

Anecdotes from the National Assembly

Brigitte Weidlich

formed on the rest of the parliamentary sessions.

On the first day of Johan DTA politician Johan de Waal asked the minister of Works, Transport and Communication, like so often before, when at last he would table the annual reports of the in voluntary in the National Assembly recovered through the 2001.

During the official opening of parliament on February 20, 2001, President Sam Nujoma criticized members for not turning up for the many of the sessions the previous year. He threatened to take "serious action against them". He however did not say what exactly would be done. However, it seems as if his scolding helped, because there were less roll calls to establish a quorum (minimum 37 voting MPs) this year than in 2000.

The president also pleaded that debates should not be too shallow. This request of his could not be fulfilled most of the time this year, although there were some good moments. Since the president only visits the National Assembly twice a year, during the official opening and again when he delivers his state of the nation address, one wonders who is keeping him in-

question, he dropped a letter or two, calling Mr Gurirab the minister of foreign "affair", which caused some amusement. The attorney general, Mrs. Pendukeni Ithana rose to state on a point of order: "We don't have a minister of foreign affair, but of foreign affairs," which resulted in even more chuckles.

Mr Piet Junius of the DTA tried very hard to find an-

swers to the defence ministry's diamond mine in the DRC and only received evaluative remarks from Minister Erkki Nghimtina. On March 1 the minister did not disclose any details of the diamond interests of the mining company in the DRC. "I will take you to the DRC and you can go and have a look," he offered. Rather frustrated, Mr

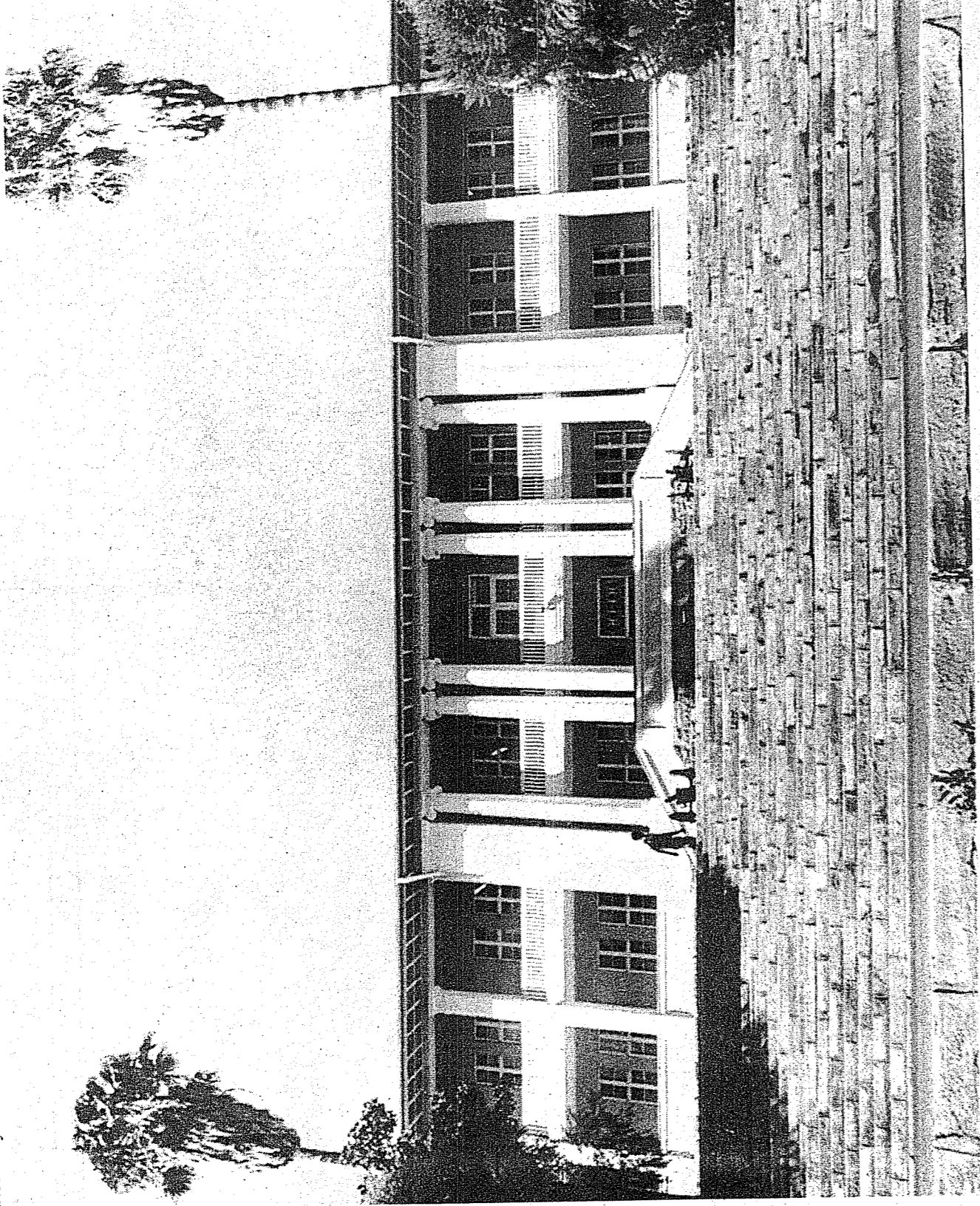
Junius commented on the words of the minister with "Thanks, now it is as clear as mud!"

On March 19, Mr Johan de Waal had the female MPs in stitches when he asked a question on mining at Toscanini. It were the last two syllables of the word which they found so amusing as the word means a certain part of the human

time to come!" he remarked very audibly, causing proceedings to terminate for some minutes due to fits of laughter.

During the short winter session it appeared as if the cold weather prevented the members of parliament from delivering funny lines for this chronicle to record.

During the Namibian spring (September 21) when



Pendukeni Ithana



John Mutorwa



Helmut Angula



Johan de Waal



Hadino Hishongwa



Hifikepune Pohamba



Chief Kuaima Riruako



Jesaya Nyamu

On September 26, Mrs Netumbo Ndiqirah, minister of Women Affairs and Child Welfare held her famous speech in favour of the Day of the African Child (on September 28, 2001) in which she claimed that the century-old and innocent nursery rhyme 'Baba Black Sheep' had racial connotations, a statement which caused some expressions of disbelief on the floor. The minister ended her speech by appealing to all MPs to attend the celebrations for the African child two days later. After she sat

down, deputy minister of Prisons and Correctional Services, Mr Jeremiah Nambinga, displayed a rarely observed humorous trait: "We are waiting for the Day of the African Man," he urged, which resulted in some irritated looks from the female cabinet members in his direction.

October 30, during the debate on the additional budget, Mr Moongo of the DTA criticized government expenses. In an attempt to detail him, deputy Prisons minister, Mr Jeremiah Nambinga rose. "Can I ask the honourable puppet a question?" he wanted to know. "No stupid questions allowed!" Mr Moongo fired back and continued with his speech.

He gave the ruling party a mouthful on the 35-million dollar liberation war museum and the Heroes' Acre, which is to cost another 35 million dollars. "That is your (Swapo's) graveyard. You are digging your own graves!" he noted, causing angry noises from the Swapo members, while the oppositional MP's applauded him.

The month of November was short as the House went into recess on November 15. The mood was similar to that in a school shortly before the summer holidays start, i.e. the energy levels for a meaningful debate ran low and tempers were short. Mr Johan de Waal of the DTA wanted to find out something about Air Namibia. The Ministry of Finance is the shareholders ministry of Air Namibia. On his question of how many aeroplanes Air Namibia had left in its possession, the deputy minister of Finance, Dr Rick Kukuru, usually a docile personality, lost it. The question had been raised weeks before but the answer was continuously postponed.

"Why don't you walk to the airport and count the planes yourself?" Dr Kukuru suggested with sharp sarcasm in his voice.

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ter Hage Geingob, who spoke for one hour on the land question. The prime minister by then had recovered from the vague answers given by deputy minister of Information and broadcasting, Mr Gabes Shihepo, to why the "Prime Minister's Question Time", had been removed after eleven years.

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Ratings on the TOP TEN in the National Assembly for 2001: (For reasons of fairness 5 ruling party and 5 opposition MP's were selected.)

No. 10 - Chief Kuaima Riruako (DTA): Keen participation by means of mostly unprepared speeches. Eager to lengthen his speeches by answering to interjections while delivering his addresses, causing the Speaker a great dilemma. Often relies on his bench neighbour, Mrs Patricia Sikka for impromptu secretarial work, as she sometimes must search for a lost page of his notes in a heap of papers on the desk. He is often the involuntary cause for amusement for the rest of the members.

No. 9 - Mrs Teopoline Mushelenga (SWAPO): She only joined the NA in March 2000 but outshines fellow back-benchers who also became MPs last year, as she has her speeches typed and in good English, and does not come to the chamber with undecipherable handwritten notes in Namlish. Her contributions are balanced, to the point and free of political back-biting. Unlike many of her Swapo colleagues, she distinguishes between pertinent legislative issues of today and mere party propaganda rhetoric usually dating back to the sixties.

No. 8 - Mr Kauurua Kaura (DTA President): is at his best when he is angry, has the ability to fling cutting remarks at ruling party benches like attack missiles. Could apply his oratory skills more often and would be on a higher rating by this newspaper if the would increase his input in the debates.

No. 7 - Newcomer Mr Linus Chata (CoD) is a talented young speaker who has a refreshing approach. He also adds aptly selected quotes from contemporary international intellectuals in his contributions. This is a big difference to Swapo MP's in his age group, who appear to be either mute or obliged to follow the 41-year-old footsteps of their party elders and just repeat their worn-out and narrow-minded 'blood and soil' phrases from the struggle days, picked up from their communist friends.

No. 6 - This rating is shared by both Dr Kaire Mbuende and Mr Willem Koijore of the ruling party. While Mr Koijore often speaks with a resounding voice due to his difficult duty as deputy speaker, he also contributes to debates and does this in a neutral way, concentrating on issues and not on party rhetoric. Dr Mbuende does rise unfortunately not very often - on economic matters and is well-versued therein.

No. 5 - Minister Helmut Angula (SWAPO) is very good off the cuff with witty interjections. Unfortunately he does not speak too often in the National Assembly. Has a dry sense of humour, which is definitely an asset. He does not hide his critical stance on the performance of parastatals, a rare trait among Swapo MPs who often give the impression they dare not criticize even the smallest government issue in public.

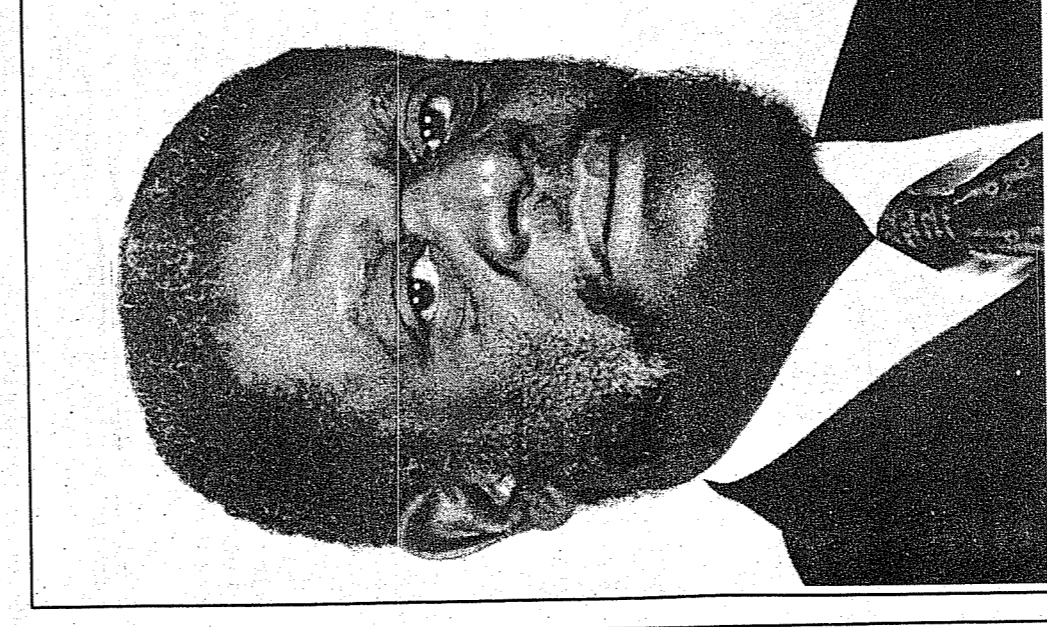
No. 4 - Minister John Mutorwa (SWAPO) always does his "homework" and gives very elaborate and well-researched answers on questions posed by the opposition. Very popular among parliamentary reporters as they can take a smoke break per one answer of his. In his well-carved out speeches he loves to attack the opposition, especially the CoD shadow minister of education, Dr Lizzy Anokugo, but always remains fair.

No. 3 - Mr Johan de Waal (DTA) is surely the fastest speaker in the House. Rises to his peak during budget debates with sharp but fair criticism and often throws in Afrikaans interjections. His pet hates are Air Namibia and TransNamib and with great persistence he brings up those two subjects in the chamber.

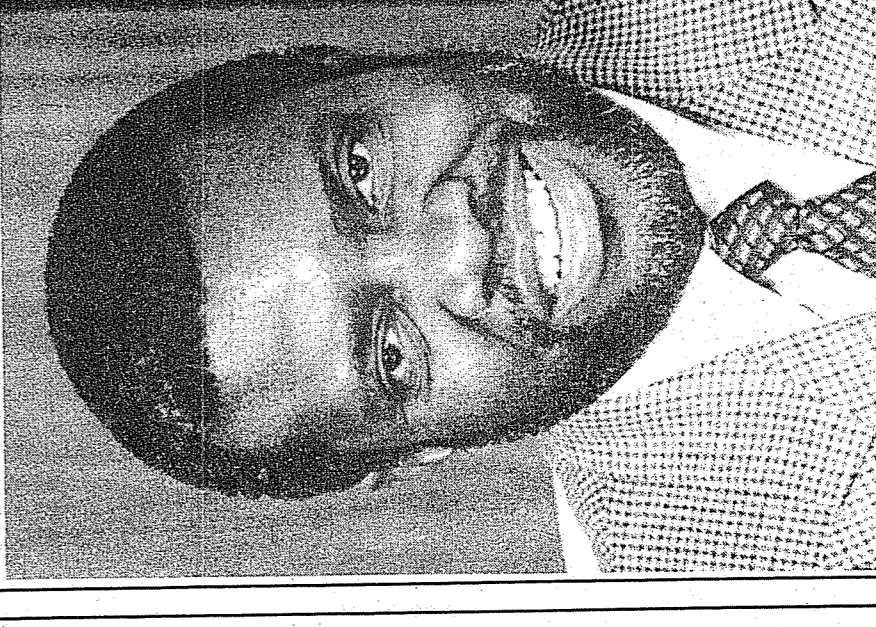
No. 2 - Mrs Nora Schimming-Chase (CoD), who carefully plans and constructs her speeches, which are very substantiated and an intellectual pleasure. Her voice can produce all kinds of nuances. Is most dangerous in her critical attacks on the ruling party when she speaks in the "innocent mode" and praises the ruling party. Attentive observers know by then that sharp criticism is to follow.

No. 1 is Prime Minister Hage Geingob (SWAPO): Apart from having a very good speech writer the personal input of the PM himself during the preparation stage is very noticeable during the rendering of his speeches and results in his distinct style. A good orator and he is the best off-the-cuff speaker. Known for his instantaneous mood swings in the NA and he plays on the emotions of members. His remark of the year in the NA: "Ponhele ya France says one should grab land."

No. 0 - Special mention must be made of Mr Royal Xoo Xoo, Mrs Lydia Kaujita, Mr David Boots, Mrs Margreth Jwagamang, deputy transport minister Immanuel Ngatjizeko and Namibia's 'schiefepij', Mr Peter 'Fshirunbu Tseehama for their muteness this year.



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