GDR solidarity:
The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle
By Hans-Georg Schleicher

Introduction
Southern Africa was a priority area for GDR solidarity. This chapter will examine the extent to which the government and people of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) contributed to the liberation struggle in South Africa. The GDR's association with this movement will be described in terms of the motives, interests and aims of GDR solidarity and the structures through which it was organised. Solidarity with the South African and Namibian liberation movements against racism and apartheid was part of what was called anti-imperialist solidarity in the GDR. While focusing on the solidarity engagement of innumerable East Germans for the anti-apartheid struggle, it is necessary to deal with the solidarity movement as a whole: its structures and functioning. Some conflicts and structural deficits of GDR society were reflected in this solidarity. Reference is also made to internal decision-making mechanisms and to ways and means of organising international solidarity and assistance under conditions of a centralistic system and limited economic capabilities.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section deals with solidarity as a major aspect of GDR Africa policy and analyses conflicting foreign policy and economic interests. Solidarity took place in a world of conflict and Cold War where, in the GDR, the German issue and the partnership with the Soviet Union in Africa were of specific importance. The basis of relations between the GDR and the ANC and SACP were common ideological and political values. The second section describes solidarity institutions and groups and their role in the GDR. Special significance is given to the Solidarity Committee and its work. An analysis of the relationship between the centralistic structures and grassroots of solidarity in the GDR has to focus on the personal commitment of GDR citizens and on mobilisation and centralisation.

The next section covers the development of GDR co-operation with the South African liberation movement from early contacts up to party relations between the ANC and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Some special features, such as the boycott movement and sanctions, solidarity with political prisoners, material assistance, support for propaganda and for the armed struggle, and political and diplomatic support, are analysed in great detail. A fourth section gives an overview of the brand of GDR solidarity, concluding with 'new thinking' in the Africa policy in the 1980s and with the heritage of solidarity after the collapse of the GDR.

Political and ideological fundamentals
Solidarity as a major aspect of the GDR Africa policy
Anti-imperialist solidarity was one of the cornerstones of GDR policy vis-a-vis the developing countries and the national liberation movements. Support for peoples fighting against imperialism and colonialism for national freedom and independence was enshrined in the GDR constitution. Based on its working-class traditions, the ruling SED in the GDR proclaimed 'solidarity with the national liberation struggle against colonialism, racism and neo-colonialism' as one of the basic foreign policy principles. The GDR leadership

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II as the boycott movement and sanctions, solidarity with political prisoners, material assistance, support for propaganda and for the armed struggle, and political and diplomatic support, are analysed in great detail. A fourth section gives an overview of the brand of GDR solidarity, concluding with 'new thinking' in the Africa policy in the 1980s and with the heritage of solidarity after the collapse of the GDR.

Solidarity was part of the GDR society; its achievements, limits and deficits can be understood only in the context of that society's development. The same is true of the international environment, which left its mark on the GDR support for national liberation movements. Last, the dynamics of the liberation struggle and the international work of the liberation movements themselves shaped the quantity and quality of this cooperation.

Within the international relations of the GDR, the links with national liberation movements in southern Africa occupied an important place. They have left many traces, not least a multitude of human contacts. Taking a good look at all the facets of these ties helps to do justice to the real achievements of GDR solidarity.
claimed an active role in the 'world revolutionary process' for the socialist German state. Even critical observers see such a role for the GDR, specifically as far as the support for the liberation struggle is concerned. It was through the activities of the Solidarity Committee that the GDR became famous throughout the Third World for its aid to liberation movements, training of cadres, treating of wounded cadres, etc. In a way, the Solidarity Committee was the best advertising the GDR had for its Third World policies ...

The GDR pursued an enduring policy of supporting decolonisation and selfdetermination of African peoples and found itself in agreement with the majority of African and non-aligned countries. Individual features that were of general relevance for the GDR's policy included shared ideological and political values with national liberation movements, its objectives internationally and in Germany, and its status as a junior partner of the Soviet Union. Last, the foreign policy of the GDR, including its relations with the liberation movements and southern African countries, was determined by its loyalty as a member of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation under Soviet leadership and by Cold War confrontations. The GDR actively took sides in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, often providing speedy and efficient support for liberation movements or friendly nations. In contrast to its political ambitions and activities, the GDR was always short of economic resources and had to try to compensate politically for the rather limited economic and financial means available. This was done by actively taking sides in African conflicts, by using centralised decision-making structures for speedy actions in support of liberation movements and others, and by relying on highly motivated people who tried to compensate for the lack of resources through personal engagement and improvisation.

While solidarity rested on the general internationalist principles of socialist ideology, it served as a vehicle for the specific foreign policy interests of the GDR in its drive to achieve recognition as an equal member of the community of nations. Solidarity with the liberation struggle in southern Africa was determined largely by the constellations of the Cold War and the confrontation between the two German states. In the 1960s decolonisation in Africa with emerging new states seemed to offer good chances for the GDR to break up the Hallstein Doctrine, an international blockade that was imposed by the Federal Republic of Germany to prevent the GDR from gaining international recognition.

The GDR established relations with liberation movements in southern Africa in the early 1960s. After the apartheid regime had crushed the structures of the ANC and other political organisations in South Africa by the mid 1960s, international solidarity became indispensable, a lifeline which gave the movement a chance to rethink and to rebuild their strength. The GDR was among the first states to offer solidarity assistance to the South African liberation movement. This principled position was acknowledged internationally.

In the 1970s, with the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire, the GDR shifted the focus of its Africa policy towards southern Africa, which seemed to offer a chance to inflict a strategic defeat on Western imperialism and to advance the 'revolutionary world process' rapidly. Solidarity with the liberation struggle became the trademark of its Africa policy. The GDR gave substantial military support to the MPLA during the critical situation in 1975/76 and helped the new FRELIMO government in Mozambique to stabilise. In southern Africa the GDR supported the ANC, SWAPO and the establishment of a Committee for Solidarity with the peoples of Africa later to become the GDR Solidarity
Committee, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin (hereafter SAPMO BArch): DY 30/IV, 2/20/53.

4 Close relations existed with the African National Congress (ANC), the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the Movimiento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) and the Frente de Libertação do Moçambique (FRELIMO).

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II and ZAPU. This solidarity resulted in valuable international recognition and praise. It also generated legitimacy for the SED regime internally. The GDR was considered by the African liberation movements to be mostly involved with Africa. The GDR was omnipresent in Africa and gave a lot of support, mainly in the field of training ... The GDR was "in charge of Africa". Three of the four priorities of its Africa policy in the 1970s were concentrated in southern Africa, namely Angola, Mozambique and the liberation movements of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The GDR also had to consider the situation and the interests of the countries in the region. Its two main allies in the region, Angola and Mozambique, were very much involved in supporting the liberation struggle in South Africa. The GDR also developed close relations with Zambia and - after some irritations in the early 1980s - with Zimbabwe; less with Botswana and Lesotho, and more or less none with Swaziland. The GDR supported the regional organisation SADCC (Southern African Development Coordination Conference) in its efforts to reduce economic dependence on South Africa. For instance, in April 1987, when a group of foreign ministers from the southern African frontline states visited the GDR to outline the problems faced by their countries in relation to the South African policy of aggression and destabilisation, they were received by the head of state Erich Honecker for an exchange of views and information on the situation in southern Africa. The GDR approach was a complex one, taking into account the liberation struggle as well as the complicated developments within those countries directly confronted with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Conflicting foreign policy and economic interests

The political players in the GDR in theory agreed on the principle of solidarity, but had to manage conflicts of political and economic interests in the practical pursuit of policy. The economic situation of the GDR had always been a difficult one. In the early years, economic hardships were aggravated by Western embargo policies. It was always a problem to find ways of practising solidarity and material support without overstretching its economy. In addition, aspects such as the repercussions of Soviet-Chinese conflict and rivalry for the GDR's policies on the volatile issue of peaceful coexistence versus support for armed liberation struggle have to be considered, and affected economic relations and trade.

Solidarity as a principle guiding the GDR's international policy determined, although to varying degrees, the thinking and action of people in the political arena. But this principle was not unaffected by concrete interests and requirements of the GDR: the principles and the interests could clash, for instance when persistent and desperate efforts to improve the domestic economic situation through international trade proved incompatible with a boycott of South Africa. Tensions and conflicts between political decision makers, which are essentially encountered in any society, normally end in a compromise, which differs to varying degrees from the initial lofty principles; and the GDR was no exception. But because the ruling dogma claimed that socialist society was harmonious and free of conflict, those conflicts could not be discussed openly and were hushed up. This 'genetic' deficiency in a society of state socialism was reinforced by Cold War positions and by the GDR's particular weakness in the sensitive area of foreign trade and international relations, where the West wielded superior power.

5 Interview with Max Sisulu, Cape Town, 5 January 1996.

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At the first All-African Peoples' Conference in Accra in December 1958, the ANC called for an international boycott of South African goods. Consequently, the conference issued an appeal for a worldwide trading boycott against South Africa.6 When the call for sanctions became more forceful at the

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conference of independent African states in Addis Ababa in June 1960, the hesitant policy of the Eastern European countries vis-à-vis the boycott came under increasing criticism. Such criticism fuelled the internal debate on the sanctions issue in the GDR (see under 'Support for the South African liberation movement', below), which reflected the conflict between political and economic interests.

Official GDR statistics on exports to Africa showed South Africa in second place until 1959, and also second on the list of African importers until 1957. Despite an ongoing decline since 1958, GDR exports to South Africa remained at a relatively high level, whereas imports dropped rapidly after 1961. By October 1963, GDR foreign trade organisations had contracted deals with South African partners worth over 1 lm Valutamark (VM), including exports of machine tools at a value of VM2.1m. South Africa was an attractive market, because the rate of foreign currency revenue was favourable. And it was a receptive market for manufactures for which the GDR had export capacities and could obtain average world market prices. Imports from South Africa, chiefly fishmeal and blue asbestos, were channelled via firms resident in Britain. Prices of imports from South Africa were below the world market average. In 1963, the GDR imported around 30,000 tons of fishmeal. In 1962 alone, doing without these important supplies of livestock feed would have meant an extra VM2.5m foreign currency counter-value expenditure. The precarious situation in the GDR's agriculture in the early 1960s underlined the necessity for buying inexpensive feed.

6 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV 2/20/410, Memorandum: The Boycott of South African Trade, attached to a letter from the SACP Central Committee (CC) to the SED CC, 12 October 1960. The Memorandum outlined the evolution of the boycott movement.

7 Refer to Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1959, (East) Berlin, 1960, 574.

8 SAPMO Barch: DY 30/IV A/610/332, report: Stand des Handels mit der Suedafrikanischen Republik, annexure to a letter by the Ministry for Foreign and Inter-German Trade to the SED CC department of domestic trade, supplies and foreign trade, 17 June 1963.

9 VM (Valutamark) was an accounting unit used to convert foreign currency world market prices for export and imports of goods and services into the GDR's non-convertible currency.

10 SAPMO Barch: DY 30/IV A/610/332, letter by the department for trade policy with capitalist countries, Ministry of Foreign and Inter-German Trade, to Balkow, 20 December 1963.

11 In view of the situation in agriculture, buying feed with a lower foreign currency input was crucial, as noted in the report on the state of trade with South Africa, 17 June 1963. (SAPMO Barch: DY 30/IV A/610/332, report: Stand des Handels mit der Suedafrikanischen Republik, annexure to a letter by the Ministry for Foreign and Inter-German Trade to the SED CC department of domestic trade, supplies and foreign trade, 17 June 1963.

The GDR's state-run shipping company Deutsche Seereederei (DSR) also faced difficulties in connection with the boycott. The company operated a liner service to eastern and southern African ports. On this route, its vessels carried over 25 per cent of the total freight from the GDR and other European countries to ports in South Africa and the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. The cargo they carried back to destinations in Western Europe and the GDR was entirely from there. The GDR Transport Ministry estimated that termination of calls at ports in South Africa would have a negative effect on the DSR's Eastern Africa Service, rendering it uneconomical and hardly worth maintaining. Yet its continued operation was considered necessary to avoid losing future business in the eastern African freight market. GDR foreign trade organisations were expected to bring in heightened amounts of foreign currency, but subordinate their activities to foreign-policy goals. Complying with the latter would evidently make the former more difficult. Understandably those organisations often complained to the Foreign Trade Ministry. The GDR, economically weak and affected by Western embargo policies, was subjected to
additional economic hardships when trade relations with South Africa were to be cut and important opportunities in that market lost. For the GDR, every single clearing mark it earned was worth its weight in gold.

There were other implications of conflicting political and economic interests. Often enough, domestic economic deficiencies and the resultant scanty stocks in shops were seen as a reason for withholding details of the contents of solidarity shipments. To give an example, the GDR media were not allowed to report that milk powder was being supplied to liberation movements to feed refugee children, because milk powder was in short supply in local shops in the GDR for some time.14 Economic limitations always had an impact on the GDR's readiness to abide by one of its foreign-policy principles: solidarity with the movement for national liberation, which was understood to include countries already liberated from the colonial yoke. Hence, much later, when the volume of material aid in the 1980s was reduced, even for top-priority countries such as Angola and Mozambique, there were no cuts in solidarity supplies for the ANC and SWAPO. Liberation movements received all the assistance they had been promised.

Solidarity in a world of conflict and Cold War

The South African liberation issue and international solidarity in the struggle against racism and apartheid can only be understood in the context of the very complex Cold War situation and the strong reflection the East-West conflict had in Africa. Many Western countries with economic interests in South Africa were reluctant to recognise the legitimacy of the liberation struggle, not to speak of providing support to liberation movements, which some perceived as being 'communist controlled'. They considered South Africa an anti-communist bulwark, guaranteeing pro-Western stability in the region. The threat of communism dominated considerations on southern Africa in some Western capitals, resulting in the typical Cold War perceptions of the liberation movements. The close co-operation of the ANC with the South African Communist Party (SACP) aggravated that view.

The GDR regarded the struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid as part of the worldwide confrontation between imperialism and progressive forces, that is, socialist countries and the forces of national liberation. Support for that struggle was furthering the 'world revolutionary process'. One major battleground of this conflict was the struggle against apartheid. The GDR took up the call for an end to Western economic involvement in South Africa issued by South Africa's liberation movement. The GDR decision to cease existing trade relations with South Africa in the early 1960s was triggered by Western press reports (see under 'Support for the South African liberation movement', below). This showed how much the policies of GDR institutions were influenced by the East-West conflict and by the competition with the other German state.

In the early years, the inter-German confrontation was a specific manifestation of the East-West conflict and a major factor in the GDR's foreign policy. It had a substantial impact on the active involvement of the GDR in the struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid and on the association with the liberation movements. The historical background points to evolutions in the GDR relationships with liberation movements. Military and security training became a special feature of the co-operation. But support for the armed struggle had always to be carefully balanced with the policy of peaceful coexistence between East and West.

The impact of the Cold War on Africa increased with the collapse of the Portuguese colonial dominions and the emergence of people's republics with socialist leanings in Angola and Mozambique, followed by an upsurge in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. These developments had given rise to hopes in the socialist countries that the balance of forces in that region could be upset, with strategic...
reverberations beyond. Their appraisal of developments in southern Africa was euphoric. It was believed that the triumph of FRELIMO and the MPLA, achieved with assistance from socialist countries, could be repeated in Zimbabwe and Namibia.

In the West alarm was sounded; similar developments to those in Angola and Mozambique had to be prevented in Zimbabwe and Namibia. South Africa itself did not seem to be endangered at that stage. Suddenly, negotiated solutions for Zimbabwe and Namibia with the involvement of liberation movements were encouraged to prevent these movements from an unconditional takeover. Western efforts reached their peak with the Lancaster House negotiations for Zimbabwe and the UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) for Namibia. Western diplomatic activities naturally served their own countries' economic, political and military interests in a strategic sense. Often enough, these had been the subject of intense debate and sharp criticism in United Nations (UN) bodies. Given the perception of the socialist states, in the second half of the 1970s compromise settlements in southern Africa did not fit in with the strategic interests of the Eastern bloc. Western negotiating initiatives on Namibia and Zimbabwe therefore encountered little goodwill on the part of the USSR and its allies.

The GDR described these activities vis-a-vis South Africa and SWAPO as neocolonialist manoeuvres, designed to prevent the isolation of South Africa, to secure Western influence in southern Africa, and to contain the gains of socialism in the region. A message by Honecker to the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, dated 21 March 1977, emphasised:

Intensified attempts have been made recently to counter the struggle of national liberation movements with neo-colonialist methods. But the peoples in southern Africa have not only an uncontested right to national independence and freedom but also a legitimate claim to choose the socio-economic system under which they want to live, without outside interference.5

Many Third World countries shared this view. The Soviet Union and its allies had, of course, additional, and in fact highly justified reasons to be doubtful about the proposed compromise solutions. And so did many other UN member states. These doubts were because of the obvious intransigence of the apartheid regime. The South African government was successfully playing the 'bulwark against communism' card vis-i-vis the West, and the West, anxious to safeguard its interests in the region, half-heartedly resisted South African schemes to torpedo the independence plan for Namibia.

The impact of the Cold War on Africa was not confined to the confrontation between East and West. Liberation movements in southern Africa received substantial support from Nordic countries. Swedish and GDR ambassadors often found themselves the only foreign diplomats at solidarity meetings in support of the South African liberation struggle, which took place under sometimes difficult conditions in Zimbabwe in the mid 1980s. But ideology and the Cold War were major obstacles preventing a substantial cooperation between the GDR and Nordic countries in southern Africa, a region where both were supporting the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. The two sides regarded each other as ideological and political rivals in Africa, and not potential partners in support of liberation movements. So cooperation remained more or less confined to some activities in practical solidarity work between the GDR Solidarity Committee and Nordic NGOs and rare occasions of personal cooperation between individual diplomats and experts.

The 1980s saw a substantial change as far as the political approach of the GDR to the problems in southern Africa was concerned. The new approach was consistent with the GDR's policy of peace and dialogue in Europe, and put explicit emphasis on the need for peace in the region. Partly owing to new political and economic priorities in the GDR itself, but also to southern Africa's degeneration into an acute 15 Dokumente der Aussenpolitik der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter DAP), 1977, Vol. XXV/2, (East) Berlin, 1982, 1014.

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rejected the policy of confrontation in southern Africa and pleaded for a negotiated solution for Namibia's independence. The GDR supported efforts by the ANC to develop contacts with political forces in South Africa, including representatives of the white political elite. The GDR took pains to avoid the impression that its commitment to the struggle against racism and apartheid would change. On the contrary, the unqualified support for the ANC and SWAPO continued and even increased. New political thinking in the GDR fitted well into international efforts to overcome the Cold War.

Anti-imperialist solidarity and the German issue
In the context of the East-West conflict, the inter-German confrontation had a major impact on GDR foreign policy. In 1955 the West German government proclaimed the Hallstein doctrine to deter Third World states from diplomatically recognising the GDR, inter alia by threatening to withdraw economic aid and to break off diplomatic relations. For almost two decades this doctrine formed an inflexible frame of reference for West and East Germany's Africa policy. At the height of the Cold War, the German-German conflict also affected solidarity. The frontline situation seemed obvious: West Germany was siding with the South African regime and Portuguese colonialism, and the GDR supported the liberation struggle. The GDR considered the exposure of West German economic interests in southern Africa and connections with minority regimes a contribution to its support for the liberation movements as well as serving its own international and inter-German policy interests.

The overall importance of the Deutschlandpolitik in both Germanys made Africa a battleground of inter-German rivalry. African decolonisation seemed to offer the GDR a chance to break up the international blockade imposed by West Germany. The GDR attacked West Germany because of its support for Portuguese and French colonial wars and launched campaigns to reveal Bonn's 'military and nuclear collaboration' with Pretoria. This helped the GDR to develop and strengthen ties with liberation movements. In connection with the GDR sanctions against South Africa, in 1963 a letter from the GDR Solidarity Committee to the OAU Liberation Committee described the diametrically opposed policies of the two German states concerning South Africa. Placing the GDR's support of the liberation movement in the context of the inter-German confrontation, it stated that 'struggle against West German imperialism and militarism and its chauvinistic policy of revanchism and neocolonialism' was a decisive merit of this support.

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Part of the GDR activities was a large-scale propaganda effort juxtaposing the positions of the two German states on the South African issue in the early 1960s. The Foreign Ministry worked out a line of argumentation to be used by newspaper editors in covering the campaign. The reference material for the press contained convincing arguments for critical commentaries on ties between the Federal Republic of Germany and South Africa, notably in the areas of trade and economic co-operation. South Africa's minister for finance, Nicholaas Diedrichs, still had excellent contacts in (West) Germany dating from the Nazi era.

From late 1963/early 1964 onwards, foreign-policy documents in the GDR on the colonial issue and on attitudes towards South Africa were similar in content and reasoning:
* The GDR's unequivocal condemnation of colonialism and racism was a reflection of bitter lessons learned from German history (fascism, racial hatred, imperialism and war).
* The eradication of the socio-economic roots of imperialism, fascism, racism and war, and corresponding legislation against racialist ideologies and racial hatred in all segments of society in the GDR were cited to account for these clear-cut positions.
* Social changes in the GDR meant that the right to self-determination was implemented, as in countries that had liberated themselves from colonialism.

"Citing post-war developments, West Germany was characterised as a state of revived German imperialism, with old supporters of racialist ideology back in key positions." Documents contained facts about West German ties with Portugal and South Africa.

The GDR solidarity campaign was accompanied by press reports about conditions in the apartheid state of South Africa and ties between Bonn, Pretoria and Lisbon. The Freedom for the South African people appeal criticised West German ties with South Africa and compared them with the GDR's position: 'Our struggle against Hitler's heirs in the Federal Republic and your struggle against Verwoerd and Vorster - that, our African brothers, is one and the same struggle. Therefore we stand unwaveringly at your side!'

19 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/986, guidelines for the press concerning the solidarity campaign in November/December, 18 November 1963.


22 Refer to Neues Deutschland, 5 December 1963.

23 Neues Deutschland, 1 December 1963.

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As a follow-up to the propaganda effort during the Rivonia Trial (see below), the SED Politburo decided on an international campaign to expose West Germany's support for the Verwoerd regime and Portuguese colonial policy in May 1964. This 'exposure campaign' may be taken as a typical example of how Cold War postures put exaggerated rhetoric into legitimate and unavoidable controversy with political adversaries. Incontestable facts were intermingled with circumstantial evidence; propaganda rhetoric and the concept of the enemy permeated the language. The campaign was aimed at a 'decisive discreditation of Bonn's neo-colonialist policies ... to help breach and finally defeat the Hallstein doctrine' and also to 'reinforce and expand the influence and links of the GDR in the African states'.

25 Results of this campaign were the Memorandum on Cooperation between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of South Africa in the Military and Atomic Fields, published by the Solidarity Committee in September 1964, and documents such as The Neo-Colonialism of the West German Federal Republic (1965) and The Bonn-Pretoria Alliance (1967).

The ANC always considered the specific frontline situation of the GDR in the East-West conflict: the legitimacy of the German Democratic Republic was always contested by the other German state. So it of course had to had have in many respects a much more aggressive foreign policy. On the diplomatic front of course the GDR and the FRG were both admitted to the United Nations at the same time, the role the two countries played of course was very contrasting, because on most issues we could expect the GDR to vote with the Afro-Asian bloc, the FRG had at best an erratic voting record on
southern Africa issues.
The South African liberation movement viewed any help to isolate the apartheid regime as welcome support for its struggle. "West German neo-colonialism" was a much-debated issue and ANC publications became increasingly critical of the Federal Government's attitude. 29 SED officials recorded Yusuf Dadoo in 1961 as saying: "The Communist Party of South Africa is, like the GDR, very much interested in uncovering links between the Verwoerd regime and West German imperialists, and it will eventually provide us with material." 30 The memorandum on West German military cooperation with South Africa in 1964 was welcomed by the SACP, and the party helped to circulate the material. In the GDR, however, there was some dissatisfaction with the commitment of the South African comrades, as they still saw US and British imperialism as the chief target of their criticism.3 Only in the second half of the 1960s, after the second memorandum, did mutual cooperation in the propaganda battle over the Federal Republic's ties with South Africa achieve the quality desired by the SED. Nevertheless, the ANC and SACP did their best to support the GDR in its struggle against the West German international boycott. Alfred Nzo remembered proudly:

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The German Democratic Republic was a subject of discrimination by the international community on the basis of what was then known as the Hallstein Doctrine. A big struggle at that time by all the friends of the GDR was to ascertain that the GDR takes her rightful place in the community of nations as an independent republic of the German people ... We were part of the forces then ... I was also participating very actively in trying to ensure that this injustice had better be corrected.

GDR solidarity campaigns were strongly influenced by the rhetoric of the Cold War and, in particular, of the inter-German confrontation. Hence, the campaigns tended to be used by the GDR leadership to gain international recognition for the GDR and to discredit its Western rival - who, however, provided ample material. The divergent lines of development of the two German states, including their differing stances regarding national liberation movements, influenced the campaigns and they mirrored the GDR's attempt to gain a distinctive image as a progressive alternative in Germany. Officially, West Germany supported peaceful change. However, Bonn's collaboration with the apartheid regime was strongly criticised by progressive groups within the Federal Republic of Germany, for example in the area of nuclear cooperation.
The heavy impact of the inter-German quarrels on the cooperation with the liberation movements lost its momentum owing to improving relations between the two republics. Both states continued to follow controversial policies in southern Africa for years to come, but abstained increasingly from attacking each other.


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Regarding the role of the GDR in Africa, the former foreign minister of Zimbabwe, Nathan Shamuyarira, remarked: ‘The GDR was one of the major players in the Eastern Bloc. After the Soviet Union, the GDR was the second most important player.’34 The GDR never challenged Moscow’s claim to leadership in the socialist bloc, because a close relationship with the Soviet Union was a matter of principle for the GDR leadership and was only too vital for the very existence of the East German state. Therefore, the GDR’s leaders constantly emphasised ‘the leading role of the Soviet Union’ until and during Gorbachev’s rule. As a junior partner of the Soviet Union, the GDR played an important role in shaping the relations of the socialist countries with the African liberation movements. Because of its active engagement and successful co-operation with African liberation movements, the GDR had some room to move within the boundaries of this partnership.

As far as the GDR and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe were concerned, the Sino-Soviet conflict strongly influenced the development of relations with liberation movements in southern Africa for quite some time. The vehement dispute between Moscow and Beijing was about important questions of strategy and tactics in the struggle between socialist and capitalist systems and about conceptions for the evolution of socialism, but equally about hegemony in the ‘world revolutionary movement’. The principle of peaceful coexistence played an important role. This explains the GDR’s unambiguous stand in the Soviet-Chinese controversy about leadership of the ‘world revolutionary movement’ and its resultant subordination to Moscow’s policy concerning the African liberation movement.

For the GDR and its ruling Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)) this stand was a matter of ideological and political principle. Their own judgement of the Chinese policy strictly adhered to the Marxist-Leninist pattern of interpreting international developments. At the same time, the SED’s critique was a reflection of its genuine concern about the maintenance of peace, which it saw threatened by the Chinese policy of those days. After all, the GDR was situated on the potentially explosive divide between the two hostile political systems, where any clash of the blocs would hit the Germans first. The Soviet Union, which occasionally as a super power was cautious in discussions with Third World and liberation movement partners, encouraged the GDR to bring its specific interests into the debate over the Chinese stance. One consideration was clearly that the GDR, placed ‘at the forefront of the international class struggle,’ could hardly be accused of any ‘retreat in the face of imperialism’, even though it subscribed to peaceful co-existence. Moreover, the GDR’s effective solidarity with liberation movements had earned its prestige, not least in AAPSO, where China still enjoyed substantial influence.

With the shifting focus of its Africa policy towards southern Africa, the GDR gave substantial military support to the MPLA in Angola during the critical situation in

34 Interview with Nathan Shamuyarira, Harare, 4 November 1995.

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II 1975/76”5 and helped the new government in Mozambique, formed by FRELIMO, to stabilise. In early February 1977, the influential SED Politburo member Werner Lamberz was deeply impressed by visits to Mozambique and Ethiopia, where Mengistu Haile Mariam had just taken power. Back home, Lamberz
convinced the SED Politburo that there was a new quality of 'revolutionary developments' in Africa with far-reaching implications; he also passed that message to the Cubans. When Fidel Castro stopped in Berlin after an extended Africa tour in March 1977, he and GDR leader Erich Honecker agreed that Africa offered the best opportunities to advance the 'world revolutionary process' and that discussions should be held with the Soviet leadership. A Soviet report to the GDR leadership on the visit of the Soviet head of state Nicolai Podgorny to southern Africa in early 1977 did not mention the new quality of developments in countries such as Ethiopia and Mozambique at all, contrary to evaluations by the GDR officials. However, a few months later, the Soviets, Cubans and East Germans gave massive support to Ethiopia. For the GDR, this was the beginning of a substantial expansion of its involvement in Africa.

Contrary to the assumption of many Western analysts that the GDR was merely a Soviet proxy or surrogate in Africa, the East German role at that crucial stage proves that it was a junior partner of the Soviet Union. The GDR had considerable room to manoeuvre, and even influenced Soviet policies. It did not question the leading role of the USSR, avoided issues of conflict, and refrained from challenging Soviet policies. The GDR tried to encourage closer co-ordination and co-operation in their solidarity efforts among the member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), which led to more or less regular multilateral meetings of the solidarity committees - but without any spectacular results. In connection with Gorbachev's policy of perestroika and possible implications on the GDR, the SED leadership developed a greater independence. The relationship between the GDR and the Soviet Union changed in the 1980s; bonds were dissolved when Gorbachev's 'new thinking' gave more freedom and room to manoeuvre to all socialist countries and when Honecker disassociated himself more and more from Moscow because of disagreement with Gorbachev's perestroika.


36 Interview with Friedel Trappen, Berlin, 2 July 1996.

37 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/J1V 2/201-1292.

38 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/J IV2/202-584.


The author agrees with Winrow that the Soviet leadership perceived the GDR as an important junior partner through successful affiliation and was willing to accord it increasing autonomy re its policies in Africa. But there is absolutely no proof that through such an active Africa policy the East German leadership attempted to secure preferential economic treatment or political support from the Soviets as argued by Winrow. Former East German politicians deny such intention. Refer to Ulf Engel and Hans-Georg Schleicher, Die beiden deutschen Staaten in Afrika: Zwischen Konkurrenz und Koexistenz 1949-1990 (Hamburg: Hamburger Beitrage zur Afrika-Kunde, 1998), 238 f.

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle
The GDR and ANC/SACP: Common ideological and political values
From the viewpoint of Marxist-Leninist ideology and revolutionary theory, the political leadership of the GDR perceived South Africa as the country with the greatest 'revolutionary potential' in sub-Saharan Africa, partly because of its developed class structure. Therefore, the liberation movement in South Africa was considered particularly important. The ongoing process of social differentiation, in particular the emergence of a comparatively strong industrial proletariat, was believed to provide conditions for a national-democratic revolution.

Political developments in South Africa seemed to confirm this approach. The ANC, the oldest African movement for national liberation, had formed an alliance with the SACP, the oldest Marxist party on the
continent. Together with the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and, later, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the ANC and SACP were the backbone of the struggle against racist domination and apartheid in South Africa. The long traditions of this struggle, and its clear social commitment from the outset, explain why the GDR’s relations with the South African liberation movement developed relatively early and with particular intensity, and why they remained comparatively stable through all the ups and downs of the struggle against apartheid. From the point of view of the African liberation movements, the biggest common ground with the GDR was the focus on decolonisation and anti-imperialism.

The strongest link in these relations was the rapport between the SACP and SED. They shared a common ideology and a socialist vision. German and South African communists had first met in the Communist International. After World War II, the Communist Party of Great Britain helped the SED to restore contacts with South Africa's communists. Brian Bunting comments:

There was of course an especially close relationship between the SED and the SACP Regular colloquiums took place between the leaderships of the two organisations in which views were exchanged on the situation in their respective countries with a view to convey information, neither side interfering with the policy or decisions of the other but both sharing the common ideology of Marxism-Leninism.4

As apartheid became more and more entrenched, and its repressive machinery more and more rigid, international solidarity became crucial for the South African liberation movement. This was a good moment for it to seek responsive partners in the GDR, which was trying hard to establish ties with African and Asian countries in order to breach the international blockade created by the West. This was a coincidence of concrete interests, and it lent additional weight to the underlying common ideology and worldview. While relations existed already with the SACP and SACTU, direct contacts with the ANC were established in 1961.


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Similar or identical ideologies, inspirations and evaluations of international developments provided ample common ground for the ANC and its partners in the GDR to establish and maintain a stable mutual relationship. Luli Callinicos mentions in her Tambo biography ‘the ANC’s warm relations with the GDR’.4

Alfred Nzo underlined similar or identical inspirations:
The GDR then became one of the forces that were very squarely behind the struggle of our people against apartheid, for democracy, peace and development ... From those early beginnings ... it remained a very loyal friend of the suppressed people of South Africa. In this participation of the general peace movement in the world it occupied a very prominent place alongside the then Soviet Union. So this interaction between these peace forces in which the African National Congress also was involved increased our intercourse with the GDR and of course the African National Congress recognised the GDR as one of its loyal partners in the struggle.42

These common positions did not exclude differences of opinion, for example on how to judge political adversaries or devise the strategy and tactics of the liberation struggle. True, the GDR and the liberation movements in southern Africa shared overall interests which were to a great extent conditioned by the East-West Cold War confrontation, but their specific interests were not always the same. Pallo Jordan, who was part of an ANC delegation led by Oliver Tambo in 1978 when the office of the ANC was opened in Berlin, remembers quite extensive discussions with the GDR Solidarity Committee, and representatives from Foreign Affairs as well as from the Socialist Unity Party. In all the discussions about South Africa, it seemed as if the GDR officials shared or accepted the view and assessment of the South African delegation of what was required in the strategic direction, etc. Later, in the 1980s, in friendly discussions with some of the people responsible for the training of ANC people in the GDR, Pallo Jordan recalls a sense that some of the partners thought that the ANC military leadership was a bit overcautious in the way it conducted armed struggle. Jordan thinks there were differences, but those were about tactics rather than principles.43

Another factor was that the officials of the SACP, SACTU and (from 1961 on) the ANC who visited the GDR found partners who had resisted and fought fascism and racial hatred, with personal experience of
illegality and exile. This was true of the first chairman of the Solidarity Committee, Horst Brasch (1960-1964), of his successor, Heinz H. Schmidt (1964-1976), and of Heinrich Eggebrecht, secretary of the committee.44 As 'Comrade Henry', the latter still has a reputation with the older

41 Lull Callinicos, Oliver Tambo. Beyond the Engeli Mountains (Claremont: David Philip, 2004), 513. 42 Interview with Alfred Nzo, Pretoria, 7 December 1995.
43 Interview with Pallo Jordan, Pretoria, 4 December 1995.
44 Horst Brasch served as chairman until early 1964. The Committee's work until the early 1970s was chiefly managed by Eggebrecht and Schmidt. Brasch emigrated to Britain in 1939. Eggebrecht was active against German fascism, was incarcerated in a concentration camp and went into exile in London and Australia. Schmidt was also in the underground, served time in prison and a concentration camp and went into exile in Britain.

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GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle generation in the ANC and other movements. When he died in 1989, Sechaba paid special tribute to him, calling him 'a true internationalist'.45

In the eyes of veteran activists on either side, German anti-fascist resistance and fighting against apartheid had something in common; both in the anti-apartheid movement and in the GDR, conditions in South Africa were often compared to those in Nazi Germany. While conceding that the usually simplistic equation in the propaganda was certainly questionable, a number of protagonists of apartheid drew considerably on the racist ideology of Nazism or had maintained close personal links with top Nazi figures and even sided with Hitler's Germany during World War II. Remembrance of those facts instilled another emotional component into the sense of affinity between the German anti-fascists who were now responsible for the GDR's external relations and foreign policy and their South African partners. The GDR was built on the ruins of Nazism - those in themselves were GDR experiences that could be of interest for future developments in South Africa. The understanding not only of the GDR leadership and the political elite, but also of many East German political activists was that after the defeat of fascism, the German people had a special responsibility towards the other peoples of the world to eradicate racism on German soil. Barry Feinberg concludes:

Obviously, the struggle against fascism in Germany played a major role in turning the GDR on a new course ... But it also gave the GDR a special edge when it came to advising liberation movements in terms of the needs of their struggle. So, it was not just the case of the GDR providing hospitality and responding to the shopping lists that were given to them by liberation movements, including the ANC. But it was also a case of having a very, very rich experience in the struggle against fascism, the struggle against racism and giving advice on strategies and tactics to employ in regard of other struggles.46

Consultations and discussions between GDR representatives and their partners from the ANC and SACP began at an early stage and were not a one-sided affair. In May 1969, M. P Naicker briefed the Solidarity Committee in Berlin on the results of the ANC's consultative conference in Morogoro. Only a few months later, in July and August 1969, a delegation of the GDR Solidarity Committee under Heinz H. Schmidt travelled to Lusaka for talks with Oliver Tambo and other ANC leaders. In May 1971, Heinz H. Schmidt met ANC secretary-general Alfred Nzo in Lusaka for consultations. Later that year, an ANC delegation with treasurer Thomas Nkobi and SACTU secretary-general Mark Shope came to the GDR to exchange views and share information on developments in southern Africa (3-9 October 1971).47

In 1972, an ANC delegation with its president Oliver Tambo and secretary-general Alfred Nzo visited the GDR for the first time, at the invitation of the

46 Interview with Barry Feinberg, Bellville, 1 October 1997.

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SED (5-10 November). They had formal talks with an SED delegation about international issues, political developments in South Africa, the ANC's struggle and ANC-SED co-operation. The two sides signed an agreement on co-operation, thus establishing direct party-to-party relations. From then onwards, there were regular meetings between high-ranking officials of the GDR and the ANC, in Berlin, in African countries or at international conferences elsewhere. In the 1970s and even more during the 1980s, regular meetings between officials of the GDR and the ANC took the character of state-like relations comparable with those the GDR had with independent African states. These relations included consultations on co-operation in international affairs.

Leaders of the ANC and SACP were highly respected in the GDR and granted treatment equal to other official guests. That was of special significance in the early years, when the ANC leaders could not expect a similar protocol treatment in too many places. Oliver Tambo met the GDR leader Erich Honecker after 1978 on a number of occasions. He and Nelson Mandela as well as Yusuf Dadoo were awarded some of the highest official state decorations in the GDR. A school and other institutions were named after Nelson Mandela.

The GDR proclaimed proudly that all forms of racist ideology, exploitation and oppression in the country had been destroyed root and branch. They argued that in what was now the GDR, that the social forces that exercised political and economic power up to the end of World War II were no longer practising and spreading racism, chauvinism and international hatred. There was no objective basis for racist ideology and exploitative practices in the socialist society of the GDR. Most foreign visitors gained the impression that feelings of racial and national hatred seemed quite alien to the people of the GDR, although developments in the East of Germany during and after the collapse of the GDR in 1989 with serious incidents of xenophobia and racism question the efficiency of the eradication of racism. On the other hand, ANC and other national liberation movements found that anti-imperialist solidarity had become a feature of everyday life. Above all they experienced the practice of this solidarity not only through the support they received from the GDR government or the solidarity committee, but also from a number of organisations and institutions.

Tony Mongalo, ANC chief representative in the GDR, remembers:

The first thing that struck me was that they (the GDR leadership - HGS) were very accessible, maybe even more accessible than in other countries where I had been. Sometimes you would be surprised how you would be able within a short time to get hold of a leader and sit and discuss. The nature of discussions ... for them it was to get information about our struggle.

48 In 1977 GDR officials met with ANC leaders in Lusaka. In 1979, Erich Honecker met Oliver Tambo in Maputo; in 1984 and 1986 deputy foreign minister Gerd König met ANC officials in Maputo and Lusaka. In 1984, an ANC delegation and GDR Foreign Ministry officials held discussions on further mutual co-operation at the UN and in Berlin. 49 In 1979, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, Dadoo received the Karl Marx Order. Mandela and Tambo both received the Grand Star of International Friendship. Mandela was also awarded an honorary doctorate by Leipzig Karl Marx University. 50 Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism. Documents published by the GDR 1977-1982, Dresden, 1983, 40. 1086

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle information about developments inside South Africa. And then from there, on the basis of that we would then say: well we can see this is what is needed here and there, what is the most urgent need. 51

There was another important aspect. Those South Africans looking for a postapartheid South Africa with a new, probably socialist societal order were impressed by the GDR. It was not a society simply to be copied, but it was of specific interest, as Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi mentioned:

Looking at the GDR was more [like] looking at a socialist model that was there, we were seeing it in terms of assistance that was given to us ...
We looked at it within a particular context and also realised that in both instances of the Soviet Union and the GDR that if we were to move towards a socialist situation in South Africa we wouldn't take either or model in a very narrow sense. We would look at what is applicable. But as I said what appealed to us very greatly was the meeting of basic needs of people.2

GDR representatives were usually cautious about offering their socialist model as a blueprint for post-colonial development. Of course there was influence: through advice, consultations, ideological, political and propaganda assistance, and through education and training. South Africans, being well aware of this, valued that their German counterparts 'never tried to impose their position on us ... Interaction was one of, I suppose, equals looking at the situation, but coming from very different angles.'53 Barry Feinberg states: 'I don't think the GDR ever presumed in my experience to tell people what they should do, but it was always giving good, honest advice based on their own experience of struggle.'54 Especially in the early years, the GDR presented itself in Africa as a partner on equal terms quite distinct from the paternalistic attitude of other European countries.

GDR solidarity: Centralistic structure and grassroots commitment
Solidarity institutions and solidarity groups in the GDR

The idea of solidarity has been deeply entrenched in German history, specifically in the history of the labour movement. When mentioning the roots of German solidarity, GDR political leaders used to refer to the staunch opposition by the Social Democratic Party under August Bebel to the colonial policy of the German Empire in Africa around 1900. Later on, there was a strong sense of solidarity among the anti-fascist forces in Germany resisting the Nazi dictatorship, which included the participation of German volunteers in the civil war in Spain 1936-39 to fight Franco and his German allies. Quite a number of the old generation of the political elite had their personal experience with solidarity when they were imprisoned or exiled during the rule of the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. Solidarity was thus a popular idea and it was part of the school curriculum. The media reported quite extensively about international events and the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle. Obviously there was a fertile ground for active solidarity. A South African who came to the GDR for military training described his impression: 'We always felt it was like they [the Germans in the GDR] were trying to wipe away the nasty history which Germany went through during the war. And so they would go all out and try to accommodate people. You got the feeling that they were genuinely committed to solidarity.'55 It appears that solidarity as a principled position was widely accepted by East Germans.

The Solidarity Committee of the GDR coordinated activities of various organisations. Widespread preparedness within the East German population to support the anti-colonial struggle in Africa was an important base for the committee to carry out meaningful work. In addition to the trade unions and the political parties, societal or mass organisations were the pillars of the active solidarity and stakeholders of the solidarity movement. There was the National Front, with political parties and other organisations under its umbrella, which contributed to spreading the idea of anti-imperialist solidarity in residential areas. The trade unions in particular, but also women's and youth organisations as well as other political organisations and professional associations contributed to the solidarity fund; some developed direct relations with partners in the African liberation movements. The armed forces in the GDR participated with substantial donations by their members.56 Another major group were the farmers.57

Politically most important, the SED played a major role as far as the support of the struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid and solidarity is concerned. In 1972, the SED established direct party relations with the ANC, in addition to those that had existed for years with the SACP. The other political parties in the GDR- the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD), the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD), the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Democratic Farmers' Party of Germany (DBD) - contributed financial donations from their members.58

The bulk of the solidarity funds were provided by members of the Confederation of Free German Trade Unions (FDGB), an umbrella organisation of 16 industrial unions with more than 9m members. It contributed more than half of the annually
55 Interview with Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Harare, 30 October 1995. 56 Their contribution to the solidarity fund was 10 per cent in 1982. Refer to Volksarmee, no. 21, May 1983, 7. 57 In the 1980s contributions amounted to 15m Marks. Refer to B. Schulz, 'East German Relations with Sub-Saharan Africa: Proletarian Internationalism vs. "Mutual Advantage", Working Papers no. 100, African Studies Center, Boston University, Boston, MA, 1985, 70.

58 For instance in 1977 the LDPD contributed over 870.000 Marks. Members of the DBD, most of them were active in solidarity groups, donated 1.6m Marks. The NDPD donated half a million Marks. Refer to Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 74 f, 150.

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle roughly M220m of the GDR solidarity fund. In 1960, when the Solidarity Committee was established, the SED leadership had decreed that the FDGB should annually assist the committee with an agreed amount of money. By 1960, the FDGB's annual transfer was some M2m. By 1975, annual transfers had climbed to M75m, and steadied at M100m from 1976 to 1987. That amount decreased to M80 and M75m in 1988 and 1989.60 In addition, the FDGB financed training courses for trade unionists at its own college in Bernau near Berlin and provided material supplies. Being a major theme in the political work of the FDGB, solidarity played a role in trade union elections and at preparations for congresses. The trade union newspaper Tibuene focused on the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

The FDGB had established early contacts with SACTU, which was founded in 1955 as the first non-racial trade union. Although SACTU was not banned in the early 1960s, some leaders were arrested and jailed, and others went into exile and established their office in London. At this early stage, the solidarity co-operation between the trade unions was a major part of the GDR support for the South African struggle. In February 1960, SACTU official Bob Hepple held talks with FDGB representatives in Berlin about the development of co-operation between the two unions. In January 1960, the FDGB had called on its members to show solidarity with South African miners after the Clydesdale gold mine disaster. Aid funds were raised in GDR enterprises and institutions.6' In April that year, a month of solidarity with the liberation struggle in Africa was organised in many enterprises and institutions in the GDR on the FDGB's initiative. Many trade union organisations protested against the racist oppression in South Africa. The FDGB invited sick South African trade unionists for medical treatment in the GDR. In October 1960, a SACTU delegation with vice-president Moses Mabhida and Wilton Mkwayi, secretary of the Textile Workers Union (Port Elizabeth), toured several GDR cities. They met railway and textile union members as well as Solidarity Committee officials, and called on FDGB chairman Herbert Warnke to discuss SACTU-FDGB co-operation.62

However, trade union solidarity could not escape the shadows of the Cold War. In March 1960, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and a number of affiliated national unions in Western states called for a month-long consumers' boycott of South African goods. Heinrich Rau, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the SED Politburo, drew attention to that move in a letter to the first secretary of the SED Central Committee, Walter Ulbricht. He urged a reaction to the 'devious game of rightist trade union leaders' who were using the goods boycott for political canvassing among African and Asian populations, 'while their governments and capitalists carry on trading with South Africa in the hope that the socialist countries will follow the boycott, which would make room for themselves

59 'M' is used in this section to denote GDR marks.


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employees to take appropriate action. Ulbricht endorsed the proposal. The stand of the FDGB on the boycott issue demonstrated how much the policies of GDR institutions were influenced by the East-West conflict and rivalry with the other German state.

In July 1961, the FDGB was a co-founder of the WFTU-organised International Trade Union Committee for Solidarity with the Workers and Peoples of Africa in Accra. FDGB delegate Hasso Breitenstein and Moses Mahbida from SACTU agreed that more South African trade unionists would receive medical treatment in GDR sanatoriums. FDGB also granted places for vocational training and study at the trade union college in Bernau. Later, South African refugees who were in the GDR for medical care and/or vocational training were granted political asylum. In the following years, FDGB regularly organised series of solidarity meetings and fundraising campaigns in enterprises and institutions to support South African workers. FDGB branch organisations, together with South African exiles, staged solidarity rallies to commemorate South Africa Freedom Day and South African Heroes Day. FDGB provided SACTU with manual duplicators, medicine, clothing, blankets and tents, among others. Top SACTU officials attended FDGB congresses. SACTU delegations visited the GDR regularly for discussions with their counterparts from FDGB. In the 1980s, arrangements were made to enable South African trade unionists to travel clandestinely from countries such as Zimbabwe for short-term training courses to the GDR. The former deputy chief representative of the ANC in Harare, Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo recalls: I remember ... some of those who were eager to do some short courses in GDR, not ANC members, some of them were coming from these organisations inside the country, were taken to the GDR itself for short courses here and so on. Of course it was all done clandestinely ... they would come to another country and somehow arrangements would be made with that country and they would be whisked away to the GDR and see what is happening there.

Furthermore, the GDR youth organisation Free German Youth (FDJ) (with more than two million members) developed direct relations with the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). Delegations of the ANCYL visited the GDR and attended the congresses of that organisation regularly. A co-operation agreement between FDJ and the ANCYL was signed in 1978. In 1982, an FDJ delegation attended a conference convened by 63 SAPMO BArch: DY 34/200.403, Rau's letter of 24 March 1960. 64 Ibid. This is borne out by Ulbricht's handwritten notes on the letter. See also H.-G. Schleicher and I. Schleicher, Special Flights to Southern Africa, Southern Africa Specialised Studies Series (Harare: SAPES Trust, 1998), 12 ff. 65 Schleicher, Chronicle. 66 Interview with Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Harare, 30 October 1995. 1090
physicians and teachers, to assist in projects in developing countries. In 1983, when one of the friendship
brigades went to Morogoro, Tanzania, to support the ANC camp there, it was named the '70th Anniversary
of the ANC Brigade'.7
Another organisation that maintained close and friendly contacts with their counterparts in the ANC, the
ANC's Women's League (ANCWL), was the Women's Democratic League of Germany (DFD)
(approximately two million members). Delegations from the ANCWL were invited and their participation
in international conferences was sponsored. Besides such direct support for their partners in the ANC, DFD
gave regular contributions to the funds of the GDR Solidarity Committee.72
The GDR Journalists Union (VDJ), a professional association with a membership of 8 400, financed
advanced training for African journalists at its School of Solidarity, which provided regular training
courses. In 1983, the Journalists Union and the ANC Journalists Circle, a working group of ANC
journalists, concluded a four-year agreement on co-operation.73 Among others, ANC journalists were to be
trained at
67 Schleicher, Chronicle.
68 Schulz,'East German Relations 70.
69 Ibid., 79 ff.
70 Schleicher, Chronicle.
71 Schulz,'East German Relations 85.
72 For instance in 1977 the National Executive of the Women's Federation handed over M3m to the
Solidarity Committee. See Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 151. 73 Sechaba, May 1983, 22 f.
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1092 The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II
the School of Solidarity. At the same time, VDJ lecturers conducted training courses for ANC journalists in
Africa, such as that from January to March 1984 in Lusaka.74
The German-African Society (DAFRIG) played a major role in mobilising solidarity and supporting
practical contacts with members of the liberation movements. Among the many organisations that actively
participated in the solidarity movement were the professional associations of artisans and tradesmen, the
Association of Mutual Farmer's Assistance (VdgB), the Sculptors and Painters Union, the Cultural
Association, the Association of Smallholders and Breeders as well as the Cooperative Society. Other
organisations and institutions, such as the GDR Peace Council and the Red Cross society, cooperated with
the Solidarity Committee and contributed resources to the nationwide solidarity effort. Especially
remarkable were the efforts of the Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters of the GDR. Its district and county
committees regularly donated to the solidarity fund. In 1977 alone, they gave more than M2,2m.75 The
Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime contributed more than M2m in 1978.76
The GDR Solidarity Committee
The main contact for liberation movements in the GDR from the 1960s well into the 1970s was the
Solidarity Committee, which was founded on 22 July 1960, providing conditions for a nationwide
solidarity movement.77 The committee coordinated solidarity activities of political parties (except the
SED) as well as mass and other societal organisations. Its task was to mobilise, coordinate, organise and
implement practical solidarity. In the 1960s, the Solidarity Committee cultivated contacts and relations with
liberation movements on behalf of the GDR. This task was taken over by the SED in the 1970s, when
official party relations were established with liberation movements. The committee provided financial
backing and material support for the liberation movements, including shipping goods.
Assistance for the ANC by the GDR Solidarity Committee involved:
* Procurement and transport of goods
* Training and education (vocational training, technical and university studies) which was supported with the major part of the solidarity fund
* Medical treatment and rehabilitation of sick and wounded people
* Production and dispatch of journals (Sechaba and others), printing of books, pamphlets, posters and material for exhibition, and the production of badges, flags, etc.
* Air travel expenses for liberation movement officials
* Rents and running costs for the office of the ANC in Berlin
74 Schleicher, Chronicle.
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Officially the Solidarity Committee was not a state-controlled organisation, but through the political leadership of the SED it was well integrated into the centralistic structure of GDR society, politically guided and supervised by the SED. Whenever foreign policy objectives came into play, the Foreign Ministry brought influence to bear on the committee's operations. Its actions were based on the principles of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-racism, which provided a sound base for solidarity. But as an instrument of the international policy of the ruling party and the state it was as much influenced by Cold War constellations and ideology. As far as relations with the ANC were concerned, the SED took over as the partner for political co-operation when the party entered into direct links with the ANC in November 1972. However, the Solidarity Committee remained responsible for coordinating practical solidarity work within the GDR and for organising physical supplies and political solidarity campaigns at national and international level.

In addition to representatives of the major societal organisations, the Political Council of the Solidarity Committee comprised officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and the SED Central Committee (SED CC). The Presidium of the Solidarity Committee included some 250 members from all strata of the solidarity movement and met annually. A secretariat was in charge of the work of the committee, again with representatives of the SED CC, the Foreign Ministry, the Council of Ministers and major mass organisations. The day-to-day work was done by a staff of about 30 (in the 1980s)." The committee raised roughly M 220m annually (the largest amount was M 300m in 1979) mostly through its affiliated organisations.79 The bulk of the funds came from contributions from members of the FDGB. The share of contributions from other organisations, governmental agencies, churches, schools, etc., rose continually, exceeding M 100m in 1987-89."

Material assistance for the ANC was organised, coordinated and financed by the Solidarity Committee. Even with party relations between SED and ANC, technical responsibility for procurement, transport and funding of solidarity supplies continued to lie with the Solidarity Committee. As far as training, education and medical treatment for the sick and wounded were concerned, arrangements were made in co-operation with the responsible governmental agencies. Other tasks were the provision of medicines, surgical dressings, blankets, clothes and food for the liberation movement abroad, and also of beds and medical care in GDR medical establishments for wounded freedom fighters. Academic scholarships and vocational training courses had to be provided. Another task was the provision of information and educational materials, and the printing and production of propaganda material. Under the prevailing circumstances, it was seldom easy for the Solidarity Committee staff to procure supplies for the ANC and other movements that would meet their needs. Fired with initiative and imagination, they tried to surmount the hurdles of economic centralisation and commodity shortages.

In June 1974, the GDR Committee for the Decade of Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination began its work as an extension of the Solidarity Committee. Its responsibility was to coordinate activities throughout the UN-proclaimed Decade of Solidarity from 1973 to 1983 and also during Days and Weeks of Solidarity. In this context, the GDR held international conferences against apartheid and on southern Africa. It supported the increasing call for mandatory economic sanctions against South Africa and for an

75 Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 151.
76 Ibid., 232.
77 Originally the Committee for Solidarity with the peoples of Africa as part of the National Council of the National Front, it was renamed Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the GDR in 1963 and became a separate institution in 1965. In 1973 it became the Solidarity Committee of the GDR.
arms embargo. Internationally, the Solidarity Committee worked closely together with AAPSO, the World Peace Council and, from the 1970s, with UN institutions, NGOs and solidarity organisations in Western countries. It was highly respected internationally. AAPSO had invited the Committee to attend, as observers, its third conference in Moshi, Tanganyika, in 1963. In 1964, the committee opened a liaison office at AAPSO's Permanent Secretariat in Cairo. In 1965 AAPSO decided to grant observer status to Eastern European Solidarity Committees. Finally, the GDR Solidarity Committee was admitted as an associate member of AAPSO in 1974. It was also represented in the International Committee against Apartheid, Racism and Colonialism in Southern Africa (ICSA). Its representatives participated in the International Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes of the South African Apartheid Regime.

The Solidarity Committee cooperated with partner organisations in other socialist countries, including consultations and practical co-operation. Co-operation with solidarity organisations in Nordic countries developed quite remarkably with those in Finland, to a lesser extent with Danish groups and with the Norwegian Communist Party. When the constant shortage of paper in the GDR made it difficult to print Sechaba and other publications of liberation movements, the Finnish Peace Committee provided paper in 1981. The committee financed the shipment of Finnish and Danish solidarity consignments to Luanda and Dar es Salaam. Activists from the GDR and Nordic countries worked side by side in refugee camps in Angola and Tanzania. Church-related anti-apartheid groups

Support of the liberation movements by GDR social organisations accorded with the GDR foreign policy principles and postures, which embraced solidarity with anticolonial and anti-racist movements. That in itself could be a problem for independent groups, mainly close to or within church circles, who valued their own principles. Some of them wanted to avoid being seen to be too closely associated with the state. In 1963, the World Council of Churches (WCC) supported a sanctions campaign against South Africa and called for Christian solidarity with liberation movements.


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The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Christian Institute also urged their fellow Christians abroad to support all peaceful efforts to bring about change in South Africa. Their appeals deliberately included the request for support of workers' stay-aways and economic sanctions. The churches in the GDR were touched by the moral and religious imperative to bring an end to the apartheid system. Churches and other Christian institutions showed solidarity with prisoners and accused in political trials in South Africa. One occasion was the trial of Abram Fischer in 1966. Among those expressing their solidarity were the Berlin Conference of Catholic Christians in European States, the Regional Committee of the Christian Peace Conference in the GDR, and pastors and theologians in Berlin and Leipzig. Bishops in the GDR even intervened with the South African justice minister Vorster to avert a death sentence. But they did not want publicity at the time, presumably because of the tense relationship between the state and the churches in the GDR. The Solidarity Committee respected their wish.4

In 1969, the Central Committee of the WCC, meeting in Canterbury, England, adopted a programme for action against racism. The Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR supported the programme through awareness-building work and the collection of funds. Upon co-ordination with the Solidarity Committee, these means were used for humanitarian programmes of the liberation movements. A major impact was the Kairos Document, published in 1985 after deliberations of a group of South African theologians and church leaders. Reflecting the critical situation in South Africa in the mid 1980s, the Kairos Document was offered to South African churches and the international community for study, reflection and additional comments.

Most churches in the GDR raised contributions to support peoples in the Third World, including their struggle against colonialism and racism. The majority of Christians in the GDR were Protestants. Members debated whether the churches should support liberation movements. The GDR churches supported the anti-racism programme of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. But it was important to preserve their independence and distinguish their solidarity as an expression of Christian charity from the ideologically motivated official solidarity. The churches established direct contacts with the ANC representatives in the GDR; they also used the good offices of the Solidarity Committee in specific cases. Within the anti-
The churches provided assistance for the ANC and other liberation movements in humanitarian fields, cooperating occasionally with the Solidarity Committee in the required practical arrangements. The Solidarity Committee was the only societal institution in the GDR that could pay for air or sea transport using GDR currency, and therefore it sometimes handled the shipment of solidarity supplies provided by

83 'German Democratic Republic demands Freedom for Bram Fischer and all South Africa's Liberation fighters' issued by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in the German Democratic Republic, (East) Berlin, June 1966.

84 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/1V A2/20/985, information on the solidarity campaign from the Solidarity Committee to the SED CC international relations department, 15 August 1966.


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Despite that kind of co-operation, the churches were not affiliated with the committee. They attended meetings of the Solidarity Committee as observers. On some occasions there was co-operation in practical matters between the Catholic Church and the Solidarity Committee, too.

The Federation of Protestant Churches donated a substantial sum every year. The ANC received assistance through the congregations of other churches as well. 'Brot fur die Welt' (bread for the world) was one of the relief organisations that cooperated closely with the Solidarity Committee. So did the Gossner Mission, which had sister organisations in West Germany. It raised funds directly and made them available to the ANC, the PAC and other liberation movements in southern Africa. This did not exclude support for the armed struggle, which was a problem for some of the churches. But Friederike Schulze, a long-time activist with Gossner Mission, mentions a 'gentleman's agreement' with the liberation movements that church money was not used for purchasing weapons. The Gossner Mission also supported South African students in the GDR. In 1971, INKOTA, an ecumenical network of grassroots solidarity groups under the umbrella of the Federation of Protestant Churches, was founded. They looked for an alternative solidarity approach, independent of government policy.

But there were examples of individual solidarity actions. For 20 years a local church community in a village near Leipzig provided goods for South African refugees and local communities in Lesotho as well as for the ANC school in Morogoro, Tanzania, with a value of up to M100 000 annually, mainly owing to the commitment and ingenuity of their pastor Gottfried Wolff.

Building the awareness of Christians of the impact of apartheid was very important. Friederike Schulze believes that the appearance of South African Christians such as Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé as well as ANC representatives such as Ingres Naidoo and Anthony Mongalo contributed to the understanding of apartheid and its effects. The author addressed a meeting of Christians on the struggle in southern Africa and the need for solidarity. Hundreds of Christians had arrived at a church in the city of Magdeburg; some of them coming from as far as the city of Halle, 100km away. The main question raised by the participants was: How can I, as an East German Christian, contribute to solidarity with southern Africa?

Publications were an important aspect. The head of the Evangelic Academy Berlin-Brandenburg, Elisabeth Adler, an outstanding German Christian in supporting the struggle against apartheid, compiled and published a book with documents on apartheid as a challenge to South Africa's Christians and churches.

86 Schleicher and Schleicher, Special Flights to Southern Africa, 184. 87 Reichardt, Nie vergessen Solidaritaet ueben, 132 if.

88 Callinicos, Oliver Tambo, 513.


90 Callinicos, Oliver Tambo, 513.

91 Refer to Elizabeth Adler, Apartheid als Herausforderung fuer Suedafrikas Christen und Kirchen: Wie lange noch?
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Solidarity activities of the churches and related groups were affected by their relationship with Marxist politicians, which for a long time was an uneasy one, owing to internal developments in the country. But both sides recognised the other as a potential ally in the struggle for peace and against poverty, injustice and underdevelopment in the world as well as in the struggle against racism. That helped in overcoming hurdles and predispositions in practising solidarity.

**Personal commitment, mobilisation and centralisation**

The GDR could rely on a huge solidarity potential reflecting conformity of the government's foreign policy of support for the liberation struggle in southern Africa with the readiness of people to express solidarity. There was a broad sense of solidarity for citizens to draw on. But the centralistic and administrative way of organising solidarity limited initiatives from below and prevented a democratic grassroots movement. Furthermore, the undemocratic character of the state-socialist society in which the political rights of its people were curtailed clashed with the official claim to champion the right to self-determination of colonially and racially oppressed people. This was undoubtedly the major weakness of GDR solidarity. Thus, the solidarity potential could not come into full effect under these conditions.

At the same time, the efficiency of the support for, and the close relations of the GDR with the liberation movements resulted from the sincere personal commitment of many East Germans. The solidarity movement—despite flaws and restrictions—was a genuine popular movement. GDR foreign minister Oskar Fischer stated in his address to the meeting of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid in Berlin in May 1974: 'The people of the GDR are brought up in the spirit of friendship for all peoples, irrespective of race or creed. This process of education begins in the kindergartens and at school.' Indeed, solidarity and anti-racism was part of general education. Children expressed themselves in drawings on the theme of solidarity, while members of the children's organisation Young Pioneers collected waste material and held solidarity bazaars. Officials of the ANC mission in Berlin went to camps of the Pioneers' Organisation to address children on the struggle in South Africa and the situation of South African children. The idea of solidarity accompanied the juveniles and adults throughout their life. The mass media played an essential part; the press, radio and television provided information on oppression and exploitation in southern Africa. South Africa was very much the focus of the media coverage of international events. But that did not preclude racist attitudes in the GDR as well.

The Solidarity Committee was not an NGO in the true sense of the word. The centralistic structure did not provide for the development of a vivid civil society and relevant organisations. The function of the committee was ambivalent: it expressed a widespread will to support liberation movements by organising and coordinating material and political support; at the same time it was part of centralistic decisionmaking structures. In the wake of the political changes in the GDR in 1989, this became an issue of controversial discussion. However, the verdict of parts of the media that solidarity was 'prescribed' by the state should at least be questioned. The solidarity assistance cannot be ascribed anonymously to societal organisations or governmental departments. It was the fruit of many people's goodwill and commitment. It is they who deserve credit for assistance. The idea of solidarity was strengthened among the population by information on developments in South Africa provided by the media, the Solidarity Committee and other organisations, as well as the ANC mission in Berlin and through ANC representatives and members staying in the GDR. Indres Naidoo recalls:

We used to go out and talk to people. I found one thing: the GDR people were very, very well informed of what was happening in southern Africa. The ANC was a name in everybody's mouth ... Of course I must say the media, the party played a role of educating people. I used to go and address schools, primary schools, high schools, colleges. And I found them quite well informed.93

Enuga S. Reddy, who used to visit the GDR as the director of the UN Centre against Apartheid, underlines the importance of anti-apartheid radio programmes in the GDR, the education of the public on apartheid by
the government, the party and associated institutions through solidarity meetings, exhibits etc. He was impressed when he heard children in the GDR singing South African freedom songs.

There were protest meetings against particularly violent acts of the apartheid regime as well as signature-collecting campaigns. Workers in some factories worked extra shifts to produce and dispatch solidarity goods. ANC representatives experienced the solidarity atmosphere when they participated in events such as the annual solidarity bazaar at Alexanderplatz in Berlin organised by journalists. Similar events took place in many other GDR cities, attended by tens of thousands of people. In 1986, when Bummi, a journal for children, printed a story about Nelson Mandela on his 68th birthday and invited children to make cards for Comrade Nelson in prison, over 87 000 greeting cards were received.95 Two years later, 70 000 young people flocked to an international rock concert against apartheid on 16 June. The money they donated was earmarked for an ANC kindergarten in Dakawa, Tanzania.96 The personal engagement of elderly people was very impressive. Anti-fascist resistance fighters who had survived Nazi prisons and concentration camps were all too ready to assist their comrades in the liberation struggle with donations to the solidarity fund.

People involved in concrete solidarity activities with the ANC were highly motivated. Pallo Jordan reflects his impressions on the GDR officers who trained MK cadres in the GDR: 'I think they were very solid, very dedicated to what they were doing and had a keen interest in the people they were training ... There was a lot of strong bonding between a number of trainees and their trainers.'97

93 Interview with Indres Naidoo, Cape Town, 12 December 1995. 94 E.S. Reddy in his e-mail of 23 April 2005 to Gregory F. Houston. 95 Sechaba, July 1987, 25. 96 Schleicher, Chronicle. 97 Interview with Pallo Jordan, Pretoria, 4 December 1995.

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Indres Naidoo adds his experience: What is very interesting with Neubrandenburg [where Sechaba was printed] was that the workers there formed a solidarity committee. The workers actually printing Sechaba were active anti-apartheid workers ... The African National Congress decided to honour them for the work that they were doing in printing Sechaba. It was not only Sechaba, but all other material what the ANC needed ... We gave them the Nelson-Mandela-Award. To my knowledge very few people received it, a factory in Erfurt, a group of people in Frankfurt/Oder, the Mandela-School in Ilmenau and a few others.98

Ursula Hoffmann, interpreting for Sonia Bunting in the GDR, recalls her experience with workers involved in the shipment of The African Communist. The working team consisted mainly of women who were very well aware of the importance of their work. They always welcomed Sonia Bunting with great warmth and gave them the impression that solidarity with the struggle against apartheid was a matter of the heart.99 On the other hand, the solidarity campaign with the Rivonia Trialists in 1963/64 illustrates how solidarity activities were organised in the centralistic society of the GDR. The precondition for launching the campaign was a formal decision by the CC Secretariat. The National Council of the National Front submitted a preliminary paper at the beginning of November 1963. It contained proposals for actions from the FDGB, the FDJ, DAFRIG and other organisations, once these had been cleared with the CC international relations department and the Foreign Ministry. At the invitation of the National Council, officials from the Foreign Ministry, SED, FDGB, FJD and other organisations met to discuss the details of the campaign. They could not finalise arrangements for action because the decision of the CC Secretariat was still pending.0

Looking at it from the angle of the domestic situation in the GDR two years after the wall was built, it seems that political leaders were trying harder to instil into the minds of people in all walks of life that the GDR was a legitimate socialist German alternative. Cautious steps towards a liberalisation of public life had given rise to new hopes throughout the population, and demonstrations of international solidarity were believed to play no minor role in legitimating the GDR as a historic alternative for Germany which embraced peace, social progress and solidarity with the anti-colonial striving of peoples for freedom. Against this background, it seemed that the National Council of the National Front, an umbrella institution comprising various political parties and organisations in the GDR, would be most suitable to handle the solidarity campaign. A preparatory commission included representatives from the SED, the Foreign
The chief responsibility for the Rivonia solidarity campaign was National Council vice-president Horst Brasch, who
was concurrently the chairman of the Solidarity Committee. The initiative had been taken by the SED CC's International Relations Department in response to a request from the SACP. The activities envisaged were founded on proposals by the organisations involved. A decision from the SED's top echelon was a formal requisite to put the campaign to work. Hence, the campaign was not a grassroots initiative, but was organised from above, with officials of the participating organisations taking charge of the activities. The mobilising effect of their efforts was remarkable (see under 'Support for the South African liberation movement', below). Later solidarity campaigns followed a similar pattern, with various organisations and institutions taking the initiative. This does not mean, however, that solidarity activities were prescribed and that GDR citizens could not identify with them. The centralistic mechanisms of society tended to discourage, rather than encourage people's own initiatives. Only to a limited degree could solidarity be the expression of a self-organised movement by the people in their own right, although - and this appears to have been a curious contradiction - there was widespread readiness to practise solidarity.

The Solidarity Committee drew up proposals for supporting the World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners (WCRSAPP) in April 1964 and beyond, which, as recommended by the CC's International Relations Department, were approved by Politburo member Erich Honecker. FDGB played a major part in mobilising its members for the aims of the appeal. Its national executive had asked some of its regional executives and the central executive of the miners' union to use members' meetings in November to encourage solidarity with the working people of South Africa, to adopt, and send to the South African government, protest resolutions against the strangling of trade union rights and the persecution of apartheid opponents, and to demand freedom for political prisoners. A circular letter of 24 February 1964 by FDGB chairman Herbert Warnke shows that in some ways the confederation was walking the tightrope: it wanted its members to launch their own initiatives to manifest internationalist solidarity, but did not want these to go too far. After praising some enterprises for their spontaneous reactions to international events, the letter warned against too many uncontrolled additional meetings. Such restriction of refreshing spontaneity, fairly typical in the GDR, favoured formalism and routine in solidarity work. But it shows that the readiness among the workers to display international solidarity must have been quite widespread. The pattern of solidarity work and relevant structures in the GDR were developed and shaped by massive solidarity campaigns with the Rivonia Trialists in 1963/64 and with Abram Fischer in 1966. These highly centralised campaigns did not leave much room for grassroots initiatives, although thousands participated. 

The trade union daily Tribuene reported extensively on the persecution of apartheid opponents in South Africa. See Tribuene, 5,9,23, and 30 November 1963.

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The solidarity campaign for South African political prisoners also showed the constraints of the centrally organised solidarity. Committee officials noted in a letter to the International Relations Department on 15 August 1966 that the solidarity campaign for Abram Fischer had been kept within narrow limits in view of the war in Vietnam. This reference to limitations of the solidarity movement because of simultaneous campaigning indicated how solidarity was in certain circumstances regarded as an easily adaptable instrument. Organising simultaneous and all-out support for Brain Fischer and the people in Vietnam was
evidently overstretching the capacity of the apparatus that was handling this instrument. Maybe a grassroots solidarity movement motivated by a responsibility of its own would have coped differently.

Setting objectives for solidarity campaigns and organising them from the top reflected the mechanisms of political decision making in the administrative, centralistic society of the GDR. At the same time, solidarity actions for the South African liberation movement were supported by numerous people in different social and political environments. Without their commitment, these actions could not have attained such a significant volume and weight. Lots of grassroots solidarity activities took place, including suggestions to name institutions or work teams after prominent South African anti-apartheid activists. Unfortunately, such valuable initiatives were often stopped or lost their momentum when they were channelled through bureaucratic procedures of the decision-making process. Contradictions between domestic realities and international aspirations, and the instrumentalisation of solidarity in inter-German politics potentially discouraged or excluded people who were critical of the system.

When speaking about solidarity in the GDR, one has to mention obvious contradictions. One such contradiction was between endeavours by many people to encourage international solidarity, public tolerance and amity towards people of different ethnic origins and political conditions in the GDR, which often left very little room for democratic discourse. True, the dominant ideology preached internationalism, but there was intellectual and cultural intolerance, too. Comparing the diametrically opposed positions of the two German states vis-a-vis colonialism and apartheid, and a sense of being on the right side of the international barrier made many GDR citizens identify with their state. To those who were aware of the gap between the GDR's international claim and the realities at home, where democratic rights were curtailed, the official presentation of solidarity had no great appeal.

One example is the raising of funds among members of the trade unions who contributed the major share to the annual fund of the Solidarity Committee. Most FDGB members bought a monthly solidarity donation stamp, in addition to paying their membership fee. After 1989, some critics interpreted this as state-prescribed solidarity - an indiscriminate verdict that did not do justice to reality. In many cases, individual union members and work teams in enterprises and institutions undertook to donate a fixed amount every month, and contributed money in extra fund-raising campaigns. But moral pressure was exerted as well, and cases of coercion are on record. What may have caused rather more indignation among the population in the

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former GDR was an administrative, centralistic management of solidarity as well as insufficient public information and a lack of co-determination about the use of the funds.

Union members did not voice their support for solidarity only when it was in line with official policy. In the 1980s, with a growing economic crisis in the GDR, fewer goods were available for solidarity purposes. Therefore, SED secretary for economy Guenter Mittag insisted that solidarity donations by the trade unions should decrease. In May 1982, the CC Secretariat adopted a 'decision on the management of solidarity donations'. According to the records, international solidarity was said to make 'high demands on material cover'. The decision essentially meant applying the brakes. The FDGB national executive set out to reduce solidarity donations from members. Fund-raising campaigns, occasionally undertaken by work teams on their own initiative, were no longer welcome. Union members criticised the new practices. One year later, in June 1983, the trade union confederation recommended that the SED CC Secretariat withdraw its strange decision, which it did.107

The GDR's solidarity with the struggle against colonial and racist oppression was much livelier and more diverse than the generally sterile propaganda suggested. At the same time, some of the conflicts and structural deficits of the GDR society were reflected in this solidarity. Solidarity was part of this society; its achievements, limits and deficits can be understood only in this context. The same is true of the international environment which left its stamp on the GDR's co-operation with national liberation movements. Last, the dynamics of the liberation struggle and the active international work of the liberation movements shaped the content, the quantity and the quality of this co-operation.

Support for the South African liberation movement

Early contact

... the German Democratic Republic, over the twenty years of its existence, has proved itself to be a constant and powerful friend of the cause of the South African liberation movement. The spokesmen of the GDR have consistently spoken out against the barbarities of apartheid and racialism; they have protested
vigorously against the savage repression and murders of those within our country who fight for freedom and human rights.

The people of the GDR, like those of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, have rendered invaluable practical aid to our cause, including our brave guerrillas of the people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe; aid which shall never be forgotten.'


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With these words in October 1969 Yusuf Dadoo acknowledged the GDR's solidarity with the South African struggle. Indeed, these relations had seen a remarkable development since the early 1960s.

Political and ideological commonalities between SED and SACP were propitious conditions for their close association from the very beginning. In 1948, one year before the GDR came into being, apartheid was institutionalised in South Africa. The SACP was banned in 1950. The 1950s were a period of mass action against racial discrimination and apartheid, the Freedom Charter being adopted in 1955. It was in 1955 that Moses Kotane, the future SACP secretary-general, paid his first short stopover visit to the GDR. SACTU entered into regular correspondence with the FDGB in the latter half of the 1950s. Contacts between the SED and SACP, between the FDGB and SACTU, and finally between the Solidarity Committee and the ANC were developing. Representatives of South African organisations were frequent guests in Berlin. In 1960, the GDR took a clear stand on the South African developments. Reacting to the Sharpeville massacre, the GDR Foreign Ministry and the National Council of the National Front condemned the rule of terror in South Africa. The FDGB protested to the South African prime minister Verwoerd. In April 1960, a month for solidarity with the liberation struggle in Africa was organised in many enterprises and institutions in the GDR. Trade union organisations protested against racist oppression in South Africa. In August, Yusuf Dadoo visited Berlin and informed SED officials about the situation in South Africa and the struggle the ANC and SACP were waging at home and abroad.

In 1960, the SACP and SACTU sent representatives to the GDR to inform about the situation in South Africa and the struggle. In 1961, Mzwai Piliso (ANC), in charge of the Cairo office of the United Front of South Africa, comprising several liberation movements, visited the GDR. He held talks with the Solidarity Committee, the FDGB, the German-African Society, and the Committee for German Unity. A delegation of the Solidarity Committee met with Piliso again in Cairo later that year. Cairo became an important pivot in relations with the liberation movements for the GDR and in 1964, the committee opened a liaison office with AAPSO there. From then on, officials of the ANC, SACTU and SACP visited the GDR frequently to discuss co-operation and assistance as well as developments in South Africa. In 1963, for the first time, the Solidarity Committee organised activities to mark South Africa Freedom Day (26 June). In December 1963, Moses Kotane and Duma Nokwe, visited the GDR to solicit material assistance for the ANC. They held talks with top officials of the SED, the FDGB, the National Council of the National Front, and the Government of the GDR in the United Arab Republic in the Egyptian capital became important for contacts to and from African and Arab countries and liberation movements.

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and the Foreign Ministry and encountered great willingness to help. The Solidarity Committee immediately provided goods worth M100,000. In 1963/64, the first group of South African journalists were trained at the school of the Journalists Union.

The 1960s, when the question for the South African liberation movement was how to survive, and the GDR had to prove its legitimacy and surmount the international blockade, were a crucial period for closer relations between the GDR and the ANC and SACP. The groundwork was laid by the GDR's decision to join the trade boycott against South Africa. Material aid for the South African liberation movement, solidarity with its imprisoned leaders, and assistance for the reorganisation of the ANC and SACP after severe setbacks deepened these relations. Jeremy Cronin assesses:

The most reliable response, the most coherent response, the 'no question asking' response came from the GDR and from the Soviet Union in particular. I think that left a very strong mark. And on general perceptions...

for millions of ordinary South Africans the fact that out there was a powerful bloc of countries that unquestionably supported our struggle was of great fundamental importance. Callinicos adds: 'The ANC relied on shipments from the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (and later from Sweden), for tinned and dried food, as well as bales of basic clothing.' The chosen forms of material assistance met the needs of the liberation movement without overstraining the limited economic capabilities of the GDR. The printing of material for the ANC and the SACP was a novel line of co-operation and a speciality of GDR solidarity, which somewhat later came to benefit other movements such as ZAPU and SWAPO. At an early stage, education and training was an essential element of the support the GDR gave to the ANC. It included scholarships for academic and vocational training and was later expanded into military and intelligence areas.

After the clampdown on democratic and legal opportunities for political activities in South Africa and the ensuing decision of the ANC and its allies to launch an armed struggle and to organise illegal resistance, assistance by the GDR in the non-civilian sector became a specific feature of solidarity. This followed an initiative of the SACP. In the 1960s, stable foundations were laid for close ties between the GDR and the South African liberation movement on which the partners were able to build in the following two decades. At this early stage of activities in Africa, observers consider the role of the GDR Solidarity Committee crucial:

It was during this era that the Solidarity Committee was of enormous importance in the execution of foreign policy, and the visit of a liberation movement leader was treated like an important state visit from a foreign dignitary. It was during this first phase then that the GDR established its international reputation in terms of aiding national liberation movements and acting in a radical anti-imperialist fashion.

Boycott movement and sanctions

South African opponents of apartheid viewed external pressure on the apartheid regime and international isolation as effective means to support their own struggle. Following an appeal for a worldwide trading boycott against South Africa by the All-African Peoples’ Conference in Accra in 1958, the international boycott movement started at non-governmental level, as an initiative by individual consumers in some African and Western countries. Eastern European countries did not become involved. In a statement of 2 March 1959, the Foreign Ministry emphasised the GDR's position as that of a staunch supporter of the peoples of the African continent who were fighting for their freedom, but failed to respond to the call for economic sanctions against South Africa. However, when West German newspapers reported that a GDR foreign trade delegation was visiting South Africa, the Foreign Ministry did react. 'Sending a GDR trading delegation to South Africa,' an internal memo of the Ministry stated, 'is inconsistent with our repeatedly declared foreign policy principles in support of the African peoples' struggle for national...
liberation and against colonialism and racial terror. Sending a GDR trading delegation to South Africa is likely to have a politically adverse effect on our relations with African states (Guinea, Ghana, Sudan, UAR*) and on our existing contacts with the national liberation movements of the African peoples."9 The Foreign Ministry forced the recall of the trading delegation.

Owing to the complicated economic situation, the GDR had substantial economic interest in trade relations with South Africa. In addition to such conflicting economic and political interests within the GDR (see section 1), the boycott issue was very much affected by the East-West conflict. The FDGB finally took the initiative in the Secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) for a boycott of freight transport by air, land and sea. A circular was sent to national member unions, suggesting a protest to the UN against the policy of apartheid. It seems, however, that the Netherlands transport workers union was the only WFTU member to join in the boycott of South African goods by refusing to handle them.29

116 Schulz, East German Relations, 26.


120 SAPMO BArch: DY 34/200.403, Note by the Trade Unions International of Transport Workers to the WFTU Secretariat, summing up the response to its appeal. The Netherlands transport workers union, member of the WFTU, had urged local dockers to heed the ICFTU's call and buy no South African goods for a two-month period beginning 1 May 1960.

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The WFTU General Council decided in June 1960 to set up an International Trade Union Committee for Solidarity with the Workers and People of South Africa, but remained silent on the boycott movement. The FDGB, motivated by its sense of rivalry with the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) in the Federal Republic, which participated in the boycott, became a founding member of that committee when it was constituted in 1961. The committee called on workers in all countries to use all means at their disposal for the isolation of the South African government and for international pressure to eliminate apartheid. This appeal, too, failed to make explicit mention of a boycott of either trade or transport.2 The restraint displayed by the socialist countries and the WFTU vis-a-vis the boycott movement was noted by the anti-apartheid forces of South Africa, not without disappointment, though with some understanding for as long as the boycott was confined to individual consumers.

With increasing international calls for sanctions, the GDR, like other socialist countries, came under criticism. From early 1960 on, the SACP raised the boycott issue as an important item in all talks with the SED. YusufDadoo met officials in the International Relations Department in August that year to underline once again the significance of economic sanctions for the struggle against apartheid. He informed his counterparts that the CC of his party had discussed the policy of the GDR and the other socialist countries and of the WFTU on the matter, expressing disappointment at the GDR's attitude. The Soviet Union, he said, had meanwhile promised him that trading with South Africa would be reviewed.22 SED officials, too, assured Dadoo that trade with South Africa would be reconsidered. They remarked, more casually though, that a boycott of South Africa might cause difficulties for the politics of peaceful co-existence. In October 1960, the SACP CC sent a memorandum to communist parties in Eastern Europe, including the SED, expressing concern that socialist governments, trade unions and other organisations had not yet identified in public with the boycott movement. Non-participation in the boycott could estrange these countries from the forces of democracy and liberation in Africa. The memorandum stated that the apartheid regime was already exploiting their hesitation for its own propaganda purposes.23

In the GDR, discussions about the sanctions were re-opened in early 1961. During a visit in January, SACP executive member Michael Harmel drew attention to Soviet and Chinese decisions to stop trading with
South Africa,’ but Western press reports also fuelled the debate. The British Tribune published a reader's letter asking whether British communists, themselves enthusiastic about the boycott, could not possibly bring their East German comrades round to boycotting South African commodities as well.'25 The SED Foreign Affairs Commission took up the issue and instructed the Foreign Ministry to consult with other socialist countries.'26 SACP representative

Vella Pillay stated during talks with the SED in April 1961 that he understood the economic problems and export interests of the GDR and was willing to accept that it might begin by simply reducing South African imports.27 Hence the International Relations Department was able to note in 1961 that consultations with the SACP had helped 'to rectify the GDR's trading policy vis-a-vis South Africa and to ensure greater efforts by its trading agencies towards joining the international boycott movement'.128 But only when the international debate took a more compelling turn within the UN and the OAU after its inception in May 1963, while the SACP and ANC kept up their sharp criticism, did the GDR finally decide to join the trade boycott of South Africa.

In November 1962, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for a boycott against South Africa.129 The newly founded OAU affirmed this demand.13 The SACP criticised, though not by name, socialist countries among those still not paying due regard to the UN resolution: 'Even countries which supported these decisions, including some African, Asian and socialist countries, have themselves failed to carry them out consistently.'131 Western reports about its trading operations with South Africa exacerbated controversy within the GDR about the sanction issue. The SACP reacted to an article in the Johannesburg Sunday Times in a letter to the SED CC: 'We would consider it absolutely necessary that your government issues a public statement repudiating the reports and declaring its correct position and policy on trade with the Republic of South Africa.' Otherwise, the SACP warned, it would sharply criticise the GDR in the press.'32 In June 1963, Mendy Msimang, ANC representative in London, addressed a letter to Walter Ulbricht, first secretary of the SED and head of state in the GDR. Referring to an article in the London Sunday Telegraph of 2 June 1963, which claimed that the GDR had offered South African arms companies hand guns, Msimang demanded clarification and an unequivocal statement from the GDR on the UN General Assembly resolution of 6 November 1962.133 Moreover, he sent a letter to the German-African Society (DAFRIG) in the GDR to inform them about his letter to Ulbricht and to ask them to bring pressure to bear on the government.31 By now, the internal debate had begun in the GDR with a view to taking an urgent decision. Deputy foreign minister Sepp Schwab wrote to Julius Balkow, minister of foreign trade: The African peoples and all progressive-minded forces in the world are more and more insistent on boycott measures. The German Democratic Republic, too, has repeatedly issued statements for international notice, saying it is a staunch supporter of the national interests of the peoples on


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the African continent who are fighting for their freedom and against the policy of apartheid in South Africa. Trading with South Africa and calls of our new East Africa shipping line at Portuguese and South African ports are damaging to the GDR's reputation and provide imperialists with an opportunity to vilify the GDR and to discredit our policy in Africa.3'

He proposed that exports and all missions to and imports from South Africa should be stopped, and urged a swift decision. The International Relations Department underlined in a memorandum on 14 June 'that in the interests of the GDR's reputation and not least in the interests of its trade with African countries, our trading with South Africa needs to be revised'.36

The final decisions on the issue were taken at a session of the SED Foreign Affairs Commission on 5 July 1963: to cease direct trading operations with South African firms; no foreign-trade personnel to be sent to South Africa; and to clarify the problems linked with the calls of GDR vessels at South African ports.137 On 8 July 1963, the minister for foreign trade ordered subordinate agencies to cease trading with South Africa and to let current export contracts expire.13 There was a brief reference in Neues Deutschland of 23 July 1963 to a press release saying that the Trade Ministry had instructed all subordinate agencies to do no trading whatsoever with firms or other institutions of South Africa.139 Not many readers were aware that this announcement had been preceded by a long internal argument over years.40

On 25 July 1963, the foreign minister Dr Lothar Bolz informed chairman Diallo Telli of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid about the trade boycott. He described the decision as an expression of the GDR's will to support the South African people's struggle for liberation and the concurrent efforts of African states at the UN, and rejected Western reports about GDR arms deliveries to South Africa as calculated propaganda.41 On 30 July, the prime minister Otto Grotewohl sent a telegram to the chairman of a foreign ministers' conference of African states in Dakar, which was to consider further international moves against apartheid, informing him of the GDR's position. He expressed his belief that 'freedom and self-determination for the people of South Africa will soon be achieved if all governments take similar steps'. The attitudes of governments would show 'who is a true friend of the African peoples'.142

Boycott was not confined to economic relations. The white minority in South Africa attached special significance to sports. From the early years of resistance, the idea of a sports boycott had been on the agenda. In 1964, South Africa was banned from the Tokyo Olympics. The OAU through its Supreme Council for Sport in Africa

136 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/610/332, internal memo, 14 June 1963. 137 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/2, minutes Foreign Affairs Commission, 5 July 1963, decision no. 8. 138 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/610/332, letter by the Ministry for Foreign and Inter-German Trade, overseas directorate II, to the SED CC department of domestic trade, supplies and foreign trade, 14 October 1963. 139 Neues Deutschland, 23 July 1963.
140 For a more detail see Schleicher and Schleicher, SpecialFlights to Southern Africa, 10-25. 141 Cf.

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle (SCSA) was committed to ending racial discrimination in South Africa. The UN Special Committee against Apartheid established the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC). They pushed for an international sports boycott and the expulsion of South Africa from the Olympic movement. Sports acquired an importance in the GDR that it hardly enjoyed in any other country, owing to its international blockade. Top performance in sports was a way of winning international prestige. But here again, the GDR had to fight against various odds: entry restrictions by NATO countries for GDR athletes; refusals to hoist the national flag or play the national anthem, etc. Therefore, it was always a gain, both for the domestic sports community and foreign-policy aspirations, when the GDR was chosen as venue of international championships. The desire to host international sports competitions easily led to conflicts, as in the world weightlifting championships, scheduled to be held in Berlin in October 1966. Early that year, the SACP brought it to the attention of the GDR Solidarity Committee that South African official sources were quoted as saying that national teams from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia had been invited by the GDR to take part in these championships.143

Incidents at other sporting competitions demonstrate the quandary that the GDR was in. In 1962, the world's best weightlifters did not participate in a competition because the USA refused entry visas to
certain countries, including the GDR, and the championships were finally held in Hungary. In 1964, Italy had to cede the function of host to Japan because GDR athletes were not given entry permits. Berlin became the new venue. Under the International Weightlifting Federation statutes, a national sport association hosting such an international event was obliged to invite all the federation's national members without discrimination. The British Anti-apartheid Movement (AAM) requested the GDR Solidarity Committee to take action. The latter's chairman, Heinz H. Schmidt, proposed in a letter to the SED CC secretary for foreign affairs:

we should seriously consider whether we ought not rather back out of organising the world championships altogether, and best of all, state the reasons openly ... An alternative would be to ... demand application of the international sports boycott against South Africa and Rhodesia ... The correspondence should be published.44

A practicable solution was finally found. Just before the opening of the championships, the congress of the International Weightlifting Federation convened in Berlin and appointed a commission to go on a fact-finding mission to South Africa and to formulate recommendations for the next congress in Tokyo the following year.145 The world championship could go ahead. Delegations of SANROC and AAM were staying in the GDR, at the invitation of the GDR's National Olympic Committee. SANROC president Dennis Brutus was given much publicity in the GDR media.146 Any doubt about the GDR's unequivocal attitude towards apartheid was forestalled and a boycott of South Africa's sports associations was championed, without prejudicing efforts to lift the discrimination against GDR athletes. It cannot have been easy for the ANC to accept this or similar solutions to holding international sport events with South African athletes in socialist countries. In such cases, left-wing radicals exerted pressure on the ANC, accusing it of 'collusion with revisionists', as representatives of liberation movements told officials in the GDR.147 These radical forces wanted the sports associations of socialist countries to walk out of international organisations which were not boycotting South Africa. That was out of the question for the GDR. Hence, the SED and SAPC subsequently worked out a common line of argument on the issue. Later, it was much easier to efficiently support the sports boycott against South Africa, while the GDR was a major sports power. In May 1982, at a hearing of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, the president of the German Gymnastics and Sports Federation (DTSB) of the GDR, Manfred Ewald, reiterated the GDR's principled support for consistent struggle against racism in sports. GDR Olympic champion Evelin Herberg-Jahl stressed that GDR sportsmen 'do not maintain any sports contacts with the apartheid regime, nor did they in the past, nor will they in the future take part in sports contests involving sportsmen or teams from racist South African sports federations'.14

The discussions about a boycott of South Africa in the early 1960s, chiefly about economic sanctions, not only shed light on the motives, the constellation of interests and the internal decision-making processes in the GDR. They show equally that there was some potential for conflict in GDR relations with the South African liberation movement. True, common ideological and political positions provided a firm base for these relations, but did not signify an identity of interests in all matters, including important ones such as the trading boycott. In the 1960s, the GDR found itself in the unpleasant situation of supporting sanctions against South Africa while facing boycott actions, although these were based on different grounds. The GDR's boycott decision of 1963 deserves critical comment. An unbiased judgement has to take into account that the GDR, owing to its economic weakness and Western embargo policies, took a painful decision. Therefore, despite certain qualifications, it is fair to say that by terminating its official trade with South Africa, the GDR was extending solidarity to the South African liberation movement.

Solidarity with political prisoners

In August 1963, the SED received a letter from the SACP with an urgent call for solidarity, informing them of the arrests of Walter Sisulu, the undercover secretary general of ANC, and another 17 prominent members of the ANC and SACP executives.46 Neues Deutschland, 17 October 1966.

146 Neues Deutschland, 17 October 1966.
147 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/201986, notes on talks by Markowski with M.P. Naicker and Alfred Kgokong, 22 October 1966.
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at Lilliesleaf Farm, in Rivonia. Nelson Mandela, who had already been tracked down by the secret police in 1962, was to be brought to trial on a charge of high treason, together with his comrades arrested at Rivonia. All of them were threatened with the death penalty. In its reply, the SED gave an assurance that the party would do all it could to launch a broad protest movement. The Solidarity Committee had already issued a protest statement against the conviction of Mandela and other ANC activists on 3 December 1962. On the international stage, a powerful solidarity movement began to form to defend the detained leaders. On 11 October 1963, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on the South African government to withdraw the prepared trial of the men arrested at Rivonia and release all political prisoners unconditionally. On 20 November the General Assembly adopted its Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The GDR supported the declaration, and pleaded for a corresponding convention, basing its arguments on the bitter lessons of German history, with the appalling effects of racial hatred practised during the fascist era.

The solidarity campaign started with a mass rally organised by the National Council of the National Front in Berlin on 29 November 1963. In his keynote speech, Horst Brasch called for massive protest against the persecution of apartheid opponents. He associated the solidarity movement with worldwide efforts for peace and disarmament. Another speaker was Harold Wolpe, a South African lawyer, who had escaped from the Johannesburg police prison a few weeks before under dramatic circumstances and was canvassing support for the activities of the WCRAAPP in London.

FDGB organised meetings to encourage solidarity with the working people of South Africa, adopting protest resolutions against the strangling of trade union rights and the persecution of apartheid opponents, as well as for the liberation of political prisoners, and sending them to the South African government. FDGB regional executives in Karl-Marx-Stadt and Magdeburg organised major rallies with about 1 000 participants each. These events had particular appeal owing to the appearance of


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152 Resolution 1881 (XVIII), 11 October 1963, in: YBUN 1963, p 21. In subsequent years, 11 October was observed as Day of Solidarity with South African political prisoners.


155 BArch: P DZ 8/7304-662, speech manuscript.

156 Neues Deutschland reported on Wolpe's visit and the World Campaign on 26 November 1963. 157 SAPMO BArch: DY 34/A 201.4176, proposal by the FDGB international relations department to save Walter Sisulu's life, 5 November 1963. Tribuene reported extensively on the persecution of apartheid opponents in South African.

See Tribuene, 5,9,23, and 30 November 1963.
the South African trade unionists Arnold and Janette Selby, who were among the first South Africans to be granted political asylum in the GDR. Moreover, union members came together to manifest their solidarity at workplace meetings in a number of other towns. 158 FDJ organised rallies, such as the one in Eisleben on 12 December 1963, with a turnout of some 800 young people, addressed by Tony Seedat, one of the ANC students in the GDR, as well as student rallies at the mining academy in Freiberg and at Leipzig University. DAFRIG organised a rally at the Technical University of Dresden, where South Africans were studying. The GDR Peace Council had a solidarity meeting with students in Leipzig, where Wolpe took part. The Democratic Women's League (DFD) called on branch meetings to adopt protest resolutions.159 The call for solidarity in December 1963 was well received by a great number of people.161 A highlight was the visit of a first major ANC delegation to the GDR, including Moses Kotane, Duma Nokwe and John B. Marks (ANC National Executive Committee (NEC)), plus Yusuf Dadoo (president of the South African Indian Congress). Marks and Dadoo addressed the annual meeting of DAFRIG and rallies in Dresden and Leipzig, and had interviews in the media. The driver of the international movement for solidarity with the Rivonia trialists was the WCRSAPP, which disseminated petition lists in 30 countries. DAFRIG was the first body to be prominently involved in the circulation of the lists and the collection of signatures. Wolpe, like Marks and Dadoo, had addressed the society's annual meeting and given very impressive accounts of the situation.161 Towards the end of 1963, the FDGB received a letter from the AAM in London, asking for circulation of the lists and reiterated this in a further letter in January 1964. The FDGB ordered 1 000 petition forms from London and organised protest rallies in enterprises and institutions countrywide.163 It informed SACTU that they would receive aid supplies valued at more than M200 000 in 1964.164 In January 1964, S. Abdul (Abdul Minty) wrote to Walter Ulbricht as the GDR head of state, on behalf of the WCRSAPP, requesting him to support the efforts for the release of South African prisoners by issuing a personal message. Ulbricht in his reply underlined the GDR's concurrence with UN resolutions and drew attention to

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle the contrasting West German policy.'65 In March and April 1964, the GDR received more calls for help. In a letter, the SAPC underlined the importance of international solidarity to save the lives of the Rivonia defendants, and of activities which were planned to come to a head in April. Abdul appealed to the FDGB to step up its solidarity efforts throughout April: 'we must demand international action before it is too late.'166 Finally, the UN Special Committee against Apartheid sent an official letter to the GDR Solidarity Committee for the first time and proposed making use of every opportunity to urge the government of South Africa: " To refrain from carrying out the death sentence passed on some political leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle and to save the lives of others threatened with this
To stop the torture and humiliation to which opponents in South Africa were subjected
* To release the political prisoners, whose only crime was their opposition to apartheid
* To abandon the policy of apartheid, which contravened the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Solidarity Committee issued a public appeal containing the essential points suggested by the UN Special Committee. The paper Neues Deutschland informed its readers of the committee's demands and carried a brief appeal for mass protest. At the same time, the Solidarity Committee sent information about the Rivonia trial and the international solidarity campaign to prominent figures in the GDR, and solicited their support for the propositions of the UN Special Committee. FDGB chairman Warnke sent a letter of protest to the South African government on behalf of 6m trade unionists. Popular artists and many intellectuals and professionals pleaded for the men around Nelson Mandela. A protest meeting was held in Leipzig, attended by over 500 citizens and foreign students. Particularly remarkable is the correspondence following a protest letter from Peter Alfons Steiniger, a Berlin expert on international law, to South Africa's minister of justice Balthazar J. Vorster, in which he called the administration of justice based on apartheid an offence against international law and demanded the release of all political prisoners. The South African government, calling attention to domestic legislation, had rejected international protests as interference in South African internal affairs. Hence it was surprising that the minister sent a written reply to Steiniger (perhaps mistaking the GDR for the Federal Republic?)

On 12 June 1964, Nelson Mandela and seven of his co-defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment. The principal aim of the international solidarity efforts, to save the lives of the accused, was achieved. The WCRSAPP wrote with some relief to DAFRIG: 'We are convinced that the efforts undertaken by you and by millions of others all over the world have helped to ensure that the accused in the Rivonia trial were not sentenced to death. For that, the people of South Africa will always be thankful to you.' The campaign to save Nelson Mandela and his compatriots reflected some characteristics of the GDR solidarity movement in those years. Activities were coordinated by the Solidarity Committee and embraced a cross-section of people of different social origin and political conviction. Although limited by centralistic structures, democratic participation and co-operation in the campaign was exercised.

After the conviction, the international solidarity movement protested against the court judgment, and continued to urge the release of political prisoners in South Africa. The next challenge was to help rescue political prisoners, including SACTU members, who had taken part in sabotage by Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and whose lives were in danger. SACTU had informed the FDGB by letter on 12 February 1964 that Billy Nair and 19 co-defendants were standing trial in Pietermaritzburg. The lives of Vuyisile Mini,
Zinakele Xaba, and Wilson Khayinga, trade unionists from Port Elizabeth, had been in danger since the summer of 1964. In a letter to DAfRIG, the WCRSAPP urgently called for protests against the death sentence handed down on these men.8 Yet international solidarity was not strong enough to save them. A case in the campaign of solidarity with political prisoners in South Africa that featured prominently in the GDR, that of Abram Fischer. Fischer, who had acted as a defence counsel during the Rivonia Trial, and earlier for Albert Luthuli in proceedings on a high treason charge, assumed the leadership of the SACP.

Towards the end of 1964, shortly after his clients were deported to Robben Island, he was ordered to stand trial for membership of the banned SACP. Released on bail, he went underground in January 1965. Ten months later Abram Fischer was arrested, and again brought to trial in March 1966. He was now faced with the threat of capital punishment. A broad international solidarity movement emerged, decisively inspired and coordinated by

175 Ibid., letter of 19 May 1964 (German translation).
176 Ibid., letter of 29 July 1964.
177 Neues Deutschland, 4 August 1964.

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle the British AAM, the WCRSAPP, and the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF).8 Brain Fischer's extraordinary personality, his integrity and humanity as well as the courage he displayed earned him sympathy and respect from people of different origins and world outlooks. The trial triggered a wave of solidarity in the GDR, too. In mid-April 1966 the Solidarity Committee asked the SED Politburo's Commission for Agitation to encourage extensive media coverage of the trial and public statements from political, scientific and cultural personalities.

82 Neues Deutschland published an exclusive contribution by ANC executive member Alfred Kgokong.83 While Fischer was awaiting the verdict, the Solidarity Committee sent him a message:

We followed with great pride and admiration your magnificent stand at the trial for your political beliefs and ideals. On behalf of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the German Democratic Republic we send you our warmest greetings and very best wishes for your health. We salute you as the great patriot and champion of brotherhood and equality of all races and nations. We pledge ourselves to fight alongside the world campaign for the release of all South African political prisoners.84

He also received messages of solidarity from prominent law professors, from the Association of Democratic Lawyers of the GDR, the FDJ and other organisations as well as individuals.85 When the court on 4 May 1966 handed down a guilty verdict and the danger of a death sentence was highly acute, protests were also mounting in the GDR. Christian institutions in the GDR displayed solidarity with the South African communist, much in line with a detailed public statement of Christian Action in Great Britain. The Bureau of the Berlin Conference of Catholic Christians in European States, and pastors and theologians in Berlin and Leipzig sent cables to the South African minister of justice. On behalf of the Regional Committee of the Christian Peace Conference in the GDR, Carl Ordnung protested against the threat of death hanging over Brain Fischer 'because he championed equality and the brotherhood of all human beings.'86 Bishops in the GDR appealed to justice minister Vorster to avert a death sentence.87 Because the court did not dare sentence Brain Fischer to death, its judgment was life imprisonment. The international solidarity movement, however, did not rest. Hours after the court delivered its judgment, a televised protest meeting took place in Berlin on 9 May 1966 with the chairman of the Berlin Association of Lawyers and Florence Maphosho, the ANC's representative in the Bureau of the Women's International Democratic Federation in Berlin. The meeting adopted a resolution

182 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/113, minutes, Solidarity Committee Secretariat session, 19 April 1964. 183 Neues Deutschland, 26 April 1966.
184 German Democratic Republic demands Freedom for Brain Fischer and all South Africa's Liberation fighters, 1. 185 Ibid., 2.
186 Ibid., 9.
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protesting against the sentence and denouncing the co-operation between South Africa and West Germany. Protest rallies took place in Leipzig and at the FDJ's youth college at Bogensee near Berlin. Universities and other academic institutions joined in the protest movement and, as during the Rivonia trial, artists, scientists and politicians spoke up too.

In 1968 the Foreign Ministry, the Solidarity Committee, the Committee on the Protection of Human Rights, and lawyers in the GDR called on the government in Southern Rhodesia to treat captured ANC and ZAPU fighters as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention, and protested against the trial and execution of such prisoners. The Foreign Ministry was prompted by the execution of liberation fighters in April 1968 to urge that sanctions against Southern Rhodesia be upheld. The GDR also responded positively to a joint initiative by IDAF and the WCRSAPP. In a circular letter, signed by Canon Collins, these organisations hoped for international solidarity to support their call that the Southern Rhodesian authorities grant ZAPU and ANC fighters the status of prisoners of war or political prisoners. The Solidarity Committee requested Peter Alfon Steini
ger to formulate a legal opinion. Steini
ger sent his paper with a letter to President Davies of the Supreme Court of Southern Rhodesia. The Solidarity Committee sent copies of the letter to AAPSO, solidarity committees in other countries, and African ministers of justice and heads of state.

South African political prisoners continued to be at the centre of solidarity activities in the GDR, specifically through the FDGB. In 1973 and subsequent years, the Solidarity Committee, the Committee on Human Rights and other organisations published declarations of solidarity. With solidarity meetings, protest letters from the Solidarity Committee, initiatives by diplomats at the UN, at OAU headquarters and the CSCE follow-up meeting in Madrid, the GDR joined in the international campaign against death sentences and prison terms passed on ANC members in South Africa. The Solidarity Committee and the GDR Committee for the UN Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination protested against the many death sentences imposed on South African freedom fighters in their home country. In April 1982, the GDR foreign minister joined the call of the UN Security Council for repeal of the death sentences against Ncibithi Johnson Lubisi, Petrus Tsepo Mashigo and Naphtali Manana, and demanded the release of all political prisoners. In early June 1983, he supported protests by the UN Security Council against orders by the

188 German Democratic Republic demands Freedom for Bram Fischer and all South Africa's Liberation fighters, 1 Off.; Neues Deutschland, 10 May 1966.
189 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/985, information on the solidarity campaign from the Solidarity Committee to the SED CC international relations department, 15 August 1966.
190 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/985, circular to all UN member states, 16 August 1968.
191 The letter was printed in Sechaba, no. 4, 1969, 11. Steiniger argued that the colonial regime defied established international law as laid down in the UN Charter, in particular in Article 1, paragraph 2, and Article 51.
192 BArch: P DZ 8/7326-662, letter from Eggebrecht to the Solidarity Committee's liaison office in Cairo, 22 October 1968.
193 In 1977 the Solidarity Committee and the GDR Committee for the UN Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination protested against the murder of Steve Biko and the trial of the Pretoria Twelve. In April 1979 both bodies protested against Solomon Mahlangu's sentence and in October 1981 against sentences passed on Tsotsobe, Shabangu, and Moises (Schleicher, Chronicle).
South African government that the death sentences against Simon Mogoerane, Jerry Semano Mosololi and Marcus Thabo Motaung should be carried out. In June 1988 the Solidarity Committee and GDR mass media joined the international campaign to save the lives of the Sharpeville Six. 194

The GDR campaign for the release of political prisoners in South Africa focused on Nelson Mandela. On 18 July 1978, the media paid tribute to Nelson Mandela on his 60th birthday, and a solidarity rally was held at Leipzig University. The Solidarity Committee sent him a congratulatory message. In 1983, Mandela's 65th birthday was the climax of a solidarity campaign which the UN Centre against Apartheid and ANC had organised to have political prisoners released from gaol. The GDR awarded Mandela the 'Star of International Friendship' in gold, which was handed over to ANC president Oliver Tambo by Erich Honecker in 1984.15 GDR citizens sent postcards to the Botha government demanding that political prisoners be set free. Children and teenagers sent 25 000 birthday cards to Mandela in Pollsmoor prison. In May 1983 a secondary school in Ilmenau was given the name 'Nelson Mandela'.196 In January 1985 the ANC representative to the GDR, Anthony Mongalo, received a petition with 1 800 000 signatures demanding Mandela's release from prison which young people in the GDR collected in a two-week campaign.197 The same year, the international movement for solidarity with political prisoners in South Africa was gaining strength. The Solidarity Committee called for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela. His companion at the Rivonia trial, Denis Goldberg, released after 22 years in prison, was invited by the SED to come to the GDR to recover from his ordeal.198

Solidarity in the GDR with the leaders and activists of the ANC and SACP was part of a worldwide movement crossing the divide between the socio-political systems of East and West, and involved people with different social, political and ideological backgrounds. It made a remarkable contribution to the movement's effectiveness. The solidarity campaigns reflected the hard and costly struggle for emancipation by the oppressed majority of the South African people as well as international developments and the Cold War coordinates in which the South African liberation movement, the GDR, and other international players were moving.

The propaganda weapon

In the 1960s the number of South African political exiles had been rising. Organising the cohesion of the South African diaspora from London to Lusaka, keeping the exiles and the international solidarity movement informed of developments, and countering the apartheid regime's propaganda offensive were becoming increasingly important. Propaganda became an important weapon for the South African liberation struggle. 194 Schleicher, Chronicle. 195 Sechaba, December 1984, 19 f. 196 Sechaba, September 1983, 10. 197 Sechaba, January 1986, 18. 198 Schleicher, Chronicle. 1117

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The ANC and SACP could rely on GDR support in this field. Pallo Jordan recounts: From 1967 the German Democratic Republic began assisting the ANC in publishing journals - Sechaba. All the responsibility ... financially and politically was borne by the Solidarity Committee ... The GDR also undertook training of journalists for the African National Congress and assumed some degree of responsibility for a number of students, who studied in the GDR from that time on.199

A volume titled ANC Speaks: Documents and Statements of the African National Congress 1955-1976 was printed in a large number of copies. In 1982, the Solidarity Committee, in co-operation with the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, published Lutuli speaks: Portrait of Chief Lutuli. For the 75th anniversary of the founding of the ANC, the Solidarity Committee produced a booklet on the history of the ANC in German.211 In 1987, the booklet 75 Years of the African National Congress of South Africa: 75 Years of Struggle against Colonialism and Racism, with contributions from a scientific conference in Berlin, was published in English as well as in German. Brian Bunting remembered this important aspect of solidarity:
Journals, pamphlets and books of the ANC and SACP were printed in the GDR and dispatched at state expense all over the world. Illegal editions were printed for distribution inside South Africa.22

A major propaganda weapon in the struggle of the ANC was Sechaba, the ANC's first own journal, which presented itself in January 1967 as 'mouthpiece of the oppressed masses'. ANC president Tambo declared: "With this first issue of Sechaba, we are launching a new and powerful weapon to carry the truth about South Africa and the voice of the African National Congress into every corner of the world."23

The manuscripts of Sechaba were compiled and prepared for printing in London by Mandla Kosi (Marimuthu P Naicker). The journal carried no imprint until the second half of 1968. The cradle of Sechaba stood in the GDR, first in Dessau, until the journal moved to Neustrelitz in 1968 and finally to Neubrandenburg. The GDR Solidarity Committee financed the printing and distribution and two editorial assistants from the ANC. Sechaba may have been the most widely known symbol of the GDR's solidarity with the ANC's fight for liberation. Eric Singh remembers that first talks about producing the journal in the GDR took place at the Tricontinental Interview with Pallo Jordan, 4 December 1995.

These included: 'Guerrilla Warfare'; 'The South African Trade Union Movement'; 'The Road to Freedom is via the Cross' (speeches of Albert Luthuli) and 'Nelson Mandela Speaks: Speeches, Statements and Articles by Nelson Mandela'.


GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle Solidarity Conference in Havana in January 1966.204 Heinz H. Schmidt informed the Solidarity Committee of plans to print a journal for the ANC in the GDR.205 Barry Higgs, a South African anti-apartheid activist, was stationed in GDR to take care of the layout, the packing and despatching of Sechaba. Co-operation at this early stage was not free of problems. Delays occurred constantly. The manuscripts were transported from London to the GDR, and the printed journal was sent back to London, from where it was posted. In May 1968, Joe Matthews, executive member of the ANC, suggested that the number of copies should be increased by using more modern printing presses, and that the whereabouts of the print shop should be mentioned. Sechaba could then be mailed direct from the GDR and could be distributed in Western countries by newspaper agencies and bookshops. The ANC had weighed up the political aspect of the problem: making public this support from a socialist country. A carefully worded imprint need not name the country of production, although the imperialists knew where the journal was being printed.206 A small imprint soon mentioned Sechaba's place of origin: Neustrelitz, later Neubrandenburg. Only years later was it revealed that this was a town in the GDR. The number of copies rose considerably, from 6 230 to 10 000 and later to 20 000.207 The production process was slow, so Naicker and Singh frequently turned to the Solidarity Committee for help.

The situation improved when Sechaba's production was shifted to more modern printing works in Neubrandenburg, but even here it required constant personal efforts by ANC and Solidarity Committee officers, and the printing staff Staff-members frequently worked all night so that Sechaba could go to press on time.208 From 1975, the manuscript was transported more expeditiously via West Berlin using the good offices of Detlev Reichel of the West Berlin Anti-Apartheid Movement.29 Another problem, the frequently inferior paper, was the result of efforts to keep production costs low, and also the paper shortage in the GDR. With the end of the GDR, Sechaba was no longer produced in Germany.

In 1968, the SACP turned to the SED with a request: The African Communist, published in London as a quarterly since 1959, was burdening the party's treasury with £2 500 sterling annually, further rises in cost were likely.210 Would the SED be able to help? In 1967, Dadoo and Matthews had inquired about the GDR's capacity to print a special issue of The African Communist in mini format on ultra-thin paper 204 See E. Singh in Sechaba, (German version) reproduced in van der Heyden, Schleicher and Schleicher (eds.), Engagiert fuerAfrika, vol. II, 133.

208 Singh, Sechaba, 139.


The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II for illegal distribution in South Africa. The SED promised to help and decided in July 1969 to print 7 000 copies of the journal as well as mini-sized copies for camouflaged transportation into South Africa. The costs for printing, initially M20 400 a year, and distribution... were borne by the SED. The number of copies rose considerably over the years.12 The production of publications for SACP’s political work in exile and for clandestine distribution in South Africa became a major element of co-operation between the SED and SAPC213 The African Communist too had a long way to go to reach its readers in South Africa and in many African countries. Harmel took the manuscripts of the first issues to the GDR; later Sonia Bunting was in charge. She had to travel with the manuscript every three months. Propaganda and underground work inside South Africa were closely related. Sechaba and The African Communist both reported an example of ‘indirect work among the masses’ in 1970. On 14 November 1969, underground fighters had caused some sensation through actions in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, East London and Durban that could not be ignored by the South African press. Leaflets from the exiled ANC floated down on pedestrians, and workers going home from their shift heard hidden loudspeakers linked to tape recordings: ‘This is the African National Congress, this is the voice of freedom.’214 In the mid 1970s, this type of action was considerably expanded and involved a number of underground fighters who had been trained in the GDR.215 Ronnie Kasrils remembers:

In the ’70s, as early as 69/70, when we were operating from London ... we were really concentrating on building the underground in the country. And I can remember we were trying to develop a special propaganda device, a leaflet bomb. We had a scientific lecturer from a science faculty, a South African, whom we sent to the GDR. … Through that visit, we developed the leaflet bomb in a much more practical way, so that it could easily be smuggled into the country in small parts and put together. It became a very important and effective weapon in terms of our propaganda.216 In early 1970, Solidarity Committee chairman Schmidt expressed satisfaction that the South African liberation movement was increasing political and ideological work and therefore was relying on assistance from the GDR:


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If we have managed in the GDR to produce for the third consecutive year now the South African liberation movement's central organ Sechaba, which comes into the country in large numbers and organises exiles from outside, this aid is ten times more important than anything else which may look more venturesome. If, a short while ago, major speeches were transmitted via simple loudspeaker systems at the railway stations of all the four big cities in South Africa and a leafletting action took place, this shows how effectively solidarity can work, and a major part of the solidarity is from us in the GDR.217

In October 1969, the committee considered a request by Dadoo which included six loudspeakers that could be connected to tape recorders and were suitable for transmitting speeches.21 A few months later, in August 1970, more than 20 leaflet bombs exploded, while tape recorders relayed speeches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London. A second wave of leaflet blasts occurred within two days. South African newspapers treated the action with undisguised alarm: 'Hunt on for ANC bombers'. An identical action followed in August 1971. In 1976, the newspaper Rapport commented that another leaflet bomb was the most provocative yet seen.219

The publication in English by the GDR of political documentation about the struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid served its own propaganda purpose, and provided valuable material to the activists in the struggle.22 The Solidarity Committee published booklets and brochures to support the liberation struggle in southern Africa, some of them focusing on Western collaboration with the apartheid regime.221 A study denounced the disregard for the rights of women in South Africa. The GDR Committee on Human Rights dedicated booklets to the struggle against racism and apartheid.222

This struggle featured prominently in the programmes of Radio Berlin International (RBI), the international broadcasting station of the GDR. Propaganda was part of solidarity campaigning in the GDR itself. The mass media reported comprehensively on crimes committed by the racist regime, on the resistance and the struggle for liberation. The radio broadcasted a special series on 'racism in the pillory'. The television network showed films such as The forgotten colony, When they take me I won't cry and All we need is freedom. GDR academics, writers and journalists discussed further assistance.

218 Schmidt's statement, 30.
219 Sechaba, 4, 1976, 41ff.
220 In 1976, for example Against Racism and Racial Discrimination - United Nations Decade for Action; was published and in 1978, Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism.

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II published books on the liberation struggle.223 A German edition of Lerumo's Fifty Fighting Years: The Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1971 was published in 1973, another volume containing comprehensive documents on the SACP history in 1984.2 To mark the 75th anniversary of the ANC, the GDR Postal Administration issued a commemorative stamp in co-operation with the Solidarity Committee. Annually in September, GDR journalists donated a day's wages to the solidarity fund.
There were joint propaganda activities between the ANC and the GDR Solidarity Committee. In 1967, the Solidarity Committee's memorandum The Bonn-Pretoria Alliance was presented to the public on South Africa Freedom Day, with Alfred Nzo attending. The GDR observed the International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in 1969 with activities coordinated by a special committee. A variety of solidarity events were organised during the International Anti-Apartheid Year in 1978. Regular solidarity weeks of action against colonialism and racism were used to propagate the South African struggle and to mobilise solidarity. The same goes for commemorative days such as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March), the Day of Solidarity with the Struggling People of South Africa (16 June), South Africa Freedom Day (26 June) and the Day of Solidarity with South African Political Prisoners (11 October). In 1982, during the UN-proclaimed International Year for the Mobilisation for Sanctions against South Africa, the GDR Committee for the Decade against Racism coordinated activities. Another highlight was the International Seminar on the Activities and Role of the Mass Media in the International Mobilisation against Apartheid in Berlin in 1981, which adopted an appeal and a declaration calling upon the international public to redouble its actions against apartheid.

An area closely linked to propaganda was culture, which became a weapon in the liberation struggle, too. Efforts of the ANC to present South African culture were supported by the GDR. In 1973, the State Opera House in Berlin showed the opera 'Reiter der Nacht' (Rider of the Night), based on the South African novel Path of Thunder by Peter Abraham. In 1976, the play The Island by Athol Fugard was performed at Deutsches Theater in Berlin. The annual International Documentary and Short Film Week in Leipzig regularly focused on solidarity with the struggle.

122 Refer to, among others, Elisabeth Adler (ed.), Apartheid als Herausforderung fuer Suedafrikas Christen und Kirchen.


227 Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 43.


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GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle in South Africa. In 1978, one day of the film festival was placed under the motto of International Solidarity with the Fighting Peoples of Africa. Film studios as well as publishing houses and theatres in the GDR included subjects which were likely to promote the struggle against apartheid and the idea of solidarity in their production programmes. A result of these efforts was the documentary film Against Racism for Anti-imperialist Solidarity. Artists and writers of the GDR expressed their solidarity through cash donations and works of art. Many writers transferred royalties for readings to the solidarity account. In November 1976, during the Intergrafik exhibition showing works by artists from 33 countries, M10 000 were raised for the solidarity fund. Arts and culture played an important role during the annual month of anti-imperialist solidarity in December, where meetings, fund-raising campaigns, solidarity concerts and voluntary work shifts took place, the
revenues of which went to a solidarity account. Special events organised in December 1976 yielded M8.7m. Annual solidarity request concerts were organised between the trade unions and the radio station Stimme der DDR (Voice of the GDR) with millions of people participating over the years. The GDR radio also featured a week of radio plays, named Art - a Weapon in the Fight against Apartheid.

The Solidarity Committee and the Sculptors and Painters Union of the GDR jointly organised an exhibition of posters on 'Solidarity - a commitment in 1976'. Another exhibition, Artists Manifest Solidarity in the Struggle against Racism and Apartheid was opened in 1978, to be shown later at the World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in Geneva, at the opening of the 33rd Session of the UN General Assembly in New York and at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The Solidarity Committee produced annual calendars in support of the South African struggle. A special stamp and a special coin were issued to mark the International AntiApartheid Year. Posters were shown at an exhibition of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid. Fifty copies each of an exhibition Apartheid - No' and another exhibition 'Freedom to the Peoples in southern Africa' were sent to partners of the GDR Solidarity Committee all over the world.

Forms of expressing solidarity were manifold and prove the commitment of people from different social strata and political affiliations which was a trademark of GDR solidarity.

Material support and assistance
Support for the liberation struggle included substantial material assistance. In December 1963, the first major ANC delegation to the GDR received a pledge to supply goods worth M100 000. Solidarity Committee chairman Horst Brasch proposed supplying goods instead of money, because of the shortage of foreign currency.

229 Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 291.
230 Ibid., 75.
231 Ibid., 123,143, 172 and 291.
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The ANC would sell the goods in Dar es Salaam to finance its operations. Goods 'Made in GDR' for sale became an important part of material assistance for the ANC in those years. The ANC received these goods in addition to ordinary aid supplies earmarked for refugees. Food, tents, blankets, medicine and clothing as well as other equipment for camp life were most valuable for the ANC and its refugee centres. In a letter to the Solidarity Committee, Moses Kotane stated how much the ANC appreciated the aid: 'We can assure you that the African people and the other oppressed peoples of South Africa will always remember what your people have done for them in their hour of need.'

From 1973 on, around the time of Africa Day, the Solidarity Committee provided the OAU Liberation Committee with consignments of textiles for combat dress, medicines, surgical dressings, and foodstuffs which were distributed to the liberation movements in southern Africa, that is, including those organisations that the GDR did not support directly. From the mid 1970s, a substantial increase of material support for the ANC and other liberation movements in southern Africa was recognisable. Large shipments of urgently needed goods were sent. Periodic shipments of solidarity goods from the GDR were sent to the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Mazimbu and the ANC camp in Dakawa, both in Tanzania. The GDR supported the ANC training centre in Morogoro, Tanzania, too. From 1987 onwards, the Solidarity Committee's support for the Dakawa centre included the training of 12 construction experts in the GDR. A youth brigade of the FDJ worked in Morogoro to support the ANC camp. GDR educationalists worked as teachers and advisors at SOMAFCO from 1986 till 1989. Rica Hodgson remembered: 'And also in Mazimbu we had some volunteer helpers, teachers. They were wonderful from the GDR, absolutely marvellous, we loved them. They were also dedicated and good.'

The following data on supplies provided by the Solidarity Committee for the ANC (in GDR marks (M)) underline the increase and the comparatively high level of material assistance for the ANC from the mid 1970s until the end of the GDR.

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232 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/985, report on the visit of the general secretary of the SACP and other leading comrades, undated.
233 For details see BArch: P DZ 8/7304-662, list of solidarity supplies to the ANC 1961-1967.1
November 1967. 234 BArch: P DZ 8/7304-662, Kotane's letter (German translation), 14 January 1964. 235
In 1977 liberation organisations in southern Africa received goods to the value of M40m from the GDR.
See Against
Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 161. In 1978 and 1979 the ANC received major consignments of
solidarity supplies. See Schleicher, Chronicle.
236 Reichardt, Nie vergessen Solidaritaet ueben, 80.
237 Interview with Rica Hodgson, Cape Town, 26 December 1995. 238 The GDR Mark was a non-
convertible, purely internal currency. There was no official exchange rate as far as
international currencies were concerned. Valutamark (VM) was an accounting unit used to convert foreign
currency
world market prices for exports and imports of goods and services into the GDR's non-convertible
currency. A
comparative calculation of GDR solidarity supplies and services into dollars, euros or rands is impossible
due to a
completely different system of commodity prices in the GDR.
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2309400 29686 1936800 2207900 2180100
2003900 1886400 2630900 3868100 3972600
Assistance to the ANC amounted to M37 306 400. Despite economic difficulties in the GDR, it even
increased between 1986 and 1989.239 It included the costs for the ANC mission. Indres Naidoo, deputy
chief representative of the ANC, recalls: The Solidarity Committee paid our rent at the office in Angerwag
... They paid for the flats, they furnished the flats and they gave us three cars and petrol. For the first time in
over two decades, I was getting a salary.24' To gain a complete picture of the full range of supplies and
services the ANC received from GDR, data would have to be added on military supplies and training, but
these are either not available or full of gaps. The same applies to data on SED assistance, on assistance
from churches and on contributions made by the various mass organisations.
As soon as the SED and the ANC established party-to-party relations, material assistance became an item
in their mutual agreements. Procurement, transport and, of course, funding of solidarity supplies continued
to lie with the Solidarity Committee. Working together with governmental agencies, the committee made
the necessary arrangements for training and education for liberation movement members and medical
treatment for the sick and wounded. Supplies financed by the Solidarity Committee included paramilitary
equipment. In addition to the supply of medicines and medical apparatus, medical treatment for wounded
soldiers and civilians played an increasingly important part in the GDR's solidarity effort from the mid
1970s. Wounded personnel of the ANC were treated in the 2nd Geriatrics Clinic in Berlin-Buch. Admission
of patients was organised by the Solidarity Committee, and sometimes by the SED CC, the FDGB and the
Ministry of Health. Thus, Berlin-Buch acquired an international reputation as a place of humanitarian help
and solidarity.
GDR's assistance in this field was very important in terms of emotional support. It had a great moral and
psychological effect among fighters and refugees who had been exposed to the horrors of South African
raids. It was encouraging for them to know that there was hope for recovery and rehabilitation even in
critical cases. Artificial limbs were in short supply in the GDR. Those responsible for procuring them had
to develop initiative in contacting suppliers and finding ways to negotiate the obstacles of an economy
ridden with shortages. Medical assistance for hundreds of wounded freedom fighters was a substantial part
of the GDR's overall humanitarian help. This is well remembered among South Africans.
Medical assistance for the ANC included the treatment of officials in hospitals, especially the Government
Hospital in Berlin, and convalescent homes. Among them
239 Refer to Records of SODI - Archives of Solidaritaetsdienst-international e.V. (SODI), Berlin. 240
Interview with Indres Naidoo, Cape Town, 12 December 1995.
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was Oliver Tambo, who received medical treatment and spent short holidays in the GDR. 24 Other ANC representatives spent time at recreational places in East Germany as well. The one support which many of our people will always appreciate was also this kind of what we used to call "rest and treatment". And we had many people in the situation of stress, many of our leaders recuperated. Oliver Tambo himself was treated for a stroke. 242

Education and training figured prominently in GDR solidarity. As early as the 1950s, scholarships had been offered to South Africans, mostly through the SACP. In 1962, five ANC students were enrolled at GDR academic institutions, followed by many South Africans in the years to come. Scholarships for vocational training were provided as well. 243 The first ANC chief representative in the GDR, Anthony Mongalo, recalls:

When I got to the GDR in 1978, I think we had about 38-40 students in different fields of study, vocational training and then also in the universities.

By the time I left, I think we had reached almost 150-200 in different fields ... Many of them after completion went to fill in positions in the ANC structures where they had the qualifications for those positions. Some of them they are cabinet ministers like Jeff Radebe, who was in Leipzig there, and Zola Skweyiya. They are ministers today. So it was help for ANC in exile, and today it is help for the ANC in the government. 4

In the mid 1980s about 1 000 cadres from the ANC and SWAPO were trained in the GDR. 245 Indres Naidoo comments on the late 1980s:

At any given time we had at least a hundred students studying there from academic level to trade level ... Solidarity Committee financed all this ... The students were brought, they were housed, they were given allowances and they were given education ... The FDJ also brought in some students for studies, then the trade unions, the FDGB, they would also bring students. 246

When Pallo Jordan visited Berlin in 1990, the South African student community in what used to be the GDR numbered well over 100 students. 247 Training programmes, straight education and technical training programmes had expanded quite widely in the 1980s. In 1989 ANC members attended a training course for diplomats at the Institute for International Relations at Potsdam-Babelsberg. (Such special courses for diplomats had previously been offered only to countries with which the GDR had very close relations.) 241 Refer to Callinicos, Oliver Tambo, 613 ff.


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In the 1980s, the amount of money provided for education and training of South Africans increased substantially (GDR marks):

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The amount spent on education and training reached M7 247 500 for the 1980s alone. 248 In addition, some of the mass organisations of the GDR provided scholarships for the ANC, sometimes at their own training institutions.

Armed struggle

The GDR regarded anti-colonial liberation wars as just wars, a legitimate form of struggle for liberation. Although to the international communist movement, support for national liberation movements, including military aid, had always been an element of pushing forward with the world revolutionary process, things became more difficult in the nuclear age. The USSR and its allies adjusted their strategy by attempting to harmonise their support of liberation movements with a policy of peaceful co-existence between East and West. They took a more or less ambivalent stand on the armed liberation struggle and on the expectations of liberation movements. Their policy vacillated between aiding armed liberation struggles and living up to a self-professed willingness to cooperate on peaceful settlements to the conflicts in southern Africa.
A general decision about practical GDR support for the armed struggle was taken in 1967, but there had been active assistance before that. In 1961/62 a small number of SACP members had been trained in the GDR for undercover operations and MK sabotage actions. Mac Maharaj was one of the first South Africans to undergo a sabotage training course in the GDR in 1962. He was involved in building up illegal structures of resistance within South Africa.249 The SACP had repeatedly communicated requests for arms to the SED. A memorandum of 1964 indicates that the ANC was particularly seeking assistance in the military training."

In the early 1960s, military co-operation between the GDR and liberation movements was confined to the supply of para-military goods. Training for individuals

248 Data for ANC, SWAPO, Mozambique, Zimbabwe: Working sheets of SODI; data for Angola: 1983-88 SAPMO BArch:
249 UWC, Mayibuye Centre Oral History: Hilda Bernstein Collection, interview with Mac Maharaj. See also SAPMO BArch:
DY 30/IV 2/20/57, letter from Industriedruck Bischofswerda to Zentrag, 21 February 1962.
250 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/985, confidential notes on a talk with Yusuf Dadoo, 29 January 1963. At the 6th SED congress Dadoo announced that a delegation with Kotane would arrive in early 1963 to discuss arms deliveries to the ANC. The visit did not take place until December.
251 BArch: P DZ 8/7412-660, confidential information by the Solidarity Committee, undated (November 1964).

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II was an exception. But similar requests continued to be made. In 1965, Yusuf Dadoo turned to the SED: I have been asked by my Central Committee to write to you on a matter which is very vitally connected with our efforts to strengthen our party and to reinforce its underground machinery. The intensification of persecution and the serious casualties we have suffered call for an equal intensification by us of measures to improve our techniques of illegal functioning. Recalling earlier aid from the SED he added:

We are anxious to embark upon a programme of training for some of our selected cadres in techniques which have a bearing on general underground activity and which include items such as illegal printing, illegal documentation, the art of personal disguise, techniques of evading both visual and electronic surveillance etc. etc. We would also like to get advice and, if possible, assistance on some of the latest techniques connected both with the printing of illegal propaganda, its camouflage for purposes of transportation into the country and special techniques of distribution.252 The SED leadership was favourably disposed to the request, but reluctant to take a decision. A policy paper of 15 March 1966 by its International Relations Department said that ‘there are divergent views in the leadership of the CP of South Africa on whether or not cadres should be trained in this line. After we received word from the group in Tanzania in December 1965 that there was no longer any interest, we were again approached with this request from London in February this year.253 There were uncertainties in the GDR in view of those contradictions. While leaders in exile in Dar es Salaam were said to stake their hopes on rapidly carrying military action into South Africa from outside, those in London were evidently giving priority to establishing clandestine structures within the country. Veteran SACP activist Ray Simons, who favoured building up structures for illegal work, confirmed divergences in the SACP and ANC leaderships on this question.5 Obviously these differences had an impact on the GDR decision concerning the more and more pressing issue of substantial support to the armed struggle.

Finally in January 1967, the SED Politburo decided on the delivery of arms to African liberation movements, thus starting a new stage of co-operation.255 The list of recipients included FRELIMO, the MPLA and the PAIGC, as well as ZAPU. The ANC was missing, probably because of these contradictions. Besides, the ANC received the weapons it needed in full from the Soviet Union. The former chief of

252 SAPMO BArch: DY 30/IV A2/20/985, Dadoo's letter to the SED CC, 7 August 1965. 253 Ibid., notes for talks with the SACP delegation, 15 March 1966. This paper was for Axen who met Dadoo and Marks
in Moscow during the 23rd CPSU party congress in 1966. Axen was given a request from the SACP CC for one or two study places for senior cadres 'outside all relations and solidarity actions'; Ibid., memo from Axen to Markowski, 15 April 1966.


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military intelligence of MK, Ronnie Kasrils, stressed that the ANC needed no arms from the GDR in subsequent years either. Instead MK received a lot of foodstuffs and clothing. 256 MK training camps in Angola were supplied regularly, especially with food. Other assistance consisted of clothing and uniforms.7

In 1967, Sechaba reflected the hopes that the South African liberation movement could make its way back into South Africa by means of the armed struggle. An article on 'The creeping war: The new trend in southern Africa' concluded that southern Africa was entering a phase of military struggle. 258 Armed operations were already an important instrument of MPLA and FRELIMO, and in 1965/66 armed attacks were launched by Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and ZAPU and by SWAPO. Finally, the ANC and ZAPU started their combined large-scale Wankie operation in Southern Rhodesia from August 1967. In the GDR there were mixed feelings about this trial of military strength. A paper by the Foreign Ministry's African Affairs Division expressed scepticism about the operation, provoking a harshly critical reaction from the GDR's consul-general in Tanzania, Gottfried Lessing. In a letter to the International Relations Department, Lessing gave his colleagues back home a lesson in revolutionary ideology: The information paper mentioned above, in my view betrays a defeatist attitude as far as its appraising parts are concerned. Approving of the arguments contained in it would mean that revolutionary struggles should not be launched unless success is certain from the outset, and that revolutionary forces should not take the initiative because the class enemies could step up their counter-revolutionary measures.59

The quarrels between the GDR diplomats reflected discussions within the South African liberation movement. Ronnie Kasrils confirmed differences in the leadership on the Wankie operation.26 But obviously, the dividing line between proponents and opponents of the Wankie operation could not be drawn between the ANC and the SACP, as the Foreign Ministry analysis appeared to imply. Divergences on the priorities of the liberation struggle would have cut across both. 'Revolutionary impatience' of many young ANC fighters needed to be taken seriously by the leadership around Kotane and Marks in Dar es Salaam. But to interpret this as Maoist plotting - as it was, it was queried in the above paper, and was only too easily done in view of a widening Moscow-Beijing rift - would have meant ignoring inner dynamics of the South African liberation movement. Lessing, with his experience of class struggle261, noted reproachfully in his letter 'that the comrades who wrote this paper seem to lack


258 Sechaba, 1, 1967, 2f.


260 Interview with Ronnie Kasrils, Pretoria, 4 December 1995. 261 Gottfried Lessing lived in southern African exile during Nazi rule in Germany. Later he served in the GDR Foreign Service as director of the Foreign Ministry's African affairs division.

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II clarity about the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint on the issue of armed struggle'. But all in all, the paper indicated that his colleagues at headquarters in Berlin had the greater sense of reality.
About the same time, SED officials in Berlin received first-hand information of events. A SACP delegation with Marks and Kotane from Dar es Salaam, joined by Brian Bunting and Joe Slovo from London, had talks with SED officials in November 1967 to exchange views and information on international developments and the strategy and tactics of each party. In their expose, the SACP representatives gave due priority to the military actions started in August.262 For the first time, the SACP and SED issued a communiqué about the meeting. It contained no direct reference to this issue, but merely stated: “The comrades of the South African Communist Party gave details about the difficult struggle demanding great sacrifices, which is being waged by the democratic forces in South Africa against imperialism and racism, for democracy, national independence and freedom.... The masses of the people are fighting back even more impressively against the terrorist measures of the government, against white domination and for the democratic revolution.

The SED expressed 'its admiration and its unlimited solidarity for the heroic struggle of the democratic forces of South Africa.'263 The restraint of both parties in their communiqué might partly have been because of the doubts of the GDR about the Wankie operation, and partly the SACP's concern at the time to make no particular mention of military activities in a communiqué with a governing communist party of the Eastern bloc. But Marks and Kotane were highly pleased with their talks; Marks even noted that he had fallen in love with the GDR this time.264

Obviously, the SACP delegation's visit in November 1967 was decisive in setting the stage for the intensive support the SED was going to provide for illegal work in South Africa. After the Morogoro conference in 1969, the training of ANC cadres in the GDR for clandestine work was stepped up. As Ronnie Kasrils recalls, training for solo fighters and small groups was subsequently arranged to take place in the GDR, which had specialised in this kind of assistance. Quite a number of the cadres the ANC prepared in London for underground work in South Africa were sent to the GDR for preparations.

In military and security co-operation, ANC and SACP preferred their partners to specialise on cadre training. In their view, the GDR's contribution was of a high standard and well adapted to conditions and requirements of the struggle in South Africa. Assistance of this kind was an extremely important part of the GDRs overall support for the struggle. The military, security and intelligence training of cadres from liberation movements in the GDR was arranged in absolute secrecy.


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In the 1970s co-operation on security and military matters intensified. When thousands of young South Africans left their country after the Soweto uprising in 1976 and joined the ANC, providing shelter and training became a critical problem. The ANC turned to the GDR, among others, for help. Special flights were arranged from 1976/77 onwards to fly young MK recruits in groups of about 40 from their camps in Angola to the GDR. Those selected were MK soldiers who had already done basic training in Angola and proved their mettle.265

From 1976 until the late 1980s, two groups, each comprising about 40 combatants, were trained in the GDR each year. The training base was a secret camp in a hilly stretch of landscape near Teterow in Mecklenburg. Military drill, general security concerns, intelligence and counter-intelligence, information and propaganda activities were the centrepiece of the courses, which lasted six months. The ANC trainees lived in the camp, with their instructors. Security was high, people did not leave the camp, but at weekends there were social occasions, and the instructors always participated. GDR instructors were responsible for the practical military and security training, whereas ANC officials gave lectures on the movement's history. The trainees' instruction and exercises covered a wide range of combat missions, such as strikes from ambush, surprise attacks, and the construction of underground bunkers and tunnels. Kasrils rated the training in East German camps as more creative and practical than the type he had received in Odessa, Soviet Union. He credited the East German instructors with high professionalism and political self-confidence. 'They gave the impression of being well drilled, in the subjects they taught, and in their ideological views. They were firm and self-confident about everything. None showed any sign of doubt.'266
Kasrils especially valued the combat-type training in Teterow, guerrilla warfare with a strong focus on survival in the terrain, which made it unique. The Vietnamese style of digging bunkers underground was developed at Teterow at a very early stage and practised later in South Africa. All together about 1 000 MK fighters were trained in Teterow. The people who went there were selected for that course. It was considered a very high level course, comparable to a similar course in Soviet Union, which was called the MCW, military combat work course. ... The Teterow training everybody wanted to go. That was considered to be a very high honour to go to the GDR. People came back having really enjoyed it there. So it was an incentive to prove themselves in training in Angola to be picked to go to Teterow. People didn't talk about Teterow, there was quite good security, but it was known it was the GDR.

Among those MK cadres trained in the GDR, a few came straight from South Africa, and went back there immediately after the training course. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo recalls:

267 Interview with Ronnie Kasrils, Pretoria, 4 December 1995.

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I know for that effect, two people who had come out of the country as for a study visit or something, they have been in London and they were whisked away to the GDR to do training for us. To maintain now the communication and so on they would write letters to London, there was somebody in London, who would repost the letters to South Africa. So, whoever was writing to them from South Africa would be under the impression that they are still in London ... I have cited these two who worked with us for a period of six months because they could maintain that kind of cover.

MK cadres did not come only for military training; some were sent with other ANC members to the 10-month political courses at the SED party school in Magdeburg. Among the MK cadres trained in Teterow were a number who have high-ranking positions in the military and security structures of the new South Africa. For example, Siphiwe Nyanda became the first black commander of the South Africa Defence Force, and Linda Mti was elected chairperson of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Safety and Security.

The current view of the former military adversaries of the ANC is that the military training of MK cadres in the GDR was effective, with high technological and tactical standards, especially in military intelligence: a line of activity they had been directly confronted with. In addition, the special training of solo fighters and small groups of up to three persons, begun in the later 1960s, continued. The efficiency of this training was highly appreciated by those responsible for intelligence work in MK. According to James Stuart: 'In the area of security training our people who trained in the GDR were and are some of our best in terms of the actual skills ... their training has been of the highest standards of quality.' South African participants of military or intelligence training courses in the GDR that voice their criticism of the usefulness of this support for the struggle the ANC was waging are rather the exception. MK cadres considered the GDR a special place for military and security training with a greater survival capacity because of its proximity to the West, and because of the GDR-West Germany situation. We felt that because of the effectiveness ... of infiltrating certain levels of the West German government, some of that skill could have been used to be able to have access to South Africa. The training was tailored to the needs of the struggle. Pallo Jordan believes that the quality of the training was influenced very strongly by the GDR's existential situation, especially in the early years in a very hostile environment, having been forced to develop relevant techniques. That obviously had a certain value to it.
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Political and diplomatic support

Political and diplomatic consultations and co-operation with the ANC constituted a special form of GDR solidarity. High-level contacts and exchanges of experiences and opinions between the GDR and the ANC and the SACP took place not only during visits, but also at international conferences and visits of GDR delegations abroad. In addition, there was usually a very close relationship between ANC representatives and GDR diplomats in African states and elsewhere.

International attention was raised when the SED and the ANC published the Joint Communiqué on the Visit Paid by a Delegation of the African National Congress of South Africa to the German Democratic Republic in May 1978, which included joint positions on international political developments.275 Thus the ANC was accorded political and protocol treatment at the highest level, comparable with ruling parties of friendly states. Later that year the ANC opened an official mission in Berlin with semidiplomatic status, the ANC chief representative being accredited to the president of the Solidarity Committee. The opening of that mission by ANC president Oliver Tambo was widely publicised in the GDR and considered an important event in the history of the ANC.276 Besides an active role in mobilising solidarity in the GDR in close co-operation with the Solidarity Committee, the ANC office in Berlin coordinated relations of the ANC with most of the other East European socialist countries.

Anthony Mongalo, chief representative of the ANC in the GDR (1978-84), remembers political consultations on international issues:

Then of course there were questions also where discussions would be like if we are going to have some big conferences like the World Peace Council or the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference. How to prepare for those things, we would sit and discuss how we get on into that. When it comes to United Nations, if there were going to be some specific resolutions which they felt would come up dealing with South Africa. And they would say: How do you think we should tackle this one.277

Max Sisulu experienced this also:

I had such discussions at different levels and on different issues: like in WFDY and IUS278 with FDJ representatives... There was a lot of interaction and discussions on many issues. There were also discussions on economic developments, for instance in connection with ECOSOC279 in Geneva, again the GDR was ‘in charge of Africa’.28

275 Joint communiqué on the visit paid by a delegation of the African National Congress of South Africa to the German Democratic Republic, 23 May 1978; see Against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism, 157 f. 276 Sechaba, January 1979, 24.
277 Interview with Anthony Mongalo, Pretoria, 28 November 1995. 278 World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) was based in Budapest; International Union of Students (IUS) was founded in 1946 in Prague.
279 Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. 280 Interview with Max Sisulu, Cape Town, 5 January 1996.

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A major international arena of the struggle against racism and apartheid as well as support for and co-operation with the South African liberation movement was the UN. Owing to the international blockade organised by West Germany, the GDR became a member of the UN rather late in September 1973 (at the same time as the Federal Republic of Germany). Before its accession to membership, the GDR used every possible occasion to participate in UN activities as far as decolonisation and the struggle against racism and apartheid were concerned. Such activities strengthened its international position. In August 1967 for instance the Solidarity Committee chairman Heinz H. Schmidt attended a UN anti-apartheid seminar in Lusaka as an observer, where he met with ANC executive members. Because it was not a member of the UN, the GDR was unable to sign the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 21 December 1965 when its representatives tried to do so in 1966. Finally in March 1973 the GDR could deposit its instrument of accession to the convention. After it had become a member of the UN, the GDR gave unrelenting support through countless initiatives to the international struggle of peoples for freedom, independence and self-determination.281
Liberation movements regarded political and diplomatic support as an important display of solidarity. The GDR representatives voted for all resolutions of the UN that supported African positions on apartheid, colonialism, and the plundering role of the multilateral corporations, as well as military and nuclear collaboration with South Africa. It was the understanding and at the same time very much in the interest of the liberation movements that the GDR played a role as a kind of watchdog in the UN in the political sense as Theo-Ben Gurirab, long-time SWAPO representative in New York, described it.282 The GDR was one of the first states to sign the UN Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crimes of Apartheid (2 May 1974). The convention came into force in the GDR with unrestricted effect.283 On many occasions GDR officials stated the firm positions of their country on the struggle against racism and apartheid, which included the demand for:

"The implementation of a strict arms embargo against the Pretoria regime " An end to the collaboration between imperialist states and South Africa
* The continued international isolation of the apartheid regime
* An end to the racist rule of terror in South Africa
* The repeal of all racist laws
"The immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and detainees " The tracking down of all those directly responsible for the crimes of apartheid in accordance with the convention.284

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The GDR advocated appropriate measures in accordance with chapter VII of the UN Charter, including an arms embargo. Sanctions were unconditionally complied with by the GDR.
With its accession to the UN, GDR diplomats in New York participated regularly in debates in the Security Council, the General Assembly and its committees, and in specialised agencies on issues relevant to southern Africa, giving support to the cause of the liberation movements. In March 1975 the GDR was elected to a seat on the UN Special Committee against Apartheid and hence used its membership to further the implementation of self-determination of the peoples in South Africa and Namibia. The GDR also supported the South African struggle as a member of special organisations of the UN. At UNESCO in Paris in 1974, the GDR co-sponsored a draft resolution condemning the policy of apartheid and recommending that UN member states review school textbooks and syllabi accordingly.

In 1974, the UN Special Committee against Apartheid met in Berlin (27-28 May): an expression of the GDR support for the work of the committee as well as an appreciation of the active engagement of the host country. A simultaneous Week of Solidarity (24-29 May) with the African Peoples Fighting for National Liberation supported the committee's work. Its chairman, Ambassador Edwin Ogebe Ogbo (Nigeria), addressed a mass rally. The Humboldt University in Berlin conducted a colloquium on the struggle of peoples against the crime of apartheid, and the Solidarity Committee launched a photo exhibition under the motto 'Apartheid NO', which was later shown in other countries.285 The support given to the work of the Special Committee was not confined to such occasions. The GDR offered to produce, free of charge, booklets in German for the Centre against Apartheid, and the first edition of such booklets were produced in 1977.286 Several times the GDR Solidarity Committee reported on its activities before the UN Special Committee.287

The GDR was involved in activities and conferences of the international solidarity movement and of the UN regarding southern African. A number of events were convened in the GDR in co-operation with international organisations or in the context of international solidarity campaigns. In years to come, the GDR continued to arrange specific events to politically activate the struggle against apartheid. In 1973, following a decision by the UN to call an International Decade of Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, a special committee was set up. In March 1978, a government commission had been set up to organise national activities during the UN-proclaimed International Anti-Apartheid Year 1978/79. The commission was tasked with increasing political and material solidarity, producing films, preparing art and poster exhibitions and issuing publications to intensify national and international propaganda against apartheid. Scientific colloquiums were organised to unmask racism and apartheid.
In February 1979, the GDR hosted a Special Session of the World Peace Council to promote solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa and to propagate the objectives of the International Anti-Apartheid Year. In 1981, an International Seminar on Publicity and the Role of Mass Media in the International Mobilisation against Apartheid took place in Berlin under the auspices of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, the Solidarity Committee and the GDR government. In July 1980 and February 1982, the International Committee against Apartheid, Racism and Colonialism in Southern Africa (ICSA) held sessions of its Secretariat in Potsdam and in Berlin. A preparatory session of the International Commission of Inquiry of Apartheid Crimes in Luanda was held in the GDR in January 1981. In 1982, marking the 70th anniversary of the ANC, a UN-proclaimed International Year of Mobilisation for Sanctions against South Africa was supported by the GDR at political and diplomatic levels and by various forms of solidarity with the ANC and SWAPO. The GDR participated actively in many international anti-apartheid conferences.

There were high-level consultations between UN and GDR officials on the struggle against racism and apartheid. In April 1983, UN assistant secretary-general James Jonah visited the GDR to discuss preparations for the 2nd World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. In May 1983 the chairman of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, Yusuf Maitana-Sule (Nigeria), and the director of the UN Centre against Apartheid, Enuga S. Reddy, visited Berlin and were received by president Horst Sindermann of the People's Chamber, foreign minister Oskar Fischer, and Solidarity Committee president Kurt Seibt. Five years later, in August 1988 the new chairman of the UN Special Committee, Joseph N. Garba, visited the GDR at the invitation of foreign minister Oskar Fischer. Solidarity Committee president Kurt Seibt visited New York from time to time and took the opportunity to address UN institutions to inform about and call for solidarity with the liberation struggle in southern Africa. He had regular consultations with the Special Committee against Apartheid.

At the various fora of the UN the GDR worked for the implementation of the aims of the world organisation in the struggle against racism and apartheid. Even before its membership in the Security Council, the GDR took the floor several times. The GDR used the forum of the UN to actively support the right of the South African liberation movement to take up arms in the fight against racist oppression and apartheid. The GDR representative at the UN in New York, Peter Florin, declared in the UN Security Council: An oppressed people is entitled to wage a liberation struggle by all means, including the use of arms, against the armed champions of a terrorist regime.' With the GDR being a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (1980-81), on 6 June 1980 GDR Ambassador Florin denounced the so-called reforms proclaimed by the apartheid regime in South Africa and demanded far-reaching steps by the Security Council against it in accordance with the UN charter. He demanded the immediate release of Nelson Mandela and all other political prisoners. As a council member, GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle actively contributed to the deliberations of the Security Council Committee established by Resolution 421 (1977) concerning ways and means of making the arms embargo against South Africa more effective and pleaded in favour of tightening it. In addition, the GDR advocated effective economic sanctions, notably an oil embargo.

The UN was an international arena where the GDR pursued an offensive policy of supporting the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, and stood up to its role as a staunch ally of and a watchdog for the liberation movements. Alfred Nzo gave his assessment:
The GDR then became one of the forces that were very squarely behind the struggle of our people against Apartheid, for democracy, peace and development. In that respect the African National Congress benefited greatly from the very important solidarity that the state of the GDR was able to give to the people of our country. In all the important international fora right up to the United Nations the GDR held aloft the flag of struggle for peace, the flag of the struggle for justice.

Close co-operation between representatives of the ANC and the GDR all over the world was a matter of course. James Stuart describes his experiences:

Political support we received from the GDR...all over we relied on the support from the GDR representatives, whether it was in Africa, in Europe, it doesn't matter where it was. We could always go to them and say: Look, I am so and so, I come from the ANC, would you be able to support us. We would like to have this or that position adopted or that position rejected. And usually without much problem we received the support of the GDR representatives.

That assistance included material and financial support for political activities. In addition to supplying the ANC and SACP with tickets for their delegations to attend conferences and meetings, the GDR played host to special conferences or seminars of the ANC and SACP. In 1967 and 1971, the ANC convened its summer school for South African students from various European countries in the GDR. Academic conferences and seminars were organised to support the struggle such as a much noticed conference on The Imperialist Nature of Racism in Southern Africa in June 1976 in Berlin and a symposium on Apartheid - Massive Violation Of Human Rights' in November 1978 in Leipzig.

Party relations ANC-SED

The level of co-operation between the GDR and national liberation movements was indicated by a few important factors. These included high-level political consultations 291 Interview with Alfred Nzo, Pretoria, 7 December 1995. 292 Interview with James Stuart, Johannesburg, 22 November 1995. 293 Schleicher, Chronicle.

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II and the protocol treatment afforded by the GDR to the leading representatives of the organisations, which included the setting up of semi-diplomatic missions of the liberation organisations and - even more important - the establishment of official party relations with the SED. In the case of the ANC, indirect relations of this type more or less existed because of the long-standing SED-SACP relations. The SACP cooperated closely with the ANC, some of its officials being part of the ANC leadership as well. From the early 1960s, SACP representatives visited the GDR regularly, attending SED party congresses and being received by officials of the SED CC for political consultations. These visits and consultations were to exchange views and information about international issues and the situation in South Africa, and to explore possibilities for material assistance from the SED for their South African partners. SACP representatives participated in SED-organised scientific conferences on ideological issues and political developments. In the 1960s, a more or less regular exchange of views on strategic and tactical aspects of the development of both parties and on international problems took place. Between 1975 and 1985, the SACP Central Committee held three plenary meetings in the GDR.

SACP-SED co-operation in the field of political propaganda through exchanges of publications was an important part of their relations. SED arranged for printing and the supply of printing equipment to the SACP. In addition to printing The African Communist and a number of books and booklets, the support included the production of special issues of The African Communist containing documents of the first regional meeting of communist and workers' parties of tropical Africa (in summer 1978) as well as the SACP's party programme in Zulu.

The close relations between the SED and the SACP played an important role in developing contacts between the SED and the ANC. SACP representatives visiting the GDR also held positions in the ANC. There were joint delegations of the SACP and ANC such as the one in 1963 with Moses Kotane and Duma Nokwe. When in October 1966 M.P Naicker and ANC vice-president Alfred Kgokong came to Berlin for a congress of the International Organisation of Journalists, they contacted the head of the International Relations Department, Paul Markowski, to discuss co-operation. In April that year Markowski, attending the 24th CPSU congress in Moscow had met with J. B. Marks and Yusuf Dadoo to discuss GDR assistance.
for the ANC and SACP. From 1967 there were regular visits in connection with the printing of ANC publications in the GDR.295

In June 1971, Josiah Jele, ANC representative in Dar es Salaam, became the first ANC official to be present at a SED party congress. From then on, the ANC was represented at all SED congresses until the last regular one in 1986. In 1972 (5-10 November), an ANC delegation visited the GDR at the invitation of SED CC for the first time. The delegation was headed by ANC president Oliver Tambo and included Alfred Nzo, Terence Ngegana and John Gaetsewe. They held formal talks with an SED delegation led by Hermann Axen, member of the Politburo and CC secretary.

294 There were many visits of delegations or representatives of the SACP to the GDR in those years; see Schleicher, Chronicle for details.

295 Schleicher, Chronicle.

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle about international issues, political developments in South Africa, the ANC's struggle and ANC-SED co-operation. The two sides agreed on further assistance for the ANC through publications and the training of personnel for the ANC-run 'Star' furniture workshop in Lusaka. They signed an agreement of co-operation between SED CC and ANC NEC, thus establishing direct party-to-party relations.

The SED viewed a formal agreement on party relations as an indicator of the political status of its relations with a liberation movement. Party relations existed with the MPLA (since 1971) and were established with FRELIMO in 1972. Liberation movements to follow were ZAPU (1976) and SWAPO (1978). In 1972, the SED took over as the number one GDR partner for political co-operation with the ANC. Consequently, all decisions on substance, objectives and formats of relations with the ANC were taken at party level. Their implementation was, in general, handled by the International Relations Department, and by its Departments for Agitation and Propaganda, Public Education, State and Legal Affairs and others when more specific or technical matters were involved. The Solidarity Committee's assistance for the ANC was an outflow of the links between SED and SACP. Relations between SED and ANC and SED and SACP developed on parallel and overcrossing tracks.

Party agreements involving the SED and friendly liberation organisations were concluded for a period of one or two years. A short preamble summarised the political and ideological premises - mutual opposition to imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism - and staked out the principal directions of future cooperation. These included invitations for study delegations and encouragement of relations between mass organisations such as trade unions, youth and women's organisations. Consultations about international developments of common interest and one another's policies, and a regular exchange of information, documentation and publications were particularly important. In the following years ANC and SED delegations met - mostly in the GDR - to consult each other on political developments as well as ideological issues. In March 1973 Michael Harmel (for SACP) and M. P. Naicker (for ANC) attended the SED's International Scientific Conference in Berlin on the 125th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto. In May 1976, an ANC delegation headed by Alfred Nzo attended the 9th SED congress. Later that year (10 December 1976), an SED CC delegation, on visiting Luanda, held talks with Oliver Tambo.296

Education of ANC cadres at facilities run by the SED was another major purpose of the party agreement. Material assistance to be contributed by the Solidarity Committee was included in the scope of party relations. The same applied to visits by senior officials for medical treatment or vacations in the GDR. Unlike the Solidarity Committee and the above organisations, the SED had foreign currency at its disposal, and could in exceptional cases fall back on this to assist international partners. Oneyear courses for ANC cadres at the SED's regional party schools were a major feature of inter-party relations. In September 1979, a basic course on Marxism-Leninism at the regional party school was organised in Mittweida (Saxony) for ten ANC members as well as 21 SWAPO members. It lasted only six months. Usually annual courses lasted for ten months. From then on, groups of ANC cadres enrolled for one-year political education courses in the GDR. The SED arranged these courses for ANC members at its regional party school in Erfurt and later in Magdeburg.

296 Ibid.

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They included excursions and contacts with everyday life in the GDR, which gave participants food for thought in various directions. Some concluded that women need to participate on equal terms in shaping society, whereas others gained insights into the difficulty of sustaining a country's economy. Others again realised from their own experience that co-operation with white people was feasible if it was based on mutual respect. The study of historical and dialectical materialism gave greater knowledge of nature and society.297

Responsibility for politico-ideological education lay with the SED Central Committee's Department of Propaganda. In a report to the top echelon of the party, the propaganda department underlined that participants in the courses 'had their first-ever opportunity to acquaint themselves coherently with the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist theory, the dialectics of the world revolutionary process and the antiimperialist struggle as well as with the generally valid laws of socialist revolution and socialist construction'. Most of the participants had never read a 'classic of Marxism-Leninism'. The report adds: 'To help them form a scientific perception of the world and, in particular, to understand the developmental processes in nature and society, arrangements were made to introduce them to Marxist-Leninist classics. Film shows and lectures showing the evolution of life on earth and the development of man and society were organised, with visible success.'298

The content of teaching at SED party schools has been questioned, particularly after the end of the GDR. However, the experience of attending a political school was valued by many of the foreign students. Jeremy Cronin comes to the conclusion:

A large number of leading ANC cadres acquired a lot of their basic ideological skills in that kind of training ... Maybe the content of what was taught was questionable, but people acquired real intellectual skills, dialectical skills ... the ability to think dialectically rather than just in a very mechanical way.

All those things had carried us through the difficult period, who are very important in the ANC now.299

Essop Pahad recalls:

What the party schools as a whole did, it gave young African comrades confidence in their own ability to understand political processes ... So, it gave them the confidence to interact with anybody in the world, even our young people once we sent them out to international organisations ... I would argue that it had great advantages. Again the disadvantages you would see afterwards, but they are more easily overcome ... many of our best people were trained in the socialist countries. So I think the long-term effect


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has been ... far more positive than negative. The negative in my view was as I say a kind of dogmatism that was there. It was there in the party as a whole, the system as a whole.’”

The central point of all discussions about the East German experience with foreign students at party schools was how to tackle economic and social development under extremely difficult initial conditions. It remains debatable to what extent the experience of the GDR as a highly industrialised country could have been of any use to the ANC and other Third World partners, particularly as they were presented as a result of 'generally valid laws' of 'the Marxist-Leninist doctrine', which was in a state of dogmatic ossification and included as indispensable features the 'leading role of the party' and policies to safeguard its unbridled power. Adherence to these dogmas in the GDR was one of the reasons for the non-development of democracy, and without democracy, social progress was ultimately unsustainable. The collapse of socialism in the GDR and in Eastern Europe has left this as a historical experience to remember.

A friend in need

Brand of GDR solidarity: Partnership, speed and efficiency

The GDR regarded its support for the liberation struggle in southern Africa as a cooperative effort. Co-operation among equal partners in a common struggle became a coherent element of solidarity. Most citizens actively involved in practising solidarity spiritualised this feeling. This attitude of partnership was
acknowledged by the ANC. Alfred Nzo commented: 'The GDR, what was impressive about it was ... when you discussed with somebody from the GDR, you discussed with real friends.' And Pallo Jordan stated: 'I never came across an incident ... where anyone from the German Democratic Republic or the SED said: 'Now with respect to this you do A, B and C, look at the world this way or view this matter in this particular direction.' ... I also would say: I never came across this, where people would say: 'Unless you do this, you won't get this,' which would be a form of arm twisting ... no incident arose where pressure could have been brought on people or on the ANC to take particular policy position or to view the world in a particular way...'

Although the GDR had specific foreign policy interests in Africa (section 1), its representatives presented its principled position of opposing colonialism, racism and apartheid convincingly. Max Sisulu recalls that the GDR helped when freedom for South Africa was a very distant vision - at that early stage it was a friend in need and therefore a friend indeed.

The strength of GDR solidarity was swift aid in acute emergency situations. The Solidarity Committee was able to organise, even at short notice, rallies of support when needed. Political decisions within 24 hours to the top of the state, up to Erich Honecker, were the guarantee for a speedy implementation of emergency aid. Of course, there were no 'bottlenecks' of too many democratic institutions in the decisionmaking process. When in autumn 1968 the deteriorating situation in Tanzania and Zambia forced the ANC to submit an urgent request for help, in December that year the Solidarity Committee and FDGB prepared an emergency shipment of clothing for South Africans in ANC camps. Another case is known from 1976, when thousands of young South African refugees flocked to the ANC in the African frontline states after the Soweto uprising. It was no coincidence that in the same year the GDR more than doubled its assistance to the ANC compared with 1975. Scholarships and facilities for military training were part of this assistance.

A delegation of IDAF, examining the situation in camps for refugees from South Africa and Namibia in neighbouring southern African countries in the late 1980s, gained comparatively positive impressions from the impact of GDR assistance in the humanitarian field and East German supplies of equipment. Alfred Nzo, who was in a position to evaluate the importance of the support his organisation received, concluded: It was therefore easy for us to place our case whenever the ANC was in any form of trouble ... And we knew the GDR was going to respond accordingly ... I remember, sometimes our camps in Angola would run short of food. It was dangerously low. The first country we [asked] was GDR, because we knew the GDR would respond almost immediately including airlifting supplies ...

This relationship had developed to that extent.

Anthony Mongalo who as the ANC chief representative in Berlin experienced the brand of GDR assistance, would compare: From the GDR, the assistance that the ANC got was far better coordinated. The GDR was more responsive, even at short notice, to requests that used to come ...

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we were able to arrange with the GDR that at this time we have this amount of food that has come, but we will need at this time or at that time ... I would get a call, look there is a planeload of new recruits, uniforms, clothing, all these things.

... If that type of assistance had not come, the moral of our people in those bushes, in those camps would have gone so low ... It was mainly the question of when it comes to urgency, the GDR was always ready at short notice. With the Soviet Union you would have had to wait for certain times to be slotted in.3” Jeremiah Mamabolo qualifies the support of the GDR:

At the level of government, there was no doubt that GDR was in the forefront of support for the liberation movements in terms of material support, political, moral support, material and so forth. ... The GDR government was in the frontline.309

In South Africa itself, the GDR was known to be one of the main allies and a staunch supporter of the ANC. Allister Sparks remembers:

It was known that quite a number of ANC people were based in East Berlin, Sechaba was produced there ... I think there were more ANC people in East Germany than in any other East European country [except] in the Soviet Union. It was a primary kind of base ... with all the military training was being given there. I think East Germany and Moscow itself were seen as the two knots of support for the ANC.310

And Brigadier Snowball of the former South Africa Defence Force recalls:

Our perception was that East Germany was the leading force of the East Bloc countries against the white government in South Africa. As such they were giving assistance to all the liberation movements, also anti-Portuguese, also anti-South African of course ... They were one of the main instigators behind the onslaught against us.”

At a symposium of German and South African historians at Robben Island in September 1997, Brian Bunting, a veteran of the South African liberation struggle stated:

The GDR placed the resources of the country at the disposal of the South African liberation movement to the fullest extent possible. Hundreds of MK members were trained in the GDR, the ANC representative given the status of ambassador. Journals, pamphlets and books of the ANC and SACP were printed in the GDR and dispatched at state expense all over the world. Illegal editions were printed for distribution inside South Africa. Cadres of both organisations were treated in GDR hospitals free of charge. Material aid was provided to the movement in Zambia and Angola. Students were enrolled at GDR universities and colleges ... Because of the warmth of support so readily offered, members of the liberation movement developed a special respect and love for the GDR.312

In a message on the 30th anniversary of the GDR, the NEC of the ANC spoke of the GDR as ‘a symbol of international friendship and militant solidarity against imperialism and reaction.’”

This militant solidarity and the frontline situation of the GDR in international politics probably made relations between the ANC and the GDR special. Cadres in MK saw it that way.3”4 There was a strong solidarity mood among the people of the GDR. It was easy for many of them to identify with the official policy of solidarity with the struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid. But there were obvious contradictions as far as internal deficits were concerned, for example deficits in democracy and economic deficits. The economic problems of the GDR, bureaucratic hurdles, the over-centralisation of structures, the lack of free initiative and the curtailment of grassroots activities limited the mobilisation efforts and the efficiency in implementing solidarity. Taking these into account, the tireless efforts of those engaged in solidarity work have to be valued – those who gave solidarity a face and made it a success.

‘New thinking’in the GDR Africa Policy

The increased African commitment of the GDR after the emergence of progressive regimes with socialist leanings in Angola and Mozambique in the mid 1970s and the upsurge in the liberation struggle in southern
Africa was noted by the liberation organisations, especially after the GDR shifted the focus of its Africa policy towards southern Africa. Pallo Jordan observed:

Beginning around 1974/75, with the collapse of the Caetano regime in Portugal and the independence of the four Portuguese colonies ... the German Democratic Republic was able to play a much more ... high profile role in southern Africa. Mozambique and Angola were becoming independent and almost immediately the GDR was able to open embassies in the two countries. GDR technical and other assistance was very important for both countries. And also in relation to the other liberation movements in southern Africa the GDR was able to play a prominent role. Beginning 1975/76, again through the Solidarity Committee, agreements were struck between the liberation movements in southern Africa, ZAPU, ANC, SWAPO and German Democratic Republic institutions on various forms of material assistance.315


GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle

Relations of the GDR with countries such as Angola, Mozambique and also Ethiopia took a new dimension when compared to other sub-Saharan states. In addition to bilateral relations with these three countries, support for liberation movements in southern Africa became a fourth focal point of its new Africa policy. Support for ZAPU and SWAPO reached a new level with substantially increased material assistance, strategic political co-operation and a new dimension of military and security support.316 Relations between the GDR and the ANC crystallised in a complex relationship with highlights in the fields of training, support for the armed struggle, political and diplomatic support and party-to-party relations (section 3). The official ANC mission in Berlin, flying the ANC flag in a designated area for foreign embassies, was another expression of that development.

In 1979, two official trips by Erich Honecker to African countries symbolised the new quality of GDRAfrica policy. On 23 February 1979, Honecker met ANC president Oliver Tambo in Maputo for an exchange of views. It was a symbolic meeting on African soil rather close to South Africa. Tambo received a solidarity cheque worth M5m for the ANC. In 1979, there was euphoria in the GDR about developments in Africa. During his state visits Honecker signed Treaties of Friendship and Co-operation with Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia: the first such treaties with developing countries other than those considered part of the socialist world. The year 1979 was supposed to be the beginning of a new stage in the GDR's Africa policy. Erich Honecker's trips to Africa indicated the peak of that development. But instead of the new higher stage, there was a subsequent decline in the importance of the Africa policy in the 1980s. The reasons were manifold. The complex GDR engagement in Africa had grown out of proportion. The crisis-stricken East German economy could not afford the strain. Other reasons included expectations of economic co-operation with African countries that did not materialise. Political and economic developments in African states of 'socialist orientation' were a sobering experience as well. At the same time, East German foreign policy became Europe-centred, focusing on international security and disarmament. The decline of the African commitment of the GDR was not abrupt. It was not even felt at that time, but it led to a reduction of economic and other activities. Bilateral relations with the African partner states became stagnant, and another envisaged trip of Erich Honecker to southern Africa did not materialise.

The GDR economy was undergoing a crisis. Fewer goods were available for solidarity purposes. Therefore, SED secretary for economy Guenter Mittag insisted that solidarity donations raised by the trade unions should decrease. The Solidarity Committee was reoriented to reduce the overall solidarity intake. In view of the general shortage of manufactured goods, the required reduction in material solidarity supplies was to be offset by an increase in solidarity services - the training, education, and medical treatment of wounded personnel - for 'national economic reasons'.'”

Unlike manufactured goods, which were short in supply, services of this kind were available and offered the potential for increased solidarity. In contrast to negative impacts as far as the amount of assistance for independent African states was concerned, there was no decline of GDR support for liberation movements. This was mainly owing to the commitment to the spirit of solidarity and the continued support of the struggle against racism and apartheid by the core of the GDR leadership and Honecker.

Another aspect of this development was a ‘new thinking’, an understanding that Eastern European models of socialism did not offer a solution to Africa’s grave problems. The need for East-West co-operation in solving regional problems and developmental issues was discussed. The first signs of a break with unrealistic foreign policy dogma contrasted with an increasing ossification of the domestic situation in the GDR. ‘New thinking’ partly reflected discussions among Soviet scholars, partly it was an indigenous development, but it was not generally accepted in the political hierarchy.

The application of ‘new thinking’ to the Africa policy included the approach that existing problems were of a global nature and had to be tackled as such. The GDR, taking note of international trends, developed a new, constructive stand in support of a political settlement in southern Africa. This shift pointed to a gradual departure from dogmatic views on development problems in the south. ‘New thinking’ on developments in Africa emerged in the International Relations Department, but not in the party leadership.

The International Relations Department submitted an expose with new reflections to the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Politburo in October 1984. Starting with an analysis of the economic and social situation in developing countries, the authors emphasised that the search for ‘quick solutions’ to these problems did not help anyone. In their view, the policy of accelerated industrialisation and technological modernisation had reached its limits, as it entailed increased technological dependence and a neglect of agriculture and food production, with catastrophic consequences for the people.

Partly owing to the pressure of the Reagan administration’s confrontation strategy, the GDR took a more realistic view in the 1980s of its own potential and that of the entire East bloc. Seen from this angle, any further advance of socialism in Africa, which would have required massive support from the socialist countries, appeared to be out of the question. The CC’s international relations department noted: Given the current power balance, the socialist countries will not be able for the foreseeable future to provide crucial material support of any major proportion to sustain the economic consolidation of revolutionary developments. It is therefore more important than ever to help revolutionary

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frontline states. In its conclusions, the paper proposed certain tasks: "In co-ordination with the USSR and the other allies, the GDR should make an effective contribution to ensuring and strengthening peace and security in southern Africa and oppose the continued involvement of the region in the imperialist course of confrontation and sharpened conflict. Its foreign policy should seek to 'mobilise all progressive and patriotic forces for a common struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, against a pro-imperialist settlement of the Namibian question, and for preventing renewed aggression'. Support should be given to initiatives 'aimed at ensuring a peaceful evolution in the region, independence, territorial integrity and sovereign statehood, and a further reinforcement of collaboration with the national liberation movements' by the African states."
* In political and diplomatic contacts, the GDR should encourage coordinated action by the OAU member states, in particular the frontline states and the liberation movements, among themselves and with the socialist states and other allies.
* Political, diplomatic and material support for the ANC and SWAPO should be continued on the basis of inter-party accords, focused on 'political exchanges of views, cadre training, provision of experts and consultants, medical and other solidarity services'.

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While the premises were still those of 'international class struggle', the paper differed from the mindset of the mid 1970s in that it no longer envisaged any further change in the international balance of forces in favour of socialism, but a need to defend positions already gained in southern Africa. The dominant concern was to prevent an escalation of the conflict and restore peace and security to the region as conditions for its future development.

This approach accorded with the interests and aims of the frontline states, which a joint delegation of their foreign ministers explained to the GDR leadership in Berlin in April 1987. Beyond that, it was becoming increasingly clear that the GDR's economic weakness (which left no scope for undertaking additional commitments in favour of Mozambique at that meeting323) did not permit a further-reaching strategy in southern Africa in the context of 'a continued world revolutionary process'. In 1987 the SED secretary for international relations Hermann Axen explained to colleagues from other socialist states in Warsaw the intention to continue co-operation with social democratic parties, among others, in the struggle against apartheid, colonialism and neo-colonialism.324

The South African destabilisation strategy confronted the Eastern bloc with a choice. Should priority go to stabilising Angola and Mozambique or supporting the armed struggle waged by SWAPO and the ANC? This question was the subject of internal discussion in the GDR, which decided in favour of Angola and Mozambique, without cutting back assistance for the liberation movements. This strong engagement in the region placed an increasingly heavy burden on the Soviet Union and its allies. The GDR's commitment to a settlement in southern Africa was not at odds with continued unrestricted solidarity for the ANC and SWAPO. Neither of those movements had ever doubted the GDR's stand towards them. Essop Pahad confirms:
The GDR would discuss with the leadership of the ANC and the party (SACP - HGS) before they made contacts with white South Africans who were not in the ANC or the party, never mind the regime. And by then we were encouraging these contacts ourselves... We also knew that they were deeply committed to support only the ANC.

In the course of 'new thinking' a strategic paper on developments in Africa to be expected until 2000 was drafted in the Foreign Ministry in 1988/89. The confrontational approach with simplifying socio-economic models was dropped, and the need for East-West co-operation in solving regional problems as well as improving the international framework for the solution of developing problems was stressed.

GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle
Post GDR: The heritage

The world changed from 1989 onwards. The Cold War was finally ended, and so too did the bloc of socialist states, among them the GDR, which not only lost its socio-economic system, but also its identity as a state. When the GDR collapsed in 1989/90, it was an unpleasant surprise for many of its African partners. Neither prejudice nor nostalgia is helpful when analysing facts or circumstances in the GDR before its implosion. But from the point of view of its African partners, especially those from the liberation movements, the GDR looked quite attractive. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi thinks that the GDR had become a kind of example, not to use the word 'model', of a seemingly successful socialist society. For Max Sisulu 'there were a number of factors for our appreciation of GDR: the stability, the welfare of the people, the warmth among the people. We felt very depressed when the GDR collapsed.'

Sonia Bunting summarised her views, having visited the GDR quite regularly:

In general we had the view that the GDR was the best organised, the most disciplined of all the socialist countries that we had experience of. We found widespread understanding of Marxism-Leninism and the organisation of the GDR society struck us as being much better managed than either the Soviet Union or any of the other countries. I think there was that general feeling that if there was one of the socialist countries that would survive it would be the GDR... We took pride in the achievements of the GDR... We were all on the same side, we were all fighting the same battle, and we were loyal to one another and we felt the need to defend one another's achievements.

Very often we didn't speak out because there might be problems arising that we could foresee or we didn't want... Every time I went [to the GDR] there would be progress of some sort or another, a new building, a new cultural centre. It wasn't stagnant in any way, it seemed to be on the up and up all the time... November '90 was the last time I visited. It was just so sad that all the things did go down.

From the outside, the GDR looked much more stable than indeed it was. But there was also an uncritical approach from the close allies. In the aftermath, Essop Pahad points to some of the problems:

The thinking in the communist movement was such that you didn't publicly criticise each other... Our own students studying in the GDR obviously saw many things that those of us who were coming as guests of the party couldn't see, but as I say I think the leadership was too isolated... isolated from their own people...

This lack of a culture of democratic discussion in the party structures as a whole... Even in our underground

Immediately after the collapse of the GDR and the unification of Germany, a wave of sweeping negative statements entered the debate over the history of the GDR and its international relations. The discussion...
had only too often been hijacked by the expediencies of day-to-day politics. But neither prejudice nor nostalgia was helpful when analysing facts or circumstances in the GDR before its implosion. A critical and factual scrutiny of the co-operation with liberation movements facilitates access to the heritage which East Germans can, with self-esteem, contribute to the united Germany. Subsequently a more sober assessment developed.

Meanwhile East Germans have established their place in the unified Germany, and part of that process is identification with their past. A number of publications by East Germans give proof of that. Apart from some uncritical and nostalgic attempts to justify everything in the GDR, most of those publications take a critical and realistic view of the past. This exercise is a vital reaction to the radical social change that has been experienced since the upheaval of autumn 1989. Coming to terms with all their past experiences, positive and negative, is indispensable, for it enables people to clear their minds and regain energy and initiative.

In the unification of Germany many East German structures were dissolved. Semi-societal organisations of the former GDR that had dealt with Africa experienced major financial problems. Some vanished; others re-grouped. Basically, their activities were limited to the geographic and political area of the former GDR. Very few of the projects the GDR had maintained in Africa survived. Few of the many East German experts involved in co-operation with Africa had the chance to continue. The ideological legacy of the GDR's Africa policy was totally rejected. Unfortunately this had affected long-term and intense contacts with a number of governments and liberation movements.331

But in Africa GDR solidarity was not forgotten. The issue of Sechaba in December 1990, a few months after the GDR had disappeared, had a cover showing the opening of the ANC mission in East Berlin in 1978 by Oliver Tambo and Solidarity Committee president Kurt Seibt. The editorial 'A Friend to Sechaba' commented on the loss that the liberation movement had suffered with the disappearance of the GDR and mentioned 'the unstinting services that the GDR people willingly and selflessly rendered to the South African people'.332 In February 1993 a large international conference in Johannesburg was opened by Oliver Tambo and chaired by Thabo Mbeki. Among the invited guests, foreign representatives of governments and organisations were solidarity activists from the former GDR. Tambo had invited them in order to

332 Sechaba, December 1990, 1.
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GDR solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African liberation struggle thank their countries and organisations for their valuable contribution to the freeing of the South African people from the bondage of apartheid.333 The East German representatives included young people from the formerly independent church-related solidarity groups as well as solidarity activists from the former GDR establishment. They were cooperating in projects inherited from the GDR solidarity. In the GDR, links with national liberation movements were particularly close in southern Africa, where they have left many traces.

With the trade unions and the other mass organisations of the GDR the strongest pillars of the East German solidarity movement vanished, and only a limited number of structures survived. A new organisation, Solidaritaetsdienst International (Solidarity Services International (SODI)) emerged as a legal successor organisation to the GDR Solidarity Committee. That was of specific importance to save the substantial solidarity funds of the GDR and make them available for development assistance. At the same time, support for a number of ongoing projects and scholarships had to be continued. SODI is a grassroots-based organisation that is not affiliated to any political party. It regards itself as functioning in the tradition of the GDR Solidarity Committee, while critically analysing and avoiding the deficits of that committee, especially those concerning the democratic base and independence of the organisation.

SODI focuses its work on traditional partners of the former Solidarity Committee. Its activities include projects in South Africa, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique. Over the last one and half decades SODI has
become a major NGO in East Germany concerned with development co-operation. Other organisations that were active in solidarity work, such as Gossner Mission, INKOTA and DAFRIG continue their involvement. The School of Solidarity of the former Journalists Union became the International Institute of Journalism Berlin-Brandenburg. A number of new small NGOs have emerged, some of them continuing East German solidarity engagement.

Most of these organisations rely on the continuing commitment of East Germans to supporting the struggle: formerly against colonialism, racism and apartheid; today against neo-liberalism and the negative effects of globalisation, for development and democracy. Elderly people who are aware of the roots of solidarity in the struggle against fascism are still strongly engaged. And fortunately many young people join the solidarity efforts. Some of them are surprised to realise how deep the East German roots of solidarity are. For many people, solidarity is an important part of their own identity, as far as their political life is concerned. And interestingly, some forms of GDR solidarity have survived or have been revived, such as the annual solidarity bazaar of journalists at Alexanderplatz in Berlin. The idea of solidarity is alive; the heritage of GDR solidarity is preserved.

Conclusion
In the GDR, solidarity with the national liberation struggle against colonialism, racism and neo-colonialism was one of the basic foreign policy principles. Solidarity was based on working-class traditions of the German labour movement and on internationalist principles of the socialist ideology. The movement of national liberation was considered a natural ally of the socialist countries in their struggle for progressive changes in the world. While solidarity rested on such general principles, it served as a vehicle for specific foreign policy interests of the GDR in its drive to achieve international recognition as an equal member of the community of nations. Solidarity with the liberation struggle in southern Africa was largely determined by Cold War constellations and the confrontation between the two German states. Later the heavy impact of the interGerman quarrels on co-operation with the liberation movements lost its momentum owing to the improving relations between the two German states. Later the heavy impact of the interGerman quarrels on co-operation with the liberation movements lost its momentum owing to the improving relations between the two German states. The idea of solidarity is alive; the heritage of GDR solidarity is preserved.

The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity, Part II was based on working-class traditions of the German labour movement and on internationalist principles of the socialist ideology. The movement of national liberation was considered a natural ally of the socialist countries in their struggle for progressive changes in the world. The political players were agreed on the principle of solidarity, but had to manage conflicts of political and economic interests in the practical pursuit of politics. It was always a problem to find ways of giving material support without overstretching the possibilities of the economy. Solidarity institutions and groups included political parties, the trade union federation (which was the main contributor to the solidarity fund) and other mass organisations. There were also church-related anti-apartheid groups outside the official solidarity movement. The role of the churches was significant. The Solidarity Committee played a central role as the major instrument for the mobilisation, organisation and implementation of solidarity. It was embedded in the political structures under the overall leadership of the Socialist Unity Party, SED.

Among the GDRpopulation there was a broad sense of solidarity, but the centralistic and administrative way of organising it trimmed initiatives from below and prevented a democratic grassroots solidarity movement. This was undoubtedly the major weakness of GDR solidarity. At the same time, the efficiency of its support for and close relations with the liberation movements resulted from the sincere personal and convincing commitment of many East Germans. A specific contribution was made by Germans who had resisted and fought fascism. Although the people usually accepted the established rules of centralised solidarity and participated in solidarity meetings and events, there was individual and independent engagement. For instance, the attempt of the leadership to curtail solidarity contributions in the early 1980s was successfully countered by a protest movement among trade union members. Similar or identical political ideologies, inspirations and evaluations of international developments provided ample common ground to establish and maintain a stable mutual relationship. This, of course, did not exclude differences of opinion, for example on how to judge political adversaries or devise the strategy and tactics of the liberation struggle. True, the GDR and the liberation movements in southern Africa shared common overall interests, which were to a very great extent conditioned by the East-West Cold War
confrontation, but their specific interests were not always the same. Early contacts existed between the SED and SACP, between the GDR trade unions and SACTU, and from 1960 onwards between the Solidarity Committee and the ANC. Solidarity campaigns and practical support for the struggle in the 1960s and early 1970s focused on the boycott movement, on economic and sports sanctions against the apartheid regime and on solidarity with political prisoners in South Africa.

Major areas of support for the ANC were propaganda and armed struggle. The GDR assisted with the production of periodicals, books and other printed material for the ANC and with producing films. Culture was another area of cooperation. Training of cadres in the military and security fields at the request of the ANC became a special feature of the co-operation. Military training in the GDR encompassed about 1 000 MK cadres, besides preparing individual fighters for deployment in the underground struggle in South Africa. The considerable support for the armed struggle had always to be carefully balanced with the policy of peaceful coexistence between the Eastern and the Western blocs.

Political and diplomatic support for the ANC in international organisations and especially in the UN, as well as at international conferences, became another trade mark of GDR solidarity. Education and scholarships, training of skilled personnel, support for ANC training institutions, substantial material and infrastructural assistance, medical treatment for the sick and wounded, special training courses such as those for future diplomats added to the dimension of assistance. The level of relations between the GDR and the ANC was raised with the establishment of party-to-party relations between the SED and the ANC in 1972. These relations and the establishment and support of an official ANC mission in Berlin with semi-diplomatic status were clear indications for a new quality in bilateral relations. The GDR Africa policy reached its climax in the late 1970s, focusing on African countries of a socialist development and on liberation movements in southern Africa.

With the deepening of the economic crisis in the GDR in the 1980s, the limits of solidarity in terms of material help became more and more obvious. Despite this situation and a decline of the GDR's Africa policy generally, the help for the liberation movements was not reduced. The full-fledged support to the ANC and SWAPO continued. 'New thinking' in the GDR Africa policy with the development of a new, constructive stand in support of a political settlement in southern Africa did not negatively affect the support for liberation movements.

Altogether the range of support and assistance for the ANC was impressive. The brand of GDR solidarity recognised by many liberation movements, including the ANC, was that of partnership on equal terms and speedy and efficient solidarity support. It can be concluded that this support was a valuable contribution to the struggle of the liberation movements in general and during emergency situations in particular. The collapse of the GDR and (nearly) all its structures in 1989/90 came as a shock for many partners in the liberation movements and interrupted solidarity relations. It took some time to preserve valuable traditions and maintain its commitment to solidarity. SODI, as a successor to the Solidarity Committee, managed to secure solidarity funds and continuing education, training and projects. There is continued solidarity in East Germany as a resurrection from the grassroots.