

Organising The Peasants¹

by

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'My detention and interrogation by the Security Police revealed to me the alarm with Which the Government viewed the prospect of a general peasant uprising in South Africa. The experience of the recent Pondoland revolt and the peasant unrest in the Northern Transvaal and elsewhere in South Africa made the authorities fearful that a general uprising, unless nipped in the bud, was a real possibility, Instead of recognising that the unrest was the natural outcome of the Government's own policies and unpopular measures, like the rehabilitation scheme and the Bantu Authorities system, it blamed it on 'communist agitators.' It was only after the publication of the Cillie Commission Report on the Soweto riots of 1976 that the ruling class began to understand that the major cause of Black unrest was not agitation by Communists, as the public had been led to believe, but Government policy. It had become the urgent function of the security forces and the quisling chiefs to smell and smoke out these 'communists and destroy them. Many innocent people were killed as the result of the implementation of this policy. The Government could not understand why the measures, which it devised for the Blacks and which it considered were beneficial to the rural population, could evoke such anti-government feeling unless as the result of incitement by terrorists outside the country assisted by agitators from within. That is why my interrogator was at pains to examine my utterances at my meetings with the peasants in order to find out if they were not calculated to incite them to violence. He did not appreciate that what the Unity Movement did was to help organise and to give political direction to masses which were already in motion. Terrorism was not part of its policy. His concern about my activities among the peasants, especially those in Pondoland and the Transvaal, was legitimate but uninformed.

¹ A chapter from the author's unpublished manuscript "My Life in Exile" 1998

My first political contact with the Pondoland peasants as a body was in 1945 during my political tour of the Transkei whose aftermath, as I have already explained earlier in this book, was my forced resignation as principal of the Freemantle Boys' Secondary School. My second contact with them was in 1960 before, during and after the Pondoland uprising. Thereafter we met in Swaziland in 1963. During 1964 I met their leaders at our extended Executive meetings on several occasions. Some of their leaders fled to Lesotho at about the same time that I did to seek political asylum. We were able to continue our political work from there. I subsequently met and worked with others in Zambia in circumstances which I will explain later in this book. The Unity Movement has had, since the 1950's and still has among members its Executive~ people whose homes are in Pondoland. My political contact with the peasants of the Transvaal was underground and fascinating.

As a result of the wars of dispossession waged by the combined forces of the British and the Dutch in South Africa, African tribesmen in the Transvaal were confined into various tribal reserves scattered among European farms all over the Northern Transvaal. The main tribal groups were the Bapedi in the north east and the Batswana in the north west. As elsewhere in South Africa these tribal reserves became reservoirs of migrant labour for the white farms, mines and industries.

These migrant workers came into contact in the industrial areas with other migrant workers from various other parts of the country and there was a consequent interchange of ideas and experiences which facilitated the spread of ideas,

From its inception in 1943 the Unity Movement displayed a vital interest in the struggles of the peasants for land and sought to integrate them with the political struggles for democratic rights under the slogan 'Land and Liberty.' The unity of the agrarian and national struggles was demonstrated in the struggle against the Rehabilitation Scheme. Leading members of the Unity Movement toured the rural areas addressing meetings of peasants. Chief among them were the late I.B. Tabata and myself. After the tour of the Transkei in 1945, to which I have already made reference in

this book, I.B. Tabata wrote a pamphlet “The Rehabilitation Scheme, A new Fraud” which became the textbook of the Unity Movement organisers in the rural areas. Peasant Committees were formed and affiliated with the Unity Movement. Peasant delegates attended All-African Convention and Unity Movement Conferences and deliberated with workers and intellectuals. They began to appreciate the national character of the problems facing them. Hence the evolution of the slogan “We build a Nation.” The arrest and trial of I.B. Tabata in the Transkei in 1948 after addressing a meeting of over 1,000 peasants in Pondoland, gave a fillip to the Movement. The ferment created by the impact of the ideas of the All African Convention (AAC) and the Unity Movement was such that early in 1952 the Government issued a proclamation making it an offence for more than 10 people to meet in the rural areas of the Transkei.

At the Conference of the AAC held in December 1956 the position of the peasants in the Transvaal came under consideration under discussion of the land question. J.H. Saliwa, a peasant from the Glen Grey district, who had recently returned from the Pietersburg area of the Transvaal after three years of deportation, related instances of cruelty on the farms. He said people were made to labour the whole day and “boss-boys” drove –them like cattle. At sunset the workers were locked up. He related stories of how in the Transvaal labour recruiting was reduced to kidnapping of youths. The Conference decided to express its solidarity with the people of the Transvaal, and to invite their organisation to join ours in the struggle for liberation.

The story of the struggle of the Bapedi in the Transvaal against the oppression and brutality of the South African Herrenvolk was told to me at length by Maredi. He was one of the first leaders of the Bapedi to be singled out as an agitator because of his opposition to the Government schemes. He was deported to Mngqesha, a village in the King William's town district, on the 30th November 1957. On the 18th March 1958 his Paramount Chief, Maroamoche was arrested and deported to Cala district together with his wife following an accusation that he had been influenced by Maredi to reject government measures. During the first half of 1958, in my capacity as the then President of the AAC and acting President of

the Unity Movement, I visited both at their respective places of deportation in order to convey to them the solidarity of the AAC and the Unity Movement with the struggle of the Bapedi people in their resistance to Herrenvolk oppression and exploitation and to offer such assistance as we could give. I visited Maredi again in March 1960 and he gave me a lengthy statement concerning the bitter struggles of the Bapedi.

Maredi told me that Prinsloo (then Chief Information Officer and later Deputy Minister of Bantu Affairs) threatened that if he did not accept the Trust he would be struck by lightning and if the Paramount Chief followed him he would also be struck by lightning. Rev. Wessels (a D.R.C. minister of religion who was employed as an information officer in the area) called Maredi aside. He opened a National Bank bag and showed him £300 in cash. He offered it to Maredi on condition he accepted the Bantu Authorities and the Trust. Maredi refused to take the money. "From my ancestors we have never accepted a bribe at the expense of our people." He told Wessels. He walked out on Wessels in disgust. Maredi told the Paramount Chief what had transpired in the presence of all his people. The police were ordered to arrest him.

The Paramount chief intervened. He reported to the Bapedi, assembled -outside in hundreds, what had happened. They threatened to burn the office. The government officials and the police then left. On Saturday the 30th November (1957) at 12 noon about 30 vehicles - vans and cars with police armed with sten-guns etc. came to fetch me and Morutanyane (Maroamoche). The people tried to pull us away from the vans and they were arrested for obstruction. I was hand-cuffed with irons on the ankles, waist and wrists and taken to Mngqesha in the King Williamstown district. On the 18th March 1958 Maroamoche was arrested and deported to Cala.

The Ikwezi Lomso (a newspaper published by the Unity Movement) of September 1958 gave publicity to the struggles of the Bapedi peasants in the Transvaal against the Rehabilitation Scheme and the Bantu Authorities from 1954 to 1958. This statement which was in Xhosa/went on to show that on the 7th March 1958 the Government, by Proclamation, declared

Sekhukuniland a “closed area”, and no one was allowed to enter or leave the reserve. Criticism of any chief who favoured the Government and the boycott of any Government supporter were made a criminal offence carrying a fine of £300 or 3 years imprisonment. After the deportation of the Paramount Chief there was violence which resulted in several people being shot dead by the police and the arrest of hundreds of others.

In his address on the National Situation (read in his absence under a banning order) at the December 1958 Conference of the All African Convention I.B. Tabata dealt at length with the ruthless arrests and torture of more than 200 African men and women of Sekukuniland on the allegations of murder, arson and incitement to violence. The events immediately leading to these arrests were the culmination of a long series of acts of intimidation. There had been the banishment of the leaders, the deposition of the chiefs who had rejected Bantu Authorities, and the appointment of quisling chiefs. It had become a common sight to see processions of police cars and pick-up vans carrying policemen armed with revolvers and stenguns invading the villages. Batches of men were dragged off to jail. But all this did not succeed in cowing the people.

Tabata said the people were looking for a lead 'The oppressed of South Africa had their eyes fixed on the Conference. The peasants want to know what we are doing, and what they must do about the Bantu Authorities, the Rehabilitation Scheme and allied questions. The workers want to know how to fight their battles as workers and how to link up these with the battles of the oppressed as a whole. The intellectuals together with the other sections of the people want to know how to coordinate their activities into a single unified effort. We have to give a reply to the urgent questions that are on the lips of the oppressed today.

The lively discussions which followed the reading of this address reflected the interest which the delegates took in the issues raised. There was a large peasant representation of over 22 organisations. I had brought a bus load of peasant delegates from the Glen Grey district. The peasants showed particular interest in the struggle of the peasants in the Transvaal and a keen desire to be united with them in the task of building the nation.

It was not until the beginning of 1964, however, that a definite start was made on an organisational basis to draw the peasants of the Transvaal into the U.M. On the 22nd January 1964 the leadership of APDUSA in the Transvaal met the leadership of the Likwapepe in Johannesburg. The Likwapepe was an organisation of the peasants in the Transvaal. Its membership was to be found mostly in the rural areas (including the white farms) but also in the towns especially in Johannesburg among the workers in the mines and the factories. The APDUSA leaders invited Likwapepe to affiliate with the U.M. and its members to join APDUSA as individuals. The Likwapepe leaders appeared to favour the first rather than the second proposition. However further discussion was postponed to the 15th February to enable the peasant representatives from the country to attend. The meeting however failed. From this first contact the APDUSA leaders confirmed that the Likwapepe was primarily a peasant organisation firmly opposed to Bantu Authorities. Some of the leaders in the Johannesburg area were associated either with S.A.C.T.U. or FOFATUSA, but the migrant labourers were disillusioned in the ANC and in these trade unions. The ANC-inclined leaders of the Likwapepe attempted to nip the unity move in the bud by making out that the U.M. wanted to swallow up the Likwapepe. In support of their argument they pointed to the request strongly urged by Mtutu Mpehle, then paid national organiser of U.M. and present at the joint meeting, that Likwapepe members must join APDUSA as individuals rather than affiliate their organisation to the U.M.

At the time of the joint meeting between Executive members of APDUSA with the leaders of the Likwapepe there happened to be in Johannesburg peasants from Pondoland sent there by the HUC² to organise the mine-workers. These peasants held meetings with groups of mine-workers all over the Rand from 22nd January. They propagated the necessity for the unity of the mine-workers, peasants, farm workers and urban workers in the fight against oppression and urged all these oppressed toilers to engage in the political struggle by joining APDUSA and the U.M. which was

² HUC is the Head Unity Committee of the Unity Movement, the supreme decision making body in between Conferences – Editor Apdusa Views

organisers were introduced to the Likwapepe delegation to whom they also conveyed their message.

On or about the 15th March 1964 the joint peasant delegations met in Johannesburg. The organiser who attended the meeting gave an enthusiastic report dated 17.3.64. I quote from it.

"Alas, they have come and gone. What courage and dedication! The whole night I could not sleep going over and over what the peasants said and what they did. You must have heard about the organisation called the Likwapepe. It embraces the whole of the rural areas of the Transvaal.

They sent six to meet those from the South. Then men met men. This six were from Zeerust, Sekhukuniland, Pietersburg. They were overwhelmed and could not talk. But let us hear the men from the north.

'We have been longing to meet you from the South. We heard about your struggles.... and we hoped to meet you because the struggle that you wage is similar to ours Seeing that we have met we must roll up our sleeves and work hard to build the Nation. Likwapepe embraces 250 chiefs (and their subjects): They asked if chiefs could come into the Unity Movement. The Southerners said no. It was their experience that at critical times they would let the people down. 'The chiefs are the bridges through which the Herrenvolk cross. The intellectuals also are bridges.....' To prove Unity between Likwapepe and Apdusa they will come south and they invite the southerners to come north. Some think that we are from Sekhukuniland only. But that is not so, for we embrace other rural areas in the Transvaal'

“They then set about in business-like manner contacting those in the town. They wanted our constitution, the Ten Point Programme (for full democratic rights) and the method we use for rallying the people. They stressed very strongly that we must work hard to build the nation for the whole country. There is no clash between us and Apdusa ... We are totally opposed to reports in the European press that we are doing this and doing that (aimed at the ANC and POQO) as some organisations do. It is a criminal offence to the nation to publicise to the enemy what we are doing.

“Once we are in the NEUM we will work hard to unite the people in the country’.

They have further instructed their members who are mineworkers to unite with Apdusa members working in the mines. They appreciated our efforts to get the mineworkers into the nation.”

The joint delegations addressed meetings of mineworkers. Our reporter continues his story:

”he mineworkers on meeting again were happy but they were critical: The mine-workers had already moved and had come into contact with farm-workers. And here they met. There were 400 representatives from nine mines, including one from Welkom. A meeting of all and enrolment were from all three Protectorates and Nyasaland (Malawi) And here one of them said:

'These ideas will unite not only Southern Africa but the whole of Africa. We must bring in the nation as quickly as possible.'

Two other meetings of over 100 were also held. The significant thing is J mineworkers organised farm workers and they were invited to meetings.”

At the meeting of the HUC held in April 1964 reports were given about the meetings with the Likwapepe. At the request of the

Transvaal members, it was decided to send a senior member of the U.M. to conduct further negotiations. I was chosen to lead a delegation consisting of myself and the Johannesburg members of the HUC to meet representatives of the Likwapepe with a view to bringing this organisation into the fold of the Unity Movement. The delegation duly met the Likwapepe representatives in mid-May 1964. Discussions were held throughout the night. The U.M. delegation explained the principles, the policy, the structure and the programme of the U.M. and showed how the Likwapepe could become a member of the Unity Movement. Great stress was laid on the non-collaboration policy of the U.M. and the necessity for an armed uprising as the only way to change the status quo in the interests of the majority of the population. The Likwapepe delegation accepted all we had to say and expressed willingness in principle to join the U.M. They were however somewhat unhappy about our non-racial policy. It became apparent that they had organised themselves along the lines of anti-whiteism - the whites, especially the white farmers, representing the oppressors in South Africa. They were disinclined to trust the whites in the U.M. with their secrets and plans. This was the only point on which there seemed to be disagreement between the two delegations. The Likwapepe delegates were impressed by the knowledge of their struggles displayed by the U.M. delegation and by the fact that the U.M. had gone out of its way to render assistance to some of its leaders in exile. They expressed strong even violent opposition to the Bantu Authorities, Bantu Education and the Rehabilitation Scheme. While admitting that they accepted the leadership of their chiefs, they made it clear that they had no truck with quisling chiefs. They freely admitted having killed some of them and their determination to continue to do so whenever the need arose. At the end of the discussions a basis for cooperation had been established and further meetings were planned to iron out the differences. It was further agreed that contact should be encouraged not only between the leadership but also among the ordinary members of our respective organisations.

Attempts to probe into the real nature, organisation and programme of the Likwapepe were resisted. All that the U.M. delegation could glean in this connection was that the Likwapepe seemed to be a loose federation of various tribal groups, based mainly in

Sekukuniland, but spread over the whole Transvaal, with tightly knit branches in the towns of the reef, and in the coal mines of Northern Natal. Progressive chiefs have some say in the organisation, though the direction of affairs seems to be in the hands of an Executive composed of commoners whose decisions the chiefs are obliged to support. This is in accord with the statement which the exiled Maredi made to me in 1960. Referring to a public meeting at which the Government officials tried to trick the Bapedi into acceptance of the Trust and Bantu authorities, Maredi said that at one stage, when Prinsloo realised that the people were opposed to the Government measures, he turned to the Paramount chief and said the officials wanted to know what the Paramount Chief thought. The people replied, 'with us Bapedi a chief is a stamp. He is there to endorse what the people say. He says exactly what we say.' The Likwapepe claimed that they were very strong numerically and financially.

Their membership was composed of 'all those who were opposed to the Bantu Authorities and Government schemes and only an insignificant minority were not.

It would appear that all members are expected to make financial contributions, but that there is no written constitution. On this basis we estimated that the membership of the organisation would be in the region of 180 000

The U.M. delegation gave its report at a meeting of the Executive (HUC) on the 30th May 1964. It was decided to arrange another meeting with the Likwapepe during the following month, the U.M. delegation to include peasants who would, if possible, visit the peasant areas in the Northern Transvaal. On the 13th June the two delegations met again in Johannesburg. The Sekukuni delegation included an elderly peasant who had not attended previous meetings. He appeared to wield authority over the other members of his delegation. The U.M. peasants took up the objection to the non-racialism of the U.M. They pointed out that it was not the colour of the man that was the decisive factor but his ideas and actions. In the criminal case which had been brought against them after the Pondoland uprising it was not whites,

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but blacks who gave damaging evidence against them. Indeed some whites had given the Pondos assistance in their struggle. The

elderly peasant delegate on the Likwapepe side whole-heartedly supported the U.M. peasant with the result that the last obstacle to affiliation was removed. All that remained was to formalize the unity agreed upon. The delegation decided to put the newly achieved unity into immediate practical effect by going together addressing meetings at the mines and factories in Johannesburg.

I obtained a first-hand report of what was happening at the time soon after I landed in Johannesburg towards the end of June on my return from meeting the U.M. delegation abroad in Dar-es-Salaam and Lusaka. Reporting to I.B. Tabata in a letter dated 16th July 1964, I wrote:

I had no sooner touched down in Johannesburg than I received the good news that agreement had been reached to unite with the Transvaal peasant group. At the very moment of my arrival the two groups each representative of the contracting parties, were at large in Jo'burg addressing meetings. Because of this not all the local HUC chaps were able to meet me that night. The anti-whiteism which was the obstacle was dispelled by our peasant representatives from the Transkei who told their Northern Transvaal fellows that in their struggles in the Transkei they had been well supported by some whites and that those who gave evidence against the people's leaders in the cases that followed the promulgation of the emergency regulations were not whites but blacks. Thereupon an elderly man from the other delegation declared that objections of his fellow delegates were untenable and demanded progress. There being no further obstacles unity was effected and a plan of joint work formulated.

You will recall that snow had recently fallen at the time and it was bitterly cold. The intellectuals were reluctant to venture out but the peasants from both groups pressed them to it.”

Further joint meetings were held on the 27th June and 4th July. The delegations jointly addressed very successful meetings of migrant workers in the mines on the East Rand and the west Rand

Arrangements were made for the Sekhukuniland peasants to visit Pondoland in September and thereafter for the Pondoland peasants to visit Sekhukuniland. Three delegates from the Northern Transvaal, namely Sol, Rich and Paul from Middleburg and Lydenburg were sent to the Transkei and Natal to meet the peasants and leaders of Apdusa in those areas. They met the regional Committee of Apdusa in Eastern Pondoland on the 22nd September, 1964.

Introducing the delegates, Majola of Eastern Pondoland referred to the recent tour of Sekhukuniland by himself and the National organiser on behalf of Apdusa and the Unity Movement. He said that Feta Khomo which the Transvaal delegates represented, had accepted the fact that national unity was not only important but vital at this critical period. Apdusa was a National organisation of the masses whose aim was liberation which could be achieved only by the nation as a whole through revolutionary struggle. Through the influence of Feta Khomo, the people of Sekhukuniland had rejected Herrenvolk trusteeship. Even the chiefs, including Paramount Chief Sekukuni, were with the people in opposing government schemes. The chiefs were obliged to carry out the wishes of the people. The National organiser seconded Majola's vote of welcome. The chairman, Nxasana, then called upon the Transvaal delegation to address the meeting on the political situation in the Transvaal. On behalf of the Feta Khomo delegation, Sol briefly outlined the struggle in Sekhukuniland. He said that as a result of the rejection of Bantu Authorities by the people, the ruling class provoked the masses to violence and when this happened the Herrenvolk troops killed the people in a most brutal manner. Troops did not only shoot and kill a number of their menfolk but chopped their hands off with bayonets. And worst of all, they caught pregnant women and forced them to lie on their backs after which they trampled on their stomachs until the women miscarried. A number of women died through such brutal action. Further he pointed out that elderly men who could hardly walk were beaten to death by troops since such elderly people were unable to run away from their homes. He emphasised the fact that despite such suffering the morale of the people was not broken right up to the present time when the people have received the message of building the nation.

In seconding Sol, Paul conveyed a message of greeting and encouragement from the people of Sekukuniland to the people of Pondoland. He said that the people of Sekukuniland wanted a revolution and nothing less. Were it not for the question of arms which had been the only problem of his people, the masses of the North would have long been engaged in a revolutionary struggle with the Herrenvolk in this country. He asked the regional leadership if Apdusa could possibly supply the masses with arms or give military training to its following. In reply Majola said "The question of arms or military training is the problem of all in this organisation because to rally the masses as, a nation means future army forces.

The senior leadership of the Movement will definitely see to it that the demands of the people are fulfilled somehow or other according to the desire of the people of Sekukuniland which is exactly the desire of the people of Pondoland and other places in the country. What is most important at the moment is the building of the nation after which the question of arms or military training and other important problems connected with a revolutionary struggle will undoubtedly be the next move.

On the 27th September 1964 the Transvaal delegation accompanied by representatives of the Eastern Pondoland Regional Committee of Apdusa and the National organiser appeared before a HUC meeting in Durban and gave a glowing report of their discussions and experiences in Pondoland. One of them said:

“I am grateful for having had the opportunity to meet the peasants of Pondoland. The people I met are fighting for liberation; just as I am..... It made me feel small to meet a leadership so sincere in the struggle They (the people) were very pleased to meet a delegation from Sekhukuniland and spoke strongly about the need for unity We must bring the people of the Free State into the nation, as in Pondoland. When all the people speak the same (political) language we can be sure that liberation will not be far off ... How much time I have wasted fighting at Tobruk and being deported for 10

years! But now the fight is really for my country. I have a hatred for the ruling class which I cannot express”

Another Pedi delegate stated:

“As for the people I have seen in Pondoland the Programme and Policy of Apdusa is part of their lives. If you ask them to give up this, they will kill you for sure. They will sacrifice anything to uphold this policy. Strangely enough with the women folk it is the same... I am sure that if such people could take over the government, we would find a more cultured people than the present rulers ... if they took over the government they would run it far better than the present rulers. We must take over (the government). Then we will have a government: which will cater for all human beings, and those who are opposed to it must leave. I am returning to Sekhukuniland and will report that I met Apdusans and from now onwards all the people must be together like Apdusans.....I feel that the people of Sekhukuniland will also be pleased that all racial groups are in this nation. We must not allow the racial groups that the government formed to divide us. All the oppressed must come together. But collaborators, whether Africans, Indians or Coloured have no place in the nation”.

The Sekhukuniland delegates requested for arms. The HUC replied as follows:

“The Sekhukuniland delegations should tell the Paramount chief and the people of Sekhukuniland that they should not come as a separate nation, asking another (foreign) nation for arms etc. They should become part of the nation by first joining Apdusa and then helping to build in other areas in order that in as short a space of time the whole nation could decide on the nature of the struggle to be undertaken. We have no arms to offer them, nor would we advise the use of force in one part of the country when the nation has not been properly organised for the f struggle.”

The delegation undertook to convey this to the organisations they represented in Sekhukuniland,.

At the same time this report was given, the peasants from Pondoland also reported the arrest of several members of their regional Committee a few days before but they were not dismayed. One or two of them were even then on their way to Sekhukuniland, with the Transvaal delegation which was returning home. Not even the nationwide police swoop on the U.M. leadership which had already begun and was continuing could stop them.

From discussions with these delegates it became apparent that the Likwapepe was an all-embracing Transvaal organisation on tribal lines. The name 'Likwapepe' means between the Vaal (Likwa) and the Limpopo. Some 257 chiefs and their subjects were members. Membership was estimated at 180,000 but this is a very modest figure. The Feta Khomo was/peasant organisation whose membership was largely confined to Sekhukuniland. The story of its birth is told in the blue Apdusa (issue) (p.14). The estimate of 70,000 members of this organisation is based on estimated attendance at one meeting in July 1958 (See pp. 15 of blue Apdusa). This number is an understatement of the strength of the organisation. Reports at the time suggested that both the Likwapepe and the Feta Khomo were growing from strength to strength and had completely identified themselves with the Unity Movement.

So far I have dealt specifically with the Pedi section of the Transvaal peasants. What about the Tswana section? Our first contact with this group was in the North West Cape near Kimberley and Vryburg. One of our Johannesburg Soyans³ came from this area and in 1963 he accompanied the national organiser to the area. A more firm contact however was made from 1965 by our Botswana centre. They made contact with Chief Abram Moilwa, exiled chief of the Bafurutse from the Marico district of the Northern Transvaal, and his people who formed a fairly large community in the Lobatsi area.

³ A Soyans is a member of the Society of Young Africa, an affiliate of the Unity Movement. – Editor Apdusa Views

The story of the persecution of the Bafurutse is graphically told in Charles Hooper's book 'Brief Authority' - the courage of the people, especially the womenfolk, in their opposition to reference books in spite of police brutality:

“Open wide the doors of the prison, Commissioner
The women of Lufurutse are ready to come in”

the women chanted in defiance of police persecution. And again

“Behold us joyful
The women of Africa
In the presence of our baas
The great one
Who conquers Lufurutse
With his knobkerrie
And his assegai
And his gun.”

It was during this period in 1957 that the police mobile column was established to deal with peasant unrest all over the country. In April 1957 Abram Moilwa, the principal chief, was summarily deposed by the Regional Native Commissioner, before a well attended tribal meeting, for having failed to persuade Bafurutse women to agree to take out reference books.⁴ Thereafter bus loads of Dinokana villagers (the chiefs village) working in Johannesburg arrived in the village and called a meeting at which it was decided to sit as a Court to try those who had taken reference books. “The rebels”, as they were called, were sentenced to death but armed police arrived just in time to prevent the execution of the sentences. Later there were public burnings of reference-books, the women going from house to house to collect them. The huts of the “rebels” who had run away from the village were burnt. Wholesale arrests and prosecutions followed. The chiefs had to choose to be either with the people against the books or with the Government for the books. The struggle led to the end of chieftainship.

⁴ The hated Pass Books, the source of unending misery and persecution for the African people- Editor Apdusa Views

It is interesting to note that despite its claims and the accusations of the local officials against it, the A.N.C. played no part in the struggles of the peasants. In the Commission of enquiry which the Government set up the Native Commissioner blamed the Lufurutse disturbances on ANC 'agitators'. But Hooper refutes this allegation and states:- 'The ANC dedicated to non-violence ... is a popular bogey convenient embodiment of the Black Peril. But Bafurutse techniques of resistance were all their own; and as their ordeal persisted they diverged increasingly from the ANC standard of non-violence and veered towards chaotic reprisal' (pp. 276/7). Leaders of the ANC told Hooper that there were not a dozen Congress members in the whole tribe. Early in 1957 the ANC finally decided that it was time they took a practical interest in events in the Marico. They began with an attempt to catch up with what had already happened; and when they did this they applied not to their own leaders who were alleged to be in the district 'exploiting the situation' but to the Anglican Rectory.' When Rev. Hooper asked why they did not enquire from their own ANC members in the district, the ANC leaders asked Hooper for a list of these members. (pp. 277). The Native Commissioner too was unable to assist them. He could produce no evidence that the men whom he named as agitators were connected with the ANC.

Towards the end of 1957 police violence and intimidation reached a new climax in Lufurutse. Armed with sten-guns, batons, revolvers, rifles and fixed bayonets, hundreds of police and army troops surrounded peaceful villagers, harrassed, intimidated and assaulted even shot them. War planes circled over them on public roads and carried out mock strafe manoeuvres at tree-top height upon groups of travellers along the road.

Newspapers gave the number of injured on one day (13th November) as 1

About 12 of these were so seriously injured that they were admitted in a hospital in Botswana "where the doctors had not been officially requested to have nothing to do with assault cases' (pp. 293)

As a result of this reign of terror hundreds of Bafurutse fled into Botswana dodging the troops stationed along the borders to stop them.

Among those who sought refuge in Botswana was the deposed chief Abram Moolwa and one other with both of whom our men in Botswana made contact.

With the assistance of these and other men, meetings were held and Apdusa committees were formed in the Marico and Vryburg areas and organisers appointed. They became a vital link between Headquarters in Lusaka and the home front.

The people accepted Apdusa enthusiastically. It penetrated into the white farms and gave new hope to the farm workers. Oppression keeps pace with the growth of the resistance movement. The rehabilitation scheme was enforced in the reserves and slave labour continued on the farms. Unconfirmed reports were received that a certain farmer in the Lichtenburg areas butchered about 59 migrant casual labourers rather than pay them their wages and that this dastardly crime was suppressed by the police assisted by the policeman chief of his area. The silver lining in this dark cloud was that the people had come to realise that their local struggle must not be isolated from the greater and wider national struggle.

The Botswana border Apdusa Committees made a great contribution to the liberation struggle. They liaised with the members of the Executive of the Unity Movement stationed in Botswana whose tasks included

- (a) the formation of underground Committees inside South Africa all along the border for the reception of Unity Movement cadres to and from training abroad;
- (b) receiving organisers from the home-front who brought reports and took back instructions from Headquarters abroad in Lusaka;
- (c) Finding safe routes for our recruits from South Africa and their return;
- (d) Transmitting propaganda material to the home front.

Peasant committees were formed along the Botswana border for the specific purpose of receiving, hiding, and guiding our cadres in and out of South Africa

A leading member of one such Committee, Tshukudu Maleka of Zeerust, and a liaison man with our Botswana centre was charged in February 1972 after being detained incommunicado for almost two years under the notorious Terrorism Act on the following indictment :

'That from 1964 to 1969 Maleka made his home available for secret meetings, addressed secret meetings and searched for exit routes from the Republic to further the recruitment of persons in South Africa to undergo political and military training on behalf of the African Peoples Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) and the Non-European Unity Movement with intent to endanger law and order in the Republic.

'At all relevant times Maleka was a member of these organisations.

'Further allegations are that the accused, during the same time and at the same places, consented to undergo military training...

'That he encouraged a number of people to undergo military training from . 1964 to 1969 in Zeerust in the Republic (quoted from the Natal Witness of 9.2.1972)

Police witnesses revealed Maleka's sallies into neighbouring Botswana and his contacts with our cadres there. The evidence being contradictory and inconclusive to prove the case against him, Maleka was found not guilty and discharged.

As we shall see later in this book it was primarily the peasant organisations and the peasant committees which made it possible for our organisers to keep the leadership abroad in touch with the Movement at home from 1964 onwards. In 1970 they enabled our trained men from abroad to traverse the length and breadth of South Africa holding clandestine meetings for six months and to recruit soldiers and bring them to Zambia without being detected by the ever-watchful South African gendarmerie., Had it not been for the fact that they were

betrayed by a traitor they would have continued to operate in South Africa for a much longer time. Although our trained men were still operating in South Africa when the betrayal occurred, the security police were not able to find any of them or their recruits thanks to the efficiency of our organizational structures.

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