

uhuru

The Venda bantustan is situated in the north-eastern corner of the Transvaal, covering some 600 000 hectares along the borders of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and Mocambique. (Consolidation plans do not allow for common borders with these territories. The 5km wide strip of land between Venda and Zimbabwe is said to be used as a military exercise area). The 1970 census figures say there are 357 919 Vendas - 251 235 within the bantustan and 106 684 outside.

The Venda Territorial Authority was established in 1969 with Chief Executive Councillor chief Patrick Mpephu, a strong supporter of apartheid, at a salary of R3 600 per annum. In 1971 the Territorial Authority became a Legislative Assembly. When Vorster visited Venda in that year it was reported that "some of the leading and more educated Africans present appeared to disagree with remarks by ... Chief Patrick Mpephu to the effect that his people were satisfied with the pace of the development of their homeland".

In 1973 Venda received self-governing status. The Venda Legislative Assembly (VLA) would have 60 members (25 chiefs, 2 headmen, 15 members designated by chiefs, and 18 elected members). The chief minister must be a chief and so must 3 of the five cabinet ministers.

From the very start Venda's political history reads as a farce. The first elections gave Baldwin Mudau and his Venda Independence Party (VIP) 13 of the 18 elected seats and initially 5 chiefs supported the VIP. This gave chief Mpephu, elected chief minister, a majority of 24 (such are the ways of "homeland" politics). But even with the odds unbeatably in his favour the "traditionalist" Mpephu (whether this is in reference to his position in a long line of stooges in similar offices is not clear) had after 11 days of VLA session lost 15 of his supporters to the VIP. Mpephu acted in great tradition and announced the closure of the Assembly.

The Commissioner-General for the Venda (at that time De Wet Nel) said that time had been wasted during the session because members had not understood parliamentary procedure and that lectures would be arranged for them during the adjournment.

In 1977 Venda was said to be discussing independence with South African officials, as well as the establishment of a defence force. Mudau (VIP) argued that Venda could not become independent because it could not be self-sufficient. Nor would it be able to resist "terrorist incursions" from neighbouring Zimbabwe.

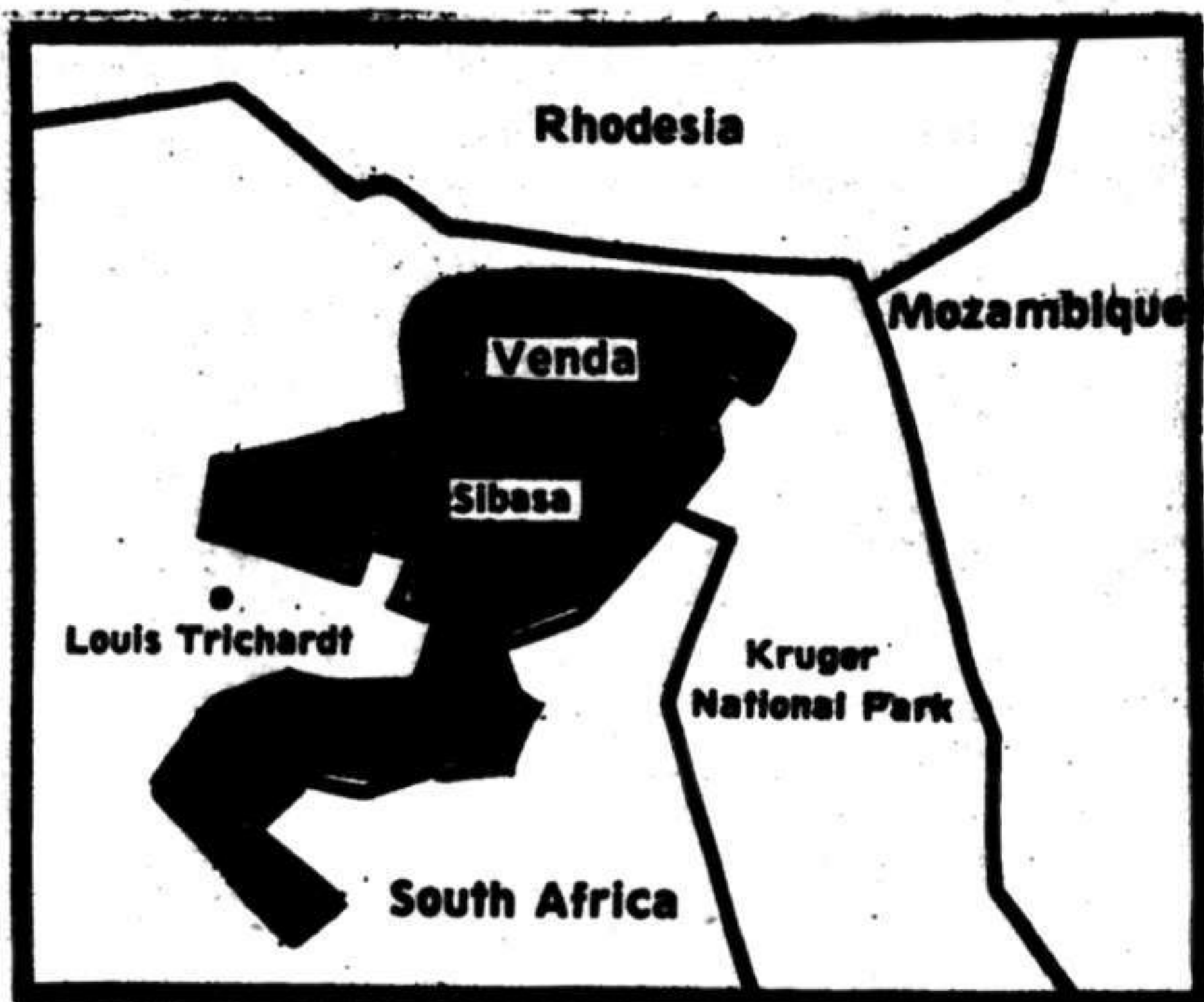
1977 also saw student revolt in the bantustans - a continuation of the events that shook South Africa from June 16 the previous year. The parliamentary buildings in Sibasa were stoned and homes of officials (black and white) were attacked. By October 7 some 357 schools had been closed, affecting 114 800 pupils.

Proclamation R276, identical to Proclamation R252 for the Ciskei, was passed for Venda with an additional clause in the definition of what constitutes subversive statements and actions - that this would include "the threatening of a scholar or by any means influencing him to refrain from attending classes or sitting for any examination" (for Proclamation R252 see box). At the start of the 1978 school year students at Vendaland schools were asked to "give undertakings" and their parents to "give assurances", the nature of which were not revealed but obviously referred to the events of the previous year.

Early in 1978 (March) Mpephu announced that he was to hold talks with Vorster on the independence issue. Opposition VIP leader Baldwin Mudau had by now changed his stand to one of neutrality - "We are uncommitted. We will leave it to the people to decide in the elections in July". (When have "the people" ever decided in South Africa?) Less than a fortnight later Mudau walked out of the Assenbly during a motion on "independence", because he had been refused an opportunity to table a motion of no-confidence.

Mpephu said that: "It has been proved that the Venda Government and people are developed", and that Venda would maintain its ties with South Africa and expected to receive assistance from her as long as "Venda acted responsibly". In June it was announced that Venda would be consolidated into an undivided territory at the expense of the Gazankulu bantustan.

And so the two parties, Venda National Party (VNP) of Mpephu, and the Venda Independence Party (VIP) of Mudau, entered the circus ring of "homeland elections" once more - a farce to the outside world, but a tragedy to the people of this region of South Africa. Both parties supported "independence" and were fighting for an increased 42 elected seats (to equal the 42 nominated posts).



CISKEI**Proclamation R252 of 1977**

Following disturbances in the Ciskei, which escalated after the death in detention of Mr. Steve Biko, Proclamation R252, made in terms of the Bantu Administration Act of 1927, was gazetted on 30 September. Similar to Proclamation R400, which gave emergency powers to the government of the Transkei during the period of unrest following the Pondo revolt of 1960 (and continued in use until replaced by similar legislation this year), Proclamation R252 extends extraordinary powers to the Ciskei Government.

Restrictions are placed on the holding of meetings, which must be authorised by a magistrate. Any person who is the author of "subversive or intimidating statements or actions" will be liable to a fine of up to R600, or three years' imprisonment. Included in the definition of such statements and actions are the organising of or taking part in a boycott, and the treatment of a chief or headman with "disrespect, contempt or ridicule" and failure to render, "in accordance with Bantu law and custom", such services to a chief or headman which should be rendered by the person concerned.

The Minister of Justice of the Ciskei is empowered to prohibit persons from entering or remaining in any part of the Ciskei which he may specify. He may also order the arrest and detention of any person whom he considers to constitute a threat to law and order. Such person may be detained for a maximum period of 90 days without trial, and during that period may only be visited by a magistrate, unless the Minister decides otherwise. The courts of law are specifically deprived of the power to interdict, delay or suspend any decision made or direction given under these regulations, and an indemnity clause prohibits the institution of any civil action arising out of the operation of these regulations against the Ciskeian Government or any official thereof.

These powers could be used by the Ciskeian Government to silence its opposition in the general election scheduled to take place soon, as was the case in the Transkei.

A SURVEY OF RACE RELATIONS, 1977

Baldwin Mudau is an urban dweller. He has, amongst other jobs, been a social worker, a lecturer at Turfloop, a research assistant in the Anthropology Department at Wits University, and Public Relations Officer for Lever Brothers. Mudau and the VIP's frustration on all levels with bantustan politics, and yet maybe a belief that they could make it work if they could gain control, has been well recorded in the interview Dison had with Mudau and in the paper presented to the conference on Opposition in Southern Africa (see Conference papers and Africa Perspective). Dison points to the predominantly petty bourgeois composition of VIP leadership and candidates for the 1973 elections, but also to the non-incorporation of them into the apartheid structure.

Chief Patrick Mpephu formed his political party (VNP) only after his "election" as chief minister. This party would be "tradition-orientated, concerned with preserving the powers and functions of the chiefs". The Sunday Express reported that he has a standard 5 education and "reads Venda haltingly. In English or Afrikaans he requires an interpreter for any conversation going beyond introductory remarks". These communication problems do not seem to be standing in the way of receiving instructions.

The VIP won 31 of the 42 elected seats in the July elections, winning all seats in 3 of the 4 districts and gaining strong urban support. Mpephu, however, is not that easily defeated. After the previous elections (1973) he had taken the 40 chiefs in the VLA to the Manyelethi game reserve attired in R70 suits bought for them (subsequently described as "parliamentary suits"), returning only 5 minutes before the voting that placed him in power (despite the VIP's popular majority). Now, in 1978, defeated VNP candidates were appointed to the 42 nominated seats even before results were officially known. P Rambau, disqualified from standing in the elections because of a six-month jail sentence, became one of the nominated members.

But even these crude machinations were not enough to ensure a docile and inevitable journey to "independence" in the eyes of Mpephu and the South African government. Towards the end of August 37 people - most of them VIP members and supporters - were detained in Venda. This number included at least 10 Legislative Assembly members, 2 magistrates and an assistant magistrate.

Mpephu released a statement saying that he had been convinced by information received "that the maintenance of law and order was in jeopardy.

"Investigations into the activities of the detainees will be undertaken in due course (sic) by the police so that the law takes its course. It is expected that criminal action will follow".

A week later 5 more people were detained including another elected VIP member, and the next day 4 students were arrested. Mudau's response of a threat to boycott VLA sittings and to institute legal proceedings for alleged irregularities in the 11 seats won by the VNP can only be described as naive and inadequate. Mpephu promptly detained three of the unsuccessful VIP candidates in the legal proceedings - at least he cannot be accused of legalism - and a twelfth VIP Assembly member.

On 13 September chief Mpephu was elected chief minister at a meeting boycotted by all but one of the successful VIP candidates (this person crossed to the VNP). Dr JS Otto, present Commissioner-General for Venda, said that members had committed themselves to the democratic principle embodied in the Venda constitution. He continued: "In this regard, you in Venda are setting an example to many states in this continent, where the democratic process has been swept away by dictatorship and other systems which make a mockery of democracy". Dr Otto also attacked marxist influence in Namibia and Zimbabwe.



To celebrate this victory for democracy on the African continent the Assembly approved expenditure of R7,6-m to prepare for "independence" in 1979. A motion compelling members to attend VLA sittings on at least 4 days per week or face losing their seats if their excuses should not be acceptable, was also passed. The Assembly the adjourned indefinitely, which commentators took to mean until 1979.

The number of detained VIP supporters now stand at 55.

The events in Venda are crude even by "homeland" political standards. Some very obvious conclusions can be drawn from the events. Of the total number of VIP supporters detained, a large proportion are members of the new and traditional petty bourgeoisie - magistrates, students, teachers and principals, and businessmen have been mentioned in press reports. On the other hand Mpephu has had to rely on the artificially maintained and altered remnants of a traditional authority structure - the chiefs and headmen. In other words, on people who are directly dependent on the central government for their power and income. It is clear that Mudau and his party are by no means radical in the alternative they offer to Venda, but are still perceived to be the less manipulable of the two groupings.

It is interesting to note that a similar strategy option had been attempted several times over the past number of years in Natal and kwaZulu. Shaka's Spear, a party associated with "traditional" elements, was but one of the BQSS/Department of Information ventures in this direction. However, Buthelezi has both the "traditional" background and the skill to utilise it in order to neutralise such manoeuvres. The apparent inability/unwillingness on the part of the state to incorporate significant sections of the petty bourgeois leadership directly into state branches may be a generalisable comment on the nature of the state option of repression within the South African social formation.

The Venda farce is but another example, although astonishing in its crudity, of the control function of the bantustans in contemporary South Africa. The political conflict is resolved in favour of the party best able to execute the provisions of Proclamation 276. The VIP with its specifically, although not exclusively, urban petty bourgeois base is not the party to fulfil this function.

To see the whole episode only as a farce is, however, to miss the underlying reality of repression of the unemployed, of students (the future unemployed), migrants and 'peasants'. That is finally what bantustan politics is all about.





Since the briefing was written several more events have taken place.

An attempt will be made to bring it up to date:

Six Tshino youths detained (Post, 78-09-21)

"Six youths from Tshino, near Sibasa, have been detained by the Security Police. Of the six youths, five are students...According to one of the students who were detained, the Security Police questioned them on the class boycott that started at the school..."

Released Venda detainees banned (Post, 78-09-21)

"The Venda Government senior clerk who was released...has been banned in terms of Proclamation R276. An order was served on Mr Muligwe Sigwavhuline four days after his release. He has been restricted to his 'house and its immediate surroundings' from 6 am to 6pm for a period of 90 days from the day of his release."

School head held (Post, 78-09-21)

"A secondary school principal is the latest victim of the continuing security clampdown in the Venda homeland.

...
The youngest secondary school principal in Venda, Mr Nwamakonde is the third school principal...detained in the homeland swoop.

...
Efforts to get a full list of the detainees have been unsuccessful as the government is not prepared to release any information about the detainees."

It appears that 5 more students were detained over the weekend of the 23rd September.

Focus on students (RDM, 78-09-28)

Mass arrests of opposition Venda Independence Party members of the Legislative Assembly, which has been going on since two months ago, have now focussed on the students in the homeland.

The recent arrests, which took place last week, include five senior students from Lwenzhe High School in the Vuwani constituency where the opposition won all the 11 elected seats in the general election which was held in June."

Costly homes for Venda MPs (Star, 78-09-29)

"Venda Cabinet Ministers are ahead of other South African homeland leaders when it comes to expensive houses. A large construction company is building three houses for Venda cabinet ministers at a cost of almost R88 000 each.

Houses for BophutaTswana's cabinet ministers in Mmabatho which were built last year, cost between R50 000 and R60 000 each. The President of Transkei, Mr Botha Sigcau, has a more opulent home which cost R500 000.

Venda opposition party leader, Mr Baldwin Mudau, said the money being spent on cabinet ministers' houses was a 'total waste'.

'Instead of putting money into developing necessary projects, they are wasting money,' Mr Mudau said."

Detainees may be freed (Star, 78-10-03)

"Political detainees in the Venda homeland would probably be released within the next few months, Chief Minister Patrick Mpephu said yesterday.

...
Twelve elected VIP members are among those detained under the homeland's emergency law. Chief Mpephu said no charges had been