Scandinavian Opposition to Apartheid


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# Scandinavian Opposition to Apartheid

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS*

SCANDINAVIAN OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID

by

Sven Skovmand
(Member of Parliament, Denmark)

(Note: This paper on Scandinavian Opposition to Apartheid in pursuance of a request by the Special Committee on Apartheid, a journalist and writer, has been active in the movement against colonialism. He is the author of several books on international Danish, among them Southern Africa (1967) and U.N., South Africa (1969). He is also co-editor of the magazine Kontakt.

was prepared

Mr. Skovmand, apartheid and affairs in and Human Rights

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author.)

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No. 23/70

October 1970

The Scandinavian countries have been active in the opposition to apartheid since the late 1950s and the anti-apartheid movements have had a strong response in these countries. They have recognized that the situation in South Africa constitutes a threat to international peace and have supported economic sanctions by the United Nations Security Council. They have been far more generous in their contributions to funds like the International Defence and Aid Fund and the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa than other Western countries. Why has this been so? One would not expect the Scandinavian countries to take much interest in southern African problems. They are so very remote from the area and furthermore, they lost their colonies in Africa in the 18th century. Their business affiliations with South Africa are weak. For several years the activities of the missionaries were the only ties between the Scandinavian countries and Africa.

All these, however, are in fact precisely the reasons why the Scandinavian nations have taken so much interest in South Africa. As they have no colonies, they are not accustomed to thinking of the superiority of white people. The missionaries have been their only source of information in many areas, but the missionaries are
for obvious reasons more concerned about the well-being of the African people than businessmen.
The small Scandinavian business communities in South Africa tend to be more eager to defend the system than the white South Africans themselves. But they have not been able to make much impact on the viewpoints of the Scandinavian peoples.

One must furthermore bear in mind that the Scandinavian countries came out of the Second World War without any serious internal problems. The young people had to look outside to find a cause to fight for and they found it in South Africa in 1960.

The consumers' boycott

The Scandinavian opposition to the apartheid policy of South Africa was at its peak in 1960 and the following years. The Sharpeville massacre came as a shock to the Scandinavian peoples and gave a lasting impression of the ruthless oppression of the non-white population of South Africa. Shortly afterwards, in 1961, Chief Lutuli was given the Nobel Prize, mainly because of the influence of the anti-apartheid movements in Norway and Sweden. Chief Lutuli's moving speeches at the ceremonies for the award of the prize in Oslo, the capital of Norway, made a very strong impression on the Scandinavian peoples, and belied the South African propaganda that the "natives" of South Africa were an inferior race.

In the spring of 1963, the Scandinavian youth movements decided to support the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly calling for a boycott of South African goods. The youth movements were well suited for the job. They had established councils during the war to deal with common affairs and there was a broad co-operation between the different youth organizations. The South African issue aroused few controversies. All but the scout organizations and a few right-wing groups agreed that the United Nations resolution ought to be implemented by the Scandinavian Governments and that a voluntary consumers' boycott action should be used as a means of pressure on the Governments.

The boycott action was to a certain degree successful. The import from South Africa of wines, canned fruit and oranges was dramatically reduced, and has never since really recovered. The youth organizations succeeded in persuading the co-operative chains and the State wine monopolies that they should not import South African goods. As these goods only took up a small part of their sales, the persuasion was not so difficult.

The disillusionment

The quick results of the boycott were in a way harmful to the anti-apartheid movements. The results were obtained, not so much by hard work as by persuasion of a few centrally placed persons. The Scandinavian imports from South Africa did not amount to much in any case: they were only a fraction of the huge South African exports to countries like Britain and the United States, countries where the boycott had little practical effect on the total trade.
So disillusionment spread. The boycott method did not seem to be effective, and the hope of Great Power action, which had seemed so natural in 1960 and 1961, disappeared. At the same time, it was difficult to keep the public's interest in South African problems alive. The Sharpeville massacre had been a shock to the Scandinavian peoples, but it was difficult to make them understand that deportations and bad prison conditions cost many more lives. The South African oppression became more subtle and efficient, but less spectacular.

In the mid-1960s, other international problems began to occupy young people's minds. It became difficult to recruit voluntary workers for anti-apartheid campaigns. For some years the anti-apartheid movements in the Scandinavian countries looked almost dead. All work had not stopped, however. The leaders of the movements concentrated on exerting pressure on the Governments to augment their contributions to different funds for the victims of apartheid. As one of the leaders once put it: "It will take us a month's hard work to collect 10,000 dollars. But we may get 100,000 dollars out of the Government in less than an hour."

So, paradoxically, at this time, the contributions of Scandinavian Governments to funds for South African victims of apartheid rose dramatically, while the public interest dwindled.

The recent upsurge of interest

During the last year there has again been an upsurge of interest in the South African problem - or, rather, the southern African problems - in the Scandinavian countries, as the South African problem is increasingly seen in a wider context of the white domination of the whole southern African area.

The reason for this is easy to understand. To the outside observer, the situation in South Africa has for several years looked hopelessly immobile. The leaders of the black people are in jail or in exile, and the white power looks so tremendously strong that there is not much hope of an early change. If one looks at southern Africa as a whole, the situation is different. The guerilla wars in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique and even Rhodesia offer a real possibility of ending the white supremacy, not only in these four territories, but in southern Africa as a whole. The anti-apartheid movements again have a goal towards which to work.

The participants in the movements are, to a higher degree than before, students and left-wing orientated young people, who tend to look upon the situation in southern Africa as part of the rich white conspiracy against the third world. Fortunately, they have until now been able to co-operate with the old leaders who take an interest in the South African question because of its humanitarian aspects.

The goals of the anti-apartheid movements

The boycott of South African goods is no longer the main interest of the anti-apartheid movements. The old boycott is in a way still working: there are not really many South African goods in the shops, and those that are, are very often disguised, so that the customers cannot see their origin.

The boycott of Southern Rhodesia is scrupulously respected by the
Scandinavian Governments, so that there is little scope for public action. The same could be said about humanitarian support for the victims of apartheid. The contributions from the Governments are far bigger than it would be possible to obtain through private collections. Besides, collections have never been popular in the Scandinavian countries where there is a long tradition of State support for purposes which, in other countries, are supported by individual contributions. That remains is the pressure on the Governments to make them support the liberation movements in southern Africa and stop private investments in the area. Sweden has moved farthest in this respect. The Swedish Government is now supporting several liberation movements, and its indirect intervention made the Swedish firm, ASEA, withdraw from participation in the Cabora Bassa project. The other Scandinavian Governments have been less anxious to mark their opposition to the Portuguese policy in Africa. FRELIMO is the only liberation movement which has obtained support from Norway and Denmark. But the aid has been given to the Mozambique Institute, not directly to the movement. The Swedish Government also supports information on southern Africa on the same principles as information about other parts of the third world. Such official support for the spread of information is not yet given in the other Scandinavian countries, with the exception of a small subsidy for a Danish magazine on southern African affairs.

An obvious goal for the anti-apartheid movements in the future must be to persuade the four Governments to take a similar political stand towards Portugal's colonial wars in Africa as they have taken against the racial suppression in South Africa.

Another area for anti-apartheid activities would be to persuade the Governments to offer more aid to the African countries in the forefront of the battle in Africa - countries like Zambia, Botswana and Tanzania. These countries already receive a considerable amount of Scandinavian aid, but the aid is only to a limited extent given to purposes connected with the war in southern Africa.

SIEK
Sweden has always been the Scandinavian country with the strongest antiapartheid movement. It is also the country where the movement was initiated. The present dean of Västerås, Gunnar Helander, was for eighteen years, from 1938 to 1956, a missionary in Johannesburg, South Africa. Because of his concern over apartheid, the Swedish public was for many years informed on the situation in South Africa. In 1953, the editor-in-chief of Dagens Nyheter, Sweden's most important paper, visited Reverend Helander and wrote several articles in his paper about the terrible conditions in South Africa. Reverend Helander left South Africa on holiday in 1956 and was not allowed to return. Together with people like the writer Per Västerberg and the historian Olof G. Tandberg, he founded the "Swedish South Africa Committee", which collected money from trade unions and individuals for legal defence in South Africa and aid to refugees from the area. The Committee also tried to influence the Swedish political leaders, above all from the ruling Social Democratic Party, and to create
interest for the South African problems in other Scandinavian countries. Together with the Swedish youth organization, the Committee was very active in the voluntary boycott of South African goods. During the mid-1960s, the interest in southern African questions dwindled in Sweden, as it did elsewhere. In the university towns of Lund and Uppsala, however, two South African committees kept the work going. In May 1968, about a thousand demonstrating students from Lund succeeded in preventing the Davis Cup match between Sweden and Rhodesia from being held. (The match was later held in France.) A year later, the Uppsala students by demonstrations played a very active role in the Cabora Bassa affair. A co-ordinating committee for southern Africa was established in the autumn of 1969 to co-ordinate the work of the different movements and to mobilize Swedish opinion. The Swedish Government has supported refugees from South Africa since 1962 and Swedish contributions to different funds have increased since then. In 1970, Sweden gave $68,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa and $80,000 to the United Nations Education and Training Programmes for southern Africans, as well as large contributions to the International Defence and Aid Fund.

The Swedish firm, ASEA, as a participant in the ZAMCO consortium, intended to participate in the Cabora Bassa project and construct the electricity transmission from Mozambique to South Africa. Partly as a result of the public pressure, partly by fear of possible charges of violating Swedish legislation on sanctions against Rhodesia, it subsequently decided to withdraw from the consortium. The Swedish Government played an important role in the case by telling ASEA that it could not guarantee against the eventual consequences under the legislation. It should be borne in mind that ASEA has a very close partnership with the Government in the development of nuclear power in Sweden.

The most significant aspect of Swedish contributions, however, is the humanitarian support that has been given directly to freedom movements in southern Africa. FRELIMO's Mozambique Institute has been supported since December 1968 and the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau since 1969. MPLA, ZAPU and SWAPO received grants in 1970. For 1970-71, it has been decided to give the Mozambique Institute about $150,000 and PAIGC about 1300,000. The MPLA is expected to receive about $100,000. ZAPU and SWAPO are to be given only $5,000 each, not because of political considerations, but because their applications for aid have not been so well prepared as those of the other freedom movements. The Swedish aid is given after consultation with an advisory committee, in which prominent members of the anti-apartheid movements are represented. The Swedish Government, through the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), supports information on southern Africa on the same generous
principles on which it supports information about the third world. Last year it spent $3,500 on information on southern Africa. 2/
Sweden provided facilities for the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid to hold a session in the Parliament building in Stockholm in 1968. The Government announced at the time that it would support the proposed Lutuli Memorial Foundation. 3/
Mr. Oliver Tambo, leader of the African National Congress who was invited to participate in the session, was a guest of the Social Democratic Party during his stay in Stockholm. The Social Democratic Party in 1969 invited the freedom leader from Guinea-Bissau, Amilcar Cabral, to its congress. In the leading opposition party, the Liberal Party, one can also find very strong sympathies with the freedom movements.

DENMARK
The first Danish South African organizations were established in 1962 and 1963 in connexion with the showing of the Danish film "Dilemna" (made illegally in South Africa after a book by Nadine Gordimer, In Strange Country). The "South Africa Fund" was established for collecting money for the victims of partheid, while the "Danish Anti-Apartheid Committee" collected money for the freedom movements in South Africa. In 1963, the Danish youth organizations set up the "South Africa Campaign" in order to direct the boycott of South African goods. 2/ In his statement on 20 March 1970, in connexion with the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Foreign Minister of Sweden stated that the Swedish Government had made a special grant to the Swedish United Nations Association to enable it to increase its flow of information material concerning the problems in southern Africa. (Editor) 3/ The Foundation is due to be established in the next few weeks. (Editor)

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The three organizations met together in 1966 and established the "Council for Southern Africa" in order to join forces and to give a new impetus to the anti-apartheid movement. The Council issues a magazine which received a Government subsidy of about $2,000 in 1970.
As regards Government contribution for victims of partheid, Denmark ranks second only to Sweden. For 1970-71, the Government has decided to give the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa about $60,000, and the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africa about $93,000. Additional amounts are given to other organizations assisting the victims of apartheid in consultation with an advisory committee which consists of members from different Danish organizations. The International University Exchange Fund, for instance, was given $93,000; most of the grant is used for the education of refugees from southern Africa.
Except for grants to the Mozambique Institute which have totalled $110,000 since 1968, the Danish Government has not until now contributed to the liberation movements themselves. However, the matter has been taken up politically by the opposition Social Democratic Party and it is probable that the Swedish example will be followed.
NORWAY
The "Norwegian South Africa Committee" was founded in 1958, shortly after the Swedish South Africa Committee. In the beginning it concerned itself solely with scholarships to black South Africans. The chairman was Mr. Gunnar Jahn who, at the same time, was a member of the Nobel Peace Prize committee. He played an important role in the decision to award Chief Albert Lutuli the Nobel Peace Prize for 1961. The festival for Lutuli’s reception of the prize became a great demonstration of solidarity with the black people of South Africa.
Two new organizations were subsequently established: "Norwegian Action against Apartheid" which was mainly concerned with the boycott of South Africa, and "The Crisis Fund for South Africa" which collected money for the victims of apartheid. The reason for creating two organizations was the opposition to the boycott in the youth section of the Conservative Party, largely because of the influence of business interests, especially shipowners.
Not until 1967 did the two organizations unite in "The Norwegian Committee on Southern Africa". At that time all the youth groups, including the young Conservatives, agreed that it was not enough to collect money for the victims of apartheid.
For 1970-71 the Norwegian Government has decided to give $25,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa and $60,000 to the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africans. Considerable amounts are also given for aid to refugees. The Norwegian advisory committee for the allocation of grants for these purposes became the model for the Swedish and Danish committees.

FINLAND
The Finnish anti-apartheid movement has been a late starter compared with the movements in the other Scandinavian countries, but it is now active in many ways. The Africa branch of the student movement Trikont, for example, organized South Africa "weeks". By this and other ways it does a good job of informing the Finnish public opinion about the conditions in South Africa. The most impressive work, however, has been done among the students of the Finnish secondary schools. In 1969 members from the Finnish South Africa Committee started a campaign called "Operation Daywork", and succeeded in persuading 75,000 out of 115,000 students to contribute their wages for one day's work to the Mozambique Institute. About $100,000 was received. In large seminars, 1,500 students had been told about the conditions in Mozambique, so that they could make their fellow-students aware and interested in the situation. For 1970-71, Finland has contributed $10,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa and $15,000 to the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africans.
The anti-apartheid movements are now trying to press the Finnish political parties with a view to bringing Finnish support for the victims of apartheid and the liberation movements in line with the Swedish policy.

ADDEESSES OF ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENTS
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Fellesradet for det sorlige Afrika, Langesgate 5, Oslo 1, Norway.
Sydafrikakommitt-n, Mannerheimvdgen 5, 126 16 Helsingfors, Finland.