

Chapter 1

Political Background



SPPF leader President Albert René (centre) visited many polling stations on election day

Background

Seychelles achieved independence on 29 June 1976, with Sir James Mancham as the first President of the new Republic and Mr France Albert René as Prime Minister. This coalition, however, ended abruptly in June 1977, when supporters of the Seychelles People's United Party (SPUP) staged an armed coup and installed Mr René as President. In May 1978, the SPUP was renamed the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF) and declared to be the country's sole political party. A new Constitution was promulgated in March 1979, turning Seychelles officially into a one-party state.

After almost 15 years of one-party rule, however, President René announced a return to a multi-party system of government at an Extraordinary Congress of the SPPF on 4 December 1991. On 27 December 1991, the Constitution of Seychelles was amended to allow for the registration of political parties. Amongst the exiles returning to Seychelles was Sir James Mancham who returned in April 1992 to revive his party, the Democratic Party (DP). By the end of that month, eight political parties had registered to contest the first stage of the transition process: the election to a Constitutional Commission, which took place on 23-26 July 1992.

The First Constitutional Commission and Referendum

The Constitutional Commission was made up of 22 elected members, 14 from the SPPF and eight from the DP. It commenced work on 27 August 1992 with both President René and Sir James Mancham calling for national reconciliation and consensus on a new democratic constitution.

However, following disagreements, the DP withdrew from the Commission and in its absence a draft constitution was duly agreed on 16 October.

A referendum to adopt the draft constitution was held from 12 to 15 November 1992. The DP together with five smaller parties formed a united opposition to campaign against the draft constitution. The law required the draft to be approved by not less than 60 per cent of the votes cast. It failed to achieve this.

The Second Constitutional Commission and Referendum

The Constitutional Commission was reconvened on 11 January 1993 to prepare a fresh draft. President René appointed Mr Bernardin Renaud, former Chief Electoral Officer, to chair the Commission in place of a Government Minister. The proceedings of the Commission were opened to the public, with live broadcasts over radio and daily transmission on television. The smaller political parties, the Churches and members of the public were able to make representations to the Commission. Decisions, even on contentious issues, were eventually made by consensus.

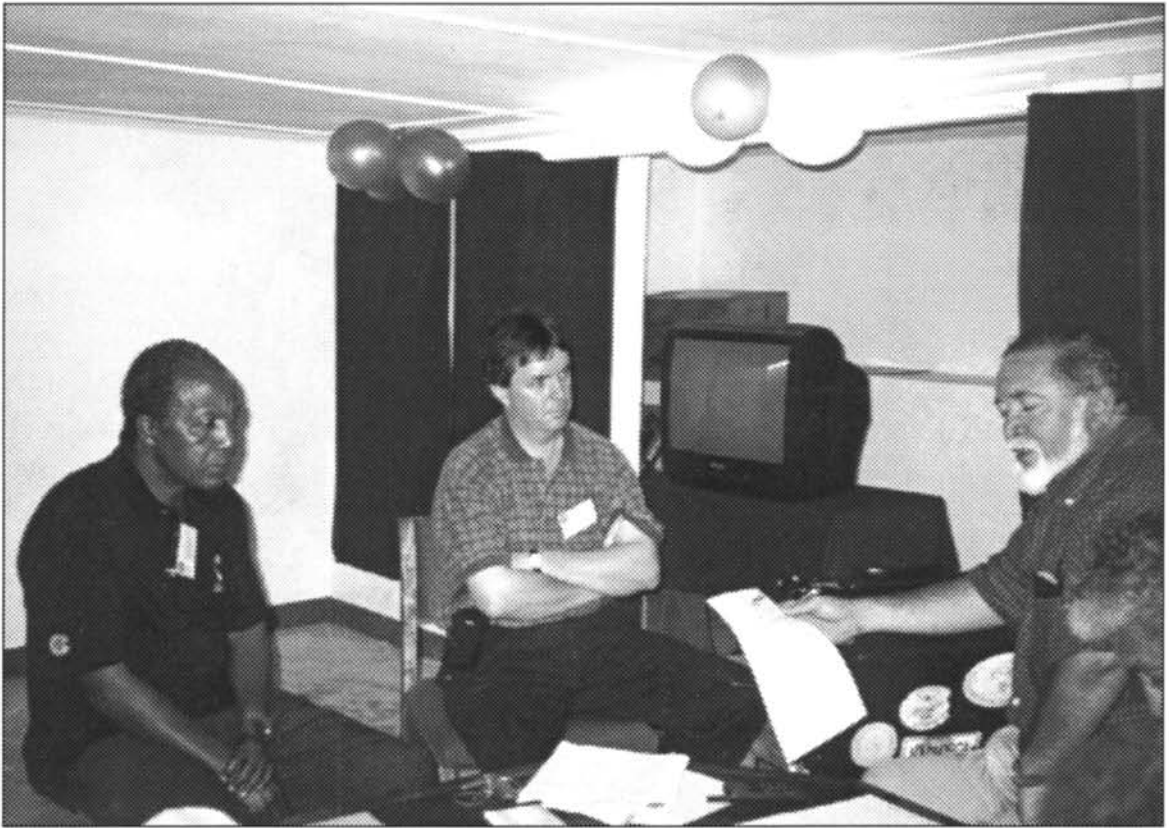
A consensus text was agreed on 7 May 1993 and a referendum to approve it called for 15-18 June 1993. The DP and the SPPF called for the draft to be approved, while Parti Seselwa and others campaigned against the draft. The draft was approved with 73.9 per cent of the electorate in favour and 24.1 per cent against.

The 1993 Presidential and National Assembly Elections

The first multi-party presidential and legislative elections under the new Constitution were held in Seychelles on 23-26 July 1993. Three political groups contested the elections: the SPPF; the DP; and the United Opposition, a coalition of three smaller political parties, including the Parti Seselwa. Two other smaller opposition parties threw in their lot with the DP.



United Opposition presidential candidate Rev Wavel Ramkalawan (left) and vice-presidential candidate Annette Georges



Democratic Party leader Sir James Mancham (right) at a party planning meeting which Observers Anthony Nyakyi (left) and Michel Doucet dropped in on

Mr René won the presidential election with 59.5 per cent of the valid votes cast, while Sir James Mancham received 36.72 per cent and Mr Philippe Boullé of the United Opposition 3.79 per cent. For the National Assembly elections, the SPPF won all but one of the 22 first-past-the-post seats. The solitary elected opposition seat went to the DP. In the allocation of the 11 proportional representation seats, six went to the SPPF which had won 56.55 per cent of the votes cast, four to the DP for its 32.27 per cent and one to the United Opposition for its 9.71 per cent.

A Commonwealth Observer Group and a group from La Francophonie were both present to observe these elections. The reports of these two missions were published and can be obtained at the respective secretariats of the two organisations.

The 1998 Presidential and National Assembly Elections

The 1998 presidential election was again contested by three candidates: Mr René, representing the SPPF; Sir James Mancham, representing the DP; and the Rev Wavel Ramkalawan, representing the United Opposition.

For the first time, vice-presidential candidates ran for election on a common ticket with presidential candidates. The candidates for the vice-presidency were: Mr James Michel for the SPPF; Mr Daniel Belle for the DP; and Mrs Annette Georges for the United Opposition.

The three parties also fielded candidates in each of the 25 elected National Assembly seats, and there was one independent candidate, Mr Marston Saint Ange (electoral district of La Digue). In the build-up to the elections, one opposition party approached the other opposition party and suggested a union to field a joint presidential candidate. This proposal was rejected.

Our Group was encouraged by the progress that has been made in the past five years to de-link the ruling party from the state and to establish a distinction between the resources of the state and those of the ruling party. We were particularly pleased to note that SPPF offices have been relocated out of

District Council offices and that all political parties have equal access to Community Centres. We have also taken note of the televising of debates of the National Assembly, and such steps as the arrangements to ensure that each party contesting the elections was given equal time on television and the radio during the campaign period.

Party Manifestos

Seychelles People's Progressive Front: The SPPF campaigned under the banner 'The Party for the New Millennium'. The party manifesto reiterated what it said was the Government's long-term vision of good, fair, stable, and dynamic government that could initiate and manage change in order to create a high quality of life in harmony with the natural environment of the country. The manifesto promised a renewed commitment to providing an excellent health service to the people of Seychelles throughout life. It promised to guarantee a high standard of education to all Seychellois children from birth to adulthood. The manifesto also promised to develop a conducive environment for business while maintaining a 'hands-on approach to develop, in a systematic manner, the pillars of the economy so that everyone gets a share of the national cake.'

The Democratic Party: The DP manifesto was entitled 'A Fresh Future, A New Direction'. It attacked the Government for keeping prices artificially high and for holding back economic growth through high interest rates, high taxes, and disincentives for business. The party promised that if elected, it would scrap the monopoly of the Seychelles Marketing Board, allowing other traders to compete, thus giving the country the widest possible choice of commodities at the most competitive prices. The party promised to give the government a regulatory rather than a running role in the economy and to open some sectors of the economy such as electricity generation to the private sector. It also promised to reform the tax system and reduce interest rates.

The United Opposition: The UO produced a 20-point manifesto under the caption 'A Contract Between the UO and the People of Seychelles'. The manifesto promised that the party, if elected, would abolish the system of 'security clearance' so that all Seychellois would have the opportunity to pursue careers in government and in the parastatals free from what it called political victimisation. The party promised to reform the system for appointing judges and also to fight crime vigorously. The party also promised to reduce taxes on food, reform the educational system, and provide a good salary and pension scheme for workers.