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BREAKTHROUGH OR STALEMATE?

Concerning Negotiations for Independence in Namibia

*(Interview with Lucia Hamutenya, Secretary for
Legal Affairs, South West Africa Peoples'
Organization--SWAPO--conducted by
Anita Pfouts, for Ufahamu, on
20 March 1982 in Los Angeles.)*

- Q: Yesterday, during your talk at UCLA, you mentioned that SWAPO is fighting a liberation struggle on three fronts: political, diplomatic, and military. Can you briefly describe the situation on each front?
- A: Yes, the political struggle is intensifying. The people in the country are more and more aware of the struggle of SWAPO, what it is all about, and have joined in big masses. We have had, especially between 1980 and 81, 100,000 youngsters who came in in Namibia because the political situation there, which is also affected by the military situation, has become unbearable for young people to continue passively sort of looking on. Many of them have come and joined the struggle in exile.
- Q: Does that have to do with South Africa drafting Black people into the South African army now?
- A: That's right, that was caused by the law of conscription and draft that compelled young people of the age of 16 and above to join the racist army. They created what they call the South West Africa Territorial Force; that is creating puppet armies, or forcing the people to serve in a racist army.
- Q: Then on the diplomatic front?
- A: On the diplomatic front, the negotiations are going on but we don't know; many of the things that have been happening are not publicly known because meetings are still being held between the South African foreign minister and the Western Five nations behind the scenes. We get very little information as to what is happening, especially between South Africa and the Five. The only news we got from the papers recently is that South Africa accepted the latest revised proposals of the Five.

The revised proposal calls for a mixed system of elections, that is a combination of proportionary representation and single member constituency system. After which election a constitutional assembly would be formed and this constituent

assembly will first draw up a constitution and two-thirds of it will approve such a constitution.

The first set of proposals, before it was revised, did not provide for this new device--for this combination of systems --and it was generally understood that elections would be run according to one of the systems, singly, as is normally the case. This new feature, including other new features, were in the revised proposal; for instance, that private institutions will be allowed in the field of cultural, health, and other community centers or that private school centers would be allowed. Therefore, trying to reinforce racism and separate development, as South Africa calls it, in the constitution of an independent Namibia.

Q: Is that why SWAPO is objecting to the revised proposal and especially to the combined system of elections?

A: It is complicated, it is undiplomatic, complicated in the sense that there is a short period of time within which the elections have to be run and the Namibian people have never been to elections before. The majority of them are illiterate, the territory is large and the combined system leaves a lot of room for manipulations.

Q: What would you say about the current military situation?

A: The military situation is intensifying. I should say that the SWAPO guerillas have sort of put under their control vast areas of the territory and it is argued now that one-third of the Namibian territory is now infiltrated by SWAPO fighters. They have also lifted speed limits in vast territories, starting from the Namibian borders up to Grootfontein--what is almost the whole northern part of the country. People can speed, and this is a sign the South Africans feel more and more threatened by the fighting forces in the country. And the latest news that we got is that SWAPO has successfully attacked a major base inside the country.

On the other hand, South Africa has also, more and more, staged incursions into the neighboring African countries and it has bombed civilian refugee camps. It has destroyed civilian villages of the Angolan people, it is destroying Angolan infrastructure, or economic points and strongholds, especially in the southern part of the Angolan territory.

Q: We were talking before about elections--has a date actually been set for elections to be held in Namibia?

A: No date has been set, although these elections started five years ago now and every time there are deadlocks, deadlocks

that are mainly created by South African objections or intransigence. But now we see that the latest deadlock, or the latest obstacle--that of a combined election system--is coming from the Western Five nations.

It is not clear to anybody why they have chosen this complicated system for elections rather than following the normal tradition of taking one system. And it seems as if the Five are joining in to delay their own plan. We know that they (the South Africans) feel that it is to their own advantage to gain time and build up their puppet groups in the country, so that they can become an alternative force but evidence has shown that this is not happening. Quite the contrary, the puppet groups are breaking up into small pieces and we don't know how much time they will still need to achieve what they want.

Q: We've talked about the state of the negotiations in relation to the elections. I'd like to get a little bit more into why you think that the so-called Gang of Five, or Contact Group, is so willing, apparently, to go along with South Africa? Do there seem to be some of their own economic interests that are at stake?

A: You're quite right. Although the Contact Group has taken up this role of negotiating, or of initiating negotiations--claiming that they have a certain degree of leverage over South Africa and that they are able to pressure South Africa to accept peaceful settlement in Namibia--we see that, on the contrary, in practice they have joined South Africa. They have joined South Africa against the oppressed people of Namibia and against the frontline states, who are being victimized by South Africa because of their support for SWAPO, to force these groups into more and more submissions and concessions and illegal compromises, in order to get the best terms for South Africa and in order to turn the Namibian territory into a neo-colonial state or into a Bantustan.

Q. The vast mineral resources in Namibia, you feel, would be one of the contributing factors?

A: That's right, quite right. The five Western nations, especially Britain--Britain, France, and West Germany, along with some other countries--are involved in the exploitation of Namibian uranium; while the United States and other Western countries are involved in the exploitation of diamonds, copper, lead, vanadium, zinc, and other Namibian mineral resources. They have also invested lots of money in Namibia, and in South Africa itself, and they have, together with the South Africans, exploited the cheap labor there. All these considerations are too big an interest in Namibia for them to

be negotiating seriously for a settlement in Namibia.

- Q: So, in other words, the current negotiations, or the on-going negotiations, are really--there's no breakthrough, it's a stalemate?
- A: There's no breakthrough, there is a stalemate. The negotiations have been sort of characterized by stalemate after stalemate throughout the past five years.
- Q: There was a recent report that SWAPO had successfully attacked a South African military base in Namibia? Can you say anything about that?
- A: Yes, there were press reports and a war communique was given out by the MPLA government and SWAPO, which stated that SWAPO guerilla fighters had successfully attacked a base in Okahowa, in northern Namibia, killing one-hundred South African soldiers and capturing weapons and other military equipment from the base.
- Q: Concerning the most recent South African raid into Angola, which took place earlier this week, do you think South Africa will use SWAPO's attack on the military base as a justification for their most recent action?
- A: The South Africans have always--or they have had a pattern since the independence of Angola in 1975-76--been aggressing the independent state of Angola. They have, at times, occupied for long periods parts of the Angolan territory. Therefore this, to me, does not seem to be something new but rather part of the on-going pattern of South African aggressions into Angola. They (the South Africans) have always claimed, whenever they have attacked refugee settlement camps, that they were, in fact, fighting against soldiers in those countries.

The Western Five nations have always vetoed demands of the international community to impose sanctions, mandatory comprehensive sanctions, against South Africa which were demanded, quite rightly, in order to force South Africa to adhere to international law and not to violate the borders of the sovereign neighboring states. South Africa has argued that they think the fact that there are Cubans in Angola gives them the right to act vindicatively, or to act sort of on behalf of their friends, their allies, and so on, to intervene and violate international law against neighboring African states. We have always held that the only way that peace can come about in southern Angola, or in Namibia, or in southern Africa as a whole, is when South Africa withdraws her troops and her illegal presence from Namibia and goes beyond the Orange River borders. That is the only time that

we will be having peace and the only time the Cubans can leave Angola.

Q: Apparently the United States has gone along with this sort of Red scare idea, that the Cubans are a Soviet extension and that SWAPO is being backed by the Soviet Union. Would you care to say anything about that?

A: When the armed struggle was started, not just by SWAPO, but also by our friends, who have now gained their independence--of PRELIMO and the MPLA--all these groups appealed to the whole world at large for assistance to wage the struggle, the various respective struggles, for independence. The West did not respond positively to these demands. What they did is they assisted South Africa by giving South Africa military equipment, advisors, sending mercenaries to the South Africans and, on the other hand, condemning the liberation movements, and the independent African states for getting help, military help, from elsewhere. We maintain that, whenever the lives of people are threatened, the question of where they get help is not the most important; but what is important is their right to defend themselves.

Q: I know that there are refugee camps in Angola. Are there also camps inside of Namibia, in the SWAPO-controlled areas? And what are the conditions in these camps?

A: The only camps that SWAPO has are the camps in the neighboring African states, that is the refugee settlement camps. SWAPO is fighting a guerilla war, that is an invisible war. SWAPO fighters are in Namibia, they are all over the Namibian territory, and they are the people who forced the South Africans to lift the speed limits, to impose curfew hours, curfew laws, and to take various measures. In other words, the presence of SWAPO forces is felt within the whole Namibia territory and it has led to raids by the South African security forces and police up to Windoek, the capital, and beyond Windoek south. These raids are in the African townships and locations and other locales where they (the South Africans) suspected them (SWAPO) to be; therefore, it would be false for South Africans to argue that when they cross the Namibian borders into the neighboring countries, they are acting in pursuit of guerilla fighters when, in fact, they leave them at home. The fact that the base at Okahowa was destroyed is another evidence to show that they (SWAPO fighters) are in the country.

Q: So then, the refugee camps would be in Angola, Zambia, and the other neighboring countries. Are you getting some material aid for the camps from outside countries?

A: Yes, we have always appealed to friendly organizations--the

support groups--to friendly governments to give us assistance for the refugees, the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the centers and especially for women and children who are in those refugee settlements. We have had good response from the African countries, the members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). We have also got good response from the Scandinavian countries, to be specific, from the Netherlands, and some support groups in the Western world, that is the non-governmental organizations and support groups, solidarity organizations and individuals, and also from eastern Europe. The contribution of governments in the West has been minimal in comparison with all the people that I have mentioned before. And, in fact, we are about to learn that the United States administration decided to ease its trade relations with South Africa; therefore, embracing the racist regime openly. This fact was welcomed by Pic Botha and his racist regime. According to them, this gives them confidence and encourages them to drag on with the negotiations and to feel at ease with the Reagan administration.

Q: Yesterday afternoon at UCLA, someone was making an announcement about a combined demonstration of people working, here in this country, in support groups for the southern Africa struggle and support groups for El Salvador. Do you see a relationship between the struggle in El Salvador and the struggle in southern Africa?

A: Yes, there are a lot of similarities in the struggle in El Salvador and the struggle in Namibia. In both there are groups of oppressed people. The majority of the people are being suppressed, being killed, being detained by forces that are acting on behalf of foreign interests, especially acting on behalf--in the case of El Salvador--acting on behalf of the U.S. administration against the aspirations of the El Salvadorean people themselves. The same kind of thing is happening in Namibia. We have people who are acting on behalf of South Africa, people who are the creation of the racist regime in South Africa, people who have no popular support among the Namibian people and who want to rule the Namibian people against their own wishes.

The intervention of the United States administration in the war in El Salvador is the same thing that we are witnessing in Namibia, although there it is openly South Africa which is killing people, the people in Namibia, but aided from behind and supported by the United States. We have a lot in common and we have the same problems, and, therefore, I feel that the Namibian people can give their contribution by supporting and giving solidarity to the El Salvadorean people in the struggle. The only way we can sort of help ourselves is to intensify the struggles on the various fronts against the

enemies.

Q: What would you see that the people in the United States could do, from here, to help insure that free and independent elections will be held in Namibia?

A: People in the U.S. can do us a great deal of help if they can pressurize the administration to stop trading with the South African racists, if they can stop investing in South Africa, if they can impose or request the American government not to veto proposals/demands for sanctions at the United Nations, and if they can request the Western Five nations to give the mandate of negotiations back to the United Nations and allow the UN to implement Resolution 435, which calls for elections in Namibia without modification, without constitutional principles, and allow the Namibian people the right to determine their own future.

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On behalf of *Ufahamu*, the interviewer would like to thank Ms. Hamutenya for this revealing update on the current situation in Namibia.



Mystery of Space