

ARGUS GROUP NO 19

F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

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"It is absolutely pointless to have a whites only election. It won't prove anything and is simply a waste of time. What is needed is a general, fair and free election in which all parties can participate on a non-discriminatory basis. The policy of my party is inclusive, not exclusive - everybody must participate in that election; exile movements and their leaders as well." The man saying this, (and his party), is not participating in the forthcoming whites only election on the 6 May, even though he is white and comes from the most prominent nationalist party supporting family in his area. In fact, before breaking away he occupied the most powerful position in the white political establishment in his region. He is Dirk Mudge, leader of the Republican Party in Namibia and Chairman of the DTA.

"I would welcome a whites only election. In this way we could settle the issue of open schools once and for all." Speaking is Kosie Pretorius, leader of the Nationalist Party in Namibia. Kosie and his supporters are fairly confident that they could wipe the floor with the Republican Party of Mudge and his supporters on the schools issue."

After a week in Windhoek, it became clear that one of the key options for whites was to participate in a general election in order to establish what the distribution of political support in Namibia as a whole is; or to participate in a white "ethnic" election to determine the degree to which prejudice and racism had changed or been confirmed.

Of course, any resemblance to neighbouring South Africa is purely a matter of co-incidence. On the 6 May, here in South Africa, a mandate would have been given for "quicker reform", "visions", "broad-based coalitions", "reform through security", "practical partition" or some such white electoral profundities.

That is the important difference between us !

But back to Namibia. The interim government suffers from a severe crisis of legitimacy and credibility, and one is struck by the candour and frankness with which they concede this. They govern without a mandate and without having had an opportunity to test the support of the people on whose behalf, and for whose benefit they claim to govern. This is not a group of white politicians using a white vote to govern everybody else who did not vote for them. These are white and black politicians, some with limited mandates, others with none, trying to govern Namibia under the heel of Pretoria and the contempt of the liberation movements. From the left, they are denounced as "stooges" tied to the financial and military apron strings of Pretoria, and from the right, they are accused of being "sell-outs" betraying the birthright of the white man in Africa. And there are some able and interesting characters among them : Dirk Mudge, an enigmatic politician whose rough-tough exterior conceals an extremely agile mind. As an Afrikaner, he has traversed political terrains which some of his people have not dreamt existed. Leaving the protection of his own tribal institutions, he has moved out and invited traditional people with primordial loyalties into modern day politics.

In his camp he also has a former vice-president of SWAPO, as well as a representative who was based in Sweden for 10 years and speaks fluent Russian and Swedish. Also in the interim government, but not of Mudge's party, is a Minister of Education fluent in 12 languages, (he speaks a beautiful idiomatic Afrikaans), and is a Tswana born in Pretoria and now a naturalized Namibian. And then, of course, former exiles like Shipanga, Katjioungua, and Kozonquizi

But outside of the interim government and not inside SWAPO are constituency politicians like Peter Kalangula of Ovamboland and Garoëb of the Damaras, who feel as strongly as SWAPO about the lack of legitimacy of the interim government. Those of SWAPO to whom I spoke, are passionate in their insistence that there can be no credible government in Namibia as long as South Africa dominates the region militarily and financially, and that can never happen as long as Pretoria cannot resolve South Africa's domestic problems and, as a consequence, it defines Namibia as part of its security interests. In short, Namibia forms part of Pretoria's "total strategy" against the "total onslaught" and anyone collaborating with Pretoria is "selling out."

And so, we have a deadlocked country - Pretoria drawing the circus arena within which the contending parties posture and live out their aggressive fantasies towards one another. They are either going to go on accepting this as inevitable or some internal dynamic is going to emerge which can bring about enough internal solidarity to challenge the deadlock. How that comes about must at least involve a demonstrable degree of military and financial independence and a government that results from a general election in which all parties, DTA, SWAPO, SWANU, Kalangula, Charoeb, NP, have competed for support without prejudice and intimidation.

It is one of those numbing ironies of history that when the interim government cautiously flexed its muscles in that direction, the representative of the South African government, with the approval of the President, warned that the interim government was not "broadbased enough to be representative of the majority of people in Namibia" ! This coming from a President who was elected by 50 members of his own party caucus, in a country of +- 30 million people and who has called an all white election for 17% of the total population in which only white parties seek a mandate on how to deal with the blacks of South Africa. "Broadbased and not representative" - my foot !