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11th November, 1982.

The Editor,  
Sunday Times,  
CITY

Sir,

Now that some of the election dust has settled and tempers have subsided it is interesting to examine the motivation behind the National Party's campaign against Mrs. Di Bishop in Stellenbosch, together with her reasoning when she applied the term "freedom fighters" to Swapo.

Whether a man is deemed a freedom fighter or a terrorist depends really on the eye of the beholder and which side he or she is on. Emotive and subjective attitudes influence definitions.

If it were possible to take a detached view of events on the border it could be said that the members of Swapo are South West Africans and, therefore, South Africans, for Namibia is still attached to South Africa. The fact that Swapo has moved its bases across the border into Angola does not alter this fact and the slow war of attrition could therefore be termed a civil war, with South Africans fighting each other.

In a civil war there are neither terrorists nor freedom fighters, there are merely soldiers - either conscripted into their armies or choosing to fight on one side or the other. Neither side has the right to apply labels to the other.

However a civil war generally results from unresolved conflicts where one section of the population, unable to achieve what it wants or to satisfy its grievances by peaceful means, adopts violent tactics. By the very nature of things this is likely to be against the ruling party, which has the power to refuse or frustrate the aspirations of some or all of its citizens.

In the case of Swapo the indigenous peoples of South West Africa, or some of them at least, objected to the discriminatory policies of the South African Government and, unable to get satisfaction of their needs in any other way, took to the bush. This fact, together with their decision to cross the border, could well be attributed to government policy, government intransigence and government resistance to peaceful negotiation to change. Swapo believes it is fighting for its freedom, and there are many fair-minded people who would agree. It is certainly not impossible to use the term "freedom fighters" in relation to Swapo

/Page Two

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Of course if one happens to be a supporter of the government and of its policies, or if one wishes to maintain the status quo, then one would obviously view Swapo as the enemy, as upstarts and insurgents, as terrorists, and these are precisely the feelings that the Nationalist smear campaign against Mrs. Bishop played on.

But perhaps government supporters should examine their own fallibility in his regard, for it is not for nothing that the policy of apartheid and discrimination is frowned upon by the entire free world. Organisations like Swapo and the A.N.C. followed policies of non-violence and only espoused violence as a last resort.

The Black Sash does not condone violence from any quarter. Nevertheless our young men from both sides are being killed and maimed for life in a way that can continue unresolved indefinitely. It makes little difference whether they are termed soldiers, freedom fighters, terrorists. The end result is the same and it is disastrous for all too many of them. It is immature of the government and its supporters not to recognize that, in the eyes of many, Swapo are freedom fighters, and that it is more important to bring the war to an end than to argue over terminology.

We believe that the Government's policy should be one of conciliation rather than conflict; that it should grant recognition to Swapo and the A.N.C., both of which are, or could be, legitimate opposition organisations; that it should permit them to operate freely and without violence in the political arena; and that it should abide by the will of the majority in devising a negotiated resolution of all our country's problems.

JOYCE HARRIS  
NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT.

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