

REVIEW

Northern European countries and Struggle for Liberation of South of Africa

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Soon after the democratic government in RSA was formed in 1994, the Nordic Institute for Africa (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet – NAI) in Uppsala, Sweden initiated a project of publishing a number of works on the links between Nordic countries and national-liberation movements in Southern Africa. The project was called “National Liberation in Southern Africa – Role of the Nordic Countries”. It resulted in six volumes presented in this review. Co-ordinator of the project, the prominent Swedish diplomat and at the present moment Economic Counsellor of the Embassy of Sweden in RSA, T. Sellström, for recent couple of decades has been directly involved in the matters related to the links between these movements and Sida – Swedish international development agency (approximate analogue of the Soviet GKES/ State Committee for Economic Co-operation) and Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He was later assigned Project Manager to NAI. Sweden was a pioneer country in establishing relations with fighters against apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa and has rendered them the biggest help among all northern countries. Although the aid was, at least officially, purely humanitarian and did not involve armament deliveries or training of military personnel, Sida’s documents are still classified. The manager of this project was meanwhile exempt, and this enabled him to deliver a detailed (one and a half thousand pages!) analysis of relations between Stockholm and the liberation movements, and in an indirect way, between Stockholm and the front-line countries of the African continent, which served if not a very reliable but a rear to these movements.

The first volume which Sellström edited himself (1999) is dedicated to analysing both actors and factors which influenced the formation of the policy of Swedish governmental and social bodies towards the anti-colonial and anti apartheid struggle. It gives particularly strong evidence of the reasons why Sweden delayed giving the liberation movements “official” aid, even if it was purely humanitarian. In the long and controversial process, lasting over a decade, while authorities were defining their guidelines, the economic interests of Swedish capital, as well as the cold war circumstances played role; on one hand the government could not openly venture support of “pro-Soviet” organisations, on the other hand they were willing to attract them, showing the advantages of the “Swedish model”.

The second volume also produced by Sellström, shows how the aid to the liberation movements was rendered in practice. It demonstrates that in fact this intention was supported by the whole political spectrum of Sweden except for the right wing Moderate party. It is no coincidence that when the social-democratic rule was replaced by the coalition of “bourgeois” parties, not only did not the aid to the liberation movements cease, but it even increased in tact with escalation of the struggle. In fact, wide solidarity campaigns, which without exaggeration had an overall popular character in Sweden came as a guarantee of this policy, while absence of an adequate movement in our country after the communist party was banned, allowed Yeltsin and Kozyrev to drastically change the attitude towards Southern Africa, and at the expense of our country’s interest start “fraternising” with F. De Klerk and his colleagues in

the government of the “white minority”, while the last was departing from the political stage of RSA

In order to avoid “Euro-centric” one-sided results in his research Sellström conducted 60 interviews in the countries of South of Africa. He interviewed leaders and campaigners from both successful liberation movements and those who landed far away from power positions. He even interviewed such odious figures as former foreign minister of RSA Rulof, (Peek) Botha and the failed agent of South African intelligence K. Williamson. The third volume of the publication contained these interviews.

It is important to emphasise that T. Sellström’s books are not apologetic. Based on interviews and documents they reveal several unappealing pages of Swedish foreign policy. In the West a number of books about Jonas Savimbi, the founder and leader of the so-called National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), was published. This material reports on his links to China, RSA and USA, - while T. Sellström is probably the first to demonstrate, that during the first years of the movement, it was in fact financially supported by Swedish social-democrat L-G Eriksson, Director of the Foundation for International University Exchange. This organisation was mainly supported by Scandinavian social democrats and its functions exceeded the framework of its name. Moreover, the social democratic party of Sweden was first to establish direct contacts with UNITA (Sellström, 1999, pp 405-406). One could assume that it was a reflection of a common for many social democrats search of the “third power”, positioned between the pro-Soviet Popular Movements for liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the Front for National Liberation of Angola (FNLA), which was too close to Washington.

The volumes on Swedish politics are interesting for other reasons too. T. Sellström has provided the main text with detailed comments revealing his deep insight of the processes taking place in South of Africa for several decades. These comments could easily make another book, but even in their present form they are a solid source on recent history of Southern Africa. New facts and evaluations from the first two volumes and especially the interviews, without any doubt present interest for historians dealing with USSR (Russian) politics in Africa, since they allow an “objects’ ” approach to the given policy and provide a fair albeit positive evaluation. In this respect Tabo Mbeki’s words (RSA president and the present leader of African National congress, ANC) - are remarkable. In interview with T. Sellström he points out that Sweden’s position provided ANC with “freedom of action” both towards the West and East. “For example, the first time ANC president met CPSU General Secretary was when Gorbachev became one. Previously, the highest-ranking CPSU figure receiving the ANC (leaders – *V.Sh.*) was the secretary for international affairs... At the same time Oliver Tambo (the then ANC president. – *V. Sh.*) could arrive in Sweden and meet the Prime Minister, who understood that he was representing a system bound to replace the one in office” (Sellström, 2003 pp154-155).

As for other countries – participants of the project – the volumes dedicated to their politics and practical moves reflect the peculiarities of the given countries.

I. Soiri, of Universities of Helsinki and Lapland and P. Peltola – former active participant of solidarity movement in Finland, - are authors of the volume dedicated to Finland’s policy in respect of the national-liberation movement in Southern Africa (Soiri & Peltola, 1999). It’s worth mentioning that as in Sweden the authors were allowed to use the archives of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was special for Finland’s policy in Southern Africa to focus on the situation of Namibia. The matter was that in the north of Namibia, in the region which the Finnish called Ambomaa (the land of ambo, ovambo), missionaries from Finland

started to show up since 1870, before the region was colonised by Germany (Soiri / Peltola, 1999 p. 10). The authors follow the evolution of their position starting from them condemning the actions of the popular organisation of south-west Africa (SWAPO) at the beginning of 1960-s for fear of banishment of the missionary activity, up to actually supporting the organisation in 1980-s.

In a persuasive manner the authors show how social and in the first place youth and student activities gradually forced the official circles to alter its policy. There is an interesting story of how the Committee for South Africa (it was active in 1965-1968) was created in Finland. In order to register it at the Legal Department an authorisation from Foreign Office saying that its statutes were in line with the foreign policy of the country, was required, although one might assume, that in a democratic country the public could protest in favour of changing the policy. Meanwhile the Foreign Affairs Ministry demanded that the Committee rephrased its goals since Finland “recognised the government of RSA and could not allow its citizens to violate diplomatic relations” (Soiri & Peltola, 1999, p.26). And what is surprising, this takes place after the UN General Assembly passes a resolution for severing relations with Pretoria! The authors state that prior to 1970-s not only the government of Finland, but even the public opinion of the country, “was fully against supporting any kind of violence”, in other words, against armed struggle for liberation which was by that time in full progress in the South of Africa. Creation of the African Committee in 1970 played a big role in changing the public opinion. Its future leaders B. Mattsson and M. Lohikoski got acquainted with the national liberation movement at spot including the liberated areas in Angola. In spite of that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland stood on same positions and in particular refused to give financial support to the conference “Students and National Movement ” (Soiri & Peltola, 1999, pp.36, 44-46,49).

The volume dedicated to Finland contains interesting information on position the presidents of Finland held towards the South of Africa, especially Urho Kekkonen and Martti Ahtisaari. U. Kekkonen declared that he could not be neutral to war and peace, and after meeting in October 1971 in Helsinki Amilcar Cabral leader of the African Independence Party of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), managed to overcome “openly incompetent and even hostile” attitude of the Foreign Office functionaries towards Cabral’s visit (Soiri & Peltola, 1999, p.52). This resulted in changing the government’s policy towards the national-liberation movements. M.Ahtisaari was in touch with these movements for many years, while still Ambassador to Tanzania and later as special representative of General Secretary of the UN in Namibia. Due to his international reputation he quite unexpectedly was able to run for presidency.

The authors evaluate Ahtisaari’s work extremely positively, as well as his role in the tragic events at the beginning of April 1989, blaming SWAPO for them. They write: “the trauma when SWAPO troops violated the agreements on the process of Namibia’s transition to independence and moved into Namibian territory, was settled by Ahtisaari’s decision to allow the South –African powers to stop SWAPO troops”. They add, that he was “unwilling to discuss the incident in details” (Soiri & Peltola, 1999, p. 132).

One could understand the former Finnish president: this tragic “incident” causing hundreds of deaths, both SWAPO soldiers’ and civil persons’, is not only responsibility of the leaders of RSA but also his own. In fact there are speculations that along with SWAPO troops which had already been in Namibia, on April 1, 1989 some of them moved into Namibia from Angola in order to concentrate in the gathering points in areas under UN control, as was the plan assumed by the latter. They had no “aggressive” intentions, but M. Ahtisaari followed the RSA lead, while the latter tried to revenge SWAPO for their own inability to destroy SWAPO for years, and weaken the organisation on the eve of the popular vote. It’s worth

reminding what Namibia's president Sam Nujoma said about Ahtisaari's actions: "Martti Ahtisaari was more concerned about his career in UN at that time than about his responsibility in front of the oppressed Namibian people which was suffering from unlawful South-African occupation... In this critical and decisive for Namibia's freedom hour, Ahtisaari's actions were treason of our cause and they led to death of hundreds of civilians" (Nujoma, 2001, p. 396-397). By the way, as far as in 1978 in UN headquarters in New York SWAPO representative (and future minister) complained to us, members of the Soviet Committee for Solidarity to Asia and Africa, that M. Ahtisaari, at that time UN Commissioner for Namibia, made decisions behind their back.

It is hard to agree with the authors' statements that "close contacts to the liberation movements which had Soviet military support would have damaged Finland's precious reputation of a neutral country in the eyes of the West" (Soiri & Peltola, 1999, p.155). There were plenty of unaligned countries, which gave support to those movements.

Unfortunately, the given volume is not free from authors' partialities to domestic political controversies in Finland, and which are not directly related to the main subject of the research. The authors refer many times to "Stalinist minority" in the Communist Party of Finland.

The volume dedicated to Norway is a compilation of articles by seven different authors on various aspects of Norway's relations with liberation movements of South of Africa under general edition of T. D. Eriksen (Eriksen, 2000). This structure unfortunately is bound to be repetitional. Four of ten chapters are dedicated to formation and conducting of official policy of Norway in this region. The authors show in a convincing way that at initial phase Norway's policy in fact supported the racist regime. General Council of Norway in Cape Town for example "defended behaviour of the police" shooting down the Africans in Sharpeville on March 21 1960 (Eriksen, 2000, p.16).

Norway as well as other Nordic countries became increasingly interested in South African problems after ANC president Albert Lutuli won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961. At that time the media was particularly focused on his "non-violence convictions" and Christian values. Meanwhile, Lutuli declared at a meeting with Norwegian vice-council that a shift from his "non-violence ideals" towards the principle of "minimal violence" was paramount in the circumstances of 1963 with Pretoria escalating repressions (Eriksen, 2000, p. 17, 20).

The book recounts interesting facts of incompetence of the functionaries in Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As for example with the President of FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique or FRELIMO) Eduardo Mondlane, who after his interview in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1965, three years after formation of the organisation and its initiation of armed anti-colonial struggle, was still described as holding "vague position in the movement, he seems to be responsible for foreign relations and he travels a lot". The Ambassador of Norway in Lisbon reported on the situation in Portuguese colonies constantly mentioning, that "the terrorists" have no support among local population, and there is no such thing as liberation struggle or uprising and that there is no trace of oppression or discrimination to be found in Portugal's "overseas provinces" (Eriksen, 2000, p.42, 56).

This volume also gives a detailed account of preparations of the international conference on South of Africa held in Oslo in April 1973 (Eriksen, 2000, pp 56-75). Convened on AU initiative

(ОАЕ – Организация Африканского Единства), the conference had somewhat strange name : "International Experts Conference on Colonialism and Apartheid Victim Support" – reflecting lack of enthusiasm about liberation movements both on behalf of UN headquarters

and Norwegian government. I recollect that contrary to their own opinion, the representatives of these movements were considered not as fighters but victims, while majority of other participants considered themselves not only experts *per se* as Norwegian government would insist, but as supporters of these movements.

It is worth mentioning that Norway – NATO member – fell behind neighbouring Sweden in commencing both practical and political aid to the liberation movements. It came to funny incidents: decision was made to ignore the New Year's (1976) congratulations from José Eduardo dos Santos, foreign minister of newly independent Angola (and its future president) since this step although not really being an official recognition, could still be considered as "political act". In fact diplomatic relations with Angola were first established in October 1977.

The authors give a detailed account of the struggle for economic sanctions against the RSA regime from Storting vote in 1963, when the special bill was supported only by two deputies from the left-wing People's Socialist party, to imposing sanctions by Norwegian parliament bill of 1986, although with plenty of exceptions and loopholes (Eriksen, 2000, p.27) in order not only to continue, but even to increase import of manganese ore from RSA (Eriksen, 2000, p.231). After imposing sanctions the government issued a license to continue to export explosives from Norway to uranium mines in Namibia (Eriksen, 2000, p. 243). This takes place in the same period when Pretoria is working on its nuclear weapon!

As for sanctions, Norwegian public organisations, such as Norwegian Council on South of Africa, did strongly insist on stopping shipping oil and oil products to RAS from Norway using Norwegian cargo boats¹. In mid 80-s the shipments gave Norway not less than 800 million of Norwegian crowns annually, while the aid to liberation movements of RSA and Namibia accounted to 70 million (Eriksen, 2000, p.397).

Implementing these demands into reality was carried out at huge costs, since the Norwegian Association of Ship Owners' had strong influence on the government of Norway.

The volume most modest in size (only 142 pages) and probably the least successful of the given series is the Danish one. K. Morgienstjerne is the author (Morgienstjerne, 2003). Denmark never helped materially any national-liberation movement in a direct way on governmental level, and all the resources allocated by the budget were channelled through church, trade and other non-governmental organisations. Still the author did not consider it necessary to analyse formation and activities of the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial organisations in Denmark but focused on "official financial aid to victims of apartheid and broadening this aid to national-liberation movement" (Morgienstjerne, 2003, p.16). The author gives a detailed account of the bureaucratic routines of authorising and carrying out decisions on matter. Some of them seem funny, as for example when in 1971 resources were allocated for MPLA for maintaining the ambulance delivered from Denmark, MPLA was considered as "contractor" which guaranteed humanitarian aid delivery from the Danish Foreign Office to the "individual refugee". (Morgienstjerne, 2003, pp 43-44).

This volume is probably interesting for its analysis of the reasons which forced the governments of Denmark to increase their support, at times indirectly, to the fighters against colonialism and apartheid. They were clearly expressed by prominent Danish social-democrat K. B Andersen, Danish foreign minister in a number of governments: "I was often criticised as a minister for supporting liberation movements... While I always said that we

¹ Contrary to the USSR public (non-governmental) organisations in Norway, as well as in other Nordic countries, were chiefly financed by the state budget.

wouldn't have done any good to the Western democracy if we turned our backs to the liberation movements. On the contrary, that would have sent them directly into the arms of communism" (Morgenstierne, 2003, p.57)

There are also some interesting facts in the book giving a clear evidence of the gap between rhetoric and actions of Danish government. Right after the incidents in SOWETO when dozens and hundreds of young South Africans were killed by police, coal import from RSA went up from 21 000 tons in 1976 to 384 000 in 1977, and 836 000 in 1978.

The author insists that in 1986 Denmark was "the first country in the West to fully impose political and economic sanctions on South Africa" (Morgenstierne, 2003, p.13). Such statement seems to be too categorical: for example the "Law against trade with South Africa" passed at that time stipulated a two years delay in implementing some of its clauses. Besides when the parliament bill was being introduced, U. Elleman-Jensen declared, that he was "not happy about it" and that he was not overwhelmed over the support he was going to get. As the author shows the centrist coalition government was forced to make this step under the pressure of the opposition since it did not have the majority in the parliament (Morgenstierne, 2003, p.117, 119). It can be hardly relevant to finish the "Danish" volume with this episode, since there were still eight years left until democratic changes in RSA.

Unfortunately, some of the books of this review are not free from inaccuracies even if not really fundamental. For example Amilcar Cabral is mentioned as President instead of General Secretary of PAIGK (Soiri & Peltola, 1999, p.47, 59; Eriksen, 2000, p 59, 72). The prominent leader of South African liberation movement was called G.M. Naiker, not Maiker (Eriksen, 2000, p.23). Moses Garoeb was not General but Administrative Secretary of SWAPO (Eriksen, 2000, p.285). Eduardo Mondlane was killed not by a car bomb (Eriksen, 2000, p.92), but by explosives hidden in a book arriving by mail. The first name of RSA president De Klerk is not Henrik (Eriksen, 2000, p.324) but Fredrik, and he came into office not in March (Eriksen, 2000, p.324) but in August of 1989. Jorge Rebel was member of FRELIMO governing body, not MPLA (Eriksen, 2000, p. 391). The name of General Secretary of AU was Diallo Telly, not Telly Diallo (Morgentsierne, 2003, p.53).

Thus, a detailed history of Scandinavian and Finland's support to the liberation movements in the South of Africa, has been written and published. The volume of this works exceeds two thousand pages! Recently, a substantial and in fact an objective book on Cuban involvement in African affairs in 1959-1976 has been published. It is remarkable that the Cuban leadership agreed on giving its author, American scientist, P.Gleijeses access to secret archives in Cuba and provided him with copies of practically all documents he had selected. (He continues researching on the next period there).

One would like to ask when would Russian scientists undertake an adequate effort? When would chiefs of our archives stop acting as "dogs in a manger", and became real colleagues of historians? When at last will the state, having declared itself ruled by the law, start implementing the rule of declassifying the documents after thirty years in archives?