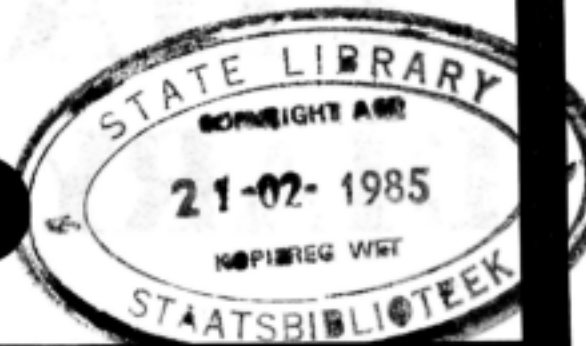


P13978

IZWI lase TOWNSHIP



Phase-1 residents on the march

BUTI, THE WORKERS ARE ANGRY

When the SAVE ALEXANDRA PARTY was formed to defend the township from being demolished, it enjoyed massive support.

This lasted until members of the party became not the *defenders*, but the *bosses* of Alex. Since they began to rule as the LIAISON COMMITTEE, more and more people have realised that these 'saviours' are actually more dangerous than Peri-Urban, or the Mso-mis.

What People Say

A resident we spoke to in a yard in 7th Avenue mentioned Rev Buti, saying angrily, "Hlomola naga moutlwa." His wife agreed, "O re tlišetsa mathatha: ha a tsamaya, le difariki tsa gae bo Makwibiri." Yet another shook his fist, saying, "Haak Vrystaat, Buti!"

The Rev knows that he is up against the popular masses. In giving his full support to the government-

created town councils, he predicted that the people would show their rejection. "They will bomb you, they will kill you and they will curse you," he told his fellow mayors.

There have been many demonstrations against the Liaison Committee. Women from the hostel are particularly disgusted with Buti. They feel that he has made their lives more difficult, not easier, since he appeared on the scene. The same feeling is shared by people who are now dumped in zinks, buses and in the old TB hospital, which even Buti realises is not fit for human beings.

The Phase-1 Conflict

The most recent and fierce opposition comes from the residents in Phase-1 houses, whose rent has been put up by Buti's Town Council by twelve hundred percent (from R10,00 to R130,00)

These residents marched in demonstration against the Council, with placards reading VOTE BUTI OUT and WE WONT PAY, etc.

Nobuhle Hall

During the meeting at Nobuhle Hall, Councillor Makubiri failed to calm their angry mood. They declared outright that they would not pay the high rents.

NOBUHLE HALL is the biggest defeat the Council has received so far.

In this issue of IZWI we describe the events leading up to the scene in Nobuhle, and we go further to discuss the question of housing and rents, to show that these issues will split Alexandra.

PHASE-1

DIARY OF STRUGGLE

After Buti announced the new rents for Phase-1, on March 30 1984, the Phase-1 Neighbourhood Committee called him to a public meeting to account for the new high rents. The residents said they would refuse to pay more than R40 to R50 per month, amounts which they could afford.

A Clever Trick

On the day of the meeting (4th April), the Town Council tried to hijack events by inviting residents to their own meeting which they had arranged at Nobuhle Hall. At sunset residents gathered in their usual meeting place in the open, under the large tree near Ngubeni's store. They decided to accept the Council's challenge, and thus they marched from 9th Avenue to Nobuhle, united in their determination not to be fooled. Their flaming torches lit up placards which read — **BOSSSES PAY US PEANUTS, BUTI CHARGES US THE WORLD and WE DEMAND RENTS WE CAN AFFORD and IS ALEX ONLY MEANT FOR THE RICH?**

The Councillors method of silencing the people was to seat themselves on the high stage behind microphones and a powerful public address system, and to be the ones doing all the talking. But the residents would not be silenced into submission. They firmly rejected Makubiri's justifications, and stressed their own point of view.

Their demands were:

1. That the new rents should not be higher than R40 for a small house, and R50 for a 6-room house.
2. That the Council should negotiate directly with residents' associations on matters affecting peoples lives, such as rent and housing.

3. That Nobuhle Hall should be available to neighbourhood groups, at reasonable notice and,
4. That people who have been moved from their houses should be told how long they will have to freeze in zinks, and that they be first to have the new houses or flats being built.



Makubiri challenged in Nobuhle Hall

On stage Councillors Makubiri and Khoza, embracing their microphones as if they were Papa and Blondie, tried in vain to charm the audience; but realised the game was up when even Councillor Molepo failed to sing along with their faulty and out-of-tune melodies. Molepo outright condemned the Council, and said that they had ceased to fight those who were oppressing Alex residents, and blacks in general. They were themselves becoming oppressors, he said.

At last, seeing that the Council's main representative, Makubiri, failed to respond sensibly to their demands, the residents made it clear once more that they were determined not to pay the new rents, and they then ended the meeting.

Till today, people have continued to pay their old rents of R7,50 and R9,20 — and these have been accepted.

How it began

Phase-1 Neighbourhood Committee has been formed to fight high rents, particularly in Phase-1. The committee presently consists of three elected members and one co-opted member. This committee has formulated its strategies and tactics (weapons of struggling against these high rentals.) Town Councils have been introduced to sift townships by putting rents so high that only richer classes could afford (what about workers?). Anyway this is discussed in our article on Black Local Authorities Act in this issue.

What needs to be clear in our minds is this: we should not end up complaining in buses, churches, shebeens, etc., about rents being put high without doing something about that. Maybe people may wonder what does doing something mean. Actually this means forming neighbourhood committees, because organisations like neighbourhood committees are there to make demands (not only complaints). People of Phase-1 have now passed the stage of complaining, by forming this committee. With this committee they say they have a right to be in Alex and it must be saved from Buti and Council. They say if *development* is a word meaning eviction, they do not want it. If development means that workers will have to give way to the richer classes, then development is their enemy not their friend.

When this committee was elected it was not elected to do things for people but with the people. Here

is a short history of the Phase-1 Neighbourhood Committee, from a committee member, to illustrate what is said above.

19/12/83

After some of us have been told different proposed rent increases ranging between the amount of R126,00 to R200,00 we decided to call a meeting under the tree next to Ngubeni's Store.

20/12/83 General Meeting

The meeting started at 6.30 p.m. with 90 residents in attendance. All those who were told about the new increase were allowed to say what happened and how much was demanded. They all said different amounts, between R126,00 and R200,00. After a long discussion on the rents issue that included criticism of the Liaison Committee (Town Council) for not fulfilling its earlier promises of building houses people can afford, both poor and rich, and its cowardly tactic of forcing residents to pay high rentals by approaching them individually instead of calling a mass meeting (just as they usually do when they want to be elected), residents decided to form a committee to deal with the Liaison Committee. The committee was empowered to conduct a survey in the area and seek legal advice.

21/12/83 Committee Meeting

We were given things to do i.e. to seek legal advice, conduct a survey, and deal with the Liaison Committee. We mandated one member to go and seek for legal aid to assist us on things like eviction. We also felt that it would be negative to reject the new rentals without telling the council what we think is affordable rent. The rent increase to R40,00 for four rooms and R50,00 for five rooms seemed affordable according to the committee. We decided to take our proposals back to the residents.

27/12/83 Committee and Legal Advisor's Meeting

The purpose of seeking a legal advisor was to get advice on our legal position concerning evictions. What we found out from him is that nobody has the authority to evict us without getting a court order first. This actually helped us to understand that lots of residents have been evicted in the past without proper channels being followed. With this information we saw that we are in a position to sustain our struggle without fearing instant eviction. The advisor also suggested we add to the survey, so that when we meet the council we could explain why we say we are against these new rentals.

30/12/83 Committee Meeting

We decided to call a general meeting to report back about our activities. Notices were distributed. We mandated a member to report what we had done.

4/01/84 General Meeting

After the report back, it was agreed that rents of R40,00 and R50,00 were affordable. People felt that we should launch a declaration campaign which every permit holder will sign to show that she/he agrees with R40,00 and R50,00 rents. The committee was empowered to present this declaration to the council as soon as possible and hold negotiations.

5/01/84 Committee Meeting

We discussed the question of approaching the council. A letter was drafted inviting a meeting with the council at our usual place of meeting or at the Councils Chamber. Two committee members were sent to deliver the letter and they met Mr Magerman (Town clerk). He told us that the notice was too short and he is not sure whether the council will make it. Mandated members told him that they were sent by the residents because the matter was delicate and urgent.

6/01/84 Press Report

Buti told a Sowetan reporter that rent increases had been suspended. This really made us confused because he was really vague, since the Old-Alex residents' rent was increased also from R7,50 and R9,20 to R10,00 and we couldn't find out which one is suspended.

8/01/84 Committee Meeting

Because of this confusion we decided to meet. We agreed that we should draft questions to ask Buti and WRAB. These questions were drafted;

1. Who has the authority to increase rent?
2. What is the basis of calculation?
3. What would happen if there is a resident who cannot afford?

Two members were mandated to go to WRAB first to ask these questions.



A General Meeting of Phase-1 residents

9/01/84

WRAB told us that it has no authority to decide on rent, only the Alex Town Council has. On the second question we were told that the calculation is based on total cost of developing the land, running the council, the cost of services etc. On the third question we were told that the people who cannot afford should make-way to those who could afford.

We now decided to write a letter to the council accompanied by similar questions. The letter invited them to a meeting to answer those questions.

10/01/84

Questions and a letter were submitted to Mr Magerman. He told us that the council has read the first letter and he felt that we should rather meet Mr Makubiri alone as he happens to be the representative of Ward-4 which includes Phase-1. Magerman was told that the committee mandate is to meet the whole council (especially Buti) and we did not recognise Mr Makubiri as our elected representative. Because of that argument Magerman said that he is going to present the letter and questions to the council at a general meeting in the evening and we should fetch the reply tomorrow.

11/01/84

Morning

A committee member went back to fetch a reply. Mr Magerman said that the council has reached a final decision at the meeting that it will only send Mr Makubiri to us. After a long argument Mr Magerman promised our member that he is going to persuade Buti, Mr Malopo and Mr Makubiri to come to a preliminary meeting on the 12/01/84 at 5 p.m.

Evening

We met for a report back. There were two things we had to decide on:

1. To send back a committee member to tell the council that we are not in favour of Preliminary Meetings.
2. We want to negotiate with them and not socialize with them.

We all adopted this suggestion and a letter was drafted immediately.

12/01/84

Morning

A committee member failed to submit the letter because in the morning all councillors including Mr Magerman were at a Press Conference and we were told that in the afternoon they will be at Daveyton.

Evening

Mr Makubiri and Magerman came to meet us. Mr Makubiri told us that Buti could not be present because of other problems. He told us that he has been made Ward-4 representative and whatever problem we have should via him to the whole council. He went further to say that there is nothing official about rent being increased. As Ward representative he asked our grievances but said although we can put our grievances he won't come up with the solution because that needs to be discussed at the council meeting. Actually what he said is that he is just a middle man between Ward-4 and the Town Council. To us it was a waste of time to meet him and we decided to close the meeting. He told us that we will meet in future to negotiate but he didn't specify when.

13/01/84 Committee Meeting

Since we didn't get anything from Mr Makubiri we decided to meet to see what steps we can take. We suggested to call a Press Conference where our declaration to the council would be tabled. We made this suggestion because Buti and his council don't take us seriously and we felt that if this thing is made public then they will be forced to meet us, because we know they are afraid of publicity. They always present themselves as saviours of Alex whereas they are wolves in sheepskin. Since this was a sensitive issue we decided to take it to the General Meeting for approval.

15/01/84 Committee Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to draft a report back on the activities of the committee. Notices were also prepared and distributed calling a meeting on the 16/01/84.

16/01/84

General Meeting failed to take place because of the bus-boycott. Since people were late from work, few people were present and we decided to cancel the meeting.

19/01/84 Committee Meeting

This meeting was arranged to discuss what action to take. This was prompted by the fact there is still confusion regarding what rents are we supposed to pay because some residents were turned back when paying rent, and told their money is not enough. We took a decision that a letter should be presented to Mr Makubiri urging him to clarify the rent issue because he stated categorically at the meeting between the committee and him that the increases are not official. The letter was accompanied by a list of people who were turned back.

Mrs Makubiri signed to show she had received the letter on his behalf. In the letter we stated that we want a reply before 21/01/84.

23/01/84

Since we didn't get any reply from Mr Makubiri a committee member went to his house. Mr Makubiri told him that the council has not yet met to discuss the letter. He said the council is going to meet on Tuesday (26/01/84) and he will present the letter for discussion and will have the answer after that meeting.

29/01/84

A committee member went back to Makubiri for a reply but was told that Mr Makubiri is not at home (thought he was left with suspicion).

31/01/84 Committee Meeting

Following the postponement of a general meeting that was supposed to take place on the 16/02/84 a general meeting was scheduled to be held on the 1/02/84. We decided to present this to the general meeting: A letter to be written to the Alex Town Council stating the following:

1. We failed to get discussion and negotiation from the council.
2. We are now presenting the declaration formally.

1/02/84 General Meeting

Residents felt that we should give the council a last chance by inviting them again to our meeting to answer questions and if they fail, then we can go for a Press-Conference.

6/02/84

A letter was delivered at the Town Council offices inviting them to our meeting on the 8th where residents will ask questions.

7/02/84 Committee Meeting

A committee member came to the meeting with the letter from the Town Council. Actually it was delivered at his house by a Youth Councillor. In the letter the Town Council stated that they won't be present at the meeting, but they didn't give reasons. The letter went further to say that, 'the Council is still assessing the rent increase and will tell you of the findings in the coming five weeks.'

To us this letter came as proof that the council is not prepared to understand that we want rents to be negotiated and not them telling us their findings. Anyway, we decided to take this letter to the General Meeting on the 8th for residents to say what steps we should take.

8/02/84 General Meeting

All residents flocked under the tree to meet Buti and his council. We reported to them about the letter. Since it was clear to the residents that Buti is not prepared to meet their committee in order to reach mutual findings, but want to set-up rents alone behind closed doors, residents came with a decision that we should put more pressure on the council by distributing our declaration to the whole of Alex to get support. It was emphasised again in the meeting that all residents should continue paying old rents and if they are told the new rents, they should come back and report to the committee.

A Press report

Buti told the press that we are sowing the seeds of confusion in the township and we are trouble-makers.

Mr Buti said he was aware of "trouble-makers" who were sowing seeds of confusion in the township

"So if we do announce that rent will go up, these people would have mobilised against us," he said.

"We know them. They do not have the interests of the people at heart. They just want to confuse them."

With this report we were left confused ourselves, because Mr Moutlana is the one who demanded these exorbitant amounts of R126,00 to R200,00, so Buti is the one who sows the seeds of confusion in Phase-1. On the one hand, Buti says, *"It is not official that rent will go up,"* and on the other hand an official Mr Moutlana says, *"Your rent is R157,00, if you cannot afford it, you better exchange with a person from Old Alex who can afford."* I would like to pose these questions to the residents;

1. Who is the trouble-maker, the Neighbourhood Committee, or Buti?
2. Who doesn't have the interests of the residents at heart, the Neighbourhood Committee, or Buti?
3. Who is sowing seeds of confusion, the Neighbourhood Committee, or Buti?

18-20/03/84

Irrespective of what Buti told the press, we distributed the pamphlet as decided by the residents at the General Meeting. This was a big job to do and we asked help from children to help us. It took us three days distributing in the Township.

Our declaration was also reported in the papers. That helped us a lot because it meant that our declaration also reached other places and not Alex only.

31/03/84

The Star reported Buti's Budget speech which he delivered on the 30/03/84. In his budget speech he said rent for four rooms will be now R124,55 and R139,55 for six rooms, and those rents were official.

The committee decided to meet in the evening to see what we should do about the report. We decided to call a General Meeting on Sunday the 1st. We notified people soon after our meeting.

1/04/84 General Meeting

A meeting was held under the tree as usual. After the residents were told of the press report and the new "official" rent increases, they took a resolution that we should call Buti and his council to come and explain why is he putting the rent so high. Where is he expecting us to get money? Residents decided to hold this meeting on the 4th. It was also adopted that we should invite residents who are outside Phase-1 to come. It was also adopted that we should make a protest march.

2/04/84

A letter calling Buti to a meeting was delivered at his house, but unfortunately he couldn't be found but nevertheless, it was left. Pamphlets calling all residents of Alex to come to a meeting were distributed at all bus terminuses.

3/04/84

Buti replied to our letter by distributing a notice calling people to Nobuhle Hall on the 4th. In his notice he put his 'justification' of increasing rentals.

What took place on 4th April in Nobuhle Hall has been described above, page 2. This diary of events in the Phase-1 struggle between the people and the Alex Town Council will be brought up to date in future issues of IZWI.

HOUSING

THE RENT QUESTION

Makubiri wants residents in the new Alex houses to pay R124 or R139 per month. He knows the amount is too high, but he says the Council is forced to charge these high rents because the houses cost a lot to build.

This seems a reasonable argument, but in fact it is nonsense. Since Makubiri talks of the 'cost' of building houses, then we too will talk of the cost of building houses, and we will show that it is possible to build houses far cheaper than they are built in Alex. We will also show that the 'cost of building', like other costs in the capitalist system, is a bad argument, since these costs are high because someone is making profits. What is a 'cost' to workers, is a profit to someone in the capitalist class. We hope after this Makubiri won't talk about high costs of building again.

The houses in Phase -1, Alexandra, each cost twenty five thousand Rand to build. But in other locations, the same house costs only five thousand Rand — more or less. Here are a few examples:

LOCATION	COST
Tsakane	R 6000
Khotsong	R 6000
Galeshewe	R 4000

These houses cost less but they are not worse than the Alex houses. Just like Phase -1 houses, they have walls of hollow blocks, iron roofs, no ceilings, cheap doors, rough plaster and so on. In some areas they are larger than the Alex houses, in some they are smaller. But in general they are all the same cheap location houses. The difference is that in Alex they cost, as we said, twenty five thousand Rands, and in other places very much less. WHY?

Makubiri will perhaps say that it is because in Alex it is expensive to develop because houses first have to be demolished, trenches dug, and blah blah blah. But in fact the twenty five thousand Rand cost IS OVER AND ABOVE the costs of levelling and installing sewerage. (IZWI has got the figures straight from Parliament.)

Here is the real reason for the difference in price building —

In Tsakane, Khotsong and Galeshewe (and in many places) there are people who see that there is a housing shortage and that there are residents who cannot afford high rents. These people TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM. They look about for ways to build cheaply — and they succeed. They are serious about solving the housing problem.

Once they have taken a decision to build houses cheaply, they plan intelligently. They buy materials in bulk (which makes them cheaper); they run their own stores; they operate their own transport; they get cheap loans from the government; they get a machine so that people can make their own bricks; they teach the home-owner to do the building; and so on.

On the other hand, the Alex Council has not planned in this way. They appoint building contractors (Wimpey, Goldstein) to do the work; and of course the building firm is interested in profit, nothing else.

The contractors put up the same house that costs five thousand in Tsakane, they use cheap labour, but they make enormous profits and charge twenty five thousand. That's a lovely business! And why should Makubiri care? He doesn't lose any sleep, and he doesn't lose any money.

They Are Not Ignorant

Makubiri and the rest of that gang, the Alex Town Council (alias the Save Alexandra Party — alias the Liaison Committee) KNOW VERY WELL that most residents in Alex cannot afford a rent of more than about fifty Rands per month. The Liaison Committee itself appointed a research team a couple of years ago to find out how much people in Alex earn and how they live. They used to say that they would keep rents low, because of the problem of low wages, poor residents, etc.

Then why are they now putting up rents so high that ordinary people cannot afford them? Anyone can see that people who earn not much more than R150 per month, cannot pay rents of R130.



His house will cost him R6000 — in Tsakane

'THEY WILL KILL YOU, THEY WILL BOMB YOU AND THEY WILL CURSE YOU'

There are many possibilities: as we have seen, 'self-help' schemes produce cheap houses. It is also possible to build 'shell-houses' where only the outer walls and roof are erected professionally, plus plumbing, sewerage and foundations. The inside walls, plastering and so on are all left to the home-owner to complete in his own time and when he can afford it. It might also be better to improve only the roads, the sewerage and the electrification of the township, allowing residents then to improve their existing properties as best they may, with cheap government loans. We do not say that any of these is necessarily the right solution. We only say that if the present plan is too expensive, other plans ought to be considered. And they should be considered in consultation with the residents and from their point of view, not from that of the middle class only.

It is not for us to come up with solutions at this stage. It is for the Councillors to admit that they are on the wrong track, and then call upon residents to help work out an

acceptable way of improving housing in Alex.

But they do not do so. Instead they try to persuade people that twenty five thousand Rands is the right price for a house, and that R130 is an affordable rent. They defend themselves, and when residents make objections they call them 'trouble-makers.'

It is they themselves who are trouble-makers, in that they cause trouble for people who cannot afford high rents!

How do they solve the problem of people who cannot afford? They advise them to exchange house with someone from old Alex who can afford the new high rents. This suggestion is very dishonest. The Councillors know that the old Alex will be bulldozed section by section, so that those who cannot afford will have to move again, even deeper into the remaining old Alex, until they will be crowded in just one yard, and will be expelled all at once together in a fleet of GG trucks — and transported to the Kalahari Desert.

What Exactly is the Problem

WHY DO THESE COUNCILLORS BUILD EXPENSIVE HOUSES AND NOT CHEAP ONES? WHY DO THEY NOT EVEN TRY TO THINK OF WAYS TO HOUSE THOSE WHO CANNOT AFFORD HIGH RENTS?

Everything becomes clear when you realise that the Alex Council does not see the problem as a housing problem. The Alex Council does not intend to build houses for all residents. Their problem is not how to provide houses, but how to change Alex from a poor location into a posh one. They don't want to house the poor, they want to house the well-off. They actually want the poor to get out; but how to get them out is the problem. They want them to go and be poor somewhere else. The Councils problem is not a housing problem, but an eviction problem.

What Is Behind Their Words

You know that it is difficult to evict people straight forward. Buti said about people who oppose black Town Councils—'*They will criticise you and call you sell-outs and government stooges... They will kill you, they will bomb you and they will curse you.*' (Sowetan 19-1-84). In such an atmosphere it is unwise to tell people to get the hell out of Alex, where they have lived far longer than the Rev. Therefore, since these councillors cannot safely evict people directly, they have to do it with cunning; and the most cunning way they have worked out, is to overcharge on rent, so that many will be unable to pay, and then it will not be Makubiri who knocks on your door early one morning, it will be the police.

For years the Liaison Committee members (alias Town Councillors) have been saying things like 'Alex we love you', 'We have saved Alex', 'Re le ahetsa'. But as one resident explains, "They swank a lot but in reality they are just full of piss and wind."



GG trucks ready to remove people from Sophiatown, 1955

Let us suppose that at first the Save Alex Party had good intentions, but the development of Alex has turned out more expensive than they expected. Is that their fault? No. But if that is the case, they should scrap those plans, and start again, the way people are doing in other locations, to find a way of housing residents of the township at rents they can afford. That is the priority.

But someone might say: if the Councillors really want to expel people why have they been so good to them? They saved Alex, they helped pensioners, they assisted people to get their documents in order to show that they had rights in the township, they are trying to uplift the township, they pay women to pick up rubbish in the streets ...

Our answer is as follows. The Councillors want popularity, and they want to rule. In the South African system, to rule is necessarily to oppress. Popularity and oppression do not go easily together. The Councillors often find themselves between these two.

Here is an example. For two years they allowed people to stay in the new houses (Phase -1) without paying full rental. Why? Because the rents intended for those houses were very high, they are oppression, and the Councillors did not want to lose their popularity. Had people known about these high rents before they would have struggled hard to prevent the Save Alex Party getting into power. Now it is too late. At this stage it is more necessary for the Council to charge high rents, than to keep its popularity.

By the time next elections are held, the Council will have done everything possible to get support by altering the character of Alex.

There will be fewer poor people, and more middle class people: so that the next time there is a vote, the Save Alex Party might have saved itself.



Houses that will cost R25000 in Alex, Phase-1

This is what Alexandra was 'saved' for - to be a middle class ghetto.

As a suburb, Alex is the neighbour of Wendywood (a middle class white suburb), of Marboro (a middle class Indian suburb), and of a proposed new Coloured suburb. As a labour reserve, it serves the white households of Sandton, and the fancy factories of Kramerville, Wynberg and Kew. These are not rough, noisy, large, stinking factories like Modder, or the steel works of the East Rand

They are 'non-noxious', and their workers are for the most part clerks, skilled workers, white-collar workers.

Alex is intended to fit in with these surroundings. It will be a dirty dump no longer. Koornhof wants a show place to take his visitors from America; and Buti wants somewhere to take his chommies from the Balalaika. And they don't want to see cripples, sick babies, shit-buckets, dongas. Even the drunks must be in 'taverns' and migrants in a 'hotel'.

What housing reveals

Housing in any society shows what kind of society it is.

In slave-owning societies, slaves were housed the way their owners profited from them best: in the West Indies they were locked overnight in a

'slave house': in South America domestic slaves lived in wooden cabins in the back-yard, while plantation slaves were housed in compounds.

In capitalist society, capitalists do not actually own people. What they are interested in, and what they 'buy', is the labour power that people have. But in order to get this labour power in the right quantities, capitalists control the working population strictly. Housing is part of this control.

Labour Power

Housing for workers is provided **FOR THE SAKE OF LABOUR POWER**, not for the sake of the worker as human beings. It is provided near to factories, towns, etc, so that labour will be available to those who need it. Housing is there to house labour power. As for the actual worker, capitalism sees him merely as a kind of frame, with skin and some useful muscles. He is a *labour unit*, having the ability to do a job of work. These *things* must be housed, so that they are fit for work.

The policy of worker housing is to build shelters **AS CHEAP AS POSSIBLE, CROWDED, NEAR TO FACTORIES, EASY TO POLICE AND CONTROL, EASY TO KEEP HEALTHY.**

When we see that worker housing is part of the system of labour control, it makes sense to ask WHO PAYS FOR IT?

The answer depends on how the capitalists intend to exploit the workers. If they intend to exploit them by paying low wages, then rent must be low. In this case the state and employers will bear the cost of housing. On the other hand, if capitalists intend to exploit workers by charging high prices for building materials, furniture, TV sets, paint, groceries and so on, then salaries can be high. The money is taken back over the counter. In this case workers might have to pay for their housing in full. It doesn't really matter which way the workers are robbed — by a low wage or by high consumer prices. In each case the

money gets back into the hands of the capitalist class. Till now, worker housing in SA has been subsidised by employers and the state. Workers have been paid low wages, and have been unskilled and unproductive (no fault of their own). Now the picture is changing. More skilled workers are needed by industry and commerce, and more Africans are passing through school (this is not to say they are getting a good education), and the state wants to develop a black middle class.

Therefore there are plans for two kinds of housing — cheap for unskilled workers, expensive for those who get higher salaries and who can afford to be 'home owners'. The black population is separating into classes, and housing policy hastens this process.

There are different kinds of worker housing. Some large companies build their own accommodation for their workers. Then there are self-owned houses, under 99 year lease. Then there are houses rented from state or from private landlords. And there are single-sex hostels. What used to be the black working class, is being re-shaped; and one of the ways this re-shaping is done, is by re-shaping housing. What used to be black working class housing, all the same, all the same rent, all the same discomfort, — is now split into many different housing schemes, each one suitable for a certain section of the black population — unskilled workers, skilled workers, clerks and artisans, supervisors, teachers, priests and policemen, councillors, businessmen, tycoons and government stooges.

Home-ownership

In a society which recognises that everyone should have shelter, and where it is not expensive to build, a house is not something special, but a social right. In capitalist society people do not have such a right. They have to struggle to find a place to stay and they are seldom secure.

In these circumstances it seems very desirable to own a house, for then you can't be evicted, there are no sudden steep rises in rent, and your children have a future. To own a house gives some foothold, at least, in a society which does not guarantee security.

However, when we look at it not from the point of view of the individual but from the point of view of masses, there are serious problems with home ownership. If access to a home is by money, and not by social right, then those people who have lots of money accumulate houses, and those without cash never manage to afford a home of their own. So that for the majority of people, ownership remains impossible. These now become tenants of landlords.

Ownership, in capitalist society, does not only mean that the owner has the right to own his property, but also that he can sell it. It has value.

Two kinds of value

In capitalism there are two kinds of value: one is called USE — VALUE, which is the usefulness of a thing (a house, for example, is useful as a shelter, as a place to live in, bring up ones children in and so on). The other kind of value is called EXCHANGE — VALUE, which means that a thing can be exchanged for money. It is because things have exchange value that people produce goods for exchange. In the process profits can be made and that is what capitalists are after.

Use-value

If houses only had use value, no-one could buy and sell them to gain profits. For a long time black location houses only had use value in this sense. To get a house, you had to be on the waiting list. You could not simply go and buy one. Houses were there for workers to live in. Such workers were needed by industrialists and businessmen, and their accommodation was provided not for exchange but for use.

(On the other hand, white housing in SA has always had exchange value as well as use value. Whites have been

able to buy and sell, as well as live, in houses. There has always been a 'market' for white houses, and companies have built such houses to sell at a profit, or they have bought many houses and re-sold them, for a profit. Thus, access to such housing is by way of money.

Housing is Politics

One of the effects of a 'market' for houses, is that houses then seem to be ordinary goods like any others that you can buy. They seem to be part of 'economic facts', and not part of politics or social arrangements in a society. But it must be realised that the 'market' is never really a free thing. It can be controlled, so that housing can still be shaped and adapted to what the society wants it to be. Building materials can be made expensive or cheap; the price of land to build on can be made expensive or cheap; rights to ownership can be manipulated; transport routes can be provided or withdrawn. The state shapes its housing the way its wants. Even with a so called 'free market' in capitalist society there will be the kind of housing employers need for their labour force, and it will be at the price they decide. Housing is always a political (a social) question.

The 'cost' of housing

Why are building costs so high?

A house is built using raw materials like stone, sand, steel, wood and cement. They are combined by human labour. These things are plentiful. People have lived in shelters made of such materials for centuries, but the cost of building was never high. Under capitalism, as we have said, things are not only made for their use value, but especially for their exchange value. They are made to be sold, and in the process of making them for sale, profit is gained. That is why people produce for profits. Building materials are not produced so that people can make shelters, but so that the producers can make profits. The materials used in building, and the labour used to do the building, are not in themselves expensive — but at each and every stage of getting and supplying materials, and in erecting a dwelling, companies make profits.

Stone is quarried using cheap labour, and producing crushed stone, which is plentiful and cheap — but the quarry company makes a profit.

Wood is chopped down and cut into planks, using cheap labour — but the timber companies, the farmers, the woodmill, the hardware stores, the transport companies, all make profits. It is true that each process adds to the value of the timber, but over and above the value, there is this profit which is actually the unpaid labour that has gone into the work.

Building companies buy these raw materials, which are expensive because of so much profit making, and they themselves make profits out of their construction work.

Of course it would not matter if all the profit went to the workers who produce, because then they would be able to afford houses at their full value. But this profit (which is money that has been stolen from workers) is in the hands of the capitalists, who use it to expand their business, and so make even more profit in the future.

It is sometimes said that competition among producers keeps prices down. This is true. But in the production of certain building materials there are very few firms in

competition. For example, the production of paint is mainly in the hands of two giant companies, Plascon and AECI, and they set the price as high as they like. Bricks should be cheap: after all they are merely baked clay. But in the Transvaal one giant company, Corobrick, is 'baas op die plaas'. When Corobrick decides to raise the price of bricks, builders can do very little about it. (One firm has found that if they buy bricks from Italy, ship them to Durban and rail them to Tvl, they are still cheaper than Corobrick bricks which are made on the spot. Which shows that monopolies cause high building costs).

**Plaster
brick
prices
up 9,6%**

A DUAL hike in brick prices and local transport costs has been announced by Corobrik Transvaal. Plaster brick prices have been increased by 9,6% and certain top-quality face bricks by 8,9%.

Materials are expensive, building is expensive, because of profit, especially where giant firms dominate production.

MANUAL AND MENTAL LABOUR

Also, under capitalism, human labour is of two kinds — physical work (which is the actual carrying, cutting, hammering, welding, digging, and so on) and so-called brain work (engineering, planning, calculating and supervising). In the case of simple houses most of these jobs can actually be done by one person.

You don't need a supervisor, when you build a location house. But contractors use supervisors everywhere, to keep the labourers working hard and fast. The division of labour, and the unproductive use of many specialists, also helps to make the costs of building high. Specialists get salaries that are far higher than the wages of unskilled labourers.

The cost of building materials includes profit; the building companies make profits; transport companies make profits; and 'brainworkers' get high salaries. No wonder the cost of building is high!

Peter Wilkinson has shown that very few people (black workers) can afford the high rents that Town Councils want to impose. See the following report —

He cites survey results in March 1981 which showed that, if the cost of housing instalments or rental was calculated at R50 a month and if no more than 25 percent of income was to be spent on housing, then:

- One in four Johannesburg township dwellers would be unable to pay.
- One in three Durban families would have problems.
- Three-quarter of Port Elizabeth residents would find housing beyond their means.

If the "realistic" cost was set at about R100 — the figure used by United Building Society chairman Mr P Scales — then only 30 percent of Soweto families, 10 percent of Durban families and six percent in East London/Port Elizabeth could keep pace.

Cheap housing

We made mention of certain building schemes which were able to provide cheap housing. Some say this is because they avoid paying for labour, since the residents themselves contribute their own labour. But in fact, in the building trade, labour is really very cheap. Go to any site and ask the labourers how much they get for their work, and you will see how cheap labour is. So that cannot be the reason for cheaper building in these schemes we have spoken about.

No. People manage to build cheaply IN SO FAR AS THEY AVOID AND BYPASS THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM OF PROFITS. They use the same kind of transport, the same kind of warehouse, the same materials — but at each stage they avoid or reduce profits; and therefore the final cost is low. In such schemes the warehouse is owned by the organisers. They try to provide their

own transport, or look for local materials that do not have to be transported. They buy materials in bulk. They make their own bricks if possible. They look for cheap loans. In short, in every way possible they do not go along with the profit system. Those who run the schemes do not look for profits, and they do not have unnecessary specialists at high salaries.

Why do they do it?

An interesting question is — what organisations run these cheap housing schemes, and why do they do it?

In fact it is groups like the Urban Foundation, and certain Administration Boards who organise the schemes. Such bodies are actually part of the capitalist system, and support it fully. And if you told them that by dodging the process of profit making they are criticising capitalism, they would be surprised. The Urban Foundations is directed by prominent capitalists, such as Menell, who is a mining financier: it is managed by bureaucrats, such as Robin Lee, who is a faithful servant of capital. What is in it for them?

The short answer is that capitalists still need cheap labour, and they therefore still need cheap housing; and if they can shift the job of building onto the backs of the residents, and reduce the cost to themselves, so much the better.

Capitalist housing is expensive — that's what the system wants, to make profits with building materials etc. Self-build housing is cheap — and that too is what the system wants, to house the lowest paid labourers, and thus keep costs for mining, for municipal work, for rough industries, low — which is a way to make profits high.

Short supply

It is not only the cost of materials and the building process that make housing expensive. When there is a limited supply of housing, the price goes up because people are desperate to get accommodation.

Mayfair East is close to central Johannesburg. The houses are small and old. Last year they were selling for about R35 000. Then in December '83 the suburb was proclaimed

an Indian residential area. Indians, starved for accommodation, and having money saved up, began offering high sums for these houses.

Now owners are demanding up to R300 000 for a single property. This shortage of land and housing is due to the political policy of Group Areas. Since there is less land available to blacks, wherever they do get rights to own property, prices tend to be even higher than in white areas.

The right to home ownership, because there are too few houses available for the number of people who need accommodation, is going to cause prices to rise. For those who have enough cash to buy property, this will lead to their enrichment. Those who are unable to buy will become even poorer. It can be seen that private ownership is not a blessing for the poor. It is worse than having the Boards, Peri-Urbans, Black Authorities etc, as the Private landlords have even less social responsibility than the government. At least the government wants its workers in good condition. Private landlords care only about rent.

SOME INTERESTING PRESS REPORTS

CAPE TOWN — The Urban Foundation is launching projects to upgrade informal housing and shacks to bring accommodation within the reach of most South Africans, the foundation's annual review has disclosed.

The houses can be constructed with easily-available materials including wattle-and-daub, corrugated iron and wood and panels made from wooden crates.

CHEAPEST

Despite various self-help projects, the majority of the urban population still cannot afford even the cheapest options for conventional housing, the review says.

"The foundation has undertaken research into suitable options, especially the progressive development of informal housing and shacks, and innovative projects in this area will be launched in 1984/85 in the Free State and Eastern Cape," the review says.

Roads would be pushed through the bush, water standpipes installed, and pit latrines or a bucket system introduced.

Mr du Plessis said the system, also known as "incremental housing" would be better planned than controlled squatting.

Soweto re-sales fetch big profits

By LIN MENGE

BUY your house — and sell it for 10 times as much as you paid for it! That is the incredible experience of a Meadowlands resident.

He bought his house from the West Rand Administration Board under the Government's Big Sale discount scheme for R1 934, and sold it last week for R21 000.

Mr Young says he could provide houses for R4 000. They would be far more acceptable than the Government housing and they could be enlarged as the needs and income of the buyer increased. This price would give the buyer a one-bedroomed home, carpeted throughout, electricity and plumbing installed, and wooden cupboard units in the kitchen.

He says these houses can be put up by five semi-skilled workers in five days. A room could be added for only R800.

THE BLACK TOWN COUNCILS

In 1963 the Government decided to abolish Alex and remove freehold rights from residents. The plan was that families would no longer be allowed to live in Alex. It would be a place for single migrant workers in hostels. Between 1963 and 1979 many families were removed to Soweto and Tembisa and almost all freehold properties were bought at very low prices.

Change of Policy

In 1979 the state changed its policy and Koornhof promised to make Alex "a fully fledged municipality. A model township that South Africans could proudly show their foreign visitors." (Sowetan 29-7-81)

In 1980, the Alexandra Liaison Committee (ALC), which had been officially recognised by Koornhof, promised "to build a new Alexandra where all the people will be living in comfortable homes - even the poor and the old." (Rev. Buti, The Star 30-3-80).

The reasons behind this change of policy are important. They will allow us to understand why the redevelopment of Alex is taking place at the expense of the working class residents of Alex.

The need for reform

In the 1970's black political organization became very active. There was a growth in black trade unions and the Black Consciousness Movement began.

The economy was going through a period of recession and unemployment was rising. In 1976/7 black students revolted against Bantu Education.

Displacing Anger

The state and capitalist class realized that economic and political reforms were necessary for the economy to pull out of the recession and to get back "political stability"

There was a shortage of skilled labour caused by inadequate Bantu Education and by job reservation. Also foreign investment was needed. This could only be attracted if foreign investors could be guaranteed that their money was safe. A stable and peaceful political climate was thus necessary and this led to many political reforms.

Examples of political reforms were:

- 1) the introduction in 1977 of home-ownership on 99-year leaseholds in the townships;
- 2) the introduction of community Councils in 1978;
- 3) In 1978 a government enquiry was made into the question of controlling labour, with a view to improving these controls (Riekert Commission of Inquiry). This enquiry influenced government policy, which now aims to rearrange apartheid by granting certain 'privileges' to Africans who are called Permanent Urban Residents, while increasing controls over non-urban Africans (migrants).

In 1981, Koornhof introduced 3 Bills into Parliament:

- 1) The Black Local Authorities Bill,
- 2) The Black Community Development Bill, and
- 3) The Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill.

The most important for this article are the first and the third.

The Orderly Movement Bill

This Bill makes urban residence conditional on access to both employment and "approved accommodation" (either owned on 99-year leasehold or rented). Urban rights will no longer be based on Section 10. Those unemployed and those without accommodation will therefore be excluded from urban status, even if they have Section 10 rights now.

The Black Middle Class

An attempt is being made by the state and capitalist class to encourage the growth of "the black middle class" who will be conservative, a cushion against working class militancy.

According to Koornhof, the 99-year leasehold scheme is important in the growth of the black middle class. Only permanent urban residents will be allowed to own houses. Such residents can get loans with the house as security. These loans can be used for business purposes. Another important point is that it will be possible for some people to own more than one house and this could promote the re-emergence of landlords who charge workers high rentals and thereby enrich themselves.

A MODEL TOWNSHIP THAT SOUTH AFRICANS COULD PROUDLY SHOW THEIR FOREIGN VISITORS



Photo from Sunday Tribune

A private investigation into the redevelopment plans for Alex has shown that there will be housing for only approximately 45 000 people, including 10 000 in hostels. The population of Alex is about 80 000 (ie. about 16 000 families); this means that about 35 000 people (ie. about 7 000 families) will NOT get houses in the new Alex. They might lose their rights to remain in the urban areas. They might be removed to a homeland, even if they have Section 10 rights now.

The Alex Town Council

The Community Councils were replaced in 1983 by Black Local Authorities. These bodies were never intended to be democratic and independent. They were only intended to appear as such.

In 1979 when Alex was 'reprieved', Buti and the Save Alexandra Party were popular leaders. They had negotiated with Koornhof and when Alex was "saved" Buti claimed it was due to his efforts. The Save Alexandra Party won the first ALC elections in 1979.

A Luxury Ghetto

When Koornhof promised to make Alex a "model township", Buti promised *"no residents here at this moment are going to be moved from their homes before accommodation has been securedNo-one should be victimised on the grounds that he or she doesn't have a residential permit."* (Rand Daily Mail 25-5-79).

Koornhof saw the opportunity of using a popular leader like Buti to carry out government plans. Consequently in 1983 Alex became the first African township to have a Town Council under the Black Local Authorities Act. Almost immediately after the 70th anniversary celebrations in November 1983, it was announced that due to a lack of opposition, Buti had been appointed Mayor of Alex and his party had been given control over the Town Council. Buti claimed that the lack of opposition was *"a very clear indication of the confidence the residents of Alexandra have in the leadership. The victory is a clear mandate from the residents"* (Chronicle, December 1983).

This claim is difficult to believe. There was already opposition to the Save Alex Party in 1979 by standholders who were refusing to sell their properties to WRAB.

By 1981, two opposition parties existed, the Alexandra Action Committee and the Alexandra Peoples Action Committee. In 1982 COSAS expressed opposition, as did many hostel dwellers as well as residents who were removed from their houses which were then demolished. In 1983 people objected to being moved to buses when their houses were demolished. One resident said,

"We know the township is being redeveloped, but not to our advantage."

"IT WOULD HAVE BEEN APPROPRIATE TO BE ROBED WITH OVERALLS, FOR WE ARE STILL REBUILDING ALEXANDRA. NEVERTHELESS, WE ARE PROUD TO WEAR THE MAYORAL AND COUNCIL GOWNS." — SAM BUTI, AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE A.T.C. — 1984.

Again in 1983 residents registered opposition to Buti's Group. A protest march carried the slogan *"Buti, West Rand, stop humiliating the people."* Buti was further accused of "dictatorship" and of "sending people into exile." There was even a call for Alex residents to boycott the elections in November. The boycott call came from a group including COSAS, AYCO, and other opposition groups.

It was because the organised opposition boycotted the election that Buti could claim that no opposition party entered the election. He therefore distorted the real events when he claimed he was unopposed. It is also a distortion to claim that he has the confidence of the residents of Alex and a mandate from them.

The Black Local Authorities Act

Despite all the talk about independent local self government, a large number of controls and restrictions are in Koornhof's hands.

1) The Minister of Co-operation and Development (Koornhof) establishes the Town Council and determines its powers and authority.

2) He appoints Directors of Local Government who are responsible to the Director General of Co-operation and Development, and who have the final say on the internal operation of the council, ie. the appointment of executives and the delegation of duties.

3) He decides on the initial size of the council.

4) He may choose or appoint people to fill vacancies on the council.

5) He may dissolve the council "if the need for it no longer exists."

6) He may remove councillors.

Section 29 of the Act states that if the Council fails to fulfil any of its functions or instructions, the Minister may dissolve the council and call new elections or appoint a new council or body to run the township. There is no appeal and the Minister does not have to justify his actions.

Ministerial control is not the only defect in the Act. No sources of finance are provided for except service charges, license fees, rentals, and fines for the infringement of by-laws. Loans and donations may be negotiated and accepted with Ministerial approval. It is the government's intention to try and make townships self-financing.

Because home ownership is effective in encouraging the growth of a black middle class, the government wants to persuade people to buy their houses. In order to do this, and in order to raise funds for the councils, it has become policy to raise rentals.

Eventually many township houses will be only for those who can afford either to buy their house, or to pay high rentals. As we said earlier, government policy is changing. Urban residence will no longer be on the basis of Section 10 but on access to employment and approved housing. Employment and housing will now be used for influx control, in place of Section 10.

New form of influx control

The Town Councils make it hard for poor people to afford housing. Unemployed people will no longer be able to live in the urban areas,

and their families will no longer be able to afford to have them stay in their houses illegally. High rental means that as many people as possible in a house must work to provide enough money to pay rent. This will mean that working lodgers will be preferred to unemployed grandparents for example. There will also be large fines for allowing people to live illegally in a house.

In this way, only the employed who have managed to win high enough wages from their bosses, will be able to afford housing. And only those with housing will be allowed to stay in the urban areas. Workers now have to fight on two sides, against the bosses for higher wages, and against the Town Council for lower rents.

What does this mean for the working class of Alex?

Koornhof - Stepfather of Alex

A senior Government Administrator has defined the councils as "safety valves". By this he means that control in the townships will be exercised by blacks who are elected by the residents. The hand of the state will no longer be in the foreground, eg. in the form of pass raids by the S.A. Police and WRAB, but in the background, behind the Town Councils (in the hands of Koornhof).

They Are In A Trap

Buti and the Town Council are caught between three sides - on the one side they have to keep

Koornhof happy, and on another side they have to keep Alex residents happy. On a third side they have to keep bosses happy - if rents are raised, bosses have to raise wages too. This is the major weakness of the Town Council and is the reason why residents may make demands on the Town Council with some hope of success.

It is this "safety valve" function of the Town Councils that represents the major difficulty of Town

Councils and which workers in Alex can use against both Buti and Koornhof. In order for the authorities to prevent political anger, they will have to be able to make concessions to residents, eg. rent reductions. This means that despite all Koornhof's controls, he will have to allow the Town Councils a certain degree of room to manoeuvre, otherwise the object of the Town Councils would be defeated.

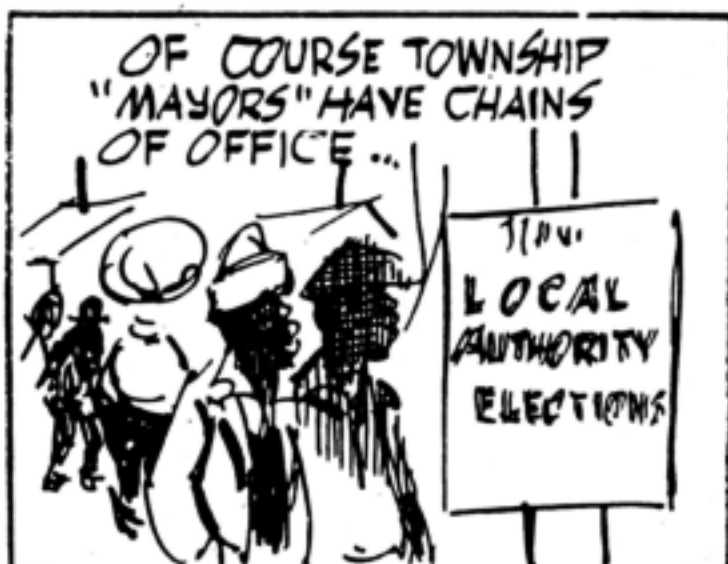
Moreover, Buti knows he might have opposition in future elections. He needs to remain sufficiently popular or have sufficient support in order to remain the mayor of Alex. Therefore he can be forced to meet the demands of Alex residents.

His words in 1981

In 1981 Buti said, "I want to tell Mr Botha that the problems of South Africa are not on the borders, but right here, with us. The struggle is right inside the country. I also want to advise the Minister to deflate the Defense budget and be involved in the housing process in the land."

(Rand Daily Mail, 22-9-81)

DAY BY DAY



Star 11-11-83 by Abe Berry

The government claims it has no money, and that is why no money is being given to the Town Councils. However, as Buti knows, the problem is not a shortage of money, but the allocation of money. Buti must be forced to demand money from Koornhof to subsidize housing and other services in Alex.

Dont let him relax

Without the pressure and struggles of the workers of Alex, Buti will promote Koornhof's plans for making Alex a middle class township. Just like Koornhof's prom-

ises, Buti's promises are meaningless. In 1981 Buti claimed that he and the Save Alex Party wanted the Town Council to serve Alex "as servants, not as leaders" (The Sowetan, 14-9-81).

The choice

The struggles of the workers of Alex must make Buti choose - either he must openly join Koornhof against the workers of Alex and be discredited, or he must join the workers against Koornhof and demand money for housing. He can no longer sit on the fence.



Dintshanyana Tsa Mmuso

ALEX NEVER WAS A COMMUNITY

Alexandra, like all black townships, is made up of people who have different interests. It has, and always has had, different classes of people living mixed up together.

Class Structure In The 50's

In the 1950's, there were three main groups of people: property owners, workers who leased houses from these property owners, and gangsters.

Those who owned land had bought it for very high prices and had borrowed from money lenders at high interest rates. Since they were exploited by money lenders, they in turn exploited their working class tenants by charging high rentals. They also built shacks and extra rooms on their properties to make as much money as possible.

The criminal group, which developed because so many people were unemployed in the early 1940's, consisted of at least six major gangs, which divided Alexandra into territories. Everyone was a potential victim. One gang, the Msomis, even set up an office

where people paid "cost of living" money: money to ensure they could continue living. Workers had the worst of it: they were exploited in the factories, by standholders and by the organised gangs.

This particular class structure no longer exists. In 1955, the Minister of Native Affairs decided to bring Alexandra under strict control, clean up gangsterism, and reduce the population to 30 000. The Peri-Urban Board took over the township to carry out these plans.

Then in 1963 a decision was taken to convert Alexandra into a hostel township. Thousands of families were moved to Tembisa and Soweto, and women and children to the homelands. By 1973, the population had been reduced to 40 000, and 396 houses were demolished. African standholders were persuaded to sell their property to Peri-Urban. Three hostels were built by 1981. Standholders were told to pay rent to WRAB in 1974.

It was then that the Alexandra Liaison Committee was formed to

"save Alexandra" and it was given government recognition in 1978.

At this stage, the Liaison Committee was firmly on the side of the remaining standholders. Rev Buti said that the Liaison Committee (LC) was a group of men who came together to challenge the decision to make Alexandra a hostel township, "in order to protect their rights to land ownership."

In 1979, it was said that Alexandra would be replanned for family housing. In July 1980, a re-development plan was announced. The township was divided into seven sections, and approved for 99-year leasehold. This however, meant that the remaining standholders had to be bought out. Suddenly the LC changed its policy and told them to stop resisting:

"Every standholder must cooperate with WRAB's request to acquire his property." They also said, "We will fight for freehold rights after the township has been rebuilt."

Class Structure In The 80's

The class structure of the 1950's has changed: organised gansterism had been smashed and African property owners bought out. In their places, new groups of people have appeared with much to gain in terms of comfort and privilege, and they are willing to stand on the necks of workers. They are people who have escaped the daily drudgery of labour in the factories or in homes in the rich, neighbouring white suburbs. They are, in other words, business people, teachers, doctors, policemen, professionals, town-councillors and so on.

The Socio-Economic Survey

According to an economic survey conducted in the township last year, only three out of every 100 working people in Alexandra are professionals and only five out of every 100 working people are skilled workers. More than half the working people in Alexandra are semi-skilled workers or ordinary workers, while 24 out of every 100 working people work in "services": these are mainly women employed as domestic servants, or in activities such as hawking, child-minding, shebeening, barbering or dressmaking, by which they add a little extra money to very low incomes. Of the remainder of working people, 15 out of every 100 are clerical workers and about four out of every 100 work in sales. As everyone knows, there are many unemployed.

The average Alexandra household has an income of R111 per person

per month. The average monthly income for individual male earners is R310. For women earners the figure is R205. Only about eight people out of very hundred working people in the township earn more than R500 per month.

It is clear therefore, that Alexandra's working class people and unemployed people, who suffer most from low wages, the insecurity of their job situation or from not having a job at all, are the majority of the people in the township. The middle class people are in the minority. These people, however, favour the LC (voted in in 1982 by only 4500 people out of a total population of at least 50 000) and believe that it has saved Alexandra.

Now, for middle class people, it is in many ways true that Buti and the LC have saved Alexandra, because the LC and the government plan to make the township into a posh suburb with tennis-courts, parks, expensive housing, privately-owned housing on 99-year leasehold, a central business district and so on. However, for most people—the workers, the unemployed and the illegals—it will become more and more difficult to survive in Alexandra, as they will be required to finance "re-development" through high rents.

Some Saved, Others Drowned

We have already seen what has happened in Phase-One: rents were kept secret from people moved there when their old houses were demolished, and the impossibly high rents were announced only when the LC had come into power. In the same way as people

paid protection money to the Msomi gang in the 1950's, people are now expected to pay madly high rents to the Town Council to protect their right to stay in the township!

Already about 50 middle-class people have applied for 99-year leasehold, and it seems as though people from outside Alexandra will be allowed to buy the expensive houses built by private enterprise in the township: the 99-year leasehold scheme will not benefit the majority of people in Alexandra, because firstly, most of their wage is spent on necessary items such as food and transport and they cannot repay housing loans. Nor can they afford site surveying expenses, the 20 percent deposit on a house and official connection fees for water, sewerage and electricity.

Furthermore, about one fifth of the population of Alexandra are 'illegal' urban dwellers who are automatically disqualified from 99-year leasehold, and the LC has said that they will not be allowed to remain in the area. It seems that only the eight or nine out of every 100 working people who earn over R500 a month will be in any position at all to pay the type of rents that are being demanded in Phase-One.

What has emerged in Alexandra, in other words, is a group of people represented by the LC, who are in a position to secure comforts and privileges for themselves, and who make up a class of allies of the capitalist SA state, helping it in its project of class rule. Their interests are fundamentally opposed to those of working class people in Alexandra.

IZWI LASE TOWNSHIP is published by Ditshwantsho tsa Rona. It offers notes and views about events of today and of the past. Though mainly concerned with Alexandra, because that is the home location of Ditshwantsho, we hold that Alexandra is but a part of South Africa, and shares in the general struggle in this country. We reject the ghetto status of the township, and we reject strategies that attempt to divide it from other parts of the nation.

It is necessary to understand society in order to change it. We invite the public to participate in this paper, by carrying out research and by contributing discussion.

Letters, articles, comments and enquiries should be sent to our address:
PO Box 720, BERGVLEI, 2012.

INTERVIEW WITH A RESIDENT

Izwi:
What are you doing for a living?

Resident:
I have lost my job after a strike at the factory I was working for. I am still using the money I got from the Trade Union, otherwise I am unemployed.

Izwi:
If you are moved to the newly built house at Phase-1, can you afford to pay a rent of R139 or R124 per month?

Resident:
No. I cannot afford to pay such a high rent.

Izwi:
Why?

Resident:
The bosses are reluctant to pay us more money. Today I am unemployed because of a strike to demand higher wages. We are getting low wages and have to satisfy some of our basic needs like foods, clothes instalments and other things, so if we pay R134 and R124, what will we eat.

Izwi:
Do you think it's a good idea to swop a house with someone who can afford to pay the rent?

Resident:
I strongly object to that because if you allow yourself to move or exchange a house you won't get a house anymore. Even if the whole Alex has been redeveloped, the Town Council won't give you a house because they will know that you cannot afford it. You will end up having nowhere to stay.

Izwi:
Looking at the rents, the Town Council is demanding high rentals, do you think the Town Council is redeveloping Alex for everyone?

Resident:
I don't think Alex is redeveloping for everyone, but only for rich people (like teachers, policemen, principals and people who are working at Peri-Urban offices and others who are highly paid), who will occupy the houses, because they are the ones who can afford high rents. Poor people like myself will have nowhere to stay since I cannot afford high rents.

Izwi:
Do you think Alexandra Town Council is representing the people of Alex?

Resident:
As far as I am concerned, Buti's Town Council is representing Koornhof and his government.

Izwi:
What makes you think so?

Resident:
I am saying this because Buti doesn't care about the poor section of the people in Alex. He is not interested in understanding our problem. What he is doing is just to apply Koornhof's instructions on us. His main aim is to evict the poor in Alex.

Izwi:
Buti claims to have saved Alex. Do you think that is true?

Resident:
If Rev Buti has really saved Alex, he should have taken into consideration that there are cripples, old aged and lowly paid workers in Alex. I don't think Alex has been saved because the majority are threatened with eviction because they cannot afford unreasonable rents.

Izwi:
If you compare the rent situation during the time of landlords and at present, do you see any difference?

Resident:
I think at the time of the landlords things were better than now. Although the landlords were demanding high rents for tenants, they were far better than the Town Council. At that time one was able to find accommodation where he pays less, because there were some landlords who were reasonable. At the moment the option is only one, to swop the house with someone who can afford. What they should have done is to make a survey to determine how much people can afford to pay and decide rents according to income.

Izwi:
The Alexandra Liaison Committee has already conducted a survey and they found out that most of Alexandra people are not earning more than R150 per month.

Resident:
That is not true. If they have really conducted a survey, why are they demanding rents that are beyond our earnings?

Izwi:
What do you think is the solution to the problem?

Resident:
I think the people of Alexandra should come together as one unit and have regular meetings to discuss issues affecting their lives. United they would be able to resist rent hikes.

Izwi:
As you have already mentioned, there are people who can afford high rents (teachers, policemen, clerks, etc.) do you think they can also involve themselves with people who can't afford high rents?

Resident:
I think out of the whole population of Alex, only 200 can afford high rents. I don't think it is a problem if out of thousands, so few are pro high rents. It does not matter if they involve themselves or not, majority rule.

SHANTIES FOREVER!

The re-development of Alexandra made a large number of working-class families face greater hardship, in temporary accommodation. These are families who were moved from their homes to make way for the building of sports grounds and a youth centre which the Sandton Civic Foundation offered as a gift to the Liaison Committee and as a humiliation to families who were moved from their homes into these leaking unbearable shacks.

The Alex Town Council, which is responsible for these removals, resettled some in unhygienic conditions in a disused brewery, their living space separated by hardboards which they use for privacy.

This situation has caused tension and frustration among dwellers. It cannot even cater for all members of the families, therefore it has caused splits within families.

Here is an example:

Peter Monaheng shared his section of emergency accommodation with his family and mother. Her house was demolished and she was told to go to Soweto, but her roots are in Alex. (Sunday Times 13-02-83.)

Putco Cleans its Backyard

When more families were moved, the Council sought help from PUTCO, who provided rusted bodies of old buses for accommodation. One should not look at this as charity from Putco; the population of the township is their milk cow, and they have to look after it - they give it a shed!

Putco donates old buses, so that people will continue to queue at the terminus; while the Council charges high rents, to get every last cent out of the people. These are two legs of the system.

Patching holes

This resettlement has forced dwellers to use a great deal of their earnings in patching up big holes on the roofs, and paving the floors. Some of their household belongings are even now lying in open spaces for lack of room to use or store them. And here's the Rev. (does he live in a shack?) quoted as saying, *'Despite the negative publicity about the bus accommodation, people accept it.'* (Star 7-10-83.)

One resident, when asked for his views about bus accommodation said, *We don't want to live in buses. You can't take a family from a house into a bus. There are open spaces here in the township, why don't they erect houses and then take us in there before demolishing our houses?* (RDM 18-08-83.) Recently rents of about R10 were introduced to these temporary structures. The Town Council says this is because of the high cost of services. Could communal taps and toilets cost so much?

In old Alex backyard shacks are demolished, and then shacks are erected by the very same Council that demolished the others. This is called re-development! Clearly their housing policy is really a control policy, in order to be sure of getting revenue. Home-built shacks cannot easily be discovered, while Council-built shacks can be made to produce rent for the Council.

In certain areas where there are shacks, some families are sharing, others not. Those who are sharing pay an amount of R20 per shack

This means that they are more uncomfortable and crowded than others, **AND PAY DOUBLE** for this privilege. Here is an interview with the township manager, that does not even answer the question of sharing: The senior township manager when asked about this said that as far as he knows there is no sharing, as each family is given a shack, and in fact some time in the future each family will possibly be given two shacks!

This statement is quite contradictory to that given by a junior township manager, Mr Moutlana, who said that people who occupy a whole shack are probably those who moved in without consent!



Freezing in Zinks

Other dwellers are dissatisfied about the whole thing, as it seems to them that those who have a whole shack to themselves must have got it by bribery. This makes people suspicious and angry with each other. It makes it a private problem, to believe that those who have money in the pocket and can pay what those in authority demand, can live happily. All residents of buses and zinks must strive for common goals to be housed properly; to be first in occupying houses to be built; to be assured of affordable rents.

One should ask why people pay so much, when their conditions are so bad. Perhaps Mr Moutlana knows, as he was saying. *'People cannot be given something for nothing. As we are the new municipality, we must raise funds in order to further the re-development.'*

It should be clear that the Town Council has been set up by the government to carry out certain tasks, such as evictions, rents and

knocking down of shacks. But the government has insisted that these Councils must get revenue from their own residents. That is why rents in the hostels, shacks and Phase-1 houses are raised, i.e. to fill the money box of the Council at the expense of the people.

It is quite clear that all residents in old Alex will in turn be subjected to the bad conditions of the shack dwellers, and to the struggle now facing residents of Phase-1. A certain Mr D---, one of the authorities, was saying, *'We do not want to make money at the expense of the people, but re-developing a township is very expensive. As the mayor wants to make Alex a model township, to do that money is needed, and if people are not prepared to pay, they must be prepared to stay in these shanties for the rest of their lives.'*

The Working Class Loses Out

Possibly Buti and his friends want to choose residents, those who have the same class interests as themselves and will be happy about

the development. The Town Council is not the workers representative, and is creating a burden for the majority of working class people in Alex, because houses that are produced are actually not meant for shack dwellers or the majority of residents, but for so-called educated persons, such as social workers, nurses, teachers and so on. Here Mr Knoetze, chairman of the West Rand Administration Board responds to a question about flats that are built: *'A small group of people will be able to relate to each other, and each flat will have its little garden. These should also appeal to teachers and single working women. It is important to have a mixture of working and middle class people. I have no fear they will not be accepted as the young professional people are responding well to the idea.'* (RDM 6-10-82.)

This is a picture of what it is going to be like: high income — stay comfortably: low income — no house and shanties forever. Is the future of shack dwellers safeguarded, as a working class?

INTERVIEW

Izwi:

Benihlalaphi ngaphambi kokuba nizohlala lana emabhasingini?

Resident:

Besihlala e 6th number 93.

Izwi:

Nasuswa kanjani ezindlini zenu?

Resident:

Sanikezwa amaphepha okuthi kufuneka siphume lapha ngoba kozokwakhiwa, sasingathandi ukusuka, kodwa sasingenawo amandla okwenqaba, ngoba abanye babe sebesusiwe kodwa sa thenjiswa ukuthi sizohlala izinyanga ezintatho.

Izwi:

Kungabe asikafiki yini lesosikhathi?

Resident:

Kudala sendlulile, nakhu namanje sisahleli lapha. Futhi njengoba sa thenjiswa ukuhlala mahala nakhu manje kufanele sibhadale imali engango R10 ngenyanga angiboni ukuthi sizophumelela ukuthola izindlu.

Izwi:

Uma uthi angeke niphumelele ukuthola izindlu ngobe usho ukuthini?

Resident:

Kwamanje ba khulume ngerente entsha e Phase-1, larenti iningi kakhulu, ngibona ngathi uma siyohlala lapho angeke siyikhone futhi noma izindlu zikhishwa sizosaba nokuhlala khona ngoba irenti inkulu.

Izwi:

Uma uthi nizosaba, ngabe ubona kungcono uhlale laumphela?

Resident:

Cha! indlu ngiyayifuna futhi ngabe kuya ngami, ngabe ngibuyela lapho begihlala khona.

Izwi:

Awuthandi yini ukuhlaliseka kahle?

Resident:

Ngiyathanda kodwa angeke ngikhone ngoba nakhu izindlu ezakhiwayo, ziyadula!

These interviews raise the question whether the working population will afford housing in the newly built Alex.

INTERVIEW

A resident from the old brewery who now lives in a shack puts his experience this way;

Izwi:

Where did you live before staying in this brewery?

Resident:

I was staying with my parents at 9th Avenue. I then became unemployed. I was the breadwinner of my family. Then we were evicted and re-settled.

IF THEY CANNOT AFFORD THE NEW RENT, THEY CAN EXCHANGE THEIR HOUSES WITH SOMEONE WHO CAN AFFORD

ALL THE PEOPLE WILL BE LIVING IN COMFORTABLE HOMES – EVEN THE POOR – S. BUTI, MARCH 1980

Izwi:

How many people live in this shack?

Resident:

It is me, my wife, and my mother, my kids were supposed to live with me, but because of lack of accommodation, I had to send them to my homeland!

Izwi:

Are you able to pay the demanded rent?

Resident:

You see no one is working here, and I'm presently looking for a job.

Izwi:

Then how do you maintain yourself and your family?

Resident:

My mother is a pensioner and we receive money from the Welfare.

This person is occupying half a shack with his family.

INTERVIEW

"Before I was moved into this shack, I resided at 93 6th Avenue where our houses were demolished to make way for the installation of sewerage system. Comparing our former place to these buses and shacks, I think the conditions were better there; even though our former landlord used to push us around, demanding high rentals; which stopped when Peri-Urban Board took over in 1979 by buying his property, I still think those houses were not as bad as this shack; which is so cold during the night, in fact it is just like staying outside. When we were first told about the removals, it was stated that shacks and buses would serve to accommodate us temporarily, and therefore would be free of charge. In fact the Alexandra Liaison Committee which is now Alexandra Town Council said we would stay for only three months, and after that new houses would be ready for us. But things are different now; we are about to finish a year staying in buses and there is still no sign of new houses, except foundations which are laid for building flats.



Destination NOWHERE. Living in scrap buses

Most of us are no longer settled, because we are not sure about our future in Alex. The Town Council has not fulfilled its promises – firstly they demanded R10 rentals from us and to make things worse this was notified through a pamphlet which did not give an adequate explanation as to why we are supposed to pay, secondly we are not sure as to whether we will occupy the flats, because according to the rentals which they demand from

Phase-1 residents – who are presently struggling against that – they are too high, and I think Councillors know that we also can't afford high rentals if put into flats. So there is a possibility that we can stay in these shacks forever, or maybe be pushed out of Alex. But as I stated we are not sure about the situation. It seems only the ATC knows what is going on in the township, and people who don't have close contact with them are left in darkness.

IF PEOPLE ARE NOT PREPARED TO PAY, THEY MUST BE PREPARED TO STAY IN THESE SHANTIES FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

INTERVIEW

"From my point of view I think the ATC is treating us like small kids.

Firstly, they told us that we would be staying in buses and shacks for three months as building of houses goes on, but now we are just about to finish the sixth month. Secondly, ever since they dumped us here, they never came back to check as to whether people are satisfied or have complaints, even when rents were proposed, (at first they said we shall live free of charge), we only learnt about that from their pamphlets which did not explain why?

I think the ATC is not prepared to help everybody in Alex, in fact they are selective. People who were moved to the T.B. Clinic are served differently, their houses were fixed, some have three rooms and some two, but what is surprising is that some of the residents there are not from Alex, I have noticed some teachers from Hammanskraal are also staying there and I don't know how? When I asked them about their rentals, they were reluctant to say anything, in fact their secrecy led me to suspect that something is being hidden, there is something Alex residents don't know about provision of houses.

I am not surprised that they desert people in buses and shacks, in fact we are not their friends here, and most of us are not educated, besides we don't own shebeens where they can come and chat to us while drinking. I am saying this because I realize that in most cases Alexandra Town Council associate with people who own businesses, like trading stores, shebeens and taxis, and also people with high social positions like principals, lawyers and social workers. They don't care about ordinary people like us. In fact a certain widower who owns a shebeen always likes to boast that she has contacts with them (ATC), and if you have a problem you better talk to her, and she will pass

on the message. I am still puzzled as to how will they run the township is it through backyard negotiations, or through open discussions with all residents in the township?"

INTERVIEW

"We were given half a day's notice to pack all our belongings and get ready to move to new houses in Phase -1.

Most of us had to stay away from work as removals are often tackled in a careless and confusing way. The following day WRAB trucks came and transported us to Phase -1, but to our surprise some of us had to share houses i.e. two and three families had to share each house as others were not yet complete. Even though we have been convinced that our former place had to be used for building new schools, none of us had an idea about rents in the new houses, in fact most of us felt Moruti Buti has helped us, and we should wait and see. After sharing houses people were allocated their own units, still we never asked about rents, instead we started making these houses look smart, by buying new furniture, making alterations and outside flower gardens. We were really starting a new life in the new Alex. After spending one month, WRAB allowed us to pay the same amount we paid at the old Alex, i.e. R7-70 for one room, but now it depends on how many rooms you had.

This went on for approximately one year. On the 3rd Dec 1983, the ALC notified us to change our former residential permits as we were occupying new houses, but on the 18th December I was shocked to learn that from next January I was supposed to pay R126-63 for my five room house, in addition to that the township manager; a certain Mr Moutlana advised me to swop my house with someone in old Alex if I can't pay. I did not want to hear more and just left the office because I felt it was a trick, how can he announce new rents in such a strange

way, because my intention of going to their office was to pay my old rent; I was not called for new rentals, besides if there are new proposed rentals why can't they let everybody know at the same time like in other townships. Later I realized that we have been tricked ever since we left the old Alex, because residents were not given enough time to decide on removals, and no information was given on rentals. All I remember is that social workers who claimed to come from the ALC interviewed us about our income and family background, this means the ALC and WRAB got information about our financial position and know clearly that most of us can't afford high rentals. My neighbours experience the same thing, they were also told about new rents when they were going to pay the old rent, the official did not bother to come and explain to all residents - and what was confusing is that we had to pay different rentals even though we occupied the same number of rooms.

On the 15 Dec 1983 residents arranged a meeting to discuss the issue, and suggested ways to tackle it, and on the 20 Dec 1983, an open meeting was held (as we had problem in finding venue). All residents of Phase -1 attended, and a committee was formed to air our views and also get an explanation as to why are rents so high. From our committee we learnt about the negative attitude the ALC had towards our demand to meet them. On one occasion they said our committee was not suppose to demand meeting the council as a whole, but must meet Mr Makubiri whom they said represents Phase -1 in the Town Council. But how can he represent Phase -1 if he can't even identify himself with our problems, in fact most of us still think this is another trick, and we should not trust what the Town Council say. This was proved when we had a meeting with the Town Council (at last they came), still they insisted on high rents, despite the fact that most residents are not in a position to afford that. The Alex Town Council has put its position clearly to us, they are not prepared to discuss our problems, they have put us in mud and now are pressing our heads down."

I AM NOT SUPRISED THAT THEY DESERT PEOPLE IN BUSES AND SHACKS

BUTI O BEREKELA MANG ?

At public meetings which the Liaison Committee used to hold, Rev Buti not only presented himself as a saviour of Alex but also used to say to residents, 'Le re khetile hore re le berekele'. These are fine sounding words from the moruti. But let us, lest we be fooled by words, go back in time and check what services has moruti Buti and his council rendered to the 'community' of Alex.

Buti O Re Tshwaresitse Pala

Ever since the LC came into being in 1979 there have been lots of promises and plans, all which offered to further the interest of the community - by which I take it the LC means all people in Alex, be they rich, poor, educated, illiterate, crippled, unemployed or anything else.

As early as 1980 Buti was quoted in a press report as saying that the Liaison Committee planned *'... to build a new Alex where all people will be living in comfortable homes, even the poor ...'* (Star, 30-3-80)

In another report Buti went on record as saying, *'...the price of rental or purchase of these units and others will be determined by a socio-economic survey being conducted by Alex Information Centre'*.

In the same report he said, *'We are also aware of our poor people. Where possible the Alexandra Development Foundation is going to assist the poor to rent their houses'*. (Star, 24-11-80)

In all the above statements, Buti claimed to be working in the interest of the entire community.

Reality Unfolds

Alas, the true situation is slowly emerging. Rent in the 79 houses in Phase-1 of the re-development scheme will be R124,55 for a four room house, and R139,55 for a six room house. The Township Mayor (Buti) in his budget speech told residents who could not afford the new houses that they *'... can exchange their houses with somebody who can afford'*.

This arouses anger from the residents in phase-1 who are solidly united and organised in a Neighbourhood Committee, which represents them, and which has made known their grievances to the Town Council.

In reply to the mayor's suggestions, the Neighbourhood Committee has stated clearly that residents in phase-1 are there to stay and not to be phased out.

Saved for whom

The picture that is emerging raises serious questions about the situation in Alex. Alex is said to be saved - the question is FOR WHOM and FROM WHAT? As for the Town Council, who are these gentlemen representing?

Answers to this question will emerge sharply and clearly if one looks at the events and developments that have taken place since Alex was said to be saved. (As if Alex had suddenly become free from national politics and of the oppressive system!)

People are housed in buses and zinks. The Town Council demands rents that are unaffordable. Flats being built are going to cost R133 per month in rentals.

Most people who are living in zinks and buses are residents of Alex who have been moved from their rooms in Alex. This goes contrary to the stated intention of the LC that:

'Development in the area will be carried out in stages in order to cause minimum inconvenience to residents. We are going to develop the area in parts. As soon as we finish one residential district, families will be resettled there before construction workers move to the next'. (RDM, July 18, 1980)

Promises Not Kept

Promises have not been kept, and lots of inconvenience, desperation and misery have been caused to many people.

Given the fact that some residents do not benefit from the redevelopment of Alex, who then does benefit? In whose interest is the Town Council working?

To answer this question, let us look at changes in government policy towards black urban areas. The government has accepted that blacks are not temporary but permanent residents in so-called white areas. A middle class is now encouraged to develop among Africans, as part of government strategy to divide and control the black population.

This middle class is a class of businessmen, professionals, teachers, P.R.O's. This is the class of people that the Alex Town Council is representing, though Buti tries by all means to hide this fact and tries to present himself as representing everyone in the 'community'.

The Council is trying to make way for the rich middle class in phase-1, by such means as encouraging the exchange of houses - a poor person goes back into old Alex, a rich person gets possession in the new house.

Though the Town Council said that families would be housed in 'alternative' accommodation only until houses in phase-2 are ready, we believe that not all people will afford the rentals. If the flats are going to cost R133 - that is way out of the reach of most people who are now in buses and zinks.

Some of these residents have actually been issued with written guarantees that they will be given priority when accommodation is built. But this is a trick, since 'priority' is worthless, if the actual condition of taking over a new house is the ability to pay a high

rent. The guarantee (which is as worthless as other promises from the Save Alexandra mob) was given only to cool the tempers of people who were demonstrating against what they saw as indecent removals.

When the flats are ready, the Council may well say *'You can have this flat - the rent is such and such.'* And if the resident cannot afford, Master Councillor will say, *'Well, that's your baby. Let the one who can afford take occupation.'*

Clearly the redevelopment of Alex is a curse to most working class people in Alex. Buti and the Town Council are representing people of their own class. Alex has been saved for them.

What then must workers do?

Workers in Alex must not fold their arms and bask in idleness, because sooner or later they will be driven out of the township. Workers do not need the likes of Buti to save them. It is from Buti that they must save themselves.

What workers need is to organise themselves into a strong township force. They must set up organisations of their own, with worker representatives, whose decisions must be in support of workers and must further their common interests.

The Phase-1 Neighbourhood Committee is one step in the right direction. It is an organisation of people who have seen that it is not only useful but crucial for them to take into their own hands the bread and butter issues of residents.

BOOK REVIEW

A book has been published called **ALEXANDRA, I LOVE YOU**. It is full of photographs of the township; it has lines from the poetry of Wally Mongane Serote; and it has a text by someone called Jon Swift.

It is published by the Liaison Committee; paid for by capitalists, whose names are advertised in large letters on page 8; it is expensive, and so it will be possessed only by those who can take out R8,00 from their pocket.

The photographs are taken from Alex, and the text is about Alex, but it is not a book for those who live in Alex. It is, thus, the worst kind of publication possible, since it offers Alex and its people as a spectacle to those who are not from Alex, but who desire the entertainment of looking at pictures and reading about ghetto life.

Because it is not for people in Alex, it need have no respect for accuracy or truth. Its object is to sensationalise Alexandra, to make it lively for those who buy it for fun.

It is not even mainly for South African readers. In the back there is a list of words explained to help foreign readers: words such as veld, meilie, coloured and Buti, Rev Sam.

The text is full of lies and ignorance:

eg. *'The people living there had always had freehold rights on their homes', page 20*

'Alex was to become . . . a model of family development', page 14

'It was a leadership which . . . would not be compromised', page 15.

It is full of bloated language:

'A certain gang was nominated the Torch Gang.' (He means it was called, or named the Torch Gang.)

Mongane Serote

It will disappoint those who used to admire the poetry of Mongane Wally Serote, that he has allowed

his work to be used to decorate the book. Those poems that seemed so angry and disgusted at the system of oppression, that seemed to unmask hypocrisy, that revealed the scabs, nerves and hatreds endemic in black ghettos - these same poems are now used to romanticise ghetto life, and to help disguise the same system they once denounced. Machel was coerced to shake hands with Botha - what seduced Serote to embrace Koornhof?

Perhaps some of the contributors are distressed by the actual character of the book, as it has turned out. If so, this should teach them an important lesson. A book is never just a book. It is a relationship. It is produced by certain people for certain others, and one must know who they all are and what is the purpose of the book. Books, too, are politics.

ALEXANDRA, I LOVE YOU was produced to advertise the Save Alexandra Party, to get loans from overseas, to conceal the reality of things within the township and to pass time for the ignoramuses on the Alex Town Council.

THE BUDGET

How the Council spends your money

A Town Council receives money (rent, permit fees, sale of water and so on) and spends money (road repair, bucket removals, etc.) Public bodies must account for their income and expenditure. They must explain to people (for it is the peoples money) how much is collected and how it is spent.

Such an account is called a 'budget'. Every year, in his budget speech, a mayor is supposed to say how much he expects to receive in income, and how he will spend it. The first budget speech of the new Alex Town Council was given by Rev Buti in April this year. It was also printed in the Chronicle, so everyone has a chance to study it. Residents in Alex should take an interest in the budget. This is where we see what the Council is doing and how our money is spent.

Our Comments

Izwi has a few remarks to make about Buti's budget.

1. A budget is meant to reveal how public money is spent. If it does not do so, then it is almost worthless. In this sense, Buti's budget 'is almost worthless.' He mentions some items that he is spending money on, such as salaries and repairs, but nearly half of the total expenditure is for something called 'miscellaneous.' Now, 'miscellaneous' is not an acceptable word in this case. Usually it is used to mean small items like pencils, light-bulbs, extra whiskey glasses and so on - small things that don't need to be listed in the budget, and that cost only very little. In Buti's budget, however, 'miscellaneous' is the largest single item. It is nearly 2 million Rands, out of a budget of 4 million Rands. What it means, therefore, in Buti's budget, is not small items, but large items that he doesn't reveal. It is in this way that the budget hides the facts. One wonders why he bothers to mention repairs

and maintenance. Why does not he simply say that everything is spent on miscellaneous?

We don't know whether miscellaneous means trips to Sun City, or bribes, or presents for Piet Koornhof, or what? It might be money to hire personal body-guards for the Councillors, since Buti believes they are likely to be bombed, killed and cursed. (Sowetan 19.1.84). We suggest the mayor gives a second budget speech, to explain the first one, and to make known - how he is spending nearly 2 million Rands of public money.

2. The same problem arises when the Rev deals with 'capital' expenditure. This means fixed items such as buildings, heavy equipment and so on. Here he sets aside more than half a million Rands for 'vehicles', but he does not give details. What vehicles? That much money can buy 56 motor cars, or 50 cars and a bus, or ten Hippos or a mayoral car plus a tank and a sneeze machine.

If he had said, R20 000 for vehicles, it would reasonably be assumed that the council needed a couple of cars for its inspectors. But half a million! That requires explanation.

Even Water is not Clear

3. There are a few small points that should be cleared up. For instance, why is it that women in hostels use so much more water than men in hostels? Buti estimates that the sale of water in the Old Mens Hostel is expected to bring an income of R2000. And the exact same amount is expected from the New Mens Hostel. Those who live in the mens hostel appear to use exactly the same amount of water, to the last drop.

But the sale of water in the Womens Hostel, is expected to bring R9,600. Can women drink five times as much water as men? Or wash five times more often? Or is their water five times more expensive?

Debtors Control

Here is another small point. So small, you hardly notice it when Buti says, '*at this stage no proper debtors control system is in use, but by the following budget this will have been done...*' What is this 'debtors control system?'

We think he means that he is organising to deal with people who do not pay his high rents in full. Therefore, Residents, beware. You had better get a 'landlord control system', to deal with those who might rob you of your accomodation.

Is Alexandra a Continent?

It is sad when a leader in local government talks nonsense. But this is Buti's habit. He says, 'A local authority should be self-sufficient, since a community can only enjoy the standard of service which that community can afford.' This is rubbish - Alexandra is a small dormitory suburb, a ghetto. In no way can it be self-sufficient. Its labour power is expended outside the township; its income is sent to a dozen rural bantustans; it buys even chicken legs and petrol in Johannesburg or Sandton; it is populated by some of the poorest people in the land. To call it a 'local authority' shows only that Buti has been duped. It is a phrase vomited by Koornhof, swallowed by the Mayor. And it remains rubbish.

Some people will do almost anything, only to get a golden chain around their neck.