

Stop Press

In a cautious step in the right direction the Committee of Management of the International Tennis Federation announced April 16 that South Africa would be barred this year from participating in all international tennis events, including the Davis Cup and the Womens' Federation Cup, to be played in Australia in December.

The ITF gave the three South African tennis bodies (one white, one black, one multi-racial) until February 1 to form one non-racial organization.

However ITF recognition was not withdrawn from the predominantly white South African Tennis Union, and individual players will still be allowed to compete in international tournaments—only a South African team being excluded.

This move by the Management Committee will have to be confirmed by a 75 percent majority at the annual general meeting of the ITF in July. A similar move last year was defeated.

INTERVIEW

Ensuring a Revolution Within a Revolution

by Stephanie Urdang

There is a new development within SWAPO. As the war of liberation escalates, as the number of trained guerrillas increases each month, as more and more people—particularly youth—flee their country to join SWAPO across the border in Angola, a new dimension of the struggle has blossomed and taken hold in the movement. It is the liberation of women.

This is not a new *idea* to SWAPO. As with other revolutionary movements, the question of the emancipation of women has been part of its ideology for many years. It is stated in the constitu-

gle for liberation to free her country from the yoke of colonialism and at the same time, free her and her male counterpart of the wrong practices and customs which served to keep them both 'unliberated.' Thus she ensures that there is a revolution within a revolution.

In February the South Africans finally allowed Ms. Ford to travel outside Namibia to take part in the latest round of talks with the five Western powers. I interviewed her in New York, and her words often gave way to infectious laughter as she elaborated, with a pleasing absence of empty rhetoric.

Interview with Martha Ford SWAPO Women's Council

and based on their prior actions on South Africa there is no guarantee—then this could be an end to major international sports competition for South Africa. To assure this, most anti-apartheid groups feel the pressure must be kept on and intensified.

It is possible that the two major effects of Nashville will be unrelated to sports. The first may be a spill-over of momentum to the divestiture campaigns, in which many college students are already challenging their university's stake in apartheid via investment in US corporations who do business in South Africa.

The second may be an added impetus to the US civil rights movement and its support for the liberation struggle in southern Africa. The leadership provided by Ben Hooks of the NAACP, Franklin Williams of the Phelps Stokes Fund and others was forceful and dynamic. The crowd sensed the possibility of a new beginning. It was a feeling that has been missing since the death of Martin Luther King. As the ugly, hooded head of overt racism has been unmasked once again in this country, it is imperative that this revival becomes real. □

tion. But practice was not in tune with this aspect of ideology.

The practice has come about slowly, accelerating dramatically during the past year, because the women themselves took up the issue and began to make their own demands. SWAPO's experience illustrates once again the political lesson already demonstrated in Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, that the liberation of women is not something that can be decreed from above. It becomes a reality only when taken up by the women themselves. At the same time, it is one facet of the total revolution, and not isolated from it.

The current position was recently summed up by Martha Ford, leader of the SWAPO Women's Council, founded in Namibia last year, in an article in the movement's journal, *Namibia Today* (1977, No. 3). "The Namibia woman is realizing that she should be actively involved in the national strug-

the groundswell of response to the liberation of women in SWAPO. She herself is an impressive and obviously highly capable woman who insists that men treat her with respect.

"In our society there are certain standards for men and other standards for women," she told me. "There are those who say that 'this is the man's role, and that is the woman's role,' dividing us from each other. Women are oppressed, so if we are talking about fighting against exploitation of man by man, then every form of discrimination and exploitation must be eradicated. We are fighting against the exploitation of women by man as well.

"We can say that women are even slaves of slaves. So we must free the most downtrodden: the women. But then, liberation works in two ways—the liberation of the oppressed leads to the liberation of the oppressor."

Establishing Practice

It is one thing to recognize this and quite another to put it into practice. But by last year, soon after the Women's Council was formed, the women militants in SWAPO came to

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the end of their patience. They were tired of an attitude from many of their male comrades that relegated them to less responsible tasks. They were tired of men maintaining that women's work was in the home, that women did not really know much about politics, and that they would more easily betray their comrades than a man. The women found themselves constantly arguing with their male comrades, who held views similar to those that prevailed generally in the society at large.

She looked almost impish when she recalled an incident that had happened in 1975. The Pretoria regime banned a march to protest the triple veto in the UN Security Council which squelched a resolution calling for an arms embargo against South Africa. Martha Ford had travelled north with a group of women from her small town, Rehoboth, to Windhoek to participate in a demonstration planned to protest that ban. She, along with four other Rehoboth women, were arrested and detained over the weekend. "Well, was there a fuss! The people of the town called a meeting after this, and said that women must be kept in their place, otherwise they would make the men look as if they are cowards."

Often it is not only the men who criticize a woman's activities. If she leaves her home for a weekend to attend to SWAPO work, it may be her mother or other older women, more set in their ways, who are the first to chastize her for being a bad wife and mother.

Establishing New Patterns

A few months after the formation of the Women's Council, its members decided to organize a rally in Windhoek to prove that the men were wrong. Previously when mass meetings were called by SWAPO, there had been one, maybe two women speakers. The interpreters were always men. This rally was organized, addressed and interpreted solely by the women. It was a resounding success.

Their male comrades came to the women and apologized for their attitudes. "Many said to me after the meeting, 'From now on we are never going to say such things again!'" Martha Ford laughed heartily at the memory. "They were completely surprised, in fact stunned, by what they saw us women do, and by the way we articulated our idea, as well as how up to date we were with the latest development!"

Since then, women have played a more active and equal role in political organizing alongside the men. The number of women attending mass



Martha Ford

rallies has also grown to over 40 percent.

It has not been easy for the women to discard their socialization and take a militant stand. "It is easier for women to be passive. But we have to realize that it is good to make decisions for ourselves. And it is vital that we support each other in this. We have been taught that other women are our rivals, our competitors.

"Women are dependent on their husbands. They bring up their children to be dependent on them. It is like being suffocated."

As women play a stronger role in SWAPO and as they become more politically developed, the experience that FRELIMO and PAIGC women speak of, is being relived: women are becoming even more political and militant than many of the men.

"When the women become active they are stronger, they are more forceful, they are more clear about what they want and how things should be done than the men. The men are just astounded, they don't know what is happening."

Cautious Response

The response on the part of men to the 'new' woman is varied. Some have thrown their support behind the women's struggle. Others have been more cautious, even forbidding their wives to attend meetings. But the issue is alive and is being confronted constantly.

"We are all colonized. In the process of fighting this, we question a lot of the

old values. It must be tackled as part of the overall fight. But still, there are comrades who do not believe this is an issue that we should be dealing with now. They are very threatened. Of course they are, they are the oppressors! They say that focussing on women's liberation at this time is divisive, and women will see men as the enemy. Women will go off into a reactionary line."

While these attitudes are still prevalent, they are on the decline, and the change in the last year has been considerable.

"You should see what is happening with our women!", another member—male—of the SWAPO delegation commented to me. "In the last year there have been tremendous changes. The women are becoming a powerful force in the organization."

Women in the Army

Women are joining the army in increasing numbers. An interview with a political commissar of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in *Namibia Today* (1977, No. 3) touches on this. "PLAN follows SWAPO's policy that each and every member of SWAPO should be trained regardless of sex or color. Men and women follow the same training. We are not in that old system of discriminating against women, saying that this is for women and that is for men. We don't do that; we are all equal."

"At the beginning," Martha Ford commented, "the men were very unhappy about the women commanders. They did not like to fall under the command of a woman. This was quite a problem, but it has been solved now and the men accept it."

To ensure that the attitudes of both men and women continue to change, the Women's Council which has established groups in all areas of Namibia, holds weekly discussion groups for women, and regular seminars for both women and men.

"The Council has the task not only of mobilizing women to participate in the national struggle, but to make them conscious that they have the same right and obligation as men to make decisions concerning their nation's interest. The discussions go deeper into what exploitation means and to understand the nature of the system. Women do feel oppressed. In the discussions we emphasize that it is not men who are the problem, but the system."

The sense that the liberation of women has become an alive question within SWAPO could be caught from

the enthusiastic way in which Martha Ford expressed the issues and the problems. She told me that women from every part of the country are insisting on the need for women to participate equally in the struggle. She said there was no difference in the level of response between the towns and the rural areas, between one ethnic group and another, or between young and old.

"But," she said, "these issues have to be taken up in a conscious and ideological way." If they arise only spontaneously as a result of a particular historical situation, they may fade away once the conditions change.

"It must become a fundamental part of the ongoing struggle. We don't want women to automatically drift back into the old patterns once we have our independence. I think in SWAPO, with so many women being active and being aware of the process and the time that such a struggle takes, this will not happen."

But it is a struggle that is still young. "We are still male dominated at the National Executive level and at the branch [regional] level and would like to see a conscious effort at drawing more women into the decision making organs of our movement. We have a long way to go but the struggle will continue." □



SWAPO members at a rally