

I N P E R S O N



IN POWER

*Tokyo Sexwale
appeals politically*

Tokyo Sexwale, a regional politician for the African National Congress (ANC), has endured a rough few months, but it hasn't put a dent in his charismatic demeanor. During Sexwale's campaign for governor of the Johannesburg/Pretoria region last spring, he was shot at in Tokoza township. Then one of his key aides was killed in a bomb attack on his headquarters, reportedly planted by right-wing white extremists.

Now, as premier of South Africa's industrial heartland, he has to satisfy voters who have high expectations but lack the resources to realize their dreams.

"Nationalization is part of our agenda," Sexwale says. "More people must be given more ownership to equalize the wealth of this country." And he vows to uphold the ANC pledge to return the land to the people. "Our people have been dispossessed," he says. "The land will have to come back to us by many different means."

ETC.

By Jim McNeill

Brownout

During the 1992 presidential campaign Candice Bergen, aka Murphy Brown, gained fame for her family values feud with then-Vice President Dan Quayle. In portraying TV's most famous single mother, Bergen crusaded on behalf of unwed mothers scorned by society for their alleged irresponsibility.

In real life, however, Bergen—who moonlights as a spokesperson for Sprint, the notoriously anti-union long-distance phone company—has shown considerably less concern for society's dispossessed.

In July, Sprint closed La Conexión Familiar, a subsidiary that sold Spanish-language long-distance services to U.S. customers, throwing its 235 employees—many of whom are single mothers—out of work. The closing came just one week before the company's workers were scheduled to vote on joining the Communications Workers of America—approximately 70 percent had signed petitions requesting the election.

In August, the company's workers placed a full-page ad in *Variety*, asking Bergen to intervene with Sprint to save their jobs. So far, Bergen has not responded to their appeal.

Although Bergen has remained silent, the formerly moribund National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has come strongly to the workers' defense. Last month, the NLRB filed an emergency injunction in federal court, asking the court to order Sprint to rehire the 235 workers. The NLRB said Sprint illegally closed La Conexión Familiar in order to

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block the union organizing drive.

The labor board also charged Sprint with dozens of other labor law violations, saying the company intimidated union supporters and threatened to close the subsidiary if the workers voted for the union.

By filing the emergency injunction, the NLRB accelerates the normally glacial pace of U.S. labor law—a good sign for the La Conexion employees, since workers often have to wait years to find out whether or not they can have their jobs back.

The NLRB's aggressive action marks an important departure from its lifeless behavior during the Reagan-Bush years. Since Clinton appointee Fred Feinstein took over as NLRB general counsel on March 3, the board has filed 58 emergency injunctions—double the number filed in all of 1992 and 1993.

"We're very pleased with the NLRB complaint," said CWA research economist Steve Abrecht. "This is a very positive step, not only for the [La Conexion Familiar] employees, but for all workers."

Sprint officials disagree. They insist the closing had nothing to do with the union election; rather, they claim, La Conexion Familiar was losing money. However, the company's workers told the *California AFL-CIO News* that they routinely exceeded the new customer goals Sprint set for them. They also received an in-house newsletter praising their productivity and applauding the profits they were earning for Sprint.

An administrative law judge will begin hearing the case on November 8.

Yet Sexwale is determined that South Africa not follow the African path of development. He acknowledges that corruption and waste have been endemic throughout the continent, and pledges strong medicine against such approaches in South Africa. "Corruption comes when people don't have rights. We are going to be accountable," he promises.

But despite such promises, the people are already growing impatient. Foreign investment has not flooded back to the "engine room" of the South African economy, the Johannesburg/Pretoria region. Sexwale pledged he would build 150,000 units of housing a year. So far, he has only managed to raise the roof of one showcase home, which provides little consolation for the 2 million people in his region who want housing.

In many ways, Sexwale's short tenure mirrors that of the entire ANC. Despite high hopes and more than 100 days in office, nothing much has changed. Yet Sexwale remains a popular figure in South African politics.

Though only a regional government official, Sexwale is already being hailed as a future president of the new South Africa. He may have to wait his turn, after such ANC luminaries as Thabo Mbeki and Cyril Ramaphosa. But Sexwale, at the tender age of 42, possesses magnetic powers that might allow him to leapfrog over the other front-runners in Mandela's inner circle. Namely, sex appeal. During a recent radio poll that asked who was the most attractive politician in the country, many white suburban housewives phoned in to nominate him. Even Tokyo Sexwale's name, pronounced with a silent X, exudes a certain allure. And how did he get the nickname "Tokyo"? "Karate," he says. "But I was a bad karatist. I only achieved a brown belt. But the reason I took it was that as a sport it encouraged two disciplines. It disciplined the body very effectively, but it also disciplined the mind."

Sexwale denies immediate aspirations to be Mandela's successor, but it is clear that he has much support at the grass roots. He seized the respect of the country last year on the day that Chris Hani, the ANC deputy chairman and leader of the South African Communist Party, was gunned down at home. Sexwale, who lived nearby, arrived and wept openly over Hani's bloody corpse. Later, after riots caused by Hani's murder, he insisted on national television that "the assassination of Chris Hani in South Africa—I'm not talking about it sparking a war, but I think it must spark a peace here."

Sexwale is also married to an Afrikaner, who was his lawyer when he was jailed on Robben Island. He spent 13 years in prison, for having conducted underground political work and military training for the ANC's guerrilla wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Despite his long imprisonment and the ongoing political violence, Sexwale is upbeat, having made the transition from soldier to prisoner to politician. He thinks South Africa's political transition has been remarkably peaceful. "The violence could have been much worse. This should have been a very violent revolution, and instead it has been a negotiated peace."

Sexwale even extends his hands to the remaining rejectionists, the white right. "We are worried about them. They are our fellow South Africans, and we do not want them to get lost," he says. "But we must also recognize that the South African nation cannot be held out for ransom." Sexwale is convinced that South Africans will give him and his party some time before demanding their liberation dividend. "Patience is the culture of the people of this country. They were patient with their own oppression, and I think that bodes well for us."

—April Oliver