiscent of Vietnam, that is: **napalm bombing**, water hole poisoning,

mobilized over 100,000 Moroccans to march into the territory, promising liberation from Spanish colonists. However, 18,000 Moroccan invaders intermingled with the peace marchers. The real objective was to procure the large phosphate deposits located at Bon-Craa.

Phosphate production began in 1973 through a combination of investments made by the U.S. Export Bank, the First Wisconsin National Bank of Milwaukee, and the infamous German company, Krupp. Through a deal made with Spain, profits will be shared with the Moroccan State agency, Office Cherifien des Phosphates. Reserves have been estimated at 10,000 million tons, the largest in the world. Morocco is already the world's largest producer of phosphate ore. These reserves **ensure mono-**

Morocco has also had difficulty with her own army in Western Sahara, with casualties running as high as 150 men per month. A recent article in the Paris paper **Le Monde** reported discontent within the army late last summer. Special Moroccan units were sent to the Sahara to put down troops who were mutinizing and refusing to fight. Despite the fact that Morocco is using mercenaries from France, Spain, and South Korea, the Polisario Front has the support of the population, who have inherited the specialized skills of desert warfare from their fathers and grandfathers.

They are a force to be reckoned with, an enemy that will not readily be subdued by those whose aim is to appropriate the resources of their country.



Algerian Press

Woman supporter of Polisario movement in Western Sahara

Mauritania. Ironically, Mauritania, a former supporter of Polisario, chose to participate in a tripartite agreement (November 1975) with Morocco and Spain to partition the Spanish Colony.

Mauritania has paid dearly for its **treachery**. Besides losing the lion's share of phosphates to the Moroccans, they have lost some crucial iron deposits which the Moroccans calimed after a common boundary was already established.

The Economy

In attempts to control the actions of Polisario, Mauritania's economy has been taxed heavily. The military budget has increased 25 percent for this year and now accounts for 30 percent of the country's entire budget. In addition, all Mauritanian citizens have been paying between 1 and 3 days of salary a month to a national defense fund. As a result, military dependency on Morocco has increased dramatically. Dakha, an important port within Mauritanian-occupied Western Sahara is totally controlled by Moroccan troops.

Polisario has been successful at using northern Mauritania as a base of operations against the Moroccan controlled towns in Western Sahara. In the

International students

The International Students Association is being reformed at Dalhousie.

The **International** talked to Dorrik Stow, present chairperson about the purpose and aims of the organization. Stow says, "Once again we are planning to re-vitalize the International students' association. There are a number of things that we want to do or examine during the year and for which we would ask your advice, assistance and support.

"You may come across our 'Socials' programme and wonder why we consider this important. These events provide an opportunity for foreign students of all nationalities to meet and make friends. Most foreign students find Canadian culture quite different from their own, and experience some kind of cultural shock in trying to adjust. Often, instead of mixing, they will try to survive in a very small group of their own nationality. Not having a place to go at week-ends or during holidays, these are the times that they feel most homesick or uneasy.

They hope that their social programme will promote greater interaction between the small 'cultural islands' than exists at present, and also be of benefit to North American students.

A second function of the ISA will be to generate interest in and increase awareness of international affairs. To this end they will continue to support the "**Dalhousie International**" they will also organize educational events (films, speakers, discussions, etc).

In summary, our plans include:

- 1) 'Socials', short sight-seeing tours of Nova Scotia, an 'International Night' in January.
- 2) Working groups to study problems of immigration, housing and foreign student reception.
- 3) An active interest in international affairs. Meetings are held over lunch every Thursday at 12 noon in Room 218 of the Dal Sub. Why not drop in one day?

For information please contact: Mahmood Alam at 422-5336; Dorrik Stow at 424-3655.