

FOCUS

NAMIBIA

Many observers of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa felt at one point during the late 1970s that Namibia was nearer to achieving independence than was Zimbabwe: as everybody knows, events proved different. Today, Zimbabwe is indeed independent, while the battle for the freedom of Namibia still continues.

However, it is clear now that no simple chain reaction will ensure that Namibia's independence will soon follow on the heels of that of Zimbabwe. This is mainly because the very outcome of the Zimbabwe elections had provided a harsh lesson for the South African regime. Pretoria fears a similar victory for the liberation movement, in this case the South West Africa People's Organisation — SWAPO — in elections in Namibia; this it is not prepared to swallow.

Ever since the Geneva United Nations conference of January 1980, which was called to settle outstanding issues inhibiting progress towards elections in Namibia, and which was brought to an abrupt end by South Africa's declaration that to proceed would be 'premature', negotiations over Namibia's future have continued rather slowly. Both South Africa and SWAPO have accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 435(1978) which calls for the holding of fair and free elections in the territory under UN supervision and control. This resolution enshrined the UN plan, which is supposed to be set in motion by the signing of a ceasefire between SWAPO and South African forces.

South Africa's blocking of this process at Geneva happened apparently after that regime had received positive hints that the then American President-elect Ronald Reagan anticipated close relations between the two administrations. Indeed relations between Washington and Pretoria have been greatly strengthened. Since the beginning of 1980 the Washington administration has taken over direct control of the negotiations with the South African regime. South Africa has used this development to their advantage and it is becoming apparent, even to other members of the Western Contact Group that South Africa is treating the reign of the Reagan administration as a period of grace. It knows that it can get away with practically no progress over the Namibian issue without fearing repercussions in the form of international sanctions, because the USA would veto any such move. France and West Germany are increasingly feeling that the South

African regime has not got the political will to go through with the UN supervised and controlled elections in Namibia.

The UN plan for Namibia does not define a constitution but merely deals with arrangements for the holding of a fair and free election. It envisages an elected constituent assembly which would be free to then determine Namibia's future direction and to draw up a constitution. At the end of last year the Contact Group presented to SWAPO, the Frontline States, and South Africa what they called constitutional principles designed to act as a framework within which the elected constituent assembly would work: and in fact to allay South African fears prompted by the experience of the constitutional guarantees in Zimbabwe. They included a Bill of Rights, the separation of executive and legislative powers, and reassurances that there would be no appropriation of private property without compensation, and no retroactively enacted criminal offences.

The Contact Group also tried to get SWAPO to agree that an independent Namibia would be neutral, that no organisations hostile to South Africa would be allowed on Namibian soil, and that no foreign troops would be allowed to be called in by an independent government except with UN Security Council approval. These last measures were rejected by SWAPO and by the Frontline States, but the general principles governing the bill of rights, etc, were accepted by SWAPO.

Still part of what has been dubbed Phase 1 of the American initiative, is the unresolved question of what electoral system to use in Namibia. SWAPO and various small regional groupings opposed to South African

rule, support proportional representation. The South Africans, on the other hand, want to see single member constituencies. To bridge this division, the Contact Group suggested a complex system whereby 50% of the seats in a constituent assembly would be elected by proportional representation, and 50% through single member constituencies. This is in effect a one man, two votes system. SWAPO and the Frontline States have rejected this as a manipulative and confusing mechanism: the elections are supposed to be organised by South Africa and merely supervised by the UN, and such a system would be open to abuse by South Africa. Moreover, the UN plan as it stands does not provide for the holding of a census, or the drawing up of an electoral roll or of constituency boundaries.

At present this issue of the electoral system remains unresolved. All indications from the Pretoria regime are that it remains intransigent over the matter. Moreover, there are still unresolved issues in the second phase of the negotiations which is due to deal with details of the deployment of the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) — the military and civilian force which will oversee the elections.

Behind the debate over details of an election process lies the cold reality: South Africa is keeping up the image of negotiating with no real intention of proceeding with implementation of the UN plan. Today, Namibia is no nearer the signing of a ceasefire that would herald the elections than it was at the beginning of 1980.

One of the reasons that South Africa is so reluctant to proceed with elections in Namibia is the fact that there is no so-called



political middle ground in Namibia. SWAPO has been extremely successful in mobilising popular support. This has been manifested in the nationwide involvement in SWAPO's campaign, which is conducted on three levels of activity: the political front at home, the international diplomatic campaign, and of course, the armed struggle. SWAPO freedom fighters are tying down over 80,000 South African occupation troops with all their sophisticated military hardware. The South African military have acknowledged that they cannot win an outright military victory over SWAPO. This is what lies behind its hideous twin policies of repression, detention and torture of Namibian opponents to the regime inside the country, and mounting attacks on neighbouring independent African states, especially Angola and Zambia, destroying agriculture and industrial infrastructures, and killing innocent civilians.

The latest development has been South Africa's attempt to 'Namibianise' the conflict. Forced conscription for all Namibians over the age of 16 has meant that Namibians are now being made to engage each other on the battlefield. This has made many thousands flee the country to escape conscription.

As part of their desperate attempt to halt the advance of the liberation struggle, South Africa has created the so-called National Assembly in Namibia, staffed with its few hand-picked ethnically based collaborators in the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). The objective of this was to present an alternative to SWAPO. Increasingly, South Africa has used the DTA as a mouthpiece through which to delay the elections and procrastinate. However, even this strategy has failed dismally. What small support there might have been for the DTA has disappeared as it has been unable to effect even minor changes in the racist South African controlled system in Namibia. Moreover, even the DTA has its own internal contradictions. The President, Rev Peter Kalangula, resigned in the middle of February, claiming that he no longer supported the ethnic nature of the DTA. He is now making a bid to create a new non-ethnic 'moderate' (ie anti-SWAPO) party. It is safe to speculate that this move has backing from outside South Africa, no doubt including certain Western interests.

It is the combined pressure of political, military and diplomatic action against the South African occupation regime in Namibia that will herald the freedom of that country. This encompasses the continued mobilisation of the Namibian people; intensification

of the armed struggle and its increasing demoralising effect on South African white youth — more and more of whom are deserting from the army; and a heightened campaign for the total isolation of South Africa through the mandatory imposition of sanctions. Since Namibians and South Africans face a common enemy their liberation struggles complement each other.

Peter H Katjavivi