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WHEN ALL TENANTS WERE NO LONGER 'SHINY WHITE AND LEGAL': THE INCREASING INTEGRATION OF THE JOHANNESBURG INNER CITY AND THE RESPONSE OF THE WHITE RIGHT, 1977 TO 1991

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Introduction

For about 27 years, from 1950 to 1977, the Group Areas Act remained sacrosanct for the National Party. In order to enforce it hundreds of thousands of people were moved and areas like District Six and Sophiatown were destroyed (Pirie, 1986:186; Davenport, 1989:420). However, from the late 1970s the policy of residential segregation started fraying as dozens of 'coloured' and Indian families started moving into Hillbrow and neighbouring Johannesburg inner city localities *de jure* reserved exclusively for white occupation (de Coning et al, 1987; Pickard-Cambridge, 1988; *Citizen*, 9 November 1977). By the mid-1980s the steady trickle had turned into a flood and by 1987 group areas in the Johannesburg inner city had effectively collapsed. In 1991 the Group Areas Act was formerly rescinded. At the end of 1992 whites constituted only 20 percent of Hillbrow's population (Morris, 1994).

This paper examines the responses of the white right wing to this ever-increasing integration. The white right wing is defined broadly to include the National Party, the Conservative Party and the neo-fascist National Front. In the period under discussion how to deal with the undermining of the Group Areas in the Johannesburg inner city became a key battle ground in white politics and reflected the increasing fragmentation of the white power bloc.

The response of the National Party, 1977 to 1980: The Big Stick is Vigorously Waved

Up until the late 1970s, very few Johannesburg landlords would have dared let an apartment to anybody classified other than white. Similarly few people not classified white would have had the courage to approach a Hillbrow landlord to ask for accommodation. This was mainly due to the very clear determination of the National Party government to uphold residential segregation. This is indicated by figures released in parliament in February 1973. The Minister responsible declared that 1 513 white, 44 885 'coloured' and 27 694 Indian families had been moved in terms of the Group Areas Act by the end of 1972 and that another 135 white families, 27 448 'coloured' and 10 641 Indian families still faced removal (Davenport, 1989:420).

For the National Party, the Group Areas Act and the resultant residential segregation were viewed as central to the success of the apartheid project (Stadler, 1987; Pickard-Cambridge, 1988; Simon, 1989; Lemon, 1991). The Group Areas Act allowed the government to provide separate local government structures, amenities and services such as education and health and helped perpetuate and reinforce the notion that the different racial classifications created by apartheid could not reside together. The renting of Johannesburg inner city flats by people classified 'coloured' and Indian represented an early crack in the apartheid edifice.

The National Party's opening response to the initial integration of the area was remarkably restrained. This appears to be mainly due to the lack of publicity on the issue. As long as there was no publicity, the government was prepared to let the migration persist. However, once the story broke and complaints about group areas transgressions from right wing individuals started streaming in, the government became increasingly bellicose about the need to take action. Marais Steyn, the then Minister of

Community Development, the ministry responsible for the enforcement of the Group Areas Act, soon set the tone. He insisted that the 'illegal' tenants be removed arguing that "overcrowding in the coloured and Indian areas is better than breaking the law." He went on to say "we are not persecuting these people by forcing them out, we are merely trying to make them comply with the law." (*Star*, 19 May 1978).

Within days of the newspaper reports, 'illegal' tenants were being told by police, reportedly acting on instructions from the Minister, to leave their flats (*Star*, 17 May 1978). Many were taken to court and prosecuted for transgressing the Group Areas Act. On face value, the sentences imposed were lenient, generally fines ranging between R50 and R100. However, a much more severe penalty was that tenants were given two months to vacate their flat and find alternative accommodation (*Rand Daily Mail*, 2 February 1979). Eventually, so many cases involving the infringement of the Group Areas Act were set in motion that a special Magistrates Court had to be set aside for them to be heard. By the end of May 1979, it was estimated that in the preceding six months, 500 people had been charged with contravening the Group Areas Act in the Johannesburg area (*Sunday Express*, 27 May 1979). Overall, from late 1978 to the end of 1979, "the police pressed charges against more than 640 black Johannesburg tenants." (Pickard-Cambridge, 1988:5). Police also visited individual landlords and letting agencies and instructed them to give notice to their existing 'coloured' and Indian tenants and not to take in more (*Star*, 19 May 1978; *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 February, 1979). The Minster responsible blamed the media for the severe harassment saying that "there were very few prosecutions before the press made an issue of it." (*Star*, 13 February 1979).

Appeals by a wide range of parties to the government to halt the evictions were ignored. Instead the 'illegal' tenants were portrayed by the government as individuals who had purposely created the situation and were being fairly treated by the authorities. Referring to the evictions, Mr R. B. Durrant, a National Party Member of Parliament, commented that

> there was no inhumane implementation of these court orders by the Department. There was in fact consideration for those who had forcibly broken the law. Those eviction orders were not granted against people who had no accommodation either. They were issued against people who had vacated previous accommodation in other areas and who purposely moved into accommodation in classified areas where they had no right to be. ... I therefore want to express my thanks to the ... Minister for the warning he has issued ... to the owners and landlords who permit this illegal occupation (*Hansard*, 1979:col. 5 821, 7 May).

Although in the early stages of the campaign against inner city integration the government appeared to be operating in a united fashion, dissension within the National Party as to how to deal with the issue soon emerged. It became a key source of tension between the more liberal 'verligtes' and the conservative 'verkrampte' faction of the Party.

The Action Committee to Stop Evictions (ACTSTOP), the organisation set up by tenants to organise resistance, ensured that all prosecutions and evictions were exposed and

given ample publicity. Harsh action against group areas offenders was severely criticised by that part of the press aligned with the 'verligte' section of the National Party. They viewed it as damaging to the National Party and typical of the short-sighted policy of the 'verkrampte' faction. *The Beeld* made a strong plea to the government to declare a moratorium on the prosecution of 'coloureds' and Indians living in white group areas. It called on the Minister to act in the name of common humanity and asked him to consider what results such actions had on political relations:

> We want to urge Minister Steyn, as Dr Koornhof did in other circumstances, to institute a moratorium on prosecutions, at least until housing is again available in brown [sic] areas. We ask him to allow families who cannot obtain any legal housing in group areas to live where people are prepared to house them (Reported in *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 August 1979).

The Transvaler expressed similar sentiments. In an editorial it criticised the Minister for threatening to escalate the onslaught against 'illegal' tenants and commented that "'although it appreciated the problems of the situation ... the fact remained that coloured and Indian people sought refuge in the area because they could not get housing elsewhere.'" The editorial suggested "'that in the interests of good race relations it would be better to withhold such threats until the necessary balance in the housing situation is achieved.'" (Reported in *Star*, 10 July 1980).

Despite the publicity and adverse criticism, the government continued to push for prosecutions and evictions. In August 1979, 120 people appeared in court charged with violating the Group Areas Act and intimidated landlords continued to evict 'illegal' tenants (*Star*, 23 August 1979).

A major challenge was launched towards the end of 1979 when two cases involving the transgression of the Group Areas Act in the inner city were taken on appeal to the Appeal Court. They had the effect of delaying prosecutions for a year while the Appeal Court deliberated. When the Appeal Court ruled in August 1980 that the prosecutions and evictions were legal, the minister concerned once more reiterated that the National Party would retain the area as a white domain. Minister Steyn said that "'Indian and coloured people living in white group areas should now move out voluntarily rather than face eviction.'" (*Star*, 2 October 1980). Asked where they should go, Steyn responded "'they must make a plan. We Afrikaners came here after the Anglo Boer war (in 1902) and we made plans.'" (*Star*, 2 October 1980). He went on to say "'[T]hey did not just come out of the sea like some mystical being. They came from somewhere and must go back there to find homes.'" (*Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980).

The Role of the National Front

An important force in Hillbrow at this time was the South African branch of the British based neo-fascist National Front (NF). Set up in 1978, by March 1979 the NF claimed to have 1 500 members and branches in several Transvaal and Natal towns (*Sunday Express*, 4 March 1979). The NF's central initial aim appeared to be searching for 'illegal' tenants in Johannesburg's inner city and reporting them to the police (*South*

African Jewish Times, 24 January 1979).

The NF declared "if all coloureds and Indians are not out of their white homes by the end of March (1979) we'll strike again. We won't give up until they are all evicted." (*Rand Daily Mail*, 29 January 1979). The NF's rhetoric was both racist and anti-semitic. A pamphlet circulated in early 1979 claimed that "'the reason coloured and Indian people are living in white-owned flats is not sympathy with them; but that this is the work of greedy zionist landlords.'" The pamphlet went on to say "'It is your country and not the Zionists.'" (*Star*, 16 January 1979).

The actions of the NF did not only lead to a substantial increase in prosecutions, it also intensified the pressure on landlords to evict 'illegal' tenants as many felt intimidated by the NF (*Star*, 3 January 1979). The NF's constant sniffing out of 'illegal' tenants meant that people were constantly being prosecuted. However, although the NF was important in the initial stages of the battle of right wing forces against integration in the Johannesburg inner city by the end of 1979 they were a spent force.

The Early 1980s, the National Party More or Less Retreats

Despite the Appeal Court victory and the fierce rhetoric of the minister, the fear of another legal challenge and the accompanying publicity appeared to make the government extremely trepidatious as regards renewing the prosecution of 'illegal' tenants. At the beginning of March 1981, charges against 107 people were withdrawn and another 56 group areas cases were postponed (*Star*, 4 March 1981). All in all, of the 564 cases that came before the courts in February and March 1981, 286 cases were withdrawn and 233 cases were suspended for six months (*Sunday Times*, 29 March 1981). Ultimately, in 1981, only three people were prosecuted in the Johannesburg inner city area for occupying premises in contravention of the provisions of the Group Areas Act (*Hansard*, 17 February 1982, cols. 136 and 137). In contrast, during the period, 1 January 1978 to 31 December 1980, 540 coloureds and 363 Indians were convicted of contravening the Group Areas Act (*Hansard*, 17 February 1982, cols. 136 and 137). Almost all of these prosecutions occurred in the Johannesburg area.

It would appear that the adverse publicity and the fact that the housing shortage in 'coloured' and Indian areas was becoming insurmountable, made a large number of key National Party officials and parliamentarians accept the changing composition of the Johannesburg inner city. At this time negotiations were also beginning as to the formation of the 'tricameral' parliament and harsh action against 'illegal' tenants could have jeopardised the incipient talks (Horrell, 1982:13). Also the government's failure to produce a coherent policy as regards group areas violations appear to reflect the turmoil within the National Party at this time as the 'verligtes' and the 'verkramptes' battled for ascendency.

In the election campaign for the all-white Parliament in April 1981, the National Party again reiterated that it stood for residential segregation. It released a pamphlet in Hillbrow pledging that the National Party would "'combat the illegal occupation of other races in Hillbrow.'" (*Rand Daily Mail*, 28 April 1981). However, by the middle of 1981 some National Party MPs were openly calling for legal recognition of the Indian and

'coloured' tenants in Hillbrow. A Johannesburg National Party MP, Mr S P Barnard, estimated that there were at least 4 000 Indian families in Hillbrow and "proposed that part of Hillbrow be turned over to Indians." (*Star*, 3 July 1981). Another Johannesburg-based National Party MP, Mr Roelf Meyer, although less explicit than Barnard, supported the idea of an Indian group area being declared near the city centre (*Rand Daily Mail*, 3 July 1981). However, the views of Barnard and Meyer were not necessarily majority views and many National Party MPs were unhappy with their proposals. Mr Koos van der Merwe, a leading member of the 'verkrampte' wing of the National Party, later to become one of the main figures in the 'verkrampte' breakaway and the resultant formation of the Conservative Party in 1982, remarked that he was totally opposed to the creation of

> a group area for coloureds and Indians in the middle of an established white area such as Hillbrow. I am opposed to this suggestion because it is in conflict with the party's principles and policy (*Rand Daily Mail*, 3 July 1981).

The conservative view on group areas still commanded a lot of support within the National Party at this time. This was reflected in the latter part of 1981 when Mr Pen Kotze, the newly-appointed Minster of Community Development, announced in parliament that legislation would be introduced that would greatly facilitate the ability of the authorities to take decisive action against 'coloured' and Indian residents transgressing the Group Areas Act. The amendments were aimed at overcoming "the time-consuming legal proceedings presently hampering the eviction of illegal residents." (*Citizen*, 17 September 1981). Kotze went on to say that the Group Areas Act "was the foundation of government policy" and therefore "is a necessary piece of legislation" and that without it "there would be chaos." (*Star*, 17 September 1981). However, among the more 'verlig' National Party MPs there appeared to be little support for Kotze's proposals and they were never promulgated.

The willingness of 'verligte' government officials to convert the *de facto* nature of mixed areas like Hillbrow into a *de jure* status was illustrated again in early 1982. Mr Francois Oberholzer, the chairperson of the management committee of the National Party-controlled Johannesburg City Council, revealed that there had been a secret meeting between the Johannesburg management committee and senior government representatives where the latter had suggested proclaiming certain parts of Johannesburg mixed areas. This proposition was opposed by the management committee who argued that white residents would be forced out of the areas in question and ultimately the proposal was dropped (*Rand Daily Mail*, 11 February 1982).

The Conservative Party Enters the Hillbrow Fray

The end of 1982 saw a dramatic development in South African politics with the splitting off of the right-wing of the National party and the resultant formation of the Conservative Party. The main reason for its formation was the belief amongst the MPs involved that the National Party was abandoning "sacred" apartheid principles. The planned inclusion of 'coloureds' and Indians in the previously whites-only Parliamentary structure was viewed as "traitorous". The large number of blacks in central

Johannesburg, especially Hillbrow, was quoted as a key indication of the government's reluctance to impose strict segregation in line with apartheid doctrine (*Citizen*, 4 August 1983).

The formation of the Conservative Party was certainly a blow for Hillbrow's 'coloured' and Indian residents as once again there was a powerful, organised force waged against them. The tenancy of coloureds and Indians in Hillbrow became a central focus for the Conservative Party as it was used to argue that the government "had gone soft" on apartheid (*Citizen*, 4 August 1983). In mid-1983, a petition was organised in Hillbrow by Conservative Party members opposing racial integration in the area. One of the organisers, Mr J H Steenkamp, said that the "petition was aimed at the average (white) man in the street who did not have the resources to flee to expensive suburbs and away from integration." (*Star*, 30 July 1983). He went on to say that he does not "hate other races. But (did) not believe that we can mix different cultures in residential areas. Integration has not worked anywhere in the world. Why should it work in Hillbrow?" (*Star*, 30 July 1983).

In August 1983 a public meeting was called by the Conservative Party to publicise the petition and to oppose calls by some National Party officials that the area be opened up to 'coloured' and Indian people (*Star*, 3 August 1983).

The meeting was attended by "about 250 mainly English-speaking people." (*Citizen*, 4 August 1983). Addressing the meeting, whilst brandishing the petition, apparently signed by 5 000 people, Mr Koos van der Merwe, now a Conservative Party Member of Parliament, "listed 16 grievances of (white) residents in the area." (*Star*, 4 August 1983). He claimed that "coloureds, Indians and blacks are swamping whites in these areas" (Hillbrow and the neighbouring suburbs, Berea and Joubert Park) and that

> whites are afraid to leave their flats for fear of being attacked; parks are occupied by unemployed blacks; Indians threaten or bribe landlords to give them accommodation, landlords are allowing people of other race groups to live in their blocks of flats, to intimidate white protected tenants to vacate, ... crime is increasing, people of colour litter the area and urinate in public. The entire situation is forcing whites to leave the area. (*Citizen*, 4 August 1983)

He went on to argue that "'(T)he National Party had gone soft on Group Areas'" and that as a result "'our (the whites) traditional way of life is being threatened'" (*Citizen*, 4 August 1983). Van der Merwe made similar claims at the Conservative Party Congress a few days later (*Star*, 10 August 1983).

Amongst white inner city residents there was some ardent support for the Conservative party. In April 1983, Mr F O Gouws, the principal of a local white primary school in a suburb bordering Hillbrow, gave a letter to each child to give to their parents. The letter "strongly" advised parents to "complain to the police about any non-whites living in Hillbrow and the city centre." (*Star* 28 April 1983). Parents were requested to "fill in a questionnaire listing any non-white tenants they might be aware of and their addresses." (The Star, 28 April 1983). Despite the letter arousing enormous controversy, the

Transvaal Education Department refused to comment or intervene. (*Star*, 28 April 1983)

The Conservative Party project was to create a stereotype of the 'illegal' tenant and the white legal tenant. The way in which Body-Gendrot (1993) depicts the racist stereotyping of immigrants from ex-colonies in to France's cities is similar to the Conservative Party's depiction of the Johannesburg inner city scenario. The stereotyping involves depicting the immigrants/ 'illegal' tenants as "producing a 'third-worldisation' of the national space as well as a pollution of culture which only spatial segregation can avoid." Thus the discourse of the Conservative Party can be interpreted as equating the disintegration of racial homogeneity with a fall in standards and an enormous expansion of anti-social behaviour.

The National Party's Response to Conservative Party Pressure

The presence of the Conservative Party ensured that 'coloured' and Indian residents continued to be harassed as their supporters took over from the National Front as the primary conduits of information to the police as regards individual infringements of the Group Areas Act. The Govender judgement of 1982 which made evictions of 'illegal' tenants possible only if alternative accommodation was available, resulted in a change of strategy by the police. Instead of harassing individuals, the police started placing the onus for enforcement of the Act on the landlords. Aware that harassing tenants was fruitless in view of the Govender judgement, the police, according to the chairperson of Actstop, Cas Saloojee, "began to pressurise landlords and caretakers to evict the tenants themselves." (*Rand Daily Mail*, 24 March 1983). The police were fully aware, according to Saloojee, that evictions of tenants by the landlord would be "much more difficult to fight" in a court of law (*Rand Daily Mail*, 24 March 1983). Also if tenants were turfed out by the landlord, negative publicity would be directed against the individual landlord rather than the police or government.

Landlords were threatened with prosecution if they did not evict 'coloured' and Indian residents. The pressure placed on them led to inner city Johannesburg property owners issuing a statement claiming that "the police are carrying out witch hunts for Asian and coloured people living in white-owned flats and are forcing the landlords to evict them." (*Star*, 4 March 1983).

This was denied by the divisional CID chief for the Witwatersrand, Brigadier Tertius Wium, who commented that

> (W)e act only on complaints and then we are duty bound to investigate whether we like it or not. If we find sufficient evidence that the law is being infringed we notify the property owners to rectify the matter (*Star*, 4 March 1983).

In March 1983, 'illegal' residents in three Joubert Park blocks were given notice by the landlords after the latter had been instructed by the police "to notify their 'illegal tenants' to vacate their buildings." (*Star* 4 March 1983). One of the biggest property owners in the Hillbrow area, Anglo American Properties, also bowed to police pressure when they gave about 35 coloured and Indian families in Highpoint, one of the biggest blocks in

Hillbrow, 24 hours notice to vacate their flats. The notice period was later extended. A spokesperson for Anglo American Properties claimed that

> their hands were tied as regards the eviction of non-white tenants from their Highpoint flats. We have been told by police that non-white tenants are contravening the Group Areas Act and if we do not remove them we will be fined (*Rand Daily Mail*, 16 April 1983).

The Highpoint tenants "ignored their eviction notices" and it is unclear if the threat persisted (*Citizen*, 7 April 1983). What did persist was the feeling amongst many 'coloured' and Indian residents that although things had improved, their tenure in the inner city was still fragile. As one columnist put it, referring specifically to Highpoint,

> (T)hey live in a twilight world where leaving and entering their homes is a carefully conducted exercise. Behaving like normal tenants with rights is out of the question for the coloured and Indian occupants of Hillbrow's Highpoint building (*Sunday Express*, 24 April 1983).

Highlighting the increasing integration of Hillbrow continued to be pivotal in the Conservative Party's propaganda weaponry. Towards the end of 1984 the Conservative Party reopened its campaign "'to clean up the Hillbrow cesspool [sic].'" (*Rand Daily Mail*, 24 September 1984). The influx of coloured and Indian residents into Hillbrow was presented as the cause of increased crime in the locality. The Johannesburg chairperson of the Conservative Party, Mr Clive Derby-Lewis, claimed that "if black people were allowed to break the Group Areas Act by living in Hillbrow, they would break other laws as well. The disregard for the law was contributing to the general lawlessness in the area." (*Rand Daily Mail*, 24 September 1984). At a public meeting in September 1984, the leader of the Party, Dr Andries Treurnicht, launched a new Conservative Party plan as regards 'illegal' residents. He called for people to form "action groups" to help police "clean up Hillbrow." (*Rand Daily Mail*, 24 September 1984). This was to be combined with continuing pressure on the government to prosecute landlords.

The language used by the Conservative Party at the meeting was so strong that Mr Alf Widman, the Progressive Party MP for Hillbrow, accused the Conservative Party of fermenting race hostility in Hillbrow and filed a complaint under Section 62 of the Internal Security Act which states that

> any person who utters words or performs any other act with intent to cause, encourage or ferment feelings of hostility between different population groups ... is guilty of an offence (*Sunday Star*, 24 March 1985).

At the same meeting Treurnicht "accused the government of being too scared to act against coloured and Indian people living in Hillbrow ... for fear of upsetting their new-found partners in government." (*Star*, 25 September 1984).

The Conservative Party policy of pressurising the police to charge landlords was not working. This is reflected in the Conservative Party's considering the idea of private prosecutions of landlords - 30 "greater Hillbrow" properties were earmarked (*Sunday*

Express, 30 September 1984).

The publicity generated by this threat had a slight impact. Some 'coloured' and Indian tenants were evicted and, in some cases, estate agents and caretakers once more allowed only whites to occupy vacant flats (*Star*, 3 October 1984). In other instances, estate agents started "insisting that people who signed the lease actually lived in the flat." (*Star*, 3 October 1984). It was also reported that hundred of 'illegal' tenants received letters from landlords instructing them to vacate their flats (Cooper *et al*, 1985:482). Generally, these appeared to be ignored.

Clearly the Conservative Party's campaign to reverse integration in this period was a dismal failure. 'Illegals' continued to stream in and by the end of 1984 it was estimated that there were about 10 000 in the inner city area (Cooper *et al*, 1985:481). The Conservative Party's battle had effectively been lost.

Why was the Impact of the Conservative Party so Limited

The response of the government to Conservative Party pressure, 1983 to 1985: One step forwards, two steps back

There is little doubt that pressure from the Conservative party helped ensure that the government did little to alleviate the situation of 'illegal' residents. Instead it appeared determined to give the impression that it was still in favour of separate group areas and would enforce the law. Pen Kotze, towards the end of 1983, again warned of "'drastic measures' planned by the government against Indians and 'coloureds' living illegally - that is, in defiance of the Group Areas Act - in Johannesburg's 'white' suburbs." (*Rand Daily Mail*, 29 October 1983). He claimed that "leftist elements had done everything in their power to thwart government efforts by attempting to delay legal proceedings deliberately and inciting people to break the law." (*Star*, 18 October 1983). Kotze was subsequently lavishly praised by the Prime Minister, Mr P W Botha, for his handling of the group areas issue. The latter pronounced that he wants "to refer with honour to Mr Pen Kotze and what he has done in spite of the attacks on him." (*Rand Daily Mail*, 29 October 1983).

The emergence of the Conservative Party, in combination with the government's apparent belief that separate residential areas were still pivotal, led to the unveiling of a new plan for dealing with increasing integration in Hillbrow. The plan unveiled in a joint statement by eight ministers, including the leaders of the 'coloured' and Indian houses of Parliament, involved the building of 1 100 flats for Indian families and 500 for coloured families (*Citizen*, 21 November 1984). The flats were to be situated in the coloured group area of Newclare and the Indian group area of Burghersdorp. Newclare is about 10 kilometres from the city centre while Burghersdorp is very close to the city centre. The plan involved persuading coloured and Indian families living in Hillbrow and Mayfair to move to government provided flats (*Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1984). The ministers' statement requested that

> those people residing where they were not qualified to stay as at November 20 this year (1984) ... register with the Johannesburg offices of the Administration: House of Delegates and Administration: House of

> Representatives before 30 November, in other words within ten days of the announcement (*Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1984).

The government's statement gave the impression that 'illegal' tenants had been consulted and given their consent to the plan:

> As a result of impending action against their occupation as well as gross exploitation, they requested, and it was agreed, that immediate steps be taken to alleviate the accommodation problem and to avoid prosecution in these cases. (*Citizen*, 21 November 1984)

Most 'illegal' residents were sceptical of the plan and would not register as they feared they would be forced to move once their names and addresses were known to the authorities. Also 'coloured' families did not want to move out of town to Newclare (*Sunday Star*, 25 November 1984).

The plan was slammed by Actstop. The chairperson remarked

> it was ridiculous for the government to build flats for people who already had accommodation and force them to move, when there were many thousands of people who had nowhere to live.
>
> We will have a situation where people who have accommodation will be asked to leave because of the colour of their skin. It proves that old style apartheid is well and thriving (*Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1984).

The government's plan was not only rejected by extra- parliamentary organisations. The Lenasia Watchdog, a committee of Lenasia residents who participated in the 'tricameral' elections, wrote a letter to the Minister of Housing in the House of Delegates, Mr Baldeo Dookie, protesting against the plan.

> We lodge our strongest complaint and objection to the fact that priority is given in allocating the flats to illegal occupants of premises in white areas.
>
> It is grossly unfair to bypass the thousands of residents on waiting lists for homes in the so-called Indian areas (*Star*, 12 December 1984).

A member of the coloured management committee in Newclare felt similarly saying "it was ridiculous to move coloured people who already had a roof over their heads into badly needed houses and flats to satisfy ideological demands." (*Star*, 24 November 1984).

It would seem that a prime aim of the government's announcement was to dissipate the criticisms of the Conservative Party. This became especially urgent in the context of several House of Assembly by-elections that were to be held around this time (*Star*, 28 November 1984).

The housing proposal under discussion never materialised. The proposal was either a

deliberate ploy right from the beginning to blunt the Conservative Party's attack or alternatively the government decided the plan was not feasible for ideological or fiscal reasons.

The proposed plan did appear to stop the Conservative Party in its tracks and from the beginning of 1985, Hillbrow hardly featured in the Conservative Party's agenda. There is no evidence of the zeal with which they attacked integration in the 1983-84 period. They also dropped their plan to institute private prosecutions of landlords transgressing the Group Areas Act (*Star*, 22 November 1984).

The police were also quiet during this period. There were intermittent actions. For example, towards the end of 1984 "police threatened 23 blacks living in Hillbrow with eviction." (*Star*, 18 October 1984). What is evident is that the government decided that their plan to move 'illegal' residents out of the inner city was not feasible and harassment of tenants and landlords in terms of the Groups areas Act became more and more minimal: Between November 1983 and July 1984, only one group areas' case, according to the Witwatersrand Attorney-General, came to court (*Sunday Express*, 15 July 1984). In 1985 there was not one prosecution under the Group Areas Act in Hillbrow.

The 1983-85 period, was a phase of much blustering by the government about its determination to enforce the Group Areas Act but once more the structural and political conditions operating, plus the uncertainty within the National Party about the morality of the Act, meant that enforcement continued to be minimal and sporadic. In this next section I want to elaborate on the conditions which shaped National Party policy towards the Johannesburg inner city at this time.

Explaining Government Policy as Regards the Johannesburg Inner City, 1983 to 1985

As mentioned, the threat of the Conservative Party using the disintegration of residential segregation as a means of garnering votes was an important factor in the government's continued commitment to the Group Areas Act. However, its lack of direct action in the inner city had several other components.

i) The formation of the 'tri-cameral' parliament

A powerful shaper of the government's policy on the Johannesburg inner city was the creation of the 'tricameral' parliament. The agreement of the 'coloured' Labour Party to enter the new 'tricameral' parliamentary structure could have been jeopardised by too harsh an approach towards 'illegal' 'coloured' and Indian tenants. Reverend Allan Hendrickse, the leader of the Labour Party, indicated that "issues arising from the application of the Group Areas Act would be high on the agenda in early meetings between the Party and Government leaders." (*Star*, April 1983). The Labour Party was to "take up a negotiating stance on the issue of suspending all prosecutions and further group area proclamations under the Act." (*Star*, April 1983).

The formation of the 'tricameral' parliament meant that the government had more constituencies to entreat. On the issue of group areas it was clear that any endeavour to meet the demands of the ultra-right as regards 'illegal' tenants in the inner city would

severely alienate the 'coloured' and Indian participants in the 'tricameral' parliament.

The lack of government action became more apparent in the months preceding the first 'coloured' and Indian parliamentary election in August 1984. A government spokesperson when asked about the lack of group areas prosecutions and evictions during this period stated that the government "'was not prepared to take such strong action in the current sensitive political climate.'" (*Sunday Express*, 15 July 1984).

ii) The continuing housing crisis

The deepening of the housing shortage also served to encourage constant movement into the Johannesburg inner city by coloureds and Indians and the ignoring of prosecutions and threats. Community leaders estimated that at the beginning of 1983 there were "more than 10 000 families waiting for houses in Johannesburg's coloured and Indian areas." (*Star*, 11 January 1983). Towards the end of 1983, Dr Essop Jassam of the Transvaal Indian Congress estimated that "10 000 new homes are required in the Johannesburg area for Indian families." (*Star*, 19 October 1983). Thousands of families were reported to be "living in overcrowded houses, backyard rooms, servant quarters, garages and 'wendy' houses." (*Sunday Tribune*, 20 January 1985). The small number of homes being built in Lenasia at this time were being sold in the R50 000 to R90 000 range. Few people could afford these prices (*Sunday Tribune*, 20 January 1985).

As regards the provision of homes for the 'coloured' and Indian working class the government appeared to have absolved itself of all responsibility and handed over the building of housing to private capital. Even the land the government made available was sold to private companies rather than private individuals (*Sunday Tribune*, 20 January 1985). These property companies built the homes which were then bought by speculators "to rent to desperate home-seekers at exorbitant rates." (*Sunday Tribune*, 20 January 1985). Gavin Relly, the then chairperson of the Anglo American Corporation, argued that shortage of housing and land for 'coloureds' and Indians in the Johannesburg area was so acute that it was equivalent to a form of influx control. He argued that it is

> it is impossible for them to migrate to the industrial areas even when they can afford to provide their own housing or when their potential employers would be willing to provide housing for them (*Citizen*, 13 July 1983).

In the mid-1980s the Johannesburg inner city was often the only solution. The majority of the National Party hierarchy had come to accept this reality. This was reinforced by the increasing dominance of a free market ideology and the concomitant belief that the government must cut spending. The dramatic drop in the gold price at the end of 1984 and the decline of the economy in 1985 meant that any possibility of resolving the housing crisis in the 'coloured' and Indian areas in the PWV was remote (Cooper *et al*, 1985:191).

iii) The perilous position of many landlords and their desire for 'model illegal' tenants

It would appear that most 'illegal' tenants in Hillbrow at this time were employed in stable jobs that paid reasonably well. They paid their rent on time and looked after the

property. Their illegal status often made them more diligent. As a group of churchmen based in the Johannesburg inner city area stated "most coloured and Indian tenants had proved to be model tenants, (and are) particularly conscientious because of their vulnerability ..." (*Star*, 21 November 1984).

They were model occupants in a context where landlords were battling to find tenants. Thus, although "hundreds of Indian and coloured families living in Hillbrow began receiving letters from landlords telling them to get out", it would appear that there were few evictions during this period and most landlords ignored the Conservative Party's threats (*Star*, 21 November 1984).
For many landlords, coloured and Indian tenants were their lifeblood. In late 1984 it was estimated that there were 500 vacant flats in the Hillbrow and Berea area (*Sunday Express*, 30 September 1984). "Desperate landlords have taken to letting flats without being too particular about the occupants." (*Sunday Star*, 25 November 1984). As one agent said "I don't ask any questions as long as a white signs the lease and his credit rating is acceptable." (*Sunday Star*, 25 November 1984).

Also in their relationship with coloured and Indian tenants, landlords were in a powerful position.

> When all tenants were shiny white and legal, countless landlords had to contend with late rents not paid at all, damage and dereliction without being able to do much about it. Now you evict on the spot. Illegals don't take you to court (*Sunday Express*, 30 September, 1984).

Clearly, however, landlords were not in a position to be too choosy about their tenants. Even a reasonably reliable Indian or coloured tenant was not likely to be evicted in the context of adhoc and amorphous state pressure.

The attitude of landlords had resulted in a situation where at the end of 1984 in several blocks in Hillbrow at least 25 percent of the tenants were coloured and Indian (*Sunday Star*, 25 November 1984).

iv) Resistance by tenants

By the time the Conservative Party launched their campaign the number of 'illegal' tenants in Hillbrow and the Johannesburg inner city had reached a point where many "illegals" no longer felt cowed.

> If once coloured and Indian people sneaked in and out of their flats in white group areas, today they stand and chat at the entrance to the building, wave at friends driving by, don't notice the white faces in the buses, which faces don't notice them. (*Sunday Express*, 30 September 1984).

In certain ways the boot was on the other foot with many whites feeling uncomfortable and as a result moving out:

> Mr and Mrs EJ Botha ... can't wait to move to an old age home. They have been in Hillbrow for "one year three months too long". ... The couple says they have never been bothered by "these people", but they don't want to live "amongst them". "Its not etiquette, you know what I mean." (*Sunday Express*, 30 September 1984).

By the end of 1984 it would appear that many tenants no longer took the threats by government or the Conservative Party seriously. This new-found confidence was bolstered by the Govender judgement and the fact that so many thousands of 'illegals' had moved into the area; white numerical dominance had been severely eroded and tenants realised it was becoming more and more difficult for the government to turn back the racial clock in these inner city localities.

The Large-scale Migration of African People into Hillbrow and the Moves towards Declaring Hillbrow a Free-settlement Area, 1986 to 1990

In 1986 there was an important turning point in the integration of the Johannesburg inner city. Whereas up to the mid-1980s most of the 'illegal' tenants were 'coloured' and Indian, African people now started pouring into the locality. The first large-scale migration into Hillbrow of African residents was taking place. The Johannesburg City Council estimated that by 1987 about 5 000 African people were living in the Hillbrow area (De Coning, *et al* 1987). The reason for this sizeable inward movement of African people is difficult to explain but it would appear that the lifting of influx control was an important factor. For the first time people classified African could live in Hillbrow without being harassed under the pass laws.

Also by this time it was clear that government reaction would be minimal. At the beginning of 1987 it was reported that "ministers have undertaken not to act against people who have already moved into white areas illegally in large numbers." (*Star*, 28 March 1987). At the beginning of 1987, the Central Business District Association estimated that 50 percent of Hillbrow's population was black. The sheer weight of these numbers meant that it was impossible to go back to the *status quo*. As an editorial in *The Star* (28 March 1987) at this time pointed out: "Make no mistake, the battle against apartheid in central Johannesburg is over. It has been won."

Although every important player, bar the Conservative Party, now admitted that Hillbrow and its environs were irrevocably 'grey areas' the government still refused to drop the Group Areas Act or declare the Hillbrow area a 'grey area'. The obsession with separate residential areas was still strong within a section of the party and, remarkably, in June 1988, there was another attempt to tighten up the Group Areas when the Group Areas Amendment Bill was presented to parliament. The Bill had some draconian provisions and was seemingly aimed at winning over right wing white voters in the face of elections planned for October 1988. According to the then Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Mr Chris Heunis, its aim was "'to strengthen the hands of ... law enforcement officers, forestall infringements and obviate the development of intolerable situations.'" (Cooper *et al*, 1988:502). The Bill made provision for the "automatic eviction of any illegal occupant on conviction under the Act." (*Sunday Star*, 3 July 1988). It was severely criticised but only in February 1989 did Heunis announce

that the Bill would be dropped. The Group Areas Act, however remained in place and even after the dramatic 2 February 1990 speech by F W de Klerk, Minister Heunis announced that the government was not planning to rescind the Act during that parliamentary session as "the government still believed in group rights, including the right to live in one's own community." (Cooper *et al*, 1990:63). The one shift was that the Free Settlement Areas Act was passed in 1989. This made provision for mixed areas and the first four *de jure* mixed areas were declared in November 1989, however no Johannesburg inner city area was included.

The government wanted to declare only Hillbrow a "free settlement area" and leave the rest of the inner city a white group area (City of Johannesburg, 1990). This was blocked by the Johannesburg City Council on the premise that opening up Hillbrow could compound the problem as everybody "would stream into one area." (*Sunday Star*, 15 April 1990). Ultimately the Johannesburg inner city was never declared a "free settlement area".

Conclusion

After F W de Klerk's landmark speech in February 1990, the Group Areas Act was effectively dead. However, only in February 1991 was the Group Areas Act, together with those other cornerstones of apartheid, the Land Acts and the Population Registration Act, officially rescinded. *De jure* desegregation of residential areas remained sacrosanct for the National Party to the bitter end.

The demise of racial exclusivity in the Johannesburg inner city in many ways epitomised the increasing unworkability of apartheid. The notion of retaining racially exclusive residential areas in the face of a massive housing shortage in 'coloured', Indian and African areas was clearly untenable. The fiscal crisis brought on partially by the enormous expenditure required to perpetuate apartheid ensured that the government would not be able to provide enough housing in the prescribed group areas. The endeavour to broaden the support base of apartheid by extending the vote to 'coloureds' and Indians made unbridled oppression of these groupings more and more difficult. The ending of influx control in the face of a severe shortage of accommodation in townships ensured that thousands of African people would flock to the Johannesburg inner city.

The responses of the two key white political parties on the right to the demise of residential racial exclusivity in the Johannesburg inner city reflects their different approaches to the crisis of apartheid. For the Conservative Party the disintegration of residential apartheid was viewed as the ultimate affront to be countered at all costs. For the National Party it represented a crisis that had to be managed flexibly. The victory of the 'verligtes' meant that there was room for a variety of responses besides 'kragdadigheid'. However, this flexibility created the space for more inward movement and ultimately made any return to the *status quo* impossible.

The crumbling of apartheid in the Johannesburg inner city was symbolic of the general unworkability of the apartheid system at the end of the turbulent 1980s. By February 1990 the 'verligtes' had come to accept this reality.

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