

35,000 march for African fighters

By Abe Weisburd

Some 35,000 black Americans, in an historic expression of support for the liberation struggles of black Africa, took part in the May 27 African Liberation Day solidarity demonstrations in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco.

Similar demonstrations were held the same day in Toronto, Canada and in Antigua, Dominica and Grenada in the Caribbean.

The purpose of the actions, in addition to showing solidarity with the guerrilla fighters in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and other African countries, was to expose the U.S. and other Western imperialists as partners of the white oppressors of black Africa, as well as to find ways of giving material support to these guerrilla fighters.

The demonstrations were sponsored by an ad hoc group, the African Liberation Day Coordinating Committee (ALDCC). A very broadly based group of black educators, political figures, student leaders, militants, religious leaders, community figures and others comprised its 50-person steering committee.

Build-up struggles

In the process of setting up the demonstration ALDCC took part in student struggles against university complicity in South African business. The committee also helped to set up demonstrations in

Washington against Portuguese violation of the borders of Tanzania and other African states. It established close ties with the African liberation movements and invited liberation guerilla leaders to speak at the May 27 demonstrations. It spoke out against the murder by imperialist agents of black leaders of Zanzibar and other African countries.

As the day approached and support for ALDCC snowballed, many African and Caribbean UN delegations began showing an interest. Recognizing the opportunity for getting black African leaders, African liberation fighters and black UN delegates to meet together, the Congressional Black Caucus, several of whom are on the ALDCC Steering Committee, called a two-day "African-American Conference on Africa" for May 25 and May 26 in Washington. The conference was attended by about 250 black Americans, African UN members and African liberation fighters.

Fighting spirit

As an example of the spirit and militancy of the conference, Essiah Zhuwara, a leader of the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe, was greeted with an ovation when he said, "The only way we can regain our land in South Africa is through the barrel of a gun."

Owusu Sadauki, chairman of ALDCC and president of Malcolm X Liberation University (Greensboro, N.C.) severely

criticized Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who had recently visited South Africa. After his return, Mr. Wilkins spoke against the boycott of South African products—advocated by ALDCC—stating that any boycott would result in the loss of jobs for black Africans.

"I strongly condemn the reactionary statements of Roy Wilkins," Mr. Sadauki said. "The problem is not jobs but freedom, liberation and control of the resources. We have not seen a struggle like the one that's on the way in Africa."

Wilkins neither joined the steering committee nor supported its actions despite the fact that such broadly based leaders as Representatives John Conyers, Ron Dellums, Louis Stokes, Charles Diggs and Walter Fauntroy served as members. Some of the others on the Steering Committee are Angela Davis, Betty Shabazz, Roy Innis, H. Rap Brown, Dr. George Wiley, Rev. David Abernathy, Imamu Baraka and Julian Bond.

Rep. Charles Diggs (D.-Mich.) said at the conference: "Blacks in Africa have been suppressed by a soft policy and the hardware of the United States." He called for a strategy to set priorities for an all-out support for African liberation fighters. It was significant that the strategy meeting called for by Rep. Diggs was closed to the

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press; none of those in attendance believed that a peaceful solution to the problem of black liberation in Africa was possible. It is also significant that ALDCC is calling for funds for arms as well as food and medicine for the African liberation guerilla movement.

The stirring two-day conference of May 25 and 26 set the tone for the May 27 demonstrations by its severe condemnation of the U.S. and European support of the colonial regimes in Africa and by setting a strategy for support to the African liberation movement

Indictments read

In Washington on May 27 some 15,000 black people marched from Malcolm X park to the South African embassy, then to the Portuguese embassy, then to the Rhodesian information center, then to the U.S. State Department and finally to the rally at the Washington Monument, where 25,000 to 30,000 black people assembled. At each stop before reaching the rally a "statement of indictment" for the particular crimes committed by that government against the black people of Africa was read, as well as a statement outlining the type of struggle being conducted by the liberation forces in the particular country and the role black Americans could play to advance the struggle. The "indictments" were read by steering committee members.

At the South African embassy Rev. Douglas Moore, director of the Washington Black United front, read the "indictment," which said in part:

"In the name of the black people of the world we charge South Africa with inhumane acts and war crimes against black Africans and for making deceptive treaties with other nations designed to usurp Africa's farmland and its vast mineral wealth.

"We indict South Africa for legally starving and enslaving blacks and we condemn her for her system of contracted labor which forces black African men away from their homes and families into cattle-like camps to work as a servant for the white master."

Rev. Walter Fauntroy, Representative of Washington, D.C. (without vote) acted as master of ceremonies at the rally. Speakers included Dr. George Wiley, co-director of the National Welfare Rights Organization; Elaine Brown, minister of information of the Black Panther party; Essiah Zhuwara, leader of Liberation Front of Zimbabwe and Imamu Baraka (Leroi Jones). A message of

support was read from Stokely Carmichael who is in Africa. A group of singers who are refugees from South Africa were part of the program.

The keynote speaker was ALDCC chairman Owusu Sadauki. In answer to the skeptics he said: "They told me that it could not be done. They told me that black people would not come to Washington, D.C.; to San Francisco, California; to Toronto, Canada; to Antigua, to Dominica, to Grenada, around the question of Africa; that black people here were not interested in Africa. They told me that you could not organize masses of black people to demonstrate because black people were not demonstrating any more. . . .

Blacks beginning to move

"Look around you, prophets of negativism and prophets of do-nothingism in the black community. Look around and see their response to the question of Africa. Look around and see that black people are beginning to understand that we are tied in with our brothers and sisters of Africa. We have a common struggle. We must continue that struggle after we leave here."

In San Francisco a march culminating in a rally at Ramon Kimball park attracted some 8000 to 10,000 black people on May 27. Among the speakers were David Sobeco of the Pan-African Congress of South Africa, Donald William, Black Workers Congress, Rev. Charles Koen, Cairo Black United Front; Nelson Johnson, Students for Black Unity; Willie Brown, member of the California State legislature; Bobby Seale; and Gary (Indiana) mayor Richard Hatcher.

The Toronto, Canada demonstration attracted about 3000 black Canadians and some black Americans from the Niagara Falls area. Some 8000 gathered at a demonstration in Antigua, some 5000 in Dominica and a smaller number in Grenada.

Owusu Sadauki told the Guardian that a date would soon be set for an ALDCC Steering Committee meeting around mid-June, to plan for future events and a structure to replace the ad hoc committee. He added that ALDCC was calling for a specific boycott of Gulf Oil Company products as well as the general boycott of South African, Rhodesian and Portuguese products. He also asked for the collection of first aid materials and clothes for the liberation fighters. He said that ALDCC was calling for money to buy arms, for the guerrillas and asked black people to continue to educate other black Americans so that their consciousness be raised.