

MEMORANDUM FOR PRESENTATION TO THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE AT
KLIPTOWN, JOHANNESBURG, ON JUNE 25TH AND 26TH, 1955.

As you probably know, Basutoland is an African enclave completely surrounded by the Union of South Africa. The Territory is peopled mostly by the Basotho - a nation welded up by Moshoeshoe from several fragments of African clans which had wandered away from the renowned African warrior, King Chaka, of the Zulus. The Basotho are a peasant community. Besides the Basotho themselves, we have a few Indians - mostly traders - in the North. There is, along with these, a small population of Eur-Africans, particularly in the south. There is a small but increasing population of Europeans, made up of civil servants and traders. The latter may not, by treaty, settle permanently in the territory. The total population is estimated at about 700,000.

You will have learned from your history books of the struggles of the Basotho on the one hand and the British and Trekkers on the other. For the Basotho these wars, lasting from 1840 to 1894, were a life and death struggle. The infant nation was determined to retain its freedom, its land and its identity. The Trekkers, on the other hand, were determined to find land - good land - for their herds and flocks. They were determined to find land in which their power would be supreme - land in which the British Government would have nothing more to require of them. Here was a big clash of vested interests!

It is not necessary, on this occasion, to go deeper than this into the historical background of our territory. It would suffice to mention that the sum total of these struggles was our retention of Basutoland, then as now, very small of size; and with this, Basutoland was declared British protectorate.

But at the National Convention of 1909, the British promised to cede Basutoland and her other territories in Southern Africa, to the projected Union of South Africa, as and when it was attained. We, of Basutoland, today have our freedom and land threatened by Section 151 of the South Africa Act and the Schedule to that act. This act was drafted by the House of Commons and passed, with amendments at the National Convention of 1909. The relevant section makes provision for the annexation of the protectorates of Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland by the Union of South Africa. According to this section, annexation will not depend on the wishes of the African people concerned. Nor does it make provision of any kind whatever for the full political representation of the Africans affected in the Union Parliament. On the contrary it seeks to place these Africans on the same footing as their brethren now in the Union. We need hardly mention that this concession was made by the British contrary to our wishes and without direct consultation. The people of the protectorates were not aware of the full implications until the white Papers were published recently. These have aroused much indignation in Basutoland at least; and they were the immediate cause for the creation of the Basutoland African Congress, in whose name I stand here.

In Basutoland we have enjoyed a version of freedom, under the British, which could be called formal and NOT actual. That is to say, if we have been politically free at all, economically we have been slaves. We believe that British failure to push up economic development in Basutoland has been very largely influenced by the pledge to annex the territory to the Union. For it would obviously be uneconomic to develop the territory for the benefit of the Union.

While enjoying our formal freedom, we have suffered grievously in Basutoland from the colour bar there and all that it stands for, which, no doubt, you all know very well; yet in this country colour discrimination is not part of the law. It is an expediency.

With it we have suffered from the rule by proclamation. We have no facility for self-determination. We are at the legal mercy of the High Commissioner who proclaims from Pretoria or Cape Town and sees, through his white representatives in Basutoland, that it is done. The so-called Basutoland Council is a dummy. Every time the members are reminded that theirs is to advise, not to pretend to legislate. But the people continue to clamour for a legislature. The Moore Report on Administrative Reforms was rejected by both people and Council largely on this ground that it refused to grant a legislature. The reason for the refusal is obvious. The White Papers disclose that the deliberate policy of the British Government is to approximate her African administrative policy in Basutoland to that of the Union, so that annexation, when it comes, should not expose any administrative differences to the Africans concerned.

We are aware that an attempt may be made to force us into the Union in the same way as the African inhabitants of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland were forced into the Federation against their will. We shall fight this issue to the bitter end with the support of the freedom loving peoples of Southern Africa and the world. If, on the other hand, the Freedom Charter which we have today assembled here to inaugurate becomes the accepted policy of the Union, wherein ALL people enjoy complete democratic rights, we will walk into the Union the following day.

While solidly associating ourselves with the just and sane demands of all the peoples of Southern Africa, we, in Basutoland, wish in particular to submit to this historic Congress of the People that:-

A. We demand our right to remain free and independent of the Union of South Africa until the proposed Charter shall have been acceptable to the Union.

B. We demand complete self-government for the protectorates in our life-time.

C. We demand complete political, economic and social equality for all men and women in Southern Africa.

D. We demand that immediate steps shall be taken by the British Government to implement a sensible economic development plan for the protectorates which have, hitherto, been sadly neglected.

E. Failing the above demands, we make a final demand that the British Government put our case before the U.N.O. Trusteeship Council for the purpose of negotiating an agreement to place the protectorates under the administration of that Council.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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