Administration reorganisation—A substitute for policy? The District Administration and Local Government in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1949–1966

by LOUIS A. PICARD

Political elites in the Third World are often accused of summarily discarding administrative patterns and institutions within a few years of a country's independence. New administrative structures are introduced without clear goals, and administrators are often unsure of the changes of responsibility that accompany new roles and areas of activity. For example, Ashford, takes note of the rapid revamping of the colonial administrative system in Algeria after 1962 in order to mobilize for rural development. However, "conditions were much too turbulent in the post-revolutionary period to enable the ideal structure to become reality." (Ashford, 1972:417) A few years later the Algerian government was forced to restore effective provincial and municipal government in order to provide an infrastructure for agricultural policy.

Reorganization is often seen by critics as a substitute for more substantive economic and social changes which the regime is unable to or unwilling to carry out. Saul takes note of the fact that political elites in Tanzania too often equated the success of the independence struggle with the take over and modification of established bureaucratic institutions. (Saul, 1973:267).

Regardless of the accuracy of such criticism in newly independent states, examples of rapid administrative reorganization were not unknown during the colonial period. One example of administrative uncertainty can be seen in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana) between 1945 and 1966. There, colonial officials attached great importance to administrative reorganization, particularly in the decision to create the office of Divisional Commissioner in the large but sparsely populated territory. The decision to reorganize the Bechuanaland administration, while at the same time ignoring the larger questions of local government for the territory (let alone the ultimate issues of political and economic development), suggests that administrative reorganization may have been a substitute for a more substantive policy in the first decade of the post-war period. Administrative policy must be seen within the context of the political and economic vacuum which existed in Bechuanaland during the 1950s, a vacuum which was as frustrating to the territory's colonial leaders as it was to its emerging political leadership.

Political Uncertainty and Economic Neglect

With the end of the Second World War, many colonial officials in Africa thought that their territories would return to the sleepy existence which for many British and French outposts was so characteristic of the inter-war period. A colonial return to normalcy seemed to be the order of the day. However, as P.C. Lloyd has noted, this was not to be. For many African states, the Second World War was "the turning point in the colonial experience" (Lloyd, 1969:83).

Not only did many nationalist movements have their origins in the immediate post-war period, but, particularly in British Africa, the post-war period saw "a radical restructuring of the economy" (Crowder, 1968:492). The British Colonial Development and Welfare Fund began to provide a much needed economic stimulus throughout most of the continent. The British Colonial Development Fund after the war was twelve times that of the equivalent pre-war scheme.

For a few of Britain's possessions, however, the hoped-for expansion of economic assistance was not forthcoming. In the High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland, the existing political realities in the region precluded any expansion of the economy through British economic assistance.

Until 1962, neither colonial administrators in Southern Africa, nor Whitehall had much idea of the future of the Bechuanaland Protectorate or the High Commission Territories. For much of the 1950s the most likely scenario remained eventual transfer to South Africa (Hyam, 1972). In addition, Bechuanaland suffered from the political fallout which resulted from the banishment of the future President of Botswana, Seretse Khama after his marriage to Ruth Williams and his subsequent feud with his uncle, Tshekedi Khama.

Until 1961, the colonial government, refused to accede to the demands of traditional leaders that a legislative council be framed, in spite of the fact that legislative councils had long been established in Britain's colonial territories to the north. Since, "the transfer question was still not finally settled... South Africa would have been dismayed by the increased power and influence this would give to the African leaders in Bechuanaland" (Colecough and McCarthy, 1980:27).

It was not until 1959 that the beginnings of a policy of political development could be discerned in Bechuana-

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land, with the appointment that year of Sir John Maud as High Commissioner in Pretoria. With the creation of a Legislative Council in 1961, and an Executive Council in 1962, a first major and irreversible step had been taken toward political independence for Botswana.

If the 1950s were characterized by political uncertainty even more so the period was one of economic neglect Britain, "having reluctantly assumed responsibility for the High Commission territories . . . proceeded to neglect them totally for fifty years" (Halpern, 1965:108). When Britain established colonial rule in Bechuanaland in 1885:

... the High Commissioner had stated that Britain's intention with regard to the administration of Bechuanaland was to do as little as possible. Throughout most of the following eighty years of British rule this promise was kept — so much that at independence, Botswana was worse off in terms of both social and directly productive infrastructure than any other ex-British territory in Africa. . . (and) in the mid-1960s the per capital income of Botswana was one of the smallest in the world (Colclough and McCarthy, 1980:27—28).

Total government revenue in Bechuanaland in 1948 was under £5 million and British grants-in-aid between the years 1929 and 1951 totalled only £427,000. For colonial Botswana, the dry years of British colonial parsimony lasted almost literally until independence was at hand.

Throughout the colonial period, the bulk of Bechuanaland's revenue came from domestic sources. Almost all of her expenditure was accounted for by routine administrative functions and of this, well over a third of all expenditures went to the police force. Bechuanaland suffered from absurdly low levels of revenue, and lacked any consistent policy of internal development within the territory. Little to nothing was spent on the development of infrastructure in the territory and health, welfare and education were left almost entirely to the local missionary communities (Parson, 1977).

After World War II a trickle of development funds began to appear in Bechuanaland. By 1950s, the expenditure of British funds had increased to 105 000 (Hermans, 1974:93). However, limits placed upon the recurrent budget prevented any significant development expenditure. The period between 1955 and 1965 was a transitional one economically in that the colonial administration began to shift its economic activity, toward the type of intervention that was to be characteristic of the post-independence government. Between 1956 and 1967/68, British annual grants-in-aid rose from £140 000 to £8 564 000. By independence, British grants accounted for one third of the Botswana budget (Picard, 1977:340). Table 1 illustrates this increase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grant-In-Aid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956/1957</td>
<td>140 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957/1958</td>
<td>480 000</td>
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<td>1962/1963</td>
<td>1 680 000</td>
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<td>1963/1964</td>
<td>1 300 000</td>
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<td>1964/1965</td>
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<td>1965/1966</td>
<td>3 378 000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966/1967</td>
<td>4 700 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967/1968</td>
<td>8 564 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Includes grants for construction of new capital of Gaborone.

An examination of archival sources indicates that administrators in Bechuanaland were well aware of the economic and political changes occurring in other parts of the continent. In a clear reference to developments in West Africa in 1950, as well as to disturbances in the Protectorate, the minutes of a District Commissioner's conference noted, "This conference feels that in these days . . . the dignity, standing and authority of H.M.'s Government and institutions need every visible backing and sign of strength and permanence, among African peoples, who are being increasingly subjected to disruptive influences. . . ." Politically many felt that the Protectorate had only two choices in the early 1950s, either join the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland or join the Union of South Africa. As the then Resident Commissioner put it in 1953, "The political future of the Protectorate is out of (our) hands. Its only future is with the Union of South Africa." Administrative Concerns in the Post-War Period

There was a direct relationship in the late 1950s, between a political commitment to internal self-govern-

ment and independence, and Britain's economic commitment to the territories in terms of grants-in-aid. Prior to that time, political uncertainties limited the policy options available to the territory's colonial government. Yet the administration was not inactive during the decade after World War II. Indeed, the post-war period saw an increased concern for organisations matters and a flurry of administrative activity all out of proportion with the economic and political changes of the period. Thus the absence of political and economic activity may have influenced the variety of administrative reforms which were introduced between 1948 and 1960.

The colonial administrator in the 1950s was well aware of the lack of economic assistance to the Protectorate in comparison to British colonies further north. A colonial administrator who joined the Protectorate Administration in 1962 noted, "We were very conscious of this (the relative lack of funds) in comparison to other areas. We spent very little money then. There was virtually nothing for the district development programmes." Awareness of this lack of economic assist-

TABLE 1

Annual Payments of British Grant-In-Aid, 1956 to 1968

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<td>140 000</td>
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</tr>
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<td>8 564 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ance no doubt had an effect on administrative policy. In a period of economic paucity and political uncertainty, something needed to be done. Colonial administrators in Bechuanaland, in the absence of alternatives, focused on administrative reorganisation as a substitute for more substantive economic and political reforms.

The actual organisation of the Protectorate, both with regard to sub-divisions within the territory and in terms of lines of authority between the centre and the district, were particularly perplexing for Bechuanaland administrators and continues to pose a major problem in Botswana today. The problem was and is particularly acute because the territory to be administered has a very large land area combined with a very small population. In terms of land areas, the country is approximately 582,000 sq km, (Smit, 1970:11) an area just about the same size as the state of Texas in the United States.

In terms of population, however, the latest estimates place Botswana at slightly more than one million people. During most of the colonial period, the population was estimated at less that 300,000 people, though this was probably consistently underestimated. To further complicate the demographic picture, the populace is very unevenly distributed, with the bulk of the population living in the eastern part of the country within 130 kilometres of the Zimbabwe and South African borders. The population in the western part of the country is very scattered and it is in this part of the country that population estimates are most susceptible to error.

The South Africa High Commissioner and the Secretariat

Organisationally, because of the location and uncertain status of the Bechuanaland protectorate, it was not a totally separate administrative entity. Indeed administrators within the Protectorate were not completely comfortable with the status of Bechuanaland, or the location of its administrative centre. Its status as a High Commission Territory added a number of additional 'layers' to the system of communication and complicated decision-making at the Secretariat level in Mafeking.

The Resident Commissioner was treated in terms of authority as somewhere between a provincial officer and to some extent on the status of the Commissioner in 1933) were expected to keep watch from Mafeking, outside of the territory, a source of dissatisfaction for both the Secretariat and Pretoria. This was not to change, moreover, until just before independence. The physical location of the Imperial Reserve in Mafeking served to exacerbate the isolation of the Secretariat from the district administration. Prior to 1900, two Assistant Commissioners, resident in the territory, divided the eastern part of the country into Northern and Southern divisions and the senior administrative officers assigned to these positions were formally responsible for the other Resident Magistrates under their jurisdiction. In practice this arrangement never worked out and the two divisions were abolished early in the twentieth century.

By the early 1920s, a more informal system had developed in which the five senior officers, with the status of full Resident Magistrate (renamed District Commissioner in 1933) were expected to keep watch over their less experienced colleagues. The system provided for maximum autonomy. Normally, the provision was made that an officer in charge of a district would communicate directly with the Secretariat in Mafeking, while officers assigned to supervised sub-districts would correspond u.f.s. his Resident Magistrate. The system was flexible and the method of correspondence depended to some extent on the judgment of the Secretariat as to the competence of the officer and to some extent on the status of the sub-district, a situation which could change over time.

The District Structure

The Protectorate was divided into districts according to a number of criteria. Table 2 shows the district population and area figures in 1947. Two basic principles were followed. All areas with large blocks of European farms or other European settlement formed separate districts, and all Setswana-speaking tribal reserves, no matter what the size of the tribe, had a separate district administration. Some districts were very large in area but with very few people. This was the case especially

the three territories, and much of what was sent to the High Commissioner was routinely approved. Proclamations were normally drafted by the Resident Commissioner and the Secretariat in the territory which would be recipient of new legislation. A survey of Dominions Office and Secretariat files would indicate that the Pretoria High Commission's main input into the decision-making process was its power to negate policy. However, this veto power was seldom used because of the system of prior consultation between the three Secretariats and Pretoria. It was up to Pretoria to consult with the Dominions Office, whenever that was considered necessary, and the Dominions Office was often kept in the picture with copies of important correspondence. The existence of the High Commissioner's Office meant that five layers of bureaucracy existed between the district officer in the field and the Dominions Office in London and created a communication system that was much more cumbersome than other British colonies with a similar size administrative cadre and population.

From the earliest period of British rule in Bechuanaland, the Resident Commissioner was stationed in Mafeking, outside of the territory, a source of dissatisfaction for both the Secretariat and Pretoria. This was not to change, moreover, until just before independence. The physical location of the Imperial Reserve in Mafeking served to exacerbate the isolation of the Secretariat from the district administration. Prior to 1900, two Assistant Commissioners, resident in the territory, divided the eastern part of the country into Northern and Southern divisions and the senior administrative officers assigned to these positions were formally responsible for the other Resident Magistrates under their jurisdiction. In practice this arrangement never worked out and the two divisions were abolished early in the twentieth century.

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with the Western Territories in the Kalahari, Kgalagadi, and Ghanzi. Other districts were land shy. A small district like the Bakgatla Reserve contained 10% of the population, and less that 5% of the land. The largest district was the Bamangwato Reserve with 18% of the land area but a third of the population.

**TABLE 2**

Bechuanaland: District Population and Area, 1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Area (in sq.mi.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chobe</td>
<td>5 159</td>
<td>37 850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francistown</td>
<td>17 707</td>
<td>2 074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaberones</td>
<td>12 312</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanzi</td>
<td>5 177</td>
<td>69 625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kgalagadi</td>
<td>7 145</td>
<td>59 850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kweneng</td>
<td>40 126</td>
<td>15 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobatsi</td>
<td>8 363</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kgaleng</td>
<td>20 207</td>
<td>3 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngamiland</td>
<td>38 859</td>
<td>34 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngwaketse</td>
<td>38 794</td>
<td>9 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngwato</td>
<td>101 647</td>
<td>42 080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuli Block</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>1 930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>296 310</td>
<td>231 805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The administrative cadre was very sparsely distributed over such a large area. Table 3 shows the districts and the district establishment as it existed in 1935. Two tribal reserves, the Ngamiland and Ngwato districts, generally had substantive District Commissioners, as did the three centres of European settlement: Gaberones, Francistown, and Lobatsi. The District Commissioners in the three European areas were assumed to be responsible for the Assistant District Officers in adjacent tribal reserves. Thus the D.C. in Gaberones would be responsible for the supervision of the Bakwena and Bakgatla Reserves.

**Organisational Problems in the District**

By the end of the 1940s, the Secretariat began to perceive communications problems between the centre and the district. Meetings which had attempted to include all administrative personnel in the districts became too unwieldy as the size of the district staff increased. Increasingly the Government Secretary's staff were being swamped with paper. These two problems plus the increase in the size of the administrative cadre led Mafeking to look for means to streamline communications and possibly screen them as well. Concerned with excessive centralisation, Mafeking began to look again for a mediating actor between the Secretariat and the district administration.

With the end of World War II, administrators began to raise questions about existing administrative practices within the Protectorate. In 1946, questions

**TABLE 3**

1936 District Administration Cadre: Bechuanaland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Resident Magistrate</th>
<th>Assistant Resident Magistrate</th>
<th>Clerk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngamiland</td>
<td>Maun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngwato Reserve</td>
<td>Serowe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuli Block</td>
<td>Seleka</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tati</td>
<td>Francistown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaberones</td>
<td>Gaberones</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakgatla Reserve</td>
<td>Mochudi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakwena Reserve</td>
<td>Molepolole</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobatsi Block &amp; Baralong Farms</td>
<td>Lobatse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangwaketse</td>
<td>Kanye</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Kgalagadi</td>
<td>Ghanzi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Kgalagadi</td>
<td>Lehututu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chobe</td>
<td>Kasane</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total in Post</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorized</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorized Administrative Cadre</td>
<td>n=21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Total in District</td>
<td>n=22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: C.F. Rey, Memorandum on District Administration, 16 October 1935, in Dominions Office file D.O. 35/379/x/6512.
focused on the role of the Resident Commissioner. "The status and obligations of the Resident Commissioner," the High Commissioner responded, are "more akin to those of an officer administering the Government of a territory...rather than to those of a Provincial Commissioner or Head of a Department." However, Resident Commissioners did not have access to the highest levels of the Dominions Office, and sometimes found that their letters were not being brought to the attention of the High Commissioner or the Administrative Secretary in Pretoria. As Forsyth Thompson, then Resident Commissioner in the Bechuanaland Protectorate put it, "I don't want to appear superior but I think there are limits to the amount which the affairs of a Resident Commissioner should be scrutinized and discussed by clerks in the Treasury and Audit Department..."12

Communication patterns between the Secretariat and the districts also needed clarification and streamlining. A circular memorandum in 1946 established new standing instructions on methods of conducting official correspondence.13 The circular, largely concerned with the amount of correspondence to the Government Secretary, attempted to create guidelines limiting some unnecessary correspondence with the Secretariat. Correspondence should be between the district administration and the departments.

**The Divisional Commissioner**

The creation of the position of Divisional Commissioner seems to have been a symptomatic response to a substantive problem. Political events connected with the secession crisis in the Bamangwato District forced the Secretariat to make some emergency administrative changes.

In 1948, Seretse Khama, the heir designate to the Chiefship of the Bamangwato, had announced that he was about to marry an English woman, Ruth Williams, against the wishes of his uncle, Tshekedi, the Bamangwato regent. The fact that the marriage crossed the colour barrier ruffled the feelings of many whites in South Africa. After Seretse's marriage, he returned to Bechuanaland to try to claim the Chiefship. However, shortly after his return he was both declared a prohibited immigrant in South Africa, and banished by the British government from the Protectorate, creating a political crisis in the Bamangwato Reserve (Dale, 1972:113). As the political situation deteriorated, Mafeking decided that a senior officer was needed to co-ordinate government policy within the Protectorate. W.F. MacKenzie, who had spent many years as a District Officer in BechuanaLand, had just been promoted to Assistant Resident Commissioner in Swaziland. MacKenzie returned to Bechuanaland as Officer in Charge in Serowe with the rank of Assistant Resident Commissioner. He remained in Serowe through the height of the crisis and his apparently successful handling of the situation set the precedent for the administrative changes which took place in 1951.

The Secretariat decided in September of 1951 to create what were at first called "Officers-in-Charge" in the northern and southern parts of the country. According to the circular memorandum which announced this decision:

These Officers will serve as a link between the Resident Commissioner and other officers in their areas, and while it is not proposed that the full duties of a Provincial Commissioner in a large colony should be imposed upon them, nor that they should be surrounded by a Provincial Secretariat, it is nevertheless intended that they should visit District Commissioners in their areas periodically to discuss current problems, to give advice, and to issue such directions as they may consider necessary.14

With regard to the lines of communication, the circular made it quite clear that "except in emergencies Heads of Departments and District Commissioners should not put up proposals on matters of policy to the Secretariat affecting either the Northern or Southern Protectorate without first consulting the Officer-in-charge concerned" (in 1952, they came to be called Divisional Commissioners) whose views should be recorded when any recommendation is made."15

Two other changes were made in administrative routines in the early 1950s which affected the status of the individual District Officer. Administrative conferences, which had been limited to District Officers, were now opened on a regular basis to department heads. In addition, after 1953 they were restricted to officers in charge of a district and in practice, District Commissioners. Subordinate field officers were excluded. Secondly, District Commissioners were no longer required to attend sessions of the African Advisory Council but would be represented by the divisional Officer-in-charge and by the Secretariat. The reason given was, "the Protectorate having now been divided administratively in half, I think that the two officers-in-charge are more than capable of being able to discuss the affairs of all districts under their charge."16

The status of the District Officer was changing and his position vis-a-vis the Secretariat after 1951 was somewhat different from what it was before. There are a number of reasons for the change. First, the decision to shift to a system of divisions was based on what was perceived as the success of provincial administrations in other colonies. It was a 'half way' system as it was employed in Bechuanaland but it was based upon similar systems in East and West Africa. Secondly, it was felt that the Divisional Commissioner would provide a better facility for communication with departments in a large country. The division would partially solve the problem of noncontiguous departmental boundaries and the Divisional Commissioner could act as a liaison between the departments and the districts rather than have communication filtered through Mafeking. Finally, it might be speculated that attempts to bring the district administration more closely in line with that of the larger East and West African colonies was in part an attempt to compensate for the lack of economic development and the political uncertainties which faced the Protectorate.
The Failure of Administrative Reorganisation

The Divisional Commissioner, as he came to be called, was seen as a liaison officer, with special responsibility for large government projects. Divisional Commissioners were to frequently visit the districts under their jurisdiction to see that the District Officer was performing his job in a satisfactory manner, and to help him with any current problem. However, the arrangement was not entirely satisfactory to those who wanted a full devolution of authority to a "Provincial" administration. As W.F. MacKenzie, then Resident Commissioner (1953-1955), put it in a letter to his Basutoland counterpart, E.P. Arrowsmith:

We do not communicate with the District Commissioners through the officers-in-charge but on matters which we think are important, send them copies of the correspondence. In each case the officers-in-charge have a local district responsibility as well as a regional one but experience has proved that this arrangement is not entirely satisfactory. 17

Both politically and economically, the period from 1950 to 1955 was a difficult one for the Protectorate. Administrative reorganization was one way to respond to a situation of administrative uncertainty. Not only was such a response inexpensive, but it also could be implemented on the spot. As a method of solving a problem, its weakness seems clear, but as a pattern of administrative behaviour this response is not uncommon since it provides at least the illusion of movement. Beyond the practical questions of administration, changes in the pattern of communication and the establishment of "Provinces" were a reflection of a dissatisfaction with the administrative system's capacity to handle the political and economic tasks that it was faced with in the last decade and a half of colonial rule. The administration, by focusing on surface changes, failed to grapple with the more basic problems which faced the District Officer in the 1950s and which would continue to plague the inheritors of these posts after independence in 1966.

There was, however, another reason why the decision to move toward Divisions was made. One of the motivating forces for the creation of the three substantive posts at the staff grade (in addition to the two divisional commissioners a third superannuary post of equal rank was established in the Secretariat) was the perception that an outlet was needed for senior officers, giving them more possibility of promotion than would have been the case otherwise. A letter from the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State makes this clear:

Between the long scale and the posts of Resident Commissioner, the secretariat offers only six promotion posts... Not all officers are suited for secretariat work nor is it in any case desirable that for the purposes of promotion emphasis should be placed exclusively on secretariat ability. Senior, experienced field officers can play a very important part in guiding younger officers and in maintaining the morale of the Service as a whole... not all the administrative officers... are members of the Colonial Service who can look elsewhere for promotion and it is unfortunate that district officers, when in the past they have reached the stage at which their translation to the secretariat was no longer a possibility, should have been left in what might have been their most valuable years to do the rounds of district posts and, in the end, to moulder. 18

With regard to the three posts that were created at the divisional level in Bechuanaland, two of the positions were filled by local officers, the post of Divisional Commissioner-South and the superannuaries in the Secretariat. For the third position, the Divisional Commissioner-North, it was decided that someone from outside the territory was needed, since all of the senior local officials had been involved in the Bamangwato crisis and were tainted by it. J.F. Millard, an administrative officer in Tanganyika, was selected for this position. Between 1951 and 1961, when the posts were abolished, there were only five occupants of the position. During the period, divisional offices never really worked to the satisfaction of the role incumbents or the Secretariat.

Millard, the Divisional Commissioner-North, and Germond, the Divisional Commissioner-South, were both asked to evaluate the position in 1956. Germond criticized the position from the point of devolution of authority. He argued that the position failed to shift any of the burden of administration from the Secretariat to the Divisional Commissioners because "the delegation of authority was so niggardly that in essence it differed almost not at all from that already possessed by the district commissioners, and... secondly, because without delegation there can be no decentralization." 19

Millard pointed to the fact that in addition to his responsibilities as Divisional Commissioner, he had to perform the duties of District Commissioner, Francis-town since a Divisional Commissioner had to administer the district within which he was located.

Both of the Divisional Commissioners criticized the post because it did not constitute a full-fledged provincial administration but tried to be something that was halfway in between. Millard, the Divisional Commissioner-North, suggested in 1955 that the only real answer to the continuing administrative problems of the territory was a resident Provincial Commissioner in each half of the Territory shorn of any district responsibilities, capable of coordinating all efforts in his "province." Such an official would provide a leadership for the territory and "provide a focal point around which provincial local government could develop... I suggest that the provincial system which has proved so successful, and which is the basis of administration in practically every other colonial territory, should be adopted... within the Protectorate." 20

Germond, the Divisional Commissioner-South was even more critical. The present situation, with the absence of a clear cut delegation of powers, led to confusion, a duplication of work effort. To Germond:
The Secretariat is equally undecided in its approach. The Chiefs themselves are puzzled about the position because... they have come to realize that the divisional commissioners have no additional powers and that they are able to give them little more than they can expect from their own district commissioners.\(^{41}\)

In spite of the suggestion by the Divisional Commissioners that the Secretariat establish a full scale provincial administration in Bechuanaland, the Government Secretary stated firmly in 1956 that "We cannot afford to establish a full scale provincial set up nor does the country need it."\(^{22}\) Instead the Divisional Commissioner system limped along for another three years until 1958 when Millard resigned. Millard had been dissatisfied from the beginning with the authority of the Divisional Commissioner in part because he had expected that his position in Bechuanaland would be analogous to that of a Provincial Commissioner in Tanga nyika. (See Picard, 1977:176, 354-'364)

With Millard's resignation, the Secretariat began to dismantle the short-lived office and transfer some of its functions back to the districts. The D.C. in Serowe was assigned Acting Divisional Commissioner, and the duties formerly carried out by the Divisional Commissioner were divided by the Secretariat, the treasury and the District Officers involved. The shell of the office remained as a gazetted position until 1964 as an office which senior District Officers could aspire but which held more prestige than authority. With the dismantling of internal self-government and the ministerial system in 1964/65 the position was abolished.

**Local Administration in the 1950s**

Colonial administrators were as concerned with the future of tribal administration in the post-war period as they were with reorganization of the district administration. The political crisis involving Seretse Khama, his uncle Tshekedi Khama and the Bangwato District authorities effectively terminated the indirect rule experiment in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. One senior District Officer expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of the tribal administration in 1955:

(Developments in local administration have) merely had the unhappy effect of creating parallel forms of administration with the tribal organization on the one side and central Government on the other and so far all attempts to integrate the two have failed. In fact, the gulf which is fixed between Tribal Administration and Central Government widens daily. ... The present state of affairs is extremely unsatisfactory and can only result in increased suspicion and lack of cooperation with Government by all sections of the Community.\(^{23}\)

The difficulty with reorganization of the tribal administration was that unlike the district administration, administrative changes at the local level had implications for the political future of the country. Lack of local government reform between 1946 and 1964 illustrates the limits placed on administrative reorganization by the political uncertainties of the period.

**The Call for Reform**

In 1947, the then Secretary of State for Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, issued a circular memorandum calling for the rapid development of local government throughout Africa. The dispatch emphasized the need for an efficient and democratic system of local government. As Creech Jones put it:

I wish to emphasize the words efficient, democratic, and local. ... I use these words because they seem to me to contain the kernel of the whole matter; local because the system of government must be close to the common people and their problems, efficient because it must be capable of managing local services in a way which will help to raise the standard of living, and democratic because it must not only find a place for the growing class of educated men, but at the same time command the respect and support of the mass of the people (Quoted in Apter, 1967:236).

The circular had the effect of causing the concept of indirect rule to fall out of fashion throughout much of British Africa as colonial administrators scrambled to establish some form of elected council (See Robinson, 1950:12-15).

The effect of the circular was much less immediate in the High Commission Territories, however. Because of the uncertain status of Bechuanaland and the other High Commission Territories, both in terms of their relationship to the Colonial Office and with regard to the Union of South Africa, the 1947 memorandum was interpreted as being not immediately applicable to Britain's South African Territories.

Nonetheless, administrators, after 1950, grew increasingly dissatisfied with the system of tribal administration in the territory. Lord Hailey toured the High Commission Territories in 1950 and concluded that the tribal administration had failed to provide any mechanism for local level participation. In his discussion of tribal administration in Bechuanaland, Hailey raised the question of the extent to which:

... the present system of Native Administration provides a sufficient opportunity for the people at large to voice their own views, or makes an adequate contribution to the process of educating them in the responsibility for handling their own affairs (Hailey, 1959:328).

In surveying the alternatives Hailey took note of the possibility of the establishment of local councils at the village and sub-district level but described as "fantastic" any proposal for the establishment of councils separate from or outside of the tribal administration. The population of the Protectorate was "far removed from the stage in which any form of election to such councils is possible or desirable" (Hailey, 1959:329).
Local administration in the early 1950s was seen within the context of problems in Serowe. At the 1953 conference of administrative officers, the Serowe District Commissioner argued that the administration needed to modernize the tribal administration, but the idea of any kind of representative gatherings separate from the Kgotla (tribal meeting) was rejected. Any reforms would have to be made through and “by” the chiefs themselves, and the colonial officials would have to avoid any situation in which the chiefs saw the administration breaking down tribal traditions. Left unresolved was the speed with which change would have to take place. One group of District Commissioners felt that the policy of the administration should be to move as slowly as possible, letting the chiefs adjust to change naturally, while a second group argued that change would have to come quickly in order to preserve any elements of the traditional system.

Modification of the Tribal Administration

The 1953 administration conference set the pattern for local government policy throughout the 1950s. Reform, until just before independence, continued to be put within the context of tribal administration. The goal would be to broaden the sub-base of the chief’s representatives and allow them to control expenditures on certain minor local projects (See Picard, 1977:170-174). This would not threaten authority at the tribal level. The timidity of the colonial administration can be explained in part by their fear of a replication of the events that followed the 1934 Native Administration Proclamations, that is, a vigorous resistance of government policy by the senior chiefs of the territory.

In June of 1954, a circular memorandum was sent to all District Commissioners indicating “that Government should initiate and encourage development toward a more representative form of government in tribal areas taking care to avoid measures that might maim the chieftainship.” The circular made it clear that reforms would not include the introduction of tribal councils at the Native Authority level because “...it will be remembered that the 1934 Native Administration Proclamation foundered because it imposed on the chief an obligation to designate a council and not to act independently of it.” Instead, it was envisioned by the Secretariat that councils should first develop at the Subordinate “Native Authority” level and merely request that the chiefs appoint out of the Kgotla, a more formal council which would be purely advisory.

The evolution toward sub-district councils would come about in two stages. The first step would be a meeting of administrative officers to gain general agreement on major objectives, while “the the second step is to persuade a committee composed largely of Africans to adopt those views themselves insofar as they are acceptable to them.”

The Government Secretary, invited district level administrators to comment on the governmental proposals. An examination of some of these commentaries not only grants a colonial perspective on the issue of local government, some ten years before independence but demonstrates in what low esteem the tribal administration was held in 1954, some twenty years after indirect rule was first introduced into the territory. A memorandum prepared by one administrator, entitled “Constitutional Reform — The BechuanaLand Protectorate” gives vent to administrative frustration over the tribal administration and also reflects the attitudes of at least some colonial administrators on the nature of the society within which they worked. Describing the tribal administration as both isolated and hostile to British rule, the memo goes on to argue:

...the native administrators as at present...do not work. They are regarded as an imposition of the central government and are not regarded as belonging to the people. They are incompatible with the traditional system of tribal administration which the backwardness and hostility preserve. (Government of BechuanaLand, n.d./a)

And yet that same observer rejected any motion of a district council system of local administration. “I can see,” the district memo went on, “no point in setting up any sort of district or tribal councils so long as it is possible for any assemblage (referring to the Kgotla) of recalcitrant, aged and hateful savages...to veto every wise decision that the younger and even more reasonable elders may make.” Another observer of tribal administration in describing what he felt was the sound state of chieftainship” in BechuanaLand suggested that, “we as a government must bear some responsibility for the deterioration of the Bechuana chieftainship.” (Government of BechuanaLand, n.d./a)

The documentary evidence suggest that by the mid-1950s British administrators themselves had come to the conclusion that the indirect rule scheme had been an abject failure. Yet, to a greater extent than was the case in most of British Africa at that time, in any attempt at reform of the local administration “the institution of the Chieftainship should be upheld.”

What was seen by administrators as the first stage of a multi-stage reform of the tribal administration focused on the decision to broaden the sub-base of the chief’s representatives and to allow them to control expenditure on certain minor local projects. Rather than local councils, one administrator suggested that sub-districts should develop what would be called “Development or Finance Committees” which would have the authority to allocate a certain amount of money within specific areas under the overall supervision of the Native Authority. This would avoid the creation of any suspicion on the part of the chiefs and they would be less likely to be in opposition to the scheme. (Griffiths, 1971:130-131)

The second stage of local government reform was to broaden the tribal administration by increasing the authority of the Tribal Councils that were slowly developing at the district level. Immediate change would be quite limited and government in 1955 merely suggested that the chief might be encouraged to set up a more formal general council which would be purely
advisory. Policy makers agreed that it was necessary to avoid any whittling down of the position of the chief both because of the symbolic significance of the office among the bulk of the population and the generally stabilizing effect the agency of rule by the chiefs had on the administration of the district. According to M.R.B. Williams, later to become architect of Botswana’s system of local government, “Up until the late 1950s, as a result of the legacy of Indirect Rule, the district administration continued to see government administration through the chief, and the chief’s views were seen as reflective of the needs of the area.”

In 1955, a committee of the African Advisory Council was formed to study the question of the establishment of local “sub-district” councils with the hope that these would evolve “naturally” from the chiefs as a result of their deliberations. A major concession to chiefly autonomy was that conditions would vary from district to district on the functions and membership of each council and D.C.s were asked to draw up plans on the basis of conditions in each area which would then be presented to the chief for approval. By 1957, at least on paper, sub-councils were established in most districts.

The administration’s attempt at evolutionary reform of local government was embodied in the Local Councils Proclamation of 1957 (Tordoff, 1973:174). The Proclamation authorized the establishment of tribal councils at the district level, with an executive committee to assist the chief. The executive committee consisted of members selected indirectly through the Kgotla and a number of the chief’s nominees. The major effect of the Proclamation was to shift the emphasis of the tribal administration “from Chief as ‘sole native authority’ to Chief-in-Council”.

Movement toward representative government at the district level was rather slow considering the fact that in 1957 Ghana was already an independent state.

Even these limited changes met with resistance from some of the senior chiefs in the Protectorate. The period from 1954—1957, in part because of the Serowe crisis, was a period of tension between the tribal administration on the one hand and both Mafeking and the Commonwealth Relations Office on the other. Several chiefs had resisted the 1954 initiatives, limited though they were. Though London’s instructions on British resistance) of Tribal Secretary to the Bamangwato Tribal Council. From this point Tshekedi was eager to strengthen the administrative and political capability of the Tribal Council, which he may have viewed as a base from which to assume territorial political office as constitutional developments occurred. While Tshekedi’s death in 1959 prevented this, his change of position on the issue of Councils ended effective resistance to local government reform and paved the way for more substantive reforms in the 1960s.

Administrative thinking on local government changed very little, very late. The 1957 Proclamation itself was only an enabling act which was to be gradually put into force by the District Commissioners after negotiation with the chiefs in each of the eight major tribal areas. The memory of the resistance to the mid-1930s proposals continued to haunt the administration. As J.E.S. Griffiths has put it:

Reform of the old tribal system was slow and gradual... indeed until the early sixties there was little real change. Tribal Administration remained as the personal rule by the chief who... made his own decisions in matters of administration. He was closely associated in this attitude with the central government which acted to a great extent through the District Commissioner (Griffiths, 1971:131).

The decision to shift from a tribal administration to an elective council system in the early 1960s came about because the tribal administration “was... overtaken by Constitutional changes at (the) national level.” The sequence of events was thus reversed from the normal pattern of much of British Colonial Africa (Vengroff, 1972:63).

The Move Toward Elected Councils

If a major change occurred on the part of the colonial administration with regard to local administration, it coincided with the 1959 appointment of Sir John Maud as High Commissioner and Peter Fawcus as Resident Commissioner. Both were committed to the constitutional development of the territories and with this commitment to ultimate self-government Fawcus and Maud, in collaboration with the Bechuanaland Democratic Party began to move the territory toward a British style system of local government.

It was not until 1963, however, that a local government committee of the Legislative Council was set up to make recommendations on the improvement of the structure of local government. The Committee met with the assumption that the modernisation of local government would necessitate the development of a system which did not depend upon the personality and office of the chief, and the Committee recommended that a system of District Councils be set up with a majority of elected members to provide certain services which would be financed from local revenue.
In the early 1960s when it was concluded that independence was near, colonial administrators wrote off to Kenya and Tanganyika for their programmes of local government reform. These formed the basis of the Legislative Council discussions in 1963 and 1964. Much of the tribal administration continued to oppose elected local government as late as 1964. As one colonial observer, very close to the scene commented, “Politically many of the chiefs were far to the right of the Europeans. They hated any new developments. They had old attitudes, craved despotic powers and harkened back to the Chamberlain agreements as a justification for their position.”

Government proposals on District Councils were given preliminary approval in 1964 by the Legeo, and following somewhat grudging non-binding consideration by the newly established House of Chiefs, the Local Government (District Councils) Law was approved in 1965. As one of the architects of the Local Government Law put it, “Operating in a newly centralized administrative system (the Ministry of Local Government and Lands) we were given 15 months to change the whole system of local government.” The rapidity of events came close to overwhelming colonial administrators in the final few years and even months of British rule.

The local government law established a system of nine British style local governments which were to replace tribal councils as the basic unit of local government. Chiefs were left with only their judicial and some ceremonial functions along with largely symbolic representation in a separate body from the legislative assembly. Elections for District Councils were held at the same time as Parliamentary elections in March of 1965, and the new councils officially came into existence on July, 1, 1966, only three months before independence. The newly established councils were thus clearly a phenomenon of the post-colonial period.

Conclusion

The uncertainties which Britain faced in Southern Africa after 1945 may have led British administrators to focus on administrative reorganisation in order to solidify colonial control over the territory at a time when Britain’s political position in the Southern African region was slipping, both because of the rising tide of African nationalism and because of the increasing intransigence of the white minority regimes of the south. Britain’s position in Bechuanaland and the other High Commission Territories was precarious for much of the post-war period, her economic and manpower resources in the territories were slim and colonial officers could not have been unaware of events in West and East Africa.

The political and economic vacuum which plagued Bechuanaland limited the parameters within which colonial administrators were able to operate. Economic stagnation was to a large extent determined by the political uncertainties of the region. These political uncertainties and the absence of a strong nationalist movement led the colonial government to place much of its emphasis on changes in the district and local administration without addressing thorny political questions. The colonial government in the 1950s centered its activity on two major areas: the introduction of the position of Divisional Commissioner into the district administration and the commitment to reform of the local administration within the context of tribal authorities. Both of these efforts were ultimately doomed to failure.

The abandonment of the Divisional Administration and the failure to introduce elected local government to the territory meant that the district administration’s relationship to Mafeking was very little changed on the eve of independence from what it had been throughout the colonial period. To a large extent the linkage between the district and the central administration remained direct, and the District Officer as the supervising agent to the tribal administration had a direct connection and indeed was a part of the policy making process within the territory. It was only in the aftermath of independence that the position of the District Commissioner began to change. After independence, no longer did the District Officer correspond directly to the administrative head of the country. Rather, the district administration was placed under a Ministry of Local Government and Lands which was set up to supervise District Councils. Under the new arrangement the District Officer no longer possessed a direct link to the effective head of government as was the case during the colonial period. The new post-colonial government in Botswana was to inherit many of the administrative problems which were characteristic of the colonial period: the small population of the country spread over a large land area, an uneven distribution of land and extreme differences in the size of districts, and the problems of communication from district to the centre. Each of the concerns remain important in Botswana today. After 1966 new attempts would be made to modify communication patterns between the centre and the periphery and a multitude of new administrative structures would be introduced to improve the administrative process at the local level.

Reorganisation in a vacuum, however, as this study has tried to indicate, tends to have little chance of improving the administrative process. In Bechuanaland after World War II, the scarcity of economic resources and the absence of political change meant that administrators focused on organisational questions in an attempt to solve problems. These organisational responses might be seen as a substitute for a lack of available resources to deal with political change and economic stagnation in post-war Bechuanaland. The results of organisational change in the Protectorate were less than satisfactory to colonial policy makers in Mafeking and Pretoria. The lessons of this would seem clear for policy makers in the post-colonial period. Organisational change, without substantive political or economic goals, will be unlikely to contribute much to the well being of the country. Further, when the political balance within the country is tenuous, as is often the case in newly independence states, precipitous administrative changes may in fact contribute to
political instability which would in turn further weaken overstretched administrative capabilities.

NOTES
1. By 1952/53 the reserves had grown to 19 000.
2. Secretarial file, National Archives, Gaborone, Botswana, S. 331/8. All subsequent references will be to file number only.
5. Oral Interview, David Finlay, former District Commissioner, June 6, 1975.
7. The 1946 census indicated a population of 296 310.
8. Located 12 miles south of the Bechuanaland border in the Northern Cape. This factor further complicated the administrative process.
10. Anthony Sillery, Resident Commissioner, Minute, 10 September 1949, S.517/1/1.
12. Letter from A.D. Forsyth-Thompson, Resident Commissioner, Bechuanaland Protectorate to Sir Evelyn Baring, 5 May 1946.
19. Memorandum, J.D.A. Germond to the Government Secretary, 14 July 1956, S.365/6.
25. Circular Memorandum No. 58, 25 June 1954. Note: This document and others referred to below which have no archival number were made available to the author from personal archives by a number of former Bechuanaland administrative officers during the course of research carried out in London in June and August of 1979.
26. The above quotes are all from Circular Memorandum No. 58 of 1954.
29. Prepared for the 1954 Administrative Conference. This proposal might be seen as the origin of what later came to be Village Development Committees (V.D.C.s) and District Development Committees (D.D.C.s) in the post-colonial period.
32. In Tanganyika, for example, local governments were established by the Local Government Ordinance of 1953, some eight years before independence and prior to the time the ultimate political evolution of the territory had been determined.
33. S.596/7—Administrative Conference, 1963. The Administration's major concern was the relationship between the new councils and the tribal administration, and for this reason it was decided that the relationship between the two had to be strictly defined by law. See also Griffiths, 1971:131—132.
34. M.R.B. Williams, Oral Interview, August 10, 1979. Williams was the first Permanent Secretary in the newly established Ministry of Local Government.
35. S.596/17.

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