

COMMENT

IT is the intention of the Nationalist government, through the Community Council system, to grant a measure of self government to urban african communities. The system was designed to replace the ineffective and unpopular Urban Bantu Councils and Bantu Advisory Boards and has been advertised as a progressive and enlightened development in government policy as it affects africans in urban areas.

What is immediately evident is the crucial role which the Minister of Co-operation and Development plays in the operation of the Community Council system. His power over the Community Councils is absolute. The Community Councils in turn have no independent powers to determine the development of urban african communities.

The limited powers which they are accorded by statute lie totally within ministerial discretion. In effect the Act allows for aspects of township administration and policing to be placed in the hands of the Community Councils. These powers may be withdrawn at any stage by the Minister and placed in the hands of the Administration Boards and the South African Police.

The provision relating to operational secrecy is ominous and may inhibit free and open discussion of Community Council decisions.

The system is in itself inherently undemocratic. Thousands of migrant workers living in urban areas are not eligible as members nor may they vote in Community Council elections. Should those who are eligible to vote decide not to participate in elections, the Minister may step into the breach and designate persons as members of

the Community Council. (See comments in introduction).

The abiding impression one has of the Community Councils Act is that it seeks merely to replace white functionaries with black functionaries in the overall administration of the townships. What Bantu Affairs Administration Boards used to do the Community Council will now do. If they co-operate all will be well. If there are disputes and differences, the Minister may withdraw their power. There is no fundamental alteration in approach. The power to determine the destinies of africans in urban areas still lies very much in the hands of the state.

# Community Councils: Control and Co-option

THE massive upsurge of popular struggle over the past months appears to be having its effects on the planning and implementation of the South African state's 'new' constitutional dispensation. Indeed, in recent weeks, two of its major planks - the 'Black' and 'Coloured' Councils - have been dropped with unsurprising rapidity (not to mention considerable side-stepping and double-talk

courtesy of PW Botha). The confusion and uncertainty obviously existent within the ranks of the dominant classes over the so-called 'constitutional question' has been mirrored by policy decisions taken about a lower level of state functioning: that of the community councils.

Here too, it is clear that things are not what they should be. On July 31, the Minister of Co-operation and Development (CAD), Piet Koornhof, acting on the request of Soweto's 'mayor', David Thebehali, announced that elections for the Soweto Council (scheduled for September 27) would be postponed to 1982 (RDM, 01.09.80). The government, Koornhof said, was to introduce legislation in 1981 providing for the development of community councils into fully-fledged local authorities - as recommended by the Riekert Commission. Council elections, therefore, should wait for this new era to dawn; all those councils whose elections fell before December, 1981, were eligible for this postponement - and all they had to do, like Thebehali, was ask.

The fact that the election for the widely discredited Soweto Council faced an enormous popular stayaway from the polls, in the context of mobilization over the issue of increased rents, was, of course, not mentioned.

The general reaction of community councils to Koornhof's statement is now awaited - although hardly with excitement.

Since the promulgation of the Community Councils Act in July, 1977, some 208 councils (with 1 500 councillors) have been established all over South Africa. A further 50 to 100 are still to come. The community council strategy represents a form of attempted state

restructuring at the local level on the part of the dominant classes - a response, to a large degree, to the intensified popular struggles of the 1970s. Although their operation and activities often appear futile, ridiculous and comic, nevertheless as state created vehicles for co-optation and incorporation, diversion and fragmentation, and, ultimately, division and control of the african dominated classes in the urban townships, these are in need of some analysis.

Questions such as:

1. How and where the Community Councils (CC) Act has been implemented?
2. What class forces do community councils (CCs) represent and how effectively?
3. What forms of resistance have been shown to their operation?
4. How is this operation to be seen within the entire complex of capital and the state's administration and control of the reproduction of its urban workforce?

should at this stage be posed, even if "answers" are difficult.

Of course, attempts at control and division of the dominated classes in South Africa's cities and towns are hardly a recent development. The supposedly new, super-improved CCs are direct descendents of their notoriously ineffectual predecessors: Advisory Boards and Urban Bantu Councils.

Advisory Boards were established in terms of one of the provisions of the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. The amendment and consolidation of the Act in 1945 made no difference to their functioning as purely consultative bodies - which usually met once a month with the local authority in charge

of the control and administration of townships to discuss problems and make recommendations (which were usually ignored). A relatively small proportion of township residents were eligible to vote for the boards, and they tended to be monopolized by the most conservative section of the african petty bourgeoisie - often for their own narrow aims.

'Channels' of co-optation and control, the boards were unable - and in most cases unwilling - to take any action on popular issues such as rents, transport and living conditions. It seems that they often spent enormous amounts of time considering questions related to trading licences, freehold land and better salaries for their members. Looking at the activities of the community councils in the early 1980s one wonders how much things have changed!?

In 1961, Advisory Boards were replaced by Urban Bantu Councils. This proved to be a change in name and not function, which remained purely advisory and consultative. As such, the UBC's activities usually met with large-scale apathy on the part of most township residents all over South Africa: the last three elections for the Soweto UBC, for example, (with once again only a small proportion of registered inhabitants allowed to vote) having percentage polls of 32%, 21%, and 14% respectively. As with Advisory Boards, the true role of the UBCs - as state created organs of division and control, allowing more efficient administration of the urban townships - was realized by the people.

Notwithstanding this recognition of Advisory Boards and UBCs as instruments of the oppressors, the question of participation

in these bodies was often a much-debated one among political organizations. The South African Communist Party, for instance, was involved to some extent in the operation of ABs in the 1940s. In the 1950s there was some debate in the ranks of the African National Congress (ANC) over the issue of participation in ABs and such institutions, with the weapon of boycott being seen in strategic, rather than purely 'moralistic'/'principled' terms. In this context we cannot go into further detail: it is necessary to realize, however, that the question of participation in the CCs of the late 1970s and early 1980s is hardly one without some historic roots.

It has already been suggested that the CC strategy represents a form of attempted state restructuring on a local level. Here, of course, it is important to recognize the fact that under capitalism, CCs (and similar institutions) 'are ... and have always been an aspect of national government which in turn is part of the state' (Cockburn, 1977: 2). The often repeated call from community councillors and the like for full municipal autonomy along the lines of white municipalities often seems to (unsurprisingly) miss the point that CCs and white municipalities are just different forms of the local capitalist state, and as such, fulfil the essential function for the dominant classes of reproducing in part the capitalist system in South Africa as a whole.

Previous articles in WIP have detailed the 'policy' of Total Strategy followed by the dominant classes in South Africa in response to the crisis conditions of the late 1970s. And it is quite clear that the



creation of 200 Community Councils must be viewed in the context of the glorious era of Wiehahn, Riekert, Urban Foundation, Jan Lombard, etc. Here, it is on two levels that we should see the operation of CCs:

1. The need of the dominant classes, in a period of crisis, to extend participation in the political structures of the (up to now) racially exclusive state. Thus, CCs: a 'new' way for some 'Urban Africans' to participate in the running of their townships (and, therefore, their lives). Low level politics and a strategy for incorporation of parts of the urban african working class and petty bourgeoisie - a strategy which appears now to be in some disarray. Hence the wait until 1982...

2. With capital and the state finding it increasingly difficult to provide some of the 'services' necessary for the reproduction of the working class, it is now becoming vital that 'black communities ... bear to an increasing extent a greater part of the total burden in connection with the provision of services in their own communities' (Riekert Commission). Thus, Community Councils are given 'municipal status'; and told to collect the rents (a question dealt with in WIP 12). The legislation that, according to Koornhof, will be passed in 1981 will, perhaps, clarify the situation in regard to this.

It is now possible to examine the functions and powers ascribed to CCs by the 1977 Act. This is done briefly here - as the Act is covered in another article in this issue of WIP. The context in which the Act was passed - wide-scale militancy and mobilization of the people of Soweto, leading to the effective destruction of the Soweto UBC and the rise of the Committee of Ten in June 1977

- is well-known (see WIP 10) and is not analysed to any extent here. However, one important point should be made: the powers and functions of Community Councils, according to the Act, do have a certain degree of 'flexibility' - and how the councils have been (and are) implemented in different townships is crucially dependent on the level of militancy there, the forms of organisation existent (notably of the 'Civic Association' type) and the resistance to their operation.

The Act details certain powers and responsibilities which the Minister of CAD may place on CCs. The most important of these are:

1. the allocation and administration of the letting of housing and dwellings;
2. the approval of building plans;
3. the removal of unauthorised dwellings - and the prevention of unlawful occupation;
4. the maintenance of 'services' in the townships;
5. the provision that members can serve on area school boards;
6. the allocation and administration of school and church sites;
7. the allocation and administration of trading sites;
8. the 'advising' and assisting of bentustan representatives in the townships;
9. the levying of dog (and other unspecified) taxes.

Most important, however, is Section 5(1)(n) of the Act, which gives the Minister the power - after consultation with the appropriate Administration Board - to hand over to a specific Council powers, duties and responsibilities not specified in the original Act. In other words, powers can be passed down from Boards to CCs. Although,

in theory, this is meant to help CCs to attain 'full, independent municipal status' - as state officials so consistently and eagerly put it - the story in practice is a different one. The handing down of powers from Administration Boards can only go a certain distance ... and no further. Thus, influx control, for example, is always in the hands of the Boards (and it would be naive to imagine otherwise). Koornhof stated at the inauguration of the Diepmeadow Council in December, 1978, that 'The Act is a vehicle for a purpose. If the purpose cannot be achieved by the vehicle, I will change the vehicle to suit the purpose' (Informa, Oct 1979). The limits on the old vehicle are very much inbuilt features of South African capitalism, however. Thus, WRAB's new chief director, CJ Bezuidenhout, speaking in May this year, stated that Administration Boards would exercise 'creative withdrawals' from the controls in african townships. At the same time, though, creativity notwithstanding, 'there would always be room for the board as a co-ordinating body somewhere between local government and central government' (Star, 21.05.80).

It is this relationship between Admin Boards and CCs which has caused community councillors all over the country much heartache and many a sleepless night as they ponder the nightmare issue: 'are we in charge of runaway vehicles with no effective powers?'

How, then, have Community Councils been established all over South Africa - in over 200 townships - since roughly the beginning of 1978? The procedure seems to be as follows:

1. The Department of CAD gazettes that

a CC is to be established in a particular township - this usually within a period of six months.

2. The Admin Board responsible - often in consultation with the then existing form of representation (UBCs usually, but sometimes still Advisory Boards) sets a date for an election.

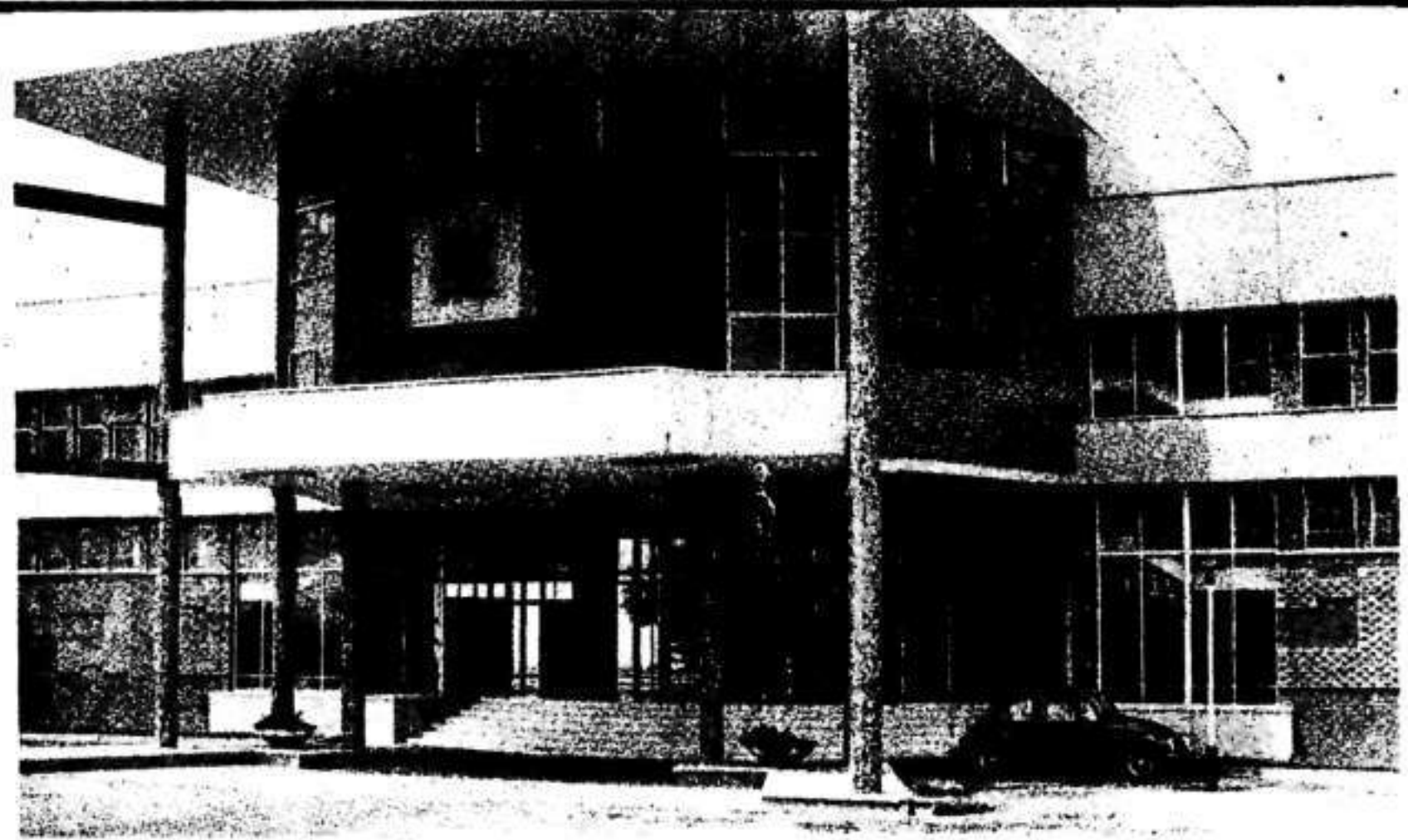
3. The election takes place. Depending on the size of the township, it is divided into wards. Some elections have taken place along 'ethnic' lines, while others have not. Only registered inhabitants of the township may vote, along with hostel dwellers.

4. The (hopefully) 'elected' CC negotiates with the appropriate Admin Board as to its duties and decides what powers are to be transferred.

5. In a heart-rending induction ceremony, the CC is inducted. The document handing over powers is signed by representatives of both the CC and the Board. This is usually effective for a year. A high-powered state official - in most cases seemingly the Deputy Minister of CAD, Dr G de V Morrison, who seems to have made this somewhat of a speciality - gives a speech, showering forth such paternalistic brilliance as 'People have to crawl before they can walk' (he said this at the induction of the Guguletu Council in September, 1979 - Sunday Post, 30.07.79).

6. The Community Council crawls into full action.

This process has been repeated roughly 200 times in South Africa over the past 2 1/2 years. Step 6 is, of course, not the final one - CAD reviews the transfers each year and on a basis of performance or 'necessity' hands down further powers. These additional



Soweto's Community Council chambers at Jabulani. These were inherited from the old Urban Bantu Council.

transfers often seem to have taken place on a fairly ad hoc basis: often, it appears, dependent on the sanction of Frans Csonjé, Deputy Secretary in CAD (and the official with overall responsibility for Admin Boards and CCs) or similarly placed functionaries.

Information about elections is usually sketchy, with the obvious exception of Soweto. What follows below, therefore, are some preliminary reports, gleaned largely from newspapers.

The story of the two elections for the Soweto Council in February and April, 1978, is well-known. In spite of pamphlets from the sky, Connie Mulder's promise of eventual

autonomy for Soweto, the release of Motlana and other members of the Committee of Ten, and the provision of special by-elections, the percentage polls were a pathetic 5,6% and 6% respectively. In the second election only 3 600 out of an eligible 60 000 voted (itself a tiny figure considering the size of Soweto). The present position of the Soweto Council vis a vis rent increases and related issues was analysed in JIP 12.

Early in 1978 elections were held in a number of townships. The poll percentages, in many cases, were significantly higher than in Soweto. A few examples are, Daveyton (19,59%), Kwa-Thema (19,75%), Vaaldriehoek (25%), Grahamstown (25,01%),



Fort Beaufort (70%), Bedford/Adelaide (40%), Bloemfontein (29%), Ermelo (32,6%), and Port Elizabeth (11,2%). Of interest here - although this is a broad generalisation - is the fact that percentages in rural towns are usually higher than those in cities. The importance of the artificial situation of tribalism/ethnicity in voting is difficult to gauge at this stage; it is clear that further information on elections/composition/operation of CCs - notably in smaller towns - is urgently required.

Such information would enable us, for instance, to assess the significance (if any) of the induction (following elections) of Councils in the past year in such places as Guguletu, Mamelodi, Galetane (Kimberley), Kagiso, Kettlefontein, Tsakane (Brakpan) and Mhluzi (Middelburg). These inductions were marked by a handing down of powers from Admin Boards; this initial transfer, however, appears to have been, in all cases, a very limited one, even within the extremely circumscribed powers CCs can exert.

It seems that CCs generally are to acquire powers in the same piecemeal way as the Soweto Council was granted its duties: firstly, given control over housing matters (as specified in the Act), permission to establish community guards (also as in the Act) and its own treasury (for Soweto in June, 1978); then more control over its own financial affairs (June, 1979); its own salaried officials (November, 1979); and seconded Admin Board officials to operate under its control (December, 1979).

Quite clearly 'municipal autonomy' is still a long way off if and when the state 'gives' CCs powers in this way. Rather, the

strategy is one that ensures responsibility for providing township 'services' falls directly into the laps of the 'elected' CCs. 'The Community Councils must consider matters and take the rap if things go wrong' as ex-director of WRAB put it (S Tribune, 14.05.80). Or, from the perspective of a Soweto councillor, 'The council has been given the power to control and draw its budget. But it is broke' (Post, 25.11.79). And it is then, of course, that rents are raised ... and the chickens come home to roost for the CCs in the form of mobilization and resistance against their actions.

But before looking at this resistance it is necessary to look at what class interests CCs represent, given the balance of class forces in particular townships and in South African society generally at this point. Notwithstanding the crudity of the formalisation, the Councils can perhaps best be seen as the quintessence of petty bourgeois politics. Their elected members drawn from the ranks of the traditional and new petty bourgeoisie (traders, bureaucrats and professionals largely), the Councils - and their national organ UCASA (Urban Councils Association of South Africa) - ceaselessly articulate demands over such issues as freehold land tenure and business rights. The distance from the discourse and practices of the working class is marked - as from the realities of exploitation. Given too, the Council's objective function as organs of control, this is hardly surprising.

Interesting in this regard, is the fact that via the agency of CCs, the South African state seems to be successfully creating its own small-scale localised, Matenzimas and Mphahlele. Community councillors

often spend a large amount of their time in attempting to increase their own allowances/salaries (often R150 to R200 per month), awarding their friends and family members (not to mention themselves!) trading licences and sites, buying themselves 'mayoral' cars and liquor cabinets, beating up their enemies with their own private police/vigilante forces, and so on.

Agencies of control and division, created by the state to extend effectively meaningless 'political' rights to a section of the urban dominated classes and to ensure that the townships - site of the extended reproduction of capital's workforce - 'pay their own way' and monopolised by a small (and often corrupt) segment of the petty bourgeoisie; the picture painted up to this point of CCs is a bleak one. And that the true functions of CCs in some areas has been realized is evidenced by the lack of participation in these 'instruments of the oppressor'. There is not the space here to overview adequately the debate over participation - which, as we indicated earlier, has long historic roots - in CCs. While bodies such as the Committee of Ten, Soweto Civic Association and PESCO (while it effectively operated) have maintained fairly consistently, a stand of non-participation ('Until and only when that day comes that we blacks have representation in the central government would people like myself agree to serve ... The community councils are a non-event and I refuse to dignify them with a comment' - Motlana, Post, 21.05.80) Inkatha's position has been more fluid (and shifty). The 'possibly yes - possibly no' stance of 1978-9 was supplanted by a definite 'no' in January,



1980 - this over the question of participation in Soweto elections (in Natal, percentage polls in CC elections are said to be high as a result of Inkatha encouragement and enthusiasm). Then, in April this year, came Buthelezi's statement on CCs in Vosloorus (significant, as the level of CC organisation on the East Rand appears to be the highest in the country):

I say to you bluntly: do not be ashamed to enter the fray at the level of Community Councils ... (they)... are not the vehicles of individual enrichment. They must be turned into chariots which rush us into battle' (Star, 14.04.80).

However, despite Buthelezi's fiery imagery (drawn, it seemed, straight from 'Ben Hur' or suchlike) by late July there had been second thoughts, and Peter Davidson, Inkatha publicity officer on the West Rand, stated that Inkatha would not take part in the Soweto elections - until the Council was made financially viable, a process he seemed to equate with giving it the land it controlled and the houses on it.

Obviously, if the land belonged to the people, they wouldn't resist paying higher rents, Davidson was implying, and only then would Inkatha be prepared to have anything to do with the CC. With Inkatha's statement, the Soweto elections began to look more and more of a no-hoper; Koornhof's postponement a few days later was not unexpected.

However, it is, of course, not sufficient to examine the issue of participation in CCs with reference solely to bodies such as those referred to above. The position and electoral stand of those parties which actually nominate candidates for election, for example, necessitates examination. (The Sofasonke Party, standing in Soweto in 1978 on the

planks of demanding 1/ freehold land tenure; 2/ the abolition of influx control (!); 3/ electrification, for instance).

The levels of political organisation and mobilization in particular townships is also vital to know, as is the level of popular militancy. And related to this is the question of resistance to the activities and operation of CCs. Information on this is sketchy, but in addition to recent action taken on rent increases we can list the following instances as examples:

1. The fire-bombing of members of the Kagiso UBC (and one Soweto councillor) in March, 1978 (Post, 02.03.80).
  2. The resistance to the renaming of Port Elizabeth's two townships by the CC - from Red and White Locations to Masanguanaville and Catuville respectively (the second being the name of a councillor). This was described as 'absurd, stupid, unwarranted and smacking of self-aggrandisement' (Sunday Post, 13.07.80).
  3. The fight of the residents of Mbekweni (Pearl) to have the CC's election declared invalid - which the Supreme Court in Cape Town eventually did in June this year (Grassroots, 3).
  4. The attempted attack on Josiah Matjila, the chairperson of the Vaal Community Council, in Sebokeng in late July after rent increases. Two body-guards were injured as Matjila was driven away in a police car, with warning shots being fired as people stormed and stoned the van.
- More instances such as these could be quoted, and further information would be most desirable. (It would be interesting, for example, to know the community's attitude to and actions towards the CC in, say, Fort

Beaufort - elected on a 70% poll, as was noted earlier - a town now undergoing generalised popular 'unrest'). In any event, it seems clear that the CC strategy will not be implemented without considerable popular struggle and resistance.

And this brings us back to the beginning of this article, for the announcement of the postponement of the Soweto Council elections - and the apparent rethinking of the Community Council strategy - is directly related to the resistance engendered by the operation of the Councils.

It does not seem essential here to summarise the main thrust of this article; the creation of Community Councils, it has been suggested must be seen as one of the responses of the dominant classes (in the context of intensified and persistent popular militancy) to the needs of

1. somewhat extending 'participation' in the political structures of the state. This has necessitated the establishment of yet another 'puppet' institution (which is not to deny that the possibility of such an institution becoming the arena of struggle and politicization exists - crucially dependent on the balance and configuration of class forces in a given period), manipulated and controlled by reactionary petty bourgeois elements;

2. greater control over the administration/reproduction of capital's urban workforce - and the necessity of shifting the responsibility of the provision of services on to the backs of the popular classes.

This survey of the genesis and operation of the CCs has been, however, somewhat schematic. Areas which have not been covered

in any depth - and should perhaps be the subject of further investigation and research - are:

- the question of community guards. The Act provides for a Community Council to manage and control such a guard in its area. How do these guards function? What is their relation to i. private police forces (such as Thebehele's notorious All Nation Police Force); ii. SAP; iii. Makgotle (a very neglected subject; and iv. Bantu Commissioner's Courts;
- the internal organisation of CCs. How do the committees appointed function? What is the role of opposition parties? This leads on to ...;
- regional and national organisation of CCs. On national organisation, UCASA was formed in October, 1978, and has 1 000 out of 1 500 councillors as members (organised regionally) at present. It holds regular conferences, chats now and again to Koornhof and his functionaries, and considers itself a 'major spokesman for urban blacks' (RDM, 22.07.80). At its most recent meeting, the Association resolved to tackle issues like finance of the Councils; deficits; 99-year leases and leasehold in general; housing shortages; unemployment; and transport. Its activities should be monitored;
- the question of financing of Councils has not been considered at any length here. The Brown Commission's first report seemed to duck the issue somewhat, and it remains an important pre-occupation of Councils - and the opposition to them. UCASA, for instance, outlined in April six steps the state should take: to give annual grants to Councils (as is the case with bantustans); to write off deficits of all councils immediately; to take white Admin Board officials from the payroll of CCs; to give interest free loans to Councils; to establish a development fund for urban african areas; to phase out Admin Boards;
- the relation of Councils to NAFCOC, Soweto Chamber of Commerce and Industry, etc. This relation often appears to be a somewhat problematic one, given the Councils' penchant for issuing trade licences to their family and friends. What will be the effect of the recent announcement by Louis Rive that limited

- industrial development can occur;
- the relation of Councils to the whole Louis Rive/ECONPLAN, etc, initiative should also be considered. And, also, of course, that to the Urban Foundation;
- finally the location of the CC strategy to the entire restructuring of urban control in the 1970s has not been adequately theorized and detailed. The Council-Admin Board relation is vital here, as is that of the Councils to CAD (and, most relevantly, Koornhof). The entire chain of command needs some urgent attention.

With Louis Rive's 'fantastic mission' (and indeed it is) coming to fruition, with Community Councils drawing up wild and extravagant budgets to 'run' their own townships, and with the popular resistance to the operation of the Councils on the increase, all these questions are worthy of some attempt at an answer. For, in spite of the strategy being in somewhat of a state of flux at the moment, the legislation the state is cooking up for CCs for 1981 will be of some relevance to contemporary struggle.



# Community Organisation - a response

## INTRODUCTION.

WHAT IS progressive community organisation? An article on this topic in Work In Progress 11 suggests that such organisation is the opposite of what is usually called 'community development'. The article further argues that the progressive organisation of communities has to move into the realm of political struggle - away from helping the poor and towards organising the working class against exploitation. The 'problems of the poor' are the

"logical outcome of a weak and disorganised working class which because of its lack of strength is unable to win the victories necessary for it to improve its lot in the short term, and to gain political power in the long term" (WIP 11:36).

The WIP 11 article therefore points out the need to 'restructure the system'. The major problem with what is referred to as 'community development' is that it ignores

"the basic prerequisite for any such improvement in the quality of life of the working class: its organisation as a political force" (WIP 11:36).

But how is this political organisation to occur? How is the system to be restructured? The WIP 11 article suggests activity, which