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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE B.N.F.

The purpose of this brief introduction is neither to give a comprehensive resume or synopsis of the history of the Botswana National Front nor is the aim to give a full account of its activities in the last 25 years of its existence. The idea is rather to throw some light on the character and tasks of the movement.

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT (B.N.F.)

1.

THE BIRTH OF THE B.N.F.

The Botswana National Front was launched in Mochudi on the 10th of October 1966 after the country's first general elections which put the colonialist sponsored Botswana Democratic Party into power in March 1965.

WHY THE B.N.F. EMERGED

The justification for launching the B.N.F. was the experience of what took place in the course of 1965 when in that one year alone 16 African countries became independent but in most cases, the colonial powers had groomed unpatriotic elements through whom they would continue their plunder of the called independent states. In Botswana, the agenda of the British Government had originally been to incorporate the territory into South Africa but when the Nationalist Party won elections in 1948, the British hoped that Botswana could be made part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. When the African Nationalist elements in the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland made the continued existence of the Federation impossible, the British again abandoned the idea. Their next move was to organise collaboration and alliance with all the aristocratic conservative, opportunist, and pro-colonialist indigenous elements through a political party which would accept a subordinate role in its relations with foreign monopoly capital.

The idea was to find a pro-colonial senior Motswana Chief who would be sponsored to form a pro-colonial Government.

Sir Seretse Khama was the choice to lead a neo-colonialist political party (the BDP) to which the British colonialist donated 500 Pound Sterling for the 1965 elections campaign.

Even before the 1965 general elections, Sir Seretse was appointed by the local British colonial administration to be the leader of the Government business. The imperialists attitude towards the BDP was that as an ally of colonialism, the party would always add a voice to the imperialist chorus against the bogey communist threat in Southern Africa and take a firm stand against socialist tendencies not only in Botswana but in Southern Africa as a whole. History proved the British correct. The BDP has assisted in many subtle ways in the co-ordination of political actions directed against progressive and anti-neocolonialist elements and has assumed the role of counter balance to the socialist oriented elements in Southern Africa by parroting (through Government Media) anti-socialist slogans and rhetorics.

So, the political socio-economic conditions justifying the emergence of the B.N.F. had to do with the qualitative introduction of neo-colonial policies, rubberstamped and wrapped in the BDP flag for which the foundation in 1961 of the colonia; legislative council had in fact laid the basis. The other major political condition influencing the formation of the Front was the absence of any powerful political force in 1965 with clear ideological and policy alternatives to the BDP. The then existing opposition elements somewhat lacked political self definition and were, in the main, reformist rather than transformist progressives. Furthermore they saw ethnocentrism as taking precedence over nationality. The

political position of men and women who formed the first fabric of the-Front leadership on the other hand was that the struggle then and in the future did not merit the ethnic or tribalist tag but merited and indeed required a class approach.

3. COMPOSITION OF THE B.N.F.

â\200\230 The Botswana National Front began as a class alliance of all patriotic elements who desired a change, change from 1 neo-colonial rubberstamp to a national democratic state, 1 a Visible change in the economic, political and social conditions of the people. From the original class } alliance, the B.N.F. is developing into a multi- 1 organisational United Front. This means that all i patriotic organisations whether social, religious, trade â\200\230 unionist or political, are welcome and encouraged into the Front. The realisation that many sections of the ') nation are affected by social and economic deprivation and exploitation regardless of race, ethnic attributes gender and other conditions, has influenced the form, character and composition of the Botswana National Front.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE B.N.F. TOWARDS THE BDP

From its inception, the BNF has always insisted that the lâ\200\230.

' BDP was never born as a patriotic nationalist movement seeking genuine national independence but purely as a political fraternity club by the colonial settler community and their indegenous disciplines - styled and modelled as it were in the fashion of the aborted Zimbabwe/Rhodesia sell out arrangement. The strategy was to maintain semi-independent Botswana as a reservior for cheap labour and cheap raw material for racist South

Africa in the interest of huge western investment in that country.

The objective position of the B.N.F. is that the B.D.P. was deliberately chosen by the colonial forces so as to maintain the grave legacy of colonialism; illiteracy and ignorance; lumpenisation and pauperisation of the working class; stagnation and virtually vegetative existence of the rural populations; low level of political consciousness; and carefully guarded policy of raw material extraction, exportation and processing abroad to create employment base for the colonising countries.

The B.N.F. is convinced that as long as the B.D.P. remains in power, Botswana's approach to political economy will never be based on the patriotic interests and aspirations of the main indigenous population but on the interest of foreign monopoly capital. Differently put, the B.N.F. is convinced that the B.D.P. neither has the correct ideological foundation, the political ability nor the correct socio-economic formula to transfer Botswana's political economy from the grip of foreign privilege peddlars to the hands of the indigenous population. In the final analysis, the B.N.F's attitude towards the B.D.P. is that the latter was never born out of an African reaction against colonial exploitation but out of European (colonial) action against African's struggle for genuine national independence.

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT FOR WHICH THE B.N.F. STRUGGLES

The Botswana National Front seeks to establish a coalition Government in which all the units of the United Front

would have meaningful participation. This means that what is aimed at is not the rule or dominance of one group or class, but an alliance in which all groups will have meaningful participation.

The B.N.F. agenda is to struggle for the elimination of inequalities in the level of the economic, social and cultural development of all districts in the country, as well as to illuminate and liberate the hearts that are burdened with bourgeois falsehoods.

THE PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THE BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT

The Botswana National Front is composed of the original Botswana National Front organization which is usually referred to as the mother body. The Botswana National Front has also the Women's League which unites all patriotic women within the Botswana National Front.

The Botswana National Front has also the Youth League which is divided into two sections, namely:-

1. the students body which is based at the University of Botswana and is called. the Botswana Students 'Council.

- there is also the general youth league of the party which is called the Botswana National Front Youth League.

- Two other organizations to be affiliated to the Botswana National Front are in the process of formation, namely:-

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and'â\200\224 The Botswana Association of Democratic Lawyers

- The Democratic Journalists' Association.

There is another new association which supports the Botswana National Front and is also in its formative stages. This is a group of young Batswana Moslems.

WHO DOES THE B.N.F. APPEAL TO?

All forcer of the Nation can join the Botswana National Front, providing that in their objectives positions they accept its minimum programme in the interest of the people.

The more recent scholarly research studies and analyses of Botswana multiâ\200\224partyism and electoral process seem to confirm that the more enlightened sections of the nation reside mostly in the urban and semi-urban areas, and further that, judging from election results, this same category of the electorate tend to reject the B.D.P. in favour of the opposition B.N.F. A further conclusion from various such studies is that on the overall, political and electoral support for the B.D.P. is gradually being eroded. The studies confirm further that the B.D.P. hgwever still commands considerable support in the remote rural areas of Botswana.

On the other hand, the proportion of workers' votes in the B.N.F. has increased considerably according to the political analysts. The B.N.F. basic political programme is to develop and maintain an open and realistic contact with the broader population. This means that the Front strictly adheres to a political position which is

traditionally with the workers, peasants, progressive students and Other youth.

In its ideology, composition and structure, the B.N.F. has always been and remains a live embodiment of the Unity and cohesion of all progressive and patriotic forces in Botswana and therefore a link up with similar anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, anti-apartheid and anti-zionist progressive and patriotic forces abroad appears pertinent at this crucial moment.

When party politics in Botswana took root, peoples' tribal homes and ethnic attributes were fixtures of political thought patterns. Today about 60% of Botswana no longer live in their tribal homes where they were born and raised so that they totally lack the political culture characteristic of the old generation of the sixties.

Furthermore the affluent and extravagant lifestyle of the B.D.P. petty-bourgeoisie also make preachments of "peace-loving, shining and prosperous Botswana" sound absolutely more hollow than ever before to a growing number of peasants. They are also drifting towards the B.N.F. as was exemplified by the Okavango syndrome.

With these happening, the B.D.P. is certainly trapped in a dilemma that their own bourgeois policies helped to create, and from which there seem to be no easy or obvious escape.

THE B.N.F.'s GROWTH AND ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE

Since 1966 Botswana's opposition politics has been keynoted by the activities of the Botswana National Front which contested the general elections for the first time in 1969 and was immediately catapulted into a second position in the country's political arena until now.

Two factors seem to have contributed to the fast growth of the B.N.F. The first was the introduction by the party at its formative stages, of youth study circles in major population centres so as to fuse theory and practice in political discourse as opposed to staid rhetoric at freedom squares without serious commitment to theoretical work. The second was the fact that the objective material conditions themselves were beginning to expose the B.D.P. weaknesses. This has resulted in a legacy of permanent mistrust of the ruling party by the emerging young generation who see its role as that of passive dupes to the machinations of neo-colonialism.

The statistical elections data below bear testimony to the B.N.F. as being the only party that has since its founding been swelling the ranks of its membership while the rest of the main parties, including the B.D.P. have been slowly but significantly losing support. The data below demonstrate parties electoral performance since 1965.

The statistics above show that of all the political parties in the country the B.N.F. is the only party that is fast growing. In the early stages the influence of the Botswana National Front was mostly in the urban areas. In the 1989 general elections the B.N.F. captured three townships namely Gaborone, Lobatse and Jwaneng, but the general trend at present is that the influence and impact of the party in the rural areas has grown significantly. From the above information it is obvious that the B.N.F. is the party of the future.

Source: Report to the Minister of Public Services on General Elections 1965-1969.

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PROBLEMS FACING THE BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT.

In the threshold of the 1980's and following the death of the late Sir Seretse Khama, the senior chief, thousands and thousands joined and/or identified with the B.N.F., some with full grasp of its historical political mission and revolutionary patriotic duty and commitment, and yet others as mere fellow travellers, lumpen and political pedestrians motivated by opportunist dreams that political power would by some mystic process instantaneously fall into the hands of the B.N.F. for their (opportunists) immediate rewards.

This ugly trend saw the B.N.F. falling prey to all sorts of internal contradictions and retrogressive tendencies that included lures to populism, parliamentary opportunism and expediency at the expense of discipline and revolutionary commitment to popular mass national democratic struggle.

The catalogue of opportunist defections and other reactionary trends that characterized 1988 were further fanned, orchestrated and trumpeted by the enemy B.D.P. camp through 'manipulation of the bourgeois press, in particular the official media - BOPA and Radio Botswana who created the impression that this opportunism in fact denoted the death of the Front rather than the birthpains of its eminent victory and triumph of progress over reaction.

But the most serious problem facing the Botswana National Front is that the ruling party has now decided to resort to a number of undemocratic measures in order to retain power. The most effective of these measures are

systematic cheating or rigging of elections. This is made possible and easy' by the fact that the ruling party monopolises all the arrangements and preparations for the elections and appoints its loyal supporters to run and supervise the elections.

There is also the extensive use of the police whose role is intimidation and misinformation. The media plays a very important role. The campaigns of the opposition parties are hardly ever reported and if they are reported at all, the information is distorted and very much mutilated.

Both the Press and the Radio are used effectively to suppress information about other parties. The expatriate communities especially Indians and other people from Asia are intimidated into voting for the ruling party and large sums of money extorted from them as purchase price for the protection which they are assured by the ruling Botswana Democratic Party.

THE B.N.F. AND THE FUTURE

The ideology, composition and party structure of the B.N.F. has always been and still is an embodiment of unity (KOPANO) of all those who seek change of the political, socio-economic status quo in the country. All these patriotic and progressive forces are of generations, ensuring the continuity of the party's revolutionary tradition. On the basis of this, one can safely say that the future of the B.N.F. remains bright and glorious. By any standard of analysis, the B.N.F. does not seem to face any substantial or sustainable challenge from its

main rival the B.D.P. because, short of ideas of its own, the latter has historically inherited the veil of bourgeois - liberal falsehoods and has based its politics solely on a staid or conservative elitist phenomena which do not conform to the ideals of the emerging young generation. Also, revolutionary events in Southern Africa which include calls for long term national democratic demands for social and distributive justice do not anger well for the continued survival of conservative parties such as the B.D.P.

In addition, as a political party for B.D.P. does not politicize its followers beyond parliamentary opportunism or beyond promises of immediate reward through nominations to political positions against popular mandate.

But unlike the B.D.P. the B.N.F. political emphasis is placed on making every functionary a selfless fighter for the triumph of the great ideals of the party and to deeply understand its policies and carry them out unswervingly without promises of immediate rewards. In other words the B.N.F. charts its political course on the basis of a long and protracted struggle rather than on an immediate seizure of power.

All the above factors appear to have positive effects on inner party life; hence the B.N.F's certain and glorious future.

THE B.N.F. NEEDS SUPPORT

The sum total of the aforementioned points, rather than anyone of them taken in isolation, should provide a clue as to why the B.N.F. seeks to establish meaningful

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contacts and relations with other progressive and democratic forces struggling against neo-colonialism. Our appeal for material, moral and ideological support is based on the fact that our main rival - the pro-colonial B.D.P. - receives enormous support from its western allies materially morally and ideologically - a trend that could in itself be injurious to the very survival of multi-party democracy itself. A meaningful link up with all anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist anti-apartheid and anti-zionist progressive forces both internally and externally appear pertinent at this crucial revolutionary moment.
.Long live the B.N.F.
Long Live the Peoples struggle
Long live the B.N.F. leader
Comrade Kenneth Koma (Dr).
ALUTA CONTINUA!