

Saima Nakuti Ndahangwapo

Defending the Investment

Rössing Uranium and the Business of Decolonisation in Namibia

Foreword by Jan-Bart Gewald



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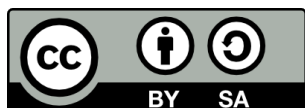
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For Tate Ndahangwapo, Meadhimo & Ndapunikwa

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In 1997, *P. Schlettwein Publishing* (PSP) launched the *Basel Namibia Studies Series*. Its primary aim was to lend support to a new generation of research, scholars and readers emerging with the independence of Namibia in 1990.

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Foreword

by Jan-Bart Gewald

In the early 1990's, shortly after Namibia's independence, I conducted historical research among OtjiHerero speaking people in the rural areas of eastern Namibia and western Botswana. Many a time, whilst speaking to people about their past, they would tell me to wait a bit, whilst they turned to a slim A4-sized glossy publication entitled *History Makers: 24 Colourful Characters from SWA/Namibia's Past*, after which they would proceed to tell me an account of the past that was based on the consulted written text.¹ Unwittingly they were telling me an account of their own past in accordance with the "Gospel of Rössing". For the text of *History Makers* was in essence a recast distillation of earlier colonial renditions of the past, used to justify the imposition of colonial rule, most notably that of the missionary Heinrich Vedder. Now, however, it was presented as something progressive and fitting for a youthful population en route to independence:

Part of the strength of any nation is a sense of its own history. To a country such as ours, poised for its step into independence, the feeling of knowing where we have come from is particularly important. It is in this spirit that Rössing dedicates this book to the young people of SWA/Namibia.²

History Makers was part and parcel of the enormous and concerted publicity campaign initiated by Rössing Uranium to win the "hearts and minds" of the people of Namibia, in which the publication and distribution of 20.000 copies of *History Makers* was but one small part.

Saima Nakuti Ndahangwapo's work, *Defending the Investment*, unravels the conundrum of a multi-national industrial mining company that collaborated with the apartheid government of South Africa in the continued illegal colonial occupation of Namibia, and consciously ignored and transgressed sanctions imposed within the context of United Nations resolutions (aimed at combatting apartheid South Africa), yet emerged post-independence as a Namibian institution enjoying the support of the ruling party, SWAPO. Saima's work makes for sobering yet essential reading for anybody interested in Namibia, its history and mineral extraction. Her work is a blow by blow account of the manner in which corporate

¹ Venter, Lester. *History Makers. 24 Colourful Characters from SWA/Namibia's Past* Rössing Uranium Ltd. 1983.. Illustrated by Sonia van der Westhuizen. 56 p.m

² Rössing Uranium team, *A Lived Legacy: Reflecting on 45 years of 'Working for Namibia' 1976-2021*, Windhoek: John Meinert, 2022, p. 43, citing the introduction of *History Makers*.

interests, driven by profit motive triumphed over morals and integrity, and yet were able to claim and attain the moral high ground.

Structured and set up chronologically the five substantive chapters of the book outline the development of Rössing Uranium from the earliest pioneering days through to independence and the early 1990s. In this, the final chapter “The Rebranding Stage”, should be compulsory reading for any young Namibian or person interested in discovering how multinational corporations develop strategies to whitewash and increasingly, in the present, to greenwash their reputations. Sadly, the publicity battles and the successful rebranding and directing away of attention from the substantive are often successful. Thus, Rössing has consistently been able to deflect negative reporting on its operations through its extremely effective use of publicity campaigns that hide and obfuscate the reality of a mining corporation in pursuit of profit. Saima wryly notes:

RUL argued that if the mine had not been established, “the town of Arandis would not exist, Swakopmund would be far smaller than it is today and all economic indicators would be substantially lower”. One could, however, add that if RUL had not been established, there would be no “biggest mine in the world”, no investment worth defending in Namibia and no profits for RTZ and its shareholders. More importantly, Namibia’s full uranium resource potential would have remained in the ground (P. 154).

Saima Nakuti Ndahangwapo is to be commended for her work. It may well be the case that in the present Rössing continues to enjoy the benefits of its extremely successful publicity campaigns, but there will come a time when future generations of Namibians will wonder if it was all worth it. Saima’s work is an indication that that time is fast approaching. When that time comes, people will be able to rely on this work, in which truth was spoken to power and the full import of Rössing as an exploitative and polluting institution, whose prime interest was profit for its shareholders, can no longer be hidden. For better or for worse, Rössing Uranium will continue to influence our view of the past and the present in Namibia. Therefore, it is to be applauded that we have Saima’s work to shine a light on the past and to help us to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

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I acknowledge the following institutions whose financial support enabled me to carry out research for this project: the Beit Fund, University of Oxford; the Leibniz-Institute für Europäische Geschichte (IEG) in Mainz, Germany; and the Sam Nujoma Foundation, Windhoek, Namibia.

I remain immensely grateful to the publishing team at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) in Basel, Switzerland.

Lastly, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my family and friends for their invaluable support.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAC	Anglo American Corporation
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
BNFL	British Nuclear Fuels Limited
BAB	Basler Afrika Bibliographien
CLP	Constituency Labour Parties
CANUC	Campaign Against the Namibia Uranium Contracts
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COMURHEX	Conversion Métal Uranium Hexafluorure
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IFIC	Iranian Foreign Investment Company
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
NAN	National Archives of Namibia
NARSSA	National Archives and Records Services of South Africa
NIT	Namibia Institute of Technology
NIMT	Namibia Institute of Mining Technology
NIOC	National Iranian Oil Company
NSC	Namibia Support Committee
NTC	National Technical Certificate
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
RIOFINEX	Rio Tinto Finance & Exploration Limited
RTX	Rio Tinto Exploration
RTZ	Rio Tinto Zinc
RUL	Rössing Uranium Limited
SAA	South African Airways
SASOL	South African Oil and Gas Corporation
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWANU	South West Africa National Union
TNA	The National Archives (UK)
UN	United Nations
UNCN	United Nations Council for Namibia

UNTAG	United Nations Transitional Assistance Group
URENCO	Uranium Enrichment Consortium
UTA	Union Transport Aérienne
WCG	Western Contact Group
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union

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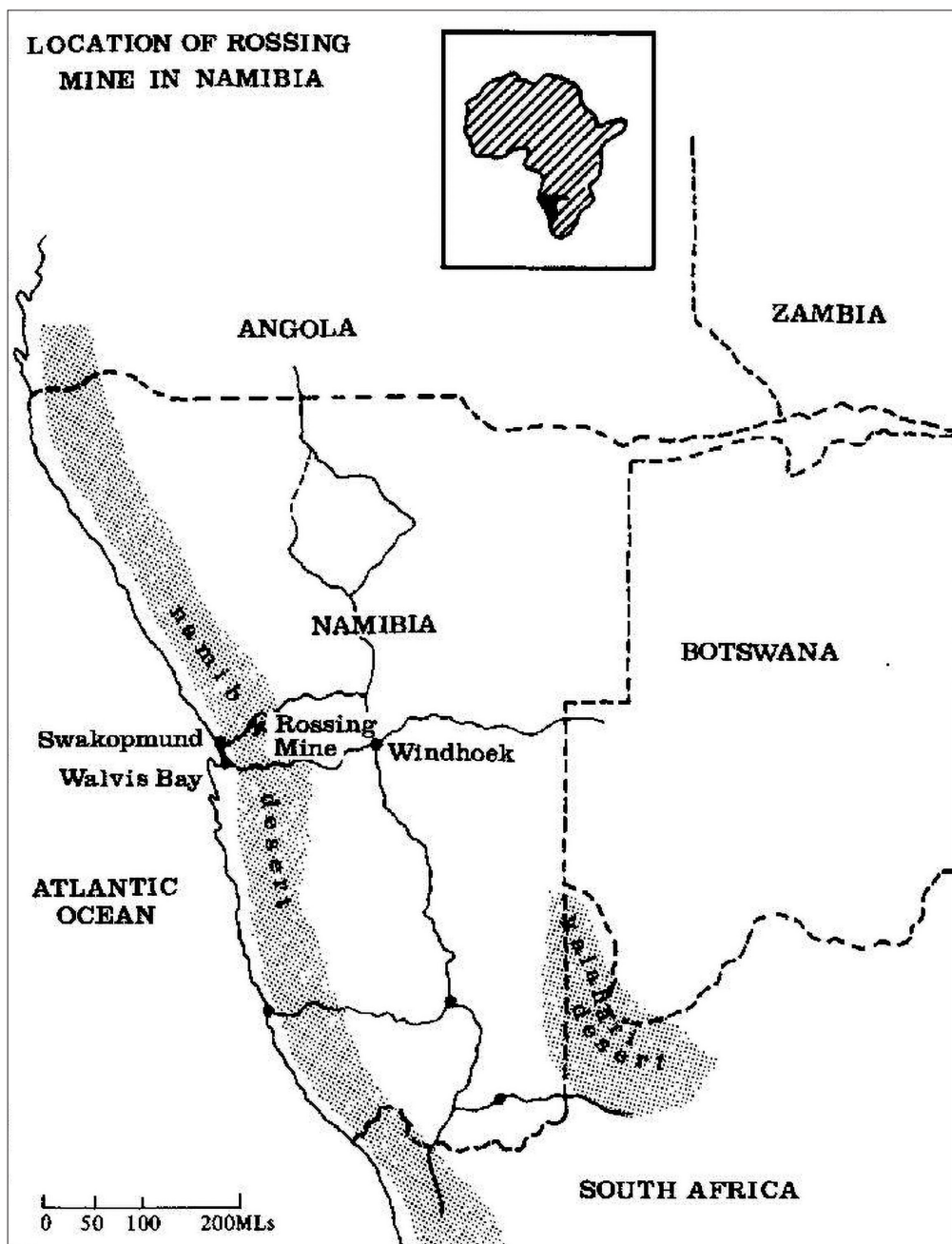


Figure 1: Map of Namibia, indicating the location of the Rössing Uranium Mine¹

¹ Roberts, A., *The Rössing File: The Inside Story of Britain's Secret Contract for Namibian Uranium*. (London, Namibia Support Committee (CANUC), 1980), 70.

1 Introduction

This book examines the history of Rössing Uranium (RUL) through the lens of big business and diplomacy in Namibia. The book endeavours to provide an understanding of the counterintuitive outcome of the economic dimension of Namibian decolonisation, through which a large multinational corporation with close links to the South African administration, and whose operations in Namibia were the persistent target of nationalists and international campaigns survived the transition to independence virtually unscathed. In examining political and commercial interests in the history of RUL the book illuminates the convergence of big business and diplomacy that led to the development of uranium production in Namibia. On the one hand, the convergence of multinational interests explains the accelerated interest in the Rössing deposits, (in the late 1960s), whose existence had been known since the late 1920s, after decades of non-interest in Namibian uranium. On the other, the convergence of interests explain the strategies that were adopted by RUL, and its parent company Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ), in response to political change in Namibia.

In the 1960s apartheid South Africa's control over Namibia was fiercely contested and increasingly viewed by the international community as illegal. This culminated in the termination of the South African mandate over Namibia by the United Nations General Assembly in October 1966.¹ It was during this period of international, as well as nationalist, interventions for Namibian independence that the RUL was established by the British multinational corporation, Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ). RTZ acquired the rights to the Rössing deposits from the G. P. Louw Company, a company formed out of a syndicate that was established by British/South African settlers. The Union of South Africa had arrogated uranium production to the state through the Atomic Energy Act of 1948, which guaranteed that the government had "complete control of uranium production, possession, and disposal".² The applicability of South African laws to Namibia meant that control over Namibian uranium deposits was vested in the South African state. This gave the South African administration the sole right to search for, prospect, or mine uranium in the territory. Thus, the prospecting rights, acquired by the G. P. Louw Company in the early 1950s over the Rössing deposit were awarded under the regulations of the Atomic Energy Act of 1948.

¹ "Question of Namibia" (initially Question of South West Africa) was the United Nations appellation for the situation in Namibia, reflected in General Assembly Resolution 2145 (XXI) Question of South West Africa, of 27 October 1966, <http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/UNGA/1966/13.pdf>, accessed 28 May 2020.

² Kawana, A. K., "The Political Economy of Mining Laws and Regulations in Namibia from 1884 to 1986", PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, (Warwick, 1988), 97.

RTZ's establishment of RUL was likewise contingent upon the consent and licensing of the South African administration. Establishing the Rössing Uranium mine was a capital-intensive venture for which RTZ had to secure investors as well as the political buy-in of the South African government. A partnership was established between RTZ and the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC), which was not only beneficial to RTZ's operations in the territory but also beneficial to the mine's financial outlook. Motivated by their national security interests, countries like Britain, Canada, Germany (the Federal Republic), Japan and the United States of America, along with South Africa, all became involved in the different phases of the mining venture. To ensure a profitable operation, for instance, RTZ secured sufficient sales contracts from various governmental entities which made provision for long-term sales contracts running from the 1970s to the 1980s. It was on the premise of these sales contracts that RTZ developed RUL and financed the exploitation of Namibian uranium deposits.³

For Namibian nationalists, the politics of liberating Namibia from South African occupation would eventually become enmeshed with the politics of protecting the territory's natural resources from the extensive exploitation orchestrated by the South African regime in collusion with several multinational corporations and their associated governments.⁴ In the 1960s, Namibian nationalists organised under movements such as the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) with the aim of exerting pressure on the South African regime to relinquish power over the territory.⁵ In August 1966, SWAPO waged armed struggle against the South African regime alongside an internal political mobilisation and an international diplomatic campaign that would result in the movement's recognition by the UN as representing the aspirations of the Namibian people. RTZ's establishment of RUL in occupied territory would bring it into direct confrontation with Namibian nationalists, who argued that the multinational mining firm was stripping Namibia of its natural resources.

The commencement of uranium mining activities in the late 1960s constituted the largest investment in Namibia's mining industry in the post-Second World War period. RTZ's Rössing Uranium mine was the first and only commercial uranium mine in operation during the colonial period and indeed well after the post-independence period. Speaking in the 1980s, for instance, a Director at Rössing Uranium stated that in the 1970s Namibia was seen as a "promising source" for uranium with deposits "identified at Rössing, Langer Heinrich, Tubas and Trekkopje, but of these Rössing is the only one which has been brought into

³ Roberts, *The Rössing File*, 6. Rogers, B., *Namibia's Uranium, Implications for the South African Occupation Regime*, June 1975, TNA EG 7/139, 4.

⁴ Hecht, G., *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (Cambridge, 2012), 82.

⁵ Two main nationalist movements were established during this period, the first being the South West African National Union (SWANU) established in 1959 and the second being the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), founded in 1960.

production and is today one of the largest uranium mines in the world. Any paper dealing with uranium production in Namibia must therefore concentrate on the Rössing Uranium mine”.⁶ The history of RUL is thus synonymous with, and is pivotal to our understanding of the history of the uranium industry in Namibia.

The focus on RUL was vital to identify the strategies that were essential to the establishment and operations of RUL under colonial rule and decolonisation. RUL’s strategies, and particularly the public relations strategy aimed at withstanding political change in Namibia, were grounded in the philosophy of “defending the investment in Rössing”.⁷ The public relations strategy sought to maintain “the image of Rössing as a positive, progressive and constructive participant in the economic and social development of South West Africa/Namibia” and it was specifically “directed towards the international community, the national community, the local community resident in the vicinity of Rössing and the internal community constituting the employees of Rössing”.⁸ Moreover, RUL’s approach to Namibian independence garnered commercial advantage for the mine and ensured the continuity of its operations in independent Namibia. Examining RTZ’s operations at RUL is therefore vital to our understanding of the response of big business to the process of decolonisation in Namibia and the continuity of the various mining operations in post-independence Namibia.

Official accounts of the history of uranium mining in Namibia identify three main stages in the pre-production period, each occupying different time frames and representing the converging interests of the different actors involved in RUL. These stages were: i) the pioneering stage (1928–1965), ii) the exploration stage (1966–1970), and iii) the construction and development stage (1971–1975).⁹ Two additional stages are discussed in addition to the forgoing categorisation. These stages which, along with stages i) ii) and iii), form the focus of this study are iv) the production stage (1976–1984) and v) the rebranding stage (1985–1990). By adding these two stages to the official categorisation the research was able to extend the chronology of events from 1975 to 1990. The two additional stages are essential to answering the research question which guides this study. The production and rebranding stages were added to provide a nuanced understanding of the history of ura-

⁶ P. Daniel, (Director, Rössing Uranium Limited), International Uranium Production—Namibian Perspective, International Nuclear Conference, Saskatoon, June 3rd–6th, 1984, 1. General Mining and Gold Fields, the South African mining houses, [had] identified ore bodies at Langer Heinrich and Trekkopje respectively. None [was] prepared to commit itself to production before it knows the political future of the territory, (The wealth of Namibia ST 250181 WITS Special Collections).

⁷ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Rössing Mine, on Thursday 8 December 1977 at 10h30, 14.

⁸ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek, on Thursday, 22 October 1981, Agenda Item: 903—Public Relations, 4.

⁹ Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, (Swakopmund, Rössing Uranium Limited, 1986), 4.

ni-um production in Namibia and the strategies that were employed by RTZ to cement its operations at the RUL mine during the colonial period and to maintain these operations in independent Namibia.

The pioneering stage, which covers the period 1928 to 1965, primarily focuses on “the resourceful identification of radio-active pitchblende on the fringe of the Namib Desert [which] ultimately gave birth to the Rössing Uranium Mine of today”.¹⁰ The exploration stage, lasting from 1966 to 1970, constitutes an eventful period in the territory’s political history when British and German interests converged through the economy of joint effort to explore for Namibian uranium. The construction and development stage, lasted from 1971 up until 1975, when RTZ was able to develop RUL in collusion with the South African regime, which assisted the mine in providing the necessary finance along with the required infrastructure to bring the mine into production. The production stage lasted from 1976 to 1984, a period when RUL, and the colonial state, vehemently ignored international opposition to mining operations, spurred on by the British government’s collusion in the exploitation of Namibian uranium. The final stage, that is the rebranding stage, lasted from 1985 to 1990, when RUL adopted a “well-planned public relations strategy”.¹¹ RUL pursued strategies that embraced a commitment to the “Working for Namibia” brand which was adopted by the mine in response to the changing political climate. The five stages in the history of uranium production in Namibia frame the chapters in this study. The book is thus comprised of five substantive chapters which examine the history of uranium production in Namibia.

Literature Review

Uranium prospecting and mining activities in Namibia were governed under stringent secrecy in accordance with the Atomic Energy Act of South Africa. Official information on RUL was practically non-existent in most accounts on RUL published during the colonial period pieced together from unofficial sources, forming a picture of the mine which was at best fragmentary and could not be properly verified.¹² This was tantamount to state-sanctioned secrecy, and it had an immense impact on knowledge production pertaining to uranium mining activities in Namibia. In the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, very little information was known, produced, or published on the Rössing deposits. What little

¹⁰ G. Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail: The Story of the Discovery of Rössing Uranium* (Windhoek, John Meinert Printing, 2018), i.

¹¹ L. J., Butler, *Copper Empire. Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c.1930–1964* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 12.

¹² B. Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium: Implications for the South African Occupation Regime*, (London, 1975), 7.

information was produced could be classified under scientific or geological studies most of which was sanctioned by the Geological Survey of South Africa. These geological studies were mainly concerned with the mineral composition of various regions in the territory and as such were more interested in uncovering the main ore bodies in which various minerals were embedded. The late 1960s witnessed an upsurge in international political opposition to apartheid in both South Africa and Namibia. The apartheid regime's continued presence in Namibia became illegitimate in the eyes of many people internationally and this had a direct influence on the literature on Namibia and South Africa's occupation of the territory. In the 1970s, the geological studies were replaced by publications that were motivated by the political situation in Namibia and especially the international opposition to South African rule in the territory. The publications of the 1970s therefore began to focus on the exploitation of the territory's natural resources by the South African regime in collusion with multinational corporations such as RTZ. These publications pointed to the collusion between state and big business in the continued occupation of the territory.

Whereas the publications of the 1970s relied on speculative sources, the publications of the 1980s dealt with more precise information on RUL's business operations in Namibia. This information was produced by the UN Council for Namibia, with assistance from a wide-ranging network of Anti-Apartheid activist platforms and presented at forums such as the UN Hearings on Namibian Uranium. It was interestingly during this period that RUL began to produce publications on its operations, both as a response to nationalist and international criticism of its mining activities as well as to the impending political change in the territory. Although these earlier works on RUL were valuable in locating the historical framework for this study, it is through the more contemporary publications on mining activities in colonial Africa, and more specifically on RUL, that this study was able to develop its line of enquiry. This literature review is thus divided into three main periods: the geological period (1950s–1960s), the period of political opposition to the mining and exploitation of Namibian uranium (1970s–1980s) and lastly the contemporary period (which includes all publications produced in the post-independence period).

Geological Surveys

In the 1950s, the Geological Survey of South Africa commissioned studies on the mineral composition of the various geological belts in Namibia. These studies focused on areas with little known geological information such as the areas on the fringes of the Namib Desert near the Swakopmund district. Various geologists produced articles for use in publications produced by the Geological Survey, with the focus on rock formation and mineral composition rather than the economic worth of their findings. It is to this category of publications that the studies produced by state geologists, C. M. Schwellmuss, Siegfried Kuschke and Henno

Martin, on the occurrence of the uranium-bearing mineral davidite in the Swakopmund district, can be added (see Chapter 2). The earliest academic work on RUL was a PhD study by the geologist David Smith, which he completed at the University of the Witwatersrand in the early 1960s. Prior to his PhD studies, Smith led Anglo America's prospecting activities on the Rössing deposits between 1956 and 1958; he based his PhD study on his findings from this period.

Smith's findings were later reproduced in a publication produced by the Geological Survey of South Africa in 1965. The publication focused on the "geology of the area between the Khan and Swakopmund Rivers situated on the fringe of the Namib Desert".¹³ In describing the area between the Khan and Swakopmund rivers as an area of "geological interest", Smith argued that, although it contained a variety of minerals, most were largely of little economic value. This, according to Smith, was "a good indicator of the limited potentialities of the area."¹⁴ Included in his study were the Louw Claims, which later became known as the Rössing deposits (see Chapter 2), to which the geologist allocated only a paragraph under the subheading *Uranium*. As with the rest of the minerals found in the area, Smith stresses that a large number of uraniferous zones discovered by the Anglo team were deemed to be unpayable. This is a questionable assertion considering RTZ's successful quarrying of the Rössing deposits in the period between 1966 and 1990 that constitutes the focus of this study. As was noted in this present study, however, this was the period of geological studies rather than the prospecting activities that commenced in the ensuing decades.

Mining and Exploitation

The next set of publications on RUL appear in the early 1970s, inspired by revelations of RTZ's exploitation of uranium resources in Namibia, and particularly the perceived defiance of such actions against the 1974 Decree No. 1 on the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia, issued by the UN Council for Namibia.¹⁵ One of these publications by Richard West entitled *River of Tears: The Rise of the Rio Tinto-Zinc Corporation Ltd.*, was published in 1972. The book focuses on the political history of RTZ, and the politics of uranium mining. An important part of this publication is that it reveals what at that stage was RTZ's highly secretive plan for mining Namibian uranium in collaboration with the British and South African governments. West particularly stressed the 'trust' status of Namibia echoing General Smuts' assertion that as the mandatory state, South Africa "should look upon its position as a great trust and honour, not as an office of profit or a position of private advantage for it or

¹³ D. A. M., Smith, *The Geology of the Area around the Khan and Swakop Rivers in South West Africa*, Memoir 3 South West Africa Series (Pretoria: Geological Survey, 1965), 79.

¹⁴ Smith, *The Geology*, 79.

¹⁵ The United Nations Council for Namibia was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1967 to act as the official caretaker government for Namibia.

its nationals”.¹⁶ The establishment of RUL, according to West, was both an “office of profit” and a major political triumph for the South African regime in its defiance of the United Nations calls for the granting of independence to Namibia.¹⁷ The value of West’s publication to this study lies in its revelation on the financing structures introduced and adopted by RTZ in establishing its world-wide mining activities. RTZ’s preferred method of financing was extended to the operations of RUL and, as this study demonstrates, these financing structures were pivotal to cementing RUL’s place on the mining landscape of Namibia (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Roger Murray, et al.’s 1974 publication, *The Role of Foreign Firms in Namibia*, sought to analyse the political implications of foreign capital operating in a disputed territory.¹⁸ Additionally, the economic, legal and social implications of these operations are presented as a central facet of the Namibian situation. RUL, according to Murray et al., was the largest single focus of foreign investment in Namibia. The authors expose the British government’s underhanded approval of the Rössing contracts to supply Namibian uranium to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency (UKAEA), despite international calls for disinvestment in the territory (see Chapter 5). The political organs of the United Nations had come to recognise the importance of international investments to South Africa’s continued occupation of Namibia. It was thus implicit that international investments, such as the British government’s investment in RUL, augmented the South African regime’s confidence in its defiance of the international community. Testament to the secrecy surrounding RTZ’s operations at the time, the authors could only speculate on the degree of involvement of other actors in the Rössing mine, stating that the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) “has an undisclosed holding, thought to be at least 10 per cent, in Rössing Uranium Ltd”.¹⁹ It would be years before the precise details of the mine’s shareholders and customers would become public knowledge and even more years before studies such as this one benefited from declassified government records in Britain and South Africa (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Barbara Rogers’ 1975 work, *Namibia’s Uranium: Implications for the South African Occupation Regime*, provided a detailed introduction to the history of RUL, highlighting RTZ’s previous experience with mining operations in South Africa, from which the company drew the expertise to exploit the Rössing deposit. Rogers located the mining of Namibian ura-

¹⁶ General Smuts in League of Nations: A practical System. Published in 1918. Cited by West, *River of Tears*, 56.

¹⁷ West, *River of Tears*, 56.

¹⁸ R. Murray, J. Morris, J. Dugard and N. Rubin, *The Role of Foreign Firms in Namibia* (London, Africa Publication Trust, 1974).

¹⁹ R. Murray, “The Namibian Economy: An analysis of the role of foreign investment and the policies of the South African administration” in Murray et al., *The Role of Foreign Firms*, 46.

mium in international contexts by stressing the role of international capital in bringing RUL into operation. It is within this context that horizontal and vertical integration came into play, through the securing of advanced sales contracts and various equity agreements with nuclear energy agencies of countries such as France, Iran, Japan, South Africa, the United Kingdom and West Germany (see Chapter 4). But it is also within this context that Rogers identifies those who could be held responsible for the exploitation of the uranium resources of Namibia. Rogers argued that “the responsibility for the opening and financing of the exploitation of Namibia’s Rössing deposits [...] rests primarily with the purchasers”.²⁰ The key purchaser at the onset of RUL was the British government, through the UKAEA. The detailed reporting on the British government’s role in RUL made Rogers’ publication pivotal to the campaign against the contracts for Namibian uranium (see Chapter 5). The British government had been Rogers’ former employer. Rogers had served as an official of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), resigning from her position in 1970 “on a general disagreement over Southern African policy, of which Namibian uranium was a major part”.²¹ It is worth noting that the FCO was among the main British government Offices whose declassified files formed an integral part of this study’s writings on the British government’s role in the Rössing venture.

Also published in 1975 was Trevor Jepson’s report, *Rio Tinto Zinc in Namibia*. Like Rogers’, Jepson’s focus was on the implications of the British government’s investment in the exploitation of Namibian uranium through the UKAEA. The author highlights the combined effects of the “international status of the territory” in which the Rössing deposits were located, and RTZ’s presence in the trust territory “at a time when political independence [was] under discussion”.²² These effects, according to Jepson, meant that RTZ was fully cognisant of the political sensitivities, at both the national and international levels, and of the implications of its decision to invest in and operate a mine located in a disputed territory. The responsibility for the exploitation of Namibian uranium, according to Jepson, lay, therefore, not only with the British government but also with the British multinational corporation, RTZ.

Jepson’s report was followed by a 1976 geological paper titled *The Rössing Uranium Deposit, South West Africa*, published in the journal of *Economic Geology*.²³ The article was co-authored by John Berning, RUL’s first General Manager. The paper focused on the geological investigation and minerology of the Rössing deposit, while detailing the exploration

²⁰ Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*.

²¹ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 100.

²² T. P. Jepson. *Rio Tinto Zinc in Namibia* (London, Christian Concern for Southern Africa CCSA, 1975), 1.

²³ J. Berning, R. Cooke, S. A. Hiemstra and U. Hoffman, The Rössing Uranium Deposit, South West Africa. *Economic Geology* Vol.71, 1976, pp.351–363.

program and pilot plant design pursued by RTZ. Beyond this not much else is revealed in the article. It, for instance, does not contain any information on the ore grade. Nevertheless, the authors had to obtain permission from the authorities to publish the article, writing that they thanked “Dr. A. J. A. Roux, President of the Atomic Energy Board, Mr. E. W. Hunt, Managing Director of Rössing Uranium Limited, and Dr. R. E. Robison, Director-General of the National Institute for Metallurgy, for permission to publish” the article. This confirms the stringent secrecy under which uranium prospecting and mining activities in Namibia were governed.

In 1979, G. Lanning and M. Mueller produced *Africa Undermined: A History of the Mining Companies and the Underdevelopment of Africa* in which the authors sought to identify and analyse the effect of mining companies on the political, economic and social structures of the continent. Lanning and Mueller argued that though territories like Namibia were leading exporters in given minerals, crediting these exports to the territory concealed a disturbing reality. The reality on the ground, according to the authors, was that control over these minerals lay neither with the people of the continent nor with the governments that governed individual territories, but with the giant multinational companies which operated in territories such as Namibia. Among these multinationals was RTZ, whose investments in Namibia’s mining industry were “encouraged by the low level of taxation and the generous concession areas offered by the South African government”.²⁴ The RUL, for example, operated for close to a decade before it paid any taxes to the administration of the territory, a concession which allowed RTZ to regain its initial investment capital in the mining venture (see Chapter 3). Lanning and Mueller thus echoed Jepson’s assertion that multinational corporations, like RTZ, could be held as accountable for their operations in territories like Namibia, as the governments which facilitated their investments, such as the British and South African governments. The blame for the exploitation of Namibia’s uranium resources was thus equally attributable to all the participating parties as demonstrated in this study.

The publications of the 1980s, on the other hand, moved beyond exposing RTZ to mustering legal arguments for the protection of the territory’s natural resources. This was because the veil of secrecy that had governed RUL’s operations had been lifted through coordinated research efforts. Through these research efforts the details pertaining to the various actors in RUL became public knowledge and were widely distributed through publications and seminars. Namibian uranium began to take centre stage as international efforts came to recognise its importance in the continued occupation of the territory by the South African regime. The 1971 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had declared South African presence in Namibia “illegal”, which declaration coupled with Decree No.1

²⁴ G. Lanning and M. Mueller, *Africa Undermined: A History of the Mining Companies and the Underdevelopment of Africa* (New York, Penguin Books, 1979), 474.

became the focus of various authors in their investigations on RTZ's operations in Namibia. In July 1980, for instance, the UN Council for Namibia held the "Uranium Hearings" with the aim of ascertaining the degree of exploitation at RUL. The Council heard testimonies from representatives of various organisations on the involvement of specific governments, state-owned entities and power utility companies in the exploitation of Namibian uranium. It was through these hearings that the implications of the RUL contracts were established, in light of the UN Council's Decree No. 1.

The Uranium Hearings resulted in the publication of papers such as that of Brian Wood on *The Campaign Against the Namibian Uranium Contract in Britain*, which documents the Anti-Apartheid Movement's campaign against the British government's contracts for Namibian uranium.²⁵ CANUC, as the campaign was known, called for the cancellation of these contracts by the British government, which calls fell on deaf ears. The Japanese involvement in Namibian uranium was documented by Kitazawa Yoko in *Japan's Namibian Connection: Illegal Japanese Uranium Deals Violate U.N. Resolution*.²⁶ As in Britain, calls were made for the Japanese government to cancel its contract with RUL. Unlike its British counterparts, however, the Japanese government heeded these calls and had its uranium deliveries postponed, but not cancelled. In *Japan and Africa: Big Business and Diplomacy*, Jun Morikawa explains that the decision to postpone, but not cancel, the Japanese contracts for Namibian uranium was in line with Japan's African policy. According to Morikawa "one of the major characteristics of Japan's African policy was the pursuit of its national interests while respecting the position of the Western colonial powers which had vital interests in the African continent".²⁷ Securing a stable supply of uranium was an important national security issue for Japan, especially because of an acceleration in the country's nuclear power plans following the 1973 oil crisis. But, as Morikawa points out, Japan harboured ambitions of joining the world's most politically powerful states on the international arena. This therefore required a balancing act of remaining in good standing with the former colonial states which controlled the large mass of votes at the UN while respecting the interests of the former colonial powers. The postponement in the delivery of Japan's uranium supplies from RUL was one such act. The other publications to have come out of the Uranium Hearings focused on the role of Canada, France, West Germany and the United States, linking the roles of these governments in RUL to their trade relations with South Africa and the support extended to South Africa's nuclear power programme.²⁸ The UN Council for Namibia produced publica-

²⁵ B. Wood, *The Campaign Against the Namibian Uranium Contract in Britain*, in SWAPO 1982, 53.

²⁶ IISH, ARCH02466 (Werk Group Kairos) K. Yoko, "Japan's Namibian Connection: Illegal Japanese Uranium Deals Violate U.N. Resolution". *AMPO, Japan Asia Quarterly Review* 12, 3 (1980).

²⁷ J. Morikawa, *Japan and Africa. Big Business and Diplomacy*. (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 1997), 18.

²⁸ See for example: Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility, "Canada and Namibian

tions, listing the various transnational entities invested in the different sectors of the Namibian economy, with specific focus on the mining industry.²⁹

Political and Commercial Strategies

Although the earlier publications, discussed under subsections 1.31 and 1.32, were tremendously beneficial to the writing of this thesis, it was really the more contemporary works, published in the post-independence period and more so those produced at the turn of the 21st century, which framed this study. For an understanding on the intricacies of Rössing Uranium the study turned to Peter Daniel's book titled *Against All Odds: A History of Namibia's Rössing*, produced in 1995.³⁰ This useful account is extremely difficult to find. I have admittedly never seen a physical copy of Daniel's 'book' as it was given to me on a USB flash drive by RUL's public relations department during a visit to the mine site in November 2016. There is no public reference of Daniel's book (printed or electronic) in any other literature or in online library catalogues and as such I cannot confirm if the book was ever printed for distribution. The research was, however, able to determine that Peter Daniel was a former director of RUL having served through most of the 1980s into the 1990s. In the early 1990s Daniel was commissioned to produce a company history of RUL. This text is therefore particularly useful as Daniel had privileged access to key actors in the history of RUL, which included the members of the Louw Company, RTZ representatives in Johannesburg and the RTZ leadership in London as well as the predominantly British (but also American and Australian) expatriate workforce that took up positions of management in RUL. More importantly, Daniel had privileged access to RTZ archives in London and to early correspondence between the varying parties in the establishment of RUL. These are archives which this study was unable to access, a restriction reflective of the period under study and particularly the Cold War dimension. The secretive nature of uranium production during the Cold War created an enduring secrecy in the records.

With this great array of sources Daniel's publication could have rendered this study unnecessary. As is likely the case with most commissioned publications, however, Daniel's work is filled with praise for RTZ's establishment of RUL and the mine's subsequent contributions to the Namibian economy. It contains very little critique on, for instance, the collusion of the multinational corporation with the South African regime or an analysis of the

Uranium". *Africa Today*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2 Indiana University Press, 1983, pp. 33–44. J. Marchand. "Namibia and Government of France." *Africa Today*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2 Indiana University Press, 1983, pp. 45–50. R. W. Walters, "the United States and the South African–Namibian Uranium Option". *Africa Today*, 1st Qtr.–2nd Qtr., Vol. 30, No. 1/2, Indiana University Press, 1983, pp. 51–59

²⁹ United Nations Council for Namibia. *Reference Book on Major Transnational Corporations Operating in Namibia* (New York, United Nations, 1985).

³⁰ P. Daniel, *Against All Odds: A History of Namibia's Rössing*. (Windhoek: Rössing Uranium Ltd., 1995), 20.

measures that were adopted by the company in response to impending political change in Namibia. While recognising the opposition to RUL's operations in Namibia and the debate on the legality of mining and exporting uranium from Namibia, Daniel argued that "to have sold [RTZ's] interests would not have helped towards independence. A buyer for Rössing would have been a South African company with policies less favourable to the workforce than became the case under RTZ".³¹ Daniel's critique of South African policies and governance over the territory does not, however, nullify the political support extended to RUL by the colonial administration. These factors, combine to validate a study on how RUL was able to survive Namibian independence unscathed.

The premise of this book begins with Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui's assertion, in *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, that the territory of Namibia was treated as "an instrument of free trade" through which the ownership of the territory's natural resources was exploited through a partnership between the South African regime, Western multinational corporations and their governments.³² This assertion is further stressed in Gabrielle Hecht's publication, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*, in which the author challenges the statement of conventional narratives of "the nuclear age" that the splitting of the atom promulgated a new world order that replaced imperialism with the nuclear bomb. Hecht not only argues for the centrality of empire in nuclear geographies but writes that colonialism had remained central to the nuclear age.³³ This, according to Hecht, was especially evident in the history of uranium production and in the mining of uranium in colonial territories like Namibia.

Empire along with the bonds it produced had been exploited by countries such as the United Kingdom, its war-time nuclear programme ally, the United States of America and Canada in a desperate bid to not only monopolise uranium deposits but also to attain security of supply. The bid to monopolise is stressed by Jonathan E. Helmreich in *Gathering Rare Ores: The Diplomacy of Uranium Acquisition, 1943–1954*, writing that a premise of paucity had undergirded the efforts of the aforementioned countries to monopolise uranium supplies.³⁴ The inter-imperial bonds were exploited in this pursuit as demonstrated by the development of the uranium mining industry in South Africa and the continuity of especially British and Canadian investments in the production of uranium in Namibia. Hecht, for instance, points out that in order for RTZ to secure capital for their Namibian uranium venture, they needed to prove that the mine could sell what it produced. The British

³¹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 17.

³² S. N. Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*. *Borderlines*, Vol. 3 (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 141.

³³ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 23.

³⁴ J. E. Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores: The Diplomacy of Uranium Acquisition, 1943–1954*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986), xii.

government provided the necessary contracts for RTZ to secure the capital and in so doing established an arrangement for the supply of Namibian uranium. RUL was an ideal source in that RTZ was a British company and, for the British government, this was as close as it “would come to controlling its own uranium supply”.³⁵ Supplies of uranium from Namibia represented “privileged access”, for as Hecht reveals, the South African government was “happy to waive end-use restrictions for Britain, as long as Namibia remained governed by South Africa”.³⁶ The South African regime gladly approved the export of Namibian uranium in exchange for British support for its continued occupation of Namibia.

The Rössing deposits were a strategic trading commodity in the South African regime’s relations with countries like Iran and Japan (see Chapter 4). Economic relations between Iran and South Africa, for instance, were prompted by calls at the UN for an oil embargo against the South African regime as Iran was a major oil producer. According to Houchang Chehabi, in *South Africa and Iran in the Apartheid Era*, oil and uranium occupied a central position in Iran–South African relations.³⁷ Chehabi writes that the head of the South African Atomic Energy Board (AEB), Dr. A. J. A. Roux, had played a key role in the establishment of nuclear cooperation between the two countries.³⁸ Apart from the export of oil to South Africa and the import of uranium into Iran, the trade relations had facilitated Iran’s acquisition of shares in RUL. Interestingly, Dr. Roux was the common denominator in both these events as he had overseen the approval of RTZ’s application for a mining licence to exploit Namibia’s uranium deposits. Iran’s participation in the exploitation of Namibian uranium thus had direct links to the South African regime’s attempts to circumvent the oil embargo and calls for sanctions, calls which members of the Western Contact Group (WCG), and particularly Britain, had sought to dispel.

The edited volume by Patrick Salmon, *The Challenge of Apartheid: UK–South African Relations, 1985–1986*, was particularly valuable for understanding British policy in relation to Namibia.³⁹ The volume itself was directed at documenting the British government’s response to the challenge of apartheid in the period between 1985 and 1986, but was also appropriate for providing a clear understanding on the overarching British policy in the

³⁵ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ H. E. Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran in the Apartheid Era”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:4, 2016, 687–709, 697.

³⁸ Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran”, 697. David Albright writes that “Roux should be considered the father of nuclear development in South Africa” for his role in the development of a South African nuclear research development program. D. Albright “Revisiting South Africa’s Nuclear Weapons Program: Its History, Dismantlement and Lessons for Today”, 28 June 2016. Institute for Science and International Security. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/45464539.pdf>, accessed 21 October 2021.

³⁹ P. Salmon, *The Challenge of Apartheid: UK–South African Relations, 1985–1986*, Documents on British Policy Overseas Series III, Volume IX. (London, Oxon, 2017).

region. Of relevance to this study was the British government's primary interest in maintaining its trade and economic interests in the region, and secondly, "in doing what we can to promote a process of peaceful change", in Namibia, through its participation in the diplomatic initiatives for Namibian independence.⁴⁰ For purposes of this study, the British government's role in the diplomatic deliberations for a peaceful solution to the Question of Namibia are examined from the perspective of that government's desire to uphold its national and security interests (see Chapter 5).⁴¹

More importantly, in *Namibia by Resolutions: A legal analysis of international organisations' attempts at decolonisation*, Tunguru Huaraka writes that because "the question of Namibia in time and substance covers the whole spectrum of decolonisation" the final analysis of the question should therefore be of decolonisation.⁴² Keeping in mind Huaraka's assertion, this study seeks to examine the response of big business to the process of decolonisation in Namibia. In *Corporate Profit and Race in Central African Copper Mining, 1946–1958*, Ian Phimister points out that "the motives of and the roles played by big business in processes of decolonisation" have been extensively debated, with a particular focus on the political outcomes of such interventions.⁴³ Phimister, however, argues that this focus on political outcomes has caused the subject's literature to overlook occasions when business turned impending political change to economic advantage.⁴⁴ These occasions were on display at Rössing Uranium, as the corporate strategies which were adopted in the face of impending political change in Namibia garnered both commercial advantage and the staying power that ensured the continuity of the mine's operations in independent Namibia. A key example of one such occasion, according to Hecht, was RUL's use of impending political change as a marketing tool to secure new contracts under the guise of "Working for Namibia" (see Chapter 6).⁴⁵

In *Mining and Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c.1930–1964* and in *Mining, Nationalism and Decolonization in Zambia 1945–1964*, L. J. Butler argues that businesses in

⁴⁰ Salmon, *The Challenge of Apartheid*, xxi.

⁴¹ United Nations Security Council. Principles concerning the Constituent Assembly and the Constitution for an Independent Namibia. <https://peacemaker.un.org/namibia-constituent-assembly82>, accessed 12 July 2018.

⁴² T. Huaraka, "Namibia by Resolutions: A legal analysis of international organisations attempts at decolonisation" (PhD Thesis, Institute Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales—Université de Genève, Geneva) 1.

⁴³ I. R. Phimister, "Corporate Profit and Race in Central African Copper Mining, 1946–1958". *Business History Review*, 85, 4 (2011), pp. 749–74. L. J. Butler, "Mining, Nationalism, and Decolonization in Zambia: Interpreting Business Responses to Political Change, 1945–1964. *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 48, 2008, pp. 317–332. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/afs/bd48/13_butler.pdf Accessed 14 June 2024.

⁴⁴ Phimister, *Corporate Profit and Race*, 749.

⁴⁵ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 293.

colonial territories were not “passive observers of decolonisation” but that they were indeed “capable not only of reacting to political change, but devising strategies designed to cushion them from the consequences of colonial independence”.⁴⁶ To this Stephanie Decker, in *Building up Goodwill: British Business, Development and Economic Nationalism in Ghana and Nigeria, 1945–1977*, adds that these strategies were devised to manage “two very important stakeholder groups: government (colonial administration, first independent republics, and the military regimes that followed) and labour (black African and white expatriate workforce)”.⁴⁷ In the case of Namibia this study would propose a third stakeholder group, namely the international community as represented by the UN for their role in negotiating and supervising the transition to Namibian independence. In the decade leading up to Namibian independence, RUL actively pursued strategies aimed at managing the incoming administration, improving labour relations, and making a case to the international community on the value of the mine to the country’s economy. RUL, as this study demonstrates, was thus not a passive observer of the process of decolonisation in Namibia. Moreover, the strategies that were adopted by the mine provided the cushioning effect described by Butler (see Chapter 6).

The literature on big business and decolonisation has identified a clear set of measures that were designed to provide a cushioning effect against impending political change on the continent. In her exploration of the responses of British business to colonial political change in Ghana, for instance, Sarah Stockwell, in *Political strategies of British business during decolonization: The case of the Gold Coast/Ghana, 1945–57*, argued that to secure their interests in the territory British businesses adjusted their activities.⁴⁸ This adjustment in activities speaks to the strategies that were adopted by big business. This book draws parallels between the strategies identified in the literature on, particularly, the approach of British businesses to decolonisation on the African continent and to those that were adopted by RUL in the face of impending political change in Namibia. RTZ’s British heritage made it a fitting case for drawing parallels between the strategies that were adopted by RUL to those of the British businesses on the continent.

Key among these strategies was the formulation of corporate public relations exercises and community outreach programmes. In *“Cultivating the African”: Barclays DCO and the Decolonisation of Business Strategy in Kenya, 1950–78*, James Morris states that these strate-

⁴⁶ L. J. Butler, *Copper Empire*, 10. Also see R. Moody and A. Whitmore. Taming the Mining Masters. *Multinational Monitor*, May 1994, pp. 19–22, 21.

⁴⁷ Stephanie Decker, “Building up Goodwill: British Business, Development and Economic Nationalism in Ghana and Nigeria, 1945–1977”. *Enterprise & Society*, Volume 9, Issue 4, December 2008, pp. 602–613, 604. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/es/khn085>, accessed 10 February 2021.

⁴⁸ S. Stockwell, “Political strategies of British business during decolonization: The case of the Gold Coast/Ghana, 1945–57”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23, 2 (1995), pp. 277–300, 287.

gies were vital to presenting British business “in the best possible light to nationalist politicians and local customers”.⁴⁹ The aim was to part with the colonial image of big business and to reinvent the role of big business through the fostering of connections with the emerging independent governments. These specific strategies were adopted by British businesses in the various parts of the continent including RUL. The design of a public relations exercise, as this study demonstrates, was the first step in RUL’s arsenal of strategies aimed at reinventing the image of the mine and presenting the mine in what Morris described as the best possible light (see Chapter 6).

Beyond the public relation exercise, Andrew Cohen in *Business and Decolonisation in Central Africa Reconsidered*, points to acts of political subversion as one of the strategies that were designed by big business to withstand political change.⁵⁰ In the case of the Central African Federation, political subversion, according to Cohen, manifested through discreet financial contributions to the federal government and through an initial resistance by companies like Anglo American to court and engage with African nationalists.⁵¹ It was, as Cohen writes, only when it became abundantly “clear that the dissolution of the Federation was inevitable”, that Anglo American saw the need to engage with emergent African nationalists.⁵² This study identified a similar approach in the case of RUL, where the mine’s management willingly dealt with the interim government established in the 1980s by the South African regime (which was denounced by the international community) and went as far as suggesting to the British government that supporting the interim government would be in the best interest of British investments in Namibia. As diplomatic negotiations for Namibian independence progressed, however, it became clear that a settlement plan without SWAPO participation would be futile. It was at this point that RUL deemed it fit to court the leadership of the nationalist movement (see Chapter 6). The argument that British businesses prepared strategies in response to a changing political landscape and in an attempt to secure their place in post-colonial Africa can thus, as this study demonstrates, be extended to cover RUL’s activities in Namibia.

Furthermore, Chibuike Uche, in “*Lonrho in Africa: The Unacceptable Face of Capitalism or the Ugly Face of Neo-Colonialism?*”, challenged the notion that “the British government did not work ‘in concert’ with British businesses in Africa once political independence became imminent”.⁵³ This view was put forward by, amongst others, Nicholas White, *The*

⁴⁹ J. Morris, “‘Cultivating the African’: Barclays DCO and the Decolonisation of Business Strategy in Kenya, 1950–78”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44:4 (2016), pp. 649–671, 650.

⁵⁰ A. Cohen, “Business and Decolonisation in Central Africa Reconsidered”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36, 4 (2008), pp. 641–58, 643.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 653.

⁵³ Chibuike Uche, “Lonrho in Africa: The Unacceptable Face of Capitalism or the Ugly Face of Neo-

Business and the Politics of Decolonization: The British Experience in the Twentieth Century, who pointed to the failure of “British governments to protect British commercial interests from the predatory instincts of determined post-war economic nationalists” as an example of the disconnect between business and politics.⁵⁴ Uche, however, argues that “case studies on the relationship between the British government and British businesses in Africa have demonstrated that the British government and British businesses worked ‘in concert’, with the objective of protecting wider British interests in the territories concerned”.⁵⁵ This study argues that although the British government did not heed company suggestions to support the interim government, RUL still presents a viable case study in line with Uche’s argument. In 1989 British government support for RTZ’s mining venture and the need to protect British interests in Namibia culminated in a visit to the mine by none other than the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. That Thatcher’s visit to Namibia, on “the day the territory’s independence process [was] formally implemented”, included a trip to RUL is particularly telling (see Chapter 6).⁵⁶

By exploring the case study of RUL and, particularly, the company’s approach to decolonisation in Namibia, this book contributes to the body of literature on big business and decolonisation on the African continent. The significance of the RUL case study to this body of literature is its demonstration of how the international dimension to the process of decolonisation in Namibia restrained the ability of big business to shape political developments in the territory through, for example, political subversion. International efforts at the UN and the diplomatic negotiations of the 1970s and the 1980s stressed the importance of an internationally acceptable solution to the Namibia problem.⁵⁷ The international dimension in the process of political change in Namibia is worth highlighting because there are very few examples on the African continent where the role of the UN was as imperative to the process of decolonisation as it was in Namibia. In the case of RUL, therefore, international and political developments shaped company strategy in the face of impending change in the territory. An examination of British business in Namibia is also significant in that Namibia was not a British colony. This study demonstrates the possibilities of extending the debate on big business and decolonisation to settings where multinational

Colonialism?” *Enterprise & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, June 2015, pp. 354–380, 354.

⁵⁴ Nicholas White, “The Business and the Politics of Decolonization: The British Experience in the Twentieth Century”, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 53, No. 3 (August 2000), pp. 544–564, 555.

⁵⁵ Uche, “Lonrho in Africa”, 357.

⁵⁶ *Mail & Guardian*, Maggie to visit Namibia, 31 March 1989. <https://mg.co.za/article/1989-03-31-00-maggie-to-visit-namibia/>, accessed 9 February 2021.

⁵⁷ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/42/14[A] A/RES/42/14 (6 November 1987), Question of Namibia: Situation in Namibia Resulting from the Illegal Occupation of the Territory by South Africa <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192504?ln=en>, accessed 27 October 2020.

corporations operated outside the sphere of influence of formal colonialism. The RUL case is peculiar both in terms of the timing of Namibian independence, the decade long wait for Namibian independence, and in terms of the territory's 'last colony' status. If forewarned is forearmed, then RUL had sufficient time to prepare for the imminent change and to emulate 'best practices' as demonstrated elsewhere on the continent. This is reflected in the strategies that were adopted by RUL, which no doubt were informed by the experiences of its parent company in its operations in countries like Zimbabwe. In 1989, for instance, RUL appointed a Personnel Manager who previously served as "Group Personnel Manager for Rio Tinto Zimbabwe".⁵⁸ The appointment was motivated by the individual's "considerable experience of independence in both Zambia and Zimbabwe" which it was felt would "be a valuable asset to Rössing at this time".⁵⁹ RUL's strategies were informed by the experiences of other British companies on the continent. These included strategies such as the establishment of a corporate foundation through which community outreach programmes, and the provision of educational opportunities to local populations, were facilitated. Where RUL differed from the strategies adopted elsewhere on the continent is through the provision of shares in the company to the incoming administration. This was a manoeuvre aimed at aligning the commercial interests of the multinational corporation with the economic interests of the newly established nation. More generally, therefore, this study contributes to the economic and international dimensions of Namibian decolonisation and to the historiography of the region.

Sources

This book is based on archival research, focusing on pertinent sources located in several national and international archives. These sources provided valuable insights into the history of uranium production in Namibia and the role of international diplomacy and big business on the Question of Namibia. The emphasis on archive-based research methods was motivated by the existence of the vast archival collection of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain and the Netherlands. The book is greatly indebted to these archival collections as it was able to utilise the work of anti-apartheid researchers who successfully uncovered RTZ's operations in Namibia. The emphasis on archive-based research was also motivated by the relevant government records that have become available in recent years. These are records which were hitherto not available to contemporaneous researchers. This is particularly in

⁵⁸ RUL—Minutes of the One-Hundredth Meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Boardroom, The Rössing Guesthouse, 5 Trotha Street, Windhoek, SWA/Namibia, on Friday 10 March 1989 at 10h30, 9.

⁵⁹ RUL—Minutes of the One-Hundredth Meeting, 9.

reference to the declassified British government records of the Cabinet Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Ministry of Defence, which contain information on the British government's policy on Namibia and Namibian uranium.

Archival research is not without its challenges, however, and more so when the archival collections belong to commercial entities. The research, for instance, experienced archival restrictions from RTZ's headquarters in London, whose post-1961 archives, and especially those pertaining to RUL, are closed for examination by external researchers. This restriction is reflective of the period under study and, particularly, the Cold War dimension. The secretive nature of uranium production during the Cold War has created an enduring secrecy in the records. RTZ's post-1961 restrictions affect the full spectrum of the period covered and this creates limitations for this study especially in terms of its overall contribution to the literature on big business and decolonisation. Much of the work that has been produced on the role of big business in processes of decolonisation has benefited from access to primary sources or to recent accessions to collections contained in the archives of businesses. This study has, however, had to rely on a limited amount of primary source material, often reproduced in secondary sources, to, for instance, identify the strategies adopted by RTZ in its endeavour to navigate political change in Namibia.

Moreover, archival restrictions were encountered regarding RUL records held at the "Rössing Uranium Mine Archives" in Swakopmund, Namibia. Although these restrictions limited the exploration of the research topic from a company/multi-national corporation perspective, they did inspire the need to network with researchers working on the history of uranium mining in Namibia. It was, for instance, through these networks that the book was able to access the minutes of the Board meetings of RUL. The restricted access to the archival collections of RUL and its parent company RTZ did not, however, cause too great a loss to the diplomatic and political narrative, which the research could access through the available governmental records as well as the records of international organisations such as the United Nations, and more specifically the United Nations Council for Namibia, and those of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The recently declassified governmental records juxtaposed against the restricted access to commercial records shaped this study and, particularly, its focus on the interrelationship between international diplomacy and big business in the process of decolonisation in Namibia.

The book benefited from sources available in various archives and library resources in Britain, Germany, Namibia, Switzerland, South Africa and the Netherlands. The discussion contained within this book has vastly benefited from the conduct of such wide-ranging archival research. The archives in Britain, for instance, were comprised of the Anti-Apartheid Movement archives held in the Bodleian libraries at the University of Oxford and the archives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the United Kingdom Atomic Energy

Authority and the Atomic Energy Office at the British National Archives in Kew Gardens, London. The research was able to draw on these materials to document both the politics of decision-making pertaining to uranium supplies as well as the opposition to such policy, as demonstrated by the onset of the Campaign Against the Namibian Uranium Contracts (CANUC).

For a company perspective on RUL, and how the mine was received by the local community and portrayed in, for instance, the national media, the study turned to archives and library sources in Namibia. The research in Namibia was conducted at the Namibian National Archives, the Chamber of Mines of Namibia, the SWAPO Party Archive & Research Centre, the Katjavivi Archival Collection at the University of Namibia, the Sam Cohen Library in Swakopmund and the Scientific Society library in Windhoek. The National Archives were pertinent to the discussion on the Louw Company and the role of the South West Africa/Namibia administration in the establishment of RUL. Apart from these official records, the National Archives contained information on the role of the administration in the construction of the mining town of Arandis as well as the eventual acquisition of shares by the administration in RUL. The records of the Chamber of Mines of Namibia not only portray RUL's arrival and broader role in the mining industry of the territory, but also the mine's role in the joint efforts by which the mining industry sought to navigate the changing political situation in Namibia. The archives in Swakopmund were relevant to the understanding of RUL's early days and the impact of the mine on the town of Swakopmund. The Sam Cohen Library, for instance, contained a comprehensive collection on RUL, which included material produced by RUL, such as the weekly newsletter "Rössing News" which appeared since the mid-1970s. The majority of the photographs reproduced in the later chapters of this study were obtained from Rössing News. The SWAPO Party Archive & Research Centre and the Katjavivi Archival Collection at the University of Namibia were crucial to the collection of internationally produced material on RUL particularly for information on the nationalist opposition to the mine. Internal memoirs on the nationalist movement's opposition to RUL and to the broader operations of the mining industry were especially important for an understanding of the nationalists' views on mining companies in colonial Namibia.

Further research was conducted in Geneva, Switzerland, which was comprised mainly of the revisiting of secondary literature and the reading of unpublished postgraduate theses at the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies (IHEID). The most relevant of these studies was the unpublished PhD thesis submitted by Tunguru Huaraka in 1985. The thesis' focus on the process of decolonisation in Namibia as well as the role of the international community in this process informed this study's understanding of the role of natural resources in the process of Namibian decolonisation. International solidarity with Namibian decolonisation was the theme that came through in the archival collections con-

sulted at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISH). The study was able to piece together a broader picture of the global Anti-Apartheid Movement's solidarity with Namibian decolonisation through the archival collections of the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement and Werkgroep Kairos held at the IISH. Archival research was conducted at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, Germany, where the German Foreign Office archives pertaining to Namibia and Namibian uranium from the 1960s to the 1980s were examined. The German archives were of particular importance to the understanding of the role of Namibian uranium in the global nuclear trade and the nuclear power programmes of Western European countries.

The final phase of archival research was conducted at the following institutions in South Africa: the National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, The Wits Historical Papers Archives at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, The University of Cape Town Archives and Special Collections as well as the Stellenbosch University Library and Archives. The archival material from these institutions was valuable for the discussion on the South African government's role in the governance and exploitation of Namibia's mineral resources and provided primary material on the correspondence between RUL and the Ministry of Mines during the formative years of the mine.

Structure of the Book

The chapters of this study are framed by the categorisation provided under the five stages in the history of Namibian uranium production (see sub-section 1.2). The discussion is thematically and chronologically structured into five substantive chapters, starting in Chapter 2 and ending in Chapter 6. The pioneering stage, which occupied the period between 1928 and 1965 is dealt with in Chapter 2. This is the stage in which Namibian uranium was discovered and pegged by a South African-British family who settled on the central coast of Namibia in the town of Swakopmund. The Louw family emerged from events following the First World War, and it was these same events that led the family to settle in the then South West Africa. The Louw family migrated to Swakopmund in the mid-1920s, following the award of the Mandate over the territory to South Africa. The economic hardships of the late 1920s and the 1930s drove the family into amateur prospecting in the Namib Desert, in an attempt to eke out a living. Their 1928 discovery of radio-active material on the outskirts of the Namib Desert yielded very little for the Louw family and it was only in the 1950s that they, in co-operation with their South African based friends, reconstituted themselves into a Syndicate and later a Company so as to interest mining companies in their discovery. This was undoubtedly inspired by a change in world events following the end of World War II and the place of strategic importance that came to be occupied by uranium as a result of

the Atom Bomb. Chapter 2 argues that the changing political, strategic and economic importance of uranium was significant for the future of uranium production in Namibia. It is to this external context that the Louw Company addressed its outward-facing strategies in order to attract commercial and political interests in their claims. The external context, and the strategies that were devised against this backdrop, can be credited for the sudden interest in the Namibia's uranium resources.

The exploration stage 1966–1970 forms the focus of Chapter 3, which traces the first major investments in the Rössing deposits. The chapter provides an account of the exploration project carried out by RTZ in partnership with the Frankfurt-based Urangesellschaft mbH. Political considerations on the part of the West German government would change the terms of the partnership as government guarantees were withdrawn due to the changing international status of Namibia. The West German government's withdrawal of support for investments in Namibia led to RTZ's dependence on the South African regime for the development of RUL. Chapter 3 argues that the convergence of interests and the interlocking networks between RTZ and the South African government were crucial to the viability of RUL and to cementing the mine's presence in Namibia. The partnership between state and company enabled the South African regime to assert its control over Namibian uranium through the participation of entities like the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) and General Mining and Finance Corporation in the development of RUL. The IDC replaced Urangesellschaft as RTZ's key partner in the exploration stage. The IDC ensured access to the much-needed loan finance which RTZ had hoped to secure through Urangesellschaft thereby ensuring that the financial risks involved in the mining venture were distributed between the multi-national corporation and the state-owned enterprise. Chapter 3 brings to the fore the political and economic support extended to RUL by the South African administration in terms of road and rail network, electrical and water supplies, as well a generous tax exemption that allowed RTZ to recoup its capital investment in the project.

The construction and development stage, which lasted from 1971 to 1975, is discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 is concerned with what Richard West described as "the unusual method of financing developed by Rio Tinto Zinc in establishing its world-wide mining and industrial ventures".⁶⁰ It examines the financing methods adopted by RTZ in partnership with its British, Canadian, French, Iranian, South African and West German shareholder-customers in order to navigate the risks of developing a mining venture in disputed territory. RTZ's strategy for financing RUL comprised of a dual system of equity and long-term sales contracts which was directed at atomic energy agencies and power utility companies in these countries. Chapter 4 argues that by adopting this method of financing RTZ was

⁶⁰ West, *River of Tears*, 23.

able to build on the support that had been made available by the South African regime and align its operations with the national interests of its shareholder-customers. This method of financing secured national and international support for RTZ's operations at RUL and it undergirded the multinational corporation's defiance of international calls to disinvest in, and cease the exploitation of Namibia's uranium resources.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the hurdles faced by RUL at the start of its production stage. Structural and technical challenges at the mine site caused delays to the start of production. These challenges had further repercussions on the commencement of uranium deliveries to the mine's customers. Key among RUL's customers was the British Nuclear Fuels (BNF) who replaced the UKAEA. This warranted the presentation of a case study on the role of consecutive British governments in the exploitation of Namibian uranium. Chapter 5 argues that the British government was primarily concerned with the risk of interference with the Rössing contracts, which could have resulted from political change in Namibia. These concerns explain British attempts to control the course of Namibian decolonization and justified the arguments in defence of the Rössing contracts, arguments which were formulated in response to mounting opposition against the government's decision not to interfere in the commercial activities of British companies operating in Namibia. The British government's collusion in the exploitation of Namibian uranium is traced over seven phases starting in 1968. These phases begin with the cover-up of the existence of the contracts and end with the completion of uranium deliveries to Britain during the contract completion phase. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the changing position of the British government in relation to new investments in Namibian uranium.

Chapter 6 examines RUL's strategies vis-à-vis the Decolonisation of Namibia. The chapter is particularly interested in the public relations and rebranding exercise embarked on by RUL from the late-1970s to 1990. RUL formulated a set of strategies in anticipation of the impending political change in the territory, key among which was the adoption of the "Working for Namibia" brand. The rebranding stage witnessed the shedding of the veil of secrecy that had surrounded the mine's operations in the previous stages. It is argued here that the new transparent nature of RUL's operations was key to its public relations and rebranding exercise. Of particular interest to this chapter is RUL's open-door policy that saw the mine host visits for individuals from various sectors of society, including that all important visit by the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Chapter 6 is followed by a short concluding chapter summarising and restating the central arguments of this book.

2 The Pioneering Stage

Introduction

The pioneering stage in the history of Rössing Uranium (RUL) was the period in which “the original prospectors found signs of mineralisation” in what were initially known as the Louw claims and later the Rössing deposits.¹ The pioneering stage can be divided into two main periods. The first period occurred between 1928 and 1955 when the resourceful identification of radioactive material in what became known as the Louw claims was carried out by the Louw family. The second period occurred between 1956 and 1966 when the Louw Company was established and the first flickers of interest in the Louw discovery became visible. During the first period of the pioneering stage, very little commercial or governmental attention was paid to the Louw discovery, apart that is from the occasional geological study of the area sanctioned by the Geological Survey of South Africa. The first period in the pioneering stage is contextualised below to demonstrate how the interest in Namibia’s uranium deposits changed over time.

In the mid-20th century, the political, strategic and economic importance of uranium changed and, as this chapter argues, this was significant for the future of uranium production in Namibia. The presence of uranium in Namibia was known since the German colonial period and the geological facts of these deposits did not change over the 20th century.² The external context of uranium, and particularly its place in global relations, had however radically changed. This was marked by international cooperation and competition in the Cold War context of the 1940s and the 1950s which culminated in the production of the first atom bomb and fuelled the belief that uranium deposits were scarce. The premise of paucity, according to Helmreich, led to a diplomatic campaign to gain control over global uranium deposits, including in countries like South Africa.³ It was during this shift in the external context that the second period in the pioneering stage of RUL began.

The second period of the pioneering stage coincided with the commencement of uranium production as a by-product of the gold mines in South Africa. Uranium production in South Africa proved to be a profitable venture for the mining companies involved and the South African government and it was from these events that the Louw Company drew

¹ Rössing Uranium. *The First Ten Years*. (Windhoek: Rössing Uranium Ltd., 1986), 4.

² See Meredith J. DeBoom (2022). “Radioactive Strategies: Geopolitical Rivalries, African Agency, and the Longue Durée of Nuclear Infrastructures in Namibia”, in: Schindler, Seth and DiCarlo, Jessica (eds.). *The Rise of the Infrastructure State: How US–China Rivalry Shapes Politics and Place Worldwide*. Policy Press: 2022, pp.137–152.

³ Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores*, xii.

inspiration and positioned themselves to reproduce the success stories of uranium production in South Africa within the territory. The Louw Company, as this chapter demonstrates, devised strategies to secure commercial and political interests in their claims. These strategies, set against the vastly changed importance of uranium in the 20th century, explain why entities, other than the Louw Syndicate, started paying attention to the Rössing deposits when they did. Examining the history of the Louw Company against the external context of uranium and particularly the onset of uranium production in South Africa is essential to an understanding of the connection between the Louw family's role in the pioneering stage and the larger narrative on uranium production in Namibia and the importance of studying this narrative in relation to the process of decolonisation.

Much of the background reading on the pioneering stage was obtained from Graham Louw's *A Tiger by the Tail: The Story of the Discovery of Rössing Uranium*. The book is based largely on the Louw family's role in the discovery of the Rössing deposits, and in the crucial years that characterised the pioneering stage. The patriarch of the Louw family, Petrus Schabort Louw (known as Peter Louw), was a South African national who arrived on the shores of Walvis Bay on the south-western coast of Namibia in January 1915 with the South African Expeditionary Forces.⁴ Louw, along with other military personnel, was later repatriated to South Africa following the defeat of the German colonial forces in July 1915.⁵ His return to Swakopmund years later in the 1920s not only established the Louw family roots in Namibia, but also set into motion the history of RUL. Graham Louw's book is invaluable for an understanding of what Jonathan Helmreich described as the "other strands" to nuclear histories, strands which official histories are not able to fully cover.⁶ Included in these other strands are "the activities of private entrepreneurs and business firms [which] cannot be easily traced, not to mention the feverish searches of individual prospectors".⁷ Graham, for instance, notes that in their feverish searches the Louw family quickly learned that "you may inherit the earth, but [...] you have to fight for the Mineral Rights".⁸ An account of the pioneering stage is invaluable to the history of uranium production in Namibia, in that it documents the transition from the "feverish searches" of the original prospectors to big business and international diplomacy.

⁴ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 2.

⁵ "Captain Peter Louw was born in Stellenbosch, South Africa in 1886. He joined the Imperial Light Horse Brigade, aged twenty-eight, and fought against the German army in the First World War, when South Africa invaded German South West Africa at the behest of His Majesty's Government. He served under General Louis Botha, who with General Smuts, landed their troops at Swakopmund and Lüderitz Bay. The landing in Swakopmund influenced Captain Louw's decision to settle in the small coastal town in the 1920s." Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 20.

⁶ Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores*, xii.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 37.

As is always the case in narratives of mineral exploration in Africa, however, Louw's account overlooks the role of indigenous Namibians in the discovery of the Rössing deposits. This is particularly in reference to the role of indigenous labour in the feverish searches and eventual pegging of the Louw claims. The only mention of 'indigenous' labour that the study was able to come across was from a report produced by the Inspector of Mines as a supplement to a report by the geologist, Dr. Martin, on the presence of radioactive material in the Swakopmund district. Writing on Captain Louw's claims the Inspector of Mines reported that:

it was learned that Louw had pegged the claims as the result of samples brought to him by coloured folk who eke out a precarious living on the banks of the Swakop river in the neighbourhood of Salem. [...] Only two of the five claims could be found despite the fact that the coloured men, who made the original discovery, and Louw's son who had helped to peg the claims, searched for several days.⁹

No mention is made of these "coloured men" in Louw's book which, like RUL, credits the discovery of the Rössing deposits entirely to Captain Peter Louw.¹⁰ Moreover, considering the prevalence of the contract labour system in the colonial economy of Namibia, it is difficult to believe that the Louw family did all the work on their own. It is also difficult to believe that the learned individuals who surveyed the region on behalf of the Geological Survey of South Africa did not make use of indigenous labour. This neglected strand in the narrative has contributed to the geographic isolation of uranium production from the rest of the colonial economy as well as to the outward focus on the external context which was significant to the establishment of the uranium industry in Namibia, as argued in this chapter.

The chapter begins with the background to the pioneering stage before locating this history in the greater context of uranium production in South Africa. Both the history of RUL and that of uranium production in South Africa have to be understood in the wider context of the greatly increased importance of uranium primarily due to the Second World War and the Cold War that ensued, as well as the technological developments that made uranium an essential component of new weapons of mass destruction. The background to the local context is thus examined all the while keeping in mind the global context of uranium production. The chapter continues with a discussion on the second phase in the pioneering stage which witnessed the signing of the option agreement between Anglo-American and

⁹ NAN IMW 15-1073-3 Inspector of Mines, Radio-Active Ores in the Swakopmund Area. Supplement to the Report made by Dr. Martin, June 1950, 3.

¹⁰ The discovery of diamonds in Namibia was initially credited to August Stauch, a German railway engineer but that error has since been corrected and the contribution of Zacharias Lewala "an African migrant from the Cape with experience in mines" is now acknowledged. See S. Press, *Blood and Diamond: Germany's Imperial Ambitions in Africa*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2021, 57.

the Louw Company that saw an extensive study carried out on the Louw claims. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction on the 1966 Rio Tinto Zinc–Louw Company agreement which set into motion the history of the RUL.

Amateur Prospecting and Private Entrepreneurship

Peter Louw returned to Namibia in the early 1920s lured back by adventure and prospects of wealth on the diamond fields of Lüderitzbucht. It is presumably here that he came into the funds for an onward trip to England, where he met and married Annie Margery Burns (Margery Louw after marriage) in 1923.¹¹ Following their wedding, the couple moved to Cape Town and later to the small coastal town of Swakopmund in Namibia. A series of tragedies had left Margery the beneficiary of a family trust, administered from the family's hometown of Sunderland.¹² The Burns Trust proved resourceful as the Louw family settled in Swakopmund, where the impact of the Great Depression was being felt. Like many of the district's inhabitants, Peter and Margery participated in amateur prospecting activities and gradually mastered the art of identifying different minerals. Their added advantage was Margery's training in "electrical treatment, radiography and x-ray at the National Hospital, Queen Square WC and at Guy's Hospital in London during the war years 1915 to 1918".¹³ Her confirmation of radioactive pitchblende in one of the rock samples led to the birth of the Louw venture.¹⁴

The imperial migratory routes that had brought the family to Swakopmund were revisited in 1929 when the Louw family decided to send rock samples to Margery's hometown of Sunderland for laboratory tests to be conducted. By February 1930, the lab results confirmed the presence of radioactive material in the samples, but not much interest came from it as the purpose and value of uranium was yet to be determined.¹⁵ Gowing and Arnold write that it was only in 1939 that scientists discovered "the effects of splitting an atom of the heavy element, uranium", a material which up until then was considered to be pretty worthless.¹⁶ Helmreich further writes that prior to 1939 "uranium was not an item which made much impression upon international affairs, world trade, or the public in general".¹⁷ The lack

¹¹ Margery Burns was born in Sunderland in 1893, she was of Scottish descent. Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 3–4.

¹² Ibid., 13

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ J. Louw, A glimpse back to the beginning of Rössing mine. <https://www.rossing.com/files/RUL-45-Years-Legacy-Book.pdf>, accessed 5 October 2018. John Louw was the eldest of the Louw sons, his younger brothers are Graham and Alan Louw.

¹⁵ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 12.

¹⁶ M. Gowing and L. Arnold, *The Atomic Bomb* (London: Butterworths, 1979).

¹⁷ "Radium, with which [uranium] is usually associated when mined, was far better known for its

of scientific and technological understanding on the value of uranium prior to 1939 thus explains the low commercial and political interest in the Louw discovery at both the local and international level. The lack of interest did not deter the Louw family who continued their prospecting activities in the Namib Desert. It is perhaps the financial resources availed through the Burns Trust that explain the industrious persistence of the Louw family in prospecting for minerals over the next four decades.

In 1939, the Louw family's prospecting activities were disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Peter Louw once again donned the South African armed forces uniform to fight in the war. This time his military tour took him from the district of Swakopmund to the Horn of Africa and onward to North Africa, where he led a reconnaissance team, from which role he emerged as Captain Peter Louw.¹⁸ The end of the war demonstrated to the Louw family that their discovery could potentially be more than what they had initially imagined. The Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by atomic bombs, created under the Manhattan Project, during the final stages of the Second World War. Susan Williams writes that "since it was impossible to build an atomic bomb without uranium ore, it was essential to obtain sufficient ore of high quality".¹⁹ This "high quality" uranium ore was obtained from the Shinkolobwe mine in southwest Congo, then under Belgian colonial rule, which Williams describes as "remarkable" assaying "as high as 75 per cent uranium oxide" content.²⁰ The atom bomb, and nuclear power in general, became absolutely central to the strategy of world powers. This made uranium a highly sought after mineral during and after the Second World War, especially because the mineral was believed to be scarce. Inspired by these events, Captain Peter Louw, who "was duly demobbed and had returned home to civilian life in Swakopmund" at the end of the war, resumed his family's prospecting adventures along with his son, Graham Louw.²¹

In 1949, the Louw family submitted the lab results from their 1928 discovery to the Department of Mines, following which a study of the area was commissioned by the Geological Survey of South Africa. The new flicker of interest showed in the Louw discovery by the South African authorities could be explained by the uranium exploration projects

use in scientific research and medical facilities." Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores*, 3.

¹⁸ "Peter Louw volunteered with the South African troops, fighting Italian forces in North Africa. He was placed in command of an armed reconnaissance unit, earning the rank of Captain through his service." Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 15.

¹⁹ Susan Williams (2018). *The Race for the Ore that Built the Atomic Bomb*. (London: C. Hurst & Co.).

²⁰ Williams, *The Race*, 2. Also see Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores*, 6., R. R. Johnson, "Romancing the Atom: Uranium Prospecting, Once and Again", *The New Atlantis*, 25 (2009), pp. 116–121, 117.

²¹ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 16. Peter and Margery had three sons: John Schabort Louw (born 20 December 1923), Graham Peter Louw (born 30 January 1927) and Alan Burns Louw (26 November 1934). Official Gazette Extraordinary of South West Africa, Windhoek, Friday 1 February 1980, No. 4078. <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/1980/og4078.pdf>

which were simultaneously being carried out in South Africa. The exploration projects in South Africa were carried out in collaboration with the Combined Development Agency, established in 1944 through a diplomatic initiative between the United States and Britain (and later Canada). The CDA was established with the aim of identifying and securing complete control over the world's uranium supplies.²² It was the responsibility of the CDA "to enter into contracts for the purchase of the greatly increased quantities of uranium needed for the expanding plants in America and Britain at which atomic weapons were being manufactured".²³ According to Helmreich, the search for monopoly was, in retrospect, a wild-goose chase especially when one considers how plentiful uranium was.²⁴ This was, however, not known in the 1940s so the situation was such that if "one nation could establish hegemony over the greatest destructive and constructive power source the world has known, then it was better to be that nation rather than not".²⁵

In their search for monopoly, and having secured control over supplies from the Congo, the members of the CDA turned their attention to South Africa, which was considered a potential source of uranium deposits.²⁶ These efforts culminated in the production of uranium as a by-product of the gold mines in South Africa by the 1950s. These post-war events in South Africa's mining industry were a motivating factor for the extension of geological studies to various areas in Namibia, including the Swakopmund district. The geological study was carried out by state geologists, C. M. Schwellmuss and Siegfried Kuschke.²⁷ Schwellmuss and Kuschke confirmed the presence of the uranium-bearing mineral, davidite, and their findings were later corroborated by the geologist Dr. Henno Martin in 1951. Both studies confirmed the presence of davidite in the vicinity of the Rössing Mountain, some 60 km from Swakopmund. Dr. Martin would, however, conclude that "the [uranium] reserves were insignificant" as they did not occur "in economic quantity".²⁸ This discouraged any further studies of the area, but somehow the Louw family remained convinced that they could uncover a significant deposit.²⁹ In March 1951, for instance, Margery Louw submitted

²² M. Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy 1939–1945*, (London: Macmillan, 1964); the Combined Development Agency began as the Combined Development Trust, established in June 1944 by the United Kingdom and the United States.

²³ R.B. Hagart, Aspects of the Uranium Industry, in *Uranium in South Africa: 1946-1956* Vol.I (Johannesburg: the Associated Scientific & Technical Societies of South Africa, 1957), 445.

²⁴ Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores*, xxi.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Williams, *The Race*.

²⁷ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 20. Siegfried Kuschke not only went on to head the Industrial Development Commission of South Africa but also served as the first chairman of Rössing Uranium when the company was established in 1970. Algar, Clive. Arandis—Newest town in the oldest Desert, in SWA 1981 Annual, Windhoek.

²⁸ Dr. Henno Martin (April 1951), cited in Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 17.

²⁹ Smith, *The Geology*, 84.

an application to the Secretary of Mines for pegged claims near the Rössing siding.³⁰ The seeds of hope had thus been sown and there had been conversations with a few confidants of the family. These conversations led to the formation of the Louw Syndicate, comprising Captain Peter Louw, his son Graham Louw, and Edwin Beecroft and Major Archie Maclaren, who were military friends of Captain Peter Louw.

The Louw Syndicate was established on 10 December 1954 with an equal shareholding for each Syndicate member.³¹ The eldest of the Louw sons, John Louw, had been studying and working in Cape Town at the time of the signing of the Syndicate Agreement. He returned to Swakopmund in the following year and was then drafted into the Syndicate's pursuit. The Syndicate members also "approached Hymer Anderson who had been digging for beryl in the Erongo Mountains, to pool his labour resources and a compressor, to blast trenches across the finds" in exchange for shares in the Syndicate.³² The Louw claims, which had been registered with the Department of Mines under G. P. (Graham Peter) Louw following the death of Margery Louw, were then relinquished to the Louw Syndicate upon its formation.³³

Uranium Production in South Africa and the Louw Claims

Unbeknown to the Louw Syndicate, their prospecting activity and all information pertaining to their claims in the territory were governed under the South African Atomic Energy Act of 1948. The South African regime had continued to govern the territory even after the official demise of the League of Nations, under whose Mandate the regime claimed the territory. South African laws thus continued to be applicable to the territory. The 1948 Act was the product of South Africa's post-Second World War uranium production programme and it was the legal framework prepared by the State "to provide the necessary security, powers and machinery to control what had by then become one of the world's most important strategic minerals".³⁴

According to Prof. L. Taverner, "the first notification that the Rand gold ores contain radioactive substances dates from 1915 and is attributed to Dr. A. Rogers, Director of the

³⁰ NAN IMW 406 PL1 Mrs. A.M. Louw, Claims Transfer.

³¹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 22.

³² Rio Tinto. Reflecting on 40 years of Working for Namibia: The first 10 years 1976–1986. 20 June 2016. www.rossing.com, accessed 26 November 2020. The reference to Hymer Anderson's 'labour resources' is another hint at the use of black migrant labour in the discovery of Namibia's uranium resources.

³³ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 22.

³⁴ J. G. van Graan, Inspection Report on The Atomic Energy Board, Pretoria, 28.10.1957. Public Service Commission, Department of Mines, National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (hereafter NARSSA), TES 5/191/32936, 3.

Geological Survey of the Union of South Africa at that time”.³⁵ The discovery of the definitive occurrence of radio-active material, “in association with certain gold-bearing ores”, on the Witwatersrand in South Africa is however credited to Mr. R. A. Cooper, whose conclusions were confirmed in 1923.³⁶ Apart from scientific reports on the presence of uranium in South Africa, however, “no interest was displayed in its exploitation as it was not at the time a commercial proposition”.³⁷ As alluded to earlier, R. B. Hagart writes that South Africa’s uranium deposits “did not become significant until 1944, when, as a result of research in Britain and in America into the use of uranium [...] it became vital to the military purposes of the Western Powers that all potential sources of uranium should be explored and tested”.³⁸ The use of uranium deposits from the Belgian Congo in the construction of weapons for the Manhattan Project had also focused attention on other potential sources on the continent. It was therefore only in 1945, when the potentialities of uranium deposits became apparent, that South African uranium resources were revisited.³⁹

Once it was established “that the ore reserves of some of the gold mines carried uranium in sufficient quantity for its extraction to be economically possible”, the South African government “took energetic steps to initiate and finance a comprehensive programme of investigation and research to establish the extent of the uranium enrichment” and develop a method to economically extract uranium from the gold ores.⁴⁰ The problem of economic extraction had required an intensive research campaign characterised by the construction of pilot plants on four different mine sites. The research “was undertaken jointly and with complete co-operation by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Laboratory in the United States of America, the Chemical Research Laboratory, Great Britain, the Bureau of Mines of Laboratory, Ottawa, and the Government Metallurgical Laboratory in the Union [of South

³⁵ L. Taverner, “An Historical Review of the Events and Developments Culminating in the Construction of Plants for the Recovery of Uranium from Gold Ore Residues”, in *Uranium in South Africa 1946–1956*, Vol. I (Johannesburg: the Associated Scientific & Technical Societies of South Africa, 1957), 1.

³⁶ A. J. R. van Rhijn (Minister of Mines), “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”. West Rand Consolidated Mines Limited, Krugersdorp. (8 October 1952). Special Collections, University of Cape Town BAP 622.34932 STOR. R. B. Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry, in *Uranium in South Africa: 1946–1956*” Vol. I (Johannesburg: the Associated Scientific & Technical Societies of South Africa, 1957), 444.

³⁷ van Rhijn, “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”, 4.

³⁸ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 444.

³⁹ “The birth of the uranium mining industry in South Africa can be said to have occurred in 1945 when the geologists, Drs. C. F. Davidson and G. W. Bain, visited [South Africa].” Both geologists were associated with the CDA and particularly with the atomic authorities of their respective countries (Britain and the USA). van Rhijn, “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”, 7.

⁴⁰ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 444. van Rhijn, “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”, 4

Africa]”.⁴¹ The research was thus a collaborative effort between the South African government and the governments represented through the CDA. As such, the “delivery of large tonnages of steel and other raw materials” necessary for the design and construction of pilot plants was made available to the South African government’s metallurgical laboratory by these governments.⁴² This degree of international co-operation with South Africa is telling, highlighting as it does the interests of major powers in the region’s uranium industry and how far back the uranium links between countries like South Africa, Britain and Canada went. There was already nuclear collaboration between these countries many years before the Rössing Mine was established and this is essential to an understanding of the continuity of these nuclear links in the production of uranium in Namibia.

The post-Second World War interest in South African uranium explains the promulgation of the Atomic Energy Act in 1948, which came into operation on 1st January, 1949.⁴³ The Act defined “uranium, thorium and any other material or substance which contains uranium or thorium in specified quantities or concentrations [as] ‘prescribed material’, ownership of all of which was appropriated to the State”.⁴⁴ By law, therefore, “the sole right to search, prospect or mine such material, as also ownership of all prescribed material mined, extracted or isolated and the exclusive right to produce atomic energy, was vested in the State”.⁴⁵ The Atomic Energy Act established the Atomic Energy Board (AEB), whose powers were “considerable since it acts for the State in the ownership and disposal of all prescribed material”.⁴⁶ Ownership of prescribed materials was vested in the AEB on behalf of the State. The Act “gave the Minister of Mines power to authorise persons or companies to prospect for and mine such materials on his behalf” but “once mined and separated the uranium oxide becomes the property of the [Atomic Energy] Board”.⁴⁷

In October 1950 “the South African Government invited a Joint Mission representing the United States and Britain, to visit the Union for the purpose of negotiating a contract for the supply of uranium”.⁴⁸ According to Hagart, the negotiations were carried out by the CDA, which was set up as a joint purchasing agency by British and American authorities. The negotiations with the CDA were finalised at the end of November 1950, “regarding the heads of an agreement to supply uranium from a limited number of mines over a 10-year period”.⁴⁹ The 10-year delivery period commenced on “the date of full production” which

⁴¹ Taverner, “An Historical Review of the Events”, 1.

⁴² van Rhijn, “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”, 7.

⁴³ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 444.

⁴⁴ van Graan, Inspection Report, NARSSA TES 5/191/32936, 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 445.

⁴⁷ van Graan, Inspection Report, NARSSA TES 5/191/32936, 3.

⁴⁸ Taverner, “An Historical Review of Events”, 7.

⁴⁹ van Rhijn, “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”, 8.

meant that “some mines commenced full production on 1st January, 1954, and their contracts expire on 31st December, 1963. Other mines entered the scheme at later dates, and date of expiry of the latest contracts hitherto accepted is 31st December, 1966”.⁵⁰ In 1952 the West Rand Consolidated Mines became the first mine in South Africa, and indeed in the world, to produce uranium as a by-product of gold “on an economic and commercial basis”.⁵¹ Its uranium output was purchased by the CDA under the 1950 agreement upon the mines’ attainment of full production in 1954.⁵²

The achievements of the West Rand Consolidated Mines, and indeed that of the other three uranium producing mines, were considered to be of “immense significance to the economic structure of the Union”.⁵³ John Louw argued that this was because, “by the mid-1950s, the energy potential of a peaceful application of nuclear power was fully recognised [and] the first nuclear reactors for the production of electricity were taking shape. This, in turn, led to a growing need for an adequate and reliable supply of uranium”.⁵⁴ The non-peaceful application of uranium—the construction of nuclear weapons—was arguably more important in the 1950s. But as Gowing and Arnold note, “atomic energy was indeed to prove dual purpose”.⁵⁵ The South African government was thus able to accrue benefits from the production of uranium as a by-product of gold production through various means. These included means such as the amendment of the Income Tax Act, the additional demand for electrical power and various chemicals required by the uranium processing plants, as well as through the foreign exchange earned on uranium exports.⁵⁶ The amendment to the Income Tax Act, for instance, stated that “there should be included with the taxable profits from gold any profits made from the simultaneous production of uranium, thus making uranium subject to the differential higher rate of tax levied on gold mining”.⁵⁷ As the pioneer in uranium production in South Africa, the West Rand Consolidated Mines was the first mine to be affected by the change in the Income Tax Act. The peculiarity of the West Rand Consolidated

⁵⁰ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 447.

⁵¹ van Rhijn, “The Story of South Africa’s First Uranium Production Plant”, 7.

⁵² Hagart writes that “at the outset of the discussions [with the CDA] certain difficulties at once became apparent. First, there was no established market and thus no established market price for uranium. The CDA was in effect the sole buyer [...] and the Agency was prepared to negotiate only on the basis of a price determined primarily by the cost of production, the amortisation of capital and a margin of profit [and not a fixed price as the South African government had hoped]. The Agency’s argument was that, since mining was in progress anyway for the production of gold, uranium would be a by-product.” Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 445.

⁵³ Blyvooruitzicht, Daggafontein, Western Reefs and West Rand Consolidated were the four mines who formed the pioneers of uranium production in South Africa. Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 446.

⁵⁴ Louw, *A Glimpse Back*.

⁵⁵ Gowing and Arnold, *The Atomic Bomb*, 3.

⁵⁶ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 448.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 446.

Mines was that it was controlled by the General Mining and Finance Corporation Limited, which later became shareholders in RUL (see Chapter 3).

The Louw Syndicate's prospecting activities fell within the realm of what the Atomic Energy Act stipulated as "prescribed" or "source" materials. In order to lay claim to their discovery the Louw Syndicate had to obtain the approval of the Minister of Mines and the AEB. In adhering to this requirement, the Louw Syndicate drew the attention of the South African authorities to the possibility of an economically viable deposit in an area that had been dismissed in previous geological studies. Moreover, if the Louw Syndicate's endeavours were to result in uranium mining activities, then the South African government would be able to accrue benefits from the territory in terms of taxation, the demand for products and services and the foreign exchange. In July 1955, amidst the onset of uranium production in South Africa, the Minister of Mines, Dr. van Rijn, awarded exclusive prospecting rights to the Louw Syndicate under the Mining Grant M. 4/4/105 under Section 58 (1) of Ordinance 26 of 1954.⁵⁸ The prospecting rights were further accompanied by a Search Permit A.E.B 30/159 issued by the AEB to the Louw Syndicate for a period of 12 months.⁵⁹ The Louw Company had acquired the permission of the South African authorities to further their search for prescribed materials and to interest buyers in their findings.

The administration of the various provisions of the Atomic Energy Act was the prerogative of the AEB. This included provisions which prohibited entities from disclosing any information related "to reserves of ore containing prescribed material, the annual output of such material, the price paid, and the extraction processes".⁶⁰ So the Louw Syndicate's attempts to interest mining houses in their discovery would have to be handled discreetly. In hindsight, Graham Louw writes, it was "clear that the South African Government's interest was allied to all possible sources of uranium, whether in South Africa or South West Africa. This was to our advantage. Our timing was right".⁶¹ With supposed perfect timing, governmental support and a mining licence in hand, the Syndicate members agreed to transform themselves into a registered Company so as to enable themselves "to negotiate as an entity with interested mining groups".⁶² The move was encouraged by the lawyer Eric Kinsman, who along with the accountant Des Bowie (both of Swakopmund) had acquired the interest of Edwin Beecroft in the Louw Syndicate. The acquisition of shares happened in November 1955, and in the same year the Louw Syndicate was registered as G. P. Louw (Proprietary) Ltd.⁶³

⁵⁸ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 23.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hagart, "Aspects of the Uranium Industry", 445.

⁶¹ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 25.

⁶² Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 23.

⁶³ Ibid.

The Option Agreement: Anglo-American and the Louw Deposits

Following the formation of the Company, the members of the Louw Company began the search for interested investors. Naturally, the Louw Company looked to mining houses in South Africa, where uranium mining had commenced during the 1950s. The Johannesburg-based Anglo-American Corporation was the first to show interest in the Louw findings. This led to the signing of an Option Agreement between the two parties, which permitted Anglo to conduct prospecting operations in the reserved area of the Louw Company.⁶⁴ The Option Agreement was for the duration of two years, dating from December 1955 to December 1957, with the possibility of extension subject to the findings of the Anglo team.⁶⁵ Work started almost immediately following the set-up of an exploration camp close to the Louw claims. The team at the desert site consisted of “geologists in charge of radiometric, mapping, drilling and general field work [to investigate] the entire reserved territory”.⁶⁶ The senior geologist on site was David Smith and he led the Anglo team as they “swung into action, drilling [...] boreholes and sample tunnels” through the Louw claims.⁶⁷ Large sums were spent prospecting the Louw claims, with large volumes of low-grade ore unearthed for analysis.

In February 1956 the Louw Company formally ceded its claim under option to Anglo, paving the way for Anglo to acquire 75 per cent of the Louw Company at a cost of £250 000.⁶⁸ It was at this point that the Option Agreement with Anglo was extended to February 1958, causing mounting excitement for the members of the former Syndicate, as well as their new partners.⁶⁹ The Louw Company members would finally earn dividends from their endeavour. As the Anglo team collected and collated their findings the need for a name for the venture arose. The “Rössing Venture” was the name coined by the team, derived from the bordering Rössing Mountain where the geologists Schwellmuss, Kuschke and Martin

⁶⁴ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 26.

⁶⁵ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 25.

⁶⁶ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 26.

⁶⁷ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 367. Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 23. In 1965, David Smith wrote his PhD based on his work with the Anglo-American Prospecting Company titled: *The Geology of the Area around the Khan and Swakop Rivers in South West Africa*, which was reproduced by the Geological Survey (Pretoria).

⁶⁸ Smith, *The Geology*, 85. Also see Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 23.

⁶⁹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 25.

had discovered the uranium-bearing davidite.⁷⁰ The Rössing Mountain would “in time become immortalized with [the] Rössing Uranium mine”.⁷¹

With a newly minted venture, Anglo’s geological team had their hands full. Graham Louw writes that the team had made new discoveries within the Louw area, and “as activities intensified, many high anomalies were being located, with the largest being designated as the S. J. orebody. An aerial radiometric survey was flown over the entire area, to be followed by a drilling programme as top priority”.⁷² Geological reports on the S. J. orebody were produced as hopes ran high. This lasted until late 1957 when the drilling came to an end just as quickly as it had started.⁷³ The stoppage resulted from geological reports which concluded that the ore deposits were of a low grade and were therefore unprofitable.⁷⁴ The Anglo team saw no justifiable reason to continue their investigations on the Louw claims. In more descriptive terms, Anglo’s Dr. H. C. M. Whiteside declared that the Louw claims were of “no value whatsoever [for] it is like a poor man’s rice pudding. It hasn’t got enough raisins in it”.⁷⁵ Interestingly, in 1950 the Inspector of Mines had written a similar report on the Louw claims, stating that “Louw’s report appears optimistic as it was found that in all probability the entire ore reserves could be carried away in a few sample bags!”⁷⁶ Anglo, however, acknowledged that they had neither the technical expertise nor the up-front capital to exploit low-grade ore.⁷⁷ The Option Agreement, along with the purchase of 75 per cent of the Louw Company, was thus not renewed beyond February 1958.⁷⁸ The success of their venture plus the monetary return on their investment continued to elude the Louw Company members.

Struck down but not destroyed, the Louw Company took comfort in that they firstly still held the mineral rights to their deposit and secondly “as a precaution, and before [their] final

⁷⁰ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 20. The mountain, in turn, derives its name from the railway siding known as Rössing. The railway siding was named after Lieutenant General Baron Arnold August Nonus Freiherr von Rössing, the Commanding Officer of the Prussian Railway Brigade, which was responsible for the construction of the railway line from Swakopmund to the inland. Freiherr von Rössing had interestingly never stepped foot in German South West Africa, but the admiration from his brigade led them to request that a railway siding be named after him. The request was logged with the German Imperial Government in 1892, after which the railway siding KM39 was named Rössing. See: Rössing News, “Rössings visit Rössing: Shed new light on our name-sake.” The weekly newspaper of Rössing Uranium Limited. Vol. 5, No. 9, 22.7.1983. Also see J. Kinahan, “The Story of Rössing Mountain.” (Rössing Uranium: Windhoek, 1988).

⁷¹ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 27.

⁷² Ibid., 28.

⁷³ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁴ Smith, *The Geology*, 85.

⁷⁵ Anglo American Co. 1959 cited in Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 25.

⁷⁶ NAN IMW 15-1073-3 Inspector of Mines, Radio-Active Ores, 3.

⁷⁷ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, footnote 44, 367.

⁷⁸ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 25.

withdrawal, [Anglo] had pegged and registered the S. J. orebody on behalf” of G. P. Louw.⁷⁹ This was of great significance to the Louw Company for it was now known that “the bulk of the radiation within the Grant territory was largely confined to the Alaskites of the S. J. area”.⁸⁰ Lastly, Anglo’s withdrawal in 1958 had left the Louw Company with “all information and data gained during the two year prospecting operations,” including all “expenditure on relevant fieldwork, assays, radiometric and borehole results”.⁸¹ The mineral rights, pegged orebody and comprehensive information package would all prove invaluable to the Louw Company’s future marketing endeavours and would indeed yield results for the Company, albeit a decade later.⁸²

South African Bureaucracy and the Louw Claims

While saddled with the burden of marketing their venture, the Louw Company had to manage the bureaucratic challenges of renewing their mining grant. In March 1958 the Louw Company turned its focus to ensuring that they obtained the permission of the Department of Mines to retain their prospecting and mining grant, which was due for renewal in 1959. The exploratory studies carried out by the Anglo team had proven to the Louw Company that theirs was a grant worth holding on to. An application was once again submitted to the Department of Mines, and after weeks of waiting, the Louw Company was issued with Mining Grant M/4/4105, which covered an area of 1200 square miles, including the S. J. orebody discovered by Anglo’s geological team.⁸³ From 1958, and well into the early 1960s, the Louw Company continued to petition the Anglo team to reconsider their decision. During this period, attempts were made to interest other mining companies such as the Rio Tinto Management Services (RTMS), based in Johannesburg, but to no avail.

Years passed and it was 1963. Five years had elapsed since the issuing of the last grant in 1959 and the Louw Company had until January 1964 to renew their mining and prospecting grant. The application for a renewal of the mining grant was submitted in November 1963 and by January 1964 the Louw Company was informed by the Department of Mines that their application had been dismissed.⁸⁴ The Louw Company’s failure to interest ma-

⁷⁹ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 33.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁸¹ Ibid., 33.

⁸² Graham Peter Louw writes that “on one of my visits to Piet Henderson the Inspector of Mines, with a hand on my shoulder, empathised that ‘within ten years or so, things are bound to swing back again’. I was humbled and horrified. No, I could never wait so long. But he was right, and I was to learn that life is about patience and cycles; there are no short cuts”. Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 36.

⁸³ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 36.

for mining companies in the find appears to have motivated the decision by the Ministry of Mines. According to Sue Southworth, the application by the Louw Company had been dismissed because “at that stage, the Ministry of Mines in South Africa took over control of exploration for prescribed materials in South West Africa”.⁸⁵ It is not clear whether the South African authorities had intended to secure investment in the Rössing claims through similar means as the negotiations with the CDA. The only option for the Louw Company was a direct petition to the Minister of Mines in South Africa for the reinstatement of their mining and prospecting rights.

Caroline (Carlie) Anderson, Hymer Anderson’s wife and the only other woman (apart from Margery Louw) to have played a major role in the Louw claims, was instrumental in petitioning the Ministry of Mines. According to Daniel, Carlie “had some excellent connections in Pretoria and through them approached the AEB to restore the company’s right to prospect for prescribed material”.⁸⁶ Following a period of protracted negotiations the prospecting rights were reinstated to the Louw Company, in 1965, albeit with major alterations to the size of the prospecting and mining area.⁸⁷ The original 1200 sq. miles issued under Grant M/4/4/105 were reduced to a mere 400 sq. miles under the new Prospecting Grant Area, M 46/3/327.⁸⁸ The exact demarcation of the boundaries of these 400 sq. miles was left to the Louw Company. The added knowledge acquired from Anglo American’s geological reports informed their decision to concentrate the 400 sq. miles around the S. J. orebody.

With the mining grant secured, the Louw Company persisted in its mission to identify mining companies that would partner with them in the gainful exploitation of the Rössing deposits. The main challenge in convincing mining companies to consider the Rössing venture was that news had spread throughout the mining industry in South Africa that Anglo American had explored the venture and found it to be unprofitable. The report of a reputable mining company was thus sufficient to deter investment in the Rössing claims. What the members of the Louw Company needed was “someone who would listen” despite the reports and “someone with foresight”, for indeed times were changing and uranium was proving to be as valuable an energy source as it was for nuclear weapons.⁸⁹ The times had

⁸⁵ Sue Southworth, Captain Peter Louw: “The Discoverer of the Rössing Orebody”. Rössing News, December 1999, reproduced in e-Rössing Bulletin, 30 Year Special Edition 1976–2006, 15. www.rossing.com, accessed 11 November 2020.

⁸⁶ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 27. Carlie Anderson continued to assist the Louw Company to secure all subsequent extensions of the mining grant, which lapsed after the initial one-year period and was later extended to an additional three years “with an option for a further three years.” In return for her services to the Louw Company, Carlie obtained shares and became a co-director with her husband in the Louw Company.

⁸⁷ Southworth, Captain Peter Louw, 15.

⁸⁸ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 27.

⁸⁹ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 35.

indeed changed and the added challenge of maintaining their mining grant made securing an investor all the more urgent.

Foresight: RTZ and the Rössing Deposits

In the early 1950s, the Rio Tinto Group initiated an exploration programme in the southern African region in search of major mineral deposits such as the discovery of Nickel at the Empress Nickel mine in Zimbabwe and the discovery of copper at the Palabora Copper mine in South Africa.⁹⁰ To coordinate its exploration programme, RTZ established a subsidiary company called Mineral Search of Africa, based in Johannesburg. The exploration programme was, however, brought to a halt in 1959 due to a drop in metal prices in the international markets. It was during this period of a reduction in exploration activities that RTZ was initially approached by the Louw Company to interest them in the Louw claims. The Louw Company's only request was that the geologist with Mineral Search of Africa examine Anglo's reports for themselves, for it was then and then only that they would see that they were being presented with a "world-class deposit".⁹¹ Unsurprisingly, RTZ showed no interest in the Louw claims, citing a limited exploration budget. The report from Anglo-American on the Louw finds could also have influenced RTZ's rebuff of the Louw Company's initial approach, considering the two mining houses were partners in the copper mine operations at the Palabora mine.

Six years later in 1965, "the investment climate improved" and a new company Rio Tinto Exploration (RTX) was formed, adopting an "aggressive exploration policy", similar to that of the 1950s.⁹² It is in RTX that the Louw Company finally found that "someone with foresight" who agreed to examine the data produced by Anglo American on the Rössing deposits. The RTX team found that the problem with the Louw claims was not low-grade ore per se but rather the means by which Anglo-American had intended to mine the orebody. Low-grade ore, as RTZ had learned from the Palabora copper mine, was best mined on a large scale through an open-cast mine, rather than the underground operation which Anglo-American had envisioned.⁹³ Whereas Anglo sought higher grade ore through traditional

⁹⁰ J. Berning, The road to Rössing—via Rio Tinto. Rössing News Christmas Edition, December 1999, 3. Reproduced in in e-Rössing Bulletin, 30 Year Special Edition 1976–2006, 3. www.rossing.com, accessed 11 November 2020. C. Herbert, "Palabora." Mining Magazine, Vol. 116, No. 1. (1 January 1967), pp. 4–7, 4. RTZ owned the Palabora copper mine in South Africa and it was there that RTZ mastered the art of extracting uranium from low grade ores. This technical expertise was later transferred to the Rössing Uranium Mine.

⁹¹ Supply of Uranium, Occurrence of Uranium and History of Extraction, Annex II, The National Archives of Britain (hereafter TNA), AB 48/152, 1.

⁹² Berning, The Road to Rössing, 3.

⁹³ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 26.



Figure 2: A Historical photograph of Captain Peter Louw standing in front of the abandoned AAC [Anglo American Corporation] tunnel to the S.J. orebody

means of mining, RTZ recognised “the value of a large low-grade” orebody, which they now sought to establish through newer mining technologies.⁹⁴ The creation of the Rössing mine could thus partially be credited to the technological changes in mining, as open-cast mining was relatively new to the southern African region.

In 1966, RTZ London authorised the Johannesburg office to enter into negotiations with the Louw Company. The negotiations comprised of further site inspections and discussions between the two entities. The picture of Peter Louw (Figure 2) was taken in 1966 during one

⁹⁴ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 40.

of the site inspections.⁹⁵ An option agreement was accordingly signed on 5th August 1966, and it provided for the appointment of RTMS in Johannesburg as the agent of the G. P. Louw Company in prospecting their claims for source material, for a period of six years between 1966 and 1971.⁹⁶ The option agreement made provision for RTMS to acquire a majority shareholding in the Louw Company. The majority shareholding amounted to 75 per cent of the issued share capital of G. P. Louw, (later increased to 90 per cent). RTMS acquired the 75 per cent shareholding at the sum of R600 000 South African Rand, which was significantly higher than the £250 000 pounds previously offered by Anglo-American.⁹⁷ The remaining percentile of the share capital would be held by the Louw Company under the understanding that RTZ would have the right of first refusal. The signing of the option agreement was symbolic of what Helmreich described as the other strands of nuclear histories which cannot be easily traced, strands which document the activities of private entrepreneurs and business firms and also the shift from private entrepreneurship to big business in the production of uranium in Namibia.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The pioneering stage in the history of RUL constitutes a period outside the primary focus of this book. It is, however, presented herein to demonstrate the external context that was significant to the establishment of a uranium industry in Namibia. It is against this backdrop that a shift occurred from entrepreneurial and prospecting activities to the onset of foreign interest in Namibia's uranium deposits. The external context is best illustrated through the CDA's investment in uranium production activities in South Africa and, ultimately, RTZ's investment in RUL. The pioneering stage occurred between 1928 and 1966 and is discussed under two main periods: the period of discovery and the period of commercial interests in the discovery of the Rössing deposits. The period of discovery, which began in 1928, witnessed the identification of radioactive material by the Louw family and the establishment of the mineral value of the discovery. The period is characterised by the establishment of a Syndicate turned Company, by the Louw family and their associates. During this period very little attention was paid to the uranium deposits of South West Africa/Namibia by the South African authorities, or any other commercial or politically established entities. The Louw Syndicate had experienced relative ease in acquiring the necessary licensing to lay claim to their discovery compared to, for instance, the later period of the pioneering stage.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 29. Peter Louw died in 1978 (aged 92), two years after production had begun at the Rössing Mine.

⁹⁶ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 31.

⁹⁷ Berning, *The Road to Rössing*, 4., Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 29.

⁹⁸ Helmreich, *Gathering Rare Ores*, xii.

The changing situation on the South African mining scene with the commencement of uranium production in the 1950s, coupled with the newly acquired global knowledge on the economic and strategic value of uranium resources, would however lead to “foreign” interests in Namibian uranium. These new commercial and political interests in the Louw claims led to the second period in the pioneering stage which commenced in 1955. The period is characterised by the signing of option agreements, first with the Anglo-American Corporation and later with Rio Tinto Zinc. The signing of the option agreement with Anglo American was particularly valuable to the endeavours of the Louw Company in that the partnership produced geological information on the location (and consequently the value) of the large low grade ore body which constituted the Rössing deposits. The second period in the pioneering stage was characterised by the continuing engagement with the South African government as represented by the Atomic Energy Board and the Minister of Mines. The Atomic Energy Act of 1948 governed the prospecting and production of what the Act described as prescribed material, and it is the provisions of this Act that brought the aspirations of the Louw Company in line with the procedures of the South African government.

The pioneering stage, as was argued herein, illustrates decades of non-interest in the Namibia’s uranium resources. The changing attitude towards these uranium resources, both in terms of the political and commercial interests were motivated by the changing importance of uranium in the 1940s and the 1950, as well as by the commencement of uranium production across the border, in South Africa. The success of mines such as the West Rand Consolidated mine informed not only the prospecting projects of Anglo American, and later RTZ, but also motivated the political interests of the South African government which had accrued direct and indirect benefits from uranium mining activities since the 1950s. By 1966, when the Louw Company signed an option agreement with RTZ, the history of RUL had come a long way from when Peter and Margery Louw first discovered the pitchblende in the rock samples that were presented to them in 1928. It is because of this context that this book has been able to better appreciate the political and commercial links that framed the pioneering stage in the history of RUL and the importance of studying this history in relation to decolonisation.

3 The Exploration Stage

Introduction

In August 1966 RTZ reached an exploration concession agreement with the Louw Company, which set into motion the exploration stage in the history of Rössing. A month after signing the option agreement RTZ's exploration team began with an intensive programme of geological and geophysical fieldwork aimed at establishing the optimum extractive processes to be pursued. The agreement with the Louw Company, as well as the subsequent prospecting activity embarked on by RTZ, had been subjected to "multiple discussions held in [South African] government circles [which] formed an essential part of the intricate terms and conditions as required by Cabinet and the Atomic Energy Act of 1948".¹ A paramount hurdle in the exploration stage of the Rössing venture was acquiring the dual approval of the Minister of Mines and that of the AEB, in which the ownership of prescribed material was vested, on behalf of the state (see Chapter 2). The Minister of Mines, as discussed in Chapter 2, issued the mining and prospecting grants required for securing the claims to a grant area. The prescribed material, which RTZ sought to mine at the Rössing site, fell under the ambit of the AEB, as authorised by the Atomic Energy Act (amended in 1967). A dual approval was thus required if RTZ were to commence exploration of the Rössing deposits.

The AEB was established to serve as "the de jure handling agent of prescribed materials for the State".² This meant that the AEB would represent the state in RTZ's envisioned exploration of the Rössing deposits. In its perusal of RTZ's application, the AEB explicitly stated its concerns regarding the "foreign" ownership of Rössing and the dissemination of information on the Rössing deposits (which was prohibited by the Atomic Energy Act). The head of the AEB, Dr. Ampie Roux, was described as "intensely loyal to his own country" and he is said to have "disliked the idea of a foreign company developing the resources of South Africa or Namibia".³ The main concern for the AEB was the exclusive control by a "foreign" company of the uranium resources of Namibia, without South African participation in the venture. Such participation was considered of outmost importance as it would allow the regime to "derive additional benefit from its position as a major uranium producer".⁴ It is against this background that the AEB's Chairman sought to address the exclusivity secured through RTZ's 90 per cent equity in the Louw Company, arguing that "unfettered control by

¹ Louw, *A Tiger by the Tail*, 41.

² Graan, TES 5/191/32936 936.

³ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 38.

⁴ Albright, "Revisiting South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Program", 3.

a foreign company of so large and significant a deposit might prove to be detrimental to the interests of South West Africa [Namibia] and the Republic of South Africa”⁵

By “interests” was meant the financial interests of the South African administration and more importantly the geopolitical gains accruable from Namibia’s uranium resources for South Africa. On financial interests it is worth reiterating that uranium mining in South Africa commenced in the early 1950s, when the mineral was produced as a by-product of the gold deposits of the Witwatersrand mines (see Chapter 2). In the 1950s and the 1960s, the tax revenue accrued from the profits of uranium production on the gold mines, and the foreign exchange earned on the export of uranium had generated additional revenue for the South African state. In addition to this, the South African government had since the 1950s anticipated major demand for uranium supplies that would be used for peaceful purposes, such as the generation of electricity. The government paid particular attention to developments in the United Kingdom (UK) where the first nuclear power reactor was erected at Calder Hall in 1956.⁶ The events in the UK were not only viewed as leading “the way into the nuclear age” but it was also anticipated that they would result in a rapid demand for uranium and with it an established uranium market.⁷

The geopolitical gains, on the other hand, were meant to offset the intensifying international pressure for Namibian decolonisation, and more broadly the growing opposition to the policy of apartheid and the international community’s isolation of the South African regime. Hecht writes that “as international pressure to end the Namibian occupation intensified, the risk emerged that Rössing’s precious product might escape South African control”.⁸ Growing anti-apartheid sentiments and the calls for Namibian independence thus necessitated the formulation of policy related to the foreign investment and control of uranium production in Namibia. Such policy was deemed to be essential for securing South African interests. These financial and geopolitical gains, combined with an apprehension of British capital, explain the Chairman of the AEB’s desire to secure control of uranium resources in Namibia which, once they were brought into production in the 1970s, could potentially be sold at an established market price on the emerging uranium market.

The need to secure control over the Rössing deposits explains the stringent secrecy imposed by the AEB on RTZ under the pretext of the Atomic Energy Act. The AEB was particularly reluctant to grant RTZ permission to disclose information relating to the Rössing deposits with potential customers, which potential customers the AEB had hoped to secure themselves. RTZ had however planned to raise funds from “international financiers” who re-

⁵ Dr. A. J. A. Roux, Chairman of the AEB, cited in Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 88.

⁶ Hagart, “Aspects of the Uranium Industry”, 452.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 88.

quired as collateral “bankable long-term contracts” which a state agency could not provide.⁹ The financial viability of the project not only depended on RTZ’s ability to share information with potential investors and customers, but also to arrange site visits. The AEB’s reluctance to allow site visits to Rössing was particularly frustrating for the RTZ team who were unable to fathom how it was that Dr. Roux “found it difficult to understand that customers were not prepared to place contracts until they were satisfied by their own assessment of the project that security and continuity of supply was assured”.¹⁰ Dr. Roux, on the other hand, informed RTZ that “the developing company would have to be South African-controlled” and that “a mining grant would not be considered until the composition of the developing company complied with the conditions of South African control”.¹¹ These divergent views between the government and the multinational corporation meant that RTZ’s role in the exploitation of Namibian uranium could only result from a partnership with the South African state. It is this convergence of interests and the South African administration’s resolve to preserve control over Namibia’s uranium resources that form the focus of this chapter.

The Exploration Partnership: RTZ and Urangesellschaft

In 1968, when discussions were being held with the South African administration, the RTZ team were still carrying out exploration work on the Rössing deposit. Realising that financing the entire project by themselves “would [be] unthinkable” the RTZ London office entered into talks with Urangesellschaft mbH & Co., of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), to jointly carry out the required prospecting work on the Rössing deposit.¹² A joint partnership was seen as a sure means of raising the required loan finance for the project while spreading the financial risk involved in the undertaking. Urangesellschaft was identified as the ideal partner because in the 1960s the government of West Germany had adopted an energy policy with the objective of deriving 20–25 per cent of its power supplies from atomic energy by 1980.¹³ The energy policy, along with the energy industry it pro-

⁹ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 89. Hecht further writes that “in 1967, a revised Atomic Energy Act transferred rights to the industry, giving uranium the same status as other minerals. A consortium of mines, the Nuclear Fuels Corporation of South Africa (NUFCOR), was formed to coordinate the uranium output [...] and market the product overseas. Although contracts still required government approval [from the AEB], NUFCOR enjoyed great autonomy as the commercial face of South African uranium, generating forecasts, managing production, and negotiating with clients to become the nation’s uranium market maker.” The AEB thus required RTZ to negotiate with NUFCOR to secure potential customers, a proposition which RTZ declined. Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 68.

¹⁰ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹² Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 42.

¹³ Referred to as West Germany or the West German government, from here on. Bundesarchiv

duced, was met with the immediate challenge of securing uranium supplies. Notwithstanding the limited supply options of uranium in the 1960s and the 1970s, West Germany's nuclear power ambitions were confronted with the lack of deposits in its own territory.¹⁴ In exploring various options of obtaining uranium supplies, the West German government encouraged the direct participation of German companies in the exploration and mining of uranium deposits by offering an incentive. This incentive was the commitment on the part of the government to subsidise 75 per cent of the exploration cost incurred by German companies.¹⁵

Urangesellschaft mbH was a private company which was constituted in 1967 as a direct result of the West German government's nuclear energy objective and the incentive provided under this objective.¹⁶ Urangesellschaft was incorporated with a share capital vested in a syndicate comprising three German companies.¹⁷ According to Rogers, the West German government "has a 40 per cent shareholding in Veba AG, a company which controls Urangesellschaft in a consortium with Metallgesellschaft AG and Steinkohlen-Elektrizitäts AG".¹⁸ Several exploration projects were targeted in the uranium producing regions of Africa, Australia and Canada but with minimal success.¹⁹ The Rössing project was presented to Urangesellschaft as an opportunity for expansion for both companies. What RTZ required from the partnership with Urangesellschaft was essentially the loan finance to conduct exploratory work on the Rössing project. The stated objective of this exploratory work was the production of an evaluation report proving the economic viability of Rössing. For this reason, RTZ's exploration team, based at the RTMS office in South Africa, compiled reports with estimates of the expenditure for the Rössing project which were made available to Urangesellschaft through the RTZ headquarters in London.

In September 1969 Urangesellschaft engaged the Bundesministerium für Wissenschaftliche Forschung (Federal Ministry for Scientific Research) for guarantees from the West German government that would enable them to secure the capital for participation in RTZ's

Koblenz (BAK) B/196/33620 W. Hoffmann, "Droht ein zweites Caborra Bassa? Deutsche Firmen erhalten Zugang zu einem der grössten Uran-Vorkommen der Welt." *Zeit*, Nr. 41, Freitag, den 9. Oktober 1970, 31.

¹⁴ According to the World Nuclear Association, a small uranium mine was operated in West Germany between 1960 and 1989. Much of the produce from this mine was used for research purposes in nuclear research centres in West Germany. <http://www.world-nuclear.org/infromation-library/country-profiles-g-n/germany.aspx>, accessed 17 August 2020.

¹⁵ Hoffmann, "Droht ein zweites Caborra Bassa", 31.

¹⁶ Murray, et al., *The Role of Foreign Firms*, 91.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 3.

¹⁹ In Africa, several projects were explored in countries like Somalia, Tanzania, Ghana and Togo, none of which yielded positive results for the German companies. BAK B/196/33620, Sigurd Illing.

Rössing venture.²⁰ Inter-ministerial discussions in Bonn were, however, focused on the political challenges posed specifically by the international status of Namibia. Once the extent of these political challenges was established, the question of Urangesellschaft's participation in the Rössing project was put before the West German Cabinet.²¹ A Cabinet decision was, however, set aside to allow the West German government time to observe as international developments at the United Nations (UN), with direct bearing on investments in Namibia, unfolded. These developments included the UN Security Council resolutions on Namibia as well as a request for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In the meantime, RTZ's application to the South African authorities for the establishment of the company through which it would exploit the Rössing deposits was approved. This was confirmed in May 1969 when the Minister of Mines, Dr. C. de Wet, announced through a media release that a company would be formed to exploit the uranium deposits in Namibia, which had been under investigation by RTMS for a period of two years.²² Rössing Uranium Limited (RUL) was established and registered in South Africa in July 1969 as a subsidiary of RTZ. The press release from the Minister of Mines stated that RTZ were the majority equity holders in RUL and would act as the technical, administrative, commercial and financial managers of the mining venture.²³ In September 1970, the Minister of Mines issued RUL with Mining Grant M. 46/4/5.²⁴ The mining rights were "granted in terms of Section 61 of the Mines, Works and Minerals Ordinance, 1968 (Ordinance 20 of 1968 of South West Africa)" which was the controlling mineral legislation of the territory.²⁵

Following the establishment of RUL, RTZ and Urangesellschaft concluded an agreement on 26 March 1970, "in a spirit of partnership and goodwill".²⁶ The agreement between the two entities was described as "a package deal covering exploration, feasibility studies, financing and supply of U₃O₈".²⁷ The Heads of Agreement reveal that Urangesellschaft "un-

²⁰ BAK, B/196/33619 Herr Keinlein (Urangesellschaft mbH) to Herr Dr. Schmidt-Küster (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaftliche Forschung), "Antrag auf Förderungsmassnahmen des Bundes im Zusammenhang mit dem Projekt Rössing", 26 September 1969, 2.

²¹ BAK, B/196/33620, Langfristige Uranversorgung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland; hier: Bedeutung des Projektes Rössing, Bonn, den 23 Oktober 1970, 2.

²² TNA, AB 48/1913 Dr. C. de Wet (Minister of Mines, Planning and Health), S.W. African Uranium Venture. Extract from Mining Journal, 2 May 1969. RTZ obtained the satisfactory assurance of the Minister of Mines, that mining rights would be granted, on the 28th April 1969 and on the 8th May 1969, the option agreement with G. P. Louw was exercised. BAK, B/196/ 33619, 26 September 1969.

²³ TNA, AB 48/1913, 2 May 1969.

²⁴ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 42.

²⁵ NARSSA, BAO 3/3760 A12/1/1/3/576/1, Issued by Minister Carel de Wet 25 September 1970.

²⁶ BAK, B/196/33619, Heads of Agreement between Rio Tinto Management Services South Africa, Rössing Mining Company and Urangesellschaft, Draft Part B—Sale of Uranium B.3. Commencement date and quantity, 12.

²⁷ TNA, AB 48/1278, "R. W. Wright, Deputy Chairman and Deputy Chief Executive of RTZ in a letter to E. J. S. Clarke, UKAEA," 19 January 1973, 1.

dertook to provide in excess of 2.5 million dollars in the form of an unsecured loan”.²⁸ German government sources confirm that Urangesellschaft’s participation in RUL came at a cost of 6 million DM (Deutsch Mark) which was secured through government funding.²⁹ The unsecured loan was paid out to RUL over a period of two years between 1970 and 1971 at DM 3 million per annum. RTZ’s deputy chief executive, Roy Wright, stated that if a conclusion had been reached that the deposits were not worth exploring and a decision was taken not to bring RUL into production then Urangesellschaft would have forfeited the “unsecured loan”.³⁰

In addition to the above, Urangesellschaft undertook to broker “a proportion of the very substantial loan finance required to bring the mine into operation”.³¹ The proportion of the loan finance which Urangesellschaft sought to secure through government guarantees, was estimated at 70 million DM (£8 million).³² Under the Heads of Agreement, Urangesellschaft committed to purchase 6,000 tonnes of uranium ore from RUL, with an annual delivery of 750 tonnes between 1976 and 1983.³³ The agreement provided an option to increase the annual tonnage to an additional 250 tonnes (1,000 tonnes annually).³⁴ The 6,000 tonnes of uranium ore were to be made available to Urangesellschaft at a price cheaper than the world market price.³⁵ In return for its undertakings, RTZ offered Urangesellschaft an option to acquire 10 per cent equity in RUL. The equity percentage was made available to Urangesellschaft at a price of 11.5 million DM, which option Urangesellschaft was required to exercise by 1972.³⁶

Because of the agreement with Urangesellschaft, RTZ was able to produce a feasibility study of the Rössing deposits which proved that the project was indeed viable.³⁷ Once the viability of the project was established, RUL reimbursed Urangesellschaft’s “unsecured

²⁸ TNA, AB 48/1278, 19 January 1973, 1.

²⁹ 2.5 million dollars appeared to have been equivalent to 6 million Deutsch Mark. BAK B/196/33620, 23 October 1970, 2.

³⁰ TNA, AB 48/1278, 19 January 1978, 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² BAK, B/196/33620, Uranlagerstätte Rössing, Dr. Mohrhauer in a letter to the Bundesminister für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, 13 May 1971. TNA, AB44/263, “Uranium in South-West Africa”, Sophia J. Lambert in a letter to John E. C. Macrae, “Uranium in South-West Africa”, 15 October 1970, 1.

³³ BAK, B/196/33619, Antrag auf Risikobeteiligung des Bundes an unseren Uranabnahmeverträgen mit den Firmen Somair, Niger, und Rössing, Südwestafrika, Urangesellschaft mbH in a letter to the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 27 October 1969, 1.

³⁴ BAK, B/196/33619, Heads of Agreement between Rio Tinto Management Services South Africa, Rössing Mining Company and Urangesellschaft, Draft Part B—Sale of Uranium B.3. Commencement date and quantity, 8.

³⁵ On the uranium “market price” see Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 50.

³⁶ BAK B/196/33619, 27 October 1969, 12. BAK B/196/33620, 31 May 1971.

³⁷ BAK B/196/33619, 27 October 1969, 12.

loan” of 6 million DM. The loan, coupled with Urangesellschaft’s 11.5 million DM buy-in to RUL, and the potential loan finance of 70 million DM, made the West German entity a valuable partner for RTZ. Urangesellschaft’s undertakings were considered of vital importance to RUL, for as Roy Wright noted “no other country or customer in the world would have contemplated it [...] bearing in mind all the circumstances of Rössing”.³⁸ By “country” and “customer”, Roy Wright was referring to West Germany and Urangesellschaft and their role in the exploration phase of RUL.

The “circumstances of Rössing” were, however, contemplated in Bonn, where the West German government’s focus was especially on the “political challenges” posed by the project in relation to the international responsibility towards the territory in which the project was located. Of particular interest was the UN Security Council Resolutions 283 (1970) which called on UN member states to disinvest in Namibia (see Chapter 4) and “to withhold from their nationals or companies of their nationality not under direct governmental control, government loans, credit guarantees and other forms of financial support that would be used to facilitate trade or commerce with Namibia”.³⁹ Resolution 283 (1970) called on UN member states to cease all investment in Namibia and to encourage individuals and companies of their nationality to “cease all dealings with respect to commercial or industrial enterprises or concessions in Namibia”.⁴⁰ Urangesellschaft’s request for government guarantees from the West German government, and the incentives provided under the West German government’s nuclear energy objectives, fell under the realm of resolution 283. The subsequent advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see Chapter 4) gave further impetus to the West German government’s consideration of Urangesellschaft’s participation in RUL.

In January 1971, the West German government decided to withdraw government guarantees for the application for loan finance submitted by Urangesellschaft. The decision to withdraw support from Urangesellschaft was announced in both the German and English press, with the precise details of what the government guarantees would have amounted to.⁴¹ The official reason for withdrawing support from the RTZ-Urangesellschaft partnership, according to the West German government, was the availability of alternative supplies of uranium, namely from Australia and Canada. These alternative sources of uranium meant that the West German government did not need to depend on uranium supplies from RUL.⁴² The other, not so official reason cited for the withdrawal of support was the “political

³⁸ TNA, AB 48/1278, 19 January 1978, 2.

³⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 283 (1970), Namibia, of 29 July 1970. www.digital-library.un.org, accessed 17 November 2020.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁴¹ TNA AB 48/1278 *The Daily Telegraph*, “Bonn Drops £8m S. African Ore Project”, Monday, January 11, 1971.

⁴² Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 3.

background” associated with the source from which the uranium under the RTZ-Urangesellschaft partnership would have been obtained. Following newspaper reports on the West German government’s withdrawal of support from RUL, a British Labour Party parliamentarian noted that “there is no doubt that the political background was the controversy about South Africa’s occupation of Namibia”.⁴³ This confirmed that what RTZ had described as a “package deal” had the West German government’s approval only in as far as the exploration and feasibility studies were concerned (Chapter 4). The millions worth of loan finance, which Urangesellschaft had undertaken to provide, was considered a “political” step too far for Bonn. Political considerations had thus trumped economic and strategic considerations for the West German government.

Rössing Uranium’s South African Partners

In 1969 RTZ established RUL, the subsidiary through which the multinational corporation would develop the Rössing deposits. The South African government had granted prospecting and mining rights to RTZ on condition that the control over RUL would be held by a South African entity.⁴⁴ The chosen enterprise for South African control was the state-owned Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC). The IDC was established “in terms of the Industrial Development Act (No.22 of 1940)” and it was “designed to provide a mechanism for financing the promotion, through private enterprise, of soundly based industrial development” and to “assist in the financing of new industries and industrial undertakings”.⁴⁵ Its primary purpose therefore was to assist private initiatives in accessing financing for new or established ventures. The financing capacity of the IDC made it the perfect medium through which South African control and investment in RUL would be exercised.

The Minister’s announcement was confirmed in May 1971 through a press release issued by RTZ under the heading “Rössing Uranium to Develop Open Cast Uranium Mine”.⁴⁶ The press release not only announced RTZ’s intention to develop a mining operation in Namibia, but it also revealed that the necessary finance to develop the mine would be acquired through the IDC. The West German government’s rebuff of Urangesellschaft’s involvement in Rössing meant that RTZ had required a new partner to help secure the necessary loan

⁴³ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia, (20 October 1975 HL Deb vol 364 cc1226-34) <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1975/oct/20/uranium-purchases-from-namibia>, accessed 8 June 2020.

⁴⁴ TNA AB 48/1913, 2 May 1969.

⁴⁵ G. S. J. Kuschke, “South Africa: the basic philosophy on which her economic prosperity has been built” (Johannesburg: Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa Limited, 1966), 5.

⁴⁶ TNA AB 48/1278, Press release: Rössing Uranium to Develop Open Cast Uranium Mine, Rio Tinto-Zinc Corporation Limited Wednesday, 19 May 1971, London.

finance and shoulder the economic risk involved in the venture. It was then that the partnership between RTZ and the IDC was formalised. As a state-owned enterprise, the IDC not only had the political backing of the South African government, but was also well positioned to take on Urangesellschaft's commitment to broker a proportion of the loan finance that was required to bring RUL into production.⁴⁷ The IDC was immune to political pressure from the growing international anti-apartheid movement, unlike the West German government.

The IDC's General Manager was the geologist Siegfried Kuschke who had carried out geological studies on the Rössing deposits for the geological survey of South Africa in 1949 and was therefore well acquainted with the area. Moreover, Daniel writes that "fortunately Siegfried Kuschke was on good terms with Roy Wright [the Chairman of RTZ] and had a healthy respect for RTZ following the success of Palabora. He was on the Board of Palabora and was anxious that Rössing should also succeed".⁴⁸ Kuschke's geological work on the Rössing deposits and the IDC's mandate to contribute to the industrial development of South Africa undoubtedly contributed to the decision to invest in RUL. According to Eric Rosenthal, the IDC's role was to "play its part in the industrial expansion of the Union [of South Africa] to whatever extent it is called upon to do so".⁴⁹ RUL might not have been located in Union territory but it represented the "extent" to which the IDC was willing to go for the good of South Africa, after all, the IDC had no geographical limitations to the attainment of its objectives.⁵⁰ The move represented a good example of how the South African state sought to harness Namibian resources to fuel its own industrial development and to counter the dominance of British capital.

The loan finance that was furnished to RUL by the IDC was worth £30 million and it was channelled to the mine through two main sources.⁵¹ The first lender of finance was Navik (Proprietary) Limited, with whom RUL signed a concession agreement in 1971, in which the mine consented to assign rights to Navik as security for the loan finance that would be furnished to the mining venture.⁵² Navik was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the IDC.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The IDC had invested in RTZ's Palabora Copper mine and therefore had an established relationship with RTZ.

⁴⁹ Rosenthal, Industrial Development Corporation, 29.

⁵⁰ Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa. SESA v.6 Cape Town, 1972.

⁵¹ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia, 20 October 1975.

⁵² TNA EG 7/139, D. F. Sims (The Legal Adviser, United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority) in a letter to P. H. Dean (Legal Advisor, RTZ), Uranium Sales Agreements dated 29 April 1968 and 26 March 1970, 1 September 1971.

⁵³ TNA EG 7/139, B. C. J. Lloyd, (Marketing Manager Rössing Uranium Limited) in a letter to F. A. Ticehurst (UKAEA), Uranium Sales Agreements, 26 August 1971. In 1983, RUL, Navik and IDC signed an agreement "in terms of which Rössing will effect early repayment of all its outstanding indebtedness to Navik under certain US dollar and Deutschmark loan agreements in return for which Navik and IDC agree to the cancelation of certain securities and the removal of certain

The second source of finance came through a British bank, Schroder Wagg, that entered into a financial agreement with the IDC in 1971, primarily for the exploitation of the Rössing deposits.⁵⁴ Schroder Wagg's financial agreement with the IDC came to light when the bank applied for a Line of Credit from the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), a department of the British government. Schroder Wagg had, prior to the agreement with the IDC, already applied for credit guarantees on exports to South Africa. In 1971 Schroder Wagg sought to get the loan finance provided to the Industrial Development Corporation included in its initial application for credit guarantees on exports to South Africa. Although the application for the Line of Credit was approved in the same year, it only came into effect in April of 1974.⁵⁵ Whether or not the delayed approval was influenced by the 1971 advisory opinion of the ICJ, or the resolutions of the UN Security Council is not clear.

Whereas RTZ had offered Urangesellschaft 10 per cent equity, the IDC obtained 13.2 per cent equity in RUL. Compared to RTZ's 46 per cent share in RUL, however, the IDC's 13.2 per cent equity seemed substantially smaller. The IDC, nevertheless, held effective control of RUL both because voting rights on the Board of Directors were separated from equity through the different categories of shares and because of the South African government, and particularly the Atomic Energy Board's, control over uranium resources in the territory under the Atomic Energy Act.⁵⁶ The AEB had especially sought to ensure that they exercised oversight on uranium production in Namibia, so as to uphold South African interest in the territory.⁵⁷ The IDC's minority holding in the company enabled the South African government to exercise a controlling influence in RUL, even if production remained the domain of RTZ.⁵⁸ The effect of the loan financing availed through the IDC was to give ultimate voting control to South African interests.

restrictive conditions relating to the Sterling and Rand Agreements dated respectively 28 June 1972 and 15 October 1974." RUL—Minutes of the seventy-sixth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Boardroom, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek South West Africa/Namibia on Wednesday, 16 March 1983, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 1049 Finance, 7.

⁵⁴ TNA EG 7/139 V. I. Chapman (Export and Credits Guarantee Department) in a letter to P. M. Foster, (Central and Southern Africa Department Foreign & Commonwealth Office), Namibia: Rössing Uranium Mine, 31 May 1974, 1.

⁵⁵ Schroder Wagg had obtained a Line of Credit from the Export Credits Guarantee Department for the export of goods to South Africa in September of 1970. Schroder Wagg later applied for the Line of Credit to be amended to cover a contract involving sales to a company to be set up in 1971 to exploit a uranium deposit in Namibia (Rössing Uranium), which was to be jointly owned by the IDC and by RTZ. This amendment of the Line of Credit was approved by the Department in 1971 and it came into effect in 1974.

⁵⁶ Atomic Energy Act of South Africa, 1948 (as amended in Act 90 of 1967).

⁵⁷ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 88.

⁵⁸ TNA EG 7/139, Namibia: Uranium Supplies—Revised October 1974, 1.

Alongside the IDC, RTZ partnered with the South African mining company, the General Mining & Finance Corporation Limited. General Mining's participation in RUL was announced through a press release in June 1970 following media speculation that the mining finance house had been lined up to replace Urangesellschaft as RTZ's prospecting partner.⁵⁹ In the 1950s, General Mining became South Africa's first mining company to produce uranium as a by-product of its gold mining and by the 1960s was South Africa's leading uranium producer accounting for more than a third of the country's uranium output.⁶⁰ The corporation's experience with uranium mining and the close links it enjoyed to the ruling Afrikaner power bloc is said to have expedited the granting of equity in RUL. A statement by the Chairman of General Mining confirmed their estimated contribution to RUL's expenses for the pilot programme as having been R1,100,000 (South African Rand).⁶¹ What General Mining paid for the share capital requirements that were in proportion to their 6.8 per cent equity holding in RUL was not revealed except that their "investment could conceivably yield a few more million".⁶²

General Mining's participation in the Rössing venture was quite significant in that it represented the aspiration of Afrikaner nationalists to match Afrikaner capital with that of British capital in South Africa's mining industry. General Mining was a gold mining company that was purchased by the Federale Mynbou Beperk in 1963.⁶³ The Federale Mynbou Beperk was founded and controlled by two companies. The first was the Federale Volksbeleggings, an industrial and mining investment house founded by the Broederbond which spearheaded Afrikaner investment in major sectors of the South African economy, and the second was SANLAM, the largest Afrikaner insurance company, founded in 1914 to channel Afrikaner savings into Afrikaner businesses.⁶⁴ The acquisition of General Mining by the Federale Mynbou Beperk was, therefore, part of a policy to enable Afrikaner business interests to gain a foothold in South Africa's mining industry, dominated as it was by British capital. General Mining was the first major mining company controlled by Afrikaner capital

⁵⁹ TNA AB 48/1278, *Daily Telegraph*, "General Mining forecasts bigger earnings", 27 June 1970. TNA FCO 96/414, The Africa Bureau, "Rössing Contract" Namibia News, May 1973.

⁶⁰ In 1980 General Mining merged with Finance Corporation and the Union Corporation to become General Mining Union Corporation Ltd. (Gencor). Gencor Ltd., Company Profile, History. www.refrenceforbusiness.com/Gencor, accessed 2 November 2020.

⁶¹ TNA AB 48/1278, *Financial Times*, "General Mining and Mining Finance Corporation Limited—Statement by the Chairman Mr. W. W. Coetzer", 23 June 1970.

⁶² TNA AB 48/1278, 27 June 1970.

⁶³ Lanning and Mueller, *Africa Undermined*, 315.

⁶⁴ Federale Mynbou Beperk became the second-largest South African mining house through its 51 per cent control of General Mining Union Corp. SANLAM owns 47 per cent of Federale Volksbeleggings and 46 per cent of Federale Mynbou. People for Southern Africa Forum, "Profile: Southern Africa Forum", June 1982. Available at: <http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-1E3E-84-psaf%20profile.pdf>, accessed 2 November 2020.

and it would, through its investment in the RUL, represent Afrikaner interests in the mining industry of Namibia. General Mining's acquisition of equity in RUL further served to entrench South African interest in RUL.⁶⁵

Tax Exemptions and Infrastructural Support for Rössing

Once the South African interests and control in RUL were secured, the South African government, and its administration in Namibia, presented RTZ with what was described by the local press as "one of the best deals ever granted by a government to any foreign company".⁶⁶ The first part of the deal had to do with the duration of the mineral grant period, which according to the issued mining grant "shall endure until such time as the minerals which are the subject of this grant and which can be profitably mined have become exhausted".⁶⁷ RTZ was permitted to exploit the Rössing deposits "for a period with no fixed limit," in other words, the estimated life span of the mine.⁶⁸ The second part of the deal dealt with the rental rate that had to be paid to the Ministry of Mines by RUL. The mine had to pay "a rental calculated at the rate of two Rand per annum per hectare or portion of a hectare contained in the grant area" to the Mining Commissioner in Windhoek "with effect from the 29th April, 1969".⁶⁹ The reduced mining grant area acquired from the Louw Company by RTZ placed the grant area at roughly 2980 ha, bringing the annual rental fee to R5, 960. According to RTZ records, this amount was rounded off to a licence fee of R6, 000 per annum.⁷⁰

Lastly, and certainly the most important aspect of this deal was that the South African government exempted RUL from paying direct taxes until such time when RTZ had redeemed its capital investment in the venture.⁷¹ This was provided for "under the terms of the South African Income Tax Act of 1963", which allowed companies to "write off all their capitalized pre-production expenditures against their taxation liability".⁷² RTZ's capital investment in RUL amounted to R350 million which had to be amortised to the multinational corporation before it could pay any taxes to the South African government and its administration in Namibia.⁷³ This presumably explains why RTZ were willing to give the

⁶⁵ TNA AB 48/1278, 23 June 1970.

⁶⁶ *Windhoek Observer*, "Rössing—Blessing or Curse of Exploitation", 8 August 1981, 22.

⁶⁷ NARSSA BAO 3/3760 A12/1/1/1/3/576/1, Mining Grant M. 46/4/5 Granted in Terms of Section 61 of the Mines, Works and Minerals Ordinance 1968 (Ordinance 20 of 1968 of South West Africa).

⁶⁸ TNA AB 48/1913, R. F. Lethbridge, "Rössing Project—Notes on Contract Position", 20 June 1969.

⁶⁹ NARSSA BAO 3/3760 A12/1/1/1/3/576/1 Mining Grant M. 46/4/5.

⁷⁰ TNA AB 48/1913, 20 June 1969.

⁷¹ *Windhoek Observer*, "Rössing—Blessing or Curse", 22.

⁷² Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, 16.

⁷³ TNA AB 48/1913, 20 June 1969.

IDC greater voting rights than their equity participation. Newspaper reports from 1981 confirmed that RTZ was yet to redeem its capital investment in RUL and had up until that point not paid any taxes to the South African administration.⁷⁴

This was an extraordinary level of tax exemption, considering that in the 1960s companies operating in Namibia had to pay an annual tax of 30 per cent.⁷⁵ The annual tax rate that had to be paid by mining companies in Namibia was however comparably lower to that paid by their counterparts in South Africa. Mining companies in South Africa paid taxes which amounted to 42.5 per cent, 12.5 per cent more than their Namibian counterparts.⁷⁶ There is a possibility that the decision to allow RTZ to first redeem its capital investment in RUL, before the payment of taxes could be applied, was applicable to the IDC and the General Mining and Finance Corporation as well. This would ensure that South African interests would themselves have redeemed their capital investment and loan financing toward RUL. The tax exemption brought the sum total of revenue accrued from RUL to the South African administration of the territory to a mere R6, 000 per annum. Calculate this over a period of twenty-four years, from the establishment of RUL in 1966 to the granting of independence in 1990, and RTZ would only have paid R144, 000 to the colonial administration. The tax exemption not only illustrates how little the territory benefited from the exploitation of its uranium resources but it also explains the mutually beneficial nature of the deal between RTZ and the South African government.

By virtue of its location on “State Lands, South of the Swakopmund–Usakos tarred road, near Arandis Siding, in the District of Swakopmund”, RUL benefited from the provision of state and municipal services, such as the supply of electrical power to the mine site, the extension of rail and road infrastructure to the mine site, as well as the provision of water to the mine “all at State’s expense”.⁷⁷ Spatially, RUL’s mine site was located close to the existing transport network as well as the local electrical power supply line. Work on the transport network only required the construction of an additional rail and road link from the mine to the Usakos–Swakopmund railway line and road network, which was paid for by the colonial administration. The main infrastructural challenge for RUL, arising from its location on the fringes of a desert, was access to water. During the exploration stage of the RUL, fresh water was transported by road to the mine site from the town of Swakopmund. RUL’s average water needs were, however, exceeded once the actual construction of the mine, and the construction of the main plant under the construction and development stage, commenced. The water was needed for RUL’s mining and processing operations and this prompted the

⁷⁴ Windhoek Observer, “Rössing—Blessing or Curse”, 17.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ NARSSA BAO 3/3760 A12/1/1/3/576/, John Berning, Annexure ‘A’ Special Power of Attorney, 26 August 1975. *Windhoek Observer*, “Rössing—Blessing or Curse”, 22.

South African Department of Water Affairs to advertise a tender for the manufacturing and supply of water pipes that would resolve the mine's future water needs. In 1973 the contract for the supply of the water pipes was awarded to an American company, Interspace Inc., and in 1974 the pipes, which drew water from Swakopmund to RUL, were laid by the Lock Joint Pipe Co. Ltd of Johannesburg, which costs were defrayed through state coffers.⁷⁸ The water supply to the mine was facilitated by the Department of Water Affairs from reservoirs built for RUL, while the electric power to the mine was supplied by SWAWEK (South West Africa Water and Electricity Corporation).⁷⁹ This degree of state investment in the physical requirements of the venture was indicative of the importance of RUL to the South Africa government.

Conclusion

Rio Tinto Zinc's exploration of the Rössing deposits commenced almost immediately after the multinational corporation had acquired the exploration concessions from the Louw Company in August 1966. Thereafter, RTZ sought to secure first the mining rights to the Rössing deposits from the South African government and secondly the necessary loan finance to commence with the exploration of the Rössing deposits. The "foreign" status of RTZ, and its representation of British capital, were met with a degree of hostility by South African authorities, particularly the Atomic Energy Board of South Africa. The AEB was especially hesitant about the granting of exclusive rights to the uranium deposits of Namibia, which the entity felt would be to the disadvantage of the South African government. The hostility was, however, quickly replaced by a close and lucrative relationship between state and firm. The South African government acquired control over the decision-making process within RUL through a shareholding arrangement that would allow for representation and voting control on the Rössing Board. South African investment in RUL was channelled through the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) and the General Mining and Finance Corporation. This illustrated the interlocking networks between mining companies and the state in South Africa. These interlocking networks were not only extended to RTZ but were crucial for the development of RUL. This was especially in light of the territory's disputed international status and international campaign to isolate the South African regime. These events informed the West German government's decision to withdraw support for Urangesellschaft's participation in RUL and resulted in RTZ's dependence

⁷⁸ TNA FCO 96/414, May 1973.

⁷⁹ The South West Africa Water and Electricity Corporation (SWAWEK) was formed on 19 December 1964 as a private and fully affiliated company of the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) of the Republic of South Africa. <https://www.nampower.com.na/About.aspx>, accessed 8 June 2020.

on South African support. In as far as investment in RUL was concerned, the IDC was more immune to the political considerations which outweighed economic interests in West Germany. Moreover, South African support for the Rössing project was not only limited to the loan financing but it also came in the form of infrastructural projects, such as the rail and road network and the provision of water and electrical power to the mine. RTZ, on the other hand, were able to secure the day-to-day operational control over the Rössing project. The partnership guaranteed a tax exemption which allowed RTZ to regain its capital investment in the Rössing project. Due to the partnership with the South African government, RTZ were guaranteed the financial and political support the company needed to get the Rössing project off the ground. South African capital and governmental support were important in facilitating RUL's presence on the Namibian mining scene.

4 The Construction and Development Stage

Introduction

RUL's exploration stage was brought to a successful conclusion in 1971 and "after a long programme of geological surveys, drilling and evaluation, it was decided to proceed with the construction of the mine in 1973".¹ The mine's location in a previously uninhabited area, on the fringes of the Namib Desert, was not without its challenges. The RTZ team was, however, committed to establishing a multifaceted, state of the art, mining venture and it would be:

[...] much more than a hole in the ground, hewn out of the rock in a remote location. There would be not only a mine but a vast and complex processing plant, maintenance workshops for plants and mine equipment, a means of supplying water and disposing of tailings, an electricity supply with sub-station, administrative offices and computer bureau, clinic, fire-station, railway sidings, training centre, catering facilities, laboratories—and people.²

This required the British multinational corporation to secure the necessary finance to develop this vast and complex venture. Services such as the electrical, rail, road and water connections were secured through the extensive support extended to RUL by the South African administration (see Chapter 3). RTZ, however, anticipated that there would be considerable challenges associated with this next phase, challenges that required solutions far beyond the support provided by the South African authorities. The financial aspects related to the development of the mining complex were the predominant concern for RTZ. But so too were the diplomatic and political challenges posed by the international status of the territory in which the company intended to establish its operations. Daniel writes that the final decision for developing the mine would rest with RTZ's "Capital Expenditures Committee in London" and "their decision would bring in other considerations. For instance, was the political situation in Namibia such that it presented an unacceptable risk?"³

The question of Namibian independence became acute in the late 1960s and by the early 1970s the South African administration of the territory had been declared illegal.⁴ To navigate the risks of developing a mining venture in disputed territory, RTZ adopted a strategy

¹ The Star's Africa News Service, "Mine boost for SWA economy", *The Star*, 15 May 1978.

² Rössing Uranium Limited, *An Introduction to Rössing: the largest uranium mine in the world*. BAP338.274932 INTRO Special Collections, University of Cape Town.

³ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 48.

⁴ International Court of Justice, Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa). Notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970). Press Communique. No. 70/7, 6 August 1970 <http://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/53/11447.pdf>, accessed 11 April 2018.

of financing RUL through a dual system of equity and long-term sales contracts. This strategy was directed at atomic energy agencies and power utility companies in countries such as Britain, Canada, France, Japan and West Germany. By adopting this method of financing RTZ was able to build on the support that had been availed by the South African regime and to align its operations with the national interests of the aforementioned countries. This method of financing secured national and international support for RTZ's operations at RUL.

In return RTZ offered its partners privileged access to a secure source of uranium for their nuclear power programmes. This was particularly important in the context of the oil crisis of the early 1970s which "heightened concerns about the dangers of Western dependence on Third World resources" (see Chapter 4).⁵ These concerns shaped the energy policies of Western countries as they sought to diversify their energy sources. The expansion of nuclear power programmes was one such response and it required a secure supply of uranium. Privileged access to sources like the Rössing deposits was thus desirable, particularly for British government officials (see Chapter 5) who stressed that "a nuclear energy programme is impossible without guaranteed supplies of uranium" and it is these supplies that RTZ sought to guarantee.⁶ The strategy was essential to providing RTZ a buffer against international calls to disinvest in Namibia, a buffer which RTZ's partners were well placed to maintain. After all, two of RTZ's partners were permanent members of the UN Security Council (Britain and France) and two others served as non-permanent members of the Security Council (Canada and Japan) in the period under study. In addition, companies in the United States (another permanent member of the Security Council) did business with RUL.

Chapter 4 begins with an examination of the process of constructing the mine and its accompanying facilities. The opening section examines the negotiations and collaboration between RUL's management and the South African authorities pertaining to the provision of housing and other facilities for the mine's workforce. The chapter then moves away from the mine site to RTZ's offices in Johannesburg and headquarters in London where the strategy of financing is brought into operation in order to secure capital for RUL. While remaining in the international arena, the chapter concludes with an examination of the international community's response to the exploitation of the natural resources of Namibia and RTZ's position on the international community's actions.

⁵ D. S. Painter, "Oil and Geopolitics: The Oil Crises of the 1970s and the Cold War." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 2014, Vol. 39, No. 4 (150), Special Issue: The Energy Crises of the 1970s: Anticipations and Reactions in the Industrialized World (2014), pp. 186–208, 187.

⁶ TNA AB 44/264 G. W. Thynne Department of Energy to E. J. S Clarke, UKAEA 23 May 1974.

Rössing Uranium: Housing and Construction

In 1971, it was decided that the management contract for the detailed engineering and construction of the plant be awarded to “an international consortium with a proven record in the design of uranium and large tonnage plants”.⁷ A tender was accordingly advertised and a consortium formed out of a partnership between Western Knapp (USA) and Davy Power Gas (UK) was “appointed as principal design and construction managers in 1971”.⁸ The timing of their appointment coincided with the development of the pilot plant operation at Rössing and this granted the American–British consortium the opportunity to fully understand the type of plant that would be required.⁹ According to a RUL publication, the “skilled labour, materials and equipment” for the design and construction of the pilot plant “came mainly from the United States and South Africa”.¹⁰ The assistance from South Africa came mainly through the Atomic Energy Board of South Africa (AEB) whose Annual Report of 1971 noted that “a close association was maintained with all aspects of the work at Rössing and valuable assistance was given in the design and operation of the pilot plant”.¹¹ The close association between the AEB and RUL was cemented a year later when the Chairman of RUL, Dr. P. E. Rousseau, was appointed to the Atomic Energy Board on 1st March, 1972 and to the AEB’s Executive Committee on 23rd June 1972.¹²

Following the “successful pilot operations in 1971/1972 testing ore samples and recovery processes, orders for mine equipment and contracts for civil work were placed in 1973”.¹³ While awaiting the deliveries of the equipment and the commencement of civil works, RUL constructed a pre-production camp to house the first group of employees and construction workers. The camp was divided into three campsites, as illustrated by the map in Figure 3, which were constructed in respect of Whites (also referred to as Europeans in the map), Coloureds (individuals of mixed race) and Blacks (also referred to as Natives or Bantu in certain colonial records). The separation of the campsites along racial lines was in adherence to the policy of segregation under the apartheid regime and would later be

⁷ BAK, B/196/33619, 26 September 1969.

⁸ Rössing Uranium, *Reflecting on 40 years*, 2. The participation of an American company in the construction of the mine’s plant operations was the reason for initial speculations that American power utilities had invested in Rössing Uranium. The Power Gas–Western Knapp contract was worth approximately £32 million. TNA AB 44/264 Central and Southern African Department, Annex D—Namibia: Rössing Uranium Mine, 16 April 1974, 1.

⁹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 48. Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 5.

¹⁰ Rössing Uranium, *Reflecting on 40 years*, 2.

¹¹ Atomic Energy Board, Republic of South Africa, *Fifteenth Annual Report, 1971 G68ES(ATOM) s.92/35 Special Collections*, University of Cape Town.

¹² Dr. P. E. Rousseau replaced Dr. G. S. J. Kuschke (Deceased on 27th July, 1971) as Chairman of Rössing. Dr. Rousseau was later appointed to the Executive Committee of the ABE (appointed on 23rd June, 1972). Atomic Energy Board Republic of South Africa, *Sixteenth Annual Report 1972*.

¹³ TNA AB 44/264, 16 April 1974, 1.

adopted in the company's policy of providing permanent housing to its workforce. Separate campsites had meant the construction and provision of separate dining and recreational facilities for the different racial groups that constituted RUL's workforce.¹⁴ The proximity of the sewage ponds and the tailings disposal area to the campsite for the black workers, as compared to that of the white workers, as indicated in Figure 3¹⁵, is particularly telling of the racial hierarchy that governed labour relations in the period under study.

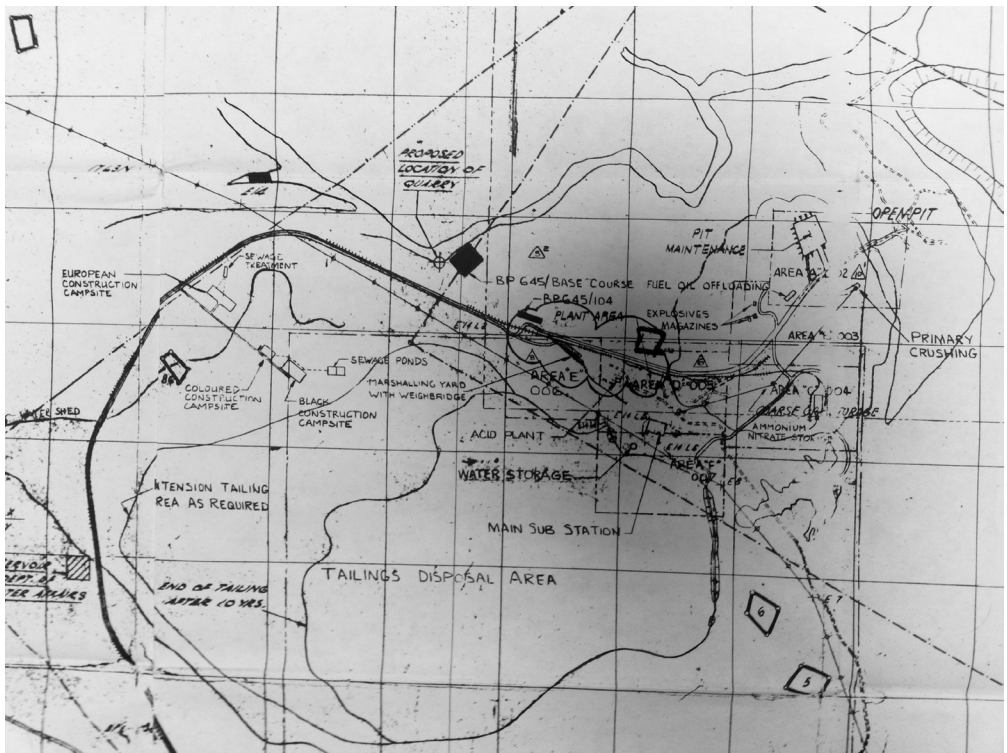


Figure 3: Plan of the Rössing Mine, indicating the segregated construction campsites for Black, Coloured and European workers

The campsites were only a temporary situation purposed for the construction of the mine's operational facilities. On the question of permanent housing, RUL's management held discussions with the territory's administration in May 1970 "on the question of how and where to provide housing for the future employees of the uranium mine".¹⁶ The result of these

¹⁴ NARSSA BAO 3/3760 A12/1/1/1/3/S76/1, Annexure B: Applicant's Representations.

¹⁵ Published by the United Nations in Plunder of Namibian Uranium: Major Findings of the Hearings on Namibian Uranium Held by the United Nations Council for Namibia in July 1980. (New York: UNCN, 1982).

¹⁶ National Archives of Namibia (hereafter NAN) JX-0012, C. Algar, "Arandis: the newest town in the

discussions was the establishment of “a committee consisting of representatives of government departments, nearby municipalities [Swakopmund and Usakos] and of Rössing”.¹⁷ In February 1971 the committee recommended that “the existing town of Swakopmund was suitable for housing some employees, but that a new town should be established near Arandis railway siding in Damaraland, 12 kilometres from the Rössing mine, to house the unskilled and lower levels of semi-skilled employees”.¹⁸ By “some employees” was therefore meant that the skilled ‘White’ workforce would be housed in Swakopmund, along with the upper levels of semi-skilled (who too were predominantly White, with some Coloured workers and an even smaller number of Black workers). The unskilled ‘black’ workforce would be separately accommodated at the newly established mining town of Arandis, whose proximity to the mine site would later raise concerns over the health implications for this workforce.¹⁹ To attract the indigenous Namibian labour, which would constitute the semi-skilled and unskilled workforce, the South African administration distributed calls for work through the district magistrate’s offices, demonstrating once again the state’s willingness to see RUL’s operations come to fruition.

In 1974, RUL awarded a contract to the civil engineering associate company of the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa for the construction of 234 houses in the town of Swakopmund.²⁰ The houses were constructed in two newly established neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood of Venita accommodated RUL’s White workforce, while RUL’s semi-skilled workforce (composed predominantly of its Coloured workforce, with some Black workers) were accommodated in the neighbourhood of Tamariskia.²¹ The provision of housing was especially useful in attracting skilled White labour from the mining communities within the southern African region. To provide accommodation for its unskilled workforce RTZ reached an agreement with the South African administration for the construction of the Arandis settlement. The aim according to RUL’s Chairman was to provide accommodation “which would stand up to international inspection”.²²

According to the agreement RUL would construct an initial 600 houses to house both married and single employees and the company would provide electricity, water, sewerage,

oldest Desert”, SWA Annual 1981, 45.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See G. Hecht, “Hopes for the Radiated Body: Uranium Miners and Transnational Technopolitics in Namibia.” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2010), pp. 213–34 doi:10.1017/S0021853710000198.

²⁰ TNA FCO 96/414, May 1973.

²¹ TNA EG 7/216RTZ, Fact Sheet No. 2—Some Aspects of Rössing Uranium, 20 May 1975, 1.

²² RUL—Minutes of the forty-seventh meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Capital Centre, Hepworths’ Arcade, Kaiser/Stubel Streets, Windhoek on Thursday, 13 October 1977, 10h30, Agenda Item: 592 Accommodation of Personnel, 9.

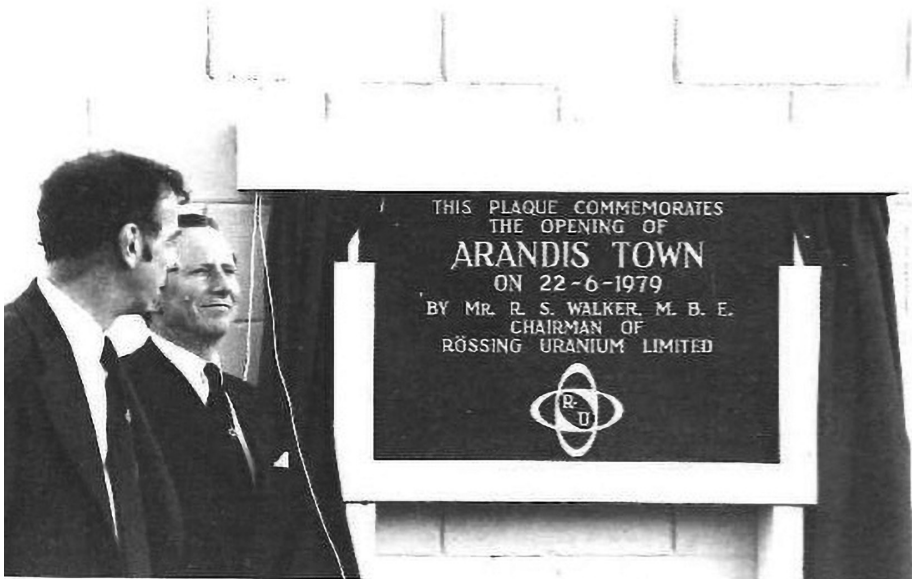


Figure 4: Craig Gibson (former Managing Director of Rössing Uranium) and Ronnie Walker (former Chairman of Rössing Uranium) at the opening of Arandis town in 1979²⁴

roads and storm-water drains, along with other services and amenities such as schools, public building and health facilities.²³ In return, the South African administration “undertook to refund the full cost of [RUL’s infrastructural investment] and to pay R3 000 towards the cost of each house”. RUL in turn agreed to pay the additional housing costs, which were in fact also R3 000 per house [each house thus cost R6 000 to construct, a cost which was split in half between the company and the government].²⁵ The provision of housing to RUL’s single and married workforce was a matter of great deliberation by its Board of Directors. The discussions were especially focused on the costs involved in the construction of houses for the various skills categories. In defending the cost of the housing, RUL’s Chairman “stated that the proposed standard was designed in order to create a sense of loyalty [among the employees] to the company”.²⁶ In further deliberations a member of the Board enquired whether the housing programme “could not be delayed because of the prevailing political situation in the country” to which the Chairman replied that “the R4,4-million which would be spent in 1979 was minimal compared to the amount that could be lost should an unde-

²³ NAN JX-0012 Algar, “Arandis”, 46.

²⁴ Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 19.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Rössing Mine, on Thursday 8 December 1977 at 10h30, 609 Development Plan for Married Accommodation, 14.

sirable government come into power”.²⁷ Housing was thus as much a part of the strategy to defend the investment and to ensure the continuity of RUL’s operations in independent Namibia (see Chapter 6). The photograph in Figure 4 was taken at the official opening of Arandis Town in June 1979. Officiating on this occasion were RUL’s Managing Director and Chairman. The picture omits the South African administration’s role in the construction of Arandis. The construction of the settlement for the housing of the unskilled and lower levels of semi-skilled workers was however, as the cost distribution indicates, a joint venture between state and company.



Figure 5: Rössing Uranium Mine

²⁷ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting, 14.

The final major infrastructural projects embarked on by RUL were the extension of the railway line to the mine site and the construction of an airport near the mine (see Figure 5²⁸). The railway line allowed for the delivery of material required in the construction of the mine and the solvents required in the extraction plant. The airstrip, on the other hand, was constructed to allow RUL to operate “its own airport and aircraft, in order to make business travel more efficient and, on occasion, for emergency medical flights as a service to the whole community”.²⁹ The airport and aircraft facilitated ease of travel for RUL’s management team, initially from RTZ’s Johannesburg offices, and later from RUL’s Head Office in Windhoek. The airstrip was also used to facilitate ease of travel for RUL’s international visitors and potential investors, who were predominantly officials from Urangesellschaft, the UKAEA, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Rio Algom (Canada), Japan, as well the management from RTZ’s London headquarters.³⁰ The details pertaining to these “international visitors” are discussed in further detail in the ensuing sections.

Foreign Commitments to Rössing Uranium

As with the exploration stage, RTZ decided to pursue a partnership-orientated approach to the development of RUL. This, according to RTZ, was “partly because of the enormous costs involved” which warranted “the modern pattern of mining development” to be “based on joint ventures”.³¹ RTZ’s joint venture approach resembled the pattern of uranium specialisation used in the French and South African industries.³² According to Guy Martin, in the French and South African models uranium “exploration and production are undertaken by a consortium of mining companies, state corporations, and electricity boards from the major capitalist countries with the aim of providing their nuclear-power reactor requirements under long-term supply contracts”.³³ A similar pattern was adopted for RUL as RTZ had “established many of its pit operations as partnerships with other natural resource corporations or with potential customers”, and “Rössing was founded on a similar basis”.³⁴

There were strong commonalities between the international partners of RUL, the primary one being that they all had a formal relationship with their national governments.

²⁸ NASA Earth Observatory image by Jesse Allen and Robert Simmon, using EO-1 ALI data, 23 March 2013. <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/search?q=Rössing+Uranium>, accessed 11 April 2018.

²⁹ C. Marais. *Rössing: The mine, the flora illustrations by Christine Marais*. (Windhoek: 1987), 42.

³⁰ Rössing Uranium. Rössing, 3.

³¹ Rössing Uranium, Introduction to Rössing, 2.

³² G. Martin, “Uranium: A Case-Study in Franco-African Relations”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, December 1989, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 624–640, 629.

³³ Martin, “Uranium: A Case-Study”, 629.

³⁴ Rössing Uranium, Introduction to Rössing, 2.

These connections were either in the form of state-owned enterprise, as was the case with the UK's British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) or through government shareholding, as demonstrated by France's Total-Compagnie. State participation in these companies had its roots in the oil crisis of the early-1970s. Political events in the Middle East had led to a decision by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to limit production volumes in late 1973.³⁵ This resulted in a substantial increase in international oil prices in 1973 and 1974. These events underlined the vulnerability of Western governments to disruptions in their national energy supplies.³⁶ Among the policies that were adopted in response to this vulnerability was the decision to expand the use of nuclear energy and the establishment of entities responsible for purchasing the necessary uranium supplies on behalf of the state. In the case of the oil industry, governments such as that of the UK had been heavily reliant on private enterprise to secure national energy supplies.³⁷ The reliance on private enterprise had left these governments more vulnerable to disruptions in energy supplies. State participation in nuclear power programmes, and in companies such as RUL's international partners, was viewed "as a means through which the Government could take greater control of the nation's energy future".³⁸

The international context of energy dependency illustrates the importance of a secure energy supply to Western governments. This international context is vital to our understanding of how economic and strategic interests in Namibian uranium shaped the attitudes of these states towards Namibian independence. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, information on RUL's partners and customers, along with the mine's operations, were governed under the stringent secrecy mandated by the Atomic Energy Act of South Africa. The Act stipulated that "no information [...] be published or disclosed on the locality, extent, and source material content of ore reserves, on the importance of the production or the price and conditions of acquisition of such material".³⁹ Consequently, no official records on RUL were released and "the relative shares of the various interests involved in Rössing Uranium [were] not officially reported".⁴⁰

³⁵ C. Marx, "Failed Solutions to the Energy Crises: Nuclear Power, Coal Conversion, and the Chemical Industry in West Germany since the 1960s." *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 2014, Vol. 39, No. 4 (150), Special Issue: The Energy Crises of the 1970s: Anticipations and Reactions in the Industrialized World (2014), pp. 251–271.

³⁶ J. Kuiken, "Caught in Transition: Britain's Oil Policy in the Face of Impending Crisis." *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 2014, Vol. 39, No. 4 (150), Special Issue: The Energy Crises of the 1970s: Anticipations and Reactions in the Industrialized World (2014), pp. 272–290.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Kawana, "The Political Economy", 99.

⁴⁰ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 4.

Barbara Rogers, however, argued that although specific information on RUL was suppressed “one thing, however, is known, the raising of the necessary capital was contingent on securing adequate forward purchasing contracts by RTZ”.⁴¹ The heading of this section was adopted from Roger’s 1975 publication to underscore the importance of foreign commitments to the onset of uranium production in Namibia. The need to secure forward purchasing contracts further led Rogers to conclude that “the responsibility for the opening and financing of the exploitation of Namibia’s Rössing deposits rested primarily with the purchaser, notably the [United Kingdom] UK”.⁴² The UK did indeed provide the first major forward purchasing contract but it could not be held solely responsible for the successful establishment and financing of RUL. British officials, for instance, noted that “RTZ have used our contract which is about equal to that which Urangesellschaft have with Rössing but smaller than that which the Japanese have, as one of their main securities for getting the loans on which the contract is based”.⁴³ If the British contract was equivalent to that of West Germany and less than that of Japan then the responsibility for the opening and financing of the mine must rest on all the purchasers including France, Japan, Iran and West Germany.

RTZ engaged natural resource corporations and atomic energy agencies from the aforementioned countries (including Canada) to acquire a minor percentage of equity participation in RUL. The combination of equity and forward purchasing contracts for the supply of Namibian uranium ensured that parties other than RTZ, and the South African entities discussed in Chapter 3, had vested interests in Namibian uranium. This not only anchored RTZ’s operations at RUL through the provision of financial security but it also provided a buffer against international opposition to its operations in Namibia. An attempt is made to provide greater detail on the foreign commitment to RUL in the ensuing subsections, looking at the role of the individual countries in turn and their commitments in terms of equity and forward purchasing contracts. It is worth highlighting that “a large number” of RUL’s long-term sales contracts “had been negotiated through RTZ Mineral Services Limited, a Swiss registered company acting as agent for Rössing, which company was formed because of the unwillingness of certain customers to deal directly with a S.W.A. [Namibian] company”.⁴⁴ The political situation in Namibia and the international status of the territory weighed heavy on RUL’s engagements with foreign interests.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ TNA AB 48/1278 E. S. J. Clarke in a letter to T. Ticehurst, Rössing, 2 February 1973.

⁴⁴ RUL—Minutes of the forty-fourth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Board Room, fourteenth floor, Unicorn House, 70 Marshal Street, Johannesburg, on Thursday, 28 April 1977, 14h30, Agenda Item: 534 Financing Arrangements, 6.

West Germany: Urangesellschaft

As discussed in Chapter 2, RTZ entered into an exploration partnership with the West German firm Urangesellschaft in 1969. The intended purpose of the partnership was for Urangesellschaft to secure loan financing for RUL through government guarantees. When Urangesellschaft failed to secure government guarantees from the West German government, it was supplanted by the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa and the General Mining and Finance Corporation, whose partnership with RTZ commenced in 1970. It is important to note here that, despite the position of the West German government, Urangesellschaft did not eliminate themselves from participation in Rössing. According to a report of the UN Council for Namibia, “until 1972, Urangesellschaft did preparatory research with RTZ on Rössing”, and “about 75 per cent of the research costs of Urangesellschaft (DM 6 million out of a total of DM 8 million) was borne by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany”.⁴⁵ The West German government’s support for the preparatory research, and for Urangesellschaft’s continued participation in RUL, however, stopped in 1972.⁴⁶

For its contribution to the exploration stage, RTZ rewarded Urangesellschaft with an option to acquire 10 per cent offtake rights to the annual production at Rössing Uranium. Urangesellschaft privately exercised this option and committed to purchase 6,000 tonnes of uranium from RUL.⁴⁷ The 6,000 tonnes of uranium would be delivered annually in 750 ton deliveries between 1976 and 1982.⁴⁸ For the delivery of the first 5,000 tonnes of its contracted 6,140 tonnes of uranium ore from RUL, Urangesellschaft paid \$7.15 per pound of uranium oxide (U₃O₈ or yellowcake).⁴⁹ Moreover, RTZ committed to reimburse Urangesellschaft in the event that the uranium market price rose above the agreed price of \$7.15 per pound of yellowcake.⁵⁰ Additionally, because of the financial security guaranteed to RUL through the commitment of countries such as Japan, South Africa and the UK, Urangesellschaft was able to withdraw from its commitment to broker the loan-finance of 70 million DM which it had hoped to secure through West German government guarantees. Instead, Urangesellschaft was only required to raise 11.5 Million DM for its 10 per cent equity in

⁴⁵ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia. Volume III. General Assembly. Official Records: Thirty-Fifth Session. Supplement No. 24, 1980, 15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/al.sff.document.puun1980006vol3>, accessed 8 June 2021.

⁴⁶ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, 15.

⁴⁷ BAK B/196/33619, Heads of Agreement, 12.

⁴⁸ BAK B/196/33620, 13 May 1971, 2. BAK B/196/33619, Heads of Agreement, 12.

⁴⁹ BAK B/196/33620 13 May 1971, 2. V. Jabri, *Mediating Conflict: Decision-making and Western Intervention in Namibia*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 56. Triuranium octoxide (U₃O₈) or yellowcake is the natural form supplied by Rössing Uranium.

⁵⁰ BAK B/196/33620, 13 May 1971, 2.

RUL, which it managed to privately secure on the financial market.⁵¹ It was under these financial conditions that Urangesellschaft's contract with RTZ for the supply of uranium ore to West Germany was viewed as being favourable among government circles in Bonn, from which much of the support for establishing Urangesellschaft had been obtained. Urangesellschaft was established with the purpose of guaranteeing the supply of uranium for West Germany's existing and planned nuclear power plants. Included among these nuclear energy companies was Veba AG, one of three companies that hold the entire share capital of Urangesellschaft mbH.⁵² The West German government "holds 40 per cent of the shares of Veba and some 25 per cent of the shares of STEAG are owned by the Gesellschaft für Energie, a majority ownership of which is vested in the Government".⁵³ The West German government clearly had vested interests in Urangesellschaft and the success of the joint venture between RTZ and Urangesellschaft was thus favourable for the regime in Bonn. Neither the West German government's role, nor that of Urangesellschaft, in RUL was ever officially acknowledged.

Britain: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency (UKAEA), and consequently the British Nuclear Fuels Limited (BNFL), were among the first foreign entities to commit to RUL's production. The UKAEA signed a sales contract with RTZ in April 1968, details of which were only revealed to the British public following the elections in 1970.⁵⁴ Hecht writes that despite the fact that the contract was being signed at such an early stage in the Rössing project (signed in 1968 even before the exploration stage had been completed), the UKAEA was particularly keen to conclude the negotiations with RTZ for uranium supplies from Namibia. This was because RTZ's status as a British company meant that RUL "was as close as the UK would come to controlling its own uranium supply".⁵⁵ The agreement between RTZ and the UKAEA was approved by the then Minister of Technology, Anthony Wedgewood Benn, who confirmed the British government's support for the acquisition of uranium supplies from the British-owned mining company.⁵⁶ Under the agreement the UKAEA committed to a forward purchasing contract for the supply of 6,000 tonnes of uranium ore from RUL. RTZ is said to have required this particular substantial long-term contract in order to convince investors of the future demand for RUL's uranium deposits. According to Hecht, RTZ's

⁵¹ BAK B/196/33620, 13 May 1971, 3.

⁵² "Control of Urangesellschaft [was] vested in a syndicate comprising Metallgesellschaft (33 per cent), Steinkohlen-Elektrizitäts AG (STEAG) (33 per cent) and Veba AG (33 per cent)". Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, 15.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ The UKAEA-Riofinex agreement was signed on the 29th April 1968. TNA AB 48/1278 UKAEA Assignment of Uranium—Sales Agreement.

⁵⁵ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

⁵⁶ J. Adams, *Tony Benn: A Biography*. (London: Biteback Publishing, 2011), 24.

subsequent contract with Urangesellschaft failed to push RUL “past the threshold of profitability, so UKAEA officials, eager to ensure the mine’s viability, happily filled the gap with a second contract for 1,500 tons”.⁵⁷ The second contract was signed in 1970 and it brought Britain’s total commitment to 7,500 tons. These contracts were used by RTZ as collateral for its international financiers and it is as a direct result of these contracts (as well as the agreements with West Germany) that RTZ was able to ensure the financial viability of RUL.

Like West Germany, Britain had no domestic uranium supplies of its own. Securing preferential access to uranium supplies from RUL was thus of utmost importance for both countries. To this end there appeared to have been some competition between the British and West German officials in ensuring security of supply from the RUL mine. When the negotiations for the contract with Urangesellschaft began Roy Wright of RTZ wrote a letter to John Clarke of the UKAEA to inform him that RTZ would soon be entering into talks with potential German customers.⁵⁸ In the letter Wright felt the need to assure the UKAEA official that “while there will undoubtedly be different factors that would have to be taken into account the overall deal will not be more favourable to the Germans than the one you have concluded with us”.⁵⁹ Despite Wright’s assurances, however, Clarke still felt that the terms of sale under the Urangesellschaft deal would undoubtedly be better than the terms put before the UKAEA, and this was because Urangesellschaft had been closely associated with RUL’s exploration stage.⁶⁰ His conclusions were not entirely imprecise as the UKAEA paid a slightly higher price (\$8 per pound of yellowcake) for uranium supplies from RUL compared to Urangesellschaft (\$7.15 per pound of yellowcake).⁶¹ The uranium supplies to Britain were scheduled for delivery commencing in 1976.⁶²

Japan: Kansai Electric

In 1970, RTZ secured a further forward purchasing contract (with no equity participation) with Japan’s second largest electric power company, the Kansai Electric Power Company. According to Jun Morikawa, Japan turned to nuclear power during the period of rapid post-war growth.⁶³ The acceleration in Japan’s nuclear power programme was, however, spurred on by the oil shock of the 1970s.⁶⁴ This acceleration resulted in African countries like Namibia,

⁵⁷ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97. Also see O. Ogunbadejo, *The International Politics of Africa’s Strategic Minerals*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

⁵⁸ Roy W. Wright was the Deputy Chairman and Deputy Chief Executive of Rio Tinto Zinc.

⁵⁹ TNA AB 48/1912, “Roy W. Wright (RTZ) in a letter to E. J. S. Clarke (UKAEA)”, 9 March 1968.

⁶⁰ TNA AB 44/264, E. J. S. Clarke CEBG/BNFL/ABA Meeting on U3O8—Rössing Contract. Paper No. 1/73 23 March 1973 Annex I Main Features of Rössing Contract, 2.

⁶¹ BAK B/196/33620, 13 May 1971. Jabri, *Mediating Conflict*, 56.

⁶² Kawana, “The Political Economy”, 152.

⁶³ Morikawa, *Japan and Africa*, 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Niger and South Africa being listed among Japan's important suppliers of uranium.⁶⁵ RTZ's contract with Kansai Electric was for the supply of 8,200 tonnes of uranium ore (2,200 tonnes more than Urangesellschaft and 700 tonnes more than the UKAEA). RUL notes that the contract with Kansai Electric "was somewhat unique in that it was the only direct contract that the Company had with a Japanese utility, all other such contracts being covered by back-to-back agreements".⁶⁶ Under the agreement, Kansai Electric paid \$7 per pound of yellowcake (\$1 cheaper than the UKAEA, \$0.15 cheaper than Urangesellschaft).⁶⁷ The uranium supplies were initially scheduled for delivery between 1976 and 1986 with amounts varying from 500 tonnes in 1977, 600 tonnes in 1979 and 1980 and 1,000 tonnes annually between 1981 and 1986.⁶⁸

Japan is said to have initially "contracted for [...] uranium from South Africa, but when the Namibian Rössing Mine started production, Japan shifted from its South African contract to Namibia".⁶⁹ Uranium supplies from South Africa would likely have meant that RTZ would secure these supplies from its Palabora mine, a copper mine which produced uranium as a by-product. The switch from South African to Namibian uranium was not without its problems for the Japanese government as "Japan [...] nurse[d] ambitions of entering the club of the world's politically powerful states".⁷⁰ Japan had presented its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in the period 1971 to 1972. Revelation of the existence of a contract with RUL would have been detrimental to Japan's attempts to secure "the large mass of UN votes controlled by Black African states", especially in a period when the Security Council had passed Resolution 283 (1970) of 29 July 1970, in which all States were requested to refrain from any relations which implied recognition of the authority of South Africa over Namibia.⁷¹

Consequently, in September 1970, Kansai Electric requested RTZ not to disclose the existence of the contract, which was concluded through Minserv, an RTZ sales subsidiary

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-first meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek, on Wednesday, 17 March 1982, Agenda Item: 951 Sales Contract Japanese Utility, 5.

⁶⁷ BAK B/196/33620, 13 May 1971.

⁶⁸ Yoko, "Japan's Namibian Connection", 34.

⁶⁹ United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations, "Transnational Corporations in South Africa and Namibia: United Nations Public Hearings." Vol. II Verbatim Records. (New York: United Nations, 1986), 253.

⁷⁰ Morikawa, *Japan and Africa*, 15.

⁷¹ The Resolution called "upon all States to ensure that companies and other commercial and industrial enterprises owned by, or under the direct control of, the State cease all dealings with respect to commercial or industrial enterprises or concessions in Namibia." United Nations Security Council Resolution 283 (1970), 3.

based in Zug, Switzerland.⁷² RTZ gladly obliged Japan's request for secrecy, a secrecy made possible by the strategic importance of uranium and a trade that enjoyed a higher level of secrecy than other forms of economic activity. RTZ considered the contract with Japan of vital importance to RUL's future operations and this justified its decision to keep the Japan contract a secret. The strategic importance of uranium combined with the value of the contract was used as a convenient excuse to hide the fact that Japan was doing business in Namibia. Despite the attempts to keep the contract a secret, Japan's commitment to purchasing Namibian uranium was revealed to the British government, with whom the RTZ management in London maintained close links.⁷³ RTZ did not reveal the precise details of the Japan contract, most especially those pertaining to pricing. As with Urangesellschaft, British authorities considered Japan a competitor in the supply of uranium ore from RUL, especially because they were aware that the quantities under the Japanese contract exceeded those of the UKAEA.⁷⁴

France: Total-Compagnie Française des Pétroles

Total Compagnie Minière et Nucleaire, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Total-Compagnie Française des Pétroles (Total-CFP), acquired equity in RUL in 1970 through a subsidiary, Minatome, S.A.⁷⁵ News of Total-CFP's participation in RUL only became public in 1973 when media outlets such as the Financial Times reported on the French partnership with RTZ.⁷⁶ Total-CFP is a French conglomerate in which the French government "controls 35 per cent of the share capital [...] 40 per cent of the voting rights [...] and possesses a right of veto over decisions by the company's management".⁷⁷ As with Japan and West Germany, the French government embarked upon the establishment of a nuclear power programme in the post-war period.⁷⁸ Unlike Britain and West Germany, France had uranium deposits within its geographic territory. According to Guy Martin the uranium deposits in France were generally small, and of relatively low grade, and could thus not meet the needs of the French nuclear power programme.⁷⁹ In order to meet the needs of the expansionary nuclear programme in France, French mining companies, like Total-CFP, embarked on overseas ventures with the

⁷² Morikawa, *Japan and Africa*, 15. Taskforce on The Churches, Canada and Namibian Uranium, 39. Also see Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 100.

⁷³ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 86.

⁷⁴ TNA FCO 96/414 Uranium Supplies from Namibia, M. J. Wilmshurst (Energy Department) to Mr. Garside and Mr. Clements, 24 January 1975.

⁷⁵ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, Vol. III, 74.

⁷⁶ TNA AB/1278 Total in RTZ Uranium Play, *Financial Times*, Tuesday June 26, 1973.

⁷⁷ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, Vol. III, 74. O. Ogunbadejo, *The International Politics*, 65.

⁷⁸ G. Hecht, "Political Designs: Nuclear Reactors and National Policy in Post-war France". *Technology and Culture* Vol. 35, No. 4 (October, 1994), pp. 657–685.

⁷⁹ Martin, "Uranium: A Case-Study"

aim of mitigating France's heavy reliance on imported uranium.⁸⁰ The French government, for instance, sourced uranium from its former colony Niger, and kept tight control over Niger as a result.⁸¹ The expansion of French companies, like Total-CFP, into uranium production was aimed at "securing a privileged position as a global player in the uranium market".⁸²

Total-CFP expanded its uranium mining activities into South Africa through its subsidiary Minatome S.A., a company that was established specifically to produce and market uranium.⁸³ Total-CFP held a 50 per cent interest in Minatome with the remaining 50 per cent owned by Pechiney-Ugine Kuhlmann.⁸⁴ Total-CFP's investment in uranium mining activities was extended to Namibia following its acquisition of equity in RUL.⁸⁵ The company obtained a 10 per cent equity share in RUL through its subsidiary Minatome S.A. According to Peter Daniel, Total-CFP's equity participation in RUL came at a cost of 3.8 million, and an additional loan of \$10 million was also availed to RUL.⁸⁶ The agreement included a long-term sales contract through which Total-CFP undertook to purchase uranium from RUL "with a reduction in the price as a means by which the loan [to RUL] would be repaid".⁸⁷ Throughout the 1970s, and well into the 1980s, references to the total tonnage of uranium under the RTZ-Total-CFP agreement was recorded as having been "a substantial amount of all French uranium imports" with no mention of the exact amount.⁸⁸ This was because the French government, unlike the British government, refused to disclose any information about its contract with RUL.

According to Martin the French government was "one of the beneficiaries of profitable long-term uranium supply contracts" with RUL, "since Total-CFP [was] entitled to 15,000 tonnes of uranium oxide from 1977 to 1990".⁸⁹ Martin goes on to say that COMURHEX, a state owned entity and a subsidiary of Pechiney-Ugine-Kuhlmann, was the main beneficiary of this contract, receiving 11,000 tonnes of the 15,000 tonnes contracted for by Total-CFP during the same period.⁹⁰ Uranium supplies contracted for by Total-CFP exceeded by far

⁸⁰ Ibid., 629.

⁸¹ Ibid., 630.

⁸² Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 119.

⁸³ United Nations Council for Namibia, *Reference Book on Major Transnational Corporations Operating in Namibia*. (New York, 1985), 70.

⁸⁴ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, Vol. III, 74.

⁸⁵ TNA AB/1278 Rössing Uranium gets partner and sales deal, E/MJ, August 1973.

⁸⁶ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 67.

⁸⁷ Ibid. TNA EG 7/139 R. Murray, S.W. African Uranium—A new dilemma for Labour, 1974. Also see Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 3.

⁸⁸ United Nations Council for Namibia, *Reference Book*, 70. Ogunbadejo, *The International Politics*, 65.

⁸⁹ Martin, "Uranium: A Case-Study", 632.

⁹⁰ Ibid. The abbreviation COMURHEX stands for CONversion MÉtal URanium HEXafluorure, or Uranium Hexafluoride Metal Conversion.

those under the Kansai (8,200), UKAEA (7,500) and Urangesellschaft (6,000) agreements. Uranium supplies to France were thus rightly recorded as having been “substantial”.⁹¹

Canada: Rio Algom

In 1974 Rio Algom Limited, a Canadian natural resource corporation, was next to sign a partnership agreement with RTZ. Canada, and indeed the Rio Algom mine, is a major uranium producer, so unlike Britain, France and West Germany, “Canadian involvement in Namibian uranium [was] not related to security of supply”.⁹² The Rio Algom mine is a subsidiary of RTZ, which holds 52.8 per cent share in Rio Algom, and the mine is credited for having launched RTZ’s expansion into uranium mining, including into other parts of the world, such as Namibia.⁹³ In 1968, Rio Algom was given an option to acquire equity in RUL. This happened during RTZ’s negotiations with the UKAEA, for the supply of Namibian uranium. It was agreed that should RTZ be unable to bring RUL into production the uranium supplies under the UKAEA contract would be obtained from the Rio Algom mine. Rio Algom’s back-up role was revealed in an information circular issued by the company in December 1968 which indicated that in the event that RTZ was unable to fulfil its obligations under the contract with the UKAEA, Rio Algom would “deliver 1,000,000 lbs of U3O8 per year during the period 1974 to 1981 inclusive, in the place and stead of Riofinex [Rio Tinto Finance & Exploration Limited] and on substantially the same terms”.⁹⁴ This was further confirmed by an official of RTZ who wrote that because RUL was “at that time, in the proving-up stage it was necessary to provide some security of supply to the UKAEA and a back-up arrangement was made by RTZ with Rio Algom Mines”.⁹⁵ The understanding was that the back-up arrangement would fall away once the economic viability of RUL was established.

The key incentive for Rio Algom’s consensus in the “stand-by arrangement” was that the company would be “entitled as consideration for its undertaking to subscribe to 10 per cent of the total equity share capital issued by any mining company promoted by the Rio Tinto-Zinc Group of Companies to exploit a uranium prospect in a specified area of Africa”.⁹⁶ Although the 1968 circular did not make direct reference to RUL, the reference

⁹¹ United Nations Council for Namibia, *Reference Book*, 70.

⁹² Taskforce on the Churches, Canada and Namibian Uranium, 36.

⁹³ N. Moss, *The Politics of Uranium*. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1981). Norman Moss writes that Rio Tinto Zinc bought out the Joubin-Hirschorn interest at Elliot Lake and set up Rio Algom which resulted in RTZ’s expansion from a medium-sized British company to the biggest multinational mining company in the world, 107.

⁹⁴ TNA AB 48/1913 A. F. Lowell (RTZ London) in a letter to E. J. S. Clarke (Principal Officer, Finance and Supplies, UKAEA), 12 March 1969.

⁹⁵ Bodleian Library MSS AAM 1127 D. A. Streatfield (RTZ Company Secretary) in a letter to Alun Roberts (Anti-Apartheid Movement), 10 June 1976.

⁹⁶ TNA AB 48/1913 A. F. Lowell (RTZ London) in a letter to E. J. S. Clarke (Principal Officer, Finance

to “a uranium prospect discovered by Riofinex in Africa” coupled with Rio Algom’s acquisition of 10 per cent equity in RUL, confirmed that the Riofinex find was indeed Namibian uranium.⁹⁷ Moreover, Rio Algom’s acquisition of equity in RUL was accompanied by a loan of US\$ 7.5 million availed to RUL in July 1977.⁹⁸ The loan from Rio Algom amounted to a two-thirds loan of RUL’s overall debt, and once it was paid off, RTZ was able to reacquire the 10 per cent equity it had forfeited to its subsidiary, Rio Algom.⁹⁹ Canadian involvement in RUL thus had to do with interlocking corporate interests rather than governmental level interests.

Iran: National Iranian Oil Company

The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) was RUL’s most peculiar partner in that the Iranian participation was orchestrated by the South African regime and not by RTZ.¹⁰⁰ South African-Iranian relations began with the abdication and forced exile of Reza Shah Pahlavi, who served as Shah of Iran between 1925 and 1941.¹⁰¹ The Shah and his family were exiled initially to Mauritius and later to South Africa following the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941.¹⁰² The Shah died in Johannesburg in 1944, and this created an emotional tie to South Africa for his descendants. The establishment of formal diplomatic and trade relations with Iran, however, only commenced in 1969 when an agreement was reached between NIOC, the South African Oil and Gas Corporation (Sasol) and the French company Elf Aquitaine (renamed Total), for the construction of an oil refinery in South Africa.¹⁰³ Iran undertook to provide crude oil to South Africa once the refinery became operational.

The increase in international opposition to South Africa’s policy of apartheid at home and in Namibia was accompanied by calls for economic sanctions and an oil embargo against South Africa.¹⁰⁴ South Africa’s vast natural resources did not include crude oil, so it was felt that an oil embargo would be an effective measure against the apartheid regime. At the UN, according to Chehabi, “an oil embargo was mooted, making friendly ties with a major oil producer like Iran desirable.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, in 1973, the Organization of Arab

and Supplies, UKAEA) 12 March 1969.

⁹⁷ TNA AB 48/1913, 12 March 1969.

⁹⁸ United Nations Council for Namibia, *Reference Book*, 103.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ TNA FCO 45/2168 Namibian Uranium and Iran [II], H. M. S. Reid (Central and Southern Africa Dept. FCO) in a letter to H. D. A. C. (David) Miers (British Embassy Tehran), 25 November 1977, 1.

¹⁰¹ Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran”, 687.

¹⁰² Ibid., 688.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 689.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 33/183 (24 January 1979) Policies of Apartheid of the Government of South Africa. E:Oil Embargo Against South Africa [file:///C:/Users/EN%20Ndahangwapo/Downloads/A_RES_33_183\[E\]-EN.pdf](file:///C:/Users/EN%20Ndahangwapo/Downloads/A_RES_33_183[E]-EN.pdf), accessed 3 February 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran”, 689.

Petroleum Exporting Countries called for a complete Arab oil embargo of South Africa.¹⁰⁶ But, as Neta Crawford notes, “Iran which already had a close relationship with South Africa, immediately stepped up its oil exports to South Africa in 1973, and though all other Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members proclaimed an embargo in 1977, Iranian oil continued to flow”.¹⁰⁷ The result was that “Iran provided 90 per cent of South Africa’s crude oil imports,” between 1974 and 1978.¹⁰⁸

In 1974 the Iran-South Africa trade relationship was extended to the field of nuclear power. As part of the late Shah’s grand design to transform his country, the Iranian government had embarked upon the construction of a nuclear power station for which future supplies of uranium had to be secured.¹⁰⁹ In 1974, the Iranian government established the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), through which Iran’s nuclear energy ambitions would be governed.¹¹⁰ The following year, in 1975, Iran acquired 15 per cent equity in RUL at an amount of US\$33 million.¹¹¹ It was understood at the time that the South African government had encouraged the investment in RUL in order to commit the Iranian government “to a measure of dependence on South Africa for their uranium supplies and thus to provide a counterbalance to South Africa’s dependence on Iran for oil”.¹¹² Dependence on South Africa for Namibian uranium and a 15 per cent equity investment in RUL was, however, nothing compared to South Africa’s dependence on Iranian oil, for as an official of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office noted, South Africa had to pay a far higher price.¹¹³

Under the 1975 equity and sales agreement Iran would receive 8,000 tonnes of uranium ore from RUL, which ore was estimated to have been worth about £200 million.¹¹⁴ This made Iran the fourth largest purchaser of Namibian uranium after France, Japan and Britain. Iran’s participation in RUL was confirmed to British government officials by the

¹⁰⁶ N. C. Crawford, “Oil Sanctions Against Apartheid”. In: N. C. Crawford and A. Klotz (eds.), *How Sanctions Work*. International Political Economy Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 104. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403915917_5, accessed 5 June 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁸ Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran”, 690. Becker, C. M., “The Impact of Sanctions on South Africa and Its Periphery”. *Africa Studies Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (September 1988), pp. 61–88, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Kawana, “The Political Economy”, 153.

¹¹⁰ TNA FCO 45/2168 Namibian Uranium and Iran [I], H. D. A. C. (David) Miers (British Embassy Tehran) in a letter to H. M. S. Reid (Central and Southern Africa Dept. FCO), 20 December 1977, 1. (Miers wrote in response to the letter written by Reid, TNA FCO 45/2168 25 November 1977).

¹¹¹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 86.

¹¹² TNA FCO 45/2168 Namibian Uranium and Iran [III], Frances Vale to H. M. S. Reid in H. M. S. Reid (Central & Southern Africa Dept. FCO) in a letter to H. D. A. C. (David) Miers (British Embassy Tehran), 25 November 1977, 1.

¹¹³ TNA FCO 45/2168 Rössing and Iran, H. M. S. Reid (Central & Southern African Department) in letter Mr. Lucas (Middle and Eastern Department), 4 November 1977.

¹¹⁴ International Institute of Social History (hereafter IISH) ARCH02466 M. Bailey and S. Bhatia, Namibia uranium may fuel Iran’s A-bomb. Observer (London), Sunday, 17 May 1987, (Werk Group Kairos).

public relations adviser to RTZ, but when news of this secret investment had surfaced, the Iranian government had been very quick to deny it.¹¹⁵ This was because of the strategy that the Iranian government had adopted in its diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa which sought to “defer to world public opinion on the issue of apartheid while maintaining high-level contacts with South Africa”.¹¹⁶ The investment could hardly have been kept a secret because it resulted in Iranian representation on the Board of Directors of RUL.¹¹⁷

Formal diplomatic relations between Iran and South Africa ended with the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979 when the Shah was deposed and the previous pro-Western (and pro-South African) orientation was brought to an end by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s administration, established in February 1979.¹¹⁸ Iran discontinued oil supplies to apartheid South Africa despite high level attempts by the South African government “to keep Iranian oil flowing”.¹¹⁹ In return, the South African government reportedly attempted to buy out the Iranian stake in RUL, but the offer had been declined by the Khomeini administration.¹²⁰ The political situation in Iran complicated uranium deliveries from RUL to the AEOI which were scheduled to take place between 1982 and 1990.¹²¹ By 1981 it had become clear to RUL that “as a result of political developments in Iran the nuclear energy programme had been abandoned” and the AEOI “sought to cancel all outstanding tonnages”.¹²² RUL considered taking legal action for the cancellation but it was concluded that “bearing in mind the nature of the administration in Iran and the situation there, it was not considered that any useful purpose would be served by taking legal action against the AEOI”.¹²³ The matter was later resolved through an agreement “involving the delivery of approximately 475 short

¹¹⁵ TNA FCO 45/2168, Namibian Uranium and Iran [II], 1. (The information on Iran’s investment in Rössing Uranium had been passed on to the FCO by Miss Frances Vale, the Political and Public Relations Adviser to RTZ)

¹¹⁶ Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran”, 692.

¹¹⁷ IISH, ARCH02466, 17 May 1987. The two Iranian representatives were Ghafour Mohseni and Rahbari Kharazi.

¹¹⁸ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ruhollah Khomeini, Encyclopaedia Britannica, January 2, 2019 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ruhollah-Khomeini>, accessed 30 January 2019.

¹¹⁹ “As late as October 1978, while revolutionary fervour was reaching a peak, the South African foreign minister, Pik Botha, went to Iran in an attempt to keep Iranian oil flowing.” Chehabi, “South Africa and Iran”, 695.

¹²⁰ IISH, ARCH02466, 17 May 1987. Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–1989) http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/khomeini_ayatollah.shtml, accessed 7 August 2018

¹²¹ RUL—Minutes of the seventieth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek, on Wednesday, 2 December 1981, Agenda Item: 929 Sales Contracts AEOI, 4.

¹²² RUL—Minutes of the seventieth meeting, 4. The political situation was mainly due to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, which replaced the Imperial Government of Iran, during whose reign there was slow down in Iran’s nuclear programmes. Later restrictions on uranium deliveries came through the UN Resolutions targeting Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

¹²³ RUL—Minutes of the seventieth meeting, 4.

tons of concentrates against cancellation of the balance of the interest-free loans” which had been extended to RUL by the AEOI.¹²⁴

The Iranian government’s shareholding in RUL was later transferred to the Iranian Foreign Investment Company (IFIC).¹²⁵ Contemporary reports on RUL’s shareholders confirm the IFIC’s continued shareholding in the company to the present day with Iran described as “a passive legacy investor in Rössing Uranium”.¹²⁶ Iran’s financial agreement with RTZ completed the list of equity shareholding and purchase contracts, which were concluded with state controlled companies and privately owned energy consortia based in countries such as Britain, Canada, France, Japan and West Germany. These entities, according to the UN Council for Namibia, “possessed the power to influence government agencies and even to obtain government support” for their participation in the exploitation of Namibian uranium.¹²⁷ The forward purchasing contracts, for instance, enabled RTZ to anchor its operations at RUL on a firm basis and to establish links between its subsidiary and the Western powers invested in the mine.

Calls to Disinvest in Namibia

RTZ was entering into equity and sales agreements with state-controlled companies, state owned bodies and private companies in which the state had invested at a time when international instruments prohibiting investments in Namibia were adopted at the United Nations. These prohibitions were to be adhered to by UN member states and by corporations of their nationality. In January 1970, for instance, the UN Security Council passed resolution 276 (1970) which declared that “all acts taken by the Government of South Africa on behalf of or concerning Namibia after the termination of the Mandate [in 1966] are illegal and invalid”.¹²⁸ Resolution 276 (1970) further called on UN member states to refrain from actions that would imply recognition of South Africa’s administration of Namibia.¹²⁹ This

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ D. F. Briggs. Exposing the Myth: Resolution Copper’s Connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran Arizona Daily Independent News Network, 29 June 2015 <https://arizonadailyindependent.com/2015/06/29>, accessed 19 November 2020.

¹²⁶ R. Knight, American Committee on Africa, Testimony to the Hearings on the Oil Embargo Against South Africa United Nations Headquarters 12–13 April 1989, March 2001, <http://richardknight.homestead.com/files/oilembargo.htm>, accessed 7 August 2018. www.rossing.com/shareholding.html, accessed 18 November 2020.

¹²⁷ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, Vol. III, 28. United Nations, Reports of Standing Committee II of the United Nations Council for Namibia. The Political, Economic, Social and Military Situation in and Relating to Namibia. (New York: United Nations, 1987), 43.

¹²⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), of January 1970. www.digitallibrary.un.org, accessed 17 November 2020.

¹²⁹ Security Council, Resolution 276 (1970), 2.

had a direct implication on the South African administration's granting of mining concessions to RTZ for its operations at RUL. Although RTZ's agreement with the Louw Company was signed in August 1966, two months prior to the General Assembly termination of the South African mandate over Namibia, the agreement did not confer upon RTZ the right to commence mining operations. This had required the authorisation of the Minister of Mines of South Africa and was only granted in 1968 (see Chapter 3). The 1968 authorisation by the Minister of Mines thus constituted an act taken by the South African government after the termination of the mandate.¹³⁰ According to Security Council resolution 276 (1970), therefore, RTZ's agreement with the South African regime was illegal and invalid.

Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), which had implications for RTZ's partners in RUL, called on UN member states to refrain from actions that would imply recognition of South Africa's administration of Namibia. This recognition was evidenced in the authorisation granted by the South African regime to agreements between RTZ and its Western partners and customers. The sales agreement between RTZ and the UKAEA, for instance, had been approved by the South African regime (see Chapter 5). Resolution 276 (1970) also called on "all States, particularly those which have economic and other interests in Namibia, to refrain from any dealings with the Government of South Africa".¹³¹ In spite of this, countries such as Britain, France and Japan proceeded to invest in RUL and commit to forward purchasing contracts for the supply of uranium from Namibia. To reinforce the provisions of Resolution 276 (1970), the Security Council adopted resolution 283 (1970) in July 1970, the relevant part of which addressed foreign investment in Namibia.¹³² Resolution 283 (1970) called on UN member states "to withhold from their nationals or companies of their nationality not under direct governmental control, government loans, credit guarantees and other forms of financial support that would be used to facilitate trade or commerce with Namibia".¹³³ The West German government's 1971 decision to cancel its support for Urangesellschaft's partnership with RTZ, for example, was in response to Resolution 283 (see Chapter 3).

Resolution 283 (1970) called on UN member states "to ensure that companies and other commercial enterprises owned by, or under direct control of, the State cease all further investment activities, including concessions in Namibia and to this end to withhold protection of such investment against claims of a future lawful government of Namibia".¹³⁴ This

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Security Council, Resolution 276 (1970), 2. J. Dugard. *The South West Africa/Namibia Dispute: Documents and Scholarly Writings on the Controversy between South Africa and the United Nations*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 444.

¹³² United Nations Security Council Resolution 283 (1970), of 29 July 1970. www.digitallibrary.un.org, accessed 17 November 2020.

¹³³ Security Council, Resolution 283 (1970), 3.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

section of the resolution had direct implications for the British government upon whose authorisation the UKAEA had committed to purchase Namibian uranium and in so doing underwrote British financing of RTZ's operations at RUL (see Chapter 5). This section of the resolution had direct implications on the French investment in RUL and the purchasing contracts committed to by Total-CFP. The collusion of the British and French governments in the exploitation of Namibia's uranium could be understood as key among the reasons why Britain and France abstained from the vote that saw the adoption of Security Council resolution 283 (July 1970).

Moreover, by Resolution 284 (1970) of 29 July 1970, the Security Council sought an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).¹³⁵ The question before the Court was: "What are the legal consequences for States of the continued presence of South Africa in Namibia notwithstanding Security Council resolution 276 (1970)?"¹³⁶ Through the request for an advisory opinion of Court, the Security Council hoped that the ICJ would underline the fact of South Africa's forfeiture of its right to administer Namibia.¹³⁷ On 21 June 1971, the ICJ delivered the advisory opinion stating that South Africa's continued presence in Namibia was indeed illegal and that the apartheid regime was under obligation to put an end to its occupation of the territory and to immediately withdraw its administration from Namibia.¹³⁸ The ICJ, by thirteen votes to two, supported Security Council resolution 276 (1970) which had declared the South African administration in Namibia "illegal" and thus considered the continued South African presence in Namibia to constitute an "occupation".¹³⁹ According to the ICJ, UN member states were obligated to recognise the declared illegality of South Africa's presence in Namibia and the invalidity of its administration's actions on behalf of or concerning Namibia.¹⁴⁰ UN member states were also obligated to "refrain from any acts and in particular any dealings with the Government of South Africa implying recognition of the legality of, or lending support or assistance to, such presence and administration", as stipulated in Resolution 276 (1970).¹⁴¹

In response to the ICJ's advisory opinion, the Security Council adopted resolution 301 of 21 October 1971 which sought to spell out the precise determinants of permissible and im-

¹³⁵ Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, Vol. III, 6.

¹³⁶ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 284 (1970) of 29 July 1970. www.digitallibrary.un.org, accessed 17 November 2020. The International Court of Justice had rendered three Advisory Opinions: 11 July 1950, 7 June 1955 and 1 June 1956.

¹³⁷ International Court of Justice, Written Statements (United States of America), 852.

¹³⁸ International Court of Justice, Legal Consequences for States, 79.

¹³⁹ The two dissenting votes were from the British and French Judges whose votes were in line with their government's position on Security Council resolutions 276 (1970).

¹⁴⁰ International Court of Justice, Legal Consequences for States, 79.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

permissible acts by UN member states in relation to Namibia. While recognising the UN's direct responsibility for Namibia, the Security Council called on member states to "conduct any relations with or involving Namibia in a manner consistent with that responsibility".¹⁴² UN member states were once again called upon "to abstain from entering into economic and other forms of relationship or dealings with South Africa on behalf of or concerning Namibia which may entrench its authority over the Territory".¹⁴³ The commercial agreements pertaining to the acquisition of Namibian uranium thus constituted an impermissible act according to resolution 301 (1971). Furthermore, the resolution declared that "franchises, rights, titles, or contracts relating to Namibia granted to individuals or companies by South Africa after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 2145 (XXI) [of 1966] are not subject to protection or espousal by their States against claims of a future lawful Government of Namibia".¹⁴⁴ The resolution thus spelled out that RTZ's operations at RUL would not be entitled to protection from the British government should consequences arise due to political change in Namibia.

The calls for disinvestment in Namibia were designed to demonstrate the international community's "non-recognition with respect to South African claims to authority on Namibia".¹⁴⁵ But the continued investments in RUL were testament to the fact that there was unwillingness on the part of UN member states such as Britain, Canada, France, Japan, Iran and West Germany to disrupt trade and economic interests with South Africa and by extension Namibia.¹⁴⁶ Needless to say the international community's actions did very little in the way of providing "the effective protection of Namibian interest at the international level".¹⁴⁷ The international community's actions and calls for disinvestment had very little practical impact on the situation in Namibia where South Africa's illegal administration and the exploitation of the territory's natural resources by corporations like RTZ persisted.

¹⁴² United Nations Security Council Resolution 301 (1971) of 20 October 1971. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/301>, accessed 30 August 2018.

¹⁴³ Security Council Resolution 301 (1971).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ International Court of Justice, Written Statements (Finland), 374.

¹⁴⁶ J.F. Murphy, "Whither Now Namibia". *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol. 6: No. 1, Article 1, (1972), pp.1-43, 34. Salmon, *The Challenge of Apartheid*, xxi.

¹⁴⁷ Ad Hoc Sub-Committee established in pursuance of Security Council resolution 276 (1970), 63. http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/subsidiary_organes/committees_standing_and_adhoc.shtml#main2, accessed 30 August 2018.

Decree No.1 for the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia (1974)

According to the UN Council for Namibia “the exploitation of the natural resources of Namibia, mainly by foreign corporations continued unabated” and this despite the Security Council resolution calling for disinvestment in Namibia.¹⁴⁸ Included among these foreign corporations was RTZ whose construction and development stage at RUL was well underway in 1974. In September 1974, the UN Council for Namibia’s concerns over the extensive exploitation of Namibia’s natural resources resulted in the enactment of Decree No. 1 for the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia.¹⁴⁹ The intended purpose of the Decree No.1 states:

Its main provisions prohibit exploitation (prospecting for, mining, processing, exporting, etc.) of any Namibian natural resource without the permission of the Council and specifically invalidates any permission, licence, concession, etc., purporting to allow, or to authorize, exploitation or exportation of Namibian resources which was or is granted by the South African administration in Namibia. The Decree provides for the seizure of any Namibian natural resource taken from the Territory without Council authorization and for forfeiture of the resource so seized to the Council for the benefit of the people of Namibia. It also authorizes seizure of the vessel in which any illegally exported resources are transported and provides that any person or organization contravening the Decree may be held liable in damages by the future Government of an independent Namibia.¹⁵⁰

The Decree ostensibly invalidated any permission, licence or concession that was granted by the illegal South African administration that authorised the exploitation or exportation of Namibian resources.¹⁵¹ For those with investments in Namibia, like the British government’s investments in RTZ’s operations at RUL, the Decree appeared to be a measure of the form of sanctions. Opposition to the Decree particularly questioned the validity and enforceability of the Decree and more importantly it questioned the authority of the UN Council for Namibia to promulgate the Decree.

Moreover, though the Decree had the support of the majority of the General Assembly, it received none from the Security Council. The provisions of the Decree were, however, hinged on the provisions of the Security Council’s resolutions of the early 1970s. The provision that persons or organisations contravening the Decree would be held liable in dam-

¹⁴⁸ Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia. Implementation of Decree No.1 for the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia: Study on the Possibility of Instituting Legal Proceedings in the Domestic Courts of States. *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (April 1986), pp. 442–491, 442.

¹⁴⁹ Decree No. 1 for the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia was enacted on 27 September 1974. Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia, Implementation of Decree No.1, 443.

¹⁵⁰ Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia, Implementation of Decree No.1, 443.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

ages to the future government of an independent Namibia, for instance, was in line with operative paragraph 12 of the Security Council resolution 301 (1971), which declared that member states were not to protect or espouse individuals or companies of their nationality who obtained rights relating to operations in Namibia, after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 2145 (XXI), against claims of a future lawful government of Namibia.¹⁵² That Namibia's natural resources were deemed to be the inviolable heritage of its people was further affirmed in the General Assembly resolution 3295 (XXIX) adopted on 13 December 1974. This was noteworthy considering the South African government's attitude towards, for instance, Namibian uranium. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the South African government sought to restrict "foreign" control over the Rössing deposits primarily because they considered themselves the rightful occupiers of the territory and thus the rightful owners of the territory's natural resources. According to UN resolutions, however, the natural resources of Namibia were the inviolable heritage of the people of Namibia which would mean that the South African government's control over the territory's uranium resources was as "foreign" as RTZ's exploitation of these resources. Resolution 3295 (XXIX) confirmed the enactment of Decree No.1 for the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia by the Council for Namibia, and requested "all Member States to take all appropriate measures to ensure the full application of, and compliance with, the provisions of the Decree [...] and such other measures as may be necessary to assist in the protection of the national resources of Namibia".¹⁵³

In addition, in December 1974, the UN Security Council adopted a strongly worded resolution which condemned the South African government's illegal occupation of Namibia and demanded that the South African regime take the necessary steps to effect the withdrawal of its illegal administration from Namibia.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the General Assembly, however, the Security Council's resolution did not mention Decree No.1 and its resolution did not call on member states to comply with its provisions. This was unsurprising as those who opposed the Decree were permanent members of the Security Council with commercial and strategic interests in Namibian resources which could have been affected by the provisions of the Decree. In the case of France, for instance, Victor Moukambi writes that:

the truth of the matter was that like the majority of Western powers, France did not accept the decision by the UN General Assembly to create a UN Council for Namibia as valid, and there-

¹⁵² Security Council, Resolution 301, 8.

¹⁵³ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3295 (XXIX). Question of Namibia. 13 December 1974, 106. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0738/97/IMG/NR073897.pdf>, accessed 30 August 2018.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 366 (1974), Namibia, of 17 December 1974 <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f17638.html>, accessed 30 August 2018.

fore did not acknowledge that the decisions of that Council had any legal value particularly on Decree No.1 on the protection of the natural resources of Namibia.¹⁵⁵

The Security Council's silence on Decree No.1 thus lent support to questions on the validity and applicability of the Decree.

The UN Council for Namibia, for its part, undertook "numerous studies through consultants, with a view to collecting all possible information and data on the nature and extent of the illegal exploitation of Namibia's natural resources and on the involvement of foreign countries and transnational corporations in this plunder".¹⁵⁶ Once the role of a given country or entity was established, the UN Council for Namibia dispatched delegations to these territories. In May 1975, for instance, a delegation of the UN Council for Namibia travelled to Japan "to ask that it cancel its contract for the purchase of Namibian uranium. The delegation warned Japan that if it continued to buy minerals it would be obliged to pay compensation when Namibia became independent".¹⁵⁷ In response, the Japanese government argued that "Namibian imports were necessary since Japan had no natural resources of its own".¹⁵⁸ This echoed the justifications used by both the British and French governments in relation to their investments in, and purchase of, Namibian uranium. For France Namibian uranium was deemed to be essential for its ambitious nuclear power programme which was aimed at freeing the country from dependence on Arab oil following the 1973 oil crisis.¹⁵⁹ Such responses hampered the work of the UN Council for Namibia and restrained the provisions of its Decree. They were also indicative of the lack of power to enforce UN decrees when powerful member states disagreed with them.

The disregard of strongly worded Security Council resolutions and the Decree of the UN Council for Namibia by investors in RUL undoubtedly bolstered RTZ's resolve to forge on with their operations in Namibia and provided a buffer against international opposition to the exploitation of Namibia's uranium resources. In 1975 the Chairman of RTZ, Sir Val Duncan, declared that:

I am not prepared to fail to deliver to the United Kingdom and others under a contract solemnly entered into for the provision of uranium from South West Africa. I am therefore not prepared to take any notice of what the United Nations say about that.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Moukambi, "Relations Between South Africa and France", 226.

¹⁵⁶ Shamshad Ahmad in SWAPO, *Trade Union Action—Report of a Seminar for West European Trade Unions organised by SWAPO of Namibia in co-operation with the Namibia Support Committee*. (London: NSC, 1982), 9.

¹⁵⁷ Morikawa, *Japan and Africa*, 80.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Moukambi, "Relations Between South Africa and France", 234.

¹⁶⁰ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 102.

It is interesting to note that Duncan singled out the United Kingdom while protecting the identities of RUL's "other" customers (see Chapter 5). In 1975 researchers like Barbara Rogers could only speculate on the participation of countries like Japan and West Germany in RUL. It was, nevertheless, the values of the contracts solemnly entered into by RTZ with countries such as the Britain, France, Japan and West Germany, which were the motivating factor behind Duncan's unpreparedness to heed the calls of the UN Security Council to disinvest in Namibia. RTZ's contracts with the UKAEA alone were worth £60 million pounds and British authorities speculated that "the Rössing Company has contracts totalling £80 million to supply French, German, Japanese and American purchasers".¹⁶¹ Disinvestment in Namibia and the cancellation of contracts with the purchasers of Namibian uranium was therefore out of the question. RTZ's concern was more with the company's reputation, and the effect disinvestment might have on their ability to secure contracts and to raise capital for future mining projects.¹⁶² RTZ's focus was on ensuring that RUL came into production so that the company could honour its contracts with countries such as Britain and France.

Conclusion

As was the case in the exploration stage, RUL's construction and development stage received substantial support from the South African administration. This was especially in terms of the provision of civil works and other amenities for the mine. The construction and development stage witnessed a closer collaboration between RTZ and the AEB, which provided assistance towards the pilot plant operations of the mine and appointed a representative of RUL to the Board of the AEB, starting in 1972. State and firm had thus become interwoven in the establishment of RUL. Despite the evident support of the South African regime, the political situation in Namibia and especially the international community's preoccupation with the situation in Namibia, presented RTZ with the challenge of securing its operations at RUL. RTZ's preoccupation during the construction and development stage was especially with securing the necessary finances it required to bring the mine into operation. To counter these challenges, RTZ adopted a strategy of aligning its commercial interests with the national interests of countries like Britain, Canada, France, Japan and West Germany. To begin with, RTZ awarded a management contract for the design and engineering of RUL to an American-British consortium. The management contract guaranteed international expertise and skilled labour for the mine and facilitated the acquisition of the necessary equipment from American and British industry (see Chapter 5). RTZ forged a close relation-

¹⁶¹ TNA AB44/264 Central and Southern African Department, 16 April 1974. Annex D, Namibia: Rössing Uranium Mine, 4.

¹⁶² TNA AB44/264, 16 April 1974, 5.

ship with South African authorities culminating in support for the design of RUL's pilot plant from the AEB, the provision of electrical power, water and transport infrastructure from the colonial administration as well as support towards the construction of housing at the mine's settlement in Arandis. More importantly, RTZ engaged state-owned and state-controlled atomic energy agencies and power utility companies to invest in RUL through a dual system of equity and long-term sales contracts. RTZ's partnership with these Western countries not only anchored its operations at RUL through financial support, it provided security against international calls to disinvest in Namibia. These calls resonated through UN Security Council resolutions through the advisory opinion of the ICJ and the Decree by the UN Council for Namibia. Two of RTZ's partners were permanent members of the UN Security Council and the other three served as non-permanent members of the same Council. RTZ's strategy during the construction and development stage paid off as its partners were well placed to protect their common interests at the international level. A case study of the security and support accorded to RTZ by one of its international partners is presented in the ensuing Chapter 5, which examines the British government's role in the exploitation of Namibia's uranium resources in collusion with RTZ.

5 The Production Stage

Introduction

When starting a mine, according to RUL, the emphasis is first and foremost “on getting into production”, thereafter the focus is on “satisfying customers who have contracted to buy one’s product” and this was no different for RUL.¹ Key among these customers was the British government which is singled out in this study from other buyers such as Japan and France, for three main reasons. Firstly, the British government was one of the most important customers for RUL and was openly committed to purchasing Namibian uranium. Secondly, RTZ was a British company and had good links with the government. These links were reflective of the convergence of political and commercial interests in the exploitation of Namibian uranium. Thirdly, the British government’s commitment to securing uranium supplies from Namibia was the subject of much controversy, culminating in a campaign by the British Anti-Apartheid Movement. In 1968, 1970 and again in 1976, the British government authorised contracts for the supply of Namibian uranium to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy (UKAEA), and later the British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL).

The authorisation of these contracts led Barbara Rogers to argue that the British government’s policy towards Namibia was “dominated by the consideration of obtaining uranium from Namibia under South African occupation”.² Rogers’ assertion is evidenced by the British government’s desire to see what became known as the “Rössing contracts” completed before the granting of independence to Namibia. The British government was primarily concerned about the risk of interference with the Rössing contracts, which would result from political change in Namibia.³ These concerns justified the arguments in defence of the Rössing contracts, arguments which were formulated in response to mounting opposition against the government’s decision not to interfere in the commercial activities of British companies operating in Namibia.

In the period between 1971 and 1975, RTZ worked to transform RUL in preparation for the production stage.⁴ The plan was to bring RUL into production within a period of five years, but as early as 1973 it was clear that the commencement of full commercial produc-

¹ Rössing Uranium, *The First 10 Years*, 11.

² UNAM Archives, Katjavivi Archives, PH PA1/20/56, B. Rogers, Changes in UK Policy on Namibia, 1966–1974, Following the Rössing Uranium Deals, 1974, 1. TNA FCO 45/2166 H. M. S. Reid to Mr. Mansfield, Namibia: Uranium, 29 April 1977, 1.

³ TNA FCO 45/2166 Colin Bright to Mr. Reid, Namibia: Uranium, 24 February 1977.

⁴ Marais, Rössing, 22. TNA AB 48/1278 R. F. Lethbridge (UKAEA) Note for the Record: Rössing. 4 November 1973, 2.

tion, which was envisioned for 1976, would be highly unlikely. The delays in production had an effect on the financial standing of RUL and, more importantly, on the company's ability to satisfy contractual obligations toward its customers. Again, key among these customers was the British government for whom, as Hecht argues, RUL was as close as they would come to controlling their own uranium supply.⁵ The British government's concerns with securing their uranium supplies prior to political change in Namibia were especially heightened by delays in the commencement of production at RUL and the impact this had on the delivery schedule to the BNFL.

The British government's decision to authorise the Rössing contracts was particularly informed by the question of security of supplies. The authorisation for the Rössing contracts can be traced over four phases, as characterised by Alun Robert. These phases date from 1966 to 1974 and were characterised as follows: Cover-Up, Disregard and Promise, About-Turn, Non-Interference. Three additional phases are added to Robert's characterisation, which enable the book to cover the trajectory of events in the period between 1975 and 1984. These additional phases are characterised as follows: Opposition to the Contracts, Delays in Uranium Deliveries and Contract Completion. Whereas Robert's periods document the British government's foundational role in the development of the RUL, the three additional phases explain the British government's attempts to control the course of Namibian decolonisation so as to protect British investments. The first of the additional three phases, for instance, examines the opposition mounted against the Rössing contracts, and the British government's decision not to interfere with the uranium contracts. The second of the additional three phases focuses on the commencement of production at RUL and the challenges faced by the mine in fulfilling its obligations to its customers. These challenges gave rise to concerns in British government circles of the impact political change in Namibia could have on their uranium supplies. The third, and final phase, in the additional three phases examines the changing position of the British government in relation to new investments in Namibian uranium.

Security of Uranium Supplies

In 1966, the UKAEA sought to secure a contract for uranium ore that would ensure adequate supplies for the British atomic energy project.⁶ Two offers brought before the UKAEA were of Canadian origin. The first was from the Denison Mines Corporation, and the other was from the Rio Algom Mine, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ). The Denison offer

⁵ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

⁶ TNA EG 7/139 G. W. Thynne to the Minister for Aerospace, Uranium Supplies from South West Africa, 12 July 1971.

was deemed unfavourable and the UKAEA commenced negotiations with RTZ's Rio Algom mine. According to British officials "RTZ's terms for supplies from this source were the most attractive of the offers open to us at that time".⁷ The Rio Algom offer was under consideration at a time when RTZ's South African subsidiary, Rio Tinto Management Services (RTMS), was carrying out investigative work on the Louw Claims, which later became the Rössing deposits (see Chapter 2).⁸ In early 1968, after two years of negotiations, the Labour government authorised the UKAEA to reach an agreement with Rio Algom. RTZ had at this stage already concluded that the Rössing deposits had economic potential if production was carried out on a sufficiently large scale. The Rössing deposits were then presented to the UKAEA as an alternative to uranium supplies from Rio Algom.

In April 1968, the UKAEA signed a contract for the supply of uranium, not with Rio Algom but with another RTZ subsidiary, Rio Tinto Finance & Exploration Limited (Riofinex).⁹ Despite the change in the contracting party (Riofinex instead of Rio Algom), the April 1968 contract was approved by the Labour government on the understanding that the primary source of the uranium would be the Rio Algom mine in Canada.¹⁰ The exact opposite was true, however, for RTZ had intended RUL to be the provenance of the contracted uranium.¹¹ UKAEA officials were in on the plan, for they had been informed of RTZ's intentions that in the event "that a new project in South West Africa [Namibia], which RTZ intended to develop, became a viable mine, the ore would be provided from that mine".¹² The UKAEA, in cahoots with RTZ, presented the contract to the British government as a *fait accompli*.¹³

The following year, in May 1969, the UKAEA dispatched J. C. Davey and R. F. Lethbridge to Namibia to seek clarity on RUL.¹⁴ The visit resulted in a preliminary note in which Lethbridge acknowledged RUL's economic potential as a "low-cost producer of uranium concentrates" and recommended that the UKAEA "would be very well advised to maintain its position in this enterprise and extremely ill-advised to fall back on Rio Algom".¹⁵ Davey and Lethbridge strongly recommended that the UKAEA continue its association with RUL, as

⁷ TNA AB 44/264 E. J. S. Clarke, Rössing Contract 23rd March, 1973. Annex 1, Main Features of Rössing Contract, 1.

⁸ BAK B/196/33619 "RTZ Exploration South Africa, "Rössing Project—Estimate of Expenditure to Completion of Evaluation Report," May 1969.

⁹ TNA AB 48/1913 J. J. Wallace, (Rio Tinto Finance & Exploration Limited) to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency, Sale of Uranium Assignment to Rössing Uranium Limited, 26 March 1970.

¹⁰ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² TNA EG 7/139, 12 July 1971.

¹³ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 13.

¹⁴ TNA AB 48/1913 E. J. S. Clarke (UKAEA) Instruction to Messrs' Lethbridge and Davey on their Visit to the Rössing Prospect, 21 May 1969.

¹⁵ TNA AB 48/1913 R. F. Lethbridge, Preliminary Note for U.K.A.E.A., 4 June 1969.

contracted under the agreement with Riofinex. The RUL was “at that time, in the proving-up stage” and this necessitated the adoption of a back-up plan that would provide “some security of supply to the UKAEA”.¹⁶ The concern at the UKAEA over security of supply was the reason behind a proposed back-up arrangement with the Rio Algom mine.

Contracting for Namibian uranium was not without difficulties for Harold Wilson’s Labour administration.¹⁷ Labour had been returned to power with a substantially increased parliamentary majority in 1966 and was committed to reduce official contacts with apartheid South Africa in recognition of the UN’s deliberations on the Question of South West Africa/Namibia. In 1966, Britain’s UN representative, Lord Caradon,¹⁸ declared that:

By word and by action the South African Government demonstrated that it was not ready to accept the essential obligations incumbent upon it under the Mandate. By repudiating those obligations, so clearly affirmed by the International Court and by this Assembly, it forfeited its title to the Mandate. It no longer had the right to carry the sacred trust conferred upon it.¹⁹

Even though the British government recognised that the South African regime had forfeited its right to administer the territory and committed to play a “full part [...] by deliberate action [...] to bring Namibia to independence” its policy towards the situation in Namibia unravelled at the question of security of uranium supplies.²⁰ This despite public declarations that “it is not possible to work for a change in Namibia as long as the status quo is supported in practice”.²¹ The politics of decision-making of consecutive British governments in relation to the exploitation of Namibian uranium is thus worth exploring.

Phase I: “Cover-Up”

As noted above, when negotiations for uranium supplies commenced in 1966, the British Cabinet was informed that future supplies would come from RTZ’s Canadian subsidiary, Rio Algom. During the negotiations it became clear that the RTZ subsidiary, Riofinex, was

¹⁶ Bodleian Library MSS AAM 1127 D. A. Streatfield (RTZ Company Secretary) in a letter to Alun Roberts (Anti-Apartheid Movement), 10 June 1976.

¹⁷ James Harold Wilson, served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1964 to 1970 and again from 1974 to 1976. The National Archives—Cabinet Papers 1915–1986.

¹⁸ Hugh Mackintosh Foot, Baron Caradon, British Ambassador to the United Nations 1964–1970.

¹⁹ Lord Caradon (United Kingdom) restating his government’s position at the Security Council’s Twenty-Fourth Year, 1465th Meeting held on 20 March 1969 in New York, 8. The original statement is contained in the Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifth Special Session, 1504th meeting, para. 141 25 April 1967 http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/69-71/69-71_08.pdf, accessed 26 September 2018.

²⁰ CANUC, Namibia—*A Contract to Kill: The Story of Stolen Uranium and the British Nuclear*. (London: CANUC, 1986).

²¹ Labour’s Programme 1973, 115. Cited in Rogers, *Changes in UK Policy*, 2.

appointed as the contracting party to allow for a possible change in the prime supplier. Shortly after the commencement of negotiations, a Cabinet directive was issued instructing the UKAEA to immediately inform Cabinet in the event that the RTZ subsidiary would supply uranium of South African origin.²² Uranium from South Africa was considered to be undesirable because of the Labour government's commitment to distancing itself from the apartheid regime. In documents produced in the late 1970s, for instance, it was revealed that "it is Government policy, but again not publicly declared, not to purchase uranium from South Africa".²³ The Cabinet directive applied to Namibian uranium which during the colonial period was classified under South African uranium sources, and labelled as such.²⁴ The UKAEA was not only required to inform Cabinet but also to obtain its authorisation before concluding an agreement with Riofinex for the supply of uranium of South African/Namibian origin.²⁵ These directives sought to ensure adherence to the British government's commitment to reducing contacts with the South African regime.

After two years of negotiations and numerous exchanges between the UKAEA, RTZ and the Ministry of Technology, the Cabinet authorised the UKAEA to conclude an agreement with Rio Tinto Finance & Exploration Limited (Riofinex) for the supply of 6,000 tonnes of uranium.²⁶ The official approval came from Anthony Wedgwood-Benn in his capacity as Minister of Technology. It was projected that the uranium supplies would be delivered over a period of ten years beginning in the mid-1970s.²⁷ It was shortly after the contract was authorised in April 1968 that Cabinet became aware of the provenance of the uranium ore. The source of Britain's uranium supplies under the agreement with Riofinex, would be the RUL in Namibia and not the Rio Algom mine in Canada.²⁸ This change in provenance went against the Cabinet directive on uranium supplies from South Africa. Cabinet approval was nevertheless obtained and it was decided that the UKAEA should "proceed with the existing contract, and accept the political difficulties which might ensue".²⁹

Provenance aside, the UKAEA failed to disclose that not one but two contracts were signed with Riofinex. The first contract for 6,000 tonnes had been presented by RTZ as be-

²² Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 13.

²³ TNA FCO 45/2167 Namibia: the Rössing Uranium Contract, 19 July 1977, 2.

²⁴ This was evident in publications of organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as well as in the reports of the Uranium Institute in London.

²⁵ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 13.

²⁶ C. Legum, UN defied in uranium deal with S. Africa. *The Observer*, 2 August 1970, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/475979575?accountid=13042>, accessed 26 September 2018.

²⁷ Anthony Wedgwood-Benn was Minister for Technology between 4 July 1966–19 June 1970, Cabinet Papers 1915–1986 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/harold-wilson-1966.htm>, accessed 26 September 2018.

²⁸ DA Streatfield, (RTZ Company Secretary) to Alun Roberts, 10 June 1976, in Roberts, *The Rössing File*, 26.

²⁹ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 98.

ing “inoperable unless a second contract, for an additional 1,500 tonnes, were also signed”.³⁰ This according to Hecht, was because RTZ’s contracts with Urangesellschaft did not push Rössing “past the threshold of profitability, so UKAEA officials, eager to ensure the mine’s viability, happily filled the gap with a second contract”.³¹ The second contract was, according to RTZ, “necessary to ensure a sufficient scale of production to make the operation profitable and therefore to raise the necessary finance”.³² Interestingly, the UKAEA presented this second contract to the British government not as a new contract but as a mere extension of the existing contract, or what the contracting parties referred to as a “supplemental agreement”.³³ The contract brought Britain’s uranium supplies from Namibia to 7,500 tonnes.³⁴

The political challenges posed by the provenance of the uranium supplies and the existence of the second contract were not lost on Cabinet. Rogers, for instance, argues that Prime Minister Harold Wilson, while “fully appreciating the sensitivity of such a major commitment to the occupation of Namibia, personally instructed that no word of the deal should be allowed to leak out to the British press and public before the General Election, in June 1970”.³⁵ With upcoming elections the decision to keep secret the existence of the uranium contracts had, undoubtedly, more to do with British public opinion than the Prime Minister’s sensitivities over the occupation of Namibia. This was evidenced by the British government’s disagreement with the course of action taken at the UN, starting with the termination of the South African mandate in 1966. Despite earlier statements by its UN representative, the British government abstained from General Assembly resolution 2145 (XXI) arguing that “the course adopted by the General Assembly in 1966 was mistaken”.³⁶ This was followed by abstentions from Security Council resolutions, which were described by the British representative as “resolutions which would remain inoperative”.³⁷

In 1970 the Conservative Party defeated the Labour government.³⁸ With the change of government came the revelation that a contract had been signed for the supply of uranium

³⁰ Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 13.

³¹ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

³² Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 13.

³³ TNA AB 48/1913, 26 March 1970.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 14.

³⁶ Lord Caradon (United Kingdom). United Nations Security Council Official Records. Twenty-Fourth Year, 1465th Meeting 20 March 1969 New York, 7. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/488696/files/S_PV-1465-EN.pdf, accessed 26 September 2018.

³⁷ United Nations Security Council resolution 264 (1969) of 20 March 1969 and resolution 269 (1969) of 12 August 1969 [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/90763?ln=en#:~:text=TitleResolution%20264%20\(1969\)%20%2F.%5D%2C%20of%2020%20March%201969.&text=%5B2%5D%20p.,of%20the%20Security%20Council%2C%201969](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/90763?ln=en#:~:text=TitleResolution%20264%20(1969)%20%2F.%5D%2C%20of%2020%20March%201969.&text=%5B2%5D%20p.,of%20the%20Security%20Council%2C%201969), accessed 26 September 2018.

³⁸ Sir Edward Richard George Heath served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1970 to 1974.

from the RUL. When the news of the uranium contract was leaked to the British press, reference was only made to the first contract for the supply of 6,000 tonnes of uranium ore. This was retrospectively explained by a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) official who noted that “only the 1968 contract with Rössing has so far been made public by Her Majesty’s Government: the 1970 contract has successfully been kept secret”.³⁹ In the absence of a full disclosure, the Labour government’s role in this first phase of the uranium contracts was aptly characterised as a “cover-up” aided by the UKAEA, as the purchasing entity and the British multinational corporation, Rio Tinto Zinc.

Phase II: “Disregard and Promise”

The leak (discussed above) to the British press was embarrassing to the Labour Party, which was now the official Opposition. It would, however, be some time before the new Conservative administration revealed the precise details of the Rössing contracts. British public opinion, it was believed, would not countenance the facts of the contracts and especially the fact of Britain’s direct reliance on South Africa for uranium supplies originating from Namibia.⁴⁰ This was because of the emergence of a strong domestic anti-apartheid movement in Britain during the 1960s. Permission to export Namibian uranium to the United Kingdom under the contract with Riofinex, for example, had required authorisation from the South African government, as stipulated by the Atomic Energy Act of South Africa. This meant the direct involvement of the South African Atomic Energy Board (AEB) from which the authorisation for the supply of uranium from RUL had to be obtained.⁴¹ The contracts for the supply of 7,500 tonnes of uranium were estimated to be worth £60 million and were scheduled to come into force in 1976, with deliveries to the UKAEA due between 1977 and 1982.⁴²

The reliance on the goodwill of the South African government for Britain’s projected uranium supplies led the Conservative government to seek the legal opinion of the Attorney General on the implications of the uranium contracts for the British government and on the possibility of cancelling the contracts.⁴³ In response, the Attorney General issued a memorandum which highlighted the existence of a force majeure clause in the contract. The clause “safeguarded any policy decision by the Government,” and in so doing, exempted the

³⁹ TNA FCO 96/414 Uranium from Namibia, Martin Reith in a letter to M. J. Wilmshurst, 10 March 1975.

⁴⁰ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia, 20 October 1975.

⁴¹ Adams, *Tony Benn—A Biography*, 387.

⁴² TNA FCO 96/414 Central and Southern African Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Namibia: Uranium Supplies, October 1974, 2.

⁴³ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia, 20 October 1975. Legum, UN defied in uraniumdeal.

government from paying penalties to Riofinex in the event that the contract was cancelled on the basis of a policy decision.⁴⁴ The British government's policy on apartheid South Africa, along with the support it had expressed in UN deliberations on Namibia, could thus have sufficed as a policy decision for the cancellation of the contracts with Riofinex. The Attorney General's advice was, however, not heeded by the Conservative government, for neither the policy of keeping a distance from apartheid South Africa nor the statements at the UN on the position of South Africa in relation to the mandate territory had emanated from the Conservative government. Both policy positions were the work of the Labour Party, now in opposition. As far as the Conservative government was concerned, "there was no question, of course, of revoking the contract with Rössing Uranium".⁴⁵ The expressed concern of the Conservative government was with ensuring a reliable supply of uranium.

Not surprisingly, the Conservative government "maintained the momentum of Britain's acquisition of Namibian uranium" and took a softer line towards South Africa than Labour.⁴⁶ That Britain's uranium supplies from RUL were dependent on South African approval, for example, was not an issue for the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who stated that South Africa was "the natural administrator of South West Africa" and it was "difficult to see how the situation could be otherwise".⁴⁷ The Minister of Technology, John Davies, publicly committed the Conservative government to increased economic links with South Africa.⁴⁸ This was despite the fact that the Security Council had adopted resolution 283 (1970), which called on member states to cease all investment in Namibia and to encourage individuals and companies of their nationality to "cease all dealings with respect to commercial or industrial enterprises or concessions in Namibia".⁴⁹ What mattered to the Conservative government was that the British nuclear power programme had privileged access to Namibian uranium through RTZ. A significant change in policy had thus occurred when the new government came to power in 1970.

Moreover, in 1970, Britain entered into an agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands by which a uranium processing plant would be established in the Dutch town of Almelo. The Treaty of Almelo was signed on 4th March 1970, and it laid down the terms by which the uranium enrichment plant, URENCO, would be established and governed.⁵⁰ URENCO was essentially a joint venture between the UKAEA (and later British Nuclear Fuels Limited), Uranit of West Germany and Ultra Centrifuge Nederland (in

⁴⁴ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia, 20 October 1975. Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ogunbadejo, *The International Politics*, 64.

⁴⁷ Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home cited in Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 15.

⁴⁸ D. Fishlock, UN Silent on South West Africa Uranium Deal. Financial Times [London, England] 9 July 1970: 8. Financial Times. 22 January 2016.

⁴⁹ Security Council, Resolution 283 (1970), 3.

⁵⁰ J. P. Verheul. "Namibian Uranium" (*Nederlands Juristenblad*, 1981), 6.

which the Dutch government had a majority interest).⁵¹ The power utilities of the participating countries were required to provide their own uranium for processing at URENCO. The supply of unenriched uranium from RUL was thus important for both the British domestic nuclear programme and the enrichment programme established under the Treaty of Almelo. This was confirmed by British government officials who noted that:

We, together with the German and Netherlands Governments, have invested a great deal of money and effort in building up the Centrifuge Enrichment process. Without sources of supply of natural uranium this industry would be of no use; not only would we lose that investment but we would also have to buy the expensive enriched fuel for our own reactors from other countries.⁵²

A month after the Conservative Party came to power; the Security Council requested an advisory opinion of the ICJ on the legal consequences for UN member states stemming from South Africa's continued presence in Namibia. The ICJ declared that South African presence in Namibia was illegal and it invalidated all acts taken by the South African government on behalf of Namibia.⁵³ The ICJ's findings prompted a study undertaken in July 1971 by the British government following proposals that the British government take effective steps in implementing the legal advice of the Court.⁵⁴ Months later in October 1971 the matter was deliberated in the House of Commons "in which Mr. Alexander Lyon expressed his view that although the contract [for Namibian uranium] had been approved under a Labour Administration, the ICJ Advisory Opinion had changed things and the contract should not be implemented".⁵⁵ This course of action was supported by Baron Caradon, the former UK representative to the UN, who called for "the withdrawal by British companies from all trade contracts and the prohibition of further contracts in Namibia".⁵⁶ Such action, it was argued, would demonstrate British recognition of the illegality of South Africa's continued presence in Namibia.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² TNA AB 44/264 G. W. Thynne (Department of Energy) to E. J. S. Clarke (UKAEA), 23 May 1974, 1.

⁵³ International Court of Justice, Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/53>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁵⁴ [Hansard], Namibia (International Court Ruling). HC Deb 12 July 1971 vol 821 cc22-3 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1971/jul/12/namibia-international-court-ruling>, accessed 02-October 2018. Mr. Ioan Evans, [Hansard], Namibia, HC Deb 17 July 1974 vol 877 cc425-7 425 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1974/jul/17/namibia>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁵⁵ TNA AB44/264 Central and Southern African Department, Annex D, Namibia: Rössing Uranium Mine, 16 April 1974, 3.

⁵⁶ [Hansard], South-West Africa: Future Administration. HL Deb 5 July 1971 Vol. 321 cc643-5. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1971/jul/05/south-west-africa-future-administration>, accessed 2 October 2018.

The government's study which was undertaken in July 1971 culminated in the October 1971 decision not to accept the conclusions reached by the ICJ in its advisory opinion.⁵⁷ The Conservative government's decision was announced both to the British Parliament as well as the UN Security Council. The British UN representative Sir Colin Crowe, explained that "the fact that the Court has given its advice cannot absolve Governments from themselves considering very carefully all the relevant legal factors, forming their own view of them and then, honestly and seriously, reaching the legal conclusions which in their judgement flow from that process".⁵⁸ The crucial question for the Conservative government was the link between the ICJ opinion and General Assembly resolution 2145 (XXI) of 1966, by which the South African mandate over Namibia was terminated. According to the British government, South Africa's mandate over Namibia had not been validly terminated supposedly because the General Assembly did not have the power to terminate the mandate unilaterally. The British government's position reflected the dissenting opinion delivered at the ICJ by the British Judge, Sir Gerald Fitzmaurice, who argued that the South African "Mandate was not validly revoked by United Nations action in 1966 or thereafter, and still subsists".⁵⁹ It was for this reason that Britain could not accept the legal consequences deduced by the ICJ.⁶⁰ Cooperation with the advisory opinion of the Court, would thus not be forthcoming.

The British government's position was further demonstrated in its decision to abstain on resolution 301 (1971) of 20 October 1971 in which the Security Council agreed with the advisory opinion of the ICJ. During a parliamentary debate on the matter the veteran Labour Parliamentarian and longstanding opponent of colonial rule, Lord Fenner Brockway, requested an explanation on the decision, asking "was not this only a resolution agreeing with the World Court's findings?" Why, then, "did Sir Colin Crowe say that the British Government did not agree with that World Court's finding?"⁶¹ The response from Conservative spokesman Earl Ferrers was that the advisory opinion was only a recommendation, and therefore not binding on member states. Unsatisfied with the response, Lord Brockway

⁵⁷ [Hansard], Further Statement on Southern Africa, Mr. James Callaghan (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs). HC Deb 4 December 1974 Vol. 882 cc1555-66 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1974/dec/04/southern-africa>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁵⁸ Sir Colin Crowe (United Kingdom) United Nations Security Council SPV 1589 6 October 1971 (6) New York <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁵⁹ Dissenting Opinion, Judge Sir Gerald Fitzmaurice, (1971, 226) International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion. <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/53/053-19710621-ADV-01-08-EN.pdf>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁶⁰ Crowe, United Nations Security Council, 6.

⁶¹ [Hansard], South West Africa: United Nations Resolution HL Deb 28 October 1971 vol 324 cc845-6 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1971/oct/28/south-west-africa-united-nations>, accessed 2 October 2018. (Lord Brockway) Archibald Fenner Brockway helped establish the Movement for Colonial Freedom in the 1950s and was an active member of the League against Imperialism.

questioned what the reason “for all this appeasement of the South African Government?” was; “Is it British financial interests that are in Namibia?”⁶² Considering the expressed view that the advisory opinion changed things in terms of the implementation of the contract for Namibian uranium, coupled with calls for “the withdrawal by British companies from all trade contracts”, the link to British financial interests in Namibia is evident.⁶³ These interests give a clear indication as to why the Conservative government rejected the Courts opinion and decided to uphold the contracts for uranium supplies from Namibia.

The Conservative government’s decision to uphold the uranium contracts meant that the Labour party, now in Opposition, had the opportunity to address the controversy arising from its government’s authorisation of the uranium contracts.⁶⁴ Acknowledging that the contracts had been a mistake, Labour promised to cancel the contracts if and when it was returned to power in the 1974 elections.⁶⁵ The decision, taken at the Labour Party Conference in 1973, read that “Labour will terminate the atomic-energy contract with Rio Tinto Zinc for uranium in Namibia”.⁶⁶ This decision was further confirmed by Anthony Wedgwood-Benn, who announced Labour’s decision to end the contract for which he, as the former Minister of Technology, took responsibility.⁶⁷

Phase III: “About-Turn”

The Labour Party was returned to power in the 1974 election with Harold Wilson again serving as Prime Minister. Another familiar name in the 1974 Labour administration was Anthony Wedgwood-Benn, who had been appointed as Secretary of State for Energy under the new administration. Benn started his term in office with a recommendation for the cancellation of the uranium contract. He told Cabinet that “the attitude of the Labour Party in Opposition on the Rössing contract was on record”.⁶⁸ A return to office did not however directly translate the Labour party policy into governmental action. When the possibility of the cancellation of the uranium contracts was brought up in parliamentary debates in 1974, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Joan Lestor, explained

⁶² [Hansard], South West Africa (Lord Brockway).

⁶³ H. Caradon, “Why Britain must change policy on Southern Africa”. *The Times*, Wednesday August 9th, 1972.

⁶⁴ Fishlock, “UN Silent on South West Africa”.

⁶⁵ Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ C. Legum, Labour pulls its punches on S. Africa. *The Observer*, 24 November 1974, <http://search.proquest.com/docview>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁶⁸ TNA CAB/128/58/3 Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Thursday 29 January 1976 at 11h30 am., 9.

that no decision had yet been taken on the issue.⁶⁹ The government had, according to Lestor, decided to review its policy on Southern Africa in general and Namibia in particular. Under this process, the government was supposedly considering “with great care and in great depth the question of whether this contract should be allowed to continue”.⁷⁰

The Labour government’s indecision appears to have resulted from an Act of Parliament passed under the Conservative government in April 1971.⁷¹ The Atomic Energy Authority Act of 1971 assigned the responsibilities of the UKAEA connected to the procurement and the manufacturing of nuclear fuel elements to the newly established British Nuclear Fuels Limited (BNFL).⁷² According to British government officials, the BNFL whose “shares are 100 per cent owned by the UK Atomic energy Authority [UKAEA] on behalf of the Government, is a Government owned company”.⁷³ The BNFL had thus “contracted to purchase uranium from the Rössing mine” on behalf of the British government.⁷⁴ The process of reassignment of the UKAEA’s responsibilities to BNFL was officially concluded in December 1974, under the Labour government. This meant that the entity to which the previous Labour government had given authorisation to contract with Riofinex for the supply of Namibian uranium no longer held this responsibility. The following year, in December 1975, Tony Benn, asked if he would make a statement on the contract between UKAEA and RTZ, simply responded that “the contracts for the supply of uranium from Namibia have been transferred to British Nuclear Fuels Limited and the UKAEA is no longer a party to them”.⁷⁵ The responsibility for the uranium contracts might have been transferred from one entity to another but this did not change the fact that the contracts still remained. The position of the Labour party on the Namibian uranium contracts had thus evidently been abandoned and the first steps towards what Alun Roberts characterised as the Labour government’s “about-turn” had begun.⁷⁶

Moreover, the Labour government’s policy towards Namibia, encompassed by its review of policy towards Southern Africa, was finally completed in early December 1974. The review recommended a clear divergence from the previous Conservative administration. The

⁶⁹ [Hansard], Namibia (Uranium Supplies)—Joan Lestor, HC Deb 26 June 1974 vol 875 c447W. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1974/jun/26/namibia-uranium-supplies>; [Hansard], Namibia. HC Deb 12 June 1974 vol 874 c566W <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1974/jun/12/namibia>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁷⁰ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia (Lord Lovell-Davis).

⁷¹ TNA AB 48/1278 Assignment of Uranium Sales Agreement (UKAEA-BNFL), 23 December 1974.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ TNA FCO 45/2166 Rössing Mine, Namibia, 7 January 1977.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ [Hansard], Uranium (Namibia) 17 December 1975, Volume 902, Response by A. W. Benn (Secretary of State for Energy) <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1975-12-17/debates/c8ece226-1e68-43f7-9ab3-ba1aa154a0b3/Uranium> (Namibia), accessed 2 October 2018.

⁷⁶ Roberts, *The Rössing File*.

Labour government, for instance, conceded that “the mandate can no longer be regarded as being in force, that South Africa’s occupation of Namibia is unlawful, and that it should withdraw”.⁷⁷ According to the Labour government, the South African regime was “in occupation without title of a territory which has international status”.⁷⁸ The Labour government’s acknowledgment of the aforementioned did not mean a total acceptance of the ICJ’s advisory opinion. This was clarified by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, James Callaghan, who explained that there were certain elements of the advisory opinion with which the British government could not agree.⁷⁹ The British government, for example, rejected the ICJ’s suggestion that the Security Council’s resolutions on Namibia were mandatory, and particularly resolution 276 of 1970 which “declared the presence of South African authorities in Namibia and all acts taken by the Government of South Africa on behalf of or concerning the Territory after termination of the mandate to be illegal”.⁸⁰ The Labour government, according to Callaghan, “would not accept an obligation to take active measures of pressure to limit or stop commercial or industrial relations of our nationals with the South African administration of Namibia”.⁸¹ The implications of the advisory opinion and the Security Council resolution on British economic interest in Namibia, and particularly the Rössing contracts, made it all the more unacceptable. RTZ’s commercial relations with the South African administration in Namibia had thus received the support of the British government.

The Labour government’s position on the Rössing contracts was confirmed again in a response by the Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Joan Lestor, who when asked if steps would be taken to cancel the contract for the supply of uranium from Namibia, replied with a simple “No”.⁸² It is striking that there were no further questions to the Under Secretary’s response and no further discussions were held on the subject until October 1975 when Lord Brockway, a Labour parliamentarian, requested a response from the government on the desirability of terminating the British government’s dependence on South Africa, for its uranium supplies.⁸³ Lord Brockway called on the government

⁷⁷ [Hansard], Further Statement on Southern Africa, 4 December 1974.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. James Callaghan. [Hansard], Southern Africa, HC Deb 4 December 1974 Vol. 882 cc1555-66 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1974/dec/04/southern-africa>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁸⁰ [Hansard], Southern Africa, 4 December 1974.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The question was posed by Mr. Derek Faulds to Miss Joan Lestor during the House of Commons debates on Namibia in December 1974. [Hansard], Namibia HC Deb 9 December 1974 vol 883 cc23-4W <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1974/dec/09/namibia>, accessed 2 October 2018.

⁸³ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia (Lord Brockway).

to “fulfil the decision, to which our Party is committed, to end the Rössing contract”.⁸⁴ The Under-Secretary for Energy Lord Lovell-Davis responded that “although the matter of the cancellation of the contracts was expressed at the Labour Party Conference in 1973, it was not subsequently adopted in the 1974 Manifesto”.⁸⁵ This meant that because the Labour Party had not contested the 1974 General Election on the promise of cancelling the uranium contracts, it was not obligated to keep the “promise” made while in opposition. The Labour government’s about-turn was thus concluded and the question of the cancellation of the contracts for the supply of uranium from Namibia was laid to rest, at least for the time being.

Phase IV: “Non-Interference”

The supposed justification for Labour’s about-turn was the unavailability of alternative uranium supplies for the British nuclear power programme, in the contracted period for supplies under the Rössing contract. This, according to Lord Lovell-Davis, was “particularly true of non-processed uranium ore, which the Rössing mine will supply”.⁸⁶ Stressing the importance of the Rössing contract to Britain’s nuclear power programme, Lovell-Davis argued that “if the contract had been cancelled there would have been no prospect in the present world supply position of replacing the material from any of the existing major sources”.⁸⁷ Barbara Rogers, however, argued that “there was a glut of uranium oxide on the world market, and producers everywhere were either closing mines or stockpiling uranium which could not be sold”.⁸⁸ This occurred in major uranium producing countries like Australia, Canada and the USA. The British government argued that most of these countries insisted on supplying uranium in an enriched form and this was not in the interest of the BNFL as they too were in the business of enrichment. According to the British government they had “invested a great deal of money and effort in building up the Centrifuge Enrichment process” and “without sources of supply of natural uranium this industry would be of no use; not only would we lose that investment but we would also have to buy the expensive enriched fuel for our own reactors from other countries, e.g. Canada and Australia”.⁸⁹ In addition countries like Canada had also decided “to prohibit the export of uranium for the purpose of nuclear war preparations” and thereby imposed end-use restrictions.⁹⁰ The argument of a shortage in alternative uranium supplies was therefore in reference to the form of

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia (Lord Lovell-Davis in response to Lord Brockway).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Rogers, *Namibia’s Uranium*, 14.

⁸⁹ TNA AB44/264 G. W. Thynne to E. J. S. Clarke, FCO Energy Dept. Note on Rössing E4A, 1.

⁹⁰ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia (Lord Brockway).

uranium (unprocessed, unenriched, natural uranium) and without end-use restrictions, as was guaranteed under the Rössing contract.

Financial consequences beyond the enrichment process also mitigated in the decision to uphold the Rössing contracts. Firstly, it was felt that “the UKAEA would expect to be sued for damages for breach of contract to the order of £5–£10million and possibly more”.⁹¹ These were the expected estimates, despite the Attorney General’s advice on the force majeure clause in the UKAEA–Riofinex contract. Secondly, “in 1973 the Exports Credits and Guarantee Department issued an insurance guaranteeing finance for the processing work for which our ultimate liability could reach £25million. Any cancellation of the UKAEA contracts would inevitably involve compensation to the Rössing Company”.⁹² Thirdly, “a British and American consortium (Power Gas with Western Knapp) holds the main contract for design and engineering work—on which a start has already been made—worth approximately £32million. Export orders for £3.7million of British equipment for the mine have already been placed”.⁹³ The financial implications were thus considered to be substantial.

The requirements of the British nuclear power programme coupled with a potential loss both in terms of financial investments and uranium supplies led to the British government’s conclusion that they saw no good reason for interfering in the uranium contracts. The decision “against any interference with this contract” was embedded in the comprehensive review of the British government’s foreign policy on Southern Africa, which the Labour government undertook upon its return to office in 1974.⁹⁴ The official government position on the uranium contracts thus became one of “non-interference”. The government’s position confirmed that the agreement BNFL and RTZ for uranium supplies from RUL had the official support of the British government. The financial implications of the Rössing contracts served as a clear indication that economic considerations trumped the anti-apartheid stance of the British government.

Phase V: Opposition to the Contracts

In 1974 the Namibia Support Committee (NSC), an offshoot of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, was established with the aim of providing support to the Namibian struggle for independence.⁹⁵ The launch of the NSC coincided with the promulgation of the UN Council

⁹¹ TNA AB44/264 Central and Southern African Department, 16 April 1974. Annex D, Namibia: Rössing Uranium Mine, 3.

⁹² TNA AB44/264, 16 April 1974, 2.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ TNA FCO 45/2167 Lord Lovell-Davis, HANSARD: Uranium Purchases from Namibia. TNA FCO 45/2167 Namibia: Rössing Contract—Draft Letter, 8 April 1976, 3.

⁹⁵ Randolph Vigne (2008), “Standing by Swapo—British Campaigning for Namibia”. <https://union->

for Namibia's Decree No. 1 and this inspired its efforts in conducting research on the role of the British government and British companies in the exploitation of Namibia's natural resource. Most notable was the NSC's research on the Rössing contracts which was aided by the work of Barbara Rogers, a former Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) official who had identified inconsistencies in the paper trail of Britain's uranium supplies.⁹⁶ These inconsistencies had to do with the changes in the source of Britain's uranium supplies, which, according to Rogers, had been switched from Rio Algom to RUL without the knowledge of the British Cabinet. Alarmed by these changes, Rogers wrote letters to officials in the various agencies that were party to the Rössing contracts pointing out that the contracts meant Britain's tacit endorsement of South Africa's continued occupation of Namibia.⁹⁷ When her efforts to have the contracts for Namibian uranium suspended failed, Rogers resigned from her position at the FCO in 1971.⁹⁸



Figure 6: Barbara Rogers at the Anti-Apartheid Committee Hearings on Sanctions against South Africa —United Nations⁹⁹

chapel.org.uk/church/news-and-blogs/30-years-of-namibian-independence accessed 3 February 2015. Saunders, *Namibian Solidarity*, 440.

⁹⁶ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁹ IISH ARCH02466 (Werk Group Kairos) UN Photo 145832 / Yutuka Nagata Anti-Apartheid Committee Hearings on Sanctions Against South Africa—United Nations, New York, 11 March 1981.

The following year, in 1972, Rogers began to conduct research on uranium production in Namibia and in South Africa, with particular interest in apartheid South Africa's nuclear ambitions.¹⁰⁰ Rogers became an opponent of apartheid South Africa, working alongside renowned figures like Ruth First in UN hearings on the institution of sanctions against South Africa. Her research efforts on uranium production in Namibia culminated in the 1975 report titled *Namibia's Uranium: Implications for the South African Occupation Regime*.¹⁰¹ The report not only documented the inconsistencies in the Rössing contracts but also the extent to which the British government was involved in the exploitation of Namibian uranium. Rogers attributed the financial responsibility for the establishment of the mine to the British government. This assertion was refuted by British government officials who declared certain aspects of Rogers' report as inaccurate, arguing that they were not the only customer receiving uranium from RUL.¹⁰² The declassified British government records of the period confirm the accuracy of Rogers' report. This is especially in relation to the information provided in the report on the economics of RUL. What information it lacked resulted, understandably, from its publication a year prior to the start of production at RUL and the cloak of secrecy under which the mine came into being. Despite her efforts, however, the British government's decision to uphold the Rössing contracts was already cemented under the policy of non-interference.

Opposition to the contracts not only came from within the civil service and the anti-apartheid movement, but from what *The Economist* described as Labour's left-wing.¹⁰³ Such opposition was illustrated through debates in parliament.¹⁰⁴ Here, the veteran Labour politician, Lord Brockway's statement in the House of Lords, in October 1975, is worth quoting in full:

My Lords, what I am saying is that the British Government have repeatedly said, despite their reservations on that issue, that the occupation is illegal, but have gone on to say that it is de facto. I am submitting that the fact of South Africa's power in Namibia does not justify our recognition of its possession of the minerals of that territory, or a contract under which we benefit from the exploitation of those minerals. What right has South Africa to plunder the natural resources of Namibia? What right have we to accept that plunder? Morally, the British Government are acting as a receiver of stolen goods in that respect.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 149.

¹⁰¹ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*.

¹⁰² TNA FCO 96/414 K. W. Joyner (Department of Energy) in a letter addressed to M. C. Clements Esq, FCO Energy Department, Namibia and Uranium, 10 October 1975, 1. TNA FCO 96/414 M. C. Clements (Energy Department), Namibian and Uranium, 13 October 1975.

¹⁰³ *The Economist*, 8 October 1977, 97.

¹⁰⁴ TNA FCO 45/2168.

¹⁰⁵ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia (Lord Brockway).

Brockway's brandishing of the British government as a receiver of stolen goods stems from the UN Council for Namibia's Decree No.1 which "declared Namibian uranium illicit because of South Africa's continued occupation" of the territory.¹⁰⁶ Decree No.1 was extensively utilised by the NSC through its Campaign Against the Namibia Uranium Contracts (CANUC) which was launched on 24 May 1977.¹⁰⁷ CANUC was a public campaign against the British government's decision to uphold the contracts for the supply of Namibian uranium. CANUC called on the British government to cancel the Rössing contracts, arguing that the decision to maintain the contract "flies in the face of UN resolutions on Namibia and the 1971 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice".¹⁰⁸ The campaign sought to stop all imports and processing of Namibian uranium, which was deemed to be illegal under the terms of the UN Council for Namibia's Decree No.1.¹⁰⁹ This use of the Decree by campaigners was fairly unusual as UN Decrees are not usually quoted at length in public debate. Nevertheless, RTZ's operations at RUL, and by extension the British contract for Namibian uranium, were categorised as illicit activities and this not only reverberated through parliamentary debates but also in the campaign material that was produced in opposition to the Rössing contracts.



Figure 7: CANUC Poster - 'Stop the Namibian Uranium Contracts'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/history/namibia/po074-stop-the-namibian-uranium-contracts.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

¹⁰⁸ TNA FCO 45/2168 W. E. Fitzsimmons in a letter to the Secretary of State for Energy, Rössing: Letter from the Campaign Against the Namibian Uranium Contracts, 11 November 1977.

¹⁰⁹ TNA FCO 45/2168 11 November 1977.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/history/namibia/po074-stop-the-namibian-uranium-contracts.html>, accessed 11 November 2020.

Moreover, to expose the role of RTZ in the exploitation of Namibian uranium the NSC established what was known as the Haslemere Group. The Haslemere Group acted as the commercial arm of the NSC, by purchasing minority shares in RTZ. These shares enabled researchers of the NSC to attend shareholders meetings organised by RTZ's London Offices.¹¹¹ It was through these meetings and the reports produced by RTZ for its shareholders that the NSC was able to obtain further information on RUL. Information pertaining to equity participation in RUL and the profits accrued by RTZ from Namibian uranium were reproduced in CANUC publications.

CANUC lobbied political parties, "notably the Labour Party, to accept the various UN, ICJ and UN Council for Namibia rulings and Decrees on Namibia".¹¹² According to a Department of Energy official, CANUC "circulated literature to Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) throughout Britain urging them to join the campaign against the Rössing contract."¹¹³ The Campaign was sufficiently effective in mobilising opposition within the Labour Party and British trade unions, leading the official to note that, "to date, we and FCO have received letters from more than 50 CLPs, from a number of MPs and from the Scottish TUC and ASLEF".¹¹⁴ These letters all raised similar questions pertaining to the government's position on the situation in Namibia and its arguments for non-interference in the Rössing contracts. The letters highlighted the Labour Party Conference and National Executive Council's decision to cancel the Rössing contracts, a decision which the Labour government had reversed.

As a result of the campaign against the Rössing contracts, British civil servants from the FCO, the Department of Energy and the Department of Trade compiled and compared defensive notes to produce a standard reply letter. The "comprehensive review of government policy towards Southern Africa in 1974 which spelled out the decision not to interfere with the uranium contract(s)", was almost always the starting point of the government's response to these letters.¹¹⁵ The arguments in favour of the Rössing contracts were two-fold: commercial and legal. In addition to the arguments put forward in support of non-interference (see Phase IV: Non-interference), the commercial considerations pertained to Britain's domestic energy requirements and the government's investment in the uranium enrichment business. One of the main advantages of the Rössing contracts was the natural form of uranium it provided. It was argued that any replacement supplies necessitated by a cancellation of the Rössing contracts would need to be in the natural form. This was important for UK reactors, the capacity to generate electricity and the government's investment in enrichment

¹¹¹ TNA FCO 45/2168 11 November 1977.

¹¹² Durker and Boyd, Briefing on the Campaign for Activist. (London: CANUC, 1986), 1.

¹¹³ TNA FCO 45/2168, 11 November 1977.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ TNA FCO 45/2168 A. W. Benn (Secretary of State for Energy) in a letter to the Rt Hon Denis Healey (House of Commons) dated 23 December 1977.

processes. British government officials argued that obtaining enriched uranium “would both cost us heavily in foreign currency and deprive our enrichment industry of valuable and much needed business”.¹¹⁶ British government officials also argued that,

Rössing is not only (probably) the biggest single uranium mine in the world but is less likely than any other major mine to be required before say 2000 for a domestic enrichment process [...] For this reason Rössing is highly desirable as a source for a British enrichment industry and a breach will ensure that it is committed even more to the Japanese.¹¹⁷

The supposed limited possibilities of replacing the uranium supplies under the Rössing contract with supplies from elsewhere, and the competition posed by uranium importers like Japan, were thus presented as mitigating commercial factors in upholding the contracts.

The legal considerations were premised on the view that the continuation of the uranium contracts did not conflict with the British government’s international obligations under the UN Charter. The British government’s position on the rulings of the ICJ and the legality of the UN Council for Namibia and its Decree No.1 formed the basis for the decision not to interfere with normal commercial activity in Namibia”.¹¹⁸ Lord Lovell-Davis further emphasised that “the purchase of uranium from the Rössing Uranium Company by British Nuclear Fuels Limited in pursuance of a commercial contract would not imply any recognition by the British Government of the right of South Africa to continue to administer the territory”.¹¹⁹ For although the South African occupation regime was “in control on the ground”, theirs was an “unlawful” administration and the mandate over Namibia could therefore no longer be regarded as being in force.¹²⁰ It is noteworthy that the British government referred to South African occupation as unlawful, whereas the ICJ and the UN Security Council used the term “illegal”. This distinction without a difference was preferred by the British government to underscore its disagreement with the rulings and resolutions of UN organs.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ TNA FCO 45/2166 H. M. S. Reid to Mr. Mansfield, Namibia: Uranium, 29 April 1977, 2.

¹¹⁷ TNA AB 44/264 E. J. S Clarke, UKAEA to G. W. Thynne Department of Energy 4 June 1974, 2.

¹¹⁸ TNA FCO 45/2167, 19 July 1977, 1.

¹¹⁹ [Hansard], Uranium Purchases from Namibia (Lord Lovell-Davis in response to Lord Brockway).

¹²⁰ TNA FCO 45/2168, 23 December 1977.

¹²¹ The British diplomat, Paul Fifoot, based at the United Nations, privately questioned the legal distinction between the terms “illegal” and “unlawful”. Fifoot noted that, although he accepted Britain’s practice of using the term “unlawful” in relation to the occupation of Namibia, he could find no legal distinction between the two words. Fifoot cited examples of the use of the words in the law of Contract and the Oxford English dictionary and found that both terms were used indiscriminately to define crimes. Despite this the term “unlawful” continued to be used by British government officials. TNA FCO 45/1936 Paul Fifoot, (United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations) in a letter to Henry Steel (Legal Advisers Department FCO). “Illegal” or “Unlawful”. 4 August 1976.

In response to calls by CANUC to cancel the uranium contracts, British government officials insisted that:

Interference with the contract would not in itself put additional pressure on South Africa. On the contrary it would be harmful to Namibians who gain employment through it, and who in the longer term will benefit from the continued employment and foreign exchange it will bring.¹²²

Beyond this extraordinarily cynical view on the supposed benefits to the Namibian people, the legal arguments took into consideration the established relationship between the British government and RTZ. According to British government officials they were “as much dependent on the skills of RTZ as a company producing uranium as we are on individual sources of uranium”.¹²³ Cancelling the Rössing contracts would not only have impacted the relationship between state and firm but British government officials also argued that “if we damaged its [RTZ’s] international standing we might find ourselves dependent on foreign mining companies as well as on uncertain sources of supply”.¹²⁴ Such arguments point to the perception that RTZ was a British company and would assist the British government before others. Despite the British government’s refined standard reply CANUC persisted in its efforts to boycott the import of Namibian uranium into Britain. The campaign collaborated with the nationalist movement SWAPO and the UN Council for Namibia to raise awareness of the British government’s collusion in the exploitation of Namibian uranium. The British government for its part remained steadfast in its commitment to the policy of non-interference with the uranium contracts. Not even a delay in the delivery of the uranium from RUL was considered an opportunity to revisit the British government’s position on the question of cancellation.¹²⁵

Phase VI: Delays in Uranium Deliveries

Uranium deliveries from RUL to the BNFL were originally due over the period 1975–1981.¹²⁶ The starting date of the delivery of the original 6,000 tonnes under the 1968 contract was, however, deferred by a further year from 1975 to 1976. These delays were confirmed by RTZ officials who stated that “no firm decision as to the start-up of Rössing has been made and although a 1976 date is practically very feasible [...] we feel that it is more sensible to

¹²² TNA FCO 45/2167 Namibia: The Rössing Uranium Contract, 19 July 1977, 2.

¹²³ TNA AB 44/264 G. W. Thynne Department of Energy to E. J. S Clarke, UKAEA 23 May 1974.

¹²⁴ TNA AB 44/264, 23 May 1974.

¹²⁵ CANUC, Chronology of Developments in the Campaign Against the United Kingdom Government Contracts for Supplies of Namibian Uranium in Violation of United Nations Decree No. 1: 1973–1985. Briefing Paper: Prepared for CANUC Conference (Sheffield, 27 April 1985), 2.

¹²⁶ TNA AB 44/264 Annex I: Main Features of Rössing Contract, 1.

delay certain tonnages and commence commercial production in January 1977”.¹²⁷ RTZ’s intentions to commence production at RUL had been set back by events at the mine site where the low-grade ore proved to be more abrasive than had been anticipated.¹²⁸ The nature of the ore proved problematic for the mine’s equipment which was “first developed for processing (by solvent extraction) low-grade uranium ore at Rio Tinto Zinc’s Palabora copper mine in South Africa”.¹²⁹ The equipment that had worked for Palabora did not work for Rössing and this, coupled with design failures and a fire which ravaged the solvent extraction plant, resulted in “an 18-month delay in the mine’s development schedule”.¹³⁰

The delays at RUL held financial implications for RTZ, who according to British government officials “had made no secret of its current technical problems” and the additional financial investments that were required to overcome these problems.¹³¹ According to *The Economist*, RTZ had to raise additional capital in order carry out improvements at the mine site and “to make the open-cast mine more efficient”.¹³² This pushed “the overall costs to at least R280m (\$310m)” from the original investment to the mine. *The Economist* went on to state that:

RTZ [had] already set aside an additional £20m (\$35m) [and] arrangements for a further \$35m to meet increased working capital requirements [had] been made with Rössing’s other major shareholders; these include the SA Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), General Mining/Federale Mynbou, Minatome SA (a subsidiary of the Compagnie Française des Pétroles), and RTZ’s Canadian associate, Rio Algom.¹³³

It is noteworthy that the *Economist* does not mention West Germany’s Urangesellschaft and Iran’s NIOC among the shareholders. This is indicative not only of the lack of comprehensive information that existed on RUL at the time but also of RTZ’s success in keeping information on its shareholders effectively secret.

The delay in the mine’s development schedule meant that RTZ was forced to renegotiate supply contracts with RUL’s customers.¹³⁴ In 1975 RTZ commenced a series of negotiations with the BNFL, a process which confirmed the British government’s policy of non-interference in the “commercial or industrial relations” of British “nationals with the South African

¹²⁷ TNA AB 44/264 RTZ Services Limited to E. J. S Clarke (UKAEA) 17 January 1973, 1.

¹²⁸ Stephen Aris, Martin Bailey and Antony Terry, How Britain smuggles uranium from Namibia, *Sunday Times (Br)*, December 9, 1979.

¹²⁹ TNA FCO 45/2168 *The Economist*, Namibian uranium: Rio Tinto Zonked, 8 October 1977, 97.

¹³⁰ Roberts, *The Rössing File*, 45.

¹³¹ TNA FCO 45/2168 N. Thorpe (Central and Southern African Department) to Mr. Reid, Namibia: Rössing Uranium Mine. 20 October 1977, 1.

¹³² TNA FCO 45/2168, 8 October 1977, 97.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Roberts, *The Rössing File*, 45.

administration of Namibia”.¹³⁵ In addition to the 1968 and 1970 contracts, RTZ offered an extra 1,125 tonnes of uranium which BNFL could acquire through a supplemental agreement with permission from the British government.¹³⁶ Although the request to secure an additional order of 1,125 tonnes of uranium was approved by the British government in 1976, it did not change the fact that the delays at RUL were proving to be problematic for the BNFL. The BNFL was “obliged to dig into their stockpile” all while importing additional uranium quantities from Niger in order to maintain production levels at its nuclear power plants and to meet its commitments.¹³⁷ The BNFL is said to have acquired 1,000 tonnes of uranium from Niger “thus roundly disproving the Labour Government’s claim that no alternative sources of supply existed”.¹³⁸ Compared to Namibia, however, British government officials considered Niger to be an uncertain “foreign” source of supply and an undesirable alternative, presumably due to the continued French dominance over the country.

Moreover, according to *The Economist*, the delays in uranium deliveries to BNFL caused an embarrassment for the British government, stemming from its policy of non-interference in the Rössing contracts which “ministers consistently [defended] [...] against Labour left-wing criticism”.¹³⁹ This assertion was confirmed by an official of the FCO who stated that “the Economist’s point about the embarrassment, which delay in reaching full production at Rössing and the consequent inability to meet commitments are causing, is a good one, given that we continue to defend the contract with BNFL”.¹⁴⁰ In parliamentary debates on uranium supplies from RUL the Secretary of State for Energy, Tony Benn, was asked “if he will review the sources of supply of uranium for the United Kingdom nuclear industry in the light of the inability of the Rössing uranium mine in Namibia to meet its contractual obligations?”¹⁴¹ Responding in October 1976, the Secretary of Energy stated that he had “been advised that production problems at Rössing are expected to be temporary and the longer-term uranium supplies from the mine are unlikely to be affected by them”.¹⁴²

Despite this confidence on the part of the British government, even further delays to the deliveries from RUL were communicated to the UKAEA by RTZ’s management, stating

¹³⁵ [Hansard], Further Statement on Southern Africa.

¹³⁶ TNA FCO 45/2166 M. J. Wilmschurst to M. Reid to Uranium Supplies from Namibia, 17 March 1977, 1.

¹³⁷ TNA FCO 45/2168, 9 November 1977, 1. TNA FCO 45/2168, 8 October 1977, 97.

¹³⁸ New Statesman, 2 June 1978 cited in Roberts, *The Rössing File*, 46.

¹³⁹ TNA FCO 45/2168, 8 October 1977, 97.

¹⁴⁰ TNA FCO 45/2168, 20 October 1977, 1.

¹⁴¹ Mr. Hooley questioning Mr. Benn, Uranium HC Deb 26 October 1976 vol 918 cc186-7W https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1976/oct/26/uranium#S5CV0918P0_19761026_CWA_411, accessed 11 January 2021.

¹⁴² Mr. Benn in response to Mr. Hooley, Uranium HC Deb 26 October 1976 vol. 918 cc186-7W https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1976/oct/26/uranium#S5CV0918P0_19761026_CWA_411, accessed 11 January 2021.

that “we could well anticipate a delay of the 750 tonnes which Rössing contractually has to deliver to the UKAEA in 1976”.¹⁴³ The confidence with which such delays were communicated is testament to the relationship between the British government and RTZ. The British government had endured continuous delays in the delivery of its uranium supplies and had “renegotiated the contracts [with RUL] on two occasions”.¹⁴⁴ By 1977 the British government was “still faced with uncertainty over future supplies” but not even this deterred their confidence in RTZ or made them reconsider the decision to uphold the uranium contracts.¹⁴⁵

RUL was eventually able to make its first delivery of uranium to the BNFL in mid-1977. The uranium deliveries had been done under stringent secrecy due in part to the regulatory measures put in place by the South African government through the Atomic Energy Act of 1967. The British government desired to keep details pertaining to deliveries from RUL from the public especially in light of the campaign to cancel the uranium contracts. In August 1976 the Secretary of State for Energy was asked when the first deliveries of Namibian uranium were due and by what means they would be transported to Britain.¹⁴⁶ To this the Secretary of State for Energy responded that “I am advised that [...] the information requested is commercially confidential”.¹⁴⁷ The commercial confidentiality was such that in mid-1977, Roger March, the Director of the BNFL, informed the Windscale Inquiry that no deliveries of Namibian uranium had been made.¹⁴⁸ The Department of Energy had, however, informed the FCO that in July 1977 “the first shipment of Rössing uranium had been received. This [was] not public knowledge”.¹⁴⁹ The FCO later informed the Department of Energy of their “concern that the necessary correction to this statement (made by the Director of BNFL under oath) should be as discreet as possible in order to attract the minimum attention”.¹⁵⁰ The FCO were later able to confirm that “the BNFL had taken delivery of 260 tonnes of uranium from Rössing” in 1977.¹⁵¹ This was a significantly smaller amount com-

¹⁴³ TNA AB 44/264 RTZ Services Limited to E. J. S Clarke (UKAEA), 17 January 1973, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Roberts, *The Rössing File*, 46.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Mr. Hooley to Mr. Benn, Uranium HC Deb 4 August 1976 vol. 916 cc799-801W https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1976/aug/04/uranium#S5CV0916P2_19760804_CWA_116, accessed 15 January 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Mr. Benn in response to Mr. Hooley, Uranium HC Deb 4 August 1976 vol. 916 cc799-801W https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1976/aug/04/uranium#S5CV0916P2_19760804_CWA_116, accessed 15 January 2021.

¹⁴⁸ TNA FCO 45/2167 Namibia: The Rössing Uranium Contract, 19 July 1977, 2. The statement was made before the Windscale Enquiry.

¹⁴⁹ TNA FCO 45/2167 19 July 1977, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ TNA FCO 45/2168 N. Thorpe (Central and Southern African Dept.) to Mr. Reid. Meeting with British Nuclear Fuels Limited, 9 November 1977, 1.

pared to the 750 tonnes per annum stipulated in Rössing's contractual arrangements with the UKAEA (who were later replaced by BNFL).

The delays in deliveries to the BNFL were further resolved in late 1977 when "the Japanese [...] agreed to forego some of their own deliveries from Rössing in order to allow an increase in supplies to the UK".¹⁵² The decision by Japan's Kansai Electric to forego uranium deliveries from RUL allowed the mine to step up deliveries to the BNFL. What was initially not clear was whether the Japanese had "agreed to forego certain deliveries" or to "suspend" all deliveries under the Kansai-Rössing contract until the attainment of Namibian independence in accordance with a statement made by the Japanese representative to the UN.¹⁵³ According to the Japanese representative, Japan, through its support of UN efforts in search of a peaceful solution to the Namibia problem:

[Prohibited] direct investment in Namibia by Japanese nationals or bodies-corporate under its jurisdiction, and [would] continue to prohibit it. Specifically with regard to the question of uranium, both the Government and business circles of Japan ha[d] given serious thought to the question of purchasing uranium from Namibia.¹⁵⁴

RTZ viewed Japan as an important customer of RUL and respected "Japan's desire for good relations with the third world" and as such had made no statements on Japan's contractual arrangements with RUL.¹⁵⁵ This changed when the UN Council for Namibia in collaboration with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the NSC conducted research into multinational corporations, such as RTZ's operations, in Namibia. This research brought to light the role of countries like Japan in the purchase of Namibian uranium, which information was made public in UN deliberations on Namibia (hence the Japanese representative's reference to the question of purchasing uranium from Namibia). The Japanese representative, in his speech before the UN General Assembly, stated that:

There is no record showing Japan's importing uranium from Namibia. Regarding a Japanese company's relations with the Rössing Uranium Mine Company, which are referred to in the report of the Committee of 24, my delegation has learned that the Japanese party to the sales contract with that company has decided to hold the contract so that the importation of the uranium envisaged under the contract will not take place under the prevailing circumstances.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² TNA FCO 45/2168, 9 November 1977, 1.

¹⁵³ TNA FCO 45/2168 N. Thorpe (Central and Southern African Dept.) to Mr. Bourke, ESSD. Namibia Uranium, 9 November 1977, 1.

¹⁵⁴ TNA FCO 45/2168 Mr. Abe, Japan's representative to the UN in a statement made to the General Assembly A/32/PV.42, 17.

¹⁵⁵ TNA FCO 45/2168 Ramsay Melhuish (North America Department) RTZ/Westinghouse: Note of Meeting, 28 September 1977, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1.

¹⁵⁶ TNA FCO 45/2168, Japan's representative to the UN, 18.

Prevailing circumstances meant the continued occupation of the territory by the South African regime and the sustained attention this received from the political organs of the UN. The Japanese, according to British officials, “were normally reluctant to surrender commercial advantage for political reasons” but the Namibia case warranted enough reason to forego deliveries in the short-term.¹⁵⁷ Because of the difficulties faced by RUL at the onset of its production period, uranium deliveries under the Japanese contracts were postponed to the period 1983 to 1994. By 1982, however, RUL’s vital sales contract with Kansai Electric ran into what can be described as “political” difficulties, stemming from the Japanese government’s decision not to “issue a licence for the importation of uranium oxide from Namibia, as required in terms of the direct contract, this being in line with its officially stated position on United Nations Resolution No. 435”.¹⁵⁸ What is worth noting is that the Japanese government’s decision constituted grounds for a declaration of force majeure by Kansai Electric.¹⁵⁹ A similar argument was interestingly put to the British government, despite which a decision was made not to interfere with the Rössing contracts. Under these circumstances RUL and its parent company, RTZ, were forced into negotiations with Kansai Electric. The minutes of a Board meeting held in June 1982 reveal that an agreement was reached between RTZ, RUL and Kansai Electric for the cancellation of “the 8,200 short tons contract” and that arrangements were made “for the supply of an equivalent amount of material by another [RTZ subsidiary] during the years 1984 to 1986” when Namibian independence was anticipated.¹⁶⁰ Namibian independence was not attained in 1986 which necessitated further negotiations on the reinstatement of the Japanese contract.¹⁶¹

The decision to forego deliveries, was according to British officials, testament to “the importance which Japan attached to this source of supply and the lengths to which they want to ensure secrecy”.¹⁶² The decision was a significant achievement by the international campaign to divest from Namibia as Japan had economic and commercial links with apartheid South Africa. Discretion in the face of political opposition demonstrated by the Japanese was, however, not a virtue the British government was prepared to emulate. In fact, British authorities were of the opinion that:

There might even be some positive advantage in the public disclosure that the French, Germans and Japanese also have contracts from Rössing. In so far as our known interest in

¹⁵⁷ TNA FCO 45/2168, 28 September 1977, 2.

¹⁵⁸ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-first meeting, 5.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-second meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room 6, St. James’s Square, London, SW1Y 4LD on Friday, 4 June 1982, 2.

¹⁶¹ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-second meeting, 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Rössing makes us unpopular in black Africa, in the UN or with pressure groups at home, it would improve our standing if we could be shown to be only one of a group of 4 countries.¹⁶³

The more the merrier, was the general attitude adopted by British government officials, who were evidently not prepared to surrender the commercial advantage presented by the Rössing contract to the British nuclear power programme.

Phase VII: Contract Completion

The Japanese decision to forgo deliveries from RUL resulted in improved deliveries to the BNFL. The greatest concern from this point on was the risk of political change in Namibia and the impact such change would have on the British government's uranium supplies. Political change in Namibia was being anticipated because of diplomatic efforts that were being formalised under what would become known as the Western Contact Group (WCG) whose aim it was to negotiate with the South African regime for a settlement of the Namibia situation.¹⁶⁴ Writing in 1977, an FCO official noted that:

If it turns out to be an accurate assessment that we will only be receiving 40 per cent of supplies this year and not much more next year, the risk is clearly very considerable that an independent government in Namibia will be able either to cut off our supplies altogether, or at the least renegotiate the price, before we have obtained more than a small percentage of the total amount provided for by the contract.¹⁶⁵

Such action by an independent government of Namibia was plausible, especially in light of Decree No.1 and the criticism levelled against the uranium contracts by the nationalist movement SWAPO. According to Hecht, SWAPO had "strongly condemned the uranium contracts in public, throughout the liberation struggle".¹⁶⁶ Despite off the record assurances by the SWAPO representative in Britain (Peter Katjavivi), in 1976, that "a SWAPO Government would not disturb RTZ's position in Namibia" the British government could not be certain that the mandate to govern would indeed fall to SWAPO.¹⁶⁷ It was thus of utmost importance that uranium deliveries to the BNFL be completed before Namibia attained its

¹⁶³ TNA FCO 45/2168 Ramsay Melhuish (North America Department) to Mr. Graham RTZ—Possible Intervention by Government in Proceedings in House of Lords, 20 September 1977, 3.

¹⁶⁴ The involvement of the Western Contact Group over the Namibian question started in April 1977 when the Contact Group of five Western nations (Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom, the United States of America) offered their good offices to promote the implementation of Resolution 385 (1976). Moukambi, "Relations Between South Africa and France", 219.

¹⁶⁵ TNA FCO 45/2166 Colin Bright to Mr. Reid, Namibia: Uranium, 24 February 1977.

¹⁶⁶ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 103.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

independence. This urgency was illustrative of how the British government's economic and strategic priorities cut across political and ethical commitments to divesting from occupied Namibia. It also confirms the UN Council for Namibia's observations that "the continuation of those supplies of uranium without change in the conditions under which it was supplied, would appear to require the continuation of South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia".¹⁶⁸

The first uranium deliveries from RUL commenced in 1977. In order to execute these deliveries, a high degree of "secrecy was all important".¹⁶⁹ Details pertaining to the specific routes of delivery, the quantities of deliveries as well as the specific customers were kept secret. The provisions of the UNCN's Decree No.1 "recommended seizure of Namibia's illegal export of its natural resources", a recommendation which, according to Daniel, could have been taken up by "left wing trade unions in countries where the material was being transhipped".¹⁷⁰ SWAPO's collaboration with the UNCN, the NSC and the solidarity of independent African countries all constituted a real threat hence the need for secrecy. An FCO official noted the need for caution, writing that:

We have taken discreet steps to warn British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., and through them RTZ, that it would be prudent to ensure that deliveries of uranium from the Rössing mine of Swakopmund will be carried only in British or South African registered ships and even then, only in ships which would not touch any other African ports while carrying the uranium.¹⁷¹

The deliveries schedule was initially supposed to end in 1982 but the completion date was deferred to the mid-1980s due to delays in deliveries experienced in the late-1970s. The increase in supplies to the BNFL, as a result of the Japanese decision, gave the British government the confidence that the BNFL would receive all of its uranium supplies from RUL by 1984. By November 1977, British government officials were not only discouraging the management of the BNFL from entering into a new agreement with RTZ for additional uranium supplies from RUL but also from exploring new uranium deposits in Namibia. An official of the FCO reporting on a meeting with the BNFL wrote that,

Mr Marsh asked whether BNFL should seriously consider purchasing further uranium from Namibia, to be contracted for in the next year or so; and whether they should look into the possibility of exploring for uranium in Namibia (in association with Gold Mines of South Africa). I said that in each case it would not be advisable to make any decision until the future of Namibia was clearer. For the moment the answers to both proposals had to be no.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Report of the UNCN Vol III, 30.

¹⁶⁹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 109.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 108.

¹⁷¹ TNA FCO 96/414 Martin Reith (FCO) to H. Hime (UK Consulate Cape Town), UN Council for Namibia—September Decree on Natural Resources, 12 January 1975.

¹⁷² TNA FCO 45/2168, 9 November 1977.

Gold Mines of South Africa were prospecting for uranium at the Langer Heinrich deposits, located about 40km from RUL, and had approached entities like the BNFL for a partnership in the exploration of these deposits.¹⁷³ So in addition to purchasing further uranium from RUL the BNFL contemplated investing in the exploration of additional uranium deposits in Namibia. This, as the FCO official reported, would have to wait in the face of looming political change in Namibia. The priority was to see to it that the uranium deliveries to the BNFL, under the existent contracts, were completed to avoid the possible risks that could be associated with political change in the territory. This decision suggests continuity with the earlier British government policy which was being shaped by perceptions of security of supply. In the late 1960s the British government sought uranium from RUL because RTZ was a British company and thus a secure source of supply. By the mid-1980s, however, continued access to Namibian uranium could not be guaranteed, hence the decision to discourage participation in Langer Heinrich.

Conclusion

The British government's role in the exploitation of Namibian uranium can be traced over a period of seven phases which covered a period starting with the establishment of RUL in the late-1960s up to the completion of RUL's contractual obligations to the BNFL in the mid-1980s. These seven phases illustrate the British government's support for RTZ's operations in Namibia and the steadfast commitment to the policy of non-interference that was adopted and upheld by consecutive British governments. Such a commitment confirms the charges laid against the British government's policy towards Namibia, a policy dominated by questions of security of uranium supplies and condoning the exploitation of Namibia's natural resources for British self-interest. The adoption of the policy of non-interference did not spare the British government from concerns over the risk of possible interference with the Rössing contracts, an interference that could emanate from political change in Namibia. The delays with the mine's development schedule and the criticism levelled against the existence of the Rössing contracts combined to pose a risk to the British government's uranium supplies. It was feared that interference with the contracts could affect the favourable price at which the uranium had been purchased or disrupt supplies and the completion of the contracts all together. The desire therefore, was to see the completion of the delivery schedule to BNFL prior to the granting of independence to the territory. For this the status quo in Namibia had to be maintained, at least until the completion of deliveries to the BNFL.

¹⁷³ The Langer Heinrich deposit was discovered in 1973. Extensive evaluation work at the site was carried out from 1974 to 1980 by the General Mining Union Corporation Limited (Gencor). <https://www.paladinenergy.com.au/langer-heinrich-mine/>, accessed 25 June 2021.

Thereafter, all new contracts or investments in Namibian uranium would have to wait until the situation in Namibia became clearer. The British government's decision not to interfere in the commercial activities of British companies operating in Namibia was one of self-interest and collusion in the exploitation of Namibia's uranium deposits.

6 The Rebranding Stage

Introduction

In the late 1970s Rössing Uranium (RUL) began to devise strategies that would help aide the mine to withstand decolonisation in Namibia. These strategies were prompted by the diplomatic negotiations of the 1970s, spearheaded by the Western Contact Group (WCG), which had made the notion of Namibian independence plausible. As a result, a rebranding strategy was initiated for Namibia's sole uranium producer, aimed at portraying the supposed social and economic value of RUL to Namibia. Since it was established, RUL was held as a symbol of Western collusion with apartheid South Africa, and it was this image of collusion that the company sought to shed. The distinct feature of the rebranding stage was the shedding of the secrecy that surrounded RTZ's operations at RUL. The new transparent nature of RUL's operations was key to its public relations strategy which was spearheaded by a newly established public relations department. Transparency thus became the motto of the rebranding stage, as the mine set about to present itself in the best possible light.

The public relations department was tasked with the responsibility of changing RUL's image, which in the view of many had served colonial and commercial interests rather than serving the interests of the nationals of the territory in which the mine operated. This view was not farfetched especially when we consider RUL's examination of the implications Namibian independence could have on its operations. According to RUL, "assumptions had been made that shareholders would wish to maintain their equity interests in Rössing, and RTZ management of the Company, and that two key issues after independence would be the attitude of the new government to foreign investment, particularly in regard to Rössing, and the extent to which independence could assist in improving Rössing's market position".¹ Managing the "attitude" of the government of an independent Namibia and ensuring continued profits for RUL's shareholders became the focus the public relations strategies that were adopted by RUL.

To this end RUL adopted the "Working for Namibia" brand. The British government, which were undoubtedly RTZ's closest allies in RUL, had previously argued that the cancellation of the uranium contracts would affect "the Namibian people whose needs for the future will be well served by long term development projects of the Rössing type".² It is this view on the Namibian people's needs for the future that was adopted by RUL. The same company that was "not prepared to fail to deliver to the United Kingdom and others under a

¹ RUL—Minutes of the One-Hundredth Meeting, 4.

² TNA FCO 45/1936, 3.

contract solemnly entered into for the provision of uranium” and “therefore not prepared to take any notice of what the United Nations says about that” was formulating a strategy that would present their operations at RUL as an asset to the future of Namibia.³ RTZ’s endeavours align with Sarah Stockwell’s argument that public relations strategies were utilised by companies to secure their position in territories undergoing political change.⁴ RUL, a company that was a symbol of colonial exploitation and whose activities were conducted in defiance of UN resolutions, utilised its public relations strategy to reinvent itself as part of an independent Namibia and in so doing secured the continuity of its operations in the country.

International Public Relations Campaign

In December 1977, the Board of Directors of RUL deliberated on, and approved, a paper entitled “Rössing International Public Relations Campaign”.⁵ The paper was produced by “Frances Vale, head of Group Public Relations for R.T.Z.,” following her visit to RUL.⁶ Vale’s paper identified key areas to which the international public relations campaign would direct its attention, namely: audio/visual and print media, press engagements and site visits to the mine. At Vale’s suggestion, the campaign was led by a team from “Rössing, Windhoek, Johannesburg and London under the supervision of London using each part of this international team to the best advantage of Rössing”.⁷ The aim of the international public relations campaign, as the Chairman of the Board revealed, was “to protect the investment that had been made” by RUL’s shareholders.⁸

The first step in the international public relations campaign was the “production of a general brochure about the operation including philosophy and social policy to be distributed internationally, within the Republic [of South Africa] and Namibia, and to visitors to Rössing”.⁹ The brochure provided a step-by-step guide to RUL’s operations and the nuclear energy cycle, along with illustrations of the different aspects of the mine. The brochure included information on RUL’s policy towards its workforce. This was particularly in response to accusations of racial discrimination, unfair labour practices, and lax health and safety standards by organisations such as SWAPO, the Namibia Support Committee (NSC) and the United Nations Council for Namibia.

³ Namibia Support Committee, 41; Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 168.

⁴ Stockwell, *Political strategies*, 288.

⁵ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Rössing Mine, on Thursday 8 December 1977 at 10h30, Agenda Item: 604 Matters Arising from the Minutes (2) International Public Relations Campaign, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

The second step in the international public relations campaign was the production of a triannual magazine, published in February, June and October, with each issue “carrying three in-depth articles illustrated in full colour about Rössing and Namibia (avoiding all political comment) to be distributed internationally”.¹⁰ The stated aim of the *Rössing Magazine*, as it came to be known, was “to contribute towards a broader knowledge of Namibia and its people” and undoubtedly to portray RUL as an integral part of Namibia. For every two articles produced on some aspect of Namibia, the *Rössing Magazine* would include one article describing an aspect of RUL’s operations. The inaugural issue of February 1979, for instance, introduced the history of RUL “*Rössing: the making of a mine*” alongside an article on desert beetles “*Life in the Desert*” and another article on the state of “*The Namibian Economy*”.¹¹ RUL’s Board of Director’s emphasis on “avoiding all political comment” was adhered to throughout. This particular step resonates with Stockwell’s observation that several firms operating in countries where political change was imminent, made attempts to combat the poor image of the firm by taking on “journalistic enterprise” through “the production of in-house publications to papers addressed to a wider African readership and intended to serve as vehicles for the promotion of expatriate interests”.¹²

Invitations to the Press were the third step in the methods used in furthering RUL’s international public relations campaign. These invitations were targeted at “representatives of the Namibian press, the South African press and the UK press”, who were in turn “followed by visits from international correspondents based in Southern Africa”.¹³ RUL’s previous policy of “restricting visits to the Mine particularly by the Press” had, according to its Managing Director, resulted in unfavourable comments.¹⁴ Up until the 1980s RUL was described in press reports as “this most secretive of projects”.¹⁵ The new policy of inviting press representatives to visit RUL was aimed at improving the way in which the mine was presented in the press. To this end RUL’s Managing Director noted that:

it was acknowledged that a press visit was an inherently less controllable public relations tool than a press release, but by the same token it carried far greater credibility reflecting, as it did, the view of an impartial observer and not that of the Company which would be presumed by the public to have taken a highly subjective view of itself.¹⁶

¹⁰ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting, 2.

¹¹ Rössing Uranium, *Rössing Magazine* February 1979. John Meinert Printing: Windhoek.

¹² Stockwell, *Political strategies*, 287.

¹³ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting, 2.

¹⁴ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek, on Thursday, 22 October 1981, Agenda Item 903—Public Relations, 4.

¹⁵ TNA AB48/1278 L. Parker, RTZ reveals some more about Rössing. *Mining News: Financial Times*. Johannesburg, (Wednesday, February 27, 1974).

¹⁶ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting, 4.

International coverage of the RUL's activities was particularly valuable in that it "provided some positive coverage on Rössing in the UK media" where the Campaign Against Namibian Uranium Contracts (CANUC) was being waged against the British government's contracts for Namibian uranium and RTZ's activities in Namibia.¹⁷ In 1982 it was reported that "seven mining and financial editors from the British press spent three days touring Rössing operations and personnel facilities".¹⁸ The editors, who were reportedly "favourably impressed with all they saw", represented the following news outlets: "The Times, The Guardian, The Observer, Financial Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Telegraph and The Sunday Times".¹⁹ The articles that were produced following the three-day tour were deemed to be "very satisfactory" by RUL's management.²⁰ Furthermore, the Chairman of RUL's Board of Directors was called upon to engage with the press by way of press briefings "(where it would be useful to do so) especially when he is overseas visiting the countries of shareholders or customers", the UK being one such place.²¹

The fourth step in the international public relations campaign was that of extending "invitations to [...] distinguished and influential people visiting Namibia or the Republic [of South Africa], e.g. UN representatives of Western Five, Foreign Office Staff, Ambassadors, MPs, Ministers of Foreign Governments, Church leaders, Trade Union leaders, etc".²² These invitations were especially evident in the 1980s when influential individuals, particularly associated with the UN effort for Namibian independence, visited the country. In mid-1983 the Chairman of the Board of Directors of RUL

suggested that it was now very much in the Company's interests for influential people to visit the Rössing mine. Mr. Walker noted that the shareholding of Rössing was widely spread and it was important that the countries in which our shareholders were located should be able to extend to their own influential opinion-formers an invitation to make direct contact with Rössing.²³

Enticing visitors to RUL thus became a collective "shareholder" effort. These influential guests were invited to take a tour of the mine led by RUL's management. The tours included the mine's main attraction: the open pit, as well as visits to Arandis, where RUL was eager to

¹⁷ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 138.

¹⁸ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-fourth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Boardroom, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek South West Africa/Namibia on Wednesday, 27 October 1982, at 10h30, 1006 Corporate Matters (Press Visit), 5.

¹⁹ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-fourth, 5.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting, 2.

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-seventh meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Boardroom, 4th Floor, 6 St. James's Square, London SW1Y 4LD on Wednesday, 8 June 1983, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 1071 Public Affairs, 10.

demonstrate the mine's commitment to its workforce through the provision of housing and schools as well as its contributions to community projects. The invitations to the mine were so successful that they were extended to the general public, including school groups. The visits to the mine necessitated the construction of a visitor's centre "which housed exhibits, an audio-visual multiscreen programme and a lecture hall" and served as the central arrival point for all visitors to RUL.²⁴

The fifth and final step was the completion of a film about RUL's operations, policies and programmes. In 1977 Vale informed the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that RTZ was "in the process of making a film about Rössing and its place in Namibia which will be available for release during the first part of 1978".²⁵ The film was produced by RTZ's Johannesburg team with assistance from RTZ London especially in relation to the editing and commentary on the film.²⁶ The brochure, magazine, press visits, guest invitations and film aimed at enabling RUL to communicate, to both the national and international public, about its activities, role in, and value to the Namibian economy and society. In 1982 it was noted that "the Mining Sector had contributed nearly 50% of the Gross Domestic Product of South West Africa/Namibia of which slightly more than half was contributed by Rössing".²⁷ It is information like this, that RUL sought to publicise in highlighting their value to Namibia.

To execute the five-step international public relations campaign, which was approved by the Board of Directors, RUL established a public relations department in its corporate structure and recruited a manager to oversee the work of the department. In March 1980 RUL appointed a South African national by the name of Clive Algar who previously served as the public relations executive at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE).²⁸ According to RTZ, "Rössing provided a much-needed stimulus for the Namibian economy pending independence" and as such required a public relations officer who understood and spoke the language of "economics" and could convey the value of RUL to the Namibian economy.²⁹ The appointment of the public relations manager, as well as the approval of the international public relations campaign, came ten years before Namibian independence occurred. RUL had anticipated political change long before it happened and began to prepare for it accordingly.

²⁴ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 139.

²⁵ TNA FCO 45/2168 Frances M. Vale (Political and Public Relations Adviser—RTZ) in a letter to H. M. S. Reid (Central and South African Department FCO) dated 15 December 1977.

²⁶ RUL—Minutes of the forty-eighth meeting, 3.

²⁷ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-eighth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Blue Room, Rössing Country Club, Swakopmund, South West Africa/Namibia, on Wednesday, 31 August 1983, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 7.

²⁸ Rössing News, Top Positions: PR Manager, Vol. 2, No. 34, Friday 14 March 1980 Sam Cohen Library, Swakopmund.

²⁹ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 138.

Rebranding

To further create the “right image” of the mine, the public relations department began to re-design RUL’s corporate image. A decision was made “to establish a uniform corporate image across the mine which was translated into the familiar Rössing blue and white”.³⁰ RUL’s blue and white colour scheme was then incorporated into “everything from the bus fleet to the Final Product building and shovels in the Open Pit”.³¹ The bus fleet was particularly important to the image of the mine at a community level, as RUL operated a fleet service that provided daily transportation to its employees living in the towns of Arandis, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. The change in RUL’s colour scheme was translated to the company’s logo with “the original logo of two intersecting ellipses with the letters RU in the centre [...] replaced by a bolder captioned logo” as seen in the image below.³² RUL had previously submitted an application “for registration of the company’s Trade Mark RU & DEVICE [intersecting ellipses] in class 16 in South Africa and South West Africa”.³³ The Trade Mark would thus have been extended to the new logo.



Figure 8: The original logo of two intersecting ellipses with the letters RU in the centre vs. the bolder captioned logo³⁴

³⁰ The public relations department recruited Christabel Hardacre in 1980 to interpret the blue and white colour scheme and “to determine the aesthetics of the right scale of the colour scheme”. Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 27.

³¹ Ibid., 27.

³² Ibid.

³³ RUL—Resolutions passed by the Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited in Johannesburg on Friday, 30 September 1977, Agenda Item: 587 Registration of Trade Mark.

³⁴ Rössing Uranium, 30 Years Special Edition 1976–2006.; Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 27.



Figure 9: Rössing Uranium Rebranded³⁵

Operating in a pre-emptive mode, the public relations department transformed the RUL's slogan from "Biggest Uranium Mine in the World" to "Working for Namibia" as depicted in the image above³⁶ The "Working for Namibia" slogan was adopted in 1985 to emphasise RUL's value to the Namibian economy and society. The aim of RUL's "Working for Namibia" position was explained in an article published by the Rössing Magazine which stated that:

Rössing believes that organisations with economic muscle and social ideals should use their energy to correct the imbalance caused by a century of colonial history in Namibia. Rössing of course has considerable economic muscle; it provides from one mine 17% of Namibia's Gross Domestic Product [and] in 1985 it injected into the Namibian economy through taxes, local purchases and salaries some R350 million.³⁷

Interestingly, the fact of RUL's role in the exploitation of Namibia's natural resources and the imbalance it caused during that very colonial period is omitted from the article. What was important, in as far as RUL was concerned, was that starting in 1985 it was now "Working for Namibia". As with the colour scheme, the new slogan was made visible on the company's bus fleet "as a testimony to all road users of Rössing's intent to work for the country which is its base".³⁸ The new slogan undoubtedly demonstrated RUL's intention to continue its operations in an independent Namibia. This was especially visible in RUL's contributions to, and involvement with, Namibian communities especially in the field of education (see p. 124 on Education and Training). RUL's intention to stay was further demonstrated through the practical ways in which it began to orient itself towards local populations.³⁹ Acknowledging the low levels of literacy in Namibia RUL turned to radio as the medium for transmitting the company's slogan to the rest of the territory. Daniel writes

³⁵ J. Tietz, Rössing, Uranium, <https://www.jurgentietz.co.za/?s=Rössing+Uranium>, accessed 15 December 2020. This website is no longer available, the image of the Logo is however accessible on: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_R%C3%B6ssing_Uranium.gif

³⁶ Rössing Uranium, *An Introduction to Rössing*.

³⁷ Rössing Uranium, Rössing Magazine October 1986, New Horizons for the Rössing Foundation. John Meinert Printing: Windhoek, 14.

³⁸ Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 27.

³⁹ Morris, *Cultivating the African*.

that RUL's public relations department booked thirty-second slots on various local radio stations which played "a slogan accompanied by a musical jingle which stayed in the minds of people: Rössing working for Namibia. Very simple but [supposedly] creating the right image".⁴⁰

Education and Training

As with the international public relations campaign, RUL's Board of Directors deliberated on the formation of a corporate foundation in 1977.⁴¹ The agenda item under which the corporate foundation was discussed was interestingly titled "International Image".⁴² The aspirations of the public relations campaign and the corporate foundation were thus aligned. According to the minutes of the 1977 meeting, the Chairman of the Board, Ronnie Walker, "recommended that in order to show its determination to contribute to the development of South West Africa/Namibia, the company should formulate plans to establish a foundation for educational purposes".⁴³ Financial assistance for educational purposes, as Sarah Stockwell notes, served as an avenue through which "leading firms operating in colonies" donated money to local communities.⁴⁴ Walker's recommendation, which was accepted by the Board, was thus not novel. The Rössing Foundation was launched in August 1978 with funding through "appropriations from dividends after tax".⁴⁵ RUL committed to reinvest two percent of its profits, which would amount "to a couple of hundred thousand Rand" for the Rössing Foundation, with a starting grant of R50,000 aimed at enabling the Foundation to start all necessary planning for the construction of its envisioned educational centre.⁴⁶

The Rössing Foundation was presented by Walker, as key among RUL's "plans to contribute to social and human development" in Namibia.⁴⁷ This contribution would be coordinated from the territory's capital, Windhoek, where the Rössing Foundation was established to fulfil three key objectives. The first aimed at furthering "the practical education of young people towards greater national productivity, thus promoting greater understanding be-

⁴⁰ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 139.

⁴¹ RUL—Minutes of the forty-seventh meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Capital Centre, Hepworths' Arcade, Kaiser/Stubel Streets, Windhoek on Thursday, 13 October 1977, 10h30.

⁴² Ibid., 598. "International Image", 12.

⁴³ RUL— Minutes of the forty-seventh meeting, 12.

⁴⁴ Stockwell, *Political strategies*, 288.

⁴⁵ RUL— Minutes of the forty-seventh meeting, 12.

⁴⁶ Staff Reporter, *Business and Industrial News*: Mr. Walker, your voice was badly needed in SWA. *Windhoek Observer* 5, August 1978, 12. A1654 Namibia Economic Resources Ea5, Wits Historical Papers.

⁴⁷ Staff Reporter, Mr. Walker, *Windhoek Observer* 5, August 1978, 12.

tween races”.⁴⁸ The second and third objectives sought “to create opportunities for Namibians and their children” and “to promote the living standards of all inhabitants of Namibia”.⁴⁹

The objective of “practical education” for the promotion of “greater understanding between the races” was to be achieved through the construction of an adult education centre in Windhoek (see Figure 10⁵⁰), whose principal activity was the provision of literacy training in English or Afrikaans, as well as “classes in advanced English, conversational German and Afrikaans and basic office procedures”.⁵¹ The adult education centre included a workshop, which was constructed with financial assistance from Barclays Bank.⁵² The workshop, which was named the Barclays Bank Workshop, aimed to provide practical training in courses such as welding and leatherwork.



Figure 10: Aerial view of the Rössing Foundation Adult Education Centre

To “create opportunities for Namibians and their children” the Rössing Foundation envisaged making available “overseas scholarships to assist in widening the education opportunities for future leaders in all areas of the national life”.⁵³ These included scholarships for

⁴⁸ Rössing Uranium, *Reflecting on 40 years*, 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-second meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek, on Thursday, 5 June 1980, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 800 Rössing Foundation, 6.

⁵² “[A] donation of R83, 000 from Barclays Bank made possible the construction of the Barclays Bank Workshop at the Foundation’s Education Centre in Windhoek”. A donation which was indicative of collaboration between British firms in Namibia. Rössing Uranium, *Rössing Magazine* October 1986, New Horizons for the Rössing Foundation. John Meinert Printing: Windhoek, 14.

⁵³ Staff Reporter, Mr. Walker, *Windhoek Observer* 5, August 1978, 12.

studies in areas such as accounting and finance, engineering, geology and medicine, which were awarded to Namibian students of various racial backgrounds for studies in the UK and South Africa as no universities existed in Namibia.⁵⁴ In 1977 the Foundation reported that two students had been sent “to study in Britain on post graduate scholarships and two scholarships to Atlantic College in Wales had been awarded”.⁵⁵ The Foundation reported that a primary school and a secondary school were being constructed in Arandis, in conjunction with a partner Foundation, known as the Kolin Foundation, which was established with profits from Minserv, the Swiss company which acted as a selling agent for RUL.⁵⁶ The final objective of promoting “the living standards of all inhabitants of Namibia” was attained through the construction of “rural training centres in northern towns where self-help education was emphasised” along with “health education through a mobile unit, scholarships, aid and guidance to schools” as well as “agricultural training centres”.⁵⁷

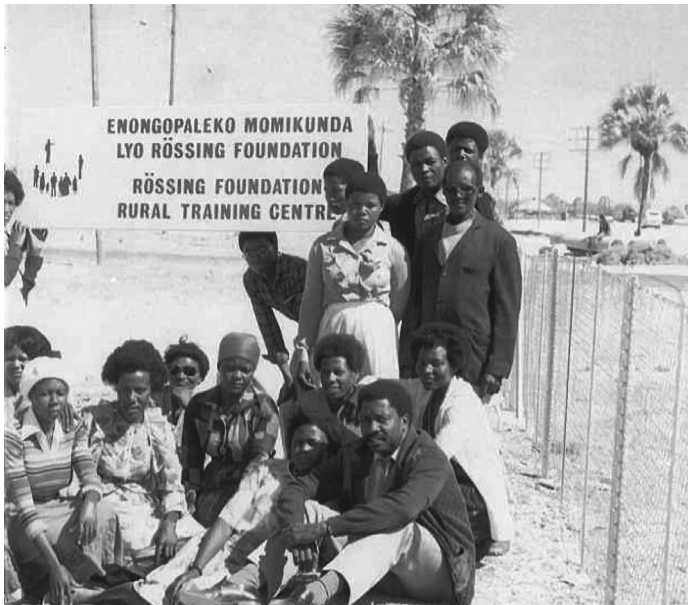


Figure 11: Students at the Rössing Foundation Rural Training Centre in Ondangwa, 1983⁵⁸

⁵⁴ S. N. Ashipala “Technical and Vocational Education and the Place of Indigenous Labour in the Mining Industry of Namibia, 1970–1990”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47, 1, (2021), 127–142, 130.

⁵⁵ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-second meeting, 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7. Minserv Administration A.G. formed in Switzerland by RTZ, took over the sales administration responsibility from R.T.Z. Services Limited during November 1980, RUL—Minutes of the sixty-second meeting, 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Rössing Uranium, Rössing Magazine October 1983, The Rössing Foundation in 1983. John Meinert Printing: Windhoek, 3.

Apart from the educational training initiatives provided by the Rössing Foundation, RUL embarked on the training of its manpower through various training schemes offered on the mine. This was motivated by the anticipated political changes in the country, and the RUL's supposed belief that "Namibians should progressively take over posts of greater responsibility within the organisation".⁵⁹ In order to implement this policy RUL established the Central Training Department in 1977, which was responsible for coordinating the various training schemes targeted at improving the skills levels among its workforce.⁶⁰ Apart from the Central Training Department, the company's various divisions provided more specialised training programmes such as the operator training provided by the operator division and the metallurgical division, as well as the training in heavy earth-moving equipment offered by the mining division.⁶¹ In 1978, RUL introduced an apprentice training school which allowed company employees "or sons of employees [to] attend technical training colleges for a block release period of 13 weeks in order to obtain a National Technical Certificate (NTC) 3, equivalent to matriculation in technical studies".⁶² The aim of providing apprenticeship training was to allow RUL's apprentices to sit for a trade test which would qualify them for promotional positions as artisans. These positions were previously reserved for whites only; skilled work, particularly in the mining industry, was racially determined. The apprenticeship programmes along with the semi-skilled training programmes offered by RUL were aimed at providing career paths that would take the RUL's employees "from the level of little or no skill to just below the skilled level".⁶³ "*Just below the skilled level*" was seemingly the target of the training initiatives aimed at addressing the policy of granting Namibians greater responsibility within RUL.⁶⁴

In 1977, RUL introduced a bursary scheme to send employees on undergraduate courses as part of its training and development programme.⁶⁵ RUL sponsored a number of students to study in the fields of mining at universities and technikons in South Africa and the United Kingdom (an award was also made for studies in Canada).⁶⁶ The aim of the bursary scheme was for RUL to raise the level of professional resources in order to produce "potential future managers at Rössing".⁶⁷ The bursary holders were required to work at RUL for a

⁵⁹ Rössing Uranium, *An Introduction to Rössing*, 10.

⁶⁰ Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 18.

⁶¹ Rössing Uranium, *An Introduction to Rössing*, 10.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ashipala, "Technical and Vocational Education".

⁶⁵ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited, held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek, on Thursday, 22 October 1981 Agenda Item 923 Bursaries, 28.

⁶⁶ Rössing News, Students Benefit from Company Bursaries, Week 3 17 January 1986, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 18.

year, through a cadetship programme that placed cadets within a division of the mine related to the discipline they intended to study.⁶⁸ This according to RUL was to allow students to “receive practical grounding in the course they intend to study”.⁶⁹ Apart from the practical year with RUL, the students were required to return to the mine upon completion of their studies and to work for the mine for a period equivalent to the duration of their studies.

In 1981 it was suggested that RUL consider funding undergraduate scholarships which would be open to the general public and not just its employees. It was believed that these scholarships, which were provided for studies in South African, British or American universities, “would enhance the Company’s corporate image nationally”.⁷⁰ The aim was to grant scholarships “for any field of study that would be of benefit to the future Namibia, they would be free from any form of discrimination and they would be free from any form of restriction except that scholars would have to commit themselves to not less than three years work in Namibia after graduation”.⁷¹ The scholarships were called “the Sir Mark Turner Memorial Scholarships in recognition of the part Sir Mark played in the development of Rössing and the interest he had in the education of young people”.⁷² The first three Turner Scholarships were awarded in 1982, with “preference given to candidates planning to obtain degrees which [would] be of direct benefit to the country”.⁷³ In 1986 twelve new Turner Scholarships were awarded to young Namibians in addition to seven existing Turner scholars, pursuing different courses at various universities.⁷⁴ As with RUL’s bursary scheme most of the Turner scholars were admitted to universities in South Africa and the United Kingdom. Scholarships were also granted for post-graduate studies through what was known as the “Leadership Scholarship scheme”. A 1983 article on the Rössing Foundation reports that five post-graduate students were admitted to attend “Cornell, Harvard and London universities” and that although the long-term effects of this part of the Foundation’s activities would not be felt for many years, it [was] hoped that eventually the scholars chosen in the first five years of the Foundation’s existence will find their way into decision-making positions in the Namibian community.⁷⁵ Speaking to another group of students in 1986, the General Manager of RUL, Dr. Mike Bates, said that “your education is very expensive—it will cost many

⁶⁸ Rössing News, Students Benefit, 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ RUL—Minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting, 28.

⁷¹ Ibid., 29.

⁷² RUL—Minutes of the sixty-ninth meeting, 29. Sir Mark Turner (1906–1980) served as Chairman of the Rio Tinto-Zinc Corporation 1975–1980, he died in December of 1980. Brinco Limited Annual Report 1980, https://archive.org/details/Brin1510_1980/page/n1/mode/2up accessed 2 February 2021.

⁷³ Rössing News, Rössing awards twelve new Turner scholarships, Week 10 7 March 1986, 1.

⁷⁴ Rössing News, Rössing awards, 1.

⁷⁵ Rössing Uranium, Rössing Magazine October 1983, The Rössing Foundation in 1983. John Meinert Printing: Windhoek, 5.

tens of thousands of rands—but it is a great investment to us”.⁷⁶ And indeed it was a great investment for RUL’s public relations campaign as the graduates list read like a list of “who is who” in Namibian politics and industry in the early 1990s and indeed to the present-day.⁷⁷ Moreover, in 1991 RUL declared that they had “invested more than R32 million in the [Rössing] Foundation giving credibility to their claim of “Working for Namibia”.⁷⁸ The education and training programmes made available through the Rössing Foundation had achieved the intended aim of demonstrating RUL’s value to the Namibian society.

Africanization

The training of the mine’s manpower in the fields of vocational and technical training coupled with the award of scholarships for tertiary level education were deemed to be “the necessary prerequisite to Africanization of senior management and technical posts”, a process which RUL aimed to achieve.⁷⁹ Sarah Stockwell writes that although “Africanization made economic sense for companies”, most were pushed into action [into Africanizing their workforce] by political necessity”.⁸⁰ This rings true for RUL’s public relations strategy, which witnessed an Africanization of its senior management in the 1980s. The strategy of Africanization was first articulated at a Board Meeting in August 1977 when Ronnie Walker stated that “he had been giving serious thought to the possible political developments in the Territory [Namibia] and how these might affect the future of the Company and the protection of the shareholders’ investment”.⁸¹ Walker speculated that South African disengagement from Namibia, and particularly the withdrawal of the South African army from the territory, could lead to one of two things. Either there would be Communist takeover, supposedly led by the nationalist movement SWAPO, resulting in the loss of the shareholders’ investment or there “would be a successor regime which would want Rössing to continue as a going concern because of its value to the economy and because as a low-grade complicated operation, it required expert techniques and personnel”.⁸²

⁷⁶ Rössing News, Your education is a great investment—GM tells students, Week 6, 7 February 1986, 1.

⁷⁷ The scholarship programme produced a governor of the Bank of Namibia, a director of the National Planning Commission, Ministers of Finance, Fisheries and Health, medical professionals as well as industry leaders in the financial and mining sectors.

⁷⁸ Namibia Foundation, Namibia Brief, No.13 March 1991. Working for Namibia, 30. T94/0041/4 National Library of Namibia.

⁷⁹ Stockwell, *Political Strategies*, 288.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ RUL—Minutes of the forty-fifth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Board Room, Third Floor, Capital Centre, Hepworths’ Arcade, Kaiser/Stubel Streets, Windhoek on Thursday, 11 August 1977, 10h00, Agenda item 584: Advisory Committee, 10.

⁸² Ibid.

In hopeful anticipation Walker leaned towards the latter development and suggested ways in which RUL could prepare itself for the foreseeable future. Walker's first suggestion was the establishment of an Advisory Committee from whom RUL "could obtain the views of influential Namibians regarding employee relations" while conveying the company's "view on matters concerning the country and its people" to potential future policy makers.⁸³ Walker's second suggestion was "that consideration be given to the appointment of some respected and influential black Namibian to the Board of the Company in due course *if a suitable candidate could be found* (emphasis added)".⁸⁴ Walker's suggestions were endorsed by the Board and five years later, in March 1983, two suitable candidates were found and appointed to the Board of Rössing Uranium. The first candidate was Martin Shipanga, a teacher at the Augustineum Training College and a member of the internal wing of SWAPO (which made him a suitable candidate in terms of the Chairman's suggestions). Shipanga was appointed to the Board of RUL in March 1983 and would continue to serve on the Board even after Namibia gained its independence.⁸⁵

The more prominent candidate, in Rössing's "Africanization" strategy, was Dr. Zedekia (Zed) Ngavirue a member of the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) who went into exile in 1961.⁸⁶ For the most part of his years in exile, Ngavirue lived and studied in Sweden and went on to complete a D.Phil. in Political Science from St Anthony's College, at the University of Oxford in 1967.⁸⁷ Between 1972–1978 Dr. Ngavirue served as a "Senior Lecturer in African History and Political Science, at the University of Papua New Guinea", whereafter he returned home to Namibia in 1978.⁸⁸ The details of how RUL came to identify Ngavirue as a "suitable candidate" are not clear, but upon his return to Namibia Ngavirue served as Vice-President of SWANU until 1980, a political role which might explain how he came to the attention of RUL.⁸⁹ Ngavirue's first professional role in the Namibian industry came in 1981 when he was appointed as the Manager for Education and Training

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁵ Mr. M. L. Shipanga and Dr. Z. J. Ngavirue were appointed Directors of the Company [RUL] in terms of Article 90 (ii) of the Articles of Association. RUL—Minutes of the seventy-sixth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Boardroom, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek South West Africa/Namibia on Wednesday, 16 March 1983, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 1040 Directorate, 2.

⁸⁶ The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), Zedekia Ngavirue Interview with Tor Sellström in Windhoek, 17 March 1995 <https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/zedika-ngavirue.html>, accessed 1 February 2021.

⁸⁷ St Anthony's College, University of Oxford, HE Dr. Zedekia J. Ngavirue (D.Phil Politics 1967). <https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/in-memoriam/he-dr-zedekia-j-ngavirue-dphil-politics-1967/>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

by the Private Sector Foundation.⁹⁰ His association with RUL began in March 1983 when he was appointed to the Board of Directors. In August 1983 Ngavirue accepted a full-time appointment with RUL as the Consulting Director: Personnel and Training, a role which reflected the decision by RUL to establish an Advisory Committee from which it could glean views on labour relations. As Consulting Director, Ngavirue reported to the Managing Director (Walker) and served as the Coordinator of the Rössing Foundation. In June 1984, he was appointed as the Deputy Chairman of the Board and in August 1985, was promoted to Chairman of the Board following Walker's retirement from the Board.⁹¹



Figure 12: Ronnie Walker, Craig Gibson and Colin Macaulay congratulate Dr. Zed Ngavirue on his appointment as Chairman of Rössing—August 1985⁹²

Ngavirue's speedy ascent to the Chairmanship had its foundations in a 1977 Board meeting where Walker's predecessor, Dr. P. E. Rousseau (Chairman of the Board 1972–1977), expressed his intention to resign as Chairman of the Board arguing that "political develop-

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Rössing News, Ronnie Walker Retires, Zed Ngavirue is New RUL Chairman, Week 35, 30 August 1985, 1.

⁹² Rössing Uranium, *The First Ten Years*, 6. Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 161.

ments in South West Africa and the inevitability of a new independent government in that country made it desirable that Rössing should adopt a true South West African image and identify itself with the aspirations of the inhabitants of that country. For this reason, he did not believe that the Chairman of Rössing should be directly linked with South Africa nor should he be a citizen of this country".⁹³ Although Rousseau was succeeded by a British national, Walker, his words resonated throughout the deliberations of the Board of RUL and the company's public relations strategy, resulting in Ngavirue's 1985 appointment as Chairman.

Ngavirue served both on the Board of Directors of RUL, as well as on the mine's management team. Like his predecessor, Walker, Ngavirue would be based at RUL's head office in Windhoek, and it was there that "he would prove an excellent Public Relations man in the capital".⁹⁴ In this regard Ngavirue would continue the work of John Berning who had been appointed "Executive Director with special responsibility for government and external relations", based at RUL's head office in Windhoek (see section Navigating the Political Landscape).⁹⁵ Shipanga and Ngavirue's appointments brought the total number of Directors of the Board of RUL to 18.⁹⁶ Africanization had been achieved through the appointment of 2 out of 18 Directors.

RUL's Africanization strategy led to the identification of a third "suitable candidate" to serve on the management team. Like Ngavirue, Charles Kauraisa went into exile in the early 1960s and would serve as a member of the External Council of SWANU based in Sweden.⁹⁷ Kauraisa studied at the Universities of Lund and Stockholm, where he completed graduate and postgraduate studies, on a scholarship.⁹⁸ Ngavirue initially returned to Namibia in 1978 under the terms of the amnesty declaration issued by the South Africa regime through the United Nations. As with Ngavirue, Kauraisa returned to Namibia in 1978 for a brief period of two months, following the amnesty declaration issued by the South Africa regime through the United Nations.⁹⁹

⁹³ Dr. P. E. Rousseau served as Chairman of the Board 1972–1977, resigning at the end of 1977. He was replaced by Ronnie Walker. RUL—Minutes of the forty-fourth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Board Room, fourteenth floor, Unicorn House, 70 Marshal Street, Johannesburg, on Thursday, 28 April 1977, 14h30, Agenda 530 Chairmanship, 1.

⁹⁴ Morris, *Cultivating the African*, 657.

⁹⁵ RUL—Minutes of the forty-fourth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Board Room, fourteenth floor, Unicorn House, 70 Marshal Street, Johannesburg, on Thursday, 28 April 1977, 14h30, 2.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), Charles Kauraisa Interview with Tor Sellström in Windhoek, 20 March 1995 <https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/charles-kauraisa.html>, accessed 1 February 2021.

⁹⁸ Ruth First (1963). *South West Africa*. Penguin Books, Baltimore.

⁹⁹ NAI—Charles Kauraisa Interview.

Charles Kauraisa's association with Rössing, on the other hand, was orchestrated by the lawyer John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who served on the board of Rössing Uranium.¹⁰⁰ Upon his return to Namibia, according to Kauraisa, he was:

Faced with the problem of how to earn a living without compromising my principles of working for institutions which were firmly steeped in the apartheid system. I discussed my problem with John Kirkpatrick, who advised me to join Rössing because he believed that I could contribute to the changes that were taking place in the company. At that point Rössing was committed to becoming a non-racial organization.¹⁰¹

This is an extraordinary statement, given the reputation of RUL as the exemplar of exploitation in Namibia. The statement is testament to the success of the public relations strategy adopted by the mine. Kauraisa first joined RUL in 1981, serving in the position of Industrial Relations Officer. Four years later, in 1985, he was promoted to Superintendent of Public and Industrial Relations and joined the management team of RUL. Kauraisa's statement on RUL's commitment to becoming a non-racial organisation is, however, questionable especially in relation to the mine's managerial team (see Figure 13¹⁰²). The photo was taken at



Figure 13: Rössing Uranium's Management Team 1985

¹⁰⁰ John Simpson Kirkpatrick served as a Director on the Rössing Board for 30 years, five of which were in the position of Chairman. Mike Leech, Managing Director Rössing, Rio Tinto, 2006 Report to stakeholders, www.rossing.com.info/reports/stake_reort06.pdf, accessed 2 February 2021.

¹⁰¹ NAI—Charles Kauraisa Interview.

¹⁰² Kauraisa and Ngavirue seated in the second row on either side of Clive Algar Rössing News, Annual Management Seminar at RCC, Week 34, 23 August 1985.

RUL's annual managerial seminar held in August of 1985 and shows Kauraisa and Ngavirue seated in the second row on either side of Clive Algar. Of RUL's forty managers only Kauraisa and Ngavirue were and would, until independence, remain RUL's examples of its commitment to a "non-racial" organisation.

In February 1989 Kauraisa was promoted to the position of Manager Communication, a position which came with the responsibility of ensuring that Rössing Uranium maintained "good communications with the public and [RUL] employees in this critical time as Namibia approached[d] independence".¹⁰³ With Kauraisa at the mine site handling labour and public relations, and Ngavirue at the head office in Windhoek upholding RUL's non-racial organisation image in both the political and public spheres, RUL had their public relations men in place.¹⁰⁴ This resonates with James Morris' observations of Barclays' activities in Kenya, for instance, writing that "placing an African employee in such a prominent position when the overall number of Africans employed [in managerial positions] was relatively small was, of course, at least in part a political and public relations exercise with the intention of emphasising the stake that Barclays had in Kenya".¹⁰⁵ Thus, while Kauraisa, Ngavirue and Shipanga were recognised as "suitable candidates" to serve on the Board and management of RUL, they were invaluable to RUL's image. Ngavirue, especially, served as both Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Rössing Foundation and Chairman of Rössing Uranium and regularly engaged with various stakeholders at the national level in these capacities. In 1985 Ngavirue was interviewed on why RUL had become so involved in Namibian society, to which he answered that:

The philosophy of our parent organisation Rio Tinto Zinc is to have its subsidiaries throughout the world identify fully with the countries in which they are located. Consequently, Rössing regards itself as a corporate citizen of Namibia. Rössing of course intends to be in Namibia well into the 21st century [...] and the [Rössing] Foundation hopes to be in operation long after the last haultruck has crawled out of the big pit with the final load of ore.¹⁰⁶

The responsibility of maintaining RUL's image, defending the investment and ensuring the continuity of its operations in independent Namibia was synonymous with the role of Chairman. Stockwell further argues that "it is apparent that the first African managerial appointees fulfilled a useful function by liaising with African politicians and officials".¹⁰⁷ This is true for both Ngavirue and Kauraisa whose years in exile and acquaintance with the

¹⁰³ Rössing News, Career Moves in Personnel, 17 February 1989, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Morris, *Cultivating the African*, 657.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Rössing Uranium, Rössing Magazine October 1986, New Horizons for the Rössing Foundation. John Meinert Printing: Windhoek, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Stockwell, *Political strategies*, 288.

political leadership of nationalist's movements like SWANU and SWAPO gave them the added advantage of establishing good relations for RUL. As Kauraisa notes on the success of Namibians who went into exile: "[W]e were all certain that we would return to Namibia one day to contribute to the development of our country, whether in politics or industry. We all shared a good relationship, whether members of SWANU or SWAPO or merely students working or living in Sweden".¹⁰⁸ The future political leadership of independent Namibia in their encounters with RUL, whether in Windhoek or at the mine, were thus met by familiar trustworthy faces.¹⁰⁹

Navigating the Political Landscape

In the late 1970s, British government officials assessed the possible challenges that would face RTZ's future operations in an independent Namibia, arguing that such operations would be dependent on the multinational corporation's ability to navigate the political landscape of a territory in transition. The first test for RTZ came in the late-1970s when the South African regime, in defiance of the UN settlement plan for Namibia, organised the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference. The Turnhalle Conference produced what became known as the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a multi-racial alliance cum political party which resonated with the South African regime's unilateral plan for the territory's independence. This unilateral plan culminated in the 1978 legislative elections, which were conducted in contravention of UN Security Council Resolutions 385 (1976), 431 (1978) and 435 (1978).¹¹⁰ The 1978 elections were denounced by the international community and declared null and void by the UN Security Council.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the South African regime pressed on with its unilateral plan and a Multi-Party Conference was held in November 1983. The Conference proposed "the establishment of an interim mechanism for the internal administration of Namibia".¹¹² Two years later the proposal was approved by the South

¹⁰⁸ NAI—Charles Kauraisa Interview.

¹⁰⁹ At independence Ngavirue was appointed as the Director of the National Planning Commission and resigned from the Rössing Board and eventually from the Rössing Foundation. Martin Shipanga continued to serve on the Board (by the time the Government had appointed its representative to the Board they found a black Namibian serving on the Board), while Kauraisa remained in the employment of RUL serving in various roles in Human Resources and Communications (for a total of 15 years), eventually being appointed to the Board of Directors of RUL and serving as its Chairman from 1995 to 2007 when he retired.

¹¹⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 of 29 September 1978.

¹¹¹ "Declares that all unilateral measures taken by the illegal administration in Namibia in relation to the electoral process, including unilateral registration of voters, or transfer of power, in contravention of resolutions 385 (1976), 431 (1978) and the present resolution, are null and void" United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 of 29 September 1978.

¹¹² National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Democratic Elections in Namibia: An In-

African administration following which an interim government was established in 1985. The interim government was composed of governmental structures headed by ministers in various portfolios, including the Minister of Mines. The veteran politician, Dirk Mudge, whose Republican Party played a formative role in the alliance, emerged as the leader of the interim government.

Despite the invalidity of the South African administration's actions, RTZ saw fit to establish contact with the interim government through the Rössing management. In 1977 RUL tasked John Berning to "maintain close ties with Government, the Turnhalle and other administrative bodies".¹¹³ Also in 1977, the Manager and Chairman of RUL, Ronnie Walker, met with Dirk Mudge.¹¹⁴ Later that year, while on a trip to London, Ronnie Walker delivered a "special message" from Dirk Mudge to the British government officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. According to Walker

Mudge felt that the West had let him down by side tracking the Turnhalle on which he had set his heart; and that [the British government was] giving in to Black African and UN pressures by a thinly disguised programme to put SWAPO in power in Namibia. Walker's comment on this (and it was not always clear when Walker was giving his view or Mudge's view) was that Mudge was much the best bet for the West's long-term interests in Namibia and that [the British government] ought to be making a positive effort to put him in power.¹¹⁵

As a British national in charge of a company with a large British shareholding, Walker viewed a government under Mudge as a sure way of upholding British national interests in Namibia. This led to his argument that "there was surely a strong British national interest in doing what we could to promote a stable and moderate Government in Namibia which would ensure the continuation of supplies of uranium from Rössing, rather than to stand by or actively promote a radical government which would jeopardise these supplies".¹¹⁶ The British government's position on the matter was that it would be improper to attempt to give political support to Mudge or to influence the decision of the people of Namibia. The "foundation of [British government] policy was that the people of Namibia should be given the opportunity to express their opinions freely through a fair electoral process on how they

ternational Experiment in Nation Building. The First Pre-Election Study June 1989, 13. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/158_na_election_060189.pdf, accessed 22 January 2021.

¹¹³ RUL—Minutes of the forty-fourth meeting, 2.

¹¹⁴ Ronnie Walker (the Manager and Chairman of Rössing) from 1977 to 1985. Walker was "transferred from the post of Manager of RTZ's company in Rhodesia where he had acquired a reputation for pursuing forward-looking racial policies." TNA FCO 45/2168 HMS Reid (Central & Southern African Department) to DM Summerhayes (British Embassy Pretoria), Namibia, 21 September 1977.

¹¹⁵ TNA FCO 45/2168 21 September 1977.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

wish to govern themselves".¹¹⁷ The adoption of such a policy was especially possible for the British government as uranium deliveries under the 1968, 1970 and 1976 contracts were coming to an end in 1984. Walker's presentation of Mudge as "the best bet for the West" was therefore more indicative of RTZ's view of Mudge as the best bet for RTZ's long-term interests in Namibia. This too was the view expressed by the British Embassy in Pretoria which noted that "Walker as RTZ's top man in Namibia is himself very keen to see Mudge come out on top in the political stakes, because he thinks this would be best for RTZ".¹¹⁸ Walker's views, according to the embassy, were fuelled by a distrust, shared by most businessmen in Windhoek, of "SWAPO's intentions in the economic field if they once achieve power. And SWAPO indeed have given much cause for this anxiety with their generally Marxist approach to the running of the economy".¹¹⁹ The real message that can be deduced from Walker's meeting with the FCO, therefore is that:

He himself would like to see HMG supporting Mudge. Since we obviously cannot do this [...] it will be up to firms like RTZ to make their own decision about possible political subventions. There is nothing to prevent RTZ from giving support to Mudge's new Republican Party if they think this will be to their advantage. Probably quite a lot of firms will do this, especially if Dirk Mudge is successful in forming his multi-racial alliance to fight elections.¹²⁰

The advantage for RTZ in dealing with the changing political landscape in Namibia is that it "could draw on the earlier experiences of big business facing the challenge of decolonization elsewhere in Africa".¹²¹ Should RTZ have decided to follow the route of political subversion, through the rendering of support to Mudge's Republican Party, then there would have been a few examples that they could draw on.¹²² Whether or not such subversions were made by RTZ to Mudge's Republican Party is not revealed in the archival collections perused in the process of this research. What is clear, however, is that once the interim government was established in 1985, its representatives were hosted by RUL and given a tour of the mine. In August 1985, for example, RUL hosted the interim government as represented by the Minister and Deputy Minister of Mines. That these "Ministers" and the government they represented were not recognised by the political organs of the United Nations did not appear to be a problem for RUL's management and its public relations department, which went on to host two more ministers of the interim government, namely the Minister of Manpower

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ TNA FCO 45/2168 DM Summerhayes (Esq) British Embassy Pretoria to H. M. S. Reid (Esq) Central and Southern African Department, Namibia, 17 October 1977.

¹¹⁹ TNA FCO 45/2168 17 October 1977.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Butler, *Mining, Nationalism and Decolonization in Zambia*, 12.

¹²² See Phimister, "Corporate Profit and Race" and Butler, *Mining, Nationalism and Decolonization in Zambia*.

and Health and Welfare and the Minister of Finance and Governmental Affairs. The office of the Minister of Finance and Governmental Affairs was ironically occupied by Dirk Mudge, RTZ's "best bet" for its continued operations in Namibia. By the end of August 1985, Ronnie Walker retired as Chairman of RUL and returned to London where he remained a director of RTZ.¹²³ The responsibility of navigating the political landscape fell to Dr. Zed Ngavirue, RUL's public relations man in the city (see p.129 on Africanization).

Government Shareholding in Rössing Uranium

Political subversions aside, the RUL's engagement with the interim government culminated in a key strategy for protecting the interests of RUL's shareholders and ensuring the continuity of the mine's operations in Namibia, namely—government shareholding in RUL. In March 1985, a proclamation was gazetted announcing that the Administrator-General of South West Africa/Namibia had acquired shares in RUL. Interestingly, the character of the Administrator-General had been a product of the 1977–1978 diplomatic negotiations led by the Western Contact Group.¹²⁴ The position had been created in response to the appointment of a Special Representative to the Secretary General of the United Nations, who would ensure "that conditions are established which will allow for elections and an impartial electoral process", with assistance from UNTAG.¹²⁵ The appointment of the Administrator-General had been acknowledged in the Contact Group's "Proposal for a settlement of the Namibian situation" as a prerequisite for ensuring the orderly transition to Namibian independence.¹²⁶

The creation of this new position would interestingly serve as a mechanism for RUL's strategy of securing the buy-in of the government of Namibia in its operations. Willem Abraham Van Niekerk was the Administrator-General between February 1983 and July 1985.¹²⁷ Discussions on the acquisition of government shareholding in RUL began in 1983

¹²³ Rössing News, Ronnie Walker Retires, 2.

¹²⁴ Marthinus Steyn served as the first Administrator-General (1977–1979), followed by Gerrit Viljoen (1979–80), Danie Hough (1980–1983), Willie van Niekerk (1983–85) and Louis Pienaar (1985–1990) Country Profile: South West Africa/Namibia, 63. http://www.the-eis.com/data/literature/Country%20profile_South%20West%20Africa.pdf, accessed 15 December 2020.

¹²⁵ United Nations Security Council. Letter from the Representatives of the Western Contact Group to the President of the Security. Proposal for a settlement of the Namibian situation. Dated 10 April 1978 (S/12636)

¹²⁶ 'The Contact Group's diplomatic efforts had produced a blue-print upon which Namibian independence would be achieved guided by "a transitional authority composed jointly by the South African Administrator-General and the UN Special Representative". Melber and Saunders, *Conflict Mediation*, 76.

¹²⁷ Van Niekerk was preceded by Danie Hough https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie_van_Niekerk, accessed 15 December 2020.

when the IDC “disclosed that the Government of South Africa had started negotiations for the transfer of the ‘A’ shares to the Government of South West Africa”.¹²⁸ These negotiations were confirmed to RUL by van Niekerk who stated that it was indeed “the intention of the Government of South West Africa to acquire the controlling shares in Rössing but the organization or government agency which would hold the shares was not yet known”.¹²⁹ By 1985 these details were ironed out and prior to the end of his term in office, Van Niekerk announced that he had acquired shares in RUL on behalf of the territory. According to Roger Murray “a 3.5 per cent equity interest with 50 per cent of the voting rights were transferred from the IDC [Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa] to the Namibian interim administration”.¹³⁰ Why it was decided to only transfer 3.5 per cent to the administration and not the full equity holding of the IDC, is not clear. Nonetheless, the IDC went from a 13.5 per cent equity share in Rössing Uranium to 10 per cent in 1985. In addition, the IDC relinquished its majority voting rights on RUL’s Board to the interim administration signalling South African disengagement from RUL and the end of South African control over RUL’s affairs. The Acquisition of Shares in Rössing Uranium Limited Proclamation is deemed to have come into operation on 1 March 1985 and it was extraordinarily gazetted by Van Niekerk on 13 June 1985 following the approval of the South African President on 7 June 1985.¹³¹

Although the Proclamation announcing the acquisition of shares in RUL elaborated on the right of the Administrator-General to acquire shares “when he may deem it necessary [...] for the purpose of directly or indirectly extending the interests of the State”, it did not indicate how the percentage of shares had been determined let alone the total cost at which such shares were acquired.¹³² Discussions at the Board level, however, reveal that the IDC expected “to receive a fair price for the shares on a normal commercial transaction basis”.¹³³

¹²⁸ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-ninth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Boardroom, Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek South West Africa/Namibia on Wednesday, 26 October 1983, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 1093 Transfer of Shares, 11.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹³⁰ Roger Murray. “Namibia through the 1990s: Turning Rich Resources into Growth”. Special, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Report No. M211 (London; 1992), 55.

¹³¹ Extraordinary Official Gazette of South West Africa, *The Acquisition of Shares in Rössing Uranium Limited and the Appointment of a Director*, Proclamation No. AG.31 (Windhoek: 15 June 1985). The proclamation was recently included in a list of 27 obsolete laws which the Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC) sought to repeal. The Namibian, Ministry of Justice, Public Notice: The Repeal of Obsolete Laws in Namibia, Friday 24 January 2020, 26.

¹³² Gazette, *The Acquisition of Shares*, 3.

¹³³ RUL—Minutes of the seventy-ninth meeting, 11. By December 1983, “The Managing Director reported that the interested parties had engaged the services of Volkskas Merchant Bank to assist in the valuation of the ‘A’ shares to be transferred by the IDC to the Government of South West Africa, which transfer was expected to be completed early in the new year [1984].” RUL—Minutes of the eightieth meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium, held in the Boardroom,

The dividends accrued to the Administrator-General from RUL were to be deposited in the Central Revenue Fund, established in 1979 for purposes of defraying the cost associated with the administration of the territory.¹³⁴ Moreover, the Administrator-General was represented by a director on the Board of RUL. The appointment of the director was overseen by Van Niekerk's successor Louis Pienaar.¹³⁵ The director, referred to as "he" in the proclamation, was supposedly appointed based on "his experience of business," which in the language of the apartheid era simply meant a white male.¹³⁶

That the shareholding agreement had been reached in anticipation of independence was revealed in an "independence interview" with Dr. Steve Kesler (the General Manager of Rössing Uranium). When asked what "the Company's position regarding nationalisation by a future Namibian Government" was, Dr. Kesler responded that "many people may not realise that the new government will be a shareholder in Rössing".¹³⁷ This, according to Murray, meant that the "shares and accumulated share of profits [from RUL] reverted to the Namibian government at independence".¹³⁸ The interim administration's shareholding in RUL would, according to Dr. Kesler, give the new government "voting control at Annual General Meetings" and would "be transferred to the Government when it is recognised by the United Nations".¹³⁹ The shareholding in RUL, was thus essentially orchestrated by RTZ in collusion with the South African administration. Such shareholding not only provided protection from nationalisation for the two parties, it ensured continued control over the operations of RUL by RTZ's management.

In June 1986, RUL celebrated its first ten years of production.¹⁴⁰ The company anniversary was celebrated with much fanfare on the mine site with the keynote address delivered to the employees by the General Manager, Dr. Mike Bates. Figure 14 shows Dr. Bates addressing the employees from a podium decorated with posters depicting RUL's blue and white colour scheme and the new logo incorporated into the number 10. The international public relations campaign that had started in the late 1970s, and took shape in the early 1980s, was thus well established by the late 1980s.

Third Floor, Sanlam Building, Bulow Street, Windhoek South West Africa/Namibia on Wednesday, 7 December 1983, at 10h30, Agenda Item: 1093—Transfer of Shares, 1.

¹³⁴ The Central Revenue Fund was established by section 3 of the Exchequer and Audit Proclamation, 1973 (Proclamation 85 of 1979).

¹³⁵ Louis Pienaar served as Administrator-General from 1st July 1985 until Namibia's independence on 21 March 1990. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Pienaar, accessed 15 May 2020.

¹³⁶ Gazette, *The Acquisition of Shares*, 4.

¹³⁷ Rössing News, Independence—Interview with General Manager (Dr. Steve Kesler), 7 April 1989, 2.

¹³⁸ Murray, *Namibia through the 1990s*, 55.

¹³⁹ Rössing News, Independence—Interview, 2.

¹⁴⁰ 25 June 1986 marked ten years since Rössing Uranium commenced production in 1976. Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 156.



Figure 14: Dr Mike Bates (General Manager of Rössing Uranium) addressing employees¹⁴¹

In October 1986, four months after the anniversary celebrations, the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America enacted the “Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986”.¹⁴² The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was aimed at exerting pressure on apartheid South Africa. The Act banned all new U.S. investments in South African businesses, while prohibiting the importation of goods that are produced or manufactured in South Africa. To ensure that none of these products made their way to the United States, the Act cancelled “landing rights in the United States for South African airlines”.¹⁴³ Of particular interest to RUL’s operations was Section 309 of the Act which prohibited the importation of uranium and coal from South Africa. According to Section 309 “no uranium ore [or] uranium oxide [...] produced [...] in South Africa may be imported to the United States”.¹⁴⁴ Although Section 309 made no specific mention of uranium produced in Namibia, the Act carried implications for uranium produced by RUL. This is because the Act prohibited “the importation of any article [...] produced [...] by a South African parastatal organisation (an organization owned or controlled by the South African Government [...])”.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Rössing Uranium—Reflecting on 40 years, 4.

¹⁴² Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/4868>, accessed 5 February 2021.

¹⁴³ S. V. Roberts, “Senate, 78–21, Overrides Reagan’s Veto and Imposes Sanctions on South Africa”. *The New York Times*, October 3, 1986 <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/10/03/politics/senate-78-to-21-overrides-reagans-veto-and-imposes-sanctions-on.html>, accessed 5 February 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99–440, 100 Stat. 1086 (1986).

¹⁴⁵ H.R.4868—Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, 99th Congress (1985–1986) <http://con>

Included in this categorisation was the South African Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) which held a 10 per cent equity in RUL. The ban on the import of uranium posed a challenge to RUL's business operations, key among which was the inability on the part of RUL's customers to have their uranium ore supplies converted to uranium hexafluoride in the United States. According to Hecht, a considerable portion of the uranium ore produced by RUL was converted to uranium hexafluoride in the US and "much of its yellowcake converted elsewhere went to the US for enrichment".¹⁴⁶ The impact of the sanctions was such that the Chamber of Mines of SWA/Namibia weighed in on the matter stating that "this Chamber, as a matter of principle is against any and every form of sanction based on political interference with international free trade. Worse still to our mind is the inclusion of Namibia in the sanctions imposed against South Africa by the United States".¹⁴⁷ The challenges posed by the sanctions to RUL's business operations had left the mine's top executives eagerly anticipating a successful end to the Western Contact Group's negotiations for Namibian independence.

Rössing Uranium: It is all British

On 31 March 1989 the South African Foreign Minister announced that the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would be travelling to Namibia.¹⁴⁸ The Prime Minister had been on a tour of Africa with brief stopovers in Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The week-long African tour, which took place in late March 1989, had been in preparation for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting scheduled to take place in Malaysia in October 1989. A visit to Namibia had not been on the itinerary of the Prime Minister's tour, however, and this led to the question as to why Margaret Thatcher had "decided to include Namibia [into her tour] at this last stage?"¹⁴⁹ The Prime Minister had consistently made mention of developments in Namibia during press conferences in Nigeria and Zimbabwe but had made no mention of intentions to visit Namibia.¹⁵⁰ In fact the question of why Namibia was put to the Prime Minister during a press conference in Malawi, which was her supposed last stop on the tour of Africa. In response, the Prime Minister stated that she had "no announcement to make about Namibia as no decision had been taken yet on whether or not to go to Namibia".¹⁵¹

[gress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/4868](https://www.congress.gov/bills/99/congress-house-bills/4868), accessed 5 February 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 163.

¹⁴⁷ The Chamber of Mines of S.W.A./Namibia, 8th Annual Report, 1986, vi.

¹⁴⁸ M. Thatcher, Press Conference in Malawi, 31 March 1989, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107621>, accessed 15 December 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ M. Thatcher, Press Conference ending visit to Zimbabwe, 30 March 1989. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107616>, accessed 15 December 2020.

¹⁵¹ Thatcher, Press Conference Malawi, 31 March 1989.

The unanticipated stopover in Namibia, appears to have been timed to coincide with the commencement of the implementation of Security Council resolution 435, which had been approved 10 years earlier in 1978. The credit “for the successful and workable settlement, together with a normalisation of relations with Angola after a Cuban withdrawal,” which led Namibia on the path to political independence would go the United States, and particularly the assistant secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker.¹⁵² Getting the different parties to the negotiation table, and more importantly their signatures on the accords had been no small feat for a man whose initiative had been described as a diplomatic bird flapping its wings but never gaining any momentum.¹⁵³ The tripartite agreement had been signed on 22 December 1988 and it produced a ceasefire agreement, signed between SWAPO and the South African government in preparation for the electoral process for Namibian independence.¹⁵⁴ The British Prime Minister’s visit to Namibia was thus timed to coincide with these historical events.

The Prime Minister’s one-day visit to Namibia took place on Saturday, 1 April 1989, with a few hours in Windhoek to demonstrate the support of the United Kingdom, “for the work that the United Nations is doing [...] to bring [...] Namibia to independence.”¹⁵⁵ The Prime Minister described the role of the United Nations representation in Namibia as standing “at the gateway to peace, with freedom and justice.”¹⁵⁶ While the UN representation stood at the gateway of peace, Margaret Thatcher had come to Namibia to demonstrate the British government’s preferred gateway in securing its interest in the Namibian economy.¹⁵⁷ Hecht writes that the RTZ management in London, “maintained a revolving door between its boardroom and the upper echelons of British ministries.”¹⁵⁸ On the afternoon of Saturday 1 April 1989, that door appeared to have revolved all the way onto the Arandis airstrip as the British Prime Minister arrived at RUL accompanied by her husband, Denis Thatcher. The two were given a guided tour of the mine and the town of Arandis by RUL’s Managing Director, Dr. Mike Bates and General Manager, Dr. Steve Kesler. In keeping with the manner of her previous stopovers in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Malawi the Prime Minister held a

¹⁵² John Barratt, “Namibia in the international Arena”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (April 1982), pp. 269–280, 278.

¹⁵³ L. Wiznitzer, “Impasse on Namibian independence”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 1st 1982, New York <https://www.csmonitor.com/1982/0601/060146.html>, accessed 15 December 2020.

¹⁵⁴ The tripartite agreement was signed between the Republics of Angola, Cuba and South Africa. See C. W. Freeman, “The Angola/Namibia Accords”, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer, 1989, Vol. 68, No.3, pp.126–141.

¹⁵⁵ Margaret Thatcher, Speech at Signals Base HQ (Namibia), 1 April 1989 <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107623>, accessed 15 December 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Lucky Asuelime, “Uranium politics of gatekeeping: Revisiting the British government’s policy vis-à-vis South Africa, 1945–1951” *Historia*, 58, 1, (May 2013), pp. 33–50.

¹⁵⁸ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 86.

press conference during her tour of RUL. Asked what sort of statement she had intended to make “by coming to what is supposed to be the economic heartland of Namibia?” the Prime Minister responded

First this [Rössing Uranium] is British overseas investment in Namibia. It is doing a fantastic job for Namibia. It is something like 17 percent of the GDP of Namibia [...] So, it is really an example of what a British company can do in a country like Namibia [...] *And it is all British so it is very good.*¹⁵⁹

Hecht was right in writing that RTZ’s position as a British company had meant that “Rössing was as close as the UK would come to controlling its own uranium supply” as this was implied in the Prime Minister’s statement on RUL being “all British”.¹⁶⁰ RUL had distanced itself somewhat from South Africa in that its offices and registration were moved to Windhoek, Namibia as opposed to its previous representation from RTZ’s Johannesburg offices.¹⁶¹ What made RUL “all British” was its status as a subsidiary of RTZ which had its headquarters in London and was listed on the London Stock Exchange. This British status was also evident in the composition of the senior staff (Bates, Kesler and their predecessors) who were predominantly British (an estimated 75 per cent of the executive management were British).¹⁶² Moreover, a large part of its new investment in the 1970s was British, which led British government officials to refer to RUL as a primarily British company confirming Uche’s argument that “the British government and British businesses worked in concert” to protect British interests in Namibian uranium.¹⁶³

The brandishing of RTZ’s operations at RUL as a key example of the plunder of Namibia’s natural resources by foreign corporations was dismissed as “nonsense” by the Prime Minister in her parting words to the press.¹⁶⁴ The view of the British government was that “as the years pass, changing the present situation and bringing, as they must, Namibian independence, the export value of these uranium mining developments will be of tremendous importance to the future prosperity and stability of that country”.¹⁶⁵ UK imports from Namibia had, according to Vivienne Jabri, amounted to a value of £63.4 million in 1983.¹⁶⁶ The import value had however fallen sharply to £6.8 million in 1986 due, in part, to the completion of uranium deliveries from Rössing Uranium to BNFL in 1984. The completion

¹⁵⁹ Margaret Thatcher, Interview visiting Namibian Uranium Mine. 1 April 1989 <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107624>, accessed 15 December 2020.

¹⁶⁰ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 97.

¹⁶¹ TNA FCO 45/2168 J. A. N. Graham, Confidential, 23 November 1977.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Uche, “Lonrho in Africa”, 357.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ [Hansard], Lord Lovell-Davis, Uranium Purchases from Namibia.

¹⁶⁶ Jabri, *Mediating Conflict*, 56.

of the delivery of the Rössing contracts to the BNFL had been expedited by the Japanese government's 1977 decision to forgo supplies of uranium from RUL under their existing contract (see Chapter 5).¹⁶⁷ The decision had been announced by Japan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations following criticism in the General Assembly of Japan's role in the exploitation of Namibia's uranium resources. The Japanese government did not deny the existence of the contract with RUL but rather stated that it would not be accepting any uranium from Namibia until the attainment of independence.¹⁶⁸ The availability of these additional supplies enabled RUL to step up deliveries to BNFL and to complete the full deliveries of uranium supplies under the 1968, 1970 and 1976 contracts.

For its part, the British government announced that once deliveries had been completed under the existent contracts, no new contracts would be approved for supplies of uranium from RUL. One could thus argue that the "tremendous importance" of the British government's contracts for Namibian uranium had not been for the "future prosperity and stability" of independent Namibia, but rather for the South African regime's continued occupation of the territory. Margaret Thatcher's response to the press—"nonsense"—should thus have been in reference to the arguments put forward by her own government and not to the criticism levelled against RTZ and the British government's role in the plunder of Namibia's uranium resources.

A few hours later, as the Prime Minister prepared to return to Windhoek, a group photo was taken to document Thatcher's historic visit to the mine (see Figure 15). A notable figure in the photo, was Dr. Zed Ngavirue, RUL's public relations man and the symbol of the mine's aspirations of becoming non-racial organisation. RUL's management handed the Thatchers parting gifts, most notably a gold brooch in the shape of RUL's logo for Mrs. Thatcher and gold cufflinks depicting RUL's logo for Mr. Thatcher.¹⁶⁹ The logo, which had been a key part of RUL's public relations strategy, appeared to compliment Mrs. Thatcher's statement on RTZ's "example of what a British company can do in a country like Namibia", for indeed this British company was now supposedly "Working for Namibia". The Prime Minister's visit to RUL was even more valuable for RUL's public relations strategy, for as the Managing Director noted:

The Prime Minister's visit was certainly the single most important visit which we have hosted. The amount of time spent at the mine in relation to her time in Namibia was an outright compliment and seal of approval. This cannot fail to impress customers and future customers.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ TNA FCO 45/2168 M. C. S. Aitchison (Department of Energy) in a letter addressed to R. Marsh (BNFL), Namibian Uranium, 25 November 1977.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Thatcher visits Rössing

A great honour was bestowed on Rössing last Saturday when the British Prime Minister, the R.T. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, concluded her visit of the African states with a visit to the mine.

Seal of approval

The Prime Minister's visit was certainly the single most important visit which we have hosted. The amount of time spent at the mine in relation to her time in Namibia was an outright compliment and seal of approval. This cannot fail to impress customers and future customers,' said the Managing Director of Rössing, Dr Mike Bates.

Well-timed visit

Her visit was also well-timed for Namibia as a whole. Chairman of Rössing, Dr Zed Ngavirue commented: 'The visit of the British Prime Minister at this crucial moment in our history was well-timed. I believe that it will prove to be of great benefit not only to Rössing as a company but to Namibia as a whole. The recognition paid to the



The British Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, standing with members of the Rössing executive: General Manager, Dr Steve Kesler; Mr Dennis Thatcher, Managing Director, Dr Mike Bates; Mrs Margaret Thatcher; Chairman, Dr Zed Ngavirue; Deputy Chairman, Mr Craig Gibson and Financial Director, Mr George Stobart.

Figure 15: Margaret and Denis Thatcher with the Rössing Management¹⁷¹

Impressing present and future customers was precisely what RUL had set out to do, considering the sanctions under the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act which banned the import of uranium products from South Africa and by extension, Namibia. The global uranium market had presented RUL with a different challenge, namely that "the release of material from the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries into the West and the perception by Western utilities that there were enormous quantities available to be realised drove the price down to historically low levels".¹⁷² The highest representative of the British government of the time had, however, travelled to Namibia to demonstrate that government's support for "British overseas investment in Namibia" and to underscore what Lucky Asuelime described as the "uranium politics of gatekeeping" that had guided much of the British government's policy towards Namibia over the past decades.¹⁷³ Thatcher's endorsement of RUL demonstrated the British government's readiness to protect RTZ "against claims of compensation, nationalisation and acquisition of assets from a future lawful government of Namibia".¹⁷⁴ Rogers' argument that the responsibility for the "opening and financing of the exploitation

¹⁷¹ Rössing News, Thatcher Visits Rössing, 7 April 1989, 1.

¹⁷² Chamber of Mines of Namibia, 12th Annual Report, 1990 (Dr. M. P. Bates, President), v.

¹⁷³ The expression "uranium politics of gatekeeping" is borrowed from Asuelime, "Uranium politics of gatekeeping", whose article investigates the role of uranium in British-South African relations from a Commonwealth perspective.

¹⁷⁴ Roberts, A. R., "The International Trade in Namibia's Uranium (An overview of the Expropriation of Namibia's uranium resources", *International Seminar on The Role of Transnational Corporations in Namibia* (Washington: 1982), 7.

of Namibia's Rössing deposits" had rested on the British government could be extended to the endorsement of its future operations as this demonstrated the British government's continued support of RTZ's operations in Namibia.¹⁷⁵



Figure 16: Martti Ahtisaari visits the Rössing Uranium mine¹⁷⁶

On the day of Thatcher's visit to Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari and the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) were faced with a crisis that threatened the entire settlement plan to the Namibia situation. Ahtisaari had previously served as the UN Commissioner for Namibia and he was appointed the Special Representative to the Secretary General of the UN for the envisioned granting of independence to Namibia in 1978. In the transition period following the 1988 formal mediations, Marti Ahtisaari became the man in charge of running the affairs of Namibia in conjunction with the South African-appointed Administrator General (Louis Pienaar). On 1 April 1989 as Margaret Thatcher prepared to visit RUL, Ahtisaari came under undue pressure to authorise an attack on SWAPO forces which had crossed over the Namibia–Angola border in contravention of the cease-fire agreement. The South African ground forces, which had been confined to their bases threatened to take matters into their own hands, with Margaret Thatcher threatening Ahtisaari that if he did not get the Secretary General of the United Nations to authorise the South African

¹⁷⁵ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 4.

¹⁷⁶ August 1989: Martti Ahtisaari, Special Representative for the Secretary General of the United Nations, visited the mine <https://www.rossing.com/40years.htm>, accessed, 15 December 2020.

forces to respond to the SWAPO incursion then she would ensure that “the whole world will be against you—led by me”.¹⁷⁷ Three-hundred People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) soldiers died on that fateful day, as the South African ground forces opened fire. By the time she had left Namibia, Margaret Thatcher had not only left her mark on RUL but also on the second bloodiest day in Namibia’s 27 years of armed struggle. Three months later in August 1989, following a period of political and diplomatic uncertainty in the UN settlement plan for Namibia, RTZ invited the Ahtisaari family for a tour of RUL (see Figure 16).¹⁷⁸ If Thatcher’s visit had impressed “future customers” then Ahtisaari’s visit would no doubt generate commentary in the international community on RUL’s role in the economic outlook of an independent Namibia.

Rössing Uranium and the SWAPO Leadership

During the diplomatic negotiations for Namibian independence it had become increasingly clear that “no stable or internationally-acceptable regime in an independent Namibia can be established without the involvement of [...] SWAPO”.¹⁷⁹ To this end, the British government decided that they would maintain good relations with SWAPO, particularly through the movement’s representative in London, Peter Katjavivi.¹⁸⁰ The FCO, for instance, records a meeting that took place in 1975 between the leadership of SWAPO and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. In a rather animated exchange, Sam Nujoma, the President of SWAPO, asked the Foreign Secretary James Callaghan if the British government would request RTZ and other British firms to withdraw from Namibia.¹⁸¹ Callaghan responded “no [...] others would be sure to step into our shoes, if we left, and we were not prepared to cut off our noses to spite our faces in this way”.¹⁸² With one party levelling criticism while the other defended their position, an offer was made to arrange a meeting for Nujoma with RTZ’s management in London so as to avail SWAPO of the opportunity to level direct criticism to RTZ for its operations in Namibia.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ R. Renwick. *Unconventional Diplomacy in Southern Africa*. (London: 1997), 133.

¹⁷⁸ Rössing News, Ahtisaari comes to mine, 4 August 1989, 1.

¹⁷⁹ TNA FCO 45/1936 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Namibia: The Position of SWAPO, June 1976, 1.

¹⁸⁰ TNA FCO 45/1976 H. M. S. Reid (Central and South African Department) to Mr. Aspin, Namibia, 8 June 1976.

¹⁸¹ Record of a Meeting between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 11 June 1975, 4.

¹⁸² Ibid., 4.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

In the 1980s RTZ, through RUL, initiated contact with SWAPO. According to Hecht, RUL “initiated an informal approach to SWAPO leaders by inviting them to a briefing in Zimbabwe”.¹⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that this happened in Zimbabwe, a country which gained its independence in April 1980 whereafter RTZ successfully negotiated the continuation of its operations with the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), who like SWAPO were influenced by Marxist ideology. The first meeting happened in 1981, when Clive Algar, RUL’s public relations director, met a senior SWAPO representative, Aaron Mushimba, in Zimbabwe.¹⁸⁵ RTZ viewed this chance encounter, which turned into a series of meetings, as an opportunity to communicate with the top echelons of the SWAPO organization. The meetings were held in secrecy owing to a number of factors: South Africa’s war against SWAPO, RUL’s supposed non-partisan approach to Namibian politics, and SWAPO’s overt criticism of RUL’s operations in Namibia. The aim for RUL was to explain its operations to the leadership of SWAPO and in so doing convey a positive image of the company. A tour of RUL would probably have been the preferred mode for the public relations department, but in the early 1980s the SWAPO leadership in exile could not as yet travel to Namibia, lest they risk arrest and harassment by the South African regime.¹⁸⁶ As the diplomatic negotiations of the Western Contact Group dragged on, the meetings between RTZ and SWAPO began to fizzle out.¹⁸⁷ Contact between the two parties was only restored once the diplomatic accord for Namibian independence had been signed in 1988.

It was interestingly during this period that SWAPO ruled out the outright nationalisation of various industries, including the mining industry. In November 1988, as “independence appeared more and more probable in 1989”, the political bureau of the central committee of SWAPO released an “Economic-Policy-Position-Document” in which the movement documented its “thinking on Namibia’s future economic reconstruction and development”.¹⁸⁸ The policy document specified that although “the state would seek to have ownership of a significant part of the country’s resources [...] no wholesale nationalisation of the mines, land and other productive sectors is [...] envisaged”.¹⁸⁹ Whether or not the decision against nationalisation was influenced by the movement’s interactions with company executives of mines like RUL is difficult to ascertain. What is clear, however, is that the phenomenon was not unique to SWAPO. Examples from other African countries demonstrate that despite the “socialist rhetoric in the lead up to independence,” nationalisation was often viewed as

¹⁸⁴ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 168.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 140.

¹⁸⁶ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 168.

¹⁸⁷ Daniel, *Against All Odds*, 140.

¹⁸⁸ BAB AA.3 88FSBoPR5 Basel SWAPO of Namibia, Namibia’s Economic Prospects Brighten Up: An Economic-Policy-Position-Document of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of SWAPO, 28 November 1988, People’s Republic of Angola, 3.

¹⁸⁹ SWAPO, Namibia’s Economic Prospects, 4.

a last resort.¹⁹⁰ The understanding was that nationalisation of various industries, including the mining industry, would not only result in a “waste [of] capital that could be better spend on schools or hospitals, but [it] would also frighten foreign investors, draining their capital and skilled expatriate manpower from the country”.¹⁹¹ Outright nationalisation had thus been ruled out by SWAPO. What was not clear, however, was whether SWAPO, in its quest for “ownership of a significant part of the country’s resources”, would “go for [...] a majority stake, a minority stake, [or] retrospective compensation for RTZ’s removal of Namibian assets”.¹⁹² First an election had to be won.

In December 1988, the parties to the diplomatic negotiations for Namibian independence signed the independence accord.¹⁹³ The following year, in 1989, several members of SWAPO’s leadership in exile were able to return to Namibia in preparation for the impending elections. It is here that RUL was presented with a first-hand opportunity to demonstrate its “Working for Namibia” slogan to the SWAPO leadership. Realising the need for a more polished approach to the future leadership, RUL’s public relations director advised the mine’s executives on how best to “diplomatically” present the work of the mine to the future officials of an independently elected Namibian government. Algar stated that:

Sometimes we—and I am as guilty as anybody—tend to show our satisfaction at Rössing’s successes in various fields but this may be the wrong psychological approach when dealing with the future cabinet ministers whose whole *raison d’être* is change and improvement of Namibia. Our theme throughout should be not only what we have achieved but what remains to be done, and in speaking about such aims we should make it clear that we are open to suggestion and comment. This of course hardly applies in the technical area but is very relevant to the whole human aspect of Rössing.¹⁹⁴

Algar’s psychological approach was first put to the test when SWAPO’s “future cabinet ministers” visited RUL in August 1989, while on the campaign trail for the November 1989 parliamentary elections. The campaign trail was evidently the preoccupation of the SWAPO representatives, with the future Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo-Ben Gurirab (Figure 17), clutching SWAPO’s Election Manifesto in his left hand. Interestingly RUL had at the time adopted “a policy of avoiding political association and affiliation and of making no political donations” during the transition period to Namibia’s independence.¹⁹⁵ Navigating the political landscape, like Press visits, would, however, prove to be a balancing act as the politicians would not part with their party manifestos during election campaigns. While RUL’s “human

¹⁹⁰ Morris, *Cultivating the African*, 659.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 660.

¹⁹² TNA FCO 45/1936 June 1976, 1.

¹⁹³ C.W., Freeman. “The Angola/Namibia Accords.” *Foreign Affairs*, 68, No. 3 (1989): 126–41.

¹⁹⁴ C. Algar, cited in Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 305.

¹⁹⁵ RUL—Minutes of the One-Hundredth Meeting, 4.

aspect” presented the nationalist movement with an opportunity to rally potential voters on the mine site, it presented RTZ with the opportunity to demonstrate to the “future” government the degree of its investment in its workforce, with the mining town of Arandis as the star “social responsibility” project. Algar’s final comment on the technical area, on the other hand, is worth noting. It not only reveals that RUL was not open to suggestion and comment when it comes to the technical area but is indicative of the company’s intention to defend the investments of its shareholders and to maintain operational control over the mine without interference from the new government.

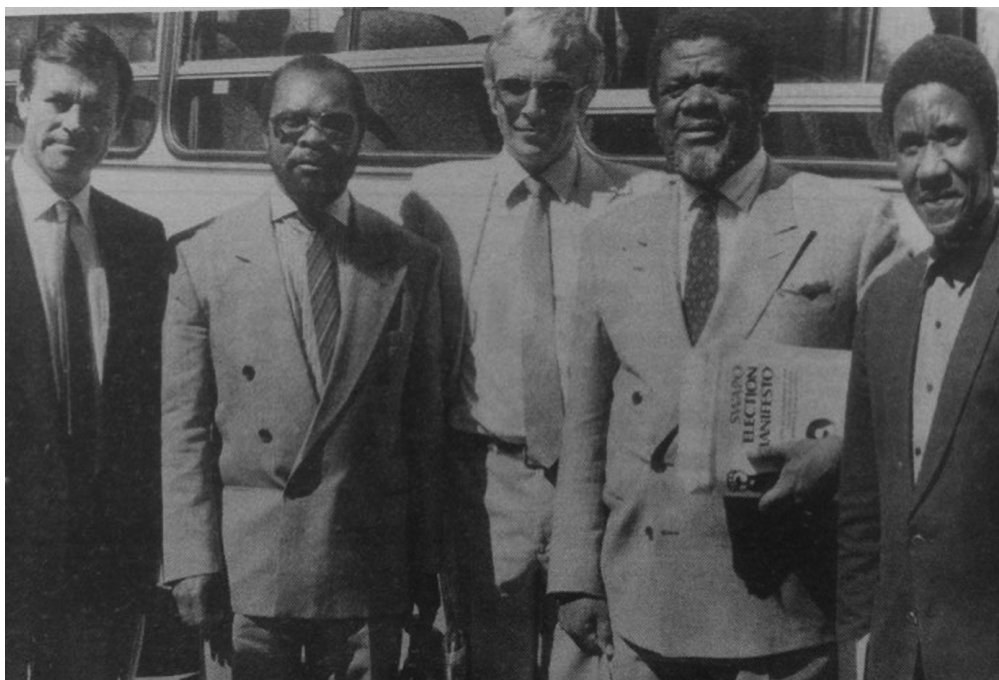


Figure 17: SWAPO leaders visit Rössing Uranium¹⁹⁶

That RUL’s psychological approach had been effective was proven in November 1989, when the leader of SWAPO and elected president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, arrived at the mine accompanied by the future Prime Minister, Hage Geingob (who had previously participated in RTZ/SWAPO meetings in Zimbabwe) and the future Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo-Ben Gurirab. The visit to RUL took place on the 10 November 1989, a day before the end of the

¹⁹⁶ Rössing News, SWAPO leaders come on site, 18 August 1989, 2. Manager Public Affairs, Rössing Windhoek, Clive Algar; Head of Mobilisation and Publicity SWAPO, Hidipo Hamutenya; Assistant General Manager, Sean James; Head of Foreign Liaison and Public Relations SWAPO, Theo-Ben Gurirab; and Chief Organiser for the Coastal Region SWAPO, Ben Amathila.

parliamentary elections for the establishment of the National Assembly of an independent Namibia. The future President, much like the future ministers who had visited the mine in August, was given a tour of the mine and of Arandis. The future political top brass of the country had thus been introduced to RUL's operations, the aim of which was to ensure "the visitors" understanding of the need for Rössing to be allowed to continue in substantially the same way as it did now, and for pragmatic future economic policies".¹⁹⁷ RUL's public relations department had moved smartly by successfully establishing a relationship with the future government days before SWAPO's victory in the parliamentary elections had been announced.

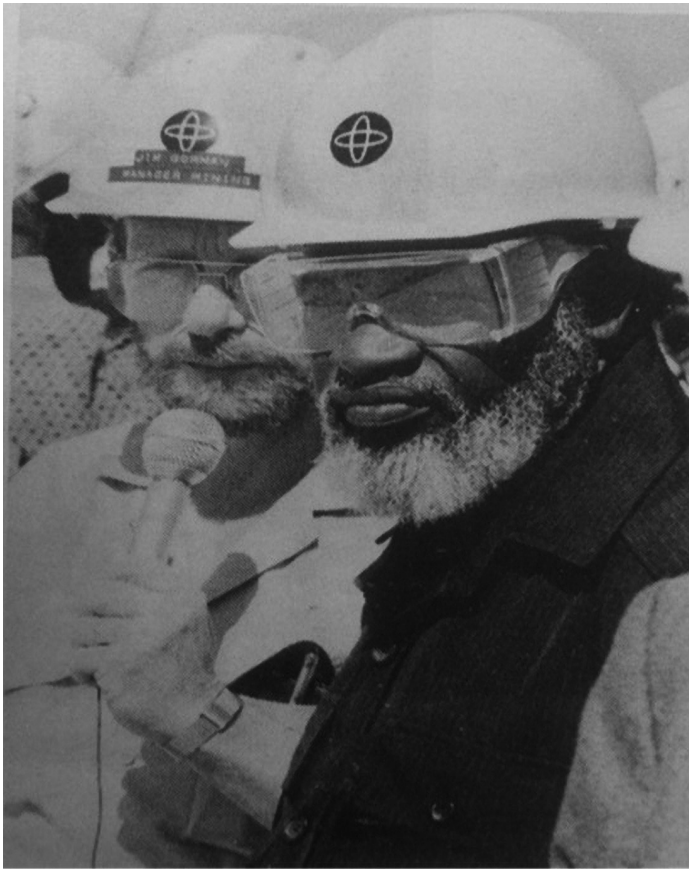


Figure 18: RUL's Mining Manager, Jim Gorman pictured with SWAPO President Sam Nujoma¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ RUL—Minutes of the One Hundred and Fourth Meeting of the Board of Directors of Rössing Uranium Limited held in the Boardroom, The Rössing Guesthouse, 5 Trotha Street, Windhoek, SWA/Namibia, on Monday 21 August 1989, 5.

¹⁹⁸ The Mining Manager, Jim Gorman pictured with President Sam Nujoma, Rössing News, SWAPO leader visits mine, 5.

Algar's statement on remaining open to suggestions and comments on the human aspects of RUL, but not the technical aspects of the mine's operations brings us back to the public relations strategy that had been put in place by RUL since the late 1970s. The 1985 acquisition of shares in RUL orchestrated by the South African administration in collusion with RTZ, had set parameters in place for the manner in which the independently elected government of Namibia would govern the country's uranium resources. The newly established government received a 3.5 per cent stake in RUL in addition to the controlling vote on the Board of Directors, previously exercised by the IDC. As the majority shareholder, RTZ would notably maintain operational control over RUL, something the company had always intended to do judging by Algar's comment on the technical area. The newly established government was welcome to give input on the human aspect, on that which pertained to its citizenry, but the technical and operational area would remain the ambit of RTZ.

This move to defend the investment and protect "commercial interests" echoed the 1982 Principles for a Constitution for an Independent Namibia which were advocated for by the WCG.¹⁹⁹ Grovogui writes that the WCG had assumed that "SWAPO was inimical to their own economic interest" in Namibia and had therefore "compelled the nationalist organisation to adhere to pre-independence constitutional principles that clearly delineated the public sphere, where state intervention was permitted, from the private spheres" such as the "technical area" referred to by RUL's public relations director.²⁰⁰ The Constitution would, in accordance with the WCG's Constitutional Principles, contain "a declaration of fundamental rights" which include "the right to protection from arbitrary deprivation of private property or deprivation of private property without just compensation".²⁰¹ The 1982 Constitutional Principles forbade the creation of criminal offences with retrospective effect or the provision for increased penalties with retrospective effect. Demanding "retrospective compensation for RTZ's removal of Namibian assets" would thus be unconstitutional. Grovogui writes that under the conditions set out in the Constitutional Principles, "foreign interest in Namibia did not have to fear popular pressure on SWAPO to effect change in the structure of capital and the economy in order to meet the needs of the dispossessed majority of Namibians".²⁰² RTZ's shareholding in RUL, and that of its partners like the IDC, the French, German and Iranian entities, including the shares of private shareholders like the Louw Company, were protected under the provisions of these principles. Mining ventures

¹⁹⁹ Principles for a Constitution for an Independent Namibia. 1982, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Included in Southern Africa in the Cold War. Post-1974, edited by S. Onslow and A. Van Wyk <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118262>, 1, accessed 15 January 2021.

²⁰⁰ Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns*, 186.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 176.

like RUL were assured of the continuation of their operations in Namibia, both through the assurances of SWAPO's anti-nationalisation policy and through the diplomatic negotiations of the Western Contact Group which produced the Constitutional Principles.²⁰³

Namibia Institute of Mining Technology: The Goodwill Gesture

By 1990, with the granting of Namibian independence, RUL was boldly declaring that its operations were a "vital part of the fabric of the Namibian economic system and indivisible from the country's forward development".²⁰⁴ RUL argued that if the mine had not been established, "the town of Arandis would not exist, Swakopmund would be far smaller than it is today and all economic indicators would be substantially lower".²⁰⁵ One could, however, add that if RUL had not been established, there would be no "biggest mine in the world", no investment worth defending in Namibia and no profits for RTZ and its shareholders. More importantly, Namibia's full uranium resource potential would have remained in the ground, to be unearthed for the full benefit of the Namibian people (this line of thought would of course neglect the role of those associated with the discovery of the Rössing deposits, the mining venture which declared the deposits "a poor man's pudding" and the South African officials responsible for approving the mining concession, see Chapter 2). Independence had been granted, RUL would now be "Working for Namibia" and the time had come to demonstrate just how vital the mine was to the economy of an independent Namibia.

On 16 March 1990, five days before the independence-day celebrations in Namibia, RUL delivered a final pre-independence public relations spectacle by announcing its intention to fund and construct a national school of mining technology, which would be donated as an "independence gift", supposedly for the new nation-state. This "independence gift" was a goodwill gesture aimed at gaining favour with the incoming independent government of Namibia. The school, which was initially known as the Namibian Institute of Technology (NIT), aimed to provide training to artisans, technicians and supervisors in the engineering, geology, metallurgy and mining disciplines.²⁰⁶ The first phase of construction was to commence immediately in 1990, with the first intake of students, an estimated one hundred students, starting their training in 1991.²⁰⁷ The construction of the Institute was estimated to cost six million Rand.²⁰⁸ The institute's proximity to RUL and the internship attachment

²⁰³ Ibid., 177.

²⁰⁴ Rössing Uranium Limited, Social and Economic Report 1990. (Windhoek: 1990), 5.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 8.

²⁰⁶ E. D. G. Mueller (Director N.I.M.T.) Namibian Institute of Mining and Technology Information Brochure—Arandis, Republic of Namibia.

²⁰⁷ Rössing News, Rössing to donate school of Mining Technology to Namibia, 16 March 1990.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

which the mine had undertaken to provide to the students at the NIT, indicate that RUL had for all intents and purposes proposed an independence gift that would secure a future workforce for its mining venture and for the mining industry at large.

RUL's presentation of its "independence gift" as a novel idea, is refuted by Dr. Leake Hangala, the first post-independence government representative on the Board of Directors of RUL. Dr. Hangala, a mining geologist by profession, was appointed as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Mines and as the accounting officer for the Ministry was party to the various negotiations between the government and the mining companies. The idea for the establishment of a mining institute had supposedly been suggested to him while on a familiarisation tour of the uranium mining industry in Canada. The idea was then put before RUL during a visit to the mine by the Permanent Secretary and the Minister Designate of Mines and Energy, Toivo ya Toivo, in January 1990.²⁰⁹ The idea was then conveyed to RUL's principal shareholder, RTZ, whereafter it was approved and presented as a goodwill gesture to independent Namibia. Eckhart Muller, who previously served as a Physical Educational Planner in the Department of National Education, was appointed as the Director of the yet to be constructed institute.²¹⁰ The "independence gift", whose name changed from the NIT to the Namibia Institute of Mining Technology (NIMT), had thus been conceded through Rössing Uranium's interactions with the future government.

Following the independence-day celebrations on 21 March 1990, the newly established Republic of Namibia submitted an urgent application to the Committee on the Admission of New Members to the United Nations. The application had been submitted with the request that it be given priority consideration to enable Namibia to participate in the special session of the General Assembly devoted to economic development, to be held from 23 to 28 April 1990. The application for Membership to the UN was approved in record time when on 17 April 1990 the Security Council unanimously recommended to "the General Assembly that the Republic of Namibia be admitted to membership in the United Nations".²¹¹ On 23 April 1990 Namibia became the 160th Member State of the United Nations Organisation.²¹² A delegation of the Namibian government, accompanied by political and business personalities, travelled to New York to attend the admission ceremony at the United Nations Headquarters as Namibia officially joined the world community of nations.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Dr. Leake Hangala, Friday, 12 May 2017 (Windhoek, Namibia).

²¹⁰ Eckhart Müller served as Director of NIMT from 1990 until his untimely death in April 2019. The Namibian, 2 Killed at Arandis, 16-04-2019 <https://www.namibian.com.na/2-killed-at-arandis/>, accessed 5 February 2021.

²¹¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 652 (1990) of 17 April 1990, Application of the Republic of Namibia. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/90006>, accessed 16 December 2020.

²¹² United Nations General Assembly Resolution S-18/1 of 23 April 1990.



Figure 19: Flag Raising Ceremony at the UN Headquarters in New York²¹³

Included among the business personalities who attended the admission ceremony were RUL's Chairman John Kirkpatrick and the newly promoted Manager for Corporate Affairs Clive Algar (former public relations director). The newly appointed government used the admission ceremony to promote foreign investment for Namibia. According to Hecht, RUL executives used occasions such as this to turn Namibian independence into a marketing tool proclaiming that by purchasing uranium from RUL current and future customers would aid a new nation.²¹⁴ By "invoking independence in its contracts" and using Namibian independence "as a trump card in price negotiations" RUL turned political change to economic advantage.²¹⁵ The recognition of both independent Namibia and its independently elected government had meant that the 3.5 per cent shareholding in RUL which was acquired by the Administrator General could now be passed to the Namibian government. RUL, in honour of the admission ceremony of its newest shareholder, organised a reception in Washington DC at which Theo-Ben Gurirab, SWAPO's former permanent representative to the United Nations and Namibia's first Foreign Minister, was the guest of honour.²¹⁶ The rich language of nationalism, with which Gurirab had criticised the plunder of Namibian uranium during the proceedings of the 1980 Uranium Hearings organised by

²¹³ Admission of Namibia into the United Nations—A close-up of the Namibian flag (third from left) following the flag raising ceremony at UN Headquarters. UN Photo/John Isaac, 23 April 1990, United Nations, New York.

²¹⁴ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 293.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 168. Phimister, *Corporate Profit and Race*, 749.

²¹⁶ Rössing News, Rössing represented in delegation to UN. 11 May 1990, 2.

the UN Council for Namibia, appeared to have been remanded to the pre-independence era, as the shareholding partnership between State and firm took hold.²¹⁷ Thereafter, according to Hecht, the “postcolonial state fully backed the company’s new slogan: ‘Working for Namibia’”²¹⁸

In June 1990 Dr. Leake Hangala joined RUL’s Board of Directors as the government nominee, to exercise government’s 51 per cent voting rights in the company.²¹⁹ In July 1991, the sanctions against South Africa, issued under the 1986 Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, were lifted and with them the restrictions on the import of Namibian uranium.²²⁰ RUL then set out to regain its foothold on the world uranium market, having committed to regaining the business that it had lost due to the impact of the sanctions.²²¹ RTZ’s mining venture, had not only secured its place in the Namibian economy but was now free to use Namibian independence as a marketing tool for securing new contracts, such as the long-term contract it secured in 1990 for the supply of 5,200 tonnes of uranium ore to the French electricity industry.²²² For RTZ’s mining venture on the fringes of the Namib Desert it was business as usual minus the controversy of RUL’s collusion with the apartheid regime in the exploitation of Namibia’s uranium resources. The early 1990s would, however, present a different kind of challenge for RUL, for although Namibian independence brought with it “much optimism that the [uranium] market was on the up-turn and that the lifting of sanctions against Namibia would open new market opportunities”, the fall of the iron curtain introduced uranium from the former Soviet Union to the world markets.²²³ By 1996 RUL had restructured its operations all the while celebrating 20 years of production, notwithstanding the first 10 years that constituted the exploration phase (1966–1976). As things changed, some remained the same. Figure 20²²⁴ portrays RUL’s Board of Directors in 1990, with some noteworthy faces. The lone African face is that of Dr. L. Hangala, the government representative on the Board. Dr. Hangala represented the 3.5 per cent government shareholding in RUL with a 51 per cent voting right. The Louw Company was represented on the Board by Graham Louw (middle row first from the left) and John Louw (front row, first from the

²¹⁷ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 151.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 293.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

²²⁰ CQ Almanac, Sanctions Against South Africa Lifted, 1991. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/document>, accessed 16 December 2020.

²²¹ The Chamber of Mines of S.W.A/Namibia, 11th Annual Report, 1989, 2.

²²² Rössing News, Rössing secures new sales contract: A major contract has been agreed between Rössing and ten per cent shareholder Total Compagnie Minière for the supply of uranium for onward sale to Electricité de France, 7 September 1990, 1. The Chamber of Mines of Namibia, 12th Annual Report, 1990, 3. Deliveries under this new contract commenced in 1995.

²²³ Namibia Foundation, Namibia Brief, No. 21 December 1998. Charles Kauraisa “Rössing Uranium”, 41.

²²⁴ Rössing News, Board holds annual visit. 30 November 1990, 1.

left).²²⁵ British, French, German, South African and Iranian interests continued to be represented on the Board, because RUL's strategies had succeeded in defending the investment.



Figure 20: Rössing Uranium Board of Directors, 1990

Conclusion

The strategies adopted by RUL in anticipation of the impending political change in Namibia were geared towards defending the investment and ensuring the continuity of its operations in independent Namibia. To secure RUL's "interests in the face of far-reaching political change", and to shed the image of collusion with the apartheid regime in the exploitation of the Namibia's natural resources, a public relations campaign was adopted.²²⁶ The public relations campaign was aimed at formulating a message for the incoming government, a message that would bring the mine in good standing with the government of independent Namibia. Abandoning the policy of secrecy that earlier had guided RUL's operations was key to the mine's public relations exercise and to its "Working for Namibia" brand. To shed the veil of secrecy RUL opened itself up to outsiders, to international and national visitors and to media practitioners whose reportage was vital to the aims of the public relations department. RUL pursued a corporate social responsibility exercise by providing financial assistance to the social challenges facing the country and most especially through

²²⁵ John Louw served on the Rössing Board until 2012 when he was replaced by H. P. Louw, the grandson of Captain Peter Louw.

²²⁶ Stockwell, *Political strategies*, 287.

the provision of educational opportunities to Namibian youths. The Rössing Foundation and the training facilities at the mine site were the medium through which training opportunities were facilitated. This community-focused outlook, along with transparency, became the foundations of the rebranding stage and a clear strategy for achieving a public relations endeavour. RUL's public relations strategies comprised of four main pillars: the international relations pillar to which much of the mine's relations with international media houses were directed, the national relations pillar through which RUL navigated the political landscape in the territory, the community affairs pillar exemplified by the establishment of the Rössing Foundation, and the internal pillar through which RUL made available training programmes for its workforce. The mine's various strategies were vital for establishing relations with the incoming government. This best foot forward approach illustrates how RUL, a company that was a symbol of colonial exploitation and whose activities were conducted in the interests of others and in contravention of UN resolutions, formulated a set of strategies which reinvented the mine and reimagined its place and the continuity of its operations in independent Namibia.

7 Conclusion

This book explored how a mining company that became an emblem of injustice for its role in the exploitation of Namibia's uranium resources in collusion with apartheid South Africa was able to re-invent and re-imagine its place in an independent Namibia. The book did this through a case study of RTZ's subsidiary, RUL, the only uranium mine to have been brought into production during the colonial period. A case study on RUL illuminates our understanding of the history of uranium production in Namibia and the role of big business and diplomacy in the establishment and operations of RUL during the colonial and post-colonial period. The study argues that RTZ adopted a set of strategies to secure its claims to and operations at RUL in colonial and post-colonial Namibia. The book aimed to explore the history of uranium production in Namibia and to present a detailed understanding of the strategies that were adopted by big business in response to changes in the political and economic environment in Namibia during the period between 1966 and 1990.

The discovery of the Rössing deposits is credited to the Louw family and particularly to the patriarch, Captain Peter Louw. Chapter 2 documents the role of the Louw family in the Rössing story focusing on the pioneering stage which lasted from 1928 to 1965. Chapter 2 divides the pioneering stage into two main periods. The first occurred between 1928 and 1955 when the Louw family discovered and pegged their claims. During this initial period there was no commercial or political interests in the activities of the Louw family. This was demonstrated by the relative ease with which the Louw family were able to secure prospecting rights over their claims from the South African colonial administration. The outbreak of the Second World War not only disrupted the prospecting activities of the Louw family, it changed the economic, political and strategic value of uranium. The atom bomb, and nuclear power in general, made uranium a highly sought after mineral during and after the Second World War. The belief that uranium was scarce fuelled what Helmreich described as a wild goose chase geared towards securing a monopoly over global uranium supplies. This search for monopoly led not only to the establishment of a uranium mining industry in South Africa in the early 1950s, but also to the second period in the pioneering stage of RUL dating from 1956 to 1965. It was during this second period that the initial disinterest in the Louw claims turned to interest through the signing of an option agreement between the Louw Syndicate and the Anglo-American Corporation. Chapter 2, therefore, argues that the changing importance of uranium was significant for the commencement of uranium production in Namibia. The external context, that is the military use of uranium, the desire to monopolise global uranium supplies and the subsequent establishment of a uranium mining industry in South Africa had implications for Namibia's uranium deposits

whose presence was known for decades and whose geological facts did not change throughout the 20th century.

Following decades of political and commercial disinterest in Namibia's uranium deposits, Chapter 3 examines the first major investment in the Rössing deposits. This sudden interest in Namibia's uranium deposits illustrates Grovogui's description of the administration of the territory's mineral resources as instruments of free trade.¹ In 1966 the British multinational corporation, RTZ, entered into negotiations with the Louw Company. These negotiations culminated in the signing of an option agreement between the two parties. To carry out the prospecting work on the Rössing deposits and to meet the financial requirements of the project RTZ entered into an exploration partnership with Urangesellschaft of West Germany. The right to exploit the uranium resources was, however, contingent upon the approval of the South African regime, giving the regime leeway to insist on South African participation in the mining venture. RTZ's exploitation of the Rössing deposits faced opposition from Namibian nationalists and opponents of apartheid South Africa who deliberately sought to isolate the regime and deny its economic control over Namibia. Chapter 3 argues that Namibia's disputed international status, along with international condemnation of apartheid South Africa, had meant that other governments were reluctant to support investments in RUL. This reluctance was most evident in the decision by the West German government to support Urangesellschaft's investment in RUL. These events explain how RTZ came to be dependent on the South African regime for the viability of RUL. Chapter 3 supports this study's argument on the importance of the international context to our understanding of the sudden interests in Namibia's uranium industry.

Chapter 4 examines how this international context bore on the construction and development phase of RUL in the period 1971 to 1975. In order to develop a complex mining venture on the outskirts of the Namib Desert required much-needed capital. More importantly, RTZ needed to secure extensive investment to shield it from the risks of developing a mining venture in disputed territory. RUL's construction and development phase coincided with the onset of the energy crises of the early 1970s, which exposed vulnerabilities in the energy sectors of many Western countries and led to the development of energy policies which looked to nuclear energy as one of the alternative sources to oil. To diversify their energy sources countries such as Britain, France and Japan expanded their nuclear power programmes. As these Western nations sought secure sources of uranium supplies for their nuclear energy programmes, RTZ aligned its commercial interests in RUL with the national interests of these nations and thereby secured the necessary finance for the project. This, as Chapter 4 argues, was achieved through what Richard West described as a peculiar method

¹ Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns*, 141.

of financing aimed at national and international support for RTZ's operations at RUL.² The strategy of aligning commercial and national interests was especially important for buffering RTZ against international criticism for its operations in Namibia. RTZ's partnership with the South African regime during a period in which demands for Namibian independence had become acute was arduous but, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, the international buy-in of countries e.g., Britain, France, Japan and West Germany made the risk of colluding with the apartheid state worthwhile. The trade in Namibian uranium was declared illegal by UN resolutions, which called on UN member states to disinvest in Namibia, and the UN Council for Namibia's Decree No.1. RTZ's partners and customers in RUL were, however, well placed to uphold a buffer against these international instruments particularly because of the importance of their international standing. The roles of the British and French governments in powerful organs such as the UN Security Council meant that RTZ was assured of the international support it sought for its investments in Namibia. RUL, as West argues, had thus served as an office of profit and a position of private advantage for the South African regime, RTZ and its partners in the mining venture.

In return for their support RTZ offered its shareholders and customers privileged access to a secure source of uranium. The lack of domestic sources of supply made a secure source like RUL all important. This was particularly true for the British government whose investments in RUL form the focus of Chapter 5. Rogers observes that the responsibility for the financing of RUL falls squarely at the feet of the British government.³ This was because the British government had approved the forward purchasing contracts which RTZ used to secure the necessary loan finance for RUL. Additionally, Hecht draws our attention to the link between state and company, arguing that for the British government, extending support to RTZ's operations in Namibia was almost patriotic as failure to do so would result in a dependence "on foreign mining companies".⁴ Security of supply was undoubtedly the underlying motivation for British investment in RUL and this underscores Hecht's argument on the importance of colonialism in the nuclear age.⁵ RTZ's British status, and its partnership with the government of a self-governing dominion of the British Empire, meant that RUL was considered a secure source of uranium for Britain. Chapter 5, however, noted that the British government, despite having underwritten the financial security of RUL, remained concerned about the question of security of supply. The main concern was with the risk of interference with the Rössing contracts, which could have resulted from political change in Namibia. These concerns justified the arguments in defence of the Rössing contracts,

² West, *River of Tears*, 23.

³ Rogers, *Namibia's Uranium*, 4.

⁴ TNA AB 44/264 G. W. Thynne Department of Energy to E. J. S Clarke, UKAEA 23 May 1974, 2.

⁵ Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 23.

arguments which were formulated in response to mounting national and international opposition against the government's decision not to interfere with the Rössing contracts and indeed the commercial activities of British companies operating in Namibia. This policy of non-interference guided the British government's foreign policy towards Namibia, leading Rogers to argue that obtaining uranium from Namibia while under South African occupation was at the forefront of British policy towards Namibian decolonisation.⁶ This book concurs with Rogers, adding that the policy of non-interference reflected the British government's fears that political change in Namibia could result in interference with the Rössing contracts. The main concern was that the government of an independent Namibia would seek to either renegotiate the contracts, particularly in terms of price, or cancel the contracts all together. Neither one of these options was acceptable to the British government. The completion of deliveries to the British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) prior to the attainment of Namibian independence was thus the ideal situation for the British government. That the British government's support for Namibian decolonisation coincided with the completion of deliveries to the BNFL in 1982 is particularly telling, adding to this study's argument on the importance of studying uranium production in Namibia in relation to the activities of big business and diplomacy in the territory.

The approach of RUL and its parent company RTZ to decolonisation in Namibia is examined in Chapter 6. Jepson's argument that RTZ was fully cognisant of the political sensitivities and the implications of its decision to invest in and operate a mine located in a disputed territory is confirmed in RUL's approach to political change in Namibia.⁷ It is worth noting that other studies of big business and decolonisation emphasise how quickly businesses had to adapt to major political changes. This was not the case in Namibia, as the book points out. The decade-long wait for the implementation of the UN settlement plan for Namibian independence gave RUL ample time to assess its operations and position in Namibia. As with the case studies presented in the literature on big business and decolonisation by authors Stockwell, Morris and Decker, RUL embarked on a public relations exercise aimed at navigating impending political change in the territory. Here the focus was on what Decker described as attempts to secure goodwill at a national level and the mine's responses to the challenges posed by the international dimension to the process of decolonisation in Namibia.⁸ The first order of business for RUL was to shed the veil of secrecy behind which the mine had operated in the foregoing decade. Opening the mine to outsiders and especially international media houses was the first step in conveying a message, at a national and international level, that reimagined RUL's place in independent Namibia. Transparency not

⁶ PH PA1/20/56, Rogers, Changes in UK Policy, 1.

⁷ Jepson, *Rio Tinto Zinc in Namibia*, 1.

⁸ Decker, *Building up Goodwill*, 6.

only became the motto of RUL's rebranding exercise, but it set the parameters within which the mine secured goodwill at a national level. The provision of educational opportunities for indigenous Namibians were facilitated by the establishment of a corporate foundation through which the mine was able to tackle the national relations and community affairs strategy set out by the public relations department. The efforts of the Rössing Foundation were complemented by RUL's bursary scheme and the Mark Turner Memorial Scholarships aimed at providing opportunities at a tertiary level. RUL's alumni would not only serve as leaders of industry but also as evidence of the mine's contributions to the various economic sectors of Namibia, contributions that were in line with the mine's "Working for Namibia" brand. RUL developed its indigenous workforce by offering in-house training programmes aimed at upskilling the mine's lesser skilled workforce. The training programmes were further complemented by the Africanization of key positions in RUL's management, actions which served to portray an image of a mine investing in its people. Africanization, as Decker argues, was important for securing goodwill with the incoming administration which in turn ensured the continuity of the mine's operations in independent Namibia.⁹ Africanization at a managerial level, as Morris argues, produced RUL's public relations men who were well placed to communicate the message of company's contributions and importance to the future of Namibia.¹⁰ In the case of RUL, these public relations men were chosen not only because of their qualifications and competencies but because of their personal links and involvement in the nationalist movements and the struggle for Namibian independence. RUL's recruitment and promotion of, for instance, Dr. Zed Ngavirue to the position of Chairman was thus strategically motivated. Tours of the mine formed an important part of RUL's public relations strategy. These tours were open to various sectors of the national and international community and it is again here that the importance of the international context to Namibian decolonisation comes into play. Prominent figures like the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, were given a tour of the mine and in return reaffirmed the British government's support for RUL's operations in Namibia. This level of support from the highest-ranking British politician of the time is unparalleled in any of the literature that was reviewed for this study on big business, and particularly British businesses, in processes of decolonisation on the African continent. Uche's argument on government and business working in concert to protect British interests was thus on display at RUL in April 1989.¹¹ The tour of the mine by the special representative of the UN Secretary General, Marti Ahtisaari, had interestingly conveyed a stamp of approval by the international community of the same mine that had formed the focus of the 1980 Namibian Uranium Hearings. The inter-

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Morris, *Cultivating the African*, 657.

¹¹ Uche, "Lonrho in Africa", 357.

national support that undergirded RTZ's operations in colonial Namibia was once again on display as the mine navigated political change in the territory.

The crown jewel in RUL's arsenal of public relations strategies was the colonial administration's acquisition of shares in the company. These shares were transferred to the government of independent Namibia. Through these shares the mine was able to co-opt the incoming government into a partnership that would ensure the control over the operational aspects of the mine would remain in the hands of RTZ. Here Lanning and Mueller's argument that control over the minerals of Namibia lay neither with the people nor with the government but with the giant multinational companies rings true.¹² What little benefits were accrued to the people were through placations that addressed areas of importance to the incoming government, such as the provision of education and the upskilling of the Namibian workforce. The presentation of Namibia Institute of Mining Technology (NIMT) as an independence gift to the Namibian government by RUL is one such example. These placations led to the establishment of relations between the incoming government and RUL. More importantly, these strategies ensured that the mine was able to survive political change and decolonisation in Namibia virtually unscathed and to secure the continuity of RUL's operations in independent Namibia.

The central arguments of this study can be restated as follows. The internal context, that is the presence and geological composition of Namibia's uranium resources, had remained the same for decades. The external context had, however, drastically changed leading to the shift in the ownership and exploitation of Namibia's uranium resources. The changing strategic value of uranium explains the sudden interest in the Rössing deposits. The international status of Namibia, the opposition to South Africa's apartheid policies and the consequent isolation of the apartheid regime led to the reluctance by certain governments to support investments in RUL. It was in this context that RTZ came to depend on South African investment through the IDC to ensure the viability of RUL and to cement its place in the territory's mining industry. To navigate the risk of investing in a politically precarious territory, RTZ established shareholder customer partnerships with state-owned nuclear power utilities in the Western world. These power utility companies and their governments were motivated by the need to access secure sources of uranium supplies as they adopted policies that diversified their energy sources to include nuclear power. RTZ's British status especially represented this sense of security for the British government's investment in RUL. The question of political change in Namibia would, however, give rise to concerns over this security of supply, especially if independence were to be attained prior to the completion of uranium deliveries to Britain. Lastly, having fulfilled its obligations to its customers, RUL approached Namibian independence with a set of strategies adopted under a public relations

¹² Lanning and Mueller, *Africa Undermined*, 474.

campaign. These strategies were not necessarily new and there were indeed similarities to the measures adopted by British businesses elsewhere on the continent. What is different, however, is the international dimension to the process of decolonisation in Namibia which necessitated an engagement to secure goodwill not only from Namibian nationalists but also from the international community as represented by the UN. RUL's strategies were aimed at both a national and an international audience as the mine navigated political change in the territory and ensured the continuity of its operations in independent Namibia.

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In the 1970s, Rio Tinto Zinc's Rössing Uranium mine became a symbol of injustice for Namibian nationalists and international opponents of South African rule. Yet, counterintuitively, the mine survived decolonisation in Namibia virtually unscathed and was re-imagined as part of modern, independent Namibia. This book explores the development of the Rössing Uranium mine during the colonial and early post-colonial period. The book presents a detailed understanding of the strategies adopted by big business in response to changes in the political and economic environment in Namibia. It does so through a case study of big business and diplomacy in the establishment and operations of the Rössing Uranium mine under colonial rule and decolonisation. The focus of the book is ultimately on the public relations campaign which was adopted by Rössing Uranium in anticipation of the impending political change in Namibia.

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