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on
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Paper Presented to the "International Seminar
on the Role of the TNCs in Namibia"

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AKTIEKOMITEE ZUIDELIJK AFRIKA

1.

November 9, 1982. While strolling along the Rue du Marais in Brussels, John Ya-Otto (Secretary of Labour, SWAPO) and I pass unexpectedly the offices of the Société Générale des Minerais, the largest trading company in the Société Générale de Belgique group. While I am explaining Mr Ya-Otto that SGM is an importer of Namibian blister copper, one of the functionaries leaves the office. He is walking in our direction and suddenly turns around to interrupt us: "No, no", he says, "you are misinformed. The bulk of our copper is bought in Zaire. Another part is bought from Namibia and Chile(?)." If he could give us any idea of the amount? But on that he wouldn't elaborate!

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There is certainty of the Belgian "presence" in Namibia - as the anecdote above wants to illustrate - but the picture remains vague. One of the most obvious reasons is that much research in this field remains to be done. For AKZA this seminar therefore is of vital importance since we are engaged in this research. We hope to get the necessary stimuli from researchers, experts or activists from other countries and to learn from their information and working methods.

In order to give you an idea of the Belgian involvement in Namibia (and South Africa) I will first focus on some issues which we think to be of an importance to this seminar. We also try to raise material support for SWAPO (and the ANC). In item B I will mention some examples and problems we have faced so far.

A. Belgium and Namibia

Characteristic for the solidarity groups in Belgium is that none of them can rely on salarised personal. AKZA is the only of the three Belgian anti-apartheid committees which is staffed with volunteers during office hours. The only subsidies we get is through the World Council of Churches and Sharing and Fraternity, and even these sources seem to dry out. AKZA - founded in 1972 as the Flemish Angola Committee - has explicitly engaged itself in all kinds of investigations such as into the nature and scope of the Belgian trade with South Africa, bankloans, into the Belgian role in the international violation of the mandatory armsembargo on South Africa, especially into the GC 5 Howitzer which South Africa claims to have produced herself and which is being tested in Namibian territories, into Ghent Coal Terminal (a huge and ultra modern coal terminal in the port

of Gent, which is jointly owned by the English Anglo International Mining Corporation and the South African mining group Rand London), and recently into Namian blister copper, diamonds and uranium. Some of these topics will be distributed among sympathising scholars and study departments of trade unions. At least, that is what we are planning since we ourselves are unable to cope with them. It is very important to inform them on the study object and on the methodology. Even if this is working we will nevertheless face problems that are closely linked with the availability of f.i. international detailed statistics which are useful to deduce information from. It would be worth while, I think, to pool this information in a central organisation (branch of the UN Committee against Apartheid?) to which the various interested anti-apartheid committees could subscribe. This pooling-committee would then distribute information to those committees of the countries that are involved.

I will briefly outline some topics of interest to our further investigation.

- Namibian blister copper is being refined by Métallurgie Hoboken-Overpelt
The Société Général des Minerais, trading company in the Société Générale holding, does the trading. The Société Générale de Belgique is in various ways of importance, since she also has shares in Rio Tinto Zinc. In 1978 the Belgian firm Synatom signed a contract with the South African Harmony Gold Mining Company for the deliverie of 2000 ton of Uranium. Where does this uranium come from?
- The Compagnie Maritime Belge is the largest ^{Belgian} firm of shipowners and also part of the Société Générale. She is part of the Southern Africa Europe Container Service (SAECS) and has a line to Walvis Bay. (If of any importance I can give the names of the ships to those who are interested.)
- Antwerp is known to be one of the world centres of diamond cutting.
- In June 1981 AKZA participated in an international Trade Union seminar on Namibian uranium. It was revealed that the port of Zeebrugge, also famous for its handling of arms exports, was used as an escape route when British and French unions tried to block the trade route. We have lost sight on further initiatives of this type.

P.S. Belgium is a member of the UN Council for Namibia but it seems that they adopt a low profile policy. Before raising this matter in parliament, opposition spokesmen need more detailed information on the Belgian behaviour in this UN body.

B. Solidarity work

Those funding organisations who are financing SWAPO-projects or projects for Namibian refugees can and do rely on AKZA. Still there are funding organisations that are willing to support such projects but haven't been contacted so far. Therefore it would be interesting to inform us of projects which we could distribute.

One of the things which prove to be succesful is the book of John Ya-Otto, "Frontline Namibia". AKZA has taken steps to make it available in Dutch. (It is published jointly by Kritak, KZA and Novib) The book is certainly worth while promoting and it would be a good thing to translate it in other languages than English, Bulgarian and Dutch!

When the author was in Belgium to present the Dutch translation to the press we discussed the idea of funding the distribution of "Frontline Namibia" in refugee camps. So far, we have only contacted the World Council of Labour to ask for financial assistance. Are there any suggestions on f.i. how to approach Heineman, the English publishing house, to obtain the cheapest formula.

Every year AKZA organises a solidarity workshop. Uptil now we have produced jig saw puzzles, but it seems to me that there are more interesting alternatives. Information on campaigns such as those of the Namibian Support Committee - with which we aren't well familiar - is welcome.

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