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AFRICANA

Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy

Matthew Chaskalson, Karen Jochelson and Sebastian Jeremy

Introduction

This paper considers rent boycotts in the Northern Orange Free State (OFS), the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV), and the Eastern Transvaal, since September 1984. The paper sketches their origins and development, the state's responses, and seeks to locate boycotts in terms of township politics and the urban political economy.

Mass rent boycotts appear to be a recent phenomenon, without a place in South African political traditions (unlike stayaways, for example). Recent rent boycotts differ from previous, and often widespread, non-payments of rent by the scale of participation, their coherence or organisation, and the articulation of collective grievances and demands.

'Rent' boycotts are boycotts of both rents and service charges. These are in practice indistinguishable to township residents, as they are billed and paid together. The state, however, attaches great importance to the theoretical distinction. Rents in principle comprise site rent, and house rent for state housing tenants; service charges cover the cost of capital development and service provision. Service charges actually constitute most of the 'rent' in many townships, rising markedly in proportion to site and house rents in the early 1980s. In Sebokeng, for example, service charges comprised 83% of proposed total 'rent' for 1984-85 [1]. The 'rents' to which we refer in this paper include service charges, unless otherwise specified.

The Origins of Rent Boycotts

Rent boycotts are a manifestation of fundamental contradictions in the urban political economy. These contradictions did not suddenly develop in September 1984, but rather had been intensifying during the early 1980s. The first part of this paper will therefore consider the origins of protests over rents and housing in the early 1980s. [2]

From the mid 1970s the South African state responded to a chronic political and deepening economic crisis by reconstituting the political and economic constraints and opportunities relating to black South Africans. This involved significant changes in many of the state's urban policies - the reform of influx control, rising state investment in and deregulation of housing and

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township development, the opening up of opportunities for greater intra-township accumulation, and the restructuring of local government. The local state sought to provide more extensive housing and public services. But the central state remained committed to the principle that township administration and development should continue to be funded through township-raised revenue. As has been pointed out: 'This is the nub of the contradiction in the state's policy towards urban Africans: the urgency of providing shelter and services... - yet a totally inadequate form of revenue to do this' [3].

By the early 1980s most Administration Boards were accumulating colossal deficits. Their aggregate deficit for 1982-83 was estimated at R32m [4]. Whilst expenditure was rising, several sources of income were falling, most especially the profits from beer and liquor sales which were used to subsidise the provision of housing and services. The state increased rents and service charges rather than introduce either further taxation of capital or central state subsidisation [5]. Large increases were required to raise rents to 'economic' levels, ie rates which would completely pay for the provision of housing and services.

Increasing revenue from rents was a political problem. The state's restructuring of local government in the townships was, at least in part, designed to resolve this political problem. But this restructuring generated unanticipated changes in political relations within the townships, transforming the relations between councillors and their supposed constituents. Councillors were increasingly seen to be corrupt, unaccountable, and irresponsible. Dependent on rents to finance township development, councillors increasingly frequently presided over rising rents and resorted to coercive measures against squatters. In short, they attempted to resolve the financial contradiction at the expense of their political credibility.

The interaction of these changing political relations with the intensifying financial contradictions provoked and shaped a series of conflicts, over both shack-demolition and rent increases. It was the transformation of political relations within the townships which, in combination with the revitalisation of national black politics, constituted the political basis for the transition from apparent quiescence to widespread resistance. During 1984 protests intensified, as further increases interacted with deepening recession and protests in the schools. Riots first took place in the Parys township of Tumahole in July, spread to the East Rand in late August, and escalated in the Vaal Uprising of 3 September.

Outline of the Boycotts

The first recent rent boycott in the PWV started in September 1984 in the Vaal Triangle townships of Sebokeng, Sharpeville, Evaton, Boipatong and Bophelong. In 1985, boycotts began in

townships in the Northern Free State that were also administered by the Orange Vaal Development Board (OVDB). The first of these was Tumahole (Parys), from April; later, boycotts spread to the townships of Vredefort, Kroonstad, Bothaville, and Viljoenskroon.

In the Eastern Transvaal township of Ethandukukhanya (Piet Retief), many residents did not pay rent after January 1984. At first this was not a formal boycott, but it developed into one over the next eighteen months. Boycotts began in other Eastern Transvaal townships in mid 1985, when rent increases combined with an organisational network based on Ethandukukhanya. These townships were: Silobela (Carolina), KwaThandeka (Amsterdam), KwaZanele (Breyten), Wesselton (Ermelo), and Umgwenya (Waterval Boven).

Residents of Mamelodi (Pretoria) boycotted rent following the 'Mamelodi Massacre' on 21 November 1985, when police brutally dispersed a crowd of rent protesters, mostly women, killing thirteen.

A later wave of boycotts swept townships on the Rand in 1986. In most cases there were already boycotts limited to particular sections of each township. In mid-year the boycotts were generalised throughout the townships. In Alexandra, the boycott was generalised during April. In Soweto, boycotts had begun in Chiawelo and Jabulani in March, and spread throughout the city in June. In Tembisa, rents were widely boycotted from May. Boycotts also started in mid-1986 in Vosloorus and Tsakane.

Township Politics and the Initiation of Rent Boycotts

The outbreak of rent boycotts represented a new stage in ongoing processes of political mobilisation over rents, housing, and local government. The broad context for the boycotts was the interaction of economic and political factors that underlay the longer processes of mobilisation. The immediate context was an intensification of both economic and political factors - many households experienced increasing difficulty in paying rents that continued to rise in real terms, and were decreasingly motivated to pay rents given the apparent lack of promised township development, the scale of corruption among councillors, the councils' illegitimacy, and later, in most cases, rising levels of repression.

1. The inability to pay

A major factor in the mass support for boycotts was many households' growing inability to pay rising rents. Local authorities' attempts to achieve economic rentals coincided with a period of deepening economic recession. Between 1975 and 1980,

real income per capita among 'africans' fell by almost 10% [6]. The burden of continued recession through the early 1980s fell hardest on the 'african' working-class [7]. Whilst the burden of recession fell heaviest on people living in the bantustans, many urban households were not left unscathed.

The extent of urban impoverishment is not, however, reflected in statistics for average household incomes, due to increasing differentiation within townships. The rapidly rising affluence among better off households often more than compensated for the concurrently falling real incomes of many poorer households. Surveys carried out by the UNISA Bureau of Market Research (BMR) - see Appendix B - indicate that average real incomes per household and per capita rose in townships of Pretoria, the East and West Rand, and Johannesburg between 1980-85. The proportion of households below constantly defined minimum and supplementary living levels, and of households earning below R4000pa, increased over the same period. Employment rates also fell dramatically. In the Vaal, average real incomes fell, with differentiation insufficient to offset the scale of impoverishment statistically. The BMR data, conservatively interpreted, suggest that at least 25% of PWV households had falling real income over the period 1980-85.

Rent increases contributed to the deteriorating economic position of many households. The BMR surveys indicate that the average proportion of household income spent on housing and electricity (ie most of what we refer to as rent) rose between 1980-85 by 26% in Pretoria, 34% in the West and East Rand, and 88% in Johannesburg. Were it not for the rent boycott, there would have been a minimum 25% rise in the Vaal [8]. The proportion would have risen much more markedly for low-income households.

The OVDB's determination to achieve economic rentals caused Vaal rents to rise by more than 400% from 1977 to 1984. When the August 1984 rent increase of R5,90 was announced, the average rent of R62,56 was already more than R10 higher than in any other township, and more than double the national metropolitan average. [9]. In Tumahole, the Community Council announced in mid-1984 that rents would be increased by 55% from R26.25 to R37 from July. Other Northern Free State townships under the OVDB's jurisdiction faced similar increases.

Rents had also steadily increased in the Eastern Transvaal during the early 1980s. In Carolina's Silobela township, for example, rents increased by 300% between 1981 and 1984 [10]. In July 1985 the Eastern Transvaal Development Board (ETDB) announced rent increases in all the townships under its jurisdiction. Rents in Silobela, Umgwenya, Ethandukukhanya, KwaZanele, Emjindini, KwaThandeka, rose to over R40.

Inability to pay rent was reflected in growing rental arrears. For example, the Mamelodi Council was said to be owed R0.9m in late 1984 [11], and the Katlehong Council was said to be owed R2m in January 1985, and R5m just over one year later [12]. In June 1984, the Lekoa Town Council was owed about R2.2m [13].

2. The beginnings of rent boycotts

The transition to an actual rent boycott requires some additional explanation. Widespread hostility to rent increases and an inability to pay do not themselves necessarily lead to a boycott. In this section we examine the different ways in which rent boycotts have started. We then look specifically at organisational involvement in rent boycotts.

In some cases rent boycotts simply evolved out of an unco-ordinated mass non payment of rent. Elsewhere boycotts began with a definite collective decision. Such a decision has variously been made as an expression of popular moral outrage at the local authorities, or as an explicitly tactical or strategic weapon.

(a) Boycott by default:

In Piet Retief's Ethandukukhanya township, specifically local factors led residents not to pay rent in 1984. Many buildings in the Old Location (inhabited since the 1920s) were destroyed by Cyclone Demoina in January 1984. The ETDB took the opportunity to effect the planned removal of Old Location residents to newly built sections of the township, and to demolish the remaining Old Location shacks.

The ETDB did not inform residents of the new rent for five months. In June, residents were told that rents were to be higher than in Old Location, and that rents would now be determined according to the 'PAYE' sliding-scale scheme [14]. The new rents were backdated to the date of occupation, so households were immediately faced with considerable arrears.

Residents were opposed to the new PAYE rent structure primarily because rents were higher than before. It was also poorly understood, and evidently did not address residents' concern with the overall level of rents. The ETDB had built the houses and provided initial infrastructure in the new section of Ethandukukhanya, and residents were probably now being burdened with the cost. Residents drew up a petition, met with the Council, and in July secured the intercession of Mondi (a major local employer), all unsuccessfully. The ETDB began evicting defaulters in March 1985, after negotiations with the residents' lawyers had failed to resolve the issue.

It is unclear how many - if any - of the former Old Location residents were paying rent during 1984. This was not a boycott, however, rather than just the continuation of their earlier position of not knowing what to pay. During late 1984 and early 1985, other Ethandukukhanya residents became involved, adding their grievances. A further R5 rent increase in February, together with the deadlock over negotiations and the ETDB's recourse to evictions, led to a general boycott. The Ethandukukhanya boycott, therefore, came about more by default than design.

In the rest of the Eastern Transvaal rent boycotts evolved in response to the July increases. Residents initially did not consider totally boycotting rents. Some continued to pay the old rent; others decided to pay a reduced rent; others paid nothing at all. When the ETDB and Councils insisted on the new rentals a total rent boycott commenced.

(b) Boycott in outrage:

In the Vaal, prior to 3 September residents did not intend boycotting rent. The anti-rent meetings focussed on the increase and resolved to continue paying the old rent. On 3 September residents marched through Sebokeng in protest against the increase. Sixty-six people were killed in clashes with police over the next week [15]. It was only in the aftermath of these events that residents stopped paying rent.

Events in Mamelodi followed a similar pattern. The trigger for the boycott was the 'Mamelodi Massacre' of 21 November 1985. At an earlier meeting residents had decided to march to the mayor to discuss rent increases, the presence of the SADF, and police brutality. The marchers were dispersed when police fired into the crowd without provocation. 'The crowd scattered running back into a column of people. As they ran they shouted for people not to pay rent because the councillors and police preferred to shoot rather than talk'. [16] Thirteen people were killed.

In Tumahole, the rent boycott was a response to a series of incidents over which popular frustration with the administration board had accumulated. An anti-rent increase protest march on 15 July was dispersed by police, provoking riots. On 10 September, after further clashes in the township and the resignation of three (out of eight) councillors, residents gathered at the administration offices to discuss the rent. After long talks with representatives, the OVDB agreed to suspend the increase. Over the following six months, the new Tumahole Civic Association met several times with the OVDB to discuss rents. The Board refused to agree to the proposal that rents be reduced to R18.50. In March the Board proposed to hold a public meeting; exasperated with the non-resolution of the issue, residents decided that they would boycott rent from 1 April unless the

Board listened to their grievances and reduced the rent. The Board cancelled the meeting, and rents were subsequently boycotted. [17]

(c) Strategic boycotts:

Activists claim that the Northern Free State boycotts (other than in Tumahole) began following a strategic decision taken early in 1985 by representatives in the Rent Action Co-ordinating Committee (RACC). The RACC resolved to start rent boycotts in Vredefort, Viljoenskroon, Bothaville and Kroonstad as a way of strengthening (or in some cases initiating) organisation in these townships [18]. It is unclear, however, whether participants in the boycotts saw them in the same way, and to what extent boycotts should be attributed to activists' intentions.

The strategic use of rent boycotts really took off in mid-1986. In March the NECC resolved to use rent boycotts as a general weapon of protest. By June, there were generalised rent boycotts in several PWV townships. Most of these boycotts were started by UDF activists and were organised around national demands but took place in areas where local rent struggles were already being waged. In Alexandra, many residents had boycotted rent from January 1986. On 21 April, however, a more comprehensive rent boycott was launched. The boycott was linked to a consumer boycott and its demands included the removal of troops from all townships, the release of all political detainees as well as the reduction of Alexandra rents to R40/month for four-roomed houses and R50/month for six-roomed houses [19]. In Soweto, Chiawelo and Jabulani residents had been boycotting rent for four months before the Soweto Civic Association called for a Soweto boycott [20].

Rents had been a chronic grievance in Tembisa also. In May, striking council employees called on residents to support them by not paying rents. Tension had risen during April, following the police killing of a Tembisa MAWU unionist, and the subsequent killing of five residents at night vigils and funerals. Civic leaders called a rent boycott around a long list of general issues that only once mentioned rents but prominuntly included national political demands - The full list is attached in Appendix 1.

3. Organisation and the boycotts' inception

In the Vaal, opposition to the rent increases had been led by the Vaal Civic Association and the Sharpeville Anti-Rent Committee. These organisations had held meetings in Sharpeville, Sebokeng and Boipatong to protest the increases. After 3 September all meetings were banned. Most of the VCA and anti-rent committee leadership went into hiding and those that did not were arrested by the end of September. The rent boycott thus started at a time when there was very little organisational presence in the Vaal.

In Tumahole the situation was different. As we have seen above, the boycott followed the break down of lengthy negotiations around the rent issue between the civic association and the development board. The Civic was formed in October 1984 in response to the rent issue and confined its activities to organising the rent protests. It was dominated by workers and some of its executive members had prior union experience on which they drew during rent negotiations with the authorities [21]. Rent boycotts elsewhere in the Northern Free State predated any significant township organisation. Indeed, activists saw boycotts as a means of stimulating organisation in the same way as rent protests had done in Tumahole.

Ethandukukhanya served as an epicentre for the rent protests and boycotts in the Eastern Transvaal. The Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAWU) organised the first protests. The presence of the union was crucial. Although PWAWU was only established in the Piet Retief area in 1983, it provided a coherent organisational alternative to the Council. There were no similar structures in the other Eastern Transvaal townships. The rent issue was discussed in the factory, and shop stewards went from house to house in the township. Residents decided to form a representative Committee of Thirteen. Several committee members belonged to PWAWU, and the chairperson also chaired the Mondi Shop Stewards Committee.

Whilst the Committee of Thirteen included many PWAWU members, it nonetheless appears to have been influenced significantly by the better-off township residents. Indeed, the workers probably were among the latter. The Committee's criticisms of PAYE therefore reveal an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, PAYE was condemned because it involved poorer households paying a greater and unreasonable proportion of their income in rent; on the other, a high-income earner was 'punished... for having spent years at school trying to improve himself' [22].

Opposition to rent increases in other townships was encouraged by reports in newspapers, and no doubt by word of mouth, of the apparent success of the Ethandukukhanya boycott. Activists from the different townships met through lawyers in Nelspruit, and thereby heard of the successful legal action against evictions [23].

When rent increases were announced, Wesselton residents elected their own Committee of Five modelled on the Ethandakukhanya Committee of Thirteen. The Wesselton committee comprised a traffic officer, court interpreter, two teachers, and a health inspector - all male. The leadership were very clearly some of the wealthiest residents [24].

In Umgwenya, however, there was no formal organisation until July 1985. An Action Committee was finally formed in response to requests by police that representatives be elected. Whilst some Umgwenya residents were in contact with lawyers and other townships, it is unclear whether there was any informal organisation in the township before July. The Action Committee was larger than committees elsewhere, with 26 members, comprising parents, 'ordinary people' (ie workers and unemployed), teachers and businessmen (but not students) [25].

The very gradual transformation from mass non-payment to boycott of rent can probably be attributed to the small and relatively isolated nature of the townships, and the absence of strong traditions of either union or township organisation. Councils seem to have retained some legitimacy until 1985. In Umgwenya, for example, discontent with a rent increase in 1984 was limited to unsuccessful attempts to take up the issue with councillors and the township manager [26].

In Soweto, the general rent boycott that began in June was organised through the network of street committees built up in conjunction with the 13 branches of the Soweto Civic. It is unclear whether street committees match the descriptions provided by activists [27] and how much participation there was in the street committees before the call for a rent boycott was made. But the committees clearly enabled the boycott call to be very widely relayed (at a time when mass meetings were not permitted), and strong support to develop throughout Soweto. In both Alexandra and Tembisa unions, and individual unionists, were centrally involved in the inception of rent boycotts.

The State's Responses

The state does not appear to have formulated any overall plan to counter rent boycotts. When such a plan was alleged to exist, in an article in *The Weekly Mail* [28], the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning flatly denied it [29]. It is certainly not clear that Joint Management Boards (JMBs) control state strategy vis-a-vis rent boycotts, or that they are subject to centralised policy-making. The one area in which a national response seems most likely is state disinformation [30]. For the most part the state's responses to boycotts have been determined by the local state, with central state policy limiting the choice of options.

Even individual Development Boards [31] appear to have lacked any coherent strategy to counter boycotts for a long time. The first (and only) known formulation of such a strategy was approved by the Lekoa Town Council in November 1985 [32]. Two contrasting general approaches by the (local) state are, however, identifiable:

a) Discussion/concession, in the belief that rent increases are justified and need only to be explained, coupled with a concern to avoid violent conflict;

b) Coercion: a concern to crush rent boycotts - with evictions and the deployment of force.

The state has displayed an unusual reluctance to adopt this second approach, especially during 1984-85. The Lekoa Town Council only started to explore repressive responses in November 1985 [33] and the first rent evictions took place in August 1986, almost two years after the boycott started. In both the Eastern Transvaal and Tumahole, officials waited fifteen months before evicting people for non-payment of rent [34]. In all of these cases the authorities have suspended evictions pending the outcome of cases testing their legality, and the boycotts continue. Moreover, the authorities have not cut off essential services to the townships for any sustained length of time, despite having frequently threatened to do so. Even in the most recent boycotts, including in Soweto and Tembisa, the state has initially pursued non-confrontational responses. When it has taken aggressive steps, these have generally tended towards less rather than more conflictual alternatives; for example, distributing threatening notices warning of legal action, rather than (as initially happenned in KwaZanele) raiding houses in the early morning, taking residents off for questioning, and literally forcing them to pay up.

There are three factors behind these responses. First, state officials have mis-interpreted boycotts. Secondly, they have been concerned to avoid violent confrontations. Thirdly, their legal position has been weak.

Initial State Analyses of Boycotts

Despite the long history of intensifying opposition to rent increases and the housing shortage, nearly all state officials publicly blamed protests - including the new boycotts - on agitators and intimidation. They have failed to recognise that economic rents are beyond the means of most township residents.

Intimidators have been widely blamed. Soweto Town Clerk Nico Malan said that the City Council:

> ...sympathised with residents... because of the pressure placed on them by groups which called for the boycott' [35].

And Deputy-Mayor Jwara was more explicit:

> People in general are keen to pay, but they fear victimisation from instigators... (being) necklaced or having their homes burnt by "comrades" [36]."

Councillor Mdlalose said that hundreds of residents had told him they were intimidated:

> These people are prepared to pay but they have indicated that they were afraid to do so because of the *siyayinyovas* [37].

Allegations of intimidation were given extensive coverage in most newspapers. For example, an article in The Sunday Star, headlined 'Catch-22 for residents *caught* in rent boycott', claimed that residents who 'pay up, could get themselves kicked in by the boycott organisers' [38]. Soweto officials, however, admitted that they had no direct evidence of intimidation [39].

Officials' analysis of riots probably informed their analysis of boycotts. Riots are - as far as officials are concerned - so clearly the product of agitation that it is inconceivable that rent boycotts are not also part of some heinous plot. Nic Louw, the Lekoa Town Clerk, testified in court in October 1985 that Vaal residents were contented and that agitators bussed in from Soweto were responsible for the events of 3 September and the rent boycott [40].

Intimidators were contrasted with the mass of 'reasonable' residents who would, officials believed, recognise that paying rents was in their own interest. Officials had no understanding of why there might be mass opposition to rent increases. Increases were seen to be 'necessary' to provide the housing and services which residents demanded. At the beginning of the rent boycott in Silobela, for example, the ETDB stated that rent increases could not be reconsidered because they were 'necessitated due to certain capital projects'. The Board called on:

> ... every responsible and thinking person to approach an increase in service charges in a positive way and to realise that it is done to ensure a more comfortable life for everybody .... It is obvious that each and every member of the inhabitants of this town has a responsibility in paying for what they receive [41].

Rent boycotts would 'compel' the state to cut services, which no reasonable resident would want [42].

This misinterpretation of the nature of protest led the state to underestimate the potential for rent boycotts to continue. For long periods, the state responded to boycotts in the belief that the township public would happily pay rent if they were neither intimidated nor misinformed. The state therefore (1) sought to set up ways for residents to pay rent free from intimidation and (2) engaged in lengthy negotiations and constantly used the newspapers to explain the 'necessity' of rent increases.

In order to facilitate 'safe' payment of rent, the Soweto Council opened an office in Johannesburg, and arranged that rent could be paid by post. Fears that council clerks could be pressurised into revealing the names and addresses of rent payers prompted Malan to warn that 'drastic measures' would be taken in the event of such leaks [43], and the Johannesburg office was staffed only by white personnel [44].

Negotiations especially characterised the state's initial response in the Vaal. The OVDB and Lekoa Town Council were obsessed with their self-image as the most successful local authorities in the country. Louw even managed to explain why riots first occurred in the Vaal in terms of the state's achievements:

> there is a saying if one wants to fight somebody, you challenge the winner, you challenge the giant,... [and] the Vaal Triangle was a giant... If you compare the facilities, public amenities in the Vaal Triangle to any other township in South Africa you would see that the Vaal Triangle is a giant... [45]

The Council met with the Vaal Trade Union Co-ordinating Congress (VTUCC) from October 1984 to December 1985. Negotiations, however, could not resolve the contradictory positions of state and residents. The Council refused to compromise on a reduction of rentals below the pre-September 1984 figure. In response to the VTUCC argument that residents could not afford rents of R62, the council 'justified' the rents by showing how all the income from rent was spent on legitimate projects. The VTUCC took residents' incomes as their starting point; the officials took the council budget as theirs:

> [Louw:] I wish however to point out that the existing rent and service charges are incorporated in the 1984/85 budget of the Town Council and unless alternative sources of revenue can be identified, I cannot foresee that a reduction in the rent and service charges can be effected [46].
>
> [VTUCC:] The big complaint is that the Town Council of Lekoa first look at expenditure and then load residents to pay for the expenditure. The correct way of balancing your books is to look at your possible income and then try to expense that income [47].

Yet the state clearly expected that the negotiations would end the rent boycott because it took no steps to evict rent defaulters until November 1985.

Similarly, OVDB officials negotiating with the Tumahole Civic Association insisted that increased rents (of R37) were necessary for capital development, despite acknowledging that 75% of Tumahole residents earned less than R150 per month [48].

Fear of Conflict

A second factor in the state's reluctance to respond with coercion has been the fear of provoking further violent conflict. Most of the rent increases announced in mid-1984 were suspended in the immediate aftermath of the Vaal Uprising [49]. In Tumahole, for example, the OVDB's Chief Director, DC Ganz, agreed to suspend the increase at a meeting with residents' representatives on September 10, whilst a large crowd of residents waited outside. The willingness to negotiate (and make concessions), the presence of senior police officers, and the latter's appeals to the delegates (rather than the Community Councillors) to ensure a peaceful dispersal, testified to the state's concern to avoid a repetition of the Vaal Uprising of the previous week [50].

Fear of provoking resistance has also restrained the state's attempts to break boycotts through the courts. Evictions could easily provoke confrontations. The OVDB's legal director warned that evictions do 'not solve the problem of social riots', and his reservations proved to be well founded [51]. Well into 1985, no water and electricity meter readings were taken in the Vaal because officials were unwilling to enter the townships [52]. Under those circumstances the state could hardly begin evicting residents. In January 1986 Breyten youths threatened to destroy the administration offices if electricity supplies to the township were cut off in order to break the boycott. The ETDB ignored the threat and suffered the consequences - the offices and two councillors' houses were burnt down on the day that the electricity was switched off [53].

When the Soweto Council began evicting families in late August 1986, they began very tentatively, limiting the evictions to just seven families. Furthermore, according to the Council's controversial housing director, Del Kevan:

> They were the incorrigibles - people who had not paid for months, not the rent boycotters who stopped paying in June [54].

These people were regarded with particular suspicion by officials. Malan referred to them:

> ... defaulters who have owed since the beginning of the year and are using the situation as a way out... [55]

Similarly, in Tembisa the Council stressed that the first families to be evicted were (they thought) long-standing defaulters. Officials thought - or hoped - that action against these criminalised families would serve as an example, but not provoke, the other 'reasonable' residents.

The Soweto evictions led to the 'White City War', immediately after which Kevan said:

> ... it will be provocative to carry out evictions when there is such trouble in the townships,

admitting that the clashes had been related to evictions [56]. Elsewhere, the likelihood of bloody resistance to evictions must have occupied the minds of officials considering ways of resolving their rent crisis.

One of the reasons behind the introduction of Community and later Town and Village Councils had been a concern to establish structures inside the townships which could absorb and defuse the political costs of raising rents and evicting squatters or defaulters [57]. Officials no doubt recognised that the collapse, exile, or at least visibly reduced legitimacy of councils shifted the political dilemma squarely on their shoulders.

Legal Weaknesses

A third factor in the state's concern to avoid confrontation has been its lack of success in using the courts to enforce an approach revolving around evictions. It seems unlikely that local state officials were aware of the weakness of their position in law before they found their eviction orders being contested in court, so their legal position does not explain why there were often such long delays before boycotters were evicted; but it does help explain why the state's moves towards a more confrontational approach often remained tentative and inconclusive.

None of the local authorities affected by the pre-1986 rent boycotts were legally able to reclaim arrear rentals or enforce consequent evictions through the courts. To effect rent increases, the development boards/town councils are legally obliged to advertise the proposed increase in at least two newspapers, to provide a thirty day period for the lodging of objections to the increase, to consider the objections, to submit the increases to the Minister for approval, and then to gazette the increases if they are still deemed necessary [58]. None of the 1984/85 that sparked off the boycotts complied with these requirements. Indeed, many local authorities are alleged to have failed to gazette rent increases since the late 1970s. Lawyers acting for evicted Tumahole residents have argued that no rent increases there had been legally passed since March 1979 [59].

Even when rent boycotts began local authorities were remarkably slow to rectify their legal position. Thus the Lekoa Town Council's "Strategy for the collection of arrear rental and service charges" dated 1 November 1985 included the directive:

> 1.14 Arrange for tariffs of rented houses in the area of jurisdiction to be approved by the Minister.
>
> - investigate the legality of declared rental and the necessity for declaration [60].

The state's legal action against defaulters failed to criminalise them or the boycott, though this may have been one of its intentions. Furthermore, it failed to cajole residents into paying rent. The value of eviction can only be exemplary because, as the DVDB legal officer observed, it 'does not solve the problem of arrear rentals' [61]. Yet the exemplary effect of legal action was negated by the evident success of lawyers in stalling eviction or imprisonment (at least to date).

The Negotiation Paradox

The two key strands comprising the state's conciliatory approach were, however, somewhat contradictory. Engaging in 'negotiations' (ie explanation and persuasion) often meant dealing with at least some of the very people who are presumed to be intimidators and agitators. Thus the Lekoa Town Council met with the VTUCC (comprising unions and some civics), but resolved that 'no acknowledgement through negotiations must be given to revolutionary groups or organisations' [62].

In several townships state officials urged residents to elect representatives to discuss the rents. In the Vaal, a circular from Louw was distributed. It called on residents 'to form committees of ten people to clarify the rent structure with him' [63]. In Umgwenya, it was the police who initiated the formation of an Action Committee.

Anybody who negotiated but did not accept the state's arguments must, by officials' logic, be an agitator. The ETDB felt that its 'willingness to negotiate' was being 'exploited by irresponsible persons' in Ethandukukhanya who would not accept that the boycott deprived the state and the board of funds necessary for its work. [64]

In Soweto, the Council had never been prepared to negotiate with the Civic Association, yet alone SOSCO or SOYCO, and failed to identify an alternative structure to mediate between the council and residents. Malan seems to have avoided saying why he would not negotiate with the SCA [65]. Council officials, therefore, relied primarily on public announcements which were widely reported in the newspapers.

The Shift in State Approach

The eventual shift to a coercion-based approach was inevitable, even given officials' obstinate adherence to their misinterpretation of boycotts and boycotters. Indeed, the shift does not seem to have involved any fundamental change in officials' analyses of the causes of boycotts, but rather a recognition that new responses were required [66].

The Lekoa Town Council and OVDB finally abandoned their conciliatory approach to boycotts in November 1985. The "Strategy for the collection of arrear rentals and service charges" adopted at the meeting of the Lekoa Town Council Executive committee has been widely discussed elsewhere [67]. The first objective of the 'strategy' was to 'collect outstanding tariffs without delay'. To this end it called for a repressive attack on boycotters with the help of the police and the courts. Civil proceedings against boycotters were to be accompanied by a sustained hearts and minds campaign to encourage the payment of rent and to promote the image of local authorities [68].

A number of factors explain the Council's shift in attitude. First, the rent boycott had now been in progress for over a year and the Council must finally have realised that simple explanations of the capital budget would not move residents to start paying rent again. Whilst the Council still referred to 'revolutionary groups or organisations', it acknowledged that residents were not going to start paying rent unless they were forced to.

Secondly, the OVDB and Council felt secure enough by late 1985 to contemplate the use of force against residents. The first State of Emergency, with mass detentions and a sustained SAP/SADF show of strength, led to relative peace in the Vaal townships.

In Soweto, the Council changed its approach much sooner, in only the second month of the Soweto-wide boycott. The Council Executive resolved on 7 July that boycotting residents should be threatened with eviction. On the 9th, municipal police began serving eviction notices under Section 65 of the Housing Act, ordering residents to pay their rent within 7 days or to vacate their premises [69].

This changing approach was reflected in a subtle but significant shift in officials' rhetoric. Council officials immediately made much more threatening public announcements. Instead of 'sympathising' with residents, officials began emphasising the waiting-list for housing in Soweto. For example, Kevan said:

> Please, Sowetans, be warned - if you don't pay your rents, no matter what excuse you make, you are going to lose your house or flat and you'll wait for many long years before you get another one [70].

Despite mounting opposition to the eviction orders - in court and on the streets - Malan stuck to a tough line. In statements he said that the Council had made it possible for residents to pay free from intimidation:

> There is now no reason that people cannot pay rent. So if they don't pay, they can expect to receive an eviction notice in the next few days [71].

Eviction notices in early August were accompanied by a letter from Kevan, saying:

> The Soweto Council has done everything in its power to make life as easy for the residents as it can... When the people said they were threatened and told not to pay their rents in June the Council opened a special office where they could pay in complete confidentiality. The Council has been fair to residents - it expects the residents to be fair to the Council... [72].

Officials rhetoric suggested that they hoped, and expected, that the boycott could be peacefully ended. Kevan said:

> We are hopeful that the situation will return to normal as we really do not want to deprive people of a place to live [73].

Malan continued to think, it would seem, that residents would pay up when threatened with eviction; the council was concerned to 'collect dues owed for services, not to evict people' [74].

The key reason for the shift in approach went unstated in most of the public announcements. After a month of near-total boycott, Malan had finally recognised that swift action was required, as he said,

> because it's more difficult to pay off arrears when the amounts have accumulated over several months' [75].

Whilst officials continued to interpret the boycott in terms of intimidation, a new response was quickly needed if the boycott was not to achieve a momentum of its own, ie regardless of motivation.

The Tembisa Town Council seems to have shifted its approach at about the same time. Defaulters were evicted, and the Town Clerk announced that the Council would get tough and ensure that rent was paid 'even if this means getting the whole of the South African Defence Force to Tembisa' [76]. Steve Kgame, UCASA President, also said at the time that 'Councils are going to get tough with people who do not pay rent' [77]. It is not clear whether there was any organisational link between these similar shifts in approach, or if they were coincidental, given the circumstances of one to two month old boycotts, and the heightened repressive atmosphere of the State of Emergency.

Coercion-based approaches have not, to date, been any more successful than the state's earlier responses. In the Vaal and Tumahole, residents ignored the rent summonses issued in November/December 1985. When people were arrested in April 1986 for contempt of court, a group of women marched on the administration offices in Sebokeng demanding their release, and elsewhere in Sebokeng state property was attacked. Ever wary of another Vaal Uprising, the Council released the arrested residents and did not implement any further eviction plans for four months. When the council finally evicted thirty one families in August 1986 they again encountered resistance and promptly stopped. The most recent action was the confiscation of

furniture from households in arrears in Sebokeng in January 1987, and when this provoked violent confrontations, officials abandoned the measure.

Events in the Northern Free State have followed a pattern almost identical to that in the Vaal. Aggressive steps by the OVDB have twice been abandoned in the face of resistance [78].

In Soweto, however, officials ignored indications of imminent confrontation. On 16 July, police raided houses in Naledi Extension 2, demanding to see rent payment receipts and serving eviction notices. Over 1000 women and students marched to the Council offices in Jabulani in protest, and the Bureau of Information reported clashes elsewhere [79]. On 26 August, 21 people were officially killed and 98 injured in clashes with security forces in the 'White City War' [80], when Soweto became, according to one black journalist, 'a no-go area, a virtual war zone, an area of blood, tears and death' [81]. Malan, and later Le Grange in Parliament, denied that rents and evictions were the cause of the clashes; SOSCO and SOYCO were blamed [82], and ANC involvement was also "suspected" [83]. A more general explanation was that conflict had begun when council police raided several defaulting White City households, and rumours started circulating that there would be further evictions [84].

Even in the immediate aftermath of the 'White City War', Malan said on television that evictions would continue as essential services had to be paid for [85].

> Our income was dropping alarmingly and we have services to maintain' [86].

This continued determination - which has not been matched by action or results, given the legal and political constraints - reflected the local state's lack of any substantial alternative as much as the prevailing atmosphere of repression. Administrators recognised that the longer the boycott went on, the harder it was to break, but there was nobody they could negotiate with (given the State of Emergency and the impossibility of even considering negotiating with SCA, SOSCO and SOYCO 'agitators').

Faced with continued boycotts, the insufficiency of coercive measures, and still stuck in their belief in the justice of their arguments, councils and boards have continued with information campaigns. The central state has begun to do the same. In August 1986, the Bureau of Information announced a series of advertisements urging people to pay rent, and released an explanatory press statement. The campaign would clarify 'the phletora [sic] of twisted messages in the market place about rents and services', explaining why services were expensive, and stressing that residents had to pay [87].

Different State Analyses

There has not been a single homogenous local state analysis of boycotts. Rather, different groups of officials have interpreted boycotts in different ways, and have supported correspondingly different responses. The fundamentally political interpretations by hardline councillors, the Government, and police, contrast with the relatively technocratic interpretations of many local officials. Only a few perceptive councillors recognised what was at issue, and they for the most part heeded residents' call to resign. The overall state response has reflected the relative importance of these different groups.

For the most part it seems that the blindly technocratic approach of professional officials in both the Development Boards and Councils has determined the nature of the state's response. The officials' approach, as Nico Malan put it, was first that the payment of rent should be an apolitical matter, 'but it has been turned into a political issue [88], and second, that counter-boycott strategies are essentially technical and apolitical. For example, Kevan justified evictions, saying:

> There is no housing authority in the world who will not evict tenants who do not pay rent [89].

Many councillors have been less conciliatory, seeing the boycott as a fundamental political attack on themselves. An appropriate response has therefore been more explicitly political. Soweto councillor Letsatsi Radebe (chairman of the Management Committee, and a former *Mogotlo* leader) blamed the rent boycott on intimidation by 'comrades':

> There is a need to discipline them. Their parents have lost control over them. No man will stand up and say they are doing wrong. They are scared of being necklaced [90].

In mid-June, he led an armed group who abducted and assaulted youths in Naledi; over 1,000 local residents confronted Radebe at his home in protest, secured the release of the youths, and called for his resignation [91]. Radebe's approach was clearly shared by other councillors, because the Council later unanimously resolved to establish vigilante groups. Radebe was reported to have:

> said it would be the task of these vigilantes to stamp out "political renegades". Mr Radebe said the climate in Soweto was revolutionary and this affected everybody. He said the area had to go back to the olden days when *amabutho* (regiments) maintained discipline.

At the same meeting the Council rejected a proposal by Mrs Violet Petjaulema that it meet with the SCA: 'Mr Radebe said there was no possibility of convincing the SCA to drop its rent boycott' [92].

Elsewhere, however, councillors have probably served as a brake on state aggression. In Tembisa, for example, the collapse of the council can be attributed to unhappiness with evictions,

which clearly increased councillors' unpopularity and the threat to their property and lives [see below]. Nowhere, however, have councillors had an obviously major impact on state responses.

State/capital relations

State/capital relations over rent boycotts have been the object of some controversy. An article in *The Weekly Mail*, based on the LTC document, alleged close capital/state co-operation on JMBs to break the rent boycotts [93]. Leading businessmen flatly denied any knowledge of such plans. Assocom's Brett, reported *The Citizen*, 'said the suggestion that the Government and employers had joined forces to fight the rent boycott was a "load of rubbish"' [94].

In the Vaal, where capital's involvement in the rent boycott has been longest, there is considerable evidence to support Brett's denial. The Vaal Chamber of Commerce and Industry had been drawn into the rent issue in October 1984 when the council first tried to break the boycott with stop order rents. At no stage did the chamber accept the legitimacy of ('stop order') Proclamation R188 and it instructed it's members not to make stop order facilities available to the Lekoa Town Council. Then from June 1985 to January 1986, the chamber hosted negotiations between the council and the Vaal Trade Union Co-ordinating Congress. Over the course of these negotiations delegates of the chamber sided repeatedly with the VTUCC. So much so, in fact, that the council eventually demanded that the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry be removed from the chair at the negotiations because he had proved not to be impartial [95].

Union pressure shaped the chamber's role in negotiations. They started to re-apply their minds to the 'rent problem' after receiving the following advice from the VTUCC:

> "It is therefore encumbent upon you to be seen to be practically involved in the present rent and other related matters presently taking place in the whole Vaal Area.
>
> It is suggested therefore that you have a duty to intervene in this matter and your failure to do so is and will be construed by all and sundry as an unforgivable and gross dereliction of your important duty" [96]

This moral censure was accompanied by a threat of industrial action if there was no suitable response from employers within the next month [97]. The unions also explained to the chamber that residents could not afford to pay the current rents. Accordingly, if rents did not decrease workers would have no option but to demand higher wages [98].

However, a crude reading off of employers' responses in terms of their fears and interests is inadequate. Over the course of the Vaal negotiations, the chamber became increasingly sympathetic to the demands of residents, and increasingly frustrated by the intransigence of the Town Council. Moreover, the representatives of the private sector at the negotiations were considerably more sensitive to the real issues of the rent boycott than were the officials. At the penultimate meeting Brian Whittaker of the Urban Foundation proposed a resolution

> (i) That under current circumstances the source of funds for the Lekoa Town Council appear to be inadequate.
> (ii) That in view of that the Town Council is requested to acknowledge that in the current economic climate, the costs of the Council cannot be met by increasing the services charges alone.
> (iii) That steps need to be taken by the Town Council to secure alternative sources of finance as a matter of urgency... [99].

The council rejected these resolutions. This was symptomatic of the officials' refusal to concede anything whatsoever in negotiation, a refusal which people experienced in collective bargaining in the factory found difficult to accept. At the next meeting the unions broke off negotiations on the grounds that given the attitude of the officials the meetings would not resolve anything. The representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the Urban Foundation seemed to agree with this.

There was also strain between employers and local authorities outside the Vaal. Generally, the crucial break between employers and town councils came over the issue of deducting rents from wages. The councils saw stop order rents as a simple way of ending the rent boycotts; employers saw them as a way of transferring the conflict over rents from the township to the factory floor. In April 1986 Heunis tabled in Parliament the Black Local Authorities Amendment Bill. The Bill included a new stop order clause to circumvent the legal opposition to Proclamation R186. However, the clause was strongly opposed by capital, as being damaging to labour relations. According to Assocom's Vincent Brett, the financial problem in the townships

> is very much a political problem rather than an economic one, and requires a political answer.

In May the clause was dropped [100].

The campaign against stop orders was spearheaded by ASSOCOM. In the aftermath of this success ASSOCOM's policy has been to try as far as possible to avoid getting caught up in the rent conflict. An ASSOCOM circular, '<u>Rent Boycotts</u>', distributed in July 1986 advised all members: "Do not become directly involved with the local Town Council over the collection of rents and service charges". The rest of the circular made it clear that employers would do well to keep a distance from the rent controversy.

[101]. Under the circumstances, then, the claim that employers are part of a state plan to crush the boycotts seems a little far fetched.

Rent Boycotts and Changes in Township Politics

Rent boycotts have informed as well as been shaped by township politics. It is, however, difficult to distinguish the political impact of the boycotts themselves from related or even coincidental events. In this section we try to identify the direct and indirect effects which rent boycotts have had on township politics.

The internal dynamics of rent boycotts have important direct effects. First, boycotts involve immediate material benefits to participants. Secondly, as arrears escalate so the cost of ending the boycott rises for the participants. Not only do residents have a direct financial stake in its continuation, but after a point they do not have the financial resources to even consider breaking the boycott. Once initiated, therefore, a rent boycott requires relatively little organisation to continue. Thus frequent detentions of rent boycott 'organisers' has not markedly affected boycotts.

The very factors that foster the success of a rent boycott may also weaken organisation. The Tumahole Civic Association was established to deal with the rent crisis, specifically, to negotiate with the OVDB. There was no perceived need for organisation over rents in the period between the OVDB's breaking off of negotiations and the first eviction orders. The boycott itself resolved the issue as far as residents were concerned, and the TCA atrophied.

Rent boycotts may also directly influence political culture and consciousness. Participation in a successful boycott may in itself radicalise previously quiescent residents. Even the first rent boycotts, which were responses to specifically local grievances, involved organisers who were linked into national or regional political structures. National political themes were thereby incorporated into local political consciousness. In addition, residents' conception of their rights may be redefined or extended to include notions of a 'just rent'. In the Vaal there was general consensus for a rent of R30 (ie including service charges) [102]. More recently, even a township conservative like former Soweto Mayor 'ET' Tshabalala has formulated notions of a just rent - with disquieting effect, as far as state officials were concerned. Many Soweto residents took up Tshabalala's suggestion and paid R9 rent and R15 water and electricity charges [103].

Crucially important in determining the interaction of boycotts and township politics was the nature of the state's response. The state's initial 'negotiation'-based approach accelerated organisational formation in many townships. The Sharpeville, Bophelong, and Boipatong Civic Associations, and the Umgwenya Action Committee, were constituted to negotiate with officials over rent boycotts. In Tumahole and in other Eastern Transvaal townships, organisations were formed in negotiations over the rent issue, but before rents were boycotted. Organisations involved in negotiations generally comprised older residents, often conservative professionals, rather than younger activists.

In Mamelodi, the Council responded to the boycott by discontinuing refuse removal. Activists set up street and section committees responsible for carrying out cleaning programmes in each area.' These were seen as the foundation for a future civic organisation [104]. The state's response to the rent boycott also strengthened street committee organisation in Soweto. The Council's threats to evict rent defaulters prompted the formation of defence committees, with increasing participation in grass-roots structures. The street committee network was then used to muster residnets quickly.

Elsewhere, however, threats of eviction had a very different effect on organisation. In the Vaal, Eastern Transvaal and Northern Free State, activists concentrated on opposing evictions and contesting the validity of rent increases through the courts. Dependence on extra-township resources such as lawyers could disrupt organisational structures originally developed for different purposes. For example, the Tumahole Civic comprised popular representatives rather than committed or more educated activists, who became more involved in the Youth Congress. Lawyers' reliance on articulate individuals as intermediaries meant working through such activists rather than the Civic's leaders. It was the unemployed activists, moreover, and not the workers, who had the time to spend at lawyers' offices in Johannesburg. The heightened role played by individuals strained pre-existing relations of accountability. This led to breakdowns in co-ordination between activists, and between activists and residents. As the Civic atrophied, Youth Congress activists further predominated [105].

When local authorities did try to evict families, support for the boycotts was often strengthened rather than weakened. Eviction was necessarily seen as an illegitimate response, given the justice of the boycott, and this illegitimacy was increased by the violence of its enforcement. Residents unsurprisingly resisted eviction. Heavy-handed reactions by the security forces, as in the 'White City War', provoked further moral outrage.

Evictions or the threat of eviction may cause tension between those who can afford to pay their debts and rent, and those who cannot. Losing a home is a serious threat given the housing

shortage, but boycott breakers face retribution. During August 1986, an evicted Tumahole resident agreed to pay his arrears so he could be reinstated. The day after he moved back into his house, it was set alight [106]. A more constructive approach has been the emergence in Soweto of the defensive structures mentioned above.

State repression, intransigence, or provocation during the course of boycotts often created new conditions in which existing organisations and forms of protest seemed to lose relevance. The state's shift to a coercion-based approach reduced the appeal of more conservative organisational responses in the townships. The radicalisation of township politics was something the former organisational leadership was often anxious to avoid. At a mass meeting in January 1985, residents demanded resolution of the rent dispute, fearing school children might otherwise cause a riot which they did not want [107]. Likewise the Umgwenya Action Committee had emphasised that residents 'want peace, stability or understanding and mutual co-operation' with the administration board.

> We insist that we as a community do not want violence but violence is forced down our throats by circumstances beyond our control [108].

In January 1986 youths took to the streets in several townships stoning and burning municipal buildings, threatening councillors or policeman and forcing them to leave the townships [109].

In some townships rent boycotts were a major contributory factor in the resignation of councillors and collapse of elected black local government. Daveyton Mayor Tom Boya was reported to have claimed that 32 community and 3 town councils had collapsed because of rent boycotts [110], but Boya subsequently denied he had said this. Councillors, he said, resigned because:

> They were victimised by their radical opponents who use violence and intimidation... [111]

In Tembisa and Alexandra councillors' resignations clearly were related to the crisis surrounding the rent boycott.

In Tembisa, five councillors and the Mayor, Lucas Mothiba, resigned in July. The deputy-mayor's resignation in early August left the Town Council inquorate. Tembisa was the sixth PWV Council to collapse (after Ratanda, Tumahole, Duduza, Tsakane and Alexandra). When Mothiba announced his resignation, he clearly stated that he had not been intimidated. His reasons capture the interaction between the financial and political contradictions facing councillors:

> I joined the Tembisa Council in good faith and with the hope that I would succeed in helping my people. But I am convinced that unless the government is prepared to subsidise 90% of the black local authorities, they will never succeed. [112]

Councillors in the Vaal and Soweto remained in office. In the Vaal, most of the councillors, however, went into exile in an army camp. In Soweto, after the 'White City War' (when one councillor was killed), most councillors fled to Fordsburg. According to White City councillor Johnson Mokoena:

> There is nothing wrong with the council and I will only resign when the people who elected me tell me to quit. [113].

No doubt their flight lost councillors whatever residual support they might have had, especially as the 'exiled' councillors expected the Council to foot their bills. Even Tshabalala expressed outrage, promising to hold a meeting 'where I will ask for a mandate to dissolve the council because councillors have deserted the townships' [114].

Rents and the Urban Political Economy

The rent boycotts have been the manifestation of fundamental conflict between township residents and the local state over the determinants of urban policy. The state has sought to ensure the social reproduction of the black urban population within a fiscal and political framework that is in contradiction with residents' financial resources and ideas of political justice or legitimacy. Implicit in residents' participation in rent boycotts is the demand that urban policy be determined by their needs, rather than the state's requirements.

In similar conditions elsewhere, states have resolved such conflict (at least temporarily) through state subsidisation of social reproduction [115]. In South Africa, indeed, such a strategy was a key element in the state's response to white working class militancy in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1980s, however, the state has been unwilling to compromise over subsidisation, as any concession violates the ideology and political basis of even a reformist variant of apartheid.

The need for significant state subsidisation has been implicitly demanded by township residents, recognised by capital, but ignored or side-stepped by the state. Negotiations between state officials and residents have therefore inevitably resulted in deadlock. In the Vaal, for exaple, the residents' delegates took local income as their starting point; officials took the council budget as theirs. The state has not even such talks as negotiations, but rather as an opportunity to persuade delegates that paying rising rents is necessary. Residents, however, have seen no reason to accept the principle of financial self-sufficiency that premises the local state's position. Negotiations could not resolve the contradiction; coercion could only suppress it.

The state's immediate responses to the rent crisis have been based on a refusal to recognise any fundamental change in the fiscal relationship of residents and councils. Officials have constantly warned that a continued boycott would 'compel' them to cut public services. In fact, however, there has been little apparent deterioration in the provision of services. Local authorities have continued to provide services through a combination of cost cutting (including shelving some capital expenditure), drawing on their reserves, and arranging bridging loans [117]. But, as Soweto's Acting Town Clerk warned, 'ultimately the residents are going to have to pay interest on the outstanding money'. The Soweto Council has stressed that it is not bankrupt: 'At the moment our debtors outnumber our creditors. The people still owe us some money, and once they pay, our problems will be over' [118].

Local state officials have, however, on several occasions sought central state funds as a temporary measure. The central state has publically not been forthcoming [119]. But it seems likely that local authorities have drawn on central government funds during the rent boycott. The reserves of the Lekoa Town Council, for example, would not have covered the over R100 million rent arrears. Nor could commercial loans have been arranged without state guarantees.

In the long term, the state appears to be planning to wash its hands of the rents problem. The White Paper on Urbanisation released late in 1986 provides for the further commodification of township housing and introduces the basis for commodified township development. The development of townships is to become the responsibility of the private sector. A Department of Constitutional Development and Planning official explained with reference to a proposed extension to Tembisa:

> The private sector develops this area for its own account and for its own profit or whatever it might be. Eventually than [sic] we corporate [sic] this development area into the jurisdiction area of the adjacent land. [120]

The state will only accept responsibility for providing welfare housing (ie housing for families with monthly incomes of less than R150) [121].

In short, the state envisages that the private sector will resolve both the financial and political contradictions. Whilst private capital sees state contracts as a lucrative basis for accumulation, it is very unlikely to contemplate assuming responsibility for wholesale black township development. It has no reason to believe that tenants will respond any more positively to private landlords than they have to the state.

The state will have to resign itself to arranging some form of subsidisation. This issue will dominate the agenda of Regional Services Councils, a point which has even dawned on Nic Louw. At a recent meeting where the Department of Constitutional

Development explained the new Urbanisation Strategy to selected Vaal employers and the Evaton and Lekoa Town Councils, he confessed: 'we all pray for the institution of regional services housing' [122].

Notes and References

Abbreviations:

BD - *Business Day*
Cit - *The Citizen*
FM - *The Financial Mail*
NN - *The New Nation*
RDM - *The Rand Daily Mail*
Sow - *The Sowetan*
ST - *The Sunday Times*
WM - *The Weekly Mail*

1. Minutes of a Meeting Held Between the Vaal Chamber of Commerce and the Vaal Trade Union Co-Ordinating Committee, 13.6.85.
2. This section is drawn from Jeremy, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships, 1980-84', Paper presented to the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand (February 1987), to be published in R Cohen and W Cobbett (eds) *Popular Struggles in Southern Africa* (forthcoming).
3. Quoted in Heather Hughes and Jeremy Grest, 'The Local State', in *South African Review 1*, (Johannesburg: SARS and Ravan, 1983), p. 127.
4. Simon Bekker & Richard Humphries, *From Control to Confusion: The Changing Role of the Administration Boards in South Africa, 1971-1983*, (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1984), p. 132.
5. The state in fact sought to phase out the few remaining extra-township sources of revenue. The Riekert Commission called for employers' contributions to be progressively reduced and eventually abolished.
6. Michael McGrath and Gavin Maasdorp, 'Some limits to redistribution', paper presented at the conference on 'the Southern African Economy after Apartheid', University of York, October 1986.
7. Jeremy Keenan, 'The recession and its effects on the African working-class', *South African Review 2*, (Johannesburg: SARS and Ravan, 1984).
8. Bureau of Market Research, UNISA, 'Income and expenditure patterns of urban multiple households in Pretoria/the West and East Rands/Johannesburg/Vaal Triangle, 1980/1985', Research Reports nos 94.1/.3/.4/.7 (Pretoria, 1981) and 130.2/.8/.9/.13., (Pretoria, 1986). The 25% estimate for the Vaal is conservative.
9. *UPE Fact Papers* numbers 22 (October 1977) and 53 (March 1984): table 45.
10. PJ Pienaar, *Administration Board Eastern Transvaal Kennisgewing*, 18/3/82; *Eastern Transvaal Development Board Adjustment of Service Charges with effect from 1st July 1984.*
11. *RDM Extra* 5.11.84.

12. *Star Africa* 24.1.85; *Sow* 20.2.86.
13. Minutes of the 9th Ordinary Meeting, Lekoa Town Council, 23.10.84.
14. PAYE ('Pay as You Earn') tied rents to income on a sliding scale. In Ethandukukhanya, for example, the rents announced in 1984 ranged from a minimum R30.31 for households with income below R50 per month (ie rent set at approximately 78% of income), to R36.64 for households earning R150-160 (about 24.2%), to R50.09 for households earning R400-410 (about 12.5%).
15. Father Patrick, *Diary of events - Vaal Triangle*, p. 8.
16. Interview with Penny Molhalghi, Mamelodi, 11.8.86.
17. J. Seekings, 'The Anvil: Politics in Tumahole, 1984-5' in *Africa Perspective* new series No. 2 (forthcoming).
18. Interview Ace Magashule, October 1986.
19. *Citizen* 23.4.86.
20. *Sowetan* 10.2.86, *BD* 4.6.86.
21. 'Anvil' p.24.
22. *Memorandum of meetings held at Piet Retief Community Hall, 10.12.84, and at the Magistrate's office, 11.12.84.*
23. interview... - Karen in Ethandukhaka, etc.
24. Interview with activist 14.11.86.
25. Interview with female resident 08.10.86.
26. Undated memo *'Complains (sic) of the Umgwenya community'*.
27. See, for example *Sow* 11.9.86.
28. *WM* 9.8.86.
29. *Cit* 4.8.86.
30. cf *Cit* 8.8.86 and below.
31. Development boards were officially abolished as of 1 July 1986. Their assets, liabilities and personnel were transferred to provincial administrators and executive committees. We refer to development boards throughout.
32. 'Strategy for the collection of arrear rentals and service charges', Annexure to the Agenda of the Second Special Meeting, Town Council of Lekoa Executive Committee, 7 November 1985.
33. Ibid.
34. Personal communication, P. Moleko.
35. *BD* 7.7.86.
36. *WM* 25.7.86.
37. *Sow* 5.2.87.
38. The article was by Jon Qwelane, 13.7.86, emphasis added in the headline; cf also *Cit* 16.7.86; *Sow* 9.7.86, 10.7.86, 15.7.86.
39. *Cit* 23.7.86.
40. *State vs Sefatsa and others*, Supreme Court of South Africa, Transvaal Provincial Division, 1985, pp. 38-9.
41. GL James, ETDB Chief Director, to Messrs Phosa, Mojapelo and Partners (lawyers), 8 July 1975.
42. See for example *BD* 12.1.87, *Star* 14.1.87.
43. *BD* 9.7.86.
44. *Cit* 23.7.86.
45. *State vs Sefatsa and others*, pp. 38-9.

46. N. Louw, 'Answers to questions put by employees of Commerce and Industry in regard to the payment of house rental, service charges and tariffs applicable in Lekoa and general complaints pertaining to township administration, Question 1, p.1 (undated).
47. 'Further particulars to answers to questions put by employees, etc' Question 1, p.1 (undated).
48. Orange Vaal Development Board, 'Summary of meeting with delegation at Tumahole, 6 November 1985'.
49. *ROM* 15.9.84; the LTC suspended the Vaal increase on 18.9.84, NP Louw, 'circular to Vaal residents', 23.10.84.
50. 'Anvil'.
51. 'Strategy for Collection...' p12 6A.
52. Louw, 'Answers to Questions', Question 43; Personal communication P Thappeli.
53. Interview with Breyten resident, 14.11.86.
54. *Star* 6.9.86.
55. *BD* 30.7.86.
56. *Sow* 28.8.86.
57. See above, also Seekings 'The Origins...'.
58. Sections 22 (1) and (2) of the Black Affairs Administration Act, No 45 of 1971 (as amended).
59. Affidavit of Wilhelmina Mofurutsi, p. 6, Wilhelmina Mofurutsi et al vs The Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, The Oranje Vaal Development Board and the Administrator of the Free State, Supreme Court of SA, OFS Division.
60. 'Strategy', p7.
61. 'Strategy', p.12 6A.
62. 'Strategy', p.2, Remarks: 8.
63. Louw, 'Answers to questions', Question 1.
64. ETDB, letter from BHJ Venter, acting Chief Director 1985.01.08.
65. See *BD* 30.7.86.
66. State officials did stop repeating some of the absurdities; Louw, for example, had abandoned his "bussed-in-agitators" explanation of the Vaal Uprising by the time he gave evidence in the Delmas Treason Trial.
67. See *WM* 9.8.86.
68. See 'Strategy', Section 2.
69. *BD* 9.7.86, *Sow* 10.7.86.
70. *Sow* 9.7.86.
71. *Star* 21.7.86.
72. Covering letter, Director Housing, City of Soweto, to registered council tenants and home owners, August 1986.
73. *Cit* 23.7.86; cf also *WM* 25.7.86.
74. *Star* 8.9.86.
75. *Star* 21.7.86.
76. *Star* 16.7.86, 28.7.86, *ME Mothiba vs Tembisa Town Council*.
77. *ST* 20.7.86.
78. Personal communication, R. Spoor.
79. *Star*, *NN*, and *Cit*, 17.7.86.
80. *Cit* 4.9.86.
81. *BD* 1.9.86; cf *NN* and *Sow*, 28.8.86.

82. See for example *BD* 4.9.86.
83. *Cit* 28.8.86.
84. Cf *Sow* of 28.8.86 with that of 11.9.86.
85. *Star* 28.8.86.
86. *Star* 29.8.86.
87. *Cit* 8.8.86.
88. *HM* 5.9.86.
89. *Star* 6.9.86. This is the same position the ETDB ended up with.
90. *HM* 5.9.86.
91. *CP* 15.6.86.
92. *Sow* date unknown.
93. *HM* 9.8.86.
94. *Cit* 4.8.86.
95. Minutes of a meeting held between the individuals and groups shown on the attached register to discuss the rental problem in the Vaal, 17 January 1986.
96. P. Thom and P. Masia, *VTUCC memorandum*, (undated). The stress is theirs.
97. Minutes of a Meeting held at Fosatu Offices 31 May 1985, p.2.
98. Minutes of a Meeting Held Between the Vaal Chamber of Commerce and the Vaal Trade Union Co-Ordinating Committee; 13 June 1985, p.4.
99. Minutes of a meeting held between the individuals and groups shown on the attached register to discuss the rental problem in the Vaal, 12 December 1985.
100. *BD* 14.5.86.
101. G.A.V. Brett to Secretaries of all Chambers, Members of the Manpower Committee, Affiliated Members, Senior Associate Members and Associate Members, *Rent Boycotts*, 25 July 1986.
102. See the VTUCC meetings; Boipatong Residents Council *Memorandum*, 29 November 1984; Bophelong Civic Association, *Resolution taken at a meeting held on the 13/10/85 at the Communal hall*.
103. *BD* 28.1.87.
104. K. Jochelson, 'Massacre sparks rent boycott' *in HIP* 44, September/October 1986.
105. Cf 'Anvil'.
106. K. Jochelson, 'Tumahole: this burden is too heavy' in *HIP* 44, September/October 1986, p.16.
107. Phosa, Mojapelo and Partners to Minister of Public Works, 23.12.85.
108. Undated memorandum, *'Complains of the Umgwenya community'*.
109. *FM* article (date unknown).
110. See for example, *Sow* 15.7.86.
111. *Cit* 25.7.86; also *BD* 25.7.86.
112. *HM* 1.8.86.
113. *Sow* 1.9.86.
114. *CP* 14.9.86; Tshabalala's suspension from the Council had just been extended again! - *Star* 12.9.86.
115. On Glasgow rent strike etc, see M. Castells, *The City and the Grassroots*, (London, 1983).

116. Soweto council officials for example referred to a R20 million loan - *BD* 6.1.87.
117. *ibid*.
118. *Star* 14.1.87.
119. See for example, *HM* 5.9.86.
120. Discussions on Urbanisation White Paper, Sebokeng 9.9.86.
121. ibid.
122. ibid.