Form letters and the future

A small facet of liberation history

• MOLLY MCCULLERS

In April 1945, South African prime minister Jan Smuts attended the San Francisco Conference establishing the United Nations. He spent his time writing two very different documents.

The first was the Preamble to the United Nations Charter, which affirmed fundamental human rights and the equality of nations large and small. The second was a document outlining South Africa's plans to annex South West Africa. This was Smuts's second attempt at seizing Southwest. He first tried at the 1919 Paris Conference creating the League of Nations but the League turned him down. He responded by playing an instrumental role in crafting the Mandates System, which gave South Africa control over Southwest as a de facto colony subject to international oversight. Now, in 1945, he hoped to finally acquire Southwest once and for all.

In a press release, Smuts argued Southwest was fundamentally a part of and entirely dependent on South Africa. Therefore, "there is no prospect of the territory ever existing as a separate state". He expected taking over Southwest to be straightforward. He anticipated support from western European allies, and South West Africa's whites-only legislative assembly had already passed a resolution in favour of incorporation.

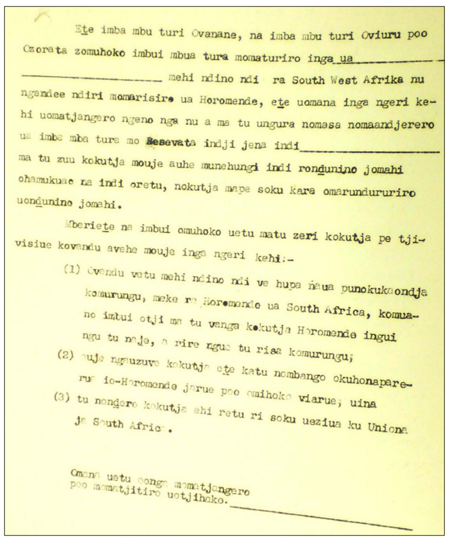
However, Smuts soon ran into strong opposition from the UN and its Trusteeship Council as well as black Namibians. He was unprepared for how fiercely newly independent nations and the Soviet Bloc would oppose him and he also did not count on other Commonwealth nations, namely Canada and New Zealand, to oppose him. The UN demanded South Africa place its case before the Trusteeship Council, dominated by hostile anti-colonial countries, especially India. Smuts and his advisors brainstormed ways of avoiding the Trusteeship Council but, when New Zealand placed its mandates – Samoa and Nauru – under the UN, they could hold out no longer.

'Plan B'

Smuts and his colleagues devised a foolproof Plan B: To demonstrate that black Namibians wholeheartedly supported incorporation into South Africa. Calling on the native commissioners for Owamboland and Kavango, Cocky Hahn and Harold Eedes, Smuts instructed them to "sound tribes discreetly" but warned against any official referendum "unless, of course, it can be taken with safety". As most Africans lived in the northern territories, which were ruled indirectly by government-sanctioned chiefs, Hahn and Eedes promised they would have no trouble obtaining African consent for incorporation. They just needed the approval of a handful of African leaders who were in some way indebted to the government in order to claim that the majority of black Namibians supported a merger with South Africa.

Africans in the Police Zone – fewer in number, scattered across reserves, politically disorganised, and generally cooperative – would be duly consulted but were not expected to be a problem. However, Herero leaders and the residents of Berseba Reserve were not keen on incorporation.

Smuts needed unanimous African consent if his plan was to have a prayer of success. He demanded the secretary for South West Africa obtain statements from each headman in the Police Zone "unequivocally requesting complete incorporation of the territory into the Union". He even had his secretary draw up a form letter for headmen to sign! Armed with these letters, native commissioners dispersed across the Police Zone to deliver a speech emphasising German colonial brutality and extolling South Africa's virtuous rule. They were then to collect signatures on the form letters. The Trusteeship Council would most certainly have rejected these letters as proof of African support. However, Smuts first had to get Herero headmen to sign the letters, and this they refused to do.



Ete imba mbu turi Ovanane, na imba mbu turi Oviuru poo Ozorata zomuhoko imbui mbua tura momaturiro inga ua ________________ mehi ndino ndi ra South West Afrika nu ngandee ndiri momarisire ua Horomende, ete uomana inga ngeri kehi uomatjangero ngeno nga nu a ma tu ungura nomasa nomaandjerero ua imba mba tura mo Resevata indji jena indi ________________ ma tu zuu kokutja mouje auhe munehungi indi rondunino jomahi ohamukuae na indi oretu, nokutja mape soku kara omarundururiro uondunino jomahi.

Mberiete na imbui omuhoko uetu matu zeri kokutja pe tjivisiue kovandu avehe mouje inga ngeri kehi:-

(1) Ovandu vetu mehi ndino ndi ve hupa naua punokukaondja komurungu, meke ra Horomende ua South Africa, komuano imbui otji ma tu vanga kokutja Horomende ingui ngu tu naje, a rire ngu tu risa komurungu;

(2) mouje ngauzuve kokutja ete katu nombango okuhonapareru io-Horomende jarue poo omihoko viarue; uina

(3) tu nondero kokutja ehi retu ri soku uezua ku Uniona ja South Africa.

Omana uetu oonga omatjangero
poo omatjitiro uotjihako. ________________

Form letter circulated to Herero leaders (Otjiherero), courtesy of the National Archives of South Africa.

Resistance

To rectify this situation, in March 1946 the secretary for South West Africa brought Herero leaders to Windhoek to personally convince them to agree to annexation. This meeting over Southwest's future turned into a debate over two very different accounts of its history.

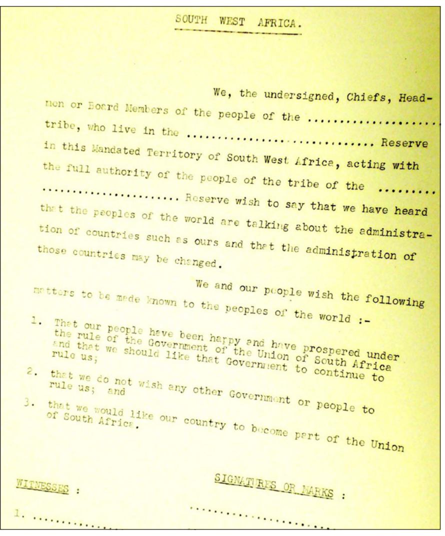
The secretary for SWA again recounted German atrocities and painted the Union's SWA Campaign of WWI as an effort to liberate the territory's Africans from tyranny, as opposed to a part of the British war effort and a chance for South Africa to seize its next door neighbour.

Herero leaders responded by completely reframing this narrative from a story of violence to one of theft. Festus Kandjou stated quite simply "in 1904, the Germans stole our land". He then explained how the South African government never made good on promises to restore that land but handed it out to white settlers. Because land alienation prefaced Germany's near-total destruction of Herero and Nama society, Kandjou's remarks put South Africa firmly in the same category as Germany. This rallied Herero opposition to incorporation far more effectively than the government's story of violence could sway them to support it.

A few days later, Kandjou, almost certainly with the knowledge and support of Hosea Kutako, telegrammed the UN secretary general "on behalf of the whole Herero nation", opposing incorporation. This telegram emboldened black Namibians' resistance to annexation, which soon turned the UN firmly against South Africa, despite Smuts's claims that the Hereros were a mere fraction of the population and Kandjou "a native of little importance". It compounded the already contentious issue of Southwest's future and drove a permanent wedge between the South African government and the international community, a situation that only deteriorated after the National Party defeated Smuts in 1948.

From this point on, there were only two options for South West Africa: independence and annexation. Over the next 45 years, black Namibians, the South African government, and the international community would carry out one of the most contentious and longest decolonisation struggles of the Cold War.

– Dr Molly McCullers is assistant professor of History at the University of West Georgia, USA. This article is based on a chapter of a larger book manuscript, based on sources from the National Archives of Namibia and the National Archives of South Africa. Contact: mmcculle@westga.edu



SOUTH WEST AFRICA.

We, the undersigned, Chiefs, Headmen or Board Members of the people of the .... tribe, who live in the .... Reserve in this Mandated Territory of South West Africa, acting with the full authority of the people of the tribe of the .... Reserve wish to say that we have heard that the peoples of the world are talking about the administration of countries such as ours and that the administration of those countries may be changed.

We and our people wish the following matters to be made known to the peoples of the world :-

1. That our people have been happy and have prospered under the rule of the Government of the Union of South Africa and that we should like that Government to continue to rule us;
2. that we do not wish any other Government or people to rule us; and
3. that we would like our country to become part of the Union of South Africa.

WITNESSES :

1. ....

SIGNATURES OR MARKS :

....

Form letter circulated to Herero leaders (English), courtesy of the National Archives of South Africa.

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- National Union of Namibian Workers

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VACANCY

POSITION: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
GRADE: E1

The Municipality of Omaruru is an equal opportunity employer and we are looking for a suitably qualified Namibian citizen to join our dynamic team as a Chief Executive Officer.

The incumbent will be responsible for

1. To execute the decisions of the local authority council, as required by the Local Authority Act 1992 (Act 23 of 1992) as amended
2. Managing the Council's operations on business principles as mandated by the Council resolutions
3. Achieving the Council vision, mission and objectives;
4. Promotion of financial self-sustainability.

Duration:

Five (5) years Performance Agreement (renewable contract based on performance)
Key Performance Areas:

- Accounting officer in terms the Local Authority Act, 1992(Act 23 of 1992) as amended.
- Supervision and Co-ordination of all Departments
- Policies Implementation
- Manage the Council's operations on business principles in line with all Government Statutes
- Implementation of Strategic Objectives with support of all staff members.
- Policy & Procedures Framework
- Human Resources Management and Maintenance of Discipline
- Relationships network and strategic partnerships
- Projects Management
- Corporate Communications and Customer care.
- Risk Management

Minimum requirements:

- A B -Degree in Public / Business Administration at honours level or equivalent qualification plus Six (6) years managerial experience.
- Master degree in the related field will be an added advantage.
- Knowledge of Finstel Programme will be an added advantage.
- Be a Namibian Citizen
- Sound knowledge of Financial Management

Minimum working experience and competencies:

- Six (6) years working experience in managing medium to large-scale public / private organization medium to large-scale public/ private organization of which five years at managerial position with experience in managing a multi-disciplinary team.
- Superior interpersonal skills to enable internal teamwork and external relationship building with a diverse constituency, including member companies, government officials, media interest groups and general public.
- Experience in monitoring and evaluation of projects.
- Strong written and oral communication skills, with experience on drafting of presentations.
- Demonstrated success in uniting the interests of diverse constituencies to achieve desired public policy outcomes.
- Ability to represent the Town Council at regional and international levels.
- Personal traits required team building, conflict resolution, adaptability, and Integrity, delegation, directive, and tolerance, achievement oriented and supportive.

Remuneration

We offer a market related salary, plus the following benefits:

- Housing Subsidy, Car Allowance and Cell Phone Allowance
- Pension and Medical Aid Scheme.
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Interested applicants should submit their applications stating relevant experience, accompanied by a comprehensive CV and certified copies of Qualifications to:

The Acting Chief Executive Officer, P. O. Box 14, Omaruru. No faxed or e-mailed applications will be accepted.

Only short listed applicants will be contacted and no documents will be returned.