

# Eradicating The Past Will Affect Tourism

"REQUEST to look in the possibility of changing street names in the town of Swakopmund". This is the heading of a letter dated January 21, 2000 to the town clerk, which J Ngolombe signed as "Concerned resident of Swakopmund and wrote inter alia "....have noticed with great concern that our town has still a larger number of colonial street names..."

"Dear Mr Ngolombe, if ever there is a town in Namibia with 100 per cent colonial past it is Swakopmund and you probably did not realise that January 27 was the Kaiser's birthday! Had the British not occupied Walvis Bay

and so denied Germany its natural harbour, Swakopmund would still be barren desert and you would not be living in Mondesa.

After World War I, Swakopmund lost the activity and income of a harbour. Over the years the earning base had to be changed. The temperature and climate helped to make it an educational centre and tourist attraction.

For the latter the preservation and maintenance of buildings from the colonial past create an atmosphere which is unique on the African continent. These buildings are not only photographed or painted by European,

Asian or American visitors but also Africans! A notable part of this heritage are the street names, which are the focal point of many a tourist's camera.

The tourist trade is the main pillar of the economy of Swakopmund and hundreds if not thousands of our citizens are dependent on it, as well as numerous handicraft sellers from African countries with their stands near state house.

As a trade unionist you should be more concerned about: - the massive unemployment in the town, and the whole of Namibia; - the AIDS crisis; - the shortage of classrooms and suitably qualified teachers with the accompany-

ing dismal pass rate after ten years of independence; - the living conditions of inhabitants in squatter camps like the one next to Mondesa; - the increasing crime rate, also in Swakopmund; rather than wasting money you have not earned on changing street names and thereby sabotaging the uniqueness of a town, that you have not founded, but take the liberty of living in.

If you want to eradicate the colonial and apartheid past, you will put Namibia with its present infrastructure from prime position in Africa right to the end of the queue. As a consequence you will have very few friends left

among your comrades. As a taxpayer, investor and resident of old Swakopmund, I am under the impression that we who live here and the business community who create wealth and well-being for all inhabitants, have no say in the issue of street names and yet everything is made to look very democratic. In the end we will be asked to foot the bill for an unnecessary and costly act. How is one to interpret the daily plea by NBC on reconciliation other than by cynicism? Hoping that sanity will prevail.

**ERICH FORTSCH, Swakopmund**