
The Historical Development of the Apartheid Local State in South Africa: The Case of Durban*

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Introduction

In South Africa there has been a high level of centralization of state power and its institutional apparatus. Therefore the central state has been subjected to a great deal of scholarly attention (e.g. Wolpe, 1972; Davies *et al.*, 1976; Davies, 1979; Greenberg, 1980). However, the role of other state apparatuses, particularly the local state, has been neglected in scholarly analysis. In fact the 'literature on the local state in South Africa is very undeveloped' (McCarthy and Smit, 1989: 136), and the 'area of municipal politics has been strikingly under-researched' (Parnell, 1987: 135). According to McCarthy (1986: 1), 'local and regional state apparatus scarcely received a footnote in the works of both the 'liberals' and 'revisionists' (social scientists) who dominated the critical intellectual agenda on South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s'.

Although the apartheid state has been referred to as a monolithic entity, there have also been several centres of power — central, provincial and local (Atkinson, 1990). According to McCarthy (1991) the emphasis on the impress of the central state in South Africa contrasts with anglophone trends, where the accent has been on the autonomy of the local state. Two possible reasons are advanced for this anomaly. First, that politics and the state are unusually centralized. Second, a paucity of research on the historical development of the local state and politics in South Africa has shrouded an understanding of their characteristics. It is the latter possibility which 'warrants further investigation' (McCarthy, 1991: 26).

The aim of this paper is to examine the historical development of the apartheid local state in South Africa with specific reference to Durban. More specifically, the nature of social relations will be analysed in this paper through an abstraction of specific moments in the periodization of the local state in Durban from the late 1800s to the early 1930s. The focus is on the nature of power relations at the local level through an examination of the conflicts, contradictions, resistance and repression in the relationship among the local state and capital, labour and the white electorate.

Conceptually, this paper is influenced by recent developments in local state theory. In order to use the concept of the local state constructively, it must be integrated with general explanations of social relations and change (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). In this

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regard, Fincher (1989) recently called for a greater research focus on the contribution of the local state to the formation of social relations in localities. Although local political apparatuses influence local social relations, the role of the local state has not been considered explicitly. Local social relations emerge from the history of the labour market, political institutions as well as the cultural heritage. By the very nature of its collective consumption functions, especially with regard to service provision and its spatial distribution, the local state can influence the nature of local social relations (Fincher, 1989).

It is important to note that particular political phenomenon and their consequences are inextricably linked to historical and spatial contingencies (Fincher, 1987). Most attempts to analyse the local state have lacked historical specificity. There is a need to 'relate historical differences and changes in state behaviour to those social processes crucial in causing such specific situations' (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988: 38).

The primary data sources for this paper were the minutes and other records of the Durban Town Council (DTC). This paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines the role of the local state in capital accumulation; the influence of the local state on labour control is analysed in the second section; and in the third section the role of the local state in responding to class issues is discussed.

Accumulation and the local state

In Durban the local state has always played a critical role in facilitating the growth and development of commerce and industry. Every attempt was made to market the city as a 'premier borough' in terms of its potential for development, in order to attract capital to Durban. There was evidence of a 'growth coalition' between the local state, the Railways Administration and local capital, which coordinated attempts to market the city as an industrial and tourist centre. In addition, the local state in Durban was also an entrepreneur in its own right.

The industrial growth agenda

Whites settled in Durban in 1824 with the establishment of a trading post. Durban became a municipality in 1854 with an elected town council (Wyley, 1986). Whites were the only franchised group in the city.¹ Within the next three decades Durban developed into a harbour town, which encouraged the expansion of secondary and tertiary economic activities. The DTC had for long actively pursued an industrial growth agenda, and made every attempt to attract capital from other regional centres, as well as overseas, to the city. Durban experienced rapid economic expansion between 1870 and 1890, particularly in the shipping and allied industries. This was associated with increased production of raw materials, as well as diamond and gold mining in the interior (Hemson, 1979). Hence, by the turn of the century Durban was levered into a 'commanding position among South African cities and it entered the heyday of municipal enterprise and local autonomy' (Swanson, 1968: 145).

Prior to the first world war, Durban was dominated primarily by mercantile interests, with very little evidence of the local political influence of manufacturing capital. Merchant capital comprised traders and shopkeepers, as well as shipping and stevedoring companies (La Hausse, 1984). However, there was evidence that even before this period, the town was developing very rapidly, especially after the formation of the Union of

¹ Racial terminology in South Africa is a veritable minefield. Any study of the South African social formation cannot avoid reference to race and ethnic divisions. However, use of such terminology does not in any way legitimate racist ideology and doctrine.

South Africa in 1910. In 1911 the Mayor, F.C. Hollander, commented on the rapid industrial development in the city and called for a comprehensive town planning scheme to facilitate and regulate this process (Mayor's Minutes, 1911: 16).

The Town Council emphasized the industrial and commercial advantages of Durban which enabled 'private enterprise to develop on terms and conditions such as no other South African town can offer' (DTC Minutes, 1 December 1914). More specifically, the council drew attention to the ample supply of coal; the plentiful supply of skilled and unskilled labour; the abundant and cheap water supply; the efficient municipal telephone service; the abundant electric power supply offered at very attractive rates to industry; and the low municipal rates. It also emphasized the availability of a wide variety of sites on very generous terms, both within and outside the borough's boundaries (DTC Minutes, 4 December 1916). The provision of transport facilities and the allocation of routes also influenced the process of accumulation.

Transport and accumulation

Transportation and infrastructure issues were dominant concerns in the discourse of the local state. The council had played an important role in facilitating commercial expansion by the provision of numerous support infrastructure and services which were essential to attract capital and facilitate accumulation.² It also recognized that the harbour played a critical role in the commercial and industrial expansion of the city (DTC Minutes, 1 December 1914).

Transport was important to the white bourgeoisie because the development of the harbour facilities of the city was critical for the growth and expansion of local commerce and industry, especially as South Africa was rapidly integrating into the global economy. Hence, advertising the advantages of the port united all factions of capital as well as the local state. At the intra-urban scale, however, there was little consensus and the local state's influence on the location of rail sidings and wharf improvements sometimes provided cause for public controversy 'as individual industrialists and developers jockeyed for advantage in influencing the Council's decisions on the location of such facilities' (McCarthy, 1991: 28).

The development of the tramways also played an important role in the expansion of the city. The Town Council believed that such a scheme would 'add to the borough revenue ... and lead to the formation of subsidiary townships' (Mayor's Minutes, 1907: 14). Hence, the extension of the tramways facilitated suburbanization and led to a spread of the rate burden (Smit, 1988: 58). The tramways ensured that there would not be overcrowding in the central city area, and also influenced an increase in land values along suburb routes.³ The importance of electric trams was that they promoted urban development and expansion in regions which were formerly beyond travelling range, including areas which were outside the municipal boundary. Hence, it would be to the advantage of property developers and land speculators, for example, to be able to influence the routes of the trams (McCarthy, 1991).

Although the trams initially served the central business district, there were soon demands from white property owners and civic associations that it be extended to serve the white working class in outlying areas. The council attempted to depoliticize route allocation by delegating this responsibility to the bureaucracy and a council sub-committee. However, this 'insulation of the transport planning process from public debate

2 Local Government Taxation in Durban. An analysis of the development of the city and the present rating system and sources of income, together with an examination of a change in the incidence of taxation with particular reference to the Council's proposal for the Differential Rating of properties according to types of usage (O.D. Gorven, City Treasurer, March 1963: 15).

3 Report of the Committee on the Incidence of Rating, 12 April 1923, para. 29.

apparently led to suspicions that land speculators were gaining influence behind a veil of local state secrecy' (McCarthy, 1991: 29).

There was also a public outcry over the differential taxation levied on central city and suburban residents for the funding of the tramway service. Basically, residents in the city centre objected to subsidizing trips of suburbanites to use the facilities of the centre, which also increased the value of property held by suburban speculators. The critical issue was that transport technology served different class interests, and was 'crucial to the development of class conflicts and class alliances within the context of the local state' (McCarthy, 1991: 28).

There was also a view that the extension of tram stages would increase the amount of land available for working class whites.⁴ This concern about the shortage of housing for the whites also formed part of a motivation to extend the borough's boundaries.⁵ Onselen (1982: 164) has suggested that by supporting the expansion of tram stages the state had actively promoted the 'geographical dispersal of the white working class as a means of enhancing its social and political control in a maturing capitalist system'. In addition to commerce and industry, tourism played an important role in Durban's economy.

Tourism and the local economy

The local state had played a critical role in developing the tourist potential of the city, which resulted in Durban becoming the premier holiday resort in Southern Africa. The council retained control of the beaches and their surrounding environments, encouraged the development of flats and hotels in the area, continued to develop the beaches, and provided recreation amenities.⁶

In 1907 Mayor Charlie Henwood reported that attempts by the council to advertise the town's winter tourist attractions had been successful (Mayor's Minutes, 1907: 7). He regarded the 1908 tourist season as the most successful ever achieved by the borough, with 15,000 people having visited the city. He urged that more efforts be made 'to enhance the attractiveness of the town, and to bring it as near perfection as possible in every respect' (Mayor's Minutes, 1908: 9).

There was a strong interdependence between the local tourist industry and the provision of transport facilities, particularly railways. In fact an alliance had developed between the railway authorities and the local state in promoting tourism in the city. This was acknowledged by Mayor Greenacre when he said that the success of projects to attract visitors from up-country depended upon the transport facilities which made this feasible (Mayor's Minutes, 1910: 20). In October 1922 the Council supported the formation of the Durban Publicity Association which would focus on marketing the city and its attractions (DTC Minutes, 6 October 1922). In addition to facilitating capital accumulation, the local state was also an entrepreneur in its own right.

The local state as entrepreneur

The DTC had been engaged in entrepreneurial activities since the turn of the century, mainly in areas where it had a monopoly. The trading undertakings in Durban consisted of the abattoir, electricity supply, markets, tramways, water supply and telephone departments. Durban was the only city which managed its own telephone service. In addition, the council also received income from issuing trading, liquor and vehicle licences, and from its administration of Native Affairs.

4 Report of the Special Committee appointed to enquire into the Scale of House Rents prevailing in Durban (1913: 7).

5 Report of Commission appointed to consider and report upon (1) the Extension of the Boundaries of the Borough of Durban or (2) the Better Government of the Local Urban Areas adjacent thereto (1930).

6 Local Government Taxation in Durban, *op cit.*, para. 29.

Table 1 Sources of revenue: 1909–14 (%)

Source	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
Rates	46	46	44	42	41	41
Trade	25	25	27	26	28	30
Rents	11	13	12	15	13	14
Licenses	10	10	10	10	10	11
Sundry Rec.	8	6	7	7	8	14

Source: A Report upon the Municipal Finances of Durban, Town Treasurer's Department, 3 July 1915: 11.

Most of the municipal enterprises had been acquired or established between 1895 and 1905.⁷ The Town Treasurer reported that during this period Durban had invested a large amount of capital in the appropriation and development of undertakings which were formerly viewed as part of the domain of private enterprise. The council itself was intent on extending the services of its municipal enterprises beyond the town's boundaries, primarily because it would increase the borough revenue (Mayor's Minutes, 1907: 14). It was also keen to increase the profits from its electrical undertakings.

The profits from the trading undertakings accrued to the Borough Fund, and were used to offset increases in rates. A comparison of rates paid and services obtained in different South African towns revealed that the citizens of Durban obtained far more than those in other cities. In fact, between 1897 and 1914 the rate remained fixed at two and a half pence in the pound (Mayor's Minutes, 1910: 5). Table 1 shows the sources of direct and indirect taxation which financed the operation of the municipality. It reveals the extent to which the rates of Durban property owners were being subsidized by the council's commercial and trading undertakings.

However, not everyone agreed with the policy of using income from the trading enterprises to subvent rates. The Report of the Committee on the Incidence of Rating appointed by the Durban Town Council indicated that the use of profits from the trading undertakings could be used to reduce the cost of the services rendered.⁸ The Committee also suggested that only certain groups, particularly the wealthy, benefitted from the relief in rates provided by the profits from the municipal enterprises. This was 'contrary to the fundamental principle of municipal organisation that any one section of the community should benefit by the necessities of other sections'.⁹ The council was urged to evaluate whether the existing system should continue. In 1934 the council accepted the Treasurer's recommendation that a Commercial Manager (Trading Undertakings) be appointed to protect and develop its enterprises (Mayor's Minutes, 1934: 7).

The council was aware that the viability of its trading enterprises could be threatened by the more competitive services offered by the private sector (DTC Minutes, 25 September 1961). For example, competition from Indian and Native Taxis affected revenue from the tramways (Mayor's Minutes, 1934: 7). The council attempted to stifle the burgeoning black transport industry through route restrictions and license objections (DTC Minutes, 11 April 1940).

It is evident that the local state in Durban had played an important role in facilitating urban capital accumulation, and had actively pursued an industrial growth agenda. This was promoted by infrastructural arrangements, alliance with the railways, the fostering of tourism, and the development of its own municipal enterprises. The local state in Durban

7 A Report upon the Municipal Finances of Durban, Town Treasurer's Department, 3 July 1915: 11.

8 Report of the Committee on the Incidence of Rating, 12 April 1923, paras. 30–31.

9 *Ibid.*, para. 32.

also pioneered mechanisms for the control and regulation of black labour to facilitate capital accumulation.

Labour control

Durban experienced a very large increase in African workers at the turn of the century, and in many respects served as a laboratory for competing doctrines and policies for social and political control of labour in the country. By 1901 Durban had a population of 55,000, comprising 15,000 Africans, 14,000 Indians and 26,000 whites, and this increased to 68,000 in 1904, with proportions of 19,000, 16,000 and 31,000 respectively (Swanson, 1976: 161). Changes in the population composition and demography of Durban led to the development of a unique system of black urban administration, which had a major influence on municipalities throughout the Union. A central concern of the local state was to control the rapidly growing African and Indian population in Durban, and this concern was commonly expressed in terms of the outbreak of diseases, insanitary conditions and crime (Swanson, 1968: 145). A local debate ensued about whether the African proletariat should be accommodated in compounds and barracks close to their place of employment, or in locations outside the city. The local state tried to appease the white electorate without endangering the supply of cheap labour into the city, or imposing any additional financial burden upon the white ratepayers or capital. The local state's attempts to control the labour force was met with increasing resistance and militancy by the African proletariat.

The 'togt' system

An interesting contradiction which developed during this period was that between casual labour, employed on a daily basis, and contract workers engaged over longer periods (Mackenzie, 1984: 14). Those employed on a daily basis were called 'togt' labourers. This suited shipping, the major employer in Durban, which had seasonal labour demands, characterized by great oscillations between seasons. 'Togt' labour developed as many Africans in Durban refused to enter into monthly contracts with employers, and forced a rise in wages by working daily. They enjoyed greater bargaining power, and greater freedom of movement, much to the dismay of small employers. However, this went against the grain of existing employment practices, and the local state and capital responded sharply to increase control over labour (*ibid.*: 15).

A collective strategy was developed 'against the workers, which involved administrative, legislative and co-ordinated employer action, [and] served to reconcile the differing interests of capitalists under the strain of shortage of labour through a further extension of the state' (*ibid.*: 89). This took the form of rigid municipal control over togt workers, with the Town Council controlling the erection, maintenance and inspection of private compounds, and forcing the owners to abide by the city's health regulations. The demand for collective and organized action against togt workers emerged from an awareness of the disproportionate structure of Durban's labour market — a high concentration in the docks and a shortage in commerce and households.

While the togt regulations represented an attempt to dominate the African proletariat, they had their own contradictions. The large number of work seekers needed an unusually large police contingent. Workers resisted the assault to cheapen the value of labour. During periods of economic prosperity demands for high wages had to be acceded to, and this 'tended to undermine not only the low wages the system was intended to enforce but also the basis for the political rule over the African working class' (*ibid.*: 41).

By 1904 the local white bourgeoisie were divided over what constituted the most appropriate conditions for the reproduction of African labour, and this concern was

expressed in terms of whether they should be housed in compounds and barracks in the city, or native locations outside the town.

Compounds, locations and influx control

The Durban Council did not cater for the influx of Africans and Indians into the city, especially with regard to housing, and the majority lived in 'uncontrolled accommodation', (mainly squatter settlements), in peri-urban areas (Maylam, 1981: 6). Attempts were made to provide 'locations' and 'villages' for them. At the local state level there were three influential constituencies shaping housing policy:

- (1) Elected Municipal Councillors, (the executive), with vested commercial and mercantile interests;
- (2) The white urban electorate which was 'unanimous in demanding docile labourers at low wages, freedom from their competition in skilled trades or commerce, and protection from their 'barbarism' or 'demoralisation' ' (Swanson, 1976: 162);
- (3) Municipal officials (the bureaucracy), particularly the Superintendent of Police, the Manager of the Native Administration Department, and the Medical Officer of Health.

There was a clear contradiction in policy — white capitalist interests were dependent upon black labour, but other whites objected to people of colour living in close proximity to them. The local state executive was aware of the need for workers to have relatively cheap and easy access to their workplaces, without inconveniencing employers, as well as the demand from local state bureaucrats that they should be removed to locations outside the borough. The Council agreed that the high cost of transportation rendered the latter proposal impossible. This view was echoed by the Mayor, F.C. Hollander in 1912, who argued that to be 'successful, it was felt that any scheme for the better housing of the natives must secure that object without in any way inconveniencing employers' (Mayor's Minutes, 1912: 15). Significantly, during this period the Durban Town Council was dominated by commercial interests (Wyley, 1986: 30–31).

The local state bureaucracy was influential in its demand for native locations at the outskirts of the city, as this would expedite effective police control, and ensure a stable labour supply with fixed wages. It argued that compounds, hostels and locations served as effective mechanisms of control, and stifled political or labour action (Swanson, 1976: 163). The debate between the local state executive and bureaucracy was about means rather than ends. There was basic agreement about the end — to exploit the African labour force to the fullest without 'threatening the privileged political, economic and social position of whites' (Maylam, 1985: 46). The debate focused on attempts to reconcile these contradictory aims. It was not merely by chance that the police and health authorities were largely pre-occupied with the urban native question. The municipal law identified such functions, apart from controlling trade licences and maintaining roads, as the chief function of local government (Swanson, 1976).

A major problem for African housing was the availability of finance. This was aggravated by the fact that neither the central nor the local state, or capital was prepared to fund African housing in Durban (Maylam, 1982: 7). In order to resolve the problem of housing, the local state pioneered a unique system, based on beer sales, whereby black labourers contributed towards their own reproduction.

Local innovation — the beer monopoly

The DTC attempted to obtain revenue to fund African housing from an ingenious source — the monopoly on the sale of native beer. This was facilitated by the Native Beer Act of 1908, which authorized the Durban municipality to establish a monopoly over the sale of

native beer. The profits were to accrue to a municipal native administration fund. This was referred to as the 'Durban System', and '[b]eer revenues became the key financial support of a more intensive and comprehensive programme of paternalistic administration than ever before, tending with relative efficiency to restrain Africans to barracks and locations' (Swanson, 1976: 174). The Transvaal Local Government (Stallard) Commission 'commended Durban as a model for African administration', and the 'Durban System' was subsequently adopted by municipalities throughout the Union (Torr, 1983: 5).

The beer monopoly basically represented a sophisticated form of coercion whereby workers were subsidizing their own reproduction and control at no cost to the local state and capital (La Hausse, 1984). The local state's function in connection with the 'black working class became removed from the direct rule of the openly coercive state, the police, to the more sophisticated rule of fluent linguists and specialists who stressed the welfare aspects of segregation' (Hemson, 1979: 132). The institution of the beer monopoly was not, however, the result of a judicious strategy on the part of the local state. Rather, it was the final form in which the exploitation of Africans in Durban was achieved, and was the result of a phase of intense conflicts between the local state, different factions of capital and white elites over what comprised the most suitable configuration of social relations in Durban (La Hausse, 1983). There was a great deal of resistance and protest against measures to control and regulate the African labour force.

Resistance and protest

In spite of the initial euphoria, the Durban system began to fail in the 1920s. The increasing resistance and militancy of the African working class threatened to undermine the local state's attempts to exert social control over the labour force. Between 1918 and 1920 the dockworkers and municipal workers were involved in numerous strikes. This period was characterized by labour unrest and resistance nationwide. In April 1918 Durban's 'ricksha' pullers refused to work because of an increase in their vehicle rentals. Under the leadership of J.L. Dube, President of the South African Native National Congress, and editor of *Ilange lase Natal*, many workers in other industries were demanding wage increases (Hemson, 1979). The local state reacted by requesting the central state to take action against Dube.

In July 1918 the railway workers were involved in strike action and the local state used the police force to intimidate the labourers, requesting the chief magistrate to intervene and the police to investigate potential instigators. As a result 'the close networks between particular employers, municipal officials, and representatives of central government were lit up starkly in the suppression of working class action' (Hemson, 1979: 184). In fact the local state (a large employer of African labour) entered into a pact with local capital in September 1919 to control wage increases. However, as worker action became more militant, employers were forced to make individual concessions (Hemson, 1979).

Meanwhile, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) headed by Champion was well established in Durban by the late 1920s. One of the issues taken up by Champion was the local state's beer monopoly. Simultaneously, yet independently, this protest was also taken up by the togt workers. This led to the boycott of beer halls in June 1929 which was sustained for 18 months. During this period the petty bourgeois political leadership 'lost ground to popular militancy as ultra-low wages and economic hardship fuelled the resistance to the monopoly system' (Torr, 1985: 30). This culminated in a clash between white vigilantes, blacks and the police, which left many dead and injured.

In response to the militancy of labour, industrial capitalists in Durban merged to

establish a united front with the formation of the Natal Employers Association in the early 1940s, whose main task was to deal with labour matters. The local state adopted a policy of amelioration, particularly the incorporation of aspiring middle class Africans, which fractionalized the working class. The Durban Native Advisory Board was established in 1930 to defuse African discontent (Torr, 1985). The municipality also attempted to provide more sport and recreation facilities for workers, which served as effective instruments of social control. Ironically, the council's reluctance to establish urban locations did not foster bourgeois interests, as the high concentration of workers in compounds and barracks could rebel against employers and the state. By the end of the 1920s the proletariat had succeeded in transforming the barracks into fortresses, which required repeated police action to restore 'normal' bourgeoisie control (Hemson, 1979: 242). The local state was also subject to pressure from working class whites, and this is discussed in the next section.

The local state and class issues

In Durban there was a strong historical alliance between the council and the white working class. The council bureaucracy, many of whom were recruited from this group, were particularly sympathetic to white working class interests. The alliance was at times supported by some members of the local state executive. The local state bureaucracy was concerned about the housing and land needs of the white working class, and this was often expressed in terms of a racist discourse. The main reason for this was because this class was threatened by the Indians who were competing with them in the labour and housing market.

The white working class alliance

The alliance between the local state bureaucracy and the white working class was cemented by the local state's decision to give preferential treatment to whites seeking employment in its different departments. In September 1914 the Council agreed to give preferential treatment to white unskilled workers in the City Engineer's Department (DTC Minutes, 7 September 1914). This received the support of its burgesses who wanted Durban to be a white, English language city. Promotion of such policies was bound to find favour with the local state executive who owed their positions to the support they received from the white electorate. The council also adopted a policy of affirmative action to give white youths employment opportunities in the Corporation's Departments, at the expense of Indian incumbents. Consequently, the number of white employees in the council under the age of 20 increased from 122 in June 1923 to 183 in August 1925 (DTC Minutes, 10 May 1940).

The strong alliance between the local state bureaucracy and the white municipal employees can be illustrated with reference to the Tramways Department. By 1919 the Tramways Department of the council had emerged as major employers. Their workforce soon became the vanguard of local white labour militancy, and was involved in numerous strikes which led to clashes with the police, and shocked the local power bloc. This marked the beginnings of patronage politics at the local level, and from this period onwards the local state made efforts to accommodate white working class interests. The 'council agreed to work towards a programme to promote home ownership amongst the [white] working classes so as to bring about 'stability, security and a stake in the town'' (McCarthy, 1991: 30).

The period of peak labour militancy in Durban (1920–22) was also characterized by a phase in which problems of slums and squatting became prominent in public discourse, which soon acquired blatant racial undertones, particularly with regard to restrictions on

Indian ownership and occupation of property (Maharaj, 1995). This forged a complex alliance between local elites, white labour and the local state 'in which racial differences amongst the workforce and conflicts with a nascent Indian land owning class proved to be crucial' (McCarthy, 1991: 31). This represented the early stages of a conflict that was to continue into the 1950s. The high rents in Durban led to demands for public housing for working class whites.

The case of high house rents

The Durban Chamber of Commerce was responsible for representing the interests of commercial capital in the city. In a letter addressed to the DTC on 20 August 1912, the Chamber argued that the 'high scale of house rents' was likely to have a detrimental effect on the industrial development of the city, and it urged the council to inquire into the reasons for such high rentals.¹⁰ The DTC acquiesced to this request, and a committee of 11, consisting of representatives from the Council, Chamber of Commerce, Natal Manufacturer's Association, Durban Master Builder's Association, Durban Retailer's Council and the South African Labour Party was formed.¹¹

The committee concluded that house rents in Durban were not higher than other coastal towns of South Africa. However, it established that there was a shortage of housing in Durban. This was attributed to the high cost of land, labour, materials and high building standards which made housing an unprofitable investment. The committee suggested that the council should sell land at a lower price, and reconsider building by-laws. Furthermore, an extension of the borough's boundaries would result in more cheap land being available which would ultimately lead to reduced house rents. Another reason for the housing shortage was the Town Council's policy of levying uniform rates on the value of land and buildings which penalized the 'legitimate user of land as against the speculative holder of unoccupied land'.¹² This was because buildings invariably had a higher value than land, and dwellings therefore carried a higher rates burden. The committee was of the opinion that the rates on land should be twice those on buildings.

The DTC accepted the committee's report that rents in Durban were not higher than other urban areas. However, the council was not prepared to take any steps to implement the committee's suggestion that rates be levied on a 2 to 1 basis on land and buildings (DTC Minutes, 7 September 1914). In addition to the apparent shortage of housing, it appeared that there was also a shortage of land in Durban.

The land question in Durban

In 1916 the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Murison, had advised the council that there was a great deal of overcrowding in the city. However, he contended that ejecting offenders without making provisions for rehousing them was not likely to improve public health.¹³ The council instructed the Town Clerk, Mr. W.P.M. Henderson, to prepare a report on the problem. The Town Clerk argued that the problem could be related in part to the fact that the council initially had a monopoly over land. However, he cautioned that before arriving at any conclusion, the difficulties experienced by the municipality should be considered. The council had to alienate land to obtain funds for public works. There was a great deal of debate about whether the land should be sold in freehold or leased, and the council had experimented with both schemes. The leasehold system was unsuccessful

10 Report of the Special Committee appointed to enquire into the Scale of House Rents prevailing in Durban (1913): 21).

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*: 4.

13 Durban's Land Problem. Report of the Town Clerk to the Mayor and Councillors of the Borough of Durban, 12 November 1917: 1.

because 'the period of lease was too short to induce leaseholders to erect even moderately substantial houses'.¹⁴

Another reason attributed by the Town Clerk for the shortage of land was the encroachment of Indians into traditionally white areas of the town.¹⁵ He was particularly concerned about the threat this presented to poor whites, and advocated some form of segregation to resolve the problem. He argued that the Indian opposition to segregation could be overcome if the council acquired statutory power to forbid white occupation of coloured areas. He devoted considerable attention to an evaluation of the merits of municipal housing.¹⁶

The ultimate concern with public housing was to cater for poor whites who were forced to live next to Indians. The Town Clerk also emphasized that the housing of single white women in Durban needed the urgent attention of the Council.¹⁷ Although the council's entry into the housing arena would disturb market forces, the Town Clerk argued that the supply of housing would be increased and rents would therefore be lowered. Overcrowding and its attendant social problems would also be reduced.¹⁸ In 1918 the DTC agreed to institute a municipal housing scheme for working class whites, arguing that the advantage of such schemes was that the council would derive income from rates, which would otherwise be lost to the 'Municipality if the population is driven by lack of suitable accommodation to the suburban districts'.¹⁹ This concern with the problems of working class whites permeated the discourse of the local state bureaucracy.

Conclusion

Cities provide the physical, social and political arena to facilitate production, distribution and accumulation. At the local state level the political process is influenced by the 'politics of production and politics of consumption' (Staeheli, 1989: 229). This process, however, is not without its contradictions and conflicts. The local state mediates in this conflict — facilitating accumulation as well as responding to the demands of labour in order to maintain legitimacy (Mollenkopf, 1978).

This paper drew attention to the role of the local state in Durban in facilitating the 'politics of production'. The economic vigour of the local state is directly dependent on the health of private enterprise. Hence, Durban was always competing with other centres to attract new investments. As a result of the uneven nature of capitalist economic development, cities are forced to compete for investments, industries, etc. (Harvey, 1985). Competition amongst local authorities means that any hesitation to grant incentives to private investors is perceived as a loss in the contest with other localities to attract investment funds (Leitner, 1990).

An historical review of the local state in South Africa revealed that while it was instrumentalist in responding to the needs of capital, it also served, for example, white working class interests. The local state's own interests were, moreover, often coincidental with, and served by the thriving white bureaucracy. In Durban there was a concern to facilitate capital accumulation, regulate and repress black labour, and to cater for the needs of the white working class. In order to further ensure that Durban was attractive to investors, the local state became heavily involved in the provision of the social means of reproduction — especially housing for working class whites.

14 *Ibid.*: 4.

15 The local state in Durban was subsequently at the forefront of calls for the segregation of Indians (see Maharaj, 1992; 1995).

16 Durban's Land Problem, *op. cit.*: 4.

17 *Ibid.*: 19.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Minutes of the Durban Town Council, 7 November 1918.

It is evident from this paper that to suggest that there was a rigid alliance between capital and the local state in Durban would be too deterministic. For example, each attempted to pass on the cost of housing the city's African labour force onto the other. Furthermore, the administrators of the local state were also engaged with the task of appeasing the fears of white ratepayers who were not employers of labour. A local debate ensued about whether the African proletariat should be accommodated in compounds and barracks close to their place of employment, or in locations outside the city. Bureaucrats like the Medical Officer of Health and the Superintendent of Police supported the removal of natives to locations and villages. The local state executive, however, was aware of the cheap labour requirements of capital, and favoured the establishment of barracks and compounds close to workplaces in the city.

Such debates reflected the changing configuration of interests between the bureaucracy and the executive. The local state had to appease the white electorate without endangering the supply of cheap labour into the city, or imposing any additional financial burden upon the white ratepayers or capital. The local state pioneered a unique system whereby African workers contributed to the cost of their own reproduction.

In South Africa the local state has frequently been regarded as part of the central state apparatus. In the process the importance of politics at the local level has been ignored. An analysis of the local state in Durban suggests that although the decentralization of power to the local level had been nebulous, the local state should not be viewed merely as an agent of the central state. The autonomy of the local state was determined by the extent to which it could follow its own interests without being constrained by local social and economic circumstances, or by interference from the central state. In many respects the local state in Durban was 'generating "autonomous initiatives" and pursuing its own strategies and goals independently of other social actors to a significant degree' (Swanson, 1983: 401). It also developed a unique system of social and economic control, the so-called Durban system, which was adopted by the central state.

The evidence presented in this paper supports McCarthy's (1991: 40) contention 'that the time has come for reconsidering the exceptionalist hypothesis on the local state in South Africa: that is, the hypothesis that South Africa is relatively unique in having a highly dependent set of political processes and local structures'. The historical analysis of the development of the local state in Durban supports Duncan and Goodwin's (1988: 38) contention that 'state forms and actions can ... be linked to changing relations between groups of people instead of being left as socially inexplicable organisational forms or bundles of given functions'.

Local states have unique histories and specificities which determine the nature of political practices such as participation and patronage. The manner in which these political practices are structured account for differences between local states (Greer, 1987). Following Duncan and Goodwin (1988) and Fincher (1989), this paper drew attention to the social and class relations, as well as the labour, political and cultural traditions which prevailed in Durban. It was evident that there were conflicts and contradictions among the local state, the white elite and working class groups over transport, labour, housing and 'race' issues in Durban. This was diffused with the adoption of a patronage style of politics which accommodated white working class interests. The increasingly racist discourse consolidated a political alliance between the local state, the white elite and the white working class. The local state in Durban was responding to its own configuration of local interests, and in many respects pioneered measures of reproduction, repression and segregation.

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