

## CHAPTER 10

"WHO COMES TO WHOM? THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND  
SHANTYTOWN LEADERSHIP 1953-1958"

### The Changing Nature of Shantytown Struggle

With the development of the Cato Manor Emergency Camp, the shack community had lost the struggle to remain free of municipal authority and gain increased security of tenure over the shacklands. It appears that with the development of the Emergency Camp many residents "realized that we had to wake up. Kwa Muhle was upon us ... coming to us."<sup>1</sup> Realizing that shack society faced the more assertive and confident power of the state, residents began to develop strategies through which they might gain increased security. Despite the uncongenial conditions of life in the Emergency Camp, the development of this Emergency Camp was to be partly responsible for the growth of new political strategies among the residents of the shantytowns.

As with the later 1940s, many of the actions of local residents would continue to be sporadic and unorganized. Many such actions had no direct intention other than to "irritate and annoy."<sup>2</sup> Municipal officials would be infuriated by the way in which untraced persons would sabotage basic infrastructural amenities. Toilets would be smashed up, water taps left deliberately flowing and stormwater drain covers stolen, or household refuse, stones and detritus thrown into drains.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, barricades would "suddenly appear" across major roadways within the shack complex.<sup>4</sup> Another "favourite trick" involved placing bricks in a paper bag on the roads and watching vehicles drive over what appeared to be an empty bag.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, municipal officials would be subject to harassment and ridicule and the occasional stoning.<sup>6</sup> Likewise drivers of municipal buses and, much later, municipal refuse trucks, some of which were brand new, could expect that, their vehicles could be stoned. Peter Cooke, the municipal official in charge of shack demolition in the area would often be insulted and mocked. Residents shouted his derogatory nickname, or called him "white trash."<sup>7</sup> Police forays into the shantytowns had for long faced organized resistance. Whenever police vans moved into the shack sprawl the children would raise the call. Shouting

- 
1. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 19 July 1985.
  2. Interview with Mr S Selby, 19 August 1980.
  3. Interview with Mr S Bourquin. While making no reference to sabotage, see for example MNAD; H2/CM, vol 7; Acting City Engineer-City Medical Officer of Health, 8 October 1958.
  4. Interview with Mr J Mnguni, 20 July 1985.
  5. *Ibid.*
  6. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.
  7. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 19 July 1985.

"Meleko! Meleko!" the call would be carried on through the shack settlements warning residents to hide any illicit commodities. Residents would also attack the hated police informers who would guide police raids into a particular area.<sup>8</sup> After police raids into the shantytowns, police guarding the "crocodiles" of suspects or arrested persons which walked under guard back to the Cato Manor police station would be subject to stonings and verbal abuse.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, residents would attempt to "charge" police escorting the lines of "prisoners" walking through the shantytown back to the police station: "they were wanting to release their friends and go back to the shebeen!"<sup>10</sup> As Dorothy Nyembe remembers, "it was in our bones to stop the boers".<sup>11</sup>

Such spontaneous and sporadic acts often created further hardships for residents. Barricades would delay the already inadequate bus service. Blocked toilets had detrimental effects on health, sanitation and domestic routines. Verbal abuse hurled at police undertaking liquor raids could often rebound against those residents whose houses were being searched: "it does not take too much to make the police scared. The children would start shouting at the police and then the cops start to break your place down."<sup>12</sup>

These actions were the visible manifestation of an anger and confusion which many residents felt towards the more assertive presence of the police and municipality.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless in many cases incidents like those attempts to abuse municipal or police officials had a more clearly developed sense of purpose than was sometimes realized. A resident says that "the tsotsis kept us on the boil."<sup>14</sup> Colin Shum recalls that "on some days you could walk around the area and you could just feel something was wrong. There had been a raid and people had stoned the police, or robbed a bus driver or stoned a corporation truck."<sup>15</sup>

As a result of such provocations, which municipal officials referred to as "minor incidents", the level of generalized militance within the shantytowns was often raised in ways which later could lead to more organized resistance and revolt.<sup>16</sup> Such was the case with the 1949 Riots, the attacks on Indian-owned property during late 1953, the beerhall riots of 1959, and the killing of nine policemen in 1960.

Such incidents would continue to occur regularly during the history of the Emergency Camp, but they did not lead to any widespread and organized resistance until much later in the 1950s. Up until this period, in spite of the deteriorating social conditions in the Emergency Camp, there were to be no cases of widespread

---

8. KCAV, interview with Mrs A Mnguni, 19 July 1979.

9. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

10. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 12 May 1985.

11. *Ibid.* See also MNAD; H2/CM, vol 7; Superintendent, Cato Manor Emergency Camp-Manager, MNAD, 17 December 1957.

12. Interview with Mrs T Phewa, 31 June 1985.

13. See, for example, C van Onselen, *Chibaro African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*, (London, 1976), pp 242-243.

14. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 31 June 1985.

15. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

16. Interview with Mr D McCullough, 5 April 1982.

rioting where established municipal authority in the area was in any way challenged. For example a resident recalls that passengers travelling on a municipal bus "nearly started to riot and kill the bus driver" after the driver had been robbed of fare money by a well known petty thief. The thief was never reported to the police but there was also not that spontaneous heightened sense of rebellion which was so characteristic of the shack-dwellers' behaviour during the later 1940s.<sup>17</sup>

To state that rioting on the scale which occurred during January 1949 can rarely be repeated, or that the increasingly more powerful presence of the municipality made such developments unlikely, is only partially correct. It is significant that despite shack residents resenting most forms of external authority, it was only with the development of the Emergency Camp that a more structured leadership element emerged in the shacklands. Furthermore residents themselves began to gain a clearer sense of the need for internal organization and long-term strategies. For example, after the municipal toilets in the Two Sticks area had been sabotaged, there was no spontaneous outbreak of militant destructiveness. Instead, a group of local women formed under the leadership of Congress Women's Leaguer Dorothy Nyembe. Using the question of toilets as a point of entry into wider issues, Dorothy Nyembe led the deputation to see Mr Loquet, then Superintendent of the Emergency Camp, "to tell him about all the things that the women wanted the municipality to do for us."<sup>18</sup>

Right from the start of the Emergency Camp the municipality also faced increasingly more organized and calculated resistance. In 1953 the municipality desired to persuade residents of the Thusini settlement in the Haviland Road area to move into the Emergency Camp. Fearing that forms of forcible harassment like "pulling down doors" would simply result in attacks on municipal officials, municipal officials resorted to "vigorous ... verbal pressure" and "marking of shacks with paint."<sup>19</sup> Residents resisted such attempts at resettlement with a clear response: municipal paint markings were painted over.<sup>20</sup>

In 1953, Isaac Zwane, a leading member of the Zulu Hlanganani and a local shacklord owning shacks accommodating over a hundred "families", refused to move into the Emergency Camp and led this particular community's struggle against the municipality. Residents refused to move unless everyone was allowed to move together "so as to retain their community relationship." Already confronting the intractable difficulties of restructuring the basis of shack accommodation in the Emergency Camp and desiring to clear shantytowns outside of the Emergency Camp, the municipality agreed to these and similar conditions demanded by other shack communities.<sup>21</sup>

Other acts of defiance included non-payment of rents, for periods of up to six months. African residents claimed that they had paid advance rents to the Indian landowners.<sup>22</sup> However such tactics were

---

17. Interview with Mr T Phewa, 31 June 1985.

18. Interview with Ms D Nyembe, 10 July 1986.

19. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 4; Memorandum, Cato Manor general, 21 October 1953.

20. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

21. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 5; handwritten memorandum, 23 November 1953 and Superintendent, Cato Manor Emergency Camp-Manager, MNAD, 1 April 1954.

22. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 4; Superintendent, Cato Manor Emergency Camp-Manager, MNAD, 8 September 1953 and Superintendents, Cato Manor Emergency Camp- Manager, MNAD, 9 October 1953.

merely either of temporary benefit or were simply resistance to the means whereby shack settlements were reconstituted inside the Emergency Camp. Such tactics provided no clearly valuable long-term strategy for resisting municipal authority and transforming shack life in ways beneficial to residents.

During the course of the development of the Emergency Camp only one clearly constituted organization or grouping would continually refuse to deal with the municipality. From its inception the Zulu Hlanganani persistently fought for the rights of illicit traders to continue their activities in the Emergency Camp. Gaining the assistance of lawyer Rowley Arenstein, whom the Zulu Hlanganani selected "because he had not represented the Indians" at the commission of enquiry into the 1949 Riots, the Zulu Hlanganani was to be remarkably successful in resisting municipal efforts to prosecute illicit traders.<sup>23</sup> As Rowley Arenstein recalls, "it was so funny to see case after case being thrown out of court. The City Council had enormous difficulty in establishing the comparatively simple issue of what illegal trading was."<sup>24</sup>

The conflict between this organization and the municipality continued through the 1950s. Some strategies of resistance were fairly simple: "you just said that this was not a shop, 'Where are the windows, where are the cash registers, where are the advertisements? Hey?'"<sup>25</sup> Acting out the parts of municipal official, shackshop trader and the trader's lawyer, that most artful of dodgers, J J Shabalala, recalls:

... when the City Health I think ... he came charging... 'I must charge, the samp is here, mealie meal is here, while everything is dirt.' The attorney asks [the shackshop trader] 'You rent the house from somebody?' [Shopkeeper nods his head, affirming that he rents the shack, whereupon the attorney asks the shopkeeper] 'You find somebody is loading ...the shelves?' ...There is no shop there. ... You can come and see, there is no name in shop, ... you come and you find the children sleeping right on top of the samp, and then somebody is putting a dish in the same samp and napkins and everything just mixed up. How can you shop there? Somebody is just buying and [storing] everything!<sup>26</sup>

Other forms of resistance were as complex and effective. One of the Zulu Hlanganani's activities was called the Zulu Hlanganani Buying Club, which would distribute goods to members of the club. Under this legal, but disingenuous guise, individual shopkeepers continued to trade despite continual police and municipal harassment and the protests of some legal African traders in the area.<sup>27</sup>

The buying club was simply the Zulu Hlanganani's wholesaling operation. Buying in many cases together, individual shopkeepers kept what they referred to as the 'Indidane book'. This was a hard-covered exercise book, "the book of confusion", filled with nonsense written in Zulu.<sup>28</sup> The book was however a veritable clay tablet of great importance. Whenever municipal inspectors tried to prosecute shopkeepers for

---

23. Interview with Mr H C Sibisi, 29 November 1983.

24. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

25. Interview with Mr B Mnqadi, 29 October 1986.

26. Interview with Mr J J Shabalala, 28 October 1986.

27. MNAD; Cato Manor Welfare and Development Board memorandum, 8 September 1953.

28. Interview with Mr J J Shabalala, 28 October 1986.

illegal trading, the retort of shopkeepers was simple: "No! No! I am not a skelm. All are my members. It is written so in the Indidane book! 'What is this book?' The inspectors did not know what was happening."<sup>29</sup> As J J Shabalala recalls, with the 'Indidane' book illicit individual traders "really wrote ... confusion."<sup>30</sup> By the end of 1955 the municipality acknowledged that there were still at least 58 "illegal dealers within the camp."<sup>31</sup>

Although many of the members of the Zulu Hlanganani would become legal traders in the Emergency Camp, others simply extended their own illicit activities. In spite of their public protestations and guile operations were manifestly those of individual traders.<sup>32</sup> With the municipality anxious to control the number of licensed trading ventures in the area, avoid "over trading" and reluctant to build further municipal trading blocks, there was probably little option but for illicit traders to totally reject all attempts to eliminate the ventures.<sup>33</sup>

However among these illicit traders were those "hotheads" like Isaac Zwane who refused to accept that the municipality had any authority to determine who should be permitted to trade in the shantytown.<sup>34</sup> Ruth Shabane remembers Zwane's: "he was the one who said that we should have nothing to do with Kwa Muhle. We should decide these things ourselves. He was hot."<sup>35</sup> But even for Zwane non-recognition of municipal authority was not part of any broader strategy of non-collaboration. Both Zwane, and J J Shabalala, were members of the Cato Manor Welfare and Development Board.

Residents recall that when Isaac Zwane succeeded in gaining municipal permission for all those living in the shacks which he owned being permitted to re-establish their community within the Emergency Camp, Zwane "was taking his flock away from Egypt."<sup>36</sup> Such recollections indicate a change of strategy amongst shack dwellers. In the late 1940s shack residents had striven to remain outside the authority of the municipality by depicting the growing Mkhumbane shack sprawl as the chosen land into which the scorned Africans trying to live in the city could settle and establish a permanent urban residence. Now, with the advent of municipal authority, these same biblical homilies were used to explain the movement from isolated shack areas into the Emergency Camp.

Changing use of old testament images was also apparent among the trading class who would call on people to remember the "bad old days" when "we were in the wilderness."<sup>37</sup> Many of these images can be seen as the attempt by a new trading class to justify their increasing wealth by evoking images of a militant communal

---

29. Interview with Mr J Mnguni, 20 July 1986.

30. Interview with Mr J J Shabalala, 28 October 1986.

31. MNAD; Cope Trading Report, September 1955.

32. See for example interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

33. MNAD; Cope Trading Report, September 1955.

34. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

35. Interview with Ms R Shabane, 18 November 1986.

36. Interview with Mrs T Phewa, 6 April 1985.

37. Ilanga lase Natal, 21 February 1953.

populism. However, there were many who, whilst still seeing themselves as "the forgotten tribe" and often singing the psalm 'Lord Speak to Us', accepted the reality of municipal power and sought to gain strategic advantages out of the Emergency Camp.<sup>38</sup> Such a strategy was to have much in common with the manner in which the ANC attempted to acquire influence in the shantytowns.

### The ANC and Shantytown Leadership

Prior to the June 1959 Beerhall riots, the ANC had for long attempted to increase membership and develop a powerful branch structure in Mkhumbane. During the later 1940s and very early 1950s, the ANC had very little popular support or organization in Mkhumbane or anywhere else in the city. This was despite AWG Champion believing that his opponents were encouraging "Congress branches in every hostel and street corner in Durban with a view to organizing factions hostile to me" and optimistic Youth League accounts of their own support.<sup>39</sup> The majority of residents in Mkhumbane had for long rejected Champion. However this did not mean that the ANC under the leadership of A J Luthuli and the Congress Youth Leaguers acquired support in the area.

Even prior to his election as Natal leader of the ANC, Luthuli had placed great importance on the organisation of support in Mkhumbane. Stanford Mtolo remembers: "Msizini was there. Congress had them. In Lamont and Chesterville the people were hot. But everyone wanted Mkhumbane."<sup>40</sup> During the course of the first meeting of the ANC in Durban after Luthuli's election as Natal leader, Luthuli set aside a whole morning during which he "sent" Congress members into the shacklands to organize.<sup>41</sup>

Although being constantly "scared of us in Mkhumbane:they remembered the Indian African Riots very well", many ANC leaders believed that there was a political quality within the shack residents.<sup>42</sup> As a resident remembers, this feeling was not unreserved:

Champion was I think scared, yes actually scared of us. We lived next to him, but we would never listen to him. That was out of the question. Now this was the same with the Youth Leaguers. They were different from Champion of course. But they were different from people who kill 'coolies'. But these people were real leaders and they did not mind being joked at. Once when the congress came to Mkhumbane, ... [name deleted] walked around as if he was on a tour of inspection. 'Hey, mnumzane, you look like Verwoerd!' They did not really mind.<sup>43</sup>

---

38. *Ibid.*, 28 January 1958 and interview with Mrs T Phewa, 6 April 1985.

39. *Bantu World*, 17 May 1952. For optimistic accounts of the growth of the A N C see *The Guardian*, 10 July 1952. For more accurate estimates of A N C power in Durban see CKM; 2:DA 19/1:44, List of Branches, 1949 and *Bantu World* 5 January 1952.

40. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

41. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 11 August 1951.

42. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 7 July 1985.

43. Interview with Mr G Bhengu, 21 February 1982. It is significant that in this account, which may be apocryphal, neither the subservient word 'baas', nor usual respects connoted by the greeting 'u Baba' are used. Instead the more neutral 'mnumzane'.

The reference to Verwoerd almost certainly derives from an incident which residents remember from the time when Verwoerd first visited the shantytowns in the early 1950s. The Minister of Native Affairs had "looked very stern" and had refused to "shake hands" with the members of the CMW&DB who had lined up to greet the Minister. Instead, Verwoerd had bowed.<sup>44</sup> While perhaps a little harsh but not vindictive, the joke accurately portrayed the very real class differences between many established ANC leaders and the Mkhumbane proletariat. For those listening carefully, such references indicated an independence of spirit which was to cause problems for the ANC.

Leading ANC members believed that the residents could become more closely involved in the organization. Luthuli believed that the militancy of the shack population could strengthen the local ANC.<sup>45</sup> He constantly impressed upon ANC organizers the need to develop a support basis in the shantytown. Membership could only be gained through the ANC focussing on the crucial day-to-day issues which faced shantytown residents. Having gained support, it was then possible, as Stanford Mtolo recalls, to "rely on the people of Mkhumbane when we needed them" - during the large mass campaigns planned for the later 1950s.<sup>46</sup>

Luthuli was continually visiting the shacklands. Luthuli was also a close friend of Ashmon Nene, a shacklord and, probably, the "Congress stalwart" in the shantytowns.<sup>47</sup> A "very fierce African nationalist", many viewed Nene as "the power behind [Luthuli's] throne." Whilst Nene himself disavows such a role, it is clear that whenever Luthuli visited Durban, he often stayed with Nene in the Two Sticks area of Mkhumbane.<sup>48</sup>

The ANC which elected Chief Luthuli was, in many important ways, a new organization. As one member recalls, "we took Congress over, it was the Congress Youth League now stepping into the father Congress."<sup>49</sup> Having a core leadership that was, whilst having taken over the ANC in Natal, often relatively unknown and sometimes rejected, perhaps politically inexperienced and certainly lacking in any really effective subaltern class hardly helped matters.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore the ANC was continually short of funds and willing, unpaid organizers. Financial and administrative chaos reigned in the offices at Lakhani Chambers.<sup>51</sup> In 1950 the Congress Youth League struggled to provide financial or legal assistance to those Africans who had actively supported the 'Stay Away' call.<sup>52</sup> During the Defiance Campaign, the ANC was unable to afford to pay the

---

44. Interview with Mr A Nene, 26 January 1984 and personal communication, Mr C N Shum.

45. Interview with Mr A Nene, 26 January 1984.

46. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 22 June 1985.

49. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983. See also interview with Mr M B Yengwa by Ms B Naidoo, n.d.

50. E Feit, *African Opposition in South Africa* (Stanford, 1967).

51. Interviews with Mr R Arenstein, 18 July 1985 and Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985. For similar general analysis see Lodge, *Black Politics*, p 70 and 74.

52. See, for example, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 November 1950.

fines of arrested members and relied on the financial assistance of the NIC.<sup>53</sup> Financial difficulties would continue to bedevil the organization throughout the 1950s.<sup>54</sup>

Facing such constraints, the ANC's organizing drive in the Mkhumbane shacklands was, as in other areas of the city, almost solely dependent upon the abilities of unpaid members and "volunteers" resident in the shantytown.<sup>55</sup> Most of the ANC organizers in the shantytown were already well known in the area. Many had established leadership positions in the shack settlements in the later 1940s. Such people were often popular, assertive and charismatic personalities. Even among male residents of Mkhumbane, Dorothy Nyembe is remembered for

Walking around with her raven's [crow] tooth bracelets, Uhuru dresses and a sharp tongue. She was not married and she went for us. She was a teacher turned to volcano. This was what she would do. 'Where are you going, come and join the Congress'. People would laugh, but they were scared. She was the one to listen to.<sup>56</sup>

Others like Ashmon Nene are remembered for "looking and speaking like a king, a priest, in shabby clothes".<sup>57</sup> Esau Makatini, a shantytown leader of long standing and descendant of the militant le Fleur family, was "the real king, with his stick, and he would just walk around, but when you spoke then it was you who must say something."<sup>58</sup>

By the time of the Defiance Campaign the ANC's organizing drive had yielded certain positive results. Attending the 1952 annual conference of the ANC in Natal were twenty-three delegates from Mkhumbane, which at that time was treated as a single branch. At this time the ANC only had 994 members in the city, of whom 160 lived in the Mkhumbane area.<sup>59</sup>

Immediately after the Defiance Campaign, the ANC began to encourage the growth of separate branches in the Mkhumbane area. During the planning of the Defiance Campaign, many local ANC members, including Luthuli, seriously doubted whether the local ANC was sufficiently powerful to embark on a campaign of defiance.<sup>60</sup> The ANC's alliance with the Natal Indian Congress was among many Africans in the city. The

53. Interview with Mr A Nene, 26 January 1984. Nene was to lead one of the last 'volunteer' groups during this campaign. During the early part of this campaign those arrested refused on principle to pay fines and preferred imprisonment. This policy was later changed. See also Kuper, Passive Resistance, Chapter 5.

54. See for example CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19: 30/13; A N C (Natal) special executive committee meeting, 6 June 1952; 2:DA 19: 30/13; A N C (Natal) executive committee meeting 20 December 1952 and 2:DA 19/1:30/9; A N C (Natal) executive committee meeting 21-22 January 1956.

55. For similar analysis see Lodge, Black Politics, p 75.

56. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 14 July 1985. See also Ilanga lase Natal, 7 June 1958.

57. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 5 May 1985.

58. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 14 July 1985.

59. CKM;reel 3B;2:DA 19:30/13; A N C (Natal), Minutes of Annual Conference, 1-2 November 1952.

60. A J Luthuli, Let My People Go, (London, 1982), p 100.



ANC was in considerable disarray and poorly organized.<sup>61</sup> This became particularly evident during the course of the Defiance Campaign.<sup>62</sup>

The ANC's renewed organizing efforts were heavily influenced by the so called 'M' Plan. This strategy was developed by Mandela in the wake of the ANC's failure to build a mass organization during the Defiance Campaign. However, many leading ANC members in Durban, whilst accepting the need to "decentralize" branches, desired to "adapt" the 'M' Plan to meet local conditions.<sup>63</sup> There was a continual tension within the ANC in Durban over the dissolution of existing branches. Although supporting the 'M' Plan, ANC leaders in the city would be ambivalent about the benefits of the consequent division of their support bases into many different branches.<sup>64</sup>

There was however, initially at least, no such tension within the ANC over the formation of smaller branches in the shantytowns of Mkhumbane. At the time of the Defiance Campaign there was only one branch in the area, the Two Sticks branch led by Ashmon Nene and Dorothy Nyembe. Nyembe recalls,

After the Defiance Campaign we had to start moving into all the areas of the slums. We had to start new branches and get people into Congress so that they can fight for Congress in their area branches. It was no good just having members, we needed branches.<sup>65</sup>

Local Congress supporters believed that the Mkhumbane area was ideally suited to such a strategy, which in effect called for the creation of localized "cells" or street committees.<sup>66</sup> The Mkhumbane shacklands had always been divided into many distinct settlements. In 1960 Colin Shum wrote,

My opinion as a result of very close contact with Cato Manor over a long period, is that the population felt that Cato Manor is a place they have built themselves ... One of the many indications of this is the existence of so many place names which in my opinion seem to indicate an attachment to the area in which they live.<sup>67</sup>

It was these small shack settlements which formed the basis of local leadership power during the later 1940s. Such localized leadership patterns were somewhat fractured by the formation of the Nogandayo, which was a

---

61. Bantu World, 5 January 1952.

62. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 1 August 1985.

63. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19: 30/13; A N C (Natal), Annual Report, 1952-1953. See also Lodge, Black Politics, p 75-76. Hirson is partially incorrect for stating that the 'M' Plan was only implemented in the Eastern Cape. See B Hirson "The Defiance Campaign, 1952: Social Struggle or Party Strategem?", Searchlight South Africa, no 1, p 101. The 'M' Plan was accepted in Durban but only really implemented in the very late 1950s.

64. See Lodge, Black Politics, p 76.

65. Interview with Ms D Nyembe, 10 July 1984.

66. For the functioning of these cell structures see interviews with Mr A Masango, 30 November 1986 and Mr H Nxasana, 26 May 1986. See also Lodge, Black Politics, pp 75-76.

67. Shum Papers; C N Shum Memorandum submitted to the Defense, 1960.

hastily formed and short-lived grouping of "leading citizens", the nascent trading class, that was neither elected nor based in particular shantytowns in the Mkhumbane area.<sup>68</sup>

With the establishment of the CMWDB in 1953, the municipality divided the shacklands up into various electoral wards. The municipality demarcated electoral wards according to the existing settlement areas within the Emergency Camp. It was this ward system that Nene and others desired to use as the key basis for the growth of the ANC in the shacklands.

In 1954 there were four ANC branches in the Mkhumbane area. Two of these branches, the Draaihoek and New Look branches seemed to be defunct. The only functioning branches were in Ashmon Nene's Two Sticks and in Ridgeview. Among those who attended the ANC's annual conference in Natal in 1954 were approximately ten Mkhumbane residents, some of whom came from Draaihoek and New Look. The organization was even more weakly organized in Mkhumbane than in 1952.<sup>69</sup>

By 1956, the sorry state of the organizational growth of the ANC in Mkhumbane was being recognized. Even the Two Sticks branch, led by Ashmon Nene and Dorothy Nyembe, was in trouble. The branch had few members, and held no regular meetings; when meetings were convened attendance was minimal. Meetings of the Ridgeview branch were poorly attended, and many had failed to renew their membership. As Ashmon Nene commented at the end of one meeting: "all organizers must go around each house getting new members. Present members never attend."<sup>70</sup>

While the ANC was endeavouring to organize in the shantytowns, it was also beginning to acquire the support of an increasing number of the already established local leadership. The political character of the ANC in the shantytowns was in many important ways to be shaped by the attitudes of such people.

The first indication of the changing views of that small entrepreneurial group who constituted the "first leaders" came with the tendency of many who had dallied in the politics of the Bantu National Congress to move, often slowly, into "the Congress."<sup>71</sup> It rapidly became clear to many that the Bantu National Congress was an abortive organization that held no promise of advancing the political future of the entrepreneur class in the shantytowns. Giving a clear indication of their class consciousness and, often, a repudiation of their own backgrounds, some would derogatively refer to the Bantu National Congress as being "for people who lived by their wits", "herbalists", "bush lawyers" and other small time "crooks".<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, it was clear that the Bantu National Congress lacked any popular support. For those who perceived a future political career through the Bantu National Congress, the behaviour of those hundreds and often thousands who attended Defiance

---

68. Interview with Mr S Selby, 12 August 1980.

69. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19: 20/1-6; A N C (Natal), names and addresses of delegates to the provincial conference. As a result of poor handwriting and poor microfilm copy, it is difficult to estimate exactly how many residents from Mkhumbane attended this conference.

70. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19:30/18, A N C (Natal), minutes of annual conference, 8-9 October 1956.

71. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

72. Interviews with Mr M O D Kunene, 19 July 1985 and Mbutho Papers, interview 5.

Campaign meetings in the city must surely have been salutary. During the course of this campaign, ANC organizers and speakers were "surprised", albeit pleasantly, with the way in which those attending meetings would vigorously support speakers' condemnation of the claims of the Bantu National Congress.<sup>73</sup>

During the 1950s, it became clear to the African urban elite and their ambitious aspirant colleagues that the state had very little desire to provide such persons with a legal city status different from the African proletariat.<sup>74</sup> For the already exempted class of Africans and those entrepreneurs and educated Africans living in the city such developments produced a profound disillusionment. Such feelings of rejection became manifested in ambiguous ways.

Along with such feelings came an awareness among African traders in Mkhumbane of the substantial differences between their desire to trade in the shantytowns and support for state apartheid policies *per se*. To such persons the strategic demands of the Zulu Hlanganani for Africans to be given the right to trade in the shacklands was one issue. Accepting the pro-apartheid stance of the Bantu National Congress was quite another issue.<sup>75</sup>

However, ambitious local leaders also faced pressure from other Africans in the city. As workers discussed the new pass laws many would gleefully comment on the diminished legal status of the exempted elite. Champion would be mimicked, as would Congress Youth Leaguers. Oscar Nkwanyana, a resident in the Somsteu Road Mens' Location, was referred to as the "barrack peacock."<sup>76</sup> Other Youth Leaguers who, like Oscar Nkwanyana, held degrees or other educational qualifications, were castigated as "people with tails to their names."<sup>77</sup>

Such vilification made African leaders in the city conscious of the potential instability of their power base. For the majority of such leaders, including many Congress Youth Leaguers, their initial power came through sports or religious associations in local communities, townships, hostels, or through their ability and willingness to provide professional services to an African population otherwise having pitifully little access to such facilities.<sup>78</sup> Despite their expanding political horizons and personal authority within city-wide and more nationally based organizations, by the middle 1950s, many leaders became increasingly responsive to the aspirations and feelings of other Africans within the city. Such was particularly the case with shack leaders amidst the shantytowns of the Mkhumbane area. The leadership element within the shantytowns comprised a very small group of illicit and licensed traders, wealthy shack-owners and other entrepreneurs. This small group controlled many crucial amenities in the shantytowns and possessed a material wealth and more free time than that which was available to the vast majority of shack residents.

---

73. The Guardian, 1 August 1952.

74. Lodge "We are being punished", p 258.

75. Interview with Mr R I Arenstein, 22 August 1988.

76. Ilanga lase Natal, 15 August 1953.

77. Ibid, 7 October 1950.

78. See for example Kuper, African Bourgeoisie, p 95-96.

However, despite their increasing wealth and the willingness of the municipality to recognize such persons as local leaders, these shack leaders became increasingly aware of the way in which their actions were criticized by shack residents. In the same way as shack dwellers had criticized local entrepreneurs in the very early 1950s, so those members of the first elected CMWDB were also harshly criticized.<sup>79</sup> Shantytown residents viewed the reasons why the municipality had established the CMWDB with scorn. Residents believed that "Kwa Muhle wanted to give us another toy telephone", be "newspapers" and "to take the blame."<sup>80</sup> Residents dismissed the first elected Board as "Bourquin's impimpi".<sup>81</sup> This Board was soon dissolved. Charles Khumalo recalls that "they were rubbish: 'Yes sir, thank you baas. Yes mnumzane.' This was when they went away."<sup>82</sup>

Shack leaders and licensed traders resented such popular pressure. They believing that, in the words of Congress Majola,

They were the first Africans to lead our people. If it was not for us, then we would not be here today. The traders of Cato Manor were the first to see that for the African to progress we must develop ourselves economically and fight for the same things as all the other races have.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, such people considered themselves the natural leaders of the community. During the 1950s, much to the amusement of many municipal officials, Champion was proclaiming, "I am not a Native".<sup>84</sup> The attitude of the new trading class was somewhat different. Charles Mbutho commented that "in another country we would be the George Washington's, the Jefferson's and the Abraham Lincoln's".<sup>85</sup>

Faced with such a position many entrepreneurs "left politics" and "looked towards their businesses."<sup>86</sup> While remaining influential, these people played a diminishing role in the politics of Mkhumbane. They were however becoming increasingly conscious of their class position, opposed to notions of non-racialism, and reluctant to become involved in politics. Listen to W S Manyathi on class consciousness amongst the traders:

Mr Ngobozi [an established African trader] found me ... down here at Cabazini with a wagon and he helped me ... to acquire a store. ... He said 'Do you see?' He was travelling in a

- 
79. Interview with Mr S Selby, 19 August 1980.
80. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 23 June 1985.
81. Interview with Mr S Selby, 19 August 1980.
82. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 23 June 1985.
83. Interview with Mr C C Majola, 2 March 1983. Although certainly not one of the early shack leaders it is interesting that Mojola, who only really became an established trader in Kwa Mashu, should identify with a member of the earlier history of the nascent trading class.
84. Interview with Mr S Bourquin, 14 June 1988. Mr S Bourquin was one of those few municipal officials who had a finer sense of the meaning of Champion's words.
85. Mbutho Papers; C D S Mbutho, "A History of Clermont".
86. Interview with Mr J J Shabalala, 28 November 1986. See also interview with Mr M B Yengwa by Ms B Naidoo, n.d.

Volkswagen, while I was just walking. 'This is the last time I am giving you a lift. Buy yourself a car' And he said 'Truly I am doing it for the last time, could you say that you are my neighbour when you live across there on the other side.?' I bought one and I realized he was right.

On relations between Indians and Africans:

I do not go into that. I talk about matters of trade. ... They quarrel, going back and forth, while I say 'Two Bob, Sixty Cents' [but] even if they love one another, ... Manyathi does not want that.

And on the political role of such an African trader:

'Where will you fetch [Luthuli]?' I asked. 'At the Central Prison.' Well then I left and went around closing stores. With that they said, 'Manyathi, give our children food. Don't join us.' I was busy selling.<sup>87</sup>

However, many of the leaders in the Mkhumbane shacklands saw in the ANC a political home which would sustain their view of a broadly-based African nationalism led by "respectable and educated civic leaders."<sup>88</sup> Such a view was entirely compatible with many of the aims and aspirations of the existing ANC leaders in the city.<sup>89</sup> Throughout the 1950s, the ANC was ambivalent about its own precise purpose. To some the organization should develop into a political party, for others the ANC was a civil rights movement; and to many others, the ANC was the organization which best represented the power of mass African nationalism and "liberation."<sup>90</sup>

The ANC was eager to gain the support of traders and other established leaders in Mkhumbane. At the same time it was attempting to build a stronger support base in the shacklands, the ANC also desired to take control of the CMWDB.<sup>91</sup> An increasing number of the entrepreneur class who were members of the CMWDB became either members or supporters of the ANC; among these were Ambrose Afrika, Esau Makatini, Japhta Mnguni, Ashmon Nene, J J Shabalala and Isaac Zwane.<sup>92</sup> Other Board members were shack residents whose local standing was directly related to their activities in the ANC, such as Dorothy Nyembe and Ruth Shabane. By the mid-1950s "most" of the members of the CMWDB were "in Congress", while by the end

---

87. KCAV; interview with Mr W S Manyathi, 16 September 1980.

88. Interview with Mr C C Majola, 2 March 1983.

89. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

90. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19/1: 62/5; A N C (Natal) executive committee report, 1954, *Advance*, 10 December 1953. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 January 1955 and KCAV; interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 6 June 1979.

91. *Ibid.*, 10 June 1983.

92. I am grateful to Ms R Shabane and Mr J J Shabalala for assistance in this regard. The issue is important but sensitive, with many preferring to disclaim membership of the ANC. For example one interviewee denied membership although had personally registered his attendance at the 1954 provincial conference.

of the decade "all but one [of the Board members] were ANC stooges."<sup>93</sup>

Although the ANC was never to support a total boycott of those African residential bodies recognized by the municipality, control of the CMWDB was of particular significance to the ANC in Durban. Many believed that it was strategically important for the ANC to use the CMWDB. With such control, it would be possible to develop branches in Mkhumbane, organize around specific local issues and acquire a knowledge of municipal policy which could not be otherwise gained.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, the CMWDB was the only established African residential body recognized by the municipality; and it was beyond the influence of the Joint Locations Advisory Board. This latter body, despite many sitting members being ANC members or supporters, was firmly controlled by Champion. Champion was intent upon using this power base to "take the Congress back to him. He was wanting to throw the Congress Youth League back. For Champion we were to be late."<sup>95</sup>

It would be naive to pretend that membership of the CMWDB Board did not allow Board members to further their own entrepreneurial ventures. Many Board members requested that the Board be given increased authority over the allocation of residential and trading sites. At meetings of the CMWDB the claims of shacklords were forcefully pressed, albeit in a disguised fashion. In 1953, the CMWDB requested that the rights of shacklords should be protected: "just Natives resident in the Scheme ... not absentee landlords [sic] should be allowed to operate in the Camp."<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, such "Native investors should be allowed to put up shacks on a number of sites."<sup>97</sup> Board members reasoned in this way:

Natives who are unable to support families - widows, old aged and those in ill-health but who have a little capital will be allowed to invest in a form which gives them relatively high returns and which prevents them from becoming a burden on the community as a whole.<sup>98</sup>

In a society becoming less structured on the process of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' and more based on the increasing accumulation of personal wealth amongst traders, this was clearly an important consideration for established entrepreneurs.

The majority of shacklords in the shacklands made enormous personal profits from rackrenting. Prominent among the shacklords on the CMWDB were Esau Makatini, Ashmon Nene, J Shange and Isaac Zwane. Others acquired trading sites through their membership of the Board.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the main focus

93. *Ibid* and personal communication, Mr C N Shum.

94. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

95. *Ibid*.

96. According to one informant this broad policy was deliberately to "keep Champion out." Interview with Mr A Nene, 18 January 1984.

97. MNAD; C M W & D B, vol 2; Minutes of a meeting between the Manager, MNAD and the Services Committee, CMWDB, 27 October 1953.

98. Native Administration Committee agenda, 18 November 1953. Emphasis added.

99. See for example MNAD; CMWDB; Board minutes 17 August 1953, 29 September 1955, 16 May 1956 and 24 April 1957.

of CMWDB activity was its quest for increased control over the area, for improved facilities in the Emergency Camp, and the development of strategies to resist removal to Kwa Mashu.

The CMWDB strove for an improvement in shantytown living conditions. Often critical of municipal policy in the Emergency Camp, Board members complained about the small size of individual plots, high rents, the lack of ablution and toilet facilities, the poor road system, a lack of street lighting, and the need for recreational facilities. The Board also requested other facilities, such as swimming pools and tennis courts.<sup>100</sup> In making such requests the CMWDB would continually stress their acceptance of municipal authority, but their desire to assist the municipality in "putting things right." Ruth Shabane continues,

The Board wanted to make things normal.. We wanted all our people there in Mkhumbane to live happily and for this we must tell the City Council what to do. When there are no roads, this must be said. Toilets, shops, all these things. Creches, schools. We [the Board] were there to get all these things done. For long we had lived in the wilderness. It was now time to get things happening.<sup>101</sup>

Residents desired those residential facilities available in other White suburbs. For African shack residents, their sense of what constituted normal city life was based around a set of aspirations never limited by the very material conditions of African life in the city.

There was however far more to requests for specific infrastructural developments. In seeking improvements in living conditions, the Board was attempting to both "make things more nice for us" and to ensure permanent African residence in the area. Dorothy Nyembe continues: "we wanted to get all the things that Kwa Muhle was building in Kwa Mashu and put them in Mkhumbane. Then they would not have to move us to that location."<sup>102</sup> In 1960 at a meeting of the CMWDB, Isaac Zwane asserted that "people today did not want to go to locations, but wanted to reside on land they could hold in freehold tenure."<sup>103</sup> For the Africans in Cato Manor Farm, that land was Mkhumbane.

This was realized by the municipality. Bourquin remembers that "the Cato Manor Welfare and Development Board were really only interested in developing Cato Manor and staying in Cato Manor."<sup>104</sup> As a result, and in any case wishing to reduce municipal expenditure in the Emergency Camp, the municipality ignored the increasingly poor conditions in the Emergency Camp. Requests to improve conditions in the Emergency Camp were either rejected or subject to lengthy bureaucratic delays and, very often, deliberate stalling.<sup>105</sup> Most requests for better facilities in the Emergency Camp were refused "due to the imminence of

---

100. See also Ilanga lase Natal, 18 September 1954.

101. Interview with Ms R Shabane, 18 November 1985. My emphasis.

102. Interview with Ms D Nyembe, 10 June 1985.

103. MNAD; CMWDB; Board Agenda, 8 December 1960 .

104. Interview with Mr S Bourquin, 10 September 1980.

105. See for example the continuing debate between the CMWDB and the municipality concerning water standpipes and ambulances.

the move to Kwa Mashu and the present policy of freezing development works [in the Emergency Camp].<sup>106</sup> By 1957 it was clear to many CMWDB members that the municipality was neither interested in providing further, amenities nor in discussing the future of Africans living in the Emergency Camp.

That a CMWDB increasingly controlled by both members and supporters of the ANC was unable to successfully struggle for the municipal development of those essential services in the Mkhumbane area which would have laid the basis for permanent African settlement in the area is completely understandable. By 1953, with the development of the Cato Manor Emergency Camp, the future of the Mkhumbane shack dwellers had already been decided.

Faced with such a situation, the CMWDB became riddled with internal dissension. Dorothy Nyembe had already suggested that the ANC call a boycott of the CMWDB.<sup>107</sup> The call was not supported. However, early in 1958 certain ANC members on the Board formed the Cato Manor Protest Committee and succeeded in ousting Isaac Zwane, himself an ANC supporter, and Zwane's cronies from the Board. Zwane's opponents had however no alternative strategy. Both sides accused the other of "cowtowing" to the municipality. Zwane regained his position as Chairman of the Board in August 1958 and the CMWDB was to continue functioning until the early 1960s.<sup>108</sup>

However what was more significant was the effect this exerted on ANC attempts to organize around basic issues of concern to the residents of the Mkhumbane area, who both desired improved living conditions and wanted to remain in Mkhumbane. Structurally the CMWDB was in no position to convince residents of the authority of the CMWDB. Equally as significant however, was the fact that whilst the CMWDB was dominated by ANC supporters who desired leadership roles in the community, such persons were unable to organize popular support for the ANC in the shacklands. The reasons for this are complex.

By the mid-1950s many residents believed that the police and the municipality had gained extensive knowledge of ANC activities in the Emergency Camp. This was not surprising, considering that the ANC operated openly in the shantytowns.<sup>109</sup> The municipality gleaned information from informers who would sit in the local beerhalls and "just listen to the gossip."<sup>110</sup> Many residents recall that with the splits in the Zulu Hlanganani, certain traders "went to the police and told them who was Congress" in the shantytowns.<sup>111</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, the municipality had also endeavoured to prohibit ANC meetings in Mkhumbane, while many ANC leaders were to be served with banishment orders.<sup>112</sup> In the late 1950s the

---

106. MNAD; CMWDB; Board minutes, 24 April 1957.

107. Interview with Ms D Nyembe, 10 June 1985.

108. Bourquin Papers; S Bourquin, memorandum on the Cato Manor disturbances of June 1960.

109. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Mnguni, 19 July 1979.

110. Interview with Mr S Bourquin, 14 September 1980.

111. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 28 April 1985.

112. See for example Ilanga lase Natal, 3 October 1953.



municipality had prevented certain sitting members of the CMWDB from attending Board meetings.<sup>113</sup>

One of the very purposes implicit to the 'M' Plan had been the recognition that the ANC could not expect to enjoy indefinite immunity from such and other state action. With the failure to organize effective branch structures, the inability of the organization to afford the luxury of required numbers of fully paid organizers and the lack of any subaltern class, the ANC began to rely increasingly upon the resources of members and supporters in various specific areas.<sup>114</sup>

However, many Board members lacked any notion of the need to gain popular support, even in their own ward areas. Residents recall how Board members "talked as if they were very special people."<sup>115</sup> Charles Khumalo recalls:

Our block man was a very wealthy man in the area. He was Mr Mhlongo. He was in Congress and very important. There ... swanking around. He was on the Board for us, but we never knew nothing. He would just say to us 'No man, just leave it to me, everything is under control. Just yesterday we spoke about this very matter'.<sup>116</sup>

Similarly, Board member Shange has an ambiguous recollection of politics during the period, but maintains that "I was a big man."<sup>117</sup> Another Board member confesses that the CMWDB promised much but failed.<sup>118</sup>

Other residents recall that "all the important people would often stand together and talk to themselves. You walked past and greeted them and some started to talk in English."<sup>119</sup> Many CMWDB members had no interest in a broader politics that went beyond local shantytown issues. Having accepted the reality of their eventual removal, many shack leaders were engaged in a rather unedifying struggle to acquire trading rights in Kwa Mashu.<sup>120</sup>

---

113. Bourquin Papers; Notes on the meeting by a Durban City Council deputation with the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, 3 August 1959. The relevant Board members, all key ANC activists in Mkhumbane were removed by invoking the administratively correct but highly provocative stipulation that Board members would be removed if failing to attend three consecutive Board meetings. The measure had never before being used despite there having been earlier cases of such continued absence.

114. For similar analysis see Feit, *African Opposition*, p.51.

115. Interview with Mr T Phewa, 12 May 1985.

116. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 19 July 1985.

117. KCAV; interview with Mr J Shange, 24 July 1979.

118. KCAV; interview with Mr R Ngcobo, 13 September 1980.

119. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 19 July 1985. This is probably a little unfair as many of the Board members could not speak English and translation services were provided for all Board meetings. It does nevertheless reflect a sense of residents' perceived distinctions between Board members and other shack-dwellers.

120. For details see MNAD; NT 7/28, vol 1. the conflict between legal African traders was over the location of various shops, competition, available capital and levels of business expertise. See also MNAD; Cope Trading Report, September 1953.

Shantytown leaders were members of a small but increasingly prosperous trading class. Whilst believing in a common African nationalism, they, like many other trading classes, espoused a gradualist, moderate politics. They also disliked mass action and preferred to focus on the steady accumulation of power. Theirs was not the politics of large-scale and rapid political transformation. Within the context of the Emergency Camp, their ability to gain those infrastructural and legal property rights which would, though a cumulative process, eventually lead to permanent African settlement in Mkhumbane were virtually non-existent. By the later 1950s the disenchantment among the trading class was mitigated by the promise of a more secure life in Kwa Mashu.<sup>121</sup>

Failings were also noticeably prevalent within the small ranks of ANC branch organizers in the shantytown. Even Ashmon Nene was criticized by various people for failing to attend branch meetings. The local voluntary organizer for the ANC branch in the New Clare area of the Emergency Camp declared that the local branch was weak but "public meetings are not essential."<sup>122</sup>

When the ANC first began organizing support in the shantytowns there had been little tension between ANC members in the shacklands and the ANC's Natal executive.<sup>123</sup> However, tension was soon to arise. Amidst personality clashes were also policy issues, the authority of the Natal executive, the autonomy of local branches, and that ever-present difficulty of aligning grass-roots concerns with a wider political strategy. Although much of the tension was publically reported, details are sketchy.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that the focus of this tension was the growing power of the ANC Women's League in Mkhumbane.

From 1950 the municipality had endeavoured to force African women in the city to undergo medical examinations and carry passes. With the Women's League in Mkhumbane being fortunate in having the services of some remarkable activists who had close relations with various church and womens' groups in the shantytowns, resistance was rapidly organized.<sup>125</sup> By 1952, recognizing the assertive nature of the womens' protests and fearing a more militant city-wide revolt, the City Council backed down. African women were not subject to medical examinations, and the municipality advised the government that it would be imprudent to attempt to issue African women with passes.<sup>126</sup>

Initially Mkhumbane was the main centre of resistance. By the early 1950s women's organizations had developed in numerous other townships in the city, and the Congress Youth League had co-operated with

---

121. Mbutho Papers; C D S Mbutho-Chief Commissioner, South African Police, April 1959.

122. KCM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19: 30/18; A N C (Natal), Annual conference held at Nene Hall, Two Sticks, 8-9 October 1956.

123. This conflict is not mentioned in either Lodge, Black Politics, or Walker, Women and Resistance, both of whom suggest that African politics in Natal remained relatively free of dissent within the ANC after the election of Luthuli.

124. Although many interviewees were intimately involved in the issue, such informants provided no information. Unlike Ilanga lase Natal, The Guardian is noticeably silent on the issue.

125. Ilanga lase Natal, 1 April 1950.

126. Mayors Minutes, 1952-1953.

the ANCWL in holding mass meetings to organize women around the issue.<sup>127</sup> At least one of these meetings was addressed by Dr Goonan of the Natal Indian Congress.<sup>128</sup> With the depositing of Champion, who had unsuccessfully tried to involve himself in the anti-women's pass issue and claim responsibility for the municipality backing down,<sup>129</sup> relations between the ANCWL and the newly elected provincial executive appeared sound. Bertha Mkhize was elected a member of the ANC provincial executive in 1951. Luthuli impressed upon women the need to organize and encouraged the formation of a Housewives League, comprising numerous women's groups.<sup>130</sup>

However tension rapidly developed between the ANCWL and the provincial executive and between various organizers within the ANCWL. In spite of numerous attempts to resolve the issue, in 1956 Bertha Mkhize and Gusta Khuzwayo, one of the more elderly but key ANCWL activists in Mkhumbane, were "kicked out" of the ANC.<sup>131</sup>

Within the ANCWL in Mkhumbane were powerful and charismatic activists and organizers. As the organization gathered strength in the area, various organizers began to squabble over the leadership. There was however, a more important divide over policy within the ANCWL. This conflict was between Gusta Khuzwayo and Bertha Mkhize on the one hand and Henrietta Ostrich and Ruth Shabane on the opposing side.<sup>132</sup>

At the root of the conflict lay the desire of certain ANCWL organizers to uphold an exclusive African and even Zulu populism which had developed in the Mkhumbane area and the local ANCWL during the later 1940s. In the changed political climate of the early 1950s, many of those Congress Youth Leaguers who had risen within the hierarchy of the provincial ANC found such principles unacceptable.<sup>133</sup> In many ways the Youth Leaguers had abandoned Africanism. The stressing of an exclusive and independent Africanism threatened relations between the Natal Indian Congress and the ANC. This still very tentative relationship was even more threatened by the manner in which many within the ANCWL, particularly in Mkhumbane, upheld economic boycott strategies which were often, deliberately or otherwise, anti-Indian.<sup>134</sup>

For the provincial executive the conflict was regarded as serious.<sup>135</sup> The issue raised thorny strategic problems and threatened the Congress Alliance. The conflict was raised certain other as important issues. Here

---

127. Ilanga lase Natal, 1 April 1950.

128. Ibid, 15 April 1950.

129. Ibid, 22 April 1950.

130. Ibid, 9 June 1951 and 12 September 1953.

131. Ibid, 14 July 1956. This information was supplied to the newspaper by Stephen Dlamini so can be regarded as reliable.

132. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA19/1:30/8; A N C (Natal), Minutes of the Provincial Executive Committee, 26-27 November 1955.

133. Ilanga lase Natal, 11 August 1956.

134. Ibid See also Edwards "Swing the Assegai", p 36.

135. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19/1:30/8; A N C (Natal), Minutes of the Provincial Executive Committee, 26-27 November 1955.

was certainly the only really strong bastion of ANC power in an area so valued by the ANC developing in a manner which posed severe problems for the ANC.

Throughout the course of the conflict the strength of the ANCWL in the Mkhumbane area grew. Based around the issues passes, medical examinations, liquor-brewing and conditions of life in the Emergency Camp - increasing numbers of women became involved in the affairs of the local ANCWL or those women's shantytown groupings which associated with the ANCWL.<sup>136</sup> Such increasing militancy was often despite the ever present dangers which women faced in attending evening meetings. At night the shackland environment was violent and ill-provided with street lighting. Many men also disagreed with women becoming involved in politics. In 1956 one of the local ANCWL branches in the Emergency Camp had no "chairlady" because the woman's "husband had objected."<sup>137</sup>

Support for the ousted Mkhize and Khuzwayo was even forthcoming from within the provincial executive, with Ashmon Nene and Pitness Simelane being key figures. Both were staunch African nationalists. Simelane in particular had been closely involved in the Congress Youth League in the later 1940s. Nene wielded significant authority in the Mkhumbane shacklands by virtue of his personal friendship with Luthuli<sup>138</sup> Congress Youth League branches in many areas of Durban publically announced their support for the ousted Mkhize and Khuzwayo. Congress Youth Leaguers had "captured" the "congress for Luthuli".<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, the 'Vukayibambe', those localized Youth League bases of the 1940s, still remained active, relatively independent of the ANC. They appeared willing to use the issue as a means to attack the provincial executive, focussing on Luthuli's role within the ANC.<sup>140</sup> As alarming for the provincial executive was the fact that Champion was becoming involved. Despite his long-standing and considerable dislike for the ANCWL and Mkhumbane residents, Champion supported the expelled women.<sup>141</sup>

The issue also brought to a climax the question of the relative authority which each of the various constituent bodies within a broadly based African nationalist movement could exercise within an organizational structure headed by the provincial executive of the ANC in Natal. With the conflict having raged intermittently for a number of years, all parties realized the dangers inherent in the situation. In January 1958, the Congress Youth League, the reinstated women and the ANC under Luthuli affirmed their desire to "revive" the "spirit of the ANC."<sup>142</sup>

---

136. Ilanga lase Natal, 25 August 1956 and interview with Ms D Nyembe, 10 June 1985.

137. CKM; reel 3B; 2:DA 19:30/18; A N C (Natal) Annual Conference, Nene Hall, 8-9 October 1956 and interview with Ms R Shabane, 18 November 1986.

138. Ilanga lase Natal, 28 July 1956. Nene had been a member of the Provincial Executive since late 1953. In 1953 Simelane was both Assistant Secretary and later Provincial Treasurer and then in 1956, Secretary of the A N C in Natal.

139. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

140. See for example Ilanga lase Natal, 11 August 1956 and 1 September 1956.

141. Ibid, 28 July 1956.

142. Ibid, 18 January 1958.

Yet, apart from the often rather paternalist views which many of the members of ANC Provincial executive held towards the ANCWL, the conflict raised issues which in many ways explain the inadequacies of the ANC's organization and support in Mkhumbane. The conflict had merely assumed its particular form because the ANCWL was the only successful ANC organization in the shantytowns.

By 1958, the ANC had established few local branches in the shacklands. The ANC-dominated CMWDB was not able to negotiate any substantial changes in shantytown living conditions, and had failed to strengthen ANC organization in the area. In many ways the weakness of the ANC in the shantytown are clearly the result of the financial, administrative and other organizational problems which were to persist in limiting the efficiency of the organization.

Yet daily life in the shantytowns did not create the conditions for the development of a politicized shack community. For the proletariat living in the shantytowns, the constraints imposed by the routines of daily life were enormous. The focus of shack residents' struggles was over day-to-day issues, with their militancy not necessarily integrated into any larger political struggle.

However, it was not only that the ANC might have overestimated the political quality of the shack residents. The ANC had specifically set out to organize in the shantytowns around day-to-day issues. However, throughout the 1950s, the ANC was never to direct its attention to the main issue amongst shack dwellers: the desire to be given permanent residence on land in Cato Manor Farm owned either by Indians or the municipality. For the ANC the future of the area was a question causing political embarrassment. Further within the ANC in the area, members and leading residents were often engaged in political in-fighting and were either incapable, unable or unwilling to develop a mass organization in the area.

As important however, during the 1950s, proletarian experience in the shacklands and city itself led to the development of an often ambiguously defined political culture. Sustaining images of class conflict, populism, nationalism and a need for anti-elitism, the shantytown proletariat was often highly critical of the policies and strategies of the ANC. In the main the political culture which developed in the shantytowns was not directly antagonistic towards the ANC. However, there were many contradictory forces which could easily create a disjuncture between the broad policies and strategies of the ANC and SACTU and the needs and aspirations of the shantytown proletariat. When it came to the big campaigns from 1957 onwards, the ANC found itself in an increasingly invidious position. Whilst desiring the organized support of the shantytown residents, the organization had not as yet become firmly entrenched in the area.<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

From their experiences during the later 1940s, many of the Congress Youth Leaguers who assumed key

---

143. For a general perspective on the relationship between African political organizations and shantytowns see B Bozzoli, "Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society" in Bozzoli (ed), *Class*, p 27.

leadership roles within the ANC in the 1950s had respected and indeed admired the determination of Mkhumbane residents. Try as it did, until early 1959 the ANC was unable to establish any solid organizational foothold in the shacklands. Within a shantytown community that had always revealed a somewhat disrespectful attitude towards African political organizations, acquiring support was hardly easy.

Support for the ANC was most evident among many of the entrepreneurs of Mkhumbane. Many shack leaders ambitiously sought a political future in the city. Desiring both to increase their own entrepreneurial wealth, shantytown leaders upheld a moderate populism. Yet for such persons the quest for a political home involved ambiguous decisions. Having gained position of leadership during the proletarian populism of the late 1940s, shack leaders had become increasingly wealthy in ways that distinguished them from other Mkhumbane residents. Although having accepted the benefits of industrialization, shack community leaders had attempted to avoid full proletarianization but were nevertheless conscious of the detrimental features of wage labour within the very community which they desired to lead. After years of provocation, many of the Mkhumbane leaders gravitated towards the ANC. Seeing in the re-vitalized ANC a secure political future in an organization which exemplified an African nationalist struggle, such people became the backbone of ANC support in Mkhumbane.

In a political environment so hostile to African political organizations which questioned established civic and national authority, the ANC was remarkably successful in establishing itself as the dominant African political organization in Durban. That the ANC even gained the allegiance if not membership of shack leaders was significant. Amongst the Mkhumbane shack residents, whose support the ANC so desired, even greater successes seemed to be evident. As the 1950s progressed more and more shantytown leaders were either members of or identified with the politics of the ANC.

Yet this support presented a fundamental dilemma to the ANC. During the 1950s the ANC gained support from contradictory sources. This did not appear to be a real issue to an organizational leadership lacking political experience, finances, administrative support and broader popular recognition. However, when the issue of proletarian support for the ANC was raised, the essential weakness of the ANC's support base in Mkhumbane was evident. The Mkhumbane proletariat was both intent upon focussing on day-to-day struggles, and yet was still militant in ways which could easily reject the wider politics embraced by the ANC. During the 1950s Mkhumbane shantytown leaders' affiliation to the ANC was both ambiguous and a source of tension in the shacklands. Similarly, during the 1950s, the nature of day to day life in the shantytowns or proletarian political consciousness was to result in an increased political awareness. However, these proletarian perspectives were neither solely directed towards the struggle for Mkhumbane nor those which could increase ANC membership or political trade unionism.