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A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

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Title: 'We are being punished because we are poor'. The Bus Boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955-1957.

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'We are being punished because we are poor'. The bus boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955 - 1957.

1.1

This article concerns itself with two bus boycotts, one well known,the other less so. They are interesting in themselves, but here it is suggested that they are relevant towards an understa of South African black resistance in general,and in particular in the context of the 1950s when African political organisations were attempting to mobilise large numbers of people in campaigns which had the ultimate aim of hastening the collapse of the existing political structure. A problem of that period , noted by many commentators both hostile and friendly to the liberation movement,is that despite the Congress Alliance's efforts to articulate its long-term aims through immediate issues: pass laws, wages, and so forth; despite the government's lack of concern to effectively legitimise its authority in the eyes of the masses; despite this being a period of economic stagnation relative to the preceding decade, so wages rose only very slowly and probably declined in real terms, nevertheless, mass response to African political organisation was uneven and often disappointing. Ben Turok, a former activist within the Congress movement, tells us that by the second half of the I950s, after an initial promise at the beginning of the decade, support for the national movement was falling off in urban areas; that frustration and repression were beginning to promote political apathy (Turok 1973: 333). The boycotts will therefore be discussed within the general context of the problems of political mobilisation.

1.2

Most analyses of the period tend to bring to the surface, not always intentionally, the tensions between leaders and followers, between political organisation and its potential constituency, between formal institutionalised resistance and informal 'spontaneous' protest. There are three principal approaches. The first is the one adopted by many members of the political organisations concerned. Using the wisdom of hindsight they tend to interpret the history of the period as involving the careful and logical unfolding of a continuous grand strategy which has the effect of raising the level of mass political consciousness to further heights, hastening the arrival of all the necessary conditions for a succesful revolution. The role of the party is that of a vanguard: it plans campaigns which in terms of their proclaimed objectives are doomed to failure, which in their frustration have the effect of lifting the scales from the eyes of those who hitherto believed that their sufferings could be ended within the confines of the existing political and economic framework. Each campaign elicits a cumulatively more savage response from the authorities which in turn deepens the masses' hatred of the system and their willingness to confront it whatever the penalty or cost (see Slovo 1976: 170). The first approach, therefore involves the vision of a politically inert mass which initally must be activated by a catalyst - in this case the African National

Congress and its allies in the Congress movement.

1.3

The second approach, sometimes used by those, who for one reason or another are critical of the African National Congress, is to contend that in fact the ANC functioned during the 1950s in precisely the opposite way. That the people, the masses, did not need to be cajoled and prodded into resistance, they had no illusions about the iniquity of the system; rather,it is argued leadership actually perpetuated certain illusions, it curbed popular militancy; guided by its own class interests, which were those of an aspirant petty bourgeoisie, it sought to restrain the course of protest and guide it into channels in which it would serve the interests of this class as opposed to those of the masses. So that when there was an outburst of protest, political organisations would institutionalise it, bureacratise it, blunt the keenessof popular anger. For such critics the history of the 1950s is the history of lost opportunities, of chances squandered (Feit 1967: 29-31; Socialist League of Africa 1961: 7-9)

1.4

A third approach, favoured by the sociologists, Fatima Meer and Leo Kuper, falls rathe between the other two. For while recognising the existence of spontaneous mass-murmerings which can suddenly erupt into violence, they imply that there is something qualitively different between the nature of protest involved in, say, a beer hall riot and that of an orchestrated campaign against, for example, Bantu Education. In spontaneous movements the agencies of oppression are ignored while the wrath of the crowd breaks on a specific or associated grievance: it is the grievance, not the system of which it is but a symptom which makes the direct emotional impact and dominates the perception of the crowd. This contrasts with the behaviou of a political movement which deliberately concentrates its energies on attacking a symptom - for example, pass laws - but articulates this attack in a general strategy directed against the system itself. The behaviour of the mass can be likened to that of a psychotic: themass cannot see beyond the immediete provocative trifle to the root of its passion. The trifle restored or the grievance alleviated will reduce the passion, which though considerably more violent and excitable than the disciplined application of political energy, is never very sustained.
Nevertheless the incident that provokes a disturbance which is essentially apolitical in character, though arising from a specific grievance, is embedded in a matrix of grievances. Ideally the role of the political organisation is an ambivalent one. On the one hand it tries to control and direct the energies of spontaneous protest - often attempting to divert it away from activity which is percieved to be unprofitable and asteful - thus in a sense it seeks to curb the implicit violence of mass disaffection. On the other hand organisations try to ' sympathetically interpret' popular emotion - to locate the immediate grievance in the matrix of grievances, to employ the raw energy of communal protest in a politically constructive manner, to ensure that the short term victories are gained and seen as victories, not concessions, as signs of weakness in authority and hence stages along a road of confrontations involving progressively more vital and important issues. In this sense, compromises to gain short term victories, while they are open to the accusation of reformism and of blurring the focus and disappating the emotion of spontaneous protest are tactically vital in any long term strategy of revolutionary implications. As Martin Legassick (n.d. :17) has pointed out:

> ...the means by which any revolutionary party mobilizes its social base are reformist, whether one talks about a "mass line","immediete demands", or a minimum program. The problem is whether"reformist" deman can win and retain popular support and whether their internal logic leads to a questioning of the system as a whole, and a stronger power base for challenging that system.

I.5

The bus boycotts provide promising material for the testing of these assumptions concerning the interplay between the behaviours of the organisation and the crowd. In looking at the two movments, the boycotts of Alexandra and Evaton, the following questions will be implicit in the analysis and there will be an attempt to resolve them at the end:

1.5.1

What is the role of political organisations in these movements? Are they performing the vanguard function suggested by Slovo, that is to say raising the consciousness of a politically backward, not to say passive, mass? Or do they attempt to bureacratise mass action, divert it along channels dictated by the class interests of a petty bourgeoise leadership? Or is the process rather the dialectical one suggested by Kuper and Meer: crowd behaviour ideally conditioning and being conditioned by in increasingly effective ways the role of the political organisation?

1.5.2

Is there a distinct pattern to bus boycott behaviour which can lead us to suppose that they can form part of a programme of what Legassick calls 'institutionalizing' popular power - that is, part of a strategy which involves objectives that are acceptable to authority in the sense that it can be compelled to accept them - that is, a gradual process of consolidating popular power at a local level round economic objectives and informal structures that are not explicitly threatening to state authority but which nevertheless involving a growth of mass consciousness of power? With this growth in self awareness, a unified and direct challenge to the political and economic system to defend or extend certain gains becomes possible?

1.5.3

If this is the case, does it suggest an alternative strategy to those adopted by the national movement and social revolutionaries at the time?

2.1

Let us now turn to the Alexandra Bus Boycott. I am first going to describe the underlying causes of the boycott as well as the immediate precipitating actions. Then I am going to look at the course of the boycott itself laying especial emphasis on the role certain organisations, groups and individuals played. Finally I will discuss the implications of the settlement.

2.2

The Alexandra bus boycott was the response of an African community to a penny rise in the single bus fare between the township and the centre of Johannesburg nine miles away. Now the failure of the African National Congress to evoke a consistently massive response during the 1950's is explained by Fatima Meer who suggests: 'revolution is not a popular cause .... security of a familiar system, even if limiting, is invariably preferred to the risks of change' (Meer 1971: 150). It has also been asserted that rising black expectations were being matched by the pace of economic growth; that urban Africans had too much to lose if administrative tranquility and economic productivity were interrupted or disturbed (Feit 1967: 130). The bus boycotts help to demonstrate that the economic climate of the 1950's did precious little to provide for the needs of a large proportion of the members of the urban black community. The African family budget rested on a knife edge: in 1956 the average wage was £191 a year (1). A penny increase in bus fares amounted to another 1.4 per cent of income being devoted to cost of going to work - regardless of the transport needs of the wage-earner's family. When one also considers that well over eighty per cent of Johannesburg's black families had incomes below the level needed for 'minimum essential expenditure' (Horrell 1956-1957: 166-170) it does not take much perception to see that efforts to explain failure in political mobilisation as a result of satisfaction of African economic aspirations are pretty far fetched.

2.3

The other point to consider is that the rise in bus fares brought up a number of issues arising out of transport problems. Transport was not a minor issue. Bus boycotts were a very common form of protest in the 1950's (2) and the Alexandra boycotters were to attract an enormous amount of support and interest throughout South Africa. As well as the townships directly affected by the fare rises there were well supported sympathy boycotts among communities which had not recently suffered them; these included Moroka, Port Elizabeth and East London. In part these bore testimony to the African National Congress's organizational strength (and an indication that it has been underrated by some scholars) - but they were also, surely, a reflection of the accumulated frustrations that developed out of the problems of transport in towns. It wasn't simply the cost of transport that was an issue in bus boycotts. In 1943 the complaints of Alexandra commuters had included such matters as routing, overcrowding, departures from schedule, danger, unsheltered terminals, and rude staff (3). Fourteen years later there had not been much improvement. Buses were still crowded (as they are today), they were badly ventilated and insufficient in number. African residential areas are often far away from the workplace and in addition to the journey time there were also the periods spent waiting in long bus queues, often without adequate shelter. In 1953 it was estimated that Alexandrans spent three and a half hours a day commuting (4). There was little consultation over timetabling and when the buses reached townships they would often stop at a single terminal: people would sometimes have to walk a considerable distance to their homes from the bus stop. And on top of all this they were not exactly cheap either: transport was quite often the second major item in the family budget. It is not difficult to understand the way

transport issues seemed to touch on an exposed nerve in the black community.

2.4.

To understand the boycott we must know something of the history and character of Alexandra township. The first thing that is significant is that Alexandra was a freehold area; as in Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare, Africans could own land (5). There seems to be a correlation between well supported bus boycotts and freehold property rights; as well as in Alexandra there had been major boycotts in Western Native Township, Sophiatown, Lady Selbourne and Evaton; also areas where Africans owned property. Such places were often very densely populated which contributed to the difficulties of administering them but which also helped to create a strong feeling of communal solidarity (6). Alexandra's population was growing very swiftly in the 1950's: in 1943 it was estimated at 50,000, less than ten years later it was thought to have 80,000 inhabitants (7). The pace of this growth was in part a response to the recent industrial development in the neighbouring areas of Wynberg and Bergvlei. Alexandra was a township which had evolved organically over forty years rather than, as was the case with the South West Townships, being suddenly and artificially constructed by external agencies. The political liveliness of the community must have owed something to the fact that it was extremely difficult to police; despite pleas from standholders there was no police station in the township (8) and in the 1950's police entered it only with the greatest reluctance (Turok 1973: 355). Alexandra had a tradition of bus boycotts. The first took place in 1940 and succeeded in forcing bus companies to reduce fares by a penny to 4d. The operators were to attempt to put the fares up three times in the next five years and on each occasion a boycott prevented them from doing so. The longest of these boycotts lasted for six weeks from November 15 1944. As well as the boycotts there had been an important squatters movement led by Schreiner Baduza in 1946 - 1947; in Alexandra there was a well developed history of collective action by the community.

2.5

Alexandra was administered by the Alexandra Health Committee. The township lay outside the municipal area and consequently the committee had very few sanctions or resources to make its authority effective. It's six officers could do little to control building (one of the designated functions of the committee) and therefore Alexandra was very crowded. Standholders were often heavily in debt: in the 1940s eighty-five percent of the property was bonded. (9) Moneylenders charged high interest and standholders would build up to about fifteen lean-to rooms on their stands (10), letting each room to a family for rents that could be as high as £4 a month (11). There was the most apalling poverty: an ANC representative claimed that most wage earners earned on average £2 10s a week (12) (SAIRR figure for an average Johannesburg black family income was £15 18 11d a month) (13). Alexandra's poverty in comparison to other black townships was reflected in the infant mortality figures: 23 per cent of the children born there died within a year, mainly of malnutrition (the figure for Johannesburg was 4 per cent) (14). There was an unusually high degree of youth unemployment: influx control regulations prevented people who were born in Alexandra from seeking work in Johannesburg (Huddlestone 1956: 26-28). This, combined with the absence of policing in Alexandra which caused it to be catchment area for people seeking to avoid the clutches of authority, helps to explain the flourishing gang activity in the township. With all these factors it is small wonder that the people of Alexandra would react so vigorously to a penny rise in bus fares.

2.6

Some understanding of the position of the bus company is helpful. The Public Utility Transport Company (PUTCO) was formed in 1945 taking over licences and stock from several smaller companies which had serviced locations in the Pretoria and Johannesburg area. Some of PUTCO's difficulties can be traced to this takeover which was on excessively advantageous terms for the companies which were being bought out (15). But to compound this there were rising costs. By local standards PUTCO paid high wages and these had risen by fifty per cent since 1945 and the price of buses and spare parts had doubled since then as well (16). Bus fares on certain routes, which were in any case sub-economic, had remained static since the 1930s. PUTCO had in 1954 applied for permission to increase its fares but this was refused by the cabinet. Then in 1955 the National Transport Commission (NTC) agreed that PUTCO could raise its weekend fares: the new fares were implemented though the Alexandra branch of the ANC and other groups tried to oppose them (17). But this did little to solve PUTCO's problems: by the end of 1956 the 440 shareholders were in a dissatisfied mood: they had only begun to receive a dividend in 1952 and at six per cent it was not a generous one (18). In fact PUTCO was able to pay a dividend only because the Government was subsidizing unprofitable routes with a grant of £207 475 (First, 1957: 58). The government was reluctant to increase the subsidy and so the NTC granted an apprehensive PUTCO a fare increase to take effect on all save Soweto routes from January 7 1957.

2.7

The Alexandra bus boycott lasted three months. The tenacity of PUTCO's efforts to maintain the new fares was partly motivated by its desperate financial position. But there was another factor. PUTCO was no ordinary company: as well as providing the subsidy the Government appointed two of PUTCO's five directorships and approved the chairman of the board (First, 1957: 58). The quasi-public nature of the company could well have contributed to the inflexibility of it's negotiating position.

2.8

In response to PUTCO's announcement on the fare rise a meeting was called on January 2 1957 by the Alexandra Vigilance Committee, a group of community leaders which amongst its other functions elected two standholder representatives to the Health Committee. Twenty four people came to the meeting representing six different groups. These were:

The Standholders and Tenants Association
The African National Congress
The ANC National-minded bloc
The ANC (Madzunya) group
The Movement for Democracy of Content
The Workers League

2.9

The Standholders' Association represented about a thousand people who owned stands or who rented or sub-let them from external property owners. S Mahlangu and J.S. Mathebula of the Association became chairman and secretary of the Alexandra Peoples Transport Committee (APTC) which was formed from those who attended the meeting. That property owners were to play a leading role in the boycott was to

be very significant but it is difficult to explain. There does not seem to have been any intention, as there had been in earlier boycotts, for local entrepeneurs to establish an alternative bus company though there was a proposal that African businessmen from Durban should be approached (19). It is possible that landlords would have been keen to resist rises in the cost of living which may have affected people's ability to pay rents. But more probably the standholders would have viewed involvement in the boycott leadership as an inevitable consequence of their status within the community.

2.10

The ANC had the largest representation on the APTC: three men and three womens' league members. The ANC had had a tumultuous history in Alexandra recently because of disputes between Africanists and supporters of the Freedom Charter (see below). The current leadership was inexperienced and fairly young. Alfred Nzo, the branch chairman had only recently joined the ANC. He was employed by the Health Committee as an Inspector. (Karis, Carter, Gerhart, 1977: 123). The other leading ANC spokesman was Thomas Nkobi, a laboratory assistant. Up until the middle 1950s the local ANC had been led by businessmen such as Phineas Nene and R G Baloyi. That they no longer predominated reflected the increasingly radical character of the movement at this time. It was important that the boycott coincided with the opening hearings of the Treason Trial: the Congress leadership was unable to pay very close attention to the affairs of the branches and for a time the local ANC was left to take its own initiatives. The presence of women on the committee was also significant. The League had submitted a memorandum of transport grievances in 1943 to show how the inadequacies of the system specially affected women: examples included the plight of washerwomen (servicing the northern suburbs) who had to deliver their bundles of washing using the overcrowded buses as well as the situation of any woman at a crowded bus stop where the strongest will always win the struggle for space on the buses (20). Women were to be prominent in the initial picketing of bus stops.

2.11

The ANC (Madzunya) group were a faction which had developed from the disputes between Africanists and Chartists which were affecting most ANC branches on the Rand. The dispute essentially concerned the alliance between the ANC, the (white) Congress of Democrats (COD) and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) as well as an ideological shift from a populist exclusive nationalism to a more all-embracing social democratic position. The Madzunyites were Africanists: after being expelled from the ANC they formed an African nationalist nucleus in Alexandra. The Alexandran Africanists were considerably less middle-class in character than those elsewhere (21). They were led by Josias Madzunya who had been ANC branch chairman until his expulsion in 1955. Madzunya was born in Vendaland and arrived in Johannesburg in 1931 to work as a domestic servant. As a casual labourer he attended a Communist Party night school and later took a correspondence course in public speaking. He currently earned his living selling cardboard boxes on a Johannesburg street corner where he would deliver lengthy political harangues. He was an energetic activist (he played quite an important part in the Bantu Education Boycott; Alexandra was one of the few townships to respond) and very outspoken:

> "These whites are just bluffing you by saying that they are friendly to you. They will never be friendly ..... Europeans are like lice. They are parasites, busy sucking on blood by means of work for unequal pay". (22)

Madzunya was a member of the APTC as was one of his colleagues, M Motsele, a former ANC branch secretary expelled with Madzunya.

2.12

The ANC national minded bloc were a conservative splinter grouping who emerged in 1952 in opposition to cooperation with the SAIC and what they alleged to be communist influence on the nationalist movement. They were led by R V Selope Thema and were usually given sympathetic coverage in the newspaper he edited until 1952, The World. It was a small group with a heavy preponderance of relatively wealthy businessmen. Their Alexandra members included R G Baloyi, a former ANC treasurer and bus boycott leader of the 1940s and more important in the context of the 1957 boycott, Dan Gumede. Gumede was the only member of the APTC who provided a personal link with the boycotts of the previous decade. In 1942 he was ANC branch secretary (23) and in the following year he belonged to both the Alexandra Transport Action Committee and the Anti Expropriation Committee (24).

2.13

The Movement for Democracy of Content seems to have had links with the Unity Movement and the Society of Young Africa, components of the All African Convention, in Johannesburg a somewhat ephemeral organisation sharply critical of the ANC. Democracy of Content was represented on the APTC by Dan Mokonyane who became its assistant secretary. Mokonyane was a law student at Witwatersrand.

2.14

Finally there was the Workers League, led and represented by George Hlongwe. This is the least well documented group. An Alexandra Workers Union was involved in bus fare negotiations in 1942 (25) and in 1955 Hlongwe as leader of the Workers League Transport Action Committee was proposing a boycott in response to the weekend fare rises (26)

2.15

So represented on the APTC was a considerable collection of sectional and in some cases conflicting interests. Broadly these fall into three groups: the property owners and businessmen, now largely alienated from the local ANC; the political parties each with a competing popular appeal; groups which confined themselves to subsistence issues, poor people's movements (27).

2.16

The APTC organised a meeting on Sunday 6th January which was attended by 2000 people. The meeting voted to boycott the buses until the fares were restored to their old level. The next day the buses ran virtually empty, 15 000 people walked the nine miles from Alexandra to Johannesburg. Simultaneously boycotts began in Sophiatown and the Pretoria townships which were also affected by the PUTCO increases

(see below). Altogether 60,000 people were to stop using the green PUTCO buses. Many of them had the alternative of a train service but the people of Alexandra had no such choice; for the next three months they walked to and from work, 18 miles a day. Several things were important in sustaining the boycotters' enthusiasm. First, the boycott committee held frequent open air mass meetings in one or other of the squares in Alexandra. Here speeches were made by representatives of the different factions and groups, but most important of all the people were informed of the progress of negotiations with the company, the municipality and employers' organisations, and given a chance to express their opinions. Decision-making was done at the mass meeting; a show of hands would determine the acceptance or rejection of proposed solutions. This direct democracy was crucial in the maintenance of boycotters' morale. It is significant that there was little evidence of any kind of intimidation; even the 'tsotsis' contented themselves with the levying of a 1s. 6d. 'boycott tax' (28).

2.17

The second point is that there was considerable sympathy for the boycotters among the white community. This was important for two reasons. First, efforts were made to provide boycotters with lifts during the early stages of the boycott. Secondly, it was not long before various white groups began to search for a compromise: unlike industrial struggles or overtly political campaigns the bus boycott seems to have had a much greater chance of exploiting conflicting interests within the white community. It is worth looking at these groups quite closely. Perhaps the one that had the most influence on the course of events was the Johannesburg branch of the Liberal Party. They were to perform a crucial intermediary function between the employers' organisations and the boycott committees. A white group which had much closer contacts with the ANC was the Congress of Democrats but they lacked the relationship with employers enjoyed by Liberals and in any case many of their leading members were caught up in the Treason Trial proceedings. Quite apart from their humanitarian feelings, the Liberals were quite anxious to increase their influence and membership among the black community; the boycott offered an excellent opportunity. The Liberals quickly formed a boycott sub-committee and set about organising a relay of lifts (though lift giving was by no means restricted to Liberals or COD members). Members of the committee also began sounding out contacts on the city council and the Chamber of Commerce. After January 22nd a series of meetings was held between the Liberal sub-committee and the APTC. Out of these an important moderating principle was established: the boycotters demands would not go 'beyond the preservation of pre-boycott fares' (29). This contrasted both with the Evaton boycott (see below) and previous Alexandra boycotts.

2.18

We will return to the Liberals later. Also very important were the employers organisations, for it was their attitude that was going to decide the final outcome of the boycott. First, the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber had played an important role in the 1944-45 boycott negotiations and on February 23rd it was to offer to fund a transport allowance which would be paid to employees. Among the more important employers represented by the Chamber of Commerce were some who were relatively progressive. One such was

OK Bazaars Limited. OK Bazaars had a fairly enlightened record. In the 1940s they were willing to negotiate with the black shopworkers union and their employees were relatively well paid (30). Many of them lived in Alexandra (31). It has been suggested that their attitude might have arisen out of relative vulnerability. A stoppage or reduced efficiency in the workforce might have rather more costly effects on a regional retailing system dependent on a single warehouse staffed by that workforce than in an industrial situation (32). Contrasting with the sympathetic position towards the boycotters taken by the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce was the attitude of the Transvaal Chamber of Industries. This became clear in a statement issued by the Chamber's President, Lulofs, on January 11th. In it he complained of a sharp increase in the rate of absenteeism (commercial employers were emphatic that absenteeism had not increased) and a lowered productivity because of physical exhaustion of the workforce. He also said that industry was reluctant to subsidise to any further extent the Natives Services Levy. The Levy was a fund contributed to by industry and commerce which financed various services and housing projects. Lulofs pointed out that many employers were exempted from this contribution (e.g. municipalities, who paid atrociously) (33). Two weeks later, the Chamber called on boycotters to 'accept their situation'. Plans for long term solutions were being formed, it loftily informed them. Absenteeism would result in wholesale dismissals (34). At this stage Industry had been influenced by the Transport Minister's denunciation of the boycott as being politically inspired. At the beginning of February Industry said it was not prepared to raise wages to end the boycott (a solution advocated with some force by PUTCO who were one of the best employers in Johannesburg) (35). Even more striking was Industry's refusal to support the Chamber of Commerce transport allowance sheme. This was after one of the major industrial bodies, the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa had decided that the boycott was 'too dangerous to touch" (36).

2.19

The contrasting attitudes of the two employers' organisations need some explanation. More research is required to bear out the following possibilities. First, it may have been that many of Alexandra's industrial workers were employed nearby (in Bergvlei and Wynberg) and consequently the boycott would not have made a great deal of difference to them or their employers. Second, the Chamber of Industry was a Transvaal body whereas the Chamber of Commerce represented Johannesburg firms only: in the case of the latter the Alexandra boycotters as a proportion of their total workforce may have been more important. Third, Industry may have been penetrated to a much greater extent by Afrikaner capital than was the case with Johannesburg commercial firms, and hence been more receptive to Government injunctions to have nothing to do with the boycotters.

2.20

But as well as the positions of various organisations one should not neglect the general sympathy the boycott evoked from Johannesburg's white community at least until the first terms were rejected. The boycott received a reasonably warm press and there was also the encouragement of the lifts. The boycott's impact is not difficult to understand: visually it was dramatic - the steady procession of men and women marching to and from Alexandra every

day shouting 'Azikwelwa' (we will not ride) and 'Ha Bongoela' (we don't drink any more) and 'Gein Ukudla' (keep food for a rainy day)* and 'Asinimali' (we have no money). And as they walked they sang the boycott song which was soon to be banned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation. To get to work the boycotters had to cross nine miles of white residential areas along a busy main road. For a while the black people of Alexandra had become visible to the Northern Suburbs.

2.21.

However behind the determination and unity of the people who were walking to work cracks were beginning to emerge amongst the groups represented on the APTC. These were the result of moves by the employers and PUTCO itself. As we have seen the first move came from the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce (JCC) when they persuaded their members to pay an extra shilling a week transport allowance. This was refused by the APTC; after all many employers were not members of the JCC - how would domestic servants and municipal labourers persuade their employers to give them an extra shilling? Nevertheless the APTC in collaboration with members of the Liberal Party drafted a set of proposals for the JCC to consider. PUTCO meanwhile had produced a ultimatum on February 18th: if the boycott was not called off by March 1st the buses would be permanently withdrawn. At this point the Government stepped in. Minister Schoeman had already said that the boycott was a political challenge to the state - a boycotters' victory would be an ANC victory. He now announced that in the event of PUTCO withdrawing their buses, no one would be allowed to take over their routes: Alexandra would never have a bus service again (37).

2.22.

This provoked the first erosion in APTC solidarity. A mass meeting was held on February 20th; it voted for the boycott to continue. Five days later a secret meeting was held between six members of the APTC and PUTCO executives. The six were drawn from the property owners on the committee; they were led by Mr Mahlangu. But though they were beginning to make conciliartory noises a mass meeting of 5000 people simultaneously again voted for a continuation. By the beginning of March the divisions were clear: the Vigilance and Standholders' associations and the ANC national-minded bloc were trying to reach towards some form of compromise whereas the other groups were opposed to any concessions being made to PUTCO (38). These latter seemed to be reflecting the feelings of the overwhelming majority of Alexandra residents who had been walking to work for nearly two months. The standholders' position was understandable: if there was to be no bus service for Alexandra in the future they would be ruined, for Alexandra would lose much of its attraction and they would lose their tenants.

2.23.

On February 28th the Chamber of Commerce, in response to APTC proposals, produced a fresh offer. Employers were to put up a fund of £25,000: this

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* An article in 'The Listener' (London) 25.4.1957 quotes a different version of this slogan: 'store food and prepare for the offensive'

would finance a scheme in which people could claim a penny back on a cancelled ticket at the end of their journey. This was put to the APTC at a meeting attended also by the Bishop of Johannesburg, Ambrose Reeves (who was working closely with the Liberals and who had a friendly relationship with Transvaal ANC leaders), A.B. Xuma and Liberal Party representatives. At this meeting ten members of the APTC voted in favour of the proposals - including the ANC representatives. Madzunya, Motsele and Mokonyane voted against them (39). On March 1st PUTCO delayed withdrawing its buses so that mass meetings could consider the JCC plan that evening. They were due for a disappointment: in Alexandra the public meetings rejected the proposals and the Africanist Motsele burnt a copy of them in front of the crowd (40). Significantly (see paragraph 2.10) women were said to have organised the main Alexandra meeting which rejected the proposals (41).

2.24.

By this stage the divisions between the groups represented on the APTC were public knowledge. The ANC national minded bloc were openly opposing the boycott (42) while the standholders were discreetly wavering. On March 3rd they had a meeting where they anxiously discussed the economic implications of the withdrawal of the bus service (43). The Africanists and Mokonyane, as we have seen, were totally opposed to any compromise. The position of the ANC leaders was less clear cut. In the negotiations of the 28th the ANC representatives voted in favour of the refund scheme. Here it is possible that the presence of Reeves and Xuma had a persuasive effect. Both were in favour of the proposals (44) and the Bishop was closely in touch with the ANC's national leadership gathered in Johannesburg for the Treason hearings (Sampson 1958). It was known that he enjoyed their confidence and therefore he was in a position to exert considerable pressure on the Alexandra ANC leaders, some of whom were new to the movement. But it is also likely that there was confusion over the choice of strategy among Congress Alliance leaders. For the day the terms were rejected at the mass meetings a leaflet was circulating in the township advising people to reject the JCC offer. The leaflet was issued by the Congress of Democrats and was evocatively entitled 'What is to be done' (45). Ruth First, a leading COD member, in her article on the boycott provides some indication of the way the Left within the Congress movement viewed the boycott:

> 'The boycott asserted the right of Africans to protest....those who would separate the economic background from the political, who would see the African protesting only against a penny rise in fares, unmoved and unaffected by Minister Schoeman's "break the boycott" threats, by the daily police intimidation, by the pin-pricks, the humiliations and the abject miseries of apartheid, erect distinctions which must be blown over in the first gusts of any African protest or campaign' (First 1957: 63).

Revolutionaries within the Congress movement do not seem to have failed to percieve the boycott's political significance: theirs was rather a sin of omission. At no time was there any evidence that senior left-wing Congressites actually provided any suggestions to the local leaders as to how to develop whatever potential the boycott had for more general political action. That other groups were able to influence the APTC to limit their demands to the fare alone (see paragraph 2.18) is an indication of the weakness of the Left at this time. In the later stages of the boycott there were signs that it could develop into a more open challenge requiring a higher level of political commitment but these owed little to the influence of outsiders.

2.25.

Political considerations aside there were sound material reasons for rejecting the JCC terms. First the scheme was inconvenient: it involved queueing twice rather than once on every journey adding to commuting time. Second, there was no assurance that there could be a permanent settlement: The £25,000 would be exhausted in three months. Mokonyane viewed the scheme as a lure to draw people back on to the buses without any formal commitments being made. Third, Pretoria had been left out of the scheme. (46) With the turning down of these terms PUTCO withdrew its buses. Bishop Reeves and the Liberals did not despair: they continued to negotiate with the City Council and the JCC and also obtained the ANC's agreement that it would attempt to persuade boycott committees to accept improved proposals. All these efforts were fairly secret:both Reeves and the Liberals felt that PUTCO and the APTC would be made more amenable if they were kept in the dark for a while (47).

2.26.

The State preferred a more heavy-handed approach. The police played a major role. They patrolled Louis Botha Avenue in force and stopped as many cars as they could that seemed to be carrying boycotters, subjecting them to checks on minor traffic regulations. Fivehundred people (mainly illegal taxi operators) were detained after breaching such rules. Not content with this petty harrassment the police raided Alexandra twice in February: altogether 14,000 people were held under some pretext (tax defaulting and illegal residence were the two most common offences) (48). The Government was also making more long term threats. An official publication stated:

> It was found that of all the townships where boycott attempts were made, the only really successful boycotts occurred in uncontrolled townships where no formal authority is exercised over the Bantu inhabitants in terms of the normal legislation applying to Bantu townships. It is also these uncontrolled areas which generally show the highest crime rates and other distrubances. (49)

It was time, announced the Minister of Native Affairs, to bring Alexandra 'under very strict control'. The proper population of the township should have been around 30,000 and steps would be taken to reduce it to that number (50). The Government obviously viewed the boycott as a major threat. It devoted two numbers of its Digest to analyses of the boycott replete with sensational revelations concerning 'underground red workers', 'red termites', and 'ANC Youth League Stormtroopers'.

2.27.

Such hysteria should be seen in the context of the State's attempt to implicate the Congress leadership on a treason charge: it's external propaganda should not therefore be taken altogether at its face value. Nevertheless it is likely that the authorities were genuinely alarmed by the boycott: efforts to exploit its political implications were not limited to state agencies. ANC spokesmen were by March claiming that 'the boycott was no longer an economic struggle but was becoming a political one' (51). By this time there were signs of a move to convert the boycott into a form of general strike. At a mass meeting on February 27 Mokonyane told the people:

'When we are tired we shall rest.... They are punishing us because we are poor....save food and prepare for the offensive' (52)

By the first week in March Nzo was actually using the phrase 'stay at home', a term linked to the South African Congress of Trades Unions '£1 a day' campaign which was just beginning. Nzo said on March 6 'When we are tired we will stay at home and wait for commerce and industry to come and fetch us for work' (53). This resolution was to become less ambivalent: the following week the APTC produced an ultimatum: the city council should provide transport for the boycotters; if this was not done by Monday the 18th workers would stay at home. (54) Now this may have to an extent reflected the onset of fatigue but there is a strong case for arguing that the ANC was trying to generate a wider political struggle from the boycott. There is evidence that suggests that the local ANC was thinking in such terms from the start of the boycott. Amongst the Treason Trial evidence were some notes for a speech by Tennyson Makiwane. Makiwane, a defendant in the trial from 1956 to 1958, had previously lived for two years in Alexandra after his expulsion from Fort Hare for ANC Youth League activities. The notes were for a speech made in February 1956. The speech is about the Evaton boycott but it seems to have been intended for an Alexandra audience. In it Makiwane suggests that consumer grievances should be linked with those of transport workers, that a common union should be formed to represent passengers and workers and that the political organisation should 'link up peoples struggle for transport in a location into a general struggle of all people in townships'(55). Makiwane used to use his lunch breaks in the Treason Trial to consult with APTC leaders (Karis, Carter and Gerhart 1977:). In broad outline this did approximate the strategy the ANC was pursuing in the February/March period. In Alexandra itself it would have been difficult for passengers to make common cause with PUTCO staff: their interests were diametrically opposed; PUTCO employees were better paid than most Alexandra workers and were faced by the threat of losing their jobs. However in Bloemfontein, where the local ANC tried ineffectively to organise a 'sympathy boycott' issues included the upgrading of black staff into jobs reserved for whites (56). The sympathy boycotts were to effect East London, Randfontein, Port Elizabeth, Germiston, Moroka-Jabavu, and Edenvale. These were in addition to the boycotts which arose from the PUTCO fare increase (Pretoria, Sophiatown and Western Native Townships). In each centre Peoples Transport Committees were formed and despite the frequent opposition of Advisory Boards they could be, as in the case of the Eastern Province centres, ninety per cent effective. Though the ANC was accused of using the boycotts 'solely for a political purpose.... not economic' (57) these sympathy protests were linked to local issues: in Bloemfontein, for example, as well as the question of black staff the municipality were also accused of using profits derived from black bus services to subsidise white facilities. For the main boycott centres (Alexandra, Pretoria and Sophiatown) a coordinating committee was established: this was chaired by Alfred Nzo for the Alexandra ANC. In Alexandra the ANC underwent a massive expansion in membership, from 600 to 6000, making it one of the largest branches in the country. The degree of politicisation of the boycott was perhaps indicated at the Alexandra meeting where Nzo first mentioned a stay-at-home. The Africanists were also present. Mr Motsele spoke of Ghanaian independence and of Nkrumah. There were cries of 'Afrika!' and 'This is our mother country. We will die first!'(58)

2.28.

However there was to be no stay-at-home on March 18. Instead negotiations began

with the ANC playing an intermediary role between the Peoples Transport Committees (PTCs) and PUTCO, Chamber of Commerce, Municipality and Liberal Party representatives. The fresh proposals were based on a coupon system: people at the beginning of the week would buy a book of coupons with the effect that the 5d tickets would cost 4d. The Chamber of Commerce would make up the difference to PUTCO. By the time the JCC funds were exhausted it was hoped that the JCC and the Municipality would have succeeded in obtaining a rise in the Native Services Levy. The ANC undertook to persuade the PTCs to accept the proposals on condition that the deal would include Pretoria. The Bishop and Liberals agreed to look for sources to fund coupons in Pretoria. There was also a general undertaking that employers organisations would encourage a rise in wages. In response to this latter point the ANC, when it presented the settlement terms to the community, included the demand of a £1 daily wage. (59)

2.29.

The events of the final week of the boycott were complex; they resulted from a threefold split between the APTC leaders. It seems clear that the local ANC were under considerable pressure from the national leadership who seem to have been open to influence from Reeves and Liberal spokesmen (Sampson 1958:). Meanwhile the property owners had made a completely independent secret approach to PUTCO guaranteeing an acceptance of the coupon system regardless of whether it was implemented in Pretoria. Obviously they were seriously worried by Verwoerd's declared intention to reduce the township population and were not prepared to risk any possibility of a continuation of the boycott in the hope that if a settlement was reached the attention of the authorities would be diverted elsewhere (see paragraph 2.26.). PUTCO agreed to reintroduce the buses if enough people turned up to ride them on Monday morning. Mokonyane, for reasons that will be explored below remained opposed to a settlement whilst the Africanists were undecided. On Sunday March 31 public meetings were held in all boycott centres. These voted for an acceptance of the terms provided a) that they were approved by Alexandra residents, and b) that Pretoria was included. On the 31st three meetings were held simultaneously in Alexandra - two were organised by pro settlement factions (who had published a circular the day before advocating a return to the buses) and one by the rest of the APTC. The latter meeting was by far the best attended. Despite the intentions of the ANC it rejected the proposals. It was felt that a) the coupons because they had 5d printed on them were intended to condition people to pay 5d. when the JCC money ran out, and b) that PUTCO should pay compensation for police action, arrests and deaths (in Pretoria) that had occurred during the boycott (60). By now there was total confusion. Liberals met APTC leaders on Sunday evening and attacked them for failing to unanimously support the settlement at the meeting whereupon some promised to urge the people to reverse the decision. On Monday PUTCO buses were reintroduced and in the absence of any clear directions and indeed conflicting advice in pamphlets from the ANC (declaring a victory and telling people they could ride the buses) and from the non ANC members of the APTC (see below) once again people started using the buses. In Alexandra the boycott was over.

2.29.

It is difficult to evaluate the ANC's decision to accept the terms and end the boycott. As well as looking at the pros and cons of continuation it is

necessary to come to some assessment of the ANC's strategy throughout the boycott. The case against settlement included the following points:

2.29.1

First, the offer was a temporary one: there was no guarantee that the Government would heed the Chamber of Commerce or the Johannesburg City Council. Significantly the Afrikaanse Sakekamer had refused all along to support the JCC. As an APTC leaflet distributed on April 7 put it:

> When the £25,000 runs out from the Chamber of Commerce - what then? We cannot sell our fourteen weeks struggle for a twelve weeks settlement. The Government has promised to step in when the boycott is smashed and the Chamber is bankrupt to bring about permanent their permanent settlement. Why drive the Chamber to bankruptcy, why drive the people to distraction? An authority which behaves in this way is highly suspect. We refuse to settle our economic affairs on the basis of PROMISES - from the enemy. Since when must we have confidence in a white government who are the source of our ruin? (Karis Carter 1977:).

The ANC and the Standholders by accepting the offer had sold out, 'they (had) tried to sell out many times' (ibid). The JCC was 'prepared to spend £25,000 now in killing the boycott in order to guarantee hundreds of thousands profit in the future' (61). At the time the arguement had some force to it. A permanent settlement was by no means a certainty. The Minister of Transport did agree in May to raise the Native Services Levy - but only if both the main employers organisations agreed. For two months employers wer divided on the issue, Commerce favouring the scheme but Industry being 'adamant' in its opposition to the scheme (62). Industrial employers were only to extend their backing grudgingly and slowly.

2.29.2

The second point (which may have tipped the balance in favour of settlement) was that the situation in the townships was hardly stable either. As an APTC leaflet of April 14 pointed out:

> Wherever we look there is confusion. Some people proclaim a victory, others say.... the boycott must go on. Some people ride. others carry on walking. (63)

Liberals by the beginning of May were seriously worried that the boycott might be restarted. The APTC leaders (including the local ANC men) had been left outof the negotiations with the Minister and the employers: 'They feel isolated, hurt, slighted and do not know what to tell their people.... first lesson of the boycott, consultation, has already been forgotten by the Europeans'(64) Had in fact the boycott exhausted its potential? Would the people of Alexandra have gone on walking? The main meeting in Alexandra did reject the scheme: it was attended by 5000 people and it was held on a Sunday (so the APTC could not be accused of holding a meeting when most of the normal bus users were still at work or on the way home). Against this one must bear in mind that people were getting very tired: the theme of exhuastion is very common in the later boycott speeches. With the removal of the buses in March one of the

objective tests of the boycott's effectiveness was gone - there was nothing to boycott. However a unified leadership may have exploited the situation more deftly: a recurrent theme of APTC leaflets after April 1st was that 'if we, the people, having united on this issue, won a victory, we would feel our strength and continue to fight for much more then 1d'. (65) So it was possible to argue that acceptance of the deal dissipated the strength and unity built up over three months. We will return to this in a moment.

2.29.3

The third point favouring continuation was that the coupon scheme was applicable to the Johannesburg routes only; it was not going to apply to Pretoria where there were separate employers organisations who were completely opposed to raising the contribution to the Native Services Levy (66). The Pretoria boycott was going to continue into 1958 without enjoying any support from elsewhere. The development of the Pretoria boycott requires some explanation. First, even compared to Alexandra people in Pretoria locations were poor. Early in the boycott a special report was produced by the Manager of the Non-European Affairs Department. Seventy percent of Pretoria's black population earned less than £9.00 a month. The last wage award had been in 1942. To give some idea of the impact of the 1d fare rise the budget of a family in Vlakfontein is illuminating. Municipal rents were £2.7s.3d. Monthly transport costs were £2.4s.3d. This left less than £5 for everything else (67). The leadership and impetus of the Pretoria boycott came from Lady Selbourne, like Alexandra a freehold township. Here even the relatively conservative Advisory Board was in favour of the boycott(68). Women played an especially important role in the Pretoria boycott. It was reported in a case at Mooiplas location in January that:

> The menfolk want to use the buses but the women insist on the boycott continuing and are apparently prepared to use force to prevent the use of the buses (69).

Because of the domestic division of labour women could be expected to be more sensitive to issues of subsistence than men: as Yawitch has suggested women react strongly to conditions that threaten the continued reproduction of the family (70). There seem to have been fewer political rivals to the ANC's position than was the case in Alexandra. However the ANC was fairly weak and inexperienced: the branch had been reformed after a period of inactivity in 1955 (71). This was possibly one reason why the Pretoria boycotters never succeeded after the Alexandra settlement in mobilising the ANC nationally in the way that Alexandra had. Alexandra's branch, over the years had contributed many people who now had important functions within the organisation. This was not the case with Pretoria - and this may have had the effect of making them more autonomous but less influential with the national leadership. But poverty and ANC autonomy are not the only factors that explain the extraordinary resilience of the 10,000 boycotters of Pretoria. Unlike the people of Alexandra most of them had the alternative of a train service: indeed in December 1958 Lady Selbourne PTC requested that PUTCO services should be permanently withdrawn. The trains were cheaper and the station was nearer the centre of the location than was the bus terminus (72). Hence the boycott cuased rather less hardship than elsewhere. Nevertheless this did not prevent moments of considerable bitterness: during the boycott buses were burnt as was an office of the peri-urban areas board and a man was killed and several were wounded when the police broke up meetings during the early stages of the boycott. The only concessions offered to the Pretoria

committees were a) the inclusion, because of its geographical position, of Vlakfontein in the Johannesburg settlement, and b) the shortening of some bus routes for the old fare price.

2.29.4

Consequently there was considerable bitterness among Pretoria boycotters when they found that they had been deserted by Alexandra: after all they had been united under a single coordinating committee. It is not surprising that some of the main defections from the ANC when the Pan Africanist Congress was formed were in the Pretoria townships.

2.30

But a strong case could be made for accepting the JCC proposals as they stood:

2.30.1

Though the remnants of the APTC did contend that settlement involved a retreat from a strategically advantageous position of strength and unity (see paragraph 2.29.2) it might be said that settlement was the best option if maximum unity was to be preserved. Certainly, the situation was volatile after April 1st, but the reintroduction of the bus service and the coupon system were substantial temptations for those who were tired. A continuation would probably have provoked deeper divisions in the community than settlement: Mokonyane's meetings thereafter in which he called on Alexandra to come out in support of Pretoria had a certain moral force but little impact.

2.30.2

There was much less morale-boosting sympathy from the white community: this notably declined after the rejection of the JCC refund scheme. Fewer lifts were being offered and press coverage was increasingly impatient, not to say hostile. As argued previously the feeling that the boycott was having an impact on the white community helped to encourage a realisation that victory was possible.

2.30.3

Then, the JCC offer at the end of March may have been the last chance of even a partial victory: if the offer had been rejected it may never have been repeated. PUTCO had lost nearly £90,000 as a result of the boycott(73): if the boycott had continued PUTCO's losses may have been so severe that no increase in the Native Services Levy that employers would have been willing to contemplate,would have made them good. As we have seen the Alexandra ANC leaders were far more open to pressure from above than were the Africanists or Mokonyane. Pressure from above came from people who could more sensitively gauge the mood of civic and business leaders.

2.30.4

The final and seemingly clinching arguement in favour of the ANC's decision was that the national movement, to use Mokonayane's words, was able 'to pick the fruit' of the struggle of Alexandra. On June 26th, SACTU and the ANC called a national stay-at-home as part of the £1 a day campaign. In Johannesburg, 80 per cent of the work force stayed away, in Alexandra the 'turn out' was 90 per cent. In response the JCC offered an 'across the board increase' of five shillings a week; this was derisively rejected by SACTU. Obviously the boycott had generated enthusiasm and receptiveness to ANC calls among the Johannesburg population and in this context it was important that APTC leaders had situated the boycott in the struggle between capital and labour:

> 'Then also Commerce and Industry showed the same fear of the peoples strength. And they were immediately hit by the peoples struggle. Tired workers are bad workers and they saw their production and therefore PROFITS dropping. From the very beginning they tried frantically for a 'settlement' trying to negotiate with the committee behind closed doors so that militant people would have no check on what was happening, offering complicated 'schemes' and even vague promises of wage increases. All this in an attempt to destroy our struggle. They are not humanitarians, they did not offer their £25,000 'for the love of the people'. They know full well that this money will be gone in three months time.. They are prepared to spend £25,000 now in killing the boycott in order to guarantee hundreds of thousands profit in the future....'(74)

2.31.

Out of the dilemma of whether to jettison Pretoria in order to conserve their Alexandra base, or to take a principled position and perhaps erode their strength in Alexandra and retain support in what was never a strong ANC area, the ANC chose the tactically correct option. But in general strategic terms they were open to criticism. First, there were moments of inconsistency in the conduct of ANC leaders during the boycott which suggest that they lacked a clear vision of how the boycott could be developed. The acceptance of the second JCC offer, the call for a stay-away in March only to be followed by a hasty withdrawal to the negotiating table, the early assurances by the national leadership that they would persuade local leaders to accept the coupon system: these do not suggest a long term strategy nor do they indicate a very high valuation being placed on the process of popular decision-making that was such an important feature of the boycott. And this leads one to the second major flaw in the ANC's approach: they did not attempt in any real sense to 'institutionalise' the popular power, the popular political participation, that had developed out of the boycott. True, they drew on its energy for the June 26th stay-at-home, but this <u>demonstrative</u> effort did little to perpetuate or constructively channel the forces of the boycott. Here an interesting comparison can be made with the 1944-45 boycott in which communists urged people to go on walking despite the fare settlement until the transport system was socialised (75). Of more obvious relevance to the 1957 situation was the Evaton settlement which placed considerable power in the hands of the Peoples Transport Committee (see below). But in Alexandra, as we have seen, the APTC was influenced to limit its concerns to the fare rise (see paragraph 2.17.). Nevertheless the democratic forms of the boycott could have been adapted to permanent and far-reaching structures

with enterprising political leadership: an informal popular township administration might have been a possibility. Then there were issues which arose out of internal class differentiations: landlords had shown themselves as a distinct interest group during the boycott, surely a move to create some form of rent control mechanism would have been widely acceptable? Though in general the ANC made a valuable contribution to the blossoming of the boycott movement it can be contended that having picked it they then threw away the fruit.

3.1

The following analysis of the Evaton boycott will begin with a bare chronology. Out of this will arise several questions and in answering then some comparisms will be drawn with the Alexandra protest. The treatment will close with an evaluation of the Evaton settlement. We will then be in a position to resolve some of the issues raised at the beginning of this paper.

3.2

The first post-war bus boycott in Evaton, a township situated 12 miles from the Vereeniging/ Vanderbijl Park industrial complex and 30 miles from Johannesburg, took place in January 1950. The bus company had decided to collect passengers on the Evaton-Vereeniging route from the edges of the township as tarmac roads did not extend within its boundries (75). Then in August 1954 there was a one day token boycott in protest against the inefficiency of the service between Evaton and Johannesburg provided by the Evaton Passenger Company (EPC). The director of the EPC, a Mr V d'Agnese suggested that a liason committee of influential Evaton inhabitants should be formed and on August 24 1954 the Evaton Peoples Transport Council (EPTC) was elected at a public meeting (76). That same month the EPC applied for a fare increase and despite EPTC protests it was granted by the Road Transportation Board. In October 1954 a boycott took place in Kliptown, another community served by Kliptown, another community served by the EPC. The boycc was successful: after four weeks during which 6 000 people walked daily to Nancefield railway station a sixpenny weekly fare rise was withdrawn and improvements in the service were promised by d'Agnese (77). Towards the end of this boycott a joi meeting was held between the Kliptown Bus Committee and the EPTC to discuss d'Agnese's application for a fare increase on the Evaton - Johannesburg route (78). The two communities decided to coordinate their activities. Early in 1955 an EPC bus boke down one night on a level crossing. Ten people were killed by the oncoming train (79).

3.3

In July 1955 the EPTC issued a bulletin calling for a public meeting on July 24. At this meeting the 2 500 users of the Evaton-Johannesburg service resolved to boycott the EPC until the monthly and weekly fares were reduced to their old levels, that is, from £2 15s to £2 5s and from 18s to 15s respectively (80). The following morning people began walking to Nancefield railway station at 4 a m. Buses carrying passengers were stopped by pickets and people were told to get off. They boycott also affected nearby Annandale. Much of the picketing was done by groups of women (81). The following day a woman was even

Page.../21..

to throw herself in the path of a moving bus to halt its progress (82). For the next seven weeks buses were picketed and stoned and there were occasional clashes between police, boycotters and an anti boycott group which was beginning to coalesce round Ralekeke Rantube, the leader of Evaton's Basotho community. This tension came to a head on September 7 when two attempts (one successful) were made to burn out buses which had entered the location. The EPC then withdrew its buses altogether until October 24. One incident that occurred during this interval deserves mention: on September 25 a car fixed up with a loudspeaker toured the location. The men inside announced their intention to establish an African-owned bus service for Evaton (83). The wreck of the car was discovered the next day in Evaton.

3.4

On October 24 the EPC resumed its service. The buses were greeted by large angry crowds, stones and roadblocks. That afternoon a procession of about one thousand people marched through Evaton. Fighting broke out between pro-boycotters and Ralekeke Rantube's followers, the 'Russians'. Two boycotters were killed and Rantube's house was damaged. The conflict was deepened in October when the EPC took to employing Ralekeke and several other Basothos to protect the buses and attack picketlines (84). In December five boycott supporters were murdered including Khabutlane, a Basotho sub-chief (85).

3.5

At some point during early 1956 the EPTC applied for four National Transport Board certificates and announced its intention of establishing a bus service for the community. Meanwhile the boycott went on with sporadic outbreaks of tension. EPC employees were taking the brunt of the boycotters' anger and on May 6 a bus conductor, Johnson Choke, was badly beaten up and died from his injuries shortly afterwards. In the days preceding as well as the day of his funeral, May 11, Basotho groups boarded buses on their way to Evaton, and rode into the location in them, emerging at the terminus to assault the picketers. Sustained fighting between armed groups of boycotters and 'Russians' tookplace between 24th and 29th June. Nine people were killed altogether, several houses were destroyed, thousands of people sought refuge on the ground surrounding the local police station (Evaton's population was estimated to have fallen by forty per cent - 20 000- during these troubles) (86). A hundred policemen armed with sten guns were needed to control the situation. The police prevailed upon the EPTC leader Molefi and Rantube to go through the motions of a public peacemaking and shortly afterwards the violence simmered down. At this point the bus company announced that the old fares would be reintroduced (87). It would seem that at this stage the EPTC leaders were in favour of a settlement but the public feeling against the EPC was too bitter for a return to the status quo to be sufficient. A meeting was held which rejected the settlement and collected £23 13s 7½d towards boycott funds (88). An EPTC meeting was held on July 10. At this it was decided to negotiate on the basis of the following demands (in addition to the maintenance of pre-boycott fares): Sunday workers should be able to use their normal weekly or monthly season tickets; a concessionary student rate should be introduced; the bus depot and booking office should be located within the township; a penalty clause should be included within the settlement making the EPC liable to a payment if it took action without consulting the EPTC (89). On August 11 the EPC and the EPTC met to negotiate and managed to come to an agreement. Some of the above terms were incorporated into the settlement which was made public on August 19. As well as the pre-boycott fares remaining operative, the EPC gave an undertaking that £500 would be paid to the EPTC if the afre was increased or if it sold interests without consultation. In addition the EPC would run its buses on the basis of a timetable drawn up by the EPTC, fifty per cent of the inspectors were to be black and shelters would be constructed at the Evaton and Johannesburg terminals (90)

At this point the EPTC managed to satisfy rank and file boycotters that they had won a substantial victory and shortly thereafter the EPC buses began to carry their full complement of passengers to Johannesburg. The boycott had ended but at a cost of fifteen deaths, the polarisation of the Evaton community and £52 000 in lost fares to the company (91).

3.6

Several questions seem immediatly relevant. First, why did the boycott (which only affected the immediate interests of 2 500 bus users and their dependants) create such a deep rift in the community? More particularly, why did Rantube and his followers oppose the boycott? Secondly, what role did any political organisations play in the events; were there any attempts to develop the boycott into a more deliberate self-conscious political movement? Thirdly, how do we interpret the settlement: why did the EPC make such important concessions and what were their implications? First of all, though, it is useful to have some knowledge of the type of community Evaton was.

3.7

Evaton's origins are similar to Alexandra's. The area originally belonged to a land speculation company which began selling off allotments to Africans in 1905. Its formal status as a released freehold African area was confirmed by the I936 Land Act. At first the location mainly accomodated farm labourers but with the dvelopment of manufacturing industry the population was to treble in ten years: from 10 000 in 1936 to 30 000 in 1946 (92). The population continued to expand thereafter though at a more modest rate: in 1955 Evaton was believed to have 50 000 inhabitants (93). Evaton was divided by a stream into two areas: the location proper and Evaton Small Farms. Despite its name, the Small Farms area was considerably more congested than Evaton location. This was because allotments there were sold during the I930s to meet the expansion of demand: they were smaller, and relatively more expensive (a high initial price being, as we have seen with the case of Alexandra, an impetus for rack-renting) (94). Evaton had an even lighter degree of administration than Alexandra. A health committee which was the most rudimentary form of local government did not exist: no whites from the surrounding area could be found who were willing to serve on such a body (95). Instead there was a Native Commissioner, and, to assist him in his duties, 22 policemen. The lack of an administrative body compar: even to Alexandra's meant that there was very little in the way of services. A more positive side of this neglect, as far as the people of Evaton were concerned, was that they did not pay rates (96) and they were free from many influx control restrictions (97). However during the I940s local ANC leaders had been pressing for self government in the form of a local authority which would include six elected Africans and three nominated members. Nothing was done about this largely because of the unwillingness of the Department of Native Affairs to finance the facilities which would arise out of bringing the location into administrative conformity with other townships (98). A factor to keep in mind is this undercurrent of discontent with the way the community was governed.

3.8

Arising from its unusual status and freedom from external controls Evaton was most attractive for people who might have found it difficult to legally live in any other location as well as those who had more complicated reasons for avoiding the authorities. Because of the absence of rates and the possibility of growing or foraging foodstuffs (99) it was relatively cheaper to live in. Consequently Evaton

had a fairly large unemployed group. A major proportion of these people were Basotho migrants who had worked out their contracts on the mines. Some of them were involved in criminal protection rackets harrassing the hundred-odd traders who operated within or around Evaton (100). There were approximately 2 000 Basothos altogether in Evaton (101). From their number the Native Commissioner chose a'chief' to 'stop people doing bad' (102). The Basothos mainly lived in the Small Farms area: here conditions were mostcrowded and uncomfortable and rooms were cheaper (103). But as well as its attractions for a lumpenprole tariat the Evaton population also included a significant petty-bougeoise group represented by the Evaton Property Owners and Residents Association. Traders must have done well Evaton as they were well insulated from Johannesburg competition. A symptom of their prosperity may have been the formation in 1956 of the first African turf club in South Africa: it had six race meetings before it was forbidden the use of the ground on which it had improvised a race course (104).

3.9

Evaton's population was prevented under section 10 of the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945 from finding work in the Vereeniging/Vanderbijl Park area - the major employment centre nearest to Evaton (105). So instead 2 500 people commuted sixty miles a day to and from Johannesburg. The rest of the population who were not involved in the informal sector or in shopkeeping would have had to pick up what work they could in the surrounding white-occupied areas: farm labourers, domestic servants, service workers and so forth. The post-war restriction of employment opportunities for Evaton's inhabitants helps to explain the slackening in its rate of population expansion.

3.10

To sum up, Evaton was a community which like Alexandra had developed organically, which was negligeably administered with little in the way of coercive sanctions of authority. In 1956 it had fairly longstanding grievances: the uncertainty of its municipal status was coupled with insecurity of property owners who coudd not obtain deeds of transfer (Mphahlele 1957: 57), an insecurity which may have filtered downwards and been reinforced by the presence of organised criminal groups (Mphahlele claims that Evaton was a refuge for Johannesburg gangsters) and the threat of unemployment. It seems likely that the 2 500 Johannesburg commuters represented a relatively priviliged group: Johannesburg wages were higher than elsewhere on the Rand and they were earning enough to make the expenditure of £2 5s a month (and considerably greater expenditure on train fares during the bus boycott) worth while.

3.11

Transport facilities were considerably worse than those provided by PUTCO to Johannesburg's townships. The Evaton Passenger Service was a small privately owned concern which operated seventeen buses on the Evaton-Johannesburg route. The company, because it serviced a community which lay outside the borders of a major municipal area, did not benifit from any subsidy or Native Services Levy. The company had taken over from Dickenson's bus service which had been unable to make a profit on the route (106). It was owned by a group of Johannesburg businessmen known by the boycotters as 'the Italians'. Fares had risen by 25 per cent since 1945 but the servi had not improved. The buses were old, they let in the rain, and frequently broke down, sometimes at night which meant that people would have to sleep out of doors until the morning. They were often late, always overcrowded, there were no shelters at the terminals, and the staff, in particular those who managed the bus queues, treated passengers badly (107). Then there was the apalling incident of the train crash when an EPC bus had stopped on a railway line. Nevertheless despite these shortcomings the bus was preferable to the train: the bus journey was half as long (one hour), took you all the way to the location, and was one

third less expensive.

3.12

As we have seen the EPC directors were conscious of these faults, and hoping to allay some of the discontent, suggested that a consultative body should be constituted to advise them on transport problems. The composition of the Transport Council was interesting: unlike the corresponding organisation in Alexandra, leading members of the Property Owners Association were not represented on the committee. The EPTC had a core of nine members: they included two shopkeepers, four factory workers, one law student, one manufacturer's representative and one articled clerk (108). Its Chairman and Secretary were both ANC members and adherents of the Africanist line. In 1955, the Chairman, Vus'umzi Make was 24. He had joined the ANC Youth League at school, had lived in Evaton all his life and was studying law. Joe Molefi, EPTC Secretary, was a year older than Make. He was born in the Free State but moved to Evaton at the age of nine. He went to secondary school at St. Peters, Johannesburg, where he was taught by Oliver Tambo, one of the original Africanist founders of the Youth League. On leaving St. Peters (where he had joinedt the ANC) he studied medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand. At thattime he lived in Alexandra, where in 1952, having given up medicine he helped to organise Defiance Campaign volunteers. After serving as branch secretary in Alexandra he moved to Evaton in 1953 to organise the ANC there which under his influence became strongly Africanist. Meanwhile he worked as a company representative (109). Also members of the EPTC were two Transvaal Indian Congress activists, Suleiman Nathie and Mohammed Ismal (sometimes spelt Asmal), both shopkeepers. All the EPTC were fairly young men in their twenties or early thirties. It is significant that the EPTC had a relatively experienced political leadership but one that was at odds with the ANC establishment: indeed it was later claimed in court that ' the ANC had nothing to do with the boycott and took very little part in it' (though by this stage they ANC leadership may have been anxious not to be implementd in a murder trial). [110] Apart from the shopkeepers the EPTC was reasonably representative of the sort of people who might be expected to use the bus to Johannesburg.

3.13

However the one group it did not represent were the Basotho residents and it is to them that we now turn. Nobody has ever provided a very satisfactory explanation of just why the Basothos should have opposed the boycott. Their violence is attribut to the anti-social nature of the 'Russians' whose behaviour conformed to a widely held stereotype of the Basotho being an especially violent people (111). The Russians originated in Newclare which did have a substantial Basotho colony. They organised a protection racket which became notorious and which led to fighting in 1952 (Huddleston 1956: 101-102). It should not need to be said that the Russians were not the only gang in Joahannesburg, neither were all Basothos gangsters, nor were all gangsters Basothos. However, partly as a result of the conduct of the blanketed Russians of Newclare the popular press tended to identify all Basotho migrant workers as Russians. This sort of stereotyping was sometimes deliberately exploited as in the case of the Dube Hostel riots of 1957 when gangsters would disgui themselves as Basothos and assault and rob Zulu workers and then present themselves as Zulus robbing the Basothos. This was considerably facilitated by ethnic grouping in seperate buildings (112). In the same way it is quite likely that the Basotho community in Evaton was being similarly stereotyped at the onset of the boycott by the activities of a small group and were then forced into a defensive solidarity after being attacked indiscriminately. And indeed, one of Ralekeke's rival Khabutlane, made a point of emphasizing that not all Basothos opposed the boycott (11 That there was a network of protection|extortion groups known as Russians who were Basotho can be explained without recourse to generalisations about ethnic characteristics: Basutoland, a desperately poor country, exports half its economic--ally active male population to South Africa at any one time: those

who for one reason or another were no longer engaged under contract would probably do their best to remain in South African urban centres: chances of adequate subsistence, let alone a cash wage in Basutoland were limited (Wilson 1972: 110). Consequently unemployed Basotho migrants could be expected to form a fairly important element within the informal sector: without skills, family, or capital resources they would have to resort to the less legitimate fringes of that sector. And in one important sense they had a considerable advantage over other participants in this field: being non-Union citizens there were fewer restrictions on their movements. It is interesting that the leaders of two major groups of Russians, Hlalele of Newclare, and Ralekeke of Evaton, knew each other from the time they had worked together on the mines (114). Aside from these general considerations there are factors specific to Evaton which help to explain the lines along which tension developed.

3.14

The Native Commissioner appointed a chief for the Basotho migrant community. He had an ill-defined status but considerable informal power. Ralekeke was placed in this position in 1952. The previous year he had come out of prison after serving a two year sentence for killing a previous incumbent, Palama. From 1952 he worked for a tailor in Evaton (115). The Basothos lived in the Small Farms area of Evaton - the poorer district. In some of Ralekeke's speeches there is an underlying theme of antagonism towards ' educated people' , of resentment that he, Ralekeke, a recognised leader in the Evaton community had been slighted because he had not been consulted by the boycott planners (who, as we have seen in the composition of the EPTC, were often well-educated men in better paid jobs that the majority of the population)(116). It is possible that the inclusion of shopkeepers on the EPTC may have also contributed to the antagonism of an underpriviliged group to the boycott. But, apart from the Basothos' feelings about the boycott there was also the way they were percieved by the rest of the community. Whatever the conduct of the majority of Basotho residents, in a position of authority over them was a man with two convictions for violent assault and a known involvement in gangster activities. There was also a more generalised resentment: the Native Affairs Commission reporting in 1947 mentions complaints in Evaton that whereas Basuto citizens were free to seek employment in Vereeniging whereas people who had been born in Evaton were prevented from doing so by the Native (Urban Areas Consolidation) Act (117). Given such tensions and the prevalence of certain stereotyped perceptions (which were at least indirectly stimula by official policies) the rift that came to light in the boycott becomes easier to understand. Fairly early on (the records are unclear as to exactly when, but at least by October) the EPC started drawing upon the services of a strongarm squad to break pickets, paying them between £2 and £3 a week (118). Naturally it found them amongst the most isolated and alienated sector of the community. Apart from the dozen or so of his followers employed like himself by the EPC, Ralekeke was able to involve larger numbers of Basothos in the struggle against the boycotters: they need not al have been Russians - those that opposed him were summaralily dealt with (see paragraph 3.13), fear could have been an important factor. Ralekeke was able to reinforce his position by calling upon other Russian groups elsewhere on the Rand (119).

3.15

It should not be thought that the Russians were the only people who opposed te the boycott: the EPC only served a minority of the community and most of Evaton's inhabitants would not have been materially affected by the increase. For example, a prominent independent African church leader, Bishop Sims, was outspoken in his opposition (Mphahlele 1956: 22) and was later killed. But the involvement of the gangsters on the side of the bus company would probably have created considerable sympathy for the boycotters' cause among those who were not immediatly affected

by the fare rise.

3.16

Given the length of the boycott (the reasons for which will be explored in a moment), the involvement of local political leaders, and the passions it seems to have aroused,it is a little surprising that the ANC should have done so little to help the boycotters (there were no sympathy boycotts) and that it did not really attempt to make any political capital from it. It is true that the National Chairman of the Youth League, Robert Resha, did visit Evaton - in his speech he declared that unless the people of Evaton had their own transport system there would never be any peace - but this was an exceptional instance of interest by a member of the National Executive. It is possible that the ANC were wary of the Africanist element involved (for that reason the Evaton branch may have been considered with disfavour) and it is also likely that the violence involved may have caused the ANC leadership to be cautious. The EPTC recieved some encouragement from Africanist groups elsewhere (120). However in their leaflets and bulletins (121) one does not find any attempt to situate the boycott in any wider context than the struggle between bus company and passengers. This, despite the fact that the police and courts were believed to be acting in collusion with the bus company and the Russians. However despite the absence of a self-consciously 'political' character to the boycott it did have an aspect which could have developed political implications. Unlike the case of Alexandra in 1957, there can be detected in the conduct of the boycott, a recurrent theme of economic self-help. The EPTC from the start had shown itself to be extremely effective in fundraising: by the fifth week several of its leaders were on bail after having been arrested for picketing - the bail money collected amounted to £250. It was perhaps this and Resha's suggestion that prompted the EPTC to apply for four certificates from the Road Transportation Board so it could run buses on the EPC routes. It was then to contest the EPC's efforts to renew its license, though no significant sum was collected towards the project. The interesting thing is that these plans did not involve the wealthier businessmen of the Property Owners' Association; they had entered into quite seperate negotiations to establish a private bus company (122). The EPTC project may have been motivated by the idea of establishing a service which would be properly responsive to consumer needs, a service over which bus users would have some control. The project does not seem to have sprung from a desire for economic aggrandisement among members of the EPTC. As we have seen fares were not the only issue involved in the dispute. If a community bus service had been established it could have been the first step towards the organisation of other aspects of township life outside the framework of state authority. Given the administrative vacuum described in paragraph 3.7 this was not an altogether unlikely possibility. It seems that the EPTC had recieved some encouragement from Indian businessmen that finance for such a venture would be made available - perhaps the presence of Indians in the EPTC was helpful with regard to this (123). There was considerable tension between African and Indian traders in the freehold townships: the two rival plans for establishing a bus service may have been an instance of this.

3.17

The final feature of the boycott which needs discussion is the nature of the settlement, the totality (in contrast to Alexandra) of the boycotters' victory. The extroadinary thing was that the EPTC was asking for considerably greater concessions: it was actually demanding a degree of control over the operation of the bus service. The company offered several compromise solutions which included reversion to old fares; despite the substiantial economic sacrifice involved in boycotting the service, the EPTC, under popular pressure, was to hold out until the company offered the terms outlined earlier (see paragraph 3.5). The following six features of the struggle had a bearing on the boycotters' victory:

3.17.1

The boycotters were able to hold out for a very long period: the existence of alternative transport facilities was crucial. The bus company was a small one and had few other routes. Unlike PUTCO, the EPC was totally independent - there were no constraints on the sort of agreement it might reach with the boycotters.

3.17.2

The bus company came to be identified with gangsters who were willing (and encouraged) to use violence against the boycotters. Feelings were bitter against the bus company: so much so that a mere reversion to the pre-boycott status quo was not acceptable. It is clear from the EPTC minutes that here the leadership was falling in with the mood of the crowd rather than attempting to spur it to greater intransigence.

3.17.3

There was complete unity among the leadership. This is one of the most important contrasts with Alexandra. Several factors explain this unity. First, there was comparatively little external interest in the boycott: no white liberal organisations tried to play a mediating role (in fact at one point the Institute of Race Relations was approached). The boycott occurred in a township located at some distance from a major urban centre, was visually undramatic (at first) and did not involve the vast numbers of Alexandra. It did not affect employers and was not so obviously visible to humanitarians. So we do not find that the local ANC was being put under any pressure from the National Executive (with whom, in any case , there was considerable tension). Secondly, there was no standholder element within the EPTC committee - therefore there were no major clashes of economic interest (which might otherwise have occurred after the fighting in June 1956). Thirdly, there seems to have been no political rivalries either (which was interesting , considering that one of the main complaints of Orlando Africanists was the closeness of the ANC's relationship with the South African Indian Congress).

3.17.4

Like the Russians the EPTC was capable of exercising fierce sanctions against those that challenged its policies: EPC staff were murdered; civic guard units were mobilised; people who spoke against the boycott were attacked; picketing was energetic and effective - it was made impossible to run a normal bus service. Though ostensibly peaceful in intention (and there were occasions when EPTC leaders actually protected EPC executives and police from angry picketers) , from the beginning opposition was expressed in a violent idiom. Buses were burnt and constantly stoned. Here the especially apalling service the EPC provided and the atrocious incident of the train/bus crash were obviously important in stimulating initial antagonism.

3.17.5

Then there was the attitude of the government. In contrast to its reaction in Alexandra, In Evaton the state does not appear to have interpreted events as being a challenge to its authority. As we have seen this was rather sketchily represented at Evaton but nevertheless it could have made the boycott far more difficult: inter-fering with the train timetable would have been an obvious strategy (124) as well as subjecting Evaton train commuters to police checks. That the boycott was largely ignored by the national ANC and that politically it was low-key (the economic self-help aspect was seldom expressed in nationalist terms) - these were obviously

significant in determining the government's response. The internecine nature of the violence might have also contributed to unwillingness to energetically interfere: the violence did not represent a threat to the authorities, it was not primarily directed against them, and indeed appeared to reinforce the tenets of state ideology. Evaton boycott leaders were actually to request the endorsement-out of the Russians - ironically a request which was refused(125).

3.17.6

Finally the possibility that the community may have been able to raise the resources to finance their own bus company might have had some bearing on the EPC's willingness to capitulate.

3.18

Yet the victory of the Evaton boycotters was a phyrric affair. The events of June 1956 (which recieved some attention in the foreign press (126)) highlighted and drew attention to the lack of administrative machinary in the township. Evaton was proclaimed an African township under the full gamut of municipal regulations. A governing council was constituted with nine elected advisory members and nine nominees under the chairmanship of the Native Commissioner. Influx control was introduced (127). The response of both the Russians and the EPTC was indicative of the political limitations of the movement: there was no protest against the new controls; instead they showed their willingness to cooperate by putting themsleves up for election with other community leaders (128). The first to suffer under the new dispensation were some of the EPTC leaders and Ralekeke Rantube; they were endorsed out. The Evaton boycotters had failed to transcend the original limited objective of their action: their immediate enemy, the bus company, had been defeated, but authority and the system it rested upon had not been questioned.

4.1

Now we can provide some answers to the questions raised in section 1 of this paper.

4.2

First , the role of political organisations in these movements. There seems to be a good case for contending on the basis of their activity in Alexandra and their comparative inactivity in Evaton that they can perform a useful function. In the case of Alexandra, the ANC, with its vastly superior system of intelligence compared to the more localised groupings was able to make strategic and tactical decisions that ensured a victory over the fare issue. By coordinating struggles elsewhere with those of Alexandra and Pretoria the ANC was to add substantially to the boycott's impact. Moreover the boycotters were gradually being persuaded to look beyond the bus company, beyond a symptom to the cause of their poverty.

But the ANC could also be accused of moving from a specific to a generalised struggle too quickly, without any consideration of how the political energies released by the boycott could be most effectively used. The logic of the boycott process seemed to lead to the 'stay-at-home':

> When we are tired we shall rest ...They are punishing us because we are poor ...save food and prepare for the offensive. (129)

But a poor community cannot sustain a stay-at-home long enough to make a serious impact on the economy and even if it has accumulated the resources for a prolonged withdrawal of labour the police will show far less hesitation in entering a township and driving people back to work than they would in interfering with a struggle situated within the workplace itself. A stay-at-home can be an effective demonstration, only in very exceptional circumstances can it be anything more.

4.3

Evaton represents a sin of omission for the ANC - for though the neglect of the boycotters by the nationalist organisation gave them a free hand in their negotiations with the bus company, nevertheless it is possible that the bitterness of the internecine conflict was at least in part a function of the absence of a percieved powerful external enemy. No attempt was made to channel resistance towards political ends: the struggle was reformist in the true sense of the word - to use Legassick's phrase - its internal logic did not lead to a questioning of the system as a whole. Perhaps communal divisions were too profound for this to have happened: Evaton's obvious attraction as a catchment area for the Basotho lumpenproletariat made overall solidarity very difficult. There were opportunities which were lost: not least among them were the numerous trials of picketers and EPTC members culminating in a murder trial in December in which the EPTC was charged; no support came from the national movement. The role a political organisation could have played at Evaton could have been valuable though problematic: the 'sympathetic interpretation' (see paragraph 1.4) of the violence of the boycott.

4.4

Is there a distinct pattern to boycott behaviour which could lead to the 'institutionalizing' of popular power. This paper argues that the boycott form of protest had potential that could have been developed. First, widespread participation was easier to achieve becuase it involved (in the case of a walking boycott) no immediate sacrifice in economic terms. It was not illegal - indeed it was one of the few forms of protest left to Africans that did not involve breaking the law. It must be conceded that certain conditions favoured the development of a boycott; these were present in the freehold townships with their relative degree of freedom, the comparative ease of political and social organisation, their strong sense of communal identity.

4.5

Then, the boycott process is itself immediatly suggestive: large scale meetings and instant democracy - the dialectical relationship between leaders and crowd. In the case of Alexandra the processions of walkers, the very tangible feeling of being involved in protest (the pickets and fighting possibly served the same

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purpose at Evaton): unlike other boycotts (electoral, rent, education) this demanded a degree of activism. The possibility of martyrs, court cases, mass oratory, the slogans, the songs - each boycott had a symbolism and imagery of its own but drew on a developed tradition: the Evaton boycotters reminded their followers of the people's struggle in Alexandra in 1944, the Alexandra boycotters were spurred by the Evaton victory of the previous year (and Molefi and Make used to visit the APTC to advise them on the organisation of the boycott (130)). Furthermore bus boycotts are often successful: the crowd's immediate protagonist is at their mercy for without their patronage it cannot function: Initially the agencies of the state can do little more than play a secondary harassing role - enough to focus people's attention towards authority - not enough to cow them into submission. The mode of protest and its immediate objectives make it difficult to systematically crush by arresting a few ringleaders. The boycott does not depend on formal structure or key personalities; it acquires its own momentum and only dies from exhaustion - it is at this point that an organisation's intelligence system is most crucial if it is going to tap the power of the boycott. Yes, to the extent to which the boycott can condition, can accustom the people to direct communal action, to the extent it can unite, and the extent to which it can exploit lines of weakness in the power-bloc to gain immediate victories (as well as creating a popular awareness of the ultimate solidarity of the power bloc), then popular power is one the way to being institutionalised. And these processes were apparent at least in Alexandra in 1957.

4.6

And so, finally, it is possible that the boycotts help to show us where the ANC went wrong in the 1950s. For Christians in the movement the road to freedom was via the cross: salvation through martyrdom:

> ...we appeal to you to become the apostles to do this noble and holy job of delivering the people of Africa into the kingdom of heaven on earth... (Meer 1971 :)

For social revolutionaries within the Congress Alliance nothing succeeded like failure: the oppressive character of the state had to be revealed in all its brutal ruthlessness. The heroes are victims, not victors. Victory comes through defeat.

Tom Lodge

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Footnotes

1 This is calculated on the basis of figures provided in African Poverty (SAIRR., 1957, p. 30). Alexandra incomes were, on average, lower than those in other townships, and many expenses (e.g. rent) were substantially higher. Ruth First (1957: 58) argues that the real value of African wages was in decline. The deficit between income and minimum essential expenditure for subsistence, health and decency' had increased from £4 17s 10d in 1950 to £7 11s 5d in 1954.

2 The following boycotts were reported between 1948 and 1961:

1948. December. Moroka. After 12 killed in collision between bus and train. (Rand Daily Mail (RDM), 9 12 1948)
1949. September-October. Western Native Townships. Issues: treatment of passengers, non employment of black staff and 1d. fare increase. Results: one man shot dead in riots and trams permanently withdrawn. (RDM, 14 10 49)
1950. January. Evaton to Vereeniging. Issue: company decision to use only tarmac roads (i.e. not enter -ownship). (RDM, 31 1 50)
1954. October - November. Brakpan. Issue: employment of black drivers. Result: after three weeks council concedes black employment. Some ANC involvement. (RDM, 22 11 54)
1954. August. Evaton. Issue: overcrowding. Results: none after one day demonstration boycott.
1954. November. Kliptown. Issue: 6d. week fare rise. Result: after 4 weeks boycott manager d'Agnese agrees to fare reduction, improvements, and timetable consultation. (RDM,2 11 54)
1955. November. Katlegong. Issue: transportation board refusal to allow Katlegong men to run taxis. Result: two week boycott of buses and Germiston-registered taxis. Led by Vuka Afrika Party. (Bantu World (henceforth The World), 19 11 55)
1955 to 1956. Evaton. Issue: fare rise. Result: reduction of fare and wideranging improvements to service. (see text.)
1956. April-May. Brakpan. Issue: 1d. fare increase. Result: reduction after five week boycott. Led by ANC and Vigilance Association. (RDM, 22 5 56)
1957. January-April. Alexandra. Issue: 1d. fare increase. Result: fare reduction through coupon system (see text) and raising of Levy.(see text.)
1957 - 1958. Pretoria townships. Issue: fare increases. Result: two year boycott, one man killed, fares maintained. Led by ANC. (see text.)
1957. January-April. Sophiatown and Western Native Townships. Same as Alexandra: affected by PUTCO increases. Resolved through introduction of coupons. (see text.)
1957. February-April. Randfontein. Issue: sympathy with Alexandra and 2d. fare increase. Result: after two months boycott township loses bus service. (RDM, 24 4 57)

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2 (cont.)

1957. February. East London. Issue: sympathy with Alexandra. Result: 11 day boycott. (The Star, 22 2 57)

1957. February. Port Elizabeth. Issue: sympathy with Alexandra. Result: two week boycott led by ANC and South African Coloured Peoples Organisation. (The Star, 18 2 57)

1957. February. Bloemfontein. Issues: non-employment of black drivers and use of bus profits to subsidise segregated white facilities. Result: boycott postponed after inadequate response to local ANC leadership. (The Star, 18 2 57).

1957. February. Germiston, Eastwood and Edenvale. Issue: sympathy with Alexandra. (First 1957: 56)

1957. March-April. Worcester. Issue: refusal of company to respond to ANC call to reduce fares. Result: 90 per cent effective three week boycott. (The Star, 12 4 57)

1957. November. Port Elizabeth. Issue: 1d. fare increase. Result: failure after second day to arouse sufficient response. ANC - led. (RDM, 26 11 57)

1957. February. Durban - Kwa Mashu. Issue: high fares on new service. (The Star, 16 2 59)

1960. January. Port Elizabeth. Issues: fare increase, protests against Coloured Affairs Department and 50 year Union celebrations. Led by South African Congress of Trade Unions. (RDM, 13 1 60).

1961. January. Port Elizabeth. Issue: dismissal of workers by Bay Passenger Company. (RDM, 17 1 61)

1961. Nay. Grahamstown. Issues: fare increases and low local wages. (RDM, 3 5 61)

3 A.B. Xuma Papers (University of the Witwatesrand). 430711e. Also Report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the operation of bus services for Non-Europeans on the Witwatersrand. UG. -1. 1944

4 RDM, 1 10 1953

5 Alexandra Township was laid out in 1905 and was originally destined for white occupation. Its distance from Johannesburg made it unattractive to potential purchasers and in 1912 (one year before the passage of the Native Land Act) the land speculation company obtained official permission to sell stands to Africans and 'Coloured' people. Its status as an African freehold township was recognised by the Native Trust and Land Act and though there were efforts in 1943 by the Johannesburg City Council to abolish the township (which is sited outside the municipal boundries) wartime economies prevented their success. Alexandra still exists today though a large proportion of its inhabitants are now housed in migrant workers' hostels. Freehold tenure rights began to be removed in 1963. See ' Challenge to Democracy: Rand's problem township' in Libertas, Johannesburg, August 1942.

6 Modike Dikobe, who lived in Alexandra in the 1940s before moving to Soweto, has pointed out to me the considerably greater difficulties of political organisation in a township where everybody lives in seperate detached houses as opposed to the crowded terraces and lean-to rooms of Alexandra.

7 'Alexandra Township - 1952' in Fighting Talk, Johannesburg, September 1952.

8 South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) B Files (University of the Witwatersrand). AD 843 (B30) d

9 The problems of landlords are discussed in a booklet published by the Alexandra Health Committee (1943: 22) and Libertas (op.cit. : 12).

10 The Star, 22 3 1957

11 Natal Witness, 22 2 1957 and The Star, 22 3 1957

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12 The Star, 18 1 1957

13 The Star, 5 2 1957

14 The Star, 7 2 1957. Fighting Talk (op cit) cites a 1951 figure of forty per cent.

15

16 The Star, 8 1 1957

17 National Transport Commission Report for 1954 to 1957, UG. 26/58, p.11

18 RDM, 22 12 56

19 The World, 9 3 1957. Also a D G Mtshaulana of the Bantu Bus Service Corporation spoke of applying to take over PUTCO routes but he seems to have nah no Alexandra connections.

20 Xuma Papers. 430711b

21 The main Africanist centre was the ANC branch at Orlando: here the leading Africanists were well-educated men, often with university degrees, and employed as journalists, teachers, articled clerks, etc.

22 Treason Trial Record. (SAIRR)

23 SAIRR B Files. AD 843 (B74) d

24 SAIRR B Files, AD 843 (B74) c and Xuma Papers 430913d.

25 SAIRR B Files, AD 843 (B74) b

26 RDM, 19 11 1955

27 I would place the Workers' League and Democracy of Content in this category. Mokonyane, unlike some of the political leadera was to insist that the boycott wa. unconcerned with political issues. Over this there was some tension between him and the Society of Young Africa. See The World 2 3 1957

28 The Star, 25 1 1957 and 29 1 1957

29 Unsigned typescript memorandum entitled 'History of the Bus Boycott' describing Liberal Party involvement. From transport files in the South African Association of Newspapers Library, Johannesburg. Henceforth: Liberal Party memo. p.3

30 I am indebted to Modike Dikobe for this information.

31 RDM, 8 1 1957

32 Modike Dikobi, who was a trade unionist during the 1940s, suggested this to me.

33 The Star, 11 1 1957

34 RDM, 24 1 1957

35 RDM, 2 2 1957

36 Liberal Party memo. p.5. See also: Digest of South African Affairs March 15 1957, p.3

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37 The Star 28 2 1957. The Government even went to the length of introducing legislation to this effect.

38 RDM, 27 2 1957

39 Liberal Party memo, p.5

40 RDM, 2 3 1957

41 Liberal Party memo, p.6

42 RDM, 27 2 1957

43 The Star, 2 3 1957

44 Liberal Party memo, p.5

45 RDM, 2 3 1957

46 RDM, 10 7 1957. Pretoria employers were totally opposed to an increase in the levy.

47 Liberal Party memo, p.6

48 Digest of South African Affairs, 1 4 1957, p.12

49 Ibid, p.5

50 The Star, 21 3 1957

51 RDM, 11 3 1957

52 RDM, 28 2 1957

53 RDM, 7 3 1957

54 Digest of South African Affairs, 1 4 1957, p.10

55 Southern African Research Archives Project (henceforth SARAP), Reel 21B, 2 YEI 96/3

56 See note two.

57 Pretoria News, 12 2 1957

58 Rand Daily Mail (RDM), 7 3 1957

59 Liberal Party memo p.7

60 Ibid , p.9

61 SARAP, Reel 21B, 2 YEI, APTC leaflet, 14 4 1957

62 Ballinger Papers (University of the Witwatersrand), File A 410/B2 Native Affairs (b). Letter from Jimmy Dey to Walter Ballinger, 7 5 1957.

63 SARAP, Reel 21B, 2 YEI

64 Ballinger Papers, op cit.

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65 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI, APTC leaflet, 14 4 1957.

66 RDM, 10 7 1957

67 Ballinger Papers, File A410/B2 Native Affairs (b). Mimeo report on Pretoria boycott.

68 The World, 26 1 1957

69 Ballinger Papers, op cit.

70 I am grateful to Joanne Yawich for an idea drawn from a lecture she delivered in October 1978 on rural and urban womens' protest movements in South Africa during the 1950s.

71 The World, 8 10 1955.

72 RDM, 3 12 1958

73 National Transport Commission Report for 1954 - 1957, UG 26/58 p.11

74 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI, APTC leaflet, 14 4 1957.

75 RDM, 31 1 1950

76 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Memo of crown evidence, Part 2, Section B. para. 2

77 RDM 2 11 1954

78 The Star, 2 11 1954

79 The World, 13 8 1955

80 The World 30 6 1956

81 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Memo of crown evidence, Part 1, Section B, re. pp. 5195, 5916, 5942

82 Ibid re. p. 5969

83 Ibid re. p. 5973

84 Ibid re. p. 5975

85 Ibid re. p. 5947

86 Ibid re. p. 5960

87 Ibid re. p. 5937

88 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 32/2, Minutes of EPTC executive meeting.

89 Ibid

90 SAIRR Survey of Race Relations I955-56 p.

91 Fare loss computed on basis of EPTC losing three quarters of its passengers a month, as was admitted by the bus company. The World, 25 2 1956

92 Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 1946-47, UG 15 49, p.30

93 SAIRR Survey of Race Relations 1955-56 p.

94 Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 1946-47, UG 15 49, p.30

95 Ibid. p.35

96 Mphahlele (1957: 56) and Native Affairs Commission, UG 15 49, p. 34

97 See Verwoerd's speech as reported in RDM 7 8 1956

98 Native Affairs Commission, UG 15 49, p.35

99 An article in The World, 7 4 1956, as well as Mphahlele in Drum, July I956, makethe point that Evaton children seemed comparatively well fed and healthy, attributing this to the possibility of access to wild fruit and agricultural produce

100 Native Affairs Commission, UG 15 49 p.37

101 RDM, 28 6 1956

102 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Part I Section B, p.13

103 Native Affairs Commission, UG 15 49 p.34

104 The World, 28 4 1956

105 Native Affairs Commission, UG 15 49 p.38. Mphahlele (1957: 60) confirms that this was still the case in 1956.

106 Report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the Operation of Bus Services... UG 31 1944, p.29

107 The World, 28 4 1956 . See also undated letter of complaint from J M Nhlapo to EPS. Nhlapo Papers (University of the Witwatersrand) A 1006 A

108 Profile based on EPTC minutes (SARAP Reel 21B) and a report in The World. 20 10 1956

109 Biographical details from SARAP Reel 12A (ref. 2XM117) and Reel 11A (ref. 2XM19).

110 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Part 3 Section b para. 5

111 See for example ' Extracts from the report of the interdepartmental committee of Inquiry into riots on the mines in the Republic of South Africa' in South African Labour Bulletin, (Durban), Vol 4 No 5, September 1978, p.51

112 D C Thema 'Inside Dube Hostel' Drum November 1957

113 The World 1 10 1955

114 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Part 1 Section b, re. para 6145

115 Ibid re. para. 6111

116 The World, 25 8 1956

117 Native Affairs Commission UG 15 49 p.38

118 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Part 1 Section b p.11 and Part 2 Section b para. 8. Also Sunday Express, 29.7 1956

119 Ibid and Sunday Times, 5 8 1956

120 See article on boycott in The Africanist (Orlando) December 1956,p.16 Josias Madzunya visted the Evaton boycotters.

121 SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 84/2; 2 YEI 84/3.

122 The World, 21 7 1956

123 RDM, 28 6 1956

124 As they did in Lady Selbourne the following year. Star, 30 1 1957.

125 The World, 4 8 1956

126 See for example Time, 9 7 1956

127 See RDM, 7 8 1956 and SARAP Reel 21B, 2 YEI 95, Part 1, Section b, re. para. 5982

128 The World, 8 9 1956

129 RDM, 28 2 1957

130 SARAP Reel 12A, 2 XM117 96/2