

## ■ CHAPTER 4 ■

# The Campaign

When we arrived in Lusaka, election day was just a week away. We were aware that there had been predictions of violence and intimidation, and we expected that there would be the usual rumours and display of partisanship which characterise most election campaigns. But our immediate impressions were that this election campaign was being conducted in a relatively calm manner and the absence of excitable crowds, of any great numbers of party emblems, buntings, or photographs of candidates were most notable. We were also struck by the low-key approach to the issues before the electorate and we were impressed by the good-humoured way in which most people signalled their support for one or the other of the two main parties.

The election campaign had begun in earnest some weeks before our arrival and had clearly settled into a pattern which made it easy for us to begin to make judgements about it. Regular political rallies were held by the contesting parties and these were prominently advertised in the newspapers and on radio and television.

Both parties used the media for advertising their manifestos and criticising their opponents. In fact, full-page advertisements often dealt with such issues as the activities of the independent monitors, and a particular advertisement placed by the Public Relations Unit of UNIP, made specific reference to the presence of observers. This attracted the attention of our Group and a response was sent to the Chairman of UNIP (Annex XII). The reply we received is at Annex XIII and our response at Annex XIV.

We attended political rallies throughout the country, including some held by the Presidential candidates in Lusaka, the Copperbelt and the Northern Province. These were attended by thousands of people, many dressed in T-shirts and caps sporting the emblems of their party and we were impressed by the orderly crowds and by the way they appeared to be enjoying themselves despite having to stand in the broiling sun for hours on end and in one case, throughout a heavy shower of rain. This pattern was repeated in the Provinces, where we attended many small rallies and where we were able to talk to people about their views on the elections.

We paid particular attention to the presence of the police at these rallies. At two of the biggest rallies in Lusaka, we noticed that there were few uniformed policemen on duty although we have no doubt that there must have been a full complement of plainclothes security officers. On the few occasions in the Provinces when we were able to identify paramilitary forces, their presence was light and unobtrusive.

A new feature of this election was house-to-house campaigning. The opposition told us that problems arose when the candidate or an agent attracted a large and often admiring crowd which followed enthusiastically the campaigning from house to house. This was in breach of a law which prohibited processions of more than 10 people without a permit and it meant that the police had the right to put a stop to this activity. However, this problem did not appear to be widespread.

There was also concern about unofficial police curfews which began at 1900 hours in some rural and urban areas. This could have been a serious limitation of the freedom of activity of people in these areas, particularly during an election campaign, when it would be expected that they would wish to participate in political activities after coming home from work. However, we were unable to verify the truth of these complaints, which were denied by Government officials.

But by and large, the campaign was a relatively peaceful one. We were impressed that in spite of the operational difficulties which faced the political parties, they were able to get their message across to an electorate that was widely dispersed and often difficult to reach.

### **Permits for Meetings**

In Lusaka, we were told that the MMD was having great difficulty in obtaining permits for rallies, particularly in the urban areas. We took very seriously the complaint by the MMD that they were denied permits to hold rallies in urban Lusaka between Wednesday 23 and Sunday 27 October because the President was due to address a UNIP rally in Lusaka on Sunday 27 October. We sought clarification of this situation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lt General B Mibenge, in his capacity as Chairman of UNIP's election campaign, and the Inspector-General of Police. The latter told us that permits were issued by an Assistant Commissioner of Police in the Lusaka area but at a relatively lower level in the Provinces. We made determined efforts to see the officer responsible for issuing permits in the Lusaka area, but were unable to get any response from him.

There were also complaints that the manner in which permits were issued in some areas left much to be desired and was particularly irksome for party agents who were forced to spend a great deal of time attempting to get a permit. It was time consuming and irritating, and required many visits before a permit was granted. While we do not believe that this police action greatly retarded the opposition's campaign, we have to record that it did give rise to the suspicion that the difficulties encountered by the opposition in obtaining permits were part of a deliberate attempt to frustrate their campaign in the Lusaka urban area. In several provinces, however, the opposition reported that they had no problems in getting permits from the police to hold their rallies.

### **Access to Funds and Facilities**

For 17 years under one-party rule, there was little difference between UNIP and government in Zambia. The party was the supreme decision-making body. At every level of government, party officials held the most senior post. In the Provinces, UNIP offices were often located in the District Council building, next door to the office of the District Executive Secretary, the chief government administrator. UNIP officials had free access to government vehicles and other facilities. Once a multi-party system was introduced, there was an urgent need to separate the party from the government.

By the time we reached Zambia, it was not surprising that this delinking process was not complete. It was constantly drawn to our attention that UNIP enjoyed an unfair advantage over the opposition because it was still able to deploy government resources at will. We observed many UNIP officials who were not Government Ministers, campaigning in government offices and making free use of government vehicles. From this, it could be inferred that the UNIP campaign benefited from the

use of taxpayers' money. This charge was certainly made by the opposition. But in our discussions with UNIP officials, they stated that government funds were being used to underpin the party's normal administrative functions carried out on behalf of the Government and not for the election campaign.

It was interesting to note that as the campaign progressed, government officials began to assert their independence and we saw clear signs that many of them understood what was required of them in a multi-party system.

### **The Role of the Media**

The media had a crucial role in this election, because with the restoration of multi-party democracy, it had to begin to make adjustments to bring its operations in line with the expectations of a democratic society. In such a society the media has a pivotal role, providing information, shaping opinion, presenting a range of views, as well as becoming a watchdog for freedom. Since the media can influence the outcome of an election, it became a matter of intense interest to us to see how the media would perform in this new situation. For this reason we decided to look at how the Zambian media had evolved in order to be in a position to make an assessment of its performance during the election campaign. At independence, there were a number of new privately-owned newspapers and a Government-owned radio service. With the advent of the one-party state 17 years ago, private ownership of newspapers ceased, while radio and later television were established as part of the Government's information services and operated by Government departments.

Three daily newspapers survived. They were the *Times of Zambia*, *Zambia Daily Mail* and the *National Mirror*. The latter was a long-established church paper, while the two other newspapers were, in effect, an integral part of the official information network.

As the economic situation in Zambia deteriorated, newspapers suffered from shortages of newsprint and many good, trained journalists left the profession. Papers were limited in content and in the number of pages printed and were unable to devote enough space to the coverage of national and international news. Circulation peaked at around 60,000 for both the *Daily Mail* and the *Times*, but since this was limited to the urban areas of Lusaka and the Copperbelt as well as in Livingstone and the Southern Province, vast areas of the country were unable to rely on the print media for information. In any case, with an estimated literacy rate of about 50%, newspaper readership would remain limited for a long time to come.

Radio, with an estimated 650,000 receivers throughout the country, has become the most important medium for the dissemination of information and provided an important link between the urban and rural areas. In order to improve reception, transmitters have been erected at provincial centres. Zambia radio broadcasts on three internal and one external channels and the services are provided in English and in 7 local languages (Bemba, Nyanja, Lozi, Tonga, Kaonde, Lunda and Luvala). Radios 1, 2, and 3 are on the air for about eighteen hours, while Radio 4 is an FM station broadcasting on a twenty-four hour basis.

Television provides a restricted service with a limited daily output except on weekends when programmes are transmitted for about 12 hours daily. It is estimated that there are about 80,000 TV sets in the country and these are clustered in the urban areas. Like radio, television provided programmes in the local languages but the majority of its programmes were in English.

## Access to the Media

Because the media in Zambia had been Government-owned or UNIP-controlled for a long time, there were grave doubts that fair coverage of the issues in the election campaign could be expected. As in so many developing countries, coverage of national affairs tended to focus on the activities of the political leadership. Political analysis and critical comment were virtually non-existent, except in cases where criticism had been voiced in Parliamentary debates or by the courts. The reporting of serious issues affecting the economy, education and health of the nation was at best perfunctory and it would be fair to say that if the primary role of the media was to inform its readers, listeners and viewers, then by any reckoning, the Zambian media had failed to perform this basic function well.

There was also the perception that the Government-controlled media would be biased in favour of the ruling party, and that the opposition would be disadvantaged. Moreover, with the advent of multi-party elections, no guidelines covering neutrality or fair-play had been issued to the established media. Because of these factors, the Press Association of Zambia obtained an injunction on 3 October to prevent the Director-General of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation and the Managing Editor of the *Times* from carrying out their duties during the campaign. On the eve of polling, the High Court lifted the injunction pending an appeal.

But the situation was not as bad as it was made out to be. Two new daily newspapers and a weekly had been quickly established earlier this year and two of them clearly supported the opposition. These were the *Daily Express*, which also publishes a Sunday edition, with a circulation now estimated in the region of 20,000 and the *Weekly Post*, estimated to be selling about 18,000 copies weekly. The other daily, the *Eagle Express*, supported the ruling party UNIP and its circulation was not available.

While these papers brought a measure of even-handedness to the reporting of the campaign, our monitoring of the media in the fortnight prior to the elections showed that both parties were given a fair chance to put across their message in the Government-controlled media. Political rallies were reported as news items and paid advertisements for both parties were regularly aired on television during the main newscast at 1900 hours every night and at intervals throughout the rest of the evening. The same was true of radio with advertisements for both parties being aired regularly.

## Analysis of Coverage

Our analysis of the coverage by the leading daily newspapers showed that both the *Times of Zambia* and the *Zambia Daily Mail* made real efforts to report the campaign in a fair manner. While the other newspapers made no efforts to conceal their partisanship, the two established dailies covered the campaign in a reasonably impartial manner. Every day, their front pages were devoted to news items featuring both Presidential candidates, while other leading Parliamentary candidates were accommodated in the limited news pages inside. Both papers used their comment columns to criticise aspects of the electoral process, the retention of the State of Emergency and the claims by both parties that violence would inevitably follow the announcement of the results. They made real attempts to identify and serve the interests of the Zambian people.

## **Payment for Radio and Television Advertisements**

The question of payment for radio and television advertisements was raised with us and a complaint made that while the opposition party had to pay for them, UNIP was not required to do so. We immediately raised the matter with the Chairman of the UNIP campaign committee, following it up with a letter (Annex xv) seeking information. In his reply (Annex xiii) the Chairman informed us that he had requested ZNBC to send us receipts of payment by UNIP for all advertisements placed on radio and television. In reply, we received a full statement of accounts, and we attach the accompanying letter at Annex xvi. At the same time we wrote to the MMD (Annex xvii) asking them to provide us with similar information about expenditure on this item. The reply is attached at Annex xviii.

## **Voter Education Programme**

Given the change to a multi-party system, we would have expected an intensive and widespread voter education programme about the rights, processes and implications of the new system. The Electoral Commission had commendably used the electronic media to educate voters, but this had a limited impact largely because radio and particularly television were not widely available outside the urban areas. The Commission also issued to the public a leaflet (Annex xix) explaining the background and procedures for the elections, but we were unable to get information on how widely this was distributed. Newspapers made little attempt to explain the new political system to their readers. In a democratic society, the media plays its part by educating voters about the electoral process and about the issues at the centre of the political debate. We were disappointed that the newspapers in Zambia carried minimal analysis of pertinent issues and paid little attention to the role they should play in voter education.

## **State of Emergency Powers**

The existence of a state of emergency during the election period was a matter of concern shared among a wide section of the population. There were numerous allegations of unofficial evening curfews in some rural and urban districts when people were picked up and detained overnight. There was also a general fear on the part of many that they too might be detained, or that operational security zones would be declared to facilitate redeployment of the army and manipulation of the voting by military personnel.

This was one of the most pressing issues brought to our attention and we raised it at every meeting with government officials. In our discussion with the President, he assured us that he had publicly given an undertaking that emergency powers would not be used to affect the elections and that it was normal police security operations which were criticised as being of political intent. Moreover, since Parliament was dissolved, the President said it was no longer constitutionally possible to remove the State of Emergency. The opposition, however, was understandably suspicious in these circumstances and it was regrettable that the issue had not been given priority earlier in the day when constitutional remedy was available.

## **Intimidation**

It was widely believed that the army, police and other security personnel would be involved in intimidating voters. However, these fears were unfounded. In fact, special instructions were issued to the police to ensure that they understood the need

to play an impartial role. We saw paramilitary personnel at polling stations, but their presence was in no way obtrusive.

On the other hand, we were surprised at the extent of charges of political intimidation in some Provinces by senior government officials and by traditional Chiefs. We were told of cases of Chiefs advising voters that how they voted would be known, and that if they voted for the opposition, they would be punished, for example, by being evicted from their land.

Despite all the irregularities we have noted, we came to the conclusion that the overall campaign was fair and did not adversely affect the opposition to any extent.