

OPERATION NAMIBIA Bulletin #10

published by: Philadelphia Namibia Action Group/5021 Cedar Ave./Phila., PA 19143 U.S.A.
(215) 474-9592



OPERATION NAMIBIA

'76 - '79

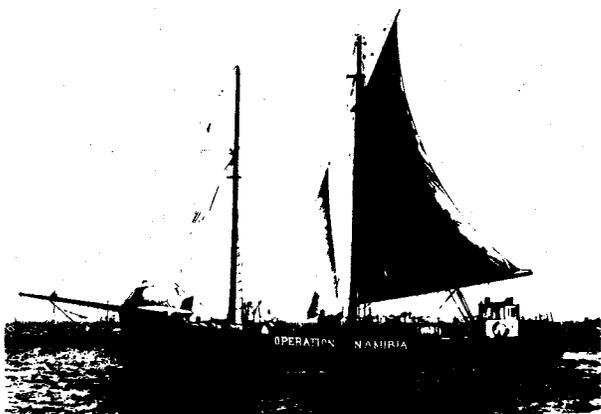
THE GOLDEN HARVEST

The Golden Harvest had been on its way to Namibia for a year and a half when it anchored in Accra, Ghana last spring. There the crew was well-received by David Acquah of the Ghana National Committee Against Apartheid, who sponsored an exhibition on Namibia in their honor and whose help with publicity was invaluable.

As always, there were problems and much work to be done on the vessel. Again they built a new boom, for the one just made in The Gambia had broken. Barry's health weakened daily and he was forced to return to Ireland for a few months of treatment and rest. More happily, they made many friends at the dockyard who volunteered their labor, books were donated from many sources, and Ghana's Foreign Ministry granted them an exceptional sum of \$5000.

To crew members Maggie and Roy, however, the greatest gift was the joyous birth of their daughter, Ann. Although her arrival was inconveniently timed, for Maggie had to return to England to insure a safe delivery, we have all shared in their pride. Roy visited his family for a few weeks, then returned to the G.H. in July to carry on what they had begun together. Needless to say, Maggie is missed on the crew, and she and Roy look forward to their reunion once the action is completed.

TROUBLE IN NIGERIA: Though shorthanded, the crew sailed on to Lagos, Nigeria, not in the least



The GOLDEN HARVEST with a patched mainsail. Thanks to a generous grant from the Ghanaian government, they have replaced this with a new sail ordered from England.

THE FRI

After leaving the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius last summer, the Fri headed for Tulear, Malagasy but was unexpectedly refused entry there and sailed on to Maputo, Mozambique.

There they learned that the Golden Harvest crew, having purchased a new long-range radio for themselves, had freighted the other radio to Tulear for the Fri! Despite much correspondence and the efforts of the French embassy, there has been no trace of it, so the Fri is reconciled to sailing with only ship-to-shore equipment, knowing that communications with us and with the G.H. will suffer greatly. Needless to say, this worries us, for they will be attempting to round a dangerous Cape with only South African ports to call in.



Crew of the S.V. FRI

In Maputo, the crew dialogued with the national revolutionary party, FRELIMO, on the relationship of nonviolent action to the armed struggles, met with George Hauser of the American Committee on Africa, and visited with Bill Sutherland and David Sogge of the American Friends Service Committee. They were graciously hosted by Sharfudine Khan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who arranged for a grant from the Lutheran World Church Federation. Although in the end they received less than one-third of the funds they had budgeted for (see p. 3), this did enable them to order a new sail from Denmark and to send David Moodie to Lusaka, Zambia where he visited the Namibia Institute, made further contacts and talked with Namibians-in-exile about the Books Project. He arrived in Lusaka at a particularly tense time, just after the bombing of Zimbabwean refugee camps, and being a white stranger, he was automatically suspect and held in detention for a few days. The same sort of tension in Mozambique seems to have precipitated a mysterious three-week disappearance of the Fri's engineer, Ed, who reappeared from detention in mid-January.

The Fri leaves Maputo February 6th, impressed and intrigued by the complicated, developing new society of Mozambique, and unsure about what lies ahead.

suspecting the trials that awaited them there, ending on October 31st when they were forced at gunpoint to sail without food or water (except for some canned fish) in an unseaworthy vessel, for they were in the middle of repairs.

"We came to Nigeria," wrote Karen Elise, "with the hope of pumping new life into Operation Namibia, a project plagued with small financial resources, mechanical difficulties, malaria, boils and South African interference. The commitment of the crew to overcome all obstacles... and the neverwaving support from dockyard workers, students, fish sellers, company managers, bus queue standers, thinkers...has kept Operation Namibia alive. We hoped that in Nigeria we could make final preparations for the long and rough sea passages ahead the the confrontation in Walvis Bay, in terms of maintenance, provisions, crew members and publicity."

Although months in advance they had shared their itinerary and purpose with the Nigerian High Commission in Accra and the Anti-Apartheid Committee and SWAPO representative in Lagos, when Gambian crew member Momodou went overland to Lagos to prepare for the crew's arrival, he found that no information had been forwarded to External Affairs as expected. Worse yet, Nigerian authorities deported him, despite the fact that Gambians can legally visit Nigeria without travel documents, because they didn't believe that an African could represent a transnational project.

MASS REFUGEE GRAVE



May 4, 1978: 600 Namibian refugees lay dead near Kassinga after South African troops had bombed and invaded their camp. Six days earlier, South Africa had accepted the Western proposals with the proviso that all violence must be ceased.

NAMIBIA UPDATE

April 1, 1978: South Africa took direct administrative control of Walvis Bay, the only deep water port on the entire Namibian coast, after 56 years of administering the Bay as an integral part of Namibia. (See our bulletin of March, 1978 for details.)

April 10, 1978: The Five (Western) Powers' "proposal for the settlement of the Namibia question" was submitted to South Africa, the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) and the United Nations:

- a) free elections for the whole of Namibia as one political entity, to elect an interim government which would prepare for independence (which SWAPO had favored and South Africa had opposed, wanting instead a series of elections by tribal areas)
- b) right of the U.N. Special Representative to approve each stage of the election process (less than the total U.N. control which SWAPO wanted but more than the assistant role which South Africa had offered the U.N.)
- c) release of all political prisoners or detainees
- d) an end to all hostilities and withdrawal of all but 1500 South African troops who would be confined to barracks (a compromise between the 50,000 troops which South Africa now has posted in Namibia and the total withdrawal which SWAPO had demanded), but "primary responsibility for maintaining law and order in Namibia during the transitional period shall rest with the existing [South African controlled] police"
- e) no mention made of Walvis Bay

April 18, 1978: M. T. Steyn, South Africa's Administrator-General for Namibia, took total power, permitting unlimited and indefinite detentions of those deemed "to be a threat to the territory's security," without recourse to a court of law. Under this Proclamation AG-26 five top SWAPO leaders were immediately arrested, followed by the detention of hundreds of SWAPO activists in every region of Namibia.

April 20, 1978: Namibia's leading independent English and German newspapers were bought by a German millionaire. The editor of one, The Windhoek Advertiser, resigned and announced that under the new owner both papers would favor the South African supported Democratic Turnhalle Alliance in the proposed elections.

April 24, 1978: At a U.N. Special Session, SWAPO President Sam Nujoma, presented evidence that South Africa was building its military strength in Namibia, with troop reinforcements, new bases and airfields, and large shipments of tanks, aircraft, artillery and ammunition.

April 28, 1978: South Africa accepted the Five Powers' proposal, adding that "any outbreak of violence" would result in South African military intervention.

May 4, 1978: In the early morning, 8 French-made Mirage jets bombed a SWAPO refugee camp near Kassinga, 150 miles inside Angola. Over 300 primary school children were killed instantly, along with medical staff and patients. All facilities---classrooms, library, clinic and patient wards---were burned to a rubble. South Africa claimed the camp was SWAPO's military headquarters, yet the site is totally uncamouflaged, far from the front, and, except for the camp's defense unit of 300, the 4100 inhabitants were unarmed civilians. After 1500 South African Defense Force paratroopers were dropped from U.S.-made Hercules C-130 transport planes, they invaded the camp, killing everyone in sight; those who ran to hide in trenches were hauled out and shot at close range; women were raped, then killed. Two mass graves on the site now hold 600 bodies, and others are unaccounted for.

In the aftermath of the attack, SWAPO broke off negotiations amidst international speculation that South Africa had deliberately tried to provoke SWAPO's repudiation of the Western proposals. South Africa announced that, independent of the U.N., it would conduct its own registration of voters for a fall election in Namibia.

June 11, 1978: SWAPO agreed to resume talks on the Western proposal, while South Africa continued with its own "independence plan," despite U.N. and Western opposition.

July 12, 1978: SWAPO tentatively accepted the proposal, subject to the findings and recommendations of U.N. Commissioner for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, who proceeded to Namibia on a fact-finding mission. An important feature of the agreement was the acceptance by the Western powers of a U.N. resolution upholding Namibia's territorial claim to Walvis Bay, though neglecting to insist that the port be relinquished by South Africa before granting independence.

August 1, 1978: Martti Ahtisaari returned from Namibia saying that a fair, U.N.-run election could not be held before May of 1979. Most commentators agreed that South Africa's insistence on holding its own, earlier election was calculated to undermine SWAPO's wide popularity base (conceded even by the South African press to be the largest) by insuring a SWAPO boycott of the election and preventing the votes of those in exile as well as political prisoners.

September 10, 1978: The U.N. Security Council approved a plan calling for a peace-keeping force of 7500, whose responsibilities would include supervision of the election process. South Africa immediately objected to this and other aspects of the plan and recalled its envoy for further consultations.

September 20, 1978: After months of stalling, South Africa finally rejected the Western proposals. This and the succession of Prime Minister P. W. Botha, the most hard-line conservative in the ruling clique, suggested that South Africa would remain rigid regarding independence and Walvis Bay.

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The G.H. approached Lagos on September 15th but couldn't get permission to enter because the port's radios were out of order; so at the invitation of a friendly sailor, they entered and moored alongside a water tanker, replenished their low water supply, and set off to announce their arrival. They found no trace of Momodou, but five days later he slipped back across the border to rejoin them. It was reassuring when they received customs, immigration and security clearance, made numerous helpful contacts, and gained extensive media coverage, including a BBC interview. The Anti-Apartheid Committee, officially appointed as hosts to the crew, agreed to print thousands of leaflets and O.N. letterheads; the NPA dockyard workers offered support, materials and labor; and word came that Head of State General Obasanjo had approved a grant for the project. For a month, things progressed smoothly.

There were some internal problems, though: a man and woman from Ghana had joined the crew for a trial period, but were soon disillusioned by the rigors of G.H. life, did not share the political and social visions of the others, and failed to attend meetings to discuss these differences. Finally, they "went on strike," left G.H., were arrested and, on October 22nd, were flown back to Ghana. Later it appeared that they were used as tools of the National Security Organization in the saga which followed, but what exactly happened and why we'll never know.

(continued on p. 4)

CAN YOU HELP?

WE WANT TO GIVE YOU MORE THOROUGH NEWS OF G.H. AND FRI— THEIR IMPRESSIONS AND EXPERIENCES AS THEY SAIL TO NAMIBIA— BUT COSTS ARE PROHIBITIVE. IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE, PLEASE ATTACH A REQUEST TO YOUR NEXT CONTRIBUTION AND WE'LL SEND YOU EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS, COPIES OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE, ETC.

THE GOLDEN HARVEST WILL BE OUT OF FUNDS WHEN IT REACHES ANGOLA, but we have no funds to send them right now.

While in Maputo, the FRI expected a \$5000 grant from the Lutheran World Church Federation office, then learned after budgeting the whole sum that all but \$1500 was held as fees for administering the funds! WE COULD SEND ONLY HALF OF THE \$400 THEY URGENTLY NEEDED before sailing from Maputo on February 6th.

We need your support. In addition to our usual expenses, we've had especially high communication bills from the crisis period in Nigeria.

Remember that checks made payable to "A. J. Muste Memorial Institute/Books for a Free Namibia Project" are tax deductible.

PHILADELPHIA NAMIBIA ACTION GROUP: Who are we and what do we do?

PNAG is a collective of the Movement for a New Society, working from an office in a Philadelphia Life Center house named "North Star." Since March of 1975, we have been an organizing center for Operation Namibia, a transnational campaign using nonviolent direct action to support Namibia's struggle for independence and social justice.

Locally we've been publicizing that struggle and exposing U.S. corporations which bolster South Africa's illegal occupation there. Numerous local radio stations have interviewed us; we've been speaking and presenting our slide show and dialoguing with other groups about cooperative actions, such as the divestment campaign at the University of Pennsylvania (where Joanie is a student and employee).

As a small group meeting twice a week on top of very busy work & study lives, we've had difficulty living up to our commitments, but Transnational Collective of MNS has begun to share time and energy with us---a morale boost for both groups.

In September we joined Training Organizing Collective in coordinating an MNS Orientation Weekend which included macroanalysis sessions on Southern Africa. We've led workshops on direct action, racism and campaign building for the summer and fall MNS training programs, and in October we again led an Orientation Weekend group in a demonstration at a local supermarket, leafletting shoppers, labeling cans of sardines "STOLEN FROM NAMIBIA/PRODUCT OF APARTHEID," and presenting petitions to the manager. The latter was part of our continuing campaign against the importation of Namibian products through illegal contracts between South Africa and multinational corporations.



"Like the two crews, PNAG is multi-racial and international. We are an eager-to-grow 5-person collective, seen above at a strategy/clearness retreat: Ken Martin and Joanie Prior below; lt. to rt. above, Laurie Wolfe, Gil Gilmore and myself."

-Linda Nunes, Tanzania

MANY OF YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN OUR CURRENT LITERATURE EXPLAINING THE BOOKS PROJECT AND OUTLINING THE HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION IN NAMIBIA. Please do send us a postcard and we'll mail you these materials immediately.

THANKS TO YOU, THE BOOKS PROJECT HAS SURVIVED

Since Operation Namibia's "Books for a Free Namibia" project was conceived at the 1975 War Resisters International conference in Holland, PNAG has shared responsibility for the action with a group in London, the crew of the Golden Harvest and, more recently, the crew of the Fri. We keep separate financial records, but each group works at fundraising for the whole and, when one group is in need of immediate funds, the others respond by sending what they can.

In order to purchase the Golden Harvest in 1976, O.N. organizers took a "leap of faith" by collecting interest-free loans from friends, organizations and some of ourselves, with the rationale that fundraising would be easier once we had proven our seriousness by launching a boat.

By the end of 1978, PNAG had repaid all U.S. loans, totaling \$5,750, helped London-O.N. with some of its debts, and sent funds to the crews when possible. Through discouraging delays and troubles, PNAG has survived financially because of your support: over \$8,000 in individual donations, and over \$9,000 in grants from American Friends Service Committee, Chase Fund, Fellowship of Reconciliation, National Council of Churches, People's Fund of Philadelphia, Sharing Fund, and Washington Area Fund for Life. THANK YOU, DEAR FRIENDS! We are also appreciative of Branywine Alternative Fund for patience when we were unable to meet our loan payments schedule at times, and to Philadelphia War Tax Resistance which has just granted us a third \$1000 loan.

Suddenly on October 16th, armed Nigerian security police (NSO) boarded and searched the ship, allegedly looking for weapons. They harassed the crew and dismissed their travel documents as "fake." Momodou and Kris voluntarily accompanied them for "questioning" but were detained instead and not questioned until just before their release nine days later. On the 17th, the NSO returned to confiscate their radio and tried to arrest them all, but the harbor master intervened by confirming the claim that forcing them to abandon ship would be against international law codes; they were allowed to stay. There were rumors, alluded to by the press, that they were spies, with possible South African connections, who were "exploiting Nigeria's anti-apartheid stand." The materials printed by Anti-Apartheid were impounded by the police, and support dwindled for no one wanted to tackle the NSO. We contacted the Nigerian ambassadors at the U.N. and in Washington, but there were no official charges or explanations except for "something must have gone sour."

We can only speculate: Were they mistrusted as foreigners, or because they represented a trans-national project yet had little money? Was the NSO unwilling to admit that it had made a mistake?

Namibia Update

October 25, 1978: Hoping to pacify African countries which had threatened U.N. economic sanctions against South Africa, U.S. Secretary of State Vance returned from Pretoria and disclosed a compromise between South Africa and the Western Powers: the disputed December election would take place as planned, after which the newly elected assembly would "consider" the advisability of holding another election in conformity with U.N. principles.

November 28, 1978: The united churches of Namibia released a Report on the Registration and Election Campaign in Namibia 1978 which revealed that: people who could not produce registration cards at army roadblocks were arrested and often beaten; tribal heads endorsed by South Africa forced their subjects to register or lose their rights to plough on communal land; officials refused to pay pensions, give hospital treatment or issue work permits to those who had not registered; people were threatened with the loss of their jobs; tens of thousands of Angolan refugees and minors were illegally registered.

December 4-8, 1978: Only two major parties appeared on the election ballot: the white nationalist Action Front for the Retention of the Turnhalle Principles (AKTUR), and the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) favored by South Africa, which campaigned for the retention of South African troops, for separate ethnic-area elections, and for the veto power of any ethnic group (including "whites") over all others, which would effectively prevent social and economic change.

December 9, 1978: Justin Ellis (an Anglican coauthor of church publications regarding torture in Namibia and the election campaign), who was expelled from Namibia just before the elections, wrote: "The campaign was backed up by the South African controlled broadcasting network...[and the] supposedly neutral Administrator General...refused to appoint a judicial inquiry into the irregularities. All SWAPO leaders inside Namibia were arrested on the eve of the elections and, with most nationalist leaders now either driven into exile or imprisoned, there was no possibility [of organizing] themselves for a boycott, or even for the spoiling of ballots...The electoral law devised by South Africa [provided for] 'mobile polling booths'... government vehicles accompanied by a military escort [which were commissioned to] collect votes at any time of the day or night...and had the right to enter 'any land or property' to find out if there were people present who would like to vote. Government vehicles were also used to ferry voters to the polls. It is a tall order to have expected Namibians to believe their votes would be secret. At least 40% of the African population is illiterate. Any illiterate person arriving at a polling place [would] be asked...whether the polling officer could mark his paper for him. To further destroy confidence, each voter had to put his vote in a numbered envelope."

December 15, 1978: The election results were a foregone conclusion: of the 50 seats for a constituent assembly, DTA got 41, AKTUR 6. Some 80% of the registered voters were said to have cast their ballots, and the total number of votes was reported as 326,264, of which 4,791 were spoiled. Since the election, Administrator General Steyn has retained control.

December 26, 1978: Waldheim received a letter from Prime Minister Botha stating that the assembly had agreed to consider U.N. elections in September 1979, but that they were deeply concerned about what they considered a strong international bias in favor of SWAPO.

Justin Ellis offered his perspective about this as well: "[South Africa's] strategy is always 'keeping the door open,' leaving some hope that it will allow a U.N. supervised election. South Africa's real hope is that through the constant delays and further demands by the Western powers for compromises from Namibian nationalists, SWAPO will withdraw from the whole exercise...It is the West which initiated the present settlement proposals, and it is now their responsibility to carry the U.N. plan through by obtaining South Africa's immediate and unqualified acceptance. SWAPO and the Frontline States have made even more concessions than one could reasonably have expected of them...But it is, I believe, impossible to expect South African compliance without an explicit threat that failure to cooperate will mean a step-by-step disassociation between South Africa and the West... refusals of landing rights for South African aircraft, leading to more serious cuts in communications (telephone and postal), ...stoppage of new loans and investments, and eventually an oil boycott. When all is said and done, South Africa's rulers understand the language of power even better than the West does."

January, 1979: U.N. Commissioner for Namibia Martti Ahtisaari was again in South Africa and Namibia for discussions with Prime Minister Botha and Administrator General Steyn regarding the implementation of U.N. supervised elections.

Given Ellis's analysis and the fact that South Africa has promised Namibia's independence by the end of every year since 1974, one must remain skeptical of South Africa's intentions.

Had it begun because one of the Ghanaians had no passport, or because Momodou had reentered the country? Was it because the crew was in touch with radical Nigerian politicians? Did South African agents interfere to discredit the Books Project? Was it because the crew sent us reports that South African goods were finding their way into Lagos despite official boycotts?

When the navy removed their lines and forced G.H. to sail, Kris was ashore with all their passports, ship's papers and project documentation, for he was trying to refute the slanderous accusations of the press. Six days later, the crew radioed from an island off Togo that they were safe, had taken on provisions, and would proceed into Lomé. Of course, without any papers, they were detained in Togo until Kris received word of their location and, together with Barry who had returned from Ireland, provided the papers for their release.

"We are tired, very thin and shell-shocked," wrote Karen Elise. Morale has been low since the ordeal, yet they have sailed again, plan to stop in Gabon and expect to be in Luanda by the end of March. Barry, still very ill, has finally had to go home for good, and Roy, who is both captain and radio operator, is longing to return to his family and experience his daughter's growth first-hand. None of them expected to devote more than three years of their lives to this voyage, but they are doing just that, with more courage and commitment than we could match.

Operation Namibia/PNAG
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