This article, dealing with women's liberation in the context of the national liberation struggle in Namibia, has been written by Bienie Cawen of the Workers Power. The author is also one of those who are here, and not those of SWAPO.

Women all over the world are fighting the oppressive structures which exclude them from decision making. However, the forms of women's subordination are not universal. Patriarchal relations need to be understood within specific historical contexts. This is particularly true for the struggle of Namibian women to which many of the concepts expressed by Western feminists do not necessarily have any bearing. We reject the narrow view of patriarchal relations which merely locate women's subordination within the context of male dominance as simply anti-men and therefore divisive. This view fails to speak on behalf of the women of the underdeveloped world and black women, even in Western societies. For black feminists, on the other hand, have gone a long way in linking patriarchy to economic structures, and the oppression of women's oppression in terms of class as well as gender aspects.

This article attempts to deepen Western feminist understanding of the character of our struggle, and with a common goal we have a lot to learn from each other's struggles, bearing in mind that our route and in and out of the Realitza delayed because of the realities of our particular situations.

The Namibian women's struggle is not simply a women's struggle but belongs to the overall liberation struggle, who are fighting for national liberation. We are fighting for a Namibia that is in the hands of Namibian women but as black oppressed people. This may sound strange to some feminists who see men as the primary oppressors. Black women believe that male oppression is the least of our worries, they will appreciate our involvement in a national liberation struggle.

Our primary struggle is for basic human rights and that is in our struggle for women under Apartheid if there is no part of her life that she can call her own. But here are equal rights for Namibian women if they live in the present system. We are equal rights for Namibian women under Apartheid structure. As Namibian women we do not deny that black men are able to oppress women, but we do stress that all black Namibians are as much the products of the victims of race and class oppression. We can't separate our understanding of the sensuality oppression from its specific historical context. This is how I wish to examine the situation of black women in Namibia and the way in which they challenge the ideologies which legitimize their oppression.

PRE-COLONIAL TIMES

Patriarchal attitudes in Namibia date back to pre-colonial times. Within traditional Namibian society there was a division of labour between men who reared cattle and hunted, and women who cooked, produced food, milked cows and cared for the family as a whole. Women were subordinate to all males within the family. Commonly men as heads of households had control of the lands and cattle, and although women retained substantial rights and a degree of social autonomy, there were limits on their control and ownership of wealth. Traditional practices such as lobolo (bride-price) - now fairly rare - and polygyny provided structures for male domination. Lobologit a value on women's labour power. Vagago, even in the absence of lobolo, in an agrarian society turns women into property, confering her the advantages of sexual pleasure, wealth, docile labour power and the production of heirs. Control over a woman's labour and fertility is thus effectively placed in the hands of men, overemphasis upon which transforms their relationship into a more overt prostitution. A woman's failure to bear children gives a man the right to disregard her at will.

In June 1984, South African Prime Minister P.W. Botha tendered his resignation to President Botha, proceeding the elections to the new, three-chambered Parliament. His resignation followed months of military reform was containing both the African National Congress and the National Conservative Party, sustaining the war in Namibia and Angola while increasing economic pressure to force all neighboring states to deal with South Africa. But in December, the government moved to reassert its control over the wage class struggle so far: 400,000 students and 500,000 workers staged a 2 day political general strike in the Transvaal. South Africa has been in a pre-revolutionary period over since. For the first time, the regime itself openly speaks of itself as "outmoded" and strives to present itself as offering reasonable reforms.

Now that there is a real prospect of a transfer of power involving the recognized leaders of the liberation movement, the ANC - we need to look at some of the political and social implications of both as to the character of the forthcoming revolution. This article will focus on just one of these dimensions, how women relate to the struggle for national liberation.

POSATU

One starting point for the argument is the speech given by Joe Foster to the 1992 POSATU Congress. POSATU was the largest federation of industrial- based unions, and Joe Foster, who was the PUMA chairman, launched his affiliate, the POSATU union, form the core of the new Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) launched in December. As General Secretary of POSATU, Foster said, "All the great and successful movement have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive - most often colonial - regimes. For those movements cannot seek a new polity while being able to deal with the particular and fundamental problems of the few. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unhelpful to the masses. It is therefore essential that workers in this country develop their own powerful and effective organization even whilst they are part of the broader power structure."

Workers Power was a close and active supporter of thePOSATU movement Solidarity, which he saw as struggling "to establish a more democratic workers control over their socialist society," Foster stated. "...the fact that a man is seen as socialist does not guarantee that workers control their own destiny."

While recognizing both the internal and external international credibility of the ANC, Foster characterized itself as a "pure populist liberation movement."

UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT

In July 1981, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was created inside South Africa, with the blessing of the ANC, as a political front to coordinate and coordinate all organisations campaigning against the new Constitutional Proposals which excluded the debate on major issues. The UDF's debate amongst the independent trade unions focused on whether working class organisations like trade unions should affiliate. The UDF itself aimed at gaining a "truly national character" and interpreted the term "freeing" as "embracing all races, and that all races are equal."

Continued on page 4
Workers Power

The presence of workers and the middle classes in the UDF is well documented, but a significant section of the working class in some major independent unions still remains outside our fold. The FOSATU unions stayed out of the UDF, stating that affiliation would be divisive of their own union membership. A much stronger argument came from Dave Lewis, the General Secretary of the General Workers’ Union (GWI) which organises on the docks and also in the construction industry.

"But the UDF has to ask itself whether the attitude and tenets of language spoken (English), which are the pace at which it’s designed. It’s philosophy to facilitate the fullest participation by working class people. Our proposal was that way.

"...In those cases where the majority of those who are organisations of fact working class people, it’s possible that these working class union members will have little influence at the level of the organisation in the decision making structure of the organisation."

Lewis is right to be alert to the UDF’s potential if the unions, where votes were not based on a bloc vote, indicate that certain parts of all other groups opposed to apartheid, but he did not rule out the possibility of a future relationship between “national political/community centre like the UDF’s national political community centre”. In fact, he alluded to the precedent for this in the affiliation of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACOTU) to the Congress Alliance (CA) in 1990.

The best argument from the UDF-affiliated unions came from Siso Mercaptan, the president of the South African Allied Workers Union (COSATU) affiliated union in the GRLU. Sisohe led the 1981 struggle against Rastaswends, and has suffered brutal repression from the regime and the loss of several comrades.  (A)

"It is questionable whether trade unions, with their accustomed ambi-

uity and their expectations of the working class any better. The idea that community organisations based within the residential areas of the working class were members of the trade unions. To constitute the working class will have such membership continue the membership of the working class to the union membership of the trade unions and the working classes. Non-unionised workers and the unem-

employment and other organisations based within the working class communities, are also in a position to express the views of the working class and are also legitimate organisations of the working class.

ANC

The ANC President, Oliver Tambo, has recently welcomed the formation of COSATU. But as recently as June ’85, the President of the ANC, John(False) trade unions were virtually ignored in his main report to the Lusaka ANC Consultative Conference. The major theoretical provision of the ANC is the pro-Soviet (pro-Soviet is not a good word) which is as argument between the left and NGOs, which is aimed for an information revolution not an information revolution. In SAPC/ANC who recognise the "two stage" nature of a "national democratic revolution" followed by a "transition to socialism".

In an article titled "New "Marxist" Ten-

dencies and the Battle of Ideas in South Africa" (African Communist, Oct. ’85), Nsumbila of the SACP, argues that the left is to expect...to win (the) on the bases of (the) industrial and mines. The danger here is that we can easily find ourselves depending on the suppor-

tiveness of the forces we want to defeat people who have no socialist principles. The result would be an economic crisis. And the people will not be able against the government but against "socialism" in general. It will be unable to see their problems as caused by the socialism we foisted upon them."

Forget about working class leadership of the current struggle in S. Africa, for New Amsterdam workers in the Freedom Charter that the working class after the revolution! In fact, it is impossible for workers to learn the way to live over skills are needed to takeover the running of society. We have seen this in the brief flutters of popular power during and immediately after the Bolivian revolution, in the Chico mine workers, and for a time in Mozambique. The con-

comer, limited, attempts to foster work-

ers’ power in Mozambique although against many obstacles, including the technocrats, the attitudes of experts, the pressure from the German Democratic Republic and other "socialist" states. But at least (Friedman) (the liberation struggle in Mozambique thought the experiment was worth trying)

NATURAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

What then is the "national democratic revolution" which the SACP and ANC advance? Before speaking of transfor-

mation to socialism? It is the defeat of the Apartheid regime by the popular front of popular (front mass mobilisation through the UDF, military activity led by the Soweto and military wing), and international pressure leading to sanctions against apartheid. Its single focus is the creation of a new society in Africa with a popular government ded-

icated to implementing the principles of the "Freedom Charter", the document drawn up in 1955 at the "Congress of the People". There is no question that this would be a spectacular step for-

ward from the horrors of apartheid, which would advance the democratic rights of black workers as well as all other classes and groups oppressed by the regime. But, in an economy dominated by multinational and State-

owned industry and mining, subject to the world market and international banking, what economic programme does the Freedom Charter contain? The national wealth of all South Africans shall be transferred to the owners of the people as a whole. All other industries and trade shall be nationalised and the land shall be transferred to the owners of the people as a whole. All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

The Freedom Charter does not suggest how the workers in a particular industry will exercise control, and the phrase "transferred to ownership of the people as a whole" may be taken to mean "transferred to ownership by a popular State".

Last September, leading white South African businessmen met with the ANC leadership in the wake of the State of Emergency. Oliver Tambo is reported to have told the industrialists, including Galvin of the giant Anglo-American (which sacked 14,000 black miners last April), that the ANC intended to nationalise "some industries, but overall forecast a mixed private and state economy in a non-racial democracy. A different note was sounded by Cyril Ramaphosa, General Secretary of the black miners’ NUM, when he told the COSATU founding conference he workers should seize power and build a new society.

CONFRONTING CAPITAL

All this has led on the British left SWP...to issue the call for a workers’ party. There is no sign, as yet, that black South African workers share these ideas. Their priority has been the formation of COSATU as a trade union federation to consolidate their growing power. It is quite possible that COSATU in the spirit of unity which led to its formation, will affiliate to the UDF instead.

If the regime digs its heeds, the con-

frontation with apartheid will further radicalise the organised workers and school students, who are already naming capitalism as one of their enemies. But the closer the prospect of a socialist revolution in South Africa, the greater the pressure from American and British imperialism to force negotiations. And so, the most likely outcome is indeed a "national democratic revolution". But an ANC government, on its current programme, would soon face im-

possible demands to give workers power within industry? how to recover from multinationals the wealth that they coveted. These demands can only be met by confronting capital. It voices like that of the Siso Njelekas are few, but a future ANC government might perhaps confront capitalism and Western imperialism.

But whether inside or outside the ANC’s political orbit, workers’ own organisations will be the best means of preventing the rise of a new bourgeois-aligned with international capital, and the best catalyst for workers’ own power.

Barry Fureness
Liverpool BF

CHRONOLOGY

1975 – present: rapid growth of independent trade unions and government.
July ’83: Foundation of UDF.
June ’84: Formation of UDF.
July ’84: Economic crisis.
Aug. ’84: Apartheid boycotts boycotted.
Sept. ’84: Rent strikes, riots, attacks on Councillors and police.
Nov. ’84: Traditional general strike.
March ’85: Language massacres.
May ’85: Soweto massacreellok AZC strikes.
June ’85: Freedom Charter publications.
Sept. ’85: UK sanctions Commonwealth sanctions.
Nov. ’85: Formation of COSATU.
Jan. 1986: Robben Island: Soweto in UDF.

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A Question Of Solidarity

Last November 100,000 people marched in London against apartheid. Meanwhile in S. Africa the struggle intensities on all fronts - in the workplace, in the townships, in the schools... British bases continue to house apartheid. British companies continue to resist government pressure. So, there is both a need and the potential for effective solidarity. The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) has taken on the only basic ground to organise this nationally. The question is what shape is it in to deliver?

AAM AGM

The recent AAM AGM had two main features. First was the ongoing row between the leadership of the AAM and the BCC-dominated City of London AA Group (CLAA). The row started in 1975 and continued in a number of different forms up to the last two years. The second feature was a series of bland resolutions from the NC restating past policies and calling for the same actions - recruitment, sales of more AA News, consumer boycotts, demonstrations etc.

The British Road To Nowhere

These two features are related. Set up 25 years ago with close links with the ANC, the AAM is founded upon an alliance between the CP, Labour Party, Trade Union leaders and the Churches. Its strategy has been to make apartheid a moral issue and to work for the return of a Labour Government committed to ending apartheid. Obvious inadequacies have raised up "hot" issues such as the Stop the Seventy Tour Campaign. The "Coloured" race riot in Cape Town was followed by the Sharpeville massacre - a site of concerted popular resistance. It was in 1965, when a boy was shot dead by police and arrests were thought to threaten the AAM's "unsaleable" image.

Furthermore, having entered into a monogamous relationship with the ANC, other initiatives have been taken; the "Sharpeville demonstration in 1960", independent trade unionism, the all-black ANC, the call for a national emergency, and a following of a fortuitous action in October 1976. (For a more detailed account of this period, see the "Sharpeville: a Cold War" of its ANC members."

Local Work

Unlike the ANC, which has to address itself to the State, there are all sorts of effective local and regional initiatives that can be taken over South Africa. By demonstrating that alternative strategies are possible, these could put the AAM leadership on the spot. Looking at the local level in Manchester, Merseyside and Archbishop Huddersfield, it is clear that this is already starting to happen.

Growth

Up to early '85, Manchester AA had 6 or 7 members and little public presence. Since then, with the declaration of the national emergency in S. Africa and a following of a fortuitous action in October 1976. (For a more detailed account of this period, see the "Sharpeville: a Cold War"

Huddersfield AA, also backing the conference, are planning to get an invitational letter to post to AAM leaders in support.

Defend Garnett Koele

Like Bob, racism works in mysterious ways. Garnett Koele is a black S. African who was involved in the S. A. Students Organisation. His relationship with a white woman in breach of apartheid's immunity law meant that he left the country to get married in Britain.

After a couple of years his marriage broke down at which point the Home Office stepped in and decided that because he didn't have a relationship with a white woman he ought to be deported to S. Africa. If this wasn't so serious it would be funny.

By the time you read this paper, Garnett will have been interrogated at Manchester Airport (16th Feb.). If this goes against him there will be no right of appeal and he will be liable to almost instant deportation. At this point only a massive public campaign will be effective. Check in the press. The Call, the Garnett Koele Defence Campaign, 6/72, Salford Road, Manchester M6, MCR, Meetings twice a week, MCR Trade Union Hall.

next Moss Side target ought to be. As the consumer boycott loses power, other groups are likely to be in a similar position.

The BLACK Community

In fact the Moss Side group has chosen to make the link between the black community in S. Africa and in Britain, planning a major event aimed at local black youth to commemorate the massacre at Soweto.

In a 'Coloured' mixed race high school in Cape Town, a riot police officer demanded that the school pupils attend an assembly. He was by informing them "I come with a message", a comment that was interpreted by students (who were actively encouraged by the school authorities) to mean: "We are going to kill all the kids who shout back, 'We will kick your balls in!'"

Sharpeville and Langla

In Huddersfield, the AA group has mounted a picket of a Barclays' branch in a multiracial, working class area rather that the city centre and followed this up by door to door peti-

The membranes of the heart were one from an Afro-Caribbean ten- ant, who said that "A victory against apartheid is a victory against racism that rings all over the world." As in Moss Side, the group has taken the opportunity to expose the issue of policing here and in South Africa.

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Namibian Women (cont.)

control legislation prohibits women from leaving the homesteads reserved for so-called homelands, effectively excluding them from the decision-making and trapping them in the rural areas.

URBAN AREAS

For women in the urban areas, life is different. Their right to be there depends on their ability to find work and support their families. For women who manage to work, the discrimination on basis of sex, race, and color becomes even more pronounced. They get the worst jobs, an extension of their treatment in education and culture. Life, for them - work first, marriage second - being forced to do domestic work in the house of a white woman who released from her own domestic responsibilities to seek waged employment, and then they still have to do their own domestic work.

For single mothers, as rural women who catch a train to the city to work, the burden is particularly heavy.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The sufferings and hardships of Namibian women under Apartheid are well documented. Their experience under a colonial regime has made them understand that together with black men in Namibia they have to fight for the total destruction of colonialism and its sister, imperialism.

It is in recognition of the fact that women's liberation is not contradictory to but can actually only be achieved through national liberation that Namibian women participate fully in SWAPO. The essence of SWAPO's struggle is that it is an struggle in which every man, woman and child can understand the bonds that bind the nation to its colonial and its imperial experience.

It is in this context that the Namibian women's liberation and their struggle for the eradication of colonialism and its sister, imperialism, has been achieved.

Imperialism knows no boundaries. Whether in Namibia, Nicaragua, or Britain, whatever its methods the unity of anti-colonialism is in the overall struggle for liberation and keeping people in subjugation. SWAPO's struggle should therefore be viewed as not solely aimed at the destruction of colonialism in Namibia but in creating a clear and unambiguous understanding of the connection between the liberation of the colony and the world.

It is in this context that Namibian women have understood the link to their liberation struggle and in the process have become major players not only in the anti-colonial movement but also in the struggle against the apartheid regime.

The Reagan administration has recently decided to increase material support (equivalent to the amount voted for the anti-Nicaraguan Contras) for the South African backed UNITA movement in Angola. This sabotage could seriously affect Angola. That war torn country is home to the majority of an estimated 5 million people. UNITA has already killed over 100,000 civilians in Angola.

January the Angolan news agency announced that South African forces had set up joint patrols with UNITA in the south-eastern Cuando Cubango province. In the third week of December, 5,3 South African armoured vehicles entered Angola, committing the now common atrocities against Angolan civilians.

WOMEN IN EXILE

While MPLA-led Angola continues its hospitality to SWAPO, the movement is able to cater for the needs of the Angolan refugees, many of them children, in its camps. Much of the administrative work of welfare is undertaken by women, who constitute the majority of the population. Angola itself is one of the Angolan camps.

Some things to read


Mauvists

Three delegates from the Metal and Allied Workers Union affiliated to COSATU will arrive in Preston on March 13 for their meeting starting at the end of February. They include the General Secretary, Mike Sepe, the national on the Women of the World at the conference on "Women in Southern Africa". The meeting will be held on March 13 at the University of Liverpool, St. Mary's Church Street, off Ribbleton Lane, Preston, Lancs. Workshops meetings will be led by those delegates, and public meetings will be held on March 13, 14, 15.

For more information contact us at Big Flare, of OLI, PO Box 70, L95 1BE. 8891.