

# Winds of change

**Military governments and one-party states are rapidly giving way in southern Africa as country after country introduces multi-party elections. As South Africa's own first universal franchise poll approaches MOIRA LEVY looks at the lessons to be learned from our neighbours further north.**

THE winds of change have amounted to something of a hurricane in this part of the world in the past two years. Harold Macmillan would have been swept off his feet.

Since Namibia set the multi-party elections ball rolling in November 1989, everyone is doing it – or talking about doing it – and the idea has spread north and east across the sub-continent.

Latest is an announcement from the ruling military council of Lesotho that the first general election in 22 years will be held in March, the same month that Swaziland is also promising to hold some form of direct poll. And even Malawi's president-for-life, Hastings Banda, has surprised the world by announcing a referendum on the future of one-party rule, also to be held in March. This follows the setting up of an opposition Alliance for Democracy in October last year.

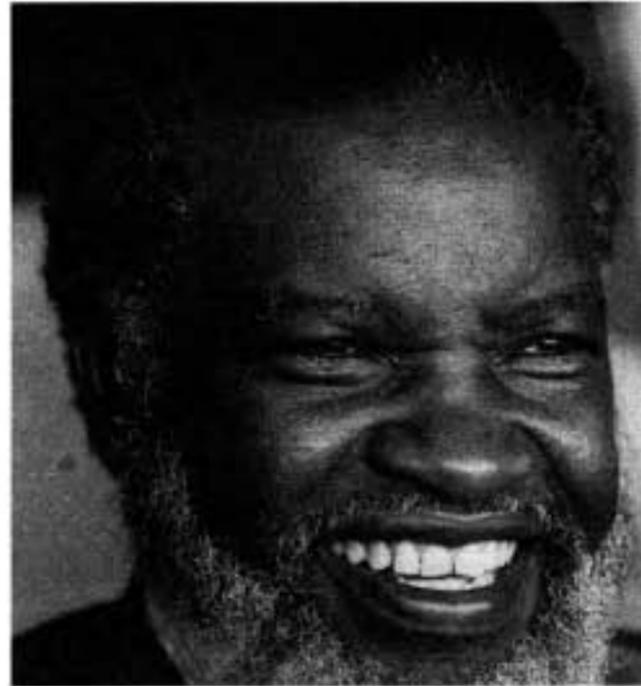
And of course there are those who have gone beyond the talk, the referendums, the promises. As South Africa's first multi-party, non-racial election approaches we would do well to look to our neighbours who have recently held fully fledged one-person-one-vote national elections for lessons in how it's done – or how it's not done.

Notwithstanding the considerable economic, social and political differences between South Africa and the surrounding countries, this country does not stand in isolation, and we cannot afford to ignore the lessons presented by the examples all around us.

First and foremost it is important to note that this change of political heart does not come out of the blue. The world is fast becoming impatient with a continent that displays a seemingly limitless capacity to absorb aid without translating it into development and growth. In the context of the post-Cold War shift of focus from the devel-

oping world to the struggles of eastern Europe, Africa risks becoming increasingly marginalised unless it can demonstrate that it can take up its rightful place in the international community.

While the multi-party elections that have been held in the recent past is an encouraging trend, they have a lot to do with the demands of international donors for evi-



**1989: Sam Nujoma of Namibia now leads one of Africa's success stories.**

dence of a shift away from one-party rule and they need to go beyond an electoral exercise aimed largely at satisfying funders' criteria.

Put even more bluntly, demonstrating intent to the world by holding an election does not translate into a fully-functioning and legitimate democracy; South Africa cannot be reminded often enough that a one-person-one-vote election is not a magic formula that can conjure up a democracy.

Angola is the most glaring example of this to date. Perhaps the first lesson to be learned from this desperately sorry case is that a commitment to holding multi-party elections requires, above all, a prior commitment by all participating parties to accept its outcome.

While Unita's Jonas Savimbi went on record repeatedly before the September 1992 poll pledging to respect the result, he lost no time in storming off in a sulky huff when the ruling MPLA's victory became known,

launching a fresh round of civil war with renewed vigour, despite categorical UN recognition that the poll was free and fair.

This leaves Angola in an impossible impasse. Unita increasingly holds the upper hand militarily; the more it drags the country back to a prolonged and ghastly war the more such political support as it may have had is further diminished. This in turn consolidates popular support for the government while at the same time undermining its ability to rule.

This brings us to the second glaring lesson to be learned: even after the poll Savimbi still possessed the means to return to the battlefield. While it cannot be seriously disputed that the rebel Unita army had backing from some South African and Zairean elements, the fact remains that promises to disband the warring armies in Angola and unite them into one single force by the time of the election came to nothing. The UN was not equipped to disarm either army or carry out the consolidation plans.

Hence the third lesson South Africans can learn from Angola's tragedy: the UN did not have the resources – indeed, some might say the will – to ensure a peaceful transition. The UN had 210 military observers and 77 police observers spread out across this huge country, falling far short of the authorised 350 and 316 respectively. In other words, a country with a population 10 times the size of Namibia was allocated a tenth of the number of UN observers.

Senior journalist and Africa expert on *The Guardian* newspaper, Victoria Brittain, reports that soon after the fighting broke out UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali requested President Dos Santos to meet Savimbi in Geneva for talks. She wrote then: 'The secretary-general's initiative follows three months in which thousands of Angolans have been killed and tens of thousands ousted from their homes. The new government which emerged from the multi-party elections has been prevented by a vast military offensive on the part of Dr Savimbi's Unita troops from exercising its administration in roughly three-quarters of the country.'

Brittain argues that by offering Savimbi a meeting, he is 'effectively colluding with the Unita leader's refusal to abide by the democratic process' and says the invitation 'ignores the flagrant illegality of Dr

# raising a storm



**1991: Frederick Chiluba of Zambia took over reins of power peacefully.**

Savimbi's behaviour'.

Here are the facts: a huge enthusiastic turnout, with a poll of 91 percent of the population, gave the MPLA 57,8 percent of the vote. President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos won 49,57 percent of the presidential vote, and immediately agreed to hold another run-off presidential election against Savimbi to satisfy the sceptics. Nevertheless, he won more of the popular vote than Bill Clinton (with his 43 percent) – which raises the question, would America, the UN and the international community as a whole have sat back, as they did in Angola, if former president Bush refused to accept the results?

The international community also failed in its responsibilities to Africa in the Kenyan election. Despite clear evidence of massive ballot rigging – publicly acknowledged by outside observers – the international monitoring committees chose to accept a second class solution, hastily accepting the outcome of the poll. Faced with clear evidence of a regime that stopped at nothing to return to power, the foreign observers obviously decided to throw in the towel and leave it to the Kenyans to decide.

Prior to the poll it was common knowledge that some opposition nominees had been beaten up, bought off for about R1,5 million a parliamentary seat, even kidnapped. As a result, 17 candidates from President Daniel arap Moi's ruling Kenya

African National Union party (Kanu) were elected unopposed.

Ballot boxes arrived late or unsecured, others were found stuffed with ballot papers pre-marked in favour of Kanu. Polling stations opened hours later than scheduled. The government is said to have refused to issue identity cards to around three million young people, the youth that Kanu feared would no longer accept the old order. There were also reports of authorities refusing to grant the required permits for opposition rallies and suggestions of Somali refugees in the north eastern province being allowed to vote – as long as they voted for Kanu.

Kenya's elections present a set of lessons for South Africa. Just as Moi had gloomily predicted, tribalism erupted as a major obstacle. Ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley in the west between Moi's minority Kalenjin tribe, allegedly with the help of the army, and other groups left unknown numbers dead. Many Kenyans believe the clashes were instigated by the government to prove Moi's repeated declaration that multi-partyism cannot work and can only lead to bloodshed.

The Kikuyu and Luos, the country's largest national groups, voted solidly for the opposition – pointing to another lesson that South Africans would do well to heed. If the opposition had spent campaigning time directing their challenges at Moi instead of engaging in vitriolic and damaging attacks on each other they could have put up a joint front and, without doubt, won the election.

The massive and very popular Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (Ford), formed soon after a ban on opposition parties was lifted in December 1991, quickly degenerated into mudslinging between the octogenarian Oginga Odinga and the younger Kenneth Matiba. The party spilt into Ford-Asili under Matiba and Ford-Kenya under Odinga, and both of these wrestled with a third party, the Democratic Party, led by Mwai Kibaki. The result: the three parties won a total of 3,3 million votes compared to Kanu's 1,9 million, but Moi, ruler since 1978, was sworn in for another term of office.

As a result, it appears, many Kenyans direct their anger not so much at Moi himself – after all he was doing nothing more than was already expected of him – but at the opposition for their internecine squabbles.

Kenya could be facing years of degenerat-

ing chaos and collapse as the disappointment of the failed attempt to rid the country of its dictatorial leader sets in. Or, ironically, it could be on the brink of a real shift in the direction of democracy. The election campaign had the president for the first time setting aside his usual arrogance and indifference and appealing to the electorate for votes. His awareness that a joint opposition effort would have swept him aside must be a sobering influence. In addition, Moi lost almost his entire cabinet in the election, including his closest confidantes.



**1993? Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique is preparing for multi-party elections.**

Notwithstanding his New Year prorogation of the first multi-party parliament, a day after it opened, there are the signs that while the elections failed to remove him from power, Moi may be for the first time accountable, vulnerable and forced to be sensitive to the strong parliamentary opposition he now faces.

Does this then suggest that there is hope in Africa for democracy after all? Look at Zambia. After his crushing defeat, veteran leader Kenneth Kaunda, brandishing his trademark white handkerchief, wiped away a tear or two along with 27 years in power, and handed over peacefully to Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multi-Party Democracy in 1991.

And Namibia can be hailed as the success

was to refurbish and restructure agricultural development to expand exports and to work towards an increase in domestic savings.

A third concern was how African countries, individually and collectively, could engage the international community. It was emphasised that debt relief was a key to economic recovery, that trade protectionism should be on the agenda and resources to assist African countries in economic and social development and the enhancing of efficiency in international organisations should be included. The major stress ought to be on helping Africa to help itself.

The second half of the seminar focused on South Africa – its internal economic and political problems and its place in southern Africa and Africa. To assist the Interaction Council a number of South Africans were invited to address the seminar – including the State President, ANC deputy president Walter Sisulu, (Mandela was in the US attending Bill Clinton's inauguration), Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the IFP, the PAC's Barney Desai and the DP's Colin Eglin. Others from different organisations included Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu of the Independent Development Trust, Judge Goldstone and the Rev Frank Chikane of the South African Council of Churches.

If it wasn't clear before the meeting started, it became crystal clear that South Africa's economy was in considerable distress and this would limit South Africa's ability to meet the unrealistic expectations of many in Africa. On the other hand, it was clear that South Africa had many advantages in terms of transport systems, technology, infrastructure and the like, which would certainly make it a major actor on the continent.



Lord Callaghan with Kenneth Kaunda and President De Klerk

ERIC MILLER

Although members of the Interaction Council were left with an impression of a highly complex situation, there was nevertheless an upbeat mood regarding the possibility of the renewal of multi-party negotiations leading to elections within 12 to 15 months. It has to be said, however, that neither the IFP nor the PAC shared the optimism of the government and the ANC.

**I**t is difficult to assess the full significance of the summit. One thing is certain – the more exposure that South Africa gets to world leaders and people of influence, the better it will be for its own re-entry into the international community.

In the second place, the question of the marginalisation of Africa is extremely

serious and it is by no means certain that Africa has convinced the rest of the world that it deserves to be taken seriously. For too long Africa has been a recipient rather than a contributor. It is clear that if Africa wishes to take its rightful place in the world community, it will have to be far more serious on issues like security, militarisation, economic development, corruption, population control and accountable government.

With economic blocs being formed in different parts of the world, the next five years will determine whether Africa remains in the backwaters of economic development, with all its attendant problems, or whether it begins to assume responsible and efficient government and focused economic efficiency and development.

## Multi-party winds of change in Africa

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story for democracy in Africa, despite its disastrous start to the campaign with allegations of Swapo torture in its camps, a massacre of returning Swapo troops due either to a misunderstanding or worse, and South Africa's efforts at destabilisation by secretly funding anti-Swapo parties to the tune of well over R100 million.

When the crucial Ovamboland vote came in, Swapo had 40 percent to the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance's 38 percent, securing for

itself 57 percent of seats in the constituent assembly.

Later, Swapo's support was quietly consolidated in the first multi-party local government elections held late last year.

Which brings us, finally, to Mozambique. The UN has deployed a task force ten times the size of the group sent to Angola. The UN special envoy to Mozambique, Aldo Ajello, has taken a high profile, declaring he is determined to see a genuine settlement and avoid the mistakes of Angola and elsewhere.

Ajello is not prepared to rush a settlement. For one thing, he insists the international force in Mozambique will not permit the election campaign to begin until all military forces are disarmed and dispersed. Rather than repeat any mistakes, the UN is willing to postpone the October 1993 election date, and Ajello has stipulated that the country must be

given 18 months to prepare for elections.

South Africa could do well to look to these recently war-ridden neighbours for inspiration. Possibly herein lies elements of the formula for electoral success: an international monitoring force that demonstrates its seriousness, partly in its size; an end to private armies, obviously under mutually agreed conditions that guarantee all parties are equally disarmed; a detailed pact, worked through by all participants until no ambiguities can be claimed as excuses for any abrogations of promises; and if necessary, despite our eagerness to reach the long-awaited election day, a softly-softly approach that checks and double checks all loopholes to ensure that our expectations of a democratic future match the future that our country deserves.

Moira Levy works in Idasa's Media Department.