A decision taken at last weekend’s Central Committee meeting of the SWAPO Party on the succession issue should really put this important debate in its proper context. SWAPO Party members and some leaders should also really learn to use party structures when addressing such important issues as such.

Succession, by design, has never been easy. There are always fears to allay and uncertainty to clarify. Unrestrained ambition, however neatly ground, has caused many a people to fall. In some cases, it has brought careers of some not-so-smart politicians to an ignominious end. And if we are not careful, we are not going to be spared the ugly consequences which follow when such a debate goes off the rails.

SWAPO Party has, for years, elected its leaders freely and fairly, using its Constitution as the guiding document and Party structures as mechanisms to effect leadership change. That process has served us well for 50 decades. And so far, good. Party structures do not fail the Party. The Party’s Constitution, too, has not been found wanting on this important issue. The Constitution, instead, provides for Party structures to guide the process. The problem starts the moment we start bending Party structures and the Constitution to fit our personal ambitions.

That is the reason Hidupu Mutwete has never had fond memories on the 2004 Extra-Ordinary Congress, which elected President Hifikepuny Pohamba as SWAPO Party’s sole candidate for the 2004 Presidential and National Assembly elections, which he won hands down. Hidupu’s fate was delivered, sealed and sealed. From the look of things now, however, he may not be the last to suffer that fate.

We have read it all in newspapers. We have seen television interviews, some of which were stage-managed. At times I wondered whether the Party’s Constitution, which has glued it together for many years, was something to go by. I smell a rat when a person starts ignoring Party structures. In actual fact, such a step rubbishes and shrugs the Party’s Constitution, which should reign supreme when such debates crop up.

It was with that in mind that SWAPO Party Secretary General, Cde Pendukeni Iivila-Hhanda, addressed a press conference last month to put a stop to that ugly debate in public. She urged all and sundry to follow Party structures when discussing important and sensitive issues such as the succession debate. As the Party’s Chief Accounting Officer, her directives were very clear and could have been the last.

“Only the Congress will have the final say,” she said. “The Congress is supreme. The succession debate should precede the Congress. The Ordinary Congress takes its course. The succession issue must be discussed at an appropriate time and within Party structures.” She added that leaders in SWAPO Party were elected for a period of five years, not more than that. After every five years, the Congress convenes to, among other things, elect a new leadership – from the President downwards. Such a directive was endorsed by both the Politburo and the Central Committee which met over the last two weekends respectively.

Now that the Secretary General, the Politburo and the Central Committee have spoken and made everything clear, I hope discipline will now prevail and Party structures will get the respect they deserve. Those who campaign outside Party structures do so at their own peril.

Newspapers and televisions will not be delegates to next year’s Congress. Leaders in Party structures will. And sidestepping them through newspapers and television interviews only insults their intelligence. They resent that treatment. To them, that flagrant disdain reeks of arrogance. It has its own price, too, which can be very biting.

The succession debate we are delving into is magnanimous. There is more to politics than that. Wise heads must concern themselves with the practical consequences the succession debate may have. Will it contribute to nation-building or, as some would have it, the merging of the revolutionary and bureaucratic forces of the party?

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