

THE ATTEMPT to find a solution to the conflict in Namibia is bedevilled by a set of peripheral issues that cloud the heart of the problem.

Namibia, which sits on South Africa's north-western flank, is a country about which few people know anything and about which they care even less.

Yet the efforts to find a solution by the "contact group" of countries – the USA, Britain, France, West Germany and Canada – demonstrates the importance of a largely unreported war. Yet on the face of it, the facts are relatively simple.

South Africa illegally occupies the country, and since 1966 guerrillas from the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) have fought a battle for independence.

SWAPO, which is recognised by the UN as the only authentic representative of the people of Namibia, has its bases in Angola, to the north. Angola is supported by 30,000 Cuban troops. This affords the South African Government the excuse that it needs to wage a military war against "communism," for it can link its attacks on Namibian guerrilla camps with the presence of Soviet-backed forces in Angola.

THE WEST wants the Namibian conflict to be settled quickly. There are three reasons why this barren country is of geopolitical importance.

- The territory is rich in uranium. It supplies 16% of the West's total production, and meets 50% of Britain's consumption;

- Walvis Bay is the only sizeable deep-water port with access to the Southern Atlantic sea lanes between Cape Town and Lobito in Angola;

- Namibia borders five countries which are crucial to the stability of the continent: South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Angola.

And so it is vital to Western interests that an independent democratic and stable system is established. The "contact group" is therefore trying to negotiate a UN-supervised election which observers believe would be won by SWAPO.

SOUTH AFRICA, however, wishes to retain Namibia as a client state. It argues that SWAPO is a Marxist organisation which, if it gained control, would threaten its neighbour.

Namibia: land initiative crucial to peace plan

South Africa is encouraged in this view by Western voices. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* declared in an editorial last Dec. 16:

"Soviet bases in Namibia would be able to directly threaten South Africa and the South Atlantic sea lanes. These prizes are big ones, not the kind that the Soviets will walk away from easily."

There is an element of hypocrisy and double-standards in the South African stand against SWAPO. For example, while attacking the Angolans for giving support to SWAPO guerrillas, South Africa feels free to provide support to guerrillas who are fighting the Angolan government under the banner of UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).



But behind all the clichés and talk of geopolitical strategies there is a truth that is strangely ignored by the white nations that are seeking to resolve the conflict.

For the underlying dispute is about the ownership of Namibia's mineral deposits and farmland.

A SERIOUS maldistribution of land is at the centre of the struggle for political independence.

White South Africans, although they make up under 10% of the population, own 38m hectares of the best agricultural and ranching land, plus

the area containing extensive mineral resources.

This is serious for the blacks, because only 2% of Namibia's 83m hectares is suitable for crop cultivation. Over half of the country is desert.

The 1.2m blacks are now left with 33m hectares of 'habitable' land, which is largely arid soil unsuitable for cultivation.

The 'Ovambo homeland' is populated by 400,000 people, but under half of its 10m hectares is suitable for crop cultivation or ranching, according to the London-based Catholic Institute for International Relations, which has exposed the key Namibian problem:

"The good ranching country of the central plateau, indeed 90% of land outside the northern region, is in Europeans' hands, with 60% of the country's 3m cattle also owned by whites.

"The confiscation of land after conquest during the colonial period, vividly recalled by Herero-speaking people in their demands for the return of their 'lost valleys' taken in 1907, lies at the root of Namibia's political economy and its people's political consciousness.

"Contemporary land distribution makes overgrazing and soil erosion inevitable. Overcrowded reserves, in which blacks were until recently forced by legislation to live, make it impossible for Africans to subsist on the land. Today as much as in the past they are pushed by rural poverty into the contract labour system."

THE LAND QUESTION, then, must figure prominently in any peace initiative.

Black guerrillas see the repossession of land as the prize of victory. This, above all else, is what the white settlers wish to resist, and it is the reason why the South African government is reluctant to reach a political agreement with the radical leaders of SWAPO.

INSITE briefing on the South African conflict

- 1884 German colonization of South-West Africa.
- 1915 Germans surrender to South Africa.
- 1920 Mandate conferred on South Africa by League of Nations.
- 1946 UN trusteeship replaces mandate.
- 1966 SWAPO, founded in 1960, launches armed struggle. UN terminates South African mandate.
- 1967 UN Council for Namibia set up.
- 1971 International Court of Justice rules South African occupation is illegal.
- 1973 UN General Assembly recognizes SWAPO as "the authentic representative of the Namibian people."
- 1974 Security Council resolution 366 calls for South African withdrawal.
- 1977 Five Western powers form "contact group." Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) formed with South African support.
- 1978 South African troops raid SWAPO base in Angola. DTA wins 82% of votes cast in "internal" election.
- 1979 Constituent assembly in Windhoek is transformed into National Assembly. Revolt by right-wing whites against laws outlawing race discrimination.
- 1982 Rev. Peter Kalangula's party withdraws from DTA, ending hopes that the Alliance could defeat SWAPO in free elections.

Redistribution of the benefits of land cannot be avoided, however:

"Namibian nationalism, having grown out of the colonial theft of land and control of contract labour, will in the post-independence period be likely to create high expectations that land will be redistributed, wages raised appreciably, and families united."²

Parallel with the military conflict, then, is an ideological one: and it will ultimately determine the socio-economic structure of Namibian society.

South Africa wants to model the country along racialist lines, with the blacks segregated into "homelands."

SWAPO began its armed struggle 16 years ago to break the whites' plan to establish an apartheid system. Under the Odendaal plan (1964) moves were instituted to split the black-occupied part of the country into 10 "native nations," while at the same time developing closer government links between the remaining "white area" and South Africa.

The apartheid model for social and economic development is offensive to the West, but what is the alternative?

Lord Carrington, the former British Foreign Minister, canvassed the possibility that independence might be achieved by means of another Lancaster House-type conference which resulted in the creation of an independent Zimbabwe.

This may have some attraction for SWAPO leaders, who proclaim an affinity with Robert Mugabe's style of moderate socialism.

The post-independence problems in Zimbabwe, however, ought to alert SWAPO to the dangers of the Lancaster House agreement.

Under the terms of that conference, Mugabe agreed that white-owned land would be redistributed only if the whites were compensated. He has now discovered that he does not have the money to meet the land hunger of the black peasant farmers.

The same would be true of Namibia, despite the fact that she has the largest diamond deposits in the world. Namibia imports 90% of her food, and the risks of disrupting the rural sector further are considerable.

Hundreds of farms have already been abandoned (one third of them in the Outjo district north of the capital, Windhoek).

The problem during the post-independence phase will be to increase output on the 5,000 white-owned commercial farms and the 100,000 black subsistence farms. This would not be achieved if a Marxist government set out to appropriate the land of efficient farmers in the name of reverse discrimination.

A CRITIQUE of the Zimbabwe solution argued that a tax on land values ought to have been instituted as the major redistributive mechanism. This would satisfy the dual need to maximise output on occupied land and ensure that idle land was placed in the hands of needy landless farmers.³

Careful attention must now be given to the problem of land reform, learning from the errors which have led to the new political crisis in Zimbabwe.⁴

For no matter which side wins the military conflict, unless a solution is found to the land question which is both equitable and economically efficient, the losers will still be the mass of landless peasants.

REFERENCES

1. *Namibia in the 1980s*, London: CIIR, 1981, pp. 32-33.
2. *Ibid.*, p.56.
3. Vic Blundell and Fred Harrison, 'The Big Sellout', *Land & Liberty*, Nov.-Dec. 1979.
4. Ian Barron, 'Land hunger - the threat to Mugabe', *Land & Liberty*, Nov.-Dec. 1981.

Pennsylvania Tax Raiders

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the present tax of 6.57 per cent of assessed value to 5 per cent on buildings and 12.25 per cent on land.

Meanwhile, Collins and collaborator, Wylie Young, began a detailed survey of about 500 parcels throughout the 66 wards. When these two reports are completed, Tayoun will stage a series of town meetings to inform residents.

BUT THE attractions of land value taxation are not limited to shifting the burden off homeowners. Tayoun appreciates the wider economic implications.

For example, many more jobs would be created in the depressed construction industry. So a meeting was organised between Collins and the "big honcho" of the Operating Engineers Union, Ralph Williams, who is also chairman of the Joint Building Trades Council.

Williams told Collins and Biddle that he recognised that the change in the property tax would be good for his people: it would encourage more building.

Tayoun believes that his campaign also has a potential political impact at the national level. He told me during an interview in his office in city hall:

"The time has come for the land tax. I know it is right for Philadelphia. We will blaze a trail, and we will be followed by cities like New York, Boston and Chicago."

The raid on the tax system is apparently going smoothly. Collins, however, is not being deceived. He says: "So far, there has been no resistance or objection to the proposal but we are not being lulled into a false sense of security. We expect opposition and we will be ready for it."

REFERENCES

1. Marshall Harris, *Origin of the Land Tenure System in the US*, Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1953, p.311.
2. *Ibid.*, p.312.
3. Henry George, *Progress & Poverty*, New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, centenary edn. 1979.
4. School and county tax rates are levied equally on land and buildings, and are in addition to the municipal rates. In Pittsburgh, the equalised county tax rate is 0.7 per cent and the school tax rate is 1 per cent.
5. *Incentive Taxation*, Jan.-Feb. 1982.