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Report on Benelux Countries - by G. Motsepe

The political situation in my area is characterized by the general crisis of capitalism, raging inflation, high unemployment, chronic economic "booms" and "slumps". This inimical state of affairs has tended to spawn negative and reactionary attitudes amongst the population who, deceived by the bourgeois media, blame their economic plight on the migrant workers, and turn to backward elements for answers, especially in Belgium and Luxembourg, leaving the US multinationals to continue their ruthless plunder. Whilst in general the economic crisis in the Benelux countries is acute, in Belgium it is more pronounced. The most interesting point to note is that in Belgium where the ruling class in collusion with multinational corporations have a vested interest in S.A., it is there also where the most vociferous support for the racist regime emanates from. Likewise in Luxembourg. In the 3 Benelux countries (Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg) the so-called democratic process of government is no more than what has been described as 'a circulation of the elite'. Their governments come and go at the drop of a hat, but the same bourgeoisie remain, comprising a coalition of Social-Democrats, Christian Democrats and conservatives. The economic hardships experienced by the working class has been compounded by a proliferation of political parties: no less than 16 in Belgium. When it is considered how tiny these countries are, then the gravity of the situation can be appreciated. In all three countries, the church plays a dominant role: owning its own media, controlling trade unions and political parties, owning land, industries and commercial enterprises. The Christian Democrats constitute the main component in every coalition government in the Benelux countries. As if the situation is not confusing enough, in Belgium, this confusion is worse confounded by the national question. This problem, aggravated by the crisis of capitalism, has already resulted in the collapse of three governments since my arrival, i.e. in twelve months. Even now the crisis is deepening with the present Belgium coalition government teetering on the brink of collapse - the currency has been devalued by 8½%, industrial action by the steel workers has erupted into violent clashes with the authorities, the government is ruling by decree with the aim of halting the crisis. It is with this as a background that we must evaluate the social and political forces ranged against us and those who are our actual and potential allies.

Belgium

Firstly, there are those elements that are against us, who are motivated by economic factors and the so-called "Soviet influence in Southern Africa". In Belgium these are:

i) leading Parliamentarians belonging to the Belgo-S.A. Inter-Parliamentary Union, i.e. more or less 40 MPs and Senators belonging to the FVV, Volksunie, CVP (Christian Demos.) right wingers and conservatives, e.g. Sen Jorissen book on S.A., leading spokesman of the pro-apartheid lobby, Prof. Vlerick - economist at Ghent University, member of Protea - pro SA lobby - Director of Krediet Bank, one of the main banks which doles out massive loans to SA, CVP minister.

ii) leading bankers and industrialists, e.g. director of Upjohn corporation of USA is a member of Protea, a company which is dumping Depo Provera in SA to be used in the fascist sterilization campaign against our women. This drug is banned in the US because of the deleterious effects it has had in American women, e.g. cancer. Most of them belong to the Belgo- South African Chamber of Commerce, which stimulates trade between the two countries. Several companies plunder the mineral resources of both Namibia and SA, e.g. Agfa Gevaert manufactures photographic equipment with silver foom Namibia.

3 medical agreements between SA and Belgium allow leading medical specialists to go to SA. Final year medical students do their housemanship there.

SOUTH AFRICA AND THE BELGIAN POLITICAL CONTEXT

Political Parties

In Belgium, we have about 16 political parties represented in Parliament: 8 in Flanders/Brussels and 8 in Walloon/Brussels. The most important of them, in terms of their number, are the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats, the Conservatives and, to a less extent, the regional parties. The smaller political parties are the communists and the ecologists.

On November 1981, there were elections for Parliament. The following numbers give a general view of the strength of the various political parties as well as the relations withing each region.

Chamber of Parliamentarians (212) members)

		Flanders/Br	Wallonn/Br
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS	61	CVP 43	PSC 18
SOCIAL DEMOCRATS	61	SP 26	PS 35
CONSERVATIVES	55	PVV 28	PRL 24
		RAD 1	UDRT 2
REGIONAL PARTIES	28	VU 20	FDF/RW 7
COMMUNISTS	2	KP -	PC 2
ECOLOGISTS		AGALEV 2	ECOLO 2

Political parties and South Africa

First of all, it is clear that so-called 'international problems' are hardly discussed in Belgium political life. Foreign Affairs was something for the Minister, so to say. This passive attitude is changing slowly. It is in the very last years - under pressure of the Flemish Social Democrats (SP) - that we start discussing the Belgian policy towards Zaire and Mobutu (although a former colony). Other international subjects can hardly reach the point of a 'broad social discussion'. It remains by questions in Parliament. No single political party has thus far made a break-point of an international policy question. In this way, it becomes clear that the problem of racism and apartheid is not a real point of discussion in Belgium. The party election programmes do not mention any measures concerning South Africa. Now and then they

will condemn apartheid and the racist regime, but in general, it remains by those statements.

Conclusion: Until now, it is not worthwhile for the Belgian political parties - looking to their electorate, as they do - to have South Africa on their programme, that means, to go beyond their nice solidarity statements. (contrary to the situation in Holland).

Political parties and the ANC

The ANC can fully rely on the communist parties (KP and PC) and the ecologists (Agalev and Eco,o). But the problem is that they are very small, never represented in the government. On the other hand, they are important in the local solidarity work.

The ANC can partly rely on the socialist parties (SP and PS). With them, the solidarity groups have also good experiences. If questions have to be raised in Parliament, the MPs are fully prepared to cooperate (questions on the Belgian links with the racists: trade relations, bank loans, arms deals/embargo violations, cultural agreement, etc.). But the activities of the socialist parties are limited. The example of the arms embargo will make that clear:

The Security council called on all states strictly and scrupulously to implement the embargo resolution and enact, as appropriate, effective national legislation for that purpose. Although the only mandatory sanction against South Africa, this resolution 418(1977) is not yet incorporated into Belgian legislation. Up to now, the social democrats did not take up this matter. The implementation of the arms embargo into Belgian legislation is not in their programme... This is why we say "the ANC can partly rely on..."

The ANC can partly rely on individuals in the Christian Democrats and the regional parties, surely not on these parties themselves.

The Christian - Democrats (CVP and PSC) and the regional parties (Volksunie and FDF/RW) do condemn apartheid, but still believe in the dialogue with the racists. There is a lot of political unwillingness in those parties, all centre parties with various interests (workers' and employers'). Class reconciliation is the holy principle for them. Influential Christian Democrats and members of the Flemish Volksunie are also members of Protea, and openly take a pro-apartheid stand.

The ANC cannot rely on the conservatives (PVV, PRL, RAD/UDRT).

The Belgian Government

So far, every government in Belgium has been an ally for the racist government in Pretoria. The Belgian government always claimed the strategy of the "dialogue". "We are against violence", they emphasize... This general attitude remains the same when the Social Democrats are in the government. For example, the increasing energy import from South Africa was decided in the succeeding Christian Democrattic/Social democratic cabinets.

Trade Unions

The General picture we gave about the Social Democrats and their attitude towards South Africa is repeated here. The two big trade unions in Belgium (the socialist orientated ABVV/FGTB, President George Debunne and the Christian Orientated ACV/CSC, President Jef Houthuys) have their regular condemnation of apartheid, but they hardly come to the moments of real support and of the Belgian link with the apartheid system. For example, the increasing Belgian coal and uranium import from South Africa is not taken up by the trade unions (although the mines are to be closed here), the many violations of the arms embargo by Belgium is not taken up, the import of South African made BMW cars was not taken up, etc. Another, sometimes difficult point is their relation with SACTU (ABVV/FGTB as a member of ICFTU, ACV/CSC as a member of WFL). It seems that they fail to understand the work of SACTU inside South Africa. They easily conclude theat SACTU hardly exists there.

The allies of the racist regime in Belgium

The racist regime of South Africa has a considerable support among various groups in Belgium. Especially in Flanders, there is a strong pro-apartheid tendency. The supporters of the Pretoria-regime joined hands in the "Belgian South African inter-parliamentary association" and the Flemish - South African contact club Protea.

After an intensified propaganda campaign by the South African Embassy in Brussels and the "Friends of South Africa" at the end of 1976 (!), the interparliamentary association was founded at the beginning of 1977. The explicit purpose of this group is to support the white minority regime by way of parliamentary contacts. Then, in October 1977, exactly the period when the regime outlawed the legal opposition inside South Africa, all Flemish advocates of apartheid got together and created Protea. It is their intention to give our people "exact information on South Africa". The text of the declaration of this group is pervaded by a blatant racist world view and treats Blacks as second-class citizens. Protea president is M. André VLERICK, professor of economics at the University of Ghent and ex-minister of finance. In the Nov. 77 issue of BEELDEN (magazine of the SA Embassy in Brussels) we can read what sort of "exact information" is meant: exact information = official South African Government information. The Protea information is only an extension of SA propaganda. Indeed, the foundation of Protea was cordially welcomed by the Embassy. e.g. Senator Jorissen's book about S.A.

Protea stands for:

- an extreme right wing ideological limitation of apartheid,
- an outspoken racist world view
- paternalistic attitude towards South Africans and Arabs,
- pathological anti-communism.

And who is supporting Protea ?

Looking to the initial Protea list of 200 members, their enormous representativity becomes clear. Except the outspoken representatives of the far right, we come across a big number of parliamentarians: 20 CVP, 8 PVV, 18 Volksunie !!! The other members of

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Protea are industrialists (about 60), journalists (13) and other influential people (40). The Protea industrialists and employers are those who surrounds the two big banks which have their headquarters not in Brussels, but in Antwerp, and which are linked with capital in the FRG. The treasurer of Protea is a director of the PARIBAS bank, Mr Leon Rochtus. Protea's president, Mr. Vlerick is also the President of the KREDIETBANK (number 9 in the world list with bank loans to South Africa). Protea came also in full blossom through the diamond axis South Africa-Israel via Antwerp. There is also a great sympathy for South Africa in Belgian medical circles. A big number of doctors are members of Protea (There is an official medical agreement between Belgium and South Africa. The racist regime is prepared to accept up to 50 Belgian doctors each year. So they can decrease the number of African medical students).

The press

The centre right press - which is rather strong in Flanders - is supporting the racists. The champion here is the "Gazet van Antwerpen". Other newspapers where the regime is defended and where propaganda articles can be published are De Nieuwe Gids (editor in chief Achiel SAMOY is a top member of Protea), Het Volk (also with Samoy's articles), Het Laatste Nieuws (Piet Van Brabant as Protea member), De Nieuwe Gazet, De Financieel Economische Tijd.

Some top officials of the BRT are also close friends for the Pretoria regime. The SAUK invited them several times. The BRT provided technical advice and other help for SAUK, when they started with the TV programmes. Some years ago, it was still possible for BRT journalists and Protea member Walter Geerts to make several propaganda programmes on South Africa.

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Need for Information in French, Films, photo exhibition

Manpower

Security problem

Diplomatic Offensive

- Oct. visit of President O.R.
- OAU group of Ambassador and Socialists
- Foreign Ministry and EEC Officials
- Trade Unionists/ICFTU
- Bishop Dancels of Belgium
- Meeting with Prime Minister van Agt for + 30 minutes

Strasbourg exhibition of Cde Mandela

Political

International Commission of enquiry - conference/meetings/films

Mobilisation for oil embargo - Benelux HCSA

May Conference on Women under apartheid

Book sponsored SA in the 80's B. Pityna

Material assistance

Material assistance seems to ebb and flow according to the fortunes of our struggle. Initially when I approached several donor agencies the EEC and solidarity groups for material aid, I noticed some slight hesitancy and doubt. But as the struggle steadily intensifies at home, more and more organisations are coming forward offering to co-finance/sponsor projects. Also, more than anything else, the visit of the delegation led by our President, last October, certainly made a major impact. Several offers of assistance have already been made, others are in the pipeline. To cite a few examples:-

1. Entraide et Fraternite
Information project in the pipeline
Poultry project
2. SACTU strike fund 600,000BF
3. Solidarite socialiste and Oxfam Belgie ready to co-sponsor
project on small hand tools
tailoring project
HCSA
AABN

4. Novib, ICCO, HCSA
 5. ANJV 90,000 guilders for Mayibuye
Amersfoort 10,000 guilders
 6. EEC
Refugees in the frontline states
Black workers inside South Africa
Information in Western Europe
- Future plans Benelux
- MP's /Trade unionists Exhibitions
 - Meetings seminars films
 - May 5 (70th anniversary)
 - Pamphlet on Depo Provera

THE OIL EMBARGO AND THE BENELUX PROBLEM

The Dutch Government Declaration foresees 3 measures to put pressure on South Africa:

- to cease supplying SA with oil,
- to stop importing SA coal,
- to make no more investments in SA.

This positive attitude in Holland seems to come to grief upon Belgian and Luxembourg objections.

The previous two governments have been under pressure from Parliament to impose curbs in trading links with South Africa since a big majority of MP's voted in June 1980 for an oil embargo. Attempts to gain support from other EEC countries, and from Belgium and Luxembourg in particular, have failed, however. Indeed the problem for Holland is that the BENELUX Union Treaty prevents the Netherlands from acting alone. So, to start the oil embargo in the Netherlands, the cooperation of Belgium and Luxembourg is required, even if Holland wants to do it unilateral.

So far, Van der Stoep's letters to Belgium and Luxembourg are still unanswered. And it is for sure that the political climate in Belgium is immature for sanctions against the apartheid regime (Belgium and Luxemburg voted against the oil embargo resolution in the General Assembly of the UN in December 81). So pressure upon the Belgian Government is needed !

"Sound of Soweto". This group claims to be neutral and therefore mentions or supports the ANC, PAC and BCM. There are one or two elements within the group who are strongly PAC. We have in February this year had a serious meeting with the leaders of the groups and discussed the possibilities of working together with them. They are prepared to discuss the problem amongst themselves and our objections to the content of their performances. The signs are reasonably good and the possibilities of drawing them closer towards us are real. Our aim is to try and bring as many of the South Africans closer towards the ANC by supplying them available material such as SGOLESA, etc.

N.B. The German authorities are very keen to have ANC students here in West Germany. the Ministry of Cooperation and Development has brought up this question with me on several occasions. They seem to be worried about their image and their past policy in this field. e.g. they have masses of students belonging to SWANU and have only recently received a group of 15 SWAPO students.

6 Publications

- a) We are issuing a regular monthly bulletin which is designed to inform "important elements in society" i.e. MF's, church people, trade unionists, mass organisations, etc. about the ANC policy ANC statements and statements pertaining. It is meant as a mobilisation bulletin and has been very successful and well received.
- b) We are translating the pamphlet "the History of the ANC into German and hope to have it ready by June 26th.
- c) We have in preparation a large documentation - a collection of 20 articles explaining apartheid in a much more detailed fashion to the German public. It is also meant to expose the imperialist stake in South Africa and it's support to the regime. We hope to publish it also as a contribution in the year of the 70th anniversary.

d) We also have planned a series of 10 paged pamphlets on specific issues, e.g. one on political prisoners, one on mass removals, one on the role of the churches, etc. aimed at mobilizing mass support. We will soon be publishing a pamphlet on the question of peace and the liberation movements specifically aimed at the peace forces in this country.

N.B. All this will be undertaken in consultation with Francis Meli.

7. Sanctions Conference

Together with the Anti-Apartheid forces we are planning an international conference on the question of sanctions in the FRG.

This is in it's early stages and hope to discuss the matter with Comrade Jele before any concrete decisions are taken.

8. 70th anniversary public meeting

We have planned a large 70th anniversary Public Meeting for the 15th of October to be held in Cologne. This is to replace a meeting which was to take place in March. Wolfgang Roth, the Nigerian Ambassador and other personalities had agreed to speak at the above meeting. We are sure that they will agree again to address the October 70th anniversary meeting. Our request would be for one of the members of the Executive to consider addressing the October meeting. We could use this occasion for contacts between ourselves and people of interest to us. In fact, we would plan a visit of delegation from the South around this date.

9. Namibia Conference

SWAPO would like a major conference on the scale of Paris to be held in the FRG. See attached documents on the subject.

10. Relationship with Embassies

Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Nigeria, Lesotho, Uganda, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, etc. were prepared to pay and host reception for Chief. Nigeria make information centre facilities available for use by us.

11. Permanent picketing of S.A. Embassy, Consulates and companies carried out by "Jabu" committee now extended to encompass all political prisoners. These committees have sprung up all over the country and in other European countries. Close relations with the ANC office.