14 December 1984

NEWSWOMAN IN NAMIBIA DETAINED

Gwen Lister, well-known journalist in Namibia and freelance reporter for the BBC London, was today arrested by the South African Police in Windhoek. She is being held under terms of the South African Official Secrets Act and the Post Office Act.

Yesterday, in the course of an official press conference in Windhoek, Ms Lister raised the matter of an envelope she had found in her box at the central post office. It contained a document marked Top Secret, a communication from South African Police headquarters in Pretoria instructing the Windhoek postmaster to intercept all mail, incoming and outgoing, of Gwen Lister for six months. She was described as a supporter of SWAPO of Namibia, 'a Marxist-oriented' organization dedicated to the overthrow of the present administration in Namibia by force. Police ordered South African and Namibian newspapers not to publish the story lest they be in violation of Pretoria's Official Secrets Act. However today's editions of THE STAR and THE RAND DAILY MAIL in Johannesburg did carry the story. Three reporters in Windhoek for English-language South African papers were today interrogated by security police but not detained.

This morning police arrested Gwen Lister at her home; they are holding her in Windhoek's central prison. She is due to appear in court next Tuesday, 18 December, on an application for bail. The 31-year-old South African-born Lister lives in Windhoek with her four-year-old son, Shane.

Gwen Lister was questioned 1 May 1983 by the South African Police at Jan Smuts airport Johannesburg as she was in transit from a United Nations conference in Paris to Windhoek. One year later she appeared in a South African court charged with possessing banned documents. She was acquitted. As political editor of THE WINDHOEK OBSERVER her columns penetrated the maze of Pretoria's manipulations to set up a compliant political structure in the occupied Territory. She wrote extensively of SWAPO and of the deep-seated aspirations of the Namibian people for their freedom. She was forced off THE OBSERVER by the owners. Most of the staff of the English-language weekly resigned in solidarity.

Pretoria's arrest of Gwen Lister and its threats to newspeople are assaults on the freedom of the press. They are unlawful acts perpetrated by the illegal occupier of Namibia.
We feel duty-bound to condemn, once again, the Reagan Administration for establishing the so-called liaison office in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, in direct violation of the resolutions and decisions of the United Nations and against the expressed opposition of the oppressed people of Namibia. By its unwarranted presence in Namibia, the United States Government is lending legitimacy to the occupying regime and is, even more dangerously, slowly but surely becoming involved in the colonial conflict in our country. The United States must get out of Namibia now!

- Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo, Secretary-General of SWAPO of Namibia at the United Nations, 29 November 1984

The US government in late February opened what it calls a 'liaison office' in Windhoek, Namibia. Washington excused this violation of United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions by saying the installation was to assist the new cease-fire between South Africa and Angola and that the move had the approval of both those governments.

The office is equipped with a high-technology telecommunications system with direct links to the US embassy in Pretoria and with the Angolan and South African governments. On staff are diplomatic, military and technical personnel. Washington says it is but a temporary situation and its people would withdraw once South African troops have departed Angola (a process now 7 months overdue) unless asked to remain.

The opinion of most Namibians is bluntly stated by Mr Ya Toivo. Others connected with the Pretoria occupation see it more in line with the Windhoek phone book.

PROTEST TO:
Secretary George Shultz
State Department
Washington, DC 20520

Is that the US Embassy?

ACCORDING to the new Post Office telephone guide, independence has crept up on us unawares and the United States has opened an Embassy in Windhoek.

The little-noticed entry in the new guide under 'American Embassy' has caused some embarrassment to the Post Office and some concern to the American Liaison office in Windhoek.

The head of the office, Mr William Jacobsen, said the office had been telephoned by the Post Office in July and asked how it wanted to be listed in the 1983 guide.

Embassy

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They had requested to be unlisted, but somehow an entry had crept in giving the office Embassy status.

Mr Jacobsen said the American presence in Windhoek was not an Embassy, Consulate, Legation or Mission, but simply a liaison office set up after the Lusaka agreement between Angola and South Africa earlier this year.

He said he had sent a written complaint to the Post Office and received an apology.

It seemed the confusion had arisen as the original arrangements concerning the office had been made by the US Embassy in Pretoria which also paid all the office bills.

"American Embassy had apparently been entered into the Post Office