

The Ulenga Moment Swapo and Dissent

BY LAUREN DOBELL

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The President is furious. Friends profess themselves stunned. Some colleagues quietly rejoice, while others vociferously scramble to distance themselves. A spray-painted "Viva Ben" appears on an overpass. Radio talk shows and editorial pages burst with opinion. In the eye of the storm is a charismatic, articulate diplomat whose sudden resignation as Namibia's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom has made him Namibia's most beloved, hated, feared and admired man of the hour. Who is Ben Ulenga and what has he done that has got his party and his country all shook up?

Impeccable credentials

Ex-combatant, Robben Islander, former trade unionist - Ulenga's freedom fighter credentials are impeccable. A Swapo member since his teens, he was among the first mass exodus of young Namibians into exile in 1974. He served with the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) for two years before being seriously wounded and captured in a skirmish with South African troops during an ill-defined mission into northern Namibia. Convicted under the Terrorism Act, Ulenga was sentenced to 15 years on Robben Island and served nine of these before his release, together with a number of other long-serving Namibian political prisoners, in 1985. Upon his return to Namibia he threw himself into trade union work, helping to organize the Mineworkers' Union

(MUN). At its inaugural congress he was elected to the post of General-Secretary for the union which, under his leadership, was outspoken in its opposition to the apartheid administration, and contributed significantly to a revitalized worker's movement in Namibia.

In 1989 Ulenga was among the internal leaders selected by Swapo President Sam Nujoma to run for office in Namibia's inaugural democratic elections. A favourable slot on the party's candidates' list also secured his place in the Constituent Assembly, which drafted the nation's Constitution before its metamorphosis into Namibia's first parliament on March 21, 1990. A year later, at Swapo's national party Congress, Ulenga's continuing popularity with Swapo's rank and file membership was confirmed by his easy election to the party's Central Committee, despite the weighting of voting procedures to favour incumbents.

In 1996, having served as Deputy Minister of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism, and subsequently as Deputy Minister of Local Government and Housing, Ulenga was appointed High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, in which capacity he served until August 27 of this year.

Treading carefully

Swapo's entrenched hierarchy and political culture have changed little in the transition from liberation movement to governing party. Respect for established authority and unquestioning loyalty is paramount; secrecy pervades decision-making structures and channels. The amalgamation of former exiled and "remainee" leaderships (including Robben Islanders) remains an un-

easy one, with the latter feeling simultaneously excluded from the inner circles of government and party and distanced from erstwhile domestic constituencies among the youth, trade unions, churches and community activists. For the consistently and stubbornly independent-minded Ulenga it has been an increasingly awkward fit. At the same time, having grown up politically within Swapo, and wholly loyal to what he believes to be its principles, Ulenga could not before now bring himself to differ publicly with party policies or practice. Privately he found limited scope for expressing his views and often found himself treading a fine line in carrying out his constituency work. Still, from time to time he was rumoured to have put some powerful noses out of joint, and to have earned for himself in some quarters the damning epithet of "trouble-maker" in his pursuit of debate on, explanation of, or accountability for party or government policy.

Now, with his resignation, Ulenga is testing much more forcefully the precise limits of the possible. For in Namibia, after eight years of governing in a formal democracy, the space for democratic dissent within the ruling party is still severely circumscribed - with significant repercussions for the nation as a whole. Worryingly, the past few years have seen a steady concentration of political power in the office of the President, and periodic threatening noises, from the same source, aimed at suppressing public expressions of dissent: as, for example, a declaration of July 10, 1997 that public protests would require prior police permission in future. Apparently a spontaneous decision - Nujoma's speeches invariably have

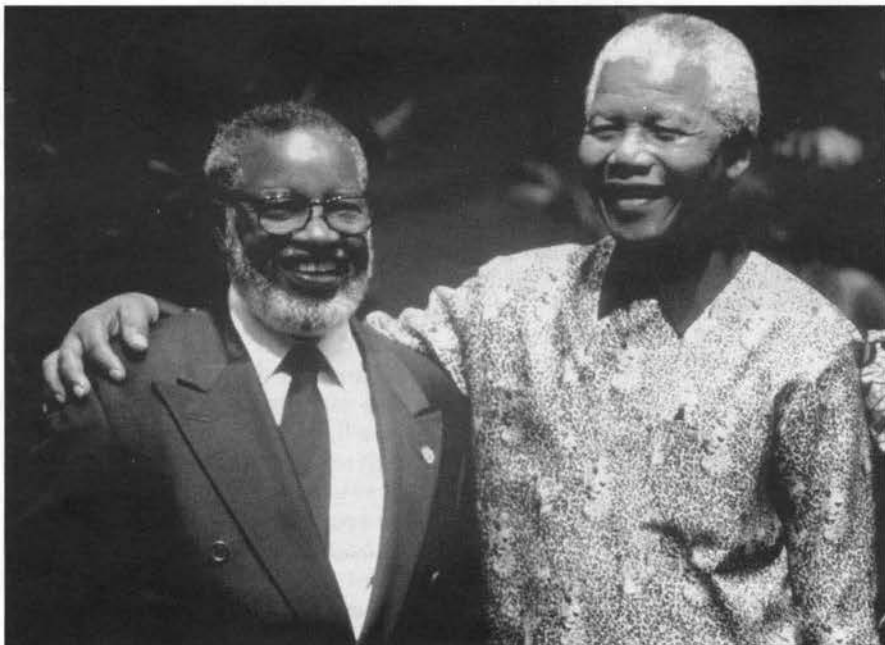
a significant Reaganesque, off-the-cuff component – its implementation was put on indefinite hold, following protests from the judiciary and press that such a ban, except in a state of national emergency, was wholly inconsistent with the Constitution. Constitutional limits to the President's powers of appointment have also occasionally been bypassed, as with the President's unilateral selection (later rescinded) of a new Ombudsman, without recourse to the recommendation of the Judicial

but one for which the governing party perhaps felt no especial sense of ownership or attachment.

In the lead-up to the 1994 national and presidential elections, criticism of the Constitution gave way to talk of amending it. Public references by Swapo party leaders to the two-thirds parliamentary majority required to unilaterally amend the Constitution were made with increasing frequency. Privately top officials talked about the one clause that preoccupied the leader-

advisors discussed not whether but how.

Having been returned to power with a significantly augmented majority, the Swapo leadership paradoxically seemed to feel less secure in office than before. Or perhaps, as some critics suggest, they simply felt comfortable enough to let their true colours show. New security legislation was introduced, and a well-funded National State Intelligence Agency was established. There have been several instances of direct government interference in NBC radio and television broadcasting decisions. Often Nujoma, stepping out of his generally affable persona, appeared to be taking a page from Mugabe's book, lashing out in public speeches at an unduly critical media, un-African gays, interfering judiciary, importunate donors, and sometimes foreigners (whites) in general. The resurrection in 1996 of questions concerning the mistreatment of suspected dissidents by Swapo in exile elicited a particularly ferocious response from Nujoma and the late Swapo Secretary-General Moses Garoeb, who warned of a bloodbath if "unpatriotic" Namibians and "foreign remnants of fascism" did not abandon their subversive agenda. (Moses Garoeb, Media Statement, March 12, 1996). [On this subject, see *SAR*, vol. 11, no. 4 (July, 1996)]



Shaun Harris - PictureNET Africa

Sam Nujoma with Nelson Mandela during the Non-Aligned Summit, 1998

Commission. Both instances fuelled existing feeling, in some quarters, that the Constitution – and its judicial watchdogs – placed excessive restrictions on the exercise of executive powers.

The constitution and controversy

This chafing at the limitations (real or perceived) imposed by the Constitution has roots dating back to the document's inception. Eighty days of negotiation and compromise among the seven parties represented in the Constituent Assembly, advised by an international body of constitutional lawyers, produced a model modern liberal constitution,

ship: that limiting the President to two terms in office. "Two-thirds!" became the campaign's rallying cry – though the President himself sometimes called for "72 for Swapo," in reference to all 72 seats of the National Assembly. Following Swapo's election, with almost 73% of the vote, talk of a Presidential third term was rife. Nujoma himself was non-committal, but promised in a national television address that no amendments would be made to the constitution without a national referendum. (NBC, December 11, 1994). Within the top ranks of Swapo the decision was already made, however. In camera and off the record the President's

Casting such a wide net in pursuit of "unpatriotic elements" and "enemies of Namibia" suggests a political market for scapegoats upon whom to heap the blame for vexing economic and social woes. High unemployment, painfully slow progress with respect to land reform, rising crime rates, a sluggish economy, steadily growing debt, a burgeoning bureaucratic wage bill, and increasing public and press criticism of perceived government corruption are persistent problems for the ruling party. Particularly worrying has been the issue of jobless former PLAN fighters who, since July, have been gathering in demonstrations of hundreds and even unprece-

dented thousands to draw attention to their plight.

Just what role these and other factors played in the President's decision to involve the Namibian army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's messy war is unclear, the more so because the decision was made by the President and his advisors without seeking the approval of Parliament, or informing the nation. For several days the presence of Namibian troops in the DRC was rumoured in Namibia, and even reported by the BBC and CNN news – reports repeatedly denied by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence – before Nujoma finally confirmed it at a Heroes Day commemoration ceremony on August 26. A few days later the first Namibian casualties were reported in the Namibian press, but it was another full fortnight before the President addressed the nation in a televised broadcast.

The President's enthusiastic support for the Kabila regime has confounded observers since the proclamation of Windhoek's "Kabila St." soon after Kabila's accession to power. It is unclear what Namibian interests are at stake in the DRC to warrant a government-to-government loan of N\$25 million soon after Kabila's installation, unspecified shipments of war materiel, and now the commitment of troops. The war has caused a serious split in SADC, with the majority of members aligning themselves with Mandela's attempts to broker a peace deal, while Namibia joins Angola in lining up behind a defiantly hawkish Mugabe. Namibia's Finance Minister Nangolo Mbumba has insisted that Namibia's involvement will be largely underwritten by Zimbabwe, though with what resources isn't clear. Some rumours point to prosaic business concerns – Nujoma's brother-in-law Aaron Mushimba is believed to have mining interests in the Congo. (In Zimbabwe similar allegations are made about Robert Mugabe's son Leo).

In his televised address Nujoma cast Namibia's participation in sweeping Pan-Africanist terms, invoking motives of African brotherhood and solidarity with "a fellow SADC member state which has fallen victim to a foreign-inspired conspiracy, and duplicity [by Uganda and Rwanda]." Interestingly, in light of the uncertain constitutionality of the decision itself (the President's sweeping powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Defence

in the Great Lakes and the Congo are instigated by white imperialists who want to control the country, take out its riches while the Congolese people live in poverty. This can no longer be allowed to continue." (The Namibian, September 21, 1998)

Saying the unsayable

It was against this general and immediate backdrop that Ben Ulenga returned to Namibia from London



Lauren Dobell

Ben Ulenga (far right) with Namibian parliamentarians

Force are granted under a Defence Act that long predates independence), the President invoked constitutional clauses concerning the defense of Namibia's borders and protecting its citizens in describing the act as also one of "enlightened self-interest." An anti-imperialist theme moved to the forefront in the President's later speeches, especially following an announcement by the European Union that it was reviewing aid packages to African countries involved in the DRC conflict in order to ensure that aid moneys were not financing military activities:

"These foolish Europeans. They formed a political union and again they want to get our raw materials without paying us. ... Disturbances

to participate in Swapo's Extraordinary Party Congress scheduled for August 27-28, 1998. The Congress convened 400 delegates from Namibia's thirteen regions, party wings and affiliated unions, though for precisely what purpose seemed to be in some dispute. Days before the Congress, senior party officials seemed anxious to dispel delegates' understanding – and press reports – that party representatives were meeting in part to discuss the question of a third term for Nujoma, and policy issues, such as land reform, that had been put off at Swapo's second national congress in May 1997. The issue of a Presidential third term had been approved at the full Congress and was not sub-

ject to further discussion, declared party spokesmen. The only item on the agenda of the Extraordinary Congress was a series of proposed amendments to the Swapo party Constitution, designed to "revitalize" the party structures. It would transpire, following the Congress, that such "revitalization" dictated further centralization of the party: to ensure the effective communication of the leadership's policies and programmes to the rank and file, all regional structures would henceforth be headed by Central Committee members.

Ulunga, though himself a member of the party leadership, was also taken by surprise at the narrow confines of the proposed debate. And for him it was the last straw. Following the Central Committee meeting which preceded the Congress, he submitted his written resignation as High Commissioner to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and letters conveying his decision to the President and Secretary-General of Swapo. The same evening he announced his reasons for resigning in a press briefing. For its significance as the first public expression of dissent from party policy and procedure by a Swapo leader, his statement is worth quoting at some length. Noting that he had been agonizing for two years over the issue of the third term in particular, Ulunga said that he had been looking forward to contributing to a debate on the question at the Extraordinary Congress:

"I have ... reached the firm conviction that the proposal to increase the Presidential terms for the current incumbent would be to the total detriment of the country, the Swapo Party and the cumulative process of political democratization and good governance in the country. ...

"[T]he Swapo Party has never given due consideration to the Third Term issue and its implications ... [N]ot once has the Party discussed the ever-important matter of Party

leadership, succession and renewal. Secondly, the Third Term proposal as directed at the present incumbent is an unacceptable subjection of the national good (as represented by the Constitution) to the personal circumstances and schemes of individuals ... [and ignores the] realities of recent African political history, the youthfulness of our state institutions and the precarious nature of our democracy.

"Indeed the leadership problems in the Swapo party have now reached critical proportions. The recent and current crisis involving ex-PLAN fighters, former political prisoners on both sides, and former exiles in general, as well as the long-standing and unresolved land reform issue, are all indicative of the profound lack and total absence of coherent policy and thinking concerning matters of vital national importance. A foreign policy crisis is now being unleashed through an ill-considered military involvement in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ...

"[The] Party should, in my view, immediately set about shedding its present antiquated leadership, completely overhaul its political and organizational problems, and provide clear direction to government and the nation through clear Party policies. ... I am aware that clear, directed and determined leadership is of the essence. Subject to the democratic views of others, I am prepared to take up the challenge." (Original press statement, August 27, 1998)

Thunderbolt

"Ben's Bombshell" was the headline in *The Namibian* - and certainly the effect was explosive. Ulunga has presented Swapo policy and practice with its most important challenge to date. In speaking publicly, from within party ranks, against a third term in office for Nujoma he has aired a taboo opinion, albeit one which he is far from alone among his colleagues in holding. In his initial statement, and in more detail in subsequent interviews, he has pub-

licly exposed the absence of democratic practice at all levels of the party and government. In standing up for the principles he believes Swapo truly represents he is setting an example for like-minded but more timid colleagues, and in expressing his readiness to "take up the challenge," he is providing a rallying point for Namibians disaffected with the current leadership. Finally, in deploring the weakness of Swapo's party structures, Ulunga has drawn a distinction between the roles of party and government in a democracy, and called for a resurrection of grassroots political activity in opposition to the steady centralization of power within Swapo leadership.

*"The party has taken an unusual step of listening to Government and to forces out there for guidance. ... What is the party there for? The party has been emptied of its essence as a party and is an empty shell. It doesn't do the job that the party should do. The party is there to set the policy agenda for government." (Interview, *The Namibian*, September 4, 1998)*

A husband and father, the 46-year old Ulunga's gamble is all the more striking in light of the personal sacrifice entailed in his resignation as High Commissioner, and the unknown risks he faces in speaking out. Far less notable critics have fared badly in the past. Since independence, the suppression of unpopular views has tended to rely on character defamation, political marginalization and informal intimidation, however, and this critic is likely to possess an unusual resistance to the usual tactics.

Indeed it seems that the Swapo leadership is uncertain as to how to proceed against the rebel within its ranks. (Ulunga has not resigned from Swapo nor its Central Committee). Initially the patrician Hifikipunye Pohamba, Secretary-General of Swapo, publicly rebuked Ulunga for not following "proper party channels" in putting his case, and appeared to threaten "disci-

plinary procedures.” Though potentially sinister-sounding, the mutterings about violations of proper party procedure were lent a comedic note by what Ulenka had already revealed concerning the absence of such channels. The President’s anger, though reputedly titanic, has not been publicly vented. A meeting of the Politburo was quickly convened, but apparently failed to materialize when a number of members suddenly excused themselves on various grounds, suggesting a reluctance to take part in any collective action against the well-liked Ulenka. The usual roster of innuendo and insinuation has been trotted out on the hyperactive rumour mill, involving shadowy conspiracies of whites, foreigners or the inevitable CIA, and the usual charges of “disloyal” and “unpatriotic” behaviour, but even these efforts seem half-hearted.

However, while many in the leadership may be reluctant to condemn him, no one is rushing to his side – at least not publicly. Privately a number are applauding his courage in expressing sentiments that are widely held, though never, until now, expressed. But if party and parliamentary peers are cautiously waiting to see what price is exacted for Ulenka’s heresies, ordinary Namibians have been less restrained. In the weeks following Ulenka’s resignation, open-line radio shows have been abuzz with reaction to the news, while Namibian newspapers have been swamped with letters – the majority supportive of Ulenka. The response has been particularly noteworthy in the unprecedented breadth and depth of critical opinion expressed. Also interesting is the nostalgia it has revealed for the heyday of internal struggle in the

1980s – and for its leaders. For one writer, the example set by Ulenka was reminiscent of a time “when debate about issues within the party and about our society was the order of the day, [a] culture of open debate ... conditioned by the general defiant mood of the mass democratic political activity of the time.” Another reminded readers that “the struggle for the liberation of Namibia did not start in exile.”

Especially fascinating has been the reclaiming of not only the spirit, but the unwritten history of the struggle, both inside and outside, by earlier generations of activists and dissidents, most notably Samson Ndeikwila of the Council of Churches of Namibia. One of Swapo’s first “detainees,” having, with eight other young members, fallen afoul of the exiled leadership in the late 1960s after charg-



Swapo election rally, 1994

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ing them with being "oblivious to their own people." Ndeikwila has been steadily working to clear the names of those detained or killed as "spies" while living in exile during the 1980s. His letters explicitly place Ulenga in a continuum of democratic dissent from authoritarian practice within Swapo - a history which appears finally to be taking fragile root in the collective consciousness of Namibians.

"Bravado and heroism"

The enthusiasm for Ulenga's stand is still tempered with caution: letters to the editor are often anonymous or pseudonymous; reporters polling passersbys discover very few willing to go on the record as opposing a third term for the President. No such reserve has characterized self-declared loyalists and "patriots" however, as witnessed by one letter urging swift disciplinary action against Ulenga: "This would be necessary in order to discourage similar conduct by those members who wish to display thoughtless bravado and heroism."

Such "bravado and heroism," it seems, is still mainly the purview of individuals: Swapo's youth, women's and elders' wings have declared officially unanimous support for a third term, while affiliated organs and unions waffle uncomfort-

ably in eloquent testimony to their lack of independent policy-making structures. The diplomatic community, foreign investors, and white Namibians have mainly withheld comment (*The Namibian's* spirited editor Gwen Lister is a notable exception), citing reasons ranging from a reluctance to interfere to a fear of exacerbating matters. An element of "better the devil you know" also plays a significant role. The generally dormant parliamentary opposition, however, seems to have taken courage from public opinion. In more than its usual state of disarray in recent months (following the expulsion of the leader of the official opposition DTA party for alleged separatist ambitions) opposition parliamentarians have belatedly braced themselves to defend the nation's Constitution.

The issue was front and centre as Parliament reconvened at the beginning of the month. After some minor procedural difficulties, occasioned by the unseemly hurry with which it was introduced, the Prime Minister has already moved the "Amendment Bill," allowing for the amendment of the Constitution "so as to provide that the first President of Namibia may hold office as President for three terms," while a companion bill has been introduced "to provide for incidental matters." Among the

latter, so casually advanced, is another proposal to dramatically alter the Constitution by empowering the President to appoint Namibia's thirteen regional governors. Previously, governors were selected by their respective elected regional councils.

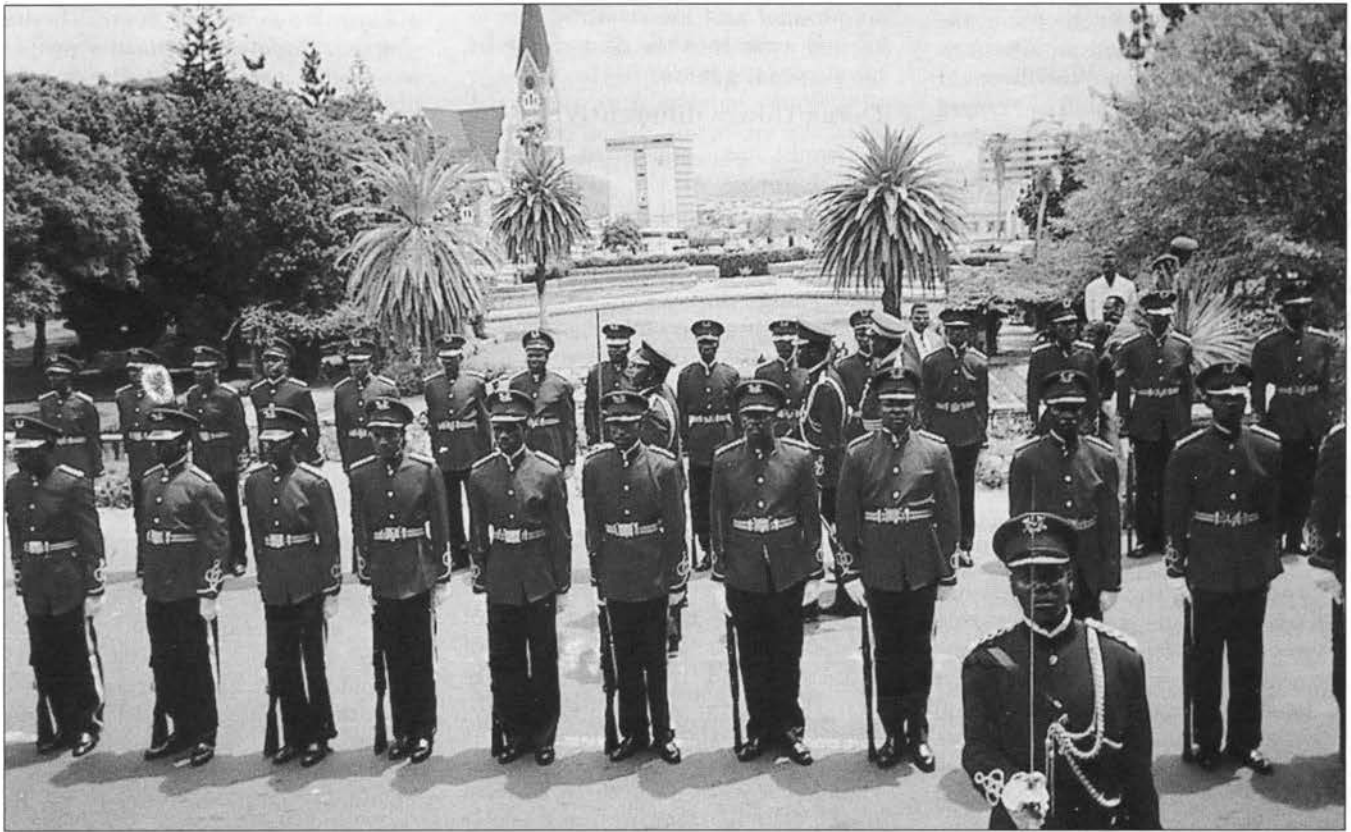
It is likely, of course, that the battle to preserve Namibia's original Constitution is already lost. Swapo has the necessary two-thirds majority to push the amendments through; only the unlikely defection of some of its own MPs can prevent it. And with its passing, a dangerous precedent will have been set. As one former student leader lamented: "Namibia is busy degenerating into a Zimbabwean-type politically. And with Nujoma's third term we must expect the situation to worsen drastically ... especially taking into account the absence of critical and active civic structures and people. Even Ben Ulenga's brave decision may become a matter of history, since people are trapped into their material positions. They just can't afford to differ with the ruling [clique], even if they wish to." (Paul Kalenga, personal communication, September 29, 1998).

And yet, as Ulenga has shown, not everyone is trapped. While parliamentarians were preparing to debate constitutional amendments that will extend the term and the powers of a President who has led Swapo for the past four decades, and the nation since independence, hundreds of Namibians gathered for the inaugural meeting of a "Forum for the Future," to hear addresses by Ulenga, by the Secretary-General of the CCN, and by the Governor of the Bank of Namibia. If, as Ulenga's wife Nambata has observed (invoking a popular Namibian expression), it is true that within Swapo's leadership people brave enough to be critical are "as rare as chicken teeth," such people appear to be rapidly proliferating among the Namibian citizenry - and, collectively, may turn out to have some bite.



Peter Bennett - CIDA

SAI



Lauren Dobell

The Statesman who Brought Honour to Africa (a parable)

BY SAMSON NDEIKWILA

In her article on recent developments in Namibia featured in this issue of SAR, Lauren Dobell cites Samson Ndeikwila of the Council of Churches of Namibia as epitomizing in his work the efforts of "an earlier generation of activists and dissidents" now seeking to reclaim "not only the spirit, but the unwritten history of the [Namibian liberation] struggle, both inside and outside" the country. As she writes, Ndeikwila was "one of Swapo's first 'detainees,' having, with eight other young members, fallen afoul of the exiled leadership in the late 1960s after charging [the latter] with being 'oblivious to their own people'" (on this moment in Swapo's history see also Colin Leys and John S. Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-edged Sword* [London, 1995], ch. 3). More recently, notes Dobell,

"Ndeikwila has been steadily working to clear the names of those detained or killed as 'spies' while living in exile during the 1980s." This personal history of considerable courage and commitment gives added resonance to Ndeikwila's deft and illuminating parable, reprinted here with permission from The Namibian where it first appeared as an extended letter to the editor.

The president was born in a poor family in a remote African village. His country had experienced brutal colonial oppression, repression and exploitation. He knows what it means to go hungry, barefoot and in rags or half-naked.

It is this background which has shaped his world outlook. And it is his simple lifestyle which has had tremendous impact on the thinking of so many people at home and

beyond. This is the man today whose mere utterances are echoed in different languages all over the world.

Many people do not know his real name. At home he has proven himself consistent in words and deeds to be called the Father of the Nation. In church circles they call him the Great Visionary of our Age. All over Africa and among the Afro-Americans they call him Our Pride. Somewhere else he is referred to as the Great Leader of Africa.

Scholars of different disciplines have all concurred that he is the most original thinker, most articulate speaker, most simple in lifestyle, and most organised and disciplined in time-management. He sincerely believes what he says and courageously says what he believes.

One reggae band in the Caribbean has released an album titled "The Statesman Who Brought Honour to Africa." The record praises the President's exemplary approach to life. It praises his government's policy guide and the revised constitution.

Notorious leaders

It recounts the priorities and initial achievements of his five-year plan. However, the last part of the record is very harsh with African leaders, dead and alive, who have killed, imprisoned, tortured, exiled and impoverished their own people. The record calls on the people of Africa never to be deceived again.

Then comes the "No More" and "Shame on You" part where solo voices shout the names of some notorious African leaders. The list is long and controversial. You hear the names of Idi Amin, Bokassa, Samuel Doe, Karume, Sekou Touré, Kamuzu Banda, Siad Barre, Mobutu, Mengistu, Abacha, Eyadema, Kabila and others. To the astonishment of some people, the record mentions several names of certain figures in former liberation movements in Africa who brutalised their own followers in exile.

Some of these people are now holding important positions in governments. This record has become so popular and fascinating that at times a person finds himself or herself singing or humming it spontaneously. Some governments have attempted in vain to suppress it by banning it from their state radios and television. One dictator President went to address the students at the university where he was also chancellor.

As he ascended the rostrum, ready to start with his speech, the students burst into the last part of this record. His own name was mentioned amongst the shouts of "No More" and "Shame on You." The chancellor started sweating all over, shivering and collapsing on the rostrum. The students continued to

sing louder and louder until he was carried away into the ambulance by his personal guards.

Doing things differently

It would take pages to describe the character of the president or to enumerate what he has done in the first four years of his leadership. He is one individual who always does things differently. He speaks of the genuine second liberation of Africa. His first appearance in Addis Ababa at the OAU summit left the world without words. His was the smallest, cheapest but most effective delegation, consisting of himself, the minister of foreign affairs and a representative of the media. They made use of economy class tickets. They booked into a guest house on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. They made use of a taxi to and from the meetings and they were always the first to arrive. Throughout the meetings he dresses casually while other leaders changed clothes even three times a day. One dictator military leader had his whole chest covered with medals and his shoulders decorated with several golden stars. However, the president was the one who really went with concrete ideas how to overcome current problems facing Africa and how the continent should move with dignity into the 21st century and beyond. The part of the President's OAU speech which was widely hailed and echoed was when he called on African leaders not to cling to power or tamper with their national constitutions unnecessarily. He urged them to follow recent examples set by respected statesmen like Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela and Ketumile Masire.

Prepares his own speeches

The interesting thing is that the staff in the President's office are not burdened with preparing speeches for him; they compile what the President has said and they enjoy it very much. When addressing people of whatever category, the president never reads out his speeches. He speaks from the heart, as he

always says. He never shouts slogans, threatens or insults people at public meetings. He speaks of empowering and giving vision to the people. Thousands and thousands would flock to public meetings when they knew that the president would speak. He refuses to refer to the people as the "masses," arguing that the term was coined by the advocates of totalitarianism. At the beginning the president had difficulty in convincing the people to cease servile behaviour like dancing in front of him, carrying his briefcase, opening doors for him, etcetera. He reminded them to treat him like anybody else. Though the president has been given so-called special advisors and consultants, local and expatriate, he has a special ear and heart for the views and feelings of the ordinary people. With his locally-assembled Toyota Cressida, he drives freely wherever he wants to go, day or night. He refuses to have a chauffeur and bodyguards. He goes to weddings, barbecues, soccer matches, or to church. He eats, drinks, dances, sings and mixes with people like anybody else. During festive seasons, the President would go to his home village as is the custom with many people.

Modest personality

It is a known fact that the President has great difficulty with a host of protocol procedures, dull formalities and bureaucratic constraints. He dislikes figurehead titles. He refuses his photos being hung everywhere. He argued against being the symbolic commander-in-chief of his country's defence force. He refused to be chancellor of any of the four universities in the country. He argued that he believes in and upholds the principle of T and T (Train and Trust). However, the President is an honorary member of many organisations, clubs and societies. It is at social occasions where the President would draw material for his speeches. Ex-combatants would thank him that they had not been forgotten and left jobless as had

been the case in some countries. Ex-refugees would urge him to encourage the nation to accord African hospitality to refugees, sojourners and visitors in their midst. Ex-criminals would tell him how they had been robbing, raping, house-breaking, smuggling, defrauding the previous governments, etcetera, and why they had decided to abandon criminality. Ex-prostitutes would urge him to deliver an inspirational speech against such a social vice. Even ex-beauty contestants would tell him of the dilemma of being paraded like animals at an auction.

The President would then address such issues so eloquently to empower and encourage the people to lead a simple and dignified life. He would even go to the extent of telling his audience that it is not a lot of money in the bank, a big and luxurious house or car, the latest fashion dress or a diamond wedding ring which would make life more meaningful or give a person real dignity in life. He would elaborate on the concept of "full pockets and empty hearts." He states that the secret to a happy and dignified life lies in self-denial and concern for other people's welfare and successes.

True service

It is worth mentioning how the President had appointed a team of able and dedicated men and women, black and white, young and old, non-partisan politicians and technocrats, a quarter of the size of the previous cabinet and much cheaper in many ways. Before appointing this cabinet, the president gave a three-hour address to the nation explaining, amongst others, what true service to the nation means. He bemoaned people who aspire to go to parliament with the sole intention of enriching themselves and to pave the way for their families and next of kin. He emphasised that today a leader who is a combination of being most simple and humble, most truthful, most ready to admit mistakes and most hardworking is the greatest of all. This was the

type of person he was looking for to work with in a team. He did not conceal the fact that the country has many such reliable people who just need be identified. He discussed the difference between good and bad leadership. He also explained, giving concrete examples in Africa and elsewhere, how corruption, nepotism, bribery, favouritism and squandering of tax-payers' money would lead to national disaster and bloodshed at one or other stage in the life of a nation. He warned the nation against bad leadership, using a famous African proverb which says: "When the fish gets rotten, it all starts from the head."

Dislike of grovelling

The President spoke of leaders who tax their people so heavily but use the money to pay themselves big salaries, build themselves expensive state and government houses, buy themselves most luxurious cars and airplanes. He spoke of leaders who are in the habit of hosting lavish parties and receptions with taxpayer's money. He elaborated on the debt yoke where leaders from poor countries borrow huge amounts of money which, in the end, their countries would not be able to pay back. He added that often this money does not reach the people in whose name it was borrowed. He also gave examples of leaders who stash vast amounts of money in foreign banks. In most cases this money has been stolen in one way or another. He categorised all such acts as institutionalised robbery and fraud. He went into some detail about the following as leading items of his government's five year priorities: education, water supplies to rural areas, primary health care, housing, local processing industries, etcetera. Addressing the future of democracy in Africa, the President identified ethnicity or tribalism and clanism as future threats with the potential to blow nations and communities apart if not handled with understanding and wisdom. He cautioned against monopolistic tendencies and encouraged civic societies, including

trade unions, student organisations, women's groups, etcetera, to welcome differences and appreciate unexpected challenges from new quarters. For example, two or three student organisations in the country would serve the student population better if they saw the wisdom in appreciating, supplementing and enriching each other rather than embarking on futile and obsolete exercises of discrediting and undermining each other. The president called upon the nation, particularly the church and the media, to assist his cabinet, not through grovelling, whitewashing, flattery and bootlicking but by plain and candid criticism. He surprised some of his listeners when he praised and thanked one local newspaper which has been very critical of his government and which had exposed traces of malpractice in high offices. He challenged this newspaper to pick up more courage and call a spade a spade. He challenged all members of parliament, whether of the ruling or opposition parties, not to defend their parties but to defend the truth and the best interests of the nation. He warned against the danger of "comrades" covering up for "comrades." This was the malady of the OAU during the last 30 years of its existence. This was also the main contributing factor to the collapse of the socialist system. Finally, the president was explicit in stating that the problems facing many countries, such as unemployment, increasing crime, lack of educational and medical facilities, shortage of housing and skyrocketing cost of living were not natural catastrophes; they were man-made and therefore surmountable. Referring to a discussion he had the previous evening with a delegation of troubleshooter students from the four universities, the president concluded by saying that even if he would drop dead the following day, he would depart in peace and very optimistic about the future of Africa, including that of his own country.

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