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Morris, Alan

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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Title: The Complexities of Sustained Urban Struggle: The Case of Oukasie.

by: Alan Morris

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On the 7 December 1985, the local community council, elected in a low poll in 1981, summonsed Oukasie residents to a fateful meeting (1). The residents were informed that they would have to move 24 kilometres north to Lethlabile on the border of Bophuthatswana. The 55 year-old township of approximately 12 000 people situated 90 kilometres north-west of Johannesburg and two kilometres from the Brits town centre was to be demolished.

This paper will briefly reconstruct the history of the anti-removal struggle in Oukasie and in the process illustrate the potential difficulties of township struggle. Three key arguments are made. Firstly, it is argued that in order to understand the different responses of Oukasie residents to the planned removal, cogniscance must be taken of the fact that like all townships, Oukasie at the time of the announcement, was composed of different social classes and groupings with different material interests and perceptions. Only by taking cogniscance of this can the issue of why some residents decided to move and others decided to stay be explained. Secondly, it is argued that the occupation of key leadership positions by unemployed residents fueled the development of vanguardist organisation. Finally, it is argued that this vanguardism, in the context of high and lengthy unemployment, contributed to the rise of factionalism and coercive politics.

What happened in Oukasie has occurred in numerous urban contexts throughout South Africa. Townships which initially were organised in that they had elected leaders which had legitimacy and represented the interests of the residents subsequently lapsed into varying degrees of disarray. The most notorious example is Crossroads, but there other areas such as Leandra, Ekangala, Tumahole and Thokoza where after a solid beginning, organisation virtually collapsed and repressive vanguardism became a dominant pattern.

A study of the dynamics of the Oukasie struggle, although it has its own specificity, could contribute towards understanding the dynamics of urban politics in other urban contexts, especially where the leadership has been dominated by unemployed workers.

The Setting

The Brits black township, better known as Oukasie, was established in 1928 (Government Notice 775 of 11 May, 1928). Prior to the movement of residents to Lethlabile it was a densely populated area with approximately 12 000 people living in an area 2,2 kilometres by 300 metres. From its inception, state provision of services was negligible. In the 1930s, about 120 very inadequate corrugated one-roomed shacks were built by the state. All subsequent housing was built by the residents themselves. The privately built housing varies significantly: prior to the removal, about a third of the homes were adequate brick dwellings, now about twenty percent are. Most homes are

made of corrugated iron and some of the very poor residents have used packing cases from the now abandoned Alfa Romeo car plant. Residents are either stand-holders or tenants of stand-holders. Stand-holders have the right of occupation of the stand but do not have freehold rights (2).

Services in Oukasie are rudimentary. At present, residents are dependent on a bucket sewerage system and about 54 communal taps. The untarred roads are rutted and treacherous, and storm-water drainage is minimal. There is no electricity or street lighting.

A survey conducted in 1987 found that 74% of those residents who were employed, worked in the white residential area of Brits or the Brits industrial area. Twelve percent worked in Oukasie itself and 14% worked in another town. Thirty-nine percent of the men in employment, work in the industrial area. Most of the women employed, are domestic workers (Becker et al, 1987:23).

The Brits industrial area developed after it was declared a decentralisation point in the 1960s. Multi-national companies such as Firestone, Alfa Romeo., Bosch, Ciba-Geigy and others were attracted to the area by state incentives and the large pool of cheap labour available. In the early seventies, prior to unionisation, many of the factories were paying on average R20 a week (Interview with local resident) (3). In the 1980s wages increased significantly due to the growth of a strong trade union movement in the area. The wage increases also contributed to bringing to a halt the expansion of industry that had taken place in the 1970s. In the 1980s a number of factories either closed down or relocated. The most notable closure was that of Alfa Romeo in 1985 which at its high-point employed 1 500 workers. Other companies such as B and S (in pursuit of a non-unionised work-force and cheap labour) moved to Bophuthatswana. These closures and relocations contributed to the high rate of unemployment which at present is close to 50% (Becker et al, 1987:23). There are some workers who have been unemployed for up to seven years and have lost any hope of obtaining formal employment in the Brits area (Interviews with residents). As will be argued later, the desperate plight of many Oukasie residents has played an important role in shaping urban politics in the area.

Why the Removal?

The plan to remove the township was first mooted in the 1950s (Horrell, 1956). However, it was only in 1970, in the heyday of separate development, that the removal plan was partially put into motion. Approximately 400 families were removed to Motahlung, an area 20 kilometres north-east of Brits in Bophuthatswana. The local Brits newspaper starkly revealed the motivation behind this removal when it stated:

> The Brits location which has been a local eyesore and abuts one of our smart suburbs will shortly no longer blight our

town. (Brits Pos, 10 April 1970 (my translation)).

The removal plan was then deferred and the first definite indication of its rekindling appears in the Brits Town Council Minutes of October 1975 where reference is made to a letter from the Secretary of the then Department of Bantu Administration and Development concerning "the removal of Bantus (sic) resident in Brits Location". The plan gathered considerable momentum with the election in 1977 of Dr Jan Grobler as National Party Member of Parliament for the area. He saw the removal of Oukasie as a key part of his platform and was in constant contact with the Minister responsible. Eventually, he obtained the support of the Cabinet and in 1979 the state bought the farm Nooitgedacht later renamed Lethlabile (Sunrise) for the express purpose of developing it into a resettlement town for Oukasie residents. At this stage, Lethlabile, in line with the state's apartheid policy, was to be incorporated into Bophuthatswana. The plan to incorporate Lethlabile into Bophuthatswana was later dropped. The state probably concluded that if Oukasie residents were to move to Lethlabile "voluntarily" it was imperative that Lethlabile was not incorporated.

Prior to the declaration of Brits as a decentralisation point, the town was very small and Oukasie was situated some distance from the nearest white homes. However, even at this stage the township was too close for the likings of many of the white residents and, as mentioned above, as far back as the 1950s it had been suggested that the township be moved.

The removal of 400 families in 1970 did not satisfy the white residents and, as the white population of Brits grew, the demand to move the township intensified. In the 1970s, it reached a crescendo with the establishment of a new white middle-class suburb, Elandsrand, next door to Oukasie. It is part of Oukasie folk-lore that potential Elandsrand residents were told that Oukasie was to be demolished. Few areas in South Africa capture the inequalities generated by apartheid as vividly as this one does. On the one side there is a collection of typical white middle-class suburban homes, many with swimming pools, a few dozen metres north is the teeming poverty of Oukasie, many of its residents too poor to afford the most basic dwelling.

The Elandsrand residents' perception of Oukasie and its future is probably captured by this snippet of an interview.

> why must we live next to them. It's noisy, crime is high, we want them to be moved. (Extract from BBC Documentary, Back on the Frontier).

The conservatism of white Brits residents is indicated by the performance of the Conservative Party in the 1989 election. In a 77,62% poll they obtained a 3032 majority over the National Party (The Star, September 9, 1990).

The Brits Town Council also made no secret of its racism and its

desire to remove Ouksie. Every year from 1975/76 onwards and up until 1982/83 the Mayoral Report stated:

> The Council has, during the year, continued its efforts to have the Brits Black Township, which constitutes a hinderance for the development of white suburbs, removed. (Mayor's Annual Report, Brits, 1981-1982. My translation).

When it was announced in June 1983 that funds were definitely going to be allocated for the building of Lethlabile the National Party MP, Dr Grobler, stated that "he was joyful at the fruit of years of hard work". (Brits Pos, 4 March 1983. My translation).

The response of the Mr Chris Heunis, the Minister responsible for township removals, was more sophisticated. He insisted that the removal was an altruistic act and argued that the area had to be moved as it was unhygienic and too expensive to upgrade. (Business Day, 18 October 1986). However, a team of engineers commissioned by the Brits Action Committee established that for about four million rand the area could be substantially upgraded thereby seriously undermining Heunis's claim. (Axelrod et al, 1986).

The residents of Oukasie felt very strongly that racism was the prime motivation for the removal:

> The ... whites, you know, are very reluctant to be next to black people. ... they feel uncomfortable with blacks next to them. White people in Brits are now getting more conservative ... If possible they would like to have all the blacks living alone in their own republics. (Interview with a member of the Brits Action Committee).

In December 1985, Lethlabile was ready to be settled and within eight months about half of the residents had moved to Lethlabile. The remainder were very firmly committed to staying in Oukasie.

Why some residents decided to move

Residents moved for a variety of reasons and revealed very clearly that black townships are not homogenous entities with a uniform consciousness. The existence of different classes with different levels of affluence within these classes ensured that the responses of Oukasie residents to the state's removal plans would vary. Thus, workers in unionised factories earn far more than domestic workers and were able to bear the cost of moving to Lethlabile. The responses of different households were shaped by what they saw as their material interests. Besides the primacy of class there were other variables that shaped a household's decision whether to move or stay. These included the age of the house-holder, the possibilty of obtaining compensation for demolished homes, and whether the household could afford to build an adequate home in Lethlabile.

Relocation was certainly to the advantage of the middle class

residents. This grouping was comprised mainly of traders, teachers, nurses, policemen and administrative staff in government offices and saw moving to Lethlabile as an opportunity to build new homes and be linked to adequate bulk services: electricity, water-borne sewerage, tap on the plot, and adequate roads and storm-water drainage. The provision of superior facilities in Lethlabile and the deliberate neglect of Oukasie was a key component of the state's strategy. As mentioned services in Oukasie are blatantly inadequate. In contrast there was a clear intent to provide adequate services in Lethlabile and by June, 1986 20,2 million rand had been expended on services, at an average cost of R6 380 per stand. (Hansard, House of Assembly debates, 23 July 1986:430).

Traders had the possibilty of expanding their turn-over due to the captive market and greater size of Lethlabile. Lethlabile, although primarily for residents relocated from Oukasie, could accommodate a far larger population. By June 1986, six months after the establishment of Lethlabile, Oukasie had become an almost totally working class township as nearly every member of the middle class had moved to Lethlabile.

Some members of the organised working class also decided to move. Trade union organisation had pushed up wages to levels where it was possible for some organised workers to afford to build homes in Lethlabile and have the advantage of access to decent facilities. This movement was facilitated by the granting of subsidised home loans by some firms to their workers. The possibility of having adequate domestic facilities, especially for wives, (doing domestic chores with access to electricity and water is a lot easier) was a strong drawcard. Organised workers who stayed often said that their colleagues were reluctant to leave but were pressurised by their wives.

Some unemployed workers also decided to move. They were generally owners of brick homes who, because their homes were brick, received on average R5 000 in compensation from the state once they moved. This compensation pay-out was very enticing. Many of these residents had been struggling for years and so this cash injection was seen as a possible way out of virtual destitution. No compensation was offered for corrugated iron houses. These residents were expected to reconstruct their dwellings using materials brought from Oukasie.

A number of the older residents were also keen to move as Lethlabile meant they could enjoy adequate domestic facilities in their twilight years.

Not all movement to Lethlabile was voluntary. Tenants whose homes were built on the stands of stand-holders who had decided to move to Lethlabile were often forced to move. When a stand-holder decided to leave for Lethlabile he was told that in order to obtain his compensation all the houses on the plot had to be demolished. As a result, hundreds of perfectly adequate homes were demolished. This had the effect of rendering many tenants

homeless, forcing them to accept the Lethlabile option. The tenants could not move back on to the vacated stands nor were they allowed to move to anywhere else in the township. An important part of the state's strategy was to freeze the allocation of government housing and plots from the time of the December announcement.

It appears as if the state expected that the strategies outlined above would ensure the "voluntary" removal of all residents. However, these strategies, although partially successful, still left more than half of the residents determined to stay and this may have pushed the state to adopt more persuasive tactics.

March 1986 saw the beginnings of a spate of petrol-bomb attacks on the township's leadership by persons unknown. Residents alleged that the violence was state-initiated and sponsored. There was a short lull until May 1986, when tragedy struck. Joyce Moedemoeng, the wife of a trade union organisor and leading activist in the township, David Moedemoeng, was killed when a powerful bomb was thrown into their home.

This murder undermined the resolve of many residents of the hitherto previously peaceful township to stay in Oukasie and many decided to move to the relative peace of Lethlabile. Their fear was accentuated by the presence of vigilante groups that roamed the township at night.

The state of emergency declared on the 12 June 1986 was another set-back for the anti-removal struggle. Almost the entire leadership was detained and the remainder went into hiding. Organisation lost momentum and in this rudderless situation, some residents lost hope and decided to leave.

A key part of the state's strategy was to be unwavering in its commitment to remove Oukasie. Residents were very rarely given reason to believe that the state might rescind its decision. This total intransigence in the face of sustained community representation and other pressures was very demoralising for the residents. The state's intransigence was illustrated by the Mahlaela vs De Beer case. In April 1986, the state's decision to freeze the allocation of sites and state housing was successfully challenged in the Supreme Court and for a while the state's plans were thrown into disarray (Mahlaela vs de Beer, 23 April 1986). The implications of this ruling were that a key component of the state's removal tactics, namely the plan to freeze all growth and development, was undermined. No longer could the superintendent of the township arbitrarily refuse to allocate empty stands or government houses to residents. However, the nature of the South African state (see Morris 1989) ensured that it would not back down but would instead develop another strategy to put the removal back on course. On the 17 October 1986, in terms of section 37 (1) of the Black Communities Development Act, the township was officially disestablished. This meant that the order proclaiming Oukasie an area for African occupation was set aside. Oukasie residents now became squatters

in their own township and, as a result, the state was no longer obliged to fulfil the court's instruction to allocate houses or plots.

Although this "disestablishment" added some impetus to the removal, the effect was not great and it remained an abstract pressure. Residents continued to proffer rent which was accepted thus implicitly legalising the status of the payees.

The drastic slowdown of movement to Lethalbile in 1987 prompted the state to use a new tactic. On 26 April 1988 Oukasie was declared an emergency camp in terms of section 6 of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act. A special Government Gazette was issued which contained a host of regulations which if strictly implemented would make life in Oukasie intolerable. Failure to adhere to these regulations gave the superintendent of the area the power to cancel the residence permit of the transgressor. Despite these extra pressures few residents left as by April 1988, the remaining residents had made a firm decision to stay. The draconian regulations were an irritation but not enough to provoke a change of mind.

Why so Many Residents Decided to Stay

The question that arises is why, in the face of so many direct and indirect pressures, more than half of the residents decided to stay. Four key reasons for this were articulated: financial considerations; a fear of moving away from one's perceived community; a refusal to be pushed around by the state and the relative proximity of Oukasie to work, shops and potential employment sources. The pertinence of these respective reasons is linked to an extent to class location and to whether residents are employed or unemployed.

Most unemployed workers have not moved because it is clearly not in their interests to do so, especially if they live in a corrugated iron house. Relocation could intensify their desperate situation. Unemployed workers battling it out in the informal sector generally have a similar perception. A move to Lethlabile is viewed with great trepidation. A long-standing resident of Oukasie, who survives by running one of the many small shebeens, expressed this point very forcefully:

> I won't go because I have no money to go to Lethlabile, I can hardly buy one brick so with what can I build a house because I have no money for one brick. (Interview with author).

Residents in the informal sector would probably lose their regular customers.

Many residents have lived in Oukasie for decades. The 1987 survey referred to earlier, found that 70 % of adults had lived in the town for longer than 15 years (Becker et al, 1987: 30) This very long association has created immense familiarity and attachment. It was found that during this extended residence

substantial support networks had been built up. The survey indicated that 66% of respondents had close relatives in other households in Oukasie and that 84% of this group had been in close contact with these relatives in the week prior to the survey. (Becker et al, 1987:31) There are also very often close links with neighbours. In the case of unemployed residents these linkages become crucial survival mechanisms. The survey illustrated that 44% of residents had participated in a redistribution of resources in the previous year. (Becker et al, 1987:32). A move to Lethlabile would seriously undermine these support networks.

A resident who has lived in Oukasie since January 1949 expressed the above points very crisply.

> I've growed (sic) in this place and I know all the corners of this place and I know who can help if I'm staying here ...

Besides the importance of affordability and social and family networks, for unemployed residents the close proximity of Oukasie to the white group area is another key factor inhibiting them from moving to Lethlabile. This proximity is crucial for casual employment and shopping. The unemployed were very aware that a move to Lethlabile would make obtaining casual work a lot more difficult. Many unemployed residents are constantly seeking employment. The most common way to do this is to walk to the Department of Manpower office daily. Financially, it would not be possible to do this if they were living in Lethlabile. Finally, the unemployed are aware that goods in Lethlabile cost significantly more than they do in Brits.

It is not only the unemployed who do not want to move. Many employed workers are totally adamant that they will not move. Their reasons are often more vague but revolve around issues like familiarity, social networks, relative distance to cheap shops and work and the issue of principle. It is evident that many residents have close personal ties and a fairly set mode of spending their leisure time. The density of the township has meant that many residents have spent their whole lives in close proximity to one another and as a result, the social bonds are often very intimate. Friends will often move around in a tightly knit circle, will drink in the same shebeens, and be in very regular contact. It would be almost impossible to reconstruct this communality in Lethlabile and there is a great fear of losing it. As a member of the Brits Action Committee said:

> I would say I like staying in Oukasie because I was born in Oukasie, I grew up in Oukasie, I schooled in Oukasie and I've come to like the place. You know I've come to identify the place with myself and the other thing is that Oukasie is different. Unlike bigger townships there are good relationships and a very strong social structure which has not been tarnished too much by capitalism. (Interview with author).

Another very important issue is the issue of distance. Most workers take a maximum of ten minutes to reach work, taxis being the predominant form of transport. A move to Lethalbile would add about another hour to the working day.

A final reason why many residents do not want to move revolves around the issue of principle. They refuse to be pushed around by the state. Resistance is partially a political decision. This is especially true of the more organised workers.

> People are determined that they are not going to move, and then ... what we are saying everyday is that this is not negotiable, but Lethlabile is not a place for us to sit or to reside, so we still repeat, Lethlabile is not negotiable what ever the government does, it can kill us, but we are not moving. (Local trade unionist, interview with author).

As has been pointed out the response of workers was not uniform. Some workers did move. The reasons for the varied responses of workers are difficult to ascertain. A worker making the decision as to whether to stay or go would be swayed by his commitment to Oukasie which in turn would be influenced by the length of his stay in Oukasie, the social networks formed, his level of affluence (will he be able to afford to build in Lethlabile) and his accommodation in Oukasie. Some workers were living in very crowded circumstances while others who were stand-holders were reasonably comfortable. The latter would obviously have less inclination to move. Although the attitude of the male partner would generally be the decider, it would appear as, mentioned previously, that often the wife would play a major role in supporting the husband's desire to stay or alternatively persuading him to move.

Fighting the Removal

On the 8 December 1985, the day after the Community Council announced the removal plans, a meeting was called (it is unclear who initiated the meeting). At the meeting, attended by approximately 800 residents, a committee was elected to represent the residents in the fight against the removal. This was the first time residents had elected an organisation to represent them on a community issue. All previous organisation in Oukasie had been directed towards the working class in the form of trade unionism or co-operatives for dismissed workers.

The committee was called the Brits Action Committee (BAC). It had twelve members, all men. A highly aticulate and charismatic personality, Marshall Buys, was elected chairperson. At the time of his election he had been formally unemployed for about four years. Previously he had worked at Firestone and had been active in the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU). The treasurer was formerly a leading shop steward at Alfa Romeo. The secretary was employed at Firestone, where he was the chief shop steward. The fourth key person on the executive in the

early part of 1986 also joined the ranks of the formally unemployed when he was retrenched. He had been very involved with the Young Christian Workers. These four members were very close friends and this factor, combined with their skills, developed to a large extent in the trade union movement, soon ensured that they would form the key decision-making caucus within the BAC. The BAC became the dominant organisation in the township and soon extended its portfolio to all township issues. The women's, youth and church organisations which all emerged in the early part of 1986 were expected to liaise with the BAC before embarking on any significant course of action. The relationship with the trade union movement was more equal. Activists in the union movement played a role in the shaping of BAC strategy and the BAC did liase with the trade unions. However, the fact that the key unionists were at work the whole day and often had union meetings or workshops at night and over the week-end meant that their presence and impact in the township was necessarily limited. This weakened their ability to influence the BAC and the general trajectory of politics in Oukasie.

It is unclear how the trade union experience of the dominant BAC caucus shaped their style of operating. The Federation of South African Trade Union (FOSATU) experience possibly made them wary of organisations not controlled by workers. Also, although within NAAWU in Brits there were shop floor organisation and accountable structures, it appears that policy was often initiated by a small grouping. The use of a caucus-type approach in trade union activity possibly influenced the working of the BAC. These points, however, remain tentative and require further research.

In their first year of office the BAC had large-scale support as they managed to stage a competant, high profile campaign against the removal and extracted the maximum out of the limited tactics and resources at their disposal.

In the first eighteen months of the anti-removal fight that section of the residents who had decided to stay were very united and determined. The underlying strategy was to put as much pressure on the state as possible so as to persuade the Cabinet to rescind the decision to remove Oukasie.

A primary strategy was to launch an intensive publicity campaign. The press were kept informed of events in Oukasie and were regularly invited to meetings and township events like clean-ups.

The diplomatic community was kept informed of developments and strongly encouraged to intervene. Twice, a demarche on the Oukasie removal was delivered by the European Economic Community to the South African foreign office.

The Progressive Federal Party was also drawn in. After visiting the area Helen Suzman made an impassioned speech in Parliament imploring the state to rescind its decision.

The BAC drew capital into the struggle by convening meetings with employer federations like the Federated Chamber of Industries (FCI) and the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa (SEIFSA) and local management. These groupings were requested by the unions and by the BAC to make representation to the state on the Oukasie issue. Formal and informal representations were made by both the FCI and SEIFSA, however, local Brits' concerns refused to intervene.

Another strategy was to counter state propaganda by commissioning expert reports on various aspects. As already mentioned, a team of engineers found that with relatively modest expenditure it would be feasible to upgrade Oukasie. Other reports examined the health and socio-economic situation in Oukasie. The reports concluded that a forced removal to Lethlabile would seriously affect the standard of living and health of the poorer, more vulnerable residents. (Barron et al, 1987 and Becker et al, 1987).

Finally, legal assistance was secured and the lawyers concerned constantly made representation to the state on behalf of the BAC.

These tactics had the effect of restoring the confidence and morale of the residents and bringing relocation to Lethlabile virtually to a halt. Despite their success and obvious talents, the support of the leadership started declining in 1987 and towards the end of that year they became involved in a desperate struggle to maintain power. Ultimately, this struggle was lost and in August 1988 the BAC was replaced by another committee, hereafter referred to as the new BAC. The new BAC although it drew on a wider base, there were residents from the women's organisation and the churches, was also dominated by unemployed workers. In the process of this leadership struggle, mobilisation and organisation stagnated and the township was torn apart by violent conflict. A township which had had a reputation for cohesiveness and united action had become a battle-ground. This violence culminated in tragedy when Marshall Buys was murdered in March 1989.

The disintegration of cohesion

A key question is why there was this rise of coercive politics and the disintegration of organisational cohesion. In order to explain this a number of important inter-locking variables need to be discussed: the mode of organisation of the BAC, the inflow of a significant amount of foreign funding into Oukasie, the repressive role of the state and the emergence of powerful individual rivals were all significant factors. An underlying factor was the socio-economic conditions prevailing in Oukasie. The pervasive unemployment and poverty in Oukasie interacted with all the above variables. Finally, it will be argued that the structural nature of the township as compared to the work-place generally makes organisation in the former context more difficult to sustain.

The mode of organisation adopted by the BAC had several ramifications. It adopted a vanguardist position and portrayed itself as necessarily the bearer of the township's interests. As such, it was not required to respond to demands to democratise the decision-making processes by drawing in other township organisations, especially the trade unions, the women's organisation, the youth, and the churches. Instead, decisions were generally made informally, often by the BAC core group. There is no doubt that many residents felt excluded and frustrated by this modus operandi and tried to persuade the committee to adopt a more formal and democratic approach. The BAC justified their method by arguing that a more open mode of operation would lead to informers feeding the BAC's strategies and tactics back to the security police. This would jeopardise the continued operation of the BAC as it would increase the likelihood of committee members being detained. The BAC core group also believed that nobody else could do a better job than they. They claimed that the initial mass meeting at which they had been elected gave them adequate legitimacy.

There was, of course, a kernel of truth in this justification. A substantial number of township residents did support them. In their first year of office in 1986, when the threat of removal was very imminent, they did serve the interests of the community very effectively. There is also little doubt that there were, and are, informers in the township and that the committee's mode of organisation ensured that the exact content of their discussions often remained confined to a small group of trusted confidantes. However, the committee suffered from the common vanguardist illusion - that they were indispensable, and failed to recognise that there were many other efficient and competant individuals in the township. Also, there was no legitimate reason not to operate in a more open fashion as a fundamental organisational premise was that all strategies were to be legal and peaceful.

In order to understand the reasons for the vanguardism that existed in Oukasie we need to go beyond the reasons given by the BAC. We need to look at the class location of the leadership core. The fact that the leadership was dominated by unemployed workers was a crucial variable, especially in the context of a township characterised by extensive long-term unemployment. Although there is little comparative research in this regard, the fact that unemployed workers have so much more time and that being a leader can be psychologically and financially rewarding, means that in many townships key positions are frequently filled by unemployed workers. This was apparent in the case of Crossroads (see Cole 1987) and in the squatter movements on the Rand between 1944 and 1952 portrayed by Bonner (1990). Seekings' (1989) work on Tumahole is pertinent. He concludes that with the movement of "unemployed activists" and "certain students" into key positions "political organisation in Tumahole was reorientated, and patterns of mobilisation changed". The reorientation took the form of an increasing vanguardism and increasing factionalism. Although Seekings analyses this shift

primarily in terms of the rise of the Tumahole Youth Congress within a context of intensifying state repression, the increasing dominance of the unemployed appears to have been an important variable explaining the shift away from "grass-roots organisation". The change in the composition of the leadership was accompanied by increasing alienation of the leadership from the masses, rivalry between leaders and corruption:

> it became increasingly difficult for activists to raise bail money for residents who had been arrested and charged. Many residents were sceptical of activists acting individually, and rumours spread. Funds were said to be misused, and some activists were not bailed out because, it was alleged, of disagreements between particular leaders. (Seekings, 1989:139).

In previous analyses of township politics it has been argued that for the working class a major problem in the urban terrain was the possible usurpation of working class leadership and demands by the petit bourgeoisie. (Foster, 1987: General Worker's Union, 1987). There is no doubt that in many townships the petit bourgeoisie will be dominant and that in these contexts urban politics will generally have a different trajectory to that outlined in the Oukasie context. However, in almost all analyses of urban politics the possible centrality of unemployed workers in township politics is omitted. Generally, there is a tendency to view employed and unemployed workers as a single entity and to assume that they share the same aspirations and respond similiarly politically. However, the psychological effects of unemployment are profound and can lead to the the unemployed often having a different perspective to employed workers and concomitantly, when it comes to urban politics, adopting different responses to situations.

Ashton (1986:137 and 138) referring to Warr (1983) outlines six primary effects of unemployment: 1) A lack of money and resultant anxiety resulting therefrom; 2) activity levels are diminished, there are few outlets for the output of energy and the development of skills; 3) the temporal structure starts breaking down as unemployed people lose their sense of time. They become bored and time loses its meaning; 4) boredom is accentuated by the lack of variety. The earning of income allows people to engage in a number of activities outside of the domestic realm; 5) the amount of social contacts is often reduced. Work often also gives the individual a sense of purpose; 6) finally work provides an important part of one's personal identity. People's contribution to and status in society is often measured by whether they are working or not. The family also measures one's contribution by virtue of the contribution to the household income.

The implication is that unemployment often leads to what Jahoda et al in their famous study of the unemployed in Mariental, a small town in Austria, called the "breakdown of a social personality". (Jahoda, et al, 1972:x).

Summarising the results of unemployment Warr (Warr, in Ashton, 1983:152). reaches a similar conclusion:

> the results are clear in respect of psychochological health. Experiences of strain, anxiety, depression and hopelessssness are likely to increase because of unemployment, and the level of aspiration, sense of autonomy and positive involvement in the world are all likely to be negatively affected.

An important point is that unemployment generally affects different groupings differently. Thus married women are best equipped to handle unemployment as they can use their domestic role to impose "a temporal structure on their daily activities". (Ashton, 1986:140). Those that have the "greatest difficulty in imposing a temporal structure are working class males" (Ibid). The working class male is beset by boredom. This is especially so in a rigidly patriachal culture as men cannot pass the time by becoming involved in domestic chores.

In Oukasie, men generally adopt a few specific modes of dealing with their situation. A small grouping still spends a significant amount of time looking for jobs in the formal sector. Almost every day they will walk to town and the Department of Manpower. A far greater number of males have lost hope of ever again finding employment in the formal sector. Many have been unemployed for five years or longer. They survive either through the help of family members or through informal sector activities. This involves selling items or services. These informal activities are often irregular and large amounts of time are spent not doing anything that can be defined as productive in the conventional sense. From mid-morning, groups of men pass their time chatting in makeshift shebeens and heavy drinking is a very common phenomenon.

Entering into urban politics gave the unemployed workers concerned a sense of purpose and was a very effective way of dealing with the trauma of unemployment. It was a way of fighting against "the breakdown of the social personality". In the first year especially, when the pressure on the community was severe, they spent a great deal of time strategising, showing diplomats and journalists around, liaising with the support groups and lawyers representing the community, organising meetings, etc. These activities helped the unemployed workers break the terrible tedium of the long days and retain a semblance of self-worth. Time once more became important, there were a variety of activities and social contacts, they were accorded respect by fellow residents, and a considerable amount of energy was expended on organising and learning new skills. In sum, it enabled them to regain a raison d'etre.

Another very important aspect was that entering urban politics gave these unemployed workers access to money. As mentioned, money was collected from the community and outside agencies for expenses incurred. It is probable that a proportion was used for personal consumption on the basis that it was the their right as

township leaders to draw a stipend, especially if unemployed. The use of positions of power in urban contexts for accumalation is not uncommon. Bonner (1990) illustrates how this occured in the squatter camps on the Rand in the forties and fifties and Cole (1987) has shown that a similar phenomenon occurred on a large scale in Crossroads.

This outline represents a context in which, especially for unemployed workers, the retention or gaining of public office is highly prized. There is a great deal at stake. I would argue that for an employed worker, gaining or holding public office is less prized. The different structural position in which he finds himself means that he has a regular income, has limited time, is engaged in different activities and has social contacts outside the domestic sphere. His personal identity is moulded through other means. Not gaining or losing power in the urban sphere will not represent a serious setback. In stark contrast, an unemployed worker has a considerable amount to gain or to lose both existentially and financially, especially with the inflow of foreign funding. This in turn, can have a profound effect on the way urban politics is conducted.

The Oukasie case illustrates that there may be an intense fear of losing power which can lead to a reluctance to tolerate dissent and open discussion on more controversial issues. The real conflict emerged, however, when the BAC's hold on power started slipping. As mentioned, for the first eighteen months or so, the level of conflict in Oukasie was minimal. The leadership was accepted and did not have to embark on undemocratic or coercive means to retain power. However, towards the end of 1987 the BAC, mainly because of its vanguardist approach, was being seriously challenged but they refused to accept the validity of this challenge and would not hold new elections. Their refusal to compromise or back down, combined with the existence of an oppositional grouping very desirous of power by whatever means, culminated in the violent clashes outlined earlier.

Ultimately, the vanguardist strategy proved to be extremely short-sighted as it gave extensive ammunition to the embroyonic opposition that began to emerge in late 1987. The opposition accused the old committee of being corrupt, dictatorial and undemocratic and demanded that new elections be held. The issue of corruption became a key weapon of the opposition in their efforts to garner support. At each public meeting they asked the treasurer to provide the community with a breakdown of expenditure of the monies that had been collected from residents and from outside donors. This was never convincingly done. The extent of corruption is unclear. However, the terribly poor financial records and rumours about large undisclosed sums made it easy for the opposition to accuse the BAC of corruption and maladministration. It certainly resulted in the BAC losing a significant amount of support.

The struggle around monies was heightened by the influx of foreign monies to fund particular projects. Sizeable amounts

flowed in to fund the community creche and the advice office. The sizeable inflow of foreign funding meant that persons in leadership positions potentially had access to large sums of money and a major source of conflict developed around who was to have access to this money. The BAC was determined to hang on to control arguing that only they were capable of ensuring that the money was used properly. The rival committee which emerged towards the end of 1987, argued that the old commitee's track record as regards financial management showed that they were not capable of administering such large amounts. The conflict over who should be signatories for the advice office monies resulted in a six month delay in its opening and contributed to a great deal of bitterness and resentment. (Discussions with advice office workers).

As indicated previously another reason for the disintegration of cohesion was due to the strategies adopted by the state. In sum they were aimed at making life in Oukasie as untenable as possible and thereby to foster demoralisation and discontent. Some of the strategies in this regard are discussed under the heading "why some residents moved?". An important strategy used by the local security police was to sow the seeds of suspicion everywhere, intensifying demoralisation and accelerating the move towards vangaurdist politics. The problem of informers and agent provacuteurs in the urban context has to be examined against the backdrop of poverty and unemployment. There is little doubt that is easier to place agents in the township then it is to place them in the work-place. In the urban context, it is common that some of the key leaders are unemployed and desperately short of money. At times the state will ensure this by destroying whatever informal activity the unemployed worker may be engaged in. These individuals become prime targets of the repressive apparatuses endeavour to infiltrate the leadership of township organisation. Oukasie was no exception in this regard. The two committees were constantly stating that the opposing committee had spies within its ranks. It is probable that the police were successful in penetrating at least one of the respective committees and although it was difficult to obtain conclusive evidence in this regard there were some indicators. For example, it was impossible to bring the two committees together despite constant attempts to resolve the conflict through mediation. A couple of key individuals on either side blocked any conciliatory measures. Another indication was the failure to resolve the violent conflict which erupted between the two committees towards the end of 1988. Various peace talks were held, however, whenever it appeared that a break-through was imminent somebody from one of the two sides would provoke a rekindling of the hostilities. Eventually the peace talks broke down completely and the two committees each with a loyal group of supporters from the ranks of the youth embarked on violent attacks on one another. These attacks culminated in the brutal slaying by persons unknown of the powerful chairperson of the old committee, Marshall Buys. In the same confrontation, the treasurer of the old committee, Moshe Mahlaela, was seriously hurt. As yet nobody has been charged.

The state has sat in the wings and let this all unfold. Little action has been taken against any members of the warring factions. This has ensured that those intent on winning the power struggle through violence have been able to pursue this path with abandon. Intense personal rivalries have been sorted out on the battle-field.

As mentioned, another key state strategy has been to be unrelenting as regards the removal. The ever-present threat and resultant insecurity has contributed significantly to the breakdown of social cohesion in the community. No committee could ever claim to have been victorious.

A Final Note: The Difficulties of Organising in the Township versus the Work-place

The Oukasie situation in some ways captures the difficulties and complexities of organising in the township versus the work-place and, as importantly, maintaining organisation in these respective spheres. In contrast to the urban scenario, the trade union movement in Brits has remained strong. It can be argued that the contemporary South African work-place has certain characteristics which makes initial organisation and the maintenance of this organisation easier. The factory is a bounded space to which the same individuals constantly return. Individuals work in the same areas and are thus intimately linked to a group of workers. Fellow workers have a very good sense of what an individual worker is capable of and whether he/she is stepping out of line. The constituency to organise is not spread over vast distances, the same people are there day in day out, and their interests are reasonably uniform. The class location of the membership is similar. Everybody earns an income and this makes it less likely that a worker will desperately endeavour to hang on to power or join the ranks of the security police. Furthermore, workers selected for leadership positions generally have little opportunity to use their position for their own gain and secondly, because they earn a regular income, will have less aspiration to do so. Once a factory is organised it is generally possible for the membership, if they so desire, to keep control of the leadership and ensure accountability. If shop stewards do not carry out their portfolio in an adequate fashion the structures in place make it probable that they will be voted out of office. Generally, it is relatively easy for workers who are dissatisfied with their representative/s to dislodge them. The workers' adversary is a lot more accessible and easier to confront. The shop stewards can at any point organise a meeting with management and hopefully sort out problems through negotiation. Finally, the possibility, if all else fails, of winning demands by collectively withdrawing labour power makes the need for organisation more concrete and makes the winning of demands more possible. These characteristics greatly facilitate communication and the ability to organise.

In contrast, organising in a township and maintaining

organisation as well as accountability of the leadership is more complex. There is a diversity of classes and class interests and the constituency is far more spread out. Even if there is door-to-door organisation it is probable that each time an activist visits a house he may be faced with a different person or the resident, because of domestic duties, may not have any time to converse. The space to be organised is far more fluid with individuals constantly moving within it. In some ways this fluidity, in its effects, is similar to the shift system. As Nichols and Beynon (1977: 110) state, shift-work runs

> against the development of ... collectivism. ... At any one time half the labour force is either at work or asleep while the other half is preparing to go to work or getting used to being at home.

In the urban terrain, if organisation is established, it is often difficult to maintain. A prime difficulty is to create workable, durable structures for this purpose. It was thought that the setting up of street and area committees would resolve the problem. However, in almost all areas it would appear that urban leadership has found it difficult to keep these committees going. Of course a primary reason for this has been the role of the state which generally crushes any endeavour to create and maintain these structures. In the work-place the shop steward system has been generally accepted by capital and sections of the state and, as such, is to a great extent insulated from attack. In contrast the street committee system has been rejected by the state, is totally unprotected by capital and is thus far more vulnerable to state repression and attack. In many situations where street committees have been established the state has generally actively tried to destroy them by detaining or severely harassing the leadership thereby weakening these structures and often precipitating their demise. Oukasie was no exception in this regard. As soon as there was talk of setting up street and area committees, repression was stepped up.

The state, especially that section which has the power to alter policy, is a lot less accessible than management and this further complicates urban politics. Obtaining a meeting with a section of the state bureaucracy that has real power to address the issue at hand is exceptionally difficult. In the case of Oukasie the leadership, after a great deal of time and effort, ultimately obtained a meeting with the Director-General of the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning. He listened to the impassioned pleas of the residents and at the end stated that he had no power, but would convey the views of the residents to the Minister.

At present Oukasie is endeavouring to recover from the bitter conflict which has raged over the last eighteen months. The trade union movement and the United Democratic Front leadership have stepped in, in an attempt to overcome the bitter acrimony. The new BAC, after an initial flurry of democratic activity, lapsed into a similar style of politics to that practised by the

original BAC. If anything the new BAC became more repressive and authoritarian than the leadership it replaced. The leadership of the new BAC is also dominated by unemployed workers. In the South African context urban politics is hazardous terrain. There are structural features which ensure that this is so.

Notes

1. I worked closely with the Oukasie leadership and residents from January 1986 until December 1988 whilst employed as a field-worker for the Transvaal Rural Action Committee. Many of my conclusions and observations are drawn from this period.

2. I have not researched the relationship between the tenants and the stand-holders. However, it appears that it was not a major issue. In the three years I did field-work in the area it was never on the agenda of issues.

3. All the interviews referred to were conducted by the author in 1987 and 1988.

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