

The Castro — Podgorny Diplomatic Offensive

The just-completed African tours of Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny and Cuban President Fidel Castro accomplished objectives far more terrifying to monetarist interests than any "Communist onslaught" on South Africa. In addition to creating the preconditions for a relatively peaceful transition to majority rule in Rhodesia — in tacit collaboration with Great Britain, West Germany and Italy — the Podgorny and Castro tours mobilized Africa's non-aligned leadership for a new offensive on behalf of a new world economic order.

Premier Castro's eight-nation, six-week tour, beginning in mid-February with strategy sessions with Algerian President Houari Boumedienne and Libyan President Muammar al-Qaddafi, was aimed firstly at eliminating a major trouble spot on the northeast Horn of Africa between Ethiopia and Somalia — both socialist countries; secondly, at ensuring the security and freedom of action of the southern front-line states facing white-minority-ruled Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa.

Castro's discussions with African leaders specified the creation of the new world economic order as the basis for African liberation. Speaking at a March 22 press conference in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, Castro said that development is a "life-or-death" question for the Third World, asserting that "these peoples will not resign themselves to die. They will struggle for progress, and struggle for their lives."

At the opening of his tour, Castro visited Somalia, Ethiopia and South Yemen, all on the Red Sea, and shuttled twice between Ethiopia and Somalia in an effort to mediate the disruptive border dispute between the two countries.

In southern Africa, Castro visited Tanzania, Mozambique and Angola and met with the leaders of the Rhodesian and Namibian liberation movements. While there, he pledged that Cuba would place its resources at the disposal of the front-line states to defend them against any aggression from Rhodesia or South Africa, but specified that Rhodesia would be liberated by Rhodesians, not Cubans.

This strategic formulation is designed to allow the front-line states and the Rhodesian Patriotic Front to undertake a political-military offensive — with the expected collaboration of British Foreign Secretary David Owen — by seeking to prevent Rhodesian Prime Minister Smith from launching further retaliation raids against pro-socialist Mozambique. Smith now appears boxed in, and Owen will probably offer him the choice of a peaceful transition to majority rule or a certain unpleasant fate at the hands of the nationalists.

Castro indicated several times that the Carter Administration's offers for negotiations on diplomatic relations in exchange for a Cuban withdrawal of troops

from Angola were not even being considered in Havana. Such questions, Castro said, "are not subject to negotiations." Later he told an Angolan audience that Cuban troops would remain in Angola until the Angolan Army was fully prepared as a modern army to repel aggression.

Toward the end of his tour, Castro returned to Algeria, where he met again with President Boumedienne, and with Cuban Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov, who had flown in together from Moscow. Upon leaving Africa, Castro traveled to East Germany and then on to Moscow, meeting with DDR President Erich Honnecker and with Soviet leaders including President Podgorny, just returned from his own southern African trip.

Soviet Treaty with Mozambique

Podgorny's trip to Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique backed up the Cuban-front-line states' strategy with Soviet power. Not only did Podgorny pledge increased aid to the Rhodesian, Namibian and South African liberation movements, but he later signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Mozambique — similar to ones previously signed with Somalia and Tanzania — which pledged Soviet defense of Mozambique from external aggression or internal destabilization:

"In the case of situation tending to disturb the peace" in either country, an article of the treaty says, the two countries "will enter into immediate contact with the aim of coordinating their positions in the interests of eliminating the threat or reestablishing peace."

In his March 28 meeting with Joshua Nkomo of the Rhodesian Patriotic Front, Sam Nujoma of the Namibian SWAPO liberation movement, and Oliver Tambo of the African Nationalist Congress of South Africa, Podgorny was accompanied by Deputy Defense Minister Sokolov, KGB General Viktor Samudurov, and the architect of the Soviets' Africa policy, Vasili Solodovnikov. Although the meeting was a strategy session for armed struggle, Podgorny later made it clear that this was a last resort: "A peaceful settlement in southern Africa is desirable," he said, opening the way for a British initiative, "but the rights of the oppressed people are being ignored, so the armed struggle is understandable."

After signing the Friendship Treaty with Mozambique Podgorny returned for a second visit to Tanzania, where he met again with President Julius Nyerere, who is chairman of the front-line states alliance among Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. In that second meeting, according to a diplomatic source, the front-line states "got what they wanted," a final specific commitment of military and economic support from the Soviets for the alliance.

The greatest success of the Podgorny tour was in improving relations with formerly pro-Western Zambia, a development that makes Zambia less susceptible to U.S. and South African pressure to split the front-line alliance. Speaking to a London Times reporter March 31, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda rejected the idea of any new shuttle diplomacy stalling tactics from the West, asserted his country's non-alignment, and told the West that if it wishes to regain favor in southern Africa: "Remove Smith from power. Remove apartheid. Remove Vorster from Namibia (see box)." Kaunda's remarks are an implicit rejection of UN Ambassador Andrew Young's "trust me" stalling ploys over South Africa in the Security Council.

British Initiatives

British Foreign Secretary Owen has indicated that he will take full advantage of this new situation in southern Africa during his trip there starting April 10. With typical understatement, Owen told reporters April 3 that he planned a "slightly more self-confident British foreign policy and a bit more boldness.... We have been perhaps too cautious, too conciliatory, and I think, myself, over Rhodesia, we ought at times to have been firmer...." Owen also remarked, "I do not think... that the only person who can deliver a solution in Rhodesia is Mr. Smith.... he is not the sole aspect of white Rhodesian opinion." Owen has invited anti-Smith white Rhodesians to meet with him while he is in Cape Town, South Africa; and Prime Minister Callaghan has already met in Britain with a key Smith opponent, former Prime Minister Roy Welensky. In addition to outflanking Smith through his own white opposition, Owen has not denied reports that he will convene a constitutional conference for Rhodesia. Some reports added that this may take place with or without Smith.

Implicitly backing the British and, indirectly, the Soviet-Cuban-front-line states initiative, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt declared on April 3 that his government would not be a party to any Atlanticist attempt to get NATO involved — as a proxy for the U.S. — in any defense of the white-run south. "NATO has nothing to look for in Africa," said Schmidt, in a speech blacked out of the American press. "The sphere of activity of this alliance does not extend to Africa, especially not to the southern part of this continent." In addition, Schmidt's Minister of Development, Marie Schlei, has

just returned from a trip through Africa where she arranged indirect aid to the Patriotic Front through Zambia. The Italian government has already extended support to the Patriotic Front, in meetings between Joshua Nkomo and Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Ratti last month in Rome.

Zambian President Explains 'Hero's Welcome' For Castro, Podgorny

Speaking to London Times reporter Nicholas Ashford Mar. 31, soon after Soviet President Podgorny's departure from his country, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda said that if the West was now concerned about the spread of communist influence in southern Africa, it had only itself to blame. The following are excerpts from Kaunda's interview:

If it is a choice between peace in slavery and armed conflict then we will choose armed conflict until genuine peace is established...

If the West is afraid that the visits of President Podgorny and Dr. Castro are going to end up in southern Africa being communist-influenced, it is the West that is to blame... The West refused to help remove the "shackles of fascism and imperialism, and neo-colonialism and racism.

The West not only refused to support us, they even refused to remove the cause of the conflict...

So what are you doing now you people in the West? You are trying to remove the effect before removing the cause. To think of communism now is to think of the effect and not the cause. Why are President Podgorny and President Castro receiving such a hero's welcome? Because the masses of the people of southern Africa realize that the Western countries are exploiters who are only interested in wealth and natural resources. It is the people of the Eastern countries who are supporting them.