

A.P. ZWANE Swaziland's Road to Danger

The present constitution for Swaziland can be said to be a tragic parting gift from Britain. It sets Swaziland firmly on the road to dangers which have been rendered predictable by events in other parts of Africa. The extraordinarily wide powers to grants to the King give permanence to the rule of a reactionary and largely unproductive aristocracy. The three-man constituencies it has set up limit the voter's freedom in choosing his representatives and facilitate the exclusion of opposition parties from parliament. By excluding the overwhelming majority of Swazis from effective participation in government and the making of laws, the present constitution gives the ordinary citizen a vested interest in revolution. Finally, the constitution gives political power to the whites which is out of proportion to their number and in that way encourages race-consciousness in the Swazi community.

The Swazis are a small, largely illiterate and underdeveloped nation which is dominated by a backward-looking aristocracy. History and geography have combined to place them in that part of Africa where race conflict is sharpest. Whether or not they like it, they are destined to play a part of increasing importance in what seems to be coming clash between Black and White in southern Africa. It is a matter of survival for them that conflict should be avoided and that the African and the Whites should agree in a negotiated settlement. For this reason, they want to feel placed in the position to influence events in the direction of a peaceful solution. To be able to do this, they must be a united people. The main weapon in their hands to bring about this unity at this stage is the monarchy. To be effective in this role of unifying influence, the monarchy must be above politics. It must not be a partisan in its behaviour or outlook.

The present constitution places the King in the front line of political controversy and in that way he is a partisan and a target for political attack. This damages the monarchy's capacity and potential as a unifying influence and weakens the Swazi people for making an effective contribution toward the stabilisation of the race situation in southern Africa. It also militates against a really united effort to raise living standards. As a political partisan, the King is at an unfair advantage. He is free to use his position and the people's loyalty to advance what could very well be sectarian goals and interests to the detriment of the majority. In this setting

political opposition becomes indistinguishable from treason. Even to agitate for reform, where the King took a different view, could be treasonable. This is the impossible position in which the present constitution places Swaziland.

It is inevitable that there should be abuses where the King is a political partisan. At present parliament is dominated by princes and other relatives of the royal family. This gives to the legislature the character of a royal agency to give employment to the people who cannot stand on their own in any other field. The educated sections of the nation, the workers and other commoner classes have been denied representation in parliament. The present constitution encourages the use of chiefs who are, in the last analysis, civil servants, to function as political or election agents for the ruling Imbokodvo National Movement.

In short, the constitution sets up a minority dictatorship. In some African countries these dictatorships have produced bloodshed and chaos or destroyed monarchies. The Ngwane National Liberation Congress (NNLC) wants none of these disasters to overtake Swaziland. For this reason the NNLC finds it difficult to understand how Britain can want to encourage them in a country like ours, placed as it is in a racially explosive part of Africa.

To the best of our knowledge the three-men type of constituency is unique in present-day Africa. The advocates of this practice have argued that it conforms to political realities in Swaziland where the power structure rests on three pillars, the aristocracy, the White community and the ordinary people.

The three-sided nature of the power structure, however, is not reflected in the composition of parliament which is dominated by the aristocracy and the Whites. As a matter of fact, the government in Swaziland is only in name, it is to a large extent under the influence of the Whites. The people do not feel it is theirs. They are not being racialistic here. If it was theirs they would be free to send the best men to parliament, which is not the case at the moment. It can be theirs only if the artificial barriers to direct participation in law-making are removed.

The virtual exclusion from effective participation in law-making of the non-aristocratic majority transforms the constitution into a weapon by which the aristocracy and the Whites protect their interests against the ordinary Swazi men and women. Although in the last general elections the NNLC polled just a little over 20% of the votes, it does not have a single seat in parliament. The industrial areas of Bunya, Havelock and Mbabane voted heavily for the NNLC. These areas have a large concentration of voters. In spite of this they failed to return an NNLC representative.

To block opposition can often stop reform. The obvious danger where this took place is that the constitution would deprive independence of any significant meaning and would leave the virtually disfranchised majority with revolution as the only means by which to bring about change. It is to be regretted

that Britain's parting gift to Swaziland will ultimately be a heritage of conflict.

Given their economic power, the political concessions to the Whites enable them to wield an influence on legislation which is out of all proportion to their numbers. This power is used among other things to slow down deracialisation on the economic plane. While localisation goes apace in the government, it is conspicuously slow in industry and commerce.

This is an invitation to the African to use the political power he has to do himself what he will regard as political justice. It is not inconceivable that he might one day be free, whereupon we might see the dispossession of the economically powerful by the politically strong. It is difficult to see how movement in this direction can be stopped without changing the constitution.

Where the constitution gives the people an unrepresentative parliament while it undermines the monarchy and sows the seeds of race conflict, the obvious cure is to change it. The NNLC accordingly requests the British government to:

- (i) Call a constitutional conference before independence to draft a truly democratic constitution for Swaziland;

- (ii) ensure that the one-man-one-constituency principle is entrenched;
 (iii) ensure that the monarchy remains out of and above politics.

It is of the greatest importance that the constitution should be democratised before independence. Thereafter, Britain will lose all power to influence legislation. If the democratisation is not done now, Britain might find that she has sold the common people of Swaziland to a possible tyranny, precisely in the way she did in South Africa in 1909.

Our goal in the NNLC is the establishment of a democratic, non-racial society in which the citizen will be free and enabled to make the best use of his life without the fear of being punished for being the child of his parents. We want to feel that Britain is with us here. The present constitution stands in the way of progress to our goal. It is the duty of the British government to strengthen the hand of those who stand for non-racialism in southern Africa. We regard our country as being in the vanguard of the fight to establish non-racialism and, therefore, entitled as a matter of right to a constitution which will enable it to march to a goal which is approved by men and women the world over.



JOHN OKAI

1
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 Counted with those who breathe,
 You cannot break my bone
 Just as you can
 Not scan the sun;
 Let watching witches watch
 And leave my brook to bark!
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 In eyes of those who see,
 You cannot grade my grain
 Just as you can
 Not catch the wind;
 So let fighting files fight
 And leave my land to lie!

2
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 Counted with those with limbs,
 You cannot catch my cow
 Just as you can
 Not arrest clouds;
 Let singing lizards sing,
 And leave my grass to green!
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 To touch of those who feel,
 You cannot sing my song
 Just as you can
 Not hold the air;
 So let standing stones stand
 And leave my cocks to crow!

3
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 To noses of those who smell,
 You cannot sail my sea
 Just as you can
 Not reach the sky;
 Let falling fairies fall
 And leave my fish to float!
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 Counted with those who walk,
 You cannot shake my spear
 Just as you can
 Not count the stars;
 So let crawling cows crawl
 And leave my mind to move!

4
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 Counted with those with tongue,
 You cannot face my foe
 Just as you can
 Not drink the dam;
 Let walling wizards wall
 And leave my waves to break!
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 In ears of those who hear,
 You cannot burn my bush
 Just as you can
 Not count the ants,
 So let swimming sheep swim
 And leave my stars to shine!

5
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 Counted with those with hearts,
 You cannot know my woe
 Just as you can
 Not drink the dam;
 Let fading flowers fade
 And leave my seed to sink!
 Just as I am!
 Just as I am -
 To minds of men who think,
 You cannot cut my corn
 Just as you can
 Not count the sand;
 So let talking trees talk
 And leave my goats to graze!