

**South Africa is using delaying tactics to block progress towards
Namibian independence. In this they have had the fullest
co-operation from the USA and Britain.**

Brian Wood

Impasse in Namibia

Only a few weeks ago over 130 governments gathered together in Paris to condemn British and other Western power collusion with Pretoria's intensifying military occupation of Namibia; following that, no less than 30 foreign ministers flew to New York to call a halt to the British and Western power diplomacy over Namibia which, they argued, has become during the past four years a cynical attempt to use the United Nations machinery to guarantee South Africa's regional 'security' interests.

At the same time, in the margins of Britain's main dailies, in obscure language, you may have noticed that the Thatcher government, in the midst of being so vehemently harangued, was actually caught red handed (so to speak) granting a licence to GEC's Marconi company to export an advanced S247 radar system to Pretoria's military procurement company, the Air Space Control Authority, almost certainly for more human slaughter in Namibia and Angola.

But the world's berating of Britain and especially the USA on 30th May at the UN Security Council meeting was not due simply to revelations about a single military contract despite the doubt this alone cast on the power of the UN to decolonise Namibia (which, after all, has been on the UN agenda since 1947). The scale of Western military (not to mention economic) backing of South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia is far more severe.

To many people who maintain a non-specialist interest in Southern Africa and generally support the national liberation movements, Namibia appears strikingly similar to Zimbabwe — a small, beleaguered white settler minority hopelessly clinging to institutionalised racism, supported in general by the Western powers and adjacent South Africa, fighting an escalating war against an ill-equipped but popular and resolute African liberation army backed by African Front Line States.

No sanctions policy

But a closer look immediately shows that, ineffective and late as they were, the

mandatory sanctions employed by British governments against the Smith regime were used as a form of pressure to save the client white minority from itself and ensure controlled change on broadly British terms (a la Lancaster House), even though the motor of change was undoubtedly the armed liberation struggle itself. In the Namibian case, despite a grand climax of sanctions measures against South Africa's regime in Namibia passed in three Security Council Resolutions and endorsed by the International Court of Justice in 1971, British governments along with other Western states, have decided not to use this lever against Namibia's whites (the first time the UK has rejected a finding of the World Court).

Why is there a no sanctions policy on Namibia? The most credible economic reason is that, in 1970-71, when the opportunity presented itself, the British, French, West German, Dutch and other, parastatal, nuclear establishments were being solicited for large, long-term contracts of uranium oxide to be supplied by the UK giant, Rio Tinto Zinc, from an, as yet, undeveloped but vast mine at Rossing in central Namibia. Clearly, similar strategic minerals from Rhodesia's mines easily bust through sanctions regulations, but in this case it wasn't possible for some of the world's major Western supply companies to actually build the biggest mine in the world for *government* contracts (the UKEA, URENCO etc) while the governments maintained a charade at the UN. RTZ got its mine at the cost of probably the biggest blow to the legitimacy of the World Court and Security Council ever.

UN mandate

Namibia in 1971 was not just any country — it was *de jure* the UN's own fief, since, uniquely in international law, after a record number of world court cases, the UN had in 1966 revoked South Africa's old 1922 League of Nations mandate. This had been given to Pretoria by 'His Britannic Majesty' to govern the ex-German colony 'South West Africa' as 'a sacred trust for civilisation'. In fact, South Africa had done



Sam Nujoma of SWAPO

just the opposite. South Africa had gradually built up a system of Bantustan racism, a massive slave-like contract labour system and ruthless provincial administrations to facilitate the plunder of Namibia's rich natural resources - gem diamonds, copper, lead, zinc, beef, karakul fur, fish. This system was enshrined in the 1968 Self Government of Native Nations Act. Not only Namibia's peculiar international status, but also its role as the apartheid regime's main colony, differentiated its politics and class structure sharply from that of Zimbabwe.

However, the battle for punitive measures by the United Nations didn't die in 1971; rather the stakes were upped. SWAPO's growing armed struggle since 1966 received a massive boost with the 1971-2 Namibian general strike, itself a response to the World Court events. Under Kissinger's influence, the Western powers and Pretoria began concocting a dual strategy to quieten the protests in the United Nations: on the one hand the UN Secretary General or his envoy was sent to 'consult all parties' on Namibian inde-

pendence, and was shown the latest ethnic clone in Windhoek (Security Council Resolution 309 of February 72 started this process) while on the ground in Namibia the racists stepped up massive repression of SWAPO members and imposed martial law in the northern war zones. The failure of this 'round one' of the new Western diplomatic shuttle led in 1973 to the recognition by the UN General Assembly of SWAPO as the sole authentic representative of the Namibian people, and in 1974, to the UN Decree No 1 banning any dealing in Namibia's natural resources. Neither one of these measures was accepted by the Western powers, even though the decisions have an impeccable international legal pedigree.

Angola

To continue the story of the differences between Namibia and Zimbabwe at the international level, the next episode leading to round two of the Western diplomacy will help explain not just Namibia's legal/diplomatic peculiarities, but a fundamental feature of the Namibian state. It begins with the April 1974 officers' coup in Lisbon, itself an act of desperation by the bulk of the Portuguese armed forces facing defeat by the liberation movements in

Angola and Mozambique. The response was twofold. Firstly the South African army in Namibia, and its attacks upon Namibians, massively increased. Secondly, they turned their attention to Angola, where the MPLA was rapidly assuming power. It was now the only state in the

one Falklands fish and chips van is equivalent to dozens of bombed Namibian and Angolan villages

sub-region independent of South Africa's transport and trade leverage.

To combat SWAPO's opening up a vast new 800 mile border area for logistical supply, the South Africans began in 1975 to make regular incursions into Southern Angola and to solicit the support of UNITA, a declining, tribally-based force. UNITA was used to stop the Benguela rail traffic and so to force Zambia into talks with the South African regime in 1975. The USA, Britain and France provided mercenaries, finance and arms, and in 1975 South Africa began training UNITA. This experience of fighting alongside, training and equipping black mercenary movements

was matched inside Namibia by the creation in 1974 of the first ethnic armed auxiliaries designed to counter SWAPO. There was mounting pressure in the UN (Security Council Resolution 366 set a deadline of 30 May for South African withdrawal from Namibia, which of course it refused), especially for an arms embargo, which the Western powers triple-vetoed. But Kissinger and Callaghan persuaded Pretoria to cobble together another black handpicked tribal leadership excluding SWAPO. So began the farcical Turnhalle Conference in September 1975.

Simultaneously, in September 1975 large South African armoured columns invaded deep into Angola. After tactical retreats almost as far as Luanda, the MPLA army (FAPLA) managed to bravely hold on for 2 months against insuperable technical odds, until relief arrived in the form of Cuban volunteer soldiers. The South Africans were finally beaten back and forced to withdraw from Angola to Namibia on the 21st January 1976.

These events showed that unlike Zimbabwe, which was being savaged by the Rhodesian settler state army and police, Namibia had no fully fledged settler state and was ruled more like a province by Pretoria's imperial police and army. More-

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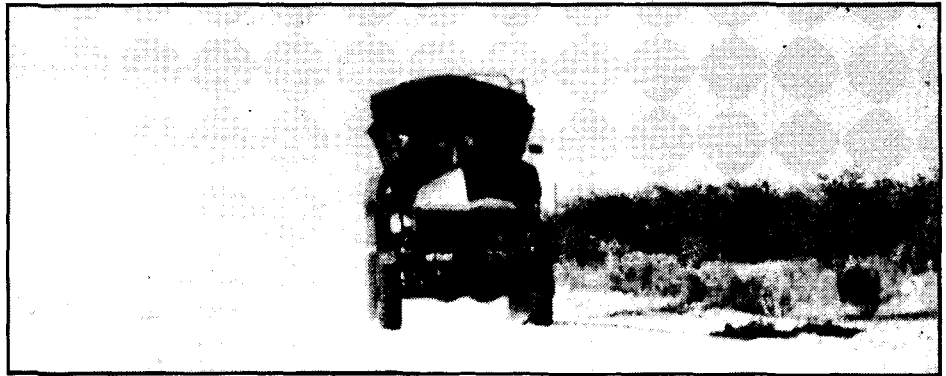
over, the Rhodesians with South Africa's help, could maintain a high degree of control of their neighbours because of the way the rail transport system was designed, whereas the South African rulers of Namibia found they had very little control of Angola except via pure military might. These political facts help explain why it was easier for the Western powers to control the decolonization of Zimbabwe than that of Namibia.

Western power delay

However, at the time Namibia looked an easier bet. Round two of the Western power diplomatic thrust emerged in 1976 when, finding themselves in a corner having to again use the triple veto to block sanctions, the US, Britain, France plus the other major Western powers with large capital holdings in Namibia, West Germany and Canada, decided to go on the offensive. They were forced to back a move (Resolution 385) by SWAPO and the African states to hold UN-supervised and controlled elections leading to Namibian independence. It had become clear that, to avoid future Angolas and Mozambiques, a more sophisticated strategy was needed.

Kissinger and Haig (then head of NATO) met Vorster in Zurich in September 1976, and with British premier Callaghan playing a crucial role, a strategy of promoting 'non-communist' black-led regimes, which they hoped would be amenable to the white settlers, was launched. The David Owen-Andrew Young plan for Zimbabwe was matched by a the 'Western Contact Group' plan on Namibia, the latter sponsors having to ask the UN for a 'last chance' to deliver South Africa to the negotiating table, on the basis of Resolution 385 and the suspension of South Africa's Turnhalle tribal debacle. By April 1978, the details of the new plan were clear.

Through the use of subtle and vague language, Resolution 385 was abandoned in three crucial aspects, even though David Owen and his colleagues claimed they were 'operationalizing' it. Firstly, whereas Resolution 385 called for the withdrawal of *all* South Africa's illegal administration and army before any elections, the new plan allowed for *only* a phased withdrawal of South Africa's rapidly growing army, leaving 1500 in camps. Secondly, the 'return to legality' in the new plan did *not* mean UN sovereignty during the transitional 7 month period before the election, as in Resolution 385, and the South African police and civil service were given equal powers to the UN peacekeeping force for



Namibia — 'in proportion to the number of citizens . . . the world's greatest military occupation'

maintaining order and organising the ballot. Thirdly, and most crucially, the new plan called for the UN election leading to independence *without* Namibia's only effective sea port, Walvis Bay, since Pretoria chose formally to annex the port in August 1977 under the terms of the 18th century British treaty. Walvis Bay handles 90% of Namibia's export-import trade. Clearly the new plan was unacceptable to SWAPO.

This watering down process was to become the normal pattern of the 'negotiations' conducted by the Gang of Five — appease Pretoria with new proposals worked out by the racists and disguised in ambiguous language, and then use every Western embassy and diplomatic force via the Front Line states to bludgeon SWAPO into agreement. The mode of attack was quite different to the Zimbabwe 'playing off one liberation movement against another' strategy.

SWAPO accept the deal

However, during 1978 and 1979, under intense pressure, the Gang of Five's bluff was cleverly called by SWAPO, a move that contains a substantial lesson in modern political thinking. Pretoria moved first and accepted the new plan without reservation in April 1978. Then, while SWAPO leaders were negotiating in New York, South African bombers mercilessly massacred over 800 unarmed Namibians, half of them children, wounding many more on the 4th May at Kassinga, the largest SWAPO refugee settlement in Angola. Pretoria wanted a SWAPO rejection of the plan. However, a rapid SWAPO diplomatic mobilisation to secure a further Security Council resolution (No 432), recognising Walvis Bay as an integral part of Namibia, put SWAPO in a position to throw down the glove and accept the plan in July 1978, much to South Africa's surprise. The bulk of this plan became Resolution 435 in September 1978, which is still officially the UN plan for Namibia's independence. ❧

What was SWAPO's rationale for this? A

complete answer requires a firm grasp of SWAPO's history and development as a movement, the nature and conjuncture of the armed liberation struggle in the sub-continent as a whole and an appreciation of the class structure of Namibia, and in particular, the Namibian state, such as it is. While there is simply not space here to draw all of this out, it is vital to start from an understanding of SWAPO's class base. The high degree of proletarianisation and labour migrancy, the fact that apartheid labour and land laws have meant that a large proportion of the family dependents of black workers are forced to remain in the arid rural reserves as 'peasants' thus creating a strong bond between workers and peasants, and the fact that the black middle class and petty bourgeoisie are presently so small and fragmented, have all been militating against a 1960s-style African 'decolonisation' process just as much as South Africa's colonial stranglehold has. Unlike Angola and especially Mozambique, which also has large expatriate settler populations, capitalist development in Namibia has ensured that the overwhelming majority of Namibian households are wage-dependent — in fact even more so than Zimbabwe, and second only to South Africa itself in Sub-Saharan Africa. Just under half the total of Namibia's 650,000 adult blacks are wage workers (these are mostly men), 40% of whom are migrants. While they receive collectively about 9% of Namibia's Gross Domestic Product (total wealth by value), the Namibian subsistence peasantry in the overcrowded reserves scratch out a mere 2.5% of GDP, and the latter are thus dependent on wage remittances on a large scale. The resultant organic link between workers and peasants is illustrated by the fact that, for example, when the racist army and police surrounded the workers' barbed wire compounds during the 1971 general strike and then deported thousands at gunpoint to the northern reserves, the reserve areas became virtually ungovern-

able. SWAPO, which started as a contract workers organisation, was organising mass meetings, arming workers and securing rural bases for the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) despite the declaration of martial law, a reign of terror which included public floggings and the arrest of many SWAPO cadres by the massively reinforced South African army.

Namibia's 'power vacuum'

The particular problem of understanding the Namibian state can perhaps best be approached by looking at why Pretoria's Turnhalle Constitutional Conference floundered. By August 1976 the 'delegates' had disbanded without agreement — except that upon 'independence' Namibia would still need to keep all military, police, foreign and constitutional affairs in the hands of South Africa! The settlers and tribal stooges found themselves without the trappings of a local state, nor even the fundamentals, such as an army or police force. Decades of direct rule from Pretoria meant that, unlike their beleaguered Rhodesian counterparts, the settlers of 'South West Africa' had to begin a crash programme of state-building — not an easy exercise in the midst of a national liberation war. This was made doubly difficult because most of the white settlers considered themselves 'South Africans' who, in the absence of any development of an indigenous manufacturing and financial sector, had little reason to embark on building a nation state. To compound the problem, the incredibly rigid apartheid structures, particularly in education, denied Namibia a potential black middle class. While, from the point of view of imperialism, Zimbabwe did not suffer the above problems, it also had one other advantage that in Namibia was lacking — a potentially large black petty bourgeoisie. Namibia's much less fertile and much less populated rural areas, plus its absence of manufacturing and large towns, mitigated against petty trade and production. All these 'disadvantages' for imperialism were however advantages for SWAPO.

We can thus begin to see why, under the UN Plan which SWAPO accepted for an election contest, the withdrawal of the bulk of South Africa's 100,000 strong occupation army posed a major problem for Pretoria and its allies. The snail's pace in the development of an indigenous neo-colonial state (even a Rhodesian type state) as opposed to a provincial wing of Pretoria's imperial white state, meant that, as racist Minister P W Botha put it, a 'vacuum' situation would result if the UN plan were

implemented. Here, in essence, is a substantial part of the reason why the racists would not accept the SWAPO challenge. While Vorster and, then, from late 1978, Botha, pleaded for more time from the Contact Group, a concerted new strategy emerged in 1979 to delay implementation of the UN Plan until the 'local state' (army, police, judiciary, prisons, broadcasting, customs, etc) was capable of holding the power of SWAPO. Every blocking delay by South Africa and the Five up until the present time is based on this fundamental dilemma. The pace of negotiations largely reflects the pace of the frantic state-building with which Pretoria's rulers are engaged. Namibia is their horrific human laboratory, and their social engineering over the past five years is colossal.

the overwhelming majority of Namibian households are wage dependent

The current collapse of the negotiations can thus be seen partly in the following pathetic South African track record. A 'South West African Army' and police force have been formed, but are totally dependent on their South African equivalents. The stage of the war and SWAPO's overwhelming support have undermined the conscription of blacks. Government ministries and departments have been transferred wholesale from Pretoria to Windhoek, but are run by white South African staff because of the minimal numbers of educated blacks. Even the tribally-based interim government formed by the Turnhalle Alliance, rife with factional disputes could not count on support from the main white break-away SWA Nationalist Party (AKTUR). It has since ceased to offer Pretoria a political alternative, the DTA leader Dirk Mudge having disbanded his pseudo-government to make way for direct SA military rule.

Southern African security

Much better understood, however, are the internal aspects of this impasse. The rulers in Pretoria, Washington and London are keenly aware that, just as the Soweto uprisings followed independence in Mozambique and Angola, and similar events followed Zimbabwe's independence, South Africa's military withdrawal from Namibia would boost the liberation struggle in South Africa itself. In this case, however, it wouldn't be a ramshackle

Portuguese or Rhodesian army which was defeated, but Pretoria's mighty military machine itself — and at that by a tiny guerilla force fighting in terrain unsuited to guerilla warfare (low population, poor vegetation cover). At the same time, the ruling National Party would have to face the cry of 'sell out' from both Namibia's whites and the growing right wing at home. The response has been twofold. Firstly Pretoria has sought constitutional guarantees (protection of private property etc) to limit the effects of a SWAPO victory on white emigration. And secondly it has begun trying to sign 'non aggression pacts' with the front-line states of a future Namibia, in order to claim legal right to invade under a number of pretexts.

The latter response is being directly encouraged by the Reagan and Thatcher governments and is the most dangerous aspect of current western diplomacy. George Bush recently told the African states, 'South Africa should be involved in shaping the security of Southern Africa'. Under this policy South Africa has *carte blanche* to continue its attacks on the front line states and to extend its illegal occupation from Namibia to Southern Angola, using its UNITA and other mercenary units, while the US and UK governments block UN retaliatory action. The global decline of US and UK economic power is countered by their increased political and military intervention, both directly and indirectly, through Pretoria and other sub-imperial powers. Only this desperate drive can explain why the US and UK have now rejected the Angolan and Cuban governments' agreements to withdraw the Cuban troop reinforcements once South Africa has vacated Namibia. As Chief US negotiator Crocker said to Reagan in a note on February 7 81 (later published in the *New York Times*) 'recognition is out unless the Cubans leave, and they cut a deal with Savimbi'.

The truth is that Washington and London see their nuclear armed, racist citadel as being too dangerously destabilised by early Namibian independence, whatever the human cost of delay. It is for this reason that SWAPO want the Contact Group disbanded and the United Nations as a whole to assert its legal authority.

Media blackout or not, the people of Britain are being called to make a stark choice — if we don't act now to support SWAPO, the ANC and the oppressed people of Southern Africa, 'the South Africa factor' will make the 'Falklands factor' pale into significance as a victory for Britain's new right. □