

LESOTHO'S ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE



The Founding of the
Communist Party
of Lesotho (Basutoland)

by **John Motloheloa**

(Secretary, Communist Party of Lesotho)

The newly-formed Communist Party of Lesotho (Basutoland) held its foundation Congress on May 5, 1962. Messages of solidarity were received, among others, from the South African Communist Party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party and from Walter Ulbricht of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. A Constitution and Programme were adopted and a Central Committee elected.

TASKS OF THE PARTY

A united front of all patriotic political parties for the achievement of complete independence and national liberation is the central task of the new Party. Our foundation Congress decided that such a front could only emerge on the basis of a progressive policy, and in co-operation with the Communist Party. The attempt to build a united front on the basis of anti-communism was sterile and doomed to failure. *A strong Communist Party with active branches throughout the country is fundamental to a national liberation front in our country.*

The main enemy of Basotho progress has been and still is British imperialism and its ally—White South African imperialism. The country's backwardness can only be overcome when freedom is achieved. Under these conditions of national oppression, the Communist Party will work with any party or group genuinely fighting against imperialism, despite differences on other issues.

Our country lacks modern industry; its agriculture is primitive. Our education, health and social services are backward. Despite all this, our Congress came to the conclusion that, led by the Communist Party, the people could defeat imperialism, create a State

of National Democracy in our country, and advance on a non-capitalist path to Socialism and eventually to Communism. The possibilities of achieving these aims in a country surrounded by the hostile South African Republic existed because of the favourable international conditions. The existence of the powerful Socialist System together with the struggle of the working class in the imperialist countries and the powerful liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America, are a guarantee of the victory of the Lesotho revolution.

The Party is to establish offices in various parts of Lesotho, and will establish a Party bulletin, *MOSEBETSI* (The Worker). It pledges itself to create the closest fraternal relations both with the international working class and especially with progressive organisations in South Africa.

The Programme of the Communist Party of Lesotho, following a brief historical outline, analyses the present situation of the Basotho people and advances the proposals and aims of the Party. The text* is as follows:—

80 YEARS OF OPPRESSION

Lesotho is an enclave entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. It is a small country of 11,720 square miles with a population of approximately 800,000.

Our country is a colony under the control of Great Britain. For the past 80 years or more the people of Lesotho have suffered colonial oppression. Threatened by the depredations of the Boers in the last century, the founder of the nation, King Moshoeshoe I, entered into a treaty of Alliance and Protection with the British Government in 1843. The Treaty provided for protection in the event of aggression by an outsider. In terms of the agreement, King Moshoeshoe and the Basotho Pitso† were to continue to exercise complete sovereignty over the country.

The Boers continued their policy of robbing the Basotho of their territory, with the help of superior arms and the barely concealed connivance of the British Government. Further treaties with the British followed, each more unfavourable to the Basotho. But Britain had no intention of abiding by the spirit or the letter of any treaties entered into with the Basotho. Over the years, by a combination of force and guile, the powers of the people over the

* The text has been slightly abridged and headings inserted.

† The traditional national council.

country were whittled down to the point where independent Lesotho became a crown colony entirely under the control of an imperialist power.

THE BRITISH STILL HOLD THE REINS

At present the government is based on a constitution introduced in 1959, which purports to give more power to the Basotho. Provision is made for a legislative council known as the "National Council". This comprises 80 members, half of whom are elected by a system of indirect elections. The rest are nominees. Women are virtually excluded from the electorate. There is an Executive Council appointed by the British High Commissioner. It consists of 8 members, half of whom are British officials.

Although the National Council has extensive powers, these are circumscribed by the undemocratic character of the constitution. Ultimate power and initiative still rest firmly in the hands of the British Government, which can veto any law, and can repeal the constitution itself without reference to the Basotho.

The prolonged rule of British imperialism has had grave effects on the economy of the country. The land and natural resources are hardly developed at all. There is no industry. Agriculture is primitive. Health facilities are scanty, and educational opportunities limited. Of the population of over 800,000, the majority are so poverty-stricken that more than half the menfolk in their prime of life are forced to go and sell their labour power at wretched rates of pay in neighbouring South Africa.

THE PEOPLE'S ASSET—THE LAND

The one natural resource which the people have managed by means of struggle to preserve is the land. Unlike other colonies, no foreigner owns any part of Basutoland. Land is held in trust for the Basotho nation by the Paramount Chief, and may not be alienated. Grazing rights are communal, but arable land is allocated to individuals by Chiefs who act under the authority of the Paramount Chief.

With the growth of population, and with changes in the needs of the people, the traditional tribal land tenure which depended on the easy availability of land has now broken down. The imperialists have been content that this remains the position. Allocation of land in the traditional manner is arbitrary, archaic and uneconomic. There is no element of economic planning in such allocation.

Of the total land area of 11,720 square miles, only about 1,453 square miles are arable. There are over 170,000 households in Basutoland with an average land-holding of 4 acres each.

Actually, the majority of families do not have more than approximately 2 acres; 14 per cent of the households are completely landless. When it is considered that an economic unit of land in the best areas of Basutoland is considered to be 15 acres, it will be realised why it is impossible for the people to live on produce from the land. Only about 5 per cent of the landholders hold 15 acres and over.

Economists have also estimated that a person holding 5.7 acres would earn £12 per year. A person holding 15 acres would still be able to earn only £120 a year. In view of the fact that land is practically the only known asset of the country, a serious economic plight is revealed by the facts.

LABOUR MIGRATES TO SOUTH AFRICA

As a consequence, thousands of Basotho are compelled to leave the country to work on the mines, farms and industries of South Africa; 83,000 males of working age were absent from the territory in 1959. That amounted to 43 per cent of the adult male population. In South Africa, which has a developed economy, the Basotho are subject to the same conditions as have made South Africa's name infamous throughout the world. Like all Africans in South Africa, they suffer racial discrimination in all fields, including wages and conditions of work. That alone is a commentary on the disgraceful conditions existing in Basutoland. Our country is a reservoir of cheap labour for South African mines, farms and industries. It has been a fundamental principle of British policy to maintain this position. The recruiting agencies of South African mines have been granted extensive special privileges to operate in the country, and nothing has been done to develop our economy so as to provide employment within the motherland.

This flow of migratory labour has had disastrous social and economic consequences in Basutoland. But objectively, it has also given rise to the emergence of class-conscious workers, trained in the harsh conditions of South African wage slavery. Thus the weapon has been fashioned to free Basutoland from the ravages of British imperialism and its ally—White South African imperialism.

For many years, led by organisations like Lekhotla La Bafu, and the Basutoland Congress Party, the Basotho have been carrying on a brave struggle in the traditions of King Moshoeshoe I to

maintain and extend the independence of the country. Throughout their struggle the Basotho have received valuable help from progressive organisations in South Africa. Individual communists, as members of Lekhotla La Bafo or the BCP have made significant contributions to the struggle in the last thirty years. The Communists are no strangers to the masses of Basutoland.

SOCIALISM—THE DOMINANT FACTOR OF OUR TIMES

The struggle of the people of Lesotho for independence has now entered a new phase; it is taking place under new conditions; in a new epoch.

This new era in human history was ushered in by the Great October Socialist Revolution, organised by the Communist Party of Russia in 1917. A new type of state, the Soviet State, came into being, in which for the first time, exploitation and oppression of workers was abolished. Millions throughout the world, inspired by the example of the workers and peasants of Russia, were aroused to fight against imperialism for their national liberation. From a backward country the Soviet Union became within the space of a generation, the world's mightiest state in science, economy and technology.

Following the victory of the Soviet Union in the second world war and the defeat of fascism, the cause of the oppressed people made a further leap forward. The great Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party defeated foreign imperialism, and domestic reaction, and embarked on the Socialist path. In a number of European and Asian countries—Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Albania, Bulgaria and the Democratic Republics of Germany, Korea and Vietnam—the people rose against capitalist and landlord rule and laid the basis for socialism. There has thus come into being the world Socialist system, comprising a third of the human race. The Socialist system is a social, economic and political community of free sovereign peoples, pursuing the socialist and communist path, united by an identity of interests and goals and close bonds of international socialist solidarity.

Of vital significance, too, is the astonishing growth in the number and power of international working class organisations, especially noteworthy are those Communist and Workers' Parties working in the citadels of imperialism, in the United States, Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and other imperialist countries.

The powerful socialist camp has become a bastion of and

stimulus to movements for national liberation in Asia, Africa and Latin America. As a result a great wave of independence has swept over these areas. There are now no fewer than 29 independent African states. The disgraceful colonial system is approaching complete disintegration and decay.

The conditions described above enable our epoch to be characterised as follows:

“Our times, the basic content of which is the transition from capitalism to socialism initiated by the Great October Socialist Revolution, are times of struggle between the two opposed social systems, times of socialist revolutions, of the breakdown of imperialism, of the abolition of the colonial system, times of transition of more peoples to the socialist path, of the triumph of socialism and communism on a world-wide scale.”

(Statement of Meeting of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties, Moscow, 1960)

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH INDEPENDENCE CAN BE WON

Lesotho, has also felt the effects of these great developments on the world scene, which have helped our people to win important victories. British imperialism is being forced to make substantial concessions, and the country stands on the verge of independence.

But it would be a mistake to under-estimate the difficulties and complexity of the struggle that still lies ahead. Politically, our country is still dominated by British Imperialism. The mine-owners, industrialists and farmers of the Republic of South Africa exploit the labour-power of the Basotho workers. The Republic includes within its boundaries Basotho territory obtained with the help of British Imperialism in the last century.

The Republic of South Africa, which is a tyranny in which a White minority enjoys political and other rights at the expense of the majority of the people, continually threatens Lesotho, as well as Swaziland and Bechuanaland, with incorporation, and the imposition of their evil system of *apartheid*.

To win complete and genuine independence, and to raise the living and cultural standards of the masses of our people, revolutionary changes are needed in Lesotho. Industry, agriculture and communications must be rapidly developed so as to provide employment for all inside the country, and enable the sons of Lesotho to return to their motherland. Such development is only possible under a system of socialist planning, which will enable

the whole people to benefit from their labour, and not merely a small class or group.

To safeguard our independence we cannot rely on the protection of British Imperialism which has betrayed the trust of our own and many other peoples, and continues to do so. For example, the two protectorates of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were forcibly joined in Federation with Southern Rhodesia for the sake of a few White capitalists.

We must rely, firstly, on our own strength and unity, and for this purpose the Basotho must enjoy complete sovereignty and self-government, including control of their own defence force, foreign policy, internal security, posts and telegraphs, air-lines, and all other powers which are controlled by genuinely independent governments.

Secondly, we must rely on our nearest allies, our oppressed brothers and sisters in the Republic, who are fighting against our common enemy, aggressive White South African Imperialism. For this purpose, the Basotho should maintain close friendly relations with the progressive movements in the Republic of South Africa, such as the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress.

Thirdly, we must rely on the sympathy and support of the independent states of Africa, Asia and Latin America. We must rely on the member states of the United Nations, nearly all of whom have condemned *apartheid*, and who can be expected to extend prompt and immediate practical aid to an independent Lesotho, should she be compelled to resist aggression and embargoes from her imperialist neighbour. For this purpose, Lesotho must be represented as an independent country at the United Nations, and enter into friendly relations with all countries, irrespective of their social system. We should rapidly develop air and other means of communication with the outside world; and enter into any necessary alliances.

IN THESE TIMES—A NEW PARTY

The parties and organisations which have hitherto existed in Lesotho have done valuable work for the country, but they have proved inadequate to meet the complex and difficult tasks of our people in the new situation which arises from our internal development, and from fast-moving changes beyond our borders.

These organisations have represented mainly chiefs, or peasants, or middle-class intellectuals. They have lacked a clear ideology and

understanding of the modern world. Hence they often compromised with British Imperialism; neglected the interests of the Basotho workers both in the country and in the Republic; failed to adopt suitable programmes for industry and agriculture, and looked for the advancement or enrichment of a few, rather than the upliftment of the poorest section of the people.

The Communist Party of Lesotho is a Marxist-Leninist Party of the new type. The Party represents the working class, and safeguards the ultimate interests of the whole nation. It is a party guided by the most advanced political and economic theory, namely, Marxism-Leninism; the science which has already led a third of humanity to liberation.

The Party stands uncompromisingly for the freedom, independence and self-government of Lesotho as the only road to a socialist Republic of Lesotho. To achieve this aim, the party strives for co-operation with other patriotic forces in the nation, in a united front of national liberation.

The Party works for close friendly relations between the Basotho and their brothers and sisters in the Republic of South Africa. It safeguards the interests of the most exploited section of the people—the workers both inside and outside the country. It will help to overcome and root out all vestiges of colonialism in this country. It will lead the way to the winning not only of formal political independence, but also of economic independence, the raising of the cultural standards and the safeguarding of the future of Lesotho.

THE AIMS OF THE PARTY

The ultimate aim of the Party is to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat to carry through changes that will lead to socialism, and finally to communism. But under the conditions prevailing in our country today these aims belong to the future.

The Party therefore advances the following immediate aims which are in accord with the necessities of the struggle today. Among the immediate aims of the Party are:

● The achievement of immediate independence for Lesotho, and the creation of a democratic state with all local and national representatives in legislative bodies subject both to election and recall by universal, equal, direct, secret, adult suffrage without regard to race, sex, colour, creed, educational or other qualifications whatsoever.

● The Party demands the ending of all vestiges of colonialism and, specifically, control by a democratic National Council of the civil service, defence, foreign policy, internal security, post and telegraphs, internal and external communications, airways, currency, and all other powers of a sovereign legislature.

● It stands for the adherence of an independent Lesotho to the United Nations and the establishment of friendly diplomatic and economic relations with all countries, including Britain, but especially with the independent African states.

● In regard to relationship with the Republic of South Africa, the Party will demand that the Republic unequivocally recognise the independence and integrity of the country. It will make new arrangements with the Mines and other employers to pay adequate wages, guarantee safety conditions, and trade union rights. It will propose that Basotho officials take adequate measures to enforce such arrangements. Furthermore, the Party will demand the return of territories belonging to Lesotho, wrongfully included in the Republic by British Imperialism.

● The Party stands for the creation of an Agrarian Reform Institute with wide powers over the use of the National asset—LAND. Radical reform must be undertaken in regard to all land. Building upon the traditional attitude of our people to the land, whereby it is regarded as belonging to all the people, the state should encourage the formation of co-operatives and collective farms under democratic administration. The state should take immediate steps to mechanise farming operations, conserve water supplies, and combat soil erosion. It should encourage scientific livestock breeding and diversification of crops.

● The Party will demand the immediate nationalisation of all labour recruitment.

● The Party will propose the establishment of a national bank and currency system.

● The Party will press for guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, of the press, of movement and of belief.

● The Party will work for a united national front with all progressive forces, aiming at an independent, self-governing, democratic Lesotho; a united front of all workers, peasants, professional and business people, chiefs and commoners, for independence and democracy, for higher living and cultural standards, and the development of the economy of the country by the Basotho themselves, through their own democratically elected government.

COMMUNISM—THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF ALL MANKIND

The historic 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union considered and adopted the great programme for the building of the first Communist society in the history of mankind. The programme is a concrete, scientifically-substantiated programme for the building of communism. All mankind will inevitably march along the road to the highest stage of human society—COMMUNISM. Lesotho is no exception. Although our country lags behind because of specific historical features, it is open to us to achieve our independence, create a state of National Democracy based on a non-capitalist economy, and advance with the help of the progressive world to socialism and communism. That is the ultimate aim that the Communist Party of Lesotho sets itself.

THE COLONIALISM OF THE EUROPEAN COMMON MARKET

“Imperialism is seeking to find new means to attain its colonial ends. It is seeking to launch a collective onslaught on the young national states. Recently the imperialist monopolies have been pinning very great hopes on the so-called Common Market.

“The ideologists of imperialism are praising to the skies this organisation, extolling the blessings it allegedly offers to its member-states. But their claims are very remote from reality. The Common Market is, in fact, a state monopoly agreement of the financial oligarchy of Western Europe which is threatening the vital interests of all peoples and the cause of universal peace, since the aggressive circles of imperialism are using it with the aim of strengthening NATO and stepping up the arms race. . . .

“Subordination of the young sovereign states of Africa to the Common Market would mean their consent to reconcile themselves to playing the part of agrarian-raw material hinterlands of the former metropolitan countries. But it was not for the sake of this that the African peoples rose in a sacred struggle against colonialism. In this struggle they have learned a great deal. They have amassed much experience of political struggle. Their desire to maintain and strengthen their independence, for which they have paid such a great price, is becoming ever more invincible.”

—Nikita S. Khrushchov (speaking at a Soviet-Mali Friendship Meeting in Moscow on May 30, 1962).