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Tor Sellström: You are by far the most influential white political leader in Namibia. In retrospect, how would you describe the involvement by the Nordic countries in Namibia's process towards national independence?

Dirk Mudge: Now that we have solved the problem, it is much easier to give credit to all parties concerned. I must say that the Nordic countries played a very important role. There is no doubt about that. SWAPO played a very important role. It is not easy to admit it, but it is true. South Africa played an important role too, although maybe at a later stage. The South African army played a role, whether we want to admit it or not. The internal parties, all of them, made a contribution. As a result of all that we came up with a solution which I hope can work. I am confident that it can work.

I asked Ahtisaari once whether he really believed that independence would have been a success ten years ago, or for that matter twenty years ago, when the liberation struggle started. I would not want to give an answer, but I think that one can have doubts about that. Maybe the good Lord has a way of allowing things to happen and we all play a role. It is a matter of checks and balances. For instance: Would SWAPO have been allowed to take over by force? If they had just conquered the country, hoisted the flag and taken over the government, would we have had a democracy then?

In many parts of the world, human rights were violated in many ways. Apartheid was one of them. I grew up under that dispensation. Separation and apartheid were more or less a way of life. It was also the case in many other countries in the world. Not only in South Africa or Namibia, but also in the United States of America to a very late stage. Of course, we were never forced to think about the situation. It was nice as long as it lasted. As practised by many people in Namibia, apartheid was not in every way crude. Many of the white farmers cared for their workers. They treated them well, but they were not allowed to sit in the lounge or admitted to the same

schools. I am often asked: Why did I change my policy? Why did I turn my back on apartheid, discrimination and minority rule? Well, because I saw what was happening. I have never had a problem with good relations with black people. I think that we in Namibia really never were allowed by the South African government to inform ourselves properly and become aware of the complexity and the seriousness of the situation until about 1972-73. The country was ruled by South Africa. The South Africans fought several court cases. They came here, Pik Botha and his lawyers. They interviewed people, but never the local politicians. We were never really allowed to participate.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Dr. Waldheim came to visit Namibia. He wanted to meet the local executive committee. I was one of them. For the first time we had the opportunity to talk to people from the outside world about the future of the country. I then had a meeting with Dr. Hilgard Muller, who at the time was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Africa. I expressed the opinion that the local white people must be involved in the determination of the political future of the country. I was not happy with the fact that South Africa was deciding on policy and our future—fighting the battle in the United Nations and other organizations—while we in Namibia had no role to play. As a result of the meeting, I was invited to visit the United Nations General Assembly in 1973, where I came into contact with the international community for the first time. I then came to the conclusion that South Africa was in a 'no-win' situation, because they had the whole international community against them.

Even before I visited the United Nations, I held my first meeting with a black national leader in 1972, namely Clemens Kapuuu, who at that time was the leader of the group that actually started the resistance against the South African government and never accepted any help from them, nor any form of self-rule. The Hereros never accepted that. So I started to talk to a man who was anti-South Africa, anti-apartheid and who was against the home-

land system in every way. I felt that he should be involved. I said that it was no use talking to puppets. We must talk to the people who were critical of the South African government.

Now, coming back to my visit to the United Nations: I sat there and saw how Muller tried to address the General Assembly for days, but he was refused. They wanted to withdraw his credentials. Ultimately, he was allowed, but then all the countries walked out. All the African countries. I suppose also the Nordic countries. I think that it was only the United States and Britain and a few others that remained. When I came back, I asked for an interview with the then Prime Minister, John Vorster. I made it clear to him that there was no way South Africa could solve Namibia's problems. They were arguing about technical and legal points, but they would not accept Namibia's right to self-determination. I insisted that that process should begin immediately. Of course, the Prime Minister wanted to know what the bottom line would be: 'How far are you prepared to go? What concessions are you prepared to make?'

My view has always been that if you negotiate, there is no bottom line. If you really want to come to a solution, you have to go there with an open mind and be prepared to talk and see how far you can get. I have seen people draw lines. Then they move them and draw a new line. It does not work. Anyway, I had problems with my own party colleagues. They were not very enthusiastic about a process involving talks with the black leaders. They said that once you start the process where do you stop? I said that I am prepared to start and that the sky is the limit. This is how we started the Turnhalle conference.

The Turnhalle conference was always labelled a South African sponsored conference, which makes me very sad. It is not true. I had to fight a long and hard battle to get it started. Firstly, with my party colleagues in Namibia and, secondly, with the South African government, who had their own ideas, like: 'Let us first get Ovambo independent, then we can talk. Let us first get the Kavango off, then we can talk. Let us get rid of the majority of the black people and then we can talk.' I opposed all of it and said that if we want to talk we have to involve everybody, and we must do so with an open mind.

After a long struggle Turnhalle started. I was elected chairman. SWAPO was not represented. This was the shortcoming of Turnhalle, no doubt about it. Therefore, it could never have been the final solution. It can only be described as a first step towards a constitutional development in this country. I am the last person to say that the conference could have been the final step.

When we started, I discovered that my white colleagues had a hidden agenda. The Turnhalle conference was based on ethnicity. I do not really want to apologize for that, because even today ethnicity is a major problem in this country. In any case, I found that my colleagues wanted to use some tactics to influence the black delegates—even with money—to accept a system which I knew would not be acceptable in the long run. I blocked it and said: 'I have a feeling that my black colleagues do not understand the implications.' I thus allowed more time to discuss.

In the Turnhalle conference, black people became for the first time ever involved in the political debate. For the first time they heard the word 'constitution'. They knew nothing about constitutions and democracy. They fought against apartheid and they fought for liberation, but liberation ends somewhere and then you come to the next question: How do you live in a liberated country? So, we started to talk about constitutional principles and the results of independence. What do you do after independence? In the conference we had people with different motives and agendas, but I had only one idea and that was that as long as the war continued we must have a role to play. Those of us who did not support war as a solution. To me it was always a question if armed struggle was a solution. On the other hand, if there were no armed struggle, maybe nothing would have happened. I must admit that. That is why I say that I must admit that SWAPO played a role. And that the Nordic countries played a role.

TS: But the Nordic countries never supported the armed struggle?

DM: Well, let us get clarity on that point, because that is very important. Nevertheless, this is where it started. Gradually, there was this friendship growing between me and the black leaders in the country, whom I had never hated, but never lived with either. I had never understood them. I travelled to see Clemens

Kapuuo. We were together in the Turnhalle conference and during this process he was assassinated. That was a traumatic experience to me. I think that it was the first time that I stood at the grave of a black friend and cried. Such things influence people and it influenced me.

The decisions taken at the Turnhalle conference motivated the contact group to take action. In our declaration of intent we said that we wanted to lead the country towards independence. I think that the Western Contact Group was afraid that there might be another UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence). They rushed to Cape Town, met the South African government and said: 'Please, stop this thing that is going on in Windhoek. Stop the Turnhalle conference and the plans that they are making there. Instead, let us look at an internationally acceptable solution.' That is how the Western Contact Group was formed and how they came up with their proposals, which led to UN Resolution 435 and independence.

I could mention the fights I had with P.W. Botha; the fact that I had to break with my party; the humiliation that we as a family had to suffer—being called traitors by the white population—but it does not matter. In any case, in 1977 I broke away from the National Party and since then DTA fought its own sort of liberation struggle. But we found ourselves in a very awkward position. There was a war going on and there was a liberation movement. I am very friendly when I call them a liberation movement. It is not easy to use that name if you have lost personal friends and relatives killed by them. You would rather call them terrorists. We could not support them. We were the victims. My family, my black friends and my party colleagues were killed. We had to defend ourselves or somebody had to defend us. We thus found ourselves in the company of South Africa. While we were opposed to South Africa politically, we were in the same camp militarily. Because we were on the receiving side of the armed struggle, we were defended by South Africa. It made it very difficult for us. It was more or less an impossible situation.

But we continued and I think that we influenced the ultimate outcome in many ways. One way in which we did so was to prepare the white population. South Africa could not

afford to let Namibia become independent if that would lead to internal resistance among the whites, which could spill over to the South African scene. In other words, we had to prepare the ground for UN Resolution 435. And it was much easier to convince the white people than the black people. They said that it was suicide. We still have the same problem. In DTA, the white component is less antagonistic towards SWAPO than the black people. Maybe because we are more experienced.

We played a role. We always felt that this role was not appreciated by the international community, including the Nordic countries. At one stage, they would not even talk to us or meet us. They did not want to be seen in our company. We were labelled South African puppets and that was the end of it. They were not even prepared to argue with us. Whatever we did was seen as a manoeuvre to cheat the black population and delay the independence process.

TS: Did you try to reach the Nordic governments?

DM: Yes, on many occasions when they were here. We also made statements in this regard, for instance, during the period of the interim government. They said that they would not talk to us because they did not recognize the interim government. I am not quarrelling about that, but they could have talked to me in my personal capacity, because I think that I had a contribution to make.

The final process was the elections in 1989. Again we had a problem which alarmed me very much. That was the question of financing our political parties. The opinion all over the world was that there must be democratic elections and that they must be fair and free. How can an election be fair if one party has unlimited funds and the others nothing? It must have been obvious to everybody that we could not get money from anywhere in the world. We were labelled puppets and seen as people opposing liberation and independence. We could not get money from anywhere. I then spoke to the South African government and insisted that they should support us. I said that we cannot have an election without money. It is impossible. It will not be fair and free. They had their doubts. There were major differences within the government, between national intelligence, foreign affairs and the military people.

My position was that Namibia was paving the way for a solution to the Southern African problem. We were going to participate in the first process towards a democratic society. I hold it against the international community that they not only did not support us financially, but even criticized us for accepting financial assistance from South Africa, as if we were bought. I was not bought by anybody and I did not accept any money with strings attached. I said that we will have an election, we will elect a Constitutional Assembly and there we will decide the future of Namibia. I think that everybody will appreciate that I played a role in the Constituent Assembly. Mr. Geingob and others have on many occasions said that they do not think that it would have been possible to write a constitution in four months if it were not for me. I always assisted in finding solutions to the problems.

TS: In relation to the Nordic governments, how did you view these Western representatives who in the United Nations and other international fora opposed Communism and armed struggle, but in Southern Africa supported movements that were close to the Soviet Union and waged war?

DM: That was our problem. We could not understand that. When we heard of countries like the Nordic countries making statements against Communism, it did not make sense to us. How could that be possible? You say that you are opposed to Communism, but you are supporting a movement which in its documents and draft constitution is clearly not in favour of a free market economy and initially said that it was not prepared to talk to anyone in the country. Not being properly informed, we could come to no other conclusion but that the Western countries—in particular the Nordic countries—were one hundred per cent in favour of SWAPO and whatever SWAPO stood for. That was the perception.

TS: Do you think that the Nordic countries influenced SWAPO in a democratic direction?

DM: Yes, in retrospect, if I look at the situation today. Having supported them—and seeing that they for a long time were blamed for supporting the armed struggle and all the killings that went with that—they found themselves in a strong position to influence. That is true and I think that they in fact have done so. Not only the Nordic countries, but also other Western countries.

People sometimes criticize the constitution and say: 'You say that it provides for multi-party democracy and everything, but who is going to control SWAPO? Who is going to make sure that they will not violate the constitution?' I say that our best guarantee is the international community, because it knows that it supported SWAPO. For example, I have taken note of the fact that the Nordic countries have sounded a warning to SWAPO that they cannot expect to receive more aid if they do not look after their affairs and their money. To me that is more or less the best guarantee, even if I had my doubts about the role that the Nordic countries played. I appreciate it very much. This is what we want to hear. SWAPO is now in power, but that is not the important thing. The important thing is that democracy is in place.

TS: In your view, what was it that made the Nordic countries so involved in Namibia and Southern Africa?

DM: Well, we could not always understand why. For example, it was different with the Portuguese. They came to Africa to colonize, exploit and make money. It should now be clear that this was not the motive of the Nordic countries. I saw a Volvo car long ago, but that is all that I know about Swedish products. I think that one must accept that they had no colonial ambitions.

Countries like the United States had problems with black people and the Germans fought a war. They came into contact with the people here and made enemies in many ways. They had a hang-up about race. The Portuguese had the same. And the British. But the Nordics did not have that problem. There was no racial conflict in their countries. The only way in which the Nordic countries came into contact with black people was through the missionaries. So I understand why the people in that part of the world could not approve of racial discrimination and apartheid.

The Nordic countries were on-lookers who said that the things that are going on are wrong: 'It is terrible. We have to do something about it'. I have some understanding for that. It is the same as when we read about what is happening in Cambodia or Yugoslavia or wherever Christians fight Moslems.

I think that they found themselves in a different situation compared to any other country in the world. They were—and I am not saying

this in a nasty way—just on-lookers. They were not involved. They had no direct interests and they did not want to have an interest in making money out of Africa. I think that there is a suspicion among the Namibians that during the process leading to independence all countries played their own cards, always hav-

ing in mind that after independence they would maybe get a better deal with the Namibian government. They do not have that impression in the case of the Nordic countries. I think that Norway maybe is visible, but I do not know of any presence from Sweden, Finland or Denmark.