

- *On the eve of their achieving formal political independence from British rule, the three Southern African territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland face serious problems of breaking their economic dependence on Verwoerd's republic. This article describes recent political developments in each territory.*

ISLANDS OF INDEPENDENCE IN THE SLAVE SOUTH



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THE FUTURE OF the three Southern African countries of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland is one of the most serious problems facing statesmen in the New Africa. The reason is not far to seek. These countries are all of them in the midst of what is now the unliberated South of our continent—that part of Africa still controlled by White minority governments or by the Portuguese imperialists. Although Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland are different and each has unique features, the justification for treating them together lies in the fact that they have a common relationship to Britain and to the Republic of South Africa. This confronts them with many similar problems in the struggle for freedom, independence and economic development.

All three countries were brought under British administration at the end of the nineteenth century during the Scramble for Africa. They were not conquered by force of arms but were brought into the British empire by negotiations and treaties which left much authority and administration in the hands of traditional ruling groups. Thus the land-grabbing which occurred in other colonies was to some extent curbed particularly in Basutoland and Bechuanaland. Although a joint British administration was created for all three territories under a High Commissioner much of the day-to-day government was left in the hands of Resident Commissioners of whom there was one in each country. The Resident Commissioner in turn worked through the Chiefs. This was an example of the so-called system of indirect rule.

From the outset the British imperialists conceived of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland as part of the Union of South Africa which state had been created and handed over to the rule of a White minority in 1910. The Schedule to the South Africa Act 1909, enacted by the British parliament as the constitution of the South African state, included a procedure for the eventual incorporation of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. It should be noted that this was done without consultation with the peoples of the Protectorates with whom Britain was supposed to have treaty relationships.

The British did not stop there. The Protectorates were included in a single customs union with the Union of South Africa. In terms of this all goods bound for these countries had their customs controlled and collected at South African customs ports. South African goods entered these countries free of customs duties. In return the Protectorates received a share of the duties collected by South Africa. The South African pound was adopted as their currency. All their communications—postal, radio and telephonic—were placed under the control of South Africa. All savings funds belonging to the peoples of these countries were under the control of South African savings and financial institutions. All economic development was stifled especially if it seemed to conflict with the basic aim of maintaining Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland as labour reservoirs serving the mines, farms and industries of South Africa.

Legal and police arrangements in these countries treated them as part of South Africa. Roman-Dutch law, the common law of South Africa, was adopted as the law of the Protectorates and lawyers had to satisfy the requirements of the South African courts to qualify for admission to the Protectorate courts. Railway and transport organisation was similarly controlled by South Africa.

The marketing of goods, the fixing of quality and prices was all largely left in the hands of South African authorities whose interest was to maintain low economic development of these countries as was the case in the so-called African 'reserves' of the Union of South Africa itself.

The Customs Union in particular which has been presented as greatly advantageous to the Protectorates has been a device for ensuring that they do not develop at all. Unable to import goods directly from wherever they liked as is the case with all countries, the Protectorates have been subject completely to South African customs and protective policy designed to protect South African industries and products. The Protectorates became a dumping ground for South African goods and found it difficult if not impossible to develop an independent commercial life.

Two arguments frequently advanced in support of the customs union is that these countries did not have a machinery for performing their own customs collection because it would be too costly. Also that the arrangements entered into in 1910 actually benefited the Protectorates. These very general arguments have never been substantiated. But nothing can alter the fact that a customs union between a developed and an undeveloped country is to the disadvantage of the underdeveloped. Furthermore no country worth its salt allows its imports and exports to be controlled by another state, to say nothing of a hostile one. As for the argument that these countries had no outlet to the sea—the same could be said of Switzerland and many other countries.

These close relationships with South Africa have persisted from 1910 until today when Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland stand on the verge of independence still tied hand and foot to the most anti-African government in the world.

The liberation movement in South Africa and all the people of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland have always opposed incorporation of these countries into South Africa. Whenever the people recognized any attempt to consummate all the links binding them to South Africa with outright incorporation they vigorously opposed it. Yet the British and South African ruling class continued to inveigle these countries into the Union of South Africa to suffer all the disabilities of their brothers and sisters in that country.

After the Second World War the situation became favourable for the oppressed peoples of the world. The victory of the Soviet Union and of socialism in a number of east European and Asian countries; the struggle of the working class in the metropolitan countries; the national liberation revolution in Asia and Africa which led to the emergence of 60 independent states; all had their impact on Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland.

By 1954 the policy of direct incorporation of these countries into South Africa became a dead letter. This was foreshadowed in the statement by Winston Churchill, then Premier of Britain, when he said with customary imperialist double-talk that no incorporation of the Protectorates would take place without the fullest consultation with the people of these countries themselves.

ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

It is not necessary here to go into the history of constitutional development in the three countries. Suffice it to say that the political links tying these countries to Britain are about to be broken. Bechuana-

land will be independent on *September 30th, 1966*. The name of the new state will be *BOTSWANA*. According to the agreement between the British government and the Basotho during the constitutional talks last year independence should be achieved on April 29th, 1966, with the new state resuming its traditional name of *LESOTHO*. Swaziland does not yet have its independence date. But the position there too is quite clear; in the near future Swazini will be independent.

The Verwoerd government and the South African imperialist bourgeoisie have not of course abandoned their traditional aim of eventual outright annexation of the three territories. But the shift in the balance of African and international forces, and the universal detestation of apartheid, have necessitated a change of tactics. Verwoerd now says he welcomes independence. The South African imperialists are concentrating on indirect methods of penetration and control. Clearly they hope by means of economic pressures, intrigues and corruption, to absorb the territories in practice, while avoiding the international uproar that would result from outright invasion and annexation. In Swaziland and Bechuanaland, ready-made potential fifth columns of the Republic exist in small but economically powerful white minorities. These have been advised by Pretoria to support the more conservative and traditional African parties against the radical national liberation movements. In Basutoland, political and financial support was given by the Republic (and by West Germany) to the right-wing National Party which advocates closer economic relations with South Africa.

Recent elections in all three territories appear to have been a signal victory for these methods; indeed they were hailed by the white racialists in the Republic as such. In each election the more conservative parties won majorities; in Bechuanaland and Swaziland the most progressive parties such as the Botswana Independence Party and the Ngwane Liberatory Congress were badly defeated.

In Swaziland the royalist Imbokodvo Party, backed both by the white settler minority and the King, Ngwenyama Sobhuza II, swept the board in the first elections held in June 1964. Though it did not put forward any clear economic or political programme—its stated aim was simply to protect the rights and privileges of the king and the chiefs in any future changes in Swaziland—it won, together with its allies, all 24 elective seats in the Legislative Assembly.

There was some surprise at the poor showing of the Ngwane Liberatory Congress, which had been the organizer of a very powerful strike movement in Swaziland which had resulted in British troops being sent to the country from Kenya to break the strike. (Incidentally though

the Labour Party, then in opposition, protested against the use of troops for strike-breaking, the troops are still there.) It should not be forgotten, however, that modern political parties are a new development in Swaziland. There had been a good deal of splintering and personal bickering among the political leaders which led to confusion and lack of confidence among the public. The issues were clouded still further by the sudden emergence of a royalist party which seemed to make national loyalty the issue in the election campaign. In the long run it will be impossible to reconcile the position of the Ngwenyama as a constitutional monarch with that of leader of a political party. Urbanization and economic development, which is going ahead at a faster rate in Swaziland with its rich natural resources than in the other two territories, is inevitably leading to an advance of sophistication unfavourable to the indefinite dominance of a 'King's party' in politics.

At the first session of the new legislature, the King, Sobhuza II, indicated the wish of the Swazi to achieve independence. Prince Makhosini Dlamini, as leader of the Imbokodvo Party, made a lengthy speech outlining the policy of his party to work for independence. A Commission of the Legislative Council has been appointed to make recommendations for a new constitution leading to independence for Swaziland. There seems little doubt that on independence the country will be controlled by an Imbokodvo government with Ngwenyama Sobhuza II as head of state.

In Basutoland the general elections held on April 29th, 1965, resulted in the following position: The Catholic-supported Basutoland National Party obtained thirty-one seats, the Basutoland Congress Party twenty-five seats and the Marematlou Freedom Party four seats. In the Senate or upper house a majority of the thirty-three senators support the Marematlou Freedom Party. The Basutoland National Party although it received a minority of the popular vote obtained a majority in the National Assembly of two over the combined opposition. The votes cast for the National Party amounted to over 108,000; the Basutoland Congress Party obtained 103,000 and the Marematlou Freedom Party 42,000. The combined opposition received more votes than the ruling party.

The Basutoland Congress Party and the Marematlou Freedom Party have got more or less similar policies. They both maintain links with Pan-African organizations such as the Committee of Nine of the O.A.U. They differ in their approach to the tactics that must be followed in winning over the masses and the chiefs. In fact these two parties exist as a result of a tragic split in the Congress Party whose leadership adopted undemocratic practices and tried to eliminate progressives

in its ranks for purely opportunistic reasons. The result of the split has been the victory of the reactionary National Party. Despite the obvious lessons of the general elections the split has not yet been healed. The result is that in recent by-elections the National Party managed to hold its position. In the Masemouse by-election the votes of the M.F.P. and B.C.P. together were more than those received by the victorious National Party candidate. As the progressive parties fail to unite, the National Party with the support of South Africa is consolidating its position. Before the elections nobody believed the National Party could win an election. They won. After the elections it was confidently predicted that they could last more than a couple of months. They have now been in power six months. By the use of patronage and the offer of jobs to their opponents the National Party is eroding the opposition. Already one member of parliament belonging to the M.F.P. has announced his intention to vote for the government. The truth is that there is no short cut to victory by the progressive parties. Unless they unite they will allow the National Party to be the governing party until independence. The South African government is keen that Basutoland should be independent with a National Party government which will be completely dominated by the imperialists. The Communist Party of Lesotho has called for serious talks to be organized between the M.F.P. and B.C.P. with a view to establishing genuine unity based on opposition to the National Party policy of working with Verwoerd and for achievement of genuine independence.

In Bechuanaland the general elections held on March 1st, 1965, resulted in a sweeping victory for the Bechuanaland Democratic Party led by Seretse Khama. Out of thirty-one elective seats the B.D.P. won twenty-eight. The Bechuanaland People's Party won three and the more advanced Party, the Botswana Independence Party, none. Subsequently the National Assembly elected four more members of the B.D.P. in terms of the constitution.

Although its election manifesto is liberal in character, laying great stress on economic questions, the Bechuanaland Democratic Party is clearly the most conservative grouping, relying heavily on the support not only of the traditionalist chiefs but also of the white cattle-ranchers and traders.

THE PEOPLE WILL RESIST APARTHEID

Surveying these election results, the Pretoria imperialists would seem to have reason to be very pleased with the ways things have gone. Independence is approaching with the governments least militantly opposed to apartheid in each territory. It does not seem likely that the

Leabua Jonathan, Sobhuza and Khama administrations will immediately reverse the general policy of appeasement of the apartheid regime followed up to now by the British colonialist administrators. In each territory, until now, anti-apartheid refugees from the Republic have been treated shabbily, and many of them declared prohibited immigrants, while supporters of Verwoerd are free to come and go as they please. Each territory has made it a crime to organize anti-apartheid activities; progressive journals—including *The African Communist*—have been banned, while fascist papers such as *Die Transvaler* pour into the territories daily. The South African Police Special Branch and—in Swaziland—the Portuguese P.I.D.E. are given a free hand, and have frequently kidnapped refugees.

At the same time the white colonialists should think twice before they imagine a smooth progression towards de facto incorporation and swallowing up of the former 'Protectorates'. There are powerful factors in each territory impelling them to resist the encroachments of the apartheid state with all their might and main. The Basotho, Bechuana and Swazi people, like all Africans, hate apartheid and treasure their independence. They demand strongly not only that no concessions be made to the African-haters across the borders, but also that practical steps be taken to protect the human rights of the tens of thousands of Bechuana, Basotho and Swazi people living and working in the Republic. No government in any of the three territories can afford to ignore this unanimous feeling of the masses.

In Lesotho, as we have seen, Chief Leabua Jonathan's minority government is in a precarious position. Any serious concessions to the Republic would undoubtedly result in the immediate repudiation of the National Party by the masses. Even within his own Party, whose chief mainstay of support is the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, there can be few illusions of the intentions of the Verwoerd regime; and the century-old tradition of the fiercely-defended independence of Lesotho, deriving from the heroic days of King Moshoeshoe I, is still very much alive.

Ngwenyama Sobhuza, also, knows in his heart that apartheid and the Boer Nationalist Republic constitute a deadly threat to his authority and his lands and his people. He and his advisers know that their popular support rests on the belief of the people that he will defend their independence; one cannot imagine that he would like to find himself in the position of a Matanzima, holding office only by virtue of the protection of the South African Police and servile subordination to the Bantu Affairs Department.

The Prime Minister of Bechuanaland, Mr. Seretse Khama, was once himself deposed from the Paramount Chieftainship by a British Labour

Government on the insistence of Pretoria, because he had the temerity to marry an Englishwoman. He is only too well aware of the daily humiliations and sufferings inflicted on the Bechuana in the Republic. Recently he visited Zambia to hold talks with President Kaunda. Unlike the other two territories, Bechuanaland has a common border, albeit only a few miles long, with free Africa; and it is likely that the two leaders aimed in their talks at increased co-operation, especially in the field of economics, and at reducing dependence on white-controlled South Africa and Rhodesia.

Whatever the position in each country the Southern African territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland are rapidly heading for independence. The placing of their destiny in their own hands will pose enormous problems. They are all close to and dominated economically and otherwise by the centre of reaction in our continent South Africa. But let there be no mistake. Africa and the whole of progressive mankind must and will rejoice with the peoples of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland on their attainment of independent statehood. The idea that these countries might be better off under British rule because of the dangers of falling in the South African sphere of influence is a confused and naive one. It is British imperialism which has landed Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland in their present predicaments. Once they have political sovereignty they can begin to act in their own interests without a 'protector' that has betrayed them over and over again. The covert imperialist supporters of Verwoerd, Ian Smith in Rhodesia and Salazar cannot be regarded as potential protectors of African interests anywhere. Nor is the principle of immediate independence for these countries to be retreated from because of the character of one or other party which it appears might be in power in each country at the time of the independence celebrations.

It would be of great importance if the free states of Africa and Asia and the socialist countries were called on to help these countries to enable them to play an independent role in international affairs and to begin the task of building modern economies. Every attempt must be made to increase all manner of contacts with the new states and to reduce their dependence on the Unholy Alliance of Rhodesia, South Africa and Portugal.

Having failed with the aim of direct incorporation of these countries South Africa is now in favour of turning them into client states, isolated from world currents and unable to carve their own path in the world. South African capitalists are being encouraged to invest there so that any economic development is not opposed to the interests of the Republic of S.A.

The policy of the South African liberation movement as reflected in the Freedom Charter and the Programme of the South African Communist Party fully supports the complete independence of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland. The oppressed peoples of South Africa have always opposed the ruling class in its attempts to incorporate these countries and will continue to do so. The struggle of the peoples in the former protectorates for independence from South Africa and Britain is part and parcel of the South African struggle for freedom. There will be no genuine freedom in these neighbouring countries until apartheid is overthrown. Support for the freedom movement by Swazi, Basotho and Batswana patriots is a means of helping their own struggle and vice versa. Unity between all forces fighting for freedom and independence in Southern Africa is an earnest of victory against apartheid.