

A Test Case for 'Planned Urbanisation'

The Free State camp of Onverwacht saw the worst of the brutalities of resettlement. Now the township of Botshabelo, its future depends on the outcome of conflicts within reformist and traditional elements of the state. WILLIAM COBBETT believes the area is a test case which will reveal the practical shape of the state's 'orderly urbanisation' and wider reform programme.

Botshabelo township, 55 kilometres east of Bloemfontein, does not immediately spring to mind as one of South Africa's major black urban areas. Yet this township - formerly the Onverwacht resettlement camp - has become the second largest township in the country after Soweto.

The Bloemfontein-Botshabelo-Thaba'Nchu (B-B-T) axis is in many ways a test-case for the state, in that it serves as a chessboard on which the reform programme can be piloted.

A mini-South Africa is captured within the 60-kilometre radius that covers the three points: there are three industrial decentralisation growth points; commuters; long-distance migrants; bantustan intrigues; and a planned new third tier of government, the Bloemfontein Regional Services Council (RSC).

To date the region has been relatively free of the resistance shown by communities elsewhere. But it is doubtful whether it will stay off the unrest map for much longer, especially if certain state designs are implemented without meaningful negotiation.

BOTSHABELO'S HISTORY □

From the early 1970s, as agricultural mechanisation continued apace and the state implemented its policy of forced removals, thousands of apartheid refugees poured into the tiny enclave of Thaba'Nchu, which is officially a segment of Bophuthatswana. There they created rudimentary squatter camps in Three Bultfonteins and Kromdraai and eked out an existence.

By the mid-1970s, the refugees, who were mainly South Sotho, outnumbered the original Tswana ethnic group, whose Barolong Tribal Authority governed the area.

The Sotho squatters suffered as a result of state-engineered ethnic divisions. Pressure on them intensified when Bophuthatswana was granted 'independence' in 1977. After a series of raids on squatters by Bophuthatswana police in 1978, QwaQwa authorities, representing the 'Sotho homeland', intervened on behalf of the Sotho in the area.

After negotiations between the South African central state, QwaQwa and Bophuthatswana, the South African Development Trust (SADT) purchased a block of land to the south-west of Thaba'Nchu. In the winter of 1979 the first refugees moved onto this Trust Land to begin the resettlement camp that would become South Africa's largest testament to its policy of massive forced removals - Onverwacht.

Initial conditions were appalling. No facilities were provided. People endured the harsh Free State winters in tents and later in corrugated iron shacks. There were outbreaks of typhoid and in the first few years infant mortality was higher than that of adults. At various times the area was closed to the press, as local officials found coverage too hostile and intensive.

The camp's sewage disposal was by means of a bucket system, still used today. Water was brought in by tanker at first; later stand pipes were laid to provide taps for communal use. As for housing, inhabitants were provided with a stand and instructed to build their own permanent structures.

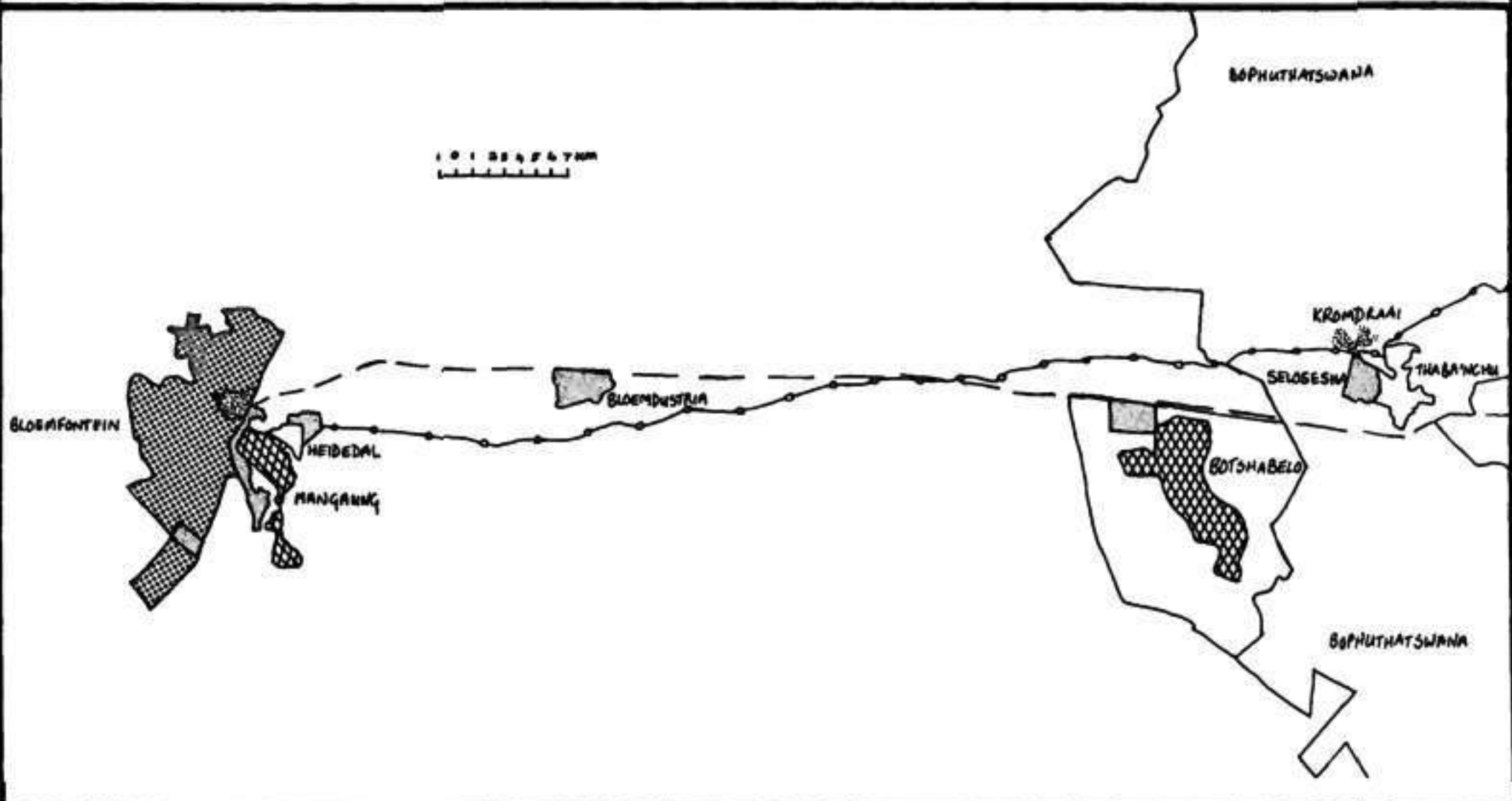
Botshabelo, as Onverwacht came to be

called officially, became the dumping ground for 'surplus' Africans throughout the Orange Free State. Its population grew rapidly from the original 64 000 in 1979, to an estimated 200 000 in 1983. Housing provision, such as it was, could not remotely keep pace with the influx of new arrivals, and the structures which did exist were under intense pressure. Thousands of families could find shelter only as sub-tenants. Stands were bursting with tenants and sub-tenants, a situation reminiscent of Alexandra in the 1940s.

BOTSHABELO AND INFILX CONTROL

One of Botshabelo's many functions is to relieve pressure on Bloemfontein's Mangaung township. Indeed, an original motivation for its existence was to shift some 26 000 South Sotho away from the Bloemfontein area. These people were moved to Botshabelo shortly after the original Kromdaai refugees arrived there.

In 1983 the state 'froze' Mangaung's population at a maximum of 100 000, and



The Bloemfontein - Botshabelo - Thaba'Nchu axis

Overcrowding reached a critical point towards the end of 1985. In an unprecedented display of joint action, between 10 000 and 30 000 people moved to the outskirts of Botshabelo and claimed stands of their own. They erected shanties and stated their determination not to be moved.

Botshabelo's current population stands at an official minimum of 300 000. Some state officials privately speculate that the figure may be as high as 500 000. In short, no-one really knows how many people are there, least of all the state. Between 1980 and 1984, Botshabelo's population grew at a rate of approximately 35% per year. This indicates a population density in excess of 3 000 people per square kilometre.

directed that all future population growth in the area was to be displaced to Botshabelo. Botshabelo's massive expansion resulted in the emergence of a substantial commuter population in the region. By December 1984 some 23 000 workers commuted 60 kilometres daily into Bloemfontein. Some 30 000 migrants who work on the Orange Free State gold fields are also based in Botshabelo.

Botshabelo was made an industrial growth point (IDP) under the 1982 Regional Development Plan. Potential employers would receive very high labour incentives, in an attempt to attract labour-intensive industries to utilise the high level of unemployed in the area.

Botshabelo's 600-hectare industrial

area, of which less than 60 hectares are in use, contains about 21 factories which employ a total of 3 000 workers at the extremely low rates characteristic of industrial decentralisation wage patterns. But it is clear that even very generous concessions could not attract sufficient industry to make a meaningful dent in the area's unemployment levels.

Botshabelo commuter access to the Bloemfontein labour market was assured by relaxation of controls in terms of section 10 of the Urban Areas Act. These commuters were given a preferential section 10 (1)(d) access to Bloemfontein; for labour purposes Botshabelo effectively became an extension of Mangaung.

This shows the dual role of such places: they serve as sites for state-aided capital investment, and also provide large labour pools for the traditional existing local labour market.

The state's new national urbanisation policy involves an attempt to desensitise and deracialise any new forms of control over the movement of people in South Africa. The B-B-T sub-region is put forward as a model for the new policy of 'planned and orderly urbanisation'. This policy was first outlined in the President's Council report on An Urbanisation Strategy for the Republic of South Africa in September 1985, and more recently in the White Paper on Urbanisation of April 1986.

For the inhabitants of the B-B-T region, the White Paper merely confirms existing policy in the area. For the past few years, manipulation of housing controls and land occupancy has been the main method of influx control in the region.

Freezing township expansion in Mangaung and making stands readily available in Botshabelo exemplifies the state ordering influx control through controlled provision of land. Clearly, as far as access to labour markets is concerned, Botshabelo's population must be deemed urban. An obvious parallel is on the north East Rand where the newly created Ekangala township outside Bronkhorstspuit has a function similar to Botshabelo's.

Botshabelo and Ekangala show how far labour provision has moved from the simple traditional division between urban workers and long-distance migrants. Peripheral labour pools form

part of extended urban labour markets, by complementing controlled residential exclusion with labour market inclusion.

The state therefore provides for a new hierarchy within the existing division of labour. The relative privileges of a limited urban labour market are now increasingly the target of fierce competition by a relatively impoverished peripheral labour force.

This labour hierarchy seems reinforced by certain provisions of the White Paper. The people of Thaba'Nchu are deemed, by virtue of their 'independence', to be 'foreigners' in South Africa (at least for the time being), subject to the differential application of the new influx control measure which controls land occupancy.

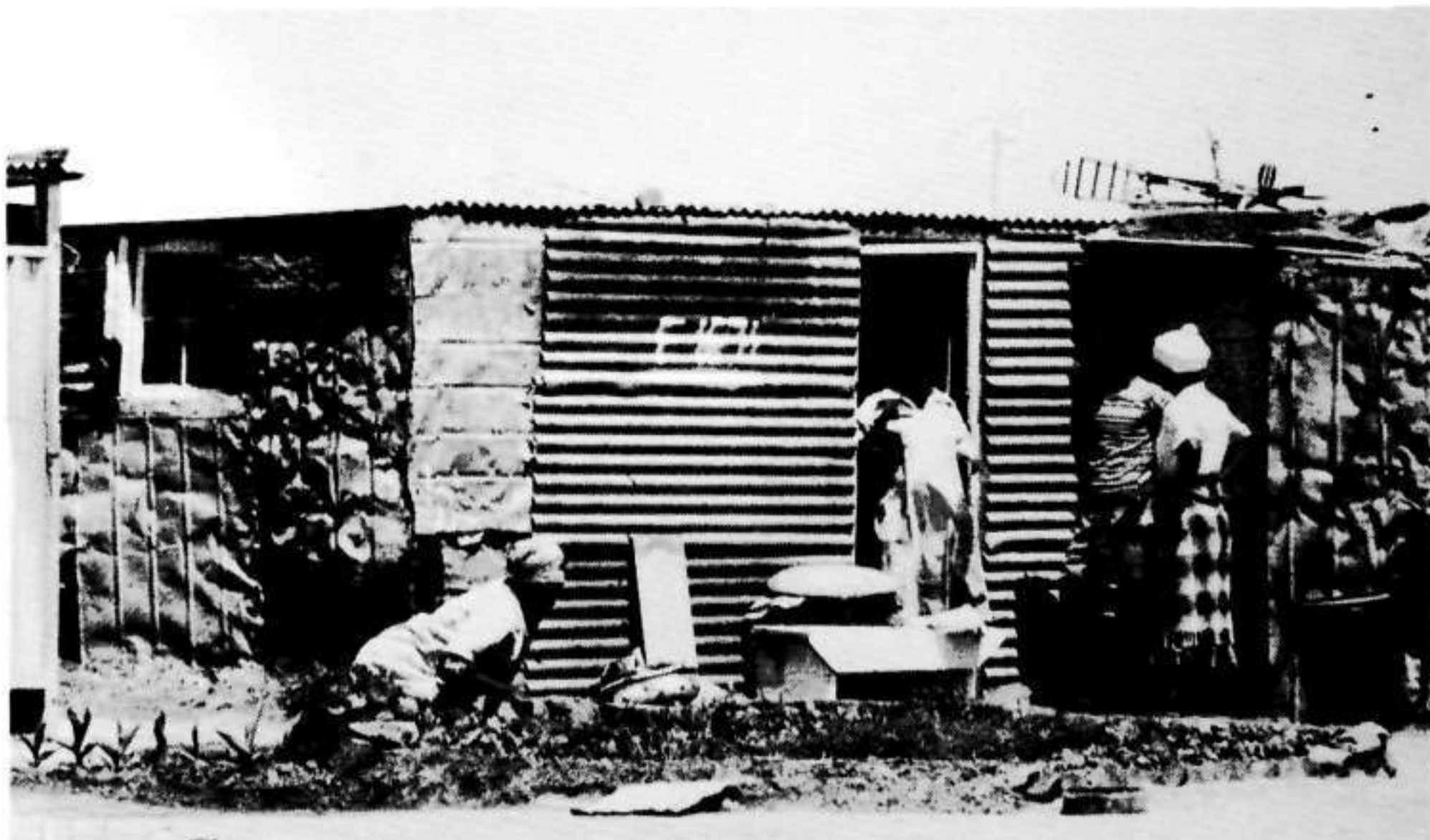
These provisions have profound implications for trade unions. Unions in the Bloemfontein area previously operated within a population of 100 000. They now have to organise within a population total of 500 000, an increase which far outstrips any growth in the employment market. In spite of this, unions have begun organising workers from Botshabelo, including those employed in the decentralisation growth point.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The PC report and the White Paper supersede previous influx control policy based on the 1979 Riekert Commission findings. But both policies have a common fundamental prerequisite for success: establishment of a viable third tier of government capable of claiming a degree of popular legitimacy.

For Riekert, urban 'insiders' were to be made materially aware of their 'privileges' through Black Local Authorities. These 'insiders' would be materially and ideologically estranged from rural 'outsiders'. But the Black Local Authorities system was a spectacular failure and in itself a direct cause of unrest in the country. Popular action, both spontaneous and organised, decimated the system.

The third tier of government has a central role in the strategy of 'orderly urbanisation' - for it is at this level that the new policy is to be administered and managed. The White Paper states: 'Local government



Onverwacht, renamed Botshabelo, was a dumping ground for 'surplus' Africans

institutions should be established for all communities and effective measures should be taken to ensure the viability of these authorities in view of the fact that they, in co-operation with all other government institutions, have the particularly important responsibility of managing the urbanisation processes at local level on a continuous basis'.

(4.3.13)

This central role of third-tier government is to be taken over by the proposed Regional Services Councils (RSC). This two-tier level of local government departs from previous local government policy. While the lower third tier is still based on the Group Areas Act, the higher tier will be multi-racial. One of the RSCs' main functions will be to redistribute resources within a region, although in a thoroughly undemocratic way. Again, the Bloemfontein area will be the test case, as it will receive the first RSC, due to be established in June this year.

However, conflicting strains within both central and local state can be seen at this level, and a range of different state interest groups are involved.

Bloemfontein itself, as part of 'white' South Africa, falls under the ministerial direction of the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning. This department has pressed

strongly for a 'functional' regional approach to planning and administration within South Africa. It views RSCs as the 'ace card' of the whole reform process, and sees their success or failure as likely to have an important impact on future state direction.

Botshabelo is being developed by the South African Development Trust Corporation Limited (STK) which falls under the Department of Development Aid. Some officials do subscribe to the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning approach, but Development Aid is more noted for elements who remain committed to the tenets of Grand Apartheid - most notably those which continue to give the bantustans primacy in any potential constitutional order.

And finally there is Thaba'Nchu - that lonely and distant segment of geographically diverse Bophuthatswana - so far from the rest of Bop that it cannot even get Bop-TV. Bophuthatswana regards itself as the 'showpiece' success story of 'separate development' and is resistant to any moves that might seem to undercut its nominal independence.

RSCs were originally intended to give political expression to economic and demographic realities. Increased integration of existing towns with urbanising populations and the

deconcentration of industrial activity, caused new sites of development to emerge; RSCs are meant to extend political control and direction over these new physical realities.

The development thrust in the Bloemfontein area aims to develop the B-B-T axis as a coherent sub-region. According to this logic, developmental needs would have clear priority over such non-developmental concepts as an invisible bantustan boundary.

On the face of it there are clear signs that the area is being developed as one economic unit. There is, for example, the comprehensive bus service which links Bloemfontein to Botshabelo. The recently-created Bloemindustria growth point, 20 kilometres east of Bloemfontein, suggests that any further growth will move towards the labour force. If Bloemindustria is successful - and some serious doubts have been expressed - commuting time would be reduced. This is one of the stated aims of the White Paper.

However, development planning and local government are not nearly as coherent as they may seem at first glance - in fact they are in a state of some disarray. This mirrors confusion within the central state, which increasingly finds its reform programme overtaken by events. To add to the problem, the 'functional' planning and structural 'deracialisation' which characterise the reform programme often come up against that 'outmoded' concept - apartheid ideology - lurking behind many corners and in many important heads.

This is shown in the recent announcement of the Bloemfontein RSC. Far from following the demographic and economic integration of the axis, as its internal logic dictates, the RSC will include only Bloemfontein and Botshabelo, and exclude Thaba'Nchu. But there is resistance within Bloemfontein about the inclusion of even Botshabelo, which is portrayed as a squatter camp that will drain Bloemfontein's resources.

This casts a different light on local development plans and particularly Bloemindustria. With Thaba'Nchu excluded (or, more likely, with Thaba'Nchu excluding itself) from the RSC, Bloemindustria will provide direct competition for the industrial development point of Seloshesha, already the least developed in the area.

The only real advantage of the Seloshesha IDP is that it is located inside Bophuthatswana, which does not allow South African trade unions to operate in 'its territory'. In fact, the hopelessness of Thaba'Nchu's independent developmental possibilities is causing it to suffer a net population loss. No doubt these people are moving to Bophuthatswana regions adjacent to more promising labour markets, such as the PWV.

Paradoxically, this embarrassing fact is consistent with Thaba'Nchu's own twisted logic. If Thaba'Nchu is an integral part of Bophuthatswana and not the B-B-T region, its inhabitants should seek work in other parts of Bop, albeit hundreds of kilometres away, and not in Bloemfontein, 60 kilometres away. Thus are the laws of economic gravity defied in South Africa.

RSCs were conceived as an elaborate solution to the interlinked fiscal and political crisis that local government has always experienced in South Africa. But clearly the tax base in Bloemfontein-Botshabelo is not big enough to allow for a financially independent RSC. The central state will have to make good the deficit. Given the size and poverty of Botshabelo, this contribution will have to be large if any meaningful upgrading is to take place: more than 99,5% of the population have no electricity, for example.

BOTSHABELO AND QWAQWA

Following their original intervention on behalf of the South Sotho in Kromdraai, QwaQwa authorities remained largely in the background. But there are indications that this is changing.

Botshabelo's possible incorporation into QwaQwa - which is situated on the northern border of Lesotho some hundreds of kilometres away - is again being regarded as a serious possibility (see Beeld, 22.02.86). Here again is a clear contradiction: at the same time as the state outlines plans to implement a regional programme, it shows that it is still trapped by the framework of traditional apartheid.

But Botshabelo does not even fit many of the peculiar requirements of territorial Grand Apartheid. Botshabelo's inhabitants have no

historical reason to be there. Let us not forget that this is a state-created township not yet seven years old. If anything, the South Sotho can lay realistic historical claim to Thaba'Nchu itself, originally a Basotho area under King Moshoeshoe I. An alliance between the Tswana and the Boers led to the land being given to the Barolong tribe.

More important, Botshabelo is not even a Basotho township. Here the state is caught in the lie of its past policies. Botshabelo was made the 'dumping ground' for all 'surplus' Africans in the Orange Free State, so the area is ethnically heterogeneous, comprising Sotho, Xhosa, Ndebele, Tswana, Swazi, Pedi and Zulu people. Any claims about preserving 'pure' ethnicity hold little water.

While certain members of the older generation in Botshabelo may favour the idea of incorporation, clearly the youth - and 73% of the population is under 30 - will not accept any extension of apartheid's bantustan structures. Any attempted incorporation could lead to an explosive situation.

In short, the state has indicated that Botshabelo is inextricably linked to Bloemfontein. Yet it also asserts that Botshabelo residents must be incorporated into the distant 'city-state' of QwaQwa. This comprises 480 square kilometres of mountainous terrain, making it the smallest bantustan. It has undergone a staggering influx of apartheid-created refugees - from a population density of 54 per square kilometre in 1970, it reached approximately 1 000 per square kilometre in 1982 - an increase of some 2 000% over the period.

Botshabelo's proposed incorporation can only mean that the QwaQwa authorities intend taking some form of

'independence', a course which the recent KwaNdebele experience both of incorporation and 'independence' should show to be both ludicrous and dangerous.

INEVITABLE RESISTANCE

The example of the B-B-T sub-region indicates that the direction of any state-initiated reforms remains at best deeply uncertain. Apart from the obvious current confusion within the state, it is apparent that past mistakes are being inevitably repeated.

Hailed as the most dramatic reform to date, 'orderly urbanisation' is itself likely to walk into fierce resistance. And the policy cannot work if its agents of implementation - the RSCs - themselves become a focal point of resistance.

This seems inevitable, given that the popular community organisations have already rejected them outright, instead demanding meaningful negotiations and implementation of non-racial municipalities. Far from providing the solution to the deep-seated problems of local government, the RSCs seem set to extend the fiscal and political crisis at this level.

More immediately, the state must clarify what it means when it talks so readily of an 'undivided' South Africa. Any extension of incorporation or 'independence' - be it KwaNdebele or QwaQwa - further divides an already deeply divided country, and again puts the state in a position of direct and seemingly deliberate confrontation with the will of the majority of South Africans.