

Chapter 1

The Political Background

Namibia achieved its independence on 21 March 1990 after over 100 years of foreign occupation and a protracted struggle for freedom on the part of the people. The four and a half years which preceded the Presidential and National Assembly Elections we had come to observe were therefore notable on three counts. They were Namibia's first years of independence and freedom from foreign rule, its first years of democracy and representative government, and the first period of tranquillity which the country had experienced for more than a century.

Foreign Occupation

The years of foreign occupation were begun by German colonisers, who declared a protectorate around Luderitz in 1884 and in 1890 established the colony of German South West Africa. South Africa's occupation began in 1915 when German forces surrendered to a South African military expeditionary force. The League of Nations subsequently granted South Africa a mandate to administer the territory. The process of land expropriation begun under the Germans was continued, and large numbers of Afrikaners were settled during the 1920s and 1930s.

Following the Second World War, South Africa refused to enter into a UN trusteeship agreement and over the next 40 years extended key elements of the apartheid system into the territory. The UN General Assembly terminated South Africa's mandate in 1966 and the same year the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) launched an armed struggle. South Africa's continued occupation was declared illegal by the International Court of Justice five years later. However, despite increasing internal and external pressure and considerable diplomatic activity, South Africa's occupation only came to an end in 1989. A UN plan for the transition to independence had been adopted in 1978 (Security Council Resolution 435) – but it took ten years before Pretoria finally agreed to arrangements for its implementation.

Pre-Independence Elections

UN-supervised pre-independence elections finally took place, peacefully, in the second week of November 1989 and were pronounced 'free and fair' by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General. More than 95 per cent of the electorate voted. SWAPO of Namibia received 57.3 per cent of votes cast and won 41 seats. This gave them a majority of the seats in the pre-independence Constituent Assembly but it was not enough to achieve the two-thirds majority which would have allowed SWAPO to determine the Constitution on its own. The Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), with 28.6 per cent of the votes, won 21 seats, the United Democratic Front (UDF) 4, Action Christian National 3, the National Patriotic Front 1, the Federal Convention of Namibia 1 and the Namibia National Front 1.

The Commonwealth had played its part in helping to ensure that the elections allowed for a free expression of will by the voters. The then Secretary-General had despatched a seven-person Observer Group, led by a member of our present Group, Alf Parsons of Australia. This Group was charged with reporting to Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in October 1989 on the preparations for the elections and the transition to independence. In its report issued before the elections, the Group found that, against the background of war, violence and mistrust, the process was delicately poised. It was not able to pronounce definitely on the prospect for free and fair elections. The Group was, however, able to note the progress already made and to highlight factors likely to bear on the integrity of the elections. In this the Group worked closely with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) whose responsibility it was to supervise the elections and after the poll to determine whether they were free and fair.

Establishment of Democratic Government

On 16 February 1990, Sam Nujoma, the President of SWAPO, was elected by the Constituent Assembly as the first President of an independent Namibia. Following independence the Constituent Assembly became a National Assembly, the President assumed executive power and Namibia became a full member of the international community, taking up membership of the United Nations, the Commonwealth and regional groupings and organisations such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Front-Line States and the then Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC).

Regional and Local Authority Elections

The first major test of Namibia's young democracy came between 30 November and 3 December 1992 with elections for the 13 new regional councils and 48 local authorities. These replaced the ethnic authorities abolished at independence and the white-run municipal authorities. The elections were reported to have been largely free of intimidation and their conduct appears to have been exemplary, with no specific complaints of polling irregularities.

On a turnout of 83 per cent, SWAPO won nine regional councils to the DTA's three (in the remaining council there was no clear majority) and took 67 per cent of the vote. These results meant that SWAPO, taking 19 of 26 seats, secured control of the upper house of Namibia's parliament – the National Council – to which each region sent two Regional Councillors. The National Council began work in May 1993. In the local authority elections SWAPO secured 57.17 per cent of the vote, to the DTA's 32.78 per cent and the UDF's 5.79 per cent.

In the period between the Regional and Local Authority elections and the 1994 Presidential and National Assembly Elections there was only one significant election, when in August 1994 voting took place to elect a new municipal council in Walvis Bay, replacing the previous whites-only body. On an 81 per cent turnout SWAPO won 78 per cent of the vote, gaining eight of the ten seats on the Council. The DTA took the remaining two.

Walvis Bay

The formal integration into Namibia of the deep-water port of Walvis Bay and a number of offshore islands had not been resolved at the time of independence in 1990. After lengthy negotiations with South Africa the integration finally took place as scheduled on 1 March 1994 at a ceremony attended by President Nujoma and several African Heads of State. The incorporation was widely welcomed in Namibia, not least because it was expected that it would boost the economy. A free trade zone is currently being established in a 20 square km zone between the town and the airport and estimates suggest that the population has increased considerably in the six months following integration as job seekers have flooded in.

Post-Independence Political Issues

In the years immediately following independence there was a national consensus on three issues in particular. There was widespread agreement on the need to foster a spirit of national reconciliation and social harmony, to raise living standards for the majority, and to develop the economy, which is still today heavily dependent on imports from South Africa and on Namibia's two main export sectors – commercial agriculture and mining.

By the time of the 1994 Presidential and National Assembly Elections, a culture of reconciliation, social harmony and tolerance was well established. Progress had been made in raising living standards and considerable efforts had been made to stimulate investment and in particular to attract foreign investment.

However, it was generally acknowledged that much more needed to be done to improve social conditions for the majority, to tackle unemployment – especially with some 16,000 people entering the job market every year – and generally to ensure a more balanced development of Namibia's mixed economy. There was also increasing concern at the slow pace of land reform.

Background on the Political Parties

Eight political parties registered for the 1994 National Assembly Elections, as follows:

- **SWAPO of Namibia (SWAPO)**, whose leader, Sam Nujoma, was elected President of Namibia in 1990, was established in 1958 as the Ovamboland People's Organisation, renamed SWAPO in 1960 and SWAPO of Namibia in 1968. SWAPO was Namibia's principal liberation movement in the pre-independence period, having launched an armed struggle in 1966. In 1973, it was recognised by the United Nations General Assembly as 'the authentic representative of the people of Namibia'. In the 1989 Constituent Assembly elections it secured 384,567 votes (57.3 per cent of the total votes cast) and 41 seats. Following independence it formed the Government, stressing the importance of reconciliation, development of the economy and improvement in the basic conditions of life for the majority. It has since laid particular emphasis on the success of its economic policies. SWAPO launched its election campaign on 29 October 1994, pledging to make job-creation the top priority for the next five years.
- **Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) of Namibia**, whose leader is Mishake Muyongo, became the main Opposition party following the 1989 elections. Founded in 1977, it was the majority party in the South African-appointed transitional government prior to independence and was supported by South Africa. In the 1989 Constituent Assembly elections it secured 191,532 votes (28.6 per cent) and 21 seats. Reorganised in November 1991, it won control of three regional councils in the 1992 elections. In the months prior to the beginning of the 1994 election campaign the DTA focused on unemployment, corruption and rising crime.
- **United Democratic Front (UDF)** is led by Justus Garoëb and was founded in 1989 as an alliance of eight ethnic parties. It won four seats in the 1989 Constituent Assembly elections (37,874 votes, 5.6 per cent of the vote), re-formed itself as a unitary party in October 1993 and announced its intention to work closely with other opposition parties. It has also emphasised the importance of action to tackle unemployment, raise living standards, curb crime, boost manufacturing investment and improve the civil service. It supports free market principles, favours pragmatism on the question of land reform and stresses the importance of improvements in education and health services.
- **Democratic Coalition of Namibia (DCN)** is led by Moses Katjuongua, was formed in 1994 and initially brought together three parties: the South West African National Union (SWANU), the National Patriotic Front (NPF) and the German Union (GU) faction of the Action Christian National (ACN). SWANU later withdrew in protest at the alleged unfairness of the way in which the DCN Party List was drawn up. At the launch of the DCN, the NPF leader said that the new grouping would campaign on a platform of "real improvements in the quality of life for most Namibians". It stressed the importance of action to combat crime, streamline the civil service and army, develop the economy and improve education, health, housing and social services.
- **Monitor Action Group (MAG)** was formed during 1994 under the leadership of former ACN leader Kosie Pretorius to promote 'a Christian outlook and standpoint'. It wants to remove 'the secular concept' from the Namibian Constitution and argues for the return of the death penalty. By its own account it is not a fully fledged political party but a pressure group for 'principle politics', using the elections as a platform to get its message across.
- **SWANU of Namibia**, the South West African National Union, was formed in 1959 in protest at the South African occupation. SWANU's manifesto for the National Assembly elections stressed the importance of improvements in education, health, housing and social security, called for a national agricultural strategy and proposed the restructuring of the economy to ensure a fairer distribution of wealth.

- **Federal Convention of Namibia (FCN)** gained one seat in the 1989 elections for the Constituent Assembly. Its manifesto for the 1994 elections stressed the importance of the devolution of power with regional control of economic policy, taxation and education policy. It proposed a federal constitution and a Bill of Rights.
- **Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP)** described its manifesto as 'a programme to open the door for the working class itself to do what is necessary and take the people forward to complete the struggle for real independence'. It attacked all other parties alike as standing 'on the side of the capitalist exploiters', called for a massive programme of public works to tackle unemployment, a 35-hour week without a reduction in pay, taxes on big companies to pay for free education, the expropriation of land 'stolen from the poor peasantry' and the confiscation of mining company assets.

Two of these political parties put forward candidates for the post of President. Dr Nujoma was the candidate of SWAPO of Namibia and Mr Muyongo stood for the DTA of Namibia.