



Upgrading of an oilspot

ANDREW BORAINE analyses the impact of township upgrading on popular resistance

‘I want to see to what extent I can better the living conditions of the people, to what extent I can get the people to accept the government so that they don't break with the authorities and drift into the hands of the terrorists’.

With these words, Defence Minister Magnus Malan announced in March 1987 that he had taken ‘personal responsibility’ for the development of a number of turbulent townships - among them Mamelodi, home of one of the strongest networks of civic and youth structures.

Mamelodi, 17 km east of Pretoria, is one of 34 townships designated an ‘oilspot’ by officials of the joint management centres (JMCs). This term, borrowed from American military strategists in Vietnam, refers to the establishment of ‘strategic bases’ from which the security forces believe they can ‘regain control’ over the black population.

In November 1985, 13 Mamelodi residents were killed and hundreds injured by the police during a rent protest. At the funerals following the ‘Mamelodi massacre’, a call was made on residents to boycott rent and join the street committees. This received widespread support.

Within a few months, a remarkable network of ‘organs of people's power’ stretched through 35 zones, under the leadership of the Mamelodi Civic Association (MCA). With the Mamelodi Town Council (MTC) severely weakened through revenue shortages and political illegitimacy, the civic association began to assume increasing control over events in the township.

The immediate aim of the June 1986 state of emergency was to regain control of the townships by destroying the influence of ‘alternative structures’ such as these. In Mamelodi this took the form of mass detentions, house-to-house raids, roadblocks and foot patrols, and the establishment of a permanent SADF base in the township. All meetings, including public funerals, were banned.

However, in line with the thinking

of the national security management system (NSMS), the repressive strategy in Mamelodi was soon broadened to include a programme of ‘upgrading’ housing and infrastructure, as well as measures to make the town council more viable politically and financially.

The key elements of the state's current security strategy were outlined by Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok in May 1987: ‘You have to address the security situation; secondly, you have to address grievances and bring good government to the ordinary people; and thirdly, you have to address the political situation’.

In plainer terms, Vlok's strategy for control in Mamelodi can be outlined as follows:

- * eliminate all opposition, particularly individual activists and community organisations;

- * upgrade the socio-economic conditions that ‘agitators’ used to mobilise the people, and restore the authority of the town council;

- * turn municipal representatives on the town council into ‘political representatives’ after the October municipal elections by including them in regional and national councils.

The two key structures in Mamelodi that have been attempting to implement these strategies are the mini-joint management centre (mini-JMC), and the joint operations centre (JOC).

The JOC, which falls under the command of the local police commander, Lt-Col Lekganyane, is the central security body in Mamelodi, co-ordinating the activities of SADF troops, local police, security police, riot police and municipal police. These activities, known in NSMS-terminology as ‘hard-war’ functions, include pre-emptive security action (detention, arrests, roadblocks, patrols), intelligence-gathering operations and monitoring of all oppositional activities.

The intelligence and monitoring work is performed by the joint intelligence committee (JIC), made up of members of the security police, military intelligence and the national

intelligence service (NIS). One of its objectives is to collect information on all political, cultural, religious, sporting, welfare and business organisations in Mamelodi. The JIC also tries to monitor the whereabouts of all activists and community leaders in the area, as well as the identity of visitors to the township.

The information provided by the JIC forms the basis for direct security action against activists and community organisations.

Many activists from the civic association and the Mamelodi Youth Organisation (Mayo) have been detained, including MCA chairperson Peter Maluleka and general secretary Stanza Bopape, who were picked up in June 1988. Bopape's family were later told that he had ‘escaped’ from custody. He has not been seen since.

The information provided by the JIC is also used for the planning of upgrading activities in Mamelodi by the mini-JMC. Two SADF members of the JOC, Capt ‘Bossie’ Boshoff and Lt Peter Gagiano, form the ‘security’ committee of the Mamelodi mini-JMC, and provide the intersection between the ‘hard war’ of the JOC and the ‘soft war’ of the mini-JMC.

The mini-JMC is chaired by a Mr Wolmarans of the department of transport. It consists of committees that deal with ‘communications’ and ‘welfare’, as well as ‘security’. These committees meet in secret twice a month, once jointly and once separately.

The mini-JMC has a total membership of about 30 people, including eight representatives from the Mamelodi Town Council. These are the town clerk, the four chief executive officers, the social welfare officer, the sports liaison officer and the council's public relations officer. These representatives are not councillors but paid officials of the council.

The other members of the mini-JMC are drawn from various government departments (in particular those dealing with black education, constitutional affairs, transport, telecommunications, health and social welfare), as well as the security forces.

The central task of the mini-JMC is to identify 'upgrading' projects in Mamelodi that could assist in re-establishing control over the township. So far plans have included:

- the development of infrastructure - the construction of a highway through Mamelodi, traffic lights, the tarring of 160 km of roads, storm-water drains, and a pedestrian bridge;
- the building of new facilities and amenities - two post offices, a mobile police station, the R3,5-million Moretele Park with swimming pools and other sporting facilities, eight schools and a new telephone system.

There are also numerous housing projects, including the recently completed elite suburb of Mamelodi Gardens.

A development project on 2 000 ha of land east of Mamelodi has been planned over the next 12 years. This will include between 10 000 and 20 000 houses, two business districts, a hospital, an old age home and another stadium, and will potentially double the size of Mamelodi. In addition, a major overhaul of Mamelodi's electricity, water and sewerage systems is planned. There are also various schemes to provide some residents with jobs, and to dismantle the migrant hostels and build family houses.

One of the functions of the mini-JMC is to make sure that various government departments are contributing to these projects, by providing research, expertise and in some cases, funding. Another function is to ensure that the town council is given the credit for the projects in an attempt to bolster its authority and influence, particularly in time for the October municipal elections.

This is the main function of the 'communications' committee, which develops methods through which the town council can 'interact' with people. So far, this has been attempted mainly through the provision of sporting facilities to schools and the distribution of food parcels to orphanages. However, direct propaganda means have also been used, including documentaries on Mamelodi, shown on SATV, and the distribution of pamphlets.

In the past, one of the major weaknesses of the town council has been its inability to generate sufficient funds without resorting to unpopular measures such as raising rents and service charges.

Part of the role of the mini-JMC is to identify and co-ordinate new sources of funding for the town council. Because of this, the mini-JMC has tried to find ways to break the rent boycott in Mamelodi, as the boycott has reduced the town council's income considerably over the past three years.

In line with current state strategy, which advocates a limited transfer of wealth from white to black residential areas, the mini-JMC has also tried to identify sources of finance outside the limited fiscal base of the town council. These have included various government departments, the Transvaal provincial administration (TPA) and the Pretoria regional services council (RSC). Finance from these bodies has been used mainly for infrastructural upgrading projects such as electricity and water.

Consistent with the state's aim of divesting itself of the responsibility of providing black housing, Mamelodi has been opened up to private development.

At least six private building and construction companies are involved in projects in Mamelodi, including the Urban Foundation's FHA Homes, Gough-Cooper Homes, Schachat Cullum Homes and Bonaero Park Ltd. Funding is also being provided by the Development Bank of South Africa, and the South African Housing Trust (SAHT). A private development company - Metroplan - is responsible for Mamelodi's eastward expansion.

Total upgrading costs in Mamelodi over the next 12 years are estimated at between R350-million and R400-million. Most of this is not being provided by the state but by private capital investment.

This investment has been made considerably easier in the last few years by deregulation in the building industry, which allows contractors to erect smaller houses using cheaper materials.

In Mamelodi there are (as yet) no clear indications whether the new state strategies of 'addressing

grievances' and 'bringing good government to the people' have lessened the resolve of the majority of residents to resist the controls on their lives.

NSMS upgrading schemes are too closely associated with the mass repression of the security forces to receive uncritical support.

The Mamelodi Town Council is widely perceived to be under the control of 'white' officials, with little real power of its own. The NSMS may be able to erase the housing backlog in Mamelodi over the next 12 years, but this cannot provide a national political solution to the current crisis.

But there are many ways in which the face of urban politics is changing. One of the strengths of the JMC system is its ability to co-ordinate a number of diverse strategies at the same time, cutting through the bureaucratic tangle of the old administration boards. In Mamelodi, the mini-JMC, together with the JOC, has ensured the re-establishment of township administration in the form of the town council, the elimination of organised opposition to the council, and the beginning of a long-term process of improving the material conditions for some township residents.

The Mamelodi Town Council is in a stronger position than it was in November 1983, when councillors last faced elections. Councillors are protected physically by 243 municipal police and the other security forces. They are provided with a co-ordinated political and economic backup system in the form of the mini-JMC, very different from the days of clashes with the administration board over land and finance.

The MTC is led by Bennett Ndla-zi, national organiser of the Urban Councils Association of South Africa (Ucasa) and a 'rising star' in the ranks of Constitutional Planning Minister Chris Heunis' 'moderate' black leaders. Ndla-zi recently became the first black person to be appointed to the liquor board, and was also included in a South African department of foreign affairs tour to Argentina.

The MTC still faces a partial rent boycott, and has been unable to make much progress in collecting arrears. It remains dependent on bridging loans provided by the TPA.



However, because of new external forms of revenues and investments, the council is no longer in such a financially vulnerable position.

The council is also legally in charge of the development and upgrading process in Mamelodi. It can disburse patronage in the form of houses, sites, jobs and business contracts. It can point to a number of completed housing schemes, and tell residents about the planned cable-way from Moretele Park to the top of the Magaliesberg.

In some ways, Mamelodi is an exceptional township, in that it has a functioning town council that has been able to spearhead a large upgrading programme. In many other areas - Crossroads, Bonteheuwel, Mbekweni, Walmer, Cradock, Thokoza, Katlehong and Alexandra, upgrading programmes have been smaller, and were initiated more directly by security officials, or through a community liaison forum established by the mini-JMC.

A common critique of NSMS strategies is that the state does not

have sufficient resources to upgrade every township. This is true, but misses the point. The current upgrading strategies in the townships are deliberately selective, designed to favour certain areas at the expense of others. This involves a differential policy that seeks to create fissures and widen existing cracks in communities. They are not designed to solve the urban crisis for all, only for some.

According to another critique of NSMS strategies, improvement of the standard of living does not necessarily 'buy' political support from townships residents. Again, this is true, but then WHAM strategy is not really about 'winning hearts and minds'. Security strategies are planned according to 'unrest areas', not the material needs of township residents. They are aimed at neutralising oppositional groups and activists, and the co-option of conservative elites, rather than a 'mass conversion' of the black population.

State policy has shifted away from

influx control towards other forms of control in the urban areas. Current urbanisation trends indicate a growing gap between the traditional urban working class - located mainly within established urban townships - and the rapidly-increasing masses of unemployed and unhoused, who live in informal settlements on the fringes of the urban areas.

The results of the October municipal elections in black townships will no doubt indicate continued rejection of apartheid policies.

But democratic organisations will increasingly have to take account of the growing stratification of the urban areas, and the selective upgrading schemes designed to reinforce these divisions.

The 'success' of NSMS urban upgrading programmes lies not so much in established townships such as Mamelodi, but in the divide and control tactics used in squatter settlements like Crossroads and Khayelitsha. This is likely to become the dominant pattern of urban upgrading in the future.