

# BUS BOYCOTTS

**EZAKHENI:** 20 000 houses, some 20 km away from Ladysmith in northern Natal - this is where many of the workers of Ladysmith industrial area live - running water, but no electricity - one high school and one technical school - two clinics. Ezakheni is in KwaZulu. It is a relocation township, the inhabitants (those who have jobs) are commuters.

They have had no choice as to where they are allowed to live.

It is not the worst relocation settlement. Other names immediately come to mind - for example, in the same area are those of Limehill, Mondlo, Nondweni, Masinga, Ekuvukeni, and many others. It is still so bad that it is said that the Madadeni Mental Hospital (outside the 'white' town of Newcastle) deals with the increase of cases from Ezakheni. Mental breakdown also characterises other relocation areas.

Let us first take a look at the settlement and its history, for this is where the latest in a long series of bus boycotts started on the 10th September, 1979. Then I will present a chronology of the events of the present spate of boycotts, and finally make some general points about this kind of action by the working class and the dynamics involved.

**POPULATION RELOCATION:** The history of Ezakheni may start further back in time, and the changes in the South African economy that 'necessitated' the events definitely do go back further, but in 1973 the MP for Kliprivier,

the district within which Ladysmith falls, took up the case of 'black spots' in the area. He led a delegation of farmers from Bergville, Elandslaagte, Beeters and Ladysmith to Raubenheimer, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD).

This delegation was to complain about 'tardiness in removing black spots'. 'Black spots' are areas of freehold tenure (African owned farms, in the main) within 'white' South Africa. These areas do not conform within the overall scheme of the state for separation and division. Some of these 'black spots' had and have been in African hands for many decades.

The farmers in the delegation were said to be concerned about overcrowding, overstocking and soil erosion. More accurately, they were concerned because these factors were occurring in the predominantly white owned farming areas. The delegation was told that a 'priority rating' for relocation had not yet been worked out.

In January, 1974, an ad hoc committee was formed by Val Volker, the MP for the area. It consisted of representatives of farming, commerce and industry. This committee compiled a priority list, with the Roosboom area heading the list.

Roosboom was an African-owned farm - a 'black spot' in the eyes of the drawers of maps in the offices of BAD. The first farm here had been bought in 1910 and extended through further purchases until it covered 2 000 ha. The residents of Roosboom had been fighting eviction orders since the passing of the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act. White farmers in 1974 added another reason to

agricultural complaints for the relocation of the inhabitants - "because it is harming South Africa's image in the eyes of tourists and is providing a 'golden opportunity to hostile overseas journalists'".

The concern with what overseas journalists would think was due to the location of the Roosboom farm - right next to the main road to the coast from the Reef, between Ladysmith and Colenso. Even the excuses, never mind the real reasons, stank.

At that time bus fares between Roosboom and Ladysmith cost 30c return and 75c for weekly tickets. The Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC, now Corporation for Economic Development, CED, about whom more later) bus service between Ezakheni and Ladysmith charged 48c for a return ticket.

As with other removals of people from 'black spots' only landowners with more than 20 morgen are entitled to compensation of replacement agricultural land. All others - those with less than 20 morgen and those who do not actually own land but live as tenants - are settled in 'closer settlements' or townships such as Ezakheni where land is available only for residential purposes.

The movement of Roosboom people to Ezakheni started in November, 1975, and ultimately 10 000 people had to be relocated from Roosboom alone. It was a forced removal.

But before that, in mid-1974, the people from Umbulwana (between 400 and 700 families) had been moved. The Drakensberg Bantu Affairs Administration Board (DBAAB), in charge of Africans in 'white' areas, reported that during May, June and July of that year (1974) nearly 4 000 Africans had been resettled in



The execution of this policy occurs wherever a 'homeland' border skirts a 'white' town or city. For example, in the Transvaal Africans from the 'white' towns of Nylstroom, Naboomspruit, Ellisras, Vaalwater, and Louis Trichardt are being relocated in Steilloop in Lebowa (see map 2, p70. Sunday Express, 79.07.29). Some 20 000 Africans are thought to be affected in this area. Another example is the demolition of the old Harri-smith 'location' and the removal of the inhabitants to Nondweni in Natal, but mostly to Witzieshoek in nearby Basotho QwaQwa.

Ezakeni would form part of this policy. It is offered as an example of the townships whose inhabitants participated in the bus boycotts right across Natal.

THE EVENTS: In Ezakeni the bus fare stood at R2,50 for a weekly ticket to the industrial area of Ladysmith, and to the domestic employment in the houses and gardens of the whites of the town.

(The chronology that follows is limited to the extent that reliance had to be placed on the commercial press in Durban and Johannesburg)

Monday, 10th September (1979): The boycott of Ezakeni Transport started. Only 40 of the 9 500 regular passengers between Ezakeni and Ladysmith made use of buses after a second fare hike for 1979 had been announced during the previous week.

Fares were said to be increasing by 70, 80 and 95c a week, and could mean that a weekly ticket could cost as much as R3,40 (six-day week).

Most workers got to work by walking, although some were late and firms reported

absenteeism of about 10%. Some workers bought bicycles during the boycott. What is interesting is even at this early stage workers refused the subsidies offered them by some employers - subsidies to cover the fare hike.

Police could find no 'intimidators', but both I Deshayes McCourt, manager of Ezakeni Transport, and some employers reported 'behind-the-scenes intimidation' - as evidence for the 'intimidation' was offered the workers solidarity in refusing even the free transport offered by some businesses.

McCourt claimed that the increase, approved by the Road Transportation Board after further subsidisation to meet fuel price increases had been turned down, would not be dropped in response to the boycott.

Tuesday, 11th: The vagueness of 'intimidation' as answer to the success of the boycott reached new depths in the commercial press - and this was only the second day! The boycott was said to have been even more successful than the previous day.

It was taking workers 3 hours to walk the 26 km from Ezakeni.

Dunlop factory in Ladysmith decided to shut down until the boycott ended. This firm was especially hard hit as they worked a night shift and workers, understandably, did not turn up for this shift. Other employers were reported to be allowing workers to sleep on their premises - illegal, but said to be temporarily allowed by the local DBAAB.

An Indian-owned bus service was reported not to have increased its fares in the district.

Wednesday, 12th: A meeting was held between the Economic Development Corporation (CED) and KwaZulu Development Corporation (KDC) - the CED and KDC are owners of the Ezakeni Transport Company - representatives of commerce and industry and the police. No statement was made, but McCourt said that fares would not be reduced.

Thursday, 13th: The KDC owned Mpumalanga Transport Company announced fare increases for Monday, effective on their service between Mpumalanga (a township outside the Hammarsdale border area) and Pinetown and New Germany (industrial areas from where many of the workers had been relocated in Mpumalanga). Mpumalanga residents threatened a boycott, and also complained about lack of sympathy and involvement from the KwaZulu MPs.

During the week a fire destroyed the offices of Ezakeni Transport in Ladysmith causing a reported R100 000 worth of damage.

Police were also said to have started harassing taxis (official and unofficial) and those giving lifts to boycotters. Police denied this. Riot police were present in the townships.

Elliot Mngadi, mayor of Ezakeni, said that the boycotts had followed appeals from himself to the transport company to keep fares down, and a subsequent residents meeting in the community hall. Mngadi said that many of the residents of Ezakeni earned as little as R8,00 a week.

Monday, 17th: The boycott at Mpumalanga started in response to the announced 50c a week increase. It was supported by the commuters to Hammarsdale, said not to have

been affected by the increase.

Workers at Marburg, near Port Shepatone on the Natal south coast, employed by the Marburg Manufacturing Company, held a sit-down strike in support of wage demands to meet a threatened fare increase asked for by the KOC-owned companies in the district.

The Marburg Manufacturing Company is a clothing firm. The minimum wage for a worker in the clothing industry in the area is set at R7,70 a week. Despite this 'minimum' wage the case of a woman worker was reported who was earning R7,00 a week - "Mrs Florence Gumede now has only R2,25 a week left to live on after she has put aside busfare, rent and money for paraffin for her Primus stove". The fare increase, set for October 1st, would mean that she would be left with 80c a week.

Tuesday, 18th: Teargas was used against some 300 workers who stormed the Marburg factory after refusing to work. Department of Labour officials had earlier warned workers to return to work or be dismissed.

In Durban a meeting was held between the various affected groups in the Ladyemith boycott and it was said that the Ezakheni Town Council would call a meeting of constituents over the weekend to discuss the issue. MP for Kliprivier, Volker, said that 5 500 workers had already been given wage increases to "cushion the bus fare rise". A bus window was smashed at Ezakheni.

At Mpumalanga workers started using the buses on the longer routes, but still walked to Hamersdale. The boycott was said to be 70% effective.

Wednesday, 19th: Chief Gatsha Buthelezi



warned that the boycotts in Natal could get out of hand - a matter of grave concern, no doubt, because of the KwaZulu government's indirect financial involvement.

Approximately 17 000 passengers would be affected by fare increases to come into effect on September 26 and October 1. This was to be on the routes between Elandskop and Pietermaritzburg. The service, Sizani Marulu Transport, is also owned by the KOC and CEO.

Thursday, 20th: Putco in Durban also applied to the Road Transport Board for increases within Umhlanga and KwaMashu, and between the townships and Durban's industrial areas.

Monday, 24th: A meeting at Ezakheni over the weekend had decided to continue with the boycott. Part of the reason was said to have been that the company was owned by whites and that the fare increases would give them higher profits. Volker said in reply that