SWAPO/NAMIBIA UPDATE

The South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) and Southern Africa's frontline states have rejected a key provision of the new Western plan for a Namibia settlement. The liberation forces stated on Jan. 23 that the election plan is unacceptable because it would give the South African-backed minority in the territory the deciding edge in constructing a Namibian constitution.

This is the latest development in the ongoing diplomatic dance that has put the U.S. and four other Western nations in the position of delaying independence for Namibia. The Western proposals to settle the dispute between SWAPO and South Africa, which illegally controls Namibia, have not even been accepted by the South African government. This latest proposal would have created a complicated two-vote plan, modeled on the West German electoral system. This would leave the 90,000 whites in Namibia greater power than their numbers alone would warrant. Nevertheless the South African regime continues to delay an agreement on the method of election, while simultaneously continuing its aggression against the Namibian refugees in Angola.

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SWAPO has the overwhelming support of the people of Namibia, by the accounts of virtually everyone who knows the situation there. When Ellen Musialelela, who toured the U.S. representing the SWAPO Women's Council in 1980, was asked how much of Namibia was controlled by her organization, she pointed to the whole map of the country. It is a situation where the hearts and minds of the people are with SWAPO but the daytime military conditions are such that political control is maintained by South Africa. The political situation could deteriorate for the South Africans, however, if the Western Contact Group proposals continue to be rejected and the shaky alliance of whites in the DTA (the so-called Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) and some African splinter groups breaks apart. There is some indication recently that this latter alliance is indeed crumbling.

FIGHTING CONTINUES IN ANGOLA

SWAPO receives strong support from African countries. Angola, which borders Namibia, offers rear bases to SWAPO. South African troops have invaded Angola and now occupy large areas of Cunene province; and South African-backed UNITA holds on to other towns in southeastern Angola. The war continues to rage on. Every government in the world has condemned the South African invasion -- except for Reagan, who says the U.S. will not oppose the South African occupation as long as Cuban troops are in Angola. The Angolan and Cuban governments, on the other hand, recently reaffirmed that Cuban troops were in Angola at the request of the sovereign government, in order to repel armed incursions by South African troops. At several points since 1976 Cuban troop withdrawals were begun, only to be halted when another South African invasion occurred.

The prospects for the immediate future are for South Africa to continue its stalling tactics and to attack refugees and SWAPO base areas. SWAPO and the frontline states will continue to resist these attacks and gain military advantage inside Namibia. It is impossible to predict when the military and political advantage will be decisive enough to overwhelm South African and U.S. intransigence. But the eventual outcome is inevitable: SWAPO will rule an independent Namibia in the next few years. This is why it is essential for supporters throughout the world to increase their material and political support for SWAPO this year. The greater the international support for SWAPO, the sooner and less bloody will be the resolution of the problem for the Namibian people. For a list of activities in the Boston area where people can express their support for SWAPO, see other articles in this newsletter.

--Dick Clapp
Somehow we survive
and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither.
Investigating searchlights rake
our naked unprotected contours;
over our heads the monolithic decalogue
of fascist prohibition glowers
and teeters for a catastrophic fall;
Boots club on the peeling door.
But somehow we survive
severance, deprivation, loss.
Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark
hissing their menace to our lives.
most cruel, all our land is scarred with terror,
rendered unlovely and unlovable;
sundered are we and all our passionate surrender
but somehow tenderness survives.
(From his first collection, *Sirens, Knuckles,
Boots*, Mbari Publications, Ibadan, 1963.)

The future of the internationally acclaimed South African poet
Dennis Brutus is entangled in court proceedings and red tape. A quick
reading of the case might suggest bureaucratic bungling on the part
of the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) as the source
of Brutus' troubles. But Dennis Brutus is an exiled activist who is
considered by the South African government to be one of its most
dangerous opponents. And in these days of reaction and cold war posturing,
the official political climate here in the U.S. is a chilly

one indeed toward a man who has worked energetically against racism
and apartheid for years.

For the past ten years, Dennis Brutus has been a professor of English at Northwestern University,
near Chicago. As a native citizen of Rhodesia (he was born there, but
grew up in South Africa and considers himself to be a South African),
he carried a British passport. But when Rhodesia became independent
Zimbabwe in April 1980, Britain cancelled his passport. By the
time Zimbabwe had issued him a new one, he was late in applying for
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the periodic U.S. visa extension which allowed him to continue working here. Then for nearly six months the INS district office in Chicago claimed it couldn't find his file, and otherwise delayed a resolution to the case. As a result the poet's immigration status became illegal.

The INS has formally agreed that Dennis Brutus originally fell into violation through no fault of his own. So why, then, does the U.S. government continue to pursue such a flawed case? And why did U.S. immigration judge Irving Schwartz uphold last November a decision that Brutus is "deportable?"

Answers to these questions are found in Brutus' past activities. In 1963 Brutus challenged the South African Olympic Committee on its exclusion of blacks from teams (a direct violation of International Olympic Committee rules). For this he was banned, or placed under house arrest, in South Africa. Brutus continued to press his objections to apartheid in sports and was then arrested for violation of the banning order under the "Suppression of Communism Act," a legal blanket used by the South African rulers to smother diverse challenges to apartheid, whatever their political origin.

As a result of this arrest, Dennis Brutus served 18 months at Robben Island prison. When he completed his sentence, the government made a deal with him: he could leave South Africa on an expired exit visa, but should he ever return he would be immediately imprisoned for having travelled on an expired document.

THE McCARRAN-WALTER SNAG

Why doesn't Dennis Brutus simply leave the U.S. and reapply for a visa, the only remedy for his current illegal immigrant status? In an interview last January he said that he would be willing to leave if he had reasonable assurances that he would be able to return. The danger which lurks behind such a strategy, however, is the McCarran-Walter Act. The 1952 law, part of the McCarthy era crackdown on dissent, makes it possible for the U.S. to bar anyone considered to be a communist or communist sympathizer. If the U.S. government chooses to honor the demeaned logic of the South African regime, which concludes that anyone who opposes apartheid is a communist, then Brutus could be forbidden reentry.

Most recently Brutus has applied for political asylum in the U.S. The court has not yet ruled on this.

Although Dennis Brutus holds a Zimbabwean passport, residence there would place him all too conveniently within range of the long arm of the South African secret police. As he often points out, Joe Gqabi, an ANC freedom fighter with whom Brutus had been imprisoned, was shot and killed last summer in Salisbury. All evidence points to South African involvement.

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In South Africa the life of a trade unionist demands more than commitment - it takes courage. The government fears the growing strength of the labor movement and is using terror and other tactics to try to break it. Thozamile Gqweta is one union leader the government has sought to crush. When he first emerged as a labor organizer in 1979, the police tried to bribe him, offering him $50 a week to inform on his union. He refused, and the police responded by detaining him without charges in prison four times in 1980. Still, his union grew and Thozamile continued to lead it when out of prison. Then in March 1980, "persons unknown" set fire to his house after first wiring the door shut from the outside. Thozamile managed to escape through a window.

In November they struck again, this time succeeding in burning his family's home to the ground and killing his mother and uncle. At their funeral several days later, police opened fire on the mourners and killed one person - "accidentally." It was Thozamile's girlfriend and an activist in her own right. Thozamile continued his work as a union leader. So, in December the government detained him again. It still holds him today. His life is thus at stake, since 47 men have died in detention in recent years. The most recent death was last month when food and cannery organizer Neil Aggett died mysteriously.

Thozamile Gqweta is a threat to apartheid. The union which he leads, the South African Allied Workers Union, is one of the nation's fastest growing and most militant unions. The labor movement poses a fundamental challenge to apartheid, which is built on a system of low wages for blacks. These wages, often below the starvation level, bring high profits and attract U.S. and other multinational
corporations. While the labor movement is still small, its rapid growth is evidenced by the doubling of the number of strikes between 1979 and 1980. Workers at a number of U.S. companies have struck in the last two years; among them are Johnson & Johnson, Goodyear Tire, Holiday Inn, Borg-Warner, and Masonite. Other U.S. firms, including Colgate-Palmolive and Kellog, have faced other forms of labor unrest.

LABOR TAKES A POLITICAL STAND

South African unions are not "bread and butter" organizations. They frequently move beyond shop floor and wage issues to demand empowerment for all workers and for the black community. Some unions are cooperating in a wider national campaign to promote the "Freedom Charter" which proclaims: "We, the people of South Africa declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, (that) the people shall govern (and) share in the country's wealth (and) the land shall be shared among those who work it."

Many unions have developed strong community ties which have bolstered the unions in their confrontations with large corporations and the powerful government. Strikes have often been successful because of community boycotts of products and community opposition to scabbing. For example, at the Ford Motor Plant in Port Elizabeth, management was unable to find scabs to replace the 700 striking blacks, despite soaring unemployment in the area.

In the past year, unions have actively sought increased cooperation with each other. In August eleven trade union groupings came together to work on joint strategies. The value of this unity became clear in February when one million black workers throughout the country struck. In a symbolic half-hour work stoppage, they protested the death of Neil Aggett in detention. The port of Port Elizabeth was completely shut down, and numerous factories ground to a halt in other cities.

Unions threaten South Africa with more problems than higher wages and lower profits. As the labor movement expands, it brings people together, politicizes them, and provides organizing experience which is important in the wider struggle for freedom.
GOVERNMENT AND MANAGEMENT COLLABORATE

Recognizing the threat that unions pose, the South African government has actively aided corporate management in busting unions. Besides Gqweta, many other labor activists have been harassed, detained, put under house arrest, or driven into exile. The New York Times recently revealed that the government had been holding secret meetings with corporations to prepare a common stand against unions. When the workers at Johnson & Johnson and two other East London companies struck, the minister of labor flew to the city to urge the firms to "hold out."

These measures, however, won't quell the labor movement. In the long run, both the government and the corporations would like to co-opt the movement by offering some minor concessions (e.g. small pay raises and the right to strike under very narrow conditions) in return for working within the system. Working within the system would mean giving up organizing against apartheid itself. It would mean accepting the inequality between black and white and the lack of political rights for blacks. With no political rights, the labor movement would be weak indeed. Most unions are refusing the government's cooptation order.

Thozamile Botha, who led a strike at a Ford Plant in South Africa in 1979, had this to say about the links between workers' struggles and struggle for national liberation:

"Black workers in South Africa do not see their struggles as separate from the national struggle of the oppressed people of the country. They see their struggle as part and parcel of the national struggle and their demands are no longer just economic demands, they are both economic and political. They realize that so long as the apartheid system exists in South Africa there will be no meaningful change. People are prepared to sacrifice. The aim is to change the system as a whole. People are not seeking for reforms, they want radical change."

-BBB

South African labor leader Thozamile Botha
"BRUTUS" continued from p. 4

Even in exile, Brutus has continued to work against apartheid, especially by protesting South Africa's participation in international sports, such as the recent Springbok rugby tour. He is the author of eight books of poetry, and a new one, Salutes and Censures, is forthcoming.

DEFEND DENNIS BRUTUS

The Black Congressional Caucus, Julien Gibbs, president of Amherst College where Brutus now teaches, U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas, and Silvio Conte, U.S. Representative from Massachusetts have joined the growing movement to stay the poet's deportation. Your help is needed to keep the pressure on, to stop the deportation, and to urge the INS to accept Brutus' application for political asylum.

Letters of support should be addressed to Elliot Abrams, Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, Department of State, 2201 "C" St., Washington D.C. 20520. Copies must be sent to Brutus' attorney's at Mahmoud & Associates, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1264, Chicago, IL 60604, for verification. Financial contributions to help with legal fees are sorely needed, and can be mailed to Dennis Brutus Defense Committee, 39 S. La Salle St., Suite 3825, Chicago, IL 60603.

-Bonnie Bishop

DENNIS BRUTUS BENEFIT

featuring PETE SEEGER
7:30 PM March 7
Northeastern University
Alumni Hall
Tickets $6 and $7
Info: 524-2255 or 522-3260

JOIN THE SPRING WEEKS OF ACTION -- MARCH 21 to APRIL 4

FROM MARCH 21 to APRIL 4 ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE STATE ARE PLANNING EVENTS TO CELEBRATE THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. A SWAPO SPEAKER WILL BE IN BOSTON. WE WILL PARTICIPATE WITH OTHER GROUPS IN PROTESTING AT THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF BOSTON'S ANNUAL STOCKHOLDERS' MEETING. SEE ATTACHED FLYER FOR DETAILS AND INFORMATION ABOUT THESE AND OTHER ACTIVITIES.
BCLSA POT LUCK SUPPER

April 14
"The Liberation Struggle in Northern Ireland"

6:30 supper
7:30 presentation by
Jane O'Brien and Gary Hicks

46 Waverly St. Brookline
for info. call 738-5663

HELP US

We need funds -- to publish this newsletter; to organize and conduct teachins and film shows on southern Africa; to keep abreast of events in southern Africa; to challenge the racist, exploitative, and sexist activities of American corporations at home and abroad; to expose U.S governmental collaboration with the minority regime in South Africa; to discredit South Africa's multimillion dollar propaganda machinery. We really need your assistance. We ask that you pledge yourself to at least $1.00 a month, and more if you can, to support our work. Send contributions to:

BCLSA
Box 8791
Boston Mass 02114

San Francisco Poster Brigade/LNS
MEDICAL AID FOR ZIMBABWE

Our Zimbabwe medical aid drive continues. Two members of BCLSA are now working in Zimbabwe in Mt. Selinda, near the Mozambique border. One as a nurse. In her last letter she commented on the conditions in the hospital there: "I'm in charge of the pediatric ward. There are several little premies (premature babies) in home-made incubators. Many of the beds don't have sheets. The hospital doesn't have hot water, and until last month all the washing was done by hand. Now they have a couple of washing machines. I think what they need most at the moment is money so that they can buy some of the things they need."

Contributions are tax-deductible and should be made out to BCMHE and sent to:

BCLSA
Box 8791
Boston, MA 02114