International Seminar
on
The Role of Transnational Corporations in Namibia

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In this presentation I want to discuss three issues:

1. The general political situation in The Netherlands on Southern Africa
2. Material and political support from The Netherlands for the Namibian people, particularly but not exclusively for SWAPO
3. Research on economic links between The Netherlands and Namibia

I will not always distinguish between activities and opinions of the Holland Committee on Southern Africa, of which I am a member, and those of other groups, with which we often cooperate closely, like the Working Group Kairos, for which David de Beer is working. I will also leave out the most important aspect of research and political campaigning on Namibia, i.e. uranium, because David will be dealing with that in his presentation.

Government and politics

People from other countries often envy us for the support we get, or rather we have managed to acquire by many years of hard work, from politicians and political parties. It is true, that along with Sweden and to some extent Norway, the political situation on Southern Africa is the most positive one in western Europe in our country. But as far as economic sanctions are concerned, I must frankly tell you that we have not got much farther than successes on the level of Parliament.

Since 1980, there is a large and lasting majority in Parliament which is in favour of economic sanctions, like joining the oil boycott of the oil producing countries, a law forbidding new investments in South Africa and the cessation or reduction of certain imports from South Africa, particularly coal. These measures should even be taken if no other western countries would do so simultaneously, as seems to be the case if one judges the political situation in western Europe realistically.

From summer 1981 to autumn 1982 we even had a center-left coalition government, which announced its intention to introduce such sanctions. That was quite a step forward, although by far not enough according to our own standards. But is was or rather seemed something to start with and try to reach more after these measures would have been taken.
But nothing much happened in practice regarding economic sanctions. Foreign minister Van der Stoel certainly is a sincere and devoted social democrat, who might really intend to introduce these measures, but he was retarded by international treaty obligations, by officials from several government departments who worked slowly and reluctantly and -not the least cause of delay- by his own very formalistic approach when it came to approach other governments whose legal cooperation was necessary. The only thing that happened in 1½ years was the announcement of an appeal to employers to introduce these measures voluntarily, pending the preparations of legal measures. It will not surprise you that the employers never agreed on that, although they managed to avoid a blunt refusal in public.

On the other hand there was some progress in other fields, which did not cost any money to anybody, like the introduction of compulsory visa for South Africans, the breaking off of official cultural ties and the introduction of a more active attitude from the side of the government towards the sports boycott. On economics, the only actual result of 1½ years of social democratic rule in the Dutch foreign office was a half-finished analysis of economic relations with South Africa and international obligations which might impede the introduction of sanctions against South Africa. It is unpublished so far, but does not contain much which might make us very optimistic about the willingness of government officials really to push ahead with any government policy on sanctions.

Then this year the government fell, on quite different issues, and since one week we have a center-right coalition government. On economic sanctions, their policy statement mentions the same measures as their predecessors, but their willingness to actually implement them is reduced to "not excluding unilateral Dutch measures". (See policy agreements attached) Furthermore, the restriction was introduced that "the economic effects on the Netherlands and on the front line states should be taken account of" in discussing the introduction of sanctions. This may sound reasonable to outsiders, and it would be good if it meant increasing aid to the front line states and to Dutch companies who might suffer losses from sanctions. But our analysis is, that these restrictions were only introduced as a way of avoiding doing anything.

So in Parliament the majority is still intact, but one should not be too optimistic about the willingness of most Christian Democrats (the centrist part of the coalition) actually to topple a reluctant government before the end of its four year term, as almost happened in 1980 on the oil embargo. The issues of armaments and economic policy, which are far more heavily debated, might come to our rescue to get rid of this government at an early date, but Christian Democrats have a well developed sense of political survival.

So we will have to devise new means to get things moving again on economic sanctions, on the short run we rather got stuck politically.

Concerning Namibia, the issue of independence according to resolution 435 has always been one of the reasons why we have publicly advocated sanctions against South Africa. At some stage there was the risk that the cause for sanctions as such might be weakened if this independence would come about. But now I think that the policies of the Apartheid regime as such will give sufficient reason to advocate sanctions anyway, until the international and national policies of aggression and suppression will have changed fundamentally and a truly democratic society will be started to be built in South Africa.

We have been discussing the possibility of stepping up the sanctions campaign by introducing a sort of deadline for the negotiations on Namibia, after which any hope for a negotiated settlement should be given up and national and international sanctions be introduced immediately. Such a deadline could be March-April 1983, because that would be the ultimate date that makes it possible for Namibia to gain independence after elections on January 1, 1984. This position has already been accepted by the two main Protestant churches in the Netherlands. We would like to discuss what you think of that idea, and whether some international cooperation or mutual information would be possible. It is mainly a matter of political assessment and priority, both of SWAPO and of the support groups of various kinds.
An other interesting development is the Dutch membership of the Security Council in 1983 and 1984. We want to work out ways to use this for our work and would like to get information and advice from those of you, who have experience with this aspect. We originally feared that this membership would put limits to the relatively independent stand of the Netherlands internationally, as it might feel obliged to represent other western countries as well who are more reluctant to do anything useful on Southern Africa. Now, we have been assured that the Netherlands will not give up its independent position, but one has to wait and see what actually happens, and act accordingly.

As to material aid to SWAPO, ANC and the frontline states one can be more optimistic. We expect the relatively high level of material aid to be maintained basically, although within even more restrictive political limits as before as to on what commodities this aid may be spent. The government might also try to get more aid spent in the Netherlands itself, but it is hard to forecast what effect this will have on aid to Southern Africa.

The most recent interesting event in Dutch and western European politics on Southern Africa is the recent West European Conference of Parliamentarians on sanctions against South Africa, which was held last Friday and Saturday in The Hague on the initiative of 5 Dutch Parliamentarians. A rather good declaration was adopted by representatives of 14 West European members of national and European parliaments. If the political and organisational follow up is well tackled, this might be a good opportunity to promote the cause of sanctions. Here I would like to discuss means how support movements could use and stimulate this, both in Europe itself and across the ocean.

Aid to SWAPO, ANC and frontline states

There are several groups in the Netherlands supporting the liberation movements and frontline states, and my guess for the total number of people who personally and regularly support these groups would be around 20,000, if this support can be measured by the number of subscribers of the magazines and contributors to e.g. the Liberation Fund of the Holland Committee. During campaigns, far more people are contributing on a one time basis. We have found it extremely useful not only to address the population directly, but also to establish contacts with other organisations like churches, trade unions, progressive media, branches of political parties, third world solidarity groups, youth groups and others. This approach expresses itself in the sources for our Liberation Fund:

- we get money from the regular public, in campaigns and on a regular basis
- some NGO's adopt specific projects or give us money we can use freely
- we spend a lot of government aid, as we often have better insight into the needs of the recipients, better ways to get things there; our organisation costs are far lower than of any government agency and we buy things cheaper.

There are restrictions as to how we are allowed to spend government aid, for instance we had trouble to be allowed to send a truck with food aid, as that truck was feared to be used for other than strictly humanitarian transport. The money we raise ourselves can be spent more freely, and this aid is supplied by us without any political restrictions.

A rather new development in this field is the introduction of smaller projects, ranging from a few hundred Guilders to several thousands, which can easily be adopted by local groups. These might be projects on food, shelter, agriculture, education, transport, medical care, office equipment, youth and women's organisations, information and propaganda, etc. etc.

As to Namibia we are considering a campaign for material and political support and intensified information in our own country, once the transition into elections
and independence come into sight. For those who know something about our past I can refer to a similar campaign for ZANU and ZAPU in 1979–1980.

A specific feature of aid to Namibia is the fact, that many churches inside Namibia have quite a good stand politically, which enables us to raise money and political support with their colleagues in the Netherlands, without risking establishing relations one might not be too sure about politically.

Research
In this respect I do not have to offer much, except of course the research done on uranium by David de Beer, Ruurd Huismans and others. But there are some interesting problems we are faced with, and experiences from other countries might be very helpful for us. This might enable us in the Holland Committee to do more research and campaigning, according to the availability of data and to political possibilities and priorities.

Apart from uranium, the principal involvement of Dutch firms appears to be on oil deliveries and on imports of minerals. There are little investments of any strategic importance in other sectors, as can be seen from the list attached to Brian Boltons paper for this conference.

It is remarkable that no governmental statistics office has separate data on Namibia, data are always aggregate ones for South Africa and Namibia. They simply do not seem to exist, as officials always are very helpful with any material they have. The same applies to general information on Namibia's trade with all countries. Even the well-equipped Economic Information Department seems to have only a fraction of the amount of material which is distributed in this conference.

The main cause of this situation seems to be the statistics of South Africa, on which Dutch data are based.

What might be tried, is making a breakdown of South African and Namibian trade statistics and see what consequences this would have for Dutch figures. Another way would be to try and get company information through trade union contacts. In some cases we have the experience that people know exactly what originates where and these data could be compared with official statistics.

We have also started to get professional advise, especially concerning minerals, adn some university people prove to have quite reliable data on specific minerals and even on specific mines or mining areas.

In government offices, one might try to stimulate the professional pride of officials and seek cooperation with them to make a reliable subdivision of Namibian and South African figures.

The same thing might be tried on the political level. In the campaign for sanctions and with Namibian independence approaching -however slowly- the availability of reliable data is crucial for any official policy.

The last two approached have been initiated by us in another field, i.e. oil deliveries from Rotterdam to South Africa, which are not to be found in any official documentation.

There may be other ways to tackle the problem, which have successfully been tried by others present and we would like to learn from their experiences.

On investments, comparable questions might be raised, but they do not seem to be very urgent in the case of the Netherlands, except maybe in the case of Shell and its mineral daughter Billiton.

One last aspect that might be discussed here is the transport of Namibian goods, particularly by ship through Walvis Bay and Luderitz. Methodically, it would be possible to trace these transport by analysing ship movements to and from these harbours, either by starting with all ships calling there, or woth some especially interesting ships. shipping companies or harbours of arrival. We have some data available on transport of oil products, but these data are merely a "by-product" of data we happen to come across in our research on crude oil transport to South Africa itself. Priorities have to be set before starting this research, if any.
It would especially be interesting to analyse imports of mining products into the Netherlands, with a special attention to indirect imports into the Netherlands of these commodities through other countries, whether in crude or refined form. Here diamonds might be a case, but some metals, especially the "strategic" ones, would be worth while to do some research on as well.

To sum up the conclusions and aspects to be further discussed of this presentation:
-Prospects for lobbying on the level of political parties and government in the Netherlands are not as bright as they used to be, but a lot must be done nevertheless or even because of that. The introduction of a deadline in the negotiations on Namibian elections and independence might provide an opportunity, as well as the promotion of contacts between parliamentarians in our various countries. The Dutch membership of the UN Security Council might provide another opportunity.
-Material and political support campaigns might be organised on the occasion of the transition into independence of Namibia. International exchange and coordination would be something to discuss here.
-There is always the unpredictable aspect of South African policy and internal developments. Another Soweto uprising, Sharpville shooting, Kassinga massacre or grand scale aggression against neighboring states may have tragical aspects, but should be used by us to increase and broaden support for the liberation of Southern Africa.
-As to economic research and campaigns on Namibia, we in the Netherlands badly need more and more reliable basic data. Uranium will remain to be the basis issue in the Netherlands, but we are prepared to do more work on other aspects as well, within the limits of political priorities and prospects for finding new data.

3 South Africa

As a contribution to the abolition of apartheid and the independence of Namibia, the Netherlands will continue to promote political and economic pressure on South Africa, within the international community, and specifically so within EEC, NATO and the Benelux.

b. Economic sanctions to be implemented by the Netherlands on its own responsibility are not to be excluded beforehand. However, these sanctions have to be in accordance with existing international obligations (resulting from decisions by EEC, Benelux and GATT). In addition, economic sanctions should be judged on the economic effects for the countries in the region, which are economically dependent on South Africa, as for the Netherlands itself.

The interdepartmental investigation in question will be completed as soon as possible, but within three months at any rate. This investigation will be focussed upon the following issues especially:

a) participation in the existing voluntary oil embargo.
b) legislation on investment such as has been passed in Sweden.
c) Restrictions on import, e.g. as regards coal,

and evaluate those factors which are of relevance to meet the existing international obligations mentioned above.

c. The Netherlands will observe the resolutions and recommendations adopted in the General Assembly of the United Nations with regard to South Africa and Namibia, as long as no explicit reservations have been made. This means especially an active observance of the arms embargo and the discouragement of contacts with the South African Government in the fields of sport, culture and science.

d. The Netherlands will maintain relations with South Africa only in as far as these relations offer a positive possibility for a contribution to the struggle against the apartheid policies. Nongovernmental organizations in The Netherlands be enabled to seek contact with and support similar groups and organisations in South Africa that oppose the apartheid regime.

e. Humanitarian aid will be given to movements that oppose the apartheid policies as well as to the victims of the apartheid system. Political refugees will be supported.

Financial aid to the frontline states will be continued, for purposes of development and will, therefore, not be destined for military objections.

At the same time, Dutch policy is aimed at widening the support along international channels (EEC).
Sporting contacts with South Africa

Dear executive,

Following on the commitment I made during the parliamentary debate on the 1982 budget of my department, I deem it of importance to make known the standpoint of the government regarding sporting contacts with South Africa.

The grounds for this arise from our rejection of the present system of apartheid in South Africa and related to this, our concern at the continuing contact between Dutch sportsmen and sporting organizations with South Africa. Further occasion for this is that international opinion as regards apartheid has as you may know, resulted among other measures in the United Nations appointing 1982 as the year of mobilization for sanctions against South Africa.

The exceptional position taken by sport in relations with South Africa, resulting from the political importance, the South African regime attaches to sporting contacts abroad, places particular responsibility on sports-bodies regarding relations with South Africa, as the maintenance of sporting contacts with South Africa could be seen as support for the policy of the South African government.

In practice, the apparent multiracial nature of possible sporting contacts, is of little influence, in contributing to the ending of apartheid in South Africa.

In this regard it is the opinion of the government, that Dutch sports organizations and their members, taking into account the rules of the (international) sporting organisations, should desist from sporting contact with South Africa, and in addition should not participate in any sporting fixture in which a South African delegation, in whatsoever capacity also takes part.

Moreover the government regrets that in the rules of some international sporting organisations the maintenance of sporting contacts with South Africa is still not excluded. Because, it is clear that even if according to the regulations, one cannot speak of formal South African representations, this is of negligible or no consequence to public opinion.

It is in connection with this that the government wishes to make the abovementioned known to the Dutch sporting world.

I would appreciate it if you would bring the abovementioned to the attention of your members.

I look forward to consulting you shortly regarding this government standpoint and bringing it into effect.

I have sent a copy of this letter to the Speaker of the Parliament and to the Dutch Municipal Association with the former request bring to the attention of their respective members.

Yours respectfully,

H.A. de Boer, minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work.