

# VIVA NAMIBIA

by Siphon Buthelezi

**Siphon Buthelezi; a member of the BCM(A) and a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe analyzes the "independence" offered by UN Resolution 435 and concludes that Namibia remains a colony of South Africa and the West.**

"... The mass of the petty bourgeoisie will as long as possible remain hesitant, undecided and inactive, and then as soon as the issue has been decided, will seize victory for themselves, will call upon the workers to maintain tranquility and return to their work, will guard against so-called excesses and bar the Proletariat from the fruits of victory." [MARX AND ENGELS, London, 1850]

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The occupation of Namibia at the end of the 19th century took place at the threshold of a new epoch of monopoly capitalism, imperialism. Historically, German imperialism was a late-comer in the scramble for colonies. For a considerable period of time after imperialist Germany had formally declared a Protectorate (euphemism for 'colony') over Namibia in 1884, German capitalists displayed little interest in the new territory which their government had secured for them to exploit.

At first, the German imperialists left Namibia entirely in the hands of a monopoly company, the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft für Südwestafrika (DKG). The DKG, a joint stock company, was one of the early tools of primitive accumulation of capital, characterised by conquest, plunder and dispossession as well as the exploitation of the colonized population. In the case of Namibia this monopoly concern remained virtually inactive, as did the multitude of speculative 'concession' companies which mushroomed in the 1890s when the imperialist authorities lost patience and broke the DKG's monopoly.

The inactivity of the 'concession' companies prompted the colonial ad-

ministration itself to take a commanding role in creating a colonial economy. In a series of military campaigns (1890-96) it set up a network of army and police posts throughout the south and centre of the country up to the border of Ovamboland. It seized every possible pretext to expropriate land for settler farms. The colonial forces of repression were on hand to enforce every fraudulent land or trading deal as a motley collection of immigrants – subsidised settlers, ex-soldiers, traders and Boers – siphoned the economic lifeblood from the Herero and Nama people. In order to service its economic and military objectives, the German colonial administration built a network of roads, railways, harbours and communications.

The overall strategy of the German colonial regime was to reproduce German society in Africa by creating a colony of European settlement. Paul Rohrbach, chairperson of the Settlement in Commission, spelt out with brutal frankness its implications for the Namibian people:

"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 Southern African natives, the loss of their natural barbarism and the development of a class of workers in the service of and dependent on whites is above all a law of survival of the highest order."

By 1903, more than half the herds previously owned by the Herero people, who lived in the central areas of Namibia, had passed into the hands of the settlers. Many Africans, whose traditional means of production and livelihood had been ruthlessly undermined, were forced to take up wage labour for the colonists, usually on a temporary or migrant basis.



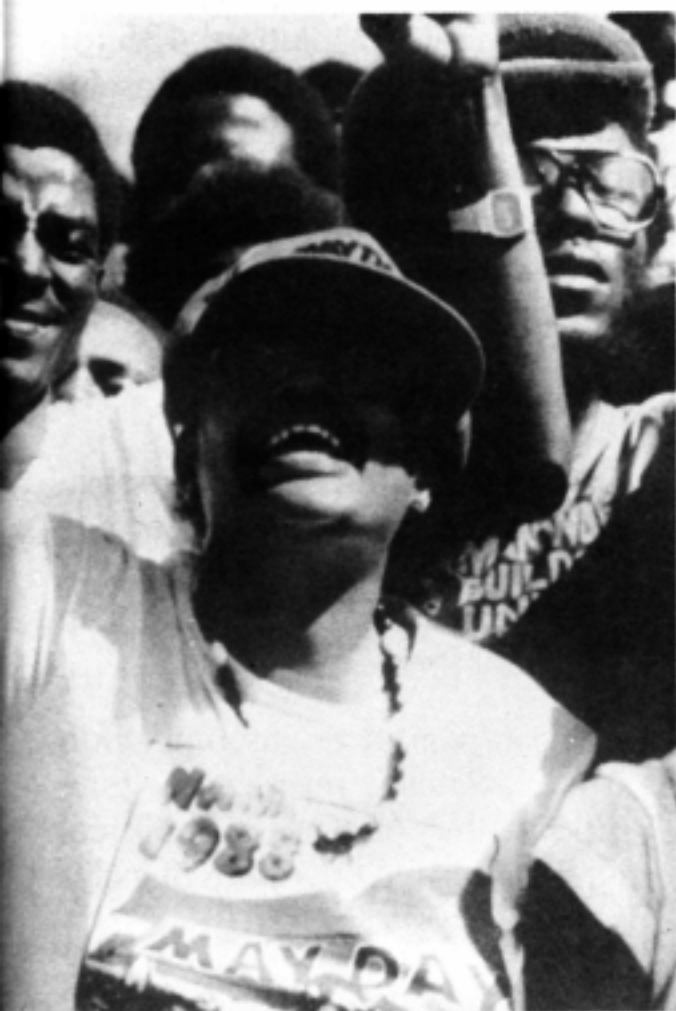
## GENOCIDE

In January 1904, provoked by the continuing expropriation of their land – the principal means of production – the Herero rose against German colonialism. Lacking sophisticated and modern weaponry and unable to move quickly because of their large herds of cattle, the Namibians were defeated and driven eastwards into the waterless Kgalagadi desert.

In August, the Nama, who lived mainly in the south of the country, joined the anti-colonial war under the

leadership of Hendrik Witbooi. By adopting guerilla tactics, a Nama commando under Jacob Morenga was able to continue fighting until 1906.

The German colonial authorities, determined to wipe out resistance, resorted to genocide, poisoning waterholes and machine-gunning displaced people. Through such barbaric methods they reduced the population of central and southern Namibia by more than half. Survivors were forced into prison labour camps on the coast, where thousands more died. The societies in central and southern Namibia were devastated. Legislation was introduced depriving Africans of the right to own land or cattle.



## COLONIAL EXPLOITATION

It nevertheless took the considerable resources of German colonialism in Namibia to subjugate the Herero and Nama, and the densely populated north was never conquered but left under the control of independent African kingdoms. Through economic coercion, the German colonialists were able to secure migrant labour from these areas. Between 1907 and 1910, the migrant labour force stood at 6 000.

Migrant workers were kept under severe control and isolated in barrack-like compounds. The exploitation of their labour power was maximised by keeping wages very low – in 1913 the wage bill of the diamond companies amounted to a mere 2 percent of the value of diamonds mined.

Workers on settler farms were kept in conditions of virtual slavery. They were unpaid, and a survey conducted in 1912 revealed that on most farms the food rationed to workers was inadequate to sustain them and their families. Settlers were legally empowered to administer corporal punishment to workers, who were often flogged to the point of death.

In 1913 the authorities began to set up 'reserves' on state-owned farms in order to restrict Namibians to small areas and to ensure a supply of labour.

By the time the imperialist war of 1914 to 1918 broke out, the basic structure of what has been called the 'apartheid system' in Namibia was already well established. The basic features of this harsh colonial system were to change little in the following decades.

## SOUTH AFRICAN INVASION: THE NEW COLONIALISTS

In 1915 the South African colonial army invaded German South West Africa (Namibia) at the behest of British imperialism and the territory was placed under the control of a South African military governor.

At the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the colonies of defeated imperialist Germany were placed under the authority of Britain, France or their allies, under a mandate system administered by the League of Nations. "Full powers of administration and legislation" over Namibia, were conferred on the British crown, "for and on behalf of the Union of South Africa."

As German imperialist rule collapsed, South African colonization was opposed by Namibians. African leaders sent messages to the UN detailing

oppressive conditions and demanding that their country be granted its independence or placed under international control. In the 1950s the first Namibian representatives were able to speak to the UN and messages were smuggled out of the country by Andimba Toivo ja Toivo and other young leaders. In 1960 alone the UN received 120 messages and petitions.

To oppose South African colonialism and to advance the cause for independence, Namibians formed a number of political, cultural and student organisations, including the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO), which in 1960 was transformed into a fully fledged nationalist movement, SWAPO.

Membership of OPO grew rapidly when it launched a campaign against the new bantustan authorities. In Windhoek there were protests and boycotts against the forced removal of the African population to the ghetto townships of Katutura. These protests met with the wrath of the colonial police, who opened fire on demonstrators on 10 December 1959, killing at least 11 people and wounding 54.

## THE ROAD TO ARMED STRUGGLE

This atrocity was a turning point in the Namibian independence struggle, galvanising the people into a wider unity and more militant action. In the face of continued South African repression and the Windhoek Massacre – Namibia's 'Sharpeville' – the leaders of the liberation movement like Sam Nujoma left the country to prepare for an armed struggle.

Meanwhile in 1960, in an effort to add pressure to UN demands to place Namibia under its trusteeship until its independence, the independent states of Ethiopia and Liberia took the issue of Namibia's independence to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague. After six years of argument the ICJ arrogantly declared that the two African countries had no legal basis to bring the case to it, and declined to rule on the issue.

The UN General Assembly, strengthened in its opposition to colonialism by the new membership of dozens of African and Asian states, also responded swiftly to the ICJ's failure to make a ruling. In October 1966 it passed a resolution terminating South Africa's mandate on the grounds that it had violated its provisions by imposing apartheid repression on the Namibian people. To administer Namibia and to prepare it for nationhood, the UN General Assembly established the Council for Namibia at its headquarters in New York.

In 1969 the UN Security Council affirmed the termination of South Africa's mandate and demanded its withdrawal from Namibia. In June 1971, the ICJ confirmed the UN's direct responsibility for Namibia. It also confirmed that South Africa's presence in Namibia was illegal and that it was obliged to end its occupation of the country. It stated that UN member states should refrain from any acts which would imply recognition of South Africa's administration or presence in Namibia.

The Court's decision precipitated mass resistance inside Namibia, leading to a general strike of contract workers at the end of 1971, and subsequent peasant uprisings in the north. These militant actions opened a new chapter in the history of the Namibian independence struggle.

## THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

For more than a century the gallant people of Namibia have struggled for their independence through various means: diplomatic, political and military. Initially SWAPO and other components of the liberation movement concentrated on diplomatic pressure and political mobilisation, but the armed liberation struggle was launched in 1966 to end South African colonial occupation.

The Namibian workers played the most significant part in the constitution of the liberation movement. The massive general strike of Namibian contract workers, launched in mid-

December 1971, consolidated the gains of this period of mass upsurge and propelled the liberation struggle irrevocably to a new and higher phase. This period of mass resistance transformed the character of the liberation movement in Namibia from sectional and localised resistance to sustained mass action on a national scale.

The guerilla struggle escalated rapidly during the 1970s, as a result of the workers' general strike and continued militant resistance and the peasant youth uprisings, which were a prominent feature of the period between 1971-2. The triumph of the Angolan revolution in 1974-5 opened up new possibilities for the armed struggle in Namibia, and the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) intensified its military actions in the northern parts of the country.

The South African regime responded with a campaign of terror in the north, and thousands of Namibians fled into Angola, and this in turn swelled the ranks of PLAN. Vastly outnumbered by the South African occupation forces and unable to establish major bases inside Namibia, PLAN was however able to expand its military campaign by using guerilla tactics and through local support from the people who supplied food, information and shelter.

Nonetheless, an assessment by South African military-intelligence officers in 1984 noted that SWAPO "has an intensive intelligence gathering network whereby the public, especially the hundreds of the *cuca* shops (trading stores) in Ovambo and Kavango, are involved and keep it informed as to the movement of the security forces."

Increased support for SWAPO inside Namibia in the 1970s and 1980s, when SWAPO openly operated inside the country, was paralleled by growing international pressure, with the UN pressing strongly for Namibian independence. In a pre-emptive move in September 1977 Pretoria installed an Administrator-General in Windhoek to supervise a Pretoria-controlled election. The Turnhalle Conference was dissolved, the par-

ticipating groups forming the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) for electoral purposes.

By the end of 1978 the DTA was installed in Windhoek, backed by the army, police and substantial funding by capitalist enterprises. It is this coalition of reactionary forces that the South African regime and its imperialist backers hoped to instal as a neo-colonial regime in November. This coalition has changed its robes many times since then but in essence remains a tool for neo-colonialism in Namibia.

## NEO-COLONIAL RECIPE

It has taken ten full years for the UN to implement Resolution 435 of 1978. This Security Council Resolution specified a year-long independence process to be supervised by a specially established UN monitoring force known as the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG). This involved a process that is now well advanced:

- A ceasefire, the partial demobilisation of South African armed forces and restriction to base of both SWAPO and South African military forces;
- The repeal of all discrimination and politically restrictive legislation, the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles and refugees;
- National elections to a Constituent Assembly after a campaigning period;
- The adoption of an independent constitution.

South African military defeats in Angola by the combined forces of Angola, Cuba and SWAPO (PLAN), coupled with international pressures, led to a series of talks during 1988 between the Angolan and South African governments, with US and Cuban participation and the political support of the Soviet Union. Under discussion was the current process in which the withdrawal of

Cuban internationalist forces from the People's Republic of Angola would follow the implementation of Resolution 435 and the end of South African aggression. Agreement on these principles was reached in November 1988 and the UN plan for Namibian independence process was set in motion during 1989.

The conception, adoption and implementation of UN Resolution 435 has ushered in a wide ranging debate within the liberation movement in Southern Africa. The proletarian tendency in the movement considers Resolution 435 as a recipe for neo-colonialism in Namibia. *Neocolonialism can be defined as a system of economic, political, ideological, juridical, military, and other relations imposed by imperialism on the developing countries (DCs) in order to keep them within the framework of the international capitalist economic system.*

It is important to note here that there is no basic distinction between the "traditional" and "new" colonialism, for, as in the past, so today the leading role belongs to the capitalist monopolies; their basic strategic goals remain unchanged: *the imperialist exploitation of the developing countries and the urge to keep them within the world capitalist system!*

The urge to keep Namibia within the world capitalist system is evidenced by events which took place in the British imperialist capital, London, in June 1989. According to a London *Times* report, SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma held talks with British Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe in London on 28 June. *The Times* diplomatic editor Andrew McEwen wrote: "Sir Geoffrey and Mr Christopher Patten, the Minister for Overseas Development, made it clear in separate talks that Britain wants close links with the Namibian Government he is expected to form." The report continues, "(Britain) also hopes Namibia will join the Commonwealth, and is ready to give it (SWAPO Government) development aid without pre-conditions."

As we all know, foreign monopoly

capital is the most important weapon for subordinating many developing countries to imperialist exploitation. The export of capital to these countries has increased as the export of state capital has assumed prime importance in the form of 'aid' and loans on specific conditions dictated by imperialism.

Imperialist 'aid' shows some division of functions between the imperialist states and the capitalist monopolies. Government funds, the bulk of which made up the 'aid' go to the DCs mainly for building up the production and social infrastructure: roads, ports, means of communication, schools, hospitals, and so on; thereby improving the conditions for subsequent activity by private capital. Consequently, the capitalist countries government 'aid' is in the nature of a battering-ram which creates a breach for profitable investments by private capitalist monopolies in the DCs. Hence, a 'mixed' economy in Namibia which allows the participation of private capital will open the floodgates for imperialist capital in the form of monopoly capital.

In political terms, neo-colonialism with its 'aid' system is designed to enhance imperialist influence in the DCs' domestic political life and in the sphere of international relations as a whole. Hence the wooing of Sir Geoffrey of imperialist Britain for an independent Namibia as part of the Commonwealth. As McEwen reported: "In short, Britain sees the country (Namibia) as a potential regional friend."

Indeed, if an independent Namibia becomes a "regional friend" of Britain, the British multinational corporation, Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) which dominates uranium mining in Namibia stands to gain more and more superprofits from its operations. So does Consolidated Goldfields which mines base metals, chiefly copper, lead and zinc, and is a British capitalist conglomerate.

The superprofits of South African and transnational corporation in Namibia and the prosperity of white farmers, businessmen and professionals all de-

pend on the exploitation of African labour power. It is this section of the population that bears the burden of capitalist exploitation. As was said earlier, the Namibian workers have played a vital role in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. In the Namibian political economy, the workers have always been potentially the most powerful of the revolutionary forces ranged against the form of exploitation which colonialism has safeguarded in Namibia, and there is widespread consciousness of this amongst the rank-and-file in the final analysis. Dialectically speaking, it is the proletariat in Namibia which has the potential of becoming a vanguard force against neo-colonialism in an independent Namibia. At a branch meeting in 1977, contract workers from Windhoek summed up the view of the working class in Namibia in these apt words:

"We, the workers of Namibia, we have to unite – all the workers in the country have to unite . . . If we cannot unite, then we will just continue to be exploited and oppressed.

"We also want to teach other workers that the capitalists are busy robbing our country of its resources. All the workers should know that foreign investors are taking what we are producing to their countries overseas. Because when those foreign investors—monopolies – came to our country, they didn't come with anything! The wealth they are taking they found here in Namibia. We are dissatisfied with the fact that our mineral resources and other wealth are being exported. They are squeezing our country dry . . . Therefore we workers feel that we have to unite so that we can take action to end the exploitation of man by man!" ■

## STOP PRESS

On November 15, 1989 SWAPO won 384 567 of the total 670 830 votes, giving it 57,3% of the vote and 41 seats in the 72-seat Constituent Assembly. The Pretoria-backed DTA won 121 seats in the Constituent Assembly with its 191 532 votes.