

INTRODUCTION

The last five months have seen heightened resistance to the Black Local Authorities in townships throughout the Transvaal. This resistance has varied from spontaneous protests to the five month-long boycott of rent increases by over 300 000 households in the Vaal Triangle. It has forced over 37 councillors to resign and left the Black Local Authorities without a shred of legitimacy in the communities they are supposed to govern.

Despite this the campaign against the Black Local Authorities is not over. While councils may not operate effectively, townships are not democratically controlled by residents. Many townships have a constant police and army presence and reports of the establishment of council police forces in many townships suggest councillors are arming themselves for a fresh assault on popular organisations.

The recent detentions of UDF leaders, make it clear that the government aims to seriously weaken progressive organisation before considering further co-optive strategies. The existence of UDF and the campaigns waged against the Black Local Authorities and tricameral parliament have shown that further co-optive strategies would have little chance of success in the absence of a serious assault on extra-parliamentary opposition.

This makes an evaluation of the campaign against the Black Local Authorities and the strengths and weaknesses of affiliates on the civic front an urgent priority.

This report is divided into the following sections:

- *Structures of local government in African areas
- *The aims of the Black Local Authorities
- *The Anti-Black Local Authorities Campaign
- *The rent increases
- *The state of Black Local Authorities in the Transvaal
- *the state of community organisation in the Transvaal
- *The way forward
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STRUCTURES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN AFRICAN AREAS

Since 1971, African areas have been under the direct control of Administration Boards. These boards had close links with the then Department of Bantu Affairs and their task was to administer African areas in such a way that the temporary nature of "urban" Africans was entrenched.

As a result the Boards ploughed vast sums of money into the development of huge dormitory towns inside the Bantustan borders and neglected the development of housing and services in African townships outside bantustan borders. Democratic local government structures were non-existent and instead Africans were given an advisory role through the Urban Bantu Councils.

In the wake of 1976, the government attempted to direct popular anger away from the administration boards and in 1977 established community councils which in the words of the ex-director of Wrab:

"The community councils must consider matters and take the rap if things go wrong" (Sunday Tribune 4/5/80).

After 1977, over two hundred community councils were established nationwide. In the elections that followed the low polls demonstrated clearly that representation on dummy bodies was no substitute for political rights in a united South Africa.

At present there are three local government structures in African areas: town and village councils established under the Black Local Authorities Act with the power to administer townships under their control; community councils with certain administrative powers given to them by the development boards; and local committees established under the Black Local Authorities Act with only an advisory role.

While the powers that each of these bodies has may vary, they have the following characteristics in common:

- * All of them have been imposed on the community without its consent.
- * They all impose the government's policy of self financing which means people living in these communities are forced to pay for housing, services and community facilities from rent

and service charges with no assistance from the central government.

- * These bodies will be forced to carry out or at least agree to the government's policies of forced removals and shack demolitions as the minister has wide ranging powers to ignore their recommendations or to overrule any decisions they make not in line with apartheid policies.
- * All these bodies have a long history of corruption, broken promises and maladministration of the areas under their jurisdiction.

In 1982, the Black Local Authorities Act was passed, setting up town and village councils in thirty two African communities. These bodies were given the power to administer these areas and to take responsibility for raising finances, providing services and controlling the allocation of houses.

The Black Community Development Act aimed to change the administration boards into development boards whose role in future would be to plan development for the communities under their control. In practice the development boards continue to administer many African communities even where town and village councils have been established. This stems from the wide powers given to the minister in the Black Local Authorities Act and the fact that the minister often designates the boards to act on his behalf in particular townships.

THE AIMS OF THE BLACK LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The following strategies of control and co-option were embodied in the Black Local Authorities (BLA):

* Ideological co-option

Ideologically, Koornhof's strategy was designed to convince people that they were gaining control of their own affairs.

In the post-76 period a major aspect of government strategy has been to offer Africans living in urban areas the promise of better living conditions. The introduction of 99-year leasehold is part of this offer.

However the government was aware that economic and material advancement alone is insufficient to co-opt, or redirect people. Some form of political and ideological incorporation is also necessary. The BLA aimed to redirect people into "civic affairs" and away from political struggle, with the illusion that avenues were opening for them to run their own communities.

* "Bantustanisation" of oppression

The struggles of the 1970's led the government to realise the administration boards were doing less to control and disorganise resistance than to focus it. The neo-colonial policy of setting up black administrations in the bantustans had succeeded in containing struggles in rural areas so the government set up similar structures in urban areas.

The first step in the "bantustanisation" of township oppression was to introduce community councils to take the flack for unpopular measures such as rent increases and evictions.

The boards continued to be in the front line at important points of conflict such as shack demolitions and pass raids. The new BLA's were an attempt to put the council in the frontline at all points of conflict - demolitions, raids, rent increases and evictions. They would appear to run the townships, both to plan "improvements" and control people's access to houses, lodgers permits and licences.

* Limiting numbers of urban Africans

The fact that the new councils were told to raise their own finances, was not simply because the central government is in debt.

It has been the government's policy for decades to starve African townships of money. The aim has been to make it as difficult as possible and as unattractive as possible for Africans who are not allowed jobs in the cities to live in the townships.

Since the Riekert Commission the government has tried to reduce the numbers of urban unemployed and make Africans' stay in the urban areas.

* Creation of divisions

As with the other "reform" proposals, control and the creation of divisions is the name of the game. The government knows that certain divisions lie just under the surface and hopes to harness and expand these into fully-fledged political and ideological divisions. Middle class elements are to be set apart in elite suburbs with 99-year lease and home ownership schemes. Workers are to live in rented houses. Shacks housing illegals will be demolished and houses raided for illegal occupants. People in rented accommodation will continue to be evicted for non-payment, while those in owned housing will have slightly greater security.

THE ANTI - BLACK LOCAL AUTHORITIES CAMPAIGN

Student, women's and civic organisations and trade unions launched the Anti-community councils campaign to boycott the BLA elections because:

- * The BLA was imposed on the African majority without their consent.
- * The BLA aimed to strengthen the policies of separate development and divide rural and urban people.
- * The new act did not have the power to effect change in the townships.
- * The new act aimed to win credibility for the government overseas.
- * The councillors were to implement government policies.

The anti-community council campaign supported by all UDF affiliates aimed to:

- * Show that the Nationalist government's laws were not acceptable to the majority of people.
- * Strengthen organisations.
- * Popularise the demands of the people.
- * Unite people from different communities to build civic structures in African communities.
- * Teach activists to do mass work.

Various methods were used to popularise the campaign:

- * Activists distributed pamphlets explaining why the election boycott.
- * Public meetings were called.
- * In some areas, activists went door to door.

The gains of the election boycott

- * The boycott demonstrated the overwhelming rejection of these councils by the African majority. Eight percent of the adult population or 150 000 out of 1 850 000 adults eligible, took part in the elections.
- * More than half the councils were unopposed eg Mhluzi, Alexandra, Kwa Nobuhle and Evaton.
- * The low percentage poll discredited the government locally and internationally.
- * The boycott greatly discredited the community councils even before they took power.

- * The campaign resulted in the creation of new Civic organisations , for example Vaal Civic Association, Alexandra Civic Association and the strengthening of existing Civics for example the Soweto Civic Association

- * The UDF was widely popularised in African communities.

The response of the government

Anti election groups were harrassed in a number of ways:

- * Public meetings organised by those opposed to the elections were banned while those organising the election campaign were given every assistance including training in electioneering
- * Members of youth, civic, and student organisations were called to report to the Security police where they were asked about their organisational involvement
- * There was a high police presence outside anti-election meetings and people attending were photographed
- * Popular leadership was indefinitely detained. Mohalekeng Civic Association and Kagiso Residents Organisation were particularly badly affected by the detention of leading activists.

THE RENT INCREASES

After the inauguration of the BLA, the councillors were faced

with the task of running bankrupt councils. The councils inherited large debts from the community councils and from the administration boards. For example:

- * The Soweto Council has a debt of R33 million
- * The Alexandra Council a debt of R875 840
- * The Mamelodi Council a debt of R2,4 million
- * The Atteridgeville and Saulsville Councils debts of R2,9 million

In addition to the outstanding debts the councils soon accumulated new ones:

- * In an effort to win credibility many councils embarked on schemes to upgrade township conditions, in particular electrification and road tarring schemes.
- * Councillors voted themselves large salaries, fancy cars, new council chambers and mayoral houses. One time Soweto mayor, 'ET' Tshabalala was the highest paid councillor in the country, earning R5 000 a month. On the East Rand the ERDB announced that all white officials seconded to the councils were to have their salaries doubled.

With the sale of liquor outlets, and the failure of councils to win the incorporation of industrial parks into their borders, the councils' only source of finance was to increase rents and service charges.

Between March and September last year, 14 councils on the Witwatersr announced rent increases. Residents dissatisfied with the quality of housing and services as well as the corruption and mismanagement of the BLA, opposed the increases .

In Katlehong and Davyton, opposition to rent increases was led by oppos councillors who called residents meetings to discuss the increases. In Soweto, Ratanda , Davyton and Tembisa, councillors realised that they were heading for confrontation with residents and suspended the increases.

In the Vaal, the Civic Association warned the Town council to suspend the increase. Since the tragic events of September last year, over 300000 households have refused to pay rent in the Vaal.

The demand by students for democratic Student Representative Councils country-wide co-incided with problems faced by the residents as a result of the BLA. As in 1976, this co-incidence of students demands and residents' problems generated resistance not only to the rent increases but to all forms of apartheid rule in the townships. To the call for lower rents and SRC's was added the call for the BLA to resign.

Since September last year, over 37 councillors have resigned, including the entire Ratanda and Mankweng Councils. A recent article noted that only 4 out of 22 councils on the Witwatersrand were still functioning. Vuyisile Siyothula of the Tembisa Town Council stated his reasons for resigning as:

- Ineffectiveness of the town council
- Complete loss of credibility by the councillors
- Lack of adequate protection for councillors
- Residents had no confidence in the town councils and called them 'Dummy Bodies'
- The failure of the government to provide a financial base for the councils
- Staffing of the Councils was not properly planned by the government. The councils depended on staff from the Development Board who were paid exorbitant salaries. These salaries decreased the finances of the town councils.
- The refusal of black academics to serve on the town councils and their criticisms of them.
- People who served on the councils were semi-literate and did not have suitable qualifications (Star 5/12/84)

THE STATE OF BLACK LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE TRANSVAAL

The resignations of councillors and the suspension of the rent increases has been an important victory for the Front and its affiliates in local areas. Popular resistance has further discredited the councils, but they remain in nominal control of the townships and where they have resigned, administration has been handed back to the Boards. Residents are as yet in no position to democratically run their own areas.

The question remains as to the extent to which the councils have failed to co-opt and divide residents and what strategies of control they are likely to use in the future.

Failure of ideological co-option

The corrupt nature of the councillors themselves and the campaigns against the rent increases mean that the councillors have lost what little credibility they may have once had.

At this stage government plans to salvage the councils by creating its 'informal, non-statutory forum' to debate constitutional issues affecting Africans has little chance of undermining the call for national political representation of African people. The challenge it presents to the UDF and its affiliates lies not in its acceptability but in its ability to co-ordinate, strengthen and support individual councils isolated by mass resistance. The recent attempts by the Urban Council's Association of SA (UCASA) to prevent the resignation of Mitteridgeville mayor ZZ Mashao because of the way this would be exploited by opposition groupings is an indication that leading councillors realise the need to strengthen their organisations.

Failure of material co-option

The government's inability to provide the material base for the councils has limited their ability to fulfill election promises. With the shelving of the rent increases, even less money is available for upgrading. Esau Mahlatsi, mayor of the Lekoa Council indicated this after the shelving of the Vaal rent increases in October last year.

At present many councillors are campaigning actively for the government to expand their financial base. They have demanded the inclusion of industries within their borders and access to municipal traffic licences and fines as well as government subsidisation of services. Recent recommendations by the Croeser Working Group suggest that white businesses should be taxed to benefit local government particularly in African areas. With the present recession and government cutbacks this seems a likely option for financing the BLA.

Control and Division

However none of these solutions will work unless the BLA find a more effective way of smashing popular resistance and dividing the united opposition they face.

The town councils have been unable to win allies among the better off sections of the working class or middle class. Their policy of allocating houses, trading licences and other benefits to friends and relatives has aroused the wrath of thousands of aspirant traders and businessmen. Opposition councillors have been ruthlessly dealt with, narrowing the support base of the councils still further: Katlehong councillor Sukazi was suspended from the council and expelled for demanding that the council discuss the unrest in the area. Another Katlehong councillor Khoali was detained by the security police after resigning his council seat.

The recent decision to form private police forces points to an increase in the repressive function of the B.L.A. the proposed private police forces find parallels in Lennox Sebe's 'Green Berets' who conducted a campaign of terror against residents during the Mdantsane bus boycotts in 1973 and 1983. The extent of their activities has made it impossible for any above ground organisation to operate in the area.

The formation of private police units suggests that the councils have not explored the very loosely defined functions of the BLAA to the full.

A significant recent trend has been the involvement of the Soweto Council in shack demolitions in Protea. This suggests that with rising unemployment and the government's commitment to tie influx control to legal housing and jobs, the council will play a more active role in shack demolitions and expulsion of so-called 'illegals'. This development could be particularly serious on the East Rand where large numbers of people live in shacks.

THE PRESENT STATE OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATION IN THE TRANSVAAL

The gains made during the anti-election campaign by various organisations strengthened and popularised the UDF at a mass level. This popularity in turn led to the birth of new organisations in various places such as the Ratanda Civic Association in Heidelberg, Ekangala Civic Association in Bronkhorstspuit, Leandra Action Committee in Leslie and the Seshego Civic Association in Pietersburg.

At a mass level, the anti-tricameral and anti-BLA election campaigns together with the education and rent protests have mobilised large numbers of people. While these people may identify with the UDF, Cosas and civic organisations, these organisations have not succeeded in consolidating.

When the UDF was formed older organisations put all their efforts into popularising it. Activists were drawn from older organisations to do the front's work. This meant activists gave less attention to building organisation leading the weakening of these organisations.

Ensuring that one's organisation has consolidated mass support in its area of operation is of utmost importance to building the front and furthering the struggle against apartheid.

The following weaknesses can be identified in organisations operating on the civic front:

- * Many of the organisations have no long term working programmed to direct their activities
- * Many of these organisations respond to issues spontaneously and at times with little understanding.
- * The leadership has a limited understanding of the broader struggle. Repression has contributed to this weakness as organisations have never had time to develop leadership at all levels.
- * Some of these organisations are content to identify with the front and allow it to direct their progress rather than embarking on local campaigns and activities this does not build local structures
- * The lack of an inter-civic forum has contributed to the lack of co-ordination of civic activities and the failure to share experiences and skills

THE WAY FORWARD

The following issues need to be considered by the Front in taking forward its campaign against the BLA:

- * How can the Front generalise the campaign against the BLA throughout the country
- * How can we popularise the people's demands for an alternative to the BLA
- * How can the Front assist civic organisations and other organisations to overcome the problems of lack of resources, and leadership
- * How can the Front channel new organisations into its fold
- * How can civic organisations overcome lack of co-ordination
- * How can civics establish closer links with trade unions to fight recent attempts to have outstanding rents deducted from wages

Community Councils still in existence

Aberdeen
Ashton
Colenso
Parys
Ceres
Nduli
Leandra
Jamestown
King Williams town
Langa
Nyanga
Gugulethu
Drift
Sands
Nyanga 111
Middelberg(Cape)
Lydenburg
Robertson
Nkqubela
Stellenbosch
Mfuleni

Local Committees in existence

Local committees are advisory boards which are established in terms of Section 5 of the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982. All existing advisory Boards are now called Local committees or 'Committees'. The function of the committees is to advise the Development boards administering the area.

Stanger

Umzinto

Cedarville

Chrissiesmeer

Howick

Kwathandeka

Relebohile

Thapelang

Tshepong

Town And Village Councils in South Africa

Mohlakeng
Wesselton
Alexandra
Bela -Bela
Atteridgeville
Bohlokong
Daveyton
Diepmeadow
Dobsonville
Evaton

Galeshewe
Ikageng
Jouberton
Kagiso
Katlehong
Kayamnandi
Kwaguqa
Kwanobuhla
Kwa Thema
Lekoa
Lingelihle
Mamelodi
Mangaung
Mhluzi
Rini
seeisoville
Soweto
Tembisa
Thabong
Tokoza
Vosloorus
Watville