

A NATION IN AGONY: THE NAMIBIAN PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE FOR SOLIDARITY,
FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

By Reginald Herbold Green and Jean de la Paix

We do not believe in a system that sells people.

- Striking 'Contract' Workers (1971)

Namibia's history of the past century is unforgiving ...
It is a virtually unrelieved record of theft and violence,
blood and iron - African blood shed by European iron.

- From Sudwestafrika to Namibia (1981)

We are outcasts in our own country
We ask
A dwelling place of our own.

- Chief Hosea Kutako (1970)

It must be borne in mind that the Namibian people are
shedding blood to liberate each and every inch of the
Namibian soil, thus each and every inch of the Namibian
land must and will belong to the Namibian people.

- Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO (1979)

TIME PRESENT AND TIME PAST IN TRAVAIL

April 1982: Symbols, Contradictions and Signposts

Easter comes in the fall in Namibia, but March/April is nonetheless a key period in the natural cycle, a time of rain and the promise of grazing and crops, or of hot dry days and the threat of famine. In March 1982 the rains came breaking a drought that had held most of the land in its grip since 1978. But on the social front the drought continued. Vagrancy laws and employer 'solidarity' have replaced pass laws and monopoly recruitment to herd single African men, torn from their families into prison-like concrete barracks; the black population of Windhoek, the capital, continued (except for a few favoured collaborators of the occupation regime) to be confined to the ghetto suburb of Katatura (whose very name

in the regional language means "the place we do not want to be").*

United Nations Secretary General Miguel de Cuellar in his first major address placed high priority on achieving the early and genuine independence of Namibia. The confirmation of Marti Ahtisaari as his Special Representative and the separate appointment of Dr Mishra as new Commissioner for Namibia (underlining the UN's legal, if not actual status as interim sovereign authority over Namibia) demonstrated the reality of his concern. But no such concern with speed or result could be seen in the Western Contact Group's negotiations with South Africa, SWAPO and the Front Line States (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe). The Five (USA, UK, Federal Germany, Canada, France)'s apparent determination to mollify the illegal occupier, South Africa, first, and see about freeing the victims after, and its tortuous complex procedural discussions amply earned the appellation "Operation Pussyfoot" given by a member of the British Council of Churches' November 1981 delegation to Namibia, Sister Catherine Hughes.

Patterns of Violence and of Hope

South Africa, unable to prevent SWAPO from organising in Namibia or PLAN finding civilian support, continued to strike into Angola and to create the military cover behind which it is desperately trying to create a puppet state of the broken remnants of UNITA and the black mercenary forces of Portugese East Africa and Rhodesia.

* Katatura is so named because the African population of Windhoek was forcibly moved there (and the 'Colored' to the separate satellite ghetto of Khomasdal) from the multi-racial Windhoek "Old Location" over 1959-68. That bitterly resisted forced movement (analogous to the parallel destruction of the similar Johannesburg community of Sophiatown which led to Archbishop Trevor Huddleston's Naught for your comfort) opened with the December 10 1959 massacre of peacefully protesting residents - Namibia's Sharpeville.

But the hopelessness of this policy was shown by SWAPO's mounting its most intensive campaign to date in the Grootfontein-Otavi-Tsumeb triangle - 300 kilometres south of the Angolan border.

The dead hand of the colonial economy and the febrile 'initiatives' of the desperate DTA puppet regime lay heavy on the land. Fleeing ranchers, hesitating mining companies, over \$200 million (an eighth of GDP) to bribe farmers to stay on their ranches (and join the 'home guard') and blacks to work for the bantustans and the DTA organs, a devastated fishing industry, and a sense of doom illustrated by the supposed Chief Minister Dirk Mudge repeatedly lashing out that South Africa was talking behind his back and would sell him down the river (or perhaps more aptly into the sands) - these were among the vignettes of the end of an era. Meanwhile SWAPO, the United Nations Institute for Namibia and invited experts met in Lusaka to examine alternatives and work out strategies and policies for political economic transition, rehabilitation and development in full confidence that working out charts for the future was their responsibility to the Namibian people.

Bullying and Bravery

The shadow over that future was made brutally plain in March, when Prime Minister Piet Wappen ("Pete the Gun") Botha met in Windhoek with the leaders of the Namibian Council of Churches. When the bishops, moderates and pastors pressed him for South African withdrawal he did indeed say that if the pressure continued South Africa would leave. But he went on to say that South Africa would take everything it had 'made' and would destroy the buildings, bridges, and mines it could not take. The Christian leaders answer was clear and blunt - nothing could be worse than your presence, go now. Botha stormed out of the meeting. Small wonder that the

NCC Executive Secretary Albertus Maasdorp says on behalf of the churches "SWAPO are our children", or that Sister Hughes comments "It was very hard to see how Christians could be anything but pro-SWAPO".

The symbols of change, the violent contradiction, the signposts to the future of Namibia are starkly and speedily visible to those who care to look. But a fuller understanding requires a deeper acquaintance with Namibia's tragic history, its unforgiving natural ecology, its colonial political economy of theft, the particular forms in which South African apartheid has cast these historical and structural characteristics and the nature of the liberation struggle of the Namibian people and the leadership they have chosen, and follow to prison, to death and to victory.

Contributions to Knowledge, Calls to Action

Four volumes have appeared in the second half of 1981 which go far to giving the interpretations and the facts to allow a fuller comprehension of Namibia, Namibians and SWAPO of Namibia. The first - To Be Born A Nation (Zed Press, London, 1981) - is an official SWAPO publication which puts the history of oppression and resistance, exploitation and the struggle for liberation clearly, coherently and lucidly with substantial bodies of detailed data and quotations from Namibian workers, churches and its own key statements.

The second - From Sudwestafrika to Namibia (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, research report no. 58, Uppsala, 1981 by R.H. Green) - is an up-to-date political economic survey set against the historical background and looking to a future in which progress

toward solidarity, liberation and justice could be achieved.

The third - Namibia in the 1980's (Catholic Institute for International Relations/British Council of Churches, London, 1981) - is the first in a monograph series prepared in close consultation with Christian and secular Namibian bodies. It surveys the background to, course of and future requirements of the Liberation Struggle in broad terms. More specific studies in the near future will cover the subordination and struggle for liberation of Namibian women and the ecology, political economy and agronomy of Namibian agriculture from 1800 to date, and looking into the future.

The fourth - Namibia - The Last Colony (Longman, Harlow, Essex, 1981 edited by R.H. Green, M-L Kiljunen and K. Kiljunen) - is an integrated set of political economic, social and political studies of Namibia supported by the most complete set of statistical estimates yet available for Namibia.

None of these volumes is neutral - their authors clearly see any such stance in respect to Namibia as immoral. But each is analytical, factual and reasoned. They provide a rich array of qualitative, quantitative and historical data, and from it argue their cases - the reader is able to judge them for himself.

SWAPO, 1960 - 1980

The colonisation of Namibia was late but brutal. Most remembered is the deliberate campaign of genocide waged by the German colonial power between 1904 and 1908, which killed more than half the people in the war area - over three-quarters of the Herero and over half the Nama and Damara perished in battle, in the waterless desert or in concentration camps. But there is also a tradition of popular

resistance, repeatedly contained, beaten back and suppressed (for the total population of Namibia is even today less than one and a half million, and scattered), but continuous. After the Second World War, resistance was manifested initially in petitioning the UN, and increasingly by strikes and go-slows by the contract workers in Namibia's mines, fish plants and settler ranches. It was in opposition to contract work that the Ovamboland People's Organisation was founded in 1957 (transformed into SWAPO in 1960), with contract workers and students forming its base. (A second movement, SWANU, was also influential in the early 1960's, but its support fell as it failed to develop a mass worker and peasant base or a truly national membership).

The early 1960's saw SWAPO establishing branches round the country, calling for national unity and self-reliance and pressing the UN to assert its legal authority over the territory. Namibians listened and joined, but the world community would not respond. In the words of Toivo ja Toivo's speech in the dock (reprinted in To Be Born a Nation) "My organisation could not work properly - it could not even hold meetings. I had to answer to the question: 'Where has your non-violence got us?' Whilst the 1966 World Court judgement was pending, I at least had that to fall back on. When we failed, after years of waiting, I had no answer to give to my people." The month after the judgement, the first armed clash took place between SWAPO guerrillas and South African troops.

Armed struggle formed an important part of SWAPO's operation in the 1970's, particularly after the collapse of the Portugese empire in neighbouring Angola. South African forces have increased in response, to perhaps 100,000 men today, and their tactics of terror are detailed in these books. More recently the Christian Council

of Namibia has told the Prime Minister of South Africa "We know of the killing of innocent people, of the wanton destruction of property and of beatings, detention, solitary confinement and torture of the local population." The north of the country lives under nightly curfew, in a war zone.

The 1970's were equally critically a decade when widespread organised national opposition reasserted itself. In 1971/72 an extraordinary general strike of contract workers against the very existence of the contract labour system was maintained for two months, linking the urban areas of the south with rural labour reserves from which the workers were recruited. In 1973 98% of the electorate in Ovamboland responded to a SWAPO call to boycott elections for the bantustan Council. 1976/7 students boycotted classes and examinations. When SWAPO public meetings were permitted, huge crowds turned out. The depth of support for SWAPO has been conceded several times by the South African authorities themselves, estimating it would win over half the votes in a free election.

SWAPO's organisational base among students, workers, peasants, women and its relation of solidarity with Namibia's churches is national, and in depth, despite two decades of South African efforts to stifle its growth. General Geldenhuys admitted this when he warned that to term PLAN terrorists was to misunderstand fatally, they were guerillas with a broad civilian support base, and with clear objectives to which military action was an end, not isolated militants for whom violence was an end in itself.

Similarly SWAPO has built up a substantial civil government capacity in three senses. First, it provides basic services and a democratic community structure for over 50,000 refugees in Angola and Zambia

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and - less completely - for Namibians in semi-liberated areas where South African civil rule has vanished and troops venture rarely. Second, it has developed a large scale education programme from creche to postgraduate to build up the cadres for an independent Namibia. At upper secondary and tertiary level this external programme substantially exceeds the scale of training provided by the South African occupation regime. Finally, SWAPO is building up data and analysis leading to a dialogue on transitional and independence planning over a wide range of social and economic strategies, policies, institutions and projects. In March 1981 the Windhoek Observer sharply contrasted what it saw as the vitality, creativeness and vision of SWAPO's educational work and forward planning with the stale, intellectual bankrupt, self-serving palliatives and bribes of the DTA administration.

Meanwhile the diplomatic activity of SWAPO outside Namibia has been directed to securing international support for its struggle for liberation, attempting to persuade the United Nations to implement its decision to revoke South Africa's mandate, and securing resources to carry on its civilian services for refugees and in semi-liberated zones, as well as training personpower and carrying out research toward post-independence development.

The United Nations

In 1966 the General Assembly of the United Nations formally revoked South Africa's mandate to govern Namibia (which stemmed from the reallocation of German colonies after World War One^{*}), a decision

* The Mandate was granted to the British Crown to be exercised on its behalf by the then Union of South Africa. Arguably it was voided by South Africa's leaving the Commonwealth in 1961. Both SWAPO and the Commonwealth clearly view Namibia as a Commonwealth territory illegally taken out by South Africa, and to become a full member on independence.

eventually confirmed by a nearly unanimous International Court of Justice in 1971. "State members of the United Nations are under obligation to recognise the illegality of South Africa's presence in Namibia," the Court declared. Formal responsibility was passed to a UN Council for Namibia, which has issued a number of Decrees, the first banning exports of Namibian natural resources without the Council's authorisation.

However, this Decree remains a dead letter and South Africa in control while the key Western countries refuse to implement sanctions or other measures to compel a withdrawal. Instead, five Western members formed a Contact Group, (widely termed 'The Gang of Five') to negotiate a transition to independence, and in 1978 their outline proposals for an election under United Nations supervision followed by independence were approved by the United Nations Security Council in Resolution 435. The implementation of Resolution 435 became a central part of SWAPO policy. Since then negotiations have continued over the mechanics of implementation. Namibia in the 1980's details their course up to the end of 1981. Stripped of the breathless meeting watching by the international press, it is a sorry tale. There have been cycles consisting almost entirely of South African objections coinciding with heavy military attacks into Angola, followed by SWAPO concessions met with further South African objections. But Resolution 435 does still remain intact, as a potentially viable and internationally acceptable way forward. In the meanwhile, the United Nations has established with SWAPO a major Nationhood Programme to train Namibians, and to build up a data and analytical base for independence.

South Africa

South Africa's post 1945 course towards the incorporation of Namibia as a fifth Province was reversed in the mid 1970's by rising international hostility mobilised by SWAPO, and extending even to the Republic's western friends, and by Portugal's collapse in seeking to prevent the liberation of Angola and Mozambique. A parallel short-term response was intensified military control. For the longer term, by 1977 South Africa was proposing, at the 'Turnhalle Conference' a neo-colonial solution - indeed a "Frankenstein monster" as Namibia in the 1980's puts it: eleven ethnic governments (with "tribal" not territorial definition of coverage) under a multi-ethnic central government and solid de facto white control. The books reviewed here are all agreed that this is not in practice a viable solution - the level of popular opposition and the minute size of any black middle class that might benefit from collaboration mean that South African troops would have to remain. The 1982 split in South Africa's protégée, the DTA, confirms their view, as does the remarkably unimpressive performance put up by the puppet members of the South African delegation at the 1981 Geneva Pre-Implementation Talks.

South Africa is unlikely to give up. It has had a triple strategy - building a neocolonial state apparatus of departments, police and armed forces; engaging in negotiations with the UN so that "an image has been sustained of something really taking place or talks reaching a real breakthrough" (NLC) - which, if nothing else, buys time; seeking to withdraw at a time and on terms entailing cost with the greatest possible remaining benefits even if this does mean accepting a genuinely national government. There are reasons why South Africa might in the end acquiesce in a genuine election -

Namibia is not strategically essential, the cost of the war now exceeds receipts from Namibia, and white soldiers being killed unsettles the volk back home. But domestic political concerns pull in the other direction: the psychological impact withdrawal would have - on both the black and white communities - in South Africa itself; P.W. Botha's weakness in respect to the two major Afrikaaner parties to his right following the recent split in the Nationalist Party; the uses of an external hot war to underline the need for volk solidarity and a "total national security state" strategy" as well as for training troops and police in combatting guerillas and political mobilisation, not to speak of the advantages of a military training ground. In practice there is no need yet for South Africa to stop playing for time, for its power of military repression is enormous and, as To Be Born a Nation warns, the liberation struggle advances "slowly, grimly, with great sacrifice." Only outside pressure can accelerate the process.

The Western Contact Group

The interest of the Contact Group ('Gang of Five') of USA, UK, France, Federal Republic of Germany and Canada is a country so thinly populated as Namibia is at first sight surprising. There are some - such as Senator Jesse Helms and the US Congress Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism - who argue that Western interests are best served by standing by South Africa as a bastion against the spread of communism in Africa, as 'represented' in Namibia by SWAPO. However, the alternative view associated with US Under-Secretary of State for Africa Chester Crocker and which prevails at present, is that the voice of trading partners in Africa cannot be ignored, that communism is better fought by establishing good relations with both South Africa and friendly African states -

and that this is not possible unless the West is seen to be making efforts to remove the last colonial sore on the continent.

The method chosen, however, (or perhaps, therefore) is immensely time-consuming. A Contact Group mission tours African capitals to consult- a formal proposal is then drawn up by the Contact Group and presented to both sides; reactions are awaited; a revised proposal is presented. Between each stage weeks elapse. It can degenerate into "diplomacy by wheeze" - in mid-December 1981 a ludicrously cumbersome and confusing dual proportional/constituency system of voting was introduced as a revised proposal, which would clearly meet objections from parties committed to one man, one vote. Once South Africa accepted it, the Contact Group pressed SWAPO to concur - alteration was first deemed impossible without allowing South Africa to reopen many other issues, and then made half-way only. As a result, April 1982 was reached with no progress.

Amazingly Chester Crocker asserted that SWAPO and the Front Line States (who stand ready to accept either a national proportional list system or - subject to an impartial census - a constituency one) were obstructing a settlement. Both SWAPO and the FLS sadly pointed out that Resolution 345 itself was a compromise means to end an illegal occupation, that since then SWAPO and the FLS have accepted a large number of amendments to "reassure" South Africa, while South Africa has yielded on none of the terms of 345 or subsequent proposals less than optimal for SWAPO and the FLS, and that it would be more convincing if the Contact Group were to pressure South Africa than its victims.

However, such pressure would now have cracks in the South African ruling elite on which to press. The business community wants the war in Namibia ended - it believes it can do business even with a nationalist government, and sees high military costs and insecurity as worsening its prospects in Namibia, at home and in other independent African states. The military high command is shifting to the view that the Namibian war cannot be won, and poses risks of unhandleable escalation and/or diversion of forces needed at home. The Afrikaaner intellectual, professional, theological and business elite is splitting - witness the Progressive Federal Party's capture of Randfontein (an upper income, high education Afrikaaner influential residential suburb) in 1982, and the boer students at Potchefstroom University who shouted Prime Minister Botha down in 1981 with left challenges. There is a real debate on what to do about Namibia, even within the Afrikaaner volk, and how it is resolved will largely determine when and if South agrees to internationally supervised transition to constitution writing, and with what conditions. Only pressure, not concessions on "entrenched clauses" (which the Afrikaaner leaders do not believe in, having carefully ripped them out of their own Constitution), still less complicity in time-wasting 'technical' objections and requests for 'clarification', can have a positive impact on that dialogue's outcome. Even the most reasonable and patient of FLS leaders are losing both patience and faith in the Gang of Five's goodsense or goodwill. A recent speech warned against making no choice between white oppressor and black victim, occupation and liberation, terrorism and self-defence, good and evil. It clearly paraphrased and rejected Crocker's 1981 Honolulu speech on even-handedness and impartiality, echoing Dante's condemnation of those who in a time of moral crisis refuse to take the great decision between good and evil.

To Namibians, "killing time" in negotiations means killing people, as the various church statements in Namibia in the 1980's illustrate. It also erodes the chances for a positive transition when the time comes. At a psychological level, a military occupation and a war breed bitterness, callousness and division. At a practical level, the further the South Africans proceed with the construction of an artificial neo-colonial state, the more difficult it will be to construct a state serving the people after independence: the new "South West Africa Defence Force" and Police will have to be integrated or disbanded; the small but significant number of Namibians enriched (by corruption or otherwise) in the new ethnic authorities stimulate both contempt of administration and unrealistic expectations of wealth. Meanwhile the economy moves deeper into crisis as drought, present insecurity, future uncertainty, ecologically unsound production patterns, global recession and South African depression perpetuate the collapse of fishing, deepen the fissures in the crumbling ranching sector, erode the mineral core of production and add to the backlog of required infrastructure and services not provided.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THEFT

"By appointment to the playboys and power merchants of the world"

Diamond jewelry, high fashion karakul coats, lobster tails, uranium oxide for nuclear power plants - the main products of South African occupied Namibia. Or rather, for this is a colony 'par excellence', the raw materials come from Namibia; the jewelry, coats and power station fuel rods are made up outside. If there ever was a poor country with an economy, "by appointment to the playboys of the world", this is it. With the addition of uranium (and atomic power is basically another item for the rich) they account for three quarters of exports and two thirds of production of goods excluding services. The contrast with the needs and consumption of Namibians themselves could hardly be more stark. Even in the case of the two major products - meat and fish - directly relevant to Namibian mass needs the same bitter irony pervades. So export centered is production that Namibia imports tinned meat (and even Irish meat to run its tinning plant), milk and both tinned and fresh fish. It is just one indicator of Namibia's position as an extreme colonial economy, indeed a virtual caricature of the pure model for such an economy.

How it was created

The early German campaigns were carried out primarily in pursuit of land for settlers - so effectively that today some 70% of the usable land is in the hands of white ranches and farms. The Germans were frank about what they were doing:

"The decision to colonise in Southern Africa means nothing else than that the native tribes must withdraw from the lands on which they have pastured their cattle and so let the white man pasture his cattle on these self-same lands. If the moral rights of this standpoint are questioned, the answer is that for people of the cultural standard of the South African natives, the loss of their free natural barbarism and the development of a class of workers in the service of an dependent on whites is above all a law of survival of the highest order." (To Be Born a Nation, page 17.)

With the available labour force in the centre and south of the country decimated by war, labourers were sought from the more established and densely populated Ovambo areas to the north. Previous studies by Richard Moorsom and Gervase Clarence Smith* have shown how the structure of Ovambo society and production was undermined by the availability of mass-produced goods and weapons from the capitalist countries, and their demand for ivory, slaves and, in the end, wage labour. With land stolen, population rising and independent, "subsistence" production in decline, the north came to depend on male workers leaving on term contracts for employment in the south. Women were forced to stay behind, and the resulting long hours of farm and domestic work, strain and lack of opportunities they suffer are perhaps too briefly examined in these works (pages 98-100 of To Be Born a Nation being the clearest although R. Voipio's chapter in Namibia: The Last Colony examines contract labour's oppression of women and pp. 202, 210 contain liberation-oriented suggestions). Government spending has been minimal - between 1928 and 1938 for example only 1.1 million rand was spent on all services for

* "Underdevelopment and Class Formation in Ovamboland 1845-1915" Journal of African History, 16, 3, 1975.

the about 260,000 African population. The 'reserves' now a 'residual sector', in the words of Namibia: The Last Colony - with 60% of all households fully or partly engaged in subsistence agriculture which generates only 2% of Namibia's GDP. The low wages formed by the need for jobs and the transfer of household subsistence cost to the 'reserves' were essential to the white ranches (whose profitability was marginal even with state subsidy), and to the initial development of the mines.

The European discovery of diamonds in 1908 (and rediscovery* of marketable copper in 1906) summoned the first real inflow of large scale capital. The 1915 conquest of Namibia also provided South Africa with a new area to settle destitute Afrikaaner farmers being thrown off the land in South Africa by the crisis in small farm agriculture. Nevertheless, it was not until after World War Two that export production boomed, with the re-equipment and expansion of mines, the establishment of fishing and canning industry, and expansion of karakul farming.

The control of labour was formalised and intensified by the application of the full panoply of apartheid law to Namibia. Duncan Innes' NLC chapter links the whole process with the development of capitalism in South Africa itself.

* A pre-colonial industry mining and smelting copper to produce tools involving specialisation and long distance trade was destroyed when the German "Red Line" cut off the Ovambo smiths and traders from the Otavi area mines.

The colony was fully developed as a source of surplus and foreign exchange, and as a market for South African manufactures (for competitors are kept out behind high tariffs, and local manufacture is weak and geared to servicing export industries).

It is important for understanding of current political developments to recognise that, in the words of To Be Born a Nation "the class of exploiters presents extreme contrasts". On the one hand, the commercial ranching sector includes a substantial proportion of inefficient farms. All depend on continued state support and continued low wages without which they would operate at a loss. One fraction of their owners forms the backbone of the extreme right wing HNP. Many have been leaving the country, selling out farms to the new "ethnic authorities" and the small group of black councillors and officials who have been provided with money by South Africa - so much so that land prices in some areas are reported to have almost doubled during 1981, despite a devastating drought. Another largely German fraction appears to view life under an African government differently and are seeking to find means to accommodating.

On the other hand, the overwhelming source of surplus has been the highly capitalised mining industry - with a net operating surplus up from R97 million in 1975 to R455 million in 1979, whilst the wage bill only doubled to R106 million (Namibia in the 1980s). This sector of mining (though

not necessarily the small mines) no longer depends on the low wage labour system - where once armies of men with shovels sifted diamondiferous gravels, huge machines now excavate. The wage bill is a small proportion of total mine costs, and during the 1970s mine wages have indeed risen sharply. While only Consolidated Diamond Mines now pays the so called "efficiency wage" (reasonable, fairly austere household consumption), the other two main groups (Rossing and Tsumeb) could readily afford to do so as demonstrated in To Be Born A Nation.

Correspondingly, the huge transnational mining corporations do not depend on continued South African rule - they are to be seen supporting independence preferably under the private enterprise DTA, or even in the case of the diamond-mining company CDM attempting to remain neutral and allowing SWAPO to organise among the workforce - as SWAPO's To Be Born A Nation notes.

By 1982 mining was in considerable disarray. Political uncertainty suppresses new investment - "In particular, it is thought that Anglo American does not wish to invest in a new mining development prior to independence" as the (London) Mining Annual Review noted baldly. This is a readily understandable concern - major mines take five years to bring on stream and at least five more to recover capital costs. And SWAPO has made clear its views illegal post 1967 mines quite differently from previously established operations. This is compounded by a severe

slump in demand due to international recession, with several mines on a care-and-maintenance basis or closed, and diamond production cut back by virtually 50% between 1978 and 1982 (probably a blessing for Namibia in conserving reserves but a present severe blow to state revenue).

The Dimensions of Theft

These books provide many measures of the impact on Namibians of the colonial suction-pump to which they are subjected. Perhaps the most telling is Namibia: The Last Colony's comparison with Tanzania: though Namibia's total per capita production is at least 6 times that of Tanzania, Africans in Namibia probably have a lower level of personal consumption and certainly a lower level of public services than do Tanzanians.

Examination of the breakdown of GDP is devastating. From Südwest Afrika to Namibia's most recent figures show 50% going to company profits and another 10% to taxes on these profits. After whites have taken their salaries and other income, only 12% is left to black Namibians. Lest it be thought this is an inevitable consequence of having a predominant, diamond-led, mineral sector, the roughly comparable figures for Botswana are 42% going to operating surplus (profits and taxes thereon), and 38% in wages and salaries to Botswana citizens. The apparent ratio between European and black per capita incomes is 23:1, compared with perhaps 8:1 in Botswana or Zambia and 15:1 even in South Africa itself.

The outward orientation of the economy is equally extreme. Two-thirds of GDP (90% of physical goods) are exported, largely unprocessed. Correspondingly, most Namibian consumption, including half the grain requirements, are met by imports. Ninety per cent of directly productive investment is foreign owned. And, at the bottom line, over a third of GDP leaves the country annually, as the profits of the colonizers. (33% in 1979, compared with 27% in Botswana and under 5% in Zambia.)

The extraction of Namibia's physical resources has been plain theft in international law since the revocation of the South African mandate. The government of the United States (though not Britain) has recognised as much in informing its companies that it would not defend them against actions by the government of an independent Namibia. The indications are that mineral reserves are adequate for long term production, but inevitably the richest and most profitably extracted deposits tend to have been worked already: the companies have "plucked the eyes of the land" (in the memorable phrase used to describe the settlement of the first Boer farmers around present day Lesotho) while not carrying out the proving and development of new reserves necessary to sustain steady future production levels.

The most serious plunder was wreaked on fish stocks. At its height, \$120 million was earned a year and eight

processing plants were in operation at Walvis Bay plus two in Luderitz. Scientific reports on overfishing were ignored; by 1980 the catch was only a seventh of its 1968 peak and only two factories remained in operation. Several companies literally packed their machinery and left for Chile where new opportunities beckoned.

A serious problem for future development is the extraordinarily low educational provision, and the lack of experienced skilled Namibians. Skilled jobs have been reserved for whites. Despite a burst of training activity by the large mines (not the state) since the late 1970s, this remains the dominant de facto position - in 1977 93% of managerial and professional posts (except primary school teachers and nurses). Up to 1977 only 5,000 Africans in the whole country had completed secondary school (compared, as Namibia in the 1980s and from Südwest Afrika to Namibia point out, with over 3,000 refugees enrolled by SWAPO in secondary education abroad in 1981), and there is no university while students sent abroad (largely to "Bantu Universities") by the occupation regime and TNCs are far fewer than SWAPO sponsored tertiary level students.

The Human Effects of Theft

The lives of many black Namibians are organised by the contract labour system - 110,000 workers left their families to migrant to work; another 50-75,000 domestic workers and perhaps 25,000 seasonal farm and fishery employees are

also paid far below minimum family subsistence levels. The effects on their lives are detailed in quotations and the results of questionnaire. A sombre, poignant, 1971/72 missionary booklet addressed to white employers "Contract Work through Ovambo Eyes" is reprinted in Namibia: The Last Colony; To Be Born A Nation's presentation (including citations of worker manifestos) is far angrier in tone but the message is the same. Poverty at home forces men to migrate and women to desperately hard work; man and wife rarely see each other, and human relationships are difficult and strained. For the migrant, working and living conditions are hard and brutal on farms and until recently in most urban and mining jobs as well. A British journalist's 1973 description of the contract workers' compound outside Windhoek is quoted by To Be Born a Nation (p.89):

"5,000 Ovambos are being housed in circumstances that would disgrace a 19th century prison. A visitor can only be appalled by the compounds' unrelieved bleakness - the barbed wire fences; the food being prepared with spades and pitch forks; above all, the over powering stench of urine which hangs over the compound."

On the isolated farms, housing is worse (indeed often non-existent despite Namibia's blazing summers and cold winter nights) and arbitrary violence from the farmer a common experience.

Agriculture in the black 'reserves' is unrewarding and

precarious*. Crop yields are extremely low even in good years as is carrying capacity for animals. Drought can be devastating - by the end of 1981 drought had reduced cattle numbers by three quarters in the Kaokoveld and four fifths in Damaraland, compared with a quarter in the affected white areas, most of which quarter had been sold for slaughter at good prices rather than died.

The experience of colonialism has been divisive and debilitating; but it is clear from the statements of individuals, churches and parties that it has also stimulated a clear realisation of exploitation, and a determination to change. Even the one serious political economic analysis in favour of a neo-colonial solution** admits the history of exploitation and the need to reduce oppression, inequality and segregation if the productive heart of the colonial economy is to be

* For example, the Herero people have had the 'reserve' pushed north and east into the Kalahari desert fringe until now it is basically the Omeheke desert. That is exactly where von Trotha deliberately drove thousands of Herero to die of lack of water.

**W.H. Thomas, Economic Development in Namibia: Towards Acceptable Development Strategies for Independent Namibia Kaiser Grönewald, Munich 1978. (Acceptability to Namibian workers and peasants does not, it seems, rank high in Thomas's priorities or else he totally fails to grasp their perception of present and past reality.)

preserved. German Development Institute works,* while much more cautious in proposals than the present volumes, fully confirm their analysis of Namibia's economic past and present as one of gross exploitation, massive inequality, denial of basic human needs and unnecessary, damaging subordination to South African and foreign company interests.

THE COURSE OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

Breaking Contract

Contract in Namibia does not mean a business transaction. It is the legally authenticated slave labour/peasant subjugation system described above and in coldly biting political economic analysis (Namibia: The Last Colony - Kiljunen and Green, From Sudwestafrika To Namibia), in poignant humanitarian appeal (Namibia: The Last Colony - Voipio) and in controlled anger (To Be Born A Nation, esp. pp.59-85) in the recent volumes. Breaking contract, therefore, does not mean going back on ones word - it means human, social, economic and national liberation.

Contract built the political economy of theft, the socio-political system of repression and the politics of authoritarian exclusions which are occupied Namibia. It will also destroy them.

This is not simply a matter of resentment at exploitation or anger at maltreatment. The nature of contract has shaped the consciousness and key themes of the Namibian Liberation Movement.

* Notably W.S. Barthold, Namibia's Economic Potential and Existing Economic Ties with the Republic of South Africa, 1977 and GDI, Multi-Sectoral Study on Namibia, 1978.

By forcing blacks to work as members of production teams it has given experience in social organisation of labour far wider than household production to most Namibians including most peasant families.

By forcing members of peasant households to go on contract to survive - and even more by sending the 1971 strikers back to the rural areas - it has created an organic peasant/worker unity.

By bringing Namibians from all parts of the country into contact it has created the national vision and communication system 'reserves' and 'bantustans' were meant to prevent.

By isolating workers in prison like compounds it has (for over a decade) created no go areas in which the Liberation Movement has space and time to organize and educate. As a perceptive CDM executive put it, no better way of assisting SWAPO in recruiting could easily be imagined.

By forcing women to act as heads of households and to go into wage work it has created both an experience of deprivation and of self organisation which has been key to the very prominent role women play in SWAPO and the highly conscious work of these women to overcome their subordination.

By its very pervasiveness, contract has forced a broadening and deepening of the political economic and social consciousness of Namibians and a realisation that minor reforms or attacks on specific aspects of the system would lead nowhere - national liberation had to be total. That perception has been at the root of the dismal failure of South African efforts to buy a following

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for the DTA or to forge a "third force" of "moderate" regional, ethnic and personality parties.

Toward "One Namibia, One Nation"

Namibia had been described in the South African press (quoted in From Südwesafrika to Namibia p. 26) as:

" a country in waiting - waiting for SWAPO ... One of the most consistent trends I found in speaking to a wide range of Namibians representing all shades of the motley political and economic spectrum was an acceptance - sometimes eagerly expectant, sometimes resigned and fearful - that a SWAPO government is on the way."

What is SWAPO? What is it likely to do? To these questions there can be few definitive answers. SWAPO is a broad front, national liberation movement which has not yet achieved power nor had to grapple with the day to day problems of running a newly independent state. Yet some points are fairly clear.

To Be Born a Nation

SWAPO is national not tribal (a theme which comes through particularly strongly because it is more often implicit than explicit). The title of its volume comes from a Mozambican liberation slogan "to die a tribe and be born a nation" used to galvanize national unity. SWAPO's name for its country is Nama - "the shield", referring to the Namib desert which so long defended the land against invaders. The date (August 26) on which it launched military action is the anniversary of the death of Samuel Maherero, the leader of the Herero war against the Germans. Contrary to assertions that 'SWAPO is Ovambo' its leaders and members came from all communities (even in a handful of cases the European) and

major Nama and Herero political groups dissolved to join SWAPO in 1976.*

The First Day Of A Longer Journey

SWAPO is quite clear in its own mind that independence is a vital first step not a day or arrival - that black faces in political and decorative managerial posts mean less than nothing (Smith produced that and Mudge is trying) and black faces in all key posts with no other changes in the economy would replicate internal repression and continue external exploitation:

" But the first day of political independence cannot be the first day free from imperialist domination. That is a daydream. Namibians are under no illusions that the occupation regime will prove gracious in defeat. ... Beyond the immediate aftermath of independence, the people's government will face a formidable task of national reconstruction and social reconstruction ... without [adequate] skilled manpower and technical resources ... management, marketing, technical expertise and know-how on big local operations ... international sources of finance and credit."

(To Be Born A Nation, pp.295-6)

The dialogue and data collection/analysis toward defining parameters, priorities, sequences and alternatives has begun - most evidently, but by no means only, in the United Nations Institute for Namibia seminars⁺ associated with the volumes in their Namibia Studies Series.

*The one legitimate black party other than SWAPO - SWANU - is basically Herero in fact if not in name. It is a ghost of its former self, little more than a talking shop of isolated students and intellectuals well aware it has no broad base or programme but still unwilling to accept that they have, as SWANU, "missed the bus" and dissolve into SWAPO.

⁺The most recent in April 1982 was on economic alternatives; the first in 1977 on person-power development. Others held include national language, constitutional choices, agriculture and education and others scheduled for 1982-83 include commerce and mining.

SWAPO has clearly chosen to concentrate on: a) building personnel and data bases for use at independence and b) developing basic services for refugees and residents of semi-liberated areas (which does give experience and tests on what may be possible later in rural Namibia as a whole). It would, after all, be rather foolish to write a plan now - before adequate, up to date information is to hand, before independence, before full consultation with Namibians at home and so early as to tell opponents what strategy and moves they had to plan to thwart.

Toward Health With The People

In some respects the most completely elaborated policy and praxis is for health. The policy statement (SWAPO Political Programme, 1976 reprinted p. 96 To Be Born A Nation) states:

- " ... Shall strive for preventitive as well as curative medicine for all citizens:
- a. comprehensive, free medical services ...
 - b. hospitals and clinics in every district ...
 - c. nurseries and clinics in every community for working people and their families;
 - d. health education centres for preventitive medicine and family planning;
 - e. institutions for the training of medical and para-medical personnel;
 - f. rehabilitation centres for disabled and infirm persons;
 - g. an International Red Cross Society. "

Here one can test words and actions - and the two square almost exactly. In Zambia and Angola SWAPO has acted on each of these points. Its medical service (doctors, paramedicals, nurses, aides, nursery personnel, administrative assistants) functions. It regularly places new entrants and experienced personnel in a variety of paramedical and medical courses. Namibian doctors

head the service. SWAPO (under the name of the UN Council for Namibia) is an active WHO member. On active research programme - including collecting data to estimate health parameters in Namibia* - is being given priority as a basis for improving present services and laying the groundwork for their transferral on a national basis to Namibia.

The Political Economy of SWAPO

SWAPO is a socialist party and seeks a transition to socialism in Namibia:

" Economic reconstruction in a free, democratic and united Namibia will have, as its motive force the establishment of a classless society. Thus social justice and progress for all is the governing idea behind every SWAPO policy decision.

- abolition of all forms of exploitation
- major means of production and exchange of the country are [in the] ownership of the people
- an integrated national economy
- land to the tiller
- agriculturally self sufficient
- a spirit of self reliance "

(SWAPO Political Programme, reprinted p. 196
Namibia: The Last Colony)

Clearly what these statements mean depends most on proxis after independence, not just on words now. But the details stressed are interesting⁺:

- a. free trade unions;
- b. basic services;
- c. respect for honestly acquired private property;

*Probably unknown even to RSA and certainly unpublished - see cited GDI work.

+For a fuller exposition see pp.197-204 Namibia The Last Colony.

- d. joint ventures, private sector (including for at least a time some present ranchers), co-operatives;
- e. gradual changes on a negotiated basis if possible (even in respect to economic relations.

These suggest a set of priorities and sequences least dissimilar from Tanzania since 1967 (and Tanzania is after all negotiating a joint venture for the largest manufacturing plant in independent sub-saharan Africa as well as operating basically public sector import/export, wholesaling, finance and - less uniformly - manufacturing and plantation agriculture). This of course does assume the foreign firms will cooperate.

Certainly To Be Born A Nation's examples (pp.50-51) of change in the mining sector stress a tax share in profit similar to Botswana's levels (35% in Namibia now, 66-70% in Botswana in respect to diamonds). Their secondary theme is joint ventures. Similarly in his television interview at the 1981 Geneva Conference, SWAPO President Sam Nujoma was quite specific that while revised arrangements were essential Namibia would accept/need foreign company presence in several sectors for many years.

Breaking contract does require decent wages, working conditions and labour relations now. It also requires a plausible Namibian share - via taxes and joint ventures as well as land redistribution - in surpluses. Similarly public utilities (now RSA owned) are seen as necessarily to be nationalized and a firm national economic policy central frame created. But much of this is policy in states as cautious as Botswana or Zambia and all of it is practice in states such as Algeria and Tanzania.

Human Rights and Participation

SWAPO does not assume that there cannot be Namibians of European ancestry. It does not assume that to the extent their higher incomes stem from more education, more experience or small business capital that they would be reduced to a national average. It does reject a system in which a white secondary school librarian receives \$20,000 plus fringe benefits and a skilled black mineworker perhaps \$3,000.

The SWAPO constitutional discussion paper (reproduced pp.102-3 To Be Born A Nation) is very firm on the need for a Bill of Rights, anti-discrimination machinery (and ratification of the relevant UN Convention) and ratification of the two UN Covenants on Human Rights. That is a very different stance indeed from RSA practice at home or (directly and through DTA) in Namibia.

SWAPO's own operational style is as informative as its written proposals. It is collegiate and participatory - some friendly observers think almost to the extent (at times) of hindering prompt decision taking. A less dirigiste Party/civil government is not to be found in Africa and very few anywhere. To SWAPO the meaning of "democratic centralism" is that full and free discussion must precede decisions and that - if situations change - they can be reopened in Party circles, but that once taken they must be carried out and, in public debate, supported by Party members.*

Evidently there are limitations on consultation and democracy during a war. But who caused a war? The 13 North American Colonies

*This is a perfectly reasonable reading of what Lenin wrote. If Kruschev, Tito and Enrico Berlinguer are to be believed it is not necessarily very close to actual practice in most European industrialized socialist economies.

and the French sans culottes, objectively, had far fewer reasons to revolt than the people of Namibia. SWAPO has remained clear that "it is always politics which leads the gun" and "we do not beautify war as a purpose or regard it as a form of sport. We see war for what it is - an extension of politics by other means." (pp.168 and 262, To Be Born A Nation).

SWAPO - Finance, Programme, Contacts

SWAPO is consistently accused of being Moscow-oriented or pup-peteered. Its statements lend little evidence to such a view; still less does the depth of church support in one of the world's most Christian countries. Nor does its list of fifteen diplomatic missions - eight in Africa (plus the provisional headquarters in Angola), two in Scandinavia, the United Nations, the UK, Yugoslavia, Cuba and the German Democratic Republic. While SWAPO has deliberately avoided making firm statements about organisations, an independent Namibia would join beyond the Organisation of African Unity, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference and the UN, plus its specialised agencies; its pattern of relations strongly implies early accession to the Commonwealth and (subject, one might suppose, to a satisfactory beef quota) to the ACP.

South Africa's own denunciation of SWAPO foreign finances and programme is self-condemning. It asserts SWAPO receives \$100 million a year in support of PLAN - 90% supposedly supplied by Warsaw Pact states, Cuba, China and Yugoslavia. It implies that the civilian programme receives comparable assistance - 70% from western and non-aligned states. The surprising point is not the source of military assistance - where else can SWAPO turn, and how large does it look against semi-official South African estimates of

\$1,000 million Namibian war expenditure (plus \$200 million to bribe ranchers and 'bantustan' employees)? Rather, it is that on South Africa's own admission, SWAPO's civil government expenditure is of an equal order of magnitude and financed from a very broad range of sources - notably Scandinavian ones.

Which Side Are You On?

Namibia's condition is not one which should leave observers neutral. For Namibians there is no option of neutrality. As the main southern leaders (led by Hendrik Witbooi, grandson of the Nama national resistance hero) declared when they joined SWAPO in 1976 (quoted pp 234-6, To Be Born a Nation):

" Now there are only two platforms left: the national movement, SWAPO, or Turnhalle. We asked ourselves: Who repressed, persecuted, humiliated, liquidated and betrayed us; was it SWAPO or the Boers and their allies?"

Since 1976 the buying of bantustan staff and homeguards and the compulsory conscription of blacks to fight against the liberation movement have made the choice even starker. To paraphrase the words of a USA mineworkers organising song:

Which side are you on boys? Which side are you on?
They say in Namibia, boys, there are no neutrals there;
You either are a SWAPO man or a pawn of the RSA.

For outsiders, there may be more choices - and less willingness to take a stand, even though our freedom and lives (unlike those of Namibians) can hardly be endangered by our stands. One argument has been to give South Africa time. As Prime Minister Vorster said - "give us six months and we will amaze the world." But that was 1974. For 35 years South Africa has been in open, legal violation of its obligations to the United Nations in respect to Namibia; for nearly 16 (since the revocation of the Mandate) its presence has constituted armed aggression and a threat to the peace

within the meaning of the Charter. (The dead and maimed and imprisoned thousands of Namibians and Angolans know how real that 'threat' is.)

Another is the claim that South Africa is the beleaguered defender of Western Christian Democracy, our ally in war. The present leaders of the Republic are no such thing - as Toivo ya Toivo said in the dock (quoted p.315, To Be Born a Nation):

"During the Second World War, when it became evident that both my country and yours were threatened by the dark clouds of Nazism, I risked my life to defend both of them ... But some of your countrymen ... resorted to sabotage against their own fatherland. I volunteered to face German bullets, and as a guard of military installations both in South West Africa and the Republic, was prepared to be victim of their sabotage. Today they are our masters, and are considered the heroes, and I am called the coward."

The record on democracy of South Africa needs no rehearsing, and contrasts sharply with that of SWAPO. As to Christianity, South Africa has twice blown up the main Lutheran press at Onipa as well as the Anglican St Mary's theological seminary, and deported a score of clergy, including three bishops. SWAPO's refugee camps have pastors, chaplains and lay readers and build churches with their own hands. Small wonder a Lutheran leader stated (quoted p.283, To Be Born a Nation):

"The Freedom Fighters are our children. Even people who are suffering still give them food because they know the freedom fighters are the people who come from us, who are fighting for our freedom - and we've got to help them."

or that the World Lutheran Federation at its World Assembly in Dar es Salaam stated that support for apartheid placed one in "status confessionis" (mortal sin) - a decision opposed only by the white South African and Namibian Lutheran Churches.

South Africa is vulnerable. It needs to import petroleum; it needs business partners to provide high technology (not least for weapons production); it now has to borrow over \$4,000 million a

year from banks and the IMF. Banks, coporations, governments, the IMF - these are the external arteries and pressure points of apartheid. South Africa does respond to pressure. When its attempt to obscure the involvement of serving security and military personnel in the 1981 Seychelles mercenary coup attempt was met by the warning that the USA, UK, France and Federal Germany would invoke the air piracy convention, and block services to and from RSA, the Republic retreated, despite the highly damaging revelations at the ongoing air hijacking trial. The vehemence and sustained energy of its attacks on bodies like the World Council of Churches (partially revealed in Muldergate fallout) also indicate its real fear that they may mobilise Western pressures it cannot simply reject.

For those concerned to act, the list of SWAPO missions and of support groups at the end of To Be Born a Nation gives one starting point - and their own churches, trade unions, women's groups and political parties another.

There will never be a clearer moral case for taking a stand than Namibia. True, it is "a small and far away country", but the sequel to Neville Chamberlain's use of those words to justify his sanctioning of the rape and murder of Czechoslovakia, should give pause to advocates of benign neglect or appeasement of South Africa. The more appropriate words are those of the late Angolan President, Agostino Neto:

So comes the moment
To advance resolutely
To build the world, which belongs
To all human beings.

London, England, and
Arusha, Tanzania
May 1, 1982

Author Note

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Jean de la Paix is the pen-name of a researcher and analyst on Southern African affairs with extensive research in the region, which he has followed up by several visits over the past few years.