



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

FACULTY OF COMMERCE, HUMAN SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT

QUALIFICATION: HONOURS BACHELOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	
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COURSE CODE: ADR811S	COURSE NAME: ADVANCED INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
SESSION: MAY 2022	PAPER: THEORY
DURATION: 3 HOURS	MARKS: 100

SECOND OPPORTUNITY EXAMINATION PAPER	
EXAMINER(S)	Dr Andrew Jeremiah Mr Cathbert Manyando
MODERATOR:	Dr F. Z. Msukubili

INSTRUCTIONS
Answer ALL the questions. Write clearly and neatly. Number the answers clearly.

PERMISSIBLE MATERIALS

Examination paper.
Examination script.

THIS EXAMINATION QUESTION PAPER CONSISTS OF 4 PAGES (Including this front page)

Question 1

OVAMBO MIGRANT WORKERS GENERAL STRIKE FOR RIGHTS, NAMIBIA 1971- 1972

Read the case study and answer the questions that follow.

In 1971 South-West Africa (now Namibia) had been under the rule of South Africa's apartheid government for more than fifty years. Apartheid laws forced indigenous Namibian tribes to live in assigned tribal areas in the northern third of the country and required passes for movement within the country. The Ovambos were the main group of indigenous people, making up close to half the population, and inhabited the area called Ovamboland. The South African government had imposed a contract labor lawsystem on all indigenous people. In order to get work Ovambos and other native Namibians were assigned contracts in minesand municipalities around the country for a year at a time. Workers had to leave family behind to live at the workplace for that period. Employers compensated workers by ranked classes, rather than the type of work. Laborers could not break the contract, but employers could break it at any time.

The Ovamboland People's Congress had sought the abolition of the contract labor system since 1957. Ovamboland People's Organization and the South-West Africa People's Organization later continued this struggle. However, the peak of the resistance was not brought about by any of these organizations. The laborers themselves developed the massive campaign from a growing sense of discontentment with the oppressive contract system.

In June 1971, the International Court of Justice declared that the South African control of Namibia was unlawful. This drew support among indigenous people as they began protests against the South African government within tribal lands. Laborers began strikes in Walvis Bay and Windhoek, Namibia's Capital. Police arrested demonstrators in an attempt to repress the protests.

Later that month leaders of the African Lutheran Church composed letters to the South African Prime Minister condemning the contract labor system and supporting the International Court's decision. The Dutch Reformed Church was on the African Lutheran Church's side as well.

From August to December Church leaders met with the South African Prime Minister and the Commissioner General for Northern Native Territories, Jan De Wet. Negotiations during this time were unsuccessful. At one of these meetings De Wet even stated that the system was voluntary and that, if Ovambos and other native Namibians were against the contract system, they would not ask for the contracts. The truth is that there was no other way for them to earn a living.

On December 10, a newspaper announced the Ovambo workers' plan to strike in Walvis Bay four days later. These laborers sent letters to friends and fellow workers around the country requesting a joint general strike throughout the nation. Ovambo workers in Windhoek held a mass meeting in their compound and decided to strike. On Dec 13, six thousand Ovambo workers stopped work and began a boycott of food from the kitchens of their Windhoek compound. The strike halted all main functions of the city. The government called in white students and non-Ovambo black workers to keep the city running, but there were not enough workers to replace the strikers.

Police arrested many Walvis Bay strikers when the Ovambos began to strike there. There were reports of police beating strikers. Strike sympathizers among the police force were dismissed. The Bantu Commissioner for South-West Africa met with workers in both Walvis Bay and Windhoek, urging workers to return to work. The strikers told him that they would only return to work if the contract system were abolished and expressed that they were no longer participating in this "voluntary" system.

Ovambos in the Klein Aub copper mine struck on Dec. 15. The next day workers at a second mine

joined the general strike as the first Ovambos began a migration from their compound in Windhoek back to Ovamboland to “repatriate” themselves. More Walvis Bay workers, hotel workers, and rural farm workers brought the number of strikers to over 10,000.

Strikers had halted work in Windhoek, Walvis Bay, and a growing number of mines, Namibia’s main source of economy. By Dec. 19, twelve thousand Ovambos were striking and many continued to migrate back to Ovamboland.

When laborers and hospital workers struck in Grootfontein, private companies tried and failed to negotiate with strikers. On Dec. 29, the Rosh Pinah mineworkers joined the strike, cutting off supplies for the Iron and Steel Corporation of South Africa. This action spurred executives, industrialists, and mine administrators to meet with the Minister of Bantu Administration. They announced that they would begin to revise the contract labor system.

By January 3, 1972, all major mines were on strike and 13,000 strikers had repatriated themselves in Ovamboland, while over 20,000 total Ovambos were on strike throughout the nation. The strikers elected a representative committee, which in turn distributed leaflets of their demands to all Ovambos and asked to negotiate with the South African government. Their main goal was to reform the contract labor system and included specific demands for the right to choose jobs, change jobs at any time, and to bring families to work locations. They also sought a new pass system and increased wages based on type of work instead of on ranked classifications.

Although government officials had agreed to reform the contract labor system, demonstrations and strikes continued. On January 12, the South African government sent more police to Namibia to prevent uprisings. The Ovamboland government voted against the contract system and supported the demands of the strikers. Nevertheless, they banned meetings of strikers in the tribal area.

On January 19, the United Nations Council for Namibia declared that the contract labor system violated the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights.

After two days of government-striker negotiations in Grootfontein, Namibia, the South African government officially abolished the contract labor system. The new regulations allowed laborers to apply for jobs at labor bureaucracies in Ovamboland. The workers could choose their jobs and were paid based on the type of work and individual contracts. Both laborers and employers could end the contract at any time. Employers had to provide free medical care. There was no provision for family accompaniment to places of work.

Many workers felt that poor conditions were still present within this new system and so continued to strike. Church leaders spoke out against the new system, just as they had spoken out against the contract labor system. On January 26, the South African government sent troops to Ovamboland to keep order. The next day there was a news blackout within the tribal area. Throughout the whole ordeal police broke up meetings with violence, killing ten Ovambos. Two more Ovambo strikers were killed by fellow tribesmen that were against the strikes and the South African government exiled 20 clergymen from Ovamboland.

On February 4, South Africa declared emergency laws that banned gatherings of more than five people in Ovamboland.

On February 14, twelve strikers were put on trial for breaking contract and starting the general strike. Most charges were dropped when the trial ended in June. The trial revealed many of the

horrific conditions in the labor compounds.

Workers continued strikes until April in protest of the unchanged conditions under the new system. During this time the Secretary-General of the UN met with Ovambo leaders to hear their stories.

The Ovambo workers in Namibia had successfully ended the labor contract system with their general strike. Many poor working conditions still remained and workers were still separated from their families, but the strikers had greatly increased their rights. The campaign also set a base for the underlying political goal of the strike: further independence from South Africa. This struggle would continue until eighteen years later.

(Adapted from Global Nonviolent Action Database (<https://nvdatabase.swarthouse.edu>))

Questions

- 1.1 Discuss sources of conflict specific to this case study and in general, with examples from the case study. (10)
- 1.2 Summarise the reasons that prompted the workers to establish the Ovambo migrant workers, which at that represented a trade union. (10).
- 1.3 Assess the viability of the strategies that the migrant workers used to force the South African government to meet their demands. (15)
- 1.4 Assume that the Ovambo migrant workers were members of a formally registered trade union. Put across the legal arguments they could have put forward to protect their rights and that they belonged to a legally constituted trade union. (10)
- 1.5 Convince an audience of the reasons why it is a good idea to join a trade union using the case study as a reference. (10)
- 1.6 Discuss the role of government in the employment relationship and comment on the South African's government conduct in the case study in this regard. (10)
2. From the case study, there is evidence that traditional approaches to Labour Relations (the unitarist, pluralist and conflict approaches) were utilised in managing labour relations. Articulate of the three approaches using examples in the case study. (20)
3. Comment on ethics in general, ethics and the labour relationship, and ethics and the law as depicted in the case study. (20)

[END OF EXAMINATION]

