

architect who had been of some service to Michael Scott years before cut me short. A lawyer to whom the architect directed me was abusive: 'You know the natives don't pay any income tax? And all they do is complain.' But Hans Berker, Judge-President at Independence, and his wife hospitably gave a braaivleis for me and some of their liberal friends, non of whom, however, would agree to convene a non-racial group, or even join one. In his chambers, Bryan O'Linn, now on the bench, was sympathetic but felt the time was far from ripe, and Hannes Smith, another Afrikaner and then editing the *Advertiser*, advised me to leave it to the Africans: 'Forget about Kerina - Kozonguizi's the one with the brains.' The famous 'Smitty' has since volunteered that Nujoma was the one that should have been backed. He had left the year before.

My last attempts failed too. Herr Lempp, a German bookseller who had African friends, told me he would be ostracized and ruined if he stood up to be counted. Percy Niehaus, leader of the local equivalent of the United Party, was courteous but dismissive. Most memorably, Israel Goldblatt, senior member of the South African bar and recently counsel for African interests in the Old Location shootings enquiry, offered serious discussion and reminiscence, but when he asked 'What are they saying in the location?' I realized how far there was to go. And Bishop Mize, back in Windhoek, expressed his admiration for our President but rejected the boycott weapon Paton had recently espoused, since this implied

coercion and as a Christian he could only bear witness to the evils of *apartheid* and *baasskap* (making the Bishop's expulsion from the country a few years later sadly ironic.)

I took the Skymaster back to Cape Town, made my report, wrote my articles, and did what I could in correspondence with Chief Kutako, through Kapuuu, and with the Hereros in Botswana, a representative of whom I had met with the old Chief (he had taken a year to make the journey, mostly spent in hiding from the South African authorities.) The visit also committed me to the Namibian struggle from then on.

The non-racial group was decades away, however, and the assembly I observed from the gallery in February 1990, with black and white Swapos, DTAs, Nats and others bringing in a liberal, democratic constitution by consensus, an amazing manifestation of it. (With, *plus ca change*, near the top of the agenda was the country's educational need, and new beef export outlets not far below.) It had taken 23 years of the 'border war' and an estimated 90 000 Namibian deaths from all causes to bring about that non-racial assembly, a cost item that must painfully be put down on the white side of the ledger. And the magnanimity, as before, on the black, who had done the fighting and suffering, and brought down Goliath. □

by David Lush

INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA: SOME EARLY OBSERVATIONS

"In 17 years of dealing with black leaders, I have never respected any of them more than I do the Swapo people I have been working with in the Constituent Assembly."

Lofty praise indeed considering it comes from one of Swapo's most bitter opponents, Dirk Mudge, chairperson of the DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance), and is indicative of the rapid change in attitudes- "Boerestroika" as it has become known - of Namibia's predominantly right-wing white community.

This has been in no small part due to Swapo's highly successful policy of "national reconciliation" which has helped persuade whites to stay on in Namibia with their much needed skills and capital. But this same policy is in danger of eroding Swapo's own power base as the liberation movement's grassroots support grows disillusioned with what many see as maintenance of the status quo.

National reconciliation has been a central plank in Swapo policy since the launch of their election campaign last June, although it was not until after the results of the

November poll were known (Swapo won 57 per cent of the vote) that this policy was seen to work.

As the newly elected Constituent Assembly started to meet, opposition parties found to their surprise that Swapo was prepared to negotiate and compromise - as it had to in order to achieve its aim of having the constitution passed by the required two-thirds majority without delay so the country could become independent as quickly as possible. Koos Pretorius, leader of the whites-only Action Christian National (ACN) party, admits he is "impressed" with Swapo's give and take approach - "as long as I didn't make the proposals," he jokes.

Swapo's immediate acceptance of what are now known as the 1982 Principles - internationally-approved, democratic guidelines now written into the constitution - stole the DTA's thunder and the latter had no choice but to settle down and become what Mudge calls a "loyal opposition". "What must be clear to everybody is that we are now in a new ball game.

"We have had an election, we have a constitution which guarantees a multi-party system and which has been

accepted by all. From now on the DTA....will be loyal to the country and to the constitution."

Even Namibian AWB leader Hendrik van As says he is prepared to give up his fight against the "communists" and go back to his farm, where he wants simply to be left alone. But if black people then come and steal his cattle and parts off his water pumps, he adds, "I will drive my cattle to the abattoir and leave the country for good".

OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS

Once the opposition parties were convinced of Swapo's sincerity, their supporters followed suit. White farmers in the eastern Gobabis region are renowned for their right wing, almost feudalistic beliefs, and it was with much trepidation that Swapo Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Kaire Mbuende, set about meeting with this close-knit community.

Doctor Mbuende – a small, dapper, soft-spoken and articulate man – was the antithesis of the farmers' perception of a Swapo commissar – a perception betrayed by the issues they raised at meetings with the Deputy Minister; some wondered whether the doctor believed in God, others wanted to know if they would be allowed to keep their guns, while others were worried that Swapo would force them off their land. Mbuende patiently explained the government's policy and, although not always agreeing with the doctor's views, the farmers left vowing to "stick it out" in an independent Namibia. After all, they say, "South West is our home", and as long as they could keep their land, the politics-weary farmers would stay.

There has also been a dramatic change of heart amongst the white business community which has suddenly woken up to the prospect of new and untapped commercial opportunities in a post-independent Namibia. The godfathers of Namibian business – renown for their right wing politics – are frequent visitors to the house of Namibian President Sam Nujoma, happy to be seen chatting with their once sworn enemy.

Nujoma personally arranged for a delegation of Namibian entrepreneurs to make a fact-finding trip to Angola where the group met with representatives of the "Marxist" government and discovered "great potential" for trade.

The success of national reconciliation firstly required the unravelling of decades of rabid anti-Swapo propaganda woven by the pro-South African media, a process which started the moment the first exiled leaders stepped onto the tarmac at Windhoek Airport, dressed not in khaki battledress and toting AK-47s but in three-piece suits and carrying attache cases.

But to be really effective, Swapo required the co-operation of the mass media. Ironically, from the day Swapo was declared winner of November's independence elections, one of the main exponents of anti-Swapo propaganda, the state-controlled South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation (now re-named the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, NBC) performed a somersault and began giving maximum prime-time coverage to once blacklisted party leaders and their views.

NBC staff admit the change was a job-saving move made by those wanting to stay on in Namibia after independence – and there are many. After all, they argue, they were civil servants and therefore take orders from those in power. With the advent of independence, the NBC will for the meantime continue as a parastatal organisation, and the new government has made it quite clear the electronic media will continue purely as a mouthpiece of the government and a vital tool in the process of "nation building"

But national reconciliation has required more than image building to win over the rich and powerful; it has also meant abandoning a commitment to wholesale nationalisation, a move which could lose Swapo credibility with the left, and in particular the unions.

Cracks have already started to appear in this bedrock of Swapo support. The new year has seen a spate of labour disputes resulting from employer malpractice. The Namibian Food and Allied Union (Nafau) recently reported that, on average, eight workers a day were coming to their office having been sacked for reasons ranging from belonging to the union to asking for more pay.

This has caused some unionists to question the validity of national reconciliation. "With all this talk of mixed economy and national reconciliation, the employers think they have the right to carry on as they used to," says one union official. "They are abusing the policy of reconciliation."



Trade Unions Graffiti: Windhoek 1989.

And as the new government begins to look more and more at home with the existing capitalist economy, the unions are standing their ground. Although still confident that workers' interests were best served by a Swapo government, President of union umbrella movement the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), John Saetenhodi, says the "exploitation of workers will only end in a socialist dispensation where the means of production belong to the people".

Grassroot disillusionment has also been compounded by appointments to the new government of servants of the old regime, in particular to the state security departments. Many activists are dismayed to find those responsible for their detention and torture in the past are still in post, causing many to wonder what their years of struggle and suffering were all for. Here too, the argument that it is all "in the spirit of national reconciliation" is beginning to wear thin. The aloofness of many of the new leaders has also prompted rumblings of discontent in the townships and villages countrywide. "The people are very disappointed that they don't see more of the President," says a nurse living in the Windhoek township of Katutura not far from the house where Nujoma stayed prior to independence. "We saw so little of him, even though we lived so close to him. We want to know him, like Zambians know President Kaunda."

She recalls a visit Nujoma made to the hospital and the way he spoke only with the management and senior staff and not to the nurses themselves. "We are the ones working with the patients and we are the ones who know what's going in the hospital, not the management. If the President wants to know what's going on in Namibia, he must speak with the people, and the same goes to other leaders who will be in the Cabinet."

DETACHMENT

The nurse's disappointment, echoed by many non-exiled Namibians, is understandable. During the years of liberation struggle, Swapo's internal leadership was always amongst the people, living in the same townships where they drank, ate and breathed with their supporters. And the names and legends of exiled leaders were always being talked and sung about, while their pictures hung on living room walls throughout the country.

There was genuine expectation that when the exiled leaders returned, they too would be like their home-based colleagues, so many were disillusioned when the besuited Swapo big guns – with the exception of Nujoma – moved into the posh "white" suburbs and were seen only on television and the rostrum at political rallies.

This detachment does not come as much surprise to "returnee" Namibians who say they saw precious little of their leaders even when together in exile. Their dissatisfaction lies instead with the relationship they have with their "stay at home" compatriots.

The triumphant welcome the stay at homes gave wave after wave of returning exiles has soured to mild resentment between the two groups. "The returnees think they were the only ones in the struggle," complains one stay-at-home typically, "but we were also in the struggle.

We were the ones who suffered under the apartheid government while they studied in countries with governments which were friendly."

EXILES

For their part, exiles came home to find an affluence amongst black Namibians which never existed when they left; before everyone lived in matching township hovels and no one could afford a car, whereas now townships have sprouted luxury suburbs and the dusty streets are filled with everything from battered Chevrolets to gleaming BMWs.

To add insult to injury, returnees have found it difficult to find employment. "In exile we were given food, work and housing, but here there is nothing," said one graduate returnee who, in the nine months since returning home after 12 years "outside", has had no job and remains dependent on the erratic goodwill of friends and relatives for food and shelter. "Our leaders gave us the impression that, when we came back, everyone would get work. But for many, this is not the case."

Ask almost any unemployed returnee what they will do in the future and the likely reply is: "I'm going to work for the new government." But again they could be disappointed, as many a civil service post is still filled by its previous incumbent.

High expectations of change make for more potential discontent during the early days of independence as the government grapples with its colonial legacy. "People think houses and things will fall from heaven," says one social worker summing up popular perception that change will come overnight, a perception which the social worker confirms exists not only amongst the working classes but also educated professionals – including teachers.

The new government has inherited a mountain of problems – R500 million national debt, 40 per cent unemployment, hundreds and thousands of people homeless or living in sub-standard housing, and 12 500 teachers of whom only 10 per cent are qualified – which will take decades rather than days to solve.

Discontent with the ruling party has already reared its head in, of all places, the far north of the country where 97 percent of the electorate voted Swapo in November's election. Swapo's regional director – veteran Simon Kaukungua – was voted out of office in the annual branch ballot as party members were unhappy with his authoritarian and inaccessible style of leadership. They also complained they were being kept in the dark by an uncommunicative Swapo head office in Windhoek. Head-quarter party chiefs declared the ballot invalid and reinstated Kaukungua, but the episode is an indicator to the political minefield the new government – and Swapo in particular – is now walking through.

So far Swapo has reconciled the minority for whom the liberation movement has exceeded all expectations. But this has been at the expense of the majority responsible for the party's parliamentary power, not to say its existence. □