

REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOUTH WEST AFRICA

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The International Conference on South West Africa was held at Oxford, England, March 23-26. I attended on behalf of the American Committee on Africa. This is a brief report on the Conference, which was a sequel to an International Conference on Sanctions Against South Africa, held two years ago, in London. It wasn't quite as large as the Sanctions Conference. Its task could not, of course, be quite as specific as its predecessor's, especially because the judgment of the International Court on the South West Africa case has not been rendered. Therefore the Conference could not give specific consideration to the recommendations to be made by the Court. Planning for this International Conference began last summer, and at that time it was thought that perhaps the Court would have given its decision by this time. In some ways it was a liability that the Conference met before the judgment had been given, but in another sense, the work of the Conference was not affected by the lack of the Court decision.

Russell Howe's article in the New Leader of February 28th

Some Americans had their attention drawn to this Conference for the first time by an article which appeared in the New Leader in late February. The article was written by a journalist, Russell Howe, who has been writing on African affairs for at least the last decade. His article was a piece of irresponsible journalism. Only four paragraphs in the article related directly to the Oxford Conference. Howe was trying to put this conference in the context of the Cold War struggle between the East and the West, in Africa. He made it appear that this Conference on South West Africa was a Communist strategy, purely and simply designed to put the United States on the spot. He said that Ronald Segal, who was the principal organizer of the Conference, was "apparently accepted as a communist by U.S. and British Intelligence." He said that Communist China had accepted a request to send a delegation to the Conference; that Guinea had been invited but Japan had not; and that as soon as the Conference opened, "certain delegations" would propose that the whole of Southern Africa, in the light of Rhodesian developments, would be made part of the agenda. Other facts might also be pointed to. My only comment on this fabrication by Howe is that if there was communist manipulation, I didn't see it. If Ronald Segal is looked upon as a communist by the American authorities, why is it that he has been able to travel within the U.S. without restriction in the past? He is coming again soon to write a book here, on behalf of a very respected publisher with a most generous advance. There was no Communist Chinese delegation at the Conference. In fact the Chinese apparently looked upon the Conference as an American-Russian plot of some sort. Japan was one of the first countries invited to attend the Conference. There was no delegation from Guinea there, and there was never any proposal made to have the agenda of the Conference broadened to include South Africa or other issues in the southern part of the continent. In fact there were no papers prepared on any subject other than South West Africa.

I wouldn't bother to mention these facts, but the New Leader article may have scared some Americans away from the Conference. The Democratic Party had apparently indicated at one time that they might send a delegation to attend the Conference. Perhaps this article was the final straw in their decision not even to send observers to Oxford.

Conference sponsorship

Two London-based organizations sponsored the Conference -- the Africa Bureau and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. In addition there were about a hundred well-known international figures who were listed as individual sponsors. This included a good many Americans -- eight members of Congress (three Senators and five Congressmen), Walter Reuther, civil rights leaders such as Roy Wilkins, James Farmer, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; Leonard Bernstein, Harold C. Urey, Jonas Salk, James A. Pike, etc.

Funds to cover the expenses of the Conference came principally from governments. Malaysia gave 1700 pounds, Ghana 2000 (this came two weeks after the coup, although it probably was approved by the Nkrumah government), India gave 500, Tunisia 250, Pakistan 200, and others.

Conference attendance

There were about 150 involved in the Conference proceedings. They came from about 32 different countries. Eighteen countries had official observers or delegates, and the rest of the representatives came from non-governmental organizations. Nine African countries were represented -- Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Tunisia, the UAR, and Zambia. In addition, the two key South West African political organizations, the South West African National Union and the South West African Peoples Organization, were represented by eight and seven delegates respectively. Only four Communist countries were represented -- Bulgaria, Poland, the USSR and Yugoslavia. The USSR delegation was not an official delegation of the government. Their chief delegate was Professor F.I. Kozhevnikov, who was formerly one of the judges on the International Court. Three Communist parties sent delegates -- from Sweden, Italy and France.

The largest national representation came from Sweden. The Chairman of the Conference was Olof Palme, the Swedish Minister of Communications. There were twelve other Swedish organizations represented. Most of the governmental representatives who came were sent by their respective embassies or High-Commission offices in London. On the whole, governmental delegations did not come directly from the home country. The United Nations Committee of Twenty-four was represented and the delegation was headed by Ambassador Collier of Sierra Leone. American representation was very thin. In addition to my representing the American Committee on Africa, Paolo Eisenberg was there from the U.S. Youth Council, and Aillard K. Lowenstein came from the U.S. as an individual deeply concerned with South West Africa. The only other Americans there were London-based at the present moment. Several preparatory papers were written by Americans or American-based specialists.

There was no evidence in the debates of a Cold War conflict. In an opening speech, the Soviet representative did put in one piece of propaganda against U.S. involvement in Viet Nam. I was in the same commission as the two Soviet delegates, and there was never a moment at which Cold War issues were raised by the Russians. In fact, they remained remarkably silent, and had no effect whatsoever on the proceedings in the commission discussions.

The findings of the conference

The Conference discussions themselves were pretty well organized. The basic work was done in four commissions, each having a set of papers which had been prepared especially for it. Commission One, dealing with the situation "Inside South West Africa: the workings of Apartheid," had papers by experts drawn up on such

questions as the condition of the people under the Mandate, the development of the South West African economy, the legal status of apartheid, education under apartheid, the Olendahl Commission, etc. The papers were written by such persons as Professor R.L. Bradford, Chairman of the Department of Political Science at Susquehanna University here in the U.S.; Dr. Absalom Vilakazi, a South African now teaching at the American University in Washington.

Commission Two, on "South Africa and South West Africa: the Relations between the Two States," had papers on the economic relations between the two, the defense position in South West Africa, and others.

Commission Three, on "The Crisis for the International Community," had papers dealing with German South West Africa, 1904-1914; the Trusteeship system of the U.N.; and consequences of the decision of the International Court. They were prepared by such men as Dr. Iain MacGibbon, of the Department of Public International Law, at the University of Edinburgh; Dr. Helmut Bley, of the University of Hamburg; Dr. Eduardo Mondlane, formerly on the Secretariat of the Trusteeship Division of the U.N.; and Dr. William Roger Louis, of Yale University.

Commission Four was on "The Assertion of International Responsibilities." Here papers dealt with the vulnerability of the South African economy, the case for international intervention, and South West Africa and the U.N.

Each Commission produced a report which was presented to a plenary session of the Conference on the final day of the proceedings, and was finally adopted. Therefore, the findings of the Conference will appear in four Commission reports. Each report went through with remarkably little debate and amendment. The basic findings of the Commission reports can be summarized in seven points:

1. South Africa has violated the Mandate in many particulars, and has imposed an exploitative system upon the people of South West Africa. There was agreement on certain facts such as that the per capita income of residents of the so-called police zone, where the white settlers live, is 176 pounds per year, while the bulk of Africans outside this zone receive only eight pounds ten shillings per year. The average income for white miners in 1962 was 2200 pounds, whereas it was only 100 for the African miners. White settlers own twice the amount of land set aside for Africans, who outnumber the whites 7:1. There was agreement that the contract labor system under which Africans are recruited by a semi-government monopoly, keeps wages depressed and operates a system under which men are taken from their homes and families for periods of between six and eighteen months to live in bachelor compounds in the police zone. Only three tenths of one percent of African pupils were in secondary classes in 1962. The average expectation of life for the African population is about half that of whites. The President of South Africa has been declared the Supreme Chief of all Africans, and acting in this capacity he can remove chiefs, divide or amalgamate tribal communities, and deport groups, etc. About a quarter of South West Africa's merchandise exports go to South Africa, and three-quarters of the imports come from the Republic. In the view of the Conference, South Africa had violated the Mandate by not developing the physical and social well-being of the people, by establishing military bases in the Caprivi Strip, for example; by refusing to accept the advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice, etc.

2. South West Africa is potentially an economically viable country. There are large deposits of minerals and diamonds. The fishing industry is productive and profitable. There is a large excess of exports over imports, which should make South West Africa capable of financing a balanced economic development in the country. Unfortunately, most of this economic profit goes to the benefit of the small white

minority, rather than being spread out to the majority of the people. In 1962, 32% of the gross domestic product went to foreigners in the form of dividends, interest and other payments. The rate of economic growth in South West Africa has been 6% per annum, which is higher than most African countries.

3. The exploitation of South West Africa by South Africa creates a threat to the peace. The Commission Four Report said, "South Africa's actions have created a crisis which has grave implications for the peace and security of the African continent. South African policies are not only a manifestation of extreme colonialism; they create a center of white supremacy and reaction whose aim is to challenge and frustrate the historical and irreversible movement of liberation and progress that is and has been taking place in the African continent. Herein lies the serious threat of war and conflict."

4. The forthcoming judgment of the International Court is a significant step forward. Commission Four's Report said, "a positive judgment from the World Court would provide a particular opportunity for the actions of the world to confront South Africa with the necessity of abandoning its race rule over South West Africa and withdrawing from the territory."

5. The International Mandate is obsolete and outmoded. The decision of the Court essentially was seen by the Conference as a means of declaring the Mandate anachronistic and moving rapidly towards the independence of South West Africa.

6. Economic sanctions and military force if necessary can and should be used by the international community through the U.N. to implement a positive decision of the International Court without delay, and very rapidly lead to an independent South West Africa. The Report said, "the termination of the Mandate must be secured by the organization of international presence acceptable to the people of South West Africa, preparatory to the establishment of an independent government of South West Africa."

7. The Conference recognized that if progress were to be made in achieving these goals, it was dependent on the attitude of the great powers, and their agreement to enforce through mandatory action the termination of the Mandate. The governments of the United States and the United Kingdom were seen as crucial. The Conference called upon "the major trading partners of South Africa to take urgent action to disabuse the South African government of its dangerous miscalculation and to adopt policies which will not only implement the numerous resolutions of the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council, but which will decisively contribute to the termination of the South African Mandate over South West Africa."

The importance of the Conference

Perhaps the most important thing about the Conference were the papers prepared for it and the book which will come out shortly with these papers as chapters. The findings of the Conference will not change the policies of governments as such. The deliberations I think will be useful for forthcoming United Nations debates. There were enough groups from a number of different countries represented so that a mood was created at the discussions of the Conference. This undoubtedly will lead to greater coordination in international action on the non-governmental level. Governmental action will primarily take place through the U.N. Since the Conference took place prior to the final judgment of the Court, and since its subject matter was not pinpointed to the extent that it was at the Sanctions Conference, this Conference on South West Africa will not be referred to to the same extent as its predecessor two years ago. The Conference's main finding was important regardless of the Court judgment, namely that the Mandate is obsolete, and that the main value of the Court judgment will be to lead to international action to end the exploitation of South West Africa by South Africa.