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## After the Dust Has Settled: Continuity or Stagnation?

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**The line between continuity and stagnation is a fine one. Those interested in public policy and accelerating economic growth and job creation have to hope that the election of Hifikepunye Pohamba by the SWAPO Extraordinary Congress will lead to a less authoritarian style of leadership that allows political talent to thrive and policy design and implementation to improve. If not Namibia is destined to remain a middle-income country until 2030.**

Ever since the SWAPO Central Committee of 2-3 April confirmed that an extraordinary congress would be held to decide who will be the party's presidential candidate for the presidential elections later this year, the political air in Namibia has been thick with excitement, anticipation and, of course, intrigue. The defining characteristic about the whole process was that, perhaps for the first time since independence, no one really knew who was going to win this election. A multitude of observers were surprised and impressed by the fact that the ruling party had decided to go for an open run-off between three candidates. In other words, SWAPO was taking a giant step in the process of consolidating democracy in Namibia and in doing so leading the way in Southern Africa.

### Where's the analysis and commentary?

And how exhilarating it was. Even those who do not regularly take an interest in politics seemed to have been excited by the prospect of a real election and change. MTC must have experienced a surge of calls and text messages throughout the run-up and eventual weekend of the vote.

And yet the run-up to the election proved to be almost a campaign without campaigning. Clearly it was not the general public who had to be convinced but the 584 delegates to the Congress. All three candidates were already well-known to party members. This probably explains why high-profile public campaigning failed to take place. Two of the candidates produced small leaflets explaining who they were and what they stood for while the candidate nominated by President Nujoma presented no public profile to speak of.

The media made an honest attempt to stir up interest and debate. *New Era*, *The Namibian* and the *Republikein* all carried in-depth and lively interviews with Angula and Hamutenya while Pohamba refused to be interviewed telling the *Republikein* that the questions would "eat him raw". Martin Mwinga writing in the *New Era* presented a thoughtful analysis of the track records and opinions of Angula and Hamutenya which ignored Pohamba altogether. NBC TV gave only very limited coverage while NBC Radio bravely interviewed candidates and analysts. Since the election, however, things have gone quiet.

### Personalities not policies - a battle for power

The coverage reflected the fact that this was never going to be an election decided on the basis of ministerial track records or policy preferences and ideas. It boiled down to a question of personalities and the balance of power within the party: would delegates simply go along with the President's nominee or was there an appetite for more radical change? The President undoubtedly has enormous prestige as Father of the Nation. He has led the party to three successive victories, increasing its majority at every

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election. Why change a winning formula by questioning his judgement and opt for a candidate that did not have the President's explicit backing? Clearly there would have to be some pretty compelling reasons for change if this phenomenal record was to be ignored.

### **Better half a loaf than none – democracy SWAPO style**

With certain notable exceptions, the campaign was marked by an almost complete absence of people publicly stating their preferences. From an individual point of view, this risk-averse strategy was entirely rational, since no one knew who was going to win. Whilst there may have been prizes for those who stuck their necks out, the downside was risking one's standing in the party at the very least, if one's preferred candidate proved unsuccessful.

This became clear on the Monday night before the Congress when Hamutenya and his deputy at Foreign Affairs, Kaire Mbuende, were unceremoniously dismissed by the President. The fight was clearly getting rough. The sackings were followed up on Tuesday, Africa Day, when the President in an almost unprecedented speech entirely in Oshiwambo raged against Ben Ulenga as "a homosexual without vision" and "imperialists", remarks some observers interpreted as a warning to disgruntled elements thinking of leaving the party of the fate that would await them were they to do so.

Bravely, or foolhardily, Hamutenya announced he would continue his campaign stating that, although it was the President's prerogative to sack him as a minister, his position on the Politburo and as candidate were not subject to the presidential whim. Clearly, however, his campaign had been damaged, the only question being how badly. Nujoma was showing himself to be utterly serious about wanting the party to accept his candidate and using his powers to the fullest extent possible to ensure he had his way. Whether this meant the election was no longer free and fair is a moot point. Those considering voting for Hamutenya had now to ponder their likely fate should he not win, as well as take into account the effect on party unity given this level of opposition by the President, who was after all to continue as President for another year and as President of the party until 2007. Was such cohabitation likely to do the party any good?

We will never know the level of support Hamutenya might have obtained if the President had not take such drastic action. It is possible that Pohamba would have won anyway by a considerable margin. Memories were stirred of the way that SWAPO saw off the challenge from the newly-formed Congress of Democrats in the 1999 national elections by resorting to intimidating tactics. Perhaps this serves as another example of an overestimated threat leading to unwarranted action. Both events suggest a certain lack of confidence in power

Table 1 shows the full results. The end of the Congress resulted in a two-thirds majority for Pohamba (341 out of 508 votes cast), a clear vote of confidence leaving little room for doubt. All candidates accepted the results with good grace and promises to support the winning candidate. No one disputed the result or spoke of ballot rigging.

**Table 1: Results of the SWAPO Extraordinary Congress**

<i><b>Candidate</b></i>	<i><b>Round 1</b></i>	<i><b>Round 2</b></i>
Angula	137	-
Hamutenya	166	167
Pohamba	213	341
Spoilt/discarded	0	5
Total	516	513

Interestingly, although 584 delegates were due to attend the Congress, only 516 voted in the first round and 513 in the second. Clearly some delegates had failed to turn up, while others may have felt they could not vote in the second round.



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## **Angula's supporters vote for continuity**

While Hamutenya bore the brunt of the presidential attack, no such action was taken by the President against the other contender, Nahas Angula. Why this was so remains a mystery. It may be that Angula was never judged to be the threat that Hamutenya was. An alternative theory is that Angula may have been encouraged to stand as an insurance policy just in case the mood for change was strong enough to mean Pohamba would not enjoy a majority. What is significant is that Angula managed to obtain a respectable 137 votes in the first round and that Hamutenya picked up only a single vote more between the first and second rounds, presumably from a previous Angula supporter. Admittedly, there were 4 spoilt votes and one discarded vote which might have been Angula supporters who simply couldn't bring themselves to vote for Pohamba. Had a deal been done? It is hard for outsiders to say. The most likely explanation is that the threat of the example of Hamutenya's ousting and ostracism was probably enough to line up Angula's supporters behind Pohamba in the second round.

## **A one-term president? - Pohamba as president**

So, Hifikepunye Pohamba won exactly two-thirds of the vote in the second round, making him SWAPO's presidential nominee and in all probability Namibia's next president. Pohamba will turn 69 this August and will be approaching 75 by the time the 2009 elections are behind us. No one knows the toll a demanding a job as president may take on a man of his age. Nujoma himself has just turned 75. Ambitious politicians will therefore already be counting on a one-term presidency and lining themselves up for the 2009 elections.

As a previous IPPR paper has suggested, it is hard to make the case that Pohamba has been a dynamic minister and a successful initiator and implementer of policy. That does not, however, mean he cannot be a successful president. Nujoma too has tended to leave policy to ministers and only get involved occasionally on particular initiatives that take his interest. Provided Pohamba can put together a team of capable ministers and ensure they deliver, a successful presidency may ensue. It is possible that, without the prestige and authority of a Nujoma, yet still enjoying Nujoma's confidence, he will usher in a new period of Cabinet and parliamentary government in which people feel much freer to debate and disagree than they do now. There are already signs that opposition parties feel emboldened by his victory.

## **President by proxy – Nujoma stays until 2007**

For over 40 years Pohamba has consistently proven himself Nujoma's most loyal lieutenant and recent events confirm this. Speculation will inevitably arise whether Nujoma will continue to be a force in Cabinet and government as party president until 2007 and possibly beyond. The only criterion for Cabinet membership is to be a member of the National Assembly. As secretary general and member of the National Assembly, Moses Garoëb played an important Cabinet role, although he was not a minister. Nujoma might be expected to do the same. The degree to which President Pohamba will be his own man, rather than simply taking orders from his mentor Nujoma, is a key question that will quickly become apparent during the national election campaign and after 21 March 2005. At this stage there is little sign of new thinking on policy.

## **Who miscalculated what? – Nujoma knows his party**

The run-up to the Congress was marked by many excitedly saying Nujoma had made a serious miscalculation. In the end it was Nujoma who emerged victorious, proving once again that no one knows his party or using power to its limits better than he. The evidence suggests the appetite for change came mainly from the urban, more educated, and intellectual wings of the party, but that the SWAPO party is a broad church which encompasses a wide variety of Namibians for many of whom history, loyalty and risk-aversion are more important than intellectual or policy ideas.

## **A luta continua - what happens to Hidipo?**



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A key question is what will happen to Hamutenya. Will this man - a politician down to his fingertips and someone who has played a long game to achieve his life's ambition of becoming president - now quit politics? History suggests Nujoma is not one to forgive and forget. Once you're out, you're out. Will Pohamba want to bring Hamutenya back into his Cabinet when the time comes to select ministers? Will Hamutenya go off and do something "creative" in business as he suggested many present Cabinet members would do after the next elections? At 64, he is only a term of office younger than Pohamba is now, so him becoming president in the future cannot be entirely written off. Unless he is expelled from the party for misconduct, the next SWAPO Congress is in 2007 suggesting he is likely to hold an important party position until then. When all is said and done Hamutenya has proven he has a solid third of the party as a support base, backing that has been put to the test at a difficult congress.

### **Case not proven - the charges against Hamutenya**

The letter of dismissal sent to Hamutenya on 24 May contains serious allegations about "clandestine political activities", "sowing the seeds of disunity" and "illegal and unauthorised primary elections in Omaheke" which are "contrary to the Swapo Party constitution and procedures". Can such accusations now just be left unproven and unchallenged? If Hamutenya continues to harbour ambitions in the party, this will have to be dealt with one way or another and cannot simply be quietly dropped.

### **A little more apathy and a little less fear - SWAPO at elections**

Nujoma will be a hard act to follow. He has clearly been of immense benefit to SWAPO at the ballot box, his enormous prestige and popularity providing the impetus for many voters around the country. It is unlikely that Pohamba will prove such a significant electoral asset, a factor which could lead to fewer votes for SWAPO or, more likely, a reduced turnout. A vote against SWAPO will no longer be seen as a vote against the Father of the Nation and that, therefore, the transition to a new president is likely to lead to a loosening of the Namibian political fabric.

### **SWAPO unity – never the same again**

Given the difficulties in forging united national liberation movements and the constant interference of outside forces on the continent trying to divide them, SWAPO places extraordinary emphasis on party unity and loyalty. However, there is a fine line between a disciplined party and one that stifles debate and legitimate challenges for power. This Congress showed clearly that, at least as far as personalities are concerned, it is not the monolithic body it often tries to present to the rest of the world. The eventual winner failed to win an overall majority in the first round, despite intense pressure from Nujoma. The second round showed that Hamutenya has a firm bedrock of support among one third of the delegates. For the first time, these were clearly exposed and put under the spotlight.

### **Vision 2030 - What about the policies?**

It has already been pointed out that the campaign featured almost no discussion of policy. Non-delegates will never know exactly what the candidates said in their addresses to Congress last Saturday. In their printed material, only Pohamba explicitly referred to Vision 2030 which aims to turn Namibia into a developed or high-income country by 2030, still safely a generation away and something which politicians now in their early 40s will probably be in power to see come about. Whatever the politicians say, the mathematics and economics of growth are quite clear. Since independence average incomes in Namibia have risen by barely 1% a year. At this rate we will still be a lower-middle income country by 2030 and it will take Namibia another 150 years before it can be classified as a developed or high-income country by international standards. In this sense continuity, the word all candidates were keen to stress, implies failure. Success means stepping up a gear to achieve a rate of growth ten times higher than the current rate - 10% instead of 1% a year. Continuity will have to mean change, improvement and a bolder approach to taking advantages of the opportunities the modern world presents if it is not to mean stagnation.

