

What might have been

ONCE upon a time there was a country in Africa called Basibia. Basibia had a small population. Most of its people were poor in terms of money but rich in spirit.

For many years Basibia was ruled by a colonial power. The officials in the colonial government paid themselves high salaries while the people starved, robbing Basibia of its wealth for their own benefit. But the people of Basibia were strong. For many years they fought against colonial rule under BAPPA, the Basibian Peoples Party. After a long and painful struggle, Basibia finally won its independence. Now the Basibian people were free to shape their own nation.

"Now we can be just like other nations in Africa", said some of the people. "Oh no", said others, "we must learn from our brothers and sisters. We will follow their successes and avoid their mistakes".

Basibia adopted a constitution that was admired all over the world because it made Basibia a true democracy.

BAPPA swept to victory in Basibia's first election as an independent nation because it promised to live up to its name as a people's party. Its election posters said 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall' and 'Build a New Basibia for all Basibians'.

The leader of BAPPA became the first President of Basibia. He loved the people of Basibia and was much loved by them.

"We are all Basibians together", he said. "Every man, woman and child in this nation is my family, and I will not rest while any of my people are suffering".

"That is fine", said some of the members of BAPPA, "but now we must talk about our salaries. To keep the peace, we have promised all the government employees who were hired before independence that their salaries will not be reduced. So we must pay ourselves at least as much as they are getting, or perhaps even more".

"No", said the President "those people were robbing our country. Why should we follow in their footsteps? Because we work for the government, we are given houses to live in while many of our people are homeless. The state even gives us pensions and medical aid. We will pay ourselves modest salaries. And I have State House to live in and a government car to travel in - I will be well taken care of. My salary must be the lowest of all".

"But, Comrade President", the others cried, "you can't do that. You are the father of the nation. Surely your salary must be the highest. No leader of any other country would do such a thing".

And the President replied "You say that I am the father of our nation - what father would eat while his children go hungry? A true leader does not separate himself from his people. Let Basibia be different. Let us set an example for

the world!"

The next day some of the President's advisors came to talk to him about cars for the government. "Of course, Benz's", they said. "The Basibian people would like to see us in cars that will suit our status as leaders".

"No", said the President, "I do not think so. We will need transport, but we must save as much money as possible for developing our nation. No one working in this government is going to drive a fancy car".

"But Comrade President", they said, "all the highest government officials before independence drove expensive cars. And so do Heads of State all over the world!"

"Yes", said the President "but we will be different. We will set an example. A true leader does not separate himself from the people. You must remember that most of the people of Basibia cannot afford a car at all. Find us some inexpensive cars that will get us where we need to go".

"Now, Comrade President", said the advisors, "we need to build a new place for Parliament to meet".

"But why?", said the President. "Is there no place where we can gather to do our work?"

"Yes", they said, "but it is old and dingy and we will be crowded there. We want a fancy room with a new carpet and leather chairs".

"No", said the President, "I will not spend any money on government buildings until every single person in our nation has a home to live in. Until that day, we must get by with what we have".

The next day the President's advisors were back again. "Comrade President", they said, "we will have to make many trips to other countries. We must share ideas and discuss issues and make agreements with the people of other nations".

"This is true", said the President, "we must do some travelling. But we must always think of saving money. None of my ministers will fly first class, and we will always stay in the cheapest hotels".

"But Comrade President", they said, "a government minister must travel in style. You would not want your ministers to be crowded and uncomfortable".

And the President said "how can you talk about being crowded and uncomfortable when I have seen some of our people living in the single quarters, 10 and 20 people sleeping in one tiny room, every night of their lives?"

"But what about you, comrade President?", they said, "you must have your own plane for efficiency and security".

"Very well, but we must find the smallest, cheapest,

simplest plane that can take me where I need to go. A true leader does not separate himself from the people. We are going to set an example to the world".

It was not long before a delegation came from Parliament to visit the President. "Comrade President", they said, "this cannot continue. We are Basibia's leaders. We fought for independence and now we deserve our reward".

"Yes", said the President, "but we did not fight alone. Would any of us be here in government today if we had not had the support of our people? All Basibians deserve the reward of a new Basibia where all can prosper".

"But, comrade President", they said, "no other country in the world operates this way. We will be the laughingstock of Africa".

"No", said the President, "I think you are going to be surprised".

And it was not long before a new spirit came to Basibia - a spirit of giving and sharing. Government ministries held competitions to see which ones could save the most money. Some of the civil servants who had been hired before independence were so embarrassed about their high salaries that they asked for salary cuts. Even private citizens sold their fancy cars because it was so unfashionable to be seen in them.

And the government spent money on health care and education and literacy training and development projects and social security payments for the old and unemployed. It was not long before the standard of living of every single person in Basibia had risen. No one was hungry. Children were healthier. Everyone in Basibia had a home, and almost everyone could read. And the government had been so careful with its money that Basibia was not dependent on foreign aid. Basibia was truly free.

The President was respected and admired more than any other leader in any country in the history of the world. All over Basibia people said "A true leader does not separate himself from the people". They voted for BAPPA again and again, and Basibia remained peaceful and prosperous.

And soon Basibia was famous. No other nation had ever dared to be so different. Visitors came streaming in from all over the world to see this remarkable place. New investors were attracted to Basibia because it was so unique. People in every land recognised the wisdom of the President of Basibia and he was awarded many honours (which he always accepted in the name of all Basibians).

Basibians had once said "We must be like all other countries". Now people in

other countries said "we want to be like Basibia".

And that is how one small nation began to change the world.

ANON

The jet outcry

IT has never been part of my culture to engage myself in public debates which are being over-emphasised for political gain.

In the face of the out-of-proportion criticism about the plan to purchase an R80 million jet for the Government and officials of the Republic of Namibia, I was faced with several questions which I could not help to answer.

I fully concur with the fact that our country faces numerous problems, some short term and others long term. Take for example the drought, hunger and unemployment which are nowadays the focus issue of those who are opposed to the purchase of the plane.

Now the question is whether it is true that those 'Muyongos' who presuppose that the R80 million could have been better spent if used for relief programmes, are more sensitive to the realities in Namibia? If so, how far back have they (Muyongos) been so critical about the way in which taxpayers' money has been spent for the purchase of things such as Casspirs and Mirages by their regime, the former interim government?

Or, does Muyongo want us to believe that the money misused on the purchase of war material at the time of their rule was less than R80 million? And was it not taxpayers' money?

This country has inherited a debt which it has to repay due to the misuse of funds and the criminal war which was imposed on our people. Again, does Muyongo want us to accept that the drought and other social evils in our country today are new happenings? I assume not.

Unemployment, hunger, to mention but a few, are the legacy of the past history of the country. Even at the time of successive colonial regimes, the problems were there.

As these problems did not prevent them (the Muyongos) from purchasing wanton war materials which ran to billions of Rands which this country is left to repay today, likewise, should these prevent the legitimate government from purchasing a plane which will enable the President and other Government officials to maintain contacts with the outside world for the benefit of the people of this country?

Even if the plane were not purchased, could there be someone who would come up with a formula which would serve as a means through

Letters to the Editor