

# Kwandebele — a rural trojan horse

**Independence for Kwandebele has been averted. In an unprecedented reversal of separate development history, an ethnic group that initiated the first step toward its own 'independence' has combined with the rest of its community to oppose the final step due to take place on December 11 1986.**

**The story begins in the 1970's. It ends on August 13 this year when the Kwandebele legislative assembly took a unanimous decision not to go ahead with independence.**

**JO-ANNE YAWITCH of Trac (Transvaal Rural Action Committee) has prepared a briefing document that describes the sequence of events and factors that led up to this rejection. Extracts from this document are published below:**

As the momentum for the creation of separate homelands for each of South Africa's ethnic groups gathered pace during the 1970's, groups of Ndebele people began to urge Pretoria to grant them recognition.

In 1974 the Ndundza tribal authority on a small tract of land in the middle of the Transvaal was elevated to regional authority status. Then in 1977 a South Ndebele territorial authority was established. The creation of a legislative assembly followed in 1980 and in 1981 Kwandebele was granted self-governing status with Mr Simon S Skhosana as its Chief Minister.

After a meeting between representatives of the SA Government and that of Kwandebele in May 1982 to discuss independence, it was said that the area would opt for independence once it had its own capital, industrial infrastructure and more land. At first 1984 was suggested as a date but it was subsequently revised to December 1986.

The factors that have combined to reverse the drive to independence are rooted in the SA Government's separate development policy — a strategy designed to enable 'white' South Africa to shed its responsibility for the political rights and

economic well-being of as many black South Africans as possible.

## • A resettlement camp for forced removals

Most of the territory's 645 000 residents have moved in over the last ten years seeking a place to settle as a result of one or other form of forced removal. The population consists of evicted farm workers, non-Tswanas fleeing persecution in the newly-independent Bophuthatswana and people forced to leave urban areas because of the housing shortage or pass law problems.

Conditions are appalling. Water is scarce and some has to be trucked in. There are no jobs. The territory's expanding commuter population has to leave home from as early as 2 am in order to reach work in the urban area four hours later. Life is a never-ending round of work and travel interrupted by only a few hours of sleep.

The daily struggle for survival in this stony, dry and inhospitable land is exhausting and wearying, as the lines etched on the faces of the residents tell. Since the time they first came to Kwandebele they are likely to have moved from a *wagkamp* where they lived in tents to a small plot where they built their shack. They are likely to have seen their cattle die of starvation. Their children are likely to be suffering from malnutrition and the small savings they came with are probably long gone. There are few other places in South Africa that are as depressing and dreary as Kwandebele's endless hills of shacks.

## • Ill-equipped administration

Kwandebele's rulers were from the start hopelessly ill-equipped to deal with the situation of human misery and poverty. For instance, in 1981 they did not include pension and disability grants in the financial estimates, leaving the aged, disabled and destitute without any state support. The following year R4,3 million — more than half the amount budgeted for social services, education and agriculture — was spent on an impulsive purchase of construc-

tion equipment.

Mr Skhosana, his close family and colleagues are a few of the people who have benefitted from the establishment of Kwandebele. They control state apparatus.

Over the years these rulers have moulded a society characterised by fear and repression. Access by outsiders, excepting officials of the SA Government, has been difficult. Even small attempts to start self-help projects and feeding-schemes have been monitored or discontinued.

In November 1984 Kwandebele held its one and only election. Until then all 46 members of the legislative assembly were nominated. A total of 600 out of 50 000 eligible voters participated in the election. Women were barred on the grounds that their husbands first had to teach them.

## • Incorporation of Ekangala and Moutse

During 1985, opposition to Skhosana's administration gathered momentum. In particular the proposed incorporation of Ekangala into Kwandebele and the actual incorporation of Moutse on January 1 1986 have created flashpoints around which opposition to Skhosana's regime has gathered in strength.

Ekangala is a 'model' township situated about 100 kms from Johannesburg and the East Rand townships. It was built by the SA government as part of the policy of creating decentralised growth points through 'orderly urbanisation'. In 1985, some two years after people, desperate for accommodation in the urban areas, had begun to move into Ekangala, the government announced the incorporation of the township into Kwandebele.

The Ekangala Action Committee, formed to protest high rents, electricity and transport costs, rejected the proposal. They felt they had been tricked because they had not been told about the proposal before they moved in. They also did not want to lose their SA citizenship by becoming citizens of an 'independent' homeland. Nor did they want to lose their or their children's sec-

tion 10 rights (still in force at that time).

Protest, repression and resistance followed in an escalating pattern of conflict similar to many others throughout the country — a protest march was arranged after a signed petition failed. The march was tear-gassed. A boy was shot. Thereafter a reign of terror was inflicted on the Action Committee during part of 1985 by Kwandebele loyalists. As a result the community as a whole has taken a decision to return *en masse* to the East Rand. This decision was communicated to the Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Mr Chris Heunis, in April this year.

### **Moutse**

The incorporation of Moutse was taken in defiance of the feelings of all the residents of Moutse. For years the 120 000-strong mainly Pedi-speaking group had voiced their opposition. However, late in 1985 the Moutse community were informed that incorporation would go ahead. Resistance and anger was met by another reign of terror inflicted from Kwandebele (See *Sash* Vol 28 No 4). Early in 1986 Mr Skhosana officially launched the Mbhokotho ('millstone used to grind corn').

Armed with sjamboks, knobkieries, pangas and sometimes guns this group was supplied with vehicles and given access to halls and government offices. Their task was to 'protect the interests of the community, to deal with people who enforce boycotts in Kwandebele, to look into the problems of family life and to deal with any trouble maker who may be arrested. They also had the power to fetch such a person from the police and hit him.'

They operated under the presidency of Mr Skhosana and his vice-president, Mr Pete Ntuli. (Mr Ntuli, who recently died in a car bomb explosion, was a notorious character whose name first appeared in public records when he was charged with the murder of Mr Andries Mahlangu, a Lebowa MP. When the case finally came to trial, Ntuli's son gave State evidence against his father and asked for protection against his father. The case was finally withdrawn on a technicality).



*SIYABUSWA: jubilation outside the Legislative Assembly after 'independence' was rejected.*  
photo Steve Hilton-Barber

### • **The Mbhokotho**

More than any other factor the activities of the Mbhokotho that operated under the presidency of Mr Skhosana and his vice-president, Pete Ntuli generated widespread hatred and fear of the Kwandebele ruling group. It is widely reputed that about half the Kwandebele Cabinet were members of the group which brutally sought to suppress dissent of any kind.

(The Trac report provides a chronology of assaults, abductions, arrests, torture, arson and even rape and murder that followed in the wake of the Mbhokotho.)

Their first victims were scholars whom they regarded as the 'trouble-makers'. Meetings at schools were broken up by police who fired tear-gas and sjambokked fleeing pupils. Those pupils who were arrested were handed over to the Mbhokotho who beat them, sometimes for hours. Teachers too were arrested.

By April 1986 the Kwandebele royal family maintain that they were continually being confronted with residents expressing opposition to the Mbhokotho and to independence. Headmen were approached to ascertain the feelings of the people. More harassment of pupils brought their parents into the fight to protect their offspring. One father, trying to rescue his daughter was brutally beaten to death, allegedly for criticising the Mbhokotho. His wife was allegedly raped.

In the midst of this situation independence was raised again. On May 7, after a meeting with representatives of the Kwandebele government Mr P W Botha announced in Parliament in Cape Town that Kwan-

debele would take independence on December 11 1986. The news was an instantaneous spark to existing tension.

On May 12 1986, four years after the meeting to discuss independence, tens of thousands of Kwandebele residents, tribal traditionalists, 'comrades', civil servants, teachers and others, met at the kraal of Chief Samuel Mahlangu, king of the Ndebele's. The purpose of their meeting was to cancel independence and work out strategies to deal with the Mbokotho.

This May meeting, like many others before it, ended in chaos after it was tear-gassed, allegedly from helicopters. Several people were killed. Three more months of fighting followed. A State of Emergency more stringent than that prevailing elsewhere in South Africa left Kwandebele sealed off from the outside world. During this time some 100 people were killed, over 300 detained while schools and the entire civil service staged boycotts. More than half the businesses were gutted.

Finally, on August 13 speaker after speaker rose in the Kwandebele legislative assembly to call for the scrapping of independence in order to restore peace in the territory. At the end of the debate, the speaker of the Kwandebele parliament, Mr Solly Mahlangu, allegedly once himself a member of Mbhokotho announced: 'Not one of you said independence was all right and should go ahead. I am of the opinion that the House is quite unanimous with regard to independence.' With that, jubilation took the place of strife in the streets of the dusty town of Siyabuswa.

# Members detained

**Sandy  
Stewart**



*Louise Vale*



*Bridget Hilton-Barber*

**Members still in detention**



*Ann Burroughs*



*Priscilla Hall*

**Peter  
Kerchoff**

**Victoria  
Vena**



**Those  
released**



*Annica van Gylswyk  
(forced to leave SA)*

*Gill de Vlieg*



*Liz Kistner*



*Joy Harnden*



*Gill de Vlieg*