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EDITORIALS

1. The Namibian Miracle

A large part of this issue of REALITY is appropriately devoted to Namibia and its independence.

When one thinks back to the situation a year ago, or even to the tragic shambles of SWAPO's return across the border, what has happened there has been nothing short of miraculous

That all those years of trading blows, military and verbal, should have ended in a Constituent Assembly which, with

apparent unanimity, could produce a constitution rooted in Liberal principles is quite astonishing.

No doubt many difficulties lie ahead. Walvis Bay is an obvious one, and the sinister figure of Eugene Terreblanche trying to stir up the Basters could be another, but the extraordinary sense of goodwill which seems to be shared by the main political leaders is a wonderful omen for the future. □

2. Negotiations: No Time to Waste

Could South Africa emulate the Namibian miracle?

It won't if serious negotiations don't start soon and move quickly.

While potential negotiators spar and try to score points they hope will impress or reassure their constituence, things are starting to go badly wrong down there at the grassroots.

The violent chaos after the Ciskei coup and the horrifying upsurge in the Natal conflict, including large-scale attacks on non-Inkatha communities, have not only left a lot

of people dead, and many others with everything they owned destroyed, they have probably put paid to any hopes of new investment in both areas, and may indeed have started a flight of what there already is. In Natal a variety of leaders make calls for peace, some more convincing than others, but nobody takes much notice. The urge to vengeance is too strong for that, and it seems that only a virtual armed occupation of the main centres of conflict will bring peace. And for how long? Not for long, until the leaders of both factions are seen together, in the field, wherever trouble threatens, telling their supporters to come to their senses.

On the other side of the picture are elements in the police force who are not neutral, or are trigger-happy, or are both. They may well be covert rightwingers trying to sabotage reform. Other rightwingers seem set on making the mining town of Welkom a no-go area for Blacks. They may not stop there.

More disturbing than any of this has been the resurrection of the dreaded "necklace", surely one of the most despicable and dehumanising methods ever conceived for dealing with people you think might not be on your side. The leaders of the liberation movement who failed, for whatever reason, to put a stop to this ghastly practice when it first reared its head amongst their supporters all those years ago, may well live to rue that day. Only Desmond Tutu and a few other brave individuals ever risked their own lives to stop it. Now reports of its renaissance are returning to haunt us all.

We may also live to rue the day when young people were urged to forget about education until they had liberation,

and to devote their energies instead to making the country ungovernable. Such lessons are more easily learnt than forgotten. Ungovernability down there, where the necklace lies in wait for non-conformists, and the incentive to learn has been largely lost, presents the ANC with a major problem. For Mr De Klerk it certainly makes his task of persuading Whites to accept a future in a non-racial democracy a thousand times more difficult.

So what has to be done if what is threatening to become a lost generation is to be saved, and if something like the Namibian miracle is to be made to happen here?

People need to be given something they feel is important and constructive to do. What better than building a new society?

But until the negotiators agree on what shape that society will take, nobody else can do very much. They should get a move on. □

by Randolph Vigne

NAMIBIA AFTER 26 YEARS

Randolph Vigne was first in Namibia just over a year after the Windhoek shootings of 10 December 1959. Namibia's Sharpeville, they launched the 30-year struggle, completed with independence on 21 March 1990 which he attended as a guest of the new government. When vice-chairman of the Liberal Party of South Africa he was banned in 1963, and left the country without a passport the following year. In England he kept in close touch with Swapo, and in 1969 became founding chairman of the Namibia Support Committee, a UN-recognized body which has worked in solidarity with Swapo throughout this period. He is today its Hon Secretary.

Revisiting Namibia this year recalled my first and only visit there before leaving Verwoerd's South Africa 26 years ago. I had introductions from Swapo friends in Cape Town, a commission for **Contact** articles, and a brief from the Liberal Party to report on the situation, while seeking also possible conveners of a non-racial Liberal pressure group. A bonus was a meeting on the aircraft with the Anglican Bishop Mize, who got off at Keetmanshoop but offered me his empty house (now the Deanery) next to the tiny St George's Cathedral in Klein Windhoek. Here, and in the Old Location, I met leaders of Swapo, Swanu and the Herero Chiefs' Council, thanks to the Bishop's manservant who took the necessary messages. I could thus lie

low and was saved the frustrations of my Cape Town neighbour, Brian Bunting, editor of *New Age*, who had visited shortly before me and had been followed or watched by security policeman 24 hours a day. Or yet Oliver Tambo who had been put on the 'plane straight back to Johannesburg when he had arrived in 1960 to act for the Chief's Council over the Old Location shootings.

The men I met contrasted sharply with the human scene around them. This was still an old German colonial town, the oppressive atmosphere further charged with tension since the Old Location shootings, and the African community contained a sort of sub-species, the Ovambo contract labourers in domestic service, minding the gardens and cleaning the red-roofed bungalows or mock schlosses of the town, rightless people of whom terrible stories of physical punishments were told. Yet here they were – the 90 year old Hosea Kutako, deeply impressive figure, his face scarred by a German bullet, who had been left to look after the fragment of the Herero nation when Samuel Maharero and a few thousand survivors of Von Trotha's *Vernichtungsbefehl* escaped across the sandveld to what is now Botswana; Ciemens Kapuuu, his secretary and successor; Levi Nganjone, a dynamic Swapo organizer who had travelled across the endless sands of Ovamboland on a bicycle, visiting embryonic Swapo