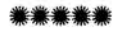


CHAPTER 1



Recent Political Developments

Background

Seychelles became independent in June 1976 with Sir James Mancham as its first President and Mr France Albert René as Prime Minister. This arrangement, however, was shortlived. In June 1977 a coup d'état took place when Sir James was in London to attend a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Mr René was sworn in as President and formed a new government. The 1976 Constitution was suspended and the National Assembly dissolved. In March 1979, a new Constitution was promulgated and Seychelles officially became a one-party state. Only members of the ruling SPPF could stand for elections to the newly-constituted People's Assembly and President René became the sole candidate for elections to the Presidency with a limit of three five-year terms prescribed under the Constitution. Sir James and other opposition figures went into exile.

On 3 December 1991, after almost 15 years of one-party rule, the SPPF decided in an extraordinary congress that Seychelles "should move from a single-party popular democracy to a pluralistic democratic system". President René acknowledged that significant changes in the international environment in the past two years and the emergence of "groups of people who are no longer prepared to participate in the national political debate within the existing political structure" had created "new internal divisions which threaten the social cohesion essential in an economy dependent on tourism and services. Pluralism is now the most appropriate means to re-establish national unity."

The President outlined a plan of action to effect transition to a multi-party system of democracy:

- the Constitution to be amended to allow the registration of political parties;
- a national election in July for a Constitutional Commission to draft a new constitution;
- a referendum on the new constitution; and,
- a general election later in the year.

Political Parties

On 27 December 1991, the Constitution of Seychelles was amended to allow the registration of political parties. President René's appointment of a well respected former judge, Mr André Sauzier, as Registrar of Political Parties was a popular choice among all sections of the community. By the end of April, the

following eight political parties had registered to contest the election to the Constitutional Commission:

- **Democratic Party (DP)** led by Sir James Mancham;
- **Movement Seychellois Pour La Democratie (MSD)** led by Jacques Houdoul, who until 2 December 1991 was Minister of Tourism and Transport in the Government;
- **National Alliance Party (NAP)** led by Philippe Boulle, a lawyer in private practice in Victoria;
- **Parti Seselwa** led by the Reverend Wavel Ramkalawan, an Anglican priest;
- **Seychelles Christian Democrats (SCD)** led by André Euzice, a former Minister in the Mancham government who recently returned after many years in exile;
- **Seychelles Liberal Party (SLP)** led by Ogilvy Berlouis, who was Minister of Defence in the Government until 1986;
- **Seychelles National Movement (SNM)** led by Gabriel Hoarau, a former preacher who had spent many years in exile; and
- **Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF)** led by President René.

By the time of our arrival in Seychelles, the campaign had come to be dominated by the old rivalry between the SPPF (previously known as the Seychelles People's United Party) and the DP. The Parti Seselwa, which had initially emerged as the focus of opposition activity, appeared to have slipped into the role of a third force with the return to Seychelles of Sir James Mancham on 12 April 1992 to take up the reins of the DP. The remaining five parties were obviously having to work hard to maintain a challenge for the forthcoming election.