

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

THE TRANSKEI "COUP D'ETAT" AND THE MILITARISATION OF THE APARTHEID STATE

(Southern Africa Dossier, Centro de Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane - Maputo.)

On December 30 1987, the 'Chief of the Transkei Defence Force', Major General Bantu Holomisa, announced that the military had taken power in the bantustan, the first to have been granted Pretoria's version of 'independence' in 1976. The civilian 'government' of 'Prime Minister' Stella Sigcau, which Holomisa himself had been instrumental in installing less than three months earlier, was dismissed. The next day, the 31 year old Major General announced the establishment of a Military Council, clearly modelled on that in Lesotho. This will theoretically 'advise' the non-executive 'State President', Paramount Chief Tutor Ndamse, who remains in office, but it will in practice be the principal executive and administrative body in the territory.

At one level these developments could be read as history repeating itself as farce. The bid by a subaltern bantustan administration to masquerade as an independent African state has now reached the point of staging a coup d'etat. There is, however, a much more serious aspect to the 'Transkei coup'. The Transkei, like every other bantustan, has never in any real sense been independent of South Africa. This does not refer just to the fact that it has not been accepted as a sovereign state by the international community. Its administration has, despite the 'independence' proclaimed by Pretoria in 1976, remained subordinated to the central South African state. The regime continues not only to be absolutely dependent on the central state for budgetary support and seconded personnel but identifies its interests as lying in the direction of continuing and even deepening these ties. Administratively, politically, economically and in every other way, the Transkei has thus continued to be a region of South Africa. The 'independence' proclaimed in 1976 meant at most that a degree of limited and highly constrained administrative autonomy was delegated by the central state to an extremely narrow stratum of local collaborators. This applies also to the region's 'security forces'. The 'Transkei Defence Force' (TDF) was created as and remains an integral and inseparable part of the South African Defence Force (SADF). It is not only funded, supplied, trained and armed by the SADF, it is integrated into the broader SADF's 'area defence' system and, in organisational terms, effectively part of the Eastern Province command of the SADF. The 'Transkei coup' thus represents the first occasion in South African history on which elements of the military have taken direct overt control of governmental administration at any level. It is therefore significant as an aspect of the broader process of militarisation of the apartheid state. At the same time, the 'coup' has to be seen as a response to a deepening crisis of bantustan administration which is not confined to the Transkei, but also affects the three other 'independent' ban-

tustans - Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei.

This dossier will examine the background to and implications of the recent 'Transkei coup'. It will begin with a brief overview of the role of Bantustan 'independence' in apartheid strategy, and sketch out some of the dimensions of the growing crisis of administration within the 'independent' bantustans. It will then examine the specific contradictions both within the Transkei administration and between it and the central South African state which form the background to the recent 'coup'. The dossier will sketch out the little that is known about Holomisa and the type of political position he represents and will conclude with an assessment of the implications of the 'Transkei coup' for the broader process of militarisation of the apartheid state.

1. BANTUSTAN 'INDEPENDENCE' IN APARTHEID STRATEGY: THE THEORY AND REALITY

The bantustans are overcrowded, badly eroded rural slum areas of South Africa, which together make up approximately 13 percent of the total land area of the country. These are the only areas in which blacks have historically been permitted to own land. They were originally designated 'native reserves' and played a crucial role in the development of capitalism in South Africa. Together with a number of similar 'reserve' areas outside the borders of South Africa (such as the South of Mocambique) these were the zones from which cheap migrant labour power was drawn. While the young men of the 'reserves' were drawn off to work as low paid migrant workers in the mines and other centres of capitalist production, the women and children remained behind and engaged in subsistence agricultural production. On the assumption that migrant workers' families fended for themselves in the 'reserves', capital used its class power and control over the state to force migrant workers to accept 'bachelor' wages, insufficient to guarantee the reproduction of the family unit. To the extent that the workers' families were able to survive through subsistence production in the 'reserves' (something which became increasingly problematical as the productive base became increasingly eroded) the value of this production became in effect a subsidy for capital accumulation. It enabled capital to pay lower wages than would have been possible if workers' families had been wholly dependent on wage income to ensure their reproduction.

In addition, and increasingly, the bantustans also served, in the words of a classic study by Govan Mbeki as, 'dumping grounds for the physical wrecks whom industry discards in the same way as waste fibre is thrown away after its juice has been extracted' (*South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt*, Penguin books, 1964, page 67). They were the zones to which the old, the young, the unemployed, women and other categories of people not required in the major centres of capitalist production, were forcibly removed. The Surplus People Project calculated that there were over 3,5 million forced removals in the period

between 1960 and 1983 alone. Twenty five percent of the 334 232 which occurred between 1981 and 1985, took place after the then Minister of Cooperation and Development, Piet Koornhof, solemnly pledged that there would be no more forced removals.

With the coming to power of the Nationalist Party (NP) regime in 1948, a further important task for the bantustans was mapped out. Within the NP's apartheid project, they were to serve as the essential prop in a 'political solution' which would sustain and guarantee continued racist minority rule in South Africa. They would be the basis of an attempt to divide the nationally oppressed black majority on a tribal basis. They would also be at the heart of the apartheid state's response to the basic demand of the increasingly assertive democratic movement led by the ANC, calling for equal political rights for all regardless of race.

Instead of acceding to the demand for political rights for all within a unitary state (which would have meant the end of racist minority rule), apartheid would offer blacks 'political rights' in one of ten ethnic 'homelands' or 'national states' to be created in the former 'native reserve' areas. The first steps taken in this direction followed the passage of the Natives Authorities Act in 1951. This provided for the establishment of 'tribal' structures as a subordinate element of local administration in these areas. Chiefs and headmen became salaried state officials responsible to, and obliged to carry out certain tasks for, white administrative officials. Those who had some customary or traditional claim to such positions were preferred, but if such persons refused to serve or attempted to use their position to thwart the directives of the apartheid state, they were simply bypassed and other more compliant individuals appointed to these 'traditional' posts. During the late 1950's and 1960's, particularly under the Premiership of Dr H F Verwoerd, assemblies with limited legislative and administrative powers began to be created in the bantustans. Some of the members of these were elected through highly controlled electoral processes, but the 'legislative assemblies' of the 'national states' were without exception constituted with built in blocks of appointed chiefs. Within the apartheid scheme these subordinated administrations were eventually to be brought to 'independence'. Blacks would then exercise 'political rights' in their 'own areas'. This would justify and reinforce the claim for whites to continue exercising political control in their 'own areas' - defined as the remaining 87 percent of South Africa. Blacks living in 'white South Africa' would be 'foreigners' ('citizens' of one of the bantustans) with no claim to political rights outside their own 'homeland'.

Even before the bantustan programme had begun to enter its final phase of 'independence', it was already becoming clear even to the leadership of the Nationalist Party that the bantustans would not, and could not, be the basis of a stable political order guaranteeing continued racist minority rule. The first bantustan to become 'independent' - the Transkei - did so in October 1976, four months after the June 16 Soweto uprising. The irrelevance of this amidst con-

tinuing widespread student 'unrest' and worker militancy was apparent, and under P W Botha increasing attention has been given to finding other 'solutions' to the 'problem' of 'urban blacks' - 'solutions' which would, of course, sustain racist minority rule. Indeed the entire 'reformed apartheid' programme of P W Botha has been premised on a recognition of the inadequacy of the bantustan strategy and the need, therefore, for other measures ('reforms') to create a new support base for the embattled regime among key strata of the nationally oppressed population living outside the bantustans. The Transvaal Nationalist Party leader, F W de Klerk, is reported to have told a private Nationalist Party meeting in February 1987 that the party had to accept that the 'homelands' policy had not achieved the results expected of it when it was first launched. Although no longer seen in the NP as the only 'solution', bantustanisation was nevertheless seen as having some role in the overall 'reformed apartheid' strategy of the Botha regime. At the least it was hoped that by 'accommodating' the 'rural' blacks in these political structures of the 'homelands', the numbers who would have to be 'accommodated' in other ways would be reduced.

Even this residual role has, however, been called into question by more recent developments. Not only is it now patently clear that the bantustan programme is incapable of offering any adequate political response to challenges posed by the liberation struggle, it has also become increasingly evident that bantustan regimes are failing as administrative units within their own territories.

There are a number of dimensions to this. The bantustan regimes have been drawn from an extremely narrow social base. The main criterion for selection has been a willingness to collaborate. The principal motivation for doing so has been to acquire personal power and wealth. The result has been that bantustan regimes have generally had minimal popular appeal and are not regarded as legitimate by the people they administer. They have been forced in many cases to rely on even more crudely repressive methods than the central state authorities, but have not always implemented repression with a level of efficiency corresponding to the degree of ruthlessness. One result of this is that the 'independent' bantustans, which were created to diffuse and contain conflict, have in practice often become flashpoints of 'unrest' and struggle. The Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana have all seen mass action and struggle of various kinds, including numerous incidents of armed struggle and the creation of embryonic alternative structures of popular power.

At the same time, the bantustan regimes have been characterised by widespread endemic corruption. Sizeable subsidies from the central state have been siphoned away in such large amounts that, on occasions, even 'normal' administration has been threatened. For example, both Bophuthatswana and Transkei found themselves unable to pay the wage bills of civil servants in 1986 and 1987 as a result of the serious depletion of funds.

In short, from the point of view of the central apartheid state, the 'independent' bantustans have become increasingly expensive and cost-ineffec-

tive weak links in apartheid's chain of oppression.

2. FACTORS LEADING TO THE 'TRANSKEI COUP'

The above sketches out something of the general context within which the 'Transkei coup' has to be seen. But the 'coup' itself was also the product of the heightening of specific contradictions both within the Transkei administration and between it and the central South African state. Both processes began to become evident by the last quarter of 1986, but their roots go back much further to the period before 'independence'.

Until his retirement in February 1986, Transkei bantustan politics had been dominated by Kaiser Matanzima. Matanzima's career began in 1940 when he was appointed chief of the AmaHala clan, subject to the overrule of the Paramount Chief of the Tembu. In 1955 Matanzima entered the Transkei Territorial Authority created under the Bantu Authorities Act; against the opposition of his nominal superior and arch political foe Paramount Chief Sabata Dalindyebo - an opponent of the Bantu authorities system (who died in exile as an ANC member in 1986). In 1958, in order to consolidate his position within the TTA, Matanzima was appointed Regional Chief of Emigrant Tembuland. In 1966, when Matanzima's inferior position to Dalindyebo in 'traditional' matters became a political embarrassment, the apartheid regime conjured up the non-existent 'traditional' office of 'Paramount Chief of Emigrant Tembuland', thereby giving him equal status with Dalindyebo. In elections held in 1963 to set up a 'self-governing' territorial authority, Matanzima's Transkei National Independence Party (TNIP) won only 12 of the 45 seats. Matanzima, nevertheless, emerged as 'Chief Minister' with the support of 42 of the 58 government-paid chiefs, who constituted the majority in the assembly. At 'independence' in 1976, Matanzima became 'Prime Minister' under the non-executive 'State President' Botha Sicgau.

From 1976 to 1979 the Transkei was ruled virtually as a personal fiefdom of the Matanzima clan - Kaiser and his brother George, the 'Minister of Justice'. Corruption became rampant, and the administration rapidly fell into shambles. As early as 1979, a pro-apartheid newspaper reported that the bantustan was bankrupt. It was saved only by an additional grant of R73 million from the central state - in addition to a grant of R113.5 million already made. The principal beneficiaries of the widespread corruption were the Matanzima brothers themselves. An official commission concluded in October 1987 that 'legally doubtful' directives by the two brothers had resulted in the loss of R45 million of state funds. This sum, equivalent to 5 percent of the territory's 'Gross Domestic Product' or 21 percent of South African 'budgetary assistance' in 1984/5, represents only a small proportion of the funds siphoned off over the years. In addition to being a modest estimate of the amount misappropriated by the Matanzima brothers themselves, almost all other senior officials have now been accused of similar misappropriations of funds. The total amount 'creamed off' by senior of-

ficials is reported to be of the order of R120 million.

In April 1978, Matanzima suspended 'diplomatic relations' with Pretoria over the central state's refusal to allocate further land to the bantustan. In retaliation for this the SADF cancelled arrangements for the training of the TDF, but continued to supply arms and equipment. 'Diplomatic relations' were re-established in 1980, but in the intervening two years the TDF experienced a rapid collapse of discipline and efficiency. In an attempt to remedy this situation, the former Rhodesian Selous Scouts leader, Ron Reid Daly, and 35 of his men were brought in, with SADF approval, to re-organise the force. In May 1981, Reid Daly was appointed 'Chief of the Transkei Defence Force'.

In 1979 on the death of Botha Sicgau, Kaiser Matanzima resigned as 'Prime Minister' and took over the non-executive post of 'State President'. He was succeeded as 'Prime Minister' by his brother, George. George Matanzima's heavy handed attempt to assert personal political control rapidly shattered the delicate tribal alliances, which his brother had carefully constructed over the years. During his first year in office, George Matanzima became involved in a frontal conflict with Sabata Dalindyebo, who still commanded considerable respect among chiefs. Taking advantage of the growing alienation from Matanzima, Dalindyebo began to put together a coalition of opposition forces which observers considered posed a real threat to the regime. Matanzima's response was to arrest Dalindyebo and strip him of his paramount chieftaincy. At the same time, George Matanzima clashed with the powerful Sicgau chiefs, who sided with Dalindyebo. By the end of his first year in office, George Matanzima's TNIP had lost its support base in East Pondoland, where the Sicgau chiefs held sway. These contradictions also reached into the armed forces. Both the head of the army and police were detained and dismissed, accused of plotting a coup. Whether or not this was true, it appears at least that they were unhappy at the heavy handed treatment of Dalindyebo.

For several years, despite continued unresolved internal contradictions within the regime, growing mass 'unrest' (involving, for example, demonstrations by students at the University of the Transkei) and armed actions by Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Selous Scouts succeeded in sustaining Matanzima in power. In January 1986, Kaiser Matanzima retired as 'State President' and later in the same year Reid Daly resigned as 'Chief of the Defence Force' in favour of Major General Zondwa Mtirara - in an apparent attempt to 'localise' the armed forces. Reid Daly and 22 other former Selous Scouts, however, remained in the territory as officially designated 'security advisers' - but in fact as a private army loyal to George Matanzima personally.

In February 1986, in a development that was later to prove of great significance, the Transkei regime was forced by Pretoria to accept the establishment of an official commission of inquiry into corruption. The background to this was the growing unwillingness of the central state authorities to continue increasing their subsidies to bankrupt bantustan administrations. In 1986 and 1987, a total

of R2 272 million had been made available as grants to the four 'independent' bantustans, while R1 398 million had been provided as central government-guaranteed loans. As indicated above, a large proportion of these funds was being siphoned off by bantustan officials. At about the same time, the Transkei was, along with the other 'independent' bantustans, forced to accept central government supervision of its public accounts through the mechanism of a Joint Financial Adjustments Committee (chaired by the Chief Executive of the Southern African Development Bank, Simon Brand).

George Matanzima's downfall really began, however, when, together with the Selous Scouts, he overreached himself with an adventurous intervention in the Ciskei. The Transkei 'rulers' had never accepted that there should be two Xhosa bantustans. Right from the start, they had demanded that the Ciskei be incorporated into Transkei. When Ciskei became 'independent' in December 1981, Transkei refused to 'recognise' it. Increasingly sharp conflict within the Ciskei - involving splits, detentions and arrests even of members of the family of 'President' Lennox Sebe - was seen by the Matanzima regime as creating an opportunity for Transkei to intervene and enhance its expansionist claims. In September 1986, the Selous Scouts organised the escape of Charles Sebe, the imprisoned former head of the Ciskei 'Department of State Security' and brother of 'President' Lennox Sebe. At about the same time, a group of Ciskei 'dissidents' was constituted in the Transkei calling for 'unity' with Transkei. In February 1987, in another military operation organised by the Selous Scouts, Lennox Sebe's 'Presidential palace' was attacked with small arms fire. This became too much for the central South African state, which indicated its concern that the feuding between the two bantustans was threatening to create further instability in the already volatile Eastern Cape region. Foreign Minister R F Botha held a series of meetings with the Transkei 'authorities' whose outcome was never fully made public but which were generally regarded as being to express displeasure at Transkeian intervention. A little later on March 29, a mutiny broke out among sections of the 'Transkei Defence Force' to protest against the arrest and detention of the then army commander, Brigadier Bantu Holomisa (the leader of the December coup). Although Reid Daly denied at the time that this had anything to do with the interventions in the Ciskei, Holomisa was known to be an opponent of this action as well as a critic of the Selous Scouts generally. Eventually, in response to the challenge posed by the mutiny, George Matanzima was forced to order the release of Holomisa. On April 1, he agreed to the summary expulsion of Reid Daly and his men, who were given 24 hours to leave the territory. On the same day, Major General Zondwa Mtirara resigned as 'Chief of the Transkei Defence Force'. He was succeeded by Holomisa, who was promoted to Major General.

What role the central state played in the demise of Reid Daly and the rise of Holomisa is not known. It is clear, however, that it was not a move initiated by George Matanzima of his own volition. Matanzima had always been close to

Reid Daly and depended on the absolute loyalty of the Scouts. The expulsion was a step taken by him reluctantly and under pressure. Moreover, it was also clear that Pretoria did not approve of the Ciskei adventure and that Holomisa was part of that current within the 'Transkei Defence Force' which agreed with that.

Deprived of the backing of the Selous Scouts and in the face of an increasing challenge from Holomisa, Matanzima's control began visibly and rapidly to erode. In May 1987, realising the increasingly perilous nature of the situation, Kaiser Matanzima attempted to make a political comeback at his brother's expense.

At the annual congress of the TNIP in that month, Kaiser Matanzima launched a blistering attack on his brother, whom he accused both of corruption and of losing control. After failing to win the support of the majority of the delegates, Kaiser led a walkout of about a quarter of their number and announced the formation of an opposition party. This led George to place his brother under house arrest.

On September 24, the military finally stepped in and forced the resignation of nine 'cabinet ministers', including George Matanzima (who was at the time in Port Elizabeth, where he has remained 'in exile' ever since). They were all accused of corruption and bribery. 'Leaks' from the official commission of inquiry, which was still sitting at the time, said that a total of R120 million had been 'misappropriated' by senior officials. A recent example cited was that of a R1 million 'lobola' payment handed over personally to George Matanzima by a construction firm which was later awarded a R30 million contract. On October 5, with the support of the Military, Stella Siggau, the former 'Minister of Posts and Telecommunications' was appointed 'Prime Minister'. Siggau was a daughter of Botha Siggau, the former 'State President'. She herself had been a long serving member of the TNIP, but was not at the very centre of power - partly because she had been dismissed as a 'minister' by Kaiser Matanzima in the mid-1970's when she gave birth to an 'illegitimate' child, and partly because of the conflicts with the Siggau clan which had taken place shortly after George Matanzima took over as 'Prime Minister'. On taking over as 'Prime Minister', Stella Siggau, pledged herself to become 'Transkei's Maggie Thatcher'.

Siggau's overthrow, less than three months after becoming 'Prime Minister' came amidst claims that continuing investigations of corruption had revealed that members of her administration had been involved as well. On taking power, Holomisa said that it had become necessary for the military to intervene directly to root out the corruption. He announced the establishment of a Military Council, which will supervise a 'government' composed of officials nominated by and acceptable to the military.

3. THE 'TRANSKEI COUP' IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MILITARISATION OF THE APARTHEID STATE.

Whether or not the leadership of the South African Defence Force was ac-

tively involved in the planning and plotting of the December 30 'Transkei Coup' is not known. However, Holomisa was described by the South African pro-consul in the territory (officially described as 'ambassador') as a 'friend of South Africa'. More importantly, what he stands for and represents appears to be in line with current SADF thinking and strategy.

As indicated above, the central authorities of the apartheid state have become less and less tolerant of blatant corruption by their allies and stooges in subordinate apparatuses. This does not apply only to those within the bantustans. Military strategists also believe that widespread corruption by members of 'Black local authorities' was one of the principal reasons for the collapse of these structures and the emergence of alternative organs of popular power during the period after August 1984. The 'Brazilian option' currently favoured by military strategists (see Dossier No. 36, January 1988), envisages 'winning hearts and minds' by reducing the level of overt corruption and trying to ensure that structures of the state are seen efficiently to carry out the administrative tasks assigned to them and bring some benefits to at least some 'influential' strata of the nationally oppressed majority. This is seen by the 'militarists' as more important than negotiating with black political leaders.

Under the 'National Security Management System' military dominated structures have been set up parallel to each level of civilian administration (see Dossier No. 34, January 1987). These, in fact, supervise and control their corresponding civilian structures. At the highest level there is the State Security Council - the most important decision making body in the apartheid state, which effectively supervises and controls the Cabinet. At local government level, there are 'mini-Joint Management Committees' (mini-JMCs). It is through the mini-JMCs that military strategists have attempted to implement their strategy of 'winning hearts and minds' through action at local level. After the declaration of the State of Emergency in June 1986, the military entered townships in force and carried out mass arrests of activists associated with alternative structures of popular power. Nominated local councillors were then installed, but unlike those who came to power in controlled elections in 1983 and early 1984, these have been closely monitored and supervised through the mini-JMCs, which have tried to integrate their activities within an overall 'hearts and minds' strategy.

In the case of the 'independent' bantustans, up to now no mechanism equivalent to the mini-JMC has been created to directly monitor and control the activities of local regimes. Real controls and limits have always existed, but they had up to now largely been operationalised through indirect mechanisms such as interventions by the resident South African 'ambassador' or other seconded officials, or in the process of negotiating annual budgetary support. In the context of a deepening crisis of the bantustan regimes, the December 'Transkei coup' has opened up another possible form of intervention, more in line with current SADF thinking and practice at other levels. Government officials in the Transkei will now fall under the direct supervision and control of the military, through the

Military Council. This will of course, in the first instance, be the supervision and control of the Transkei Military, but the links between it and the formal SADF are extremely close. The TDF is funded, supplied, armed and trained by the SADF. Like other bantustan forces, it grew out of and is modelled organisationally on the SADF. According to one authoritative study, the bantustan forces have 'a dual task: to protect the repressive bantustan authorities, and to carry out local and regional operations as dictated by the strategic priorities of the central government in Pretoria' (G. Cawthra, *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, London, 1986, page 125). Like the other bantustan forces, the TDF consists of a number of 'counter-insurgency' units. In terms of the SADF's current 'area defence' strategy these constitute the 'first line' of defence, but they also depend on the back up and support of other units, which the bantustans themselves do not have. This is provided by the SADF in what are officially described as 'joint operations'. There is, therefore, a de facto, if not publicly acknowledged, integration of bantustan forces into the broader structure of the SADF. In the case of the TDF, this integration is into the Eastern Province Command of the SADF.

Whether in the end the new Transkei military regime itself lapses into the type of corruption it is pledged to wipe out, whether it comes into conflict with Pretoria, or whether it becomes a more effective instrument for the apartheid state to exercise control within the bantustan, remains to be seen. A new experiment in bantustan administration, with potential repercussions beyond the Transkei region is clearly underway. If it is seen by the apartheid regime to be 'succeeding', the chances of a series of coups in the other 'independent' bantustans - all of which are experiencing similar crises to that in the Transkei - will be high. In any event, the December 30 'Transkei coup' must be regarded as yet another small step in the continuing process of militarisation which is taking place at all levels and in all apparatuses of the apartheid state.