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THE LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM : NAMIBIA IN 1984

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Viewed in terms of the balance of internal forces the future of Namibia has long been determined. There is widespread acceptance that in free and open elections, such as those called for by Resolution 435(78) of the Security Council, SWAPO would gain approximately 80% of the vote and would form the first government of an independent Namibia.

Why in the years since 1978 has this not been allowed to happen? It is clearly the will of the majority of the 1.5 million Namibians that they become free of South African control. The United Nations and other international bodies have repeatedly called for the independence and freedom of Namibia. Year by year expectations flower and year by year these expectations wither and die.

A simple answer is that the government of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) wishes to prevent or at worst to delay the establishment of a predominantly black SWAPO government¹ along its northern border. They worry about the psychological effect upon the 15.26% of South Africa's population who are white and they are acutely aware that there are close relations between SWAPO of Namibia and the ANC of South Africa. The "loss" of Namibia would be the first instance in which "white" land and other property within RSA control would have been surrendered into the hands of blacks.

The blocking of Namibian independence by South Africa could not have been so successful and so prolonged were it not for various kinds of support and assistance provided by a number of Western powers. Principal among these, particularly in the period of the Reagan presidency, has been the United States which has played the dominant role in the activities of the Western Five. This group (US, UK, West Germany, Canada and France) took upon itself the role of "honest broker" in the Namibian impasse. Formed in 1977 they had by the next year drawn up a plan for Namibian independence that both SWAPO and the RSA agreed to. This plan became embodied in Security Council Resolution 435(78) but when this passed the RSA objected to the proposed election date and to the proposal that

UN forces monitor RSA police in Namibia. Next year they found fault with the size of the UN forces and with the proposed location of SWAPO bases in Namibia. In 1980 and 1981 they accused the UN of partiality and put forward a proposal for a ~~demilitarized~~ zone. Since then Resolution 435 has been held up by the twin reefs of "Cuban linkage" and the Reagan/Chester Crocker policy of "constructive engagement" with South Africa.

The "Cuban linkage" argument is that it is unfair to expect the South Africans to agree to 435 until Cuban troops are withdrawn from Angola. In other words, SWAPO cannot be allowed into the political life of Namibia until another country, Angola, sends home Cuban troops, troops who arrived in Angola in 1975 to help the Angolan government repel attacks by UNITA, FNLA, RSA forces, and the Zaire army.² SWAPO and the government of Angola agree with equal fervor that only SWAPO will negotiate over Namibia, and only the Angolans over Angola. Both wish the RSA forces to leave their territory but neither considers the prior withdrawal of the Cubans from Angola as either sensible or safe. Why should they, on the basis of past experience, trust Pretoria?

The "constructive engagement" policy is a revival of the "don't let's be beastly to the Boers" line. It starts with the recognition that all is not well in Southern Africa and suggests that the road to reform will open up only if "we" (presumably enlightened Western democracies) get alongside those who hold power in the RSA and engage in sympathetic dialogue. Reagan exemplified this viewpoint in a CBC interview on January 27, 1982 when he said: "Apartheid disgusts me." He ~~then went on~~ to speak warmly of those who practise apartheid: "As for the Republic of South Africa, we must treat that country as a friend and not turn our backs on a country that has been our ally and which has been fighting shoulder to shoulder with us in all the wars of this century."

Are the reasons that Reagan advances the real ones? After all they would be equally if not more true of countries to which the US is hostile such as Cuba, Nicaragua and the USSR.

More weight should be attached to two other reasons - the strategic importance of the RSA in relation to the Cape shipping routes and the alleged dependence of the West upon RSA's strategic minerals. Doubts have been cast on both these reasons. In an age of ICBMs, worrying about who controls the Cape route seems a clear instance of generals going into a war prepared to fight the previous one. In their book Sanctions Against South Africa, Bolton and Rogers devote Chapter 1 to debunking the importance of the RSA mineral reserves to the West. They conclude that this importance has been greatly exaggerated and that, with many metals, RSA reserves are shrinking and internal use is growing so that:

The amounts of the very minerals we are told are indispensable to European industry, which are likely to be available to it in the near future, are already falling.³

Meanwhile new sources are being developed outside RSA and changes in technology result in substitution or changes in demand for particular metals.

However, in the context of reasons behind US policy, it is less important whether the Cape route and RSA minerals are of vital strategic importance than whether the US administration believes they are.

Certainly it can be demonstrated that in the exploitation of RSA and Namibian minerals Western TNCs are making handsome profits. By opening the door to these corporations the RSA has gained access to capital and also has won partners and advocates who speak up for apartheid both publicly and in the corridors of power.

South Africans know well the importance of this support. Professor W.F.J. Steenkamp of the University of South Africa spoke from the heart of Afrikaaner volk when he said: "We have learnt that our large international economic relationships are our best shield in a world which has chosen us as scapegoats." Naive though he may be about why "the world" condemns South Africa, he knows well whom to look to for shelter.

Why have foreign economic interests acted so consistently on the side of the Pretoria regime? First of all Pretoria was shrewd enough to invite them in to participate in a dreamworld

of capitalist exploitation where wages were very low and unions were banned, where regulations about pollution or environmental damage were unheard of, and from whence it was possible to expatriate the bulk of the profits.

To complement the rich array of minerals -- diamonds, copper, lead, zinc and uranium -- there was an abundant supply of labour and a government willing to stimulate labour availability by imposing taxes which had to be paid in cash. Indeed, many of the racist laws introduced by the South African regime had the effect of dispossessing black Namibians and forcing them on to the labour market. Most important of these was the classification of land under the Odendaal Plan, whereby the blacks (90-95% of the population) hold one-third of the land while the whites (5-10% of the population) hold two-thirds.⁴ Moreover:

... the white area covers some 50.6 million hectares of the best farming and government land, townships, diamond areas, native reserves and game parks... It contains virtually all Namibia's known base mineral deposits, diamond reserves and the bulk of the commercially active agricultural and fishing sectors. The 32.8 million hectares allocated to the black population vary from thinly-populated semi-desert reserves to highly populated areas such as Ovamboland.⁵

This inequitable distribution of resources is backed by legislation and social policy which discriminates against Namibians and which generously aids foreign companies and white settlers.

SWAPO has analysed the consequences of the apartheid regime's systematic social engineering, which has not only blocked the emergence in any strength of a neo-colonial elite of indigenous businessmen, professionals and managers, but has also destroyed the independent economic base of the peasantry.⁶

This situation is a direct consequence of the preference shown to the settler farming sector, to the foreign mining sector and to the colonial economy in general. As good land, cattle, mineral deposits and labour were taken from them, those struggling to maintain subsistence were forced to make do with less.

R.H. Green and K. Kiljunen report that:

Almost 50% of the economically active (and two-thirds of the people) are nominally in the so-called subsistence sector. However, the share of gross domestic product (GDP) is ... not over 4% on an adjusted price basis. The productivity is so low that this residual sector ~~cannot~~ provide subsistence.⁷

Such inequalities ensure that blacks enter the labour market hungry for work and subsistence. Labour bureaux operated by the tribal authorities in the "homelands" classify all adult males under the age of 65 and assign them on contract to specified employers.

Africans ... can in theory stay without limit in urban areas while looking for work. In practice, they may not seek, accept or remain in employment without official permission and they must still have their contracts registered.⁸

The employers rationalise their payment of low wages by arguing that the workers' families are supporting themselves in the "homelands." Thus only the immediate needs of the single male worker need to be provided for and the question of how the rest of the family is fed, housed, educated and cared for is left to be settled within the tribal "homeland."

Gail Hovey reports the 1979 wages for workers in the giant Tsumeb mine as US\$130 per month for black and US\$1,222 for whites.

The black wage, which includes non-cash payments, was far below the bare subsistence level, put at [US]\$190 for a family of six in Windhoek.⁹

Another attractive feature for foreign investors in Namibia is the ease with which profits may be expatriated.

Corporations owned within South Africa face no exchange controls and profits are freely moved to South Africa and invested there.¹⁰

From 1950 to 1956, some 17.2 percent of GDP was appropriated by foreign corporations. By 1977, a United Nations Council for Namibia study estimated that 36 percent of Namibia's GDP was remitted abroad.¹¹

When the needs for investment in Namibian infrastructure and for the provision of adequate social services are considered, this policy of remitting the wealth of Namibia to

foreign investors moves from the category of greed to that of criminal activity.

Those foreign investors, in the RSA and in various Western countries, look with disfavour at the prospect of transfer of power in ~~Namibia~~ from the RSA to SWAPO. They expect and fear the effects of major changes in land distribution, wages, the contract labour system, social services, education and in the privileged position of foreign capital.

It is not surprising, then, that they look with favour at the RSA's delaying tactics while at the same time speeding up the rate of exploitation. An example of this latter tendency was reported in the Financial Mail (S.A.) of July 27, 1984. Under an agreement dating from 1923 De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines is pledged with respect to the important Orangemund diamond deposits not to exhaust "the superficial and more valuable deposits to the detriment of the low grade deposits." CDM administrators say they "hope" to continue the mine into the next century. "But," says the Financial Mail, "CDM internal documents indicate that the mine is virtually exhausted after intensive overmining, especially in the Seventies." Gail Tovey in Namibia's Stolen Wealth reports:

In 1979, CDM put its operation on a round-the-clock, three-shift schedule to raise output to the highest possible level.¹²

"Work for the night is coming," as the hymn says. But is there some alternative of the supposed dark night of SWAPO rule?

The RSA clearly thinks so and the focus is now on efforts to impose a neo-colonialist solution:

The classic pattern of transition from a colony to neo-colonial status is that the colony in its pure state flies the flag of the metropolitan state which supplies the key administrative and other personnel and which dominates the economy of the colony, erecting tariff barriers and taking other measures to exclude rivals.

Under neo-colonialism the political apparatus appears to move into the hands of the formerly colonised people but economic power continues to be held by corporations resident in the former colonising power or, more typically, in that power

and in a number of other industrialised nations. For these corporations it is "business as usual" except that they must provide for a class of agents or entrepreneurs who emerge from among the formerly colonised people to act in concert with the foreign corporations. The concentration of economic power does not reside within the former colony and economic policy is determined to suit the interests of the foreign corporations.

Namibia, Africa's last colony, has undergone in the past twenty years a process of economic transition which is remarkably similar to that experienced in the transition from colonial to neo-colonial status.

One factor which will work to ensure that Namibia remains economically tied to South Africa is the enormous burden of debt that has been created in the past few years, some because of infrastructure investment, some because of the waste involved in the "ethnic administrations" of the ten tribal "homelands".

A confidential memorandum of the (Namibian) Department of Finance ... in June, 1983 noted that government expenditure, because of the slump, would be 62% of GDP in 1983 the memorandum expected Namibia's debt as a proportion of national income to surpass Zaire's in 1985 and to be equal to the entire national income in 1987.¹³

A second factor which will pose serious problems for an independent Namibia is the way in which external trade is focussed on and through South Africa. To the RSA by overland railway goes meat, karakul pelts, hides and skins. Back comes more than half of Namibia's food including most of the maize.

A further complication is the campaign waged by the RSA since 1977 to assert that Namibia's main port, Walvis Bay, is RSA territory. As Richard Moorsom points out, Walvis Bay is to Namibia: "... an integral and indispensable part of the national economy."¹⁴ Certainly, if Walvis Bay were in RSA hands, an independent Namibia would be less free.

In the political arena the first attempt by Pretoria to find a acceptable potential candidate for governing Namibia was the creation and nurturing of the D.T.A. Internally and internationally it never gained credibility. It was neither

representative, independent of the RSA nor capable of efficient administration. When, in January 1983, Dirk Mudge resigned, the D.T.A. administration was at an end.

Undeterred the RSA moved the pieces around and produced the Multi Party Conference (MPC) a loose alliance of ethnic groups and parties moderate enough to be acceptable to the RSA.

Recently at Lusaka the RSA proposed that SWAPO unilaterally lay down its arms and join with the MPC in forming a Namibian government. SWAPO rejected this as they did similar unilateral ceasefire proposals at the Cape Verde Island talks. They called instead for the implementation of Resolution 435.

What developments would be likely to lead to an acceptance by the RSA that it must withdraw from Namibia and that 435 or some similar process must be allowed to proceed?

The neatest solution would be for the United Nations to take decisive action such as implementing Resolution 435 by sending in a UN force or imposing comprehensive sanctions on South Africa.

Such a solution is, of course, almost unthinkable because, with the exception of the Korean War, the UN has never worked in this way. Currently the US operates a monotonous veto in the Security Council on proposals likely to damage the interest of the RSA. Hopes for any changes in the position of the US or of other major Western powers seem tied to the campaigning of the anti-apartheid movements and the extent to which their demands are accepted by political parties in the various countries. Neil Kinnock has pledged that a future Labour Party government would introduce sanctions against South Africa. In the US the Black Caucus in Congress and the Reverend Jesse Jackson support strong action against the RSA. In Western Europe generally there is increased support for the anti-apartheid struggle as evidenced in the reaction to the Botha visits of June 1984. Two European NATO countries contribute funds to the ANC.

With respect to economic pressure, it is again the major Western powers which have the greatest capacity to help or hurt the RSA. In both Europe and North America strong divestment programs have enlisted support from universities, unions,

municipal authorities and churches. The US government is committed to instruct its representative on the IMF to "actively oppose" future loans to any country "which practises apartheid." However, the commitments to pressure the RSA in this way have not yet reached a crucial weight.

SWAPO attaches considerable importance to the continuance of the war, a war which is rarely reported in Australia but is certainly an unavoidable issue in the RSA. Here, for instance, are a sequence of items broadcast by Johannesburg radio:

- 16 July : Report of a new RSA unit formed to counter SWAPO infiltration of farmland. About 800 were estimated to have done so since February 16th.
- 18 July : Three separate SWAPO attacks were reported with two RSA military deaths admitted, two buses "sabotaged" and a civilian and his car "abducted".
- 27 July : It was claimed that 322 SWAPO members had been killed in Namibia since February 16th.
- 1 August : Two people were killed by a landmine and the town of Oshakati came under mortar attack.

Meanwhile a report from Maputo radio on 14 July had given some details from the SWAPO side: they claimed to have killed 140 RSA soldiers, destroyed six RSA bases and carried out a series of sabotage actions all during the previous month.¹⁵

The other important military arena is Angola from whence the South Africans were pledged to withdraw by the end of March. Now, August 1984, "there are still two South African battalions on Angolan territory."¹⁶ There are a number of elements in the Angolan power equation: in addition to RSA and Angolan government forces there are the Cubans and the RSA-backed UNITA rebels. A withdrawal by the RSA may see the collapse of UNITA though in some past years when the RSA claimed to have no forces in Angola they were active in flying in munitions and providing other forms of support to UNITA.

There is a catch-all phrase for the areas where the SADF takes action: the "borders". Whether it is Namibia, Angola, or another of the Front Line States, SADF incursions are likely to result in some casualties among the attackers. Back in the RSA

there is growing resistance to conscription and the reluctance of most "Coloureds" and Indians to be involved in elections under the new Constitution is linked to the fact that after the vote of little substance will come the call-up papers and the prospect of death in defence of apartheid.

Military spending by the RSA for 1984-85 is set at R4.2 billion, twice the level of four years ago. This rate of increase cannot be sustained by a country which as the Economist, July 28, 1984, reports is: "going through its worst recession since the 1930s." The ANC, however, is pledged to intensify the armed struggle within the RSA just as SWAPO is doing in Namibia. In this situation there must be voices within the RSA government in favour of some kind of deal, either internal or external, that reduces the pressure.

The Nkomati Accords, the agreements with Angola and the new Constitution should be seen in this light. All of them, however, are flawed by a determination to retain power and authority with the RSA: in other words, they are strategic moves to guard the RSA power base rather than meaningful negotiations based on recognising or conceding the power that adheres rightfully to the other party.

In summary, then, a changed RSA stance on Namibia may result from one or more of the following factors: political changes in certain Western countries; shifts in the military power balance in Namibia and Angola; or from economic and other internal problems and from the lowering of white morale within the RSA.

A final consideration is the role that Australia is playing in the Namibian question. Australia is a member of the Council for Namibia and has expressed support for Resolution 435 and rejection of the linkage theory.

Both the Fraser and Hawke governments have opposed support for armed struggle though the Hawke government agreed that SWAPO could open an information office in Australia. (So far SWAPO has not done so because of funding problems.) In the past eight years we have provided nine scholarships to SWAPO students.

Australia has taken no action in support of the Council for Namibia's Decree Number One which indicates the illegality of present foreign involvement in the Namibian economy and provides for the imposition of penalties. On the broader issue of sanctions, the Australian position is one of non-interference in the normal flow of trade until sanctions are put in place with the support of the world community. In practice this means no action without Security Council unanimity and this does not appear likely in the immediate future.

Australia, surprisingly, does not respect even the oil embargo and we send some petroleum products to South Africa despite the fact that almost all oil-producers refuse to do so. Brunei is an exception as is Shell which was denounced in the media recently as an "oil embargo buster."

In short, Australia is doing little to hasten the advent of a free and independent Namibia. There, as in South Africa itself, it is proving "no easy walk to freedom" and while Namibians can list some hopeful signs they are still uncertain of the length of the road.

REFERNCES:

1. SWAPO, as a non-racial organisation, has some white members.
2. The CIA was involved in funding for UNITA and FNLA. ~~Long~~ Long had links with Zairian President Mobutu.
3. p.6. The Catholic Institute for International Relations 1983 publication, Mines and Independence, discusses the importance of Namibia's minerals on pp.31-33 and concludes that although Namibia is the 17th largest mineral producer in the world, this production is in no way vital to the West.
4. Statistics about Namibia are difficult to establish because of the South African practice of incorporating many Namibian figures with those of South Africa. With population statistics, low figures for blacks can help disguise just how little is spent per head on education, health, etc. Figures range from SWAPO's estimate of 1,500,000 blacks and 77,000 whites to South African "statistics" of 753,000 blacks and 99,000 whites (1974).
5. Namibia, the Facts, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1980, p.16
6. SWAPO of Namibia, To Be Born a Nation, Zed Press, 1981, p.293
7. "The colonial economy: structures of growth and exploitation," in Namibia, the Last Colony, Longman, 1981, p.33
8. Namibia, the Facts, p.28
9. Namibia's Stolen Wealth, The Africa Fund, 1982, p.31
10. To Be Born a Nation, p.51
11. Namibia's Stolen Wealth, p.26
12. p.27
13. Mines and Independence, pp.65-66
14. Walvis Bay, Namibia's Port, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1984, p.22
15. Facts and Reports, edited by the Holland Committee on Southern Africa, August 17, 1984.
16. Augusta Conchiglia in Africasia, August/September, 1984.

