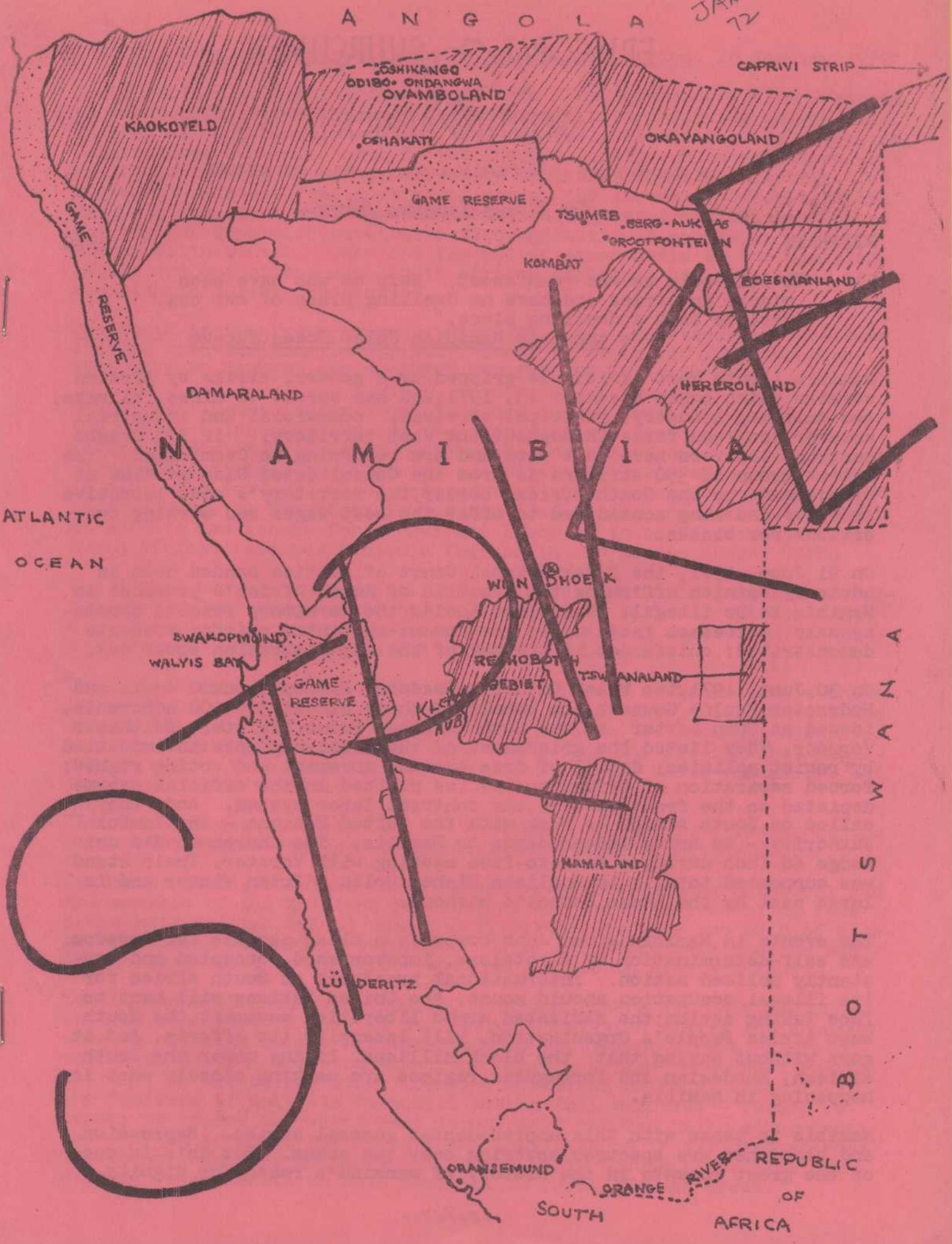


A N G O L A

JAN 72



EPISCOPAL CHURCHMEN
for
SOUTH AFRICA

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—For A Free Southern Africa—

EPIPHANY

1972

"O God, help us who roam about. Help us who have been placed in Africa and have no dwelling place of our own. Give us back a dwelling place."

- the late Namibian Chief Hosea Kutako

Namibia (South West Africa) is gripped by a general strike by African workers which began December 13, 1971, and has spread to mines, railways, the building industry, municipal services, commercial and industrial enterprises, and farms throughout the vast territory. 12,500 Ovambo contract laborers have quit work and are returning to Ovamboland. The latest group of 350 strikers is from the Consolidated Diamond Mine at Oranjemund on the South African border, the territory's most lucrative industry and long considered to offer the best wages and working conditions for blacks.

On 21 June, 1971, the International Court of Justice handed down an advisory opinion affirming the Republic of South Africa's presence in Namibia to be illegal. Namibians inside the territory reacted spontaneously: tribesmen faced up to government-appointed chiefs; students demonstrated; chiefs not in the pay of the administration spoke out.

On 30 June, 1971, two black Lutheran leaders, Bishop Leonard Auala and Moderator Paulus Gowaseb, on behalf of their almost 300,000 adherents, issued an Open Letter to the South African Prime Minister, Balthazar Vorster. They listed the grievances of the African people: intimidation by racist policies; denial of free speech, movement and voting rights; forced separation of tribal groups (as plotted in the official scheme depicted on the front cover); the contract labor system. And, they called on South Africa to work with the United Nations - the lawful authority - to bring independence to Namibia. The churchmen did not budge an inch during a face-to-face meeting with Vorster. Their stand was supported totally by Anglican Bishop Colin O'Brien Winter and in large part by the Roman Catholic bishops.

The events in Namibia since June comprise a clear mandate for freedom and self-determination by a voteless, impoverished, occupied and constantly policed nation. International pressures on South Africa for its illegal occupation should mount; the United Nations will have to face taking action; the dedicated, armed liberation movement, the South West Africa People's Organization, will intensify its efforts. And it goes without saying that the black millions living under the South African, Rhodesian and Portuguese regimes are marking closely what is happening in Namibia.

Namibia is tense with this unprecedented general strike. Repression and bloodshed are spectres hovering over the scene. But this is one of the great moments in the history of mankind's reach for dignity.

NAMIBIA:The General Strike. Elsewhere in Southern Africa. 18 January 1972

- South African police reinforcements were flown 12 January from Pretoria to Ovamboland, introducing more armed, para-military foreign police into an area already heavily policed, and ominously escalating the situation. Commissioner General Jannie de Wet charged "foreign white agitators were trying to stir an uprising of Ovambos", THE NEW YORK TIMES reports. The statement reflects real government worry, the shreds of disbelief that Africans can mount anything so immense as a general strike, and paves the way for expulsion or other action against such people as Anglican Bishop Colin Winter. Once the few whites sympathetic to the Namibian people are out of the way, South African officials can dispose of the Namibian leadership unobserved.
- The South African government is striking back. Thirteen men have been charged with inciting to strike. Their trial is set for 25 January. THEY HAVE NO LAWYERS and NO FUNDS FOR DEFENSE.
- A strikers' committee in Ovamboland has issued written demands: abolish the contract labor system and the pass system; freedom to choose and change jobs without fear of punishment; the right to live and work with wives and families; abolition of a centralized labor agency; increases in pay. The strikers also insisted that they be represented at talks 19/20 January at Grootfontein between headmen and government officials at which a new scheme for recruiting labor is to be discussed, writes South African reporter Benjamin Pogrud in the London SUNDAY TIMES.
- The Ovambo Legislative Council for the model Bantustan (members are appointed by the government) on 14 January gave full support to strikers' demands, denouncing the contract labor system as "a form of slavery", reports Stanley Uys in THE OBSERVER of London.
- David de Beer, secretary of the Anglican Diocese of Damaraland, a white South African sub-deacon, says: "We, the clergy, are not liked because we are close to the grass roots of this problem. We know the hardships the Africans suffer because we work among them and see it first hand - and we try to tell this to the Government and the white community. But they don't want to listen."
- "It has been organized by God." - Nathaniel Mahuiriri, a leader of the South West Africa Peoples' Organization & strike committee member.
- In South Africa, Zululand chief executive officer Gatsha Buthelezi and the members of the Zululand Territorial Authority (representing four and a half million Zulus) unanimously refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Pretoria government. Chief Buthelezi said that he was "conscience-bound to disagree" with many of South Africa's laws.
- Tension among Rhodesia's 5,220,000 Africans (there are only 249,000 whites) continues to rise as the Pearce Commission visits the country seeking opinions on the British-Rhodesia settlement scheme. Riots occurred at Shabani asbestos mine (one African killed, 9 wounded by the police), at Gwelo, and other towns. The African National Council - the chairman of which is Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa - formed recently to oppose the settlement terms, said the Ian Smith government was "trying to smear the Council and implicate it in all disturbances". The Council and the multi-racial Centre Party accuse the regime of denying them permits to hold meetings in rural African areas.

ON-SPOT report

THE STRIKE OF OVAMBO WORKERS IN SOUTH WEST AFRICA AND THE CHURCHES

- by the Rev. Stephen T. Hayes, priest of the Diocese of Damaraland
(Father Hayes is a young South African national, a worker-priest)
(who is close to the Namibian people in their daily lives.)

BACKGROUND

The Ovambos are a group of related tribes in northern South West Africa and southern Angola. Those living in South West Africa number about 350,000, and comprise about 45% of the population of the territory. The area they live in, called Owambo, straddles the border between South African-ruled South West Africa and Portuguese-ruled Angola.

Men from both parts of Owambo have formed an important part of the unskilled labor force for the mines, farms and factories of the southern part of South West Africa, generally known as the Police Zone. The name Ovamboland is usually used to distinguish that part of Owambo that lies in South West Africa.

Men wishing to work in the Police Zone may normally only do so by means of the contract labor system. An organization which represents the employers, the South West Africa Native Labour Association (SWANLA) is the sole recruiting agency. Prospective employees report to the recruiting office in Ondangwa, Ovamboland, and if accepted are sent to Grootfontein, the railhead in the Police Zone. From there they are graded and dispatched to employers throughout the territory.

The workers are graded according to physical fitness and age into Class A, B, C, and piccanin. The latter are children. Minimum wages are laid down for each class, ranging from \$5.25 for a piccanin to \$12.25 for a Class A laborer. These wages are monthly.

The prospective employer fills in an order form, in which he orders from SWANLA the class of laborer he desires, and pays a deposit to pay for railrage, food en route and blankets. The employer also has to provide board and lodging for the employee for the duration of the contract. The contract normally lasts for one year, and may be extended by mutual agreement for a further six months. Many employers pay more than the minimum wage, and some provide better working conditions than others. Actual wages range from the minimum up to \$140 per month, but the average is around \$28.

CHURCH OBJECTIONS TO THE CONTRACT SYSTEM

Almost all the churches in South West Africa have objected to the contract labor system. The contract system is being increasingly applied in South Africa, though in a much milder form than in South West Africa. The South West African system is in fact the platonic ideal of contract labor, which the National Party government wishes to apply in South Africa as well. It has there come under fire even from the Dutch Reformed Church, which on many issues supports the South African government.

Strike (continued)

The main objection to the system is that it places a great strain on the family life of the workers, who are not allowed to take their families with them to their place of employment. They are also not generally free to choose their employers or the type of work they are to do, but must accept the employers to which they are assigned by SWANLA. As the greater part of Ovambo has a subsistence agricultural economy, there is little cash available. The imposition by the South African government of taxes on the inhabitants of Ovamboland, which have to be paid in cash, have led to great economic pressures being placed on the Ovambo to work in the south. In fact the original purpose of the imposition of these taxes was to force the Ovambo to go and work for the whites in the south.

For these and other reasons, some churchmen have referred to the contract system as "a form of slavery". Its most serious condemnation came as a part of the Open Letter sent in July, 1971, by the two black Lutheran Churches in the territory to the South African Prime Minister. Bishop Leonard Auala of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church and Moderator Paulus Gowaseb of the Evangelical Lutheran Church jointly signed this Open Letter.

Not only have the churches condemned the system as evil, but through pastoral contact with their members they were aware of profound dissatisfaction with the system. The Open Letter was a warning to the South African government that this dissatisfaction existed. The church leaders subsequently held meetings with South African Prime Minister Vorster and Mr. Jannie de Wet, Commissioner General for the Northern Native Territories. At one of these meetings de Wet denied that the contract system was a form of slavery and said it was freely accepted by the Ovambo themselves, who did not hesitate to sign contracts. De Wet said that if they did not like the system, they would not allow themselves to be recruited. This statement was to be later given as a reason for the strike.

THE STRIKE

The strike appears to have had its origin in Walvis Bay. It was reported in the WINDHOEK ADVERTISER of December 10, 1971, that the workers in the Municipal compound at Walvis Bay were planning to strike on December 14, in protest against the contract system. It is said that the workers in Walvis Bay also wrote letters to other parts of the territory, urging the workers there to strike on that day.

The South African Sunday newspapers reported the strike plans prominently, and an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, RAPPORT, said that it was believed that the strike was being encouraged by certain church leaders. These leaders were not named, but a photograph of an Anglican priest of Windhoek was placed in the middle of the article.

On Sunday afternoon, 12th December, the residents at the Windhoek municipal compound, which houses about 6,000 Ovambo contract workers, held a meeting at which it was decided to strike the following day. A few, fearing trouble, did not return to the compound that night.

Strike (continued)

On Monday, 13th December, the vast majority of the city's contract workers did not leave the compound to go to work. White schoolboys, in the middle of their summer holiday, were employed as rubbish collectors and for milk delivery. The building industry closed down, but it was due to close down a few days later for the annual holiday. At Walvis Bay, where the idea had apparently originated, the strike was not so effective. It is estimated that only about 1/4 of the workers went on strike, but they have been joined by larger numbers, who waited till the end of the week when they were paid.

Later in the week, the strike spread to the American-owned Tsumeb mine, which is a major source of revenue for the territory. The lead smelter closed down altogether, while the copper smelter was manned by whites, with a greatly reduced rate of production. It is estimated that it will take at least a year for the mine to achieve full production again, provided the labor situation returns to normal.

Workers at the Klein Aub and Oamites copper mines, and also at the Berg Aukas lead and vanadium mines also went on strike. A number of other smaller mines have also been affected.

Most of the strikers were sent back to Owambo in special trains, and recruiting has ceased. Normally about 500 new recruits arrive each week at the Grootfontein depot of SWANLA. This means that even though some workers have not gone on strike, they will not be replaced when their contracts expire.

Some farm workers have joined the strike, generally as a result of hearing of the strike on the radio. On one farm in the Grootfontein district, belonging to a Mr. James Simson, 9 Ovambo workers went on strike. The farmer took them to the police, who arrested them. (A breach of a labor contract is a criminal offense). The farmer said he did not wish to employ two of them, whom he regarded as 'agitators'. They were sent back to Owambo. The remainder were beaten, and were then asked if they would return to work, and six of them again refused. The farmer said that his 'kitchen-ovambo' heard of the strike on the radio, and told the others about it, and they all went on strike.

One of the complaints about the contract system is that while it is illegal for either party to break the contract, the employers who break the contract are rarely punished. Recently at a congress in Windhoek, one farmer, Mr. Danie van Vuuren, said that he always withheld the wages of the workers until their contract had expired, and recommended this to other farmers as a method of ensuring that workers stayed until the end of their contract. Though he publicly admitted breaking the contract, and publicly advocated breach of contract on the part of employers, no action was taken against him. If an employee of such a farmer wishes to make a complaint, he must report his complaint to the police or the nearest magistrate. If however, he leaves the farm to do so, without first asking the permission of the farmer, he is liable himself to be charged with desertion. This, again, is what has been described by the churches as a form of slavery - where a man is in effect forced to work for no wages, under threat of prosecution.

Strike (continued)

NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT THE STRIKE

The day the strike began in Windhoek, a meeting was held in Walvis Bay, which was attended by Mr. G. White, the Chief Native Affairs Commissioner for South West Africa, and a group of headmen from Ovamboland. Bishop Auala, who was on holiday in Swakopmund nearby, was also present.

The strikers made the point that Mr. Jannie de Wet had said that they freely accepted the contract labor system because they were not forced to sign on, but that they allowed themselves to be recruited freely. To show that they rejected the system, the strikers said they were now freely handing in their contracts and opting out of the system. Mr. White stood up to say that they had misunderstood Mr. de Wet's remarks and that that was not what he had meant. The strikers shouted at Mr. White to sit down, and he did so.

The following day, Tuesday, 14th December, a similar meeting was held in Windhoek. Mr. White said that he understood that the workers had grievances, but that a meeting was to be held in February between a group of Ovambo headmen and representatives of SWANLA, under the chairmanship of Mr. Jannie de Wet. Mr. White said that the strikers would be given a choice - they could return to work and await the result of the February meeting, or they should return to Owambo. The strikers decided to return to Owambo.

After Mr. White and the headmen had left, the police sealed the gates of the compound, and no one was allowed in or out. A number of local people, including a school principal, who were in the compound visiting friends or who had gone to attend the meeting out of curiosity, were arrested when they tried to leave the compound. They were taken to the police station, and visitors from the local Katutura township, where the compound is situated, were told to pay \$14.00 admission of guilt. They complained that no charge had been specified, and Colonel Krige, the district commandant of the police, when asked by a reporter of the WINDHOEK ADVERTISER what the charge was, refused to reveal it.

AGITATORS AND INTIMIDATION

White employers in Windhoek ascribed the cause of the strike to 'agitators', and said that their employees would never strike unless they were forced to. However, there is little concrete evidence of intimidation or agitators. Documents exhorting the workers to strike were handwritten - which would seem to indicate a degree of haste and spontaneity. On the first day of the strike in Windhoek the strikers were boycotting the food prepared in the compound kitchens, and were travelling freely in and out of the compound to buy food at the local shops.

Mr. Clemens Kapuuo, the Chief of the Hereros, who owns a grocery and general dealer store in Windhoek, reported that there were a large number of strikers who came to his shop to buy mealie meal, meat and bread. He spoke to a number of those whom he knew, and said that they were unanimous in saying that the strike was aimed at the contract labor system as such and not at individual employers or any other issue.

Strike (continued)

Chief Clemens also said that the Hereros generally supported the strike, though they did not join it because it was arranged by the compound residents, who had not consulted the residents in the rest of Katutura. He said that the Hereros also had to put up with a somewhat milder form of the contract system, and that they too were opposed to the system.

It appears therefore that strikers were moving freely in and out, but did not attempt to escape to return to work, which would be expected had they been forced to strike by intimidators. Chief Clemens reported a sharp drop off of customers on Tuesday, 14th December, which was when the police sealed off the compound. When the strikers were taken to board trains to return to Owambo, they were peaceful and orderly. There was no attempt on the part of any of them to leave and return to work, in spite of the presence of the police, who had said that they would protect people from intimidators.

Allegations on the part of certain newspapers that the churches had helped to organize the strike are also totally without foundation. Undoubtedly many of the strikers were members of the various Christian churches in the territory, and they apparently used Bible passages in speeches at meetings. However, the hierarchies of the churches knew nothing of the strikes until they were reported in the press.

Certainly the churches are in sympathy with those who are opposed to the contract system, but the strike was arranged and took place without the knowledge of the leaders of the different churches. At the time of writing (December 24, 1971), most church leaders are not in Windhoek but they will probably meet to discuss the strike and the contract labor system early in January. Only then will it be known certainly what the official attitude of the churches is to the strike. Miss Voipio, a lecturer of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at OtKimbingwe, has done extensive research into the contract labor system, and while the full results of her research will not be available for about a year, her knowledge and experience will undoubtedly guide the churches in how to act.

From the available evidence, it would seem that the strike was a more or less spontaneous demonstration of dissatisfaction with the contract labor system. Undoubtedly someone must have had the idea of a strike, and perhaps a small group propagated this idea in Walvis Bay. But its ready acceptance by workers in widely scattered areas of South West Africa, in some cases with workers joining the strike after hearing about it on the radio, does not indicate an organized conspiracy or campaign of intimidation. Nor was the strike instigated by church leaders. It seems to have been organized entirely by the contract workers themselves.

POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE STRIKE

It remains to be seen whether the strike will be effective in bringing about any significant modification of the contract labor system. The fact that it was more or less spontaneous, with no central organization, means that the strikers have no leaders who can present the demands and grievances of the bulk of the workers. The meeting to be held probably in January at Grootfontein between SWANLA representatives and Ovamboland headmen will probably not be representative of the strikers, as headmen have not had first hand experience as contract laborers.

Strike (continued)

What the strike may well achieve is the creation of a climate in which the whole system can be discussed and possibly revised. The local National Party newspaper, DIE SUIDWESTER, in the brief space of a week, has changed its attitude from a defense of the principle of the contract system to a far more flexible approach, and the realization is growing among South African government officials that the situation demands a radical approach.

The economic effects of the strike will probably not be seen for some time. The mining industry is the most seriously affected, but because recruiting has stopped there will probably be a gradual draining away of labor from the mines, factories and farms. Whatever is decided about the contract system, it will probably take two to three months to bring the labor force up to normal strength again. There has been talk among employers of bringing in workers from elsewhere - Botswana and Malawi have been mentioned, as well as South Africa. However, this would seriously damage the apartheid policy of the South African government. Ovamboland is destined to become an independent Bantustan, and its main economic resource at the present time is labor. If it can no longer export workers to the south of South West Africa, then the whole pattern of its development will have to be radically revised, and this would represent a major failure in the apartheid system. This should also be seen in the light of the fact that the South African government was hoping to extend the contract labor system to South Africa itself, where it is already in limited operation, particularly with miners and with blacks wishing to work in the Western Cape.

It is possible that the contract system could be replaced by a form of influx control, such as operates in most parts of South Africa - but this too would be setting the apartheid clock back.

Up till now, South Africa has not had to spend much money on the administration of South West Africa: the revenues from mines, agriculture and the fishing industry have made the territory more or less self-sufficient. But if the labor dispute continues much longer, there is likely to be a serious recession in the mining and building industries. The fishing industry has already been hit by reduced quotas, and will be further affected by them.

In other words, South West Africa may become an economic liability for South Africa, and have to be subsidized out of the pocket of the South African taxpayers, who generally have little knowledge of, or interest in, the territory. At most, its retention is a question of national pride with the whites of South Africa.

Windhoek
24 December 1971

EPISCOPAL CHURCHMEN for SOUTH AFRICA
14 West 11th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

13 January 1972

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THE GENERAL STRIKE IN NAMIBIA: A Call to Americans and the Churches.

The strike is one month old today. There has been scant attention paid except in South Africa. The United Nations is collecting itself, the United States government sits tight, the churches are mute, labor is silent, American corporations are up tight.

U.S. business is represented in Namibia chiefly through the Tsumeb Corporation, a major feature in Namibia's \$126 million per annum mining industry (copper, zinc, lead, tin, silver, vanadium, diamonds, etc. - with uranium to come). Tsumeb Corporation is controlled by American Metal Climax, Inc. and Newmont Mining Corporation, each with headquarters in New York City and both listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Tsumeb Corporation uses contract labor, pays taxes to the illegal South African administration, and its American holders reaped profits of \$15 million in 1970. Its miners went out early in the strike.

The churches: Blacks in Namibia have virtually no sympathetic high level understanding and comfort but from some church leaders. This infuriates the South Africans. Bishop Auala, Moderator Gowaseb, Bishop Winter, others, are marked men. Remember the fate of Dean French-Beytagh.

Americans and their churches have a duty to act:

1. URGE YOUR CHURCH LEADERS TO:

- send funds for relief and legal aid of strikers and their families;
- dispatch a delegation to Namibia at once to show solidarity with witnessing churchmen and the Namibian people.

2 - WIRE, PHONE, WRITE: Secretary of State William Rogers
Washington, D.C. 20520

PHONE: (202) 655-4000

AND ASK HIM TO:

- serve notice on the South African government to refrain from any repressive acts;
- urgently request the U.N. to send observer teams to Namibia;
- establish a diplomatic presence in Namibia, accredited to the United Nations and pledged to the ultimate sovereignty of the Namibian people.

3 - WIRE, PHONE, WRITE:

Mr. Ian MacGregor, President
American Metal Climax, Inc.
1270 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10020
PHONE: (212) 757-9700

Mr. P. Malozemoff, President,
Newmont Mining Corporation
300 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 1022
PHONE: (212) PL 3-4800

CHALLENGE THEIR POLICIES AT SHAREHOLDERS' MEETINGS

- 4 - Get your Senators and Representatives to bring Namibia to the Congress and support Congressman Charles Diggs' call for fair employment practices by American firms in Southern Africa.



Father Stephen Hayes (left), with fellow churchman in Namibia.

EPISCOPAL CHURCHMEN for SOUTH AFRICA

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