Many observers of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa felt at one point during the late 1970s that Namibia was nearer to achieving independence than was Zimbabwe: as everybody knows, events proved different. Today, Zimbabwe is indeed independent, while the battle for the freedom of Namibia still continues.

However, it is clear now that no simple chain reaction will ensure that Namibia’s independence will soon follow on the heels of that of Zimbabwe. This is mainly because the very outcome of the Zimbabwe elections had provided a harsh lesson for the South African regime. Pretoria fears a similar victory for the liberation movement, in this case the South West Africa People’s Organisation — SWAPO — in elections in Namibia; this it is not prepared to swallow.

Ever since the Geneva United Nations conference of January 1980, which was called to settle outstanding issues inhibiting progress towards elections in Namibia, and which was brought to an abrupt end by South Africa’s declaration that to proceed would be ‘premature’, negotiations over Namibia’s future have continued rather slowly. Both South Africa and SWAPO have accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) which calls for the holding of fair and free elections in the territory under UN supervision and control. This resolution enshrined the UN plan, which is supposed to be set in motion by the signing of a ceasefire between SWAPO and South African forces.

South Africa’s blocking of this process at Geneva happened apparently after that regime had received positive hints from the then American President-elect Ronald Reagan anticipated close relations between the two administrations. Indeed relations between Washington and Pretoria have been greatly strengthened. Since the beginning of 1980 the Washington administration has taken over direct control of the negotiations with the South African regime. South Africa has used this development to their advantage and it is becoming apparent, even to other members of the Western Contact Group, that South Africa is treating the reign of the Reagan administration as a period of grace. It knows that it can get away with practically no progress over the Namibian issue without fearing repercussions in the form of international sanctions, because the USA would veto any such move. France and West Germany are increasingly feeling that the South

---

1 A group of Western governments comprising the US, Britain, West Germany, Canada and France.
political middle ground in Namibia. SWAPO has been extremely successful in mobilising popular support. This has been manifested in the nationwide involvement in SWAPO’s campaign, which is conducted on three levels of activity: the political front at home, the international diplomatic campaign, and of course, the armed struggle. SWAPO freedom fighters are tying down over 80,000 South African occupation troops with all their sophisticated military hardware. The South African military have acknowledged that they cannot win an outright military victory over SWAPO. This is what lies behind its hideous twin policies of repression, detention and torture of Namibian opponents to the regime inside the country, and mounting attacks on neighbouring independent African states, especially Angola and Zambia, destroying agriculture and industrial infrastructures, and killing innocent civilians.

The latest development has been South Africa’s attempt to ‘Namibianise’ the conflict. Forced conscription for all Namibians over the age of 16 has meant that Namibians are now being made to engage each other on the battlefield. This has made many thousands flee the country to escape conscription.

As part of their desperate attempt to halt the advance of the liberation struggle, South Africa has created the so-called National Assembly in Namibia, staffed with its few hand-picked ethnically based collaborators in the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). The objective of this was to present an alternative to SWAPO. Increasingly, South Africa has used the DTA as a mouthpiece through which to delay the elections and procrastinate. However, even this strategy has failed dismally. What small support there might have been for the DTA has disappeared as it has been unable to effect even minor changes in the racist South African controlled system in Namibia. Moreover, even the DTA has its own internal contradictions. The President, Rev Peter Kalangula, resigned in the middle of February, claiming that he no longer supported the ethnic nature of the DTA. He is now making a bid to create a new non-ethnic ‘moderate’ (ie anti-SWAPO) party. It is safe to speculate that this move has backing from outside South Africa, no doubt including certain Western interests.

It is the combined pressure of political, military and diplomatic action against the South African occupation regime in Namibia that will herald the freedom of that country. This encompasses the continued mobilisation of the Namibian people; intensification of the armed struggle and its increasing demoralising effect on South African white youth — more and more of whom are deserting from the army; and a heightened campaign for the total isolation of South Africa through the mandatory imposition of sanctions. Since Namibians and South Africans face a common enemy their liberation struggles complement each other.

Peter H Katjavivi

THE BRISTOL CITY EIGHT

Unlike most industries, football’s industrial relations, and indeed its organisation, cannot be explained simply by capitalist economic laws. One law, though, is proving to apply to football just as much as to any other capitalist industry — that when things go wrong, it is the workers who suffer.

The first people to discover this were the ‘Ashton Gate Eight’, eight members of Bristol City football club who, as the club’s disastrously inept management brought it face to face with liquidation, were left to take the responsibility for maintaining the club in existence. Clubs previously had maintained the inviolability of contracts, and were often to be heard, usually in the form of their chairmen, complaining bitterly about the lack of loyalty in the game.

As Geoff Merrick, the club captain and players’ spokesman discovered, loyalty only ran one way. The directors’ answer, when the club got into trouble, was to face the players with an ultimatum: either they accept £58,000 to be split among the eight and tore up their contracts worth between £250,000 — £290,000, or the club went into liquidation. For players who had mortgages, families and responsibilities based upon their contracts, it was an impossible situation. Some, like Merrick, had turned down lucrative moves in previous years out of loyalty to the club and a desire to stay with the colleagues they had grown up with. Now they were faced with losing their livelihoods or taking the responsibility for closing the club and costing their other colleagues their jobs too.

Significantly neither the Football League nor the Football Association made any move to help. The Professional Footballers’ Association, however, immediately acted in defence of their members. As Gordon Taylor, the PFA secretary remarked ‘We couldn’t afford to have such a bad settlement, not only for the sake of the players concerned, but for all our other members’.

PFA accountants studied the books, and although the deal that was finally negotiated was far from perfect, they did succeed in rescuing something from the wreckage. Instead of the club going into liquidation, which would have left the players waiting for up to two years before they received a penny, or accepting the ‘take it or leave it’ offer, the PFA succeeded in protecting the players’ contracts. They are now protected along with the other creditors of the old Bristol City Football Club Limited — management has passed into a new company, Bristol City (1982) Ltd — with first claim against the proceeds from a new share issue and from the sale of assets of the old company, the most valuable of which is the grounds and its facilities. A second consequence of that agreement was that at the same time the jobs of other PFA members employed by Bristol City were protected.

It was, perhaps, the best the PFA could get in the circumstances. Yet it is hardly surprising that Geoff Merrick should be left to say bitterly ‘loyalty is a complete and utter waste of time. Loyalty is a dirty word’. For during the week’s negotiations far from getting the public support they deserved, the players were often treated as the villains of the piece. Merrick’s reward for rejecting a move to Arsenal in order to help the club he had supported as a boy reach the first division was public abuse. Some of his colleagues received threatening phone calls. All were treated as if they were holding the club to ransom, rather than the other way round.

In the current economic plight of football, a grossly mismanaged declining industry, their experiences are unlikely to remain unique for long. Although Brian Winston, Orient chairman and one of the more progressive voices on the Football League management committee, admitted that the problems of football stemmed from the top, even he saw little alternative to hammering the players. Interviewed on television, he forecast a 25% redundancy among professionals at the end of the season.

If that is so, then a lot more clubs are going to be trying to tear up players’ contracts. For