

# Namibia's Chance for Independence

On December 22, 1988, South Africa, Angola and Cuba signed, at the United Nations in New York, two agreements: one for the withdrawal from Angola of 50,000 Cuban troops between April 1, 1989 and July 1, 1991, and the other for Namibia's independence in 1990, after the holding of free elections under UN supervision. The agreement was signed after several rounds of negotiations in which the US participated as «mediator.»

## 100 YEARS OF COLONIAL OCCUPATION

Namibians were robbed of their land for the first time in 1884, when the German imperial flag was hoisted over it, and South West Africa became a «colonial possession of Germany.» After World War I, Germany was dispossessed of its colonies, and the administrative mandate over South West Africa was given to a British dominion, the South African Union. In 1946, all territories under mandate were to be placed under UN supervision, a decision ignored by South Africa which managed, for the following 20 years, to keep the administrative mandate over Namibia with diplomatic maneuvers and tricks.

On October 27, 1966, the General Assembly of the UN ended the South African mandate over Namibia, reaffirming the inalienable rights of the Namibian people to independence and self-determination. South Africa refused to recognize this decision and sent troops into Namibia, which meant a de facto annexation. Namibians were robbed of their land for the third time.

## SWAPO AND THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

The Namibian people never accepted the occupation of their country and have a long tradition of resistance against colonialism. A turning point was reached with the establishment of SWAPO on April 19, 1960. In its political program, which was adopted in 1976, SWAPO defines the stages of its development as follows: In the second half of the 1950s, the major task

became the establishment of a political organization able to assume the leadership of the masses and to give an organized character to the spontaneous and uncoordinated resistance acts which characterized this period. This aim was reached with the establishment of SWAPO in 1960.

The second stage consisted of making out of SWAPO an organization deeply rooted in the Namibian society, dealing with concrete problems concerning people's lives as well as, in a larger context, the question of national independence. This process took place in the first half of the 1960s.

In 1966, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) was created to confront the repression of the South African occupiers against the liberation movement. Armed struggle began.

In the fourth stage, in the beginning of the 1970s, armed struggle became the main form of resistance against the South African racist regime.

## A CHANGING BALANCE OF POWER

A combination of events in the 1970s led to a shift in the balance of power in the region. In June 1971, the International Court of Justice ruled that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was illegal. In December 1973, the UN General Assembly recognized SWAPO as the sole authentic representative of the Namibian people. With the fall of fascism in Portugal and the end of Portuguese colonialism, which brought about the independence of Mozambique (1974) and Angola (1975), the power equation in Southern Africa was

transformed. South Africa, continuing its policy of deception, tried to install a credible puppet government and to push forward the Bantustan policy in Namibia.

In 1977 Canada, West Germany, France, the UK and the US formed the so-called contact group. They felt that their interests in Namibia were threatened as the armed struggle intensified, and realized that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was no longer guaranteeing their strategic interests and the activities of their companies. In the following process of negotiations, the «contact group» turned out to be only interested in preserving the interests of the West and of South Africa, while putting pressure on SWAPO. The negotiations failed.

Finally, as South Africa's isolation grew and world condemnation became louder, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 435 on September 29, 1978. South Africa formally accepted Resolution 435, but in the years that followed Pretoria has repeatedly stalled on implementing the plan. The Reagan administration's policy of «constructive engagement» gave South Africa a powerful protection for obstructing the independence of Namibia. Meanwhile, the US and Pretoria linked Namibia's independence with Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. This accentuated the ties between Namibia and Angola which had long existed, not only due to geographic proximity, but more importantly due to the common aspirations and cooperation which link SWAPO and the MPLA.

## ANGOLA, CONFRONTING THE AGGRESSION

Since its independence in 1975, Angola has been subjected to massive military destabilization, with dramatic social and economic consequences. Besides direct intervention and aggression by South African troops, one of the tools used against Angola is UNITA. Having failed to install a counterrevolutionary government in 1975-76, South Africa and its allies, among them Israel and the US, con-