Sweden Against Apartheid:

A Historical Overview

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Abstract

Sweden's relations with the South African liberation movements date back to the 1960s, when the Swedish anti-apartheid movement arose. In addition to moral support and about $400 million dollars in financial support, Sweden became the first Western country to give official political support to the anti-apartheid movement. Such was the relationship between the African National Congress (ANC) and Sweden, that the latter became the first country outside of Africa to be visited by Nelson Mandela in 1990, after his release from decades of imprisonment. The aim of this contribution is therefore to provide a brief synopsis of the rich history of Sweden's solidarity with the South African liberation struggle and the role played by the Swedish youth, the Swedish anti-apartheid movement, civil society, trade unions, and Olof Palme, former Swedish prime minister, who was one of the most committed allies of the liberation movements.

Introduction

The South African white minority government's racial segregation policy, commonly known as *apartheid*[1], featured for the first time in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1952, ultimately leading to decades of harsh condemnation and the formation of the Special Committee Against Apartheid, which was tasked with coordinating efforts and mobilising international opinion against apartheid (Bangura, 2018: 5). Yet, despite apartheid being raised for many years before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), concerted punitive action took a long time to be realised, due to Great Power politics and veto rights playing out in the larger Cold War theatre. This prompted Sweden to start acting unilaterally and in collaboration with other Scandinavian states on their abhorrence of apartheid. The Swedish people took exception to the apartheid system, denouncing its racist oppression and minority rule from their 'self-image as a people in solidarity with the disadvantaged countries and groups in the world' (Bangura, 2018: 1).

This article is by no means an exhaustive account of Sweden's solidarity with the South African liberation struggle, nor can all individual role-players or entities be mentioned, due to space constraints. A detailed account of all Sweden's efforts can be found in Tor Sellström's definitive books, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa,* Volumes 1 and 2, published by the Nordic Africa Institute in 1999 and 2002, respectively, and *Liberation in Southern Africa – Regional and Swedish Voices*, by the same author (2002). Other notable contributions include various compilations of speeches, letters, and other documents, by Enuga Reddy, an Indian-born diplomat who led the anti-apartheid efforts at the United Nations' Special Committee Against Apartheid and its Centre Against Apartheid.

Early Protests and Aid Initiatives

The earliest campaigns were initiated by the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), after apartheid was introduced at the level of higher education in South Africa. Through donating blood, funds were collected in support of their victimised Black South African student peers. Building on this early campaign, the SFS succeeded in influencing the Swedish Social Democratic government through active lobbying, resulting in Foreign Minister Östen Undén bringing the matter of apartheid to the attention of the UNGA in 1959, with specific reference to the 'worsening situation' of non-white students in South Africa (Sellström, 1999: 98).

Outside of the student movement, the first organised Swedish expression of anti-apartheid solidarity was initiated by CSM missionary Gunnar Helander (Sellström, 1999: 112). Between 1939 to 1956, Helander regularly informed the Swedish public about the situation in South Africa. He was such a thorn in the side of the apartheid regime that he was not allowed to return to South Africa after a holiday in 1956. Subsequently, in March 1961, he formed the Swedish South Africa Committee (SSAK) with writer Per Wästberg and historian Olof Tandberg, amongst others. The SSAK was intensely engaged in collecting money from individuals and trade unions for legal defence in South Africa and aid to refugees; influencing Swedish political leaders; creating interest for the problems in South Africa in other Scandinavian countries; and actively boycotting South African goods, together with the Swedish youth organisation (Skovmand, 1970: 4; Sellström, 1999: 112–113; Nordic Africa Institute, Internet).

It was the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960[2] that really kick-started the Swedish anti-apartheid movement. According to Skovmand (1970: 1), the massacre came as a shock to the people of Scandinavia, and 'gave a lasting impression of the ruthless opposition of the non-white population of South Africa.' In the aftermath of the massacre, international fundraising efforts to oppose apartheid and support its victims increased dramatically, and led to the establishment of a Defence and Aid Fund in South Africa[3] (Houser, 1982: 18). The apartheid regime was condemned in harsh terms by Swedish officials both in-country and in the United Nations (Bangura, 2018: 1). Furthermore, from 1962, the Swedish government started supporting refugees from South Africa, and Swedish citizens made gradually increasing contributions to different funds. Driven by strong public opinion against the perils of apartheid, and a position of traditional concern for refugees, humanitarian and educational assistance for refugees started flowing from Sweden and other

Nordic countries[4] from 1963 (Reddy, 1987: 8; Bangura, 2018: 1; Skovmand, 1970: 5).

Meanwhile, following their early efforts, the Scandinavian youth movements decided in 1963 to heed the call of a UNGA resolution calling for a boycott of South African goods. As they had established councils during World War II to deal with common affairs, and broad cooperation existed between the different youth organisations, they were well suited to enact such a boycott (Skovmand, 1970: 2). They were marginally successful in persuading cooperative chains that imported wine, canned fruit, and oranges, as well as State wine monopolies, to not import South African goods. This resulted in imports of goods from South Africa being drastically reduced. However, the impact was not overly dramatic, given that such goods constituted only a small part of sales revenue. This led to some disillusionment, and other international problems also started occupying the minds of the youth, resulting in difficulty recruiting voluntary workers for anti-apartheid campaigns (Skovmand, 1970: 3).

At the government level, however, efforts continued, with contributions to different funds for the victims of apartheid sharply increasing (Skovmand, 1970: 3). Direct and official humanitarian assistance to the national liberation movements in Southern Africa was endorsed by the Swedish Parliament in May 1969 (Sellström, 1999: 17). Sweden thereby became the first industrialised country in the West to forge a direct relationship with movements that other Western countries shunned as 'communist' or 'terrorist' within the context of the Cold War (Sellström, 1999: 18; Sellström, 2002a: 9). It was also the first industrialised country to give massive financial support and official political support to the anti-apartheid movement (Wallström, 2015). This followed renewed interest in the problems of South Africa, which was increasingly regarded in the wider context of white domination in the whole of Southern Africa. The guerrilla wars in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Rhodesia were regarded as offering real possibilities of ending white minority domination and supremacy in the region. Once more, students and left-wing oriented young people started participating in anti-apartheid movements, from a position that tended to look at the situation in Southern Africa as part of 'the rich white conspiracy against the third world' (Skovmand, 1970: 3). Renewed interest within the youth movements included the establishment of a coordinating committee for Southern Africa to mobilise Swedish opinion and to coordinate the work of the different movements. Their efforts paid off when in 1969, student-led boycotts, together with public pressure, led to the Swedish firm ASEA withdrawing from a consortium that would have constructed the electricity transmission infrastructure from the Cabora Bassa hydro-electric dam project in the Zambezi River, to Mozambique and South Africa (Sellström, 1999: 474–502; Skovmand, 1970: 5).

Besides the SSAK and youth movements, two other key anti-apartheid organisations in Sweden were the Africa Groups of Sweden (AGS), and the Isolate South Africa Committee (ISAK) (Thörn, 2009a: 20). Some Africa Groups were originally organised under the SSAK. In April 1974, local Africa Groups in Gothenburg, Jonkoping, Lund, Stockholm, and Uppsala formed the AGS as a national organisation (Nordic Africa Institute, Internet). Its objective 'was to support liberation fronts in Southern Africa against colonialism, imperialism and racism on the liberation movements' own conditions'. Its main activity involved fund-rasing, campaigns and information activities, in order to lobby decision-makers vis-à-vis Southern African issues (Nordic Africa Institute, Internet). The AGS was successful in getting a number of established Swedish non-govermental organisations on board. This included all political parties' youth sections, except that of the Conservative Party. It was also successful in getting a platform for its anti-apartheid solidarity work accepted, based on the sole recognition of the ANC. In 1979, the AGS formed ISAK as a broad Swedish anti-apartheid umbrella organisation, positioning it to become the dominating Swedish anti-apartheid organisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Thörn, 2009a: 21).

Sweden and the United Nations

Following the arrest and trials of thousands of opponents of apartheid by the apartheid regime in 1963, the United Nations for the first time called on member states to assist with contributions to the victims of apartheid (Reddy, 1987: 6; Houser, 1982: 18). Eleven governments responded with announcements of contributions, with Sweden giving 40,000 GBP in 1964 (Houser, 1982: 18). In 1965, a United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa (UNTF) was established,

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as well as an educational and training programme. At the same time, the UNGA started appealing for assistance to national liberation movements that were recognised by the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) (Reddy, 1987: 6). The basis for these appeals was that the UN 'recognised the legitimacy of the struggles of the liberation movements' (Reddy, 1987: 6–7) and also because the African Liberation Fund, established by the OAU in 1963, had set a precedent for assistance by governments and inter-governmental bodies to liberation movements (Reddy, 1987: 7).

Sweden and the other Nordic countries furthermore started providing developmental aid on a substantial scale in the early 1960s, in response to the UN appeals and as an expression of their solidarity with poorer countries (Reddy, 1987: 7–8). Sweden also contributed $100,000 each to the Defence and Aid Fund and the World Council of Churches (Reddy, 2008: 15). It was noted as consistently concerned with the problem of aid to prisoners and their families (Reddy, 2008: 17). The aid was mostly directed to a limited number of 'partner countries' such as the Frontline States in Southern Africa and other independent African states neighbouring South Africa. In 1970, it contributed $80,000 to the United Nations Education and Training Programmes for Southern Africa; $68,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa; and further contributions to the United Nations Education and Training Programmes (Skovmand, 1970: 5). However, little of the support went to the South African liberation movements at that point (Reddy, 2008: 66).

Since the late 1960s, the United Nations appealed for global assistance to 'the victims of colonial and racial oppression in Southern Africa' and 'their national liberation movements' (Reddy, 1987: 2). Sweden responded positively, pledging support along three lines of action, together with the other Nordic countries (i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway). These included sanctions and boycotts; humanitarian, educational, and economic assistance to national liberation movements and the oppressed people whom they represented; and promoting understanding and support for freedom struggles, including action by the United Nations (Reddy, 1987: 2–5).

Prior to this, in 1968, the Swedish Government hosted a session of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid. ANC President Oliver Tambo participated in the session as a guest of the ruling Social Democratic Party. The Liberal Party also showed strong sympathies (Skovmand, 1970: 6). Indeed, Sweden was always unequivocal in its statements against apartheid in the United Nations, no matter which party was in charge. For example, a few months after the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976[5], the Swedish representative, Olof Rydbeck, stated in the UNGA that it was clear that the political repression in South Africa was intensifying, confirming the 'impression of a more and more desperate minority intent on maintaining its privileged positions' (United Nations, 1976: 12). Reference was made to new security laws that were introduced by the apartheid regime, which enabled it to indefinitely detain anyone suspected of disturbing the law and order, and to step up plans to establish independent black homelands[6] (United Nations, 1976: 14). According to Rydbeck, the apartheid regime used its homelands policy as a tool to continue the social and economic exploitation of black workers, and to consolidate white dominion (Bangura, 2018: 1). Rydbeck was very clear on the fact that Sweden would not recognise the homelands in any form. He further emphasised that the apartheid system was inhuman and morally repulsive, and a system of violence, because it could only be upheld by the use of force (United Nations, 1976: 14; Bangura, 2018: 1). Sweden also regarded it as the most systematic violation of the UN Charter, constituting a major challenge to the international community and a threat to international peace and security. As such, Sweden regretted that more than ten years after the UNSC recommended

a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa on the initiative of Scandinavian countries, vetoes by three UNSC members have stopped a decision on the matter (United Nations, 1976: 14).

Along the same lines, in March 1977, Swedish Ambassador Anders Thunborg noted in a speech at the UNSC that the question of South Africa was taken by all political parties in Sweden to be a major issue. He, too, believed that apartheid was a threat to international peace and security, and voiced his support of an internationally coordinated effort to halt further foreign investment in South Africa (Bangura, 2018: 3). Two months later, the Swedish Minister of International Development Cooperation, Ola Ullsten, voiced his disappointment regarding the fact that the UNSC had not yet considered steps that would inhibit further investment in South Africa (Bangura, 2018: 3).

Swedish Trade Union Action Against Apartheid

Initially, there was an internal divide within the Swedish trade union movement over what strategy to follow regarding South Africa. As Thörn (2009a: 37) notes, 'the unions were…sceptical towards the ANC and its call for the isolation of South Africa.' Part of this skepticism was rooted in the fact that the main ally of the ANC was the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which in turn was affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which was 'communist-dominated' (Thörn, 2009a: 38). This did not sit well with the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Central Organization of Salaried Employees in Sweden (TCO), which were under the umbrella of the strongly anti-communist International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU). Another reason for the skepticism was that punitive measures against South Africa by the Swedish government would have a negative impact on the business interests of Swedish companies, with the knock-on effect of unemployment in Sweden (Thörn, 2009a: 38).

In an effort to resolve the impasse vis-à-vis strategy, a study delegation of the LO and the TCO reported, after a tour of South Africa in 1975, that they strongly detested apartheid and the social system in South Africa. Subsequently, they called on the Swedish public and all organisations to join in a common cause to support the struggle against the apartheid regime. Similar to the politicians, they demanded restrictions on Swedish capital transfers to South Africa, in order to prevent new investment for as long as 'Swedish enterprises are profiting by the Black, Asiatic and Coloured labor force through discriminating working conditions' (Bangura, 2018: 3–4). This coincided with the stabilisation of relations between the unions and the AGS; however, the second largest union under the LO, the Metal Union, continued to strongly oppose the call for isolation of South Africa for fear of job losses (Thörn, 2009a: 93).

The concern of the international trade union movement was heightened following the 1976 Soweto Uprising, and after the apartheid regime banned or detained twenty prominent leaders and organisers of trade unions in November 1976. The Swedish TCO joined several other national trade union organisations around the globe to protest against the detentions and bannings, especially after being called upon to do so by SACTU (United Nations, 1977: 4–5). Ultimately, the international protest culminated in a week of concerted trade union action against the apartheid regime, from 17–22 January 1977 (United Nations, 1977: 6, 9). Subsequently, the Nordic Trade Union Council (NFS) presented a list of fourteen points for further action against apartheid, viz: steps to ensure the adoption by the UNSC of resolutions to stop new investments in South Africa; the implementation of an arms embargo against South Africa; the isolation of South Africa economically, socially, and culturally; measures to counteract South African economic influence over other African states; economic support to the education of South African refugees in Lesotho and other neighbouring countries; a ban on new investment in South Africa; discontinuation of all State-controlled exportation and importation to and from South Africa; a ban on the use of Nordic territory by South African ships and aircraft; assistance to workers who may suffer as a result of a blockade against South Africa; opposition to any sporting activity between South Africa and the Nordic countries; organisation of trade union education to black and coloured workers in South Africa; increased legal, economic and humanitarian assistance to victims of apartheid; the spreading of knowledge about the oppression in South Africa, in the national school system and through other means; and opposition, in a suitable way, of tourism and emigration to South Africa and

South African territories (United Nations, 1977: 11, 19; Harriman, 1977: 8).

The LO and the TCO believed that close co-operation between governments and trade unions were essential in fighting the evils of apartheid (United Nations, 1977: 11). They therefore submitted the fourteen action points to the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid and called upon the latter to organise a conference consisting of both governments and trade unions (Harriman, 1977: 8). Subsequently, SACTU and the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) announced that it would sponsor a solidarity conference in collaboration with Swedish trade unionists in 1978, in a country neighbouring South Africa, 'to highlight the problems facing workers in South Africa and to discuss plans for action' (United Nations, 1977: 17). It must be noted, however, that unions affiliated to the LO never joined ISAK and the issue of the isolation of South Africa remained a hot debate due to the potential of job losses in Sweden (Thörn, 2009a: 21, 93).

By 1984, internal resistance in South Africa was rising, and the Frontline States were weakening, exemplified by the Nkomati Accord that Mozambique was obliged to sign with the apartheid regime, following devastation from South African aggression and destabilisation. Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme recognised the need to find ways to support the United Democratic Front and independent trade unions, and other resistance movements inside South Africa, as well as the need for greater political and material assistance to the Frontline States. In 1986, assistance to the Frontline States had increased rapidly, to more than 300 million dollars, and Sweden had also become the principal source of support to resistance movements in South Africa, in the face of brutal suppression by the apartheid regime (Reddy, 1990: 11). Most of this support went to the ANC, arguably courtesy of Palme, who was one of the strongest Swedish political voices against apartheid.

Sweden and the ANC

It could be argued that Sweden's relationship with the ANC was fueled by the friendship between Palme and the ANC president-in-exile, Oliver Tambo, since 1966. Palme had invited Tambo to his home in a gesture of recognition of the ANC as a liberation movement, and marched with Tambo in the May Day parade in 1966 (Reddy, 1990: 7). Subsequently, Tambo would often visit Sweden. Yet, in contrast with direct and official humanitarian support to other African liberation movements from 1969[7], the ANC only received its first, modest allocation in February 1973. In the two years after, support to the ANC represented only 2–3% of the total channeled to the PAIGC and FRELIMO. Despite the fact that the ANC had established close ties with the Social Democratic government by this point (Thörn, 2009: 436–427), *de facto* recognition of the ANC was only extended in the mid-1970s (Sellström, 2002b: 398). In early 1974, Sobizana Mngqikana arrived as the first Chief Representative of the ANC to Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries (Thörn, 2009: 426–427). This delay corresponds with the fact that the AGS only recognised the ANC as 'the leading liberation movement in South Africa' (Sellström, 2002b: 398) in November 1974. Mbaqikana was tasked with broadening the ANC's support in Sweden, but it was no easy task. The Social Democratic Party had decided not to look at the ANC through the lens of the Cold War, and gave the organisation its full support (Thörn, 2009: 428). It is important to note at this point that the ANC was the only South African nationalist organisation to be recognised *de facto* by Social Democratic and non-socialist governments in Sweden, under official, bilateral agreements. It wasn't without obstacles, however, mainly because the Social Democrats did not want to focus entirely on the ANC only, by their own admission. Instead, they opted for a pluralistic approach (Sellström, 2002b: 398).

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Between the mid-1970s and early 1990s, the Swedish government assisted anti-apartheid activists – mostly ANC – with about $400 million in humanitarian aid. Stipends and scholarships were provided to exiled South Africans, and humanitarian aid made its way to ANC exile camps in the Frontline States. Furthermore, ANC development projects such as farms, handicraft and educational centers, were also funded, as were the families of detainees in South Africa, and a host of human rights, cultural, legal aid, religious, labour and civic groups inside the country. The funds were disbursed by Sweden's development aid agency, SIDA, and smuggled into South Africa by a large network of anti-apartheid activists and sympathisers (Duke, 1996).

One thing that was made very clear by all Swedish governments was the policy not to assist in the use of violence. In March 1979, then-Swedish Foreign Minister Hans Blix emphasised that while there was understanding for a decision of despair by majorities that have persistently tried persuasion, reason and peaceful pressure to resort to force, Sweden supported non-violent solutions to political problems, as violence inevitably brings suffering (United Nations, 1979: 1). As such, Sweden never rendered direct military support, or supplied military equipment, to liberation movements. However, the value of this stance in the bigger scheme of things is debatable, given the huge sums of monetary support that were given to liberation movements that were engaged in armed struggles in Southern Africa.

Later ANC leaders consistently paid homage to Sweden for its 'commendable contribution to our anti-apartheid struggle', and noted that they equally valued 'our historical ties forged under the rubric of international solidarity' (South African Government, 2011). In 1988, Oliver Tambo, who could be regarded as a key roleplayer in building the close relationship with Sweden due to his frequent visits and engagements with Swedish politicians and civil society, described the relationship as follows:

> There has [...] emerged a natural system of relations between Southern Africa and Sweden, from people to people. It is a system of international relations which is not based on the policies of any party that might be in power in Sweden at any particular time, but on the fundamental reality that the peoples of our region and those of Palme's land of birth share a common outlook and impulse, which dictates that they should all strive for the same objectives (Sellstrom, 2002a: 9–10).

The Role of Olof Palme

According to Roberts (2020), Palme was one of the liberation movement's most committed allies. Born into a prominent and wealthy family in January 1927 (Reuters, 2020), he became appalled by the evil of racism while studying in the United States in 1948. This experience, together with travel to India and other Asian nations in 1953, as leader of the Swedish student movement, strengthened his feeling of solidarity with the poor and oppressed (Reddy, 1990: 5–6). He joined the Social Democratic Party in the early 1950s, after graduating with a law degree from Stockholm University in 1951 (Clarity Films, n.d.). He began his political work vis-à-vis South Africa while he was still a student, by joining the blood-donation drive and transferring the funds he received to the opposition against apartheid in South Africa (Clarity Films, n.d.; Reddy, 1990: 5–6). He rose quickly through the ranks of the left-wing Social Democratic Party and was elected to the Swedish Parliament in 1958 (Clarity Films, n.d.; Reuters, 2020). He became a member of the Cabinet in 1963, and henceforth participated in decisions that placed Sweden at the forefront of action against apartheid in the Western realm, and in the support of African liberation movements (Reddy, 1990: 7). He became the Prime Minister of Sweden in 1969 (Reuters, 2020). This coincided with a turbulent time in Southern Africa. A white minority regime under Ian Smith in Southern Rhodesia had declared unilateral independence from Britain, while simultaneously, armed struggles had been launched against colonial authorities in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. The liberation movements were facing greatly increased needs as a result of this, prompting a decision by Palme in 1969 to provide direct assistance to these movements (Reddy, 1990: 8).

As leader of the Social Democratic Party and as prime minister, Palme consistently and effectively, through words and action, demonstrated his solidarity with oppressed people around the globe (Reddy, 1990: 5). Throughout his life, he repeated his conviction that apartheid was

> by nature a system of violence which can only be maintained by force and by the oppression of the black majority...it is also a system of social and economic exploitation which separates workers from workers on the basis of the colour of their skin, at the same time as almost two million black people are unemployed. A society which responds to demands for human dignity and decency with brutal police action and indiscriminate killing must not only be condemned; it is also doomed to permanent division and conflict (Palme, 1977: 2).

Palme left no stone unturned at the United Nations and in every international forum open to his participation, to urge world powers to recognise oppression under apartheid, and the illegal occupation of Namibia, as a threat to peace (Palme, 1977: 1). Together with other entities in Sweden, and international anti-apartheid movements, he took whatever action necessary to compel the world to listen and to take action against apartheid (Reddy, 1990: 3). He pointed out how the apartheid regime was 'reinforcing the machinery of oppression, strengthening its defences and endevouring to gain assurances of wider international support' (Palme, 1977: 1), with the 1976 Soweto massacre serving as proof that the regime would not hesitate to use brutal violence (Palme, 1977: 2; Bangura, 2018: 2). He was particularly aghast at statements by Rhodesia's Ian Smith, and the apartheid regime's John Vorster who demanded external aid to enable it to 'fight for the interests of the free world':

> Haven't these people learnt anything? Let us make it very clear. Democratic socialists will never accept Smith's perversion of Western Democracy. We will never include Vorster's oppression and racism in a free world...Smith and Vorster are doing the very opposite to democracy. They are denying the peoples of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa the most fundamental human rights which are a pre-condition for democracy (Palme, 1977: 2).

Under Palme's leadership, generous assistance was provided by Sweden to the victims of repression and liberation movements, as well as new independent states in Africa. He never grew tired of promoting international action against apartheid, especially in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, and the critical period after 1984, when the increasing popular resistance and violent township protests in South Africa forced the apartheid regime to declare a State of Emergency (Reddy, 1990: 5; SAHO, 2019). He constantly challenged other major Western powers that continued to obstruct international action, and played an instrumental role in obtaining a firm commitment from Socialist International, to support the African liberation struggle (Reddy, 1990: 5). According to Reddy (1990: 6), he was always abreast of what was happening in Southern Africa; met frequently with leaders of the liberation leaders; and paid great attention to their views in a non-paternalistic manner. He emphasised that African people had to be helped in the context of their choices (Reddy, 1990: 5). He addressed many conferences on Southern Africa, where he consistently stressed that neutrality was not possible in the region; that no middle ground existed between the oppressors and the oppressed; and that reform of apartheid, or a compromise with apartheid, was not possible, thereby denouncing moves by major Western powers to give assurances to the apartheid regime, in exchange for co-operation in negotiated settlements in Rhodesia and Namibia (Reddy, 1990: 9). According to the leader of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Rt. Revd. Trevor Huddleston, CR, in Reddy (1990: 3), Palme repeatedly stated his conviction

> that apartheid is *irreformable*. That persuasion, dialogue and diplomatic pressure are themselves incapable of destroying what is basically evil in itself. That there can be no such thing as 'constructive engagement' with a tyranny. The only way is to destroy the tyranny itself and replace it with democratic rule.

In order to destroy the tyranny of apartheid, Palme proposed a specific policy for Social Democrats globally to pursue. This included: support for a binding UN arms embargo against South Africa; material and political support to already autonomous states and to the liberation movements; better coordination of efforts in the United Nations for an effective policy of isolation and sanctions against South Africa, including persistant refusal to recognise the Bantustans; determined efforts to bring about an end to South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia; reconsidering new investments and the export

of capital to South Africa and Namibia; support to black trade unions and student movements in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe; and setting up parliamentary committees to ensure that internationally acknowledged working practices were in effect in companies with subsidiaries in South Africa (Bangura, 2018: 2–3; Palme, 1977: 4).

In 1979, Palme also became one of the sponsors of the World Campaign Against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa, launched by the exiled South African, Abdul Minty (Smith, 1980: Preface). The World Campaign was set to work in close cooperation with the United Nations, the OAU, anti-apartheid and solidarity movements, liberation movements in Southern Africa, and the Frontline States, in ensuring full implementation and strengthening of the UNSC mandatory arms embargo of 1977 (Minty, c1981; Reddy, 1990: 10).

Palme also minced no words on what he felt was complacency on the part of the West. In this regard, Huddleston admonished the world to listen to what Palme had to say:

> His words are a massive assault on the complacency of the Western powers in their attitude to the monstrous evil of apartheid. Not least on those countries in Europe who for so long sustained the Pretoria regime in its tyranny by trade, investment and collaboration (Reddy, 1990: 3).

Palme was shot in the back at close range on the night of 28 February 1986, as he walked along a busy street in Stockholm. A second bullet grazed his wife, Lisbeth. She survived; Palme didn't. Thousands of people were questioned and more than 130 falsely confessed to the crime. In 1996, an allegation was made that the murder was carried out on the order of apartheid-era security forces, due to the deep enmity they had for Sweden. Despite all of this, no-one was ever convicted (Reuters, 2020; Duke, 1996). But Palme's legacy remains. He fought apartheid until the very end. A week before his assassination, he addressed the Swedish People's Parliament together with Tambo (Roberts, 2020). Palme's lifelong message is encapsulated in the following quote: 'we must live up to our responsibility for bringing this repulsive system (of apartheid) to an end' (Reddy, 1990: 11).

Palme's death was mourned by thousands of oppressed South Africans, with the Delmas Treason Trialists (Roberts, 2020) and ANC stalwarts like Oliver Tambo and later Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe unanimously praising him and his government for their repeated and unequivocal expressions of abhorrence of apartheid. Tambo called him 'one of us, a fellow combatant who has made an inestimable contribution to the struggle for the liberation of South Africa' (Reddy, 1990: 5), while Motlanthe described him as 'a tireless campaigner for peace, equality, human rights and freedom' (South African Government, 2011). His crusading efforts were also appreciated by the OAU and the UN. This is particularly exemplified by the gold medal he was awarded by the UN in 1978 in recognition of his contribution to the international campaign against apartheid (Reddy, 1990: 11).

Ultimately, all the efforts by the various entities and individuals in Sweden culminated in the next phase of the campaign against apartheid: punitive sanctions.

Swedish Sanctions

Sweden introduced measures against apartheid South Africa before most other countries. From 1967, no export credits from public funds were granted, and there were few cultural or sporting contacts with South Africa, due to a prohibition on public funds being used to subsidise such contacts. Visa requirements were introduced for South African citizens in 1978. From 1982, these visas became a highly restrictive practice that de facto barred South Africans from visiting Sweden, unless they could show that they were opponents or victims of apartheid (Conlon, 1986: 9).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Swedish government and organisations such as ISAK persistently proposed the introduction of an effective and mandatory policy of sanctions on South Africa, as well as the application of total trade boycotts (Ruyter, 1990: 4; Reddy, 1990: 3). The Swedish government also became an active co-sponsor of UN resolutions (Conlon, 1986: 9). This put the country, along with Norway and Denmark, at loggerheads with Great Britain in the 1970s over how to manage their relations with the apartheid regime. The three Scandinavian states, in a high-profile Southern Africa policy, advocated loudly for

UNSC sanctions to be imposed on the white minority governments in South Africa and Rhodesia, in order to increase pressure for reform. Britain, on the other hand, was concerned about Soviet influence in the region backing majority rule, and Britain's own economic and social interests in the region. Hence, they proposed a slower and more careful approach (Svenbalrud, 2012: 746–747). Such was the discontent that the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) wanted punitive measures imposed on Norway and Sweden, 'to sanction their position in South African matters' (Svenbalrud, 2012: 747). This, despite Sweden sharing many basic foreign policy positions with Britain, such as containing Soviet communism and supporting the post-war international liberal order (Svenbalrud, 2012: 748).

It was only in 1979, however, that Sweden prohibited new investments in South Africa (Sellström, 2002b: 398). In the face of the veto rights of permanent members of the UNSC, which severely limited the range of actions that could potentially be taken against South Africa, Foreign Minister Blix proposed unilateral action by the Swedish government (United Nations, 1979: 2). On 7 June 1979, a Swedish law was passed that banned investments and loans to South Africa and South-African-controlled Namibia (United Nations, 1979: 2; Conlon, 1986: 9; United Nations, 1989: 15). The law was revised and extended in 1985, to prohibit certain types of lease-back agreements for capital equipment (Conlon, 1986: 9). The 1979 action was the first example of Sweden acting unilaterally against South Africa, outside of UNSC resolutions (Gauhar, 1980: 638). Aside from the UNSC veto issue, however, there was also another reason for the late introduction of a ban on new investments in South Africa, as alluded to earlier: resistance from trade unions, in particular the Metal Union, and Swedish companies with business interests or subsidiaries in South Africa, who feared unemployment in Sweden in the face of South Africa's isolation.

> "Sweden went beyond the UNSC resolutions of 1985 by enacting an absolute ban on the import of an extensive range of agricultural products from South Africa (Conlon, 1986: 9). By 1987, this special law had been replaced by a general trade ban, which entailed that no person domiciled in Sweden could render marketing or consulting services on a commercial basis to any person or entity in South Africa"

Further action by the Swedish government would only follow in 1985, earning it sharp criticism from ISAK, who continuously lobbied for sanctions and the isolation of South Africa and publicised the involvement of Swedish companies in South Africa (Thörn, 2009a: 80). In October 1985, Sweden and the other Baltic states adopted formalised strategic guidelines for general policy coordination. Ultimately, all five governments went beyond the guidelines, in their respective national applications. The overall purpose was to gradually wind down new investments in South Africa by Nordic states; to work with the private sector towards informal agreements with the respective governments to restrict their activities in South Africa; to gradually wind down trade relations with South Africa; and the implementation of UNSC resolutions 558 (1985) and 569 (1985) (Conlon, 1986: 6). In addition to previous laws and measures, as alluded to earlier, Sweden also introduced the following: an end to trade in arms and military equipment in both directions; a ban on the buying or selling of Kruger Rands; no collaboration in the nuclear field; a ban on exports of computer equipment that could be used by the South African army for military purposes and/or adaptations thereof for use by the police; no trade promotion; opposition to loans by the International Monetary Fund (IMF); discouragement of technology transfer; restrictions on relations in the fields of sports, culture and science; and joint Nordic guidelines for visa regulations for South African citizens (Conlon, 1986: 6–9; Terry and Bell, 1988: 6; United Nations, 1989: 22, 29).

The only measure that could not be enacted at a national level was a ban on air traffic with South Africa. This was because the governments of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were the joint owners of Scandinavian Airline Systems (SAS) (Conlon, 1986: 7; Ruyter, 1990: 11). Hence, the three countries together responded to the call for an air traffic ban with South Africa. In accordance with a ministerial agreement of

27 June 1986, SAS would abrogate its 1958 agreement on air traffic with South Africa and end its flights to Johannesburg from September 1985 (Conlon, 1986: 7; Ruyter, 1990: 11; United Nations, 1989: 30).

Sweden went beyond the UNSC resolutions of 1985 by enacting an absolute ban on the import of an extensive range of agricultural products from South Africa (Conlon, 1986: 9). By 1987, this special law had been replaced by a general trade ban, which entailed that no person domiciled in Sweden could render marketing or consulting services on a commercial basis to any person or entity in South Africa (United Nations, 1989: 23, 31). Furthermore, provincial and local authorities were asked by the Swedish Parliament in 1985 to boycott South African products and goods for a period of one year, for reasons of solidarity, and penalties for contravention of all measures were strengthened (Conlon, 1986: 9–10; United Nations, 1989: 8). Sweden's Board of Trade was commissioned to submit an impact study on the effects of an eventual interruption of South African supplies of specialised metals, and to draw up contingency plans. Shipping companies were asked to avoid traffic via South African harbours, and to rather use ports in Frontline States. The Swedish business community was requested to disengage itself from commercial dealings with South Africa, and to follow a UN decree that called for the protection of Namibia's natural resources. Furthermore, a 'gentlemen's agreement' was reached with major coal importers in Sweden, in March 1985, to phase out imports from South Africa (Conlon, 1986: 10; United Nations, 1989: 22; Working Group Kairos, 1989: 6). It took a while though for this to materialise, as considerable volumes of South African coal were still transshipped to Sweden from Dutch ports – a trick by coal traders to hide the South African origin of the coal (Working Group Kairos, 1989: 17).

Another far-reaching measure enacted by Sweden in 1985 was that Swedish companies had to consistently report on the activities of their subsidiaries in South Africa to the Board of Trade. This was done in order to comply with the provisions of the ban on new investments. Detailed data of capital transactions between the parent company and subsidiary was required, including on the conditions of employment in, and certain activities of the South African subsidiaries. The Board of Trade had to summarise these reports and issue an annual report to the Swedish Parliament (United Nations, 1989: 9–10).

Sweden and the other Nordic countries turned the screw even tighter from 1 January 1988, when they implemented comprehensive measures intended to counteract apartheid and reduce the dependence of the countries of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference and the Frontline States on South Africa (Terry & Bell, 1988). The law that allowed provincial and local authorities to boycott South African products and goods for a period of one year had now been replaced by the general trade ban (United Nations, 1989: 8). This ban was furthermore expanded to include Namibia, and other economic measures were also expanded (Terry & Bell, 1988). This meant that by 1989, Sweden had a total ban on all trade and new investments with South Africa and Namibia, and any persons or entities based in Sweden were prohibited from acquiring portfolio investments in South African or Namibian commercial enterprises (United Nations, 1989: 28). The transport of oil on all Nordic-registered ships was also almost totally banned (United Nations, 1989: 5).

Epilogue

By April 1991, despite brutal and meaningless violence continuing, South Africa had made some progress towards political transformation. The Nordic foreign ministers, however, agreed that economic sanctions could only be revoked after the abolishment of the apartheid system, and a comprehensive political assessment of the situation (United Nations, 1991: 2–3). That said, the Nordic foreign ministers nonetheless felt that the encouraging changes taking place in South Africa already justified some steps on their part to promote dialogue and the process of democratisation. In this regard, the special guidelines applicable to the granting of visas to South African citizens would be abolished. However, restrictions that were required to ensure the implementation of nationally applicable sanctions would remain (United Nations, 1991: 3).

Meanwhile, due to widespread concern about continuing violence in South Africa, and the prospect of free and fair elections in 1994, SIDA allocated considerable resources for various peace and election monitoring initiatives (Sellström, 2002b:

861). Furthermore, in November 1993, the Swedish government decided on a final contribution to the ANC, which was paid over in October 1994. The amount of 6,5 million Swedish Krona brought 21 years of close cooperation between Sweden and the ANC as a liberation movement to an end (Sellström, 2002b: 858, 861). Up to this point, Sweden had disbursed a total of 4 billion Swedish Krona as official humanitarian assistance to liberation movements in Southern Africa (Sellström, 2002a: 9). Of this, 896 million Swedish Krona had gone to the ANC (Sellström, 2002b: 861). This support was characterised by Carl Tham, the head of SIDA from 1985, as 'one of the most important foreign policy and cooperation efforts carried out by Sweden' (Sellström, 2002b: 869).

In closing, William Minter in Sellström (2002a: 9) aptly describes Sweden's momentous support to the liberation movements as follows:

> In the 1980s, the international right wing was fond of labeling SWAPO and ANC as 'Soviet-backed'. In empirical terms, the alternate, but less dramatic, labels 'Swedish-backed' or 'Nordic-backed' would have been equally or even more accurate, especially in the non-military aspects of international support.

Bilateral relations between Sweden and South Africa were normalised in December 1993. This was marked by ANC President Nelson Mandela, and the last apartheid president, F.W. de Klerk, visiting Stockholm after being jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. It was the first time ever that a South African head of state visited Sweden. In March 1994, Sweden reciprocated, when Swedish Foreign Minister Margaretha af Ugglas visited South Africa (Sellström, 2002: 861). Not long after that, between 26 and 29 April 1994, peaceful elections brought a formal end to apartheid and white minority rule in South Africa. The long struggle for freedom and inclusive democracy in South Africa was finally over, and thousands of liberation fighters could probably resonate with the sentiments of ANC stalwart James Ngculu:

> The support we received raised morale because sometimes you sit in the camps and all that happens is that the sun rises and the sun sets. The books, the games, the clothing and everything we received from the solidarity movement sustained most of us. And the radios – you could listen to the news and music. A small thing but so important (Roberts, 2020).

Notes

1. An Afrikaans word meaning 'apartness.'

2. The Sharpeville massacre followed a non-violent anti-pass protest campaign orchestrated by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). On the morning of 21 March 1960, a crowd of people chanting freedom songs and calling out campaign slogans, approached the Sharpeville police station, where a heavy contingent of policemen awaited them. The leaders asked the police to allow them to go through to the police station, where they wanted to surrender themselves for refusing to carry passes, in line with the campaign slogan of "No Bail! No Defence! No Fine!" By midday, the crowd had grown to 5,000 people, faced by 300 policemen. A small scuffle led to a policeman being pushed over and the crowd advancing to see what was happening. The police started firing with live ammunition, later claiming that they did so because the protesters had started throwing stones at them. The two minutes of firing on the crowd left 69 dead and 180 people seriously wounded (SAHO, Internet).

3. Helander was also one of the founding members of this organisation.

4. The author acknowledges that other Nordic countries in addition to Sweden supported South Africa's liberation struggle. For more information, please refer to the Liberation Africa Project undertaken by the Nordic-Africa Institute.

5. The Soweto Uprising was triggered by the apartheid regime's introduction of the so-called 'Bantu Education Act' in 1953. In 1976, Afrikaans was made compulsory alongside English as a medium of instruction, leading to a gradual mobilisation of students. Between 3,000 and 10,000 students mobilised in Soweto on 16 June 1976 for a peaceful march against the government directive. The students were met by heavily armed police, who used teargas and later live ammunition against them. A widespread

revolt erupted, quickly turning into an uprising that spread across South Africa and continued into 1977 (SAHO, Internet).

6. A total of ten self-sufficient, ethnically defined homelands (also called Bantustans) were planned by the apartheid regime (Mukonoweshuro, 1991: 171). Three and a half million people were forcibly removed to these homelands between 1960 and 1994. Sham independence was granted to these territories in the 1970s, but poverty was rife and many returned to the cities of South Africa to work as labourers (Apartheid Museum, n.d.).

7. PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau; ZANU of Zimbabwe; SWAPO of Namibia; FRELIMO of Mozambique; and the MPLA of Angola (Sellstrom, 2002a).

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