

# CISKEI INDEPENDANT?

by Nancy Charton

The Ciskei is situated between the Kei and the Fish Rivers, and the Stormberg Mountains and the sea. It comprises some 530 000 ha, and consolidation proposals will add another 300 000 ha transforming it into one block. It has a de facto population of 660 000; 1 433 000 'Ciskeians' live outside the territory itself. Geographically it is encapsulated by 'white' South Africa, without its own outlet to the sea.<sup>1</sup>

In both rural and urban Ciskei poverty is endemic. Only 13% of the land is arable, and much of it is eroded and exhausted. The Ciskei does not feed its own resident population. Many are forced to sell their labour in 'white' South Africa, bleeding the territory of its manpower. In return it gains irregular remittances which go, not into development of the land, but into feeding hungry mouths. Few rural dwellers have access to fields or grazing land; most are landless, keeping body and soul together by means of migrant labour. Investigations in Mdantsane in 1976 revealed an unemployment rate of 25%, with a further 14% working in the informal sector; almost 50% lived below the poverty datum line. A continuous flow of rural migrants and work seekers ensures low wage levels in the whole region.<sup>2</sup>

The Ciskeian government has attempted to alleviate the situation by the construction of capital intensive irrigation settlements in the rural areas. There are now three, and more are projected; however they involve only a miniscule section of the rural population. The Republican government has encouraged industrialisation in the East London/Berlin Kingwilliamstown triangle. There are two modest growth points in the Ciskei itself, at Sada and Dimbaza. This development strategy has created jobs in, or in close proximity to the homeland, at vast capital expense to both public and private sectors. However, it has increased rather than reduced the dependence of the Ciskei on the Republic for capital, technology, skilled personnel, raw materials and markets.

The proximity of the territory to the white areas, and two centuries of interaction between white and black means that most Ciskeians aspire to the affluent standards of living set by whites. Thus the level of consumption in the Ciskei is influenced by white standards, which will continue for the foreseeable future to skew the process of distribution in the territory. The rapidly expanding middle class of politicians, chiefs, civil servants, teachers and merchants are all dependent on the state for salaries or loans; and the Ciskeian state is dependent on South Africa. These people form a privileged class tied to South Africa's chariot wheels by bonds of common economic interest.

In 1979/80 the Ciskei generated only 23% of its revenue of R64,9m.<sup>1</sup> Although it currently enjoys the status of a 'self governing' territory its constitutional autonomy is completely negated by its dependency at fiscal level. Real political autonomy requires an autonomous tax base. Otherwise it does not exist.

Finally the communication system is controlled by 'white' South Africa. Chiefs and headmen control the traditional channels operating through the village councils. The newspapers circulating in the area mediate news to blacks from white political perspectives.

The social and economic fabric of the Ciskei has grown over the centuries. Its economic, social and political dependence on South Africa is structural; it cannot be terminated at the stroke of a constitutional pen; dependence can only be broken by the painstaking building up of an autonomous, integrated economic base.

Chief Minister Sebe has been cautious in committing himself to independence. His first election manifesto did not mention it at all. During the second election in 1978 he stated that it was a possibility only after land and economic issues had been resolved. In June 1978 his party won every seat in the legislature, and thirteen opposition candidates lost their deposits. Since then the drift towards independence has been rapid. In August of that year a Commission was appointed to report upon the feasibility of independence. The report of the Quail Commission was published early this year.<sup>3</sup> Well aware of the structural nature of Ciskei's dependence, they laid down five pre-conditions which they felt would ensure at least the internal legitimacy of the new state, and a reasonably autonomous economic base.

The first pre-condition was that there should be a 'carefully supervised' referendum which would reflect the will of the people of the Ciskei, both in the Ciskei, and in the rest of South Africa. A majority in both areas would be necessary before taking independence.

The second pre-condition concerned Ciskeian citizenship. In view of the existing pressure of population on land this is a vital issue. The Republic has the right at present to re-patriate arbitrarily any 'Ciskeians' it might regard as 'surplus'. The Quail Commission calculated that 323 000 were liable to be resettled in terms of the government's declared policy. These people are 'illegal urban dwellers' or they live in 'black spots' in white areas. In reality this is a very modest estimate, for it makes no allowance for the constant movement of Ciskeians from the white farm areas into the homeland. Such people become 'surplus' on the farms due to the increasing size of farms, and mechanisation; they are without residential rights anywhere in the Republic; their Homeland is their only recourse. The Ciskei government has been powerless to resist the impetus towards re-settlement, planned or voluntary. This is clearly demonstrated by figures showing that 365 020 people have been re-settled in the Ciskei during the past two decades.<sup>4</sup>

A decision in favour of independence which left the Ciskei open to having the nearly one and half million citizens beyond its borders arbitrarily re-patriated, is clearly hazard-

ous. It would amount to economic suicide. The Commission was very conscious of this danger, and felt too that the rights of Ciskeians to seek work and to remain employed in South Africa needed to be safeguarded.

The third pre-condition related to the land. The Ciskei claims all the land between the Stormberg mountains and the Indian Ocean and between the Fish and the Kei Rivers. The Quail Commission endorsed this claim; they felt that an independent Ciskei would need to control a relatively large, coherent economic region with a well developed infrastructure, access to the sea, and the nucleus of an industrial sector.

Finally the Commission felt that South Africa should guarantee the Ciskei 'equitable financial support'.

Press reports during the past month reveal that the bargaining which has been taking place between the Ciskei government and the Republican government has indeed revolved around these issues. It is obvious that Chief Sebe has yielded ground on the two most fundamental to economic autonomy. It is rumoured that the van der Walt Commission has awarded King Williamstown and Berlin to the Ciskei. East London and the white corridor along the Kei remain in the Republic. The Quail Commission's dream of a coherent territorial base for economic development has been ignored. We are told that there is to be regional development across national boundaries — a so called 'co-prosperity zone.' Unhappily national independence seldom facilitates regional development; in the past in Africa it has more often than not destroyed it.

Chief Minister Sebe says the citizenship issue has been settled to his satisfaction. The Ciskei is to be part of a confederation of states, and will share South African nationality. Of course this might well resolve the problem of passports for Ciskeians in a world which obdurately refuses to recognise independent 'Bantustans'. However, it by no means guarantees the right of domicile of 'Ciskeians' in the common area. And that is the crux of the issue. Any agreement that lays the Ciskei open to the process of re-settlement as it has been experienced in the past twenty years will negate whatever economic development may take place.

It is obvious from statements made to the press that considerable economic inducement has been offered to the Ciskei. Chief Minister Sebe remarked that those territories which had become independent were noticeably better supported by the Republic. Precisely what commitments have been made is not clear. However, it should be obvious that a settlement which accepts subventions from South Africa as adequate compensation for the lack of a coherent territorial base for economic development is short-sighted in the extreme. It will simply perpetuate the dependence experienced heretofore, at both economic and political levels. And what guarantee is there that the next Republican government will honour past pledges in this respect? Homeland leaders know

all too well that the path of homeland development is strewn with broken promises.

The referendum is to take place on 4th December. Who is supervising it is not clear at the time of writing. However, French lawyers and foreign journalists have been invited to observe. The Ciskei is a one-party 'state'; opposition to the official party line is not tolerated, and the result of the referendum will presumably be a vote for independence, which has now become official party policy. Ciskeians not living in the Ciskei tend to be alienated from Ciskeian politics. In order to vote they must register as Ciskeian citizens, and many of them refuse to do this on grounds of political principle. In the circumstances a referendum, however carefully supervised, when confined to registered Ciskeian citizens, can have only one predictable result — a resounding YES vote. However, it will not reflect the feelings or the aspirations of the majority of those in the common area. The procedure now adopted certainly negates the spirit and the intention of the Quail Commission recommendation.

What advantages are to be found in the type of independence outlined above? The Ciskei will gain constitutional autonomy, which means nothing in view of the lack of an adequate economic and tax base. It will gain international status, which means nothing because it will not be recognised by the international community. It will gain some land, but not enough. It will allow its people to retain South African nationality, but it lays itself open to an endless process of re-settlement and impoverishment because the right of domicile in the common area is not secured. It gains promises of economic support, promises which will be subject to the whims and fancies of the government of the day in South Africa.

On the other hand the Nationalist government gains a singular victory, and can once more point to the 'success' of its multi-national policy.

The Ciskei, once it has accepted independence loses whatever political bargaining power it might have had. Minister Koornhof said: "Independence: we'll make it attractive!"

He did, in the short term. And Ciskei politicians are ready to settle for short term economic advantages. In the game of political chess we are now witnessing check mate is coming up — and it is the black king which is laying himself open to defeat. □

#### FOOTNOTES

1. 'Agricultural Development in the Ciskei: Review and Assessment' J. B. M.C.I. Daniel. Presidential Address to S.A. Geographical Society, 25/7/80.
2. Ciskei: Ed N. Charton (Croom Helm: 1980)
3. Report of Ciskei Commission (Conference Associates: Pretoria: 1980)
4. "Draft Report on Re-settlement in the Ciskei 1958–1980" Grahamstown Diocesan Council: 1980;

#### Editor's Note

The result of the referendum was 295,891 in favour of independence, 1,642 against and 2,198 spoilt papers. There was a 59,5% poll. In the Port Elizabeth area, for one, where 87% of the people are Ciskeians, most people did not vote.