

I am also strongly critical of Mr. Biko's use of *thesis*, *anti-thesis*, and *synthesis*. He says that for liberals, the *thesis* is apartheid, the *anti-thesis* is non racialism, and "the *synthesis* very feebly defined." But for Black Consciousness, the *thesis* is a strong white racism, the *anti-thesis* is black solidarity, and the *synthesis* is a "true humanity where politics will have no place". Really, Mr. Biko, this is too much. The *synthesis* is just as likely to be war.

PERSONAL NOTE

I am going to close this article on a personal note. Mr. Biko says – I am using his language – that I "shouted" from London "perhaps apartheid is worth a try". Either Mr. Biko is deceived or he is deceiving. I have never said a word in favour of apartheid in my life. I have fought it, not only in the life of my country, but in my own life too.

I was not speaking about apartheid at all. I was speaking of those instruments of power which the Government has created, namely the territorial authorities. I was urging that they should be used to the full. Mr. Biko regards them all as contemptible, and thinks they should not be used at all, because white people created them "to give some kind of authenticity to their lie." This is moralistically very grand, but one cannot lay it down as a principle that one must not use one's opponent's moves in order to checkmate him, simply because his desire is to subjugate. That would be the end of all sport, political or otherwise.

Long before I "shouted" from London, I wrote from Botha's Hill in REALITY of March 1971, this paragraph.

"REALITY, and the Liberal Party before it, are and were totally opposed to the policy of separate development, on both moral and practical grounds. The goal is – as it was always – one common society whose rights and obligations are shared by all, free of all racial discrimination, and upholding fundamental rights and the rule of law. But where the Government in its pursuit of separate development creates instruments of power that can be used, however imperfectly, for the achievement of progress towards those ends, then the proposition that one should use them is one fully to be considered."

It is possible that Mr. Biko would think, *or would feel obliged to think*, that I wrote this paragraph to give some kind of authenticity to the white man's lie, and that in secret I rejoice in this clever way of perpetuating subjugation. I suppose that he is entitled – though it would have to be in some contorted way – to such an opinion. And I fear that is what Black Consciousness might become, a refusal to believe – on principle – that any white person can speak the truth. Unless it can overcome this, I predict that it will never have the noble future which Mr. Biko dreams for it, and will become the twin of White Nationalism.

And what, Mr. Biko, would be the *synthesis* of that?

WHEN THE OVAMBO WENT HOME

by Dudley Horner

On the northern border of Namibia (South West-Africa) in a region consisting of a fairly well-developed type of woodland and dry forest vegetation, which thins out and passes into dry steppe country to the north and west of the Etosha Pan, live some 340 000 Ovambo who constitute nearly 46 per cent of the entire population of the mandated territory. The South African Government's colonial policy, with its basis of so-called separate development, contains the greater majority of these people within a "homeland" which constitutes roughly one-twentieth of the total area of Namibia. This land is called Owambo or Ovamboland, the people are Ovambo. Some 40 000 Ovambo (mostly male) are obliged by various circumstances to seek employment in the southern sector of the territory which has been known for some time, and very aptly, as the Police Zone.

The Ovambo have been in the past, and to a large extent still are today, primarily cultivators subsisting on crops of millet, kaffircorn, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, groundnuts and gourds, all of which are cultivated with particular success during years of ample rainfall. They are, to a lesser extent, also herdsmen keeping cattle of little commercial value and small stock (mainly goats.) Ovambo depends for its crops and livestock on local rainfall and the floodwaters from Southern Angola. The territorial Water Affairs Department has devised a water conservation

scheme culminating in the construction of a weir across the Kunene River near Eriksson's Drift which, together with the construction of the Okatana canals, is expected to remove the spectre of famine in years of drought. The question of rainfall is obviously of prime importance and food-supply is a crucial factor in the local economy. In some 82 years between 1883 and 1966 the northern sector of Namibia has suffered 34 years of drought and during the famine of 1961 2 000 tons of maize a month had to be delivered to Owambo.

Before the effective settlement of Namibia by whites the Ovambo enjoyed the respect of the other indigenous peoples who treated them as a people apart, living in splendid isolation. At the request of the pioneer missionary Hahn, the Finnish Lutheran Church started among the Ovambo, a mission which enjoyed considerable success over the years. The efforts of early missionaries resulted in the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church (ELOK) which today rejoices in a membership of some 200 000 people, largely concentrated among the Ovambo.¹ ELOK has acted as a cohesive force; and the Anglicans have also been very active in the area.

Although the boundaries of the German Protectorate of S.W.A. were officially recognised in June 1890,² Owambo never actually came under German rule.³ Thus the German depredations of the land of the indigenous people, who had launched various unsuccessful attempts to secure a measure of independence between 1904-1906 left Owambo untouched⁴ and her people in possession of their inheritance.

- 1) Bruckner de Villiers. *The Present State of the Church in South West Africa.*
- 2) J.H. Wellington. *South West Africa and its Human Issues* P.172
- 3) S. Hayes *A brief look at S.W.A. in. Reality*, July 1971
- 4) Wellington. *Op. Cit. p. 214*

Ovambo Kraal

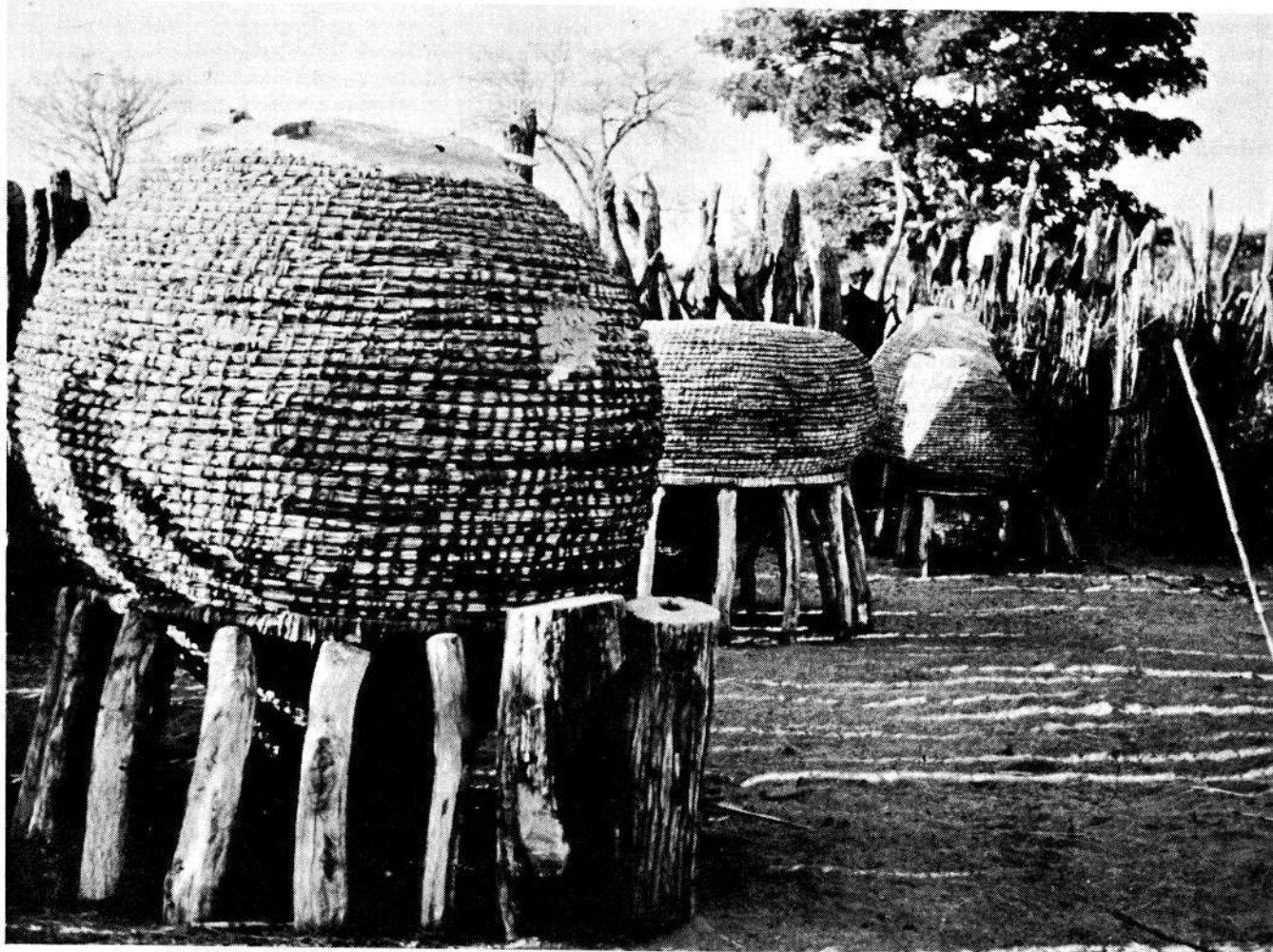
THE MANDATE

In 1915 South African forces conquered and occupied Namibia (then German South West Africa). In 1917 a joint attack by South African and Portuguese forces during which Mandume, the last uKwanyama king, was killed, resulted in the division of Ovambo territory, thus effectively establishing the modern boundary between Namibia and Angola.⁵ South Africa was entrusted with the administration of the territory after the Paris peace talks in 1918.

With the South African government in effective control of the former German Protectorate, it is useful to consider Article 22 (1), of the Covenant of the League of Nations which reads:-

“To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the states which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that *the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization* and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant”.
(my italics)

- 5) Hayes. *Op. Cit.*
- 6) Wellington *Op. Cit. p. 445*



It is important in any assessment of the recent Ovambo strike to bear in mind certain provisions of the Mandate for German South West Africa to which the South African Government of the day agreed:⁷

- "The Mandatory shall promote to the utmost the *material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants of the territory subject to the present Mandate. (My italics)*
- The Mandatory shall see that the slave trade is prohibited, and that no forced labour is permitted, except for essential public works and services, and then only for adequate remuneration. *(My italics)*
- Subject to the provisions of any local law for the maintenance of public order and public morals, the Mandatory shall ensure in the territory freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship, and shall allow all missionaries, nationals, of any State Member of the League of Nations, to enter into, travel and reside in the territory for the purpose of prosecuting their calling".

This Mandate was made at Geneva on 17 December 1920. In the light of practical experience who could blame any Ovambo for regarding the provisions enunciated above as so much high-falutin' verbiage?

It is necessary to examine events in Namibia as a whole, particularly in the southern two-thirds of the territory. The economy of Namibia rests on three key industries: Mining, Agriculture and Fishing which contribute roughly 47 per cent, 17 per cent and 3 per cent respectively to the actual value of the Gross Domestic Product at factor cost. The diamond mines in the South and the base mineral mines in the North have been described as the sheet-anchor of the territory's economy.

PASS SYSTEM

The white settlers in Namibia evolved a "pass law" system closely resembling the sophisticated measures of influx control which have reduced black South Africans to that state of helotry which some regard as the essential prerequisite for the maintenance of white domination. There is nevertheless one important difference: the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act which applies in South Africa does not apply in Namibia. This Act prohibits strikes by or lock-outs of African employees, the instigation or incitement of such strikes or lock-outs, and sympathetic strikes or lock-outs. The maximum penalties on conviction for a contravention of these provisions are a fine of R1 000 or three years' imprisonment without the option of a fine, or both fine and imprisonment. The fact that this Act is not applicable to Namibia could well explain the initial caution exercised by the authorities in their handling of the strike, although international attention would also have been a contributory factor.

The pass laws apply only in "white" areas of the southern sector. Thus, an African who remains in the northern sector, or in a Reserve of the southern sector, does not need to possess any "pass" or identification document.⁸

7) Wellington *Op. Cit.* p. 447-448.

8) The description of the control of black labour in Namibia has been taken from Muriel Horrell's *South West Africa*.

With certain exceptions, African men over 18 years of age who wish to move from one magisterial district to another require travelling passes.

Those granted permission to leave the northern sector are provided with an identification pass (commonly known as an I.P.), on which brief information relating to the holder, and his thumb-print, are recorded. This serves as a travelling pass. No African women except the wives of evangelists and ministers of the church, and of Government employees, are allowed to leave in order to reside in the southern sector, and even those who are exempt from this provision require the chief's consent.

Before an African man is issued with a railway ticket he is, by law, required to produce a travelling pass. Although women are not required by law to have travelling passes, many who wish to move from one district to another do apply for such documents, and officials are not discouraging this practice.

WHITE AREAS

Adult males in "white" areas of the southern sector are required to be in employment unless they are temporary visitors or have been granted certificates of exemption from labour. Such certificates may be issued to those who are unfitted for work because of old age or infirmity, or, in the discretion of officials, to any other applicant who is of good character and has private means of support.

If an African man who does not possess a certificate of exemption is found wandering about in a "white" area and cannot prove that he has adequate means of support, or if he is found trespassing on a farm or loitering near a dwelling-house or enclosed property, he may be deemed by a court of law to be idle or disorderly. On a first conviction he may be assigned as a labourer to public works, a municipality, or a private person. On a subsequent conviction for trespass or "loitering" a fine of up to R100 may be imposed. In default of payment, or if convicted for a second or subsequent time of being "idle", he may be sentenced to up to twelve month's imprisonment, with or without spare diet and solitary confinement for the first three months.

Men who want to enter employment may apply to a magistrate, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, or officer in charge of a police post for a permit to seek work.

URBAN AREAS

Provided that a Bantu Affairs Commissioner or municipality grants permission, an African may visit an urban area for up to 72 hours without requiring a permit other than a travelling pass. Certain categories of visitors may stay for more than 72 hours without permission, for example chiefs and headmen, minister of religion, teachers, policemen, prison warders, and court interpreters. No African may enter an urban African township, however, unless he is registered as a resident of it, or unless he has obtained a permit from the municipal or other authority in charge.

Africans may remain in an urban area if they were born there, or have worked there uninterruptedly for one employer for ten years, or have been there lawfully and

uninterruptedly for fifteen years, and have not, in the meanwhile, been convicted of any serious offence. Those who qualify to remain (men and women) are registered with the municipality: they need no other documentary proof. They may seek their own employment. A man or woman who is the registered tenant of a municipal house and who qualifies to remain in the area may retain the tenancy for as long as he or she can continue to pay the rental.

A permit to seek work in a town is not issued to an African who does not qualify to remain there, however, unless there is considered to be a shortage of labour. Every urban local authority is required to submit to the Administration, whenever required, a return showing, inter alia, the number and sexes of Africans who are needed for the different categories of work, or who are deemed to be redundant. The Administrator may order Africans who are considered to be redundant, and who do not qualify to remain to leave the urban area concerned. If an African is allowed to enter an urban area to seek work, the type of employment which he is authorized to accept may be specified on his permit. If an "unqualified" man loses his job and no suitable vacancies exist he may be ordered out of the town. Employers who are permitted to introduce African workers into urban areas must guarantee to return them to their homes or last place of residence on the termination of the contract of service.

An African man in employment is required to possess a copy of his service contract, which contains particulars relating to the holder, his employer, the rate of wages, and the duration of the contract. These contracts must be completed before a duly authorized official, who is required to ensure that the conditions of service are equitable. A breach of an employment contract by either party to it is a criminal offence

RECRUITMENT OF LABOUR

All African workers required from the northern sector and from Angola until very recently were recruited by the South-West African Native Labour Association (Pty) Ltd. (SWANLA) – a semi-government body with headquarters at Grootfontein and depots at Ondangua in Ovamboland and Runtu in Okavangoland. This was how the system worked: *

All employers in the southern sector who required labour with the exception only of farmers, had to obtain a permit from the magistrate.

If a permit was granted, the applicant forwarded it to SWANLA. The period of the contract and the wages offered had to be stated. The wages offered could not be less than the minimum laid down for each class of employee – these minimum wages are described later.

The maximum initial contract period was 309 shifts (working days) for mining or industrial work, and twelve months for domestic service in urban areas. Farm labourers were given the choice of signing a contract for twelve or for eighteen months.

A man in the northern sector who wanted work went to the nearest recruiting depot, where he was medically examined. If his state of health was adequate he was given the choice of available vacancies.

* This system was in operation until recent Ovambo Strike when new terms for labour were negotiated.

When a worker's contract of service was completed he had to return home for at least a month, and might then reapply. By mutual agreement, he could return to his previous employer.

The minimum fixed wages laid down for farm labourers recruited by SWANLA from the northern sector varied according to the age and experience of the worker, and his state of health. An "A" class worker was completely fit; a "B" class worker less so; while a "C" class person was either a juvenile (under 16 years of age) or an adult who, although capable of work, has some injury or deformity. The minimum cash wages per month were:

	House Servants and general Workers		Shepherds	
	12 month contract	18 month contract	12 month contract	18 month contract
CLASS C. JUVENILE				
inexperienced	R3.75	R4.50	R5.25	R5.25 for first 12 months and R6.00 thereafter
experienced	R5.25	R6.00	R6.75	R7.50
ADULT				
Worker returning to his previous employers	R6.00	R6.75	R7.50	R8.25
CLASS B.				
Inexperienced or experienced	R6.00	R6.75	R7.50	R8.25
Experienced worker returning to his previous employer	R7.50	R8.25	R9.00	R9.75
CLASS A.				
Inexperienced	R7.50	R8.25	R9.00	R9.75
Experienced worker returning to his previous employer	R8.25	R9.00	R9.75	R10.50

(It is true that payment-in-kind would considerably increase the value of the appallingly low cash wages mentioned above. However, estimates of the value of payment-in-kind are invariably unreliable).

STRIKE

It was against the background of this system of "tied" labour that reports of a threatened strike at Walvis Bay were issued in early December. Police reinforcements were flown into Namibia, the entire police force in the territory was placed on stand-by, and armed reinforcements moved into Walvis Bay. The General Manager of the Tsumeb Corporation was reported to have said: "I don't expect anything is going to happen here. I don't know more than the man in the street." Subsequent events were to prove his first statement inaccurate but his second correct.

In Windhoek between 5 000 and 6 000 Ovambo held mass meetings in Katutura township, rejecting employers offers and destroying their rations. During the next day or two Katutura was effectively sealed off by a detachment of police and the Security Police were reported to be active.

Employers in Namibia were reported to be outraged by the "unreasonable" demands of the workers. White students and schoolboys on vacation were employed in various capacities, particularly on the railways at a basic rate of R109 a month — an interesting contrast with minimum contract rates mentioned earlier in this article.

Over the next few days 5 200 Ovambo at Windhoek, 3 780 at Tsumeb, 640 at Klein Aub, 450 at Walvis Bay, 900 at Berg Aukan, 300 at Uis tin mine, 240 at Rosh Pinah tin mine, 72 at Swakopmund, 65 at Karabib, 80 at Oamites Copper mine, 80 at Husab, 59 at J.G. Strydom Airport plus a number of railway maintenance men and loaders and porters at the airport came out on strike. The 4 000 Ovambo at the important Consolidated Diamond Mines remained at work but declared their complete solidarity with the strikers (some 300 struck early in January). In all, nearly 13 000 Ovambo had come out, and had been transported back to Owambo on special trains.

NEW ARRANGEMENTS

On 30 December the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development said that details of new labour arrangements would be announced by the end of January. It was reported that the Owambo Legislative Council would take over the running of the contract labour system on a more flexible basis. Consolidated Diamond Mines announced a 10 per cent wage increase for all workers, (their then overall average wage being R43,42 per month), the seasonal summer rains started falling heavily in Namibia and 600 workers on a canal project in Owambo also downed tools.⁹

At a meeting of returned workers at Ondangua in Owambo Mr. Nangutuala was elected chairman and dissatisfaction with the proposed meeting between the Owambo Legislative Council and the authorities scheduled to take place at Grootfontein was expressed. The meeting agreed to reject both the contract labour system and any agreement reached if the strikers themselves are not consulted and if they do not support the agreement.¹⁰

DEMANDS

On 12 January the *Star* reported that an undisclosed number of policemen had been flown from South Africa to Ondangua in Owambo. Reports indicated that the situation in Owambo was tense but quiet. The strikers' demands contained in a pamphlet circulating among the 13 000 strikers in Owambo were:¹¹

- Improvement of employment agreements to include liberty for Ovambo to do work they wanted to and of which they had experience and knowledge; freedom to change jobs without "fear of landing in jail";
- Freedom to have their families with them.
- The rate for the job irrespective of colour, and equal treatment for all.
- Employment bureaux in all tribal regions and towns.

9) *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 December *Sunday Express*, 2 January.

10) *Sunday Times*, 9 January.

14) *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 January.

- Mutual respect between employer and employee.
- Sufficient pay for workers to buy their own food and provide for transport needs.
- An identification card instead of a "pass".
- The removal of the "barricade" — the police post at the Owambo border.

On 14 January the Owambo Legislative Council elected Chief Philemon Elifas Chief Counsellor in place of the late Chief Shiimi who had supported the South African Government's policy of separate development.¹² During its debate on the strike the Legislative Council unanimously condemned the contract labour system, were particularly bitter in their criticism of the South West African Native Labour Association (SWANLA), and called for higher wages for Owambo workers.¹³ At that time, fewer than 1 000 workers had been recruited to replace the 13 000 striking Ovambo.

SOME AMELIORATION

The Minister of Bantu Administration and Development announced, after his discussions with employers and the Owambo Legislative Council, at Grootfontein that a completely new system of black labour regulation would come into operation. It seems that the much-despised SWANLA has been killed and that the Owambo Government will control labour employment offices, not only within Owambo, but at certain points in the southern sector. Individual contracts will be negotiated by employer and employee and these will set out in some detail the conditions of service. It is clear that there will be some amelioration of the monstrous system of labour regulation which has obtained in the past.

The degree will depend very largely on the Owambo Government who do not bargain from a position of strength. It is equally clear that the contract labour system has *not* been abolished.

While reports indicate that Ovambo workers are starting to register for employment other reports indicate that white settlers are mustering their forces to resist what they term "unreasonable" demands. Rumour is rife on the question of the extent of unrest in Owambo itself. Police reinforcements in the territory have been augmented by units of the South African Defence Force. There are reports of wide-spread disturbances and indications that serious discontent has arisen among a people who have been subjected to a form of exploitation which is a national disgrace, and, since Namibia relies so heavily on foreign investment, an international scandal.

There will be many who will agree with J.H. Wellington's judgement.

"(We white South Africans) given by Humanity a sacred trust to foster and further the interests of the indigenous people of South West Africa . . . have put our own interests first and foremost."

12) *Star*, 14 January.

13) *Rand Daily Mail*, and *Star*, 15 January.

14) *Sunday Times*, 16 January.

15) *P Press statement* 14/72 (P), 20 January.