

# **Namibia Strikes a Blow for Freedom**

**By Z. Nkosi**

The great strike which started in Namibia on 13th December, 1971, almost totally paralysing the economy of the country has struck a blow against South African domination of the territory from which the racist regime will never recover. With the collaboration of her imperialist friends, South Africa may for a while continue to hang on by the exertion of brute strength, but any moral pretensions she may have claimed have been completely shattered.

Addressing the United Nations Security Council in September 1971 on the World Court's advisory opinion handed down in June 1971 that South Africa's presence in Namibia was illegal and 'South Africa is under obligation to withdraw its administration from Namibia immediately and thus put an end to the occupation of the territory', the South African Foreign Minister Dr. Hilgard Muller maintained there was peace, prosperity and progress in the territory.

I state categorically that there is no threat to international peace and security as a result of conditions there. Nor will there be, unless members of this organisation artificially create one as a pretext for the realisation of ulterior motives.

On economic development, Dr. Muller said:

Here we have to deal with allegations that the inhabitants are in a state of constant economic servitude, even that they are reduced to starvation. Facts and figures give the lie to these allegations. The economic life of the territory continues to prosper – and at a gratifying rate. For this, the credit is in a large measure due to the efforts of the South African Government.

Dr. Muller said it had been alleged in the United Nations that South Africa was oppressing the peoples of South West Africa, was failing to promote their welfare and was denying them their right to self-determination.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In the political field my Government is making determined efforts to bring the peoples of South West Africa towards self-government. Ovambo and Kavango now both have their Legislative and Executive Councils functioning. This process will continue until the stage of full self-determination, based on the will of the peoples, is reached.

The South African Government is adept not only at self-deception but also at deceiving others. In June 1971 – just before the World Court judgement was announced – a group of foreign journalists was taken on a conducted tour of South West Africa, including the so-called ‘homelands’ or ‘Bantu areas’ by Mr. R.F. Botha, Nationalist M.P. for Wonderboom, and Mr. David Tethill, of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

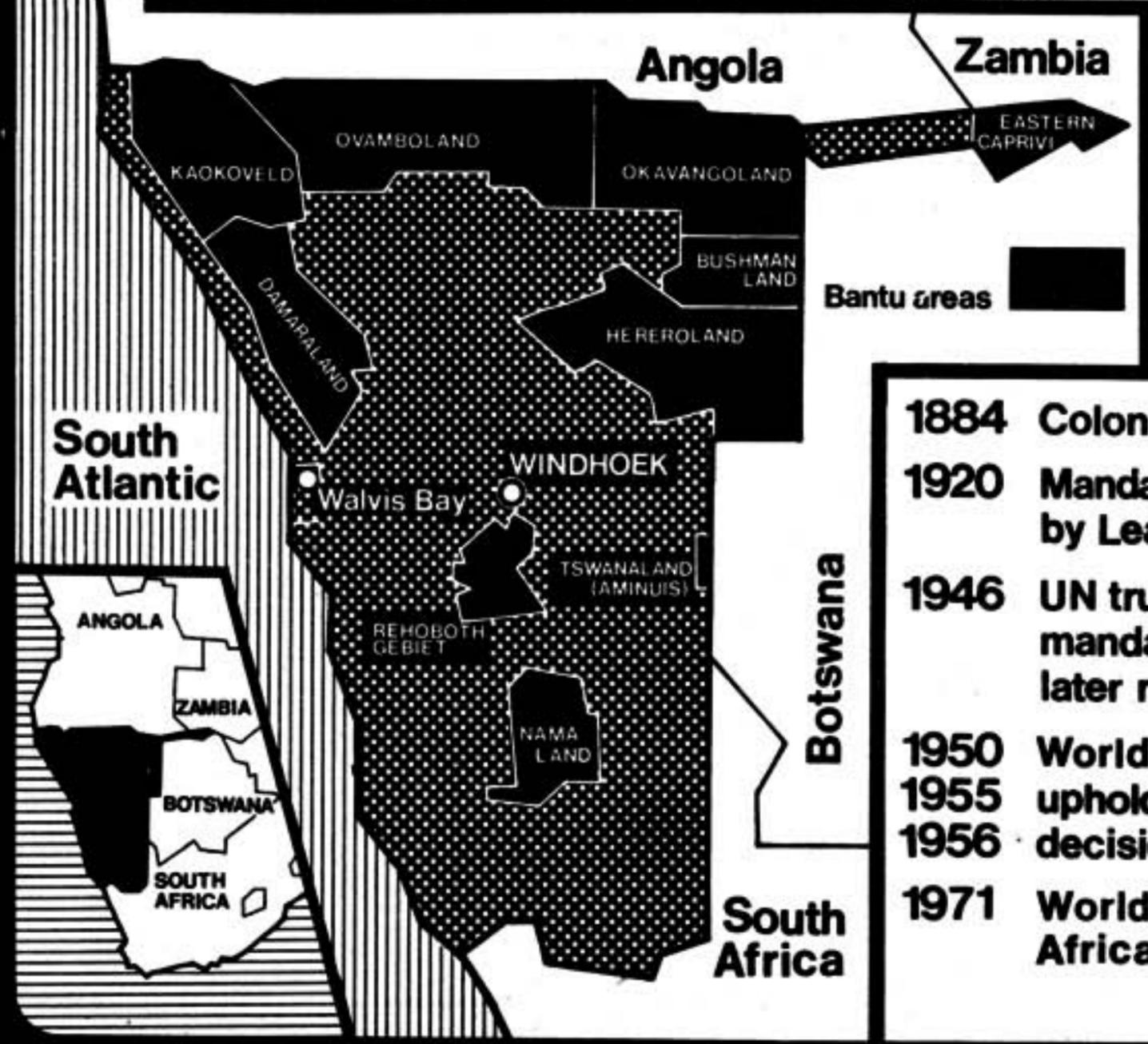
Afterwards Peter Younghusband wrote in the *Sunday Times*:

This has been a completely free and fair tour. The result has been severely damaging to the credibility of the United Nations . . . Ovamboland is a Black man’s country where there is no racial friction, very little apartheid and the Black Ovambos and White Security Police sing songs together . . . . . It is a flourishing territory of happy people . . . . .

Throughout our tour of Ovamboland – the area where most of the alleged atrocities are said to be perpetrated – I saw no evidence of oppression of the Africans. We were also given this assurance by Chief Councillor Ushona Shiimi, of the Ovamboland Executive Council. He said: ‘There is no truth in these stories of atrocities. There is no injustice against Black men in my country. We are happy under the care and protection of the South African Government’.

# NAMIBIA (South West Africa)

M42



## AREA

**318,000 sq. miles**

## POPULATION

**African 485,000**

**Mixed 29,000**

**European 96,000**

**Total 610,000**

- 1884** Colonised by Germans.
- 1920** Mandated to South Africa by League of Nations.
- 1946** UN trusteeship replaces mandate. South Africa later refused trusteeship.
- 1950** World Court
- 1955** upholds UN right of
- 1956** decision on territory.
- 1971** World Court rules South Africa illegally governing

## THE STRIKE DISPELLED THE MYTHS

The strike of the contract workers has dispelled these myths totally. A whole people has risen in protest against their exploitation and oppression. Foreign Minister Hilgard Muller has up to the time of writing taken refuge in silence. Chief Councillor Shiimi has been spared the necessity of facing his angry people by getting himself killed in a car accident on 14th November, 1971. But the adaptable Peter Younghusband wrote in the *Sunday Times*, one week after the outbreak of the strike:

The Ovambo strike has dealt a serious blow to South West Africa's industry and thrown into confusion the South African Government's policy on S.W.A. . . . What has caused most shock is the realisation that the Ovambos, around whom the Government are painstakingly building a model Bantustan, have suddenly demonstrated a sharp independence of spirit and a remarkable ability to organise themselves into a cohesive force of mass protest.

Most White South West Africans are recalling that the Ovambos – 300,000 strong and the country's largest ethnic group – are the people on whom so much reliance was placed to vote in favour of continued South African trusteeship in the plebiscite recently offered at the World Court hearing at the Hague. That offer was rejected. Thank heavens, everyone in Windhoek is now saying.

White South African and South West African politicians have been trying to argue that the whole strike is the work of foreign agitators and intimidation. It is worth recalling Peter Younghusband's report at the time (December 19th):

So far as can be ascertained, there is no political motive. Brigadier E. de W. Brandt, Divisional Commissioner of Police, exhausted after a week of 18-hour days (he sleeps in his office) told me: 'We do not yet know what is behind this. We just don't know'.

The Security Police had evidently been spending too much time singing songs instead of studying the realities of the situation. In the words of Anglican deacon Mr. David de Beer: 'The Whites don't want to listen. They are living in a Utopia here and they don't want it spoilt. They don't want to know anything that might spoil their pleasures or lighten their wallets'.

The facts show that the impoverishment and persecution of the indigenous peoples of the territory had reached the point where an explosion was inevitable.

## CONTRACT LABOUR

One aspect of the strike can be grasped immediately from a study of the position of the Ovambo people in relation to the total population, and more especially in relation to the total of contract labourers.

The latest official estimates of population available are for 1966 and are as follows:

Group	Numbers	Percentage
Ovambo	270,900	44.40
Whites	96,000	15.73
Damara	50,200	8.23
Herero	40,000	6.56
Nama	39,400	6.46
Okavango	31,500	5.18
East Caprivians	17,900	2.93
Coloured	15,400	2.52
Rehobothers	13,700	2.24
Bushmen	13,300	2.18
Tswana and others	11,300	1.85
Kaokovelders	10,500	1.72
	<hr/> 610,000	<hr/> 100.00

The involvement by ethnic group of the African male labour force in the South West African economy in 1966 is stated by the Government's 'South West Africa Survey' published in 1967 to be as shown on the table overleaf. The involvement of the Africans in the cash economy can be taken to have increased considerably since then. The country's gross domestic product in 1965 was R213.9 million. By 1969 it had risen to R368.9 million. Figures given during the recent strike by an official of the South West African Native Labour Association (SWANLA) show that the number of Ovambo recruits passing through Grootfontein on their way south had risen to 39,000 a year, coming in at the rate of more than 3,000 a month. Since contracts last between 12 and 18 months, the total of Ovambo employed in 1971 must have been much higher than the 1967 figure given in the table overleaf.

Industry	Ovambo	Nama	Herero	Damara	Other	Total
White agriculture	9,532	3,033	3,173	4,451	2,884	23,073
Mines, commerce, industry	20,651	1,516	2,652	2,612	248	27,679
Public services (excluding local authorities)	6,748	1,362	1,237	2,582	1,683	13,612
Domestic service	2,164	762	131	535	87	3,679
Shopkeeper and togwork	194	562	258	336	163	1,513
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,289</b>	<b>7,235</b>	<b>7,451</b>	<b>10,516</b>	<b>5,065</b>	<b>69,556</b>

At any rate, the figures make it plain that the economy of South West Africa depends almost wholly on the availability of Ovambo contract labour. Once that labour was withdrawn, the economy was rapidly brought to a standstill.

The question has been asked: why did only the Ovambo workers go on strike? The figures above supply most of the answer. In many industries, and particularly on the mines, the entire labour force consisted of Ovambo contract workers. But that other groups supported the strike cannot be disputed. SWANLA tried, but failed, to obtain recruits from other sections of the population. The Government made urgent approaches to especially the Kavango and Damara peoples, and their stooge authorities and chiefs issued appeals to their 'subjects' to come forward for recruitment. But there were no scabs. Chief Clemens Kapuuo, the elected leader of the Herero people, said in a press interview that only a complete scrapping of contract labour would satisfy the territory's Africans. 'There must be discussions with all groups. I think South West Africa's African people would be completely united, because they all suffer the present system.'

Although he is the elected and popular leader of his people, recognised as successor to the late Hosea Kutako, Chief Kapuuo is not recognised by the South African Government, who find him too independent for their liking. One of the most important consequences of the strike has been to expose the Government-appointed authorities

and chiefs as the agents of apartheid. Their instructions were defied by the masses. None of them were elected to office by their people. Both the Ovambo and Kavango Legislative and Executive Councils — and they are the only two groups in South West Africa to get them so far — were appointed by the Government. The strike has struck a mortal blow at the Government's attempt to foist the concept of Bantustan on the African people.

## **STARVATION WAGES**

The Government's 1967 'South West Africa Survey' says:

The degree to which the indigenous inhabitants take up wage employment is a measure of their interest in achieving higher standards of living . . . in South West Africa 60.7 per cent of all Native males, irrespective of age, were classified as economically active in 1960, as compared with 55.4 per cent for the Bantu of South Africa.

Considering the greater economic development of South Africa, the higher involvement of the Namibian Africans in wage employment is a measure not only of their greater interest but also of their greater poverty.

The recruiting of contract labour in Namibia has gone on for the last 50 years. At first recruitment was haphazard, with each employer or group of employers seeking its own labour supply and arranging its own terms. Since 1943 all recruiting has been handled by the South West African Native Labour Association, whose shareholders are the South West African Administration, the Northern Labour Organisation (one of the bodies which existed before SWANLA's formation), and Anglo-American's Consolidated Diamond Mines, each holding one share, plus an organisation called the S.W.A. Society of Farmers Employers of Contracted Natives, which holds two shares.

SWANLA first estimates the demand for labour, and then makes its recruiting arrangements. The following description of how the system works was given in evidence to a United Nations Committee by an Ovamboland resident:

If a reserve does not supply enough labour, it is looked upon as a bad reserve. A message comes from the Commissioner to the welfare officer. The welfare officer calls the headmen and reserve board members. The welfare officer reads the letter to the board members, and tells them that they want a

certain number of labourers to work on the farms or on the roads, and this number must be supplied. If that number is not supplied, the headmen and board members are scolded. Then the Ovambo is sent off with a ticket. He does not know where he is going. The name of the master and the place are written on the label, and the people at the railway station send him where he has to go. After the station master has read the label, he rings up the police station to come and fetch this 'parcel', and he is taken to the police station, from where he is fetched by the farmer or taken by the police to the farmer. Sometimes men have to walk for fifty to sixty miles. They may just be shown the road and told to go.

Every employer must pay a recruiting fee of R25 an African; the tribal head in turn gets only R1 for each recruit produced. The recruiting system is a prison-like system of forced labour from which the recruit cannot ever escape. No African may leave his reserve unless he is in possession of a contract; nor may he leave the police (White) zone unless he is in possession of a discharge certificate signed by his employer. It is a criminal offence to leave a job during the period of the contract, and the railways are under instructions to refuse to sell a ticket to any African who is not in possession of his proper documents.

SWANLA has its scale of minimum wages, which vary according to the age and experience of the worker and his state of health. An A class worker is completely fit, a B class worker less so, a C class worker is either a juvenile (under 16) or an adult with some injury or impediment. A class C juvenile, inexperienced, qualifies for R3.75 a month, a class A experienced worker returning to his previous employer gets R8.25 minimum. The 1967 Government 'Survey' estimates that wages paid in kind in the form of accommodation, food, certain items of clothing, medical attention etc. may be valued at about R10 a month. At best this still leaves the worker far below the bread line; at worst these 'extras' amount to almost nothing at all. Many farmers, for example, provide no housing at all and expect their labourers either to construct their own or to sleep under a bush. Conditions in the urban or mining compounds are on the whole indescribably bad. In the new township of Katutura near Windhoek workers complained of indescribable squalor. The *Star* described it last year as

a soulless settlement of row upon row of nasty little houses separated into tribal areas . . . The Ovambo compound, which houses 5,220 Ovambo contract

labourers, is so bad that even the armed police, whose job it is to keep order, are under orders not to enter it.

One worker during the strike last December said: I knew when I came to Windhoek that once I am in there, I am in hell.'

There have been repeated riots in Katatura against the conditions and police harassment. In June last year 800 were arrested and thousands screened after a mass police raid. In November, after police had erected a new control and checkpoint at the entrance to the compound, the inmates revolted and in one savage outburst wrecked the new buildings, broke up furniture and fittings, and ripped off the new security gates. When the police arrived, their cars were stoned. No arrests were made at the time, but later there was another army-style police raid and again nearly 300 Africans were brought before the courts.

It was against this background of tension that the strike began the following month. If conditions in Windhoek, the capital, were 'hell', they were no better elsewhere. Wages were not subject to negotiation — the worker got what was laid down in his contract and that was that. There are no trade unions and strikes are forbidden. Some employers claimed they paid more than the minimum wage. For example, the SWANLA minimum for recruited mine labour was a cash wage of R8.69 a month, but the Government 'Survey' claims the actual average in October 1966 was R17.58. It is significant, however, that the shut-down in the mining industry was complete, except at Consolidated Diamond Mines works at Oranjemund, where Anglo-American, already paying a minimum wage of R27.30 for unskilled workers, almost immediately offered a 10 per cent increase in an effort to stop the slide of workers who had begun to join the strike. The general manager of Consolidated Diamond Mines told the *Rand Daily Mail* correspondent in Windhoek at the end of December: 'I have received a deputation from the Ovambos here who made it clear to me that they are against the contract labour system and asked me to put forward their view to Government officials. I have done so.'

Newspapermen who interviewed strikers in various parts of Namibia found the average wage to be from R6 to R8 a month — about half the starting wage of recruited mineworkers in South Africa, and they are the lowest paid of all African workers in S.A. industry. Yet let us

turn to Dr. Hilgard Muller again, enlightening the United Nations in his speech last September.

'Per capita income (in S.W.A.) was the highest in Africa in 1966 – R491 – three times as high as that of Zambia and 10 times that of Tanzania.' Listening to Dr. Muller, you might be forgiven for thinking Black Namibians are better off than their compatriots either in South Africa itself or anywhere else in Africa. In fact, the opposite is the case. It is the enormous disparity between Black and White wages, plus the super-profits extracted by the White capitalists from exploited Black labour, which raises the S.W.A. per capita income above that of the rest of the continent.

A white shift boss on the Tsumeb mines was paid R375 a month in 1966, plus a safety bonus of R10 plus a production bonus. The salary of a white mine captain was R435 a month. At the very moment of Dr. Muller's speech, the average White was earning in a month more than the highest paid African workers in a year. White schoolchildren recruited as scabs during the strike were paid R109 a month.

### **THE PROFITEERS**

But the biggest beneficiaries of the Namibian slave labour system are, of course, the bosses. Details of economic development in Namibia are difficult to obtain, as all statistics are now consolidated with those of the Republic. The breakdown of the gross domestic product given in the Government 'Survey' applies to the year 1965:

Agriculture	16.8 per cent
Fishing	3.2
Mining	46.6
All other sectors	33.4

The proportions have undoubtedly changed since then, and mining now provides well over 50 per cent of revenue, totalling about R200 million a year. Diamonds constitute about 60 per cent of all mine production. Most of the diamonds are produced by Consolidated Diamond Mines, a subsidiary of De Beers, which holds a concession in the coastal desert region covering an area 60 miles wide and 220 miles long, and whose net annual profits in recent years have averaged R50 million.

Eighty per cent of base mineral production is in the hands of the Tsumeb Corporation, in which two large United States companies, American Metal Climax and Newmont Mining Corporation are the principal shareholders. From 1947 to 1966 the gross value of metals produced by Tsumeb amounted to nearly R500 million. Between 1958 and 1965 the company's net profits totalled R74 million. Its profits in 1967 alone were over R19 million.

South West Africa's biggest mining development in recent years has been the uranium mining operation at Rossing, near Swakopmund, in which British and South African capital are joined. The South African Industrial Development Corporation is to contribute about R60 million loan capital to the project, but Rio Tinto Zinc will have the principal share of the R30 million equity with General Mining (the joint enterprise of Federale Mynbou and Anglo-American) and the West German Deutsche Urangesellschaft as junior partners. Production at the mine is expected to start in the mid-70s, and in defiance of United Nations resolutions Britain has agreed to buy 7,300 tons of uranium worth about R70 million from Rio Tinto between 1976 and 1982.

But if mining provides the bulk of Namibia's exports, valued at R128 million in 1966, agriculture and fishing make a sizeable contribution, totalling in 1966 R33 million and R49 million respectively. Fifty-four per cent of total exports in that year went to South Africa, and the remainder overseas.

Total investment in mining, fishing and manufacturing in Namibia was estimated by the *Financial Mail* in February 1971 as about R100 million, of which R40 million comes from South Africa and just over R50 million from all other foreign countries. The balance is held by Namibian Whites. 90 per cent of Namibia's imports come from South Africa.

The return on this investment in Namibia is enormous. In 1962 the Vice-President of Newmont, Mr. M.D. Banghart, told the annual meeting of the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers that American firms doing business in South Africa made an average profit of 27 per cent on their investments — a rate higher than they could obtain anywhere else in the world. With the wages of contract labour pegged and profits soaring, the percentage return on capital invested has probably risen in the intervening years. Certainly, the interest of foreign capitalists has not abated. In November 1970

the Johannesburg *Star* reported: 'A number of America's mining companies have decided to enter or re-enter the mining industry in South Africa and South West Africa where, apparently, they consider the political and economic stability more assured than in many other areas of the world.' Bethlehem Steel, Hanna Mining, Phelps Dodge and Marcona Corporation were amongst the companies sniffing around. All this at a time when Nixon was officially claiming to be discouraging further US investment in Namibia!

Eager for the pickings, other foreign companies have begun to show interest in Namibia, and the administration has encouraged widespread exploration and prospecting activity for oil and base metals. Subsidiaries of Falconbridge Nickel of Canada have begun work on developing a R4 million copper mine near Windhoek. French, U.S., British, Canadian and South African companies are searching for oil.

Perhaps the most sinister development of all is the Kunene River scheme, estimated to cost R200 million, in which South Africa and Portuguese interests are combining to harness the waters of the river for purposes of irrigation and electric power for Angola and South West Africa. Like the Cabora Bassa project in Mozambique, the Kunene scheme is intended to be not merely a scheme for economic development, but the construction of a bastion for white settlement and hegemony in all Southern Africa.

West German capital was going into property in Namibia, reported the *Sunday Times* in July 1970. And precisely one year later a leading Johannesburg estate agent, Mr. Wilfred Isaacs, returned from a visit to Namibia describing Windhoek as 'a property developers' paradise.' Rubbing his hands at the prospects, he said property values in the centre of Windhoek had risen by more than 30 per cent in the last three years. The housing shortage was so severe that people were letting their servants' quarters as flats for whites for as much as R60 a month.

This ruthless looting of the wealth of Namibia — all the more intensified as the prospect of the end of South African rule looms near — last year provoked the Herero leader Chief Kapuuo to protest. In a letter to his solicitor in London, dated 3rd September 1971, he wrote:

I am deeply concerned, and so are my peoples, with the way the natural mineral resources of this country are being removed from it with the full knowledge and permission of the South African Government . . . .

Apart from its mineral wealth, which is substantial, South West Africa is a poor country. The Africans who will be brought to these mines under the contract labour system, who will work for periods of twelve to eighteen months deprived of their natural family life, unable by current laws to negotiate their salary, and prevented under strict laws from bettering their conditions, benefit but little.

This country, which is our country, is being exploited by greedy entrepreneurs, robbed of its wealth, and rendered barren for the future. Our fear is that when freedom finally comes to this land, it will be returned to us with no minerals left . . . The one wonderful asset which we have for developing the land for the well-being of all its people will have been taken away from us.

We deplore what the Government in Pretoria is currently allowing. We have not been consulted in all this . . . .

We would like to make it clear that in this matter our appeal as the Herero nation does not in any sense preclude appeals by other African peoples in this territory. At a time when the International Court has declared South Africa's continuing presence in South West Africa to be illegal, we would urge that immediate steps be taken by the highest bodies to protect the rights of the indigenous peoples of this territory from being exploited.

We wish all foreign firms to be removed immediately. We wish to be consulted on ways and means by which our peoples can have a fairer share in benefitting from the wealth of the land of their birth.

## **VORSTER THROWS IN POLICE**

At the time of writing, the strike was still at its height, the Government was still engaged in negotiations with employers and territorial authorities (though refusing to meet the strikers' leaders), and police reinforcements had been flown into Ovamboland. In face of the demands of the elected strike committee for the complete scrapping of the contract labour system, the Bantu Administration Department had merely promised minor modifications. The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Maj. Gen. T. Crous said in Pretoria:

The police are not moving into Ovamboland because of any trouble. We are merely augmenting the established force there because we haven't broken the back of this strike yet, and we must take measures to guard against an internal flare-up.

Clearly the stage was being set for the use of strong-arm methods by the police to smash the strike and force the workers back to their jobs at the point of a gun. Whereas in the White zone the strike took place in the presence of local and foreign pressmen and observers, so that the Government was forced to exercise forbearance, behind the security screen in the reserves the Government can revert to the use of brute force which has typified its rule even since it came to power, and the rule of the previous German and South African Governments in Namibia since the beginning of White conquest. The notorious Terrorism Act was first born of the necessities created by the resistance movement in Namibia, and the Government can be expected to make full use of its unlimited powers in its bid to quell the present disturbances.

Force can be the only Government answer in Namibia, just as in South Africa, to the demands of the workers. As a spokesman of WENELA, South Africa's major recruitment agency said, commenting on the Ovambo strike:

If the Government insists that Africans stay in their homelands, African workers will never be able to sell their labour on a free market. There has to be a contract system.

The spokesman said he was in favour of allowing African workers to sell their labour on a free market, but added: 'This is not possible under present Government policy.'

Bantustans and migratory labour go together. There can be no scrapping of the one without the scrapping of the other. It is precisely because the Ovambos have struck at the very heart of the apartheid system that the Government can be relied on to bend every effort to defeat them. There are important differences between the structure of the labour force in the mining industry in Namibia and that in South Africa. The following table shows the composition of African labour force of members and contractors of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) (i.e. most gold and coal mines in South Africa) as at December 31st, 1969:

Area from which recruited	Number	Percentage
South Africa	116,530	31.40
Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland	84,875	22.87
East Coast (Mozambique etc.)	99,807	26.90
Tropical territories (Malawi etc.)	69,858	18.83
	<u>371,070</u>	<u>100.00</u>

On the one hand, this indicates why there is no single group who can shut down the South African mining industry at one stroke as the Ovambos did in Namibia. The labour force is dispersed, with the bulk of workers coming from outside South Africa. The South African mining industry has long based its labour control system on the tactic of divide and rule, playing off one ethnic group against another.

On the other hand, the enormous publicity which the Ovambo strike has received in South Africa is a guarantee that no section of the labour force has failed to understand the demonstration of the immense power of the working class once there is unity, leadership and cohesion. Without firing a shot or using any form of violence, the Ovambo workers have paralysed the economy of Namibia. The South African Government's whole Bantustan policy is based on the premise that migratory labour is the only alternative to the establishment of a powerful urban African proletariat, the only means of preventing the growth of African trade union and political power, the only way to prevent integration and the ultimate destruction of White supremacy. Yet Namibia, where there are no trade unions, has shown the tremendous power of the African migratory workers, despite all the activities of the Security Police. The major worry of the Vorster Government must now be – what is to prevent this poison spreading not only to the South African workers, but also to the workers of all the countries of Southern Africa from which her migratory labour force is drawn? The so-called backward and undeveloped Namibia has pulled off, with shattering effect, the greatest strike of African workers since the great mineworkers strike on the Witwatersrand in 1946. This could well prove to be the beginning of a tidal wave which sweeps through all of white dominated Africa. It is perhaps symptomatic that at this very juncture the hideous Voortrekker monument near Pretoria is reported to be threatened with collapse.

## **PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE**

It is important to emphasise here that the Ovambo strike did not come – as press reports have tried to convey – as a bolt from the blue. It was the culmination of years, nay decades, of stubborn resistance by the Namibian people, of growing and seething anger against the conditions in which they are forced to live and work by their South African overlords, aided and abetted by Western imperialism.

From the time of the first German conquest, no section of the Namibian people has submitted to this foreign tyranny, but has continued to assert, stubbornly and unyieldingly, its right to self-determination and independence, its right to enjoy the full fruits of its labour instead of being robbed and exploited by local and overseas capitalists. Without delving too deeply into history, one need only mention the Herero war against the Germans, the Bondelswarts risings, the continuous struggles of the Rehobothers, the battles for land of the various Ovambo tribes, the Windhoek location shootings in 1959, the names of Namibian heroes like Hosea Kutako, Maharero, Morris, Witbooi, Ja-Toivo and many, many others, some who have died in the hands of the Security police, and others who are still languishing in detention or who have been jailed for life under the Terrorism Act — all this shows that the spark of resistance has never failed to glow in the hearts of the people and needs only the breath of opportunity and hope to fan it into a roaring flame.

In its bid to dominate Africa, South Africa turned the Caprivi Strip into an armed camp and built there an enormous air base from which it is capable of launching an attack on any independent African country. In 1966 the South West Africa People's Organisation launched its campaign of armed struggle and has steadily built up its counter-attacks on the White racists in the ensuing years. With the use of ferocious measures the South African forces have attempted to cow the Caprivian people into submission, but with the backing of the people SWAPO fought back. On January 7th 1972, the *Rand Daily Mail* gave the South African death toll in this savage border battle as 17 — seven of the deaths occurred in 1971 and one as a result of the most recent landmine incident in January 1972. To judge by the furious threats of Vorster against the Zambian Government for 'harbouring terrorists', the likelihood is that South African casualties are in fact far higher than have been officially admitted.

Nor has SWAPO's guerrilla work been confined to the Caprivi strip. Groups of guerrillas have penetrated far into the interior of South West Africa. One group whose activities were publicised conducted widespread training operations for over a year from a secret base in Ovamboland until they were discovered by the police. The South African Government is still offering a reward of R1,000 for information leading to the capture of one of SWAPO's guerrilla leaders Israel Iyambo who has

been operating successfully in northern Namibia over a period of several years.

The armed struggle of the Namibian fighters could not fail to rouse an echo in the breasts of the whole Namibian people, to give them the perspective of future liberation and growing confidence in their ability to achieve it, because the freedom fighters were seen to be acting not in isolation but in conformity with the repeated resolutions of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity demanding the end of the South African occupation. Then came the decision of the World Court in June 1971, destroying completely any legal or moral claims which South Africa could advance to justify her presence in Namibia.

Public agitation and opposition to apartheid mounted. Already in March 1971, the Rehobothers had decided not to pay taxes either to the South West Africa Administration or to the South African Government in protest against the South African occupation and the activities of the Government's Rehoboth Development Corporation. In July 1971 the Rehoboth Volksparty, which had just won a landslide victory in the triennial elections for the Rehoboth Council, sent an urgent appeal to the Security Council 'to implement the decisions of the World Court as soon as possible because the South African Government is continuing its rapid application of apartheid within South West Africa.'

Also in July 1971 two churches, representing more than half the population of South West Africa, called on Vorster to set up a 'separate and independent state' in South West Africa. In an open letter to the Prime Minister circulated widely in the territory the joint church committees of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA, formerly the Rhenish Mission, listed the violations of human rights in the territory and added: 'Our people are not free and in the manner in which they are treated they do not feel safe'. In an unprecedented gesture, Vorster met the leaders of the two churches, Bishop Leonard Auala and Pastor Paulus Gowaseb, to discuss their grievances. The two bishops said the Prime Minister's rejection of the World Court judgement indicated that 'the present conditions and bad treatment that followed from it would be perpetuated.' Apartheid meant subjection and slavery for the Namibian people. Bishop Auala said:

The police abuse their powers. Innocent people were hit and tortured. They were given electric shocks and were intimidated. Rifles were aimed at them and they were threatened with death. Today we all fear the police. They treat us not as people but as the devil.

The talks ended in deadlock, with Vorster insisting that the policy of separate development was the only solution. This created a head-on conflict between State and Church in Namibia. Later in the year the Anglican Bishop of Damaraland, the Right Rev. Colin Winter, condemned apartheid as a sin which caused endless suffering to the poor of the community. In reprisal, the Government restricted and deported many church leaders. By December 1971 one third of the Anglican Church's workers had been victimised in one way or another and 16 other church workers had been hit by the Government. Dr. Bruckner de Villiers of the Christian Institute said both sides were 'poised for a traumatic confrontation' which would inevitably 'result in a mutually damaging catastrophe'.

On August 22nd, 1971, the *Sunday Times* reported from Windhoek:

The Government are facing serious and unexpected difficulties in implementing their separate development policy in South West Africa. There are clear indications that a growing and influential group of Non-Whites – probably the majority – are not only rejecting the policy in its present form but are coming out more openly than ever before in opposing it.

In November 1971 Chief Clemens Kapuuo of the Herero, Chief Hendrik Witbooi of the Nama, leaders of the Rehoboth Volksparty, Mr. J.W. Jagger, leader of the People's Voice, a newly formed political party, and leaders of other groups and organisations met in Windhoek to discuss preparations for a 'summit conference' between all Non-White political leaders in South West Africa in February 1972. This was the first time common action of this kind had been mooted in Namibia. A press correspondent commented: 'The significance of this move lay in the common recognition by non-white peoples that the South African Government has deliberately tried to keep them separate from each other, in the face of a common cause and a common opponent. The development of militancy among the Ovambo . . . . . indicates the start of a nation-wide movement against the South African authorities.'

All this ferment culminated in the great December strike, which presents the South African Government with its greatest challenge and

the Namibian people with their greatest triumph and their greatest opportunity. This strike is not a local issue, but one which affects the future of all Southern Africa, the security of all independent Africa and the maintenance of world peace. It is the duty of all progressive forces, in all countries, to take effective action to support their Namibian brothers in their hour of crisis and help bring to an end the rule of the South African racists as soon as possible.

*January 1972.*

### **POSTSCRIPT**

Since the above was written, a number of events have taken place indicating that the crisis in Namibia is sharpening in intensity, that the South African Government is stepping up its repression, and that the turbulence has already spread beyond the borders to Angola.

- 26th January — The Minister of Bantu Administration, Mr.M.C.Botha, places an official ban on official press statements out of Ovamboland and says that troops are being sent to assist the police in the protection of 'international boundaries'. *Die Vaderland* reports that a full-scale insurrection is under way in Ovamboland. Over 120km. of fencing on the Angolan border have been destroyed.
- 27th January — Prime Minister Vorster says there is no crisis situation in Ovamboland and there is no ban on news from the territory.
- 28th January — Mr. H. Rothkegel, chairman of the labour committee of the South West Africa Agricultural Union, tells a farmers' meeting at Gobabis that the new wage levels would not be made public because there would be 'a fuss at the United Nations where everything we do is bad'. But he adds: 'No Ovambo will work for under R35 again.'

- 31st January — The *Rand Daily Mail* reports from Windhoek: 'The new contract system does nothing to change some of the worst features of the old system, and makes no provision for workers to have their families with them, which was one of the main demands of the strikers. Reports from Ovamboland seem to indicate it is not acceptable to a large body of the strikers.'
- 1st February — Ten people have been killed in clashes between the people and the police in the last 72 hours. 'The situation in the homeland is still extremely tense', says the *Rand Daily Mail*. The paper also reports newly recruited workers are demanding a minimum wage of R5 a day and are refusing to accept former conditions of accommodation and transport.
- 2nd February — The Anglican Bishop of Damaraland, the Rt. Rev. Colin O'Brien Winter, has his permit to visit Ovamboland withdrawn.
- 3rd February — The establishment of a legislative council for the Eastern Caprivi, with its seat at Ngwese, is gazetted in Pretoria. All 28 members of the council will be nominated.
- 4th February — Emergency regulations are promulgated in the *Government Gazette* similar to Proclamation 400 in the Transkei — public meetings are banned, any person can be detained in solitary confinement without trial, it is an offence to do or say anything likely to subvert the authority of the State, the Ovambo Government or any State officer. Road transport services to northern Ovamboland are suspended.
- 4th February — The United Nations Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa calls on South Africa to withdraw from South West Africa and instructs the Secretary General, Dr. Kurt Waldheim, to open talks with all parties concerned to establish conditions for the exercise of

self-determination and independence. Of the 15 members of the Security Council, only People's China withheld its support for the resolution.

8th February — The *Rand Daily Mail* reports: 'Growing trouble among the Ovambo tribesmen of South West Africa has spilled across the frontier into Southern Angola.' The Portuguese are said to be worried by reports of 'subversion and even terrorism' in the Cunene administrative district, where the Cunene dam, a joint Portuguese-South African project, is being built. 'If there is trouble on a major scale in Cunene it could be the work of Angolan 'liberation' movements operating in co-operation with the striking Ovambos to defeat the concentrated forces of both Portugal and South Africa straddling either side of the Cunene River frontier.'

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#### **BIRTHDAY GREETINGS FROM AFRICA**

In addition to the Parties listed in No. 47, Fourth Quarter 1971, the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party received warm messages of congratulation on the Party's fiftieth anniversary from the African Independence Party of Senegal and the Socialist Vanguard Party of Algeria.

#### **CORRECTION**

Francis Meli writes drawing attention to two minor errors in his article 'A Nation is Born' which appeared in our last issue. The number of African troops who went down in the wreck of the *Mendi* in 1917 was seven hundred, not seven thousand as stated (p. 24).

And in addition to J. Gumede and J. La Guma, also present from sub-Saharan Africa at the 1927 Brussels conference of the League against Imperialism were J. Colraine, a white trade unionist from South Africa and L. Senghor of Senegal.