

AFRICA NEWS

A Weekly Digest Of African Affairs

SOUTH AFRICA

'Siege Trial'

Watched Closely
[AN] On September 11, a South African appeals court commuted the death sentence of James Mange, a black man convicted of conspiracy in what was perhaps the country's most intense criminal trial in recent years. Mange's reprieve follows ten months of clemency appeals from dozens of government agencies, and, as Julie Frederikse reports, it coincides with another pivotal court case:

JOHANNESBURG — If the death sentence had been carried out on James Mange, defenders of the South African legal system would no longer be able to claim that no one has ever been executed for a purely political crime.

Solomon Mahlangu, hanged in 1978, who like Mange was a self-avowed guerrilla of the African National Congress (ANC), was convicted on a criminal charge — the murder of a white civilian in downtown Johannesburg.

Neither Mange, who will now serve twenty years, nor his eleven co-defendants killed or injured anyone. They were convicted of involvement in plot to attack a police station in Cape Province, though they had no weapons in their possession at the time of their arrest last year.

The success of the appeal for clemency in the Mange case is seen here as evidence of the government's reluctance to flaunt local and international opinion; hanging Mange would have tarnished Prime Minister P.W. Botha's carefully cultivated reformist image. It should also be noted, however, that the South African appeals court has a generally more liberal reputation than the lower courts, as evidenced in recent rulings opening up the fields of labor and influx control of broader interpretation.

The appeals court ruling in the Mange case comes in the middle of a similar and potentially more sensational political trial, one involving charges of treason and terrorism in connection with two guerrilla attacks in January 1980. Those accused of carrying out the raids were allegedly trained in socialist countries as ANC guerrillas.

The trial takes on added importance because, unlike the spate of guerrilla attacks against police stations in black townships over the past few years, the attacks in January targeted white areas. In the first incident, a police station in the tiny white farming community of Soekmeekar was riddled with bullets from Soviet-made AK assault rifles. In the second incident, three guerrillas armed with AKs and hand grenades marched into a bank at midday in the Pretoria suburb of Silverton, took hostages and demanded the release of political prisoners. The five-hour siege ended when a police SWAT team stormed the building in a shoot-out that left three guerrillas and two of the hostages dead.

As in the Mange case, the Silverton-Soekmeekar defendants were nowhere near the scene of the attacks when they were arrested. The prosecution, consequently, has depended chiefly on the testimony of security police and unnamed witnesses, who have turned state's evidence to link the nine accused to the armed incidents, allegedly planned by the ANC.

The mood of the current trial, known as the 'Silverton siege trial,' cannot be compared with the Mange case, for that was the most bizarre political trial this country has ever seen; Mange and his co-defendants refused to recognize the legitimacy of

the court, fired their legal counsel, interrupted the trial with renditions of freedom songs, and were finally incarcerated in a glass cage in the courtroom.

The Silverton siege trial may be less spectacular in its proceedings, but it may also ultimately prove more significant on a symbolic level. A recent poll, for example, found that 75 per cent of South Africa's black majority population supported the siege.

"It's not necessarily that we blacks all endorse violence," said one observer, "but the Silverton incident is the kind of thing that makes the whites take notice. That's why we're all watching this trial very closely."

Meanwhile, school boycotts which began in April this year are still occurring. On September 17, the Minister of Education and Training announced closure of primary and secondary schools in the western cape. Earlier in the month, Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage schools in the eastern cape were closed indefinitely. Both actions followed continuing protests by students demanding changes in the country's segregated schools policies.

UGANDA

More Election Snags
[AN] The historic national election scheduled for September 30 has now been officially postponed. Nevertheless, as a special correspondent who recently visited Uganda reports, partisan political maneuvering intensifies with each passing week.

KAMPALA — An election timetable has been finalized and December 10 is the designated voting day. The first step laid out by the electoral commission, however, the demarcation of constituencies, has already been delayed past the September 20 deadline, and a mood of skepticism as to how, when and if elections will take place has set in among the Ugandan population.

Recent events have heightened rather than appeased apprehensions, and the main question now is whether the election will be rigged to facilitate the coming to power of former Ugandan president Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress Party (UPC).

At this point it is not at all clear which of the two major parties contesting the elections, the more conservative, traditionally Catholic, Democratic Party (DP), or the UPC, would win a 'free and fair' vote. What has become apparent, however, is that the main issue in the election is the personality and past performance of former president Obote. In comparison, other more substantial would-be party distinctions fall by the wayside.

Both the DP and the recently-formed Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), headed by the vice-chairman of Uganda's ruling Military Commission, Yoweri Museveni, have lashed out at the UPC for using their advantage in the present government to entrench themselves during the interim period before elections, and for giving themselves undue advantage at election time.

Some Ugandan politicians have alleged that the Military Commission's take-over from former Ugandan President Godfrey Binaisa last May was a move to bring Obote back to power. This suggestion was initially scoffed at by members of the DP, who were willing to go along with the coup, since it enabled the resumption of political party activity.

The UPM came into being after the May coup. Museveni and its other founders had originally advocated holding elections under the umbrella of the Uganda National Liberation Front, a

governing coalition that ousted former dictator Idi Amin. When the Military Commission seized power and gave the go-ahead to partisan political activity, however, they reconciled themselves to the new arrangements.

Now both the DP and the UPM are beginning to reconsider their initial compliance.

On September 16, the National Consultative Council, Uganda's interim parliament, met to vote on an election bill which called for a 126-seat parliament. The DP and UPM joined forces to propose an amendment to the bill which would raise the number to 140, their argument being that more seats would allow for a more representative breakdown of the population.

The amendment was defeated by a margin of 48 to 39 with two abstentions. Of the 48 votes against the amendment, 47 came from the UPC, which had organized all party council members to vote as a block.

In addition, at the onset of the council meeting in question, the minister of public service and cabinet affairs, Wilson Okwenje, a UPC member, warned all Cabinet ministers and deputy ministers that for reasons of "collective responsibility" they were beholden to vote with the government bill, and thus against the amendment.

Both DP and UPM ministers and deputies refused to abide by the directive, only to find out through a radio broadcast the following morning that they could choose to resign from government or be fired. This announcement came from the lips of Paulo Muwanga, a UPC partisan and chairman of the Military Commission.

Later that day, a Consultative Council meeting attended only by UPC members unanimously passed the election bill and voted in a UPC member, Francis Butagira, as chairman. This session was either boycotted by DP and UPM partisans or was unknown to them.

Military Commission chairman Muwanga later backed down from firing the DP and UPM ministers, but with the UPC now enjoying greater control over the council, opposition from the dissidents has mounted. Both parties have decided to boycott all council meetings until the Military Commission nullifies the decisions made at or after the September 17 meeting.

The DP has gone further, threatening to withdraw its cooperation from the government unless a list of demands are met. Among them, the

DP has asked the ultimate decision-making power, which now lies with the Military Commission, be restored to the council.

Charging that the Military Commission appointed a number of ministers and deputy ministers "solely for the purpose of increasing the strength of the UPC in the council," the DP has demanded that these government officials no longer be allowed to participate in council affairs.

They have also accused the six-man electoral commission favoring the UPC and are calling for the electoral commission to be reconstituted.

Other DP demands are for the release of all political prisoners, including members of the Democratic Party, who they claim are being held in military prisons and police stations. In addition they are calling for more Tanzanian police reinforcements, or if necessary, police assistance from friendly Commonwealth countries, and have further asked that a Commonwealth team come to Uganda to observe the "whole electoral process."

The fourth party contesting the elections, the Conservative Party, which seeks a federalist arrangement in Uganda, has no members on the Consultative Council and not much national following.

With the UPC defending the legitimacy of their recent moves in the council and denying they have been involved in any election malpractices or have any intentions of rigging elections, reconciliation between the parties will be difficult to say the least.

Asking Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, who still has 10,000 troops and 1,000 police in the country, to mediate in the dispute, may be a last resort. But, according to Tanzanian military personnel in Uganda, what the Tanzanian authorities want most at present is to wash their hands of the whole Uganda situation.

Fears of a possible move from within the ranks of the Ugandan army have escalated with the increased political tension. Despite the Military Commission's promises to put an end to the insecurity plaguing the country and stomp out the rampant corruption when they assumed power from former President Binaisa, lawlessness, especially purportedly politically motivated crimes, he has been on the increase. And the black market rate of exchange, the gauge of the relative stability of the Ugandan economy, has gone up.



Heads Together

United States Ambassador Donald McHenry (l) confers with Secretary of State Edmund Muskie during United Nations General Assembly speech by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko last week. Gromyko accused the U.S. of pursuing a foreign policy "of pressure and blackmail."

UPI Photo

Although unconfirmed, there have been numerous reports of intimidation and fighting among various tribal and political groupings within the army as well as among the civilian population.

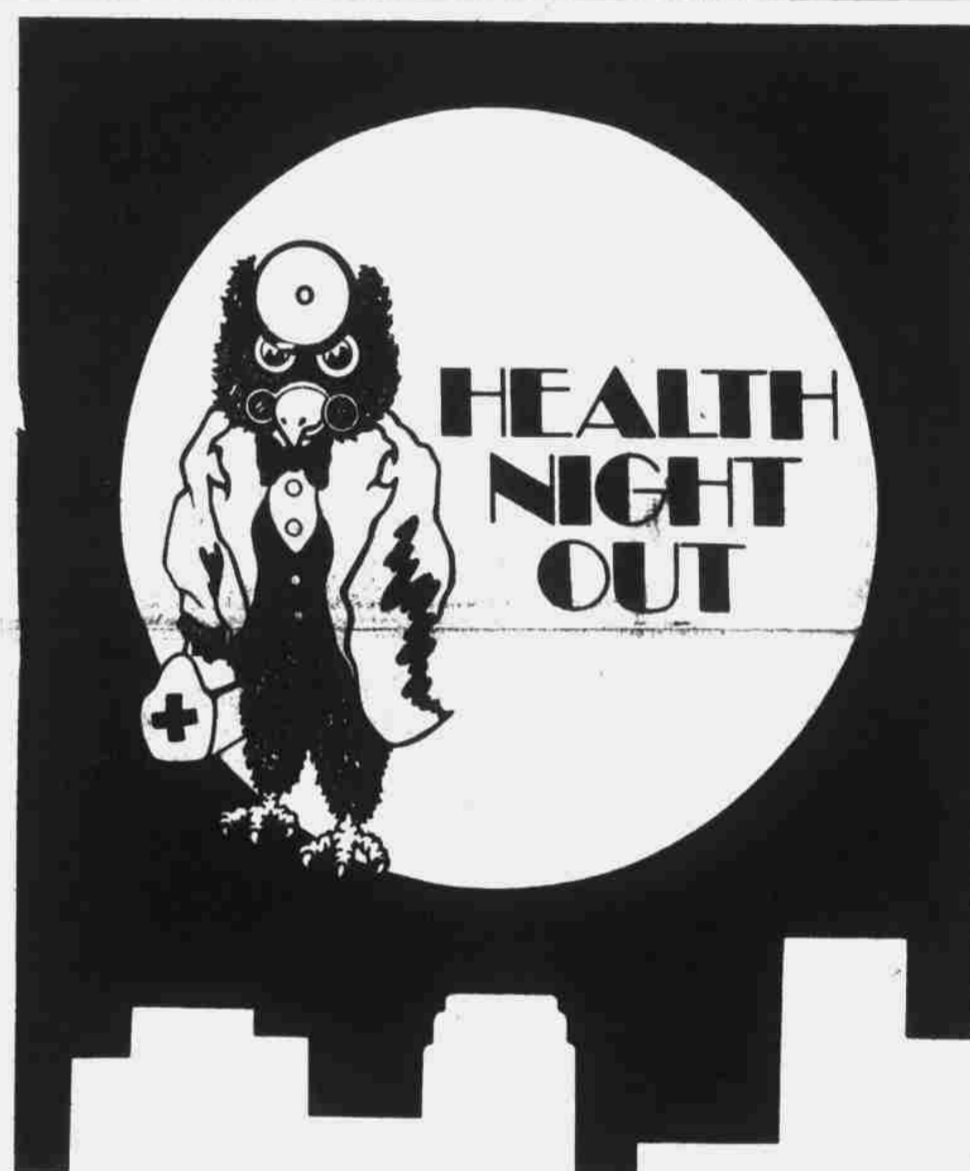
A microcosm of the nation's political divisions can be found at Makerere University in Kampala, where students have split into two distinct groups, UPC versus the others, each claiming to be the legitimate representatives of the student body.

Initially most Ugandans saw elections as a way out of the present instability, but the feeling now is that they will merely exaggerate already existing divisions and obfuscate the real issues — those of reconstruction of an economy already devastated by eight years dictatorial rule under Idi Amin.

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"The Generation Gap: Understanding Teenagers."
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