



Africa in Campaign 80

by Fungai Kumbula

Anxious not to be caught unaware again, all three presidential candidates have made policy statements regarding Africa. In an increasingly restless world, it has finally been realized in the highest levels of government that this giant continent cannot continue to be confined to the back burner. Even a cursory look, however, is enough to demonstrate the different ways and degree of importance each candidate assigns to Africa.

"The United States must recognize that Africa will play a key role in world affairs in the years ahead...Africa possesses an abundance of oil and other raw materials essential to the world economy and, represents an important potential export market for our manufactured goods..." says independent John Anderson. He goes on to state that South Africa's refusal to share power with the Black majority in both South Africa and Namibia threatens the stability of Africa.

He calls for a "peaceful transition" to majority rule and says an Anderson administration would seek an end to apartheid through negotiation and encourages compliance by all countries with the United Nations embargo on the export of military equipment to South Africa. He also says he would work in consultation with the Organization of African Unity in dealing with problems relating to the continent.

The Anderson promises sound good but then again they are the promises of a politician. The trouble with the independent candidate is that he has no track record in Africa. In all the years he served in Congress, one has never heard him make a statement about Africa. Anderson, judging by his statement above, suffers from the usual American malaise of viewing Africa simply as a source of raw materials and a market for American goods and technology; the Africans, the people, are somewhere in the background and are mentioned almost as an afterthought.

Reading the Republican Africa policy statement, one gets the feeling that it was drafted at the last minute simply because everybody else was saying something about Africa. It also becomes very apparent that this is the party of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger who worried so much about the white-majority regimes of southern Africa to the total exclusion and complete disregard of the African majority.

"The Republican Party supports the principle of self-determination in Africa. We reaffirm our commitment there to this principle and pledge our strong opposition to the effort of the Soviet Union and that the United States and the industrial West have vital interests there -

economically, strategically and political." The rest of the statement is more of the same: condemning Cuban, Soviet, Nicaraguan and East German presence in Africa and asserting that, given a choice, Africans would reject the "Marxist," totalitarian model being imposed upon them. Again the Africans are very much in the background; the important thing, the Republicans' preoccupation is the keep the Soviets at bay. The Cold War Doctrine is very much alive in the Republican Party and, candidate Ronald Reagan is one of its leading champions.

One of Reagan's aides caused a major furor by suggesting that should Reagan win in November, there would be a total reversal of US foreign policy as regards Africa; in essence, a Reagan administration would re-establish military ties with South Africa and resume sales of arms to the apartheid regime. Regan quickly disassociated himself from this philosophy but he did not fire the aide in question and, of late, has remained ominously silent in matters of foreign policy. He still has to win the election next month and the strategy of late has been to tone down much of his ultra right-wing rhetoric in a major bid to attract the undecided voters.

He has even said in earlier campaign speeches that the United States should start providing covert aid to the UNITA terrorists in Namibia. This would start the civil war in Namibia all over again. This sort of "confrontation politics" has been the hallmark of Ronald Reagan ever since he set out on his presidential bid in the last election. From the point of view of the Africanists, a Reagan victory next month would be a DISASTER of major proportions.

Some "smart" journalist asked Prime Minister Robert Mugabe on his recent visit to the U.S., "Mr. Prime Minister, who do you endorse for President in the upcoming election?" The answer was a classic in African proverbial logic:

"When I was young, I had a dog that never caught anything. I wanted to exchange it for another but my uncle asked me: 'How do you know that the one you are going to get will be any better?' Needless to say, I kept my old dog," Mugabe responded. The journalist just smiled sheepishly; it is not clear whether he understood.

"Africa will be of central importance to American foreign policy in the 80s. By the beginning of 1977, U.S. relations with Africa were at a low point. We had little credibility in Black Africa for we made little or no attempt to see African problems from an African perspective," begins the Democratic Party's Africa policy statement.

The statement goes to detail

America's efforts to influence the course of events in southern Africa, how and why they failed and the efforts since to remedy the situation. The Democrats say they have since begun to view Africa as a separate entity and not a mere appendage to superpower confrontation. Though the Carter administration often has been faulted for not going far enough, it is the first administration to at least make the effort to deal with Africa one on one. Carter was the first American President to visit Africa. He also sent the UN Ambassador to several African countries including South Africa. Vice President Walter Mondale met with then South African prime minister John Vorster and voiced the U.S.'s opposition to apartheid. Despite intense pressure from strident right-wingers like Senators Helms and Hayakawa and others within his own party, Carter refused to recognize the "internal regime" of Ian Smith and Abel Muzorewa and

insisted on an all parties conference. In the end everybody agreed that the President had been right all along.

From an African perspective, the Africanists would go with Carter.

(Continued from page 1 col. 6) high level of voter registration will increase the pressure on candidates to try to be responsive to Black concerns. Political apathy and low registration virtually guarantee that these concerns will be ignored or fessed.

These are some of the factors that should be considered when deciding whether massive political participation can make a difference. Another reality is that reward does not always come immediately but political participation is an investment in the future.

Williams adds, "Toward this end, there is a role for all 17 million eligible Black voters to play this year in the continuing struggle for equal justice and equal opportunity.

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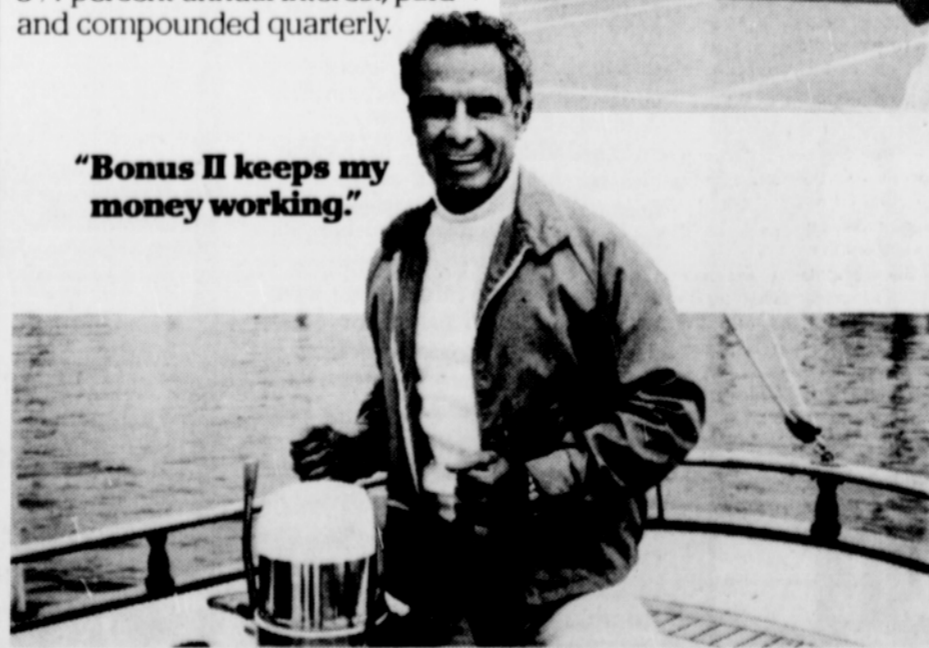
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