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NAMIBIAN WORKERS ORGANISE

NUNW/COSATU



In 1987, long before Namibian independence was even on the agenda, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) decided to produce a joint book on the Namibian trade union movement.

At that stage the Namibian trade unions had just begun to assert themselves. The idea of the book was to provide information useful for both Namibian and South African workers on the history of the working class struggle in Namibia. It was hoped that this would help to build a powerful working class solidarity between South African and Namibian workers.

The International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) – a research and educational service organisation specialising in working class struggles internationally – was commissioned by COSATU and NUNW to research, write and produce the book.

Work on the book started in 1988. Between then and May 1989, two ILRIG workers visited Namibia a number of times – once with comrades from COSATU – and gathered a vast amount of information on the struggle in Namibia. Information came from workers, from trade unionists, from SWAPO, from documents and from observation.

At all times in the process of writing the book, material was referred back to COSATU and NUNW for discussion and approval. The final chapter on solidarity was done at the end of August 1989, when a delegation of COSATU leaders visited Namibia to discuss setting up a permanent Working Committee with the NUNW.

The book is coming at a time when Namibia is about to achieve her independence from South African colonial occupation under UN Resolution 435. The Namibian workers' struggle for a living wage, for the right to strike, for decent houses, for jobs for all and against privatisation will not end with independence. The need for strengthening and extending trade union organisation in Namibia will not end with independence. The necessity for building solidarity between the Namibian and South African working class will not end with independence.

NUNW and COSATU hope this book will assist Namibian and South African workers to strengthen their organisation and solidarity in the struggle for a liberated Southern Africa where the needs of the workers come first.



Viva NUNW Viva!

Viva COSATU Viva!

*Viva solidarity between
Namibian and South African
workers Viva!*



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INTRODUCTION

On May Day 1989 workers throughout the world came together to celebrate their victories, their unity and their international solidarity. In Namibia this May Day was a special celebration. All over the country workers came together in rallies. In their hearts they were happy. Their struggle had been long, but now a big victory was in their hands. On that day they united in their unions under the umbrella of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) and they held high their slogan *Workers unite for independence!*

On this day they showed their commitment to carry their demands loudly into an independent future:

- ★Freedom from South Africa!
- ★Freedom from exploitation!
- ★Decent education for all!
- ★No privatisation!
- ★The right to organise without victimisation!
- ★Free and fair elections!
- ★Safety at work!
- ★Maternity benefits!
- ★Housing for all!
- ★Freedom from poverty!
- ★A living wage for all!
- ★The right to strike !
- ★Recognise our trade unions !
- ★Jobs for all!
- ★An end to the migrant labour system!
- ★A 40- hour working week!
- ★Pensions we can live on!
- ★The right to health care!



The workers said that true independence will only begin when these basic demands are met.

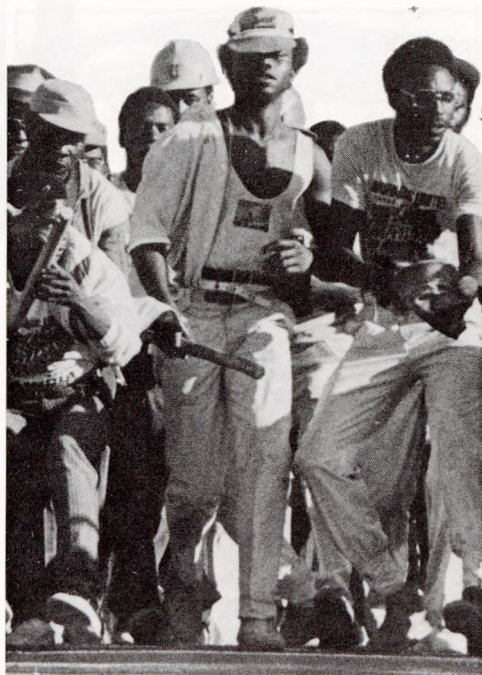
For the workers of Namibia independence has a special meaning. Since 1986 they have built the strongest industrial unions in their history. They looked back on their history and they saw how their struggle, together with everyone who has fought under SWAPO's banner has brought this victory of freedom from South African oppression. In their May Day rallies they looked forward to independence and they held hope that it will bring a time of peace.

The workers of Namibia were not the only workers who celebrated the victory in Namibia. Workers all over the world celebrated with them. But in South Africa this celebration had a special meaning. South African workers have been struggling against the same government and bosses as their comrades in Namibia. But now, as the Namibia people came close to their freedom, the people and workers of South Africa felt a new confidence. At their May Day rallies the workers of South Africa committed themselves to struggling in solidarity with their Namibian comrades. They shouted loudly *Viva SWAPO! Viva NUNW!*. They knew that the victory of the Namibian people was a great step towards their own victory.

Viva NUNW Viva!

Viva SWAPO Viva!

This book is the story of the long struggle of the Namibian workers. It is the story of their many setbacks and victories. It shows the unity and strength that has helped to drive the South African colonial regime out of their land. This book celebrates their victory.



PART 1

THE ROAD TO A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT



RESISTANCE TO GERMAN OCCUPATION

The people of Namibia have had a long history of foreign occupation in their country. Even before the time of the South African rulers, the army and the settlers of Germany occupied Namibia. About one hundred years ago, the capitalist countries of Europe began to compete with each other to conquer different parts of Africa. These governments wanted to colonise African countries so that they could get raw materials which they needed for factories in Europe. In this 'scramble for Africa', Germany made Namibia a colony in 1884. It called it German South West Africa.

The German government encouraged white settlers to farm cattle in Namibia. But for this to happen the settlers needed land. To get the land, the Germans sent in their army to drive black Namibians out. But they also used another tactic to rob Namibians of their land – the tactic of division. The Germans made treaties with some chiefs which offered the chiefs protection and money. They used these chiefs to make war against other chiefs. The Germans then moved in and took the land of the defeated people. Because black Namibians did not always stand together, the Germans could use these divisions to steal their land and cattle. And on the stolen land, German settlers raised cattle to supply the greedy needs of merchants and companies in Germany.

But although black Namibians were divided, they did not just sit back and accept the poverty which the Germans brought to Namibia. They fought many battles against the Germans to win back their stolen land and cattle. These battles led to a big war of resistance which took place between 1904 and 1907.

Around this time conditions for the people of Namibia were becoming worse. Many more German settlers came to farm cattle. This meant even more land was taken from African communities. At this time the cattle disease called rinderpest killed many cattle. Survival from day to day became much harder. This forced many Africans to go and work for low wages on white farms. But people were determined to fight against these attacks. The African people felt that:

The cruelty and injustice of the Germans have driven us to despair. Our leaders and the people feel that death has lost much of its horror in the light of the conditions under which we are living.





▲ Chief Samuel Maharero

Hendrik Witbooi – leader of the Nama-speaking people ▼



Let us die fighting! – These are the words of Samuel Maharero, chief of the Herero-speaking people. They are the words which aimed to unite all Namibian people in the struggle against German colonialism. Maharero saw the brave action of the Bondelswarts uprising against the Germans. He saw in this action that all the different groups of Namibian people were affected in the same way by German colonial rule. And Maharero spoke at a time when the Herero were making big plans for an uprising against the Germans. He wrote a letter to Hendrik Witbooi, leader of the Nama-speaking people calling for unity in action. But this letter never reached Witbooi. Instead, a chief who did not support the uprising passed it to the Germans. So when the Herero rose against the enemy in January 1904, they did so without the support of the Nama.

At the beginning of this war, the Herero people won many battles. The fighting Herero soldiers seized most of Hereroland. They also seized most of the cattle from the white settlers living in this area. And they showed much courage and determination in defending their victories. They were strong and united. Young and old, men and women stood together! And together they shouted:

Whose land is Hereroland? Hereroland is our land!

For five months the Herero people defeated the Germans. But soon the German colonialists began to get scared of the Herero people's confidence and victories in the war. They brought more men from Germany to help fight. They also sent a new general to take over the leadership of the colonial army. This General Von Trotha had a very cruel policy. He commanded that:

The Herero as a nation must die! We don't take any prisoners of war! Shoot to kill anyone who is on the other side!

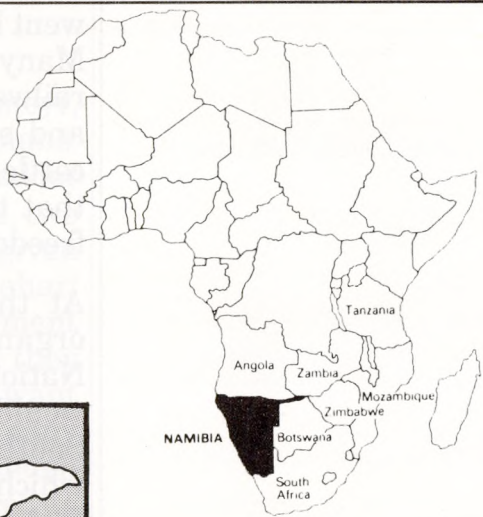
The Herero people fought bravely against Von Trotha and his army. But they soon began to suffer many defeats. The enemy had more guns and military equipment. And Von Trotha made plans to trick the Herero people. Many of them were forced into the desert as part of these plans. Here they met a slow and brutal death without any food or water!

In these years of war many other groups in Namibia became confident when they saw the brave actions of their neighbours, the Herero people. They also took up arms against the Germans. But all these actions were met with the brutal methods of the Germans. In this way 80% of the Herero people died and so did half of the Nama people.

After this war of resistance black Namibians faced a life of even greater poverty. The Germans had now captured most of their land. Their lives as independent farmers had been destroyed and they were forced to work for the colonialists. Pass laws were introduced which forced Africans to work for wages. At this time the Tsumeb copper mine was opened, and in 1908 diamonds were discovered. The Germans started to use contract labourers to work on these mines. Contract labour meant very low wages for the workers. For the bosses, mining supplied the raw materials needed in Europe and also big profits. So German rule was the start of the poverty which we still see in Namibia today. But it was also the start of a long struggle against this poverty and oppression.



NAMIBIA



This map of Namibia shows all the towns which we will read about in this book

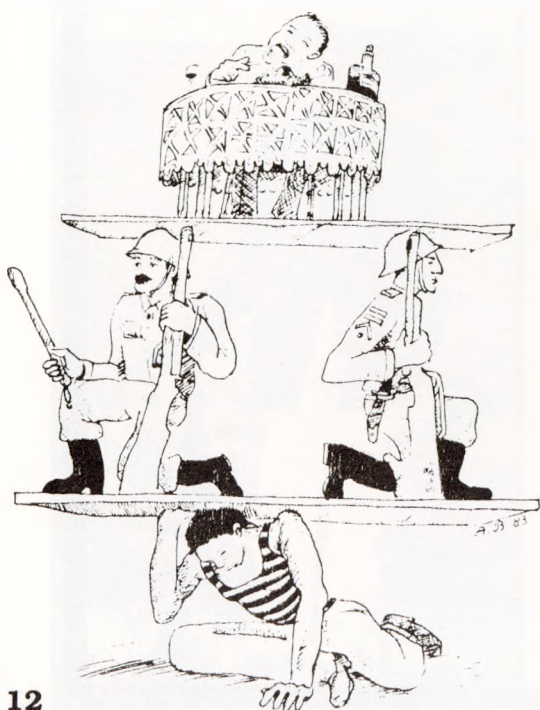
SOUTH AFRICA – THE NEW COLONIAL MASTER

In the year 1914, the capitalist countries of Europe went to war. These countries were fighting amongst themselves for world-wide economic power. In this war South Africa was helping Britain to fight against Germany. In 1915 South Africa sent its army into Namibia to take it away from the Germans. As the army of South Africa marched in, many black Namibians went back to the land which had been stolen from them. Many workers who had worked on the mines and the railways during the time of the Germans left their jobs and started to farm again. Some even took back the cattle which the Germans had seized. They believed that the South African army had come to bring them freedom from German rule.

At the end of this world war, a new international organisation of governments called the League of Nations was formed. This organisation said Namibia would become a mandate of South Africa. This meant South Africa was supposed to rule Namibia in a way which would build the country and protect its people. But soon it became very clear that the South African rulers were only thinking of how black Namibians could be forced to work for cheap wages. So the land was not given back to black communities. Instead the South African government let the German settlers keep their land. They also passed laws which said that black Namibians must live in reserves (bantustans). They could leave the reserves only to work for wages.

The South African rulers also moved quickly to take control of the mining industry which the Germans had started. The diamond mines near the sea came into the hands of the bosses of the South African company De Beers. Some smaller mines were also started. We know that for the mines to make big profits for the bosses, they need lots of cheap labour. Although many black Namibians had been forced off their land and had to look for work in order to survive, still the mine bosses did not find enough workers. So they began to turn their eyes to those Namibians who had managed to keep their land, and were still ruled by their own chiefs.

The South African rulers started a campaign to defeat these communities. They marched on their land and made war against the people of the north. They bombed



the land and kraals of the Bondelswarts in the South and the Ukuambi people in the north. And in the place of these people's own kings and leaders, the South African rulers appointed new headmen to rule on behalf of the colonialists.

After these attacks more black Namibians were forced to work for low wages in the mines, on the railways and on the farms of the white bosses.

In our own lives we have seen that the bosses are not happy even when they do have enough workers. We know that they want to control our lives, and keep us divided so that our struggles will be weak. When we are weak the bosses know that their big profits will not be threatened. In Namibia the bosses and the government tried to do these things.

Stealing our land

In 1920, the new South African administrator, Hofmeyr, used the law to take more land from black Namibians. Half of all the land in Namibia he said was to be used for the farms of three thousand white settlers. The two hundred thousand black Namibians were only given 10% of the land. Most of this land was in the Kalahari desert where people could not farm. The government knew that if people could not survive on the land they would have to look for work. But the bosses did not want to have to pay wages which would have to feed many mouths. They only wanted to pay each worker enough wages to feed himself. So men workers were forced to leave their families in the reserves in the north. There the families had to try grow food on the little land that was left so that they could survive.



Stealing our freedom

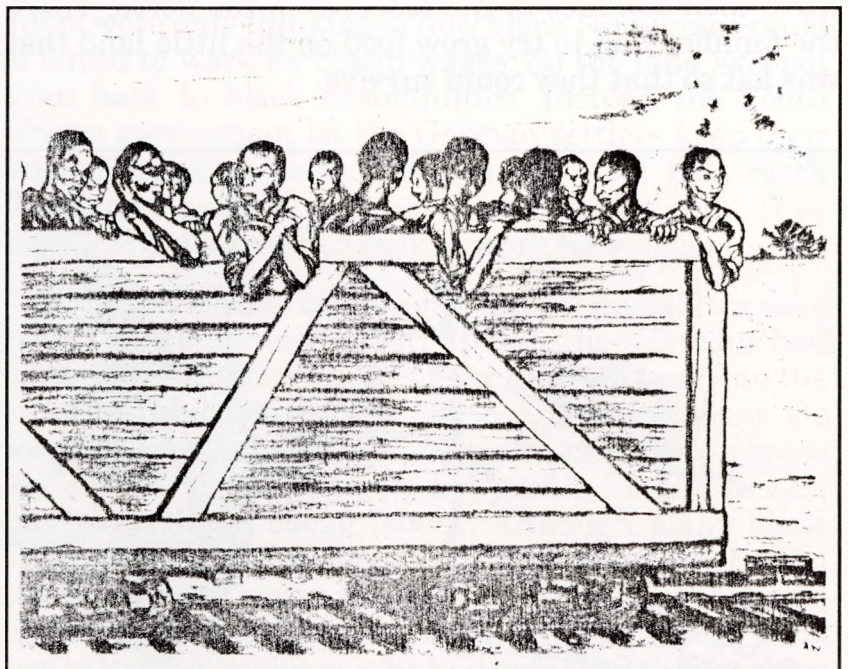
The South African rulers continued to use the pass laws started by the German colonialists. But they also made new laws which said that every black Namibian outside a reserve had to carry a pass. In the pass the government put a stamp which said what the person was allowed to do. There were stamps if you wanted to look for work. There were stamps if you wanted to travel to visit your family. There were stamps if you took a job and needed to live outside the reserves.

Stealing our labour

The government and the bosses used all these laws. But they still needed more ways to control workers. They saw that many workers refused to work for some bosses because they were badly treated or because they could not bring their families with them. So the bosses needed to make sure that there were always enough workers at the right places. In fact, the bosses wanted to control Namibian workers like cattle in the hands of a herder. So the bosses used another system of control. This system was called the contract labour system. To make this system work, the bosses had organisations which recruited workers from the reserves. In 1943 they established an organisation called the South West African Labour Association (SWANLA), to recruit labour for all the bosses in Namibia, but mainly for the mines.



Contract labourers had to travel a long distance to get to work.



Vinnia Ndadi, a member of the National Executive of SWAPO, was once a contract worker. He has written his story of how he was recruited:

AN

VINNIA NDADI'S STORY



I was very young – still seventeen in fact – when I first went to SWANLA in 1946. First they sent me back home saying I was too young and weak. Employers buying people from SWANLA wanted strong boys able to do hard work on the mines and farms. I was sent back like this four times before they finally accepted me. Workers were classified according to their health and the strength of their bodies. That's the only important thing to the recruiting agent. He doesn't want to buy a sick or weak person unable to perform the work he is contracted for. At Ondangua they treated us like cattle. After our physical examinations they graded the very strong and healthy ones 'A boys', those with good health but not very strong as 'B boys', and the youngest and weakest as 'C boys'. After my physical examination I was tagged with a number and my 'C' classification. I had to wear this tag on a string around my neck.

Later that day all of us who passed were put into buses and taken to the SWANLA camp just outside Grootfontein. As soon as we arrived there we were formed into a long line while a man counted up the 'A', 'B' and 'C boys'. Then we went to the big compound and joined all the others who were waiting for their papers and transport to the south. The camp at

Grootfontein consisted of SWANLA offices and barracks for the contract workers, surrounded by a high, barbed wire fence. The workers' barracks were called 'pontoks'. They had zinc roofs, concrete floors and no beds. Each man just got two dirty, lice-infested blankets to sleep on. The place was filthy and hot with lots of bugs – big ones. The smell was so bad I couldn't sleep for several hours that first night. We had just one bucket for 20 people and I usually preferred to go into the bush to relieve myself. The food was terrible – just mielie meal, and a small piece of meat once a week.

Finally they assigned you to a job: 'Johannes! You're going to milk cows on 'X' farm! You'll work at the Tsumeb mines!' and so on. You couldn't refuse. At first I said to myself that I wouldn't take just any job, but when I saw a man badly beaten for refusing his 'contract', I decided to take whatever they gave me. Fortunately, I was told, 'Vinnia, you'll work as a 'houseboy' for a Mr Jooste. He's a farmer in the Mariental district'.

I went by train from Grootfontein to Mariental, in the south. We were squeezed into small cattle cars, more than twenty men in each. They put down canvas to cover the cattle mess but it was impossible to lie down. I stood or sat the whole five days to Mariental. There were no buckets or latrines. We just had to wait each time till the next station – if we could – then run to the bush or latrine. Also there was no water. Eating the dry bread from Grootfontein I got extremely thirsty, which was worse than the hunger.

At Mariental station I was told to wait till my boss arrived. I stayed in a station 'pontok' till Mr Jooste came a week later. ■

LEARNING THE NEED FOR UNITY THROUGH STRUGGLE

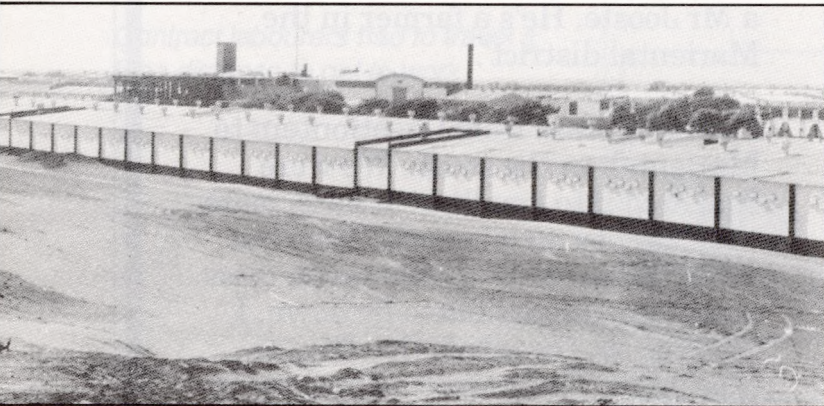
As the South African rulers established themselves in Namibia and brought their methods of control, workers found many different ways to resist. Most often workers could not struggle in the same ways as today. They had not yet built the weapons which we have today.

Contract labourers were forced to live in cold, over-crowded compounds



On the farms workers were isolated. There were few workers on each farm, and they were far from the towns. The farmers also had much power, and the police supported the farmers in attacking the workers. These workers had little choice. Often they could only run away. And without strong organisations, any worker who tried to struggle would surely be jailed or even killed. But these workers also made sure that the bad farmers were known by all workers coming to any farming area. Workers warned their comrades about the 'kwaai base' (bad bosses) so that they could try get contracts on other farms.

On the mines life for a contract worker was hard. There the workers lived in compounds, without their families. Unlike the farms, the workers on the mines were not so isolated. They travelled in large groups from the north, and on the mines they all lived and worked together. Even though the bosses used their apartheid methods to keep workers of different 'tribes' and colours apart, the workers soon learnt that if they stood together their strength was greater. Even in 1893 at the first German mine Gross Otavi, workers struggled together. In that year workers went on strike for higher wages.



Workers' compound in Walvis Bay

When the South African rulers took over from the Germans, they made harsh punishments for workers who struggled. But when they started a system of paying miners only near the end of their contracts, the workers took action. For a long time they used go-slow and wild-cat strikes to make the bosses listen. In 1917 they built an organisation on the 'mines called the 'mutual benefit society' which was like a workers' fund. Workers paid part of their wages to the society. Whenever a worker was fined by the bosses or the government for taking action, the society paid the fine.

In the coastal town of Luderitz, workers started to build the first trade union. In this town there were small factories where crayfish was canned. In the 1920s the Luderitz workers formed a branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, the ICU, which was a mass organisation in South Africa.

These small organisations and first actions of the workers did not form part of a mass movement at this time. The government and the bosses did everything to crush the confidence of the workers. The workers did not yet have a strong organisation to defend themselves from these attacks. Many Namibians still stood too far from one another.

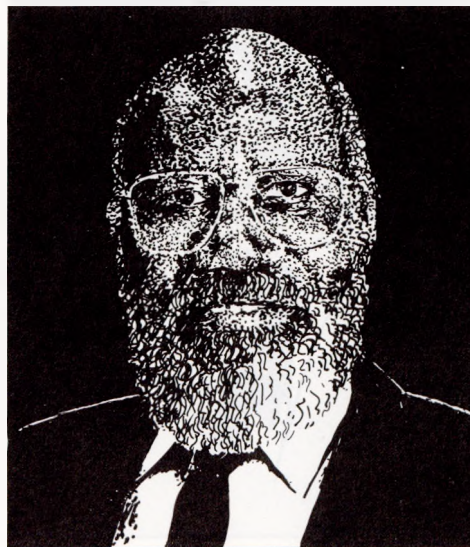
FROM OPO TO SWAPO – THE ROOTS OF A UNITED NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Between 1939 and 1945 there was another war between the powerful countries of the world – the Second World War. During this war the fishing industry and public service in Namibia grew. Many more new workers came to know what it was like to work under bad conditions and low wages. And many of these workers also began to see how the contract labour system was designed to keep them in chains. But workers did not just accept these chains without fighting. In 1948 two thousand mineworkers went on strike at the Tsumeb copper mine. After 1949, the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), an affiliate of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) began to organise in the canning factories at Luderitz. In 1952 and 1953 thousands of workers at these factories went on strike. They won an agreement with the bosses, but the government moved fast and attacked their union. Three workers were shot dead during the 1953 strike. After this the FCWU was not able to work in Luderitz. But even though their organisations were being crushed, workers were getting more experience of struggle.

In 1957 a group of Namibian workers and students who worked in Cape Town met together in a barbershop. In this group was Andimba Tivo ja Toivo. He had worked on the South African mines and railways. He spoke about the contract labour system and said that there must be a campaign to have it scrapped. But before a campaign like this could be successful, workers must be part of strong organisations. So this group decided to start a new organisation called the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO). Some of these people went back to Namibia. They called meetings about the contract system and soon many workers were talking about this new OPO.



Andimba Toivo ja Toivo – after spending many years on Robben Island, Comrade ja Toivo is today the General Secretary of SWAPO.



One of the new leaders of OPO was Sam Nujoma – the president of SWAPO today. He went around to the workers' compounds. He spoke about OPO and the importance of strong worker organisation. This is how Vinnia Ndadi remembers these days :

On 25 June 1959, Sam Nujoma came to Walvis Bay. At the gate of the Ocean Fishing Co. Sam talked to the watchman, asking if he knew about OPO. The man said, 'I've heard of it, but I don't know any members.' 'Well, I'm a member,' Sam Nujoma said. 'Would you call a meeting of the workers here in the compound, so I can tell you all about our new organisation?'

Almost everybody came out. The word got around fast and the men were eager to hear. We gathered at our usual meeting place. Sam introduced himself, then asked if we had heard about OPO. I said, 'Yes, we heard about your organisation being formed in Windhoek.'

'Actually,' he said, 'we started in Cape Town, but now we are trying to bring all the people of South West Africa together in OPO.' He then talked about the need for freedom and an end to the contract system. 'We all know, especially you contract workers, that we have suffered much under this system. Our people have been forced to work for slave wages under miserable conditions – dictated by these racist boers. Families are broken up and we are made to live in lousy compounds like this ... not treated like human beings, but like cattle! One day we will bring an end to this system and we will work as free people, each and every one choosing our work according to our desires and needs, without force.'

Then he asked us, 'Will you join the struggle to abolish contract labour?' Everyone shouted, 'Yes! Yes! That's what we want!' Nujoma continued; 'We in OPO want to abolish this whole system and we want Walvis Bay to join us, to set up a branch of OPO. With so many contract workers here, especially in the fishing industry, you should have a strong branch working for you. We must work together – you, me, all of us – to end our oppression!'

Comrade Sam Nujoma – he is today the President of SWAPO



In many parts of Namibia workers in the compounds, locations and on the mines went to these meetings. Here they heard the words of the OPO which spoke of worker organisation and worker struggle. And they heard these

words at a time when their needs were great. So thousands of workers joined the OPO to help them struggle for the things they needed.

They set up OPO committees in the compounds. Each committee elected a representative to attend OPO branch meetings. After a branch meeting, the representatives went back to their compound committees to give a reportback. This process meant that workers did not often come together in mass meetings. In this way workers tried to protect themselves and their new organisation from the attacks of the government and the bosses. But there were also many problems which these new branches faced. One of the biggest problems was the lack of communication between the branches in different towns. This made it difficult for the OPO to organise national campaigns.

But the OPO also said that contract labour was not the only problem faced by Namibian workers. Workers faced control by the South African government and bosses in many parts of their lives. So workers must also struggle for freedom from colonial rule. It was not only workers who were saying these things. Students, teachers and traditional leaders in the Herero Chiefs Council began to see the need for unity in the struggle against colonialism. In 1959, people from these groups came together to form a united body called the South West Africa National Union (SWANU). Soon workers in OPO built an alliance with SWANU to take forward their struggle. The first campaign which this alliance organised was to resist the forced removal of the people living in the Old Location of Windhoek to the new township Katutura.



We'll never move to Katutura!

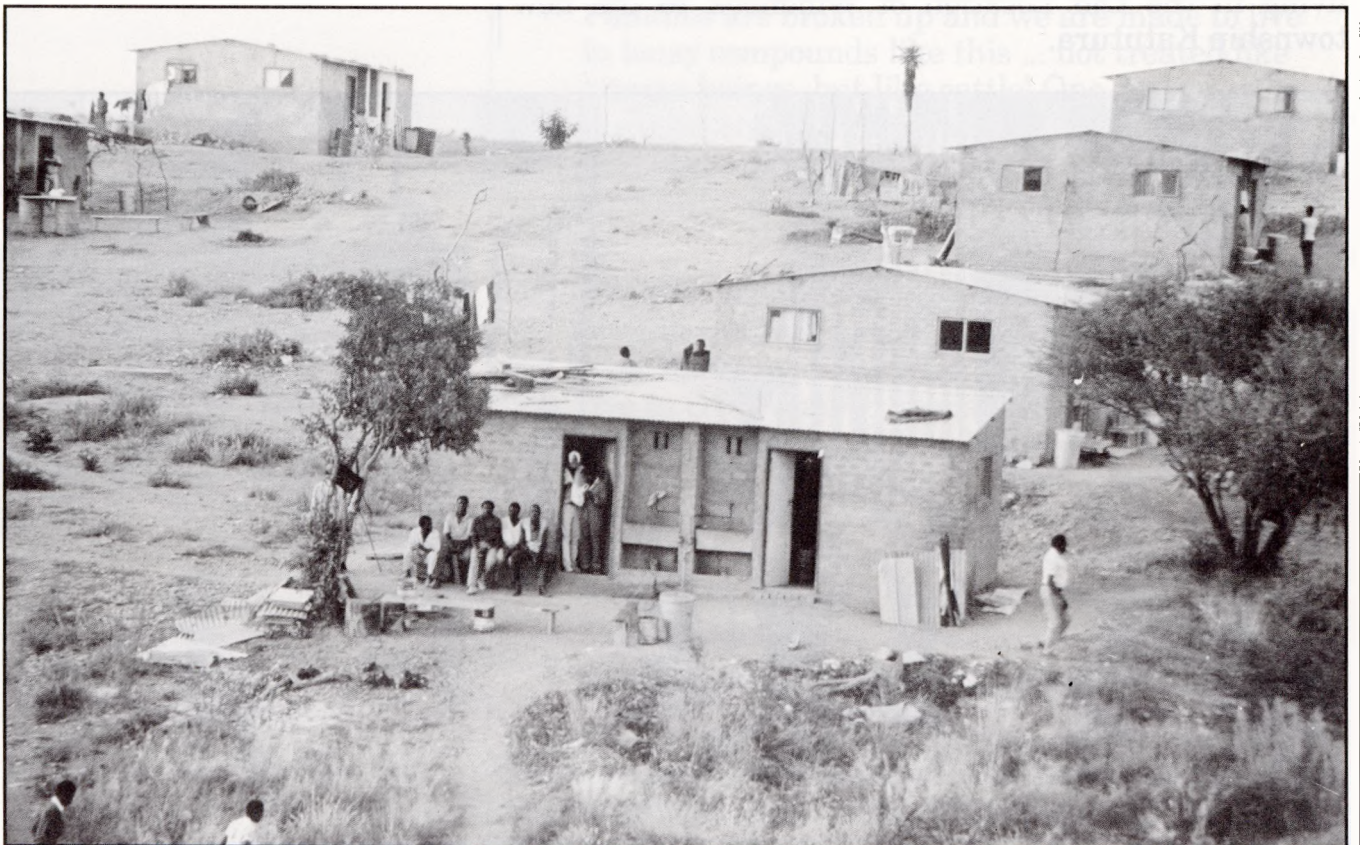
For many generations black Namibians who worked in Windhoek lived together in a shanty town called the Old Location. Here living conditions were very bad. People lived in shacks which they had made from things like cardboard, cloth and pieces of wood. The streets were narrow and dusty. The Old Location was also very overcrowded. But the community was strong and united. And black Namibians were allowed to own land.

In 1959 the South African authorities announced their plan to move people from the Old Location in Windhoek to a new township. The people gave this new township the name 'Katutura' which means 'We have no home'. It was built eight kilometres outside Windhoek. The authorities said that there would be better conditions at Katutura. But the people of the Old Location knew that this move really meant: *higher rents, higher bus fares, more poverty!* The government also said that Katutura was only meant for Africans. 'Coloured' Namibians would be moved to their own township called Khomasdal. And people who were unemployed, sick or old would be sent back to the reserves. So we can see from this plan that the government was trying to weaken the people by dividing the black community.

We'll never move. You'll have to haul our dead bodies to your damned Katutura!

This was the people's answer to the new plan of the South African government. These words showed the

A section of Katutura today – in Katutura many people are unemployed, there is a shortage of housing and much poverty.



determination with which the people of the Old Location struggled against their removal to Katutura. And they were the words which united OPO with other organisations like SWANU in a campaign to stop the government from carrying out its plan.

These organisations called many protest meetings to show the government the people's anger. The people of the Old Location began to realise that it was only through united action that they could make the government listen. People heard about the kind of action which the black people of South Africa were taking during these years. And they heard how the boycotts of buses and beer halls hurt the pockets of the government and the bosses. People also knew that the government made a lot of money from Old Location services like the beer halls. So together with their organisations the people of the Old Location decided, like their South African comrades at this time, to boycott the buses, beer halls and all other municipal services. The boycott would continue until the government withdrew its plan!

In taking forward this campaign, the women of the Old Location took strong and militant action. They mobilised many people to take part in the boycott and on 9 December 1959 they marched to the South African administrator's house in Windhoek. Their march was strong and united. They marched through tear-gas, determined to show their protest. On the following day more people joined the women in picketing outside the beer halls. When the police arrested three people the crowd became very angry. Without any warning the police began to fire on people. Many people tried to defend themselves with stones and bottles, but the police had guns. On this day eleven Namibians were killed and more than fifty wounded! Today in Namibia 10 December is observed as National Women's Day. It is a day on which we remember and celebrate the strength of these women in the Old Location.

SWAPO is born

After this day, people were bitter because again the government had used violence. But people were not defeated. They were angry, and even more determined to build strong organisation. They saw that the OPO alliance with SWANU had begun to experience problems and divisions. They now began to see how important it was to have one, united organisation in which all the people of Namibia could struggle for their freedom. In April 1960, OPO changed its name to the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO). All over Namibia, people celebrated the birth of SWAPO which spoke of their unity in struggle for national liberation.

Still today, comrades in Namibia remember the strength of the women in the struggle against removals from the old location. Because of their strength, it took the South African government ten years to finally remove the last families from the Old Location.



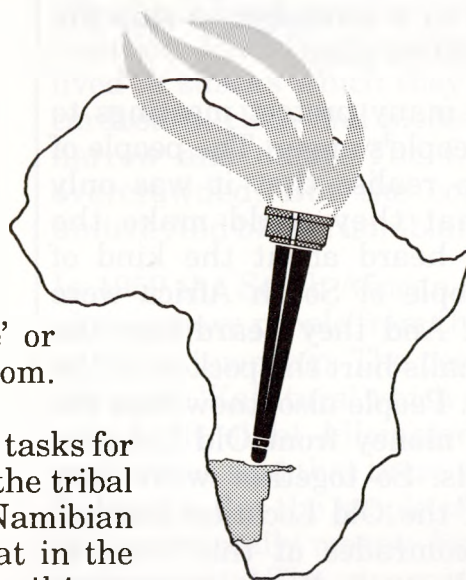
ONE NAMIBIA, ONE NATION

In 1960 when SWAPO was launched, it was a great step for the Namibian liberation struggle. For the first time, an organisation was being built for all Namibians, no matter what language they spoke or what 'tribe' or 'ethnic group' they came from.

One of the most important tasks for SWAPO was to overcome the tribal divisions which exist in Namibian society. We have seen that in the early years black Namibians mainly struggled against colonialism as separate ethnic groups – like in the Herero wars, or the Bondelswarts rebellion. Even today there are problems with ethnicity or tribalism. The colonial government and its puppets accuse SWAPO of being only an Ovambo organisation. And many people look at the DTA and say that it is the Herero who are the puppets. If we look at the history of colonial rule, we can begin to understand why tribalism is still in Namibia.

Before the European colonists arrived there were different groups who spoke different languages in Namibia. These groups also had different ways of making a living. Some groups were farmers of food crops and some were farmers of cattle. There were some communities which hunted and collected their food from wild plants, and some who only mined for copper and kept goats but sold their metal to other groups for food.

All these people did not live a completely peaceful life. Water is scarce in Namibia, and in times of drought there were sometimes fights over water supplies and grazing near water holes. The different communities were also sometimes divided between the powerful groups like chiefs and those who did not



have power. There were also differences in power and wealth between men and women. But most of the time these groups were able to live peacefully, living in their different ways and trading with their neighbours for the things they themselves were not able to produce.

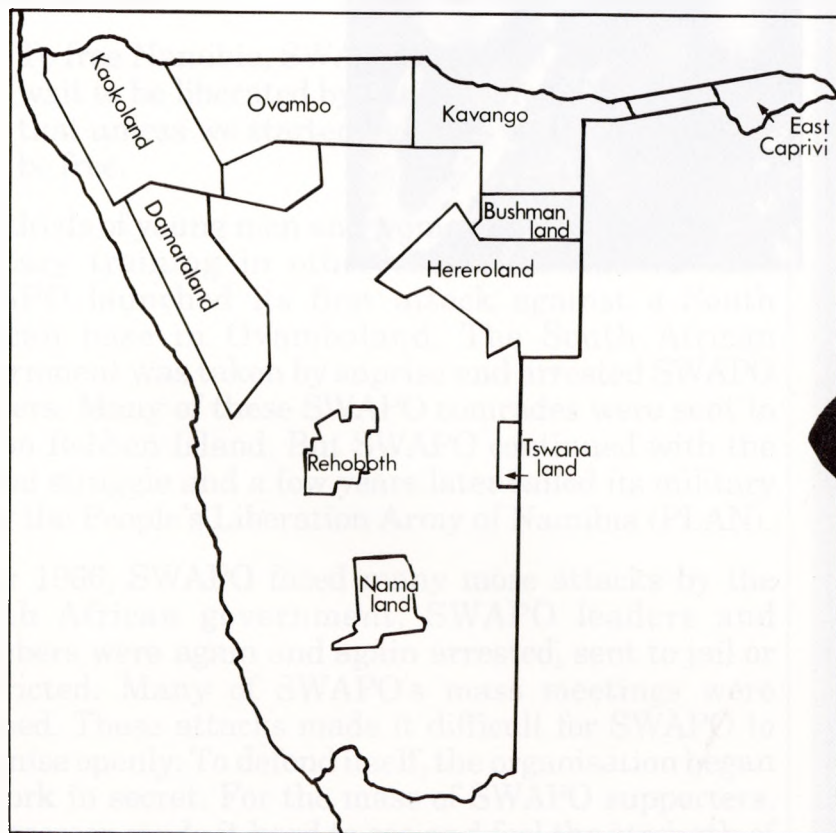
It was with the arrival of the Europeans in Africa that conflict between ethnic groups really became a problem. First the Nama and Orlams people came into Namibia after being driven off the land by whites in South Africa. This meant that more people were forced to live on a small piece of land. Then the church missionaries came into Namibia, and set up mission stations across the country. These stations became centres of trade where European traders were able to exchange their goods for the cattle and the copper of black Namibians. The Europeans began to supply guns, farm tools and utensils, and this stopped trade between different African communities. Because black Namibians were exchanging their cattle for the European goods, their own cattle herds became very small. Europeans also came to hunt and to look for precious metals and stones like copper, gold and diamonds. They destroyed many of the wild animals and took much land – the things to which Africans could turn to help them survive. As the struggle to survive became more difficult, African people began to fight amongst themselves over land and cattle. There were times when they saw who the real enemy was and tried to build unity, like with the Hoachanas treaty between the Nama people, the Orlams people and some Herero chiefs. But usually battles of resistance were fought by different groups alone, or one

after the other. We have already seen how the Germans used these divisions for their own benefit.

It is these very same divisions and differences which the colonial rulers have tried to make bigger and to use against the Namibian people. They added to the divisions by making the apartheid reserves and bantustans. This forced migrant labourers to travel, work and live only with other migrants from their own 'tribe'. Even today we still see how the South African regime and its puppets can only look at black people as 'Damara', 'Ovambo', 'Herero' and so on. Just when the people of Namibia began to unite inside SWAPO, the government developed new plans for the reserves. Since the 1970s the government has tried to win the support of black Namibians by offering tribal leaders and puppets many benefits if they accept the divisions of apartheid.

The majority of Namibians, with SWAPO, know that they share their experience of oppression and exploitation. But it is workers especially who know about this sharing. Every day when workers go to work they see that they are exploited as workers, not as 'Ovambos' or 'Hereros'. They know that while the bosses and the government have tried to keep them apart, their suffering has been the same. It is this which has been the rock on which to build their unity.

It is this common experience which has made them determined to come together in their united organisations. In the meetings of the unions today you will not only hear one language. You will hear English, Afrikaans, OshiHerero, Oshivambo and other languages. And when workers speak to each other, they do not refer to ethnic groups, but call each other by the name of 'comrade'. ■



This map shows the Bantustans which the South African government imposed on the Namibian people. We can see that most of the land has been reserved for white farmers and settlers



PART 2

KEEPING THE TORCH BURNING



During the 1960s, the news of this new organisation SWAPO spread to many parts of Namibia. Hundreds of people attended SWAPO mass meetings. They saw how SWAPO could help oppressed people to struggle together. Soon SWAPO branches and committees sprung up in many towns. And the strong solidarity built between the contract workers in OPO was taken into these new SWAPO branches. Together people called for an end to the contract labour system and racial oppression.

Freedom is in OUR hands

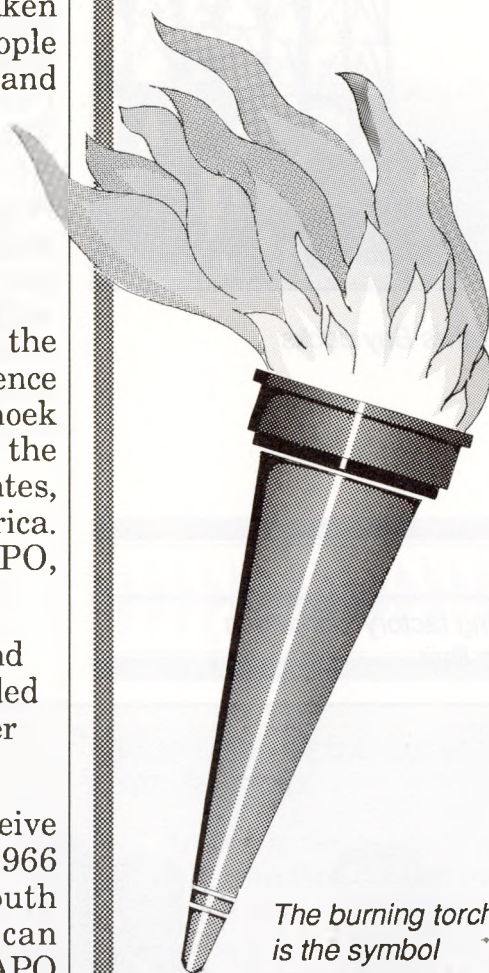
It was also during these years that SWAPO made the decision to take up arms. They had seen the violence used by the South African government in the Windhoek massacre. They had also seen how the big powers in the United Nations like Britain and the United States, refused to take strong action against South Africa. Comrade Sam Nujoma, the president of SWAPO, explained that:

To free Namibia, SWAPO could not sit back and wait to be liberated by outside forces. We decided that unless we started fighting, we would never be free.

Hundreds of young men and women left home to receive military training in other countries. And in 1966 SWAPO launched its first attack against a South African base in Ovamboland. The South African government was taken by surprise and arrested SWAPO soldiers. Many of these SWAPO comrades were sent to jail on Robben Island. But SWAPO continued with the armed struggle and a few years later called its military wing the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN).

After 1966, SWAPO faced many more attacks by the South African government. SWAPO leaders and members were again and again arrested, sent to jail or restricted. Many of SWAPO's mass meetings were banned. These attacks made it difficult for SWAPO to organise openly. To defend itself, the organisation began to work in secret. For the mass of SWAPO supporters, this secrecy made it hard to see and feel the strength of their organisation.

But the people of Namibia struggled to keep the voice of SWAPO alive. They continued to resist the control of the South African authorities.



The burning torch is the symbol which SWAPO uses. It is the symbol of the fire which burns in the hearts of all Namibians in their struggle.

It is the light of freedom which burns against the darkness of oppression.



▲ *The Walvis Bay docks*

Canning factory workers in Walvis Bay
▼



In 1968 workers at the Walvis Bay canning factories started a campaign for overtime pay. During this struggle, workers built strong unity. The dockworkers acted in solidarity with the canning workers and workers from the north refused to become scabs. Again in 1969 and 1970, these canning workers went on strike against their long working hours. It was the experience of unity in these actions that gave workers more confidence.

It was with this confidence that they heard in 1971 about the International Court of Justice decision that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was illegal. After this decision Namibian school students took action. They demanded that South Africa must get out of Namibia. Many of these students were expelled. And they took their militancy with them as they left school to become workers. They also brought with them the idea of a general strike.



The flame becomes a fire – 1971/2 strike

In December 1971 and January 1972, twenty thousand workers took action against the contract labour system. This strike was a turning point in the struggle of the Namibian people. Never before had so many workers united in mass action!

A worker explains how the strike was planned:



Soon we began to organise. We would approach one or two workers in each factory, in the railway and building companies. We only talked to those we trusted. Around that time the South African government wrote a newspaper article saying the contract workers wanted to work under the system. We used this article to tell our fellow workers: 'See, the South Africans are saying we are pleased with the system, so we should do something to show them that we really don't want it.' Everyone supported this idea.

Workers sent messages to all the towns and mines in Namibia announcing the strike. On 13 December 1971 twenty thousand workers from the industrial towns all over Namibia went back to their homes in the north. There had been a good crop which could provide enough food for the striking workers. But in the north workers did not all live together and so it was difficult to meet together. So when they arrived in the north workers in each area elected representatives to speak for them on a contract committee.

In response to the strike the government ordered the puppet chiefs to force the people back to work. Then the government tried to get scabs. But many people all over Namibia stood in solidarity with the workers. They refused to take the jobs of the strikers.

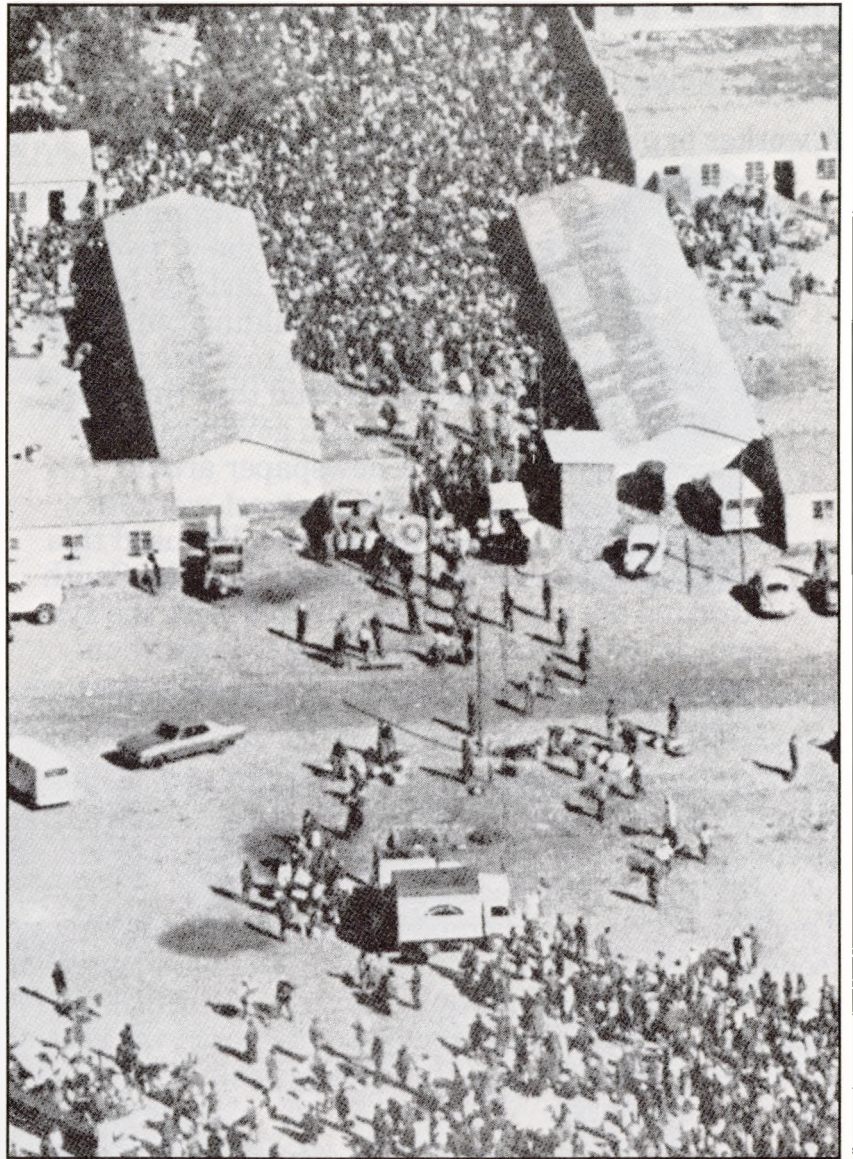
Then the government made another plan to get the workers back. It agreed to scrap SWANLA and it announced a new contract system. Under this system workers could choose where they wanted to work and they could leave their jobs without being chased by the police. The government tried to tell workers that they had won a great victory.

WORKERS' DEMANDS IN THE 1971/2 STRIKE

- 1 An end to the contract system, and the freedom to work at a place of our own choice and to change jobs without police interference!**
- 2 The freedom for workers to bring our families with us to the towns!**
- 3 Equal pay for equal work!**
- 4 Labour offices must be placed in all the Bantustans and in every town with free advertising of jobs!**
- 5 Scrap the pass laws!**

When workers still refused to end their strike, the government sent in the army. They forced workers back to work at gunpoint. All meetings were banned. When workers tried to meet to discuss their plans the army attacked. The government declared a State of Emergency in Ovamboland. Hundreds were detained. More than fifty people were shot by the soldiers. The big strike of the Namibian workers had finally been defeated.

Workers gather at the Katutura compound during the 1971/2 strike ►



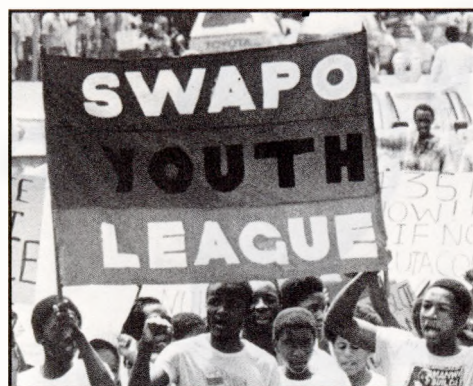
But the workers carried with them a new confidence. Their strike had been the biggest in their history. For two months they had felt the power of unity. And they went back to work knowing that the monster called SWANLA was dead. They also knew that all over Namibia bosses were paying higher wages because they were scared of the strength and the confidence of the workers.



The fire spreads

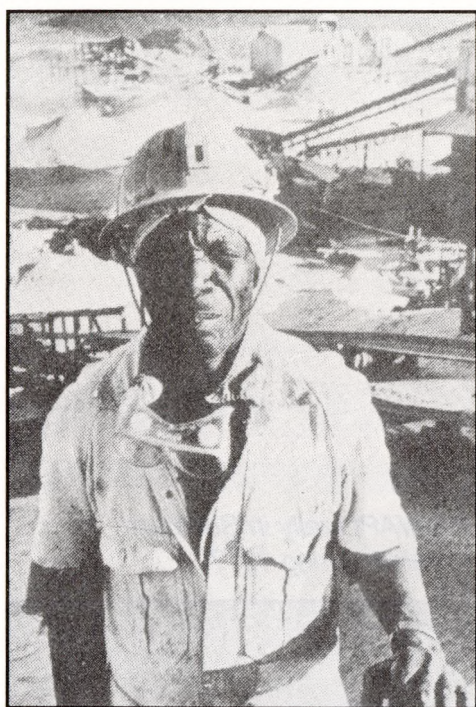
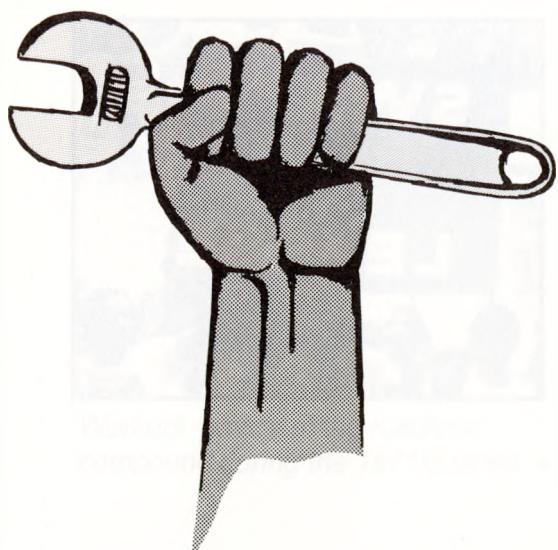
After this great action of 1971/2 workers all over Namibia felt stronger. While the attacks of the government had crushed the strike, workers were learning about the power of united action. All over Namibia workers began to refuse to work long hours without over-time pay and they defied the pass-laws more than ever before. When the bosses refused to hear their demands, workers used strike action to force open the bosses' ears.

These militant actions also gave confidence to the youth and other comrades in SWAPO. Together they began to fight the attempts by the government to impose the apartheid bantustan system. In the SWAPO Youth League the youth took militant action and campaigned hard with workers against the bantustan elections of 1973. In that year 97% of black Namibians boycotted the elections. All over Namibia the Youth League and SWAPO branches built a mass campaign against the tribal bantustan system. It was these united actions which brought to life their slogan *One Namibia One Nation*. And it was these actions which gave birth to SWAPO's new political programme of 1976 which spoke of how workers, peasants and youth must struggle together for a socialist society.



A SWAPO rally in Southern Namibia during 1977





Divide and rule

The government attacked this unity with different strategies. Again they held tribal elections in 1975. This time they used guns and threatened to take jobs and pensions away from people who refused to vote. Many leaders of SWAPO were arrested and sent to Robben Island. Behind their violence, the government started their Turnhalle deal. They offered tribal puppets many privileges in exchange for helping the government make an 'internal settlement' without SWAPO. These puppets used their supporters and tribal police to attack SWAPO members and to cause fights between their party, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), and SWAPO. The government and the bosses used 'reforms' to pretend that the DTA puppets were not so bad. They took away the pass laws and they made a law which said that blacks could join trade unions. But these did not change the lives of black Namibians. They were still exploited and their lives were still controlled by a government which they had not chosen.

Workers build their own weapon – the NUNW

Most workers already carried SWAPO in their hearts, but they also needed strong organisation to help them struggle in their daily life at work. That is why in 1978, SWAPO and the workers of Namibia began to build a trade union.

Comrade Jason Angula, SWAPO's Secretary of Labour, and two other comrades Pastor Max and Arthur Pickering went all over Namibia, into the mines and compounds. The workers knew Pastor Max. He was the one who held church services for migrant workers. Workers met in their compounds and hostels. They spoke of building a trade union which they first called the Namibian Workers Union (NAWU). But as their union grew stronger, they gave it the name of SWAPO's union which had been organising underground since 1970 – the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW).

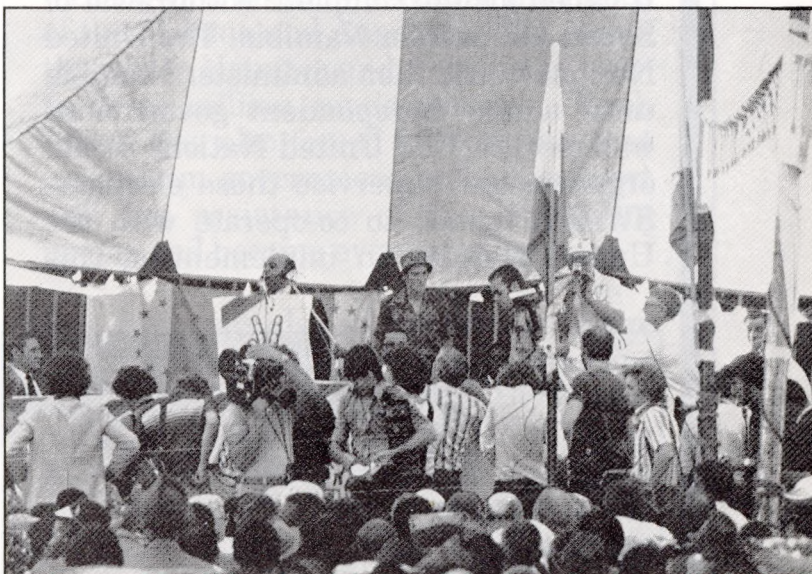
At this time they organised NUNW as one big general union for all Namibian workers. Workers knew that they must control their own organisation if it was to speak with their voice. So they elected committees in the compounds and the places where they lived. It was here that workers were together in the biggest numbers. And it was here that they had the time to meet and to hold night classes. Only in a few places were committees elected in the workplace.

The confidence which workers gained during and after 1971/2 now flowed into organisation. And with the direction and unity of organisation, the workers' struggle grew stronger. It was like this especially on the mines. Workers at CDM, Krantzburg and ISCOR's Uis mine all went on strike over wages in 1979.

But the NUNW was also bringing another kind of strength to workers. This was a time of harsh attacks by the government and its puppets. When a Herero puppet leader created tribal conflict by sending his bantustan police to attack Ovambo-speaking supporters of SWAPO, it was to NUNW that workers turned. It was NUNW that called a two-day strike to demand that the government must act against these tribal police. The government did not listen and the police killed twenty six workers in the hostel.

Even though the government and the puppets were saying that the fights were tribal conflicts, the people in SWAPO and NUNW knew that there were many Herero-speaking people who opposed the tribal puppets. And they knew that in SWAPO and NUNW there were people who spoke many languages, not only Oshivambo. So they used their unity to fight the divisions and tribalism of apartheid. They used this unity to boycott the elections in 1978 for the ethnically-based 'interim government'. The people of Namibia also knew that in the United Nations, SWAPO and the countries of the world had made a plan for independence. This plan was called Resolution 435.

This growing strength of organisation threatened the profits and control of the bosses and government. After more than five thousand workers at CDM went on strike in 1979, the government decided to crush the NUNW. It arrested all the leaders of NUNW. It closed down the union offices and took away the union's money. It tried to kill the workers' struggle. Without strong organisation in the workplaces, NUNW was not able to survive this attack. So from 1980 NUNW was again forced to hide and work underground. And for six years workers had to carry all that they knew and all they had learnt secretly in their hearts. As NUNW worked secretly, workers prepared themselves for the day when they would again stand proud with the strength of organisation behind them.



▲ A DTA meeting – the DTA is a puppet 'multi-racial' party which is contesting the elections in Namibia today. It has the support of the South African government in trying to prevent SWAPO from winning a victory at the polls.

WHAT IS RESOLUTION 435?

The decision by the International Court of Justice in 1971 said that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was illegal. But the South African government continued to refuse to leave Namibia. A few years later it began to make plans for the 'interim government' of Namibia. With these plans the South African government made it clear to countries of the world that their occupation of Namibia would not end.

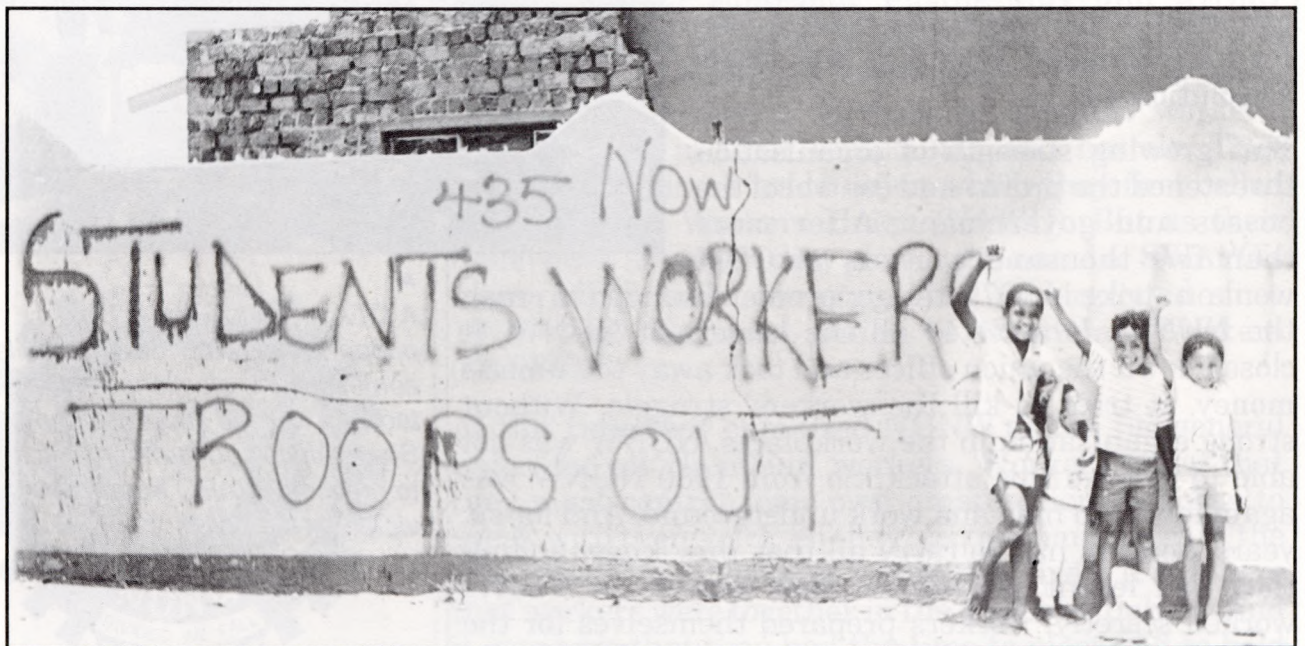
This situation forced the United Nations to pass Resolution 385 in 1976. Since the late 1940s the United Nations had put pressure on the South African government to withdraw from Namibia. Resolution 385 was the first plan about how this withdrawal should take place. It called for the complete withdrawal of South Africa from Namibia. The United Nations would then administer Namibia until a new independent government was elected. The United Nations would organise and supervise these elections. SWAPO agreed to co-operate with the United Nations in implementing this



resolution. The South African government refused to support Resolution 385.

Many of the African countries in the United Nations became angry. Again South Africa had shown that it was only interested in profit, control and war. These countries called for sanctions against South Africa. But this call was resisted by countries like the USA, Britain, France, West Germany and Canada which had important investments in South Africa and Namibia. Sanctions would not benefit their economic interests! So these five countries formed a Contact Group which tried to pressurise South Africa into accepting Namibian independence under Resolution 385.

The South African government made it clear to this Contact Group that it was not prepared to withdraw from Namibia. The Contact Group then began to work out another plan for Namibian independence which would be acceptable to South Africa. After a lot of pressure was placed on SWAPO, SWAPO agreed to



make some big compromises in this new plan. SWAPO agreed to allow an Administrator-General, appointed by South Africa, to organise the elections. The United Nations would only supervise the elections, keep the peace and organise the return of the Namibian refugees. This plan was very different to the plan for independence under Resolution 385: South Africa would now only have to withdraw from Namibia after independence. And the same forces who have made war against the Namibian people for so long would organise the elections!



The South African government first accepted these proposals from the Contact Group. A few months later South Africa announced that it no longer supported the plan. But this plan was accepted by the United Nations in September 1978. It became known as Resolution 435. We can see that for two years the imperialist countries had stopped the call for sanctions against South Africa. And after two years they had come with a plan that was a big compromise for SWAPO. Still this Contact Group had not managed to get South Africa to agree to Namibian independence. But the Contact Group continued to negotiate with the South African government. That government knew that these countries would not impose sanctions. They had nothing to fear!

In 1981 the new Reagan government in the United States offered the South African government a new plan. It argued that South Africa should only agree to Resolution 435 if Cuban forces leave Angola. This plan suited South Africa. It meant that Namibian independence was not only their problem. It was also the problem of other capitalist countries which had economic interests in Southern Africa. Now the USA began to negotiate to get Cuba out of Africa rather than pressurise South Africa about its illegal occupation of Namibia.

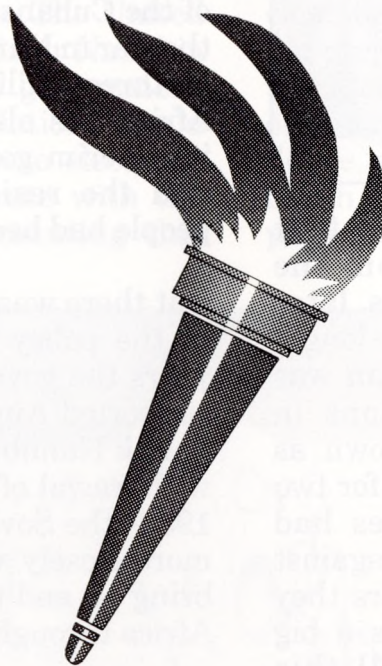
At the end of 1988 South Africa finally agreed to withdraw from Namibia under Resolution 435. After many years South Africa had been forced to negotiate Namibian independence. Many SADF soldiers had been killed in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale and South Africa was faced with a military defeat at the hands of the Cubans and Angolans. The cost of the war in Namibia and Angola had risen to three million rands per day. South Africa was also forced to recognise that its interim government had no support and the resistance of the Namibian people had become even stronger.

But there was also an important change in the policy of the Soviet Union. For years the government of the USSR had supported Angola and Cuba in refusing to link Namibian independence with the withdrawal of Cuban troops. In the late 1980s the Soviet Union started working more closely with the United States to bring an end to the conflict in Southern Africa through negotiations.

These things led to the negotiations between the South African government, Cuba and Angola. In these negotiations the South African government agreed to implement Resolution 435. Cuba and Angola agreed to withdraw Cuban troops from Angola. ■

PART 3

THE TORCH BURNS BRIGHT AGAIN



The attacks on SWAPO and NUNW in the 1970s and 1980s made it difficult for Namibian workers to stand united.

During the early 1980s, more and more SADF soldiers were brought into Namibia. These soldiers were sent to the north of Namibia. There they fought against PLAN guerillas. This war brought much suffering to the local communities. SADF soldiers destroyed the homes of many people. They drove their casspirs over fields of crops. Koevoet, a special police unit, tortured and murdered people for being SWAPO supporters. Every night people had to be indoors because of the SADF's curfew. The government then announced that all black Namibian men had to serve in the SADF. This was part of their plan to make black Namibians fight against each other. At this time the South African government also passed a law which made it illegal for SWAPO to hold mass meetings.

Together with these attacks, the government continued its programme of 'reform'. In 1983 it was forced to scrap the first 'interim government' of Namibia. This government was corrupt and inefficient. It also had not managed to win any support from the majority of Namibians. To take its place the South African government set up a new 'interim government' called the Multi-Party Conference (MPC). Again this was a government of the DTA and other ethnic parties. The MPC government started a campaign to try and win support for its policies.

But the majority of Namibians were not fooled by the words of the MPC puppets. They continued to build support for SWAPO as their national liberation movement. SWAPO mass meetings were banned, so people organised smaller meetings. SWAPO leaders were arrested and detained but people continued to meet in their branches. And through their actions people began to challenge the law which made mass meetings illegal. When SWAPO began to organise big meetings again, many comrades were beaten up and arrested. After one of these attacks, SWAPO appealed to the Supreme Court to scrap this law, and they won! In celebration of this victory, fifty thousand people marched to a mass SWAPO rally – it was one of the biggest SWAPO rallies ever held!

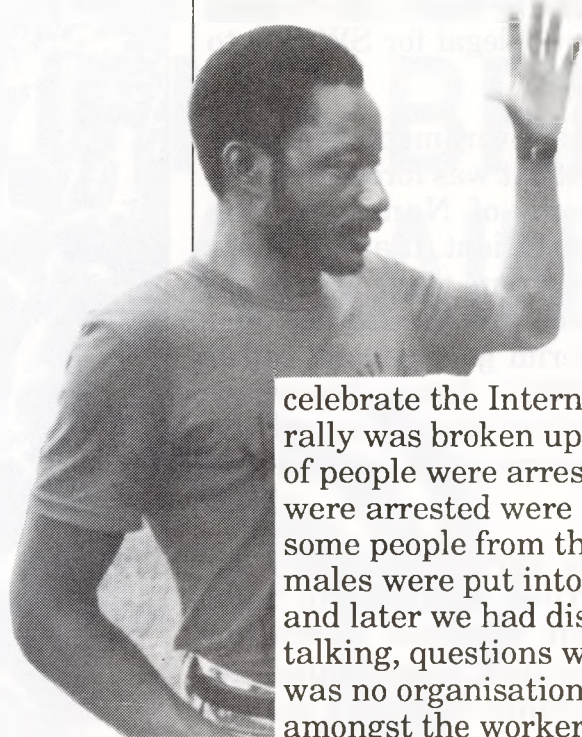
With this militant spirit, people again began to build their organisations. In 1985 Namibian students launched their organisation called the Namibian National Student Organisation (NANSO).



Building organisation in the workplace

It was also in this year that some Namibian comrades were released from Robben Island. While they were in prison, these comrades had many discussions about the importance of building NUNW again. And they took these discussions with them into the local SWAPO branches. Ben Ulenga who had been on Robben Island for eight-and-a-half years remembers these days.

The revival of NUNW – Ben Ulenga's story



When we were released from Robben Island, we joined the local SWAPO structure in Windhoek. We continued to discuss the issue of organising workers with our comrades like those in the SWAPO Youth League. On 26 January 1986 the Youth League organised a rally to

celebrate the International Year of Peace. This rally was broken up by the police and quite a lot of people were arrested. Most of the people who were arrested were actually miners together with some people from the Youth League. All the males were put into one cell. We started singing and later we had discussions. And as we were talking, questions were raised as to why there was no organisation going on at the moment amongst the workers. We began to discuss the need to start building an organised force amongst the workers.



Police break up a SWAPO rally in 1986

This meeting made us feel that we should go and arrange further meetings where we could take up this issue. After our release we called a meeting with SWAPO national leadership, people who were part of the old NUNW, and workers from various places. And at this meeting, of course, everybody agreed that there was a need to start organising actively amongst the workers. We looked at the way the NUNW started to organise in the late 70s and they did it more or less at the SWAPO level. They went to the hostels and organised workers and this resulted in a situation where workers felt very strong when they were all together in the hostel. But they didn't do much at the workplace. So people felt that there was a need to start organising on the factory floor and organising industry-wide. From this meeting a committee was elected to start reactivating the NUNW inside the country. And from this committee, a smaller committee of fieldworkers was elected. I was made head of the fieldworkers' group and we were given the task to go out physically and see the workers.

There was one car that we obtained. We started to go out to some companies in Windhoek and the surrounding areas. We found that at some of these places, the workers had their own workers' committees still going on. At some places you had committees initiated by the companies and these were quite useless and workers were very unhappy with them. So we had discussions with these people. We would, for example, come and start talking about the situation of the workers there. We would discuss what they usually do if they are faced by problems. Let's say all of a sudden a worker didn't get his wages or his wages were cut. Sometimes, they'd discuss it in their committees if they had them. Sometimes you'd find people who would stand up on their own and demand to know what happened to their wages – and of course they would be dismissed. And then we went on to discuss the appropriate steps that workers could take in order to change the situation. And workers were saying that we need to unite – we need to have worker structures. And of course we agreed. We then went ahead and suggested that maybe at the next meeting a committee could be elected and before we left they always gave us a contact person.

So we started organising illegal meetings because we had to have meetings on the sites, on the premises, without having approached management. Most of the bosses in and around





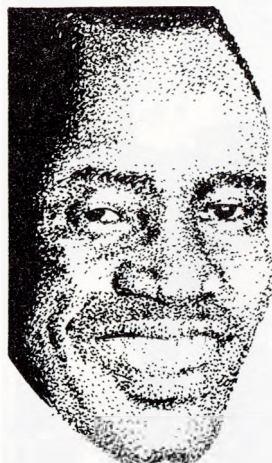
Windhoek were very negative. Some bosses warned their workers against us and others literally chased us away. I remember, for example, when we went to a hotel in Windhoek and went to the back where the workers were cooking. We didn't know that the owner of the hotel was also in the kitchen. As we were standing there with the workers, he came up to us with a knife and we had to leave in a hurry! But things went fairly well until we had quite a few committees in Windhoek and the surroundings.

By the end of August, there were about forty committees in all. Twenty eight of these committees all belonged to the food industry. There were people from the dairy industries, the breweries, the Coca Cola plant, the meat industries, and from the hotels. So we organised a meeting of people from various committees. People were discussing generally what they should do, proposals came, and it was decided now that that there would be a big congress of the food industry workers. Then in September there was the launching congress of the Namibian Food and Allied Union (NAFAU). That's how it was organised. The committees that we organised were not all food industry committees. There were municipality workers involved, there were miners, there were transport people and railway workers. But most of the committees were from the food and related industries. That's why the Namibian Food and Allied Union was established. It was the first union to be created.



Building NUNW committees

In the factories it was a difficult task to build these new committees. Comrade Kefas Nangolo, a worker at the South West Breweries (SWAB) in Windhoek told the story of their committee to *The Namibian Worker*, the newspaper of NUNW. They first asked Comrade Kefas when they began to organise the workers at SWAB.



We began talking to the workers in the middle of 1986. You see, at the same time another union came and asked us to sign forms. They spoke of trade unions. We paid R5 and R10 to become members of the union. Some of us, myself included, signed the forms but we did not really know what was going on. The people of this union did not really speak to us about these things. We just heard that they spoke with the

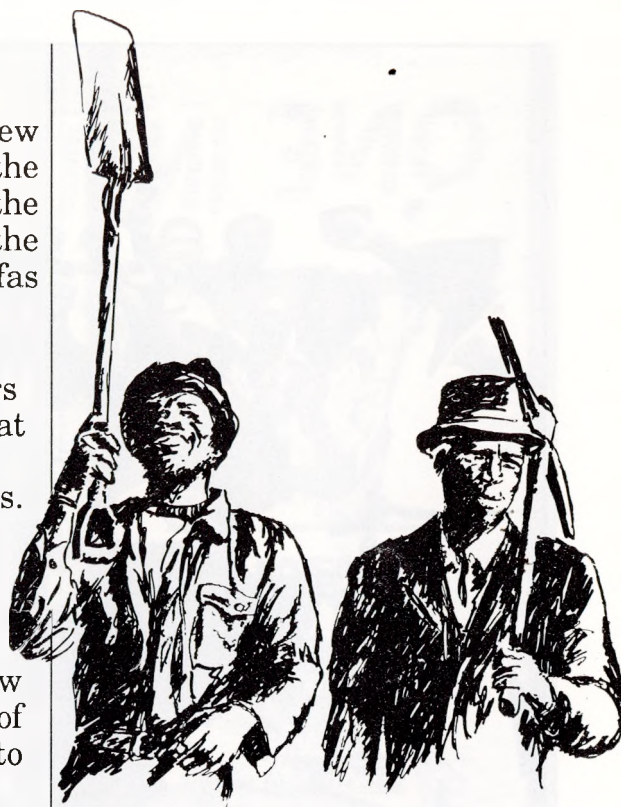
management, but we did not know what they were speaking about.

The Namibian Worker then asked how they become involved with NAFAU, and com Kefas said:

Well, we heard about NUNW. We met with Comrade Itengula and Comrade Ithete of NUNW. They advised us to get all the workers of SWAB together and to choose our own committee. I was elected as the assistant secretary of the committee. In the beginning, things were not easy. We did not stand together. Some of the workers saw that we met with people from NUNW. They went to tell the manager that we had a meeting with people from Robben Island. They also said that SWAPO was involved and that we were planning to burn down the brewery.

We overcame these problems slowly. With every meeting our group grew bigger. We began to get NUNW membership cards. At that time NAFAU did not yet exist. The membership cards were only R1. Some workers still had their cards of NUNW from 1977 and 1978. This gave them and others the confidence to join us.

We spoke about the picture on the card. One of the old members of NUNW explained to us what the picture meant. The workers understood. And in September 1986 we sent our representatives to the launching congress of NAFAU.



	National Union of Namibian Workers
	MEKO ndjo <small>FIRST NAME</small>
	NA TANGWE <small>SURNAME</small>
No.: 462	

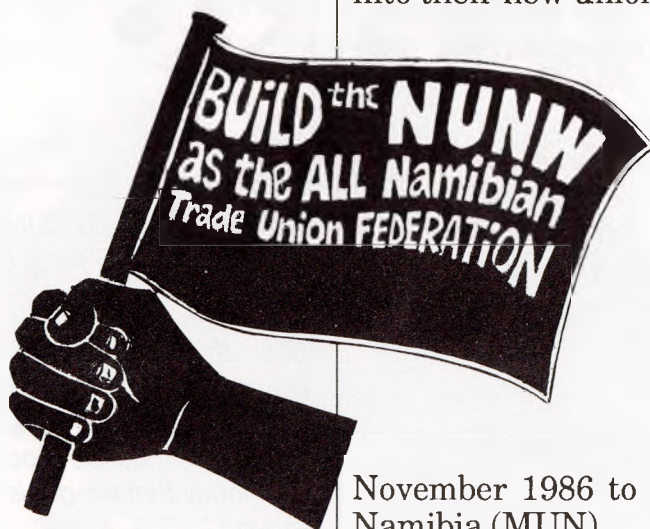
This is how the old NUNW member told about the meaning of the pictures on the membership card:

'Look, this is the pick and the spade. These are our tools. These things are our things. And look, here is the pot – there must be food in that pot, the money that we get is not enough.'

The new NUNW still uses the pictures of the pick and the spade.



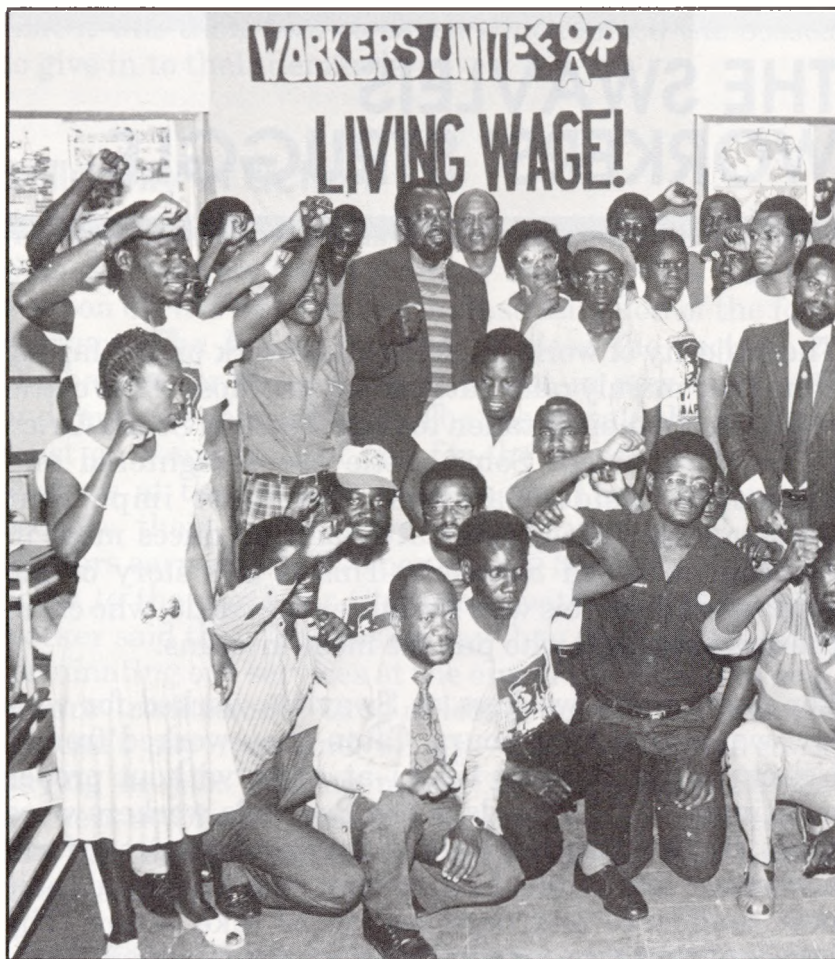
So 1986 is a very important year for Namibian workers. It was the year in which Namibian workers started to build organisation in their workplaces. In their new organisations workers began to discuss how they could build worker control and democracy. It was also the year in which workers said there must be one union one industry. We know that with one union per industry workers can build greater unity to struggle against the bosses. Namibian food workers took this spirit of unity into their new union NAFAU.



Other workers saw this new union which the food workers had built. Soon workers from the committees at Rossing, CDM, TCL and other mines came together to discuss forming one union for the workers in the mining industry. With much celebration in their hearts and chanting their slogan 'A People United Shall Never Be Defeated!' mineworkers came together in

November 1986 to launch the Mineworkers' Union of Namibia (MUN).

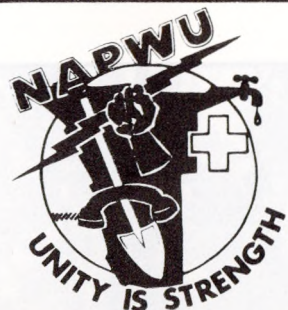
In Namibia workers have also built other new industrial unions. Metal, contruction and paint workers have built



a union called the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers' Union (MANWU). Workers in the transport industry have formed the Namibian Transport and Allied Workers' Union (NATAU). For all public sector workers, those in the government services and municipalities, there is the Namibian Public Workers' Union (NAPWU).

After the formation of the industrial unions, NUNW continued to organise workers into committees. Many of these committees were in small towns where the industrial unions had not yet organised. But NUNW also helped with coordinating the work of the industrial unions. The NUNW had a Joint Union Committee (JUC) which brought together the national office-bearers of the industrial unions. Namibian workers began to talk of NUNW as their umbrella body.

With this growth of organisation in the workplace Namibian workers took a great step forward. In many workplaces workers began to use their unity and organisation to challenge exploitation by the bosses. In 1986 and 1987 there were two important struggles which together are a symbol of this new confidence. These are the struggles of the foodworkers at a company called Swavleis and the mineworkers of the mining company TCL.



THE SWAVLEIS WORKERS' STRUGGLE

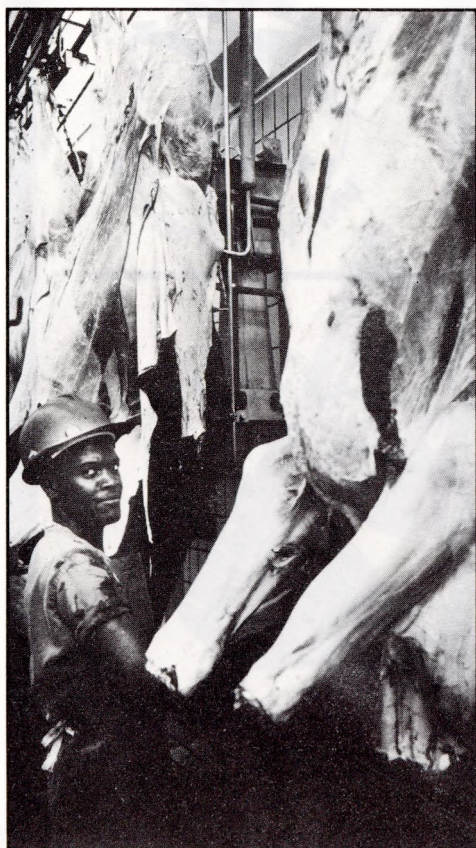
AN INJURY TO
ONE IS AN
INJURY TO ALL!

The majority of workers in Namibia work on the farms. Here they mainly raise cattle for meat. Most of the cattle raised in Namibia is taken to Cape Town in South Africa to be slaughtered. Some cattle are slaughtered and processed inside Namibia. The most important company that slaughters cattle and produces meat in Namibia is called Swavleis. This is the story of the workers at Swavleis who slaughter the cattle, who clean the carcasses and who put the meat into tins.

For many years workers at Swavleis worked for very low wages and long hours. Often they worked from 7 o'clock in the morning till 11 at night without proper overtime pay. The needs of the Swavleis workers were great. In 1986 they were one of the first factories to form a workers' committee. In that same year they used their new confidence and organisation to take action. The bosses at that time were making a 'rationalisation' plan. They said there was not enough cattle so they had to cut back on production. The bosses had already closed two factories, one at Otavi and the other at Gobabis. Next they said that they might close the Okahandja factory. But they also said that workers at Windhoek and Okahandja had a choice. Either the bosses would lay-off workers or all workers would move from the normal 9 hour 15 minute day to a 6 hour 10 minute day at two-thirds the normal wage.

The workers rejected this plan. They said that the bosses' plan was racist because only black workers were being forced to work shorter hours. They also said that the bosses were trying to increase profits because even with shorter hours they had to fulfil the same production quotas.

When the bosses tried to implement the system the workers held a meeting. One worker stood up in this meeting and said: 'We have been patient for too long and we are not going to accept starvation wages'. On the first day of the new system the workers stopped work twice. They refused to work when the bosses did not listen to them. The bosses became worried. There were many meetings that day amongst workers, between the committee and the bosses, and between the bosses and all the workers. At the end of the day the bosses agreed to go back to the 9 hour 15 minute day. Now they said that the cattle supply was better. But the workers knew



that it was their own strength which forced the bosses to give in to their demands.

Solidarity in action

A month later, there was a new struggle to fight. This time the workers had a stronger weapon. This was the weapon of NAFAU, the new industrial union of the food workers. The bosses wanted to close the factory at Okahandja for three months to put in new machines and renovate the buildings. The bosses said the workers must go home without pay for the three months. The workers at this factory were angry. They were angry because their wages were already very low – some workers earned only R70 per month. Now they had to go home to the north for Christmas with no money. One worker said this: 'The bosses say they are 'traditionally' terminating our services at the end of the year, and now we are 'traditionally' tired of losing our houses because we can't pay rent and we are 'traditionally' tired of having no jobs and no money at Christmas'. So the workers at Okahandja went on strike. They demanded the full three months' pay in advance. The bosses dismissed them all.

The workers at the Windhoek factory heard about the strike through their union, NAFAU. When trucks with cattle from Okahandja arrived at Windhoek, the workers had to make a quick decision. The bosses asked them to slaughter the cattle which their comrades in

Swavleis workers meet together during the strike



Okahandja had refused to slaughter. The workers at Windhoek Swavleis knew that they must stand together with their comrades. They refused to slaughter the Okahandja cattle. Now the bosses were not just fighting the workers of Okahandja. They were fighting the workers of both their factories who were standing united under their slogan:

An injury to one is an injury to all!

After two days the bosses agreed to reinstate all the workers at Okahandja. They also agreed to pay the workers an extra month's wage plus a bonus. They also paid full wages for the days on strike. Again the unity of the workers had won! They had shown the bosses the strength of their unity, not only in one plant, but in the company as a whole. Soon the workers of Swavleis would fight their biggest battle. They would have to use the lessons and experiences of this unity to help them win.

One company one strike

The new struggle was like this. At the end of every week the workers got their pay packets. On the pay slip there was only one amount written – the total pay for the week. Workers knew that they often worked overtime, but the payslips did not show them how much they were being paid for overtime. They could not tell if they were being paid properly. The workers of Swavleis say this about their struggle:

We tried talking to the bosses. We said 'you must write there on the slip how much we are being paid for normal hours and how much for overtime.' The bosses would not listen, so we began boycotting overtime work. After two weeks the management tried to divide us. As we went to collect our money, the bosses held some of us back. There were twelve of us they held back. They said to these workers that they must sign this paper and that they must not come back. They said that these workers had not completed their quotas. But we knew they were trying to break our unity. The next day was a Saturday. These twelve comrades came to tell us that they had been dismissed. We met that day and decided to confront management. On Monday 18 May 1987 we refused to work till the bosses explained the dismissals. We said 'Why did you dismiss these people when *all* of us are on boycott?' They answered us. They said the twelve were bad. They are political and intimidators. We did not accept this. We stood there in our overalls refusing to work. The bosses said we must get back to work. We refused, saying the workers



must come back. We then showed all our demands and showed how our demand for proper overtime pay was first. 'Now you won't let the people back – so now we fight about all these things'.

The workers of Swavleis showed the bosses all their demands, including the re-instatement of the twelve. They demanded to be paid proper overtime pay. They demanded a wage increase of between R2 and R3 an hour. At that time the lowest paid worker was getting 36c an hour. The highest paid worker was getting R3 an hour. There were even workers who had worked for ten years and were only getting R1,19c an hour. The workers also demanded transport. Many workers had to get up at 2 in the morning to be at work by 7. Often they only finished at 11 o'clock at night. Between their houses and the bus stops they had to walk a long way through the township. When it is dark this is dangerous. Many workers had been attacked. So the workers said the bosses who were making workers travel in the dark must provide safe transport to their homes.

By twelve o'clock that morning the bosses were still not giving in. They said we must leave the factory if we are not going to work. We said 'NO! We want to work, but first we must solve this thing – bring our comrades back.' The bosses then threatened to call the police. We left the factory then because we knew our people would get hurt.

On that day, 18 May 1987, workers at both plants went on strike. All six hundred workers were dismissed by the bosses. But the workers refused to collect their severance pay. They said that they had not been dismissed:

We are on strike!

THE WINDHOEK ADVERTISER

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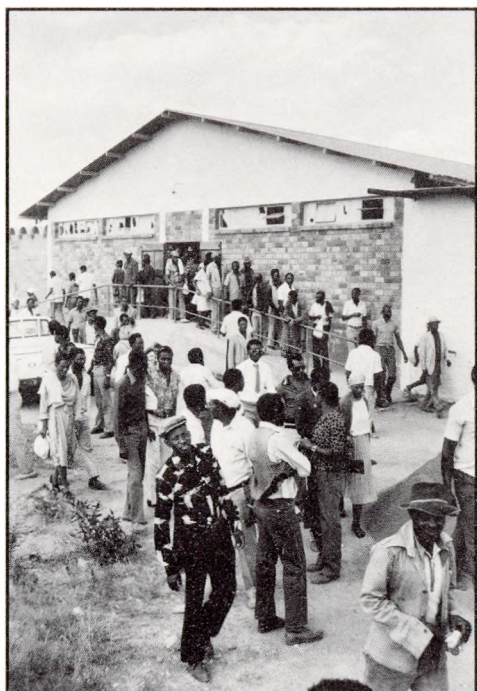
NO. 11159

TUESDAY, MAY 19 1987

EDITOR: 56, WINDHOEK 9000. 22-5464
DISTRIBUTORS, ADVERTISEMENT: 56, WINDHOEK 9000. 22-5411

Strike cripples meat industry

The work force started boycotting overtime in an attempt to get management to give them increases, transport early mornings when it is dangerous (Nafau), said yesterday that the workers had not collected the money owing to them because, "management considers them first."



▲ Workers gathering at the Katutura Community Centre hall during the strike

The workers knew that the law was not behind them. There was nothing in the law which protected the workers from these attacks by the bosses. Only the strength and unity of the workers would get their jobs back.

The bosses also knew these things. Immediately they began to attack the strength of the workers. At Okahandja they said to the workers that they must leave the hostel. They locked the store-room where the firewood was kept so that the workers could not cook or keep warm.

The bosses also hired unemployed workers as scab labour. The striking workers spoke to the unemployed workers, and some of them refused to be scabs. So the bosses then brought workers from South Africa to replace the strikers. But we know that new workers must learn their jobs. The scabs' production at Swavleis was slow. Only one hundred cattle were processed each day at Windhoek compared to five hundred every day before the strike. This strike was making the bosses lose R200 thousand per day!

In their meetings the strikers discussed how they could make their struggle even stronger. They discussed how important it was to build support for their strike in the community. The community could also put pressure on the bosses. The workers decided to talk to the black shopowners in Katutura. These owners bought their meat from Swavleis. And many of their customers were the very workers who were on strike. These shopowners agreed to meet with Swavleis. They told the Swavleis bosses that they would boycott Swavleis meat if the strikers were not re-instated.

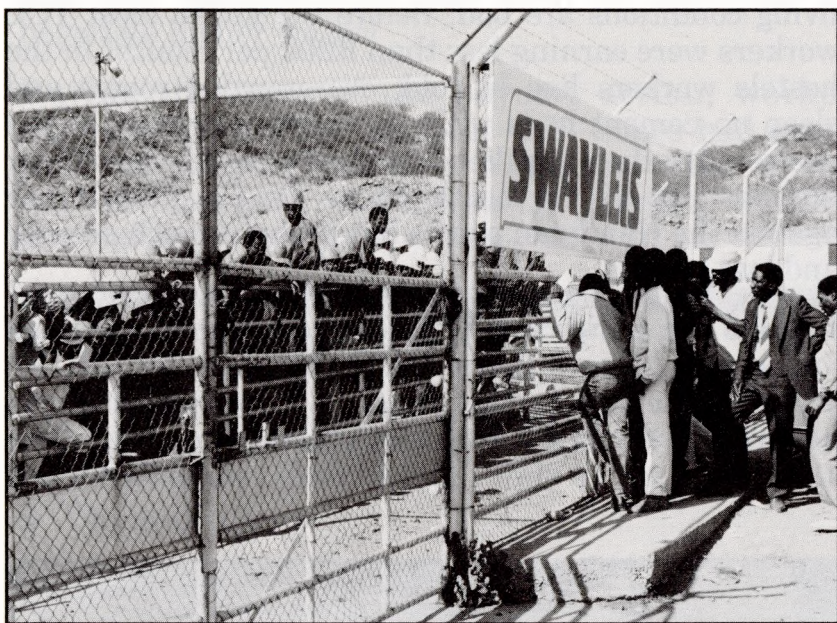
Worker victory at Swavleis

After three weeks the unity and strength of the strike brought a victory to the workers. While the Windhoek workers were meeting in the hall near the offices of their union they received a message. The bosses of Swavleis had agreed to re-instate all the strikers except the twelve who had been dismissed before. The bosses promised a wage increase after the workers came back to work. But they refused to pay the workers for the three weeks of the strike.

The workers realised that not all their demands had been met – especially the one about their twelve comrades. But they still felt they had won a great victory. The bosses had seen their strength. They knew that it was their unity which forced the bosses to make concessions. They accepted the bosses' offer and marched together from their meeting back to their jobs. As the workers marched they knew that they were

carrying the unity of the strike back into the factory. But they also felt empty because their twelve comrades were not with them. They felt determined to take their strength back into the factory where they would use it again for future struggles and to bring their twelve comrades back.

After the strike the bosses were worried about the unity of the workers. They saw that many workers who had not been striking or were not members of the union had decided to join the union. So the bosses made sure that they kept their promises. Swavleis hired special buses from the municipality to give workers transport to and from work. They also gave a wage increase. Today at Swavleis the lowest paid worker earns R1,35 an hour and the highest R4,80. But most importantly, the workers at Swavleis know about their own strength, the strength which they built through these struggles. It is a strength which they can use to struggle for all their needs.



These struggles of the workers at Swavleis brought a great victory. But in the history of the workers' struggle there are also many defeats. Soon after the struggle at Swavleis there was a struggle by the workers at the mines of the Tsumeb Corporation Limited (TCL). This struggle brought defeat to the miners of TCL, but it was a defeat from which workers can learn many lessons.



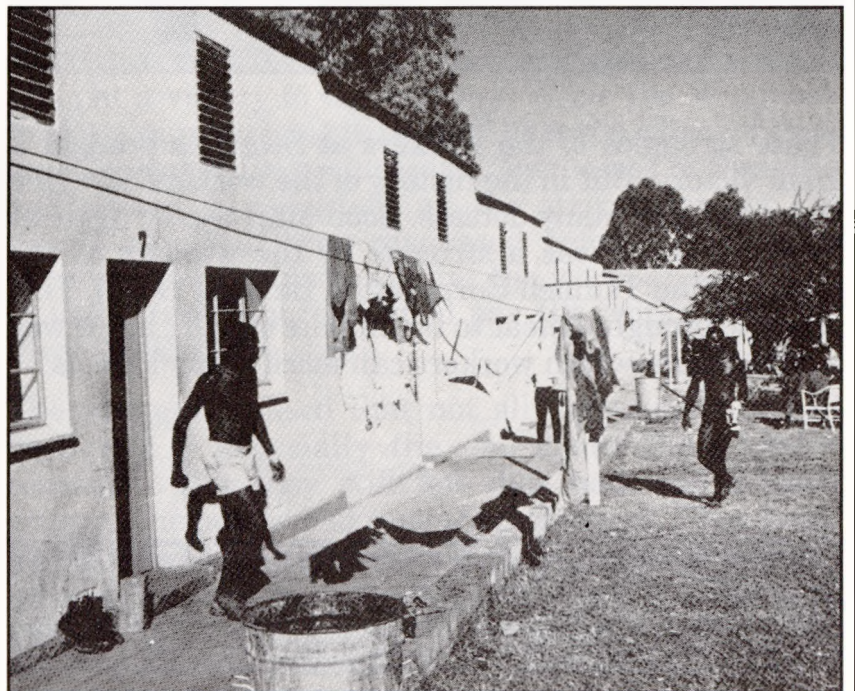
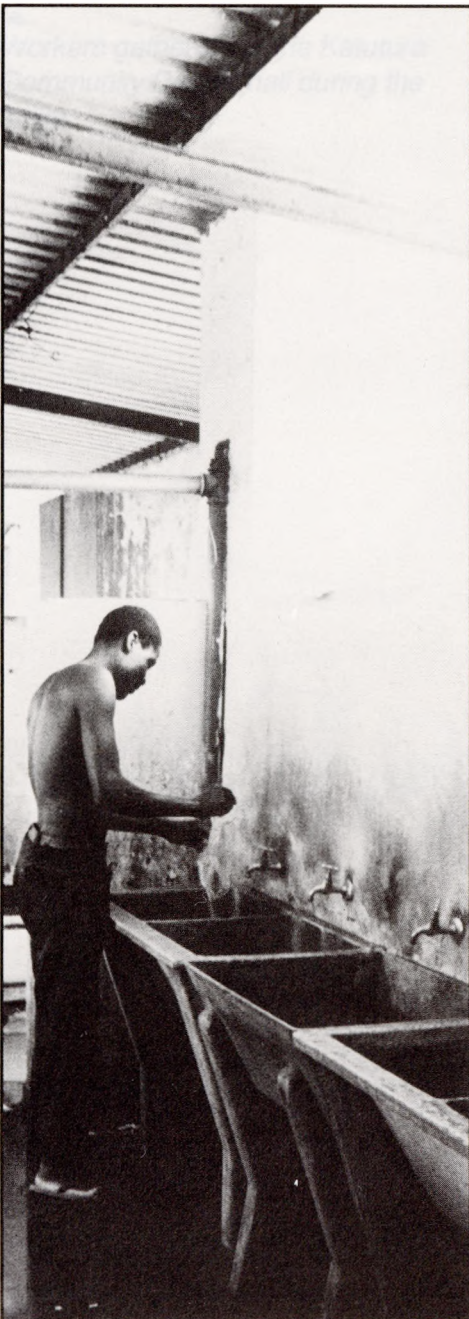
MINeworkers UNITE – THE TCL STRIKE

On 26 July 1987 four thousand mineworkers went on strike. In this strike, workers from the Tsumeb, Otjihase and Kombat mines united in action against the TCL bosses. For many months these TCL bosses had refused to listen to the workers' problems. With one loud voice workers said: 'We have had enough! Our words have fallen on deaf ears!'. This was the start of the biggest strike in the history of Namibia's mining industry.

The life of a TCL mineworker

While the TCL bosses make their big profits, life for the workers is very hard. Workers earn low wages and their living conditions are bad. Before the strike most TCL workers were earning less than R200 per month! In the hostels workers live in cold, overcrowded rooms and sleep on cement beds with no mattresses. Most of the workers see their families for only 3 weeks a year. Their families live in the north where South Africa's war against the Namibian people has brought much poverty and loss of lives.

In 1986 the workers of TCL formed committees which joined the Mineworkers' Union of Namibia (MUN). They had turned to the union to help them struggle against the many problems which they faced. In June 1987 workers at the Tsumeb mine mandated their



union committee to discuss these problems with the bosses. When the TCL bosses refused to meet the union, workers decided to take action. They called for a boycott of all white-owned shops in Tsumeb. One of the workers explained the reasons for the boycott:

We use our low wages to buy things from the shops in Tsumeb. Here we have to pay high prices. The bosses of these shops must be forced to put pressure on our bosses at TCL to pay us higher wages so that we can survive.

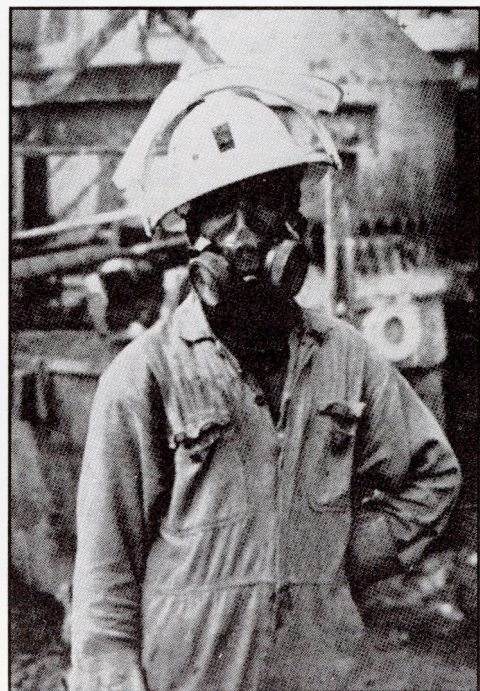
Workers spread the message of the boycott. At first it was mostly the workers in the mine hostels which supported this action. Soon the message also spread to the black community of Tsumeb. Although there were no community organisations, still the community joined the workers in their action. For almost two months the people of Tsumeb supported the boycott. Even though the boycott forced some shops to close down, the TCL bosses still refused to negotiate with the workers. They said that workers must wait until the next year to negotiate higher wages!

During the time of the boycott action, worker representatives from the three TCL mines had many joint meetings. From these meetings a list of the workers' demands were drawn up. Together workers demanded:

-
- ★ a 120% wage increase
 - ★ 60 days' leave
 - ★ compensation payment for injuries which workers get at work
 - ★ decent pensions
 - ★ improvement of living conditions – better facilities, better housing and better food in the hostels
 - ★ an end to intimidation of union members
 - ★ the mine must provide safety equipment for the workers
 - ★ TCL bosses must make a statement condemning the war in the north which affects workers and their families.
-

After three meetings with the bosses, the workers could see that the bosses were not taking their demands seriously. A worker representative who was part of these meetings explained:

The bosses only want to speak. They do not want to listen. Bosses want to give their story to the workers. But they themselves do not hear the story of the workers.



So workers decided to tell their story through strike action. Two days before the planned strike the bosses issued a statement which was read to the workers in all the different sections of the mine. A union member remembers the words of this statement:

We hear that there is a strike on this mine. It is the duty of management to bring the following points to your attention:

(1) Your fathers, your grandfathers and your forefathers have worked on this mine without any problems.

(2) If the strike goes ahead there will be severe consequences.

(3) There will be no pay for any days on strike.

(4) TCL management considers this strike illegal.

The workers were not intimidated by these words! Four thousand workers from all the TCL mines downed tools. The workers were strong and united. Every day workers gathered in the hostels to discuss new developments and their feelings about the strike. And the striking workers defended themselves by electing their own 'Namibia Police'. These comrades supervised the hostel gate and helped keep the discipline of the strike.





The strike committee on the way to negotiations with the bosses

The bosses' response to the workers' strike was harsh. They refused to negotiate over the issue of wages:

We do not speak to striking workers over wages. TCL cannot give wage increases in the middle of the year.

They also refused to discuss the workers' demand for longer leave. The bosses said that leave is a condition of employment and they will not discuss these conditions with an unrecognised union. Only when MUN proves that it is representative will the TCL recognise it. Then on Friday 31 July, TCL bosses dismissed all the striking workers.

The striking workers refused to hand in their TCL cards or to collect their outstanding wages:

We do not consider ourselves dismissed. We are united in strike action.

Workers from all parts of Namibia supported the struggle of their comrades. At CDM, MUN members threatened to go on strike if the TCL bosses evicted the workers from the hostels. NAFAU and MANWU also expressed their solidarity with their sister union, MUN. And in South Africa, the National Union of Mine-workers (NUM) sent messages of support to the miners of Namibia.

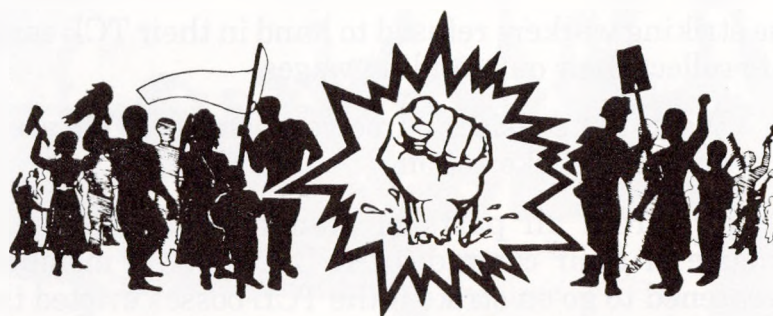
When the bosses saw the determination of the workers, they decided to use the court to try and evict the workers. On 18 August the court ruled that all the workers had been dismissed legally. The workers first thought that they would win in court. They knew that their struggle was right. But when the court ruled in favour of TCL, they were not surprised. They knew that the law was against them.



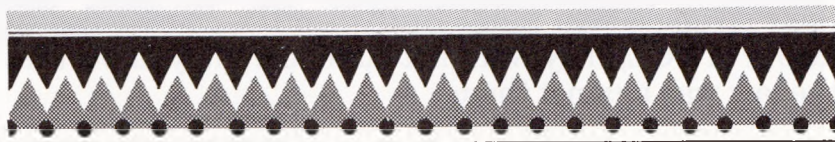
After this decision by the court, all the striking workers were forced to leave the hostels and their jobs. TCL started a recruitment campaign. Many striking workers went to apply for new jobs with TCL. With heavy hearts they had to say that they were not members of the union. They knew that TCL would not give jobs to union members. Many comrades were refused jobs, especially those who had been elected to be Namibia Police during the strike.

Today there are still many workers from the strike who do not have jobs. Sometimes TCL calls them back to the mine. When they arrive they find that there is no job and that they must wait for a vacancy. Some miners have tried another mine company for jobs. But they were told they could not have jobs because they still belong to TCL!

For the union things are hard. All the strikers had to start at the lowest wage. Many workers from the strike were at first scared to re-join the union. They worry that the bosses will fire them. But since then the union has grown stronger. MUN is trying to prove majority membership so that it can negotiate recognition. TCL is making this difficult. When the union brings the membership forms to management for verification, many are rejected. The bosses say the signatures are not the same as on the time-sheets or on the job application forms. For the union this is a problem. Many workers cannot write, and so when they sign their names, each time they sign differently.



But workers have again shown their confidence in organisation. The problems of the workers are still serious at TCL. But more and more TCL workers are again turning to the union to help them struggle. When they turn to the union workers show that they have not been crushed. They have taken the lessons from their strike and are using them to re-build their union and to make their struggle even stronger.



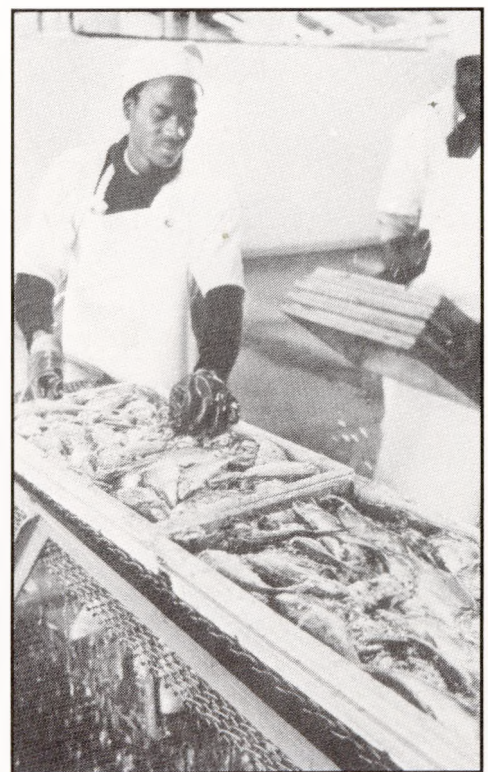
THE WORKERS OF LUDERITZ

This book has spoken about the workers in big towns like Windhoek and on the mines. But all over Namibia, in small towns, there are also workers who have built their unions and branches of SWAPO. They have also managed to overcome the attacks of the bosses and government. It is like this in the small town of Luderitz.

Earlier in this book we heard something about the workers of Luderitz. We read how in the 1920s they built a branch of the ICU, and in the 1950s the Food and Canning Workers' Union organised them. We also read how both these branches were smashed by the South African colonial government. In Luderitz today the unions are much stronger. Like the unions elsewhere in Namibia, they have become strong through a long, difficult struggle. This is the story of the workers in Luderitz and how they built the unions.

Luderitz was the first town built by the German colonialists in Namibia. It was established in 1883 by the first German trader, Alfred Luderitz. For many years this town was a trading town and the only harbour of Namibia. From the 1920s, the time of the ICU, Luderitz became an important place where the rock lobster (crayfish, kreef) was caught and packed to be sold to the rich in Europe. Today the lobster industry is still the biggest industry in Luderitz. There are two big processing factories: Seaflower and Lalandii. Seaflower is owned by two big fishing companies called Swafil and Seaswa which are owned by the giant South African companies SA Mutual and Barlow Rand. Lalandii is owned by the General Development Corporation (Gendev) which is part of the group of companies owned by the other South African food giants Tiger Oats and Premier Milling. There are also other companies in Luderitz, like Taurus which collects seaweed. The seaweed is dried and processed to produce gelatine for the food industry.

Most of the workers in these companies come from the north of Namibia. They travel for many hours, past Windhoek and down to Keetmanshoop. From there they must travel for nearly five hours through the hot Namib desert before they arrive at Luderitz. When they arrive they first see a town with big rich houses, but soon they arrive in the location. Here they find that there are some hostels, a few houses and many, many tin shacks. These tin shacks are rusted and they leak when it rains. The





▲ *'Sands Hotel'*

people of Luderitz call the place where the shacks are all crowded together, built on sand and rock, 'Sands Hotel'. The people who live there must pay R12 a month to rent a piece of land, R8,40 per month for a toilet, and R4,84 per month for a dustbin. Water costs extra. They must pay for all these things from the starvation wages of the bosses. It has been like this for many years. Since 1974 fishermen who catch the lobsters have earned the same wage – R19 per day! For twelve years they had worked without a pay rise. These workers only work for six months in the year, between November and April. So their wages must last them twice as long.

It was in these conditions that workers in Luderitz lived for many years. At a time when workers in Windhoek and on the mines were beginning to build industrial unions, the workers of Luderitz had many needs. They saw that their comrades were building their struggle, and they became more confident when they saw this. Soon the workers of Luderitz also joined the struggle to build their own unions.

The first action came from the workers at Taurus. They went on strike after sixteen comrades were dismissed for 'being lazy'. Their strike lasted two days. Their unity caught the bosses by surprise. The sixteen workers were re-instated.

In the month after this strike the fishermen went to work for another season. They faced the same problem

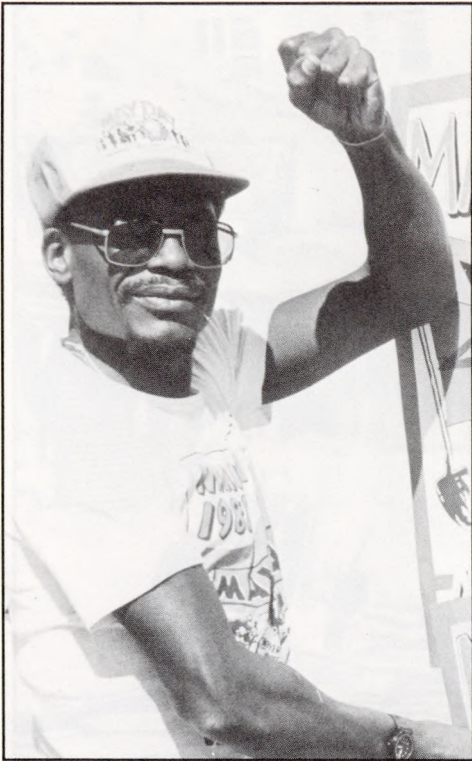
as the years before. They were still earning the same wages. The workers who were called 'bakkiesmanne' still earned less than the deckhands. The fishermen from the two companies, Swafil and Gendev began to meet to discuss their problems. They saw that they had no union to turn to. They had joined a union a few years before called the Fishermen's Union. But they saw that they just paid money and the people from the union could not show what they had done with the money. So the fishermen elected a joint committee. This joint committee tried to talk to the bosses about wages, but they saw that the bosses did not listen. So when the season broke for Christmas they held a meeting. They discussed what they must do. They said in that meeting there was only one way – *action*.

On 1 January 1987, the day the fishing season re-opened, the bosses went to work. They went to the docks to see if the boats were going out. When they got there they saw all the fishermen sitting on the decks, refusing to take the boats out to sea. They asked what was happening, and the workers answered: 'We are on strike, we want better wages'. They told the bosses that they wanted equal pay for all fishermen, and they wanted the commission to go up from 11c per kilogram to R1,00 per kilogram.

The bosses refused to meet the joint committee. The bosses said the workers must split the committee. Only Swafil workers can talk to Swafil bosses, and only Gendev workers can talk to Gendev bosses. But the workers insisted on meeting as one committee. They knew that the factories could not work without the lobsters from the boats. They knew that they were strong.



◀ The fishermen on strike



▲
Comrade John Pandeni

Swafil bosses threatened the fishermen. They said that they had two buses full of scabs waiting to leave Cape Town. The workers ignored these words. After five days, the workers phoned NUNW in Windhoek. The workers told the union about their strike and they asked the union to negotiate with the bosses. Comrade Pandeni, the general secretary of NAFAU came to Luderitz, but the bosses refused to see 'outsiders'. The workers then decided to split their committee so that negotiations could begin.

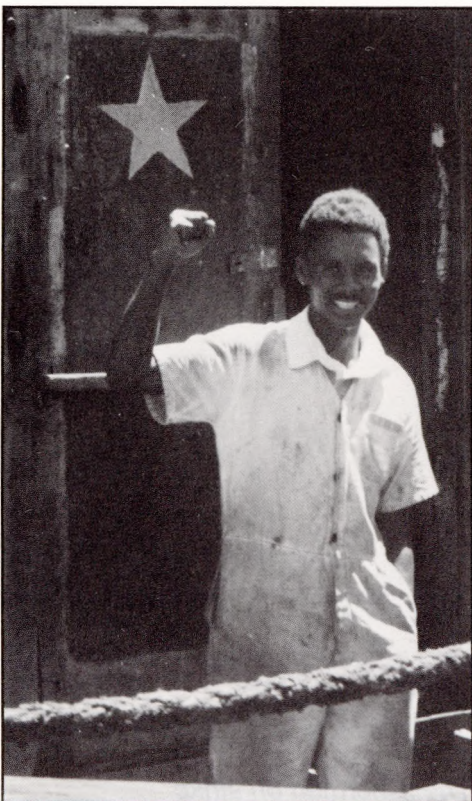
In negotiations they repeated their demands. The bosses said that they could not give increases because there was not enough money. But the workers just laughed. They told the bosses what they knew. Swafil caught 1000 tons of lobsters in the last season and made a profit of eight million Rand. Gendev caught 500 tons of lobster and made a profit of nearly three-and-a-half million Rand. The workers said: 'We know because we catch all your lobsters. We are out there on the rough seas in your tiny little boats risking our lives to make those giant profits for you. We know that you are selling the lobsters which we catch to Japan where they pay very big money for our lobsters. We know that every year you, the bosses of Swafil and Gendev are selling forty million rands worth of lobsters from which you make those big profits. We have a right to share in all of that money.'

Nine days after the workers began their strike, they accepted an offer from the bosses. It was agreed that all fishermen would receive the equal wage of R19 per day and that each person would get a commission of 35c per kilogram. Extra money would be paid for the live lobsters which were brought into the factories.

The workers had won a victory. And they took their unity into the union. They turned their committee into a committee of NAFAU. Now they were building the strength of the union.

The fishermen were not the only workers for these bosses. There were workers in the factories where the lobsters are packed and processed. These workers are mostly women. During the strike these workers did not get any lobsters, so they could not work. After the strike, these workers also joined the union. Together the fishermen and the factory workers united to build their union. When the factory workers also demanded wage increases, the fishermen told the bosses that they would also take action if the bosses refused to listen. The unity of the factory workers and the fishermen became a powerful weapon.

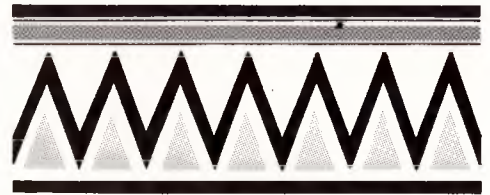
It is this weapon which the workers used to negotiate new contracts, and it is this unity which has won for the workers the first recognition agreement in the whole



food industry. Today, the bosses of Lalandii have signed a recognition agreement with NAFAU. The union is also negotiating an agreement with Seaflower.

When the other workers in Luderitz saw the strength of this strike, and the unity of the fishermen and factory workers, they also joined the union. The workers at Taurus are also in NAFAU, together with their comrades from the fish smokeries, from the cold storage companies, from the hotels and from the bakery. And when workers from the municipality and the railways and harbour came to NAFAU, the food workers helped them launch their own union branches of NAPWU and NATAU.

There are special problems for the workers of Luderitz. This town is very small, and so NATAU and NAPWU branches are not very big. Before the NUNW had even begun to form a federation of industrial unions, the unions in Luderitz were already meeting together in their own local joint committee of NUNW. Here they built the strength of all their unions. And here they worked together with the SWAPO branch to build the unity of all Namibians in Luderitz in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. For the people of Luderitz organisation has been important. No longer do people speak of themselves as Namas, Hereros or Ovambos. Today in the meetings of SWAPO and of the unions people talk only about themselves as Namibians and as workers. They talk about how they must all be united in struggle.



Workers in Luderitz march on May Day 1988 – through united action, workers have built stronger organisations in Luderitz



Our union makes us strong

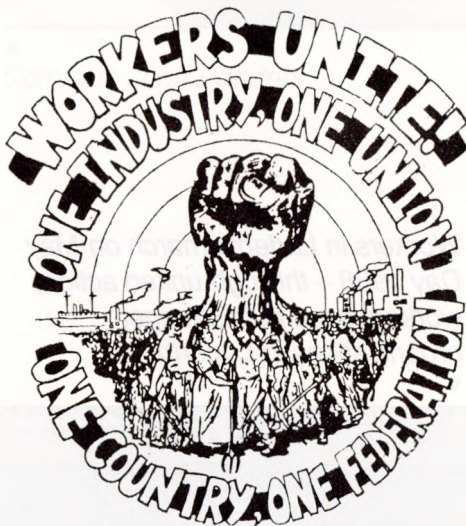
This story of the struggle in Luderitz is like the story of workers and their unions all over Namibia. The biggest victory of all is that workers today have finally begun to build strong, democratic industrial unions.

With this organisation workers have built unity, not only in the workplace, but amongst all workers in one industry and between the workers of the many different industries. It was this unity which workers celebrated at the first May Day rallies ever held in Namibia in 1987.

As the unions have become stronger the bosses have learnt that they cannot treat workers like cattle anymore. The workers now know of their power, and they have used this power to defend themselves against the attacks of the bosses and government. In many companies workers have won big increases in wages. Some workers are earning twice as much as before the union came. Today, when bosses dismiss workers they are often forced to take them back because of the strength of the unions. In the past bosses often refused even to talk to the union. Today those same bosses have been forced to talk. Although few companies have signed recognition agreements, many bosses now informally recognise the worker and shop steward committees.

Workers are not only building unity in their unions. Since the time of the first NUNW committees the workers have seen themselves as part of the liberation movement. The torch of SWAPO still burns in their hearts. Through their unions they are building unity with all those who are struggling for liberation. The most important example of this is how workers took action to defend the students against the attacks of the government.

In 1988 students all over Namibia boycotted classes in protest against SADF bases which were near their schools in the north. Because of this closeness, many students had been hurt by the bullets of the SADF. When the students took action, the police and the army used force against them. All the unions under NUNW met to discuss these attacks. They decided that workers, the parents of the students, must act to defend their children. Together with the students and other parents, the workers in their unions organised the biggest stayaway in the history of Namibia.





In organising this action there were problems. There was often not good communication between the different industrial unions. The only structure where they could meet was in the Joint Union Committee in Windhoek. There were no other joint committees in the different regions and towns. These problems meant that workers were often not part of making decisions about the stayaway. Even with these problems fifty thousand workers from all over Namibia stayed away from work for 2 days. This took place only two weeks after South African workers had their biggest stayaway ever, the 3-day stayaway in protest against the Labour Bill.

It is with this unity, this strength and this militant spirit that workers and all the members and supporters of SWAPO entered the last stages of struggle before independence.



PART 4

WORKERS UNITE FOR INDEPENDENCE



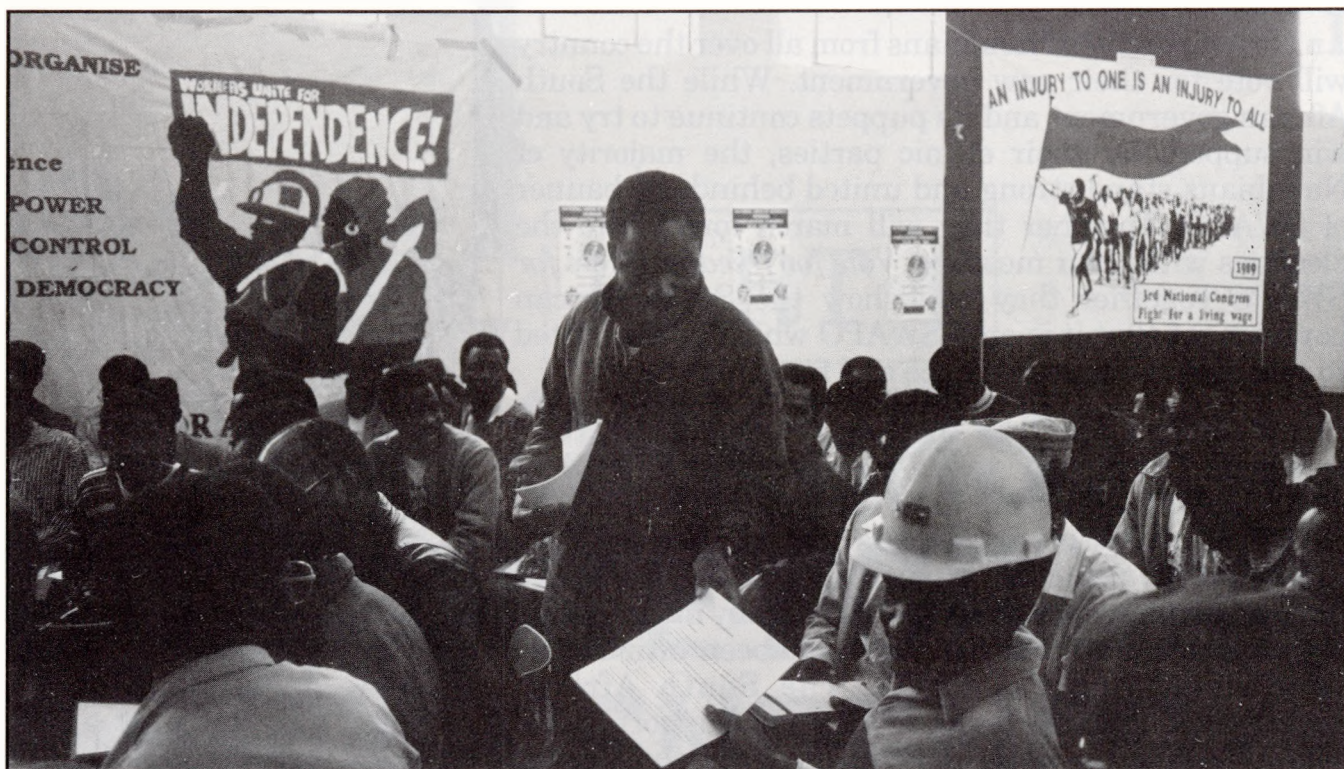
In November 1989 Namibians from all over the country will vote for their new government. While the South African government and its puppets continue to try and win support for their ethnic parties, the majority of Namibians stand strong and united behind the banner of SWAPO. Together they will march forward to the elections with their message: *Vote for freedom! Vote for SWAPO.* Together they will show the South African government that it is only SWAPO which is committed to real political independence and freedom.

But workers know that they have not yet won their freedom. The South African government is still in control. South Africa will have this control until the day on which a new government is elected. And workers know that the South African government and the bosses have many plans to weaken SWAPO. They have already seen how supporters of SWAPO have been intimidated by Koevoet and the SADF. The South African government has also given money and support to the DTA. Workers have seen how the government and the bosses have tried to shape conditions so that a future SWAPO government will find its hands tied. As independence comes closer, Namibian workers and their unions have committed themselves to making their struggle even stronger. It is only with strong worker unity that they can resist these dirty tricks.

Building NUNW as the Namibian trade union federation

As workers look forward to the many hard struggles which lie ahead, they see how they need to build strong union structures under the democratic control of workers. They have taken the lessons from the stayaway into the Consolidation Congress of the NUNW. At this congress the external wing of the NUNW was brought together with the unions inside Namibia. Together they resolved to build the NUNW as the Namibian trade union federation. This new federation will unite all the industrial unions in Namibia. The Namibian National Teachers Union (NANTU) has also affiliated to the new federation. Worker representatives from these unions will meet together in local federation committees, regional federation committees and a national federation committee. In this way workers from different industries can share information, discuss the problems which face all workers and build cooperation between the industrial unions at a local, regional and national level. With better contact and communication, workers from weak union branches can work together with other unions to strengthen themselves.





One of the most important tasks of these committees is to build worker control in the unions. We know that a union is the home of the workers and so it is workers who must make the decisions about the activities of their union. Workers from each union branch or worker committee will elect their representatives to the federation committees. These representatives must bring the workers' mandate to the federation committees and then report back to the workers. In this way all decisions made in the federation will be the decisions of the workers!

The new federation will give Namibian workers a more powerful weapon with which to wage the struggles ahead. It will give workers one, united political voice to protect their interests in the independence process. These are the words of a comrade from the MUN branch at Rossing:

All trade unions should be united in one united body. Multinational corporations work together like brothers and sisters. We must also work like brothers and sisters in order to fight them.

Workers support SWAPO

Workers in Namibia also know that they must prepare for the time after the elections. That is why they have decided, in their unions, to give their full support to SWAPO. For years workers have carried the fire of SWAPO in their hearts. Now they are making resolutions in their congresses to commit themselves to campaign amongst all workers to vote for SWAPO.





These are the words of the workers in the Consolidation Congress:

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM AND RESOLUTION 435

The Congress noted that:

- a) The National Union of Namibian Workers have suffered brutal exploitation and oppression during the (entire) colonial period.
- b) Namibian workers have formed part and parcel of the forces of National Liberation led by SWAPO of Namibia.

The Congress is therefore convinced that:

- a) National Independence and Freedom for Namibia as struggled for by SWAPO creates a more favourable climate for workers to fight exploitation.
- b) South Africa and her puppets in Namibia will attempt to abort independence and create a neo-colonialist dispensation.
- c) Exploitation of workers can only be ended in a socialist dispensation where the means of production belong to the workers.

Therefore Congress resolves to:

- a) Render all support to the National Liberation Organisation SWAPO of Namibia in the coming election.
- b) Step up political mobilisation of workers in co-operation with all the affiliated industrial unions.
- c) Maintain vigilance and encourage workers to fight all attempts by the Racist SA regime, their puppets and



**VICTORIA E CERTA!
VICTORY IS CERTAIN!**

the capitalist employers to abort Namibia's independence by:

(i) taking protest action against continued political oppression.

(ii) creating relevant ad hoc structures for the monitoring and countering reactionary activities on the side of the colonial racist regime and its tools.

(iii) encouraging and recommending all the affiliates to negotiate with the employers for sufficient time off work for the purpose of political mobilisation and organisation in view of the coming National elections in terms of UN Resolution 435.

(iv) continuing with the workers' struggle against capitalist exploitation till victory in this regard is achieved.

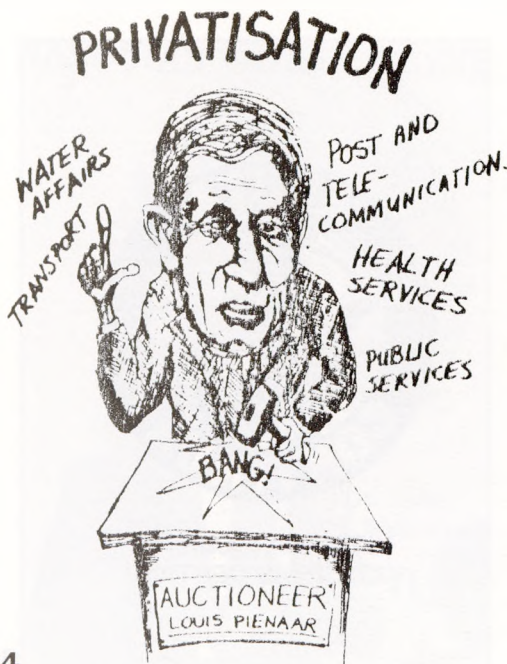
Already workers are taking the words in this resolution and are putting them into action. Under the leadership of NAPWU, workers in Namibia have taken up a campaign against privatisation.

Protect peoples' property, reject privatisation!

The interim government, and later the administrator-general Pienaar, have begun to sell off government services like hospitals, post offices, transport and schools to private companies. This process is called privatisation. The unions have already felt the attacks of privatisation. When the South African Transport Services (SATS) sold all its holdings in Namibia to the National Transport Corporation (NTC) 492 workers were dismissed!

But Namibian workers know that privatisation is not only an attack on jobs, prices and wages. They know that the South African government and bosses are also attacking the power of a future SWAPO government. The services which South Africa is privatising are the services which a new government needs to control so that they can begin to improve people's lives. The Namibian unions say:

Privatisation means that the costs of repairing water pumps, of receiving medical care, of delivering children, of using telephones and of sending parcels will rise. Private companies who want to buy our public services want to make money out of US.



When the bloodsuckers take over the public services many workers will lose their jobs and their accustomed benefits. Private companies will bring machines to replace workers and they will keep only the bare minimum of the workers that are needed. Private companies are first for profits and last for people.

We say no to privatisation because the public services are the property of the people. They are our services because our taxes paid for this. The future government must control these services - not private companies. We reject attempts of the foreign oppressor to auction off our country.

Protect people's property, reject privatisation!

On 1 April 1989, the day on which Resolution 435 began to be implemented almost fifty thousand people marched from Katutura towards Windhoek and Pienaar's house. Their message was *Stop privatisation!*

This campaign against privatisation has shown that as Namibia faces independence the question of who controls the economy becomes more and more important. SWAPO released an economic policy document in December 1988 which shows that a future government of Namibia must control the economy of Namibia so that it can start to redistribute the wealth of the country. But the future government of SWAPO will only be as strong as the organisations which support it. It is these organisations which will have to struggle to take control of the country's economy away from the bosses.



WHO OWNS NAMIBIA?

Almost everything in Namibia is owned by foreign capitalists.

Agriculture

Agriculture is not the most profitable part of the economy. But it is the biggest in terms of the amount of land and people involved. About 60% of the population live on the land. The vast majority of them live in the reserves where they farm for their own needs and for the peasant market. But 60% of all the land is owned by white farmers who keep sheep and cattle. Of the five thousand white farmers, almost half live in South Africa or West Germany.

From the sheep the farmers produce karakul pelts which they send to western Europe for sale at high prices. The cattle industry is the biggest farming sector. The cattle are mostly exported live to South African abattoirs.

Mining

The mining industry, as we have already seen, produces the most profits in Namibia. There is not a single mine in Namibia which is owned by a Namibian company. CDM diamond mines are owned by De Beers, a South African company which is owned by the giant South African multinational Anglo American Corporation. Rossing Uranium is mainly owned by the British multinational Rio Tinto Zinc, although it is also partly owned by the South African company Gencor and the government controlled Industrial Development Corporation. The TCL mining company is owned by the South African mining company Goldfields.

Other big bosses in mining are ISCOR, the South African parastatal metal company which owns mines at Rosh Pinah and Uis.

Fishing

The fishing industry is almost totally controlled by South African bosses. The fish caught in Namibian waters are mainly brought to shore and processed in Walvis Bay, which South Africa refuses to allow to be part of Namibia. The only Namibian-owned company in fishing, Consortium Fisheries, is also based in Walvis Bay. The fishing boats from many other countries also come to the Namibian coast. These countries have used South Africa's illegal control over Namibia as an excuse to take massive amounts of fish from the sea. This has meant that many fish like pilchards have almost disappeared from the sea along Namibia's coast.



There are three main groups of South African companies which control the fish industry:

Gendev/Ovenstones:

This group is owned by the South African companies Premier Milling, Liberty Life and Johannesburg Consolidated Industries (JCI).

Tunacor:

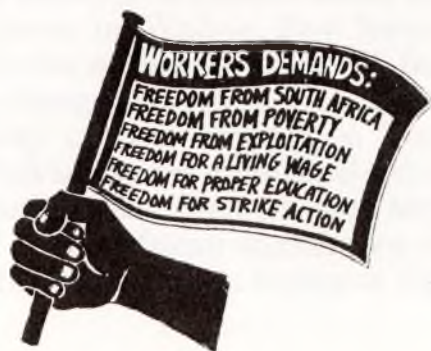
This company runs the Tunacor fish processing and canning factory at Walvis Bay and is owned by the South African companies Marine Products, Fedfood and Sanlam.

United Fishing Enterprises:

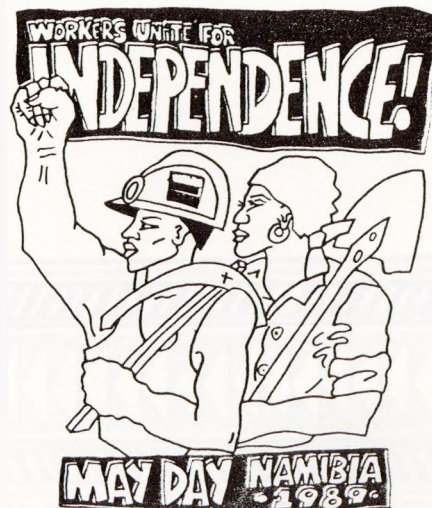
This company is made up of a number of companies called Seaswa, Swafil, Oceana and Sarusas which are owned by the Silverman family, Tiger Oats, Barlow Rand and the South African parastatal the Fisheries Development Corporation (FDC). This group runs the big Breemond canning factory in Walvis Bay.

From these things we can see that the people of Namibia are working mainly for bosses from foreign countries. This means that very little of the profit stays in Namibia. In fact, of all the products of Namibian industry, only 10% stays inside the country. This means that the Namibia economy does not even produce enough food for its own needs. This greed of the bosses means that at independence, the people of Namibia will still be forced to import from South Africa 85% of their food and other things which they need in their daily lives.

It is because of this that the demands made by Namibian workers on May Day 1989 are so important. These are the demands of workers who are struggling to control their own lives. They know that they can never take that control until they have smashed the power of the bosses. We have seen how many of the biggest bosses are from South Africa. These are the same bosses who exploit the workers of South Africa. Namibian workers know that they alone cannot defeat the international power of the bosses. They must also unite with workers in other countries to make their struggle international. That is why they look towards the workers of South Africa. Together they can fight these bosses who are controlling their lives and exploiting their labour.



Walvis Bay docks. – The South African government has for many years claimed that Walvis Bay is part of South Africa and not Namibia. Even with independence, the South African government will continue to control Walvis Bay. Because the issue of Walvis Bay is not included in Resolution 435, a future independent government will have to struggle for the re-integration of Walvis Bay into Namibia.



PART 5

BUILDING WORKERS' SOLIDARITY



International worker solidarity is one of the most important principles of our struggle. This solidarity is crucial because the bosses' system of exploitation does not respect any borders. The bosses in one country are often the same as the bosses in another country. The bosses usually stand by each other to protect their system of exploitation. Workers also need to stand together to fight this system of the bosses.

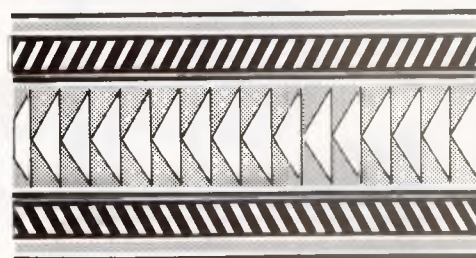
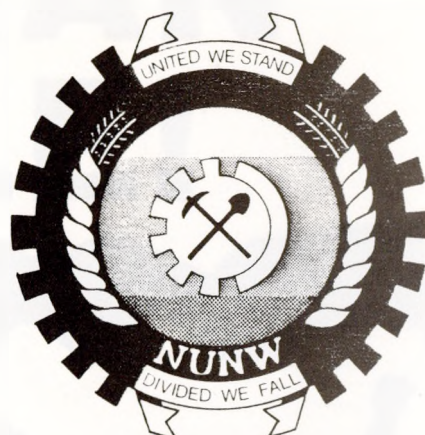
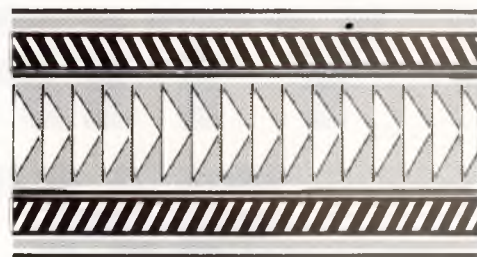
The struggle for independence in Namibia and the struggle for liberation in South Africa is a test to this spirit of solidarity. The bosses and the apartheid government who oppress the majority in South Africa are the same forces that illegally occupied Namibia. It is the same bosses and government who imposed the hated policy of apartheid on the Namibian people. It is the same bosses and government who are today using tricks to weaken Namibia's independence and to keep control through their puppets. South Africa's strongest hold over a free Namibia will be through its control of the Namibian economy.

Most of the big companies in Namibia are under the control of multinationals based in South Africa. We saw earlier how Goldfields, Anglo American and Premier own the lion's share of Namibia. It is only in agriculture, farming and meat processing that the hands of local bosses hold a share. Now that Namibia is facing independence, the bosses see that they have two choices. Firstly they can stay in Namibia and hope to carry on exploiting workers and draining the country of its wealth. Secondly they can leave Namibia and hope to take the money of the Namibian people with them. It is only the strong and united action of workers in Namibia and South Africa which can defeat the right of the bosses to make this choice.

South African and Namibian workers are connected in many ways. There are also many ways in which these connections can be turned into a powerful alliance. COSATU and NUNW have identified some issues around which workers can begin to build this alliance through solidarity action.

Walvis Bay

Walvis Bay is in Namibia. But we have heard that Resolution 435 allows it to remain under South African control. Workers in Walvis Bay have organised themselves into the affiliates of NUNW. But the bosses are refusing to recognise their unions. The bosses claim that Walvis Bay is in South Africa. The companies operating in Walvis Bay are mainly subsidiaries of South African companies, like Premier and Metal Box. As Namibian and South African workers we must discuss how to tackle these anti-union tactics of the bosses and



how to return the control of Walvis Bay to the Namibian people.

Theft of Namibia's wealth

The imperialists and the capitalists are trying to sabotage Namibia's independence by running away with the wealth of Namibia. Already millions of rands - the wealth created by Namibian workers - is in South African banks and companies. NUNW comrades say R120 million is leaving the country each week. SWAPO is demanding that Namibia's share of foreign reserves invested in South Africa must come back to Namibia. South African workers must demand that F W de Klerk and the bosses return the wealth that belongs to Namibia.

Privatisation

We have seen how the Namibian workers are fighting a big struggle to stop privatisation. It is the South African companies which are doing most of the buying. One of the biggest privatisation struggles is over the pension fund. Pienaar's administration wants to sell off the pension funds which are worth R1,3 billion. At the moment all of this money is invested in South Africa and controlled by companies like Sanlam. If privatisation goes through, it means the pensions will not come back to Namibia. It will stay in South Africa and bear fruit to make the bosses in South Africa rich.

Independence process

There has been much intimidation and harassment of SWAPO supporters. The police and army are using violence and threats to interfere with SWAPO's victory. Workers through NUNW have demanded that harassment ends. They demand that the bosses recognise the right of workers to support and campaign for SWAPO. They have also demanded that workers be able to hold union meetings in the workplace to discuss independence. South African workers must continue to monitor the process. Workers in South Africa must continue to counter the South African government's propaganda and to take action against South African companies which victimise workers for building SWAPO.

Living Wage

Both COSATU and NUNW have Living Wage campaigns. The demands of these campaigns are the same. The two federations are fighting for workers to share in the wealth they produce. The two are fighting to end the cheap labour system which has used apartheid to maximise profits and to leave our



SOLIDARITY WITH THE NAMIBIAN PEOPLE!



The mass democratic movement salutes the people of Namibia.

Their courageous resistance, supported by International opposition to occupy Namibia, has finally led to the implementation of Resolution 435.

We salute SWAPO as the legitimate representative of the majority of the people. Over many decades it has fought unstintingly for liberation and self-determination in Namibia.

Any attempts to undermine this legitimacy through intimidation and propaganda

will not succeed.

Namibian Independence will mean a blow to apartheid — a free Namibia will signal that the final countdown has begun for a South Africa free of racial oppression and exploitation.

We call on all democrats in South Africa to build solidarity with the people of Namibia and with SWAPO.

We declare 28 April to 7 May 1989 Solidarity Week with the freedom-loving people of Namibia.

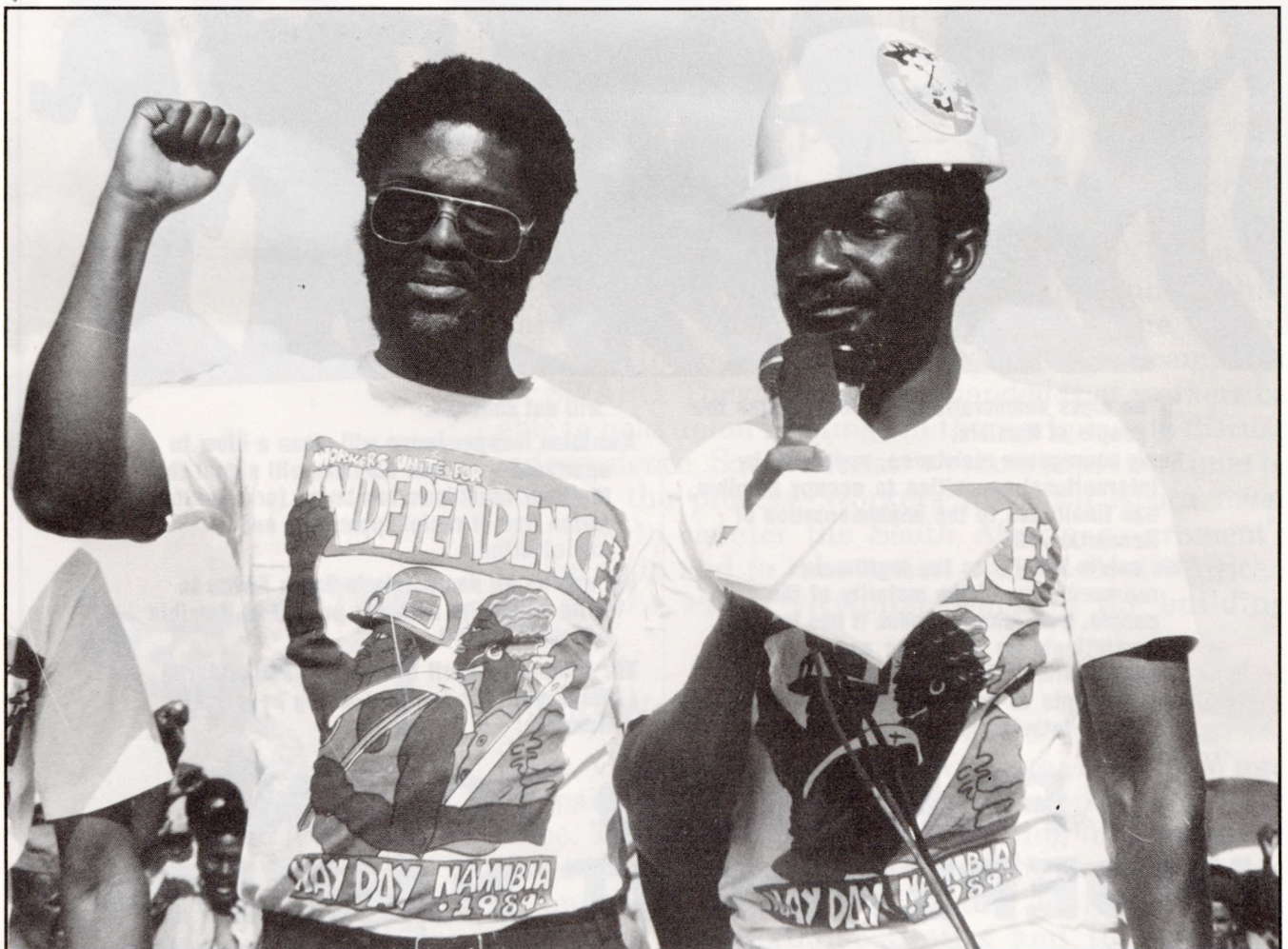
FORWARD TO AN INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA!

communities in poverty. Increased worker to worker contact, more joint demands and joint campaigns will mean a giant step forward for workers in Southern Africa.

In South Africa Namibia Solidarity Committees have already been set up. COSATU has played a leading role in building these committees. The committees will provide information, mobilise support for SWAPO and NUNW, raise funds, and help with election monitoring. In COSATU affiliates workers have taken resolutions committing themselves to concrete action in support of Namibian workers. We have seen how the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) at its 1988 National Congress passed a resolution which says that no union member should transport weapons to Namibia.

Delegations from COSATU and other mass organisations in South Africa visited Namibia in April 1989 to talk to NUNW and SWAPO about building solidarity. And comrades in Namibia have been making solidarity visits to South Africa. NUNW comrades attended the Congress of COSATU and the congresses of many affiliates. They have also spoken at May Day rallies.

Moses Mayekiso, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), and Ben Ulenga, General Secretary of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN), speaking at a 1989 May Day Rally in Namibia



The meetings between the delegations recently agreed that the best form of solidarity was to strengthen the struggle and to build our mass organisations in South Africa and in Namibia.

There was agreement to help with monitoring, to send funds and to help with education, research, media and trade union work. This would mean that comrades from South Africa would go to Namibia to share their knowledge of organising and to learn about the Namibian liberation struggle. This has already begun to happen in the mining, food, metal and transport sectors.



COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo and NUNW General Secretary John Ya Otto talk about solidarity in this interview. The two leaders and their delegations had just finished another set of talks about deepening solidarity.

Question: How do you see solidarity between NUNW and COSATU, or the liberation movement in Namibia and the liberation movement in South Africa?

Naidoo: Our view is that there are historical links which bind the liberation movements of South Africa and Namibia. These are links between SWAPO and the ANC, and NUNW and COSATU. We must strengthen these links. That is why we have agreed to set up a solidarity committee made up of representatives of both organisations. This committee will focus on a programme of practical assistance to develop the labour movement in Namibia. We see this as very important because it is the major South African bosses that have over the years occupied Namibia and who are continuing to rob the resources of Namibia. We have committed ourselves to struggle through our organisations in these companies to pressurise the bosses to stop their exploitative practices.

Ya Otto: With this visit of COSATU and the meetings we have had, we have entered a new chapter in our relationship with organised workers in South Africa. We hope that links will be strengthened and that the solidarity which we have consolidated will keep us close to each other.



Question: What is the role of workers in laying the basis for socialism and people's democracy in Namibia and South Africa? Can you please touch on the principles of worker control and worker democracy.

Ya Otto: Socialism is something very necessary. We fought to liberate our people from exploitation. We fought for the means of production to be put back into the hands of the people, the workers, so that the dignity of the workers is restored. This is why we are fighting and so many lives have been sacrificed. Only when we have overthrown colonialism and the minority racist regime in South Africa are we certain to pave the way for the betterment of workers through scientific socialism. The first task is to fight to liberate Namibia and then to also help South Africa liberate itself. Then we will have paved the way for a system that is not capitalist or exploitative.

Naidoo: The trade union movement has socialism as its goal because trade unions are working class organisations fighting for the interests of the working class as a whole. We believe that we have to build socialism not through rhetoric, but through actual practice on the ground and that the building blocks for socialism are worker control and worker democracy. Firstly, worker control arises from workers' needs to control their organisations and entrench in our constitutions the idea of a worker majority in every structure of the trade union movement. Secondly, we build worker control to challenge the right of employers to determine conditions in the factory - from production to dismissals to wages. By challenging this, we are advancing worker control over production.

With regard to worker democracy, we are seeing both in Namibia and in South Africa a growing confidence of the working class that the practices of the working class such as accountability, reportbacks and leadership acting with mandates are becoming entrenched in our struggle.

In South Africa we see that the struggle for socialism is part of an uninterrupted struggle. We are fighting for national liberation and in the process we have to lay the basis for socialism by building working class



organisation and politics as the politics of our people. The liberation movement in its entirety has accepted the leadership of the working class more broadly, and at the moment the mass struggle is being led by the working class in our country which includes the organised workers, the unemployed, the women, the students, the youth and a range of working class forces at play. At the end we will ensure that we have a system free of economic and political exploitation when South Africa is liberated. The entire subcontinent is dominated by South Africa politically - in fact it plays the role of imperialist in the subcontinent. It is only when we liberate the subcontinent from the destabilisation of the South African regime that we will have a society that is truly based on the dignity of the working class.

Question: What is your message to South African workers, Comrade Ya Otto?

Ya Otto: The NUNW will continue, with vigour and determination, to assist workers in South Africa to liberate themselves. Only through action, including industrial action, can you put pressure on the racist regime in South Africa to abandon apartheid and to end minority racist colonial power. Only through action can you force it to the table to negotiate with the rightful people of South Africa and thereby gain liberation. We are in full support. We shall keep the momentum of this relationship going.

Question: What is your message to Namibian workers, Comrade Naidoo?

Naidoo: The message which we have shared in the past is that Namibian workers must continue to organise and to build SWAPO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Namibian people. It is only through our unity, organisation and mass struggles that we will gain our real freedom. Our message is that South African workers are fully behind them and behind SWAPO in their campaign towards winning their elections and removing the yoke of colonialism from Namibia as a whole. We want to tell Namibian workers that we pledge our total solidarity with them. We are part of their struggle to rid them of the bondage of colonialism and exploitation, we are part of the struggle to free Walvis Bay, which is rightfully part of Namibia.

★
Vivasolidarity!
Viva COSATU!
Viva NUNW!
Viva worker unity!
Viva!
★