

By Dr. Fako Likoti  
Political Scientist and Governance Analyst

### **BASOTHO ACTION PARTY (BAP) FLAWED PERCEPTION ON THE ROLE OF THE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT UNDER THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM**

Despite BAP being led by academics of great repute and being advised by people of good standing, it has become a major challenge in our democracy by the manner the party recently interpreted the roles of its parliamentary caucus and the Speaker of parliament under the Westminster system. The party has been on the news lately for wrong reasons, namely, defining erroneously the functions of a parliamentary caucus and the role of the Speaker of parliament. The Leadership of BAP has been promoting an incorrect narrative in the media about its parliamentary caucus and the Speaker of parliament regarding, what it says, is the party preferred composition of its parliamentary caucus. Political parties must know that once they are in parliament, their members are beyond the executive reach.

In a Mixed Member Proportional Representation system (MMP) such as ours, the party cannot withdraw its member in parliament once such Member has been sworn in as an MP. This explanation will become clear in the next article. What is important to note is that, parliamentary structures such as caucus and Speaker belong to parliament not outside it. Communication in parliament also follows certain governance procedures that political parties must adhere to.

While Lesotho is a constitutional democracy and has adopted the Westminster system since gaining independence in 1966, its Parliament continues to face significant challenges in operationalizing the norms and values embedded in that system. Since the restoration of democratic rule in 1993, a misguided belief has taken root: that political party executives can directly communicate with the Speaker of Parliament regarding the roles of Members of Parliament (MPs) and even attempt to dictate the composition and responsibilities of parliamentary caucuses.

It is imperative to clarify that, once elected, MPs are not addressed or treated as representatives of their individual political parties, but as Honourable Members of Parliament. The Leader of the second-largest party is officially recognized as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, while the rest are addressed simply as Honourable Members. Communication with the Speaker of Parliament is strictly through parliamentary caucuses, not through the executive structures of political parties.

In established Westminster systems such as those in Canada and the United Kingdom, a caucus refers to all members of a political party within Parliament, including senators or members of a provincial legislature. These members elect among themselves a caucus chair who presides over their internal meetings. This structure functions entirely within the confines of Parliament—it is not external to it.

**BAP JOINING THE GOVERNING COALITION**

After 2022 elections in Lesotho, BAP gained a commendable six PR seats in parliament under the current MMP system. BAP as a new party that fragmented from the then mighty All Basotho Convention (ABC), its performance was stunning and surprised many political analysts. After joining parliament, BAP like most parties in parliament, under the Speaker's guidelines and guidance, elected its first parliamentary caucus.

Few months after joining parliament, the party caucuse wrote to the Speaker of parliament notifying him about its new status, that of joining the ruling coalition government. It was the parliamentary caucuse of BAP that wrote to the speaker of parliament NOT the BAP as a political party. In fact, it would be wrong for BAP to communicate with the Parliamentary Speaker as a party not as a caucus under the current Westminster system Lesotho if following.

During the ninth, tenth, and current eleventh parliaments of Lesotho, political party executives have repeatedly overstepped their bounds by writing to the Speaker to demand the expulsion of certain MPs—particularly those appointed through proportional representation. In some instances, they have sought to alter the composition of parliamentary caucuses altogether.

#### BAP FLAWED MISCONCEPTION OF CAUCUSE UNDER WESTMINSTER SYSTEM

Recently BAP, through its Leadership wrote to the Speaker of parliament not once by numerous times using this unparliamentarily communication. Instead of BAP being an exemplary in communicating with the speaker, it resorted to dictating to the speaker about who to remove from its caucuse and who should be given a certain portfolio. This is not acceptable under the Westminster system for a party to dictate to the Speaker as BAP appears to be doing.

Currently, the party has gone at length to inform the speaker as to who should lead its caucuse and whom the party has fired and suspended. This form of communication, which is clearly outside parliamentary norms, has raised alarm among political scientists across the Southern African region.

These practices in Lesotho parliament persist despite clear principle that once MPs are sworn into office, they become accountable to Parliament and subject to the authority of the caucus they help constitute—not to the external leadership of their political parties. These attempts by party executives to exert undue influence over Parliament not only undermine the independence of the legislative arm but also risk discrediting Lesotho's democratic credentials both locally and internationally.

The role of caucuses within the Westminster system cannot be overstated. A caucus acts as the principal internal mechanism for coordination, discussion, and strategic planning among parliamentarians of the same political party. It provides a forum for private deliberation on policy, legislative strategy, and party positions, and serves as a means of enforcing party discipline. In some jurisdictions, caucuses are also responsible for selecting

Cabinet members, assigning committee roles, and even determining leadership positions within the party.

Moreover, caucuses serve as a bridge between backbenchers, the Cabinet, and the Speaker of Parliament. They are essential to the internal functioning of Parliament, enabling robust debate and policy refinement while upholding the principle of party unity where necessary. In opposition, caucuses formulate alternative policies and strategies to hold the government to account.

It is, therefore, entirely unparliamentary and constitutionally improper for any political party executive to order the Speaker of Parliament to remove, fire, or expel a member from a recognized parliamentary caucus. Only the caucus, constituted within Parliament and recognized by the Speaker, has such authority. Party structures outside Parliament have no such mandate. This flawed practice by some political parties must be arrested before it distorts our democracy.

Given these developments, the Lesotho Parliament must take proactive steps to engage local experts and civic educators to sensitize political parties on the foundational principles of the Westminster parliamentary model. Respect for these structures is not only essential for maintaining legislative independence but also for preserving the integrity and functionality of our democracy.

Author Bio: Dr. Fako Likoti is a political scientist and governance analyst with extensive experience in parliamentary systems and political development in Southern Africa.