

NAMIBIA, SWAPO AND THE LABOUR PARTY



Namibia: South Africa's Colony

Namibia is the last colony in Africa and is a United Nations Trust Territory. However, it has been ruled by South Africa since the First World War. Its 1.5 million people are subjected to South Africa's racist policies, and one of the most intense military occupations in the world. 100,000 South African-controlled troops and the Koevoet death squads maintain a regime of arbitrary terror against the local population, with arrests, detention, 'disappearances' and murder being daily occurrences — a situation not dissimilar to what is going on in El Salvador and Guatemala today. Despite intimidation and repression, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation), Namibia's national liberation movement, has actively opposed South African rule, through political mobilisation as well as armed struggle. Since 1966, the United Nations (UN) has deemed South Africa's

presence in the territory as illegal, a position verified by the World Court of Justice in 1971. Today, South Africa is waging a brutal war in north Namibia, where a state of emergency has existed since the 1970's.

Namibian Women in Struggle

The central role of Namibian women in this struggle for independence has grown steadily. They are organised in the SWAPO Women's Council, formed in 1969 to ensure women's full participation in the struggle against national oppression, racism and sexism. Due to the particularly brutal nature of the South African illegal occupation of their country, Namibian women have been separated from their male relatives because of the migrant labour system, the forced conscription of Black Namibian males into the South African forces, the removals of whole communities into 'homelands' and the repression which has driven many into exile. Women have proven themselves to be equal partners in the struggle and an essential part of the leadership of SWAPO. SWAPO women combatants fight alongside their male comrades; women are the chief organisers of projects in areas such as education and health in the refugee settlements in Kwanza Sul (Angola) and Nyango (Zambia). And their struggle is also one of daily physical survival with the ever present threat of South African and UNITA attacks. International solidarity with their struggle should be a priority in the labour movement and the Labour Party over the years has in fact given many promises of support.

Labour Party Promises . . .

- ★ Since the early 1970s, the Labour Party (LP) has promised to conform to international law and United Nations policy regarding Namibia; to 'seek to end the unlawful South African occupation of Namibia' (Labour's Programme, 1972, 1973, October 1974 Manifesto).
- ★ The LP promised to end contracts, treatments and agreements which implied recognition of South Africa's illegal occupation (Labour's Programme 1972, 1973).
- ★ The LP also promised that, in government, it would supply financial aid



to the liberation movements, including SWAPO of Namibia: 'Labour will provide humanitarian aid to active movements in need of agricultural, medical and education supplies as they face massive problems of development in the liberated areas', it said, with reference to the 'just struggle' of the southern Africa liberation movements.

Labour's Action in Government

Despite these promises, the Labour Party's record has been dismal.

- ★ In 1968, Wilson's Labour government approved a contract between Rio Tinto Zinco (RTZ), Britain's largest mining multinational, and the UK Atomic Energy Authority, for Namibia uranium. RTZ, with the Labour government's permission, actually made the development of the huge Rossing uranium mine in Namibia possible, using specially developed techniques to mine hitherto commercially unviable low-grade ore. Despite subsequent promises to terminate this

illegal trade, Labour governments did not do so.

★ Labour governments opposed the UN arms embargo against South Africa, and even when they eventually agreed to comply in 1977, they continued to allow British firms to sell arms and military hardware to South Africa (including Westland Wasp helicopters, Marconi radar equipment, Leyland vehicle parts and the fuel essential to the South African army's mobility). Many of these sales took place at a time when the bulk of South Africa's operational armed forces were being deployed in Namibia.

★ Even after the passing of a United Nations Decree (No 1 of 1974) banning the exploitation of occupied Namibia's natural resources, Labour governments under Wilson and Callaghan continued to allow imports of Namibian fish, karakul furs (worth over £15m), diamonds (\$2 billion are today stockpiled in the City of London) uranium (for Britain's nuclear weapons programme), and other rare minerals.

★ These same Labour governments in the 1970s vetoed resolutions in the United Nations calling for sanctions against South African military build up in Namibia.

★ The Wilson and Callaghan Labour governments failed to take effective action against gun-point forced elections for South Africa's puppet governments in Namibia in 1975 and 1978.

★ Labour ministers during the last Labour government worked with Henry Kissinger and US diplomats to draw up a pro-imperialist plan for Namibian independence — one which would not provide for total withdrawal of the South African army and police during elections for the government of an independent Namibia; nor guarantee the safe return of SWAPO leaders from exile; nor recognise the territorial integrity of Namibia. This plan did not officially oppose South Africa's annexation of Walvis Bay, Namibia's only deep-water harbour.

Demand that the Labour Party Support SWAPO and Namibian Independence Now!

For two decades SWAPO has called on the Labour Party to oppose racist South Africa's occupation of Namibia. But, in government, Labour has effectively aided this occupation and colluded with South Africa's brutal regime and the perpetuation of Namibia's colonial status. Only a tiny handful of Labour MPs have spoken out against this. It is time for Labour Party members to ensure that their party sides with SWAPO's struggle and stops any future Labour government's backing for racism and colonialism in Namibia. To ensure that a future Labour government will actively support SWAPO and the Namibian people, Labour activists can campaign NOW to commit the Labour Party to the following:

★ That the next Labour government act to end all diplomatic, military and economic links with South Africa's occupation of Namibia.

★ That the next Labour government imposes total comprehensive, mandatory sanctions against South Africa, particularly over its occupation of Namibia.

★ That the next Labour government pays to SWAPO (as the sole authentic representative of the Namibian people) compensation to the value of all Namibian natural resources illegally imported into Britain (in terms of UN Council for Namibia Decree No. 1, 1974).

★ That the next Labour government ensures strict compliance with the UN arms embargo and puts a stop to the operations of all British firms in occupied Namibia, particularly those providing finance capital and fuel to the South Africans.

But while the war and repression continues, your active support is needed NOW. Get your Labour Party and trade union to support SWAPO's struggle for independence:

★ Campaign for sanctions against South Africa and support workers in the implementing of boycotts, in particular against the illegal imports of Namibian uranium.

★ Campaign for South Africa's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Namibia and oppose any neo-colonial initiatives and solutions — Namibian Independence Now!

★ Give material support to SWAPO and SWAPO Women's Council by getting your LP or TU to donate to the following material aid campaigns:

SWAPO Women's Council
Landrover Appeal
Sanitary Towels Appeal
SWAPO Medical Kits Campaign
SWAPO Mosquito Nets Appeal

★ Publicise SWAPO's struggle through local meetings in your Labour Party or trade union (speakers, leaflets or exhibition on Namibian women from SWSC).

★ Affiliate or join SWAPO Women's Solidarity (SWSC)



Please fill in this form and return to:
SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign, PO Box 16,
London NW5 2LW. Telephone: 01-267 1941/2.

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____

Labour Party/Trade Union _____

I/We would like more information on

- SWAPO's struggle for independence
 SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign
 The material aid campaigns for SWAPO
(please tick)