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Tor Sellström: How did you first come into contact with the Nordic countries?

Charles Kauraisa: I came across the name Herbert Tingsten in Cape Town while reading a review of his book attacking the apartheid system in South Africa in the late 1950s. He was the first Swedish academic to study and reject the system and it made an impression on me. I remembered it later when I met him in Sweden. Soon after that Hans Beukes, the first Namibian student to be offered a scholarship by a Scandinavian country, escaped from South Africa into Botswana to take up studies in Oslo, Norway, in 1959. During my years in South Africa, where I completed my secondary schooling and college education, I was actively involved in the Cape Peninsula Students' Union. My political mentors were I.B. Tabata and Ronnie Britton of the Unity Movement. They were the people who exposed a number of us to the study of Marxism.

TS: The book by Herbert Tingsten, was it *The Problem of South Africa*?

CK: Yes. I read a review of the book in a newspaper in South Africa and I was impressed. Some of my friends also read the review and we discussed it. When one talks about the anti-apartheid movement and its origins in Sweden, one should keep in mind the role played by people like Herbert Tingsten and Sara Lidman, who recognized the immorality of the apartheid system and its implications at an early stage.

I returned home a few days after the Windhoek massacre of 10 December 1959, finding an upsurge of political militancy in the making. Ironically, I received replies to my applications for teaching posts at the two main black secondary schools in Namibia at that time—the Augustineum Secondary School in Okahandja and the Rehoboth Secondary School—from the security branch. I was told that the Education Department would advise me where I was to be posted, but I was not going to be offered either of the positions for which I had applied.

I was practically exiled to Walvis Bay, where I taught for a short period in the Old Location before I left for Sweden. I met Ben Amathila, the present Minister for Information and Broadcasting, there for the first time after he had been expelled from Augustineum. He later became the SWAPO representative in Sweden for many years. At the same time,

Uatja Kaukuetu and myself obtained scholarships to study at the universities of Lund and Stockholm, respectively, through the assistance of Joachim Israel. Uatja was a friend of mine. He had also studied in the Cape, but had returned home earlier and was involved in politics. At that point he was the SWANU leader.

We applied for passports, but were refused. We informed Joachim Israel accordingly. He, however, managed to obtain permission for us to enter Sweden without passports provided we could get to some country that we could fly from. He was working closely with Ulla Lindström, who at that time was Minister of International Cooperation and worked with the question of Namibia at the United Nations.

We escaped into Botswana towards the end of 1960, from where we proceeded to Southern Rhodesia and to Northern Rhodesia. The political situation was such that we were forced to continue towards Katanga. We thought that there was a chance of getting out from there, but it was impossible. We returned to Lusaka and then went to Dar es Salaam from where we flew via Nairobi to Sweden. We picked up the necessary documents permitting us entry to Sweden from the Swedish consulate in Nairobi. In Sweden we were soon separated. My colleague went to Lund and I started my studies at the University of Stockholm.

TS: One person who was involved when you and Kaukuetu left from Tanzania was the Swedish missionary Barbro Johansson?

CK: Yes, she was very helpful. She was really influential in Dar es Salaam, highly respected by all the TANU officials and Tanzanians in general. She was very excited by the idea that we were going to study in Sweden. She gave us an excellent briefing on Sweden and Swedish politics, particularly as I was rather concerned about the little I had read about Sweden. The picture I had about Sweden was that it was a monarchy with a state church and all the things that we associated with a reactionary country. She patiently explained everything to us. We remained in Tanzania for almost a whole month. We had close associations with TANU, in the same way that we had had with UNIP in Northern Rhodesia.

The first meeting that I addressed in Sweden was in the Great Church in Stockholm, where I talked about the political situation in Namibia and the apartheid system in general. I

also met Herbert Tingsten at a meeting organized by Per Wästberg. Thereafter I concentrated on learning the Swedish language, which was not easy, and stated my university studies. In the meantime, both my colleague and I continued to talk at political meetings and particularly at student meetings throughout the country, informing about the situation in Namibia and the apartheid system in South Africa.

During that time, the political spotlight was on South Africa. The President of ANC, Chief Luthuli, received the Nobel Peace Prize and was permitted to visit Oslo to receive it. It generated a lot of publicity in Sweden. I joined exiled South African artists in Sweden in anti-apartheid meetings and discussions that resulted in the formation of the Swedish anti-apartheid movement. Ronald Segal, who was in exile in Britain, was also invited to Sweden for political discussions. He was the first South African to campaign for economic sanctions against the South African government.

TS: Tingsten was a liberal. The early solidarity in Sweden was thus much broader than the socialist left?

CK: Indeed it was. It really took off as the number of Namibian students increased in Sweden. For the most part we were involved in mobilizing the Swedish opinion against the apartheid system and for the decolonization of Namibia. Amongst the students were Zed Ngavirue, who is presently the Director General of the National Planning Commission, Moses Katjuongua, who is an opposition member of parliament, and Kaire Mbuende, Secretary General of SADC. At a later stage Ben Amathila joined us as representative of SWAPO.

In the early 1960s, Oliver Tambo of ANC and Fanuel Kozonguizi of SWANU were regular participants at the annual First of May rallies which were held all over Sweden. They addressed those meetings in the name of the South Africa United Front. The close relationship between the nationalist movement and the Social Democrats of Sweden—in particular people like Olof Palme, Ingvar Carlsson and Pierre Schori—can be traced to the early 1960s. I got to know Tage Erlander and Olof Palme through my participation as a speaker in these rallies. Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, ANC, SWANU and later SWAPO addressed these rallies on a regular basis.

TS: What did the South Africa United Front represent?

CK: The South Africa United Front was formed in London by Oliver Tambo (ANC), Nana Mahomo (PAC) and Fanuel Kozonguizi (SWANU). It was a political front to put over the views of the oppressed people of South Africa and Namibia at that time. Basically, it was these three leaders who were the members of the front. Initially, in 1961-62, we addressed most meetings—even in Sweden—in the name of the South African Front and when Oliver Tambo and Fanuel Kozonguizi came to Sweden to address the First of May rallies they spoke as members of the front.

The anti-apartheid movement in Sweden grew very fast and soon became a broadly based movement supported by almost all the political parties, trade unions and intellectuals. Ben Amathila did an excellent job, particularly in the later years when SWAPO moved to the armed struggle. We supported his endeavours on the basis that a genuine armed struggle should be supported irrespective of our political differences. From time to time, we participated in joint meetings with SWAPO. We never had any animosity or strained working relations between ourselves and Amathila when SWAPO later was recognized as the authentic representative of the people of Namibia.

Besides working with the Social Democratic Party, we lobbied the Scandinavian governments to take a firm position on the question of Namibia at the United Nations. Concerted efforts were made by all of us to convince them to take the lead in sanctions against the South African government and to support the efforts of the United Nations Council for Namibia. In that respect we must mention people like Ronald Segal, who had the foresight to work on the initial question of economic sanctions against South Africa.

The question is always asked how Sweden came to play an important role in Southern Africa. I tend to think that the seed was planted in the early 1950s. As we all know, it was really India which took an early and clear stand on the question of racialism and apartheid in South Africa and they also took the lead on the question of Namibia at the United Nations. When one looks at the records of the countries that supported the first resolution not to incorporate the then South West Africa

into South Africa and the whole question of the mandate, you will notice that Sweden also took a clear stand against the South African regime. At a later stage, the first intellectual anti-apartheid writings and debates came to the fore.

TS: With influences also from church people, such as Dean Gunnar Helander?

CK: Yes, exactly. Per Wästberg also played a very important role with his writings. He really influenced the Swedish opinion. I think that it was the intellectuals that tipped the scales in favour of Southern Africa. I must come back to Tingsten. What he said and how it was publicized. Subsequent to that, the peace award to the late Albert Luthuli helped to focus on South Africa.

Unfortunately for South Africa, the South African legation was extremely vocal in Stockholm. They were reacting forcefully in defence of the apartheid system. It forced the debate in Sweden, in which intellectuals and writers took a leading role. The imposition of the apartheid system was to the Swedes—particularly so close after Nazism and the Second World War—totally unacceptable and forced people like Joachim Israel and others to take an uncompromising stand against it. The Swedish public reacted and also started taking a clear position on the issue of apartheid. The Swedish intellectuals described and characterized the apartheid system as legalized racism. Although there were dictators in Latin America and elsewhere, the Swedish public could not accept racism in whatever form and I think that it made it easier for the anti-apartheid movement to dominate the political scene until the emergence of the powerful and fantastic solidarity movement for Vietnam, which engaged us all.

TS: The question of the right of small nations to self-determination was important in this context?

CK: That question was very close to the hearts and minds of the Swedes. It was embodied in Undén's foreign policy of neutrality. Sweden took a strong position on the question of self-determination and the rights of small nations. It made it easy for the Swedish public to support the liberation struggle against colonialism.

TS: Was the anti-colonial struggle in the Portuguese-speaking colonies also important?

CK: Yes, the Angolan situation came to the fore during this time. We had people like Neto, Mondlane and Cabral visiting the Scandinavian countries to campaign for support for their independence struggles. They received substantial humanitarian aid from Sweden. There were also a number of students from the Portuguese-speaking colonies. Some were studying in Lund. It also helped to get the Swedes to support their struggles. Cabral was particularly successful and PAIGC received extensive assistance from Sweden.

TS: How many years were you in Sweden?

CK: I was in Sweden for about twenty years. Although I spent some time elsewhere, I retained my Swedish residency and I consider Sweden my second home. I have a daughter there who is about to complete her studies at the University of Stockholm.

I studied at the Lund University for my first degree, but other than that I lived in Stockholm, where I did all my studies at the University of Stockholm. I went to the United States where I spent a year studying at Princeton University and I returned to Stockholm to complete my post-graduate studies. I was involved in research work and lecturing in political science, international relations and the theory of development.

TS: You were in Sweden when the question of development aid really started to be discussed. Do you feel that there were political conditions attached to the aid from the Western countries?

CK: Yes, it was clear that the Western aid during that period was given with the purpose of trying to get the leaders of the nationalist movement and other people involved not to rely on the support of the so-called Communist countries, the Soviet Union and China in particular. This did not, of course, stop the leaders of the nationalist movement—who basically considered themselves non-aligned—from accepting aid from either the East or the West in order to strengthen the liberation struggle against the colonial powers.

However, Scandinavian aid was slightly different, in particular Swedish aid. Sweden considered itself a neutral country, particularly at the height of the Cold War. There was a genuine anti-imperialist intellectual movement which was developing in leaps and bounds and its success was that aid should be given to the people of the Third World who were in-

involved in struggles to overthrow the yoke of colonialism or were fighting imperialism without any conditions attached to it. The Social Democratic Party, the youth and other radical organizations in Sweden who were participating in the anti-Vietnam movement were strongly opposed to aid with strings attached. They supported the liberation movements from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique irrespective of whether their leaders received aid from the Soviet Union or China.

It was a realistic approach on the part of the Scandinavian countries to support the liberation struggle without setting conditions. The Scandinavian aid was purely given on a humanitarian basis. They did not support the armed struggle, but concentrated on areas where they could provide the needed assistance. It was mainly political or diplomatic support and, of course, humanitarian support to refugees and students.

TS: You set up the External Council of SWANU in Sweden?

CK: Yes, in 1965 we set up the External Council of SWANU to assist the SWANU Presidency to become more effective. I served as both the Chairman and as Foreign Affairs Secretary. Zed Ngavirue was also its Chairman for a long time, until his return to Namibia in 1978. At that point, we decided to dissolve the External Council and concentrate on political work within Namibia. The main reason for setting up the External Council was that SWANU had taken a conscious decision that the National Executive should remain within Namibia while the political parties remained unbanned. It somewhat affected the decision making process. For example, with regard to our position on the question of the armed struggle, which affected our relationship with the OAU Liberation Committee.

TS: That was around 1966?

CK: Yes, in 1966-67 and particularly in 1968. Although we had people trained in guerrilla warfare for the purpose of infiltrating the country and eventually commence the armed struggle, the OAU Liberation Committee had a different agenda. They did not share our point of view and wanted us to make a clear statement that SWANU was embarking on armed struggle. This we could not do. Subsequently we had discussions with our colleagues in SWAPO, who embarked on the armed strug-

gle with PLAN, but those discussions led nowhere and SWANU never took part in the armed struggle.

TS: This seems very confusing. In the case of Sweden, we are talking about a government, which took a principled stand against armed warfare as a means of resolving conflicts. The ruling Social Democratic Party supported SWANU. Then SWAPO launches the armed struggle and the Social Democrats shift their support from SWANU to SWAPO?

CK: There were lots of debates with those who were leading the party at that particular point. We had lots of seminars and discussions until it became clear that the armed struggle was necessitated by the situation and therefore must be supported. The Social Democratic Party was slightly divided. You had a left wing which said that it must be supported, in particular the youth. You also had those who were strongly opposed to it. The labour movement position was that they would like to see support on humanitarian grounds and not support for armed struggle.

TS: You returned to Namibia in 1978?

CK: Yes, in 1978 I returned for a short time together with a number of other SWANU members. It was mainly to test the so-called amnesty declaration which South Africa had given us through the United Nations, whereby we were assured that we would not be arrested if we returned to Namibia. I went back to Sweden after two months and returned finally to Namibia in 1981. It was at the time when the Contact Group made its formal proposals for a settlement after some intense negotiations with all parties concerned. I was very involved in those negotiations. As soon as the plan was accepted and only needed to be implemented, some of us thought that there was no longer any reason for us to remain outside the country. The implementation of the plan only hinged on linkage or non-linkage to the situation in Angola. Unfortunately, our calculation was wrong. South Africa persisted and SWAPO continued with the armed struggle, so the implementation process took longer than some of us anticipated.

TS: Is there anything that you would like to add?

CK: My theory regarding the success of the Namibians who went into exile in Sweden is that we were all politically motivated, either studying or working. Those who completed

their studies successfully obtained skills that stood them in good stead. For example, I came from a political and academic career. I was involved in research and lecturing in countries like Finland and Germany while attached to the University of Stockholm. I then joined the private sector in my country.

I joined Rössing towards the end of 1981. It was not easy to leave the political and academic fields. I came back to Namibia for just a short visit and my father who was getting on in years asked me to stay. I was faced with the problem of how to earn a living without compromising my principles of working for institutions which were firmly steeped in the apartheid system. I discussed my problem with John Kirkpatrick, who advised me to join Rössing because he believed that I could contribute to the changes that were taking place in the company. At that point Rössing was committed to becoming a non-racial organization.

However, the other factor that contributed to our success was that we were all certain that we would return to Namibia one day to contribute to the development of our country, whether in politics or industry. We all shared a good relationship, whether members of SWANU or SWAPO or merely students working or living in Sweden. All our friends and party officials—academics and others—with whom we worked for a long time contributed to this. Even when SWAPO was recognized as the authentic representative of the people of Namibia all Namibians in Sweden were treated equally and there was no discrimination against people of other parties. This was not the case in some of the other countries.