

Third Term Opens Up Can Of Worms

THE debate about the third term of office for President Sam Nujoma has dominated the media and many a public fora in Namibia as Mr Nujoma's present tenure to the presidency slowly draws to a close.

Some people and organisations are either giving unqualified support, devoid of factual reasoning, or giving quite unconvincing reasons like 'he has the experience, he is still young, he is THE father of the liberation struggle', etc, in support of additional terms for the incumbent. As a black Namibian, and probably echoing the sentiments of like-minded Namibians, I see this as hogwash although people are entitled to their opinions.

A most disturbing turn to the debate dawned with Werner Lister's arrival in the camp of the unqualified supporters. This simply amplifies the perception that the black and presently disadvantaged have been holding all along which suggests that the independence and the concomitant policy of reconciliation (which was forced down Swapo's throat by the Western Contact group through the 1982 Principles) has effectively maintained the status quo with fairly insignificant wind-up dressing. For all practical purposes it resembles icing sugar on a rotten cake. One should not be surprised if more formerly advantaged come out in public and join the List wagon since theirs is an ostensible fear that should the President step down, and a more radical leader take over, their cozy corners (presently cushioned by so-called reconciliation) will be shaken. This is fear of the unknown, or at best a marriage of convenience, isn't it?

As a Namibian who has spent the best part of my life under oppression, it is really not of concern to me who serves as a president and for how long, as long as the aspirations and hopes which many of us countered during our entire youth to fight for liberation are catered for, and given undiluted attention and preference. Also as long as tangible changes are brought to bear, exclusively aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the black majority.

I would agree that the constitution can easily be changed to allow for multiple terms of presidency. (For some reason the debate has been dubbed "Third Term Debate", but

Swapo has not yet clarified whether if amended it sought a third term, fourth term or even life presidency. Therefore, I prefer to talk of the multiple tenure of office.)

In any event, there are issues adversely affecting the livelihoods of the black majority on a daily basis, while benefiting the perpetually privileged minority, which could also be improved through constitutional amendments only. Some are obviously more important than the presidency and it is really on condition that these are effected that we as blacks ought to support any constitutional amendment.

Therefore, Mr Nujoma and Mr Geingob if the constitution is amended to allow additional tenure for the President, why not also amend it for the following issues to be realised:

a) A meaningful national programme of land reform whereby the state is in a position to expropriate land, minimum agro-economic units are defined and excessive land expropriated with compensation at real (not inflated) values. Willing-buyer-willing seller has failed dismally and Government's hands are tied because of constitutionally enshrined private property rights which have allowed the likes of Mr List to own a host of farms. Our parents in communal areas remain poor and as landless as ever.

b) Affirmative action. This policy remains ill-defined and vague, a paper concept. It is still business as usual in the employment market. Thus far there has been a clear lack of will to tackle this issue again because of the constitutional free market situation and respect for people's rights. Therefore, a codified, well defined programme is needed which could include reserving jobs for

blacks, in-service training schemes, tax incentives for industries embarking on affirmative action initiatives, and, most importantly, a clear-cut definition of the concept "formerly disadvantaged", among others. Are Katutura and Khomasdal equally disadvantaged in the job market, why is it an exception to the rule to see a black face at Namport, Telecom, some banks, AirNamibia counters or in any industry?

This state of affairs is certainly not going to change unless the state intervenes and regulates it. The quota system has been applied in the U.S. and has served our African American brothers and sisters excellently. Zimbabwe has launched a black empowerment drive after 17 years of laissez-faire.

c) National reconciliation. This exercise should be defined in practical terms and be supported by a public relations campaign. Should I still be humiliated by a two-year old Afrikaner child when I take my family to Von Bach Dam for the weekend "Mamma, mamma wat soek die hotnots hierso?"; if my wife and I go to watch the brave warriors against Zimbabwe, should an intoxicated Coloured guy be telling me "...geen swart kaffir gemors sit langs my nie?"; will people at Gobabis continue to be denied access to renting a flat which they can afford because they are of wrong colour? This only shows that the present policy does not work as it is supposed to and makes it a paper concept.

Any reconciliation which ignores the past is meaningless since it is the very past which necessitates reconciliation.

d) Education. There is a dire need for creating fully-funded state schools of excellence in formerly disadvantaged areas, and in those parts of the rural

regions commonly known as communal areas. None of the schools black people have access to have the same level of resource endowment as Windhoek Hoerskool, for example, and can certainly not produce the same results and pupils of equal calibre. Such schools can serve as breeding grounds for black scientists and technologists by catering for above average black children who otherwise could not have gained access to quality education because of prohibitive costs; distance from the regions since most are urban-based; or the attitudes of exclusively white managements of the former whites-only schools where these exist.

Arguments of this nature will certainly and immediately be branded as inflammatory, counter-productive, racist, hate speech or even threatening the peace and stability we have been enjoying for the last seven years. However, all is not well for the black person who does not live in peace and stability. History has proven that peace built on the demise of the majority is generally short lived.

Therefore the question is what is more important in your opinion Swapo Elders, Mr List, and Nanso?

1) Changing the constitution to allow continued presidency for Mr Nujoma for rather dogmatic reasons; or

2) Changing the constitution to redress issues affecting our daily lives and that of the future black generations; or

3) The former on condition that the latter is guaranteed?

As the debate continues, please let us qualify tangibly why we support or do not support the amendment of the constitution.

DANDANI BOOIS, KATUTURA



'WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT?' ... President Sam Nujoma