

THE CISKEI REFERENDUM

By Nancy Charton

1. Introduction.

On 4th December 1980 Ciskeian voters went to the poll in an unprecedented referendum. They were asked simply to respond YES or NO to the proposal that the Ciskei be independent.

Chief Minister Sebe and his party had negotiated a 'package deal' with the Republican government which they considered an ample basis for assuming new independent statehood. Chief Sebe did not consider a referendum essential. "The voice and the great rumbling of our great Chiefs is so loud and clear that there is no choice for us". A referendum was something which had no precedent in African political culture. However the Quail Commission, set up to investigate the pro's and cons of independence had recommended it. And the Chief Minister felt it was important to comply with international standards of democratic process. If this was self-determination it must be seen to be so, both in South Africa, and overseas. (1)

There are 503 000 registered Ciskeian voters, constituting an estimated 80% of all Ciskeians. Of those registered 299 731 voted. There was thus a 59,5% poll. The results were as follows:

YES	295 891	98,8%
NO	1 642	,5%
Spoilt Papers	2 198	,7%
TOTAL	299 731	(2)

The Rev. W. Xaba, Acting Chief Minister at the time, commented on this result: "The voice of the nation has spoken". Prof. L. Schlemmer has claimed that Chief Sebe has won a large and defensible mandate to proceed with negotiations for independence. (3)

How valid are these claims?

2. THE VOICE OF THE NATION: WHAT NATION?

The problem is of course to define the nation! Different people define their political universe in different ways. Thus in a survey done in Mdantsane in 1976,6% of respondents were found to relate chiefly to their tribe, 37% to the Ciskei, and 44% to a united South Africa. Even within the Ciskei then there are those who see Ciskeian institutions as less relevant to their interests than the central South African organs of government. Permanently urbanised Africans living in other areas of South Africa tend to be even more alienated from homeland politics. For many of them the Ciskei government is a political fiction, invented to divert their aspirations from the central power structures of the Republic. The Ciskei, and all it stands for is seen as irrelevant to their daily lives; and the Ciskei government, for all its good intentions, has proved unable to articulate the interests of its absentee citizens.

In view of this split in opinions about the legitimacy of homeland institutions, it is interesting to examine and compare voting patterns within the Ciskei, and in the rest of South Africa. In the Ciskei itself there are 208 000 registered voters, of whom 80% or 166 400 voted. In the rest of South Africa there must be 295 000 registered voters; of these 133 331 voted, or 45,2%. What is interesting in this situation is not the average percentage poll, but the actual distribution of the vote. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of Ciskeians living within the Ciskei have spoken. It is equally clear that there are many alienated and apathetic 'citizens' in the remaining areas of South Africa. In East London itself there are 32 000 voters of whom 45% voted. In Uitenhage there are 20 000 voters of whom only 27% voted. Port Elizabeth was a contrast to the general pattern. There are 33 000 registered voters, and no less than 89% voted. (1)

There was apparently little interest in the election in Ginsberg, a stronghold of the black consciousness movement. (2)

Voting patterns then clearly illustrate the split in opinions as between the Ciskei itself, and the rest of South Africa, with Port Elizabeth a notable and interesting exception. Chief Sebe had called on Ciskeians: "Go to the polling stations singing those songs sucked from your mothers' breasts, or if you choose the worst - to betray the nation - do not go to the polling stations." (3)

Many took this advice, and maybe they did not betray the nation, maybe they just had a different definition of the nation in mind. The Quail Commission had recommended a majority both in the Ciskei and in the rest of South Africa in favour of independence as a pre-condition. This has not been met, and maybe, given that difference of definition, it never will be.

3. WAS THE VOICE OF THE NATION FREE TO EXPRESS ITSELF?

Both pre- and anti-independence factions attribute disappointing results to 'intimidation'. There may have been abuses, such as were reported during the election. However, the most effective 'intimidation' is of a more subtle kind. Most Ciskeian perceive the party in power to be the government; they know that it has the power to allocate scarce resources such as houses, pensions and jobs. Most Ciskeians, even the well-educated, remain totally unconvinced that the ballot is secret. Identity numbers must be written on each ballot paper and stamped. And it is claimed that people at Mdantsane were threatened that those who were not registered as voters would lose their houses. In this game facts are not important; perceptions are. The ballot is not held to be secret; the government is all powerful, and the source of essential resources. Discretion dictates that the individual support

1. East London Daily Dispatch: 5/12/80
2. East London Daily Dispatch: 18/12/80
3. Sunday Times: 4/1/81

1. Die Burger: 9/12/80
2. Daily Dispatch: 5/12/80
3. Sunday Times: 21/12/80

the party in power. The bandwagon syndrome has been identified in voting behaviour all over the world. It would certainly explain the unanimity of Ciskeian voters within the Ciskei. In such a situation the vote may be seen as a response to a particular power situation.

Ciskeians outside the homeland itself are not subject to the same pressures, unless of course they are migrant workers. Permanently urbanised Ciskeians do not see the Ciskei government as fulfilling any positive function for them, nor as exercising power over them. They are free to associate, or disassociate themselves from the homeland. A goodly number have chosen the latter path. And admonitions from academics to participate in such opportunities for political expression as the system offers, are unlikely to change their attitudes. (1)

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1. Schlemmer: in Sunday Times: 4/1/81
 2. The Friend: 25/11/80

4. DOES THE REFERENDUM CONSTITUTE A MANDATE FOR INDEPENDENCE?

For large numbers of Ciskeians 'independence' has been presented as a desirable goal. "It is a promissory note guaranteeing all men the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (2)

The referendum certainly demonstrates considerable internal support. The fruits of independence will determine whether that support will be able to be maintained without the use of force. In the end the electoral appeal of a political party, or a leader rests on ability to produce goods, material or cultural which satisfy the aspirations of the most significant groups in that society. Chief Sebe's regime, whether independent or not, will have to earn its legitimacy like any other regime by satisfying the aspirations of its people, of the chiefs, civil servants, the emerging entrepreneurs and professional people; but also of the workers in the factories of East London, the landless rural poor being re-patriated in their thousands from the urban and rural areas of 'white' South Africa. □

SABATA DALINDYEBO

Paramount Chief Sabata Dalindyebo (A! Jonguhlanga! — he who looks to the nation!) was born, as he lived, in the centre of controversy (25 November 1928). His father had died suddenly some five months earlier before marrying his official Great Wife. Many years later, George Matanzima would say that old Mhlobo Matanzima had been instrumental in selecting Sabata as heir, but the truth of the matter seems to be that he was unanimously chosen by a national meeting of the Thembu people (September 1929) because his mother outranked the three other wives of the late Jogilizwe.

After a stormy school career — he was expelled at least once and never matriculated — Sabata faced up to his regent and guardian (Chief Dabulamanzi Dalindyebo) who refused to present him for circumcision. Backed once again by the full Thembu council, Sabata took the matter to court and forced the issue. He was duly circumcised, and on 30 June 1954, installed as Paramount Chief of the Thembu.

Almost immediately, Sabata and his advisers found themselves locked in conflict with Kaiser D. Matanzima who, at that point, ranked no higher officially than senior chief of St Marks District. K.D. was, however rather older (thirteen years) and considerably better educated (qualified as an attorney) than the young Paramount. Moreover, he had from a very early stage recognised the possibilities of the Bantu Authorities system, which the then Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H. Verwoerd, was busily setting up. Matanzima claimed to be Paramount Chief of 'Emigrant Thembuland', an administrative division set up in 1865 by the Colonial authorities on land confiscated from hostile Xhosa and given to Thembu collaborators. Foremost among these was the first Matanzima, Kaiser's great-grandfather and truly the founder of a family tradition.

Sabata naturally resisted Kaiser's claims which cut back his own authority and divided the Thembu nation into two. But the Government Anthropologist upheld Matanzima —

hardly surprising, since K.D. was a 'Progressive' chief while Sabata's secretary, Jackson Nkosiyané was well known as a vigorous opponent of the South African government and all its works, from tribal authorities to rehabilitation schemes. In 1958, K.D. was recognised as chief of 'Emigrant Thembuland', while Sabata was told that any further "impertinent letters" would result in his deposition. Nkosiyané and other "undesirable advisers" were banished.

Sabata did not waver in the face of this dire example. In 1961, he organised a meeting of some thousand chiefs and headmen to protest against rehabilitation. According to one historian, "in 1963 the Engcobo and Umtata districts were said by police to be the most violent districts in the Transkei."

Sabata supported Victor Poto's Democratic Party against Matanzima in the 1963 elections to the Transkei Legislative Assembly, and he stood by the opposition through Matanzima's successive electoral triumphs, through the defection of Tutor Ndamase (Poto's heir), and, finally, through the disintegration of the Democratic Party itself. Initially, he refrained from open support of either Hector Ncokazi's radical Democrats or Knowledge Guzana's Parliamentarists. But as the former gave way to repression and the latter to irrelevance, he increasingly allied himself with the radicals.

Sabata is reputed to be somewhat erratic in his personal habits ("his path is strewn with broken bottles" runs one line of his praises) and he had no intellectual pretensions. He preferred to leave most of the talking in the Legislative Assembly to his representative (and leading D.P. radical), Florence Mancotywa. Nevertheless, his moral authority was immense. Alone among his fellow-chiefs, he resisted the power and luxury which were his for the asking. Alone, he persevered in obstinate and implacable opposition to Kaiser Matanzima and to the very conception of Transkeian