



*A White Defector
Speaks
on
Atrocities
in
Southern
Africa*

THIRD WORLD COALITION
INFORMATION PACKET

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The Third World Coalition is a project of the American Friends Service Committee which has as one of its tasks the distribution of information to third world staff of the AFSC and to progressive groups and organizations domestically and internationally. Address all comments and inquiries to the Third World Coalition, 1501 Cherry St., Phila. Penna. 19102.

BILL ANDERSON is a 21 year-old rifleman first (private) in the South African army who, after serving a year in the army in Namibia and Angola, defected in July, 1976 and left his native South Africa to reside in London. "I couldn't stand the atrocities," he said.

He is a Capetown native who attended private schools in South Africa. His father is a renowned oceanographer, his mother a former educator and his sister is a college graduate in psychology. They are, according to Anderson, "arm-chair liberals".



He said his original intentions were to escape continued duty in the army, but to return to South Africa in five years with a new identity. He soon realized the impossibility of such a scheme, however, and slowly, through conversations with SWAPO (Southwest African People's Organization) officials in London, began to understand the full implications of what he had done and the value of the information he had.

He decided to "go public" with a full sworn account of what he had witnessed while serving as a cook in the South African army, and on August 30, 1976, the London Guardian newspaper published Anderson's eye witness accounts of torture techniques used by South African army personnel on teen-age African youth along the Angola-Namibia border.

In September, 1976 Anderson presented further testimony before the United Nations Council On Namibia in New York city.

In October, 1976, Anderson appeared at a press conference in Philadelphia Pennsylvania at the American Friends Service Committee headquarters. The result of that conference and a private interview by the Third World Coalition are contained in this information packet. Editing was done by TWC staff person, Harry Amana, but the comments made by Anderson are directly quoted and fully in tact.

Statement by Bill Anderson

I spent twelve months in the South African army from July last year to June of this year and I experienced some pretty horrific things. Since I left the army in June, I went to London and made a statement to the London Guardian newspaper which came out on August 30th, and then the Council For Namibia at the United Nations invited me to New York to testify to the Council, which is why I'm here (and) to talk to people.

During my 12 months training I had 7 months of active service in the operational area in Southern Africa (Northern Namibia and Southern Angola). We were far in the south (of Angola) so we didn't have much contact with all that was going on, but on a couple of instances cattle thieves were caught who were suspected of being MPLA-SWAPO agents or supporters and I saw these people being beaten up by NCOs and officers and then subjected to a type of water torture where a rag was placed over their heads and water poured onto it, suffocating them. The bulk of what I had to say though was what happened in May and June of this year.

Water torture

We were involved in what is called "Operation Cobra" in which I think it was five battalions were involved in clearing a very small area in Northern Namibia--northeastern Ondongwa--which is the main base in the northern area. Clearing it of guerrilla activity. There had been quite a few incidents in this area before we got there.

For the first four or five weeks of this operation the battalions

worked in their own particular areas sending out their own patrols in a fairly haphazard way. At this stage they were searching crawls. Most of the people in that area are subsistence farmers that have no contact with any urban life at all and these patrols generally looked out for the possibility of arms being hidden in any way, and checking people (to see) if they knew anything of guerrilla activity.

Well, when they brought in suspects, the first two were walking in the direction that guerrillas were supposed to be moving in after they had contacted with South African troops. And just because these two happened to be walking along the (path) of these fleeing guerrillas, they were brought in. When they were brought into camp I personally saw them beaten with fists and with rifle butts, burnt with cigarettes, their mouths filled with sand generally very roughly treated, and this was by the ordinary troops who on an average were about 18 or 19 years old. And this went on in front of senior officers.

They were then taken into an interrogation tent and interrogated with the persuasion of shock treatment. And they were tortured (with) a field telephone--shocks being applied to their earlobes, nipples and genitals. For the two months I was there I went to bed every single every night-- night with the screams of these people being tortured.

Then for the final three weeks of the operation I think the people up top realized this operation wasn't having any result and they brought all five battalions together into a very systematic sweep of a very small area. At this stage orders were given that every single male

"shocks were applied to their nipples."

every night--
"screams of the tortured."

adult whether suspect or not was to be brought in for interrogation, and when I say adult, some of them were as young as thirteen. Orders were also issued throughout the whole operation that if anyone ran away they were to be shot, and these were the standing orders.

1,000 tortured

Our battalion dealt with at least 200 prisoners, and assuming that the other battalions did the same, that meant 1,000 of the local population in a very small area of about 300 or 400 square miles were tortured, most of them being totally innocent. And while this operation was going on--I don't have any figures--but I'm sure similar operations were going on at various other points in northern Namibia. I think the UN brought out figures on the number of troops in northern Namibia at the moment, and there're somewhere in the region of 50,000, which sounds very reasonable. And there are a hell of a lot of troops up there acting like this all the time. I didn't have much experience of the other battalions; this could have been an isolated case of brutality, but as far as I see and as far as my understanding goes it wasn't.

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Q. Were all of these fighting troops?

South African police

A There were 10 South African police with us who, I think, were meant to be in charge of interrogation, which they were for the first couple of days and after that the army officers took over and then all the troops just joined in as well. Their interpreter was a black. I'm not sure if he was an Ovambo from the local population or not, but he was responsible for a lot of the atrocities that were carried out.

Q What was the general attitude towards the torture you described?

A After the first couple of weeks they were no longer scared of beating up prisoners in front of senior officers. Although I don't think anything was ever said by the officers, they were silently encouraged to be involved in this sort of thing. I think half of it was that having been up in the area for seven months, which is quite a long time (with

torture: "a form of entertainment"

just) one group of people with no sort of entertainment or anything, that (it was) in a way, a form of entertainment. Something different after all this time. And we had people who sort of went into it to pass the time....it was in a way, spiritually cleansing for them to do this. They really thought this was the way they could show their duty. Once the torture started (it extended) into the afternoons as well. They used to go through these prisoners and duck their heads in buckets of water for prolonged periods, almost drowning them. And this used to take place outside this interrogation tent. Whenever that was done a huge crowd would gather to watch and this was part of the entertainment. On one occasion too, guerrillas were shot and (their bodies) brought in. As far as I know, an explicit statement was made by the commandant. I never heard it myself, but I gather the commandant actually said "I want everyone to come and have a good look at what a dead terrorist looks like", and these bodies lay there for two days.

Q Did anyone say anything against this or was it not safe to do so?

A I'm going through quite a weird stage at the moment because of a lot of guilt. A lot of things I didn't accept (but) I kept quiet because I realized early on in my training that the only way to survive is to

keep quiet and if I'd said anything they could just have turned around and put a bullet in me. But I did, while I was there, accept a lot of things... only now that I'm out do I realize exactly what I was accepting and I've been through quite a stage of guilt in this matter....your whole state of values does become warped...(you're) kind of brainwashed, especially having been up in that area for such a long time.

Q Are you the only member of your batallion who reacted the way you did?

A To such an extent, yes. I would say that about 90 percent of my batallion was involved in some way or another with these activities and supported them. I knew people who came back from watching, joking about it and laughing at what had been going on. The other 10 percent, a lot of them for humanitarian reasons, didn't like the way prisoners were being treated. They disagreed to some extent or other. But basically most of them had a position where they've got a very comfortable life in South Africa and there're not prepared to sacrifice it or to stand up for anything.

Q What happened from that time on and what's your status now?

A At the moment I'm still traveling on a South African passport and I haven't any status in Britain yet. I'm going to attempt to get a resident's permit when I get back there. I think South Africa would love to get me back there. There are a number of things they could get me on. First the Internal Security Act which (says) that any military information is confidential. They could have me under the Suppression of Communism Act. This act is used for any anti-government activity which is regarded as communism. They could even argue a treason case

stage of guilt

Suppression of
Communism Act

if they looked on the situation as being one of war, and the death penalty still stands for that. More than likely I wouldn't get any where near a court and security police would give me a good going over and I'd sort of join the South African national sport of falling out of windows, which they seem to be very good at doing.

Q What will you do in London?

A I'm hoping to go back to the university next year (and) hopefully I'll be working in something constructive around South Africa. I know there are a lot of South Africans trying to get into the work of the liberation movements...many more people trying to get these jobs than there are jobs. But a white South African, no matter how genuine they might sound, are still held off suspiciously by the (liberation) groups. For myself it took a long time to make a decision to make a statement which meant I couldn't go back to South Africa. I made it because I felt that just my statement alone could possibly be more effective than anything I could do back in South Africa. I was surprised at the warmth with which I was received by the liberation movements and, at least outside the country, they're not talking about South Africa only for the blacks, (but a multinational) society for all South Africans. I don't know to what extent this will be the opinion in South Africa, but I'm optimistic.

received warmly
by SWAPO

Q While you were in northern Namibia did you come in contact with any of the black population in anything other than a military manner?

A No, (but) even if I had they wouldn't have spoken to me. Actually their attitude to the troops was quite interesting. When we were in Calueque

in Angola, the local population was very friendly towards us, I think basically because we had the upper hand; we were in command and they were prepared to go along with us to keep us happy. And the same thing when we were far west. For two months we were about 100 kilometers west of Ruacana, and there again the local population was very friendly. But in Ovamboland where all of this (Operation Cobra) is going on the hatred is being shown explicitly. They've got to such a stage where they're not prepared to go along and sort of smile and wave at South African troops.

Q How far did South African troops penetrate into Angola in September, October, November of last year?

A There was a motor platoon from our battalion up in the Zaire border (and) there were a good couple of companies north of Launda that I knew of.

Q Were they airlifted up there?

A Yes, I think most of them were.

Q What type of aircraft was used?

A I don't know whether they used South African aircraft, which would be a C-130. I assume that's what they used. Those that went in September, October, and November were completely reissued with new kits and new identity tags, the works, so that they couldn't be identified as South Africans.

Q Identity tags that would make people think they were mercenary soldiers?

A Yes.

Q Did you see or receive any information that the South African troops

South African
soldiers:
posed as
mercenaries

training UNITA guerrillas to take offensive action against SWAPO forces?

A I didn't have any direct experience of any of that. A lot of things I wasn't very clear on at the time. I had some contact with UNITA troops through a convoy of refugees which stopped at Rawandas, a town held by South Africa and UNITA. We were told "if UNITA speaks back at you, shoot them." Things were very strained. Basically South African troops didn't like fighting alongside blacks.

Q Was there any presence of Israeli troops or advisors?

A I never saw Israelis there although a lot was spoken about the fact that the South African army was going to go over to using (Israeli) automatic weapons replacing the R-1, and that there had been quite a bit of contact with Israel. I know that a number of officers had gone

Israeli weapons,
advisors

to Israel but whether the Israeli advisors had come back I don't know, but I never saw any myself.

Q Do you have any information on South African military raids on a Namibian refugee camp in Zambia?

A No but a report came out in the Guardian, I think the day after my statement was published, in which a South African soldier who remained anonymous because he's still in South Africa, reported he had been involved in one of these raids and he confirmed it all, but I didn't know anything of it myself. I'm not sure about confirmation from the Zambian side (but) it sounds as if that type of thing took place. If it was the Reike (sp) troops I spoke about I can well believe it. They are the South African elite. To go into them you have to sign up for

at least three years. In that time you have a free fall ticket (paratroopers); you have deep sea diving; you do anything and everything. And once they get active they are really animals. They don't use South African weapons; they use captured AK-47s which they find are better weapons. One story I heard--I don't know how true it is--was told to me by a lieutenant who was in the paravets. He had broken his ankle and was taken out of the paravets and put into our battalion. While he was in Angola (he said) some of these troops caught a man they had to take back to camp for questioning and the sergeant in charge said "You're not traveling on my vehicle," and put his hands together and shot a hole through his hands and then got a piece of wire and tied it through the hole and dragged him along the back. I've heard many stories of the way they go on.

"they shot a hole through his hands."

Q Do you know anything about the situation in Rhodesia? Whether they are doing the same kinds of things that you were involved in?

A I don't have any direct experience (so) I'm not too clear on it (but) I think the Rhodesian army is acting in more or less the same way. I think that the reports of a massacre of three hundred Mozambique people recently are true. They're very capable of doing that sort of thing. You get very conflicting reports. I speak with the people that have been there. Some say that life goes on as normal, but others say that people are worrying--that men set up in business and middle-age men are doing the yearly (armed) service and are spending a lot of time in the defense force. I think it is taking the toll on the people.

Just as in South Africa where up to now they've always said that the defense forces can look after anything. But at the moment I would estimate that they have about a million men to draw on for their force. But there are 50,000 in northern Namibia alone, which means that there must be 100,000 being drawn out of the country. As soon as you step up operations and (attempt) to fight off guerrilla warfare, you need to work on the ratio of one guerrilla to ten defendants and that's a very modest ratio. So as this war gets stepped up I think it's really going to take its toll not only on the South African economy, but on the manpower in general. After Angola and Mozambique (the revolutions) people talked and worried for a couple of weeks then put their heads back in the sand and nothing more was said about it, (but) all the fire arm shops are sold out and the pistol ranges are flooded with people. I think there is a fear that's been hidden away for so long they're now at the stage they can no longer hide it. I think people are very worried.

pistol range
"flooded with
people."

Q What is the drift of military thinking about the situation that South Africa may face with a SWAPO dominated Namibia and a black-ruled Zimbabwe?

A I wouldn't like to say. I think before that happens...I don't think a SWAPO dominated Namibia...is going to be one clean step. I can't see

main supply town
in Namibia
doubled in size

South African troops pulling out of Namibia at all. The main supply town there has doubled in size in the last couple of years and they are still building these huge stores. And then, from another point of view, they have not yet, as far as I know, started to end fortifications along the Orange river which is near the Namibian-South Africa border,

and as soon as they realize they have to pull out they'll be very quick in setting up some line of defense along there, although I think the Orange river boundary is easy to defend. Also with the black people there is a feeling of hope, especially with what happened in Mozambique and now Angola. They are beginning to see some hope for the situation although I think it is a very strange revolution, where the working class are being very quiet and are not prepared to go into it. I think the press reports are pretty accurate in saying that it is the children that are doing most of the shouting and the action. In these terms, my approach to the Black consciousness movement, which is fairly strong in South Africa, (is something) I can't condone. To me it is as racist as...the Vorster regime is, but I can understand it and I think it's a very important stage in what is going on in South Africa. I think the settled working class have gone through so much in the fifties and the defiance campaign in 1953 and in other moments. I think their general attitude is, let's carry on as we are and keep it vaguely peaceful--why get all involved again. And I think the kids are having to work really hard on sort of getting the working class mobilized and getting them together.

Q You said that you didn't condone the black consciousness movement?

A The black consciousness movement in South Africa as I see it is talking about South Africa for the blacks to the exclusion of anyone else. I found when I was working (with a university group) we tried to make contact with the SASO people and they would have nothing to

The black consciousness movement? "I can't condone it."

do with us at all. I feel that it is wrong in the fact that I belong in South Africa as much as any black does. So I would condemn it on that level although, as I said, I think it is a very important stage. To put it bluntly, I think a psychological buildup is needed amongst a lot of the population. I mean, such incredible statements are coming out. I know on television in London a crew got in Soweto and they interviewed a young chap throwing stones at police and the interviewer said to him: "Don't you get worried that you are throwing stones and there are these men standing with guns?" And the young guy--must have been twelve or thirteen--said, "They can shoot me; it makes no difference because we are right and we're going to win." And there's so much of this going on: kids in Cape Town saying to

"Tonight you'll have to bury us."

their parents, "Don't go to work today because tonight you'll have to bury us." And they are just totally fearless, and I think it's the most incredible thing that's happened there for a long time.

Q In a climate like that, what kind of reaction did you have in Namibia?

A I find it very hard...friends back home wrote me and asked what can we do, and I think it is very hard. As with the Soweto (uprising), (white students from the university of Johannesburg (went along) with banners like, "Don't Start The Revolution Without Us!" A lot of people were just jumping on the bandwagon and it was quite a gass' to go along, but I think a lot were very serious about it. I had a letter from a friend in Cape Town--a couple of white people had gone along with a colored friend and were involved in one of these riots. And

at one stage the colored girl turned around and said, "Look, clear out; it's no longer safe for you here. " I don't think the whites have got a part to play in this type of thing at the moment...what you can do I don't know. I don't know whether I should say this--if it should get back in other circles (but) I wrote back and said, "Close the University of Capetown." Which is something I'll be thinking for a long time because to me the situation is such now that it must be looked at, figuratively speaking, in terms of black and white and no in between. I feel you have to act now as if crisis point has been reached. I think armed struggle is the only answer there; I don't see anything else happening there. And over reacting to what has been going on on one side--I feel really terrible that so many people are getting killed; but on the other hand I'm really happy that something is going to happen. I think a lot of blood is going to have to be shed there and I think that's the only way it can happen now because I'm 100 percent sure that the Afrikaner won't give an inch of his power or his land. I think it's not only in terms of politics there, it's very much in terms of the Afrikaner culture and the Afrikaner's identity which he is so scared of losing.

Q You don't see a peaceful solution?

A I do. I'm optimistic. But I think the longer it takes for a change to come, the less likely that is. At the moment, my vision of a non-racial situation is only involved with people who are prepared to live under such a system. I think it's going to necessarily going to be a socialist form of government as most liberation movements in Africa have been. A

"Armed struggle is the only answer."

...a socialist system

Non-racial theater

lot of people would never come to terms with living under that kind of system and a lot wouldn't come to terms with living under a black person telling them what to do.

Q Would you say the Afrikaners have as much right to be there as the blacks, say relative to the Americans rights to be here relative to the Indians?

A They did more or less arrive at the same time, but I don't think any argument based on historical grounds as to who owns the land is feasible at this stage in our history. I feel that if someone is born in a country and grown up there he has a right to a say of what's going on. The Afrikans society as such only developed 100 or 150 years after the Dutch had been there. I don't know why the question is whether the Afrikaners have a right to be there or not. The question is whether they have a right to be there while the blacks live on a substandard level. Or have a right to claim it's their country soley. I'm not trying to say that the Afrikaner has a right to the country to the exclusion of anyone else. I think everyone there at the moment has a right to the country, although because of the Afrikaner's way of rule, he 's got a hell of a punishment coming his way and he's going to pay for it I'm sure. And I think it's going to be to the exclusion of him in the country, which I agree with because he's only got himself to blame.

Q If whites can't help directly in a situation like Soweto, wouldn't their responsibility entail giving support to the black uprising and to try to gain support among white South Africans?

"hell of a punishment coming"

A I agree with that, but from my point of view, while I was there I was fairly frustrated in trying to do something in the system. I find it very hard to figure out a white student's role in the country. If you came to the point where you realize that the polling booth is a farce and most change is got to come from within the system itself, there's no point I see in working amongst the white community within the system, trying to change that because you're wasting your time. And then, at the moment, because of the way things are, it's very hard to work with the blacks because so much patronizing help has gone their way that they are, rightly so, very suspicious of anyone who offers help. I went through quite a big change while I was at the university in Capetown. I went to a private school (and) they are all very elitist, very snobbish. And the school where I was at had a big estate attached to it. With its own black population and we used to do a lot of work amongst the blacks on the estate. But it was all in the old 1950s liberal fashion which was just so patronizing. And I was actually brought up when I was very young with this very patronizing attitude towards the blacks and it was only when I was at the university that my eyes were really opened as to exactly what the situation was. In the last elections in 1974 I was involved in a group called the Alliance for Radical Change in which we were talking about black majority rule. And at that stage I was sort of reaching an understanding of the situation. After a year at the university I went into a theater at Capetown--a non-racial theater--and during that time my whole attitude was sort of strengthened.

hard to work
with blacks

Alliance for
Radical Change

Q What does the term "non-racial" mean?

A I just prefer using it as opposed to multi-racial. I feel that multi-racial is still trying to separate the groups. I think non-racial is a formal positive way of looking at things.

Q In other words apartheid doesn't apply in that theater?

A No, it's actually quite an interesting case. Now the main state theater in Capetown has in the last year opened its audiences to black and white. But for the last four years the theater where I worked has been having mixed audiences and I worked in a set where we had two theaters and the theater where I worked we had mixed casts as well. This was done on a club system. There were about 5,000 members of the club and only members could see these performances.

Q What about the divisions in South Africa itself--white South African society--between Afrikaners and English? We're getting an idea from what you're saying, but what is the extent of the division and what do you project in the next year or two?

A It's not quite definite. It's wrong to say the Afrikaners all support the government and the English all are liberal, but to generalize that is basically what it is. But there are a number of English speaking people who support the government and a vast amount of English speaking people who are United Party supporters. The United Party is a...well no one knows what they stand for. Even their leaders don't; they always ask this at elections, but basically, they support the government in principle and argue with them on details. And they're the main opposition and supported by the English. The rest I'd say are basically arm-chair

English versus
Afrikaners

liberals. There are Afrikaner liberals and Afrikaner radicals, but on the whole they support the government also. There is quite a strained relationship between the two groups (English speaking and Afrikaners) that starts in schools. There are very few schools teaching Afrikaans and English from childhood. The Afrikaans universities are the same. Also there is quite a bit of hard feeling (and) I don't think it's going to change.

Q What kind of posture does the South African government take towards progressive whites or activists?

A The activists have just about all been squashed. The banning orders are what they start them off on. Usually it's a ten-year banning order and while you're banned you aren't allowed to be in the company of more than one person at a time. You aren't allowed to study. You aren't allowed to speak in public--I'm not sure of all the regulations on it. House arrest is another part of this. There's also detention without a trial and then very few people are ever charged. When they are charged it's under the suppression of communism or terrorist act. Three British citizens were recently charged--a couple who I actually worked with in Capetown, but in Britain there was enormous publicity for a number of weeks on their case which is all very well, but I think people seem to forget that there were three white people held under this system and everyone shouts about it--meanwhile, since June over 3,000 black people have been arrested the same way and will, more than likely, never be brought to trial. They can be detained as long as the government wishes.

progressive
whites
also detained