

CHAPTER 6

A Celebration of Freedom: The Poll and the Count

It seemed less an election and more a celebration of freedom as millions of South Africans of all races patiently stood in line, many for long hours, on the first day of general voting on 27 April 1994. From before dawn huge crowds, determined and disciplined, formed outside many voting stations. The expectancy was palpable, as people waited for the daybreak which was to usher in freedom and the final demise of apartheid. Many could hardly believe that they were actually about to exercise the right to vote and elect a new Government. They were overwhelmed with joy and with a profound sense that they were making history. They talked about what they would tell their grandchildren of this momentous day, and of how it all seemed unbelievable that what they had fought and waited for so long had finally come true.

Our 51 teams of observers were spread out at voting stations all over the nine provinces to observe the day. By 6.30 a.m., we were at designated voting stations to observe the voting process. At the head of most queues were men and women who said they had been there since 5.00 a.m. - some even earlier. The IEC estimated that at about 80 per cent of the designated 9,739 voting stations, the polls opened at the appointed time of 7.00 a.m., or slightly later. The record was best in Northern Cape, Western Cape and Orange Free State. However, at about 20 per cent of the stations, particularly in the PWV, KwaZulu/Natal, Eastern Cape and Northern Transvaal, disorganisation prevailed. This was especially so in the former 'homelands', in black townships, and in rural parts of these provinces. Thousands were in line, some for as long as 12 hours, waiting for stations to open. The lucky ones managed to vote by the evening, but many thousands of others had to wait until the next day for the polls to open. As a result of these long delays, 29 April 1994 was declared as an extra voting day for the most affected areas, namely Transkei, Ciskei, Venda, Lebowa, Gazankulu and the KwaZulu parts of KwaZulu/Natal. The East Rand, east of Johannesburg, did not feature in the list, even though, as a result of the severe distribution problems, and a last minute rush to obtain TVCs, a number of stations opened on 29 April. COGSA drew this matter to the attention of the IEC the evening before. These votes were now to be considered separately from the rest. In a letter to the Chairman of the IEC, the COGSA Chairman expressed his hope that the votes would be counted since the need to open the stations was not the fault of the voters. A copy of the letter is at *Annex XV*.

The delays at opening time were caused by a breakdown of the IEC system of supply, distribution and delivery of high security election material which included ballot boxes, ballot papers, IFP stickers, ultraviolet lamps, stamps, ink and seals. In areas such as Soweto, South Africa's most populous township, and in many parts of KwaZulu/Natal, most stations were only able to open by midday when supplies were eventually delivered. In the volatile area of East Rand, voting stations did not open until late in the afternoon, and 75 stations in the black townships of Katlehong and Thokoza did not open until the next day. The East Rand had been the scene of the worst political violence in the PWV in recent times. At some voting stations, we intervened as tempers flared and angry voters demanded that they be allowed to vote. We assisted beleaguered Presiding Officers (POs) to obtain voting materials and helped to open voting stations, one as late as 7.00 p.m. when the poll was scheduled to close. Despite these difficulties many stations received only a trickle of voters on the second day of general voting because most people had voted the day before. Even in areas where it was deemed necessary to open on 29 April, the third day, voting was very light.

There were many positive aspects of these historic days of polling. Above all, there was the enthusiasm and the boundless patience displayed by the people of South Africa who were determined that this special time would proceed successfully. While there were frayed tempers and voluble complaints, most voters were ready to wait in line in the hot sun, in heavy rain and in the chill of the night. Many in the white communities brought out their deck chairs and newspapers to while away the time. The black, coloured and Indian communities displayed a similar patience and were philosophical about the long wait. They had longed for this day all their lives; a five-hour wait was inconsequential, they said. At a tented station in Soweto, an old woman who had been in line since 5.30 a.m. went home three hours later to make tea for all the voting officials when there was still no sign of the station opening up. When we met her at 11.00 a.m., still the first voter in line, she said, *Perseverance, my dear, is the mother of success.* As one newspaper commentator said, *black South Africans learnt what white South Africans already knew: how to vote. White South Africans learnt what black South Africans knew: how to wait.* Many voters and party agents excused the IEC, saying that this was the first time that it had done the job, so mistakes should be expected. They invited us to come back in five years' time when things would be better.

In another positive development, we saw white farmers bringing groups of farm workers by tractor and trailer to voting stations in many regions, thus allaying the initial fears expressed by some political parties that the farm workers would not be allowed to vote.

The unflagging zeal, diligence and dedication shown by voting officials in the face of many challenges and their ability to cope patiently with the incessant pressure from a multitude of voters, while at the same time still streamlining their own procedures, also went a long way to ensure that voting, in the end, proceeded smoothly.

What was remarkable, too, about the voting days was the exceptional peace that prevailed throughout the country, which for several years and up to the last week before polling had been ravaged by political violence. Some of our group had come to South Africa with trepidation because of the vivid images of violence and brutality relayed internationally. The initial briefings we received, especially in KwaZulu/Natal, only seemed to confirm the worst fears of some observers. But the IFP decision to participate in the elections lifted the pall of fear and uncertainty over security on voting days. Even the senseless carnage which briefly burst upon the elections in a spate of bombings in the PWV, allegedly by the extreme right, only served to stiffen the resolve of all to vote. In the event, those three days were the most peaceful days that South Africans could remember in a long time. There was virtually no reported incidence of violence because of political rivalry. After the voting ended, IEC Chairman Mr Justice Kriegler asserted that there was not a single death attributable to the elections during the voting period. There was also hardly any report of large-scale intimidation of any kind. The Bharagwanath Hospital in Soweto, reportedly the biggest in the Southern hemisphere, recorded one of the quietest periods ever experienced in the emergency departments of the hospital.

Special Voting Day

The Special Voting day opened on 26 April 1994 with the disabled, the infirm and the sick standing in long lines waiting for stations to open. Many of the stations opened late and some failed to open at all because of late delivery of high-security materials. In parts of Eastern and Northern Transvaal, after having waited for up to eight hours, voters were told to return the next day as supplies had still failed to arrive by dusk. In the Orange Free State, hundreds of voters who had waited in vain for stations to open in the townships or who were caught in slow-moving lines were bused by party agents to other voting stations, usually in the central business district. In many rural areas across the country, local leaders and party agents quickly arranged 'combies' to take villagers from non-operational stations to neighbouring local stations. At Bharagwanath Hospital, patients in striped hospital bath robes and with all manner of disabilities, stood or sat in line. Many carried their drips with them, draped over their shoulders or, curiously, over their heads. Some of them came in wheelchairs and we saw one patient wheeled in on a trolley. Tables and ballot booths had to be shifted to enable him to pass through and mark his ballot paper in secrecy.

The infirm and elderly also came out in their thousands. At most stations, voting officials had arranged long lines of chairs in the station compound to enable voters to wait in some comfort. Many among the elderly were obviously moved by the occasion and had tears in their eyes when they told us how much this day meant to them. Some clutched their old 'pass books', a mark of apartheid oppression which ironically would now confirm their identity and open the door to the vote and to freedom. Even jaded foreign journalists were

emotional at the sight of hundreds of the old and disabled standing in line with such dignity and pride. At a station in KwaZulu, we saw a 92-year-old woman raise her fist and cry "Amandla" (power) after casting her vote.

In many parts of the country, we saw voters standing in line outside closed stations. Because of the delay in finalising the list of voting stations and the lack of publicity thereafter, many voters did not know which stations would open on the special voting day. On one occasion, we were requested to assist an IEC official to persuade a crowd of elderly and disabled voters to vote at another station as the one they were at would only open the next day.

At many voting stations, ordinary voters had joined the line of special voters to cast their vote. At hospitals and clinics throughout the country, off-duty staff also joined patients, claiming the need to vote as they would be on duty on general voting day. While at some stations, POs were meticulous in weeding out those who did not appear to be 'special', at others, ordinary voters were allowed to vote.

At a number of hospitals, we observed IEC teams administer the voting process from ward to ward among patients too ill to queue. We were moved by the courtesy and care with which this operation was carried out, and the strong message that it conveyed about the need to facilitate the right of each person to vote.

Prisoners, except those convicted for serious crimes, were also allowed to vote on the special voting day. Mobile units were set up in the prisons and we observed voting at several including the Johannesburg Prison, the biggest in South Africa with over 6,500 prisoners. As at many other stations, the supplies for this prison did not arrive on time. Not even low security materials like voting booths and IEC posters and tapes were available. It was not until about 1.30 p.m. that the poll was opened to the clanging and cheers of prisoners watching the proceedings from their cells next to the makeshift stations in mess halls. The IEC had sent seven mobile teams which moved from block to block to conduct the voting. While voting went smoothly in most blocks, at one of the largest with over 2,000 prisoners, only 70 prisoners had voted after six hours of opening. Most of them did not have their TVCs which had been issued the previous week. The cards, issued without prisoners' identity numbers, were held by prison officials initially and distributed only on voting day. At this block, officials, carrying a box filled with TVCs, had to move from cell to cell to locate the owners. Voting officials did not finish their work until 3.00 a.m.

We were impressed by the kindness and politeness displayed by voting officials. They assisted the special voters to enter voting stations, ushered them from one step of the process to the next and helped them to make their cross against the party of their choice. In some areas, POs told us that they were surprised at the small numbers of special voters who needed assistance. Voter education in these areas had obviously been effective.



On the first day of voting in Johannesburg, the lines of voters snaked up and down on pavements and in fields.



Voters in a Pretoria suburb relax while waiting to cast their vote.



All smiles from an elderly lady who has waited a lifetime to cast her vote.



The disabled and ill cast their vote on a special voting day just before the elections.



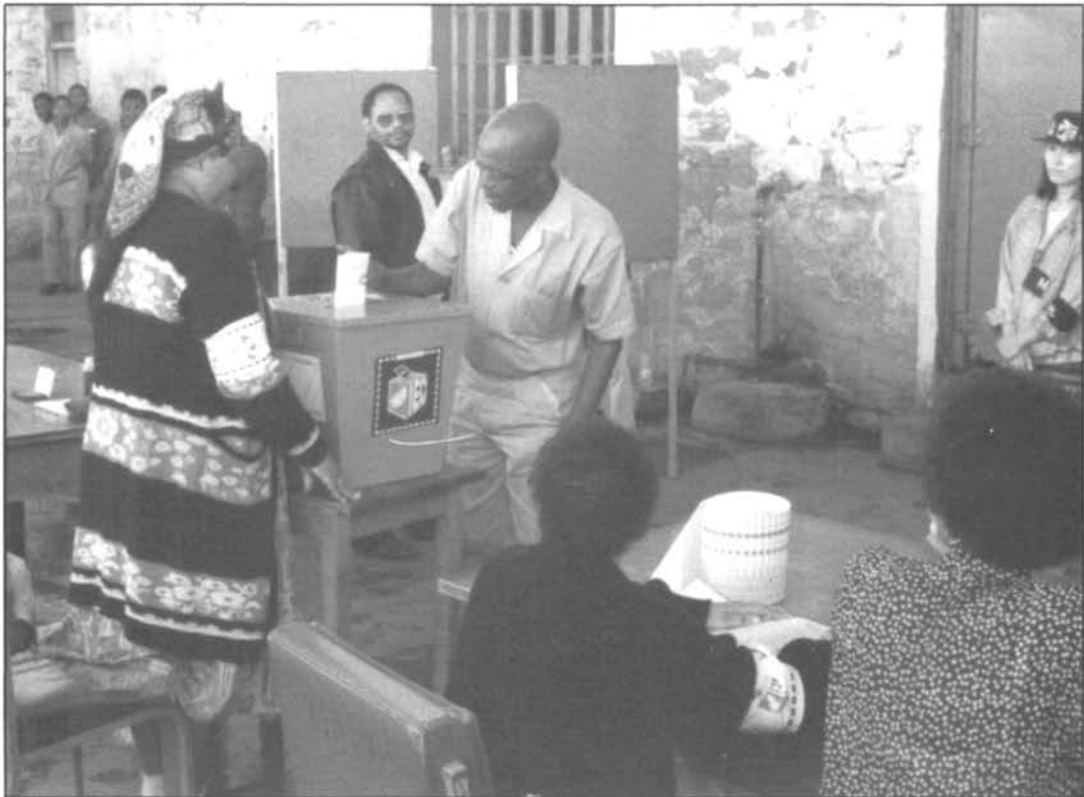
Patients unable to walk were given special assistance to vote at the hospitals.



A patient drapes his drip bag over his head to keep the saline solution flowing as he awaits his turn in line to vote.



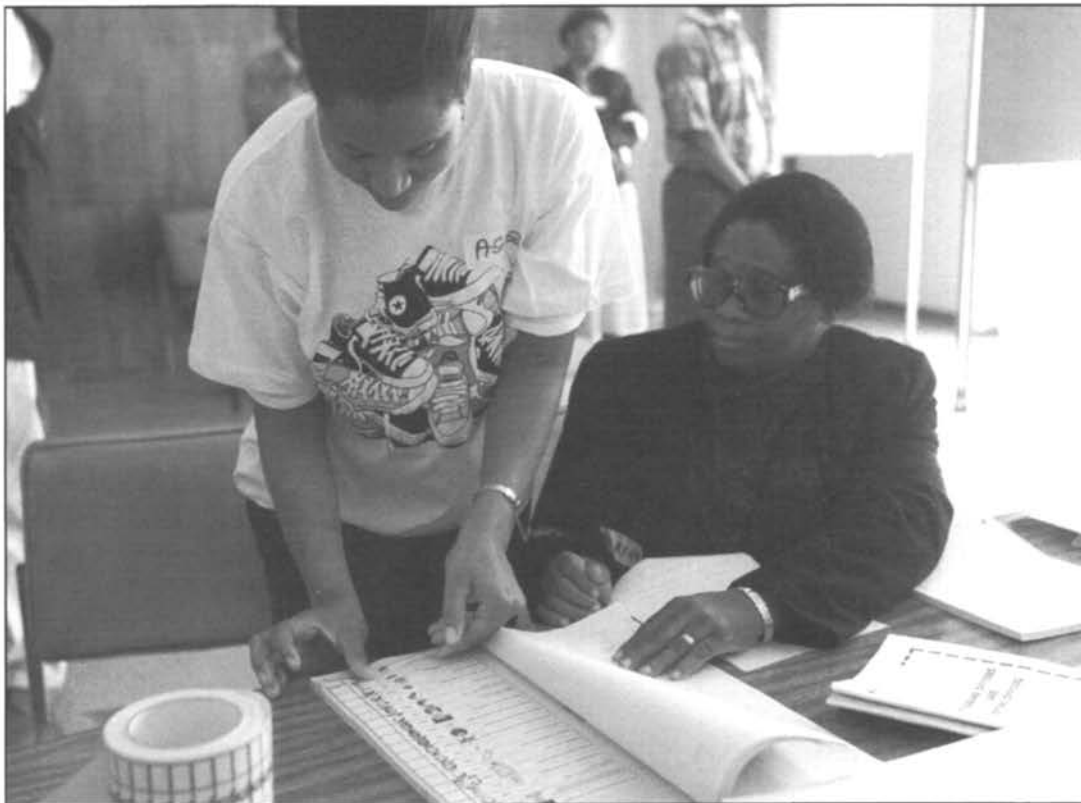
The elderly waited patiently in the sun – some having arrived from well before dawn.



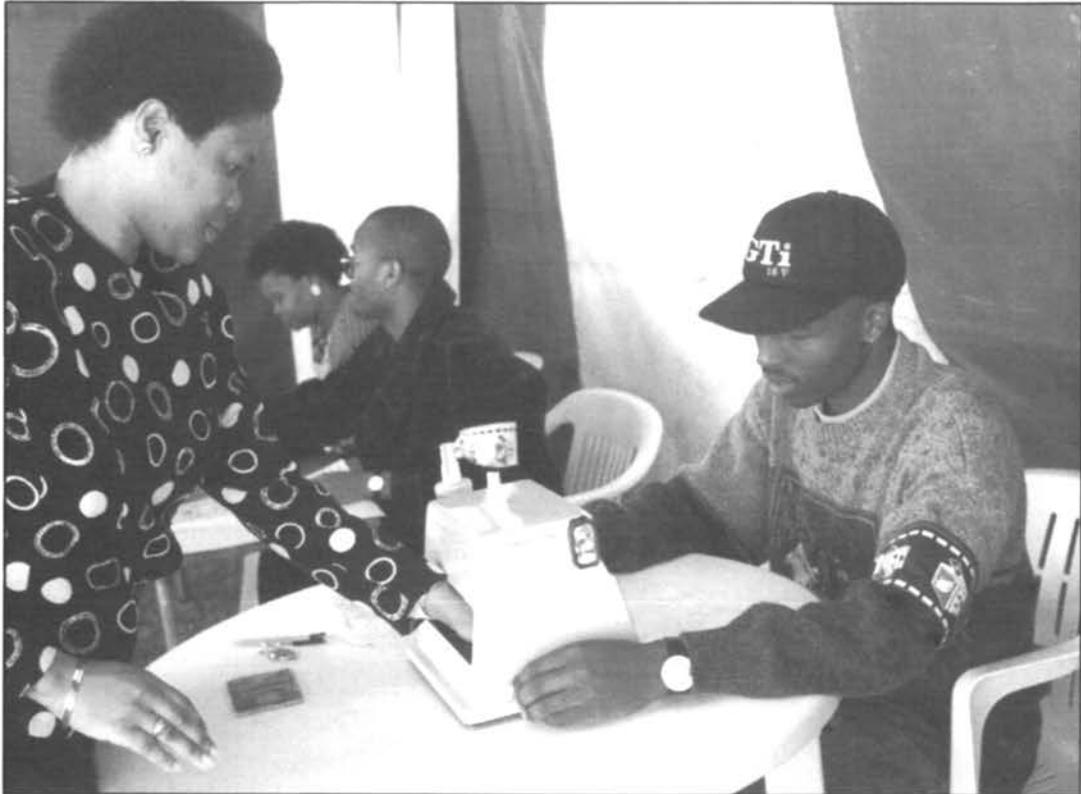
Prisoners were given facilities to vote ... here at Old Umtata Prison, in Eastern Cape.



As part of security measures, the police frisked voters at the entrance to voting stations.



An electoral officer carefully aligning an IFP sticker on to the ballot paper.



Checking for evidence of previous voting ... a voter places her hand under the ultraviolet lamp at a tented voting station in Soweto.



Party agents and observers crowd around a voter needing assistance at a voting booth.



The police were used to deliver ballot material to stations which had not received any. Here, the police deliver at Ndwedwe in KwaZulu/Natal.

General Voting Days: Adequacy of Election Materials and Facilities

While most voting stations across the country received their election materials without difficulty, the IEC system of supply, distribution and delivery of high security material did not work for around 20 per cent of the stations and resulted in the failure of over 2,000 voting stations to open at or near the appointed time of 7.00 a.m. on the first day of general voting. These supplies were to have been stored at secure warehouses in regional centres and Deputy District Electoral Officers (DDEOs), each responsible for a cluster of voting stations, were instructed to collect their supplies on the eve of poll. Presiding Officers were requested to be at their voting stations by 5.30 a.m. to receive these supplies from their DDEOs. But for many of them, it was a vain wait. We met many despondent and upset POs waiting for their DDEOs to come, and getting increasingly nervous as they watched the long lines of voters snaking around their stations.

We received several explanations for the breakdown. Foremost seemed to be the failure to finalise the list of voting stations which therefore affected planning for the allocation of supplies to each DDEO. According to the POs we met in Soweto, each station was to get three boxes (1,500 ballots per box) of national and three boxes of provincial ballot papers to cover the 3,000 voters that each was expected to handle, plus 50 per cent extra for contingencies for two or three days of voting. A kit to include the other high security materials, such as ultraviolet lamps, IFP stickers, stamps and ink, was also to be prepared for each station. We were informed that because of last minute changes and additions to voting stations, the manager of supplies at many warehouses did not have a final list to enable them to allocate the proper quantities to each DDEO. He therefore lost control of the distribution of supplies and had no way of preventing DDEOs who claimed they had more voting stations than earlier planned from taking more supplies. Some overzealous DDEOs also collected more boxes of ballot papers than necessary. This meant that nothing was left for those DDEOs who came later.

In the absence of these materials, POs in the affected PWV areas in desperation went to IEC headquarters in Johannesburg to collect supplies, only to be told there were none left as all the IEC reserves had been sent to KwaZulu/Natal and to Transkei for the extra 1,000 voting stations set up there in the last few days. DDEOs and the more assertive of the POs then started driving around from one polling station to another to plead for boxes of ballot papers from POs who had extra. A number from the East Rand drove with headquarters staff to a warehouse late in the day to obtain their supplies. Some POs whose stations had been used as special voting stations on 26 April 1994 went to the strongrooms where their ballot boxes, unused ballot papers and other high-security materials were kept and moved the unused material back to their stations. In some areas, adequate records appeared to have been kept of these unscheduled movements of materials; in others no record was kept.

The late distribution of supplies was also due to warehouse managers failing to break up bulk supplies and allocating sufficient amounts for each

DDEO to collect. In Cape Town, supplies stored at two central warehouses were transferred in bulk to counting centres and DDEOs were left with the responsibility of breaking up these supplies and distributing material as appropriate to the POs. The logistical problems overwhelmed the officials who had not expected to undertake a task which they said should have been the responsibility of the warehouse manager.

Another cause for the breakdown was the non-delivery of supplies or their delivery to the wrong address. Supplies for several areas ended up in warehouses several kilometres in the wrong direction. Some were discovered by the afternoon, while others remained missing. In Umtata, the capital of the former 'homeland' of Transkei, our teams found an abundant supply of ballot papers at the airport warehouse. After the end of polling, IEC monitors discovered hundreds of thousands of undelivered ballot papers in two warehouses in the PWV region which should have been distributed to centres in Thokoza, Katshele and Soweto. This discovery led to allegations of sabotage. As we went to press, the IEC announced that it had summonsed four warehouse managers – two of them seconded to the IEC from the Department of Home Affairs – to answer questions on the matter.

Procedures at Opening and Closing of the Poll

For the most part, Presiding Officers and their staff were able to carry out the procedures at the opening and closing of the poll. There were, however, many inconsistencies in the application of regulations and procedures. The problem was not so much due to incompetence, but more to the IEC's failure to establish an effective communication link so that officials at the bottom could be properly informed of changes made at the top. Regulations and procedures were amended, rescinded or introduced almost on a daily basis in a series of Technical Updates which were to be distributed to all POs. But it was obvious that many POs remained uninformed of such changes. In many cases, DEOs and DDEOs were not in touch with each other and with their POs, therefore breaking the lines of effective communication. Many were unfamiliar with smaller voting materials and more detailed procedures. For example, a considerable number were not aware of the need to use three types of seals (wax, aluminium clip and plastic strap) to seal empty ballot boxes. Many more were unaware of the existence of numbered coloured labels to be pasted on to each ballot box – orange for National and green for Provincial – and the need to record the serial number of each IEC label used. Numerous boxes were either identified by handwritten markings on masking tape, or other IEC stickers. Many were not marked at all until this was pointed out to the POs during our visits. It was obvious, too, that the party agents there were uncertain of some procedural details. But they kept a watchful eye on the proceedings and in most cases were satisfied that nothing untoward had happened.

We are of the view that, taken as a whole, the inconsistencies and irregularities in the application of these procedures did not, in most instances, affect the security of the ballot papers in the boxes, and were the

result of inexperience and lack of information, rather than deliberate intent.

Voter Identification

The decision to issue TVCs to all eligible voters without proper identity documents meant that, in the end almost all those who wanted to vote had some form of acceptable voter eligibility document. The issuing process was, however, a major problem as many voters still did not have TVCs by voting day. Cards were being issued until the last voting day to meet this high demand. All over the country, thousands of residents had converged at fairgrounds, community halls, magistrates' offices, shopping centres, hostels and voting stations to get TVCs at the last minute. At the historic Freedom Square in Kliptown, Soweto, where Mr Mandela had signed the Freedom Charter in 1955, TVCs were being issued on voting days to thousands of people, mainly from the squatter areas and hostels. Several empty containers were converted into offices: for the police to certify affidavits of age and residence; for volunteers to help voters fill up application forms and take their fingerprints; for IEC and Home Affairs officials to take the photographs and issue the TVCs. It was a festive occasion with music blaring, enthusiastic volunteers rushing back and forth to help an endless stream of applicants and grateful voters cheerily holding up their TVCs as they rushed into buses ready to take them to nearby voting stations. We were moved by the commitment and dedication of the volunteers who organised this issuing centre. As the evening light failed them, they bused residents to Uncle Tom's community hall in Orlando West, a few kilometres away, where TVCs were still being issued. We saw voters running in the dark, their TVCs clutched in hand, determined to cast their vote in the last minute of the last day of voting. More poignantly, we noticed that the voting station across the street was next to the monument honouring the many young students killed in the Soweto uprising of 1976.

Secrecy of the Ballot

Each station had specially constructed voting booths that were adequate to ensure the secrecy of the ballot. There was, however, confusion over the proper role of party agents in witnessing the assistance provided by the Presiding Officer to those voters who needed help in marking their ballot paper. At many stations, POs allowed party agents to witness this process in accordance with an earlier IEC directive. However, on 19 April 1994, a new procedure established that only international observers, IEC monitors or voting staff could act as witnesses. Many POs were not aware of this change in the regulations. Where we could, we did our best to advise the POs of the correct procedures. There were a number of occasions when we witnessed the presence of party agents and wondered if the voter felt intimidated surrounded not only by IEC officials, monitors and observers but by party agents as well. Few, however, seemed worried that the secrecy of the ballot could be compromised by such practices.

Allegations of Irregularities

We received reports of irregularities and saw some of them ourselves. There were a number of reported incidents of IEC officials or monitors canvassing for a particular party among voters waiting in the queue. There were allegations of POs or other voting officials trying to pressure special voters into voting for a particular party. We saw party posters on display and stickers being distributed within the inner perimeters of voting stations in some hostels.

In KwaZulu/Natal, our nine teams in various parts of the province, saw a number of irregularities. The PO and officials at one station allowed obviously under-aged residents to cast their votes. The officials confided to us that they feared for their lives and property if they did not allow these youths to proceed. We also saw a few voters being allowed to vote on the strength of TVC application forms and unattached photographs alone. At most stations in IFP strongholds, we saw only IFP and NP party agents. We were told that ANC party agents were too scared for their lives to be present. In one area in KwaZulu, a group of IEC monitors alleged that they had been intimidated on the special voting day. Voting the next day was delayed as the monitors refused to go to their stations without police escort and the POs refused to start the poll without them.

We were advised that pressure was applied by traditional leaders on voters and polling officials in some areas of the country. The recruitment of voting officials at very short notice in KwaZulu meant that the process was carried out without proper verification by the IEC. Some of the POs in KwaZulu were said to be government officials and *indunas* (chiefs) who were likely to serve the interest of the KwaZulu government rather than the IEC. In some cases, the POs recruited their own family members to manage the voting stations. It was felt that such appointments provided opportunities for intimidation and abuse. In one case, an IFP candidate claimed that he was an IEC official and had transported ballot boxes to the counting station. We also received reports of 'pirate' voting stations being opened by IFP supporters who had allegedly seized supplies from legitimate stations.

While we appreciate the constraints within which the polls were delivered in these areas, these irregularities were cause for concern and should be investigated by the IEC.

Performance of Electoral Officials

We were impressed by the dedication, pride and efficiency with which most voting officials carried out their duties. Once supplies arrived and the station was opened, voting proceeded smoothly and briskly. By the afternoon of the first day, as they gained experience and confidence, officials were able to process almost double the rate of voters they had done in the morning. However, voting officials in some IFP-controlled hostels and in parts of KwaZulu were obviously recent recruits and had not received adequate training. They were uncertain about the regulations and procedures to be

followed and often turned to us for assistance and clarification. What voting officials lacked in experience was often made up by a dogged determination to ensure that all those eligible who wanted to vote got the chance to do so.

Most voting stations were well staffed. Officials at the door and in the voting hall kept the flow of voters moving swiftly through each step of the process. At some big and busy stations, voting booths were numbered and ushers briskly directed voters to the appropriate booth. We also came across voting stations where officials at the door greeted voters with a smile and an apology for the long wait. At another, we saw an official apologising to voters for having to spray their hands with invisible ink. We also saw many POs asserting their authority effectively in dealing with over-zealous IEC monitors, party agents or troublesome voters.

What impressed us, too, was the resourcefulness of many officials. At several stations, officials, fearful that stocks would not be replenished on time, devised ways to conserve and share out what supplies were available. The 'wasteful' spraying of invisible ink onto the hands of voters was abandoned; some officials used tissue paper to dab the invisible ink carefully onto voters' fingers, others pressed voters' fingers into stamp pads sprayed with the ink. Identity documents were stamped with red ink to conserve invisible ink supplies. A newspaper reported that in one province, POs had resorted to using ultraviolet lamps used for killing flies to check voters' hands for invisible ink.

There were also inconsistencies in applying voting procedures. At most stations, officials only checked the voter's right hand under ultraviolet light even though both hands were supposed to be checked. Some officials marked the back page of the voter's ID document as instructed, while others marked the second page of the ID document which had space for record of voting. Some used invisible ink to stamp the document, others used red ink. In some cases, officials stamped the ballot paper with invisible ink, instead of red ink. This would naturally affect the validity of the ballot during the counting process. A serious inconsistency too, was in the issuing of ballot papers without IFP stickers. At most stations, voting did not begin or was suspended until IFP stickers were available. But at a few, POs were instructed by IEC officials to write in the IFP name and rule in the boxes on the ballot papers. At others, voters were instructed to write in the letters 'IFP'. The IEC had decided that ballot papers without IFP stickers or where voters had written 'IFP', 'Inkatha' or 'Buthelezi' would be deemed irregular, but valid if the voters' preference was clearly indicated.

Performance of Party Agents

The presence and performance of party agents were mixed. Of the 19 parties taking part in the national elections, only the ANC seemed to have agents at the vast majority of stations – even the NP found it difficult to cover many areas, particularly in the former 'homelands'. The IFP was well represented in areas

where it had substantial support and the PAC and the DP featured in some places. But the other parties were very rarely represented.

While some party agents took a detached view of their responsibilities, others appeared to be over-zealously interested in the voting process, trailing harassed POs, walking all over the station to inspect the work of voting officials and in a few cases, talking to voters. At one station, a party agent seemed to be supervising a ballot box but when questioned volunteered that she was indeed an IEC official but was wearing a party agent armband because no IEC bands were available. We gently suggested that it might be better to wear no armband rather than the wrong one. Many other agents, however, were happy to sit at their designated areas behind officials and quietly and vigilantly observe the voting.

Some parties had agents outside voting stations and had communication lines established to divert voters standing in long queues to other less congested stations. Buses arrived to pick up these voters, send them to vote and then send them back home. In some areas, the ANC had bused thousands of voters from black townships to white towns where voting stations had opened on time and where the lines were short. In an ironic twist, voters from the prosperous white suburb of Sandton, north of Johannesburg, converged on a voting station at a nearby squatter camp which had a shorter line.

We spoke to party agents at the stations we visited. In most cases, they had no complaints about the process, not even the delays. Once voting proceeded smoothly, they forgot about the confusion of the first morning and, like everyone else, were caught up in the spirit and excitement of the historic occasion.

Security Presence

Security presence in most areas was visible and adequate. Because of the peace and calm that prevailed, security officials had little to do. At most stations, voters were able to enter the inner perimeter without being searched for weapons. Some policemen told us that they only frisked those voters who appeared suspicious. Others said they would only act on the instruction of the PO. This practice did not seem to bother either voting officials or party agents as the stations were free of any disturbances or threats. At some stations in Northern Transvaal and in Western Cape, the police on duty used electronic scanners to detect weapons. Sometimes all security cover failed and in one instance, at the request of the PO concerned (who had had no security protection for his station for two days), we intervened with the Ciskei police to ensure that the station was properly protected subsequently.

In volatile areas with a history of violence, security officials were helpful in escorting observers and voting officials and also in allowing them to use their communications equipment to reach IEC officials. For many security officials, it was a novel experience to be amongst residents who until most recently had been hostile towards them and regarded them with suspicion.

The Transport and Storage of Ballot Boxes

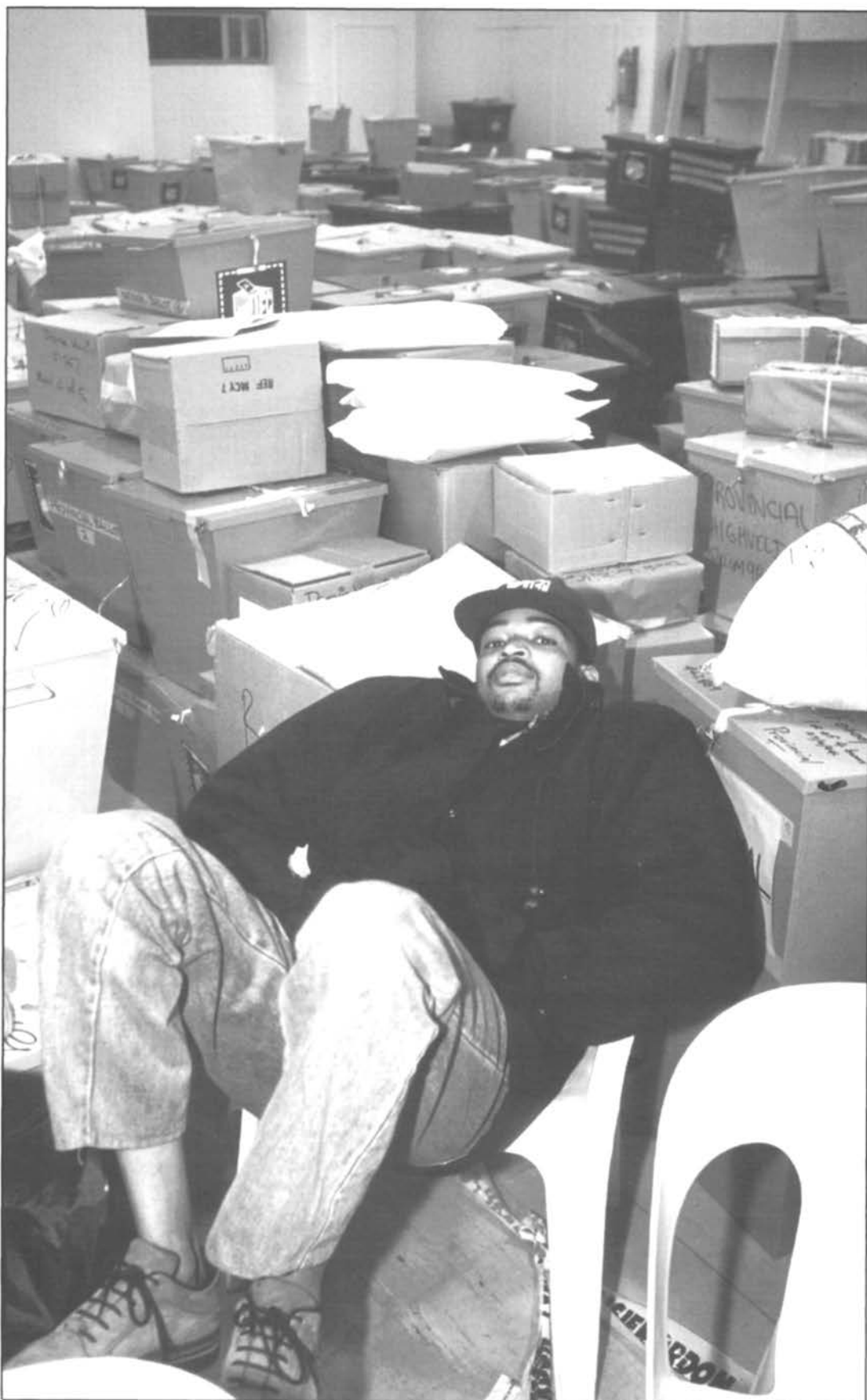
The transport and storage of ballot boxes at the end of each voting day was a problem in many areas. Many POs did not know where their boxes were to be taken. At the end of each voting day, ballot boxes were supposed to be delivered to secure rooms, and on the last day, they were to be transferred to designated counting centres. In some cases, DDEOs collected the boxes on the first days of voting and delivered them to counting centres because of a lack of suitable secure storage space. In others they were kept at designated local secure rooms. Sometimes, the POs themselves had to deliver the boxes to storage centres. Yet in other instances, the IEC organised a convoy of security personnel, IEC monitors and party agents to collect the boxes from a cluster of voting stations and transport them to the points of secure storage.

In some areas, co-ordination between DDEOs and POs was poor. We met POs who were stranded at voting stations waiting for their DDEOs to collect the boxes. Some POs had no cars of their own and the police, who were to accompany those boxes to storage centres, did not want to carry the boxes in their vehicles, lest they be accused of tampering with them. It was unfortunate that after the close of poll there were instances of mishandling during warehousing and transport which broke the seals of some ballot boxes. The IEC reportedly received more than 500 complaints from all parties alleging that boxes had been tampered with, seals broken, ballot statements and box identification documents lost and boxes delivered without the required supervision or even misplaced altogether.

The Count

The culmination of the elections – reconciling the number of votes cast and allocating them to the appropriate parties – proved to be a complicated and difficult part of the process. Not only were reconciliation and counting throughout the country delayed by the additional day of voting which affected a few regions, but the highly detailed procedures adopted through a continually changing and ever more complex series of regulations and instructions also proved in the event to be cumbersome, slow and sometimes unworkable.

Some electoral officials, particularly in the Northern Cape and the Orange Free State, were able to streamline the procedures with the approval of local party agents and without sacrificing the integrity of the count. This enabled them to conclude their tasks and report the first results of the vote within approximately 24 hours of the start of the count. At that stage, however, most counting stations were still wrestling with the initial step in the process, namely to reconcile the number of ballots in the box with the number of ballots issued as recorded in the PO's statement. This problem was largely due to the sometimes chaotic distribution of supplies and a failure to maintain proper records on voting days. As concern grew about the reliability and feasibility of this step, Mr Justice Kriegler, late on 30 April 1994, announced that the statutory requirement for reconciliation would be modified for the time



In some places, here at Nasrec outside Johannesburg, ballot boxes were heaped willy-nilly awaiting the count.

being to enable counting to begin. All irregularities and objections would, however, be recorded.

Each ballot was to be unfolded face down and checked to ensure it had the same voting station stamp on it. It was then to be counted in groups of 20 and then packs of 100 ballots to determine the total number of ballots actually in the box.

It was originally intended that counting officials would be divided between reconciliation duties and the subsequent separate process of allocating votes to parties. However, this would have meant half of the enumerators would have been waiting hours to allocate ballots to parties. Some stations abandoned this procedure so that all staff could concentrate on the reconciliation process before turning to the allocation by party. Where this was done on local or provincial initiative, the count proceeded much more quickly and far more smoothly than in most other centres.

A late instruction that the ballot box seal had to be checked to confirm that it contained the appropriate number as recorded by POs reached some counting officials after the reconciliation had been completed. Elsewhere, reconciliation was stalled by inaccurate or unavailable statements, disputes over ballot box seals and other difficulties with details of the counting procedure such as the number of party agents allowed to supervise the process and the time when the process should actually begin. At a few stations, counting was held up when officials went on strike to back their demand for immediate payment of duty allowances.

Following reconciliation, ballots were to be returned to their boxes and resealed until the second count could be undertaken by officials who would display each ballot to party agents before assigning it to its respective pile on party allocation tables. This proved to be a very slow process. As a result, in some stations it was agreed that counters could pre-sort ballots into party piles before displaying the contents of each pile to party agents. At others, party agents, satisfied that the sorting was being done properly, waived the need to display each ballot paper. Such actions significantly reduced the counting time.

A further check on the count was then to have been undertaken by a different set of enumerators who would count the piles on the party allocation tables. The final agreed counts for each party were then to be totalled and reconciled again with the total number of ballots cast.

It was also originally intended that ballots from several stations would be massed together so that party preferences of any one station would not be known. This complicated the verification process further, so some stations in Johannesburg and the Orange Free State counted the ballots station by station to facilitate the verification of the total party allocations.

Once the count had been agreed, the party totals were to be communicated to the IEC provincial headquarters which would forward them to the national centre in Johannesburg where they were to be released officially from time to

time. Parties then had a further opportunity to appeal to the IEC over any disputes remaining with the Counting Officer.

In centres such as the Nasrec counting centre in Johannesburg, there were allegations that some ballot boxes turned up full of grass. Elsewhere, there were charges that boxes had disappeared. In Port Elizabeth, it was alleged that boxes full of ballots, but not accounted for, arrived at the counting centre. Allegations mounted as the counting process dragged out.

By midday on 2 May 1994 – three days after the poll closed – scarcely more than a third of the results had been declared. For the following 24 hours, the IEC suspended the release of incoming results when it discovered that its computer system which collated results had been interfered with, adding three to four per cent to each incoming tally for some small parties.

The counting process had been designed to be as transparent as possible and to provide for internal recounts and cross-checks on officials so there would be no doubt that the final results accurately reflected the votes cast for the parties. However, the time taken to conduct the count due to the complexity of the nine individual steps in the delivery, storage, reconciliation, counting and publication process in fact confused the counting process and contributed to the suspicions that they were meant to allay.

Among the positive signs that emerged from the counting process were the low percentage of rejected ballots and the enormous dedication of counting officials in sticking with a task that was fraught with difficulties. In many cases, party agents, once confident with the process, were co-operative and agreeable with dispensing some steps and procedures that had only further delayed the counting.

As results continued to be released, it appeared that the number of invalid votes would be very low. Considering that the great majority of voters were going to the polls for the first time and that the level of illiteracy among black voters was high, the great number of valid votes cast indicated that voter education by parties, private foundations, NGOs, the media and the IEC had effectively reached the public. It was also a tribute to the diligence of individual voting station POs and staff in assisting voters who were unable to cope on their own but were determined to participate.

The commitment of the great majority of voting officials was also reflected among most counting officials who persisted with their work, despite unwieldy procedures and frustrating delays. They shared the evident determination of the vast majority of South Africans of all races to make this election work, no matter how difficult the challenges facing them.