

SWAPO AND THE CHURCHES: AN INTERNATIONAL SCANDAL

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'Swapo has the right to protect her people from those who are collaborating with the enemy... Yours in Jesus Christ.'

— Dr Abisai Shejavali, General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Namibia.¹

'The illegal occupation of Namibia has been facilitated by Namibians who have collaborated with South Africa and have been traitors to the cause of a free Namibia. Yet SWAPO is willing to accommodate these people in a free Namibia and forgive their misguided behaviour.'

— Report of the World Council of Churches, May 1988.²

'So it goes'

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

The Problems of the Text

On 14 November 1989, Pluto Press published *Church and Liberation in Namibia (CALIN)*, edited by Peter Katjavivi, Per Frostin and Kaire Mbuende. The book contains a number of documents on the relation between the churches and political conditions in Namibia, from 1958 to 1988, with individual essays by each of the editors and three others. David Theo Goldberg, assistant professor at the School of Justice Studies at Arizona State University, has described the book as 'crucial for anyone wanting to comprehend the role of the church in the promotion and realization of Namibian independence'. (*Southern African Review of Books*, Jan/Feb 1991)

Goldberg's review is characteristic of the ignorance combined with tunnel vision of the international liberal/left establishment relating to southern Africa. The book in fact makes it impossible to comprehend the role of the churches in one of the most important episodes in the recent history of southern Africa: the cycle of wholesale arrests, torture, imprisonment and murder of Swapo members on the orders of their own leaders, dating from at least 1976 until the release of survivors in May 1989. The emergence of Swapo's prisoners from their dungeons took place six months before publication of *CALIN* and more than 18 months before Goldberg's opaque review.

The complicity of the churches — their refusal to speak out, and the sanitary screen they provided to the torturers — is continued in this book, which serves to perpetuate the offence. Like the churches, the editors of the book are culpable. Their book is a knowing deception, offered to readers at the moment when the truth could no longer be concealed. To throw light on what the book obscures, I append, at the end of this article, two letters from innumerable texts available to the editors, which they omitted to publish. These stand in criticism of the book and, more important by far, of the whole spectrum of official Christianity.

The foremost editor, Peter Katjavivi, author of *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (1988), is described in a biographical note as 'Namibia's leading historian'. (p v) He is currently Vice Chancellor at the university in Windhoek, and is also a member of the National Assembly. For many years he was a leading representative in Western Europe and the US of Swapo, during its long guerrilla war against the South African regime. Frostin is a Swedish academic and theologian. Mbuende, who holds a PhD from the University of Lund, is described in the book as a leading Swapo activist since the 1970s. In 1989 he was a reader at the Institute of Future Studies, Stockholm. The editors represent the historical working together of Swapo and the Christian churches, the subject — from very different perspectives — of *CALIN*.

Black Theology and the Pits

Swapo's purges of its members have been described in 'A Namibian Horror' and an interview with Panduleni and Ndamona Kali, published in *Searchlight South Africa* No 4, February 1990, and in Trehwela (1990/1). It is characteristic of the cover-up disseminated by the nationalist parties, the churches, the liberals, the stalinist states and the left internationally — including nearly all the trotskyst sects — that *CALIN* should be prefaced by additional clouds of incense in the form of a preface by one of the pillars of black theology in South Africa, Rev Nyameko Barney Pityana, director of the Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches (WCC), based in Geneva. In the period of the formation of the black consciousness movement in South Africa in the late 1960s, Pityana was secretary general of the South African Students Organization (SASO) when Steve Biko was its first president.

It was Pityana's view in the early 1970s that 'a study of Black Theology is a study of black consciousness or self-awareness'. (Pityana, p 58) The quality of his awareness may be judged from his encomium on the relation of Swapo to the Christian virtues. 'The church is the life and soul of the people of Namibia', he declares:

In times of sorrow, of struggle and in times of joy, Namibians have known their church leaders to stand alongside them.

...Swapo pioneered the programme of providing chaplaincies among Namibians in exile. The Swapo leadership petitioned the church to ordain some among their number who would symbolize the presence of the church among them as they struggle for liberation. Such was the foresight of the Swapo leadership and their insight into the needs of the Namibians in the diaspora...The Swapo team of chaplains has direct access to the President of Swapo, Dr Sam Nujoma, who is ready to listen to the needs of his people. (pp viii-ix)

This intimate and subservient relation of a team of priests to the leadership of a nationalist political party, with its own army, secret police, prisons and torturers, throws an interesting light on the New Testament text that distinguishes between the obligations owed by Christians to God and Caesar. It is

precisely this identity between nationalist politics and religion that Pityana, following the practice of Swapo and the Christian churches, seeks to idealize and promote in his laudatory comments on the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), a kind of popular front of Christianity in Namibia.

The development of the CCN — set up in 1978 — was for Pityana a ‘very significant step’. It meant that

through CCN, Namibians maintained a unity of perception of the social reality of Namibia. Not only was it being demonstrated that there was no dichotomy between the gospel and politics but it was shown by the example in CCN projects and staff who were active in the liberatory movement either as SWANU [South West Africa National Union, the smaller nationalist movement in Namibia — PT] or Swapo. (p x)

The word about ‘no dichotomy’ between the churches and Swapo became flesh in Swapo’s torture pits, as the churches in Namibia and internationally turned their eyes from the maimed body of the victim and like Pharisees strode past on the other side of the road. Or, like Pilate, washed their hands and delivered sentence. Or, like the Sanhedrin, called for exemplary justice to be delivered on the heads of those who, in the words of Dr Shejvali, quoted above, were ‘collaborating with the enemy’. Swapo members who succumbed to its internal purges were victims of a totalitarian ‘unity of perception’ (in Pityana’s phrase) between the nationalist leaders, the independent African states, the stalinist bloc and the churches. Their experience illuminates with a garish light the nature of world society in the three decades before the crack-up of the Berlin Wall.

It is Pityana’s opinion that ‘under CCN, Namibians were liberated to experiment, dream and have visions about the future of their country’. He states that during this period ‘a distinctive theology of Namibia could be said to have emerged’. Between the candy floss of the priests and the torture chambers of Swapo lies a distinctive theology of complicity. One recalls Pityana’s comment from his days in SASO that the ‘first step’ was to ‘make the Black man see himself, to pump life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth’. (quoted in Hirson, p 110)

A Special Relationship

Pityana’s preface gives an adequate reflection of the character of the book as a whole, supposed by him to offer insight into the ‘soul of Namibia’ (whatever that might be). (p xi) His preface is dated Geneva, June 1989. By this time, about two hundred Swapo members detained in the region of Lubango in southern Angola had already been released from the pits in which they had been held. Agence France Presse reported the first meeting between journalists and the released prisoners, still held under Swapo guard, on 27 May

1989. The AFP correspondent, Marie Joannidis, reported: 'One after another the ex-prisoners undress to show marks and scars — most of which are old — left by torture.' (*Call Them Spies*, hereafter referred to as *CTS*, p 87) On 9 June, a freelance photographer, John Liebenberg, reported in the pro-Swapo weekly, *The Namibian*, published in Windhoek, that he had met many detainees held by Swapo who had apparently been subjected to 'severe beatings, rape, mental torture and extreme deprivation'. There is no reference to any such reports in Rev Pityana's preface of June 1989.

The introduction to the book by its editors Katjavivi, Frostin and Mbuende is dated July 1989. On 4 July, a planeload of about 150 former prisoners of Swapo arrived back in Namibia at Oseri Kari camp, immediately followed by extensive reports in the international media of their allegations of torture. Outside southern Africa, reports appeared in the *New York City Tribune* (5 July), the *Daily Telegraph* (London, 5 July), the *Independent* (London, 5 July), the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (7 July) and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland, where Pityana was based, 7 July). There is no reference to these reports of torture and imprisonment in the introduction to *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, despite the editors' warm references to Swapo and 'Namibia's own experience and contribution to liberation theology'. (p xvi)

In his essay on 'The Role of the Church in the Struggle for Independence', Katjavivi speaks delicately of a 'special relationship' between the churches and the nationalist movement in Namibia, noting that some individual church leaders held 'key posts' in Swapo. (pp 25, 3) One that he mentions is Dr Zephania Kameeta, vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA/Namibia (Rhenish Mission, known by the initials ELK), whose poems and other writings are quoted extensively throughout the book. Rev Kameeta is an executive committee member of Swapo. Another pastor, the Rev Hendrik Witbooi of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), is vice-president of Swapo. Daniel Tjongarero, who is not a priest but was director of the communications department of the CCN at the time of publication of the book, was also at the same time Swapo's deputy national chairman. The overlap between Swapo, the leadership of individual churches in Namibia and the executive of the CCN was a primary fact of Namibian national life throughout the period of the purges.

The Christianizing of a Horror

In a more crudely conceived essay entitled 'Church and Class Struggle in Namibia', Mbuende drops pearls of wisdom. For example:

We are living in the epoch of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. Therefore, our crisis is the imperialist crisis and our problem is imperialism and capitalist exploitation. (p 43)

For Mbuende, nationalism as a 'non-class ideology' could be used to 'articulate the interests of the bourgeoisie in one historical setting and those

of the working class in another setting'. (p 41) He develops the fantastic conception of a future 'third church, which will be proletarian' (in opposition to the old missionary-colonial church and the current 'petty-bourgeois' reformist church with its bourgeois ideological basis), and of a future struggle in which 'only the proletarian church will be able to succeed'. (p 45) For him, the church is 'linked to Swapo and other popular forces by the struggle against foreign domination' (p 40), a struggle which somehow through Swapo will 'lead to the building of socialism and not capitalism'. (p 44) The notion of internationalism is alien to Dr Mbuende in this heady atmosphere of millenarian futurology. The suggestion of this Christianiser of leftist rhetoric is that in some way Swapo was a party of socialism.

The essay by Frostin is a paean to a 'holistic' theology of liberation. The writer appears to be unaware that a leading proponent of the philosophy of holism was the former South African prime minister, Jan Smuts, who made a serious attempt at the holistic incorporation of Namibia (then South West Africa) into South Africa in the 1940s. Frostin polemicises against a 'dualistic theology', by which he means one in which religion is compartmentalised away from political and social life: again unaware of the 'dualism' by which the issue of Swapo's torture system is evaded by Swapo's supporters. It is not my province to judge between the clerical proponents of abstention or participation in political causes. What is noteworthy, however, is that Frostin's essay is specifically critical of the 'dualistic understanding' of a statement issued in the early 1970s by a conference of pastors of the German Lutheran Evangelical Church (DELK), published in a work edited by Pastor Siegfried Gröth, of the Vereinigte Evangelische Mission (VEM) based in Wuppertal in Germany. (Gröth, 1972) In this statement, DELK was explicitly hostile to political action that 'obviously oversteps the bounds of the church's competence'. (*CALIN*, p 53)

Enter Pastor Gröth

Gröth had been adviser on southern African affairs to the VEM since 1961, and was prevented from entering Namibia by the South African regime from 1971 to 1987. In the early 1970s he was asked by the two black Lutheran churches in Namibia (ELK and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia – ELCIN) to tend to the spiritual needs of the refugees, especially in Zambia and Botswana. Significantly, Gröth was the only priest of note who attempted to save the Swapo detainees in the purges of the 1980s. The problematical character of his intervention is discussed later in this review. Familiarity with the work of Gröth is shown in *CALIN* not only by Frostin but also by Emma and Zedekia Mujoro, principal at the Lutheran Theological College at Otjimbingwe in northern Namibia, in an essay 'Namibian Liberation Theology and the Future'. Yet *CALIN* preserves scrupulous silence on the central place of Gröth in the relation of the churches to the spy drama.

Gröth spoke and wrote extensively to his many church contacts about the horrors taking place in the Swapo camps, to no avail. In a letter to a Namibian

priest in July 1985 he wrote that his visit to Swapo exiles in Zambia in March 1985 was the 'most difficult trip to Africa for me since more than twenty years'.³ Shortly afterwards Gröth suffered a breakdown in Zimbabwe, brought on by his discovery of what was taking place in Swapo. He returned to Wuppertal on 13 May 1985, where he gave a full account of the purges to Rev Kameeta, Mujoro's predecessor at the Theological College. Gröth's letter continued:

[I] had the chance to discuss this serious issue with Brother Kameeta. I informed him about the emergency situation in Zambia and Angola and mentioned the names of my friends and brothers who are in such a dangerous situation...I told Brother Kameeta that responsible Christians and Swapo-members are appealing to the churches for their support and help. (CTS, p 42)

Gröth also urged the matter on Pastor Hendrik Frederik, the Preses (president) of the ELK, at a confidential talk on 14 June, and with Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOK). Between them these two churches have over half a million members, an enormous moral force in a population of less than a million and a half. As Gröth confirmed in a letter to the director of Amnesty International: 'They know about the present difficult developments in Zambia and Angola'. (17 September 1985. CTS, p 43) Yet despite representing through their churches the majority of blacks in Namibia, whether individually or collectively the church leaders Kameeta, Frederik and Dumeni did nothing. Yet for Pityana, it is Kameeta through his eucharistic prayers and verse who best represents the 'distinctive theology' and the 'soul of Namibia'. (pp x,xi)

The Scandal in the CCN

At the time of publication of *CALIN* the CCN represented the following churches:

- * Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA/Namibia (ELK)
- * Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN, formerly ELOK)
- * Anglican Church in Namibia
- * African Methodist Episcopal Church
- * United Congregational Church in Southern Africa
- * Roman Catholic Church
- * Methodist Church in Southern Africa
- * Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa.

The German Evangelical Lutheran Church (DELK) withdrew from the CCN in 1987, on the grounds that the body was too politicized. DELK's membership, which was exclusively white, expressed the strongest reservations about church identification with the political struggle in Namibia in the early 1970s. These reservations appeared in the book edited by Gröth in 1972.

The highest policy-making body within the CCN is the general meeting of church representatives, convening every second year. Between these meetings the executive committee governs the CCN as a whole and is responsible for policy implementation. All church members are represented on the executive committee. When *CALIN* was published, the president of the executive committee was Bishop Hendrik Frederik whom Gröth had met on 14 June 1985. The vice-presidents were Sister Irmgart, OSB, of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Rev. Matti Amadhila, assistant to Bishop Dumeni, (whom Gröth had also approached).

The chief official of the executive was its general secretary, Dr Shejavali. He acted throughout the purges as chief hatchetman of official Christianity in Namibia on behalf of the Swapo torturers. His former associate general secretary, Vezera Kandetu, contributes a brief essay to *CALIN* on 'The Work of the Council of Churches in Namibia' in which there is no word on the grimmer side to the work of the CCN, or on the character or conduct of his immediate superior, Dr Shejavali. With the coming of independence in March 1990, Kandetu ascended unto government as assistant to the new deputy minister of Information and Broadcasting, Daniel Tjongarero, also late of the CCN. So it goes.

Pilate in Africa

Two episodes irreparably stain the record of the CCN, which courageously offered assistance to the huge numbers of victims of the South African regime. The first was the murder of a former director of the Christian Centre in Windhoek, the predecessor of the CCN, about which church leaders and the CCN kept silent. As reported in *Searchlight South Africa* No 6, the director of the Christian Centre in the 1970s, Tauno Hatuikulipi, was murdered in Angola, apparently in January 1984, on orders of fellow members of the Swapo central committee. After arrest, trial and constant harassment by the South African regime in Namibia, Hatuikulipi had escaped to join the Swapo political and military leadership in Angola, but clashed with the security apparatus when it set out to express its dominance over the military.

A report by the Committee of Parents — formed in 1985 to attempt to defend Swapo's victims in exile — noted that Hatuikulipi's wife, Magdalena, who had remained in Windhoek, was

kept in the dark by the internal leadership about the fate of her husband. In May, 1984, she was still cheering the Swapo delegation, which left for the [Lusaka] Conference [at which delegates from Namibia learnt at first hand for the first time of the terrors abroad]. A few weeks later a friend informed her about her husband's murder. She confronted the internal leadership who admitted that he was dead but they claimed that he had committed suicide. She is left with five children.⁴

Neither the CCN nor the churches protested the murder of Hatuikulipi, their own former top-level representative, and direct predecessor to

Shejvali. The Committee of Parents described the reaction that followed inside Namibia, as delegates to the Lusaka conference brought back accounts of the atrocities abroad.

Parents went up in arms. They chose the most logical thing to do under the circumstances. They went to the church leadership to affect at least moral intervention into the maltreatment of their children...

But the expectations turned out a painful nonetheless revealing experience. They found that in exercising their trust in the institutions which for generations they had considered their friends, they had instead created violent enemies. Priest and pastor slandered them, called them agents and destroyers and accused them of spreading malicious rumour. (ibid)

After keeping their campaign out of public scrutiny for a year and a half — ‘to give the spiritual leaders and their supporters the chance to mitigate the Swapo tragedy’ — the disillusioned relatives set up the Committee of Parents in Windhoek in March 1985 to campaign directly on their own behalf. This led to the second specific instance of clerical connivance with the Swapo torture machine: the dismissal from the CCN of two active members of the Committee of Parents, under the ever-beneficent hand of Dr Shejvali.

From the Churches to the Parents

At the beginning of 1985, Erica Beukes, an activist in the Swapo Youth League during its most militant period in the mid-1970s, worked for the CCN in Windhoek as head of the health section in its development department. Her brother, Walter Thiro, one of Swapo’s prison victims, died painfully in a Swapo labour camp at Kwanza Sul in southern Angola. On hearing of her brother’s imprisonment, Erica approached the local priest, Pastor Nakamela, for assistance. He in turn consulted Rev Kameeta. Rather than take up this matter, despite his position as one of the leading churchmen in Namibia, Kameeta referred the petitioners to Nico Bessenger, Swapo’s foreign relations secretary: a truly Pilate-like referral to Caesar.

Having no confidence in Bessenger, Erica Beukes arranged to see the most respected of all Swapo leaders, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, who had himself been tortured by the South African police and imprisoned on Robben Island for 16 years. She met Toivo in August 1984 and

expressed her concern on behalf of her family for the safety of her brother. She told him that they had received information that he was languishing in jail in Angola, and she expressed grave criticism of the leadership of Swapo. He thanked her for the trust the family had shown to approach him on so grave a charge. But, he pointed out that the South African regime had launched a concerted propaganda campaign against Swapo to discredit the movement...He could not promise to free

her brother, but would investigate the matter and report back. He did not return.

It was after meeting ya Toivo, and still feeling relatively reassured, that Erica Beukes and her immediate superior in the CCN, the director of its development department, Attie Beukes (no relation to Erica), toured Europe in February 1985 to raise funds for the work of the CCN. They met church leaders and supporters of the struggle against the South African regime who gave them disquieting news of the purges in Angola and Zambia. Namibian refugees gave them copies of letters to church leaders and pleaded with them to do something when they returned to Namibia.

Some requested them to again try to move the church leadership to action. Others were sceptical, reasoning that they were fully informed about the reign of terror unleashed by the Swapo leadership. The latter turned out to be right. (ibid)

On 21 March, the same day that they returned to Namibia, Attie Beukes, Erica and Erica's sister Bertha Yon met with Bishop Frederik to press for action. Attie and Erica approached him both as individuals and as officials of the CCN, on whose behalf they had travelled to Europe. They later met Pastor Kristof Shuya, general secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of South West Africa (VELKSWA). Attie Beukes also informed Bishop Bonifatius Haushiku, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Namibia, and then reported to Dr Shejvali, his immediate superior in the CCN. Mr Beukes 'stressed the urgency for the church leadership to convene a meeting to plan action. But, no-one would commit himself to such a course of action'. (ibid) The response of the Namibian activists to this dereliction by the churches was to set up the Committee of Parents.

The Church Militant

On 2 June the Committee of Parents delivered a memorandum to the church leadership: it received no reply. A month later, a delegation from the Committee met with Bishop James Kauluma, head of the Anglican Church in Namibia, in an attempt to get action on the proposed meeting. The bishop's response was forthright. He was incredulous at

the insolence of the committee to level charges at a respected leadership. He refused to take part in further discussion about the topic. He suggested that the committee should take up the matter with the Swapo leadership, because it had nothing to do with the church leadership. He charged that the women reacted without factual information, but he refused to read the letters offered to him by the delegation. (ibid)

The Committee, represented by 24 delegates, finally met with the church leaders on 9 September, almost six months after the first approach to Bishop

Frederik. The churches were represented by Bishop Frederik (ELK), Dr Shejvali (CCN), Bishop Dumeni (ELOK, now called ELCIN), Pastor Matti Amadhila (assistant to Dumeni in ELOK), Bishop Haushiku (RCC), Father Nordkamp (RCC) and Pastor Prinz (Methodist Church). The Committee made a full report and Bishop Hendrik showed he was aware of the testimony of Pastor Gröth, but the meeting closed without any definite commitment from the church leaders. A bland and meaningless letter followed from Dr Shejvali on 19 September, thanking the parents for the meeting and concluding: 'May God bless you all'.

That September, Attie Beukes went to Geneva as director of the development department of the CCN for a conference with donor agencies. In Europe, he met some of the support groups and Namibian refugees, and returned home with further information about the purge victims. He also met Father Gröth, who was unwilling for the information in his files to be made public.⁶ Coinciding with Beukes's visit, the Committee sent letters to support groups of Swapo in Europe (the Namibia Support Committee, the Namibia Association), to church bodies (World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, British Council of Churches, Vereinigte Evangelische Mission, Swedish Free Church, United Church of Canada), to the UN secretary general, to the Swapo president (Nujoma) and to the presidents of Cuba, Angola and Zambia: the countries most directly in authority in the zones where Swapo held its prison camps. Evasive replies were received from the church bodies and silence from the UN secretary general, on behalf of the world authority that had recognised Swapo as 'sole and authentic representative' of the people of Namibia.

Matters came to a head in the early months of 1986. The Committee decided to send a delegation to the UN secretary general, Javier Perez de Quellar, to be led by Stella-Maria Boois (whose son Ben Boois was a Swapo prisoner) and Erica Beukes. They asked the VEM in Germany – Gröth's mission – for financial help with travel expenses, but were refused, apparently at the urging of Namibian church leaders. As a result, the delegation was unable to set off.

Then on 16 February 1986, the Swapo leaders Theo-Ben Gurirab (foreign relations secretary, now Minister for Foreign Affairs) and Hidipo Hamutenya (secretary for information, now Minister for Information and Broadcasting), issued a statement at a press conference in London declaring that Swapo was holding as prisoners at least 100 members who were South African government spies. It declared that the spy network had first been detected in December 1983, and had penetrated both political and military wings of the movement abroad. Gurirab made it clear that the statement was a response to reports circulating in Namibia and Europe that Swapo was involved in 'fascist' activities against Namibian refugees. (*CTS*, p 48).⁷ Alleged confessions on video tape accompanied the press conference.

On 13 March 1986, less than a month after Swapo had admitted that it was holding many prisoners – in fact many more than a hundred – Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes received a firm response from the collective guardian of

the Christian soul in Namibia, the CCN. They were informed by Dr Shejavali that they had been dismissed from their jobs, with immediate effect. The letter to Erica Beukes stated:

The decision to terminate your employment with the Council of Churches in Namibia was reached only after careful consideration of your leading role in the 'committee of parents' and the various statements issued and published on behalf of that committee 'care of the Council of Churches in Namibia'.

This Council is most perturbed about the way you have chosen to represent the serious allegations made by that committee. It regards the attack on the credibility of 'local pastors and priests' in a very serious light, unwarranted and uncalled for. The statements issued on behalf of that committee, coming, as it is, from an employee of the Council of Churches in Namibia, contains very serious allegations, inter alia, in regard to the role of the Churches and it's [sic] commitment to upholding basic human rights...

It is in these circumstances that the Council had no choice but to terminate your employment.⁸

The decision was confirmed by the executive committee of the CCN, meeting on 17 March. In a letter from the legal firm of Lorentz and Bone of 18 March, Attie Beukes was ordered to hand over the keys of his office as well as all documents and correspondence, 'against the background of recent developments which have brought about serious tension between you and other senior office bearers' of the CCN.⁹

Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes refused to comply with these instructions, until the CCN obtained a legal injunction issued by the South African appointed court. Soon afterwards, Oxfam in Britain summarily stopped funds to a teaching project (the Science and Mathematics Programme) in Katutura township in Windhoek with which Erica Beukes was connected. The project was then evicted from its teaching premises, which were taken over by the CCN.

The worthy Kandetu, writing in *CALIN* on the work of the CCN (his then employer, prior to the Swapo government), says not a word about this sordid affair. The omission is characteristic of the book as a whole. Kandetu does, however, blandly report that the 'Faith, Justice and Society Cluster' of the CCN serves to provide advice and information to the Namibian people 'on their rights, privileges and responsibilities before the law'. (p 210)

From the Bible to the Witch-Hunt

Two months after the sacking of Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes, leaflets were circulated in the townships of Windhoek, written in Afrikaans and headed 'Verraiers van Suid Afrika in Swapo Geledere' ('South African Traitors in the Swapo Membership'). In tone reminiscent of Germany in the 1930s, the leaflet concluded with the slogan: 'Swapo is die Volk...Die Volk is Swapo'.

The leaflet was issued by Swapo as a direct threat to leading members of the Committee of Parents ('Ouerskomitee'), seven of whom — including Erica Beukes, her husband Hewat, Attie Beukes and Stella-Maria Boois — were listed by name as among a 'whole group of traitors that South Africa has apparently planted within the leadership corps and activists of Swapo, both within Namibia and abroad'. (translated) Suspicions were voiced going back to 1977. These 'puppets or spies of South Africa' were accused of having given information to their 'bosses', resulting in South African military attacks and massacres at Swapo camps in Angola such as Cassinga and 'Vietnam'. Many of these spies, it stated, had already been caught and were being 'held under the supervision of Swapo' ('aangehou onder die toesig van Swapo'). The Committee of Parents was accused of having sent letters and telegrams to world leaders stating that Swapo had arrested their children without justification and that women were mistreated in Swapo camps.

A direct and very menacing attack was made on Stella-Maria Boois: 'she herself and her son [held by Swapo in its pits in Angola] are South African spies'. The leaflet incited the instincts of the lynch mob with a further chilling call:

Irrespective of whether they are friends, relatives or mere compatriots
— STAY AWAY FROM SOUTH AFRICA'S POISON!

Weg met Maria Boois! (Away with Maria Boois!)

Weg met Stella Gaes!

Weg met Talitha Smith!

Weg met Attie Beukes!

Weg met Hewat Beukes!

Weg met Erica Beukes!

Weg met Paul Vleermuis!¹⁰

Three months later, on 31 August 1986, the house of Erica and Hewat Beukes was mysteriously fire-bombed and gutted. Fortunately, neither they nor their children were injured.

None of this history relating to the CCN and its victims appears in *CALIN*. One would be entitled to wonder whether this terroristic Swapo leaflet was itself not the work of the dirty tricks department of the South African military occupation forces, if identical sentiments had not been expressed a year later in a letter published in the *Windhoek Observer* on 30 May 1987 by a leading Swapo member, the advocate Anton Lubowski (assassinated in Windhoek in 1989). There Lubowski dismissed allegations of the kind put forward by the Committee of Parents as 'false propaganda that is being spread by puppets, collaborators and spies'. The holding of Swapo's alleged one hundred 'spies, collaborators and puppets' (i.e., people identical to the members of the Committee of Parents) was vigorously defended, in the firm expectation that 'we will be catching even more in the not too distant future'. Lubowski concluded his letter, addressed to Erica Beukes, by accusing her of being a 'person who has committed the worst crime against the freedom

of your countrymen imaginable'. (CTS, pp 71–72) It is hard to penetrate the psychopathology of such sentiments, in which the authentic tone of the Swapo spy drama is expressed.

The Sanctification of Torture

In the same month that Lubowski's menacing letter was published in the *Windhoek Observer*, the nationalist movements of southern Africa, including Swapo, met in what the World Council of Churches describes as an 'historic dialogue' with international church leaders in Lusaka, Zambia. (CALIN, p 199) The meeting culminated in the 'Lusaka Statement' which inter alia expressed recognition of Swapo by the WCC as 'sole and authentic representative of the people of Namibia', the formulation adopted by the United Nations. In its own words, the 'WCC adopted the Lusaka Statement as its own'.¹¹

For all practical purposes, the standpoint of the churches was that of Advocate Lubowski and the authors of the Swapo leaflet distributed in Windhoek in May 1986. Despite the mass of evidence about Swapo's purges — which now included a book, including 92 pages of documents, some from Pastor Gröth, published in Namibia in 1986 by Erica and Hewat Beukes and Attie Beukes, called *Namibia, A Struggle Betrayed* — the Africa Secretary of the British Council of Churches, the Rev Brian Brown, made submission to a hearing of the WCC in Washington DC on 3 May 1988 that 'both church and Swapo are people's movements...partners in opposition to the South African occupation'. It was not true to say that 'the church is Swapo and Swapo is the church'; a more accurate description was that 'the "people" are Swapo and the "people" are the church'. Nicely, he declared that the churches 'endorse Swapo's purposes, if not all of its methods'. The Christian churches, in Brown's words, had 'become an integral and important part of Swapo'. (CALIN, pp 188–90) With these semi-totalitarian semantics, the men of God sprinkled incense on the torture pit. Without any hint of qualification relating to Swapo's own admission that it held large numbers of members as prisoners, despite the testimony of Gröth and the appeals of the Committee of Parents, the WCC reported formally in tones worthy of a stalinist regime. It stated that

The illegal occupation of Namibia has been facilitated by Namibians who have collaborated with South Africa and have been traitors to the cause of a free Namibia. Yet Swapo is willing to accommodate these people in a free Namibia and forgive their misguided behaviour. (CALIN, p 202)

Not only did the churches uncritically promote this Orwellian Newspeak, the editors and publishers of CALIN more than a year later were content to reprint this kind of language without comment. The WCC was recommended by its Washington hearings to call upon the governments of the world to 'provide all necessary forms of support to Swapo...' (p 203) This enthusiastic

endorsement of Swapo followed a visit to Swapo's camps in Angola in December 1987 by one of the WCC's sister organizations, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), based like the WCC in Geneva. As Gröth reported in 1989 after the release of Swapo's detainees, the visit followed a 'very painful discussion' within member churches of the LWF in response to the appeals of the Committee of Parents in Namibia. While in Geneva, the Swapo president, Nujoma, invited the LWF to send a fact finding delegation to Angola to investigate the charges of human rights abuses.

After months of preparation, a six person delegation spent five days in Angola and reported on 29 March 1988. The visit was a fiasco. The churchmen were predictably shown merely what Swapo wished them to see and were not allowed access to the prisoners themselves. Their report was circumspect, stressing that because of lack of time and preparation the delegation could not satisfactorily complete the task with which it had been entrusted. This did not prevent the LWF secretary general Gunnar Staalsett, from declaring a month later in the bulletin *Lutherische Welt-Information* (No 14/88 of 14 April 1988) that allegations of human rights abuses in the Swapo settlements were unfounded and that the work of the Committee of Parents was 'part of the ongoing South African propaganda war aimed at discrediting the liberation movement'. Staalsett's bizarre act of disinformation appeared in the bulletin under the heading: 'Angola: No indication of Swapo violations', expressing a very different emphasis from the one actually recorded by the delegates. (Gröth in *CTS*, pp 35-36)

A second CWS delegation led by Staalsett had met Swapo representatives in Angola only the month before, among them the Catholic Bishop Haushiku and Pastor Shuya of VELKSWA, both of whom had been briefed by Attie Beukes as far back as March 1985. The LWF's visits turned the authority of the churches even more terribly against the detainees. This is how, in the late twentieth century, on the eve of the collapse of the regimes of eastern Europe, world public opinion was manipulated and managed on the issue of Namibia.

A Guilty Secret

There is a passage in *CALIN* which directly connives at sanctification of the Swapo prison system. It appears in a summary of reports from a delegation of Namibian churchmen to political and church leaders in ten countries of western Europe (including the Vatican) and the United States, presented at an evaluation meeting in Frankfurt, Germany, on 4-5 December 1986. The visits of the delegation had taken place over the previous ten days. Coming after the work of Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes for the CCN in western Europe in 1985, the Swapo statement about holding 100 'spies' of February 1986 and the sacking of Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes in March 1986, this interconfessional mission was characterized by explicit bad faith. The delegation met top government and church leaders, and functioned unashamedly as a fund raiser for Swapo. Under the hymnal rubric 'We are Slaves of Hope', the delegates in their report record their concern with Mammon. Different

types of support were welcomed by the Namibians 'as long as it was channelled through the churches, the Council of Churches in Namibia, or the South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo)'. They reported that Sweden had 'promised a substantial raise in its financial support to Swapo'. (pp 185–86)

In London, the Namibian delegation attended an ecumenical meeting at Bloomsbury Baptist Church, at which there was 'evidence of good knowledge of the Namibian situation' among the church-related action groups, and at which solidarity was expressed with Swapo. Yet the question of Swapo's prisons, so far from Bloomsbury, was posed to this cosy gathering. The delegation reported evasively:

Outside, the church members of the International Society for Human Rights held a protest at the delegation's visit and the presence of Swapo representatives. Delegation considered this protest to be inspired by South Africa to defame Swapo and the churches... (p 172)

The focus of the ISHR protest, omitted by the church leaders in their laundered report, was the purges in Swapo and the fate of its prison victims. It is not necessary to endorse the political perspective of the ISHR to acknowledge that its reportage on the detainee issue in Swapo has been factual. As in the sacking of Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes, the Namibian Christian leaders in their report chose to mask a system of gross abuses by defaming those who reported it.¹²

In reproducing the report of the Namibian church delegation, the editors of *CALIN* connived with the churches by failing to explain the context of the protest by the ISHR at Bloomsbury, despite having published a number of footnotes to elucidate the document. The uninformed reader is not permitted to grasp the context of the protest by the ISHR or the issue at stake, while those in the know are strengthened in their effort to conceal the truth. A dishonest piece of mis-reportage is made worse by editorial complicity.

Today there are signs that the churches have gently begun to wean themselves from their previous uncritical embrace of Swapo, and a tiny trickle of funds has gone to projects aimed at helping Swapo's former torture victims. (letter from Erica Beukes, April 1991) The Rev Brian Brown is no longer with the British Council of Churches. But the murky past remains well shrouded, especially through books such as *CALIN*. All this is in sharp contrast to the work of Rev Salatiel Ailonga, the only cleric to come out of this episode — including even Gröth — with his humanity and his honour fully unimpaired.

A Witness to Humanity

Ailonga was a Namibian refugee, based in Zambia, the first clergyman to go into exile. At the beginning of the Swapo spy mania in the mid-1970s he was compelled to flee to Finland after he drew attention to Swapo's crimes against

its own members. As could be expected, Ailonga is a non-person to the editors of *CALIN*. His name does not appear at all.

Writing from Finland on May 24 1977, Ailonga took advantage of the fact that his bishop, Leonard Auala, was in Dar es Salaam attending a meeting of the Lutheran World Federation. (Auala was the predecessor to Bishop Dumeni, with whom Pastor Gröth and the Committee of Parents pleaded in vain for assistance in 1985). While Bishop Auala was in Dar-es-Salaam the government of Tanzania was holding eleven former leaders of Swapo in prison without trial or the benefit of habeas corpus, at the behest of the Swapo leadership and the government of Zambia. Those in prison – critical of corruption in high places in Swapo, its lack of democracy and the participation of Swapo armed forces in the war in Angola alongside the South African army – had been arrested in Zambia in April 1976 along with over a thousand trained fighters and members of the Swapo Youth League, and threatened with mass executions by the Swapo president, Nujoma.¹³

Giving details about torture and shootings at the Zambian army's concentration camp at Mboroma, Ailonga appealed to Bishop Auala to visit the detainees, among whom were several well-known members of his church. Auala, who died in 1982, had made a bold stand along with Moderator Paul Gowaseb of the ELK in a major document of resistance to the South African regime of 30 June 1971. Read aloud in every black Lutheran assembly the following Sunday, the statement – written by students at the Lutheran seminary at Otjimbingwe, endorsed by the boards of ELOK and ELK and signed by Auala and Gowaseb – stated that the South African regime in Namibia had 'failed to take cognizance of Human Rights', that black people in Namibia were continuously being 'slighted and intimidated in their daily lives' and were not free.¹⁴

The slighting and intimidation of Swapo's exile members by its leaders, and the unfreedom of Swapo's internal critics in the prisons of Tanzania, failed to register with Auala and his delegation. He did not respond to Ailonga's plea. It was left to the exiled Anglican bishop of Damaraland, Colin Winter, to administer to the spiritual needs of the eleven jailed dissident leaders. The church leaders preserved silence on their guilty knowledge. As Gröth reported in a memorandum written after the arrival back in Namibia of Swapo detainees in July 1989,

Very little of the Swapo conflict of 1976 was publicized. In the upper echelons of the Namibian churches, it was indeed never officially discussed. The Namibian churches' emerging solidarity with Swapo and its liberation struggle since the early seventies made them avoid discussion on the issue of violations of human rights by the exiled Swapo. (*CTS*, p 34)

Yet the question of publicizing the abuses of the 1980s was very problematic for Gröth himself.

The Passion of Pastor Gröth

Gröth's intervention, its conditions and limits posed a moral and theological dilemma to the German churches as sharp as any since Hitler's time: more specifically, to the Lutheran tradition, and in particular to the oppositional current brought together in 1934 as the Confessing Church (*die bekennende Kirche*). I am not here discussing the fall of such as Kameeta, Hendrik, Auala and Dumeni beneath the highest moment in the Lutheran tradition, and even beneath their own standpoint, expressed by Bishop Auala in his talk with the South African prime minister B J Vorster on 18 August 1971 as a 'burning thirst for human rights'. (quoted in 'Report' by Siegfried Gröth, *CTS*, p34)

The distinctiveness of cultural life in Namibia, especially compared with South Africa, consists very largely in its being drenched in religious consciousness, above all that of the Lutheran churches of northern Europe. Thus the seamless interweaving of politics and religion in Namibia, and between Namibian politics and northern European religion. Especially in the 1980s, the moral character of the Protestant churches of northern Europe — mainly German and Lutheran — was hammered on a Namibian anvil. The theological context of the questioning on Namibia was very well known in Germany, and thus to the pastors of the VEM (to which Gröth belongs), since its parameters were those of their own theological education. This German education centred largely on the teaching, influence, and life and death of Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hanged by the SS in the concentration camp at Flossenburg on 9 April 1945.

It is not without significance that Bonhoeffer — gagged, banned, imprisoned and finally executed by the Nazis — acted at one time in the early 1930s as secretary to the Youth Commission of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, and of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, two early ecumenical organizations which led after World War II to the founding of the WCC. At the height of the war, as an emissary of the German resistance, Bonhoeffer delivered messages in Geneva to Visser t'Hooft, later the first General Secretary of the WCC. Through its relation to Bonhoeffer and also after the war to Pastor Martin Niemöller — imprisoned for eight years under Hitler — the WCC passed judgement on itself in the 1980s by its silence on the detainees in Swapo's pits. At the war's end, Niemöller became president of the Lutheran Evangelical Church's Office for Foreign Relations, and was present when the WCC was formed in Amsterdam in 1948. The WCC's response to Swapo in Angola calls to mind Niemöller's self-critique of his early response to the Nazi terror, the three words: 'I was silent'.

Gröth gave voice to this crisis of the German Christian conscience, which required him to be measured by its own standard. Through his breakdown and through his efforts to mediate through the churches, but also through his refusal to take the step of public opposition to the purges in Zambia and Angola, Gröth drew a line rejected by Bonhoeffer between a purely religious act and a worldly one. After an intensely bitter dispute between himself and

Attie Beukes in Germany in September/October 1985, over whether or not he should make his files public, Gröth preserved silence even after Attie Beukes and Erica Beukes were dismissed by the NCC in March 1986. His moral authority was thrown publicly on the side of Swapo's prison victims only after they were already released from the pits, and had returned to Namibia. Gröth's testimony was then published in Germany as *Menschenrechtsverletzungen in der Exil-Swapo*. (Human Rights Violations in Swapo in Exile) on 18 September 1989, and reproduced as Gröth's 'Report' in *CTS* (October 1989) There he states:

It was not possible for the Namibian churches to exercise any noteworthy influence on the issue of the violation of human rights. In the joint liberation struggle, the clerics responsible in Namibia relied on what the Swapo representatives told them.

This is contradicted by Gröth's own representations to those same churchmen, from 1985 to 1989. He continues:

It remains incomprehensible how the exiled Swapo succeeded in violating human rights for more than ten years...Swapo could arrest people or be responsible for their disappearance without it being seriously discussed at an international level, in the church, or in the ecumenical domain.

In Namibia itself, even in the churches, it was impossible to officially and publicly address the facts of the case concerning torture by Swapo. [Yet this was done by the Committee of Parents, and by the publication of *Namibia, A Struggle Betrayed* – PT]. Amongst international bodies, this topic was taboo. The international community, as well as the churches, were overcome with a lameness, a powerlessness, that is difficult to explain.

Gröth states that after the return of Swapo's prison victims, he had been confronted as pastor for Namibian refugees with the question: 'Why are you only making this public now? And what made you treat the violation of human rights by Swapo as a purely internal and confidential matter to the church?'. (*CTS*, p 39) His reply in his own defence, printed in *CTS*, is that firstly, he did not wish to 'create problems for the families in Namibia' with whom he was in contact; secondly, he 'did not want to speak out publicly' because in his view it was 'more important to negotiate on these difficult issues with the leaders concerned'; and thirdly, that he was afraid that what he had to say would be 'abused for propaganda purposes, that the South African propagandists would get hold of it', even in Germany. (*ibid*)

Taken in themselves, these are reasonable criteria, but unsatisfying. Effectively the churches in Namibia, the WCC, the British Council of Churches and the VEM, with Gröth as its crucial representative, were *non*-confessing religious bodies. In Bonhoeffer's terms, they preferred the 'cheap grace' of conventional left-nationalist liberation theology to the 'costly grace' of active

commitment to their own professed principles. Gröth's powerlessness stemmed from his self-confinement to the 'inwardness' that Bonhoeffer found inadequate in his prison letter of 30 April 1940), by contrast with Bonhoeffer's conception (following Hegel on the social nature of humanity) of the need for outward action and relationship with others. Gröth's Gethsemane, his theology of the cross, found its suffering figure in the torture pits at Lubango. Bonhoeffer had argued that the Christian was called on to participate in the 'suffering of God in the life of the world'. (letter of 18 July 1944, in Bonhoeffer, p13) In the last resort, Gröth retired into religion and left the worldly defence of humanity – and the calumny – to others.

First and Last Word

In the exceptionally difficult campaign to reveal the truth about Swapo's purges and to rescue the victims, the most courageous individuals were the small group in Namibia around Erica Beukes, Attie Beukes and Stella-Maria Boois. The last word on the complicity of the churches, continued in *CALIN*, belongs to Ailonga. He has the place of honour because of his humanity and his prescience and because his was also practically the first word to be raised on behalf of the victims. He was fearful, he wrote to Auala, that all the thousand members of Swapo then still held in detention in Zambia in May 1977

may be lost within a short time and never return to Namibia. But there are thousands of families, friends and relatives of these people, and their voice will be demanding an explanation. What will the answer of the church be?...If you as leaders of the church in Namibia will fail to go with love into this question in Swapo, which is a small group, how will you be able to cope with problems which will arise on a much larger basis within a free Namibia, be it under the leadership of Swapo or someone else? (*CTS*, p 40)

In the following years, until the detainees crept from their dungeons in May 1989 like the prison wraiths in *Fidelio*, the churches in Namibia and internationally gave their answer. It is one of the scandals of the twentieth century. Swapo's prison system, preserved from investigation by complicity of the churches, will be endured in its effects for many years in the social life of southern Africa and in the personal lives of its victims. The volume under review is the product of a shameful history.

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1. Dr Abisai Shejavali, General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Namibia, in a letter on the subject of Swapo's detainees to Mr Koshy, 23 December 1985. *Call Them Spies (CTS)*, p 47] *CTS* was published in October 1989 by Motinga, an ex-Swapo detainee and former commander in Swapo's military forces, and Basson, a former senior officer in the South African

Defence Force. It is probable that Basson's connections with the South African Defence Force made publication possible. It is exclusively a book of documents.

2. In CALIN, p 202.

3. Letter to Reverend Paul Isaak in Chicago, 8 July 1985. CTS, p 42. Isaak's brother Sam had been detained by Swapo.

4. Report by Committee of Parents, April 1987. In CTS, p 63.

5. Ibid, p 64.

6. The manner in which this became available to Beukes awaits its own telling.

7. Deputy to Hamutenya in the new ministry of information and broadcasting is Tjongarero, formerly director of the communications department of the CCN, assisted by Kandetu, former associate general secretary of the CCN and author of the brief essay on the CCN in CALIN. In Namibia, saintliness is the surest road to power and place. The spokesperson for labour camps is assisted by public relations officers for the Almighty.

8. Photocopy of letter in possession of author.

9. Photocopy of letter in possession of author.

9. Leaflet in possession of author.

10. Report of the World Council of Churches, Washington Hearings on Namibia, 2-4 May, 1988. In CALIN, p 199.

11. For a detailed history of the Swapo spy-drama of 1976 see Trewhela (1990-91).

12. Because of the standpoint of the ISHR on Mozambique, Angola and Nicaragua, Erica Beukes and Attie Beukes later worked separately, still under the name of the Committee of Parents. Those like Stella-Maria Boois worked under the name of the Parents Committee.

13. For a detailed history of the Swapo spy-drama of 1976 see Trewhela (1990-91).

14. In Herbstein and Evenson, p 54.

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Paul Trehwela (1990/91), 'The Kissinger/Vorster/Kaunda Detente: Genesis of the Swapo "Spy-Drama", Parts I and II), *Searchlight South Africa*, Nos 5 and 6.

DOCUMENTS

Document 1

Letter from Reverend Salatiel Ailonga, a Namibian pastor, then a refugee in Finland after having fled from Swapo in Zambia, to Bishop Leonard Auala of the Evangelical Lutheran Owambo-Kavango Church (ELOK), 24 May 1977. Auala was the senior figure in Ailonga's church. He was then attending a conference of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, at the head of a Namibian church delegation. The letter refers to Swapo's suppression in 1976 of resistance to its collaboration with the South African army in the war in Angola. For the background, see Paul Trehwela, (1990-91).

Dear Bishop Auala,

As you know, since 1976 there was a conflict among the Namibians in Zambia. This led to many leading members in Swapo and my Chaplaincy being imprisoned on the request of Swapo's leadership. First, eleven leading members of the Party and Youth League, then forty-eight from the front, talking on behalf of the soldiers, and later on over one thousand Namibians disappeared. In the wake of this I had to leave Zambia and since June 1976 I have been staying in Finland.

Now you have the opportunity of being in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, where eleven of the imprisoned are being held. They are said to be in the following places:

Immanuel Engombe, Zakaria Shikomba, Andreas Nuukuawo and Martin Taaneni, who at the present is seriously ill, are in Keko Women's Prison, Dar.

Filemon Moongo and Johannes (Jimmy) Ampala in Mtwara Prison (?), Keshii Pelao Nathanael, Ruben Shangula, Tabora Prison (?), Andreas Shipanga and Salomon Mifima, Isanga Prison, Dodoma.

I request for you to look for a possible way to see these people, because some of them are said to be seriously ill. It is a good luck for you that Zambia is close to Tanzania and it would be well if you would try to go there to see the people in Buloma [Mboroma - PT] camp North of Lusaka, who are reported to be dying because of lack of food and medicine.

According to the proofs and my knowledge, this is not a purely political case or internal Swapo affair. It is a case concerning the wellbeing of the Namibians and their human rights, which touches the church and its responsibility to a great extent. The imprisoned in Tanzania and Zambia are members of all churches, including Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

The reason for the imprisonment is not yet known to the world, and there is no legal ground to hold people without trial. This needs to be said with all seriousness even at the present meeting [of the LWF in Dar-es-Salaam - PT], looking for the justice and dignity and liberation of the human being as a whole. If there should be any fault or crime, not all the thousand could be held responsible. There is a reliable report that at Buloma camp in August last year many people were shot at, many were wounded and some died, among them Frans Manguwala and Naftali Lilya.

In matters like these, which may have the most serious effect for the future, the church should not be silent. All these thousand may be lost within a short time and never return to Namibia. But there are thousand of families, friends and relatives of these people, and their voice will be demanding an explanation. What will the answer of the church be? I would say that in every leadership, church or state, the leaders have to be led and shown the truth without fear or partiality. That shows not enmity, but love for the leaders you correct, because you care about what he is doing. If you as leaders of the church in Namibia will fail to go with love into the question in Swapo, which is a small group, how will you be able to cope with problems which will arise on a much larger basis within a free Namibia, be it under the leadership of Swapo or someone else?

I request you in all humility to take this matter seriously and prevent more vain bloodshed.

I attach some proofs of personal statements and written letters to support the information above, showing the very serious state of many Namibians outside our country.

(signed) *Salatiel Ailonga*

Copies:

Dr Lukas de Vries, Pres ELC,

Rev Albetus Maasdorp, Assist. Secr. Gen., LWF,

Prof Mikko Juva, Chairman LWF.

(printed in CTS, p.40. First published in *Namibia, A Struggle Betrayed*, 1986. Also in *Swapo. The 1976 Anti-Corruption Rebellion*, Windhoek, 1987, a pamphlet issued by the 'Independent Group' and edited by Hewat Beukes. De Vries later joined the pro-South African interim government as a deputy minister. Juva and Maasdorp were leading world officials of the LWF. The *Times of Namibia* reported accurately on 6 October 1989 that Namibia's 'most prominent and well respected churchmen' had been well informed about the plight of Swapo detainees abroad since 1977 but had 'failed to inform the nation of this tragedy and preferred to remain silent'. It is plain from this letter that the same applies to the LWF).

Document 2

Letter from Rev Siegfried Gröth in Germany to Rev Paul Isaak in Chicago, 8 July 1985, informing Isaak of the imprisonment in Angola of his brother Samuel Isaak, a Swapo member.

Dear Brother,

After such a long delay I am now able to write to you. In the meantime I hope you have received the letter of Mrs Sohn, my secretary, made at May 18, 1985. The reason of my long silence is a very serious illness. After my three weeks' stay in Zambia among the Namibian refugees I had a break-down in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. In the middle of May I returned to Germany, accompanied by my wife who came to Zimbabwe to my support. But here again I had to go to a hospital for further treatment. Since last week I started slowly my work in the office.

First of all I have to say to you: This was the most difficult trip to Africa for me since more than twenty years. I arrived in Lusaka on March 19 and made immediately the experience that there was a very dangerous situation among the Namibians in Exile. I was confronted with an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, hopelessness and despair. Some of my good friends and brothers in Christ I could not find, among them your brother and Thomas. As far as I know, a lot of SWAPO-members disappeared and were brought from Zambia to Angola. As I heard in a lot of confidential talks with old friends among Swapo, these brothers are accused to be spies of South Africa. They must be in detention after internal SWAPO-trials.

On March 4 hundred of SWAPO-members were invited by SWAPO-leaders to the Namibia Institute of the United Nations in Lusaka [in a report written after the return of the prison victims to Namibia, Gröth gives the number of people present on this grisly occasion as 'more than 400', CTS, p34]. From the afternoon up to one o'clock in midnight the invited people had to watch video tapes which were shown to them. On these tapes Namibians were confessing about South African actions among SWAPO people in Zambia and Angola. According to the confessing Namibians they were recruited as spies for South Africa. Two key-persons in this trial were Samuel Thomas and Benny Boois. Boois and Sam and maybe others were confessing that a lot of SWAPO-members became spies for South Africa. Among the names which were mentioned is your brother. As I heard from close friends who are still SWAPO-members he had to go from Zambia to Angola and is now detained. This happened after the video-tape was shown in the time between March 12 and 20, according to the information of a close friend to me.

Dear Brother, when I got these informations during my stay in Lusaka it was a shock for me which I shall never forget. I could not believe what I heard again and again from my brothers in Christ and good friends. As you know your brother is a very close friend to me since years and we had all the years when we met in Lusaka a spiritual fellowship and became more and more brothers in Christ and close friends. We had a relationship and friendship of trust and brotherhood. And, as you know, I'm close to your family, to you, and I remember with great thankfulness your father who was one of the first pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. I am personally convinced that your brother is not a South African spy. All the years when we met I made the experience that he was a loyal member of SWAPO. Therefore he left his family and his country years ago and therefore he was willing to accept the difficulties and sufferings of a life in exile. He was very much concerned to make his studies in order to be a responsible member of a new and free Namibia in future. And Sam was also a responsible and committed Christian who was willing to suffer as a disciple of his Lord. And finally he was concerned about his family in Namibia. These three loyalties were important for your brother Sam and my friend. I'm saying this as the pastor and shepherd of Sam with whom I had a close relationship by faith and friendship.

I was asked by responsible Christians and SWAPO-members in Zambia to contact representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. I was asked by them to inform brothers of the Namibian churches so that they know about the critical situation of the Namibians in Exile. Our brothers in Zambia are convinced that there is such a great crisis in Zambia and Angola among SWAPO that churches in Namibia have to give their support and advice. Otherwise it could get worse and worse for the Namibians in Exile. This cry for help from Namibian churches came to me as a pastor who is asked by Namibian churches to take spiritual care among the Namibians in Exile in Zambia.

On May 15 I had a confidential talk with Rev. Zephaniah Kameeta in my house in Wuppertal. I returned from Africa on May 13 and had the chance to discuss this serious issue with Brother Kameeta. I informed him about the emergency situation in Zambia and Angola and mentioned the names of my friends and brothers who are in such a dangerous situation. I also mentioned names of your brother and Samuel Thomas. I told Brother Kameeta that responsible Christians and SWAPO-members are appealing to the churches for their support and help. I hope very much that Brother Kameeta as Vice-president of ELC will do his best and I trust in him. I also had confidential talks with Pastor Hendrik Frederik, the Presses of the ELC on June 14 in my house. I informed him as the President of the Church about these dangerous developments and the needs of friends and brothers in Zambia and Angola. And the consequence of the experience in Zambia was my break-down in Harare some days later. But I'm also convinced that our Lord Jesus Christ is our only Saviour and Good Shepherd. Since my visit in Zambia I'm praying daily for my brothers and sisters in Angola and Zambia who are suffering and have to go through the valleys of despair and darkness. I don't know what exactly is happening with Sam and the others in Angola. The Lord knows and he is taking care of them. This is my conviction. All the years that Sam and myself were listening to the Good News that Jesus Christ is our only Saviour and good shepherd. And I am convinced that the Lord is also the good Shepherd of your brother who is in such a difficult and dangerous situation.

I'm writing this with great sorrow as somebody who is also suffering because of the situation in Angola and Zambia among our friends there. May our Lord give you strength and hope! Let us pray to him that he will save your brother and my friend and the others! And let us pray for your mother and your whole family! In my daily prayers I am very much with all of you.

This is a very personal and confidential letter to you. Your family and other families are affected by these events. But also the churches in Namibia are affected and have to take care of those who are struggling for survival, hope and faith.

I would be very grateful if you could respond as quickly as possible to my letter. I'm waiting for your reply. And if I get any new information I shall write to you as soon as possible.

I would like to greet you very heartily with the word of Our Lord Jesus Christ which has strengthened and encouraged me during the last weeks: 'I will not leave you alone; I will come back to you'. (John, 14,18)

Your brother in Christ,

(signed) *Siegfried Gröth.*

(printed in CTS, p42. Samuel Thomas is the brother-in-law of Swapo's vice-president, the Rev Hendrik Witbooi. Such an illustrious relative by marriage did not save him from the purge. He returned to Namibia from Swapo's underground prisons on 4 July 1989, along with the bulk of his fellow victims).