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NOTE

THIS ACCOUNT OF RECENT EVENTS IN SEKHUKHUNELAND HAS BEEN PIECED TOGETHER FROM PRESS REPORTS AND OTHER REPORTS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES. BECAUSE OF THE APPLICATION TO THE SEKHUKHUNE AREA OF PROCLAMATION 52 of 1958, THE S.A. INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS IS NOT IN A POSITION TO CHECK ON THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION INCLUDED.

SEKHUKHUNELAND

Sekhukhuneland is a reserve midway between Pietersburg and Middelburg, about 100 miles from each. The Bapedi and Bakone people live there, in scattered "locations", or kraals.

It is divided into two Native Commissioner areas, Schoonoord in the north, and Nebo further to the south. The Jane Furse Hospital is on the boundary, just within the Nebo area. The Government has been attempting to re-settle the Bakone people in the south, leaving the Bapedi in the Schoonoord district, but this process has by no means been completed.

The present Paramount of the Bapedi is Rian, a lad aged about 13, who attends the Catholic school (possibly because the Bantu Education system has not been introduced there.) The Acting Paramount is Moroamoche Sekhukhune, who until recently was assisted by a tribal council composed of Methodi Sekhukhune (tribal secretary), Mabathani Mothane (head induna), James Mabuye Sekhukhune (apparently also known as Tseke), Hobolale Sekhukhune (called Kgoboladi in some reports), Kgorodi Maredi, and others. Each of the "locations" is under a sub-chief or headman. The tribal headquarters is at Mohlaletse, in Golok's location, near Schoonoord.

Frank Maserumule has been appointed chief of the new village for the Bakone people at Nebo. His son-in-law, Kotale Matlala Rabelatane, is chief of a sub-group of the Bakone still living in the Schoonoord district.

After the Bantu Education Act was passed, and Anglican mission school at Jane Furse was taken over by the Government. It had previously catered for children up to the J.C. stage, but was converted into a primary school only. It is possible that this caused resentment.

Further ill-feeling developed in connection with betterment schemes. The Agricultural Officer, Mr. Pritchard, apparently lacked tact and aroused resentment when he insisted that stock should be reduced in numbers, goats disposed of, grazing fees paid, and also fees paid for trees or grass cut, A rental of 30/- a year for arable lots was introduced.

In November 1954 Dr. Verwoerd, accompanied by a number of senior officials, held an indaba at Oliphants River, near the Zebediela citrus estates, at which Moroamoche was present. The chiefs were urged to accept Bantu education and Bantu authorities.

Moroamoche subsequently held a tribal meeting, and the people rejected the Bantu Authorities system.

It is said that Mr. Pritchard began meeting the various chiefs, making glowing promises of increased power under the new system, and that money was paid to some of them to win their support. Pritchard is said to have had spies in every village who reported to him the names of those who opposed the Government's plans.

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In May 1956, Mr. Wessels of the Native Affairs Department (apparently the Native Commissioner) asked Moroamoche to convene a tribal meeting, and advised the people to accept Bantu authorities. He is reported to have said that the Paramount's power would be increased, his salary would be raised, and the people would be taught how to cultivate the ground. Four of the tribal councillors - James Mabuye, Methodi Sekhukhune, Mabathani Mothane and Hobolale Sekhukhune, stood up and said that they accepted the new system. All the rest said they opposed it.

Next month another meeting was called and was addressed by Mr. Wessels. Again the four said they were in favour of Bantu authorities, but the rest repeated that they were not. Godfrey Sekhukhune, a near relative of Moroamoche, was a leading speaker in opposition to the scheme. It is alleged that the Native Commissioner tried to persuade Moroamoche to sign a document signifying his acceptance of Bantu authorities, but that the people pulled him away to prevent this.

A few days later Moroamoche called another meeting to ask whether the people were genuinely opposed to the scheme, or whether they were merely following his lead. It is said that they made it quite clear that they did not want Bantu authorities.

In November 1956 some members of the tribe who work in Johannesburg visited Sekhukhuneland and wanted to hold a meeting, but the Native Commissioner would not allow this.

Meanwhile, James Mabuye had been having discussions with the Native Commissioner, and as a result, Mr. Prinsloo (Chief Information Officer, N.A.D.), the chief Native Commissioner, the Native Commissioner, and a number of other officials visited Schoonoord during December, and addressed a meeting that Moroamoche had been asked to call. They promised the people a railway bus, a secondary school, a clinic, a post office and a telephone. Mangubane Nchabeleng, Stephen Phasha, Mosewane Niba and Kgaphone said they would like to accept these amenities. Moroamoche said he would, too, as long as this did not involve also accepting Bantu authorities. An official photograph was taken of Mr. Prinsloo shaking hands with Moroamoche. Mr. Prinsloo is reported to have said that he was thankful that, by shaking hands, Moroamoche had signified his acceptance of the scheme; but Moroamoche denied that he had done so.

Other chiefs and headmen reported to have become converted to the Government's point of view, besides those mentioned already, were Phasoane Mahoshi Mashabela, Kotale Matlala Rabelatane, Moreoane Riba, Ben Maloma, Mankopane Nchabeleng and Lady Ngoanamohube Khaphola.

On 20 December, Moroamoche, James Mabuye, Methodi and Hobolale were summoned to the Native Commissioner's office to meet Mr. Prinsloo, who said that Moroamoche was not an educated man like the others, and they should nominate another chief. Hobolale suggested that Methodi should take over. James Mabuye is alleged to have said that Moroamoche was "an idiot, careless and cowardly so that he cannot dominate the people". Mr. Prinsloo apparently suggested that James should become chief and that councillors should be appointed to assist him.

In the December 1956 issue of "Bantu" there was a photograph of James Mabuye as chief. Rumour spread that Moroamoche was to be dismissed.

A meeting of the tribal council was called on 2 February 1957 to ask Methodi (tribal secretary) and Mabathani Mothane (head induna) why they had not reported what the Native Commissioner was planning, since they were understood to be in his confidence. They gave no satisfactory explanation, and were dismissed. Ntladi was appointed induna, and Arthur Phetedi Thulare, a grandson of Sekhukhune II, who was employed as messenger in Johannesburg, was summoned back to become tribal secretary. They were introduced to the people at a meeting held on 10 March, and it was said that the people were very satisfied.

On 26 March the Native Commissioner addressed a quarterly meeting of the chiefs, telling them that they must fence the northern part of the tribal grounds. The Trust would pay £390 and they must contribute an equal amount. The chiefs said that they would have to consult their people. Mr. Wessels said he was glad that they had accepted Bantu authorities; but they denied this. They asked why James Mabuye had been described as chief when his photograph appeared in "Bantu", and Mr. Wessels is reported to have said that it was a mistake made by the camera.

On 10th April Moroamoche and Phetedi Thulare were summoned to the Native Commissioner's office. The Africans decided that William and Jim Sekhukhune should accompany them. They agreed to Mr. Wessels's suggestion that labour should be provided for digging two water pits, but when Moroamoche was asked to sign an agreement he refused to sign anything. Mr. Wessels said that Moroamoche and the four pro-government councillors were to report to Mr. Prinsloo in Pietersburg in two days' time. They replied that these four men were undesirable: the tribal council should instead appoint representatives to go.

Moroamoche and Phetedi Thulare were then instructed to go to the charge office: Moroamoche came out later saying that Phetedi had been arrested. Godfrey Sekhukhune was brought along too, and the two men were immediately deported, the former to Matubatuba and the latter to Mtunzini. They were given no opportunity of collecting clothes or money first.

Mrs. Muller later asked the Minister why they had been deported. He replied that their presence in the area was inimical to the peace, order and good government. All the reasons could not be revealed without detriment to public interest; but it could be said that the tribe was showing an increasing tendency to oppose all measures designed to improve the tribal area and administration. It was evident that there had been incitement.

Resistance had reached a climax when Phetedi became secretary, the Minister said. He had connived at the dismissal of four tribal councillors, had usurped the powers of the Acting Chief and denied his authority, had dominated tribal meetings, influenced decisions, and intimidated those who disagreed with his views. Godfrey had been an active supporter of the dissentient group, had fostered a spirit of opposition and incited Africans to oppose measures introduced by the Department. Both had caused grave dissatisfaction and dissension, dangerous to peaceful administration.

After these deportations, Moroamoche refused to go to Pietersburg to meet Mr. Prinsloo, but sent two representatives, one of them being Kgorodi Maredi. The four pro-Government chiefs went too. Mr. Prinsloo is reported to have said that the chief was in trouble, and to have threatened Kgorodi with arrest. If the people accepted Bantu authorities and if the ex-induna and ex-secretary were re-instated, the two deportees would be returned, he said. Kgorodi and the other representative of the chief must return two days later to report the tribe's decision. But when they returned it was to report that the tribe refused to reinstate the two men.

On 23 April Moroamoche was summoned to the Native Commissioner's office. His sisters and others accompanied him. Mr. Prinsloo is reported to have said that lightning would strike unless Moroamoche signed a document accepting Bantu authorities. In spite of his sister's expressed fears, he refused to sign. Mr. Prinsloo is reported again to have promised that the deportees would be returned if Moroamoche gave in.

He apparently did give in, for a Bantu Authority was set up on 5 July 1957, under "Acting Paramount Chief Morwamotshe Sekhukhune" (apparently Moroamoche), to consist of not less than 34 and not more than 40 councillors. It was vested with the powers, duties and functions of a regional council.

Some 8,000 members of the tribe then donned ceremonial dress and gathered at Mhlaletse from as far as 20 miles away. Petitions were handed to Native Affairs Department officials, urging the return of Arthur Phetedi and Godfrey.

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They were not allowed to return, however. Some new amenities were provided, such as two secondary schools.

Apparently things went badly with the new Bantu authority and disputes between pro-Government and anti-Government people continued.

On 30 November 1957, a procession of cars and pick-up vans carrying armed policemen, accompanied by the Chief Native Commissioner, the Police Commandant and Mr. Pritchard arrived at Mohlaletse. Seven men were arrested, no reason being given, and taken to Schoonoord.

Two of them, Lot Kgagudi Maredi and Khahudi (or Kgagudi) Morunthanyane (the new tribal secretary), were immediately deported to the King William's Town area. The others - Nkopidi Ramphelane, Tseke, Judas Hlakudi, Nthereng Nyaku and Khoru Nyaku, were lodged in gaol. The tribe obtained legal help and their cases were brought before the magistrate at Lydenburg. Three were acquitted and two convicted of minor crimes relating to assaulting and obstructing the police and obstructing the local Native Commissioner. Small fines were imposed.

Before the trial, one of them made application to the Supreme Court, his counsel alleging that the police at Schoonoord had refused to give him access to his client. The matter was settled out of court after ready access to the accused was promised, and the State agreed to bear the costs of the application.

Also on 30 November, the Chief Native Commissioner told Moroamoche that he was not to hear or decide tribal cases for a period of one month. On 3 December this order was extended for a further 3 months. The Bapedi Tribal Authority was disestablished on 29 November.

Meanwhile, many of the Bakone people had been trickling back to their old homes. Some of them did so in order to seek employment at the Jane Furse hospital as builders, farm workers, carpenters, orderlies, etc.

A new police sergeant was posted to Schoonoord, and Mr. Pritchard was transferred to somewhere in the Cape.

On February 28th a proclamation had been gazetted permitting the Minister to "seal off" any area, prohibiting the entry of Africans not resident there unless they obtained permits from the Native Commissioner. Anyone within the area who made any verbal or written statement likely to interfere with the authority of officials, chiefs or headmen, or who threatened violence, loss, boycott, disadvantage or inconvenience to any person because of his loyalty to the State or his chief and headmen, would be guilty of an offence carrying a penalty of a fine of up to £300 or imprisonment of up to 3 years or both. The vehicles of those entering the area illegally might be confiscated. This proclamation was applied to Sekhukhuneland on March 7th. One tribesman was subsequently fined £50 for illegal entry.

On March 11th Moroamoche won an appeal against his suspension on a legal technicality - the Government had acted under a law which required that he be given the opportunity of defending himself, and this opportunity had not been given him. Immediately thereafter he was served with a notice suspending all his civil and criminal jurisdiction.

Kgobalala (or Kgoboladi) Sekhukhune, a retired policeman, was appointed in Moroamoche's place, and on 21 March Moroamoche was deported to Cala in the Transkei, his wife and child accompanying him.

In terms of a proclamation of 17 March, the A.N.C. was prohibited from operating in Sekhukhuneland, and it was made an offence for anyone there to be a member, or even to use an A.N.C. slogan or sign.

"Contact" (Vol. 1 No. 9) reports that the new Acting Paramount was rejected by the people, who refused to co-operate with him in cattle culling or pension payments. The practice was, when pensions were due, for a notice to be pinned on a tree in the kgotla. When Kgobalala did this the notice was torn down and the people told him to nail it on a tree near his house. The

Government's reaction was said to have been to stop the payment of pensions.

On 11 April a proclamation was published transferring the assets, liabilities, rights and obligations of the Bapedi Tribal Authority and the employees of the local council for Sekhukhuneland to the Native Trust.

The primary school, with about 300 children, at Mohlaletse was closed at Easter 1958, and the grants for teachers' salaries transferred to other schools. It is said that the pupils are not being allowed to attend any other school.

According to "Contact", the Department then wrote letters to two men, Phehlane (an induna) and Mosehle (a half-brother of the Paramount) inviting them to call a mass meeting to elect another chief. They refused, saying they had no authority to call a meeting. The Native Commissioner, to whom they conveyed their refusal, sent them away with instructions to return with Kgobalala. Instead they reported back to the tribe.

Next day, May 13, large numbers of tribesmen from all over the reserve (about 5,000 according to "Contact" - another report states that there were between 300 and 500) assembled at Schoonoord, and asked the Native Commissioner to discuss with them the closing of the school at Mohlaletse and the banishment of Moroamoche. He is reported to have refused, but to have undertaken to visit Mohlaletse the next day to discuss matters. Phehlane, Mosehle and Kgobalala were called into the Native Commissioner's office: the first two insisted that two other spokesmen of the tribe should accompany them.

According to the "Contact" report, Kgobalala said he was too old to be the Acting Paramount. The five men were then asked to nominate someone else; but they insisted that chiefs were born, not elected.

It is said that when the Native Commissioner visited Mohlaletse on the following day, no tribesmen turned up to hear him.

"Contact" reports that the next official move was to approach four minor chiefs, giving them the alternative of accepting Bantu authorities or giving up their positions. They refused, and were told to choose successors who would be prepared to co-operate with the Government. One of them, Phasoane, called a tribal meeting and said that if the people wished to accept Bantu authorities they would have to elect a new chief. They rejected the idea.

According to "Contact", on May 16th a detachment of police (European and African) was sent to arrest Phasoane and also his younger brother who was his induna and another member of the tribal committee. A report from another source states that the man arrested was Nkadimeng, because a school in his area had been boycotted.

"Contact" states that the men were roughly handled and thrust into the police van. At this, people rushed out and surrounded the van, holding it to prevent it from moving. A press report stated that stoning took place. The police opened fire (police version - self-defence; Bapedi version - panic). According to "Contact" two tribesmen were shot dead (the Star of 19 May said that four were shot dead and seven wounded). The van then drove off.

"Contact" states that a man in the crowd said "You see, we told you that the Government is stronger than you people". An argument started. The man was attacked and left unconscious. Then the crowd moved off in search of another man who was regarded as a collaborationist. At first he barricaded himself in his hut, then later emerged armed with an assegai. The crowd swarmed over him and he was killed with an axe.

The angry crowd swept on to the house of two teachers, which they sacked. Three schools were damaged. A trading store owned by Tseke Mabye (James?) was burned down, and his lorry, motor-car and motor-cycle were destroyed (Star 19/5/58). Two more men were murdered - according to the Mail (22/5/58) one of them was Chief Kgolane Kgolokwe (was this Kgobalala?).

Next day the police came in force (about 12 vanloads according to "Contact"). About ten people were arrested on suspicion of murder, and during the next few days about 150 more were arrested on charges of assault and arson. The Mail (22/5/58) reported that another tribesman had been hacked to death on the previous day. The police had confiscated numerous assegais, knives, knobkerries, choppers and a panga.

A mobile police force remained in the area, headed by Detective Sergeant J.H. van Rooyen, who was specially transferred from Zeerust.

Mr. Prinsloo was reported to have said that the disturbances had their origin in the fear that the Bapedi were losing their authority. They numbered about 20,000 in a population of about 300,000 in Sekhukhuneland, and had built up a little "Assegai Empire". Trouble and violence had repeatedly followed attempts by groups in the tribe to break away from the ruling junta.

Officials said that the Bapedi feared they were losing their power to the new chiefs who were recognized by the Government. The Bapedi were against progress.

According to the Rand Daily Mail (24/5/58) the A.N.C. says that the trouble in Sekhukhuneland can be blamed on the working of the Bantu Authorities Act. It refutes the official statement that the trouble is an attempt by the Bapedi tribe to dominate the other groups because the Royal House of Sekhukhuneland has, since 1863, been recognized and accepted without question not only by the people but also by successive Governments as the rulers of Sekhukhuneland.

The possession of dangerous weapons by Africans in Sekhukhuneland was prohibited on 26 May (Government Notice No. 731).

According to "Contact" Vol. 1 No. 10, "trouble committees" have been set up by Bapedi tribesmen throughout Sekhukhuneland. A central committee, with two representatives from each village, is responsible for organising the opposition to Government policy and for protecting the people and their property.

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