



MPLA troops march in Angola. The Soviet Union was an important ally in the struggle to overthrow colonialism and imperialism.

The Soviet Union and southern Africa- Friend of the liberation forces?

by JENNY QUINN

Ten years ago, thousands of Americans were marching on the Pentagon and militantly demanding that the U.S. get out of Vietnam. In the ranks of the anti-war movement, anyone who suggested that we call instead for both "superpowers" to get out of Vietnam, the USSR along with the U.S., was immediately recognized as a dupe of the State Department. After all, this is just what Johnson, McNamara, and Rusk were proposing in order to hide their aggression in Southeast Asia.

Today, the struggles in southern Africa demand our attention and call for our solidarity. But within the forces who say they support the liberation of southern Africa, we hear solidarity defined in terms of fighting both superpowers, or even that the Soviet Union, and not the U.S., is the main threat.

But this time it comes from a different quarter...not simply from the State Department, but from so called Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries as well. Because this logic is dressed up in a revolutionary garb, it is sowing confusion in the ranks of the solidarity movement and misleading some honest anti-imperialists.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze what the real role of the Soviet Union is in South Africa. Is the Soviet Union as some say a Social imperialist power more dangerous than the U.S.? Is it a socialist model of internationalism as other argue. Or is it something that lies somewhere between these polarities?

CONTRADICTION NATURE OF USSR

The Soviet Union is a socialist country and for this reason has a very definite, built-in antagonism with imperialism. Its socialist character propels it toward support of all the other forces in the world that share a basic antagonism with imperialism.

But socialism in the Soviet Union is diseased. A revisionist party stands at the helm of state, a party with a class outlook akin to that of the capitalists. Consistent with that outlook, and in order to protect their privileged position, the revisionists pursue a policy of accommodation with imperialism, and their relations with other peoples are marred by Great Power Chauvinism -- that is, the pursuit by a large and powerful nation of its own interests, rather than mutual benefit, in its relations with a smaller nation.

From the standpoint of the world's peoples, the Soviet Union is an ally, but

it is stretching the point to call it a friend. If the USSR is a friend it is the sort of friend who cannot be fully trusted to give his all in a battle and who might turn and run...the sort of friend that does not give friendship selflessly, confident that you will return the same.

No, this friend is quick to remind you of your debts to him, quick to attach strings for favors rendered. And when you must fight your enemy, this friend urges appeasement and unnecessary compromise.

This friend is even ready to talk to your enemy behind your back in order to "help".

This is not the stuff of which real friendship is made. Nor is it the content of proletarian internationalism.

In looking at Africa we can see all these contradictory aspects of Soviet policy.

MATERIAL AID

In Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa itself the Soviet Union has provided valuable military and economic aid as well as diplomatic support to the liberation movements. This aid has been indispensable and without it it's doubtful that the liberation movements would have been able to succeed to the extent they have.

This is most clear in the case of Angola. In 1975 with the collapse of Portuguese colonialism, Angola stood on the brink of liberation. In a desperate attempt to turn back the tide, the U.S. and South Africa intervened. The U.S. bankrolled Holden Roberto and the phoney CIA supported FNLA (Front for the National Liberation of Angola). South African troops rushed to join the forces of UNITA, another phoney national liberation movement.

The aim of U.S.-South African policy was to thwart the MPLA, the liberation movement which had fought the brunt of the war against the Portuguese and was clearly committed to an anti-imperialist course for an independent Angola. The MPLA called upon the Soviet Union for an escalation of military assistance *only after* these initiatives by the U.S. imperialists and the South African racists.

The Soviet Union had been aiding the MPLA for years and under the circumstances increased their aid to the tune of \$100 million in order to repel the imperialist threat. Independently of the Soviets, the Cubans came to the aid of Angola with volunteers. The result was

that the FLNA and UNITA were routed and, for the moment at least, the U.S. had to accept defeat.

Clearly, without Soviet and Cuban aid, the MPLA would have been defeated or at very least a long civil war would have been the result. This is the objective effect of the slogan "Soviet Social Imperialism out of Africa". In practice it stands for an Angola under the neo-colonial domination of U.S. imperialism.

BUT STRINGS ARE ATTACHED

At the same time, the strain of Great Power Chauvinism is evident in Soviet behavior in Africa. The small country of Guinea in West Africa is a case in point. In 1958, Guinea gained its independence from France and announced its determination to pursue a non-aligned course. The imperialist countries boycotted trade with Guinea and tried to force it into submission. The 1970 agreement between the USSR and Guinea gives some indication why.

The Soviets loaned Guinea \$92 million for the construction of a bauxite mine. Ninety percent of the mine's output was to be exported to the USSR, 55% to pay off the loan and 35% as barter for Soviet produced goods. These goods were often of inferior quality and in some cases bore no relation to the needs of the Guinean economy. Diplomats told stories of warehouses full of Bulgarian sesame seed paste, perhaps a great staple in the Eastern bloc, but inedible to most Guineans.

Only 10% of the mine's output was left to be exchanged for freely convertible currency. The Soviets secured the bauxite at \$10 a ton below the world market price. All in all, an agreement that is hardly consistent with a policy of proletarian internationalism.

At the same time it should be remembered that such inequitable trade agreements are not equivalent to the export of capital characteristic of imperialism, however reprehensible they may be. After all, the Guineans own the mine and once the Soviet debt has been retired will be free to market the bauxite according to their own lights.

It is cases of this sort that lend most credence to the warning that nations and movements that value their independence should steer clear of the Soviets.

LIBERATION MOVEMENTS GUARD OWN INTERESTS

But in some ways, the most important

factor to take into account is the liberation movements themselves. The liberation movements who have been fighting colonialism for years are not about to trade their hard-won independence to anyone. The newly independent countries of Southern Africa are jealous of the prerogatives of sovereignty, and given that they waged a protracted armed struggle and won over the masses in the process, they are in a strong position to resist encroachments from any source.

It is the liberation movements themselves which are in the best position to decide who is the greatest threat to their independence. And these movements have made it clear, that it is U.S. imperialism that constitutes the real and immediate danger.

Angola, the country which has received the most aid and is at the same time been most dependent on that aid, is a case in point. The People's Republic of Angola has made clear from the outset its intention to follow a policy of non-alignment. That this is more than words is reflected in the actual relations between the newly independent country and the USSR.

In 1976, Angola signed an agreement with the Soviets covering mutual cultural, scientific, military and trade relations. While all the features of the agreement are not known, some key features stand out. Soviet-Angolan trade is to be conducted in freely convertible currency, which means that Angola is not locked into a junior partner relationship within the USSR's "international division of labor" that prevails among Soviet bloc countries.

Angola joins other socialist countries which like Vietnam, while friendly to the USSR, have chosen to remain outside COMECON and retain their trade options. Also, contrary to the predictions of our "Marxist-Leninists" the Soviet Union did not acquire any military bases in Angola.

ALVES AFFAIR

The Alves affair is another indication of the MPLA's determination to guard its independence. Early last spring Nito Alves, a member of the MPLA central committee, held private meetings with Soviet diplomats in Lusaka, Zambia. Alves made statements that Angolan President Neto was "anti-Soviet". Following this, a Soviet diplomat was expelled from Angola and Alves and his cohorts were expelled from the MPLA central committee.

Steven Biko, Revolutionary Brother Murdered in South Africa

by BELINDA

In his short lifetime, Steven Biko, a leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, had established a rich history of resistance to the racist regime of the South African government. He had been imprisoned several times for his political activities although he never stood trial. Since 1973 a five year ban had forbidden him from meeting anyone publicly, from publishing and from being quoted (even after death).

During the Soweto uprisings, he was detained for 101 days without hearing or trial, spending most of that time in solitary confinement. His last jailing came on August 18, when he was arrested but not charged. At that time, he was put in solitary confinement at Port Elizabeth. On September 12, Steven Biko died in that South African prison.

Biko was the 21st political prisoner to die in police custody during the past year and a half. When the news of the death hit the papers across South Africa the reaction was strong and immediate, provoking the biggest wave of protest against the government of South Africa since police in Soweto attacked demonstrating school children last year.

Just hours after his death was announced, anti-apartheid forces gathered in memorial services for Biko. It was the first of several demonstrations to the memory of a man who was described by one newspaper as being "perhaps the most important Black leader in South Africa."

When 1200 students tried to hold a service at a Black university outside Johannesburg, they were quickly surrounded by police, herded into a grandstand, and taken away in police vans. Officials said the students were being detained under the Riotous Assemblies Act, which requires official permission for public gatherings of more than three people.

Opposition groups in the white community joined Black leaders in demanding a judicial inquiry, the removal of Police Minister James Kruger, and the revocation of the Terrorism Act under which Biko had been held since August 18th.

Internationally, the sounds of dismay came quickly from the United States and Britain which are desperately involved in working out a deal with the South African government to try and squash Black liberation movements in neighboring Rhodesia and Namibia.

Feelings ran so high in South Africa that 20,000 people attended the five hour long funeral despite the government's prohibition of bus permits which would have allowed buses to travel outside their normal areas.

THE GREAT BLACK HOPE?

Why all this sound and fury about a single man? A man described in the press as a Black moderate. A man, according to the Philadelphia *Bulletin* who "simply wanted Black to stop being subservient to white..." A man described by one white South African editor as "one of the main hopes for a peaceful solution to the racial crisis in this country."

Steven Biko was a thirty-year-old Black man whose influence on the course of events in South Africa has been and will continue to be for some time profound and lasting. He was instrumental in the founding of the South African Students Organization (SASO) in 1968, and he was the leading theoretician of what has come to be known as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). SASO was formed from a caucus of students within the University Christian Movement in an important step towards consolidating an alliance among non-whites in South Africa. As the first president of SASO, Biko spent working to ensure that political unity be established among Indian, "Colored" (mixed-race), and African

As the first president of SASO, Biko spent a considerable amount of time working to ensure that political unity be established among Indian, "Colored" (mixed-race), and African students—a difficult task in the face of the white power structure which works against unity of any kind.

In 1970, Biko remarked that "the Black (non-white) people of the world, in choosing to reject the legacy of colonialism and domination have at last established a solid basis for meaningful cooperation among themselves in the larger battle of the third world against the rich nations."

This kind of statement indicates that Steven Biko understood the need for unity among third world peoples, and, more importantly, realized that the goal was

not to replace Black faces for white within the power structure, but to overcome and rid the third world of its dominance by the rich and powerful colonialists and imperialists.

This same theme runs through the policy manifesto adopted by SASO at its 1971 general conference. At that meeting SASO endorsed a resolution which rejected foreign investment in South Africa, saying that investors "profit from exploitation and end up with a vested interest in its maintenance." The resolution condemned "Black puppets who go overseas under the cloak of leadership and persuade foreign investors to stay in South Africa with the belief that (that investment) is for the betterment of Blacks." At that same meeting, SASO declared its solidarity with the people of Namibia "in their determination to rid themselves of this unwarranted (South African) occupation."

From the beginning, SASO and its community counterpart, the Black People's Convention, emphasized its ties with both urban workers and rural peasants. It organized literacy projects, self-help programs such as medical clinics and cooperatives and devoted much time and energy to stimulating and supporting trade union militancy.

None of this should be taken as being a moderate's view of the means toward liberation. Biko fully understood the implications. He observed: "the importance of the SASO is not to be found in SASO per se. . . rather it is to be found in the fact that this new approach. . . heralded a new era in which blacks (third world peoples) are beginning to see with greater clarity the immensity of their responsibility."

This new "greater clarity", is what the Black Consciousness Movement is all about. And Steven Biko played a prominent role in its formation. Steven Biko is dead, but the Black Consciousness Movement is very much alive.

As stated by the president of the Black People's Convention, Kenneth Rakhidi, when delivering the funeral oration for Steven Biko: "Forward we march until we win. The best road to follow is the road that Steven Biko followed."

Prime Minister Lopo de Naciminto journeyed to Moscow for discussions with the Soviets. Two months later, Alves led an abortive coup attempt against the MPLA.

There is no evidence that the Soviets were involved in this or supported it. The coup is suspected to have been linked to members of the PIDE (the Portuguese Secret Police) and have been part of a coordinated imperialist plan for "destabilization" of the anti-imperialist front line states. The same day as the coup, South Africa mounted a ground and air attack on Mozambique.

The incident reveals both the Soviet penchant for meddling and the Angolans determination to maintain their own course. As Neto himself put it: "We have a series of capitalist countries who are against us and don't want us to follow this path (of non-alignment). We also have friendly countries, who while they are friends, are countries who don't understand our options very well."

USSR NOT ALONE

Unfortunately the Soviet Union is not the only socialist country guilty of meddling in African affairs. In Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) ZANU and ZAPU, the two major liberation organizations, are joined together in a Patriotic Front aimed at ousting the Smith regime. ZANU has historically been close to China politically while ZAPU's primary ties have been with the USSR.

Recently, on the eve of a meeting of the OAU (the Organization of African Unity), the Chinese news service released a statement attributed to Robert Mugabe who had just returned from the People's Republic. Mugabe allegedly accused the Soviet Union of social imperialism and said it was more dangerous than western imperialism. If the statement had been true it would have destroyed the unity of the Patriotic Front.

Mugabe countered the statement, saying: "Such fabrications are aimed at undermining the Patriotic Front. It is absurd to come out against the Soviet Union which makes tangible contributions to the cause of liberation of Southern Africa from the yoke of racism." From the standpoint of the interests of the African revolution, this is doubly unfortunate. Historically, China's role in relation to the liberation movements has been characterized by a much greater attention to the ideological side of developing People's war than the aid of the Soviet revisionists which has tended to place technical considerations above politics. Also China's economic and trade agreements have been on the basis of equality. But in recent years, China has increasingly sought to attach the political string of anti-Sovietism to its support.

A MARXIST-LENINIST VIEW

As these examples indicate, the situation in Africa is complicated. There is little room for rosy idealizations of the Soviet Union ala the CPUSA. Nor can we stand reality on its head as the CP-ML and others do in order to conform with the People's Republic of China's view of the world that sees the Soviets as the wolf at the backdoor, more dangerous than the U.S. tiger that is battering down the front door.

As proletarian internationalists, it is our responsibility to build solidarity with the liberation movements which necessarily includes their right to take aid from the Soviet Union. While we have no interests in aiding revisionism by glossing over the negative aspects of the Soviet role in Africa or anywhere else, we have even less interest in promoting the line of the State Department that Soviet aggression is the issue in Southern Africa. The African people and the U.S. working class will both be best served if we strive to tell the truth.



Steven Biko (left) and his wife and children (right) showing that they are as determined as ever to carry on the struggle for majority rule in South Africa.

