

## Chapter 4

# Polling Day and the Count

### A Remarkable Day

When we compared notes on events during the final day of the elections, we all agreed that it had been a remarkable day. In the course of our observations at all 22 polling stations, we had seen an impressive election machine at work, reflecting great credit on the Director of Elections and his staff. But the undoubted success of the day rested on a combination of the professionalism, impartiality and courtesy displayed by all election officials, the mature and pragmatic attitude adopted by candidates and the discipline and calm demeanour of voters.

We had observed the elections on the Inner and Outer Islands on the first three polling days, when we accompanied election officials as they conducted the poll for voters living on these isolated islands. We had spent several days visiting polling districts on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue, where we familiarised ourselves with the regulations for the elections and identified polling stations. We had also met with electoral officials and attended meetings where they briefed elections staff and party officials on the regulations and procedures. We made ourselves known to candidates and their agents and ascertained that they had no substantial complaints about the arrangements for the conduct of the elections.

Our prior activities could not fully prepare us for the reality of the day on 23 July. In order to ensure that all 22 electoral areas would be fully covered, we paired into five teams and set off early in the morning to be at 11 selected polling stations in time for the opening. We were all delighted to find them ready for business with large numbers of people queuing patiently outside. All polling stations opened promptly at the appointed time of 7.00 a.m.

Everything was in good order. It was apparent that the Electoral Officers were of a high calibre. Each polling station was well staffed and had been organised with the greatest attention to detail. Care had clearly been exercised in the selection of sites for polling stations. Each was located in either a school or a community centre and all were in large, airy and clean rooms.

We spent the entire day observing the poll, visiting and revisiting stations throughout the day. Each polling station had been organised with enough assistants to process voters promptly and efficiently. In some stations three or four sets of electoral officials were organised around tables to deal with separate lines of voters. They were scrupulous in the performance of their duties, which considerably hastened the flow-through of voters.

One aspect of the day's events which was new and interesting to most of us was the high turnout of very old, ill and disabled people. Because they, along with airline workers, nurses and other special groups, were invited to vote at opening time, the scene at many polling stations was unusual to say the least. We were most impressed by the way the staff responded. A voter suffering from epilepsy, who had an attack as he prepared to vote, was calmly sent to hospital, where he recovered and then returned three hours later to cast his vote.

We were careful to scrutinise the conduct of the Electoral Officers in this process and to see how arrangements for incapacitated voters, as laid down in the Electoral Law and the Code of Conduct, and consistent with practice throughout Commonwealth countries, were being administered. The Regulations stipulate that such a voter may ask the Electoral Officer to record his/her vote in the presence of a person selected by him/her. The Electoral Officer should be satisfied that the voter was truly incapacitated; had chosen the witness freely and genuinely; and was expressing a free choice. We observed hundreds of these cases, and we did not come upon one instance where the process had not been carried out kindly and correctly. We noted that some elected not to use a witness. We commend the Director of Elections and his staff for ensuring that this group of people was not disenfranchised and electoral officials and voters alike who behaved so well towards them.

*A voter having her right forefinger dipped in invisible ink. Her thumb has already been dabbed with a violet stain*



Once voting was under way, the processing of voters was most efficient. Besides official staff, each station provided facilities for two polling agents from each party, and also for candidates, most of whom spent the day there. Relief staff were present and a secretary handled the telephone and fax machine. Every eventuality had been looked at and contingency arrangements made for them. The arrangements were an outstanding display of meticulous planning.

Good order was maintained throughout the day, and we saw no instances of intimidation or of disorderly conduct. Police officers were on duty at all polling stations, maintaining order outside and assisting generally inside. There was no army presence anywhere.

### **Polling in the Inner and Outer Islands**

The elaborate and expensive arrangements made to enable some 600 voters on the 12 Inner and Outer Islands to cast their ballots was impressive. We accompanied electoral officials to witness the polling on eight of these islands from 20 to 22 July 1993. We travelled from island to island in aircraft and in boat, carrying polling booths, ballot boxes, ballot papers, envelopes and other voting materials. Within minutes, a polling station would be set up and voters would be processed smoothly and quickly, in the presence of polling agents from all three parties. We were impressed by the proficiency of the electoral officials and by the voters who, in spite of living on these isolated islands, were well-informed about the elections.

The only hitch we came across was at the start of voting on the Inner Island of Bird which was delayed when a senior official of the resort island argued at length with the Director of Elections to allow his workers to vote for candidates in their home districts, in keeping with the arrangements made for voters from the Outer Islands. But the constitutional provisions had placed Bird in the electoral area of Inner Islands which included La Digue, Denis, Fregate and Silhouette. The Director of Elections, who had accompanied his officials, did not have the right to make any such changes. The dispute was resolved when the Electoral Officer announced that he was now opening the poll for the country's Presidential and National Assembly elections. A queue formed immediately and voting began. We noted that the resort official who had raised the objections eventually joined the queue to vote.

As we flew from island to island, the Electoral Officer and policeman on duty kept the sealed ballot boxes within close sight. At the end of the day, the boxes were taken to the Elections Office at National House in Victoria and kept in a strong-room under 24-hour guard. We received no complaints from any of the party agents on the arrangements and proceedings for these polling days.

### **Voters' List**

The voters' registration list of 50,370 names proved credible and accurate on polling day. All those who came to vote and found their names on the list were able to vote. There were a few cases of voters coming to the wrong polling station. In each case, electoral officials checked the master list to direct the voter to the appropriate station. There were also isolated cases of voters who had registered but whose names were not on the list, but they were cleared to vote when their registration receipts were produced and verified by the Elections Office. There were also a small number of people who went to polling stations, but who had not registered and were therefore not allowed to vote. There were isolated cases of voters with the same name born on the same day who were barred from voting. It appeared that the computer programme designed to eliminate double registration recognised only one name and automatically removed the other name from the list. This is a situation that needs to be rectified. Barring these instances, we were satisfied with the accuracy of the registration list. At the end of the day, 43,584 people had cast their votes for the Presidential election and 43,579 for the National Assembly election, an impressive turnout of 86.5 per cent the highest recorded of the last four polls. Taking into consideration that about 3,000 names on the list are Seychellois thought to be living overseas, an effective turnout of over 90 per cent would be a more accurate estimate.

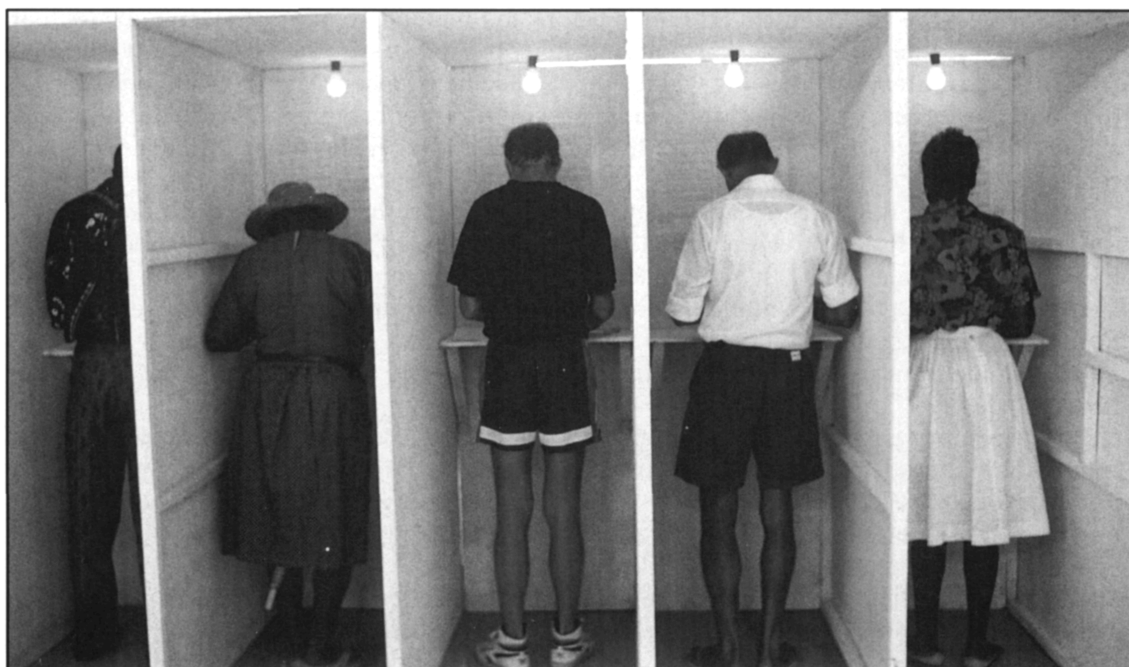
### **Secrecy of the Ballot**

From the first election in July 1992, the secrecy of the ballot had never been questioned. The credibility of the electoral system established by the first Director of Elections, Mr André



*An elderly woman casting her ballot*

*Ensuring secrecy. Voters marking their ballot papers in the well-designed and well-lighted polling booths*



Sauzier, and continued by his successor, Mr Bernardin Renaud, and the credibility of all the officials who had been appointed in consultation with all political parties, meant that the voters of Seychelles had total confidence in the system.

A decision by Mr Renaud to allow political party agents to witness the process of printing the ballot papers, at which some of us were also present, was welcomed by the political parties as a further confidence-building measure.

### **Adequacy of Polling Arrangements**

Much thought and care had gone into the arrangements for polling day. Every single item of polling material needed, from ballot papers to signboards showing the direction of a polling station, from fax machines with direct links to the Elections Office operations room to staplers and sellotape, was provided for. All equipment and supplies were in good working order. Adequate numbers of polling booths were set up in each station to handle the number of voters expected. Each booth had an electric light bulb and notices pinned up providing instructions on the voting procedure. Every contingency arrangement was in place, including supplies of spare light bulbs, pens, drawing pins, candles and tissue paper. Nothing at all was left to chance. As a result, polling stations were able to open and close on time, voters were processed quickly and everything worked according to plan.

### **Performance of Electoral Officials**

Electoral officials were outstanding in the conduct of their duties. Those in charge of polling stations were senior government servants and professionals from the private sector, specially selected to maintain credibility and confidence in the electoral process. It was to the credit of the first Director of Elections that the appointments of all Electoral Officers and polling clerks were made in consultation with the political parties. Officials who were identified as being actively involved in party politics were weeded out and replaced. This process continued into these elections. The integrity and independence of Electoral Officers, their deputies and other electoral officials were therefore unquestionable. This was particularly evident and important in their dealings with the old and disabled and with their handling of doubtful registration.

Nearly all of these officials were doing the job for the fourth time in a year. They were thus able to process the voters much faster than before and within two hours, the long queues that had formed at the opening of the poll had disappeared. As in the past, they were most efficient and courteous in assisting voters who needed help, ushering voters from one stage of the voting procedure to the next and guiding them to empty ballot booths. We did not come across one instance of inefficiency or discourtesy in the 11 hours of polling nor were any reported to us.

Different Electoral Officers had organised and managed their stations in different ways. Most had set up three to five separate tables to verify voters' names on the list before they had their thumb marked with violet ink and their forefinger dipped in invisible ink. Some stations had divided their voters' list into alphabetical groupings and voters were guided to the appropriate table. Polling clerks read out loudly and clearly each voter's name, the page and line number to enable polling agents to cross out the name on their copy of the list.

We were impressed by the confidence and flexibility displayed by Electoral Officers, especially in their dealings with candidates and party agents. They went out of their way to put everyone at ease, acceding to such requests as removing a light bulb from one polling booth for those voters who did not like the glare of a bare bulb, and altering one booth to enable agents to see how voters needing assistance were helped. They were careful to obtain the agreement of all agents in making the changes requested. At the biggest polling station, the agents did not wish to go through the procedure of name checking as they felt this would slow down the voting process. Instead each agent would take down the names of voters as they were announced and would later cross-check them against their copy of the list. The Electoral Officer agreed to the request and as a safeguard made them sign his occurrence book to record this arrangement. Such a request was a reflection of the degree of confidence the parties had in the electoral officials and the system established.

At every station we visited, we asked the agents from the three parties and the candidates present if they had any complaints to make and whether they were satisfied with the process. There were virtually no complaints from any of the three parties.

### **Performance of Party Polling Agents**

Polling agents from all three parties were at every polling station to keep a vigilant eye on the process. For added measure, the candidates were also present, most of them staying for the full 11 hours that the stations remained opened and then staying on to observe the counting. Most agents had copies of the voters' list and carefully cancelled out the names as they were announced. However, at several polling stations, the agents were trying out a new system where they were only taking down the page and line number of the name. At the end of each hour, the list was delivered to a central checking area nearby and these names would be appropriately crossed out. They found this a much faster and efficient way of keeping pace with the voters passing through the process.

At one station, however, this caused some confusion and led to supporters of one candidate claiming that scores of voters had voted twice because their page and line number had been recorded twice, some within the space of one hour and others at different times. We advised the candidate to report this to the Electoral Officer, but he declined to do so until he had fully investigated the matter. At the end of the day, he informed us that his supporters had made an error in cross-checking the names. There had been two agents at the station, one recording the announcements from one polling clerk and the other from two other polling clerks. Both agents had apparently recorded the announcement of the page and line number in their own separate sheets of paper and on subsequent cross-checking, made it appear that the same voter had voted twice. At other times, the agents simply misheard the numbers announced. The agents and other party workers manning this operation obviously needed to be better trained. We were, however, gratified to note that the candidate had used his wisdom to calm the more hot-headed among his supporters and dismiss the allegations.

## **Allegations of Irregularities**

Notwithstanding the goodwill and tolerance that characterised these elections, there were of course the inevitable complaints of party irregularities and violations of the Code of Conduct. We received a list of complaints from one political party about vote-buying, canvassing in the immediate vicinity of polling stations, the use of government vehicles to transport voters, party 'checkpoints' close to polling stations, and party supporters congregating at homes of district leaders. There were also complaints that one party had put posters up on polling day while another had pulled down the posters of a candidate of an opposing party that had been displayed within the prohibited 50 meters of a polling station. We investigated most allegations. A few of the complaints were verified and rectified. Others we realised were due to a lack of awareness of the normal workings of well-oiled party machines on polling day. But we found most complaints to be totally unfounded and even mischievous. This, however, did not detract us from our overall impression that the new mood of reconciliation which now prevailed in Seychelles had done much to ensure a calm and peaceful polling day.

## **Security Presence**

All polling stations were manned by officers from the Seychelles Police Force, including from the PMU. We noted that the police were an integral part of the success of polling day. They guided voters to the entrance of the polling stations, ushered them into and out of stations, and were vigilant in their care of the ballot boxes. When one party vehicle festooned with party flag and stickers arrived at a polling station, the police officer in charge marched up to the driver and told him to move on immediately as this was a violation of the Code of Conduct. The police undertook their responsibilities politely and discreetly and were most helpful, particularly to those who required special assistance. They deserve commendation for an excellent performance.

## **Conduct of the Count**

With two ballots to be counted for these elections, the Elections Office had expected the results to come in the early hours of the morning. As it turned out, by 11.00 p.m., results from all but three polling stations had been submitted. We were able to witness the counting at 15 stations and again were impressed by the efficiency of the electoral officials and the procedures adopted. Some stations opened all the boxes at the same time to start the count, while others counted one box at a time. We were told that unlike the July 1992 election, agents and candidates did not, this time, see the need to scrutinise the sorting and counting quite as vigilantly as before. They were able to observe the process carefully from close quarters and were consulted by the Electoral Officers when appropriate. It was obvious that they now had faith in the system and were confident that no irregularities would take place. At one polling station where an opposition party candidate was expected to win, the Electoral Officer went through an elaborate process of personally opening each and every envelope, and displaying each ballot paper to all present before placing it on the appropriate pile. Needless to say, this station was one of the last to report its result, but the count had been done to the satisfaction of all agents and candidates. As with the polling process, we did not receive one complaint.

One cumbersome procedure that had slowed down the counting was the use of envelopes for ballot papers. The need to open the envelopes, pull out and unfold two ballot papers and then sort them into Presidential and National Assembly piles considerably lengthened an otherwise straightforward process. While we understood the original reason for this practice of using envelopes as an extra security measure, the confidence in the system and the credibility now established should enable the Director of Elections, in consultation with the political parties, to consider abolishing this procedure.

We were impressed by the very low percentage of rejected ballots, which stood at only 1.17 per cent for the Presidential election and 1.6 per cent for the National Assembly

election. The discrepancy was apparently due to the fact that some voters, especially among the old, insisted on casting only their vote for the Presidential election. Most of the rejected votes for the National Assembly election were therefore blank ballots.

### **Declaration of the Result**

The final results were announced live on television and radio at 1.30 a.m. on 24 July 1993. Mr Albert René had won the Presidential election with 58.8 per cent of the votes, while Sir James Mancham received 36.29 per cent and Mr Philippe Boullé of the United Opposition 3.74 per cent. For the National Assembly election, the SPPF won all but one of the 22 first-past-the-post seats. The solitary opposition seat went to the DP. In the allocation of the 11 proportional representation seats, six went to the SPPF which had won 56.55 per cent of the votes cast, four to the DP for its 32.27 per cent share and one to the United Opposition for its 9.71 per cent. A copy of the full results is at *Annex XI*.