

Southern Africa and Liberal Interventionism*

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The Carter administration has been asserting of late that it is seeking to bring about majority rule in southern Africa. It has put forward an image of liberal interventionism-on the side of the Africans. Yet Joshua Nkomo and Sam Nujoma have insisted that all they want is for the US not to help the white regimes. Liberal interventionism stands forward as the most dangerous enemy of African liberation movements in southern Africa, and the Africans know it.

Geopolitically, southern Africa has become, and promises to remain for some time, a world node of acute political conflict. The ending of the war in Vietnam brought into being a relatively stable situation in that region. The Middle Eastern conflicts seem to be winding their way, however slowly, to an arrangement that may or may not turn out to be stable. But southern Africa promises most clearly to be a center of increasing, not decreasing, armed conflict.

The difficult years for African liberation (1965-74) were precisely the years of intensive US involvement in Vietnam. The United States clearly felt that it could not "afford" another major trouble zone and threw its weight behind the status quo. After the coup in Portugal in 1974 the downward thrust of African liberation was resumed. The response taken by Henry Kissinger was to drop the status quo option represented by NSSM 39 and to replace it with the liberal interventionism initiated hesitatingly under Eisenhower, then pursued with a flourish under Kennedy. At that time the US had encouraged the European powers to 'decolonize',

*Excerpts from an address by Immanuel Wallerstein to the first meeting of the Association of Concerned African Scholars (ACAS) Houston, Texas, November 3, 1977. Originally published in ACAS Newsletter 1 (1977), p. 3.

provided the resulting African regimes were pro-Western or at least 'non-aligned', and provided -- even more important -- that economic links with the West were not cut. Basically Kissinger sought to revive the earlier US option of a 'deal' of decolonization and apply it to southern Africa in 1976.

Thus when Andrew Young or Walter Mondale or David Owen speaks of a 'last chance' for a 'peaceful transition' he means it is a last chance to install relatively tame African governments in Zimbabwe and Namibia, governments that would hold their own radicals in check and would continue to permit the same steady flow of products and profits as historically has been the case. Of course the 'deal' would provide a cut for local politicians and businessmen. But this is no skin off the back of the large corporations. The 'cut' for African cadres would simply substitute for the 'cut' now taken by the white settlers.


	
ASSOCIATION OF CONCERNED AFRICA SCHOLARS P.O. Box 791, East Lansing, Michigan 48823	
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IMAGE: COVER, ACAS NEWSLETTER 12 (1984)