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EDITORIALS

1.

THE NEWCASTLE BOYCOTT

Throughout most of last October there occurred what has come to be a recurring event in South Africa—a boycott of buses by African commuters, following an increase in fares.

This latest boycott was directed at the buses running from the Black areas of Madadeni and Osizweni, to Newcastle, one of South Africa's new industrial growth-points. Newcastle is in Northern Natal, it is the site of the new Iscor steel mills, and it is 13 km from Madadeni and 23 from Osizweni. The busfares between Newcastle and these, its Black "labour reservoirs", have increased steadily over the years. The new fares meant that a return trip to Newcastle from Osizweni would cost ninety cents a day and a return trip from Madadeni sixty cents—this in an area where the Poverty Datum Line is calculated at R108 a month and a great many people earn less.

For a month the people of the two townships refused to use the buses and either walked to work, went by taxi, got lifts in private cars, or were transported by their employers. They

did this in the face of threats and continual provocation, principally from government officials. The Secretary for Transport announced from Pretoria that the boycott must be broken. Road blocks were set up. Taxis and private cars were stopped and inspected and put off the road if anything could be found wrong with them. Pressure was put on employers not to arrange private transport for their workers. In spite of all this the boycott went on until at least a partial victory was won. Fares at Osizweni were reduced to sixty cents and those at Madadeni to thirty-six, although only from certain fixed staging points.

The resentment African people feel about the ever-increasing transport costs they have to pay, and the boycotts and occasional violence which follows such increases, are only part of a far deeper resentment at the things apartheid has done and still does to them. Madadeni and Osizweni contain all the ingredients for a far more dramatic explosion than anything produced by the recent boycott. Consider their history. Both are really homes for displaced persons. Most

of the people who live in them don't want to, and never did. They are there because apartheid has ejected them from where they were reasonably happy to be and sent them to where they didn't want to go.

Both Osizweni and Madadeni are new creations, places to which people removed from elsewhere by government policy are sent. Like, for example the people of Charlestown, and its adjoining townships of Clavis and Clavis Extension. At the time of Union Charlestown was the Natal railhead and customs post on the Transvaal border and, in a small way, it thrived. After Union the customs post closed and the railway headquarters were moved to Volksrust, in the Transvaal. Charlestown began to die. Its Town Board had debts to meet but a declining number of ratepayers that it could tax to pay them. It set out to persuade Africans to come and buy plots, and was successful. Many did buy, believing the assurances the Town Board gave them that their title-deeds meant perpetual security. The first African purchase in Charlestown was made in 1910; others, in Clavis and Clavis Extension, followed later. Rates were paid, the Town Board was enabled to meet its debts, but the Black ratepayers got precious little back for their money. For instance a provincial inquiry in 1948 found that, thirty six years after the sale of the first African plot in Clavis, there was only one water-tap for the entire community. In Clavis Extension there were none. Charlestown itself, which still had some white residents, was much better off.

From the time the Nationalist government came to power increasing pressure was placed on the people of the Charlestown area to move. They were told they were living in a White area, and must go. Until the early 1960s this pressure was successfully resisted but, in 1963, the first removals took place, initially of tenants, later of landowners. Those first removals were to Madadeni, and they followed a now familiar pattern. First, all livestock had to be disposed of because it wasn't allowed at Madadeni. Forced sales were the order of the day and speculators, some Black, most White, did well. Then came the government trucks, onto which families and all their possessions were loaded. Their wattle-and-daub homes were destroyed. Next followed the 30 mile journey to Madadeni to be greeted there not by a house related in any way in size to the one left behind, but by a pre-fabricated wooden single-room shack, 16 ft by 10 ft, without a floor—and perhaps, as an extra, a tent. The rents were higher than at Charlestown and where Charlestown had schools and stores and other essential amenities, Madadeni had none.

All over Northern Natal are other "Charlestown" whose broken communities have ended up at Osizweni or at Madadeni, forced there by apartheid. Two groups who must

regard the escalating busfares with particular bitterness are the people who once lived in Lennoxton and Fairleigh. These were two suburbs of Newcastle itself, within not many minutes walking distance of the very centre of the town. Here, too, Africans lived as landowners or tenants, having bought or rented land according to the laws laid down by White authority, secure in the illusion that the rights they possessed were inviolate. They, too, have gone. They must now pay those busfares to travel from a place where they don't want to be to get to work in a town which they helped establish and build. Their contribution as workers and rate-payers over the years has simply been written off. What must be the depth of their resentment?

Nor is the story over. Thousands of people are still being forced unwillingly out of their homes and into places like Osizweni and Madadeni. The October boycott was hardly over when it was reported that a new wave of removals was taking place, this time from Clavis to Osizweni, and that the conditions were no different from those of 1963—the hasty disposal of livestock, the loading on to the trucks, the demolition of the homes, and the long journey to a strange place, there to face the prospect of starting life all over again in one room. The following week the first families were shifted out of the old Black freehold area of Roosboom to Ezakheni, near Ladysmith. Ten thousand people will be moved from Roosboom to Ezakheni. They will meet there others like themselves—the one-time freeholders of Kumaloville, for instance, who, having bought their plots legally in 1908, were dispossessed of them in 1963, and sent to live at a place called Hobsland . . . where their stay was brief. After a short spell devoted to trying to re-establish themselves they were dispossessed again, and sent to Ezakheni.

Madadeni and Osizweni and Ezakheni are creatures of apartheid. They are flashpoints for the future. Apartheid we have been told for over a quarter of a century will reduce racial tensions. The Newcastle bus boycott has shown that any tensions which might have existed between that town's Black and White residents when they all lived together were as nothing compared to what they are now that they live apart. And they can only increase. For apartheid has decreed that, while Newcastle and Ladysmith will remain in White South Africa, Madadeni and Osizweni and Ezakheni will be in Kwa Zulu. A frontier has been drawn between where Black people live and where Black people work. They will commute across it every day. At the end of the week they will take back to Kwa Zulu that part of their wages which they have not spent across the border, but most of the wealth their labour has created will accrue to White South Africa.

What basis is that for a stable new order? □