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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: "No Easy Walk to Freedom": Political Organisation in the Western Areas of Johannesburg Between the World Wars.

by: David Goodhew

No. 255

The Western Areas of Johannesburg, and Sophiatown in particular, came to symbolize black protest in the 1950s and became arguably the most politicized area in the country, albeit for a short period. This paper will seek to explore the background to such developments by looking at the activities of political organisations prior to the Second World War, during an era recognised as one of limited political activity in the cities though not in the countryside, "the years of anguished impotence" according to one writer.[1] This lack of dramatic events was mirrored in the history of the Western Areas, yet this was not for want of trying on the part of a variety of bodies. An examination of such campaigns both enhances understanding of the suburbs in question and offers insights into the local workings of these organisations. Though township history was referred to as "the great unwritten history" only a decade ago, much has been done to remedy this situation and this paper draws heavily on the work of Andre Proctor, Eddie Koch and Hilary Sapire.[2]

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[1] P Walsh The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 1912-52 (Lon 1970) p.129

See also T Lodge Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (Lon 1983) pp.10-11

S Marks and S Trapido The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa (Lon 1987) S Marks And S Trapido(eds) pp.41-4

[2] B Bozzoli (ed) Labour, Townships & Protest (Johannesburg 1979) p.5

A Proctor Class Struggle, Segregation and the City: A History of Sophiatown, 1905-40 in B Bozzoli op. cit.

E Koch Doornfontein and its African Working Class, 1914-35: A Study of Popular Culture in Johannesburg (MA University of the Witwatersrand 1983)

H Sapire African Urbanisation and Struggles Against Municipal Control in Brakpan, 1920-58 (PHD University of the Witwatersrand 1988)

The Western Areas of Johannesburg - the freehold suburbs of Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare and the municipal location of Western Native Township (hereafter W.N.T.) - came into being at the turn of the century. In 1905 Sophiatown and Martindale were proclaimed, followed in 1912 by Newclare, with W.N.T. last in 1919. Though later famed as an island of non-racialism, the suburbs were in fact more racially diverse during their earlier years than later on. Initially the population of Sophiatown and Martindale was largely white whilst Newclare was intended to be a coloured township. The area's 'white' character disappeared rapidly but coloured and Indian communities, though increasingly outnumbered by the African population, maintained distinct and separate identities throughout the district's history. Precise population figures are available for 1921, at which point Africans made up slightly under half of the 5324 people living in the freehold suburbs, with the rest of the population comprising 1698 coloureds, 567 whites and 417 Indians, the whites being mostly in Sophiatown and Martindale and the Indians mainly in Newclare.[3] In the 1920s the African population soon dwarfed the others, whilst W.N.T., a purely African township, grew quickly but unevenly to reach some 14000 inhabitants by 1931.[4] No precise population figures are available for the 1920s and 1930s but a missionary in 1931 estimated Sophiatown as having 7000 people, over double the figure for 1921. In 1935 Ballenden, manager of the municipal Native Affairs Department, said the freehold

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[3] Western Areas Survey 1950 Appendix 1 p.5

[4] Native Economic Commission (N.E.C.) Statement by G Ballenden, manager of Native Affairs Depapartment (N.A.D.) Johannesburg 1931

population was 18 000 and probably several thousand higher. By 1941 the African population of the freehold areas was some 34000.[5]

Documents offering exact information on economic life in the area are scarce prior to the late 1930s. Almost all male workers worked in and around the centre of the city, thus provision of a tramline was essential to allow the placement of W.N.T. so far from the city. Yet by the end of the 1920s the trams running to the township were close to bursting point, as were the buses which served the freehold townships.[6] An official who worked in W.N.T. could not remember the residents working predominantly in one or another trade, but referred to "the thousand and one jobs that black men do." An official in 1931 stated that location inhabitants were to be foundin a wide variety of occupations but could think of none which predominated.[7]

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[5] Transvaal and Southern Rhodesian Missions Quarterly, V, 2, April 1931

Star 30 August 1935

CAD NTS 7032:31/322(6) Pt.2 Native Affairs Commission Inquiry into Kaffir Beer. Minutes of Evidence Col. O J T Horak 8 September 1941 p.66

[6] I.A. TD 177:19/11/63 vol.1 Services - Newlands Extract from coucil minutes 14 June 1929

Star 29 January 1930

[7] Interview W.J.P.Carr 29 September, 24 October and 7 December 1988 with David Goodhew and Deone Van Tonder

N.E.C. Minutes of Evidence G Ballenden, 12 May 1931 p.7699

Regardless of occupation wages were extremely low, whether a worker had any education or none. The same official, in discussing wage levels felt it reasonable to ignore those on higher wages "because they are so few...they are only exceptions."[8] Throughout the period the average wage remained well below the minimum considered necessary for subsistence.[9] Consequently any means of supplementing wages became of paramount importance.

The illegal production and sale of alcohol had been an integral part of the life of the townships from their very beginning.[10]However brewing does not seem to have taken place on the same scale as in Doornfontein's

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[8] Ibid G Ballenden 12 May 1931 pp.7701-11

Ibid S Mtoba Memorandum 1931

[9] TAB GNLB 285:52/18/72 Correspondence with the M.O.H., Johannesburg re. Segregation of Natives in Johannesburg 8 October 1923 Superintendent of Locations to M.O.H.

N.E.C., 1930-2 Report Addendum by Mr. Lucas, pp.208-9

R Phillips The Bantu in the City (Lovedale 1938) pp.31-4

[10] TAB GNLB 159:362/14 Complaints By Natives Against the Police 24 February 1914 Deputy Commissioner of Police, Johannesburg, to Director, G.N.L.B.

TAB GNLB 136:2756/13/54 Liquor in Western Township 13 May 1920 C H Roberts to the Superintendent of Locations

K Eales 'Jezabels', Good Girls & Nine Married Quarters, Johannesburg 1912 (African Studies seminar paper 17 October 1988) p.3

[11] E Koch Doornfontein and its African Working Class, 1914-35: A Study of Popular Culture in Johannesburg (MA University of the Witwatersrand 1983) p.109

slumyards.[11] In 1919 an official balanced the disappearance of "wash-boys" with the increasing practice of African families to take in washing to augment their incomes.[12] Only some 10% of households in W.N.T. were engaged in the liquor trade by the end of the 1920s,whilst a far greater number of women worked in the northern suburbs of the city taking in washing or doing domestic service.[13] A resident of Newclare remembered taking in washing as forming a major activity though this was balanced by a concentration of Sotho women in one corner of the township, brewing for migrant workers in the mines close by. A mission worker in Sophiatown, when asked what proportion of the township's women took in washing, replied

> the huge majority does. I think nearly every single women does...and we arrange all our work according to washing days.[14]

Though, of course , there was nothing to stop a person brewing and washing.

In addition, culturally it would be a mistake to see the residents of Western Areas as too poor to be interested in more 'middle class' activ-

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[12] Minute of the mayor, Johannesburg City Council, 1918-19 Report of the Superintendent of Locations

[13] Interview W.J.P.Carr

N.E.C. minutes of evidence G Ballenden, 12 and 22 May 1931, pp.7691-2 and 8334

[14] Interview Gladys Marks 14 October and 9 December 1988 with D Goodhew

N.E.C. minutes of evidence Archdeacon Hill, Fr. S Carter and Miss S.R.Maud 11 May 1931pp.7612-3

ities such as churchgoing. In the mid-1920s a policeman, when asked if he found any trouble with brewing in Newclare, replied that he found the area

> quiet at weekends except of course for the noise coming from the different churches and the Natives going and returning from church.[15]

As early as 1919 the council sought to avoid giving churches sites in W.N.T. by claiming that "there were sufficient churches in the immediate vicinity."[16] The first Anglican church for Africans in Sophiatown was opened late in 1925 but, having been extended once it was completely rebuilt in 1934 and soon found itself packed even though greatly enlarged.[17] Despite earlier reluctance, the council was moved by persistent requests to allocate eight sites for churches in the location,

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[15] CAD JUS 539:8266/29 Establishment of a police post at Newclare and Newlands 7 April 1926 District Commandant, S.A.P., Johannesburg to the Secretary, The Coloured Women of Newclare

[16] TAB MJB 1/8/44 Minutes of Parks and Estates Committee 6 February 1919

[17] Transvaal Missions Quarterly V, 15, January 1926

St. Cyprians Native Mission, Johannesburg, Annual Report 1929

USPG Papers X/1102 D Maud, circular letter, Easter 1935

[18] CAD NTS 5618:51/313I Pt.1 Johannesburg: Church and School Sites 11 May 1939 Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to D.N.L., Johannesburg

Intermediate Archive (I.A.) West Rand Development Board (WRDB) 60/18/2 W.N.T. - Methodist Church of South Africa 19 September 1930 Rev. E Carter to Acting Manager, N.A.D.

though by 1937 nine had been built in the township. Nor was this sufficient - by 1930 the Methodists in W.N.T. were seeking permission for an extension.[18] Schooling in the townships was at this time entirely under the auspices of the various churches, who exerted a significant influence on their pupils. By 1937 there were thirteen schools (all primary) in the area, holding some 4524 pupils. The spiralling population meant that the schools were simply running hard to stand still and large numbers of children, probably the majority, grew up without their influence. Many more parents wanted to send their children to school, and were ready to pay fees, than could be accomodated - it was supply and not demand that was the problem.[19] Ethiopian and Zionist churches were also strongly represented, though exact numbers are difficult to obtain.[20]

The period following in the First World War is now reconised as one of great ferment in black politics. To a small degree the few thousand residents of the Western Areas of Johannesburg were involved though this was on a very small scale and developments of any significance only came

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[18] CAD NTS 2819:219/302 St. Cyprians 5 July 1937 Secretary, Diocese of Johannesburg to Secretary, N.A.D.

The Watchman XII, 149, June 1934

Minute of the Mayor, Johannesburg City Council, 1917-8 Report of the Superintendent of Locations. The superintendent noted as "a remarkable feature" the eagerness of African parents to give their children some education.

[20] TAB MJB 3/6/24 Reports of the Parks and Estates Committee Report of the Superintendent of Locations 31 January 1919

TAB GNLB 206:1697/14/D76 Native Intelligence Memorandum on Native Separist Churches and their Organisers 28 October 1921

A History of the Roman Catholic Church in Martindale (1942)

later on. A contingent at an anti-pass meeting was reported as coming from Sophiatown, whilst weekly meetings of Africans were reported at the nearby white suburb of Brixton and a Congress meeting was held in W.N.T. to protest at the massacre at Bulhoek. During the unrest of 1922, however, Africans in the area were notable for their calm.[21]

Early township politics in W.N.T. reflected the uneven but rapid growth in population, being fragmented and limited in scope. The township had a distinct place in the history of the Western Areas by virtue of being Council owned and run, unlike the other townships which were freehold. This difference was marked with regard to representation, for whilst the freehold townships had no official channel of communication with the local authorities, the municipal location was from the outset represented by an elected 'Native Advisory Committee', anticipating the Advisory Board system which was set up under the Urban Areas Act of 1923. Despite the small size of the township's population in its early years, there were sixteen and fourteen nominations in 1920 and 1921 respectively for the

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[21] Star 1 April 1919

TAB GNLB 206: 1697/14/76 Native Intelligence 19 January 1920 Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Johannesburg to Director of Native Labour (hereafter D.N.L.), Johannesburg

Umteteli Wa Bantu (UWB) 11 June 1921

TAB MJB 3/6/27 Reports of the Parks and Estates Committee, Johannesburg City Council Jan-June 1922 Report of the Superintendent of Locations, 3 March 1922 and Annual Report,year ending 30 June 1922

[22] RDM 22 June 1920

TAB MJB 3/6/26 Reports of the Parks and Estates Committee, Johannesburg, 1921 Report of the Superintendent of Locations, 28 January 1921

seven places on the board.[22] As established in 1923, advisory boards contained six members, four elected and two nominated by the Council. Only registered tenants were eligible to vote, and then only if they were not in arrears with their rent.[23]

During the Township's early years the board sought redress of a number of relatively minor grievances.[24] In 1924 elections for the Advisory Board were postponed until January 1925 and remuneration of 10s. per month for board members ceased, this in turn provoked a boycott of elections because of the lack of consultation on this matter.[25] Relations continued to be poor with a meeting in the township again condemning the changes in the location regulations and the lack of consultation in framing them,

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[23] I.A. City Health Department (CHD) (second series) 221:12/12/16 Native Locations: By laws, 1908-49 Johannesburg City Council By Laws for Native Locations, 3 October 1924

[24] TAB MJB 3/6/25 Reports of the Parks & Estates Committee Report of the Superintendent of Locations 2 July 1920

Star 24 September 1921

TAB MJB 3/6/27 Reports of the Parks and Estates Committee Report of the Superintendent of locations, 19.5.22

Star 1 February 1923

[25] TAB MJB 3/6/30 Reports of the Parks and Estates Committee Report of the Superintendent of Locations 17 June 1924

CAD NTS 4197:51/313 Pt.2 Johannesburg Municipality 8 April 1925 J.Sebiloane to Secretary of Native Affairs 25 April 1925 D.N.L. to Secretary of Native Affairs

whilst also deciding to play no part in welcoming the visiting Prince of Wales to Johannesburg, in line with the policy of the A.N.C..[26]

In 1927 the inauguration of the municipal Native Affairs Department and the arrival of its first manager saw residents seeking to use the paternalistic ethos of 'native administration' to their benifit. In an address presented to the new manager residents expressed their hope that he would see his position as

> 'a father of children always ready to help and redress grievances.'

Slightly earlier in the year some fifty residents had presented a departing superintendent with "a handsome flower stand" and, referring to him as "'father of the township'", again emphasised his paternalistic role and the obligations that went with it. There are several other instances where groups of residents descibed their relations with officials and with the council itself in such terms whilst a former clerk at W.N.T. recalled being routinely referred to as 'morena' and other such names.[27]

The first sustained reports of political organisation in the area as a whole only come from 1926 onwards when a series of Transvaal African

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[26] UWB 30 May 1925

[27] Star 9 September and 7 January 1927

N.E.C. 1930-2 Minutes of Evidence Stephen Ntoba 15 May 1931

Interview Mr. W.J.P. Carr

Bantu World 13 February 1937

Congress meetings were held in the district. This was, perhaps, a final flickering of the more populist T.A.C. policies earlier in the decade. Reports of the meetings give limited details but it would seem that the meetings did not form part of any consistent central policy. In late 1926 a meeting was held in Sophiatown at which James Thaele spoke, whilst Clements Kadalie and the I.C.U. were certainly active in Johannesburg at this time, and they probably campaigned in the area, though it seems that the response they met with was rather lukewarm.[28] Early in 1927 there was a T.A.C. meeting at W.N.T. to protest at the eviction of Africans from central Johannesburg. Later in 1927 three more T.A.C. meetings were held at W.N.T., the first two chaired by Theodore Mvalo, with attendences of 100 and 200 respectively. At the first a trade union was proposed and at the second a campaign against the liquor laws - appeals for funds for both causes were made.[29] Mvalo was also president of an organisation

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[28] CAD JUS 915: 1/18/26 Pt.3 'The African World' - Police Reports re. Activities of Native Weekly Paper, 10 June-6 September 1926 6 July 1926 Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, Witwatersrand to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

P Wickins The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (Cape Town 1978) p.90 and 113

[29] TAB GNLB 402: 56/11 Pt.1 Proclamation of Johannesburg under Section Five of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1923 5 March 1927 Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand to District Commandant, S.A.P., Johannesburg

CAD JUS 918: 1/18/26 Pt.11 Native Agitators, Reports of 15 October 1927 Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand to District Commandant, S.A.P., Johannesburg

CAD JUS 918: 1/18/26 Pt.12 30 October 1927 Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand to District Commandant, S.A.P., Johannesburg

UWB 12 November 1927 This meeting was mainly concerned to attack the pass laws, it is unclear whether Mvalo or Letanka were present at the meeting.

called the Native Tenants Vigilance League of South Africa at this time. In November 1927 he sought an interview with the manager of the municipal Native Affairs Department concerning various matters, including conditions at W.N.T. and in February 1928 Mvalo held a meeting of the Vigilance League in W.N.T. saying it was part of Congress and attacking the current Advisory Board. David Letanka, who had been very active in the campaigning against the pass laws in 1919 and remained a prominent figure in the Johannesburg A.N.C. and a resident of W.N.T., also spoke at that meeting, whilst Mvalo claimed to have won permission for residents to brew beer at home (which was untrue).[30] He had previously been involved in an organisation called the Bantu Protection League and both organisations were suspected of being intended to benifit their officials and not those they sought to represent. Indeed Mvalo and a fellow official were jailed for fraud in early 1928, the former having already been convicted fifteen times in the previous twenty years for various counts of theft and assault across the country using a variety of aliases.[31] He seems to have traded in a mixture of nationalism and fraud, in any case he was not to resurface

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[30] TAB GNLB 402: 56/11 Pt.2 Proclamation of Johannesburg under Section Five of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1923 6 October 1927 N.B.Tantsi, Secretary of the Native Tenants Vigilance League of Africa to D.N.L.

CAD JUS 919:1/18/26 Pt.14 Native Agitators, Reports On 28 February 1928 Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, Witwatersrand to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

[31] CAD NTS 7606:35/328 Native Tenants Vigilance League of South Africa, 1927-9 22 December 1927 Acting D.N.L. to Secretary for Native Affairs

Rand Daily Mail 25 January and 9 February 1928

CAD NTS 7202:12/328 H.T.Mvalo 3 December 1929 Clerk of the Court, Herschel to S.A.P., Herschel

again in the district. As will be suggested later there was something of a political vacuum in W.N.T. at this time but Mvalo was ill-equipped to exploit it.

A branch of the Communist Party was reportedly founded in Sophiatown in August 1928, though no record of its activities has survived.[32] It was the T.A.C. which continued to have the most visible presence in the area. Two meetings in W.N.T and one in Sophiatown were reported in late 1928 and early 1929 at which pass and liquor laws were attacked. Daniel Letanka was prominent at these meetings as a chairman and as a speaker, though the response was not always favourable.

> He asked for subscriptions to secure the release of those arrested for being in possession of liquor. The audience, however, refused to subscribe, and asked what had become of the money that they had already subscribed.[33]

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[32] South African Worker 22 August 1928

B Bunting Moses Kotane (Lon 1975) p.47 Moses Kotane remembered branches being founded in African areas of Johannesburg at this time.

CAD JUS 269:3/1064/18 Pts.5-7 Bolshevism in South Africa Deputy Commissioner Transvaal, S.A.P. to Commissioner of S.A.P., giving a general report on Communist activities in the Transvaal, mentioning work at various centres but not in the Western Areas of Johannesburg.

[33] CAD JUS 921:1/18/26 Pt.21 Native Agitators, Reports On 19 October 1928 Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

CAD JUS 922:1/18/26 Pt.22 Native Agitators, Reports On 21 November 1928 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

TAB GNLB 400:55/1 Commission in the Union: Report of Meetings Held by Agitators, 1929 22 February 1929 Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, Witwatersrand to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

Given Mvalo's actions and the well publicised corruption in the I.C.U., this attitude was, perhaps, not surprising.[34] The attendance at this meeting was about 400, the other meetings drew crowds of thirty and ten respectively.

In W.N.T. the period of economic depression from 1929 into the early 1930s saw strong protest over the issue of rent. This had long been a grievance, with the Superintendent of Locations commenting in 1923 on how residents

> are only able to pay their rents after a hard struggle and in many instances long after it is due.

and throughout the 1920s this was to be the case.[35] However, by 1929 worsening economic conditions coupled with the impact of commercial laundries on the main source of income for women in the area - taking in washing - resulted in a petition from 1000 of the township's women, sent to the Johannesburg Joint Council and the Organisation of European Women via Clara Bridgeman, calling for a reduction in rents and backed by repeated protests from the Vigilance Committee who complained of lack of response from the Advisory Board.[36] The level of rent was not the only

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[34] E Roux Time Longer than Rope(Wiscosin 1970) p.215 remembered how in the late 1920s the corruption within the I.C.U. was "in the minds of everyone."

[35] TAB GNLB 285:52/18/72 Correspondence with the M.O.H., Johannesburg re. Segregation of Natives in Johannesburg 8 October 1923 Superintendent of Locations to M.O.H.

TAB NJB 1/8/23 Parks & Estates Committee minutes Minutes 13 January and 26 May 1925

TAB GNLB 404:56/45 Prosecution of Location Residents for Non-payment of rent 29 May 1926 Acting D.N.L. to Magistrate, Johannesburg

[36] RDM 17 May 1929

UWB 28 December 1929

grievance, also important was the strictness with which the officials dealt with defaulters. This in turn might vary depending on the location superintendent involved - one report on complaints felt that the new superintendent at W.N.T. was more rigorous than the previous one.[37] By September 1930 congestion in the courts made it impossible for officials to keep up to date with prosecutions, a factor which tenants "were taking full advantage of" and in early 1931 the period after which tenants were prosecuted for arrears was lengthened from one month to three, nonetheless large numbers of tenants simply fled from the township rather than try to pay back their arrears.[38] At this time Dr. Xuma, living in Sophiatown, commented that

> a matter of fact the Western Native Township is known as 'The Zoo' among the natives.[39]

Bitter complaints continued, with residents using "every legitimate and constitutional means to voice their grievances." Some success was achieved when a number of prosecutions were declared ultra vires[40] The residents also made further use of the Joint Council to make representations, strongly attacking the Council over its harsh administration.[41] By July 1932 conditions in the township were so serious (500 of the householders, over 20%, were unemployed) that the council conceded that the unemployed could not be expected to pay rent.[42] At the same time the Johannesburg policy of not charging a fee for permits for lodgers was lenient compared to policies on the rest of the Reef, which caused much ill-feeling. In other ways administrators in Johannesburg offered some limited help to their African tenants, opening an Employment Bureau and ensuring that council departments should give preference to the council's tenants.[43]

By 1934 unemployment and the depression in general had eased greatly but had not departed. The Chairman of the Native Affairs Committee admitted that most residents still could not afford to pay their rents and the the township's Vigilance Committee continued to call for a reduction.[44]

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[37] Star 8 March 1930

Interview W.J.P.Carr

CPSA A881/F.9 Pim Papers Joint Council Reports, report by W Webber re. complaints of the residents of W.N.T.

[38] TAB GNLB 404:56/4523 September 1930 Manager, N.A.D., to Chief Native Commissioner

Star 6 March 1931

N.E.C. minutes of evidence G Ballenden 12 May 1931 pp.7733-4

[39] Ibid. Dr A.B.Xuma 22 May 1931 p.8360

[40] UWB 29 August and 19 September 1931

[41] CPSA AD843 B28.7 Rheinallt-Jones Papers: Locations Summary of the Complaints of the Residents of the Western Native Location, c.1932

[42]

RDM 1 July 1932

[43] Minute of the Mayor, Johanmesburg City Council, 1930-1 Report of the Manager of N.A.D.

[44] UWB 28 July and 4 August 1934

Bantu World 7 July 1934

Eventually rent in the council's township's was reduced in 1936. See Johannesburg City Council Minutes 603rd Meeting 23 June 1936 p.821

Whilst protest over rents caused some small concessions from the local authority, the burden remained acute and helped provoke widespread disenchantment with the Advisory Board system. Nor was this helped by a public and acrimonious row between rival factions on the board over who should go to the Advisory Boards' Congress in Port Elizabeth.[45] Yet the acrimonious relations between elected and nominated members, which a pronouced feature of later years, were noticeable by their absence at this time, perhaps indicating the degree to which the board had ceased to be a forum for issues affecting large numbers of the population. Officials found little interest shown in the township's board, though elections remained keenly fought by those who did stand. Even board members shared this attitude. When asked what caused such disinterest, one replied that "...there is nothing in which to be interested."[46] A sub-committee of the Johannesburg Joint Council meeting in 1934, on which two residents of the township sat, (one of whom was an advisory board member), felt that advisory boards in general were "most unsatisfactory" mainly because the location superintendent was the chairman and thus blocked many decisions and recommendations.[47] In the mid-1930s apart from a request for board

[45] UWB 6 and 20 December 1930

[46] Interview W.J.P. Carr

N.E.C. Minutes G Ballenden 12 May 1931 p.7757

Ibid S Ntoba 15 May 1931 p.7939

[47] CPSA AD1433 Cj 2.4.4. Johannesburg Joint Council minutes of meetings Minutes of meeting of sub-committee meeting at Ekutuleni, Sophiatown 13 September 1934

This echoed accusations made in the Summary of Compaints by Residents in the Western Native Township c.1932 CPSA AD843 B28.7

members to be allowed to travel on 'white' trams the board seems to have been moribund.[48]

Yet with the exception of the Advisory Board, the deepening depression saw heightened political activity in the area. Late in 1929, William Ballinger and D.D.T.Jabavu spoke at Sophiatown urging "passive resistance" against the amendments to the Riotous Assemblies Act.[49] At a meeting of the T.A.C. in W.N.T. in April 1930 speak ers (not including the absent Letanka) strongly urged their audience to support the Communist Party's planned pass burning on 1 May, whilst police reported "strong talk about burning passes" and hopes of Marcus Garvey's imminent arrival in the area.[50] A meeting of the 'Anti Pass Propaganda' (a shadowy body of almost nothing is known) was held in Sophiatown in late March with different speakers but along similar lines. A further T.A.C. Meeting was held in Sophiatown in April where several leading conservatives who later opposed pass burning spoke and where the pass laws were attacked though no specific plans for pass burning were mentioned.[51] Moreover elements of the T.A.C., the Communist Party and the 'Anti Pass Propaganda' were not the only groups campaigning against the pass laws at this time. A conference of the Independent I.C.U.

[48] I.A. Transport Department (T.D.) 14/1/1 vol.1 Blacks (Natives) General 5 May 1936 Ballenden to the General Manager of Transport

[49] TAB GNLB 399:55/1 Commission in the Union: Report of meetings held by Agitators, 1929-30 15 January 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector, to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand. This meeting was to protest at draconian ammendments to the Riotous Assembies Act, though Ballinger was keen to avoid the burning of Pirow's effigy as occurred at a similar meeting.

[50] Ibid. 17 April 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector to Deputy commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

[51] Ibid. 16 April and 2 May 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector, to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

branches on the Reef called for pass burning in June 1930, whilst a meeting of the I.C.U. of Africa was held in Sophiatown in late April, though its attitude to pass burning is not recorded.[52] In fact the Communist Party meeting on 1 May only drew some 200 Africans and no pass burning took place, despite very substantial propaganda work beforehand.[53]

The Independent I.C.U. became active in Western Native Township during the second half of 1930. Clements Kadalie spoke at one meeting there and expressed his disappointment at having attracted only some eighty people to hear him speak, despite having distributed 500 handbills in the township to advertise the meeting. At the same meeting another speaker noted the opposition of the Council's N.A.D. manager to their desire to open an office in the neighbouring suburb of Newclare, saying this would not deter the organisation. However such opposition was, seemingly, effective for attempts to open an office were still being hampered by the N.A.D. manager a year later.[54]

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[52] Ibid. 17 April 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector, to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand. Given that Ballinger was firmly in control by this point it is highly unlikely that the meeting would have supported the Communist Party's plans.

[53] Ibid. 26 May 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector, to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand

CAD JUS 269:3/1064/18 Pt.5 Bolshevism in South Africa - Reports on, 1929-30 11 April 1930 Commissioner, S.A.P. to Secretary for Justice

[54] CAD JUS 923:1/18/26 Pt.26 Native Agitators, reports on 10 June 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector, to Commissioner, S.A.P.. The report of the meeting does not make it clear what its purpose was beyond recruitment.

N.E.C. Minutes of Evidence Memorandum by H.D.Tyamzashe, Research Secretary of the Independent I.C.U. 18 May 1931

The Communist Party continued to call for mass pass burning, now naming 16 December as the date on which this would take place. An Anti-pass conference in Johannesburg included delegates from W.N.T. and Sophiatown, whilst Albert Nzula addressed a Communist Party meeting at W.N.T. in late November 1930 and called on his audience not to listen to other leaders who saw pass burning as too drastic a measure. Nonetheless the Police observers at the meeting felt that the forty people who attended were against the proposed protest, being influenced by the "other leaders" whom Nzula mentioned.[55] The "other leaders" were almost certainly Letanka and H.Selby Msimang who lived in the area and were on the more conservative wing of the A.N.C., opposing pass burning,[56] and also Kadalie and Tyamzashe of the Independent I.C.U., who had already campaigned in the township. Initially the latter had supported the proposed campaign but shortly before the intended start of the campaign they had become strong opponents of such plans.[57] Accounts of meetings elsewhere in Johannesburg provide some indications of why Africans were unwilling to burn their passes. When Sidney Bunting addressed a meeting at Klipspruit

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[55] TAB GNLB 399:55/1 Commission in the Union: Reports of Meetings held by Agitators, 1929-30 4 December 1930 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

[56] P Walsh The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 1912-52 p.175 and p.233

[57] CAD JUS 923:1/18/26 Pt.26 Native Agitators, Reports On 30 June 1930 R.S.Mitchell, Senior Inspector to Commissioner, S.A.P.

CAD JUS 924:1/18/26 Pt.29 Native Agitators, Reports On 15 December 1930 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

> One native Ndhlovu, sub-Induna of the location, asked Bunting 'who had given him permission to address that meeting.' He also asked what provisions had been made for women and children of those who might be arrested for burning passes. Bunting said that no permission had been obtained. He said that if provisions had first to be made for women and children, passes would never be abolished. Some natives said Bunting had come to rob them. He was told to go away at once. The meeting closed at 2 p.m.. The people were hostile to the speakers.[58]

A similar concern for his own family was the stated motivation of Henry Tyamzashe of the Independent I.C.U. to refuse to support the call for pass burning at a meeting of that same body called to support the plan. Another speaker at the same meeting suggested a more prosaic reason for the lack of enthusiasm for the planned protest.

> Many natives did not attend the meetings because they gave much of their time to liquor, a number having been arrested that morning and were then in the cells at Fordsburg Police Station. That was the freedom they asked for![59]

As well as the dissention between the various bodies in the area a further probable reason for the limited interest in pass burning was the failure of the previous attempt, which made continued appeals seem somewhat hollow. Moreover, shortly before the planned protest, serious clashes occurred between the party's executive and their most active African member, Thibedi, in turn leading to friction with the communist-sponsored African trade unions.[60] On the proposed day when pass burning was to commence the response in Johannesburg was limited. Some 150 Africans met in Newtown and some twenty passes were burned - though elsewhere, notably in Durban, the response was much greater.[61] Further reasons why pass-burning failed to evoke a significant response in Western Areas may involve the fact that, in W.N.T. at least rent was the dominant issue, whilst the substantial unemployment in the area left residents unwilling to render themselves even more vulnerable.[62] In addition the policing of pass offences seems to have been more lax outside the centre of the city. During a court case in 1934 it emerged that the police had been ignoring night pass violations by standholders and "persons of good reputation".[63] The area's substantial coloured and Indian population,

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[58] TAB GNLB 399:55/1 Commission in the Union: Reports of meetings held by Agitators, 1929-30 7 October 1930 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

[59] Ibid. 22 October 1930 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

[60] Bunting Papers 20 September 1930 S.P.Bunting to the South African Federation of Native Trade Unions 22 September 1930 S.P.Bunting to the Secretary of the Communist Party in Cape Town. E Roux in Time Longer Than Rope pp.202-7 emphasised how how important Thibedi was to communist work.

[61] CAD JUS 924:1/18/26 Pt.29 Native Agitators, Reports on 3 January 1931 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

P La Hausse The Dispersal of the Regiments: Radical African Opposition in Durban, 1930 (African Studies Institute seminar paper 24 March 1986)

[62] See abovepp.15-17

[63] RDM 17 November 1934

as well as those Africans who had obtained an exemption certificate would have had less reason to feel troubled by the pass laws. Further attempts to start a pass-burning campaign were made in late 1931, and a small meeting of the Communist Party in Newclare expressed approval of the idea, though no actual protest seems to have been staged.[64]

Despite the lack of response from the Western Areas over pass burning, the early and mid-1930s saw Communist Party activity increase sharply in the the townships, being manifested in a variety of forms. Several meetings of Ikaka La Basebenzi(the Workers' Shield), sponsored by the Communist Party, were held at the Martindale Bioscope during 1932, with J.B.Marks, who lived nearby in Newclare, taking a prominent role.[65] Ikaka continued in existence into the middle years of the 1930s, with some 500 members on the Reef. Moses Kotane, the president, when interviewed by the acting Director of Native Labour, mentioned the earlier meetings in Sophiatown and said that the Council had prevented them from holding meetings out of doors so they had hired a hall and continued to hold meetings. A year later the Ikaka newspaper, Umvikeli Thebe, was regularly

[64] Umsebenzi 20 March 1931

TAB GNLB 401:55/1 Native Unrest, 1932-5 17 November 1931 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

[65] Ibid. 22 February, 2 April, 12 April and 15 November 1932 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

H.J. & R.E. Simons Class and Colour in South Africa. 1850-1950 (Lon 1969)p.444 quoted Ikaka's aims as being to "organise mass campaingns against all forms of white terror" and "fight against all forms of racial oppression and racial chauvinism."

being sold in Sophiatown and Western Native Township, though the excellent sales dropped disastrously after the victory of Italy in Ethiopia became certain.[66] This shift from appeals for dramatic protest to more piecemeal, low-level organisation was to characterise the Communist Party's activities in the Western Areas during the mid-1930s.

In the mid-1930s the party's newspaper was reporting considerable activity in Sophiatown where one of the two Johannesburg branches of the Young Communist League was located.[67] At this time Communist activity seems to have concentrated on social and educational spheres. This included a "Grand May Day Social", whilst the Sophiatown Young Communist League offered lectures, band practice and boxing practice.[68] In 1935 the Communist Party opened a night school in Sophiatown which taught political training, English, mathematics and "kindred subjects". This was reported as being "crammed to capacity" a few months later and was still in action in 1937 - though there is no record of it thereafter.[69] Even young

[66] CAD NTS 9263:39/371 Ikaka La Basebenzi: Resolutions 17 April 1936 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

E. & W. Roux Rebel Pity (Lon 1970) pp.141-2

[67] Umsebenzi 6 January and 19 May 1934

[68] Umsebenzi 21 April and 19 May 1934 and 5 March 1938

[69] Umsebenzi 13 July and 16 November 1935 and 2 January 1937

children were involved one afternoon a week in the "Pioneer Movement", where they were encouraged

> to play, to be occupied and to be told in a simple fashion about the lives and struggles of children in other countries etc....Children are our future - we have to get hold of them now to prevent their falling under bad influence and degenerating.[70]

This is not to say that the party did not seek to mobilise political support - meetings were held against the cost of living, against militarism, the Natives Ammendment Act, the 'Scottsbro Boys' and to protest at pass laws and police brutality.[71] A concerted effort was made to organise the residents of Newclare regarding their extremely poor housing conditions. In October 1936 a meeting attended by "hundreds" of tenants resolved to campaign for lower rents and sent a deputation to interview standholders.[72] In May 1937 the campaign against high rents led to a mass meeting and further negotiations with standholders.[73] However there is no further record of this group's activity, though it did resurface in the following decade. The Western Areas were exceptional with regard to Communist activity as a whole for the Communist Party of the mid-1930s was at its lowest point since its foundation, having been

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[70] Umsebenzi 3 April 1937

[71] Umsebenzi 1 September and 3 November 1934, 23 March 1935 and 5 March 1938

[72] Umsebenzi 17 October and 7 November 1936

[73] Umsebenzi 1 May 1937

hit by purges in 1931-2 and 1935, being reduced to a much smaller membership than that of 1928-30, amid continuing police harrassment.[74]

Umsebenzi also reported regular party meetings being held in Sophiatown and W.N.T. during 1936 and 1937,[75] whose proceedings have been recorded due the presence of the police at almost every meeting. Between September 1936 and July 1938 Communist Party meetings took place on almost every sunday afternoon at the second gate of W.N.T.[76] Whilst various notable figures in the party spoke at such meetings, certain speakers were in evidence at virtually all meetings and were often the only speakers, namely Edward Nokwena and Petrus Nati. The meetings partly sought to drum up support for Communist candidates at elections for the Natives Representative Council and for Native Representatives in the Senate, as well as for the party itself.[77] However the bulk of each meeting was devoted to fierce attacks on repressive laws in general and upon the police in particular. Nokwena declared that "any native who was free today had been

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[74] E.Roux S.P.Bunting: A Political Biography (Cape Town 1944) pp. 125, 142 and 152

H.J. & R.E.Simons Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950 pp.482-5

B Bunting Moses Kotane (Lon 1975) pp. 61 and 90

[75] Umsebenzi 4 April, 29 August and 12 September 1936 and 23 January 1937

[76] These and the following details are all taken from:- CAD NTS 7670:86/332/1 Native Unrest, Police Reports, Witwatersrand 1936-9

[77] Ibid. 30 November and 1 December 1936, 14 January, 22 February, 22 March and 20 April 1937 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner S.A.P.

in a blood bath in the past." Mati at one point called on his audience to "...forget everything and swim in blood."[78] On one occasion a protest meeting was called outside the local police station, however this does not seem to have taken place.[79] Unrest in Vereeniging, at which several police were killed and injured, was described as "a good thing and long overdue".[80] However when one occasional speaker, Cromwell Dladla, suggested attacking the police present at the meeting, the chairman warned him not to incite the meeting to violent measures.[81] The police, having allowed previous speeches, prosecuted Dladla who served one month in gaol.[82] At several subsequent meetings unsuccessful efforts were made to collect funds to pay for Dladla's defence[83] and at one meeting Mati announced that he and Mokwena had broken with the Communist Party because their lack of support on this issue and because Edwin Mofutsanyana and L.C.Joffe had given evidence which helped convict Dladla, calling the

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[78] Ibid. 23 September 1936 and 14 January 1937

[79] Ibid. 14 January 1937

[80] Ibid. 26 October 1937

[81] Ibid. 23 November 1937

[82] Ibid. 6 January 1938

[83] Ibid. 7 December 1937, 17 January and 24 January 1938

party "an organisation of Jews" which "will not have anything to do with natives."[84]

On the following sundays Mokwena and Mati continued to hold meetings but now under the auspices of the "Defence Committee" or the "National Congress". On one sunday "Defence Committee" and Communist Party speakers followed and fiercely attacked one another.[85] This happened again on the following sunday, but the next sunday saw the conflict go beyond verbal antagonism.

> The speakers chiefly addressed their audiences at the same time, and shouted at each other, finding fault with the views of the other party; this resulted in a disturbance. The Communist Party group made a rush at the Defence Committee, who took to their heels. When the trouble subsided speeches were continued, and a second rush was made by the Communist Party during which Mati was injured by a stone striking him at the back of his neck.[86]

One of Mati's attackers was Gaur Radebe, who was successfully extending the party's influence in the area by working through the Advisory Board at this time. The conflict can thus been seen as an attempt by more mainstream party leaders to reassert control over wayward elements. On several later sundays the two groups held meetings at the same time, but

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[84] Ibid. 17 January 1938

[85] Ibid. 28 Feruary 1938 Detective Sergeant to Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, C.I.D., Witwatersrand

[86] Ibid. 8 and 15 March 1938 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

there were no further incidents. However, increasingly only Mokwena and Mati appeared and their last recorded meeting was on 10 July 1938.[87] Such meetings attracted crowds which varied in size from five to 200, though the average attendence was around fifty. Despite, perhaps because, of the eccentric nature of proceedings they continued to draw an audience for nearly two years.

Despite the Communists' characterisation of African standholders as accomodationist and oppressive[88] it was they who were involved in the most sustained conflict between the inhabitants and local government to affect the freehold suburbs during the 1930s, organising effectively to oppose the Council, though the owners at no stage attempted to represent the bulk of the area's population who were tenants. By 1926 there were 302 African and 140 'coloured' owners in Sophiatown and Martindale (no figures are available for Newclare), but a decade later 538 properties in the three freehold townships were wholly owned by Africans (very few owned more than one stand) whilst "a large number" of properties had been partly paid for.[89] It was also in 1926 that the Sophiatown and Martindale Non-European Ratepayers Association was formed, the main association for African landlords (other, smaller, bodies such as the Newclare African

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[87] Ibid. 5 July 1938

CAD NTS 9629:511/400 Pt.1 Subversive Propaganda 7 February 1940 Paris Moshoeshoe, N/D 20511 to Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, C.I.D., Witwatersrand. This letter mentions Mokwena as one of the speakers at a Communist Party meeting at Sophiatown on 4 February 1940, so it would seem that the rift had been healed by that time.

[88] Umsebenzi 16 November 1933

Ratepayers Association and the Sophiatown Landowners Association also operated).[89] A submission to the Native Economic Commission suggests a body which was strongly nationalist and individualistic but also highly critical of existing government policies.[90] In 1931 the council proposed to have the freehold suburbs "proclaimed" under the Natives (Urban Areas) Act to allow the council to "control or remove" lodgers in the area, a question which provoked conflict throughout the decade and into the next.[91] Having "cleared" the bulk of Johannesburg of Africans the council now sought to prevent them taking refuge in the Western Areas, yet such a policy threatened to deprive owners of their properties since it was the income provided by such tenants which allowed most of them to pay off the large bonds on their properties.[92] By use of a series of deputations coupled with judicious deployment of lawyers the standholders successfully staved off the threat for the rest of the 1930s, despite increas-

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[89] CAD NTS 7206: 30/326 Newclare Location: Meeting of Natives At 21 May 1926 D.N.L., Johannesburg to Secretary for Native Affairs

Minute of the Mayor, Johannesburg City Council, 1934-5 Report of the Manager, N.A.D.

N.E.C. Minutes Statement by Sophiatown and Martindale Non-European Ratepayers Association, 1930

[90] Ibid

[91] TAB NJB 4/2/91:A616 Natives in Sophiatown and Martindale 8 July 1931 Town Clerk to Hon. Secretary, Newclare Ratepayers Association

[92] CAD NTS 5306:51/313E Pt.2 Johannesburg: Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare 28 December 1932 Town Clerk to S.N.A.s ? November 1932 S Myeza, secretary, Sophiatown Landowners Association to Chief Native Commissioner

ingly vociferous pressure from residents of the surrounding white suburbs to have all Africans in the area removed, though by 1939 it was felt to be expedient by the owners to threaten "passive resistance" through non-compliance with any council scheme which harmed their interests.[93]

Apart from the groups mentioned above there were other organisations seeking to represent owners in the area, breaking down along perceived racial divisions. Some of residents of Newclare had from the beginning of the township's life sought to emphasise their coloured identity and distance themselves from the bulk of the population. This identity was made manifest through separate churches and schools, by a strong attachment to churchmanship and the tendency of many adult men to be artisans.[94] The combination of colour, culture and class had a further manifestation in the form of the Newclare Ratepayers' Association. This body and the Vigilance Association which preceded it made persistent appeals for Africans to be removed from Newclare from 1915 into the 1950s, including the period when African owners were fighting to remain in the

[93] CAD NTS 5309:51/313E Pt.4 Johannesburg: Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare 15 February 1939 Note of interview between Minister of Native Affairs, lawyers for the Sophiatown and Martindale Non-European Ratepayers Association and the chairman and secretary of that association.

[94] Interview Eva Bartman and Florence Wagner with D Goodhew 19 September 1988

Interview Eddie Hoffman and Walter Le Pere with D Goodhew 11 September 1988

Interview Gladys Marks with D Goodhew 14 October and 9 December 1988

[95] I.A. CHD (first series) 125/931 Newclare Township 26 February 1915

area.[95] The Newclare Standholders Association was a less prominent body but was usually present at negociations between the council and African owners.[96] The Association supported the latter but seems to have obtained its membership mainly fron the Indian community, its existence being partly necessitated by the tendency of coloured and African owners to blame Indian landlords for any rack-renting that took place.

Early in 1937 Umsebenzi printed several articles praising Advisory Boards as "the neglected mouth of the people" and the Western Areas were the first district to see the fruits of this shift in policy.[97] Political life in W.N.T., having been in the doldrums in the mid-1930s, began to regain vitality in early 1937, largely at the instigation of Gaur Radebe, a prominent member of the Communist Party and the A.N.C. Moreover, Radebe's efforts helped to radicalise the adjacent freehold suburbs as well as the location. Initially, as secretary of the Vigilance Committee, he

M.O.H. to Messrs W McBean, Charles Eberson and Others

CAD NTS 7206:30/326 Newclare Location: Meeting of Natives Atl March 1926 S.N.As to D.N.L., Johannesburg, 22 May 1926 Acting D.N.L., Johannesburg to S.N.A.s

TAB HJB 4/2/91:A 616 Natives in Sophiatown and Newclare Extract from minutes of the Native Affairs Committee, 3 June 1931

R.W.Wilcocks Collection, 77/17/2, Stellenbosch Documentation Centre, Commission on Coloured Affairs, 1936-7, minutes of evidence, evidence of the Joint Temporary Committee of Johannesburg Coloured Organisations, 2 July 1936 p.2128 I am grateful to Harry Dugmore for pointing out this source to me.

[96] CAD NTS 5308:51/313E Pt.3 Johannesburg: Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare 6 November 1934 B Savory, solicitor for Newclare Standholders Assoc., to S.N.As

[97] Umsebenzi 2 January and 10 July 1937

organised around the issue of a council scheme to raise rentals to pay for the introduction of a free medical scheme. Despite being barred from using the township's Communal Hall, Radebe used a local church for two well attended meetings to protest at the scheme and to plan a separate health scheme, whilst calling on the Advisory Board to join in the struggle to prevent an increase in rents.[98] That year's Advisory Board election saw Radebe, along with three similarly radical colleagues, successfully challenge the sitting Advisory Board in an election which was far more energetically contested than was usual.[99] In their first year of office the new board members centred their attentions on campaigning against a planned census. Concerned that census information might be used to tighten up influx control, Radebe and thirteen other residents of the township refused to give information to the ennumerators and, when charged for so doing, they organised three protest marches through the centre of the city after their various court appearances. Thirteen of those charged did eventually give census information, whilst Radebe won his case on a technicality.[100] Later in the year the board also sought power to form a residents body to control crime in the township, particularly that

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[98] Umsebenzi 15 January and 27 February 1937

[99] Umsebenzi 15 January 1938

[100] Star 18 August 1938

Bantu World 10 and 17 September 1938

[101] CPSA AD1433/Cj 2.1.20(1) Johannesburg Joint Council Correspondance 1940 Copy of resolutions passed by a meeting of W.N.T. residents, 24 November 1938

committed by adolescents.[101] The growng problem of juvenile delinquency continued to deepen cleavages between young and old in the final year of the decade and beyond.[102]

More significant was the boycott in 1939 of the newly opened beer hall which adjoined the township, which in turn fed into the changing economic circumstances of the area. As the 1930s progressed more of the families previously residing in the slumyards were squeezed out and a number came to live in the Western Areas, whilst as Johannesburg's African population continued to increase rapidly official statments reflected a growing disquiet over the scale of illicit liquor production,[103] which gained concrete expession in several violent clashes between the police and the residents of Western Areas.[104] Nonetheless washing and domestic service continued to play a very significant role in the area's economy, partic-

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[102] UWB 14 October 1939 A conference od Reef Advisory Boards, including W.N.T., called for more power to control "the problem of the juveniles".

I.A. WRDB 401/13/2/2 W.N.T. Communal Hall 27 November 1939 Superintendent W.N.T. to manager, N.E.N.A.D.

[103] Star 23 March 1935

CAD NTS 4199:51/313 Pt.5 Johannesburg Municipality 10 August 1936 Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, to Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand

RDM 7 March 1937

[104] Star 27 September 1937

RDM 20 January 1938

[105] A History of the Roman Catholic Church at Martindale (1942) Roman Catholic Archive, Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand

ularly in W.N.T. where municipal administration made brewing more difficult.[105]

During the boycott Radebe worked with L.J.Mfeka, a local trader who does not seem to have shared his political affiliations. Certainly propaganda used to promote the boycott had an Africanist tone and made no mention of the Communist Party.[106] A major motivation on the part of the authorities was their perception of Western Areas as the "worst" area for illicit liquor production, the previous holder of that accolade, Prospect Township, having been removed in 1937.[107] At meetings where Radebe was the main speaker, residents condemned the beerhall and called on residents of the neighbouring freehold suburbs to withold their support as well.[108] A few days after the first of such meetings the beerhall superintendent wrote of

> innumerable complaints from our customers...that after leaving our Beer Hall they are stopped and assaulted

[105] CAD VWN 412:sw65/2 Ekutuleni 8 September 1942 Inspector's Report

[106] CAD NTS 5394: 51/313G Pt.1 Johannesburg Municipality - Kaffir Beer 12 April 1939 Lt. Col. Jno. Spence, Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P. enclosing a translation of a a protest pamphlet in Sotho and Zulu. Mfeka was then joint-proprietor of the Abyssinian Fish and Chip Shop and Grocers in the township.

[107] Star 4 January 1937

[108] Bantu World 8 and 22 April 1939

and of pickets stationed on the approaches to the hall to head off potential customers.[109] Radebe, noting support from Sophiatown's shebeen queens, blamed the violence on "the hooligan element" in Sophiatown, though he admitted that the Advisory Board and the Vigilance Committee were responsible for the pickets.[110] Nearly six months after the opening of the beerhall the manager of what was now called the Non-European & Native Affairs Department admitted that the project was not a success and suggested turning the beerhall into a market and selling the beer to "some of the better known native women" (i.e. shebeen queens) who would then sell it to the area's residents. This scheme was never carried out. As for the cause of the beerhall's failure, this he attributed to the many shebeens in the district which siphoned off potential customers and, "in a minor degree" to the boycott.[111] Meetings of residents of W.N.T. continued to condemn the beerhall and even alleged that the municipal police practised unusual leniency to those inebriated on municipal beer in an effort to drum up trade.[112] Radebe and other local leaders were to continue and develope this trend of using the Advisory Board for campaigning in the following decade.

[109] I.A. WRDB 401/8/3 Beerhalls: Western Areas Beerhall, 1938-61 12 April and 22 May 1939 W.J.Reardon, Superintendent of Western Areas Beerhall, to Manager, N.E.N.A.D.

[110] RDM 14 April 1939

[111] I.A. W.R.D.B. 401/8/3 Beerhalls: Western Areas Beerhall, 1938-61 3 August 1939 Manager, Johannesburg Non-European and Native Affairs Department, Report to the Non-European and Native Affairs Committee

[112] Guardian 6 October 1939 and 5 April 1940

Brief mention should be made of the T.A.C. whose activities continued in the area in the 1930s but with a less localised flavour. In 1931 only one T.A.C. meeting was recorded as having taken place in the district, this being concerned to attack the idea of passes for African women. Letanka was chairman of this meeting but his death early in 1932 removed a key link between local politics and the T.A.C. and seems to have brought to an end any further attempts by the T.A.C. to campaign on specific issues in the Western Areas, though their attempts to do so in 1926-31 should not be exaggerated in importance and were rarely attended by more than 30-40 people.[113] During the 1930s meetings of the T.A.C. were occasionally reported as having taken place in Western Areas and prominent figures from the district were often to be found at key meetings elsewhere, but without exception they were concerned with the overall policy and the office-holders of the T.A.C., rather than the interests of specific areas.[114] Robert Resha joined the A.N.C. at a meeting in Western Native Township in 1939, but remembered the Sophiatown branch as "a branch by name, it was not an actual branch at all."[115]

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[113] CAD JUS 925:1/18/26 Pt.33 Native Agitators - Reports On 27 July 1931 Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P., Witwatersrand to Commissioner, S.A.P.

UWB 30 April 1932

[114] UWB 19 November 1932, 30 December 1933, 21 April and 6 October 1934, 14 December 1935, 5 and 12 December 1936, 2 and 27 February 1937 and 13 November 1937, 9 January, 7 May, 13 August and 17 September 1938, 27 May 1939

[115] C.P.S.A. AB1812 Treason Trial Records Examination of Robert Resha pp. 16373 and 16384

The political life of the Western Areas of Johannesburg between the wars presents a striking contrast to the ferment of the next two decades, despite the efforts of a variety of groupings. Constraints of time and space prevent more than a cursory examination of why this was so, nonetheless certain points can be made. Whilst residents shared many common experiences, their were striking differences between the various townships and within these townships. The freehold areas and W.N.T. differed concerning the diversity of population, ownership, the social background of residents and over representation. Nor should the location be seen as in essence conservative - rather, the Advisory Board was to play a radicalising role in the later 1930s (and in the later 1940s). Within the townships racial perceptions were significant as were cleavages between owners and tenants and towards the end of the period between old and young. Moreover as the Communists found in 1930-1 there was no automatic correlation between the severe uniformity of poverty and political radicalism, neither did poverty necessarily lead to the abandonment of a more 'respectable' lifestyle.

The Western Areas saw a wide variety of political movements and leaders operating during the inter-war years and substantial interaction between them. The personal qualities and tactics of leaders also had a crucial impact on the success of their efforts. Tricksters and fools not only ensured the failure of their own movements, but cast suspicion on the leaders of more capable groups. The period saw the final outworkings of the populism of the T.A.C., to be followed by stagnation, only relieved in the 1940s. The lack of dramatic events comparable to those in Potchefstroom or Durban belies the fact that such places never saw as much sustained campaigning by the Communist Party as did the Western Areas. The party was by far the most prominent organisation in the townships,