

# Heavy Handed Democracy

## SWAPO's Victory in Namibia

BY TOM LODGE

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In the results of Namibia's parliamentary and presidential elections (November 30-December 1, 1999), the main surprise was in the size of SWAPO's majority, up from 72 per cent in 1994 to 76 per cent, confounding predictions that its following would be severely dented as a consequence of the appearance earlier in the year of a new opposition party led by SWAPO veterans, the Congress of Democrats.

The absolute size of SWAPO's share of the vote increased too, from 361,800 to 408,174, an increase approximately equivalent to the additional numbers of people voting. Turnout was less, however, down from 76 per cent to 61 per cent - although the total number of eligible voters indicated by the voters roll is considered by experts to be misleadingly high: the 878,869 names on the list if they were all valid would represent an unlikely 99 per cent of Namibians over the age of 18.

As in 1994, more than 60 per cent of SWAPO's support came from the four northern regions, Ohangwene, Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto, confirming its continued hegemony within the Ovambo community; here total opposition support was confined to modest single figure percentages. SWAPO also emerged as the victor in the Caprivi region, hitherto dominated by the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance which suffered from

the association of its former leadership with August's abortive secessionist rebellion. SWAPO majorities elsewhere pointed to the strength of its support in the main cities, including, of course, the capital, Windhoek.

suburban neighbourhoods that previously favoured the DTA.

The same picture prevailed elsewhere; for example the CoD captured the Windhoek West constituency, a lower middle class residential area accommodating junior



*SWAPO meeting on 28 November*

Tom Lodge

Both the statistics and the geographical distribution of the votes indicated that the new party, the CoD, had collected most of its adherents from the former leading opposition party, the DTA. Overall, the CoD obtained nearly 10 per cent of the vote, just edging ahead of the DTA's 9.4 per cent; in 1994 the DTA had won 20.4 per cent of the ballot. In Caprivi, SWAPO's support was concentrated in the far east as well as the poorer districts of the administrative centre, Katima Mulilo, as in 1994. Meanwhile the CoD's 6,386 votes were concentrated in the more

civil servants and clerical workers, but SWAPO won more than two thirds of the votes in Windhoek's working class townships. As with the DTA in 1994, small inland towns in the South of the country tended to favour the new party. In the Ovambo regions, in which the CoD concentrated much of its campaigning effort, its share of the vote did not exceed 5 per cent. Of the remaining five parties on the ballot papers, the United Democratic Front retained its parliamentary representation, its 15,685 votes (3 per cent), concentrated as before

in the North-West and suggesting a predominantly ethnic Damara support base. The white exclusivist Monitor Action Group also kept a seat, a beneficiary of the highest remainder method of allocating fractional shares of the vote. The presidential election results were very comparable to the distribution of parliamentary votes, allowing for the differences resulting from only four as opposed to eight options on the ballot paper. Sam Nujoma received an overwhelming endorsement from 416,218 Namibians for his third term of office.

Complaints by opposition parties that their agents were often refused admission to voting stations in Northern regions fuelled accusations of foul play and the CoD leader Ben Ulenga expressed dissatisfaction about the very high proportion (25-30 per cent) of tendered votes (votes cast outside the voter's constituency) in the Ovambo regions. However, several hundred observers, both local and foreign, ensured that proceedings were checked in over half the polling stations; they were often critical of shortcomings in administration which pointed to

The more serious reservations about the Namibian election refer to the quality of campaigning. Local newspapers reported twenty-two instances of serious intimidation of opposition parties by SWAPO supporters during October and November. The reports were well detailed and several have resulted in court proceedings. They included the disruption of rallies, assaults on opposition party officials and supporters, and the stoning of vehicles. Schoolchildren were conspicuous offenders in many of these incidents, sometimes quite openly incited by local SWAPO officials. All but two of these reports concerned events in the northern regions; if they were accurate then SWAPO's heartland would have represented an extremely difficult electioneering environment for opposition parties, especially the CoD, allegedly the main target of these attacks. The Electoral Commission published a Code of Conduct which all parties signed but the task of enforcing the Code's provisions was left to the police.



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*Queue outside polling station in Linyanti. Village elders on left monitor the proceedings. EU observer talks to a regional CoD organizer on right.*

## Free and fair?

How accurate a reflection are these results of the electorate's political preferences? SWAPO's opponents made no really serious objections to the way the poll was administered. It is true that the decision not to equip polling stations with copies of the voters roll deprived officials of the most certain method of ensuring against invalid voting. Supposedly indelible ink used for marking voters hands which could easily be washed off and a clumsy system of affidavits for voters without identity documentation may have supplied ample opportunities for multiple voting.

poor training (evident among party agents as well as officials) but discovered no reasons to question the integrity of the Electoral Commission. The voting statistics do not suggest significant incidences of over-voting; as noted above, turnout was proportionately lower and the absolute increase in voting was reasonable given the likely expansion of the electorate in four years and the efforts expended during August and September in registering new voters. Security measures to guard against ballot box tampering were well designed and observers' reports suggest that they were implemented comprehensively.

## Demagogy, SWAPO-style

It is arguable that the behaviour of SWAPO supporters was a reflection of popular sentiment and that the harassment of opposition parties in SWAPO's strongholds did not significantly affect voter behaviour. Such an argument is weakened by the evidence that senior SWAPO leaders encouraged this behaviour. There were also reports of threats of schoolchildren and teachers being threatened they would lose bursaries or jobs if they supported the new party; this again suggests that intimidation was not limited to spontaneous sorts of thuggery by over-enthusiastic rank and file party members. In any case, they would have taken their cue from speeches by SWAPO leaders. As early as April 18th, Sam Nujoma warned his supporters against "dark forces masquerading under different guises - in the name of democracy and freedom."

Similarly, on May 4th, at Elim in the Omusati region, Home Affairs minister Jerry Ekandjo denounced the CoD as a group of "traitors and spies" who wanted to bring back "the government of the white people." On August 19th, Deputy Minister Jeremia Nambinga told a rally in Ohangwena about a clandestine military training programme he said the CoD was running at Onatuwe. On October 30th, Higher Education Minister Nahas Angula produced a document at an Oshakati rally which, he said, contained a confession signed by the Congress of Democrats' leader, Ben Ulenga, from the time when he was captured as a SWAPO guerrilla in 1976. If authentic, the document would suggest that Ulenga gave his interrogators very comprehensive details about SWAPO's military organization. This was the second accusation directed at Ulenga in two months: in September, SWAPO's newspaper, *Namibia Today*, suggested that the CoD leader had stolen money when he was the secretary-general of the mineworkers' union. It was subsequently confirmed that Ulenga had received a loan from the union and that this money had been repaid.

Meanwhile, Ignatius Shixwameni, until his resignation from SWAPO in early October Deputy-Minister of Information, became a second focus of *ad-hominem* invective at SWAPO rallies. Shixwameni, former leader of the Namibian National Students' Organization during the 1980s, announced his departure from the ruling party with a condemnation of its "near political cannibalism" - a reference to his clash with the President at a Central Committee meeting earlier in the year. SWAPO, he said, had lost its vision and its leadership had become animated principally by their schemes for self-enrichment. He himself remained a communist, he said. Two weeks later Shixwameni joined the CoD, exposing himself to the full ire of his former

colleagues. Prime Minister Geingob told a meeting in Tsumeb that the CoD should now be known as the Congress of Deserters. Shixwameni was himself guilty of corruption, Geingob said, referring to the lists of assets which Shixwameni had published detailing the gifts he himself had received in office. Seeking, apparently, merely to trivialize and defuse Shixwameni's broader intention of placing the question of SWAPO leaders' own corrupt practices on the table (see Paul Kalenga, "The Congress of Democrats," *SAR*, Vol. 15, No. 1) Geingob guffawed instead that Shixwameni evidently thought alcohol was an asset for he had included two bottles of vodka on his list!

Shixwameni's successor in the Ministry was announced on October 17th. In a canny move the President announced the appointment of Namibian National Farmers' Union leader Gabes Shihepo. Shihepo had recently headed a well attended demonstration to State House to complain about the treatment of farmworkers and the slow progress of land reform. Bringing critics on board in this fashion probably represented more effective electioneering practice than rhetorical assaults on their honour.

### Policies and patriotism

For many voters, however, the most persuasive aspect of SWAPO electioneering would not have been the personalized rhetoric directed at its opponents, but rather the power that a SWAPO organized event could embody. President Nujoma, for example, habitually used his official Falcon jet to travel to regional centres before being transported from one rally to another by army helicopters. SWAPO's use of official transport (for which it paid at discounted rates) was a conspicuous feature of its electioneering. Confronted with such plausible evidence of the party's capacity to summon the state's resources, voters may well

have found it easier to believe such commitments as Nujoma's promise in Omaruru on November that the government would create 50,000 jobs.

Indeed, job creation was one of the most important commitments in SWAPO's manifesto. SWAPO's Plan of Action for Peace, Progress and Prosperity chiefly emphasized the party's achievements in office rather than its plans for the future, however. Its closely printed pages supplied a wealth of statistical information about the activities of the various branches of government. The few policy undertakings referred to in the manifesto include firmer anti-corruption measures, the acceleration of land reform, improvements in police discipline, the reduction of the budget deficit, and job creation through agricultural projects. Under the next administration, HIV-AIDs would become a notifiable disease and 85 per cent of the rural population would obtain access to clean water, the manifesto maintained.

In fairness to SWAPO, the bad-tempered tone of the campaign was almost inevitable, given the emergence of the CoD as an opposition party with a difference in that its formation was prompted by the resignation of a heavyweight SWAPO leader. Ben Ulenga's renunciation of his SWAPO membership in August 1998 was in protest against Nujoma's third term as well as the rising incidence of corruption within government and party; it was not surprising therefore that leadership integrity became the main issue around which CoD built its campaign or that SWAPO responded in kind. At the CoD's campaign launch in Oshakati, Ulenga told the 500 strong audience about politicians who had built comfortable lifestyles for themselves while the country's economy degenerated and government services disappeared. Apart from condemnations of the government's performance, the CoD man-

ifesto called for a reduction in the numbers as well as the privileges enjoyed by public office bearers, a reduction of the defense budget in favour of training more policemen, bureaucratic rationalizations in education to supply the savings to fund free "basic" teaching, and more far-reaching land redistribution. The government's plans for a supplementary budget also afforded ad-

its ranks, then questions should be asked about the "undertakings (which) were given to (secretary-general) Lukas Pohamba and the president of the country during their secret meeting with the security forces in 1966 when they briefly returned to the country." Moreover, who betrayed the brave comrades of Ongulumbashe? Who was responsible for "making Unita what it is to-

in exile as "sole legitimate representatives" of Namibia's people.

At the same time, SWAPO itself is no monolith and the 10 years of liberal democracy may have helped to some degree to strengthen its own internal democratic practices. An incident at its electoral convention was suggestive. According to SWAPO norms, the President nominates the first 30 of the 72 candidates on SWAPO's National Assembly list. When Nujoma's list was read out it was evident that five ministers had been omitted: Hidepo Hamutenya (trade), Nangolo Mbumba (Finance), Nahas Angula (Higher Education), Ben Amathila (Information), and Helmut Angula (Agriculture). After the omitted ministers had threatened to withdraw from the convention, the President felt compelled to make a special plea to delegates to include them in the other 42 nominations. The convention complied with the President's injunction, but indicated its disapproval of the nomination proceedings by successfully objecting to the party leadership's assumption that the Presidential nominees would fill the first thirty positions. It took the delegates most of the weekend to accommodate the main party and government notables within the top 50. Richard Kapelwa Kabanjani, Minister of Youth and Sport, was one casualty in this process as was the deputy-minister of energy, Klaus Dierks. Another indication of the convention's independence was that one of the ministers left off Nujoma's list, Amathila, obtained the most votes. For democracy watchers, it was one of the better moments in Namibia's third election.

**S A R**

**Omission:** *We failed to point out, in the Ian Spears Angola article on p.7 of SAR Vol. 15 No. 1, that Ian Spears has published a longer article on the same subject in the Fall 1999 issue of International Journal.*



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*Inside a polling station in East Caprivi. The poll is in an old disused school.*

ditional mileage for CoD speechwriters: the new National Assembly would consider a budget that would earmark N\$173 million of its N\$360 million total for the military and provide nothing for expenditure on medicines despite the depletion of stocks in state pharmacies.

Nonetheless, the furore surrounding the Ulenga "confession" distracted media attention from such sober issues. Ulenga was swift to retaliate. The document was a forgery, he maintained, as was demonstrably evident from the phraseology it used. This was a view which seemed to be shared by most commentators. In any case, Ulenga continued, if SWAPO was going to raise the issue of traitors within

day" (a reference to SWAPO's early collaboration with Unita)?

Very swiftly, electioneering ceased to concern itself with policy and instead focussed on issues of patriotism and legitimacy; in northern Namibia particularly, the political fears and social tensions engendered by a brutal liberation war still cast a long shadow. "SWAPO is my mother, SWAPO is my father, We will never forget SWAPO," the party's Young Pioneers chanted at the opening of the organization's electoral convention on October 22nd. Some of SWAPO's older leaders, it seems, have yet to move away from their historical assumption of the status conferred on them