

Small Is Beautiful, Mr Hanekom

MINISTER Gert Hanekom has been reported as advising the Hospitality Association of Namibia (HAN) at the organisation's recent congress, that it should decide whether it wants a "free, unregulated market" or a regulated one. It is a point that the Prime Minister made some time ago. As the Prime Minister and Minister Hanekom have both said, HAN cannot have it both ways.

Minister Hanekom also requested that our association and HAN should try to reach agreement on the minimum number of rooms that an establishment should have to be recog-

nised under new legislation. We must point out that Minister Hanekom is essentially advocating a regulated market, simply for the sake of what he hopes will be some degree of peace in the industry. But such a compromise will not bring peace, because it will not address the one question that we have always posed: Why should successful small businesses be driven out of business, just because they are small?

Mr Johnnie Hamman, the new chairperson of HAN, is reported as say-

ing that HAN has reduced its demand for a minimum number of rooms, from ten to five "to enable new legislation to be passed". In saying this, he pretends that HAN have made a generous concession. But it is far from being generous; in fact, it is cleverly constructed so that, if it were implemented, it would wipe out the businesses of 95 per cent of our members, not to mention the businesses of many others who are not members of our association. Perhaps we should share in this

spirit of generous compromise, by stating that although we cannot accept the wiping out of the business of 95 per cent of our members, we will accept the destruction of 65 per cent? Or would 55 per cent be sufficient for Mr Hamman and HAN?

What Mr Hamman and some members of HAN are proposing is, in fact, much more than the destruction of, say, thirty or fifty successful small businesses. They are proposing that new legislation should outlaw the prospect of most

Namibians ever being able to share in the accommodation industry of their own country in an entrepreneurial way. They are effectively proposing that no homestead in the north of Namibia should be able to offer accommodation to tourists. They are effectively proposing that no resident of, say, Rundu or Otjimbingwe should employ the facilities at her or his disposal to offer accommodation commercially. They are effectively proposing that no Namibian without access to capital re-

sources of at least half a million dollars (at interest rates of above 20 per cent) should be able to enter the accommodation industry. And they are demanding that the Namibian state should ratify this discrimination against its own citizens.

We call upon the media and the public to recognise that this issue is not simply a matter of a disagreement with HAN and the Budget and Home Accommodation Association. It is a matter of principle: and that principle involves the question of whether or

not the majority of Namibians, who were denied meaningful access to economic activity under apartheid, will continue to be denied it under new legislation of the type proposed by those who benefited - and still benefit - under the outdated Ordinance 20 of 1973. If members of HAN are successful in their demands, then economic reactionaries in other sectors will be encouraged to attempt the same.

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Mad Cow ...