

People's power and state reform in Alexandra

For a brief period, Johannesburg's Alexandra township was a 'liberated zone', run by structures set up by the local population. KAREN JOCHELSON looks at the time of people's power, its subsequent collapse, and the lessons to be learnt from that experience.

The collapse of people's power in Alexandra township was not caused solely by the state's clampdown on popular organisation. For people's power involved an insurrectionary strategy which gave rise to hasty organisation and was based on an inadequate understanding of state power.

The Alexandra experience of the 1980s involves a complex interaction between repression, reform and people's power. Some argue that government's reform policy is merely a failed attempt to restructure apartheid along liberal, capitalist lines. They maintain that reform has proved a sham, with the government offering minimal concessions to avoid genuine democratisation and consequently provoking popular protest.

Resistance, so this argument goes, has necessarily been met with state repression. This reflects the weakness of the state in two ways.

Firstly, the extent of the challenge of popular organisation, especially people's power, is measured by the degree of government repression. Secondly, successive clampdowns demonstrate government's shaky hold on the future and lack of direction as it seeks to crush resistance and conserve and control the status quo.

This simplistic depiction of reform and repression as distinct policy alternatives dependent on the state of opposition politics, is unconvincing. It assumes a monolithic 'apartheid regime' and unchanging state structure, practice, policy and ideology. It fails to examine the changing terms of reform policy and the means of its implementation. Emphasis on the political illegitimacy of the South African state obscures its attempts to legitimate reformist and repressive activities in black communities. As the character of resistance has changed, so the state has developed new responses.

Alexandra is a black township in the heart of Johannesburg and

Sandton's white suburbia. On May 7 1979, the government announced that Alexandra would be 'replanned for the accommodation of land-owners and other qualified families'. This signified a reversal of a 1963 decision to demolish the freehold township and build a hostel city for urban workers. Alexandra's reprieve and subsequent development implied acceptance of the existence of permanent urban African residents.

The government rezoned the township for family housing and 99-year leasehold. The conversion from dormitory to residential town - from 'slaap' to 'woon dorp' in the language of reformists - became a practical reality when a masterplan to upgrade the township was unveiled in 1980. It recommended installation of basic infrastructure such as water, sewerage and electricity, and construction of storm-water drainage and graded, tarred roads. It suggested demolishing the township and constructing income-differentiated housing and an elite suburb.

Taxable property and the creation

of a central business district, planners hoped, would create a tax-base for financially self-sufficient local government. The government also recognised a liaison committee as the official representative of the community. State reformists' dream of a class-differentiated, politically-stable and economically-privileged, permanent urban African population lay behind the plan to upgrade Alexandra.

The dream soon faded under practical problems of implementation. The credibility of the liaison committee declined as redevelopment moved off the drawing boards and onto the streets. Construction of housing was painfully slow and residents were resettled in unsatisfactory temporary housing, including 'renovated' Putco buses.

When the liaison committee assumed black local authority status in 1983 the financial burden of development was shifted to residents. Rent for newly-constructed homes rocketed way beyond the pockets of most Alexandra inhabitants. And allegations of corruption in the council made the community even more suspicious of development.

The character of popular opposition gradually changed through the 1980s. Residents' opposition began with attempts to delay implementation of reformists' upgrading plan, and criticism of it. This led to a partial and then total rent boycott in 1985.

The leading political actor was the independent Alexandra Residents Association (ARA). But its activities were gradually superseded by the Alexandra Youth Congress (Ayco) and the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) which allied themselves with the United Democratic Front. The tone of local politics changed dramatically as activists from these groups established street committees and people's courts. People's power aimed to challenge state power rather than merely oppose state policy.

People's power was a short-lived experiment. The declaration of a second state of emergency in 1986 and widespread detentions crushed organisation. A joint management centre (JMC) was activated in 1986 making the SADF and state security system central to township administration.

This seemed to signal the failure of reform policy. But JMCs complement a new reform strategy implicit in orderly urbanisation policy and the recently-created regional services councils (RSCs). JMCs and RSCs represent a new institutional structure which complements the state's ideological offensive to create legitimacy for the reform process in the township.



State reformists dream of a class-differentiated, politically-stable, permanent urban African population.

The February 1986 'six-day war' between Alexandra youth and police was a turning point in local politics. Until then organisation in the township had been aimed at criticising and delaying implementation of the redevelopment scheme. By April 1986, activists announced people's power had been established in Alexandra. This dramatic shift in popular mobilisation was evidenced in new political actors, modes of organisation and political agendas.

During the early 1980s, ARA and its precursor, Ditshwantsho tsa Rona, had been the major organising force against removals and higher rents that accompanied township redevelopment. Ditshwantsho began as a cultural, political and historical discussion group in 1981. But its concern gradually shifted to organising opposition to township re-development and high rent tariffs.

Three local committees were established. They consisted of:

- residents in new houses facing dramatic rent increases;
- inhabitants who had been moved

into unsatisfactory temporary housing and were awaiting promised new accommodation;

- and those whose houses were zoned for destruction to make way for infrastructure installation.

In late 1984 the three committees decided they needed a co-ordinating body, and ARA was launched.

ARA argued that the upgrading programme had betrayed Alexandra's workers. If redevelopment meant high rent or expensive homeownership schemes, then it was aimed at 'forcing low paid workers out of Alex. To charge high rent is to select the wealthy for these houses... It is not the fault of the worker if he is retrenched, or if he gets a low wage. That is the fault of apartheid and the capitalist system'.

ARA also criticised the priorities of the development programme: people needed houses, not huge leisure and sporting facilities.

Ditshwantsho and ARA's emphasis on class analysis as the precondition of political action; on the role of the activist as facilitator rather than line-giver; and careful, slow, house-by-house organisation made them exceptions among most community organisations of the time. During this period Ayco and its ally, the Alexandra Civic Association (ACA) were inclined to rely on pamphlets and press statements rather than slow grassroots organisation. Ayco tended to emphasise nationally co-ordinated political campaigns and underplay local grievances.

Rent increases were suspended indefinitely at the beginning of February 1985. During 1985 the council tried to persuade residents that it was their duty to contribute to the running of the town by paying rent. Councillors argued that participation in the council was justified: the council was a means to a valid goal of township development.

The council lambasted ARA for misleading residents, delaying redevelopment and then blaming the council. However it consistently ignored ARA's overtures to discuss residents' grievances.

Opposition to high rent and redevelopment in Alexandra followed the pattern of similar protests elsewhere in the country. Rent and bus boycotts, squatter and housing protests highlighted the depth of the



Alexandra was one of the townships marked for upgrading

urban management crisis. Public outcries against the tricameral parliament and black local authorities emphasised the undemocratic nature of the government's reform package.

By June 1985, 240 councillors, including 27 mayors, had resigned from councils across the country; 120 councillors had been attacked and five had died. Homes of 75 councillors had been burned down. Only two of 38 town councils continued to operate, one of which was in Alexandra. Local government's fiscal and political bankruptcy was patently obvious.

The declaration of the first state of emergency in July 1985 seemed an admission that the state had lost control and the plan to create stability through reform had backfired.

In November the council, emboldened by the appointment of its own municipal police force and perhaps sobered by the effects of the Vaal Triangle rent boycott, announced substantially reduced rent tariffs. Four-roomed sub-economic houses would cost R60 rather than R130 a

month as originally proposed, and tariffs for a two-roomed flat dropped from R183 to R100 a month. But this admission that the economic rent policy was impractical had come too late. And despite restrictions on political activity, the emergency seemed to fuel rather than crush popular resistance.

Ayco had become a significant actor in township politics by 1985, when it made a concerted effort to organise and educate its youth constituency. It held weekly discussions on the education crisis, township social problems, apartheid and capitalism. It prioritised organising youth street-by-street and emphasised the responsibility of youth activists in conscientising parents.

The entire Ayco executive was arrested in the detention clampdown following the state of emergency in 1985. But the discussion groups and preliminary organisation paid off. In August that year, Ayco launched an anti-crime campaign. The high crime rate and lack of police concern

was a long-standing source of rancour among residents. The state of emergency only heightened their resentment. The campaign's popularity was also helped by the strict discipline shown among comrades.

But further detentions removed remaining experienced activists from the township. By December 1985 an unruly element had begun to take over. These 'com-tsotsis' were new to political activity and relatively uninitiated in principles of political organisation and disciplined political behaviour. If their conduct was roughshod, it was often for the 'right' motives - hence the name 'comrade-tsotsi'.

But some comrades were still highly critical of heavy-handed behaviour in political campaigns. This, they felt, would not endear them to older, conservative township inhabitants and laid them open to criticism from hostile media. When some experienced activists were released from jail in December, they tried to reassert control and channel the groundswell of radical discontent in a positive direction.



They set about forming youth groups for each of the four sections into which they had divided Alexandra. These groups, they believed, would boost morale, and promote grassroots rather than centralised organisation. Decentralised organisation would better withstand repression and help bring militant youth under control.

At the same time an allied group of activists, disillusioned with the ACA's lack of political activity and recognising that non-politicised youth had to be controlled, decided to introduce street committees in Alexandra. Several of them were active in Cosatu affiliates. These committees were a way around the ban on indoor and outdoor meetings and a means, so activists believed, of consolidating politicisation that occurred at funerals and ensuring mass participation in the struggle.

Almost every night during February youths went from yard to yard summoning people to discuss creating street committees. Issues such as high rent, the housing shortage, overcrowding and lack of

township development were discussed as local and national problems.

'We started with problems in the yard: only one line for washing, no drains, the bucket system, night soil spilling in the yard and kids getting sick. People tended to blame themselves or their neighbours instead of seeing it as the state's problem. People had to unite and direct their grievances at apartheid', explained an AAC supporter interviewed in 1987.

The basic unit of organisation was the yard committee which dealt with residents' daily problems in a politically educative manner. Two representatives from each yard committee constituted the block committee. Four representatives from each block committee sat on a street committee. Each street committee was to elect two representatives to the AAC which would be launched formally in August 1986.

The discussions and attempts at organisation allowed residents to air common frustrations, resentment and anger against the authorities. But the spark that set fire to the township was the funeral of an unemployed youth attended by over 11 000 people on February 15 1986. When police used teargas to disperse mourners, youths retaliated and took to the streets armed with petrol bombs and dustbin lids.

Over the following few days, a civil war raged within the township, popularly baptised the 'six-day war'. Youths pitted themselves against the SADF, SAP and township collaborators. Police reported they were fired at by armed residents. Frequent targets of popular anger were councillors, West Rand Development Board employees, municipal police and black policemen - who fled the township on February 17.

On February 18, residents stayed away from work and over 30 000 attended a meeting called by Ayco. The meeting demanded immediate withdrawal of security forces, release of all people detained and arrested in the past few days, and instant lifting of the state of emergency. Following negotiations, security forces agreed to maintain a lower profile. By February 22, the township appeared to have quietened down - the 'six-day war' was over.

At a funeral for 17 'war' victims on March 5, ANC and South African Communist Party regalia were in full display. The crowd's chants of 'Viva! Oliver Tambo/Nelson Mandela/Joe Slovo! Viva!' made its sympathies clear.

Speaker after speaker at the funeral repeated the message that, though comrades were freedom fighters, they had to be disciplined. Calls were made to form yard and street committees. The street committees would prepare residents 'to forget about our past differences and to prepare ourselves for the future'. Activists believed that street committees would allow residents to overcome ethnic rivalries and personal frictions which arose from living in such crowded conditions. Street committees were embryonic forms of future democratic mass government.

The overriding message from funeral speeches was an urgent desire for self-government and willingness to sacrifice even life to achieve it: 'Our people want FREEDOM now. They want to govern themselves and determine the destiny of their country TODAY not TOMORROW... They have therefore SHED ALL FEAR OF DEATH because the word TO LIVE has acquired the same meaning as the words TO BE FREE'.

Local grievances now meshed with national political demands. Consumer and rent boycotts were launched in mid-April. The boycotts were part of a national programme intended to isolate all collaborators socially and effect the collapse of local administration. Alexandra pamphlets listed demands ranging from affordable rent and electrification of the township, to dissolution of the council and police, withdrawal of troops and police from the township, and unbanning of the ANC. The 'entire apartheid regime' had to be dismantled and replaced by 'a democratic people's government', announced one pamphlet. Compared to the ARA's rent boycott demands, these embodied a political challenge to government.

In just one year, the face of popular politics had been transformed. The ARA had rejected councillors and the town council as legitimate community representatives. But it

had still been willing to negotiate with the Alexandra Town Council.

This new wave of radical protest, led by youth who aligned themselves with the UDF, superseded ARA in aims and organisation. The days of bargaining with councillors were over: 'The youth are no longer begging. They are tired of trying to negotiate and never being accepted by councillors', explained an adult activist. Local government had no credibility and councillors were urged to resign.

Ayco and AAC could draw huge crowds to meetings. Perhaps some people were coerced, or attended out of fear, as newspapers and the SABC insisted. But security force brutality generated an upsurge of anger among residents of all ages. In popular opinion, police action had crossed the moral boundaries of law and order.

ARA had explained its demands for lower rents and its criticism of the redevelopment of Alexandra in terms of working-class interests. It had also maintained that building democratic grassroots organisation was a slow and lengthy process. But its small-scale, single-issue committees, and its emphasis on education before action, meant it was unable to capitalise on new waves of anger.

The heat of February's battle and widespread support evident at public meetings led comrades to believe residents were 'ready' for new forms of organisation. Activists intended street committees to play an educative and political role. Discussion would root local grievances in a broad analysis of apartheid and capitalism, providing the foundation for informed political intervention. Street committees were also a training ground for democratic government.

In mid-April a flurry of resignations clinched the town council's demise. Some of the councillors publicly rejected the black local authority system, but the council chairman still maintained that participation in government structures was acceptable if it meant improved living conditions.

The UDF claimed the council's collapse as 'a victory that belongs to the people of Alexandra'. It promised that 'if councillors choose to join the ranks of the democratic

movements, the doors are wide open for them'. A councillor and policeman who had resigned from the SAP offered to join ACA.

The council collapsed on April 22. That evening vigilantes burnt the houses and cars of several Ayco, ACA and AAC activists. Residents claimed that black policemen who had been driven out of their homes in earlier unrest were responsible.

Decentralised street committee structures with their speedy communications network now proved their value. The next day, April 23, residents stayed away from work and students boycotted schools. At a meeting in the stadium, speakers called on the 45 000 residents present to form 'self-defence units to protect ourselves from the agents of the system'. A week later AAC claimed people's power had been established and residents could now defend themselves against police. Self-government was in the offing: 'We believe we can solve our problems by ourselves', said an AAC spokesperson.

But the confidence was premature.

In mid-May security troops cordoned off the township, set up checkpoints at every exit and carried out an unhindered house-to-house search, described as a 'normal crime prevention' campaign. The police and army occupied the stadium to prevent further mass meetings. Permission for the funeral of eight victims of vigilante violence was twice refused - and then permitted on May 18.

Township organisation went underground. The AAC was unanimously elected sole representative of Alexandra during a mass meeting of township organisations. Most activists at the meeting agreed that the ACA should dissolve itself and serve in AAC structures. Ayco and Asco, it was decided, would continue to organise their constituencies under the guidance of AAC. ARA activists did not attend the meeting, but ARA was unilaterally disbanded.

Streets and schools were renamed in a symbolic display of popular control over the township. Youths daubed new names on boards and walls despite the intensive SADF patrols. ANC, Tambo, Solomon Mahlangu, MK, Steve Biko, Soviet, and Sobukwe were new street, area and school names.



When the state of emergency was re-imposed in June 1986, it marked the end of people's power in Alexandra. Despite the heavy security presence, AAC's confidence in its control over the township was evident even just prior to the second emergency. AAC officials met the newly-appointed administrator to assess his credentials and plans for the township. They wanted to hold a public meeting to canvass whether he was acceptable to residents. But the emergency pre-empted this.

People's power had challenged local government, which then collapsed. Its insurrectionary rhetoric was seen as a direct threat to state security. But to attribute its rapid collapse solely to state repression is shortsighted. Born in a violent and repressive political climate, it never had the opportunity to consolidate for the future by strengthening political education and building a democratic base.



Vuyi Mboob - Afrapix

The state had to deal with the continuing urban crisis... while counteracting the ideological challenge posed by people's power.

Some activists were aware of the potential weakness in the operation of people's government. ARA criticised the way street committees had been introduced: it maintained that politicisation was so low among youth that abuses were inevitable and no lasting structures would emerge. Dissatisfaction also emerged among older, apolitical residents who had initially supported the AAC. They began to complain about the power and arrogance of youths and resented being judged or punished by youngsters. They would willingly attend meetings, but disliked being ordered to do so: 'We have learnt from these children. It's because of them that we don't carry the dompas, but they cannot tell us what to do. They must fight the boere, not us'.

AAC and Ayco were aware of these problems. Domestic problems brought to people's courts were supposed to be dealt with by adult AAC

members. They recognised it was 'disrespectful' for youths to pass judgement on their elders.

A significant factor in the quick demise of people's power lies in its own perceptions of dual power. A discussion paper circulated in the township at the time portrayed organs of people's power as tools to move from ungovernability to dual power. Though government power had been expelled from Alexandra, it argued, an organisation was necessary to imprint the people's will in organising daily life. It defined people's power as 'the ability to assert and defend our class interest, against those of other opposing classes. This involves control over every aspect of our lives - at work; at school; where we live; over the structures of local and national government; over the army, police, courts and prisons; the media; the church; financial institutions and the economy as a whole'.

Organs of people's power had to take control of importing and distributing foodstuffs and medicines, provision of health care, organising funerals and mass meetings, defence, administration and services, building organisations for particular constituencies, and running people's courts.

Local government did appear to have collapsed and had left a power vacuum. But this did not mean the township was ready for dual power. Local activists interpreted the demise of local government and the rapid mass mobilisation as a period of dual power. However, 1986 did not involve a situation in which the state was unable to rule and alternative organs of government were effectively challenging the status quo. The state, with its untouched centralised power structure, still had its military forces firmly behind it and was able to repress township resistance with brute force.

When the Alexandra town council collapsed in April 1986 a township administrator was appointed. He also heads the Alexandra mini-JMC. Nominally, the Alexandra council structure continues to exist, but its activities are now managed and planned by the mini-JMC. JMC upgrading programmes complement RSC strategy. They intend to counter the effects of two years sustained political protest by winning over disaffected communities and creating legitimacy for the reform package.

JMCs characterise a new bureaucracy where administrative and state security systems overlap. They are the lowest level of the national security management system (NSMS) and have an insignificant policy-making role. But they are the most visible manifestation of the NSMS structure at ground level.

The militarisation of local government is not a sudden phenomenon, but a long-term consequence of state restructuring which began when PW Botha assumed presidency.

Since September 1986, Alexandra has been administered through a mini-JMC. Membership of sub-JMCs and mini-JMCs is flexible and interested parties may be invited to attend committee meetings. Committees may meet twice a week and the level of security force participation is determined by the unrest situation. The mini-JMC consists of about 20 people drawn from local offices of departments of post and telecommunications, health and welfare, manpower, home affairs, education, SADF and SAP. Usually five representatives are drawn from the city council, including the town clerk, administrator or mayor and representative of engineering, technical, financial and law enforcement branches, or ambulance services. Private sector and local community representatives may be drawn in through liaison forums or steering committees.

State action from the latter half of 1986 attempted to resolve two problems. The state had to deal with the continuing urban crisis and the shortcomings of the Riekert reform strategy - while at the same time counteracting the ideological challenge posed by people's power and the easily politicised, deep-

seated grievances over abysmal living conditions.

The second state of emergency was declared on June 12 1986 to preempt expected widespread insurrection on June 16. It gave the state more sweeping powers than before and seemed to be more carefully planned. Reinstating control over Alexandra had three dimensions: repression of political organisation; an ideological offensive to create legitimacy for the reform programme in the township; and institutional reform of urban management administration.

Resistance was crushed by the state of emergency, detentions and police and army presence in the township. Security forces swept through townships the night before the emergency was declared, detaining thousands of people. The police net stretched from high profile leaders to local grassroots activists and comrades. The entire AAC leadership was detained. The SADF cordoned off Alexandra and mounted 24-hour roadblocks at every entrance. High mast street lights were installed and World War Two searchlights lit up the township from nearby high ground to hinder political activity at night.

The state then launched an ideological offensive to counter the ideology of people's power. Arrests of residents were followed by a series of criminal and treason trials which aim to criminalise township leaders and their radical ideas.

Public violence, sedition, treason, subversion, arson and murder charges attempted to recast people's power and people's justice, and restore law and order. Simultaneously, JMC media sought to create a new moral community upholding free enterprise values and obligations of a dutiful citizen. It explained and tried to foster support for a new reform programme.

Finally, the terms of reform strategy itself were different. Urbanisation policy, RSC rationale and JMC strategy are complementary aspects of a new urban management policy.

Non-discriminatory, 'neutral' technocratic legislation and fiscal controls regulate labour settlement and employment patterns.

The responsibility for housing provision has shifted from the state

to the individual and the private sector. Upgrading programmes and RSC fiscal policy have an ultimate aim of setting black local authorities back on their feet.

The highly-centralised structure of RSCs and JMCs also insulate the state from the effects of popular protest while simultaneously preventing cause for such mobilisation. The state of emergency did not manifest state loss of direction, but provided the space for implementing new policy and institutional mechanisms to resolve the structural basis of the urban crisis.

The *Alexandra Urban Renewal Proposal* was presented in 1986. It embraces security and orderly urbanisation strategy and is being implemented through the new RSC and JMC administrative structures.

In following orderly urbanisation policy the upgrading scheme envisages Alexandra as a metropolitan township catering for a class-differentiated population which is relatively well-paid. The plan limits state involvement to providing service and infrastructure and defines upgrading housing as the property owners' responsibility. It also sees the housing market as a new source of employment.

The security establishment metaphorically characterises the township's upgrading as an 'oil spot' programme. Initially specific townships are targeted for redevelopment. Successful reconstruction will permeate other Reef townships and gradually spread over the whole country. Alexandra's proximity to white areas, its symbolic value as an area of militant people's power, and current international attention focused on the treason trials, make the township a particular challenge.

The 1986 planners linked the lack of development to the emergence of political dissatisfaction among township residents. The earlier 1980 upgrading scheme had intended to demolish most houses, even though no suitable land existed for temporary accommodation. Consequently, argued the 1986 plan, the community viewed redevelopment as 'resettlement' which was 'socially and politically unacceptable'. People were bitter about the loss of freehold, which the 1986 plan termed their 'heritage and birthright'.

Residents' insecurity, the slow implementation of the plan and lack of upgrading of services in 'old' Alexandra, concluded the 1986 plan, had 'contributed towards the worrying security situation and the resignation of the former councillors'.

The new urban renewal proposal recognises and seeks to address these failings. It adopts many of the first plan's suggestions about expanding school and recreation facilities, installing municipal services, higher density and differentiated housing patterns and creating a small business district. Security strategy demands that work begins immediately and demonstrates tangible results.

One prong of the strategy is service provision. By March 1987, a post office and clinic had been built and public phones installed in the township. High mast lights had been erected, the main thoroughfare tarred and an outfall sewer had been completed. Escom drew up a plan for electrification of the area according to 'third world' standards. This meant substituting cheaper overhead lines for conventional underground cables, which would nevertheless still cost R120-million. The urban renewal proposal suggests individual stand metering for every dwelling by means of prepaid tokens - a nifty strategy to avoid service boycotts.

By the end of the year the council reported that ablution facilities - toilet, shower, wash trough - had been provided for every township dwelling.

A second prong of the plan is to make home-ownership more easily and rapidly available. All stands were surveyed and every structurally sound dwelling given a value during 1987. Residents can buy houses on freehold tenure, 99-year leasehold, or, where a property is occupied by more than one tenant, on sectional title. The responsibility for upgrading housing now lies with the individual owner. Provision has been made for loans to upgrade property, and technical advice and skills training are available. The planners argued that the privatisation programme, assisted by employers, building societies and financial institutions, 'would avoid continuous subsidisation by the state and would give the community a stake in the land'.



The cost of the urban renewal programme is prohibitive.

Housing standards have been differentiated according to income. Land on the east bank of the Jukskei was allocated to a private company for elite residential development.

In old Alexandra, the plan proposes maintaining, if not increasing, population density by retaining the current pattern of several dwellings in a yard, and developing dual function dwellings (residential-cum-business). This will minimise removals and reconstruction. Additional land for development will have to be claimed from surrounding areas currently zoned for industrial and white residential usage.

In October, shelters of several shack dwellers were demolished.

The council maintained that their presence was illegal because the shacks did not comply with legal and health requirements, and stood in the way of the urban renewal scheme. It did however, promise that those squatters who had lived in Alexandra before July 1986 would be permitted to put up shacks on services land set aside for a temporary transit camp.

The 1986 proposal argued that the 1980 plan's reliance on government funding for housing and infrastructural development was impractical given the present state of the economy. But even with current lower infrastructural standards and shifting responsibility for housing to the individual, the cost of the urban renewal programme is prohibitive.

Financing this scale of development is beyond a local authority. The state granted R75-million for 1987 from the National Housing Commission and has promised a further R92-million over the next three years. Alexandra also requested R58-million from the Central Witwatersrand Regional Services Council. Local government now has a potentially sounder financial foundation than envisaged in the early 1980s. But the enormity of development may still place unbearable strains on fiscal resources.

The overriding philosophy of mini-JMCs is to exercise 'good government' which 'must see and be seen', according to a senior intelligence official.

The key behind the psychological battle has been an information dissemination programme which explains developments in Alexandra and asserts a new value system. The Alexandra JMC has established a newspaper, *Newsletter to the People of Alexandra*, and a comic strip, *Alex and Friends*, to sell the new deal. These are published by the Bureau of Information and distributed freely. The Bureau also produces the *Metropolitan Digest* which offers a similar ideological focus though its 'news' is drawn from all townships on the Rand.

Newsletter portrays upgrading in physical and psychological terms: 'Through development we reach the sky!' The overriding philosophy behind it is 'Help Us to Help You Build a Better and Happier Future

for the Alexandra Residents'. It has given detailed accounts of the progress and problems of urban renewal, apologised for any inconvenience and frequently invited residents to participate.

For a start in October 1986, this meant residents had to begin paying rent, breaking the five-month-old, township-wide, rent boycott. In mid-September, the council issued rent arrear statements to all permit holders with letters urging residents to pay up or explain their problems to council officials.

The administrator stressed that the council did not fund the police or army in any way - and definitely not through rent payments. If service charges increased through inflation, the only way to beat it, he suggested, was higher productivity.

Articles on upgrading coincided with comic strips handed out by security forces. 'Alex', a young, healthy, happy resident did verbal battle with 'Comrade Rat', a weedy scruffy creature who always ran down new township development rather than accepting it enthusiastically. A liaison officer at the Bureau for Information described Alex as 'the good person, the good things of life. He represents the council's activities'.

Newsletter ran a series of articles introducing the administrator and council staff and officials and putting a human face to government. The council's sports liaison officer hoped to re-ignite community spirit, and improve the individual through expanding sports activities, with the help of government and business funding. A member of the council technical staff took redevelopment into his own hands and, of his own accord, built play-parks for children. He had an 'insatiable desire to work for the community'. The chief of community services had 'strength of character coupled with a pleasant personality including a keen sense of humour' and promised 'giant steps' with 'new' council powers.

Surrounding businesses have been incorporated into the JMC urban renewal and education programme. Besides financing housing construction, they sponsor skills training centres, small business development and youth programmes and provide equipment for clean-up campaigns.

The newsletter advertised skills

training programmes (especially building skills) for unemployed, such as the Murray and Roberts 'Earn While You Learn Homebuilding Course'. Barlow Rand opened the Alexandra Enterprise Centre which was portrayed as a 'breeding ground for our future black manufacturers and industrialists'. It would help solve today's vexing problems of 'unemployment and dependency'. In November 1987 the administrator and businessmen launched 'Progress through Employment'. Its sub-committees deal with job placement, promotion of home industry, provision of venture capital to small businesses, training, and work creation. Representatives from technikons and the department of manpower also sit on the committees.

Urban development is complemented by the fostering of an individualist ethic where self-achievement and hard work guarantee success. Warren Dale, president of the Sandton Chamber of Commerce, explained the motivation behind the Chamber's involvement in Progress Through Employment: 'The Sandton Chamber of Commerce is interested in creating a capitalist attitude in Alexandra and spreading the entrepreneurial spirit which does not exist there... They must realise that personal advancement will come from hard work not slogans... Our interest is in the development and maintenance of a capitalist framework'.

The paper tried to repair the image of the SADF. A report on a funeral for school children killed in a bus accident mentioned that 'the friendship offered by the SADF did not go unnoticed ... I overheard one boxom (sic) auntie say, as she wiped tears off her eyes: "They are not as bad as we are led to believe they are"'.

A front page article apologised for the inconvenience of security force roadblocks. It explained that roadblocks were 'to keep all troublemakers out'; 'to ensure the security and safety of all Alex residents'; and, significant in terms of urbanisation strategy, to 'prevent Alex residents from being overcrowded by squatters'.

Finally, *Newsletter* aimed at establishing a hold among disaffected youth. Several white trainers, possibly SADF personnel, and black

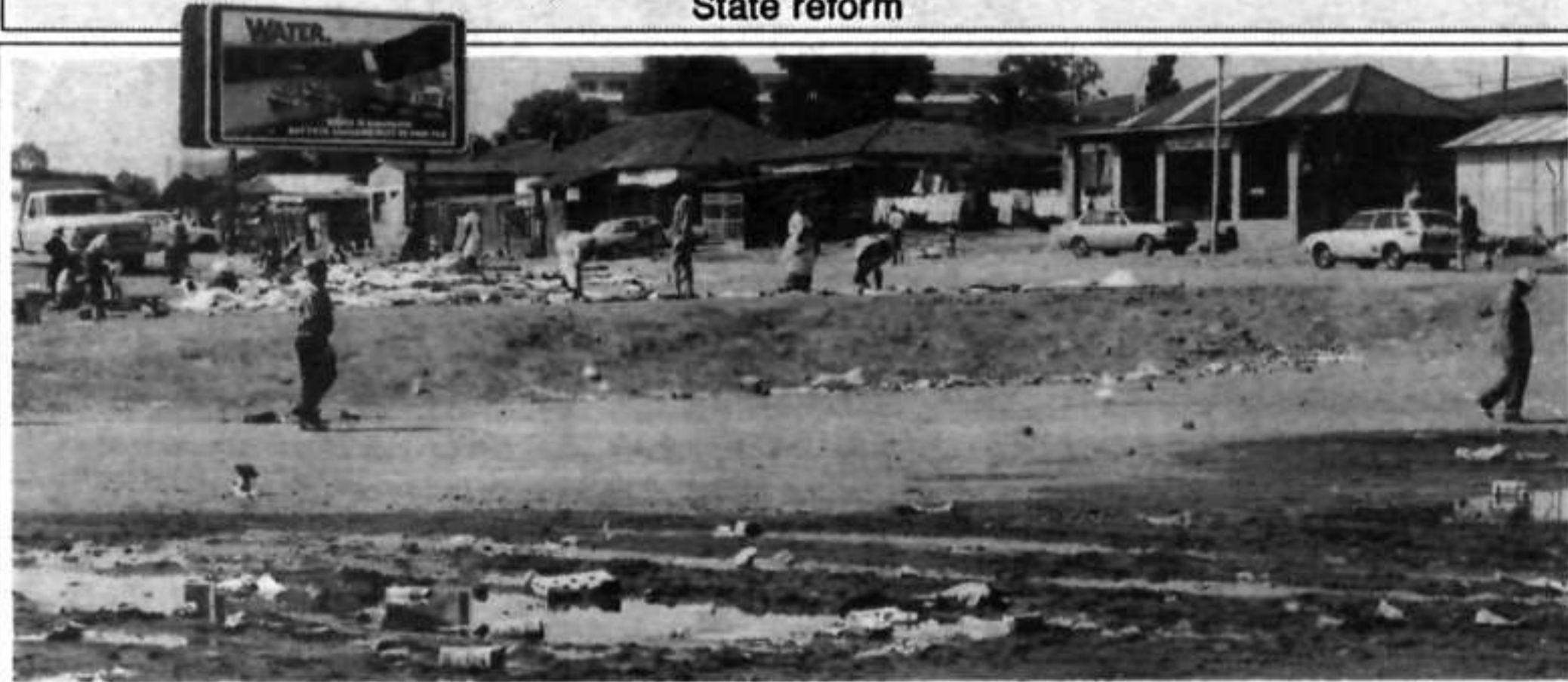
coaches were hired by the council to run sports clinics for school children and organise competitions. Sport was seen as a healthy, non-political diversion for township youth. A R10-million project backed by businesses was launched to develop cricket skills in Alexandra. At the launch an Alexandra educationist said: 'We hope that with the advent of cricket we'll be able to make good bowlers out of so-called stone-throwers in townships'.

Metropolitan Digest offered more overtly political comment than *Newsletter*. It promised RSCs would help solve local government problems, advocated change through negotiation rather than violence, and portrayed councillors as sympathetic, community-conscious people, with a ready ear for their constituents. It even went into ideological battle with the Freedom Charter. It argued that the Charter was 'outdated' since many of its demands had already been met by the current government: abolition of pass laws, freedom to form trade unions and participation in local and provincial administration with national involvement being envisaged through the national statutory council.

By July 1987 Alexandra's administrator boasted that no unrest existed in the township due to the upgrading programme, the state of emergency - which had 'definitely managed to create a climate of peace and security' - and improvement in employment opportunities.

The state of emergency appears to have created 'a climate of evolution' and restored the conditions for reform. Local political movements such as AAC, Ayco, and ARA are inactive or possibly have gone underground. ACA has reconstituted itself, but in a potentially compromising framework.

The Alexandra JMC is sufficiently confident of its strategy's success to broach the possibility of local government elections. In December 1987, *Newsletter* introduced the issue of 1988 municipal elections: 'To make a community a happy one, individuals ought to vote so that the best leader can be elected. Through this leader you will gain a voice in the community... The power of these councils are not of less importance or second best. No, these councils



'A long history of suspicion cannot be wiped out with a few months of overdue development.'

have equal rights and help develop your own community equally'.

This confidence was matched at a national-level. Riekert had proposed participation in local government as a further hallmark of 'insider' privilege. In line with urbanisation policy, the government granted squatters local government franchise in April 1988.

The state of emergency represents not so much government's floundering last resort to maintain the status quo, as an attempt to establish reformist policy on sounder political, fiscal and administrative footing. Alexandra's Urban Renewal Proposal embraces new urbanisation policy and security strategy which counteract the urban crisis in complementary ways.

Urbanisation strategy uses subtle fiscal controls and non-discriminatory legislation to direct workseekers and industry to particular areas, thereby rationalising regional labour markets. The housing shortage is being dealt with by making home-ownership more accessible, lowering housing standards and shifting the burden for provision and upgrading from the state to the individual property owner and the private sector. RSCs and JMCs represent a new, highly-centralised administration which insulate the local state from the effects of popular protest.

RSCs promise infrastructure funded by business levies. Home-ownership and the expansion of small business in townships will also offer a future tax base. RSCs allow black and white local authorities to co-operate in multi-racial metro-

politan government - a move matched at a national level by the national statutory council.

JMCs are an efficient bureaucracy, wholly within the reformist camp. They are extremely sensitive to the political mood of local communities, and able to respond immediately with upgrading and education programmes complementing urbanisation strategy.

It is difficult to gauge how residents perceive the new developments. A long history of suspicion and distrust cannot be wiped out with a few months of overdue development. Urban renewal can be interpreted as a government 'gift' to townships, as easily as a 'peoples victory' wrested from the state after the battles of 1986. By March 1988, about 15 000 Alexandra households were still in rent arrears, but whether from political conviction or economic necessity is unknown.

Suppression of open resistance and the difficulties of organising in such an atmosphere pose new problems for township, radical, political actors. Tangible benefits arising from the upgrading programme may win over more conservative residents and those who, while sympathetic to the demands of Ayco and AAC, were dismayed by the violence it provoked in the township and from the state. And if a repressive political climate continues, local activists may reconsider their principled boycott of local government structures. By January 1988, a leading ACA member felt participation in local authority elections was a viable political tactic: it could allow for

bargaining from within the state, and create a legal space for political mobilisation. The argument that reform policy has been eclipsed by repression in response to the strength of political opposition is too simplistic. The current era of repression does not indicate that the state has lost direction and resorted to suppression of resistance to maintain the status quo.

The transformation of popular opposition and emergence of people's power did not reflect a period of dual power, as some activists believed. Though local government structures did collapse, the central state remained strong and has been able to re-initiate reform policy on new terms. Society is being re-ordered according to technocratic, functional, and regional prerequisites to redress the structural roots of the urban crisis. Urban renewal programmes financed and administered by RSCs and JMCs seek to redress socio-economic grievances that first sparked popular protest and thereby prevent political organisation around the more radical intentions of people's power.

While the state presently appears to have the upper hand, the success of its new strategy will depend on popular reception. Political organisations will have to consider an appropriate strategy for this new terrain.

This article is an edited extract of a paper, People's power and state reform in Alexandra Township from 1979 to 1987, presented to the annual congress of the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa in July 1988.