

# BASUTOLAND ADVANCES

by DAN TLOOME

**BASUTOLAND**, the land of the sons of Moshoeshoe, is gradually moving towards self-rule. The Basutoland National Council passed a resolution in September, 1955, asking for legislative powers in all internal matters. In short, the Basutos are demanding that the Council — at present a mere consultative body — be given power to make laws in all internal matters affecting the country. The Resident Commissioner and the Departmental heads of his staff should not dominate but advise the Council.

In pursuance of this resolution, the Earl of Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, has invited a delegation, representing the Basutoland National Council, to visit London for talks on their proposals for constitutional advance in Basutoland. The delegation is accompanied by Mr. A. G. T. Chaplain, Resident Commissioner, and also by a constitutional adviser, Professor D. Cowen, of Cape Town University.

These proposals, formulated in the form of a joint report by two committees, do not reflect the personal opinion of individuals, but represent the views of outstanding individuals and organised bodies, who gave evidence before the Committees. The National Council has appointed two Committees to give thorough examination to the whole question of the Chieftainship in Basutoland, and to consider constitutional reform, required to meet the present social and political development of the inhabitants of the country.

## MOSHOESHOE AND BASUTOLAND

The story of Basutoland is bound up very largely with the story of Moshoeshoe, the founder of the nation, and one of the outstanding geniuses of African, indeed of world history. Under his leadership the scattered groups of clans, settled along the banks of the Caledon River, and often at war among themselves, were formed into a united people, with a common territory, language, culture and economy, powerful enough to survive the combined attacks of British and Boer imperialism and to preserve their identity and a large part of their homeland from the fate which overcame the African peoples of the surrounding territories.

The rise of Moshoeshoe as a popular and outstanding Chief of his time, stems from his association with Chief Mohlomi, who died eight years before the 'wars of Calamity', as they are called. Mohlomi was a wandering philosopher. He practised and preached a wide toleration, showed goodwill to all, detested war and always spoke against it. Before he died, he contacted a young and ambitious chief of his clan, by name of Moshoeshoe, who was already attracting a growing number of followers. Mohlomi thoroughly and completely imbued the younger man with his philosophy, and prophesied for him a great future and started him off on a road from which Moshoeshoe never swerved. Moshoeshoe was a man of outstanding wisdom and diplomacy. Always adaptable and alive to new impressions, his famous war tactics included, among others, the idea of fortifying and holding the hill fortresses which are found all down the valley of the Caledon River, and he made great use of rock slides, keeping masses of heavy stones piled up ready for launching. His power lay in his implicit faith in the people. Always considering himself a servant of the people, he is reputed never to have been an absolute or despotic ruler. Nothing could swerve him from his faith in the Basuto maxim, so frequently quoted:

"Morena ke Morena ka batho" — "A chief is a chief through the people."

Moshoeshoe was not only a nation-builder, great general, a great statesman-diplomat, and a pioneer democrat; he was in many other ways a thinker of most outstanding originality and power, and a pioneer of the national liberation movement in Africa.

He and his people suffered endlessly from the encroachments, bad faith and aggression of the White intruders. Yet he never gave way to crude anti-White racialism, or flung his warriors, armed with assegais, to a useless death against the guns and horsemen of the invader. He determined to take over and use for the advancement of his people whatever the Europeans had that might be useful to them. He saw to it that his people acquired firearms, and at the time of his death and for many years afterwards there was no Mosutu man without a rifle. He imported horses, and improved the stock, so that the Basuto pony became famous as ideally adapted to this mountainous country. He invited missionaries, both Protestant and Roman Catholic to his country freely, and made the fullest use of their services for spreading literacy and other useful accomplishments among the people. He even made use of the services of one, Casalis, virtually as his foreign secretary. Yet he always saw to it that — unlike other parts of Africa — the missionaries remained the servants of the people and did not become their masters. "We become Basutos, from today onwards our destinies and those of the tribe are identical," wrote Casalis; years afterwards when another missionary, Mabile, attempted to lay down the law, Chief Letsie said: "I will see whether Mabile or myself is chief." Mabile had to climb down.

## PIONEER OF UNITY

As early as 1849, Moshoeshoë had already realised that the survival of the Basuto as a national group lay in the idea of confederation of all the African tribes and a united fight against the White encroachers. He sent ambassadors to the Zulus, the Xosa, the Bechuana and to Adam Kok, the great Coloured leader, head of the Griqua State, to propose agreement and unity. He was always ready to lend his aid to other peoples struggling to maintain or regain their independence.

But he was ahead of his time. It was not until 1912, with the founding of the African National Congress, that his great dream of a united freedom struggle in Southern Africa, was to begin to become a reality. The only course open to him was to mobilise the Basutos, to fight back against attacks as well as he could, and to preserve as much of the independence and integrity of the motherland as possible.

Moshoeshoe saw that it was impossible to defend Basutoland against a united front of the British Government, on one hand, and the Orange Free State on the other. Hence all his diplomatic efforts were directed to preventing the creation of such a united front. He sought the aid and protection of Britain against the continual encroachment of the Free Staters.

In fact the Basuto were never conquered or defeated in a major battle, and their fortress of Thaba Bosiu remained inviolate until the end. But though they lost no battles, and could not be defeated in battle, they could not survive alone against the superior resources of imperialism. In asking for British "Protection" Moshoeshoe was sacrificing a part of Basuto independence in order to preserve the very existence of his people. That protection, however, was to cost the Basuto dear. Not only did the British deprive the Basuto of their independence, sending in their administrators and magistrates, and destroying the people's traditional democratic institutions; they also handed over a very large and fertile part of the country to the Orange Free State. The whole rich and fertile territory to the West of the Caledon — today the most prosperous part of the O.F.S. — was "awarded" to the Boers, when Britain was called in to mediate in a war in which the Free Staters had actually been defeated by the Basuto. The Basuto learnt, as the Czechs and others were to learn, that Britain is used to appeasing aggressors with awards of other people's territory.

## BASUTOLAND TODAY

Hence, Basutoland today is confined to a small and very mountainous territory of about 10,000 square miles, entirely surrounded by the Union. The Caledon river forms its northern and western boundaries with the O.F.S. Over two-thirds of the country are occupied by the Drakensberg and Maluti mountains; on the slopes of which the skilful Basuto farmers wrest a bare living from the soil. But the country cannot support its

600,000 inhabitants. Year after year thousands of Basuto make their way into the Union, to be exploited as cheap labour on Witwatersrand mines and Free State farms.

The British have done nothing to develop the territory economically. Apart from home crafts, there are no industries. The people live in great poverty.

Yet, thanks to the wise and far-seeing policy of Moshoeshe, the country has not — like Swaziland and Bechuanaland — become the prey of foreign land-sharks and millionaire farmers. No foreigner may own land in Basutoland, or even settle there without express permission. The land is vested in the people, through the chiefs. Traders may occupy premises by permission, but on their departing the ground on which their premises are sited revert to the people.

As a result, only about a thousand Europeans — officials and missionaries — are to be found in Basutoland. The immigrants — Africans from other tribes, and a small Indian community — have become or are becoming assimilated with the Basutoland population.

## CHANGE IN SOCIETY

The struggle of the people of Basutoland, like all struggles that are characterised by the laws of human and historical development of any given society, has assumed various phases at different periods.

Here is a people that has today organised itself into a united Basuto nation, bound together by its national aspirations and by the desire to emancipate its country from economic backwardness, and to raise the political and cultural development of its people. What used to be the country of a disunited and backward folk, fighting desperately, under the leadership and guidance of Chief Moshoeshe, to protect their country from attempted rape by the British and Boer troops, is today a country of an advancing people, emerging gradually from the dark ages into a society of workers, peasants, intellectuals and middle class. A society politically conscious and beginning to think not only in terms of conditions surrounding Basutoland, but also in terms of the status of Basutoland in relation to world affairs, and the development of its people towards self-rule and independence.

## THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

The democratic tradition of Moshoeshe has borne fruit in our times. The great chief was no dictator; he consulted leading chiefs and others on day to day matters, and in all matters of importance it was customary to sound public opinion at national gatherings called 'the Pitso.' These assemblies were attended by the chiefs and all men. All had the right to speak.

It was these assemblies which ultimately led to the formation of the present National Council. The idea of the Council itself was first mooted as far back as 1890, but the Council met for the first time in 1903. The regulations provided for the Council to consist of not more than 100 members; five being nominated by the Resident Commissioner, and the rest by the Paramount Chief; with the Resident Commissioner as president. The term of office of members was to be one year. Since then, the Council has undergone various transformations by way of improvement, but, as stated above, it has always remained a consultative body with no legislative powers.

It is this National Council which, at its 51st session in September 1955, passed the famous Motion 90, asking for self-rule. To this the Secretary of State has replied indicating his preparedness to consider the proposals, but making it clear that power to make laws by the Council would be in regard only to internal matters affecting the Basuto alone, but not in regard to matters affecting people other than the Basuto or countries other than Basutoland.

The Commissioner, appointed by the National Council, has now produced a report on constitutional reform and Chieftainship Affairs. The report embodies proposals, the broad principles and structure of which are as follows:-

It is recommended that Basutoland should be ruled by a Central Government, having under its wing (a) a legislature, (b) an Executive Council, (c) Local Government composed of District Councils, (d) the College of Chiefs, composed of the Paramount and Ward Chiefs of Basutoland, the Paramount Chief to become the President of the College. The College shall have powers to elect an action committee charged with doing the day to day work of the College. And finally, there would be (e) the Judiciary and the Civil Service.

This is the structure of the proposals contained in the report of the Commission, whose representatives will soon be flying to London for discussions. The proposals reflect a progressive outlook by the Basutos and their chiefs; they endorse the theory that no power on earth can stand in the way of a closely organised and advancing people; they reflect the reaction and the attitude of the Basuto in no uncertain terms, towards the issue of the incorporation of the country into the Union of South Africa. The proposals are a total rejection of the theory of Apartheid and all its

repressive measures practised by South Africa; they have clearly indicated that the desires and aspirations of the people of Basutoland are showing inclinations of self-rule and independence. We have no illusions regarding the proposals as the final solution of emancipating Basutoland from British Imperialism, but there can be no doubt that an advance is being made, and if the proposals are accepted, the people of Basutoland will have laid a stepping stone towards a democratic Basutoland of the people, by the people, for the people.

## THE MENACE OF INCORPORATION

In some respects the Basuto people of today are still confronted by similar problems to those which faced their ancestors of a hundred years ago. Lesotho does not need Britain. Her people are fully capable of running their own affairs; they do not need British-appointed officials, living on Basuto taxes; they can and should be able to stand up as equals among the nations of the world, conducting their own foreign policy, and developing their own country.

But so long as the country remains surrounded by the Union, and so long as the Union is dominated by greedy imperialistic apartheid politicians, continually regarding the spread of democratic and self-governing institutions in Basutoland as a threat and a challenge to their own despotism and oppression, so long independence in Basutoland will never be complete or secure.

Hence, the future development of a free, independent and progressive Basutoland, peacefully developing towards her destiny, is closely bound up with the development and success of the democratic people's movement in the Union of South Africa. Naturally, the closest ties of friendship should therefore exist between such bodies as the Basutoland African Congress and the Congress alliance in our country; and it is inspiring to be able to record that such ties already exist and are being brought closer in a struggle which, in the end, is a common one.

As for us in the Union, we shall struggle to the end against all attempts to enforce the incorporation of our brothers in Basutoland against their will. And we shall regard with the most lively sympathy and encouragement every step taken by the great Basuto nation along the road to independence and self-government.