

BLACK SASH NATIONAL CONFERENCE
March 12 -15 1987
Cape Town .

Black Sash Eastcape
'Operation Oliekol': Removals and
Orderly Urbanisation in the P.E./Uitenhage areas

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Note: The first section of the paper is an overview of the implementation and threatened implementation of orderly urbanisation in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage, and the second section outlines briefly the establishment of a Port Elizabeth Anti-Removals Committee (PARC).

Introduction

The general developments in the Eastern Cape, focusing on political organisation, state responses and economic recession are documented in Cherryl Walker's Albany Black Sash researcher's report and in Judy Chalmers' Eastcape Black Sash COPE field worker's report. These reports indicate both the highly developed nature of township-based organisation in the Eastern Cape, as well as the correspondingly powerful state repressive machinery to crush resistance and facilitate the implementation of the so-called reform package. Central to this policy is the devolution of power to local (albeit discredited) authorities to bring about 'orderly urbanisation' at the local level. The Ibhayi Town Council has another name for 'orderly urbanisation': "an oliokol approach you drop a drop of oil here, and spread it out" (referring to the intention to move systematically from one area to the next, "stabilising and neutralising", creating "sterilised" areas.)

The Direction of Orderly Urbanisation in the P.E./Uitenhage area.

Some communities in the P.E./Uitenhage areas have lived with piece-meal removals and threats of forced mass removals for a long time - in the case of Langa (Uitenhage) and Walmer (P.E.) for decades. However, before the development of the "receptor" townships of Kwanobuhle (Uitenhage) and Motherwell (P.E.), and until the tragic removal of Langa to Kwanobuhle last year, no mass removals had been enforced in the area before.

Now, with that community licking its wounds, other communities with previous threats of removal, rumours of removal or even reprieves from removal, are taking more seriously than ever the Government's determination to proceed with its policy of orderly urbanisation at all costs. Although organisationally strong to an almost legendary degree, the main northern township areas of Port Elizabeth had, until the threatened removal of Red Location (a part of New Brighton), never had to organise specifically around the issue of forced removal. The two other township areas that have faced this threat directly, Langa and Walmer, are separated from the main township clusters, and are both situated near white residential areas. In Uitenhage, the right-wing interests of the encroaching white suburb of Leyville had a direct influence in bringing about the removal, while Walmer Township, a traditional PFP constituency in P.E., has been granted a reprieve.

Langa

In many respects, the residents of Langa have experienced the full

gamut of popular resistance and state repression with its concomitant social tensions, all of which have had a bearing on the resistance to the removal and the removal itself: the growth of broad-based community and worker organisations, the "workerist-populist"-type tensions in the two main COSATU unions spilling over into community politics, the development of alternative local structures in the form of street and area committees, the effective destruction of the local community council; and state responses: the Langa massacre of March 1985, the threatened removal and its eventual implementation, the large-scale detention and harassment of leaders and activists, and, most recently this year, the experience of vigilanteism in the "receptor" township of Kwanobuhle.

The background to the removal, the removal itself and the recent vigilante action have all been well documented in other sources¹ and here it will be considered sufficient to record that one month into the State of Emergency on 14 July 1986, the removals began, and by October Langa was completely destroyed. 30 - 40 000 residents were relocated in a crude tent town in Kwanobuhle, derisively referred to as "Tjoksville" (place of the trampled) locally, where conditions are appalling - four deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning occurred in the early stages of the relocation, and in every respect the conditions are worse than in Langa - distance from town, schools and hospital, waste disposal, health, housing and community cohesiveness. On 12 June members of the Langa Co-ordinating Committee, which represented the residents in their refusal to move, had either been detained or had gone into hiding. On 29 July, the Port Elizabeth Supreme Court, in response to an application brought by the Kwanobuhle Town Council, declared all structures between 4th and 9th Avenues illegal, two weeks AFTER the removals had already begun. The removals were effected by the use of demoralising intimidation tactics, with the show and threat of force as a crude reminder to would-be resisters. Sash field worker, Judy Chalmers recorded, "It would take more than ordinary courage to withstand that midnight knock on the door". The most bizarre official tactic was the insistence, with the monotonous regularity of a stuck record, by the Kwanobuhle Town Council Administrator, that the removals were 'voluntary', and an affidavit to this effect was produced by the Town Council Administrator in response to an urgent Supreme Court interdict lodged by four Langa residents seeking to restrain the Council from demolishing their shacks.

note1 See Sue Lund, 'The Battle for Kabah. Orderly Urbanisation and Control', South African Labour Bulletin, Vol 11 No 8 (Sept-Oct 1986); Grahamstown Rural Committee, G.R.C. Newsletter No4 (Summer 1986); Judy Chalmers, 'Langa Removal', Eastcape Black Sash COPE report, Port Elizabeth 1986; Planact, 'Langa. The Case for Upgrade', Johannesburg, 1986; Mandla Mashego, Planact, 'Caught in the web of orderly urbanisation - Forced Removals in Langa', Johannesburg 1985; Rory Riordan, ORSA, 'The events in Kwa Nobuhle, Sunday, 4th January 1987', Port Elizabeth 1987).

What were the lessons that were learned from the Langa removal?

Firstly, that the removals took place in spite of the effective campaign that was launched by community organisations against the local community councils, forcing members to resign and black policemen to flee. This has not discouraged the Government from pursuing its objective of devolving power at the local level to bring about unacceptable 'reforms'. In the case of Langa, this was decisive. By bolstering the discredited Kwanobuhle Town Council with white administrators empowered to act in the absence of elected black councillors, the Government effectively allowed the local highly conservative white interest groups of Uitenhage to decide on the fate of the Langa residents with full judicial backing.

Secondly, it came about in spite of the highly effective and relatively ideologically cohesive organisational structures in the townships. They were, however, not able to fully withstand the onslaught of the state's repressive apparatus in its determination to ignore popular elected leaders and grassroots organisation. In Langa, the second State of Emergency was the other decisive factor in facilitating the removal. The detention and harassment of leaders and activists was a crippling blow to the co-ordinated anti-removal effort.

The campaign had been prepared at street and area committee level, a co-ordinating Committee had been mandated to negotiate with the local authorities, legal counsel had been sought to contest the Supreme Court action (and later to bring an interdict and to seek protection for remaining residents), and, most impressive of all, a well publicised, feasible, alternative upgrade plan designed by a professional and progressive planning team was commissioned and presented to the authorities. All this impressive array of preparations achieved was to buy a little time.

Thirdly, though the removal did not occur with the aid of vigilante action, (as in Crosroads), the growth and encouragement of vigilanteism in Kwanobuhle points to the kind of destabilisation tactics that can be expected in the whole P.E./Uitenhage (and indeed, nationally), in the year ahead: this will help clear the path for orderly urbanisation without the more visible presence of the SADF.

The vigilante attacks that occurred in Kwanobuhle on 4 January 1987 with the backing of the Security Forces were and are explicitly aimed at smashing local popular UDF structures.² One of the more tragic

note2 Rory Riordan of DRSA compiled comprehensive documentation of the progress of the vigilante attacks (see reference 1 above). The statements he took bear ample evidence to the collusion between the police and the vigilantes. Legal action arising out of the evidence he collected, is planned to be under way before the commemoration of the Langa Massacre on the 21st of March.

consequences of the rise of vigilanteism in Uitenhage is that it is bringing to the fore once more some cracks in the hard-won cohesion that was painstakingly forged between the unions and the community organisations before the removal and the second State of Emergency.

Despatch

500 families from the small industrial town of Despatch, situated between Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth, were forcibly removed to Kwanobuhle in the wake of the Langa removals, taking everybody by surprise, including the residents and support groups. The same tactics were employed as in Langa.

Walmer

The Eastcape Black Sash has been reporting on the progress of the campaign to resist a full-scale Walmer removal for several years (see attached document by Bobby Melunsky). The following comments concern the upgrade proposals.

The Government announced permanent status for the township of Walmer (est. in the 1920's) in October 1986 and R1-million was allocated for upgrading. This amount was doubled to R2-million in 1987.

However, recent statements by the Ibhayi Town Council are far from comforting for the "illegal" shackdwellers who make up by far the largest group in Walmer (nearly 3 times as many as the registered tenants). This tallies with the discovery by COPE late last year that eviction notices in terms of the township regulations were being surreptitiously handed out to some backyard lodgers, who were told to dismantle their "extended yards". The targets of this campaign were discouraged by the local community organisations from signing receipt of the documents. No further developments took place until the disquieting implications of the statement by Minister Heunis to Andrew Savage, PFP MP for Walmer, this year that Walmer was to be retained "within its present boundaries" and that if sufficient stands could not be made available to accommodate the present population at an acceptable standard, those families for whom provision could not be made "will have to be housed in other black townships in the Port Elizabeth region". The Urban Foundation, which has had historic links with Walmer in its struggle for retention, has also recently made public its fears that "some residents might have to move to other black townships in the upgrading programme". A feature of the Walmer upgrade plan is the secrecy surrounding the way in which the money is to be spent, and the refusal so far on the part of the Ibhayi Town Council to respond to the offers made by the Urban Foundation for its involvement in the planning process. The Urban Foundation has meanwhile pointed to further funding for Walmer should the Ibhayi decide to respond favourably to the involvement of the private sector.

The Walmer example is a classic case of the predicament communities find themselves in when they are forced to negotiate an upgrade plan that has been imposed from the top. With the euphoria of the reprieve wearing off, the community is facing the sobering reality of upgrade 'orderly urbanisation'-style.

Red Location

Red Location is a section of New Brighton well situated next to the railway line and closest of all the main P.E. township areas to the commercial and industrial centres. The corrugated iron structures that they occupy were once army barracks used by the British soldiers during the Anglo-Boer War. The number of families living there is about 1 500, of whom 400+ are backyard lodgers. Children and grandchildren also occupy shacks attached to the main structures. According to a sample survey conducted by Rory Riordan of ORSA, 69% of the subjects had lived there for more than 20 years. It is an area known for its poverty. The general conditions bear witness to years and years of official neglect and hopelessly inadequate services. Significantly, it is an area that has proved hard and dangerous to control by the security forces.

The first official statements of the intended removal of Red Location surfaced in 1983, but only came to near-actuality in November last year, well into the second State of Emergency. The tactic adopted by the Ihayi Town Council was to threaten the "lodgers and illegal shack dwellers" with eviction (in terms of the Illegal Squatting Act) by a certain date, and intimidatory tactics (threats over loudhailers) were used to 'soften' people up closer to the deadline. One day after the deadline, the Council summoned the press to a 'press conference', claiming the removal was voluntary and then invited the press to a display of the how voluntary the removal in fact was. This misfired badly and turned into a bizarrely staged "voluntary move" by a man, who it later transpired, had bought a house in Motherwell anyway. 6 Municipal police trucks, a Casspir, 4 police vans and scores of armed security policemen stood by to effect the "voluntary removal". 3 days later the Red Location anti-removals Committee were informed of an official reprieve and a three-phase plan for upgrading the area.

Throughout the period, the harassment of ORSA's Rory Riordan, members of the Black Sash and of the press (in fact. any outsiders) by the security police and SADF made contact very difficult and eventually the area was declared a "military zone" and Riordan was banned from entry.

What were the essential ingredients that led to the Red Location reprieve, and how secure is the arrangement? Without the neatly prepared campaign of Langa, and with no legal action regarded as worthy of pursuing (rightly or wrongly), the residents of Red Location won the important first stage in the battle for the right to remain in the area.

- There are no encroaching white or 'coloured' residential areas in the vicinity of Red Location - theirs was a battle for the rights of

the poor to remain in a 'prime site' township area which could with ease be transformed into a middle-class housing buffer zone, easier to police and exact rents, but with massive social and political costs.

- Red Location is well-known for the militancy of its youth. This was probably a motivation but also a deterrent for the removal.
- A committee delegated by the residents to act on their behalf to approach the Black Sash, IDAMASA and the PFP, held regular report-back meetings to the residents and helped create a spirit of cohesiveness and resistance. Residents held nightly vigils to pre-empt a Langa-style midnight
- Rory Riordan of DRSA (a PFP body) took up the cudgels on behalf of Red Location. He assisted with the drafting of a petition (which was signed by 4000 people and sent to the State President), prepared and collated a survey, and with Andrew Savage, the PFP MP, negotiated with the authorities around the issue that Red Location could be redeveloped with high density housing. He was instrumental in arranging for an alternative plan to be drawn up great haste to prove this point.
- The residents rallied around the issue of why Mr Mundell, an official of the Town Council, previously known to the people as their "father" (for his approach of consultation and respect), had deserted and betrayed them, and why he refused to address them, sending instead the SADF and police to carry out their own plans. This tactic was very effective and may even have been decisive.
- Press publicity was very good - the threatened removal captured the imagination of the local press, and via the NCAR, the national and international press. The GRC and the NCAR spent time with COPE members and other concerned people, where local groups gained a clearer understanding of government policy in relation to removals and of how support work could be more effectively co-ordinated.

Security appears to have been a prime motive for removal as its timing and the following notes of a meeting between Andrew Savage, Rory Riordan and a very senior official employed by the Ibhayi Town Council on the Red Location removal seem to bear out. "The intention of the security forces in the black townships, was to adopt an "oliekol approach". You drop a drop of oil here, and spread it out. Firstly they would do New Brighton, by applying the security fence and the roadblocks. They would then "stabilise and neutralise" New Brighton, until it became a "sterilised area". Then they would move onto the next area (oliekol). He confirmed that the Red Location was difficult to control and that that was why it was being done first..... After the Red Location and New Brighton were "stabilised and neutralised", the forces would move on to Soweto-by-the-sea, which was next scheduled for the barbed wire, and "stabilisation and neutralisation". Just the previous week, the security forces had surrounded Soweto and arrested

"150 genuine, acknowledged, diagnosed extremists".³

In December, roughly two weeks after the reprieve of Red Location, 97 young comrades were 'smoked out' of their houses in Red Location with teargas and detained in terms of the State of Emergency. A month later, an organised vigilante attack took place in New Brighton, centering on Red Location, and certain young men were sought out, 3 of whom were brutally slain, and 17 others injured. Collusion with the police was less overt than in Langa, but there were instances such as the handing over of two severely injured youths by the vigilantes to the police, who, it subsequently transpired, transferred the two to St Albans as emergency detainees.

The officials have begun to implement their 'three-phase' upgrade plan for Red Location, but it is far from clear that all the so-called illegals will in fact gain the permanent right to remain in the area. It could be yet another example of the surplus being shaken off during the upgrade, the plans of which have never been shown to the residents, let alone drawn up in consultation with them.

Soweto and Veeplaas

According to the senior Ibhayi Town Council official (as quoted above), Soweto, a sprawling shanty town on the outskirts of the other townships, is next in line for a dose of the 'orderly urbanisation' medicine. Soweto is in the G.R.C. Newsletter as a 'war zone' and a no-go area for outsiders. However, the newly formed Port Elizabeth Anti-Removals Committee has established links with representatives there, and hopefully some kind of groundwork will be laid there as well as in the adjacent Veeplaas shanty area. Veeplaas is situated precariously between the Uitenhage Road (from which extremity removals are carried out from time to time) and a black middle-class housing development area, at present mainly occupied by the black civil service.

Kleinskool

Kleinskool is a mixed black and coloured area. People were recently delegated to approach the PE Anti-Removals Committee for assistance to resist the rumoured removals of the African people, which they described as a 'divide and rule' strategy. Several preliminary meetings have been held, and a good base has been laid for working closely with the community. The results of some immediate investigations have revealed that the area is about to be proclaimed a 'coloured' group area. The advantages of that are that the African people will no longer fall under the jurisdiction of the Ibhayi Town Council, but of the PE Municipality, some of whose members may be willing to negotiate the rights of the African people to remain there. The disadvantage is that

note3 see Rory Riordan's diaries on the Red Location removal, which document the full detail of ORSA's extensive involvement in the negotiations with the authorities to prevent the removal.

if the Group Areas Act is applied stricly, the case will be hard to defend legally.

Zwide

51 rent-arrear evictions took place in the established township of Zwide in February this year, with further reports of evictions filtering in this month filtering in. Residents who sought legal assistance were told that re-instatement would only be considered if part-payment of half the arrears was paid. In most cases this amounted to R3-400. An official of the Ibhayi Town Council revealed to Judy Chalmers that the Zwide rent office alone was R4-million in the red. A rent boycott was introduced in response to rent hikes last yeat, but not uniformly followed in all the townships. It seems the Council chose the 'soft underbelly' of the rent boycott movement to start with its campaign to smash the boycott, so as to intimidate the more hardy areas.

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THE FORMATION OF THE PORT ELIZABETH ANTI-REMOVALS COMMITTEE

The need for a committee to focus specifically on removals in the PE area should be clear from the previous report. At present the Committee employs two field workers, one of whom is a member of a civic, and the other is a member of COPE. The committee in its final form is to consist of one representative from each of 9 black residential areas, as well as 5 or 6 other members from non-township based organisations such as Sash. This committee will elect an executive to run the organisation but not to decide on policy. PARC has a newly opened office in North End.

The structure of PARC, while being difficult to organise initially, (some areas did not send representatives at first because they confused PARC with a "new organisation" from Cape Town), will facilitate the education of the community on 'orderly urbanisation', so that people will be able to understand the levels of policy and stages of removal, and hence be able to strategise accordingly.

PARC hopes to affiliate to the NCAR in the near future.

WALMER UPDATE

The long fight to stop the black-spot removal of old Walmer Location, now generally referred to as Walmer Township but still dubbed "ilokishi" by residents, ended with an official reprieve in October 1986 that sent some householders hurrying for home-improvement loans.

The proposed move, reportedly on the drawing boards during the war, was vigorously resisted in the early 60's by Sash members who included such stalwarts as Di Davis, Allison Pirie and Peggy Levey. The plan was shelved. Later, when local administration board officials announced that improvements could not be undertaken in view of its imminent removal, resistance crystallised.

The first salvo was fired when then Sash president Joyce Harris handed a memo to Dr Piet Koornhof during the annual conference in 1979 calling for the retention of the township. A flurry of press letters from Sash members stirred local interest.

The Save Walmer Committee was formed, on which Sash was represented, and a sustained campaign was fought, in which nearly every visiting dignitary was enlisted, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson. The SWC consisted of residents of both "black" and "white" Walmer.

Mr Louis Rive was mandated to investigate the feasibility of the township's retention and it became apparent that the local authority, the East Cape Administration Board, finally accepted the situation. The Urban Foundation strongly supported the retention of the township and it actively demonstrated its interest. The commitment of a life-time resident community councillor no doubt had some bearing on developments.

A curious aspect was the long time it took the government to make the final announcement.

What now remains in issue is the model to be adopted for its upgrade, and on that depends whether the current population will all find accommodation or not. The Urban Foundation has appealed for its all-classes maximum population plan to be utilised.

We await developments.

B. MELUNSKY
12/3/87