

A REVIEW OF

RENDER UNTO KAISER: A TRANSKEI DOSSIER

Barry Streek and Richard Wicksteed, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1981.

by Tiresias.

Anyone who regularly reads the South African newspapers will be aware of the fact that there have been some very curious occurrences in Transkei, South Africa's homeland prototype. One recalls, for example, the much-vaunted plan for the development of an international harbour at Umngazana Mouth; the severing of diplomatic relations with South Africa in April 1978; the curious affair of Mr Humphrey Berkeley and the even stranger tale of the flight to Swaziland of the Paramount Chief of the Thembus, Chief Sabata Dalindyebo. But one tends to see these bizarre occurrences as single instances. Time blurs the detail and so one fails to perceive the outlines of the whole.

That option is no longer available. Barry Streek and Richard Wicksteed, both professional journalists, have compiled a dossier on Transkei which strips away the veil and reveals beneath it some appalling and unpalatable truths. When one picks up the book for the first time the opening paragraph of the Introduction seems a trifle melodramatic:

"One of us was talking recently to a senior journalist on an Afrikaans, very pro-Nationalist newspaper when the conversation turned to Transkei and its political leaders, President Kaiser Matanzima and his brother, Prime Minister George Matanzima. His reaction was immediate and instinctive: 'Them? Those two brothers are the Papa Docs of Southern Africa.'"

But by the time one reaches the last paragraphs of the Postscript:

"Transkei's director of social services, Mr I D Sawula, said of the drought and of the general situation in the region: 'If you drive through the countryside, you will find a lot of young men and women roaming around, unable to find work on dry land or finding no jobs to earn a living. This unemployment crisis has now spread to suburban areas like Umtata and Butterworth, resulting in a fast-increasing crime rate and an unprecedented high population of street beggars.'

That summed up the reality of life for the average Transkeian after nearly five years of 'independence' rather more accurately than the optimistic projections which continue to flow from government sources."

one's cynicism has evaporated — dispelled by the cumulative blows of the author's chronology of deceptions, cruelties, greed and opportunism which are the hallmarks of the Transkeian regime.

The blame for this catalogue of woes cannot be laid at the door of the Matanzima brothers alone, although there can

be little doubt that theirs are the hands upon the rudder of state in Transkei. The blame falls also upon the South African government which has relentlessly endeavoured to prolong the signs of life in the stillborn Transkei child. It is they who have provided the vast sums of capital which have flowed freely through the hands of the Matanzimas into the pockets of a succession of petty swindlers who have seen in Transkei the chance for a fast buck. And for some the spoils have been gargantuan. A sum of R9 million was paid to a certain Mr Salim el-Hajj for the development of a harbour at Mazeppa Bay — the Umngazana project having been abandoned after considerable initial expense — and the benefit to Transkei was a depressingly familiar zero.

The book's thirteen chapters deal with a number of issues which are central to any understanding of the Transkei brand of politics, a robust hybrid of all that is most deplorable in South Africa itself. The Matanzima's personal backgrounds are sketched in merciless detail. The undeniable economic interdependence of Transkei and South Africa is convincingly outlined. The unenviable record of fiascoes in the fields of diplomacy, corruption, the suppression of the Methodist Church of South Africa and law enforcement are painstakingly described and documented. And the result is a damning indictment of not only Transkei, but also the South African government and its policy of balkanisation of the sub-continent.

That the book has struck some raw nerves is evidenced by the fact of its banning in Transkei almost as soon as it first appeared in an Umtata bookshop. The title of Chapter 11, *Tell It Not in Umtata*, could not have been more aptly chosen. It tells the tale of the suppression and harassment of the Press in Transkei — harassment which has seen the banning of the East London *Daily Dispatch* and the arrest, deportation and detention of a number of journalists. And although the authors' statement that "(t)he journalists have, however, withstood the constant pressure from the state, and have not been cowed" may tend toward hyperbole if the judgment is based upon the degree of control which the Matanzimas have succeeded in exercising over Transkei's small press corps, it is vindicated by the appearance of this book.

No one who reads it can fail to be convinced of the moral bankruptcy of Transkei and, indeed, of the homeland policy as a whole. And yet one would differ from the authors' concluding observations in which they paint a gloomy picture of Transkei's future prospects. The present system bears the unmistakable imprint of government by

the Matanzimas. But they, like others before them, will pass and the reins of government will fall into new hands. The potential heirs to the throne of the Matanzimas are not, in my view, necessarily the men who are close to them now. While the Matanzimas have an undeniable personal following, this is due more to Kaiser than to his brother George. And there is no reason why that following should attach itself to any of the Matanzima protégés. It is just as conceivable that there will be a reaction against

them when the firm hand of the Transkei President finally releases its strong grip on the domestic politics of Transkei. I rate this book as the equal of other South African exposés, like those which followed the Muldergate debacle. Its defects of proofreading and style and the weakness of its conclusions do not reduce its worth as a compelling documentary account of ideology gone mad. And no one who reads it will long doubt that that is a fair description of the great Transkei experiment. □

The Editor,
REALITY.

Dear Sir,

I feel I must take issue with C. A. Hamilton in her article "The Study of South African Precolonial History; "Bantustan Propaganda" " in the May issue of Reality, where in Note 19 she mentions the Stanger and Lower Tugela Museum. This she slates as being largely irrelevant to Zulu history and says the museum contains "mostly colonial memorabilia — old ballgowns and regimental dress." There are, in fact, no old ballgowns on display and little in the way of regimental dress though obviously the museum is largely endowed with the household effects of the early colonists. There is an entire showcase of authentic Zulu costume and artifacts obtained through the good offices of a chief at Mapumulo, the pattern of which has probably not varied much over the last two or three hundred years if it were possible to find records. There is also a showcase of Indian traditional bridal wear; as far as possible it was hoped that the museum would be representative of the population as a whole. By the way, Stanger cannot be said to be situated "in the heart of historic Zululand."

As for the curatrix having no knowledge of pre-colonial history, it will be appreciated that it is extremely difficult to find an informed and dedicated person for a part-time job at about R60.00 per month.

Yours sincerely,

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