

De Beers Taken To Task ...

OUR beautiful country is endowed with rich natural resources, the most important of which are diamonds, rated today as the highest quality gems in the world. Despite claims that prices of diamonds have dropped by 41 per cent per cent at De Beers London Based Central Selling Organisation (CSO), this so-called endangered industry is today one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, especially the off-shore diamond exploration.

Last year, diamonds worth of N\$2,5 billion were exported from Namibia. The magical question is: Are the people of this country really benefiting from the sales of their resources, especially diamonds? Far from that! Today, as in the past, the Namibian diamond industry is monopolised and manipulated by one company only, namely, De Beers and its subsidiary, Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM). It has been plundering the diamond resources of our country for the past 30 years and still wants to continue this ruthless exploitation.

Of course, there is now Namdeb, which is a partnership between De Beers and the Government of Namibia, but the truth is that the latter has no real say in this joint venture. The staff component at all strategic positions in the production and management sectors are reserved for foreign nationals, especially South Africans, while Namibians are placed at politically oriented management positions, such as General Manager: Human Resource Development where they can easily handle the Government and trade unions in case of a strike action. There is serious lack of Affirmative Action, there is racial

discrimination and the rate of theft paying for illegal diamond deals, is on the increase.

Of late, workers at Namdeb received notices of voluntary retrenchments under the pretext of getting rid of its old exploitative migrant labour system. The crux of the matter is that, Namdeb is not comfortable with the latest joint venture partnership between the Namibian Government and Russia to penetrate and revamp the diamond industry. Therefore, to make things a bit difficult and complicated for the Government, they concocted a retrenchment strategy since they know that this will be a bitter pill for the Government to swallow.

With the retrenchment of over two thousand works following the closing of TCL's operations, it will be hard for the Government to allow another huge number of retrenched workers to join the already ever increasing army of unemployed Namibians. This arm-twisting strategy of multi-national companies is also aimed at softening the Government on the issue of employing foreign nationals.

It is a fact that Namdeb is one of the companies with the highest number of foreign nationals in its services. This was recently confirmed by Mr Paul Chapeaux, General manager at Namdeb on an NBC Talk Show. He justified the move as being due to lack of specialists and experienced cadres to fill positions now occupied by foreign nationals. But many employees of Namdeb refuted this statement describing it as a smokescreen aimed at justifying the perpetuation of white supremacism in the company. 'There are hundreds of Namibians who worked for the

company for over 15 - 20 years, who are in actual fact doing the donkey work but never considered for promotion to managerial level', is what most of the employees said.

Mr Peter Naholo, Secretary General of the Mine Workers Union of Namibia, recently warned Namdeb that MUN will not hesitate to call on employees of Namdeb to strike if the company persistently refuse to rectify its Human Resource Development Policy. Mr Naholo condemned the old practice of migrant labour system by CDM and pointed out that it is high time that the Government seriously consider reviewing the operations of Namdeb in this country.

Namdeb always claims to be that biggest tax-payer to the Government coffers, which might be true. But a closer look at the matter reveals that the real income of the company is impossible to check since the sorting, processing, evaluation and marketing of Namibian diamonds is conducted by experts connected, directly or not, with De Beers.

As far back as 1994, Namdeb undertook to consider the possibility of establishing a cutting and polishing factory at Okahandja. We welcomed the news that the factory is to be opened in August this year, if at all. But why did it take so long to fulfil this obligation? The answer is easy. De Beers is not too eager to assist Namibians in creating our own diamond industry because this would undermine the company's grip on our economy and its domination in the country. This is also the hidden agenda behind the lack of Affirmative Action in Namdeb.

Happily though, De Beers is not

the only diamond mining company in the world. There are other reliable partners who unlike De Beers, are sincerely interested in the upliftment of Namibia's diamond industry and not in perpetuating its present semi-colonial status.

A step in the right direction, for instance, the Joint Protocol Agreement signed recently by President Sam Nujoma with his Russian counterpart, President Boris Yeltsin, which inter-alia includes the joint exploration, processing and marketing of Namibian diamonds by Russian private companies. In addition, an article in The Namibian recently disclosed that the Russian Alrosa company is

prepared to make considerable investments in Namibia. In my view, the immediate implementation of this project will be to the benefit of Namibia and its people and should be encouraged and supported by us all.

Our Government has every right and even obligation to protect national interests and oppose De Beers's domination and monopoly in the country's diamond industry, by amending, if necessary, existing laws and agreements and also by entering into just and profitable partnerships internationally.

**SACKY NAMUGONGO
WINDHOEK**

Another Side Of Namibia

YES, I am a German national and came to Namibia almost two years ago. Yes, my car was broken into, my camera stolen, I was attacked by three armed men while sleeping in my house, pupils I trusted stole from me and my maid, whom I was very fond of, stole from my friends when they were staying with me.

But, when I got stuck in the sand I did not have to ask for help - somebody just stopped, towed me and left with a smile. I have never had to change a wheel myself because a man would come along and offer his help; when I caused an accident with my car, neither the lady I had injured nor her husband gave me one angry word. Some time ago my Landrover suddenly died in Swakopmund. I rang the Landrover Agent who

"made a plan" and came within a few minutes. They towed it, drove it to the Auto-Electrical Shop and within a very short time during which he was cramped under the car, he (the gentleman from Auto-Electrical Shop) found that one starter cable had come off and fixed it. Neither he nor the Landrover Agent would take any money although it was a busy Saturday morning and other customers were waiting. It also turned out that one of the men had in the past helped me to change a wheel.

Does this not make up for the theft and even violence? This is another side of Namibia!

**AMEI BINNS
WALVIS BAY**