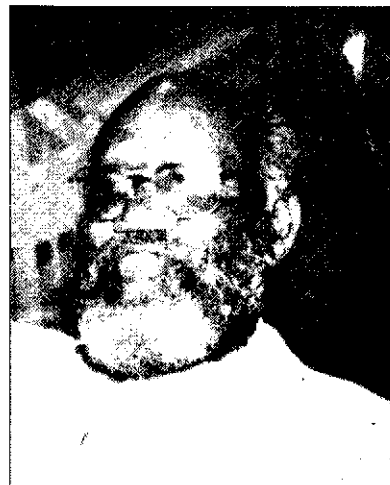


Ja Toivo Calls for Sanctions Against South Africa



Aigls Kemezs/Now

Herman Toivo ja Toivo

"Because of Reagan's policy of constructive engagement ... the war continues in northern Namibia ... and while it is true that we do not control territory physically, psychologically we are controlling the whole country."

One of the founding fathers of the Namibian liberation struggle came to Toronto recently. The legendary Herman Toivo ja Toivo, Secretary General of SWAPO is one of the generation of Mandela and Sisulu whose personal history is closely linked to the origins of the mass struggle for the liberation of southern Africa. And like Mandela, Toivo has spent much of the last two decades in South African prisons; he was released in March 1985 after eighteen years on Robben Island.

Born in Ovamboland, ja Toivo grew to maturity during the 1930's the period when South Africa was tightening its economic grip on South West Africa, and turning the territory into a vast labour reserve for the farms, mines and fisheries of the region. Wages paid to migrant labourers in South West Africa were half the pitifully low wages paid to migrants in South Africa itself. After service in World War II ja Toivo became one of the premier organizers of contract workers, during the 1940's and '50's in Namibia and in 1957 he moved to Cape Town to organize Namibians there. It was there that ja Toivo founded the Ovambo Peoples' Congress (O.P.C.), later to become the Ovambo Peoples' Organization, one of the three organizations that merged in 1960 to form the South West Africa Peoples Organization - SWAPO. Ja Toivo was one of 37 Namibian defendants who went on trial under the notorious Terrorism

Act in Pretoria in August 1967, after a mass roundup of SWAPO leaders following the launching of the armed struggle by SWAPO in August 1966. In February 1968 ja Toivo and 33 others were convicted and given sentences ranging from 20 years to life. Ja Toivo was subjected to systematic and repeated beatings, sleep deprivation and other forms of torture. Speaking from the dock, ja Toivo and others denounced in eloquent words the kangaroo courts that convicted them.

Since his release from Robben Island, ja Toivo has reoccupied the position of Secretary-General of the party. Perhaps more than any other living person, Herman Toivo ja Toivo embodies the fighting spirit and indomitable will of the Namibian people.

As the number two cadre in the SWAPO leadership, Toivo speaks authoritatively on SWAPO's position on the current situation in Southern Africa. During his meetings in Toronto, ja Toivo made a number of comments, giving *Southern Africa REPORTS* readers insight into the current thinking of the SWAPO leadership.

"Because of Reagan's policy of constructive engagement which I call destructive engagement the war continues in northern Namibia. The oppressors have 100,000 troops on our soil. The Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia is still scoring victories, and while it is true we do not control territory physically, psychologically we are controlling the whole country."

On the question of the so-called *internal solution*, independence for Namibia under a puppet regime, ja Toivo said:

"On June 17 the South African racists

introduced what they call the Interim Government; this is just a continuation of the old manoeuvre of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) Ministers' Council, and National Assembly, none of which had any credibility among the Namibian people. We are sure that this one like the others will crumble very soon. The principals are the old collaborators, representing no one but themselves and their bank accounts."

On the question of *linkage* (the linking of South African withdrawal from Namibia to the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola), ja Toivo saw it clearly as a stalling tactic designed to give South Africa breathing space to impose an internal solution. And ja Toivo was extremely critical of the role of the U.S. government and Reagan's special envoy, Chester Crocker, propping up the South African regime in Namibia. And despite the March 1984 Lusaka Accords between Angola and South Africa, ja Toivo documented the continued attacks by the latter on the former.

"In June, South Africa invaded Angola in hot pursuit of SWAPO. They claimed to have killed 50, and later in another incident, 61 SWAPO soldiers. These

stories were lies. In both instances there was no contact with SWAPO because we have no forces in that area. The truth of the matter is that the South Africans went to defend UNITA; in the most recent incident, to save the UNITA headquarters, which were on the verge of being encircled by Angolan troops."

Ja Toivo applauded the resolute actions of the South African people and the tremendous upsurge of resistance in the last twelve months. And he predicted dramatic future changes in the form and intensity of the South African liberation struggle. But he also rejected the view that the people of Namibia must await a revolutionary victory in South Africa before achieving their own liberation.

We must always tackle the weakest link and at the present, Namibia is that link. You know, when South Africa withdrew forces from Southern Angola, it was not really because she wanted to fulfill what she promised the Angolans in the Lusaka agreement; it was due to pressure of the crisis brewing in South Africa. She wanted to deploy those forces in the townships. And so, in this case as well, if the pressure of incidents keeps on mounting and accelerating, South Africa will be forced to withdraw her forces from Namibia to concentrate on protecting South Africa itself."

The major purpose of ja Toivo's visit to Canada was to press for comprehensive and mandatory sanctions against South Africa and for divestment.

"The changes you see going on in South Africa today are merely window-dressing. The Bothas are not really going to bring about changes unless we stand up and push them from inside and outside. That is why we are here in Canada appealing to our friends to demand comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa. We ask you to make the Canadian government come out clearly and show the world where they stand. This in-

volves first, withdrawal from the Contact Group, the Group of Five. France has come out by saying it will no longer participate in meetings of the Contact Group. Then they went further and gave SWAPO diplomatic status and material assistance in the form of food and trucks. We are grateful to France for the concrete moves and we are also appreciative of the stand that Canada has taken at the U.N.. For example, at the recent Security Council debate



on Namibia, my comrades were saying that Canada's statement appeared as if it came from SWAPO itself! But we don't want to see only statements. We want to see work. We want the Canadian government to come out and stand on the side of the oppressed and fighting people of Namibia!"

The meeting with ja Toivo also offered us a fascinating glimpse into the man behind the statements. During the meeting with TCLSAC ja Toivo spoke movingly of his years on Robben Island and the solidarity of the political prisoners in South Africa's Alcatraz. Located on a barren island in the south Atlantic near Cape Town, Robben Island has long been the maximum security home of South Africa's greatest patriots. When ja Toivo was finally released in March, there was intense speculation that South Africa's motive in

giving up one of their most prized catches was to sow disunity and strife within SWAPO; or somehow to 'turn' ja Toivo. We now know that this didn't happen. Ja Toivo's reintegration with the outside leadership was instant and complete, and his presence added to SWAPO's strength and unity. Southern Africa REPORT asked ja Toivo if there were any attempts by the prison authorities to manoeuvre him in some way according to a hidden agenda:

They had been manoeuvring long before I was released. In 1976 they sent me someone, a white man who introduced himself as coming from the University of South Africa. He said he had been trying to come and visit me for years, but he was not allowed. And then finally they agreed, they allowed him to come and see me. And he said - but since you have been in jail for such a long time, perhaps you don't know what is taking place; let me brief you first, as to what is taking place outside. Then he said, South Africa has also recognized SWAPO, like the United Nations, and there are changes taking place in Namibia as well as in Transkei - And I said oh! Is that how it is? And in Rhodesia, remember this was 1977. So I asked him, what is your work, you said? He said, No, I'm a researcher at the University of South Africa. I continued to ask him: are you a professor or what? He said, No, I'm just a researcher. Then I said, Well, I don't want to talk to you. He said, That's all right; I'm not going to force you. If you don't want to talk to me, it's fine. Perhaps we will meet again. So we parted. Then, after I left, he called in another Namibian comrade from his section. So he went there, and he told him the same story, saying that he wants to talk to him. This comrade said No, I'm not versed in English, I want an interpreter, so one was brought. He repeated his story, saying that they (South Africa) had recognized SWAPO, and this man said, if you want to talk to SWAPO, SWAPO is outside. We are in jail; go ahead, go talk to SWAPO. (laughter) So that was the end of that.

"In 1977 it was the first time the Group of Five went to South Africa with Prime Minister Vorster. A man came to me named Mumurumba Ke-

rina; he was a friend of mine who became a chairman of SWAPO and who was expelled from the organization in 1963 for having written a letter to American Metal Climax saying he was prepared to work together with them for the good of Namibia. We believed that he also got money from them. When DTA started he came back to Namibia from Brooklyn, N.Y., where he was living. We used to hear in prison almost every day about his doings. When the South Africa-Namibia Foundation was formed Kerina got involved in it. He often came to Cape Town on Foundation business. He wrote me and said that Namibia was about to obtain independence under the DTA. And he said please feel free to apply to the prison authorities to allow me to come and see you. He enclosed a picture of himself and a long list of names of SWAPO members whom he claimed were killed by SWAPO.

"I was called to the governor's office to read this letter. I said I wanted to discuss this letter with eight of my Namibian comrades. The governor agreed and we assembled. But there were only seven. So I said no, this is not sufficient. If we don't get all eight we won't discuss the letter, the meeting will not go on. So they brought the eighth man. I told them, here is the letter from Kerina. I don't want to see him, but we can take our time to discuss this letter, it may take three or four days (laughter). So we spent three days appearing to discuss the letter when we were covering our own agendas. Then I told them, you must take the letter back to your own sections. Take three, four or five days to discuss it, take more time if you need it. That's how we managed to meet inside the prison while appearing to consider weighty offers from DTA collaborators.

"These were just two of the many incidents that occurred. Also they have been writing in their newspapers that, if I am released, there will be a struggle for power in SWAPO, and secondly, they used to say if I am released before the elections my charisma will disappear! And I heard also some speculation that they were thinking that if I am released they will be able to persuade me to be on their side. They already tried such a trick, because on

the day of my release from Robben Island, I was called into the governor's office and a man was standing in the shadows whose face I could't make out. As I came near him he turned around and I recognized Andreas Shipanga who had been expelled from SWAPO and who was now part of the MPC. I refused to talk to him but I learned later that before my release he had gone to my mother in Windhoek and told her: "I have brought your son



here from Robben Island". She replied, "No, I don't want to see you, please go away."

For the members of TCLSAC it was a privilege and an education to meet a man whose name has meant so much to the liberation struggle in southern Africa. It gave us a better sense of the reservoirs of courage and fortitude that energize the people of Namibia enabling people like ja Toivo not only to survive the years of prison but to continue to hold fast to the goals of liberation. Moreover, this knowledge lent a special quality to ja Toivo's appeal for support for SWAPO students in Cuba, a specific request with which he chose to close our session with him:

"As the time goes on, the needs of the struggle are also increasing. We are

appealing to our comrades and friends to redouble their efforts in giving us whatever they can in the way of material, food, clothing, or medical and agricultural equipment and transport. Please contact our New York office, and they will redirect these contributions. And don't be surprised if you get word from our office in Cuba. We have two schools in Cuba, which accommodate over 1,000 students. When they are in the hostels, these kids are looked after by the Cuban government. But when they go to university the government pays only for their academic tuition. Clothing, they must provide themselves. So when you get word saying send these goods to Cuba to go to Namibian university students, don't be surprised. I must also express our gratitude and thanks for the work you are doing over the years; and I hope that the distance we have covered in the struggle is longer, and the one we are facing now will be shorter. Without your support we wouldn't be where we are today. I hope that you will continue struggling, comrades and friends."

Any contributions for SWAPO from our readers can be directed to SWAPO, 801 2nd Ave., #1401, New York, N.Y., 10017 USA. If you wish a tax receipt for your contribution both OXFAM and CUSO have projects with SWAPO. Send your contribution, earmarked for SWAPO, to OXFAM, 251 Laurier Ave., #901, Ottawa K1P 5J8, or to CUSO, 135 Rideau St., 3rd floor, Ottawa K1N 9K7.

