

# SOUTHERN AFRICA

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## Namibia: Some Introductory Notes Leslie Barnhart

Namibia. The Namib desert stretches along the entire coast of this West African country. Scorched by burning hot winds from the east for part of the year and cooled by coastal fogs for the other part, this foreboding body of sand is at once an extremely harsh environment to man and yet held tenuously in equilibrium by nature. If one looks closely at the surface of this desert one may find the top layer teeming with animal and insect life that have learned to live both above and below the ground. Digging deep below the sand one finds an incredible wealth of the rocks and minerals that keep the industrial world ticking. Copper, gold, diamonds, uranium - what more could one ask for? Night and day the southern hemisphere's largest privately owned fleet of earth moving equipment digs diligently, extracting great quantities of the earth's hardest rock.

Who enjoys this great wealth of resources? We do. The United States and other industrial nations are well represented in the mining industry of Namibia. Huge transnational corporations such as AMAX (American metals), Allis Chalmers (nuclear technology), The Hanna Mining Company, and Union Carbide are just a few that represent the U.S.. England and South Africa share Rossing Uranium Unlimited, the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa and DeBeers. Eleven out of the nineteen South African companies in Namibia are mining companies. Australia, West Germany, France, Japan, Switzerland, Israel - fishing, banking, automobiles, agriculture, marketing, oil; all of these industries are owned or run by whites. Do Black Namibians reap any of the benefits from all this industry? No. They are forced to live on reserves or in bantustans, they must carry passbooks at all times and are subject to

arbitrary arrest. Under contract labor laws they are forced to work in the factories for pennies or face starvation. Sound familiar? South Africa is not only Namibia's southern neighbor, it is also its oppressor. South Africa has been the colonial ruler of Namibia for almost seventy-one years and has smothered it with its oppressive *apartheid* policies.

Long before any European or South African colonizers had invaded Namibia, this barren region held few settlers. For centuries only Bushmen and a now extinct tribe called the Bergdama inhabited the Kalahari and Namib deserts. Anthony Bannister says in his book, *Africa's Harsh Paradise*, that the Bergdama were, "a black race whose origins are unknown and whose culture has been lost like a drop in a turbulent ocean." The Herrero and Nama tribes came in from the north to graze their cattle on the only arable land in the region, the central plateau. They immediately were in conflict over land as there was so little usable land. The Ovambo followed but stayed in the northern part of the country. They soon established the reputation of being highly protective of their own land, unfriendly, and impervious to the conflict between the other tribes. These characteristics were to prove beneficial to them in future conflicts with colonists.

Other tribes wandered in and out of the territory, trading with the Ovambo for copper that they were mining in the Kalahari and trading with the Herrero and Nama for cattle. The first foreign traders brought guns, liquor, and cloth to barter for ivory, cattle, and slaves. When the traders discovered the great mineral wealth of the country, they entered in droves. The traders were followed by Christian missionaries. At about the same time, Germany and Portugal were competing for colonial claims in Africa. Each had an anxious eye on the wealth of resources in Namibia.

The launching of COSATU (the Congress of South African Trade Unions) last December and its decision to participate in the national liberation struggle constitutes the most significant political development in South Africa during the last year. In choosing to enter the political arena COSATU has adopted a policy significantly different from its major predecessor, FOSATU (the Federation of South African Trade Unions), which refused to go beyond the workplace. At one point FOSATU even accused the ANC of being a "populist" organization and denigrated the importance of the struggle for Black political empowerment. COSATU, in contrast, has begun meeting with the ANC and SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions). In its founding convention, it adopted several resolutions including calls for an end to pass laws, *bantustans*, and discriminatory education. It also called for disinvestment. As a consequence coordinated mass action against *apartheid* including full participation of the labor unions is now likely to emerge. Given the power of the unions to cripple the *apartheid* economy such action, along with the ANC's armed struggle, now has the greatest potential ever to bring an end to *apartheid*.

Howeverr, COSATU needs to consolidate. Currently it consists of most unions of the erstwhile FOSATU and NUM (the National Union of Mineworkers) and represents over 500,000 workers. NUM used to belong to CUSA (the Congress of Unions of South Africa) which differed from FOSATU (and COSATU) in that it followed the "Black Consciousness philosophy" of an exclusively Black leadership rather than a non-racial one. Other members of CUSA have so far refused to join COSATU citing the danger of domination by white intellectuals. A March 1986 article in the ANC journal, *Sechaba*, acknowledges this problem as having been critical in FOSATU but denies that it still exists in COSATU. No matter whether the ANC's assessment of the situation is correct, COSATU is so significantly different from its predecessor that some reconsideration on the part of CUSA seems appropriate. Attempts to forge principled unity in the labor movement can only help the struggle against *apartheid*.

All sectors of the international solidarity movement need to explore ways of aiding COSATU. Some US unions such as the UAW have a long history of working with the South African labor movement. However much remains to be done. *Apartheid* recognizes the significance of COSATU. Strikes in mines last January were crushed with remarkable brutality. It is hardly likely that *apartheid* will

change its ways. It is imperative that the international solidarity movement begin a process of education that highlights the significance of COSATU, raises funds, and finds ways of contributing to strikers' funds in the event of strikes. At its December founding meeting COSATU gave *apartheid* six months to abolish pass laws and threatened economic action otherwise. That period expires on May 31st. If a general strike is called then it will be particularly unfortunate if the international movement finds itself totally unprepared to provide any assistance.

### Call for a Coke Boycott Deb Miller

At the National Student Anti-Apartheid Conference held last November in New York City, a proposal was forwarded to boycott a major U.S. company doing business in South Africa. The NAACP is boycotting a major company, Shell; perhaps several others will soon also be boycotted.

The Southern African Liberation Committee here at Michigan State University felt that a boycott of Coca-Cola - this was the company proposed at the conference - would be an ideal opportunity for the American public to show its dissatisfaction with American businesses that continue their collaboration with the South African government. SALC felt that such a boycott could have tremendous effect if well-organized and executed among the anti-apartheid groups across the country. MSU students and local media are already showing enthusiasm. As a suggestion, full page advertisements would be an effective method of exposing the boycott to the public. Another suggestion would be to add another company - perhaps Mobil Oil - to the boycott to increase its impact on American companies. Also petitions signed by people promising not to purchase their products would further increase the boycott's effect on the companies. The boycott was officially endorsed at the Plenary Session of the Midwest Conference Against Apartheid and Racism on November 17, 1985.

The committee began its campaign by informing all residence halls, the university president, the purchasing department of the cafeteria's Foods and Services Division (which has a contract with Coke), and other related campus organizations of our plans, and requested their endorsement. This forced all of the organizations to take a stand and to make a statement. We immediately caught Coke's attention, and they retaliated by distributing leaflets explaining how they are "protecting" the black workers and are helping

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# Communique of the Meeting Between the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the African National Congress

Delegations of the Executive of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) the National Executive Committee of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) and the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress (ANC) met in Lusaka on 5th and 6th March 1986.

The respective delegations were led by Comrade Jay Naidoo, General Secretary of Cosatu, Comrade John K Nkadimeng, General Secretary of Sactu and Comrade Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC. During the course of the discussions Cosatu and Sactu held a separate session to discuss matters of common interest as trade unionists.

The meeting resulted from the common concern of all parties arising from the fundamental and deep-seated economic, social and political crisis into which the Botha regime and the apartheid system of national oppression and class exploitation have plunged our country. There was common understanding that the Pretoria regime and the ruling class of South Africa are powerless to provide any real and meaningful solutions to this general crisis, that lasting solutions can only emerge from the national liberation movement, headed by the ANC, and the entire democratic forces of our country, of which Cosatu is an important and integral part.

In this regard it was recognised that the fundamental problem facing our country, the question of political power, cannot be resolved without the full participation of the ANC, which is regarded by the majority of the people of South Africa as the overall leader and genuine representative.

The meeting recognised that the emergence of Cosatu as the giant democratic and progressive trade union federation in our country is an historic event in the process of uniting our working class and will immeasurably strengthen the democratic movement as a whole.

After extensive discussions on the current internal and international situation, characterised by a warm spirit of comradeship, the three delegations agreed on a number of important issues. They agreed that the solution to the problems facing our country lie in the establishment of a system of majority rule in a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa. Further, that in the specific conditions of our country it is inconceivable that such a system can be separated from economic emancipation. Our people have been robbed of their land, deprived of their due share in the country's wealth, their skills have been suppressed and poverty and starvation has been their life experience. The correction of these centuries old economic injustices lies at the core of our national aspirations. Accordingly they were united not only in their opposition to the entire apartheid system, but also in their common understanding that victory must embrace more than formal political democracy.

The Cosatu delegation explained that the principal tasks facing their federation is to consolidate their membership and affiliates, rapidly effect conversion of the general unions which are part of Cosatu into an industry-based union, within each industry bring about mergers in order to realise the principle of one industry, one union and to unite the entire working force of our country under the banner of Cosatu. At the same time, as a representative of our working class, Cosatu is seized with the task of engaging the workers in the general democratic struggle, both as an independent organisation and as an essential component of the democratic forces of our country. In this regard, the advancement of the interests of the workers and the democratic struggle of our people requires that Cosatu, in working together with the other democratic mass organisations, seek to build disciplined alliances so as to ensure

that the mobilisation of our people in united mass action also deepens the organisational basis of all democratic organisations of the people.

The delegation of the ANC also reported to the meeting on its policy, its programme, its strategy and tactics. The ANC emphasised the need for the greatest possible mobilisation of all the people of our country to join in united political action against the apartheid regime, equally and in combination with the mass political struggle. The ANC also stressed the importance of the armed struggle to defend the people against the enemy armed forces and to give the people the possibility to seize power from a white minority regime which holds on to power by the use of force.

The three delegations agreed that it is of central importance that the campaign for the immediate unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, should develop with even greater intensity. They agreed that the three organisations would do their utmost in pursuit of this goal.

As the crisis of our country deepens, so too does the resistance, anger and the will of our people to fight back. In the process many issues have emerged and will continue to emerge as central campaigning issues.

At this very moment the entire democratic movement is confronted with the task of finding the correct campaign basis to destroy bantustan education and establish in its place one single democratic, non-racial, free and compulsory system of education for all the children of our country.

Similarly it has become imperative that the workers of our country, together with all the democratic forces, work together to destroy the pass laws — the badge of slavery — and the whole system of influx control and prevent the Botha regime from re-introducing this hated system in any guise whatsoever.

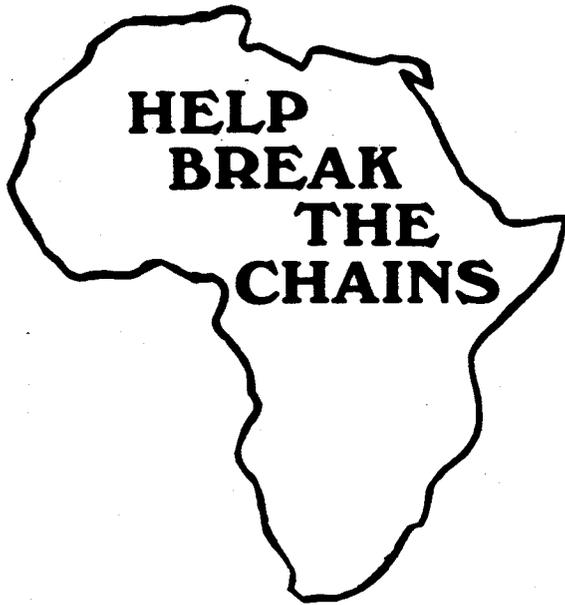
In these and all other campaigns facing our people it is the duty of the democratic forces to work together and consult one another in order to establish the maximum unity in action by all our people. The delegations further agreed that the obstacle to any negotiated solution is the Botha regime. They concluded that no negotiations are possible while the leaders of the people are in prison and while the Pretoria regime refuses to accept that our country should be governed by all its people, both black and white, as equals, as brothers and sisters. In this context the national liberation movement, headed by the ANC, explained that neither negotiations nor 'talks about talks' have taken place and that the ANC is committed that any negotiations, if and when they should take place, must be public and involve the entire democratic movement.

In the discussions between Cosatu and Sactu, both agreed that the widest possible unity of trade unions in our country is of utmost importance in our people's struggle against the apartheid regime and the bosses. Both agreed that there was no contradiction whatsoever arising from their separate existence.

The meeting between all three organisations was characterised by an overwhelming optimism that despite all the manoeuvres by the Botha regime and its allies, despite the heightening repression, victory over the system of white minority racist rule is not far off.

The meeting reiterated the commitment of the three organisations to fight for a society free from the chains of poverty, racism and exploitation which would require the restructuring of the present economy.

7 March 1986



*"We are very appreciative that the bracelet program participants have taken it upon themselves to wear the bracelets until...all the political prisoners in South African jails are free."*

Andimba Toivo Ja Toivo  
SWAPO Secretary General  
August, 1985

## **Wear a South African Political Prisoner Bracelet!**

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In a conference in Berlin, though, in 1884-5, Germany was allocated the territory which it named South West Africa and the boundaries to the territory were set at the conference. Soon after the conference, the first German colonizers landed in the territory. Their first attempts at gaining control over the African tribes was met with heavy resistance. Discouraged they retreated to outlying areas but were soon sent shiploads of soldiers and more German settlers.

With the help of the traders and the missionaries, the Germans soon had the "native" tribes under control. The missionaries and traders helped in the sense that they had already been able to weaken the people greatly. The Herrero and Nama had discovered the usefulness of guns that helped prolong their on-going war over land and held them heavily in debt to the traders. The missionaries were busy trying to get disparate tribes centralized in a few large areas which greatly facilitated the German efforts of conquest. In turn, the traders were able to use the colonial court system to back up their claims and were able to steal from some tribes everything they had. The missionaries also laid claim to many farms and their cattle.

In 1904, after the Germans had firmly established themselves in the territory, one large tribe of Herreros did attempt to revolt. They were driven into the Kalahari where many were shot and the rest died of starvation and thirst. As the Germans and Portuguese were none too friendly at this time, they heavily guarded their borders and many African tribes found themselves cut in half or unable to follow game into different hunting grounds. These nomadic tribes were forced to become agriculturalists in the already overcrowded central plateau or were forced to work for the German settlers. The oppressive regime in South Africa was pushing many groups north into Namibia, again adding to the internal pressure. The Germans attempted to solve the problem by exterminating 60% of the African population in the south and central regions by 1907.

The Germans imposed forced labor, pass, vagrancy, and contract laws. They had most of the remaining Africans working in the "Police Zone" in the northern part of the plateau. By 1913, 13.4 million hectares of land had been taken over by settlers, more than half of the cattle was in settler's hand, and the Germans had exported more than 5.5 million carats of diamonds. They had killed and driven off so many Africans that they had to ask other colonies to send workers. These Germans, though, had such a widespread reputation for extreme brutality that every other colony, including other German ones, refused to send workers. Everyone, that is, except South Africa.

The German attitude toward the African people is clearly summed up by Paul Rohrbach, had of the Settlement Commission, in this quote: "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 in the service of and dependent on whites is above all a law of survival of the highest order."

The Germans were superseded in this survival of the voracious by the South Africans who as "British allies" in 1914, seized South West Africa from Germany. As can be expected, nothing changed for the Africans, they were in the exact position South Africa wanted them to be. At the end of World War I, the Treaty of Versailles put the territory under the supervision of the League of Nations. The League put the territory under the mandate of South Africa saying that the South Africans were to "promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and social progress of the inhabitants of the territory." General Smuts then declared that the mandate was equal to annexation and began to treat South West Africa as an appendage to South Africa. He did, though, send the required annual reports on the status of the territory to the League until its demise in 1939.

South Africa, soon after its initial occupation of the territory, moved all of the Africans that were not already living in the Police Zone onto reserves and into bantustans. In 1923, it passed the Native (Urban Areas) Act which segregated urban areas. In 1927, it passed the Native Administration Act which prevents Blacks from running shops or businesses outside townships. The reserves are situated on the border of the deserts and the central plateau. There is no arable land there in order to grow food or graze cattle and so the Africans were forced to seek work in the factories or starve. They were also subject to arrest if found outside the reserve without the proper pass, and were thrown in jail or shipped to another reserve even if they had no family there. The situation is the same today.

In 1945, the United Nations, as the successor of the League, became the trustee of South West Africa. South Africa decided to propose annexation formally but was turned down. It was heavily criticized by the UN general assembly for its actions in South West Africa and from 1949 refused to send any more reports to the UN. A year later, the International Court of Justice ruled that South Africa

## Namibia Contd.

must report to the UN but South Africa refused to comply. It took it seventeen years, but the UN finally terminated South Africa's mandate and assumed responsibility for South West Africa. It then set up a commission to administer the territory until its independence. This was all, of course, symbolic, as the South Africans had already fully implemented *apartheid* and were in complete control of the country. In 1968, the country was renamed by the UN, in cooperation with the African people of the territory, "Namibia." The UN called for South African withdrawal from the country. In 1971, the International Court of Justice ruled that South African occupation in Namibia was illegal and called upon other states to refrain from assisting this regime. Throughout the years up to the present, the UN has called many times for different embargos against South Africa with the U.S. usually abstaining. Another concern of the UN is that South Africa is the enemy of all its neighboring countries and has been using Namibia as a base camp to direct its attacks on Angola and Zambia. In 1960, an indigenous Namibian resistance movement was started in full with the founding of the South West Africa People's Organization. The UN recognizes SWAPO as the true governing body and sole representative of the Namibian people. In 1966, SWAPO decided to take up arms against the South African army in Namibia. The UN supported this move and today Namibia is in a state of civil war.

Today, Blacks make up 88.5% of the population; English, Afrikaners, and Germans make up the other 11.5% of the population. (Coloureds were included in the Black population.) 60% of the Namibian people live on 5% of the land along the northern border and eastern tip of the Caprivi strip where towns and mines are concentrated. Another 20% live on reserves. The Ovambo tribe has been granted a "homeland" which it governs itself. Whites own all businesses, land, industry, and mines; Blacks are forced to work for barely subsistence pay. Many times they are not given a place to live on company property, and one oil company's workers built their own shacks out of oil drums. The condition of the Namibian people is equal to and in many ways worse than that of the South African Blacks. Namibia, for all its natural wealth, is extremely poor when one looks at the conditions of the Blacks.

Franz Fanon once said: "Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is a violence in its natural state and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence." This seems to be the conclusion forced on SWAPO. It is hard for the non-colonized to decide if this is the best approach. Most people are against violence as an answer to their problems, but in the end it is for the colonized to decide.

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## Coke Boycott Contd.

change the situation from inside. This and all other paranoid propaganda (i.e. articles by white South African students) was immediately rebutted by our group and has been used in our favor.

In terms of publicity, we are continually covering the campus with fliers and are in the midst of printing T-shirts and buttons. The boycott has also received a considerable amount of press attention. The Associated Press contacted our student president, a major Detroit newspaper wrote an article about our actions, and the campus newspaper printed at least an article a day on our progress along with many opinion articles submitted by students, as well as by our members.

Many of the residence hall governments have voted to support the boycott; our members have been in a frenzy trying to formulate talks for all the dormitories to inform them about *apartheid*, divestment, and the National Student Boycott. The greatest barrier that we have encountered has been the apathy involved in the residence hall government's proceedings. Yet the publicity the issue has received, and our determination to force the State News to retract misinformed and incomplete information has also changed many attitudes. Throughout our presentations, we have also been stressing divestment.

ASMSU, the student government, has given us incredible support. They voted unanimously in support of the boycott, and 9-2 in support of divestment of \$500,000 held in companies that deal with South Africa from our Foundation, and in support of completing MSU divestment, and they allotted \$6,000 for the focus issue of the spring Anti-Apartheid awareness, to distribute to any organization of funds for any anti-apartheid presentation. We now ask all other universities to take up the boycott.