

CHAPTER 3: FROM DREAM TO REALITY - ALEXANDRA, AN "INSIDERS'" TOWN 1979 - 1984

Alexandra's reprieve signalled a change in status from slum and hostel town to an 'insiders' township. Behind a plan to upgrade the township lay state reformists' dream of a class-differentiated, politically-stable, and economically-privileged permanent urban population. Preferential access to housing and employment, homeownership and participation in local government were the hallmarks of insiders territory. The slum would be razed to make way for a suburban idyll.

Rev Sam Buti's liason committee, which eventually accepted town council status, believed it could use local government for its own ends. But it was soon forced to compromise and finally, desperate for finances for its faltering development programme, dramatically increased rents beyond the means of residents.

A civic organisation contested the increases and criticised the upgrading for being in the interests of only the rich. Though willing to negotiate with the council, its overtures were ignored and residents' grievances disregarded. Popular organisation began to adopt an increasingly radical tone and intent.

3.1 Save Alexandra Party: From Protest Politics to Collaboration

Elections to the Alexandra Liason Committee (ALC) were held on 16 May 1979. Rev Sam Buti's original committee, renamed the Save Alexandra Party, was victorious. Over 11 000 residents voted in the elections (1) and the poll was 49% (2).

The Save Alexandra Party saw itself, said Buti, as a 'political body with clear national goals but acting on a local level. It is a party involved locally in the struggle for liberation' (3).

Opposition to homeland policy and group areas, the demand for freehold rights and pragmatic negotiation politics were the foundations of its political platform. The party promised to help people acquire residence permits, protect rights to land ownership, and develop more housing.

Councillors continually stressed that they were concerned with rectifying residents' permit problems. They planned to conduct a census to determine how many residents' documentation was not in order. The council portrayed the census as an altruistic move. Unspoken was the possibility that it could be used to sift out 'undesirable inhabitants' such as the unemployed and aged. But Councillor Makubire promised

'We aim to help those people become lawful residents of the township' (4).

And Buti announced

'We are going to see to it that no residents here at this moment are going to be moved from their houses before accommodation has been secured in the proposed new flats. No-one should be victimised on the grounds that he or she doesn't have a residential permit' (5).

By early 1980, ALC had completed several projects. It had tarred a main road, set up office at a former brewery, established a newspaper, created a counselling centre with the Sandton Municipality and employed a qualified social worker (6). ALC had agreed on a flag and coat of arms for Alexandra, bearing the motto 'Through Development We Reach the Sky'.

The Committee had also pledged to improve residents' standards of living and education, and to alleviate unemployment. To this end, it created the Alexandra Development Fund and the Alexandra Development Corporation. The Corporation was to build a R39 000 furniture factory and a R12 500 clothing factory. The factories would employ Alexandra residents and the profits would be ploughed back into the community (7).

ALC's dream was

'a new Alexandra emerging like the phoenix of mythology from the ashes of old Alexandra' (8).

Housing was first priority. Buti promised residents

'a new Alex where all the people will be living in comfortable homes - even the poor and the old' (9).

He promised to develop Alex in stages. People would be moved into new housing before the West Rand Board (WRAB) demolished the old (10).

By December 1980 the Department of Co-operation and Development had completed a masterplan for Alexandra, which had been commissioned by WRAB. ALC had participated in the feasibility study (11).

The Masterplan embodied Buti's hopes to transform Alexandra from a slum to

'a network of tarred and tree-lined streets winding in curves and crescents down to the Jukskei River through a variety of flats and houses, parks and gardens, sports grounds, shopping centres and libraries' (12).

3.2 The Phoenix Rises: The 1980 Development Plan

The Masterplan aimed to create an aesthetically-pleasing environment which adequately housed the population. It recognised that Alexandra's function was

'to supply labour to the urban area and to offer a pleasant and convenient place of residence for its inhabitants' (13).

The community was to participate in the planning, implementation and maintenance of new developments.

The planners had little with which to work. They recognised that slum conditions could be set firmly at the door of the authorities who had not made any financial aid available (14).

Basic municipal amenities were virtually non-existent. All roads were gravel, and, without stormwater drainage, were in exceedingly poor condition: potholed dust bowls in winter, and muddy swamps in summer. Water was provided by communal taps, one for every two or three houses. Only the central thoroughfare had street lighting; and the hostels and a few houses had electricity.

Sewerage was removed by the bucket system. But the buckets were collected only every three days and often overbrimming before one day was out. Refuse removal was also inadequate: one bin was provided for each yard regardless of the number of families living there, so rubbish was dumped in the streets. Poor sanitation and pools of stagnant water in yards and streets provided fertile breeding grounds for any number of endemic waterborne diseases (15).

The Masterplan made several recommendations to remedy the abysmal state of infrastructure: a new water reticulation system would supply each individual unit, and a sewerage system, an electricity reticulation system, stormwater drainage, graded, and in some cases, tarred roads would have to be installed (16).

Alexandra was reorganised into seven suburbs. Differentiated housing - family and semi-detached houses, duplexes and flats - (appropriate to income category) would be constructed for an estimated 6 000 families and 8 000 single persons (17). The emphasis was on high density accommodation to solve the overcrowding problem, regardless of residents' wishes (18). 'Education' would be necessary to familiarise people with other housing types. An elite suburb would be created, but since 60% of residents fell into a sub-economic category,

'care should be taken not to provide housing that the people cannot afford' (19).

Alexandra had been rezoned for qualified families and 99-year leasehold. Following Riekert, housing was clearly seen as a means to delineate classes, to divide and rule. The planners wrote:

'Social stratification (grouping) is a universal phenomenon. This social stratification is necessary to maintain order and stability within each community. Disregarding it leads to disinterested irresponsible behavior, frustration and unrest' (20).

The Masterplan, like the Riekert Commission, was concerned to create a tax base for local government. Taxing property was one option, hence the emphasis on homeownership. The other was the creation of a central business district containing supermarkets, shops, offices and administration buildings (21). The business district would help limit 'the leakage of capital' from the town (22).

Alexandra had very few community facilities: 43 churches, one clinic, a theatre, one office, and two creches, two beerhalls, and two discos (23). The transition from 'woon' to 'slaap dorp' required more extensive amenities. Planners suggested provision would have to be made in the town centre for theatres, a community hall, a library, a day hospital, local administrative offices, and an hotel. Each neighbourhood should have access to its own churches, creches, small community halls, old age home and clinic (24).

Extended leisure facilities were also on the cards: a sports stadium with three soccer fields, an athletics track, tennis courts, swimming pool, and a club house. Leisure facilities for hostel inhabitants would be provided at the hostels. The land alongside the Jukskei river could be redeveloped into a pedestrian park system, and a dam and picnic area could be built for 'relaxing over weekends' (25).

As Alexandra would cater for a skilled workforce, adequate training facilities would have to be provided. Six lower primary, four higher primary, three combined, and two secondary schools existed. The planning committee felt only five were in an acceptable condition (26). The rest would have to be demolished. In the future Alexandra would need 18 primary schools, six secondary schools, a technical centre, a technical high school and a technical institute (27).

Buti promised the first batch of housing units would be complete before the end of December 1980 (28). But in August when the estimated buying cost of R26 000 to R30 000 was announced, it became clear that the target population was not Alexandra's working class (29).

3.3 Off the Drawing Board and onto the Streets

3.3.1 Promises are easily broken

As 'redevelopment' moved off the drawing boards and onto the streets, ALC broke promise after promise.

To implement the Masterplan, the remaining 300 standholders had to be bought out by WRAB - a move resisted by all standholders. What upset them particularly was that WRAB evaluators approached them without warning and usually valued their property far below its market price (30).

When the standholders appealed to the Liason Committee, the Committee wholeheartedly supported WRAB. Buti now argued that it was 'imperative' for standholders to sell their property to WRAB:

'The restructuring of Alex will not get off the ground as long as stand owners are not prepared to sell to WRAB.

There is no way we can improve these properties as long as they are still in private owners [hands]' (31).

ALC argued it would fight for freehold rights after the township had been rebuilt.

Overcrowding was also seen as a crucial problem. ALC was no longer quite so conciliatory towards 'illegals'. It explained that it had asked for more land, but until this was granted, conditions in the township could only be improved by 'thinning out' the population - illegals would have to go (32).

ALC appeared to have done a complete about face. During ALC elections Buti had been adamant that ALC would never accept community council status. A community council merely rubber stamped WRAB policy; a liason committee was 'a door between the

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community and the board' and though it had 'less power it had more control' (33). ALC intended fighting for municipal status equal to that accorded white municipalities.

The Liason Committee believed it had been incorporated into local government on its own terms and it could use the structure for its own aims. But it had rapidly discovered that even with liason committee status, it was forced to implement government policy and follow WRAB's dictates. Even so, it still believed that participation was palatable if it meant improved living conditions. As Buti said several years later, after his resignation

'When I concentrate on building a town I am also involved in liberating my people' (34).

3.3.2 Finding finances

Even by late 1980 the problems of financing redevelopment began to worry ALC and WRAB. The Masterplan would cost R100 million to implement (35). This, said Buti, would have to be borne by residents directly or through the repayment of loans (36). Koornhof stated openly that ALC could not expect the central government to foot the bill. It would have to solicit funds from local authorities and private enterprise (37).

WRAB was already in financial difficulties. For the 1980 financial year it faced a deficit of R13 536 948 (38) which four years later had increased to R16 858 532 (39). It was also committed to upgrading Soweto and in 1980 was considering an upgrading plan expected to cost R1 billion (40). WRAB's notice that hostel rents in Alexandra would more than double from 1 August 1980 met with dissatisfaction among hostel residents (41).

WRAB began a R1 million programme in 1981 to provide essential services for the first phase of Alexandra's development. But the board warned that until the government approved finance, no new accommodation would be built (42). The following year it could still only promise that 300 houses and flat units would be ready in next three years, all on 99-year leaseholds (43).

Financial assistance was forthcoming from the private sector. The Star launched the 'Alexandra Uplift Programme' in February 1980. It called on every individual 'housewife, businessman, labourer, community leader, industrialist' to contribute:

'Let us save Alex - and in doing so, set a pattern for uplifting every race relationship, every slum, every communal mess in the land ... A vision is being created of a new Alexandra: a new family suburb of city workers ... Let's roll up our sleeves and tackle our "world problems"' (44).

Reform could capture the imagination of even the government's liberal critics.

The Sandton mayoral project of 1980/81 concentrated on seeking private sector funding for projects including a sports complex, the Thusong Youth Centre, an old-age home, a dental clinic and a Montessori nursery school. The Thusong project, for example, received funding from over 40 organisations including South African Breweries Community Fund, Anglo American Chairman's Fund, Abe Haggart Trust, Donaldson Trust, and the Urban Foundation (45). The nursery school was funded by The Star's TEACH scheme and by Rotary (46).

Bank of America was approached to consider a \$500 million development scheme for an elite suburb, without sub-economic housing, in which houses would all be sold (47).

Even a merger of Sandton and Alexandra was investigated to overcome ALC's limited financial resources. Sandton Mayor, Perry Oertel, justified his constituency's subsidising the township, saying that it was preferable if Sandton's workforce came from a contented, healthy residential area (48). Such a merger would be 'a peep into the future' of multi-racial community life. But central government would have to accept the financial responsibility for redevelopment (49).

In 1981 ALC began discussion with the Johannesburg and Sandton municipalities over incorporating Kew, Marlboro and Wynberg industrial areas into Alexandra to give it a financial base

(50). In 1984, for example, rates earned from Marlboro and Wynberg were R347 097 and R1 573 422 respectively (51) - a stable and welcome potential revenue source.

3.3.3 ALC's 1981 election: evidence of declining credibility

By the 8 September 1981 elections, two opposition parties had emerged to contest the elections with the Save Alexandra Party. The opposition parties were the Alexandra People's Action Party and the Alexandra Action Committee, chaired by Mike Beka. Beka, a former Save Alexandra Party member, had had a fallout with Buti over expropriation of standholders (52).

Buti viewed his opposition with considerable hostility. His speeches revolved around an 'either with us or against us' line, and depicted the opposition as sell-outs to his 'Renew, Don't Destroy' cause (53).

The Save Alexandra Party was 'victorious'. The total number of votes cast was 5 779 - far lower than the 1979 election - of which it won 4 500. The Alexandra Action Committee received 136 votes, while the Alexandra People's Action Party received 167. There were 101 spoilt papers (54). Buti was re-elected council chairman.

The low poll was attributable firstly, to restrictions on voters' eligibility. People who were in arrears with their rentals were not allowed to vote. Residents had to produce their pass books and housing permits at the polling booths. Voting was an insider's privilege.

Secondly, ALC's credibility had declined with the lack of progress in redevelopment and its backtracking on its 1979 election promises. By August 1981, the only new houses in Alexandra were nine that had been built by private contractors (55).

Redevelopment proceeded at snail's pace through 1982 and 1983. Johannesburg City Council promised Alexandra 102ha on the east side of the township for expansion. An old-age home, new education facilities, a sports centre and technical training school were in the pipeline. They would be funded by business corporations (56). Of 42 houses built by the private sector by 1982 - all for 99-year leasehold - only 13 had been sold (57). By 1983, WRAB had built 79 houses and private enterprise another eleven (58) and work had tardily begun on a small electrification programme (59).

Financing development was still a sore point. After a four-month postponement (60), WRAB again promised to spend over R13.8 million in a two phase programme: the first phase would entail spending R5,3 million on 88 houses and 194 flats; the second

involved 232 houses and 92 flats costing R8,5 million (61). At least 15 houses were expected to cater for the luxury market. The remainder would be sub-economic houses costing R7 000 to R9 000 for a buyer or available to rent at R10,30/month (62). WRAB sought government funding for township development programmes in its area totalling R110 million in 1982 (63). In early 1983, ALC was promised a loan of R6 million, part of which it planned to spend on 100 luxury houses at R30 000 each (64). But promises were not enough, and luxury housing was not a priority in most residents' eyes.

The third reason for ALC's declining popularity was also attributable to allegations of corruption. In March 1983, Buti appointed a commission to investigate corruption and bribery involving WRAB and ALC officials. It was alleged that people who were temporarily being housed in an unused WRAB beerhall paid up to R500 for a permit to qualify for a house in Alexandra. Buti admitted that

'corruption is on the increase among the ranks of WRAB and the Alexandra Liason Committee. Officials accept bribes, gifts, and other presents from persons requiring permits, houses, qualifications to stay in the area' (65).

He said no disciplinary action against committee and board officials had been taken because there was no evidence. A senior WRAB official promised he would take action if his officials were involved in housing permit bribery (66).

Nothing appears to have come of Buti's commission. But two years later, in January 1985, rumours of corruption again took to the winds. Alexandra's traders accused Buti, the town clerk and a councillor of shady dealing in trading licences. They had allegedly granted licences to relatives without going through the formal procedure, that is, advertising the licences, consulting local trade organisations and getting full council approval for the allocations (67). Another council official alleged that successful application for a licence depended on who the applicant knew or on what influence he could draw (68).

The reputation of ALC and the Save Alexandra Party was gradually whittled away. The first signs of resistance to the redevelopment plan appeared in late 1981 (see below, section 3.4).

The declining popularity of Buti and his cohorts was evident during the township's 70th anniversary celebrations in 1983. Only 2 000 people turned out to watch the celebrations. The Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO) had urged residents to boycott and instead attend a United Democratic Front (UDF) People's Weekend Rally (69). Three years previously, at ALC anniversary celebrations about 7 000 people had attended the two-day long festivities (70).

3.3.4 Accepting local authority status

November 1983 saw Alexandra become one of the first town councils under the Black Local Authorities Act. The Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and AYCO called for a boycott of the election. Save Alexandra Party candidates were unopposed so no election occurred. Buti announced this a 'victory' and

'a very clear indication of the confidence the residents of Alexandra have in the leadership' (71).

In its election manifesto the Party declared its aims were to introduce a non-racial society and strive for black solidarity (72). Buti maintained ALC's decision to accept municipal status was not a sell-out:

'As a liason committee we did not have legal status with the government, and could not negotiate to borrow money. ...We were trapped. I don't support the Black Local Authorities Act but we needed money to build our town. ...The Local Authority is not the answer but it can be used as a vehicle to reach certain things we need' (73).

The council planned to begin building flats in 1984. These were aimed at 'young professional people', teachers and single working women who demanded a 'new style of living'. The council would allocate units according to applicant's position on the waiting list and his intention to buy, rather than rent, accommodation (74).

Throughout this period, the Alexandra Town Council (ATC) continued negotiating with the Johannesburg and Sandton city councils over incorporating neighbouring white industrial areas. Employee and industry levies were a less controversial source of revenue. In January 1985 the Sandton management committee chairman finally rejected ATC's application to incorporate these areas (75).

Budget estimates for the first seven months of ATC's life estimated a deficit of R875 840 (76). The auditor's end of year report reflected a sobering deficit of R1 225 147 on budget of R6 million (77). Almost the entire income of R2,5 million was derived from rents and service charges and less than 10% from sorghum beer and liquor profit (78).

The council was forced to cut back its own expenses. It abandoned buying a luxury car for Buti and building a mayoral house in May 1984. Buti stressed that the council's first priority was family housing (79). In September it postponed plans to convert an old brewery in Wynberg into council chambers, and to renovate the existing offices. The economic situation was felt to be too serious to warrant spending money on such extravagances (80).

The council intended to investigate a more efficient debt collection system (81). But its attempts to increase rent dramatically drove residents to protest.

3.4 From Protest to Challenge

3.4.1 The beginnings of resistance

The first reports of resistance to the redevelopment plan began to appear in late 1981. Out of a population of 60 000, about 10 000 were suspected of living in Alexandra illegally (82). A socio-economic survey commissioned by ALC in 1979 found that 15,9% of household heads in its sample had neither family permits nor single permits (83).

Squatters were left homeless when their shacks were demolished and the Committee denied responsibility for seeking alternative accommodation. ALC said it had no moral obligation to provide shelter for people who were

'not bona fides of the township. They [were] people who had just streamed to Alexandra from nowhere' (84).

Houses were demolished to make way for new development and this also aroused great frustration. The following year the council tried to solve the problem by forcing several families to share a house, for example four-roomed houses were shared by two families - a situation the council promised was temporary (85).

In September 1983, the South African Police (SAP) and WRAB police patrolled the township when 23 families refused to move from their homes to a derelict tuberculosis hospital on the outskirts of the township. Their houses were to be demolished to make way for the installation of sewer pipes and electricity cables. People considered the area too dangerous for women, as a single men's hostel was nearby, and unsafe for children because of its proximity to a river. Families would have had to share a hall without partitions, and water and toilet facilities were considered inadequate. The protest was organised by Ditshwantso Tsa Rona (see below, section 3.4.3) (86).

Residents marched to Buti's home demanding to speak to him. When he finally agreed to attend a meeting to explain the situation, he accused the demonstrators of 'starting trouble' and causing him 'embarrassment'. He said he had made personal sacrifices for Alexandra and now people were calling him 'the oppressor' (87).

Residents were given a week's reprieve. ALC complained it would have to pay contractors a R800 a day penalty fee for the delay - a cost it was willing to bear only because it recognised the grievances were legitimate (88).

Some residents were resettled in the abandoned hospital and others in 20 buses donated by PUTCO and renovated at cost of R15 000 (89). Buti promised residents the move was only temporary (90).

A month later, Schachat Cullum donated temporary housing structures worth R1,25 million which accommodated 200 people awaiting construction of their new homes. It was hoped this would pacify people opposed to moving into buses (91). The protestors' demand for suitable alternative housing was considered sufficiently serious to warrant a further R575 000 the next year from an R11 million government loan for housing construction and service installation (92). ATC later complained it was not given access to the loan (93).

3.4.2 Rents people can afford?

As from 1 February 1984, the Alexandra Town Council announced that new income-differentiated rent tariffs would come into operation. In Phase One (a newly built area of 79 houses), people earning R150-R250/month would pay a monthly rent of

R130,40 for a four-roomed house and R145,74 for a six-roomed house. At the other end of the income scale, those earning between R451 and R650 would have to pay R175,36 or R200,83 for a four-roomed or six-roomed house respectively (94).

Buti explained the new rents were an attempt to offset the councils expected deficit and guarantee the council's financial self-sufficiency (95). He maintained the new rents were 'within reasonable reach of the people' (96). Those who could not afford to pay would have to exchange their new houses with a family in 'old' Alexandra (97).

Rent in 'old' Alexandra also increased. Formerly R7,10/month, the new rates increased to R12 for the first room and R4 for each additional room. This was intended to increase in January 1985 to R13,50 for the first room and R5,50 for each additional room (98).

People living in buses, prefabricated huts and the TB hospital were expected to pay R10/month and those in prefabricated huts, R25/month (99).

Rent increases contradicted the principle of affordable housing that ostensibly had been a Masterplan guideline and a die-hard Save Alexandra Party principle. The increases also ignored the findings of a socio-economic survey commissioned by ALC.

The survey found that most household heads fell into the category of skilled (37,9%) or unskilled labourers (28,6%). Only 4% were categorised as 'professional'. Of the women, 49,3% were housewives, 21,6% unskilled labourers, and 14% skilled labourers (100).

The average income was R150-199/month. But 21,6% earned less than R100/month. Only 3,2% earned over R500 (101).

These findings were supported by a later survey conducted for the Carnegie Conference. Male sample subjects' occupations ranked in order of frequency were labourer, semi-skilled worker and clerical workers, and for women were service sector, labourer, and clerical worker (102).

Pillay found an unemployment rate of 11,3% (103). More women than men were unemployed and the average age of unemployed workers was 25 (104). Of those unemployed, 41% had never worked before and many were new workseekers. The mean period of unemployment was 10,5 months (105).

Mean total household income was R568/month (106), but the average individual wage was R264 (107). Pillay calculated per capita income per household at R111/month (108).

Quite clearly Alexandra was a working class township, suffering the effects of structural unemployment and poverty wages - a scenario not conducive to planners' and councillors' dreams of black suburban bliss. 'Economic rent' was beyond the pockets of most Alexandra residents.

3.4.3 Rent protests: 'Is Alex only meant for the rich?' (109)

Alexandra Residents Association (ARA) appears to have been the sole organising force against removals and rents. Its roots lay in a cultural group, Ditshwantsho tsa Rona, formed in 1981. Its members - Alexandra residents, University of the Witwatersrand students and Sandton suburbanites - met for political and historical discussion, and created photographic histories of Alexandra. Between 1982 and 1984, they produced a regular journal, Iswi lase Township, which analysed a range of issues from influx, control and housing to capitalism and its effects on commercial media and crime. The group felt it had to analyse the workings of South African capitalist society as a precondition to informed political intervention.

Ditshwantsho had initiated protest against removals to the TB hospital and PUTCO buses in 1981, but community organisation declined soon thereafter. When new rents were announced for Phase One in December 1983, it revived organisation along

neighbourhood committee units. Ditshwantsho activists organised house-to-house and open door meetings. They insisted on small numbers to foster participation.

Once the Phase One Committee was firmly established, they moved on to form the Bus and Zinc Committee in October 1984 and in January the following year, the Sewer Committee. The Bus and Zinc Committee consisted of residents who had been moved into temporary accomodation provided by the council. The Sewer Committee covered a strip from 7th to 22nd Streets which was due to be demolished so sewer installation could begin. This would affect 247 families.

Each committee divided its area into zones, and zones into blocks. The committees met weekly to plan forthcoming activities and to delegate tasks. Ditshwantsho activists were usually given the responsibility of researching areas of concern such as the composition of rent, and the cost and nature of housing projects in other townships. They believed thorough analysis was the basis of the most significant political action.

'Political action is discussion, criticism, teaching and learning (110).

In late 1984 the three committees decided they needed a co-ordinating body and the Alexandra Residents Association was launched. Only one Ditshwantsho activist held office, the other executive members were drawn from the committees. ARA brought out a monthly bulletin which lasted until April 1985.

ARA argued that Buti and Koornhof had betrayed Alexandra's workers. If redevelopment meant high rents or expensive homeownership schemes, then it was aimed at

'forcing low paid workers out of Alex. To charge high rent is to select the wealthy for these houses. ...It is not the fault of the worker if he is retrenched, or if he gets a low wage. That is the fault of apartheid and the capitalist system' (111).

Housing highlighted class distinctions in the township which prevented 'the people' ever being one. Alexandra, argued ARA, had only been reprieved for the rich.

ARA also criticised the priorities of the development programme. People needed houses not huge leisure and sporting facilities. Millay's study showed that 80% lived in shared accommodation and the average number of rooms per household was 1,9 (112). The mean household size was 5,5 people, though a substantial 22% of the sample had seven or more family members (113).

From December 1983, the Phase One Committee persistently requested that Buti attend a public meeting to explain the high rents and discuss residents' grievances. He was persistently 'busy' or 'out'. The council finally attempted to pre-empt the committee and called its own public meeting. Phase One residents accepted the challenge: if the council would not come the people, the people would go to the council.

On 4 April 1984, over 600 residents marched to Nobuhle Hall with placards, lit by torches, stating 'Bosses Pay Us Peanuts, Buti Charges Us The World', 'We Demand Rents We Can Afford', and 'Is Alex Only Meant For The Rich?' (114).

The Phase One Neighbourhood Committee called on the Alexandra Council to lower rents to an affordable R40 or R50 for a four or six-roomed house respectively - rent should constitute no more than 10% of a person's income (115).

Bus and zinc dwellers expressed discontent that their 'temporary' accomodation seemed to have become permanent. They felt they had been dumped and forgotten and wanted a deadline for moving and first preference for new houses and flats. They argued that adequate alternative and affordable housing had to be provided by the council before people would consent to moving.

Buti sent apologies but no explanation for his absence. Deputy Mayor Harry Makubiri addressed the crowd. He remained intransigent over the grievances, arguing that the residents had three options only:

'You can pay the rent as set down by the council, you can buy the house or you can swap it with a person who can afford to pay the required rent' (116).

ATC's financial position did not offer any viable alternative.

Residents resolved not to move or pay high rent. They decided to continue paying their original rent of R7,50 and R9,20 and to seek support for their actions from other parts of the township which would eventually also face higher rents (117). A partial rent boycott had begun.

In a magnanimous gesture, the council agreed to reduce rent in Phase One to R124,55 for a four-roomed house and R139,55 for a six-roomed house. But it recommended that residents buy their new houses under 99-year leasehold as a way of securing 'a sound investment on your hard earned money' (118).

If the rent demanded by ATC was way beyond the pocket of workers, so was leasehold and home-ownership. A four-roomed house cost R17 000 and a six-roomed house was valued at R21 500 (119).

Building societies and banks required initial deposits of 20% on the buying price (120).

Even the survey commissioned by ALC had shown that while most residents in the sample wanted to buy a house, almost 60% had savings for a deposit of less than R200, and another 20% could afford less than R300 (121). As for monthly repayments: 40,8% said they could afford only R10-24/per month and another 22% said they could spend R25-49/month (122).

Not suprisingly, only 79 houses had been sold under 99-year leasehold by March 1984 (123).

In October the council appeared to cede to one ARA demand when it announced that bus and zinc families, who had been in their 'temporary' accommodation for over a year, would receive the first option on the new flats (124).

But the concession was paltry. The council informally told the Bus and Zinc Committee that a two-roomed flat would cost R183/month while a bachelor flat would cost R113. Again residents argued this was too high for a low-paid community. And again, councillors refused to listen. They failed to attend a public meeting to which they had been formally invited (125).

Residents also resolved to fight for the right to a house rather than a flat. A few days later the council agreed that the residents would get preference on new five- and six-roomed houses (126). But a year later they were promised first choice for completed flats in Phase 2 (127).

In December 1984, flat rents were dropped slightly to R160/month for a two-roomed flat and R100/month for a bachelor flat (128). The council now urged employers to

'help workers by paying them a living wage so that they can afford modern and costly facilities' or help by funding housing schemes (129).

In January 1985, ARA formed a Sewerage Committee. Residents in the area said they would not move until they were given proper alternative accommodation - they did not want a repeat of the the bus people's experience (130).

3.5 The Council Answers Back

3.5.1 Defending its image

Rent increases were suspended indefinitely at the beginning of February 1985 (131). ARA's criticism and demands were considered sufficient threat to warrant public reply in the council's newspaper, The Alexandra Chronicle.

Buti accused ARA of misleading residents and distorting facts:

'They say to you: "Buti is mad; Buti wants Alexandra for the elite; Buti does not care for you, the workers; Buti is this ...Buti is that ..." Liars! They lack a definite programme. They fail to tell you what they can do for you. ...They say I do not care for you. I do not care for Alexandra. You know that I love Alexandra. You know that I have committed myself to give all of you a better quality of life' (132).

The newspaper lambasted ARA for delaying redevelopment and then blaming the council. The resistance to removals, it warned

'is a deliberate attempt by ARA to retard the redevelopment of Alexandra and therefore a direct insult to those residents who have given those men in the Town Council the mandate to seek a better quality of life for them' (133).

During 1985 the council tried to persuade residents it was their duty to contribute to the running of the town:

'It is necessary for all the residents to contribute towards the running of their city. ...The council renders essential services to the community. Everybody derives a benefit, either directly or indirectly' (134).

The legitimacy of working through government structures was also at stake. Buti justified the local council as a means to an end, and as a way

'to speak up for the people who cannot speak for themselves and protect the rights of all who are helpless' (135).

Youth were seen as a particularly vulnerable sector. After the Alexandra Junior Council was inducted in mid-1984 - the first black junior council - The Alexandra Chronicle published frequent appeals to township youth to join the fun and help save Alexandra:

'You cannot sit idle or busy yourselves with petty political mud-slinging while your township is in need of your services' (136).

ATC announced it would begin to examine self-built housing schemes to cater for those who could not afford even sub-economic houses. 'Low-income' residents also had a place in Alexandra. Councillor Mashile stated: 'We can not just wish them away' (137). ARA's rumours that Alexandra was an elite town were unfounded and an attempt to divide the dearly beloved community, said The Chronicle (138).

3.5.2 A call to arms

During late 1984, the council was authorised by the Department of Co-Operation and Development to appoint its own police force (139). It was among the first sixteen local authorities scheduled

to establish and control their own police forces. Other councils included the Soweto, Dobsonville, Diepmeadow and Lekoa councils.

The Alexandra Town Council planned to spend R700 000 establishing its law enforcement unit, despite its financial predicament. Buti still maintained the council's most important priority was housing (140).

The municipal police were clearly not going to restrict their activities to simple law enforcement. ATC budgeted for 11 shotguns, 40 revolvers, 10 rubber bullet guns, 50 teargas cannisters, 40 riot helmets and shields, one bomb blanket, 40 sjamboks and three police vans. The cost of the riot equipment was estimated at R132 547 (141).

By November 1985, Alexandra could boast the first eight women recruits to its otherwise male municipal police force (142).

3.5.3 New rent tariffs announced

Possibly the creation of the police force and the declaration of the first state of emergency on 21 July 1985 gave the council renewed confidence to reannounce new rent tariffs in November. No doubt the rent boycott in the Vaal Triangle had sounded a sober prophecy. Tariffs were substantially reduced from earlier

figures. Four-roomed sub-economic houses would cost R60/month and six-roomed homes R90/month. Flat rents were pinned at R100 and R70 for two-roomed and bachelor flats respectively (143).

Despite the council backing down, the rent boycott continued to spread and at the end of the year, at a public meeting, ARA called for a general rent boycott. The council's argument that high rent was necessary to pay for infrastructural and housing development was credible. But it refused to recognise that residents could not afford higher rent, however much they desired the new accommodation. This was no 'agitators' plot' but purely economic pressures.

3.6 Resistance Heats Up Nationally

Protest in Alexandra was relatively quiet during 1984 and 1985 compared to developments elsewhere in the country.

The tricameral parliamentary elections in August 1984 signified a victory for the verligte military-business alliance and gave President PW Botha sweeping dictatorial powers. It also sparked attempts to organise national opposition to the new constitution and the Koornhof Bills (144).

As the economic situation deteriorated and its effects fed political fires, reformers' dreams began to fade. Falling gold prices, crippling drought, diminishing export markets played off against rising state expenditure on defence, education and civil service salaries to send inflation spiralling upwards. 1985 recorded the highest inflation rate in 66 years (145).

The state responded with a monetarist austerity programme to control money supply and consumer spending and hopefully reduce inflation. Bankruptcies, mergers and takeovers vied with retrenchments, lockouts and plant closures as an index of economic crisis. The economy now mustered negative growth rates. Economists calculated that 15-25% of the total black labour force was unemployed (146). Consumer prices rocketed. Coffee, milk, tea, cooking oil, and margarine increases averaged 10% in 1984 (147). The following year bread and rice, for example, increased by over 21% and with petrol increases of 40%, public transport costs rose by 30% (148).

The effects of the recession provided a fertile field of grievances for popular mobilisation: rent boycotts, bus boycotts, squatter and housing protest movements, and widespread strikes. Nationally, civics and youth congresses - many affiliated to the United Democratic Front - were able to exploit the contradiction between state attempts to improve the urban environment and local government's fiscal and political bankruptcy, in much the same way as had ARA in Alexandra in 1984 and 1985.

However the Vaal uprising in September 1984, followed by the declaration of a rent boycott in all townships governed by the Lekoa town council, signified the tone of the future. A national schools boycott contributed to the general malaise. A mass worker stayaway in November 1984 marked the start of effective political relationships between the union movement, student and community organisations (149).

Detention of union leaders and the consequent threat of further labour unrest even led the Federated Chamber of Industry, the Associated Chambers of Commerce and the Afrikaner Handels Instituut to take public action. They issued a joint condemnation of security police' heavy-handedness, and called on police to charge or release detainees (a stand they later quietly dropped).

'There are no profits for business in disintegrating communities. Stability is terribly important for business' (150)

explained Tony Bloom, chair of Premier Group Holdings.

The government's response in early 1985 was to promise future modifications to influx control, lift the Immorality Act and open 44 commercial districts to all races. Simultaneously, it detained and then charged high profile UDF leaders for treason.

Reports of unrest in rural townships began to appear with increasing frequency: Seisoville, Phomolong, Oberholzer, Tzaneen, Ikageng, Thabong, Odendaalsrus, Virginia, Vryburg, Bothaville, Beaufort West, Paarl, Parys, Galeshewe, Mangaung, Somerset East, Fort Beaufort and Cradock (151).

The Langa Massacre on 21 March 1985 marked the beginning of the Eastern Cape uprising, which eventually brought the area to the verge of ungovernability. In its wake, 46 councillors resigned and TB Kinikini, the only councillor of Kwanobuhle township who refused to do so, was necklaced - a grim warning to councillors nation-wide (152).

Investigations by the Kannemayer Commission also revealed that the SAP had surreptitiously revised its role: carrying lethal weapons and shoot-to-kill orders had replaced riot control equipment and imposition of law and order. In June the disappearance of four leading Eastern Cape activists and discovery of their burnt and mutilated bodies a few days later lent credence to a popular belief in sinister state sponsored violence.

Indications of Alexandra's tinderbox temper were evident too, even in early 1985. On 9 February Vincent Tshabala, an ANC guerilla and former Alexandra Youth Congress member was killed in

a shootout with police. His funeral two weeks later was attended by 3 000 people. Afterwards Buti's house was stoned - a move, he said, intended to force him to resign. But, he argued

'I have never been a stooge ...We are a body which will always fight to the bitter end for a better way of life' (153).

He received another warning at the beginning of March when his house was destroyed in an explosion (154) and again towards the end of the month, when his shop was set alight by a mob (155).

An ARA member was abducted, taken to council premises and then Buti's house and accused of being responsible. He was later locked in a police cell by council police. He alleged that he recognised his kidnappers as members of the Alexandra Junior Council - a charge denied by the police, the town and junior council (156). ARA answered:

'Our method of struggle is open, and relies on argument and reason, not on bombings or assassinations' (157).

'...Any leader who refuses to be criticised is an oppressor' (158).

On 22 March 1985 the government issued a year-long ban on all indoor meetings dealing with school boycotts. A week later, outdoor gatherings in 18 magisterial districts in the Eastern Cape and the Transvaal and indoor meetings to organise industrial

action were prohibited. Meetings of the UDF and 28 other organisations were banned for three months. Deputy Foreign Minister, Louis Nel, explained

'There is incontrovertible evidence of an orchestrated attempt by forces from beyond our border, joined by radical elements inside the country to make the country ungovernable and to bring about a revolutionary situation' (159).

By June, 240 councillors, including 27 mayors, had resigned; 120 councillors had been attacked and five had died (160). Homes of 75 had been burned down (161). Only two of 38 town councils continued to operate (one in Alexandra) and there were 375 vacant seats (162). The declaration of the state of emergency was an admission that the state had lost control and Riekert's plan, which had intended to create stability through reform, had backfired.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Star, 1979.05.21
2. Star, 1980.09.08
3. Sowetan, 1981.07.29
4. Star, 1979.05.25
5. Star, 1979.05.25
6. Sunday Times, 1980.01.13
7. Star, 1980.02.25
8. Star, 1980.02.25
9. Sunday Times, 1980.03.30
10. Star, 1980.07.18
11. Department of Co-operation and Development (for West Rand Board): Alexandra Masterplan, December 1980; p 1
12. Star, 1980.02.25
13. Department of Co-operation and Development, op cit, p 7
14. Ibid, p 24-5
15. Department of Co-operation and Development, op cit, pp 47-49; Tshandu, Z: The State of Health Care Services in South Africa: A Case Study, Unpublished Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986; pp 65-67
16. Department of Co-operation and Development, op cit, pp 47-49
17. Ibid, p 6
18. In a survey conducted at the request of ALC, 81,4% of the

sample said they preferred to own a house to a flat
(Lamont, T: Preliminary Report on a Socio-Economic Survey
Done in Alexandra, Department of Sociology, UNISA, 1979;
p 20)

19. Department of Co-operation and Development, op cit, p 28
20. Ibid, p 29
21. Ibid, pp 32-5; Star, 1980.07.18; Rand Daily Mail.
1980.07.18
22. Department of Co-operation and Development, op cit, p 32
23. Ibid, p 37
24. Ibid, p 38
25. Ibid, p 44
26. Ibid, p 40
27. Ibid, p 41
28. Star, 1980.07.28
29. Star, 1980.08.17
30. Post, 1980.07.28
31. Post, 1980.07.28
32. Star, 1980.09.08
33. Interview with Darky Rametse, former councillor, 1987.06.04
34. Sunday Star, 1986.04.06
35. Star, 1981.09.08
36. Star, 1980.09.08
37. Star, 1980.11.01; see also: Star, 1980.02.25
38. SAIRR Survey, 1982, p 315-6
39. SAIRR Survey, 1984, p 165
40. SAIRR Survey, 1980, p 320

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