

Some Findings on the Origins of Political Parties in Botswana

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A GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ORIGINS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN AFRICA

Any analysis of the historical origins, development and nature of political parties in Botswana cannot be undertaken in an insular context; it has to be undertaken within the broader and wider framework of political development and change within the Southern African region in particular and the African continent in general.

This approach is necessitated by the fact that the African continent has the same and common historical and colonial experience. The advent of imperialism in Africa has also consolidated this common experience. This approach, however, does not mean nor imply that Africa had the same process of political development. If anything, however, this approach does recognize the fact of uneven socio-political and economic development in Africa resulting from colonialism and imperialism. The crucial advantage or usefulness of this approach, however, lies in the fact that it helps us to understand how, when, and why, political groups and associations originated and developed in Africa.

It is common knowledge that the advent, of colonialism and imperialism in Africa resulted in the oppression and exploitation of the indigenous people of Africa and deprived them of the opportunity to create and remake their own history.

The result of this colonial exploitation was the birth of anti-colonial resistance movements in Africa mainly in the 20th century in order to eliminate this process of the erosion of their national freedom. The vicious white racial discrimination which was borne out of colonialism and imperialism also helped greatly in fanning the fire of nationalism that had been smouldering for a long time since the arrival of colonialism in the African continent.

But in most parts of Africa, it was not until the first World War that Nationalist Movements in Africa became a reality. This was mainly due to the fact that an intensification of the exploitation of masses resulted in the increase of political awareness of the masses.

It is also a fact that Africans who served in the war came back imbued with the high feelings of national pride and a better insight into the working and operations of colonialism. These were some of the people who emerged as leaders of the nationalist movements that were to emerge in Africa. Another group which became a major catalyst in the formation and direction of nationalist movements in Africa was the small but influential intelligentsia which was part of the petty bourgeois class. This group emerged mainly in areas where colonialism had percolated deepest.

This was particularly the picture in the coastal areas of West Africa, East Africa and certain parts of Southern Africa; i.e., Africans who had the closest and intimate contact with colonialism were the first to develop programmes to resist colonialism. A point which requires special attention here however is the fact that although the development of African nationalist political consciousness and organisations later on

began to include the masses of the African people, the leadership and control of the nationalist movements remained almost exclusively the domain of the intelligentsia, the petty bourgeoisie as a whole and some few individuals who had managed to accumulate some wealth. Even today the leadership and control of nationalist political parties and nationalist movements is still essentially the preserve of this group.

Another outcome of the rise and development of African nationalism had been the birth of pan-Africanism whose political programmes and slogans were that Africa was to the Africans what Europe is to the Europeans and in the context of the development of African nationalism Pan Africanism represented a radical strain of African nationalism. Hence it quickly became the major focus of colonialism because it was seen to represent a brand of nationalism which aimed at a complete destruction of the status quo. Thus everywhere where pan-Africanism rose its head, it evoked a swift reaction from the colonial administration and in most cases if not all, the colonial administration created its own 'nationalist' movements to counteract the operations of any pan-Africanist nationalist movements.

In Southern Africa, the main theatre of African resistance to colonialism was South Africa. It was in South Africa that resistance movements first emerged culminating in the formation of the African National Congress in 1912, the first nationalist organisation to be formed in Southern Africa.

The African National Congress (ANC) was formed to continue the struggle began by African Kingdoms in South Africa which culminated in many border wars in the Eastern Cape Province, Natal, Transvaal, Orange Free State and the Transvaal before 1912.

In the other countries of Southern Africa, mainly Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia, the nationalist movements emerged quite late, but they followed almost the same pattern that was followed by the ANC i.e., agitation for national liberation from colonialism.

Their focus too, was to mobilize the masses against colonialism and imperialism in their respective countries. The foregoing analysis of the origins and development of nationalist movements in Africa has shown that the major unifying force has been the presence of colonialism in Africa. It has illustrated that colonialism, resulted in the formation of political groups and parties dominated by a small influential intelligentsia. What is also significant about the rise of nationalist movements in Africa is however the fact that nationalism has tended to unite all oppressed people irrespective of their class divisions because the major focus of attention has been the destruction of colonialism, imperialism and white racialism. The net result of this unfastidious amalgamation of different classes on the basis of nationalism has been the submersion of class divisions and resulting in the perpetuation of the exploitation of the masses by a budding African petty bourgeoisie class which replaced the white colonial masters.

It is within this broad context that an analysis of the origins and development of political parties in Botswana could be fruitfully undertaken.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM AND NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS IN BOTSWANA

The process of the formation of nationalism and nationalist movements in Botswana like in the other former British High Commission territories, Lesotho and Swaziland, had a slow development. Indeed it could be argued that the formation of nationalism and its practical translation into nationalist movements only began to take shape at the beginning of the 1960's.

There had been however, indications and signs of national consciousness and political awareness even before 1960, Black nationalism in Botswana in fact began to show its head as early as the 1920's when individuals such as Simon Ratshosa began to level some criticism against the colonial administration. Simon Ratshosa in particular was one of these budding intelligentsia who felt that the

role of the chiefs was despotic, corrupt and outmoded. The traditional leadership also expressed dissatisfaction with colonialism. What is significant, however, about Simon Ratshosa's criticisms about the colonial administration was that he was advocating for reforms to be brought about within the colonial administration without challenging its presence in the territory. In other words, he was not calling for the transfer of power from the colonial administration to the indigenous people. Simon Ratshosa does, however, represent the first rumblings of nationalism in the territory and these rumblings continued throughout the 1930's and early 1940's and occasionally supported by chiefs.

But as we have argued above, the actual process of the formation of nationalism and the development of national consciousness which was translated into nationalist movement began, seriously, at the beginning of the 1960's.

Perhaps it is fundamental here to attempt to show why the process of nation formation and national consciousness began in Botswana so late. In order to comprehend this, an analysis of the impact of colonialism in Botswana seems essential.

We have attempted to show somewhere in this paper that the course of the liberation struggle and quest for independence in Africa, the process of the formation of nationalism and national consciousness developed and took shape most rapidly in areas and countries where there was a high concentration of colonialist activity resulting in the destruction of the pre-capitalist mode of production by colonialism and its replacement by capitalism. The result of this new mode of production was the birth of a working class and the mushrooming of a petty bourgeois class which became the nucleus and hub of the nationalist struggle for independence. But this process of the destruction of the pre-capitalist mode of production was absent for a long time

from the Bechuanaland Protectorate mainly because the colonization of the territory began in earnest only towards the end of the 19th century when Britain decided to formally declare the territory its protectorate. But even after this actual colonization had taken place, Britain did not show much interest in the territory, with the result that its presence in the territory was very minimal and consequently no effective colonial machinery was introduced in the territory because Britain was convinced that the territory had no natural resources of any consequence which would justify the establishment of a permanent administration. It was also not attractive for capital investments and for the setting up of industries. The net result of all this was the slow destruction of the pre-capitalist mode of production and the introduction of the capitalist mode of production of colonialism. Thus for a long time the territory did not experience the pangs of class upheavals resulting from the introduction of the capitalist mode of production which countries like South Africa, and mainly at its urban centres, experienced resulting from the birth of a working class and the creation of an intelligentsia essential for the servicing of the colonial machinery. Thus the slow and almost half-hearted penetration of colonialism in the territory delayed the birth of a working class and intelligentsia groups; the two groups which served as catalysts and leaders of the nationalist movements in other parts of Africa.

Indeed, for a long time, in fact up till today, Botswana has remained essentially a subsistence agriculture-based country with no industrial and commercial base of any consequence with the result that the bulk of the population is still predominantly peasant with a small intelligentsia and a working class just beginning to grow. Another major feature of the formation of national consciousness in Botswana is that there is no evidence of cultural, religious or social pressure groups preceding the formation of nationalist movements as was the case

in other countries in Africa where we find trade unions, religious groups etc., which served as predecessors and cornerstones of nationalist movements which were later to emerge. In conclusion it could be argued here that the fact that colonialism was 'less' vicious in Botswana than in other parts of Southern Africa contributed greatly to the slow process of the formation and development of national consciousness and the quest for independence. But the question that comes to one's mind is what was it that made the formation of national consciousness and the birth of nationalist movements in the territory start in 1960? In other words, what were the circumstances which created this euphoria for independence only in 1960?

These questions are essential because we have argued that the destruction of the pre-capitalist mode of production and its replacement by the capitalist mode of production introduced by colonialism resulting in the birth of the working class and intelligentsia were at the root of the formation of national consciousness and nationalist movements in other parts of Africa and this process had not taken any real, meaningful structure in 1960. Indeed the territory still had the same socio-political and economic complexion it had in the 1950's.

The answer to this question lies in an assessment of the situation in Africa and in Southern Africa in particular during the 1960's. The significance of the 1960's for Africa lies in the fact that this period saw the massive wave of decolonization and the granting of independence to a number of states in Africa.

In Southern Africa, the year 1960 will go down the annals of the black nationalist movements as one of the crucial years in the struggle for liberation in which black nationalist movements in South Africa; the African National Congress and the Pan-African Congress pitted their strength against the forces of oppression and exploitation culminating in the massacres of Sharpeville. As a result both the ANC and PAC were outlawed in South

Africa forcing most of their top leaders to flee the country into the neighbouring territories, especially Botswana and Swaziland. And, perhaps more important than this was the fact that some of the prominent members and leaders of these organisations were actually the nationals of these territories, who because of the clampdown on ANC and PAC, decided to return home. These are the people who later formed the nucleus of nationalist movements in these territories.

In Botswana, the outcome of the influx of these exiles was the emergence of the Bechuanaland People's Party under the leadership of Messrs. Motsete, P. Matante and M. Mpho. In Swaziland, the result was the revamping and re-structuring of the Swaziland Progressive Association and its transformation into the Swaziland Progressive Party under the Leadership of Messrs. Nguku, Dr. A.P. Zwane, and Dumisa Dlamini and in Lesotho the outcome was the formation of Basutoland Congress Party under the leadership of Ntsu Mokhehle.

Another major factor in the formation of national consciousness and the resultant birth of political parties in Botswana was the role of migrant workers, i.e., Batswana who were employed in the mining and agricultural industries in South Africa. These workers played their part at essentially two levels. Firstly, their active political involvement in black nationalist movements in South Africa, and secondly in their agitation for independence when they return to Botswana from South Africa. We have already touched on their involvement in the politics of black nationalist movements in South Africa. It is indeed, a known fact that a number of migrant workers from Botswana took an active part in the politics of the ANC of South Africa and later on those of the PAC. Some of these workers rose to senior positions within these movements. Thus when they returned to Botswana, they had already been greatly exposed to nationalist politics and as such served greatly as catalysts in the formation of political parties. One has in mind people like Messrs. Matante and Mpho.

The significance of migrant workers from Botswana in South Africa in relation to the birth and development of political parties in the territory is borne out by the fact that at its early stage, the BPP had about seven branches in the Reef-Witwatersrand complex of South Africa. Internally, the returning migrant workers also had a profound effect on the birth and growth of political parties. They formed the nucleus of the budding working class which was in turn the major driving force and mainstay behind the formation of BPP.

But ironically, this system of migrant workers had also disastrous effects on the economic development of Botswana: i.e., the underdevelopment of the country, with the result that the formation of national consciousness and of political parties was a slow and sluggish process.

The absence of industry of any significance in Botswana had the effect of turning the territory into a perennial reservoir of cheap labour to be exported to South Africa. The net effect of this has been that the territory's socio-economic and political life was stunted. But more importantly perhaps is the fact that the system contributed greatly to the creation of the territory's dependent economy, i.e., an economy which became almost completely dependent on South Africa.

This underdevelopment creating a dependent economy affected virtually every aspect of socio-economic and political life in the territory because the territory was robbed of its most able-bodied part of the population. The cream of the population was skimmed off leaving behind only old men, women and children who could not play any meaningful role in the economic development of the territory which in turn could have stimulated the growth of political and social awareness. One should therefore, see the delayed growth of national consciousness in Botswana and the sluggishness of its development within the context of the overall underdevelopment of the territory and also the effect of the migrant labour

system and the socio-economic and political life it bred. The system might have had the effect of exposing Batswana to the politics of nationalist movements in South Africa which stimulated an increase and sharpening of political awareness and also of solving, though temporary, unemployment problems for the territory but the net socio-economic and political effects of the system seems to outweigh all these factors because till today the effects are still dogging Botswana.

THE BIRTH OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN BOTSWANA

As we have already pointed out the formation of national consciousness and nationalist movements in Botswana did not seriously begin to adopt a tangible form until the beginning of 1960. However, the primary stirrings of national consciousness pre-date 1960, and in this respect reference has already been made to the activities of Simon Ratshosa during the 1920's and 1930's. Although these rumblings did not transform themselves into nationalist demands for the transfer of power from the colonial administration to the indigenous people of the territory.

If anything, they remained at the level of vocal complaints against the sluggishness of the colonial administration and the call for the strengthening and improvement of the colonial administration. What was the nature and origins of the first political party, or nationalist movement to emerge in Botswana.

Some scholars on Botswana political development still argue that the formation and development of national consciousness and nationalist movements only begun in 1960. In this regard one would like to quote Robert H. Edwards who contends that 'organized political activities date on from 1961, stimulated by the imperial initiative of 1960'.¹ Although Edwards does not specifically mention political parties as such it is clear that his reference to organized political activities is meant to denote political parties or nationalist movements. It is however not clear why he chose to indicate 1961 as

the date on which political groups began to emerge as it should have been obvious to him that the Bechuanaland People's Party was already prominent by 1961 unless Edwards is referring to its activities thus ignoring the actual date of formation which was in 1960. Edwards also mentions an attempt by local whites who 'tried to form a right-wing alliance with the chiefs' but which failed. Here too, Edwards does not give any information as to the structure of this alliance and the names of the individuals and chiefs involved in the effort to create this alliance.

But, according to Grotmeter, the first political formation to emerge in Botswana was the Bechuanaland Protectorate Federal Party (1959) but he argues that the first 'real' political party to emerge was the Bechuanaland People's Party in 1960 in this respect he observes that 'The Bechuanaland People's Party does not seem to have been preceded by a progressive association or any similar organization'.²

It is obvious here that Grotmeter does not consider the Bechuanaland Protectorate Federal Party to have been a serious nationalist movement although he does acknowledge its existence prior to 1960; therefore admitting that formally it was formed before the Bechuanaland People's Party (BPP).

But Richard B. Stevens considers, like Edwards, the BPP to have been the first formal political party to be created in Botswana and in this regard he does not even mention the existence of the Bechuanaland Federal Party. It is not clear however if he was unaware of its existence or he feels that it does not, like Grotmeter, satisfy the requirements of a nationalist party.

Adding to this confusion, a report in the journal The Africa Institute argues that, 'The Bechuanaland Congress was probably the only political party that existed before 1959...'³

During a survey conducted amongst party leaders to determine the first party to emerge in Botswana the

majority of the people interviewed gave the Bechuanaland Protectorate Federal Party as the first political party to emerge in Botswana. None of the people interviewed however, had any knowledge of the existence of the Bechuanaland Congress Party mentioned by the Africa Institute, quoted above. It should also be mentioned however, that no other scholar makes any reference to the existence of the Congress Party. What seems possible however is that the African Institute may be talking about the Federal Party. But in the face of the dearth of information or data either supporting or dismissing the contention by the Africa Institute, the question of whether the Congress Party existed or not still remains a matter for further investigation. But it does seem that the Federal Party was the first party to emerge in the area. This party was formed under the leadership of Mr. Leetile Raditladi. Some observers have argued that the Federal Party was followed by the Liberal Party, an alliance of whites and chiefs.⁴ But indications are that the Liberal Party was in fact the Federal Party which changed its name in 1961 or there about to become the Liberal Party.

Further evidence is provided by the fact that the leadership of the Liberal Party was the same leadership which led the Federal Party - Mr. L.D. Raditladi was the leader of the Party but because of its new complexion, Mr. J. Openshaw, one of the whites who showed some interest in the Liberal Party, became the Secretary-General of the party but otherwise the entire executive of the Liberal Party was made up of the people who were in the executive of the Federal Party, which puts beyond doubt that liberal party was in fact the Federal Party under the new name. But it is not clear as to what happened to the Liberal Party (formerly the Federal Party). It seems to have just melted away from the political arena. The Africa Institute says that the party dissolved afterwards but offers no reasons why the party dissolved.

J. Grotpeter says that 'The Bechuanaland Protectorate Federal Party decided to dissolve early in the year (1962) and unite with the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, then being organized by Seretse Khama (now Sir Seretse Khama).⁵ But this claim was denied by Senior officials of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) interviewed. On the contrary, they claim that the party died a natural death because of poor organizational structure and leadership. What seems to have happened, however, was that some members of the defunct Federal-Liberal Party joined Sir Seretse's group which was busy organizing BDP.

The second political party to emerge in Botswana was the Bechuanaland People's Party under the leadership of Messrs. K.T. Motsete, P.G. Matante and M. Mpho, which was formed in 1960. A number of people consider the BPP to be the first real political party in Botswana principally because it was the first political party to articulate more coherently and radically the submerged nationalist feelings of the indigenous people of the territory. In fact, it was the first political group in the territory to call for the total transfer of power from the colonial administration to the indigenous people of the territory. It was also the first political party to bring into the territory 'radical' nationalism and national consciousness that was sweeping across the continent of Africa.

The third political party to be formed in the territory was the Bechuanaland Democratic Party under the leadership of Messrs. Khama (now Sir Seretse), Dr. Masire, Mr. Nwako, etc. This party was formed in 1961.

In 1964 a fourth political party emerged in the territory when Mr. Mpho broke away from the BPP and formed his Bechuanaland Independence Party (BIP).

The last party to emerge was the Botswana National Front (BNF) formed in 1966 under the leadership of Messrs. K. Koma and Daniel Kwele. The above then is a short panoramic view of the chronological development of political parties in Botswana.

BECHUANALAND PROTECTORATE FEDERAL PARTY

There is very little information regarding the intentions and motive which inspired Mr. Leetile Raditladi to form his party, the Bechuanaland Protectorate Federal Party. All the literature examined only mention the fact of its formation without mentioning the factors and circumstances instrumental in its formation. There are, however, suggestions indicating that Raditladi decided to form a political party because of his dissatisfaction with aspects of traditional rule and power of the chiefs.

The party's statement of its aims and objectives also does throw some light as to the motives and reasons underlying its formation, for instance, one of the aims of the party was that the party was to work 'for the unity of the tribes of Bechuanaland and to promote political, economic and social emancipation' of the people of the territory. It is also possible that Raditladi was responding to the chorus of nationalism and national consciousness which was already sweeping across Africa in 1959 when his party was formed.

Ideologically, the party was still rather traditionalist and, it supported, with some modifications, the retention and perpetuation of the essence of the traditional political system. The party opposed the nomination of African members of the Legislative Council by the African Council on the grounds that this institution was composed of appointed chiefs and as such people nominated by this Council would not be true representatives of the majority of the people of the territory. The party was opposed to a racially based system of representation, and it also appears that it was opposed to racialism in the territory in general as evidenced by its inclusion of whites in its membership when it changed its name to that of the Liberal Party. An anomaly in the complexion of the Federal Party was however, that although the Party was critical of the African Advisory Council, it had its own members in the Council. An interesting feature of the Federal Party, however, is

that although it was the first political party to emerge in the territory, it failed to become a mass party and its membership was very small. In fact, one year after its formation, the party could only report a membership of fifty, drawn mainly from the Serowe area which was the party's base area, this was inspite of the fact that there were a number of factors in its favour.

The first major advantage was that it was a black political movement and this fact alone should have guaranteed it massive or at least a substantial support in the territory. Secondly, it was the only black political party at its inception and for some time after its formation. This too, should have given it enough leverage to marshall a large support throughout the country. Thirdly, colonialism was beginning to bury its teeth deeper into the territory and thereby dislodging the socio-economic structure of the territory. This should have served as its rallying point as has happened in other countries in Africa at the inception of nationalist movements. But despite all these advantages and conducive conditions, the Federal Party seems to have commanded very little support as has been evidenced by its small membership.

A question which comes to mind is, why did the Federal Party enjoy very limited support despite the above-mentioned conducive factors? Was it the result of inactive party leadership? Or was the cause immanent in the structure of the society in which it was formed?

It seems that the greatest drawback of the Federal Party was the fact that the party remained for a long time tribally organized and based, i.e., it catered essentially for people in the Serowe area and for this reason it deprived itself of the opportunity of winning the other groups into its fold.

It did later on, however, try to broaden its outlook as has been shown by its change of name and inclusion of whites but by then it was already too late as the more broadly and nationally based BPP had

already appeared on the political scene. The second major drawback was the fact that it had no clear ideological policy which could have enabled it to clearly articulate the national consciousness of the people, i.e., it remained essentially traditionalist in outlook.

There is also no evidence to indicate that the Federal Party ever advocated for the transfer of power from colonial administration to the indigenous people as was the case in other countries in Africa where nationalism and national consciousness were beginning to take form and shape.

If the party had taken this stand it is possible that it would have enjoyed wider support. Finally, the Federal Party seems to have had a very poor organizational structure, with an almost non-existent recruitment, publicity and campaign machinery which could have been geared towards the popularization of the party. A conspiracy of all these factors seems, therefore, to have been responsible for the limited membership of the party, its fragile existence and ultimately its death at a time when other nationalist movements in the country were beginning to mushroom.

BECHUANALAND PEOPLE'S PARTY (BPP)

This was the first nationalist movement in the territory which was broadly and nationally based, with a massive national support from the indigenous people. More important, perhaps, is the fact that it was the first nationalist movement to advocate for the total transfer of power to the indigenous people.

By sheer coincidence, the BPP had an added advantage in that, it was formed almost at the time when the British colonial administration was publishing its draft constitution for the territory's self-government. This factor served as a launching pad for its political agitation. It also served as a further stimulation to the BPP to press for the immediate granting of full independence to the territory. This call for the immediate granting of full independence to the territory

endeared the BPP to the masses of the indigenous people of the territory, whilst at the same time, invoking the wrath and anger of the local whites and the colonial administration who viewed the party as an epitome of militant pan-Africanism geared towards the liquidation of the territory's white community and the colonial system.

Its call for immediate transfer of full power and the granting of full independence to the territory embittered and frightened the British colonial administration. For this reason, there are suggestions that the British colonial administration tried to destroy the BPP. These suspicions and allegations were confirmed by a number of BPP officials and members interviewed. There are also suggestions that in their determination to exterminate the BPP from the territory they instructed the chiefs to deny the BPP permission to hold meetings and rallies in their areas and this had the effect of denying the BPP the opportunity of popularising its policies in those areas with the result that the party was not popular in the rural areas. It seems, however, that it was very popular in the urban centres, especially Francistown.

There are also claims that, in fact, the formation of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party by Messrs. Seretse Khama, Quette Masire, et al., was instigated by the British colonial administration in the territory who felt that an indigenous counter-political party was essential to stem the rising tide of popularity which the BPP was enjoying. We will come back to this point later in our analysis of the formation of the BDP.

It would appear, however, that even if the British colonial administration did not interfere with the party's activities in the rural areas, it would still have had a lukewarm reception in the rural areas because of the low level of political consciousness and political apathy of the peasant community in the territory reinforced by the attachment to traditional politics.

In our general analysis of the emergence and formation of national consciousness and nationalist

movements in Africa, we have advanced the argument that the process of formation of national consciousness and nationalist movements began in those areas where contact with colonialism had been comparatively more intense and sustained, resulting in the destruction of the pre-capitalist mode of production and its replacement with the capitalist mode of production from which grew an elite intelligentsia group and the working class whose level of political consciousness and national awareness were higher than those of the peasantry in the rural areas.

It is within the context of such analysis that one can explain the popularity of BPP in the urban centres. Indeed, Francistown and Lobatse were the only urban centres in the territory at the formation of the BPP and it was in these areas that the party enjoyed massive support. These two centres became the major pillars of the BPP.

The movement's strategy seems also to have hindered its organizational programme. It is a known fact that right from its inception the BPP was opposed to the institution of chieftainship and it spelled its policy and attitude towards this institution quite categorically, i.e., it would seek to abolish it from the territory's political system. This attitude frightened the chiefs and the result was the loss of support from the chiefs who, because of their powerful influence in their areas, were able to instruct their subjects not to support BPP. Furthermore, because of the 'conservatism' of the majority of the peasants, it was inevitable that the rural people should view the BPP as a dangerous party that was geared towards the destruction of their indigenous socio-political and economic system that had served them from time immemorial. In other words, peasants were bound to resist any introduction of a foreign political institution and certainly political parties were alien institutions which had no place in the peasant's political vocabulary. This was in part a

rejection of the alien system rather than the BPP purse, and any challenge to the indigenous system was bound to be resisted. There is no doubt, that chieftainship still had a strong appeal in the territory and certainly the BPP policy was bound to result in this hostile reaction from the rural people in the territory who still accepted the chiefs as their legitimate leaders. Another major feature of the BPP was the fact that soon after its inception the party was suddenly embroiled in major internal conflicts and clashes which were to dog the party for a long time, resulting in the breaking up of the party into factions in 1964 when the three major political figures in the party, viz., Messrs. M. Mpho, P.G. Matante and K. T. Motsete began attacking each other in public. There has been a number of explanations offered by people in an attempt to throw some light as to the root cause of these internal feuds and conflicts within the BPP.

Some people argue that the major cause of the feuds was the personality clashes between Messrs. P.G. Matante and M. Mpho. Others attribute the cause of the feuds and clashes to the allegations and counter-allegations of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds. Mr. Mpho, when interviewed also attributed the cause of the conflicts to what he called 'internal corruption, mismanagement and misuse of party property'. Mr. Matante on the other hand, blamed the cause of the strifes within the party on Mr. Mpho, accusing him of having tried, with the cooperation of the African National Congress of South Africa, to oust him from the party power structure. But the major cause of the recurring conflicts and clashes within the BPP seems to have been ideological rather than mere personality clashes or the alleged embezzlement and misuse of party funds and property.

Indeed, most analyses of the major cause of the conflicts seem to overlook this ideological dimension which has also bedevilled other nationalist movements

in Southern Africa mainly in Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. In fact, Grotperter seems to have hit the nail on the head when he remarks that:

'The roots of these party conflicts... are intertwined with the politics of the banned African National Congress and the Pan African Congress of the Republic of South Africa.'⁶

It is also quite evident that the seeds of dissension, conflict and feuds within the BPP were sown at its inception because the BPP was being formed at the height of the conflicts between PAC and ANC and these conflicts did have an effect on the politics of Messrs. Matante and Mpho and ultimately on the stability of the BPP, since the two leaders were intimately involved with the politics of ANC and PAC, respectively.

The second major point to be taken into account in this analysis of the conflict within the BPP is that these conflicts were heightened by the fact that a large number of the top leadership of these two movements were in Botswana at the time following their flight from South Africa, after the outlawing of their movements and the subsequent clamp down by the South African regime. There is no doubt that their presence served as a yeast to ferment the conflicts within BPP. Indeed, Mr. Matante does seem to confirm this point when he claimed during an interview that Mr. Mpho tried to oust him with the cooperation of the ANC. It seems, therefore, that the major cause of the conflicts within the BPP was ideological stemming from the fact that two of the major pillars of the party, Messrs. Mpho and Matante were previously members of two diametrically opposed movements. But during this conflict which mainly centred around Messrs. Mpho and Matante, the leader of the Party Mr. K. T. Motsete, seemed to have sided with Mr. Matante.

There is no conclusive evidence, however, to indicate why he chose to align himself with Mr. Matante rather than Mr. Mpho apart from suggestions that he was under the influence of Mr. Matante because Mr. Matante was his Vice-President. But although this conflict was

centred around Messrs. Matante and Mpho, it soon engulfed Mr. K.T. Motsete, after the expulsion of Mr. Mpho who later on formed the Bechuanaland Independence Party.

The second major leadership crisis, which erupted early in 1964, was between Messrs. Matante and Motsete with Mr. Matante challenging Mr. Motsete's leadership of the party. What was at the root of this leadership crisis between two men who were in unison in expelling Mr. Mpho and his colleagues?

Mr. Motsete was a man with moderate political views, a product of the classical British liberalism whilst Mr. Matante's political views were those of a militant pan-Africanist - beliefs which were based on the belief that Africa belongs to Africans alone and whites have no decisive role to play in the political arrangements that were taking place in Africa. It is therefore, highly probable that their conflicts stemmed essentially from their political outlooks as regards the future of the party in the territory and the territory itself.

In conclusion, it should be observed that the net import of all these internal strifes and feuds was the weakening of the BPP, culminating in the party's poor showing in the territory's first general election. In fact, it does appear that the party never fully recovered from this internal fractricide.

Even at the Constitutional Conference in Lobatse in 1963, the party could not present an effective united opinion as it was represented by two factions - Motsete-Matante faction and Mpho faction, each claiming to represent the 'true' and 'genuine' BPP. Fratricidal frictions apart, the BPP remains historically, the first nationalist movement to activate national consciousness and political awareness within the territory.

BECHUANALAND DEMOCRATIC PARTY (BDP)

The BDP emerged a year after the formation of the BPP, in 1961. What is of interest to us is, why the founders of BDP formed it instead of joining hands with

the BPP in an attempt to consolidate the nationalist struggle for emancipation from British colonialism.

Grotmeter explains why BDP was formed. According to him:

'the BDP was certainly a response to the growing strength of the BPP and received much of its early support from among people in the Bamangwato Reserve... (furthermore) the BDP came into being only after the traditional leaders saw that the Bechuanaland Protectorate Federal Party was not able to deal effectively with the challenge of the BPP.'⁷

Edwards argues that:

'...this very homogeneity for a time made it difficult to say whether the Democratic Party was a political party or only a loose band of congenial associates... who were all opposed to BPP extremism.'⁸

In support of his argument that the BDP was formed as a reaction against the BPP, he quotes Dr. Masire as saying that:

'The Bechuanaland People's Party had been in existence for nearly a year when ours was formed. From the very beginning it had made some grossly irresponsible statements. It was growing popular on the strength of its irresponsible statements.'⁹

During an interview in 1975, Dr. Masire still maintained that:

'We formed BDP because we did not have much faith in the BPP. We did not have faith in BPP because they had a bad administration and we were not happy with the running of their affairs. We could also see that although the party functioned as one party, there were three distinct factions within the party. There was the president of the party, Mr. Motsete who had Tswana interest at heart, but his two Lieutenants in the person of Mr. Matante and Mr. Mpho were members of the ANC and PAC before - Mr. Mpho was an ANC and Mr. Matante PAC. The founders of the Democratic Party could not take the politics of another country and apply it in another country.'¹⁰

But some opposition members also claim that the BDP was formed essentially to neutralize the BPP. Others even go to an extent of claiming that, in fact, the BDP was a product of the British colonial administration's machination to destroy the BPP.

One opposition member remarked, during the interview that:-

'The British colonial administration seemed to favour the name of Seretse Khama as a man and as a son of Khama, the leaders of other parties, Messrs. Philip Matante and Motsamai Mpho were new to them.'¹¹

The late Mr. K.T. Motsete, is also quoted as having claimed that the BDP was a product of the British colonial administration and the local whites. To sustain his claims, he is quoted to have alleged that:

'...the BDP received substantial amounts of money from Oxford Committee for Famine Relief and from the white inhabitants of the country. This committee is funded partly by the British government'.¹²

An analysis of the above views seems to suggest strongly that the formation of the BDP was essentially a reaction against the BPP and its policies, which they saw as extreme and radical.

There is also a strong indication that the traditional leaders who were opposed to the BPP saw the formation of the BDP as the only solution to safeguard their political role in the country. As to the role of the British colonial administration in the formation of the BDP, it is difficult to make a conclusive statement either way, because of lack of concrete evidence. But what seems to be beyond doubt, however, is the fact that the British colonial administration seems to have been more receptive and accomodating to the BDP than to the BPP. There seems to have been cordial relationships between the BDP and the administration. The local white community appears to have also seen the formation of the BDP as a neutralizing factor to the 'extremism' of the BPP and its alleged anti-white attitude.

Senior BDP members however deny any active involvement of the British colonial administration in the formation of the BDP but admitted that the attitude of the colonial administration towards the BDP was not that of 'hostility'.

The BDP, it should be observed, right from its inception, had a well-oiled party machinery backed by sufficient financial resources. Added to this financial base the party was spared the sort of serious internal feuds that beset the BPP. Over and above these factors, the party had the added value of the leadership charisma and popularity of its leader, Sir Seretse Khama.

All these factors conspired to give the BDP an image of respectability and overwhelming popularity in the territory. The result was that it won the first general election overwhelmingly. But although the party was spared the serious fratricidal leadership feuds which characterized the birth and development of the BPP, there were, however, apparently some differences within the party regarding the role and place of the traditional leadership within the party and the country as a whole.

Edwards, names Mr. Moitakgola Nwako as having been the leader of a group which was against the party's total reliance on the traditional leadership. He remarks that Mr. Nwako '...attacked chieftainship and was inclined to dismiss the traditional support which the party sedulously cultivated'.¹³

In an interview in 1975, Dr. Masire remarked that:

'The role of chiefs was almost nothing. If anything, it was inclined to be on the negative side. They were ambivalent. In the first place, they envisaged that if we become independent, we would only be reverting to the old times when each one would be a boss of his area. Now we as politicians felt, of course, greatly opposed to this relegation of what had become a nation into tribal groups... (thus) they became obviously opposed to political parties'.¹⁴

Dr. Masire's observation reveals a striking difference in political outlook between the traditional leadership and the educated leadership elite within the BDP, and also seems to confirm the view that there were differences within the party regarding the role of chiefs.

But despite these differences in political outlook, it seems the two needed each other. In fact, their

need for each other was symbiotic. The traditional leadership needed the BDP. Since the BPP was opposed to them, it was only through the BDP that its existence and role within the territory's political system was assured. On the other hand, the educated leadership elite needed the traditional leadership on whose support its political growth and survival was partly dependent.

Thus although some BDP members may have argued against total reliance by the party on the traditional leaders, it is obvious that the BDP drew substantial support from the traditional leadership.

Till today one of the major sources of the BDP support seems to be the traditional leadership, although currently traditional leadership is on the wane. Traditional leaders see the BDP as a guarantee for their survival within the present 'modern' western political system because basically the policies of BDP protects and promotes their aspirations and interests. This alliance between the traditional leadership and educated leadership within the BDP stems from the need by the educated leadership to retain the allegiance and support of the traditional leadership whose powerful hold on the peasants is a guarantee for the survival of the BDP. Over and above this, this symbiotic need for each other seems to stem largely from the realization by both groups that their interests are identical, i.e., a controlled modification of the existing the indigenous political system and its gradual assimilation into the western political system.

BECHUANALAND INDEPENDENCE PARTY (BIP)

The bitter conflicts within the BPP led to the expulsion of Mr. Mpho and his colleagues from the BPP and the result was the birth of the Bechuanaland Independence Party. At first, however, Mr. Mpho and his colleagues continued to operate under the name of BPP although expelled from the BPP. Thus at the constitutional talks in Lobatse in 1963, the BPP was represented by at least two main factions - the Mpho BPP and the Motsete-Matante BPP.

It was only in 1964 that Mr. Mpho and his colleagues decided to transform their faction into the Bechuanaland Independence Party under the leadership of Mr. Mpho. The key motivation behind the formation of the BIP seems to have been the desire by Mr. Mpho and his colleagues to form a party through which they would be able to express and implement the views and ideas which they were unable to express within the BPP, and to challenge the BPP leadership more effectively.

There are some people, however, who suggest that Mr. Mpho was instigated by the ANC of South Africa to form his party but these claims cannot be substantiated. What is, however, possible is that, because of his previous membership of the ANC and the warm relationship that seems to have existed between himself and his former organization, the ANC could have had some influence, directly or indirectly in the formation of the BIP. Till today a significant aspect of the BIP, however, is that in terms of ideology and character there is very little difference between it and the BPP.

BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT (BNF)

The Botswana National Front Party is the youngest political party in the country, having been born in 1966, the year in which the territory attained its independence. According to the founders of the party, it was formed in order,

'To unite the different communities in Bechuanaland on the basis of full equality in order to struggle effectively for national independence as contrasted with nominal independence, to build a united Botswana nation and to mobilize the masses of all the communities in Botswana making them an integral part of the national liberation movement in Africa for real independence and Pan-African unity of the continent.'¹⁵

They considered the formation of the BNF as essential because they believe that:

'...in Bechuanaland our experience is that the political atmosphere and the political situation are very much worse under a black pro-colonist government. The neo-colonialist regime of the Democratic Party is much more reactionary than that of the classical colonial administration that preceded it.'¹⁶

Thus Messrs. K. Koma (Secretary for External Affairs), Daniel Kwele, (Vice President), R. Molomo, (President), and their colleagues saw the formation of the BNF as essential in the continuation of the struggle for national liberation. Another factor which they claim motivated them to form BNF was their desire to try to reconcile the warring elements within the BPP in order to revamp it. They contend therefore that their original intention was not to form a new party but to attempt a reconciliation of the different warring factions within the BPP, because they were convinced that:

'...the outcome of the (previous) elections would have been different if the Bechuanaland People's Party had not split into warring factions (since) everybody knew that the patriots were essentially united in their opposition to neo-colonialism...'¹⁷

Apparently when these attempts failed a decision was taken to form the Botswana National Front. But more important however, it seems, the BNF was formed essentially to oppose the BDP which was seen as neo-colonialist and reactionary by the founders of BNF. They believed that a pro-socialist government was essential for Botswana hence the adoption of socialism as the ideology of the BNF.

Although the founders of BNF seemed to have been united in their opposition to the BDP, tensions however still found a place within the party leadership involving the then Vice-President Mr. Daniel Kwele and some members of the leadership. It is not clear as to what the cause of the leadership conflict was. But some observers claim that the conflict centred around whether Mr. Kwele should lead the party or give way to the then Chief Bathoen Gaseitsiwe. It is also claimed that the

BNF leadership felt that if Kwele assumed leadership of the party he will negatively affect the fortunes of the party because he belonged to a group that was not politically forceful.

PARTY IDEOLOGIES IN BOTSWANA

Generally speaking, political parties are established around some basic and fundamental ideology which normally serves as a unifying bond amongst the different members of the same political party.

In Botswana, as in most countries in Africa during the anti-colonial struggle, the major ideology that served as a catalyst for the formation and development of nationalist movements has been nationalism; i.e., the desire by the indigenous people to free themselves from colonial bondage. This had been the major ideology in the territory through which different strata of the people were able to come together.

It is not the intention here, however, to imply that this development of nationalism was not affected by class cleavages. What is being argued here is that, despite the existence of class divisions within the indigenous people of the territory, this development of national consciousness has been significant in the sense that it attempted to unify different socio-economic groups robbed of their nationhood by British colonialism and imperialism in the territory.

Another feature of this process of the formation of national consciousness in the territory has been its relative lack of 'radical militancy' which characterized many nationalist movements in Africa. An explanation of this lack of militancy perhaps could be found in the fact that the process of colonialism, imperialism and white racialism was not as 'violent' as it had been in other territories, with the result that the transformation of the pre-capitalist mode of production and its replacement by the exploitative capitalist means of production, creating new patterns of authority was a relatively 'mild' process in Botswana.

The absence of a large white-settler community with its colonial mentality and behaviour seems also to explain why the level and degree of anti-white feelings by the indifenuous people was lower than, say, in South Africa and Zimbabwe where there have been large resident colonial white communities. The result of the presence of these large resident colonial white communities was the intense and systematic destruction of the pre-capitalist African culture and its replacement by a developing capitalist system, with the result that nationalist movements born under these circumstances tended to be more militant than those growing out of conditions where colonialism had been less 'severe'.

Another major feature about party ideologies in Botswana has been the absence of acute ideological differences. The reason seems to be that these parties were formed for the sole purpose of mobilising nationalist feelings and the creation of an independent state. Distinct ideologies therefore do not seem to have played any major role in the formation of nationalist movements in Botswana.

All four parties, therefore, were essentially nationalist parties whose sole aim was the creation of the independent state of Botswana. Hence even today the main rallying point for the galvanization of the people irrespective of their class divisions, is still nationalism.

The BNF, however, claims that its aim is the establishment of socialist society. There is yet no substantive evidence, however, to back up this claim. Essentially, therefore, political parties remain nationalist in outlook with very little difference amongst them except in political styles.

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- ¹⁰Interview with Dr. Masire, (Secretary-General of BDP) 1976
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