

EDITORIAL / OPINION

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

STOP SOUTH AFRICA'S WAR ON NAMIBIA

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

The closer Namibia gets to the date for its official independence from the racist and violent stranglehold of apartheid South Africa, the more South Africa continues to commit brutal atrocities against the people of Namibia. In particular, in recent days members of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) have been hunted down and attacked by South African military units and police forces.

The United Nations plan for the implementation of U.N. Resolution 435 sets the timetable for Namibia's independence. Since this resolution went into effect on April 1, 1989, nearly 300 SWAPO soldiers and an undisclosed number of Namibia civilians have been murdered by the South African military.

What South Africa fails to understand is the undying love and support that SWAPO has among the vast majority of Namibians.

Our concern is that the vast majority of thirty million African Americans here in the United States, as well as millions of others who support the freedom and independence of Namibia, should not remain silent as South Africa increases its terrorist campaign to deny Namibia its freedom and sovereignty. It is interesting that there are not many loud voices being raised in the Congress of the United States concerning the situation in Africa in general and in particular concerning Angola and Namibia.

Too often those of us who live in the United States, assume a comfortable distance to what is happening in other parts of the world. The only caution now is not to start celebrating the victory before it is actually won. South Africa has now shown its determination to try to hold on to Namibia. It is our responsibility to join in support of SWAPO as this struggle enters the crucial stage. Let history show that SWAPO's eventual victory will be our victory as well.

To the Editor:

At 6:30 a.m., several hundred Oregon State Penitentiary inmates start out to their respective work areas five days a week. For 40 hours these men work for wages that would discourage most outsiders from getting up in the morning, let alone maintaining their employment. Yet prison inmate employment has its benefits: it keeps away boredom, helps one to do one's time, teaches a trade, and in some cases, allows a person to say--maybe for the first time in his/her life--that they've done a job to the best of their ability.

The sad thing is that the best prison is generally more quality oriented than the best in the community. Prisoners have opportunities to be employed in vocational positions which teach welding, data processing, clerical skills, product design and manufacturing, and a wide range of other marketable skills. Many prisoners leave prison with the thought that they can get a job when released only to find that, more often than not, the door of opportunity is closed to them due to the unattractive label "ex-offender".

If criminal activity is a result of lack of economic opportunity--in some cases, and personal irresponsibility, wouldn't it be logical to assume that providing employment to an ex-felon upon release would be a progressive solution to some of the crimes committed in this country? Wouldn't it also be logical to assume that, if you give a man a job when he's done his time, he will not sneak into your house while you're asleep and "liberate" your appliances? New prisons, private for profit endeavors, and the promulgation of ignorance, are not the answers to the crime problem in this country. Neither is showing a man that he can succeed if he applies himself--and when he does (in prison) kick him every step of the way when he's released. In many respects, parolees newly released from prison find themselves in a much more hostile environment than the one they just left. In prison, he was simply

one of the men...in the community he becomes traumatized with the labels "ex-felon," "ex-convict", or "ex-offender".

The jobs open to him are those with very little potential. Once a lead man in a shop (an inmate supervisor), he finds that he can easily qualify as being a janitor or a short order cook when he's released. Nowadays, an ex-felon can't even successfully be employed as a gas station attendant. And, if he does find a good job, he is visited at his workplace by a parole officer, who makes sure everyone knows that the "ex-con" is a "ex-felon", especially if the job is more prestigious than that of the parole officer.

Situations such as the above do not help attitudes which are already severely frayed at the edges. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions. One cannot wave one's magic wand and change peoples' biases, prejudices, and attitudes. In order to do that you would have to stop time, go back and start all over again.

Personally, I think it's kind of odd that taxpayers are willing to spend millions of dollars every year to keep some of us in prison. I fully understand how you feel. There are prisoners here I wouldn't dare associate with on the street, let alone see you associate with under different circumstances. Thank goodness, those kind of prisoners are in the minority.

It would seem more logical to allow us the opportunity to come into society with a clean slate. Our time would be completed. For the most part, we're a costly burden to society by us vacationing in prisons around the country. Some of that money could be spent on mass employment for released prisoners who are sincere about making progress through the benefits of full employment. The theme of this message could be "JUST GIVE ME A JOB and I WON'T BE BACK".

Submitted by,
Clifton Wash

REMEMBERING SCHWERNER, GOODMAN AND CHENEY

Twenty-five years ago two young Jewish-Americans and an African-American were slain in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney had joined hundreds of youthful idealists committed to the proposition that all human beings are created equal. Young Americans by the hundreds, even thousands put their lives on the line all across the world fighting to desegregate lunch counters, demanding dignified and equal treatment on public transportation and striving to rally a disenfranchised people to register to vote.

Indeed Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney were killed because they were tampering with the status-quo. They were involved in a dangerous and subversive activity; struggling to ensure the inalienable right of every American citizen to exercise the right to vote as guaranteed by the constitution of the United States. There was fierce and violent resistance to the vote in the south for good reason. Ballots in the hands of Black voters could shatter the system of segregation for all time. To paraphrase Jesse Jackson, those who picked cotton would be empowered to pick sheriffs, council persons, mayors, congress people, senators and presidents. Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney were killed to strike terror into the hearts of the oppressed and those who would dare to muster the courage to work with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation.

It is good for us to remember the resolve of these young civil rights martyrs and Jimmy Lee Jackson, Medger Evers, Viola Luizzo, Rev. James Reeb... Because of them, as the old folks put it, we sure ain't what we wanna be, we sure ain't what we're gonna be but we sure ain't what we were. Things have changed. Much work remains to be done however if we are to get to the "promised land" that Martin Luther King talked about the night before that fateful day in Memphis.

I recently talked with Dr. Carolyn Goodman, the mother Andrew Goodman. She expressed a fervent desire that the work that her son was involved in continue. She was near exhaustion from criss-crossing the country encouraging young people Black and White to continue the struggle for human dignity, decency and democratic rights for every American citizen. She was deeply pained by the racial disharmony, racial violence and anti-semitism which still plague America. Yet she was still full of hope. She is optimistic that today's youth will carry the torch passed on by the civil rights martyrs.

Mrs. Goodman turned to the plans for a series of major events which will mark the 25th anniversary of the Mississippi murders. The Governor of Mississippi and a host of civil rights leaders past and present, student leaders and public officials will gather in Philadelphia, Mississippi on June 21 for a memorial ceremony, and a giant rally. Then a south-north (reverse freedom ride) will start the long trek northward. The organizers hope that the caravan will inspire thousands of the unregistered people to sign up to vote.

In Washington, D.C., as is appropriate, there will be a major rally in support of registration reform legislation being sponsored by Senators Kennedy and Cranston and Representative Conyers and Swift in the House. Indeed, the Memorial Coalition has made eliminating barriers to registration and full voter participation a principal goal of the four day commemoration. The final destination of the South-North Caravan will be New York City, where organizers hope to register thousands of the unregistered and conclude with a memorial service in St. John Devine Cathedral. It will be a fitting series of events.

In the final analysis, however, it is we who must remember what Schwerner, Goodman, Cheney and all the other martyrs gave their lives for. They died so that we might live. A Lasting memorial would be our resolve to complete the work that they so valiantly pursued; we must finish the unfinished democracy.

COMMON SENSE ON GUNS

by John E. Jacob

Military-style assault weapons have been used by drug dealers in shoot-outs with police and with rivals, and by a deranged man who invaded a California school.

The public outcry over the increasing use of those weapons led the President to ban their importation and influenced Colt, a major gun producer, to stop production of at least one such weapon. Such a development probably won't come overnight. The gun lobby in Washington is very powerful, and its chief spokesman, the National Rifle Association, has managed to torpedo federal attempts to pass state and local gun laws.

But the NRA is fast losing support because the average citizen can't see any reason to allow free and easy access to weapons that are turning our streets into combat zones.

But who uses military assault weapons? The NRA says they're used for deer hunting, but as Robert Hughes recently wrote in Time Magazine:

"No serious hunter goes after a deer with an Uzi or an AK-47; those weapons are not made for picking off an animal in the woods but for blowing people to chopped meat at close to-medium range, and anyone who needs a banana clip with 30 shells in it to hit a buck should not be hunting at all."

The gun lobby says it's not condoning criminal use of fire arms, just defending the constitutional right to bear arms. But the Constitution says nothing about any right to stock up on automatic weapons or walk the streets with handguns.

The public's rights and the rights of legitimate gun owners can be protected by a federal gun regulation law whose provisions include:

:a ban on military-type weapons such as machine guns and assault rifles.

:Licensing of all guns.

:Tough requirements for licenses, including checks and delays so that you can no longer buy guns over the counter in a matter of minutes without even verifying identity.

We're the only country in the industrial world where guns are so easily available and we're also the one with the highest crime rate. It's time for domestic disarmament

BLACKS AND JEWS

by Dr. Lenora Fulani

Earlier this month the New Jewish Agenda, which defines itself as an organization of progressive Jews, initiated expulsion proceedings against 18 of their members who also belong to the New Alliance Party. (NAP) "Although NAP frames its anti-Semitic remarks in the context of an anti-nationalist position, NAP is clearly not anti-nationalist, for it supports without criticism the nationalism of Louis Farrakhan, who also preaches anti-Semitism."

As the chairperson of the New Alliance Party, I wrote to protest the proposed expulsion of Jewish members of NAP who were also members of NJA. This is part of what my letter said: "what 'crimes' have these Jewish sisters and brothers committed to so outrage the NJA inquisitors as to precipitate a call for their expulsion? Beneath all the specific accusations, there is really only one charge of substance--they are actively involved in the Black-led, independent New Alliance Party."

"I have never been thrown out of any Black organization nor threatened with expulsion for working closely with Jews. That is because the African-American community is willing to work in broad, progressive non-partisan coalitions."

No doubt much of your objection to the New Alliance Party stems from my support of and from Minister Louis Farrakhan. While I have differences with him, I am not willing to reject him. That you are willing to do so is a repudiation not just of Minister Farrakhan but of the millions of black people--Muslim and non-Muslim--who follow him and respect him."

"Liberal and progressive Jews must learn that the Black community will not be dictated to; we will choose our own leaders, and determine our own agenda, and whether you like it or not you will have to respect it."

On April 8 the national steering committee of the NJA held expulsion hearings in New York City. The Jewish members of NAP who were about to be expelled had been told that they or a representative could appear at the hearings to speak--for a maximum of four minutes each--in their defense. Since the real issues was not NAP's "anti-Semitism" but NJA's racism, each of the 18 Jewish sisters and brothers chose to be represented by an African-American friend or colleague.

Only one person at a time was allowed into the basement of the small synagogue in Greenwich Village where the hearings took place. None of the "accused" were permitted to be present. In some cases their Black representatives were asked questions; in others the steering committee members sat in stony silence while Black lawyers, teachers, and community organizers expressed their outrage at the crime that was being perpetrated by so-called progressive Jews in repudiating other Jews for the crime of following independent Black leadership. Within a few days, the NJA steering committee had made its decision. In a letter dated April 11, the steering committee's national co-chairs announced their "final solution" to each Jewish member of NAP they were expelling: "...your actions...caused serious damage to the Manhattan NJA chapter and the national organization

The NJA is seeking to intimidate genuine Jewish progressivism into silence and inaction by accusing those who speak out of being "traitors"--not "real" Jews, not "good" Jews. It is, tragically, not the first time that progressive Jews have been betrayed in this way.

This is supposedly progressive Jewish organization has shown itself to be nothing more than a front for the racist, anti-Semitic and anti-progressive Democratic Party. They have brought shame to the progressive movement which Jews all over the world have helped to lead and build.

I am deeply, deeply proud of NAP's Jewish leaders and builders--if the leaders of NJA were not blinded by their racism, they would be also.

Unfinished Symphony

by Stevie Wonder

Reprint, Portland Observer, January 1983

SOMEWHERE A CHILD is hungry. Somewhere a homeless man is cold. Many days people are without shelter and always mankind is in need of love. It is not an easy time, yet it is not a hopeless time. We must uncover the formula for survival that will refresh our souls and uplift our spirits.

It is in God's plan for love to be life's eternal destiny. What better way to celebrate God's plan than by rehearsing the music to the unfinished symphony? Dr. King knew the score. He had the music and many willing players. He inspired us to allow our spirits to touch our hearts. He encouraged us to seek greater tone, better clarity and higher range.

He understood the formula to help the musicians perform. We need that now. We need that spirit more than ever. We took those spiritual energies for granted. Yeah, we have learned that spirits never dissipate, they only return in another space and time.

Let me suggest that the spirit of Dr. King is here with us. It is here in another space and time, and it is pushing us toward positive peace and love.

Remember how he marched. Know that that spirit still consoles us. Remember his words. Know that they are forever recorded in God's almanac, and truly, they're housed in God's almanac of love's universe. Know that our responsibility is an awesome task.

We are assigned to create positiveness where negativity reigns high. We are assigned to embrace our brothers when distrust pervades our souls. We are responsible for maintaining the legacy when many would prefer it to be gone.

As we tune the instruments of love we can make this symphony work. Our conductor, Dr. King, left an unfinished symphony. We must finish it for him by adding those notes and chimes that create the harmony of love and life.

There is no doubt that we need a national holiday. We need it as much as we need nourishment for our bodies. We need a day to celebrate our work on the unfinished symphony. We need a day where we can have a dress rehearsal of solidarity and understanding. We need a moment to come together in the spirit of a man who taught this world how to love. We need a day where the dignity of man is recognized by his character and not his profession. We need a day of unity because our symphony is music that all lost hearts will hear.

This day is not just for Black people, because love is just not Black. This day is not just for white people, because love is not just white. This day is not just for yellow people, because love is just not yellow. This day is not just for brown people, because love is just not brown. This day is not just for red people, because love is just not red. This day does not exclude anyone because of the color of their skin, because love is a rainbow of our souls.

Take some time to reflect on how you can finish the symphony. Take a minute to assess what you can do. Let's accept the responsibility for being great musicians. Let's record our rhythms together. Teach your family about our culture of love. Celebrate this day so we can spread the infection's germ of love. Celebrate with all of your heart, and celebrate with all of your soul. And celebrate with action that carries you to new heights. Soar on these new heights through all the years.

Let our final movement be that of the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Let us begin by celebrating the day that will be the beginning of endless days of human harmony, embellishing upon a universal chord that joins in with the eternal symphony.

Our first performance of this symphony of love will begin with our collective expression of respect and commitment to the conductor of this great symphony, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and all those who in the name of love we honor here today. We'll make the dream come true because our hearts tell us so.

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