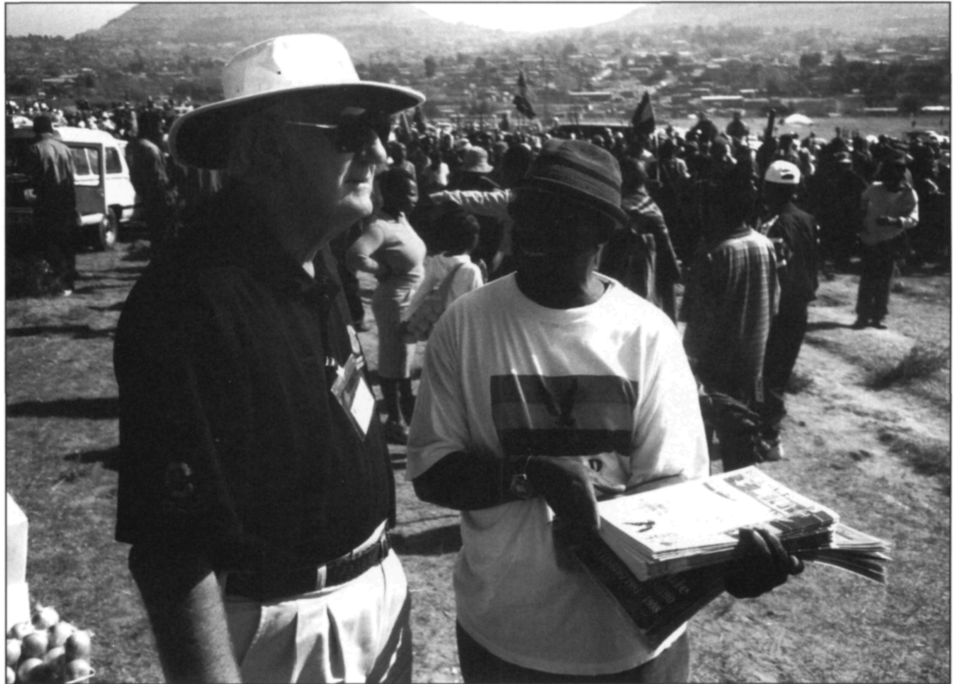


## CHAPTER 3

# The Campaign, the News Media and Electoral Environment

**OBSERVING THE CAMPAIGN . . .**  
Commonwealth Observer David MacGibbon on the fringes of a rally near Maseru. The Observer Group concluded that the political parties were able to organise effectively and campaign openly



### The Campaign

The election campaign commenced at the close of nominations and continued until 48 hours before the opening of the poll. Because the Group was only present for the final stages of the campaign its observations must be limited to that period.

Permission to hold rallies appears to have been given freely by the police and the Group heard of no instance of tension with the organisation of rallies.

Each of the major parties held rallies in Maseru on the Sunday preceding the election. We estimate that over 50,000 people attended the five rallies we observed, with the rallies of the LCD and BNP attracting the major share of this total attendance. The rallies of the other parties that we observed, namely the Lesotho People's Congress (LPC), Basutoland African Congress (BAC) and the youthful and female dominated Lesotho Workers Party (LWP), were smaller than those of the two major parties and differed in format in that they were more structured. The rallies were good-natured and there was no violence whatsoever. People were bussed in from the countryside and created an appearance of massive support. There was a noticeable celebratory mood, with free food and drink provided. There were many vendors around the rallies, but at the end of the day they had sold little.

The usual paraphernalia of elections was not significantly in evidence during the campaign. Party T-shirts were worn, and were on sale, at the rallies. Although some free leaflets were distributed, manifestos and photographs of party leaders were sold. BNP election posters, which portrayed General Lekhanya, were displayed from the light posts along the roads in the capital



**RALLYING SUPPORT . . .** final political rallies and processions before the election. The Observer Group stated that “the rallies were good-natured and there was no violence whatsoever”

city and in some country towns. No other party used posters so extensively as part of its campaign.



## The Media

### (a) The Electronic Media

The Government owns and controls Radio Lesotho and its television counterpart. Radio Lesotho provides nationwide coverage. The private radio stations are Catholic Radio and Moafrika FM, People’s Choice Radio and Joy Radio, none of which can provide national coverage.

The Government has the effective right, under section 47K of the National Assembly Election Act 1992, to determine the content of news. The IEC has the duty to monitor news broadcasts to ensure news coverage of the campaigning by all political parties. Some political parties advised the Group that their activities during the election period were not the subject of news broadcasts on the publicly owned stations.



We were advised that the private radio stations provided the opportunity for all parties to make use of their limited facilities and that only the opposition parties accepted their offer while the LCD apparently did not see the usefulness of this offer.

Both government and private media provided the opportunity for the IEC to broadcast voter education programmes.

Radio Lesotho provided opportunity for opposition parties to campaign but this was limited to one hour each throughout the period of the election campaign which, in our judgement, was rather inadequate and unfair especially when the same media carried the ruling party’s activities free of charge on the

ostensible and perhaps legitimate grounds that these were government activities.

We do not consider that there was a level playing field insofar as opposition access to the local media was concerned. The limited coverage by the national television station, which is confined to Lesotho's capital of Maseru, may not have made much difference but certainly the governing party used Radio Lesotho effectively. We were told that all the parties were free to purchase airtime. With the exception of the apparently well-funded Basuto National Party (BNP), most of the other parties did not have the financial resources necessary to conduct an electronic media campaign.

#### **(b) The Print Media**

The print media consists of various newspapers in the Sesotho language and four English-language weekly newspapers – *The Post*, *The Survivor*, *The Public Eye* and *The Mirror* were by and large, independent. Judging from the editorial opinions published during the campaign, they were fair in their comment, calling on the political parties not to reduce the contest to personalities but to concentrate on issues. They all covered the rallies of the major parties. One of these newspapers, *The Post* (which may have had affiliations with a political party) appeared strongly to oppose the ruling LCD party and described it as not having much to offer in terms of solving Lesotho's myriad of problems. There were no advertisements by the parties in the print media.

#### **(c) Conduct of the Media**

An election reporting guide was issued by the IEC to members of the media. It set out ethical standards for journalists in the 2002 elections, dealt with the conduct of the media on election day, and states that the media "have an important role to play in exposing electoral malpractice". It provided a checklist for journalists covering the election.

#### **(d) Conclusion**

The Group, given its inability to assess the coverage provided in the Sesotho language, does not believe that it is in a position to accurately gauge the extent to which the media directly influenced the result in this election.

### **The Electoral Environment**

The campaign environment was peaceful and the ambience quite positive. The co-operation between the parties in the IPA and the work of the IEC evidently contributed to this environment. We were advised that the Churches had done much to preach against violence. The Group did not observe overt enthusiasm on the part of the electorate until the last few days before the election. A point that emerged consistently from our conversations was that there was a strong wish amongst people for the aftermath of the elections to be peaceful, not least for an atmosphere of stability and economic development. The presence of international observers from the Commonwealth and other organisations and countries helped assure the people that they would not be deprived of their rights.

On the whole we believe it is fair to say that the governing party benefited from the privilege of incumbency and the near monopoly of state electronic media working for them. What effect this had on the voters is a moot question.

In the final days of the campaign the BNP took public issue with the IEC over the availability of the final voter list and the printing, delivery and distribution of ballot papers. Observer Groups received copies of voluminous correspondence between the BNP and the IEC on the issue of ballot papers in which details of alleged irregularities and the IEC's responses were provided. We were advised that consultations between the IEC and BNP were undertaken which allowed polling to take place.